

THE TEARS OF
DARK
WATER

A NOVEL

C O R B A N A D D I S O N



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

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I am in the sea and a sea is within me.

—AHMAD-E JAMI

The devil flows in mankind as blood flows.

—THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD

Whatever things may appear, the meaning is always deeper.

—GAARRIYE

For the jewel of the Indian Ocean, may you rise again.



And for all those who bear your scars as their own.

I

THE WAY OF THE GUN



In those days there was no king. Everyone
did what was right in his own eyes.

—THE BOOK OF JUDGES

DANIEL

MAHÉ ISLAND, SEYCHELLES

November 7, 2011

Daniel Parker woke with a start, a line of perspiration on his brow. He looked around the darkened cabin of the sailboat, searching for her face, but she was gone. He shook his head, as if the sudden motion could shake off the anguish of the dream, but the chains of the past bound him to her, as did the vague whisper of a prayer that she was wrong. Her words were stuck in his mind, like a prophecy playing in an endless loop, the truth of half a life spoken as if from the beginning.

It won't last.

The declaration had escaped her lips without effort, but not uncharitably. She had smiled at him when she spoke, her green eyes dancing above the dimples in her cheeks, her candlelight dress and red-brown Bissolotti violin luminous in the concert hall.

Nothing does. Why would you expect us to be different?

He looked out the porthole at the lights of Victoria harbor, sparkling in the twilight before the dawn. The sky was the color of ash, but the stars were beginning to retreat on the coattails of the night. He listened to the main halyard knocking against the mast and the gurgling sounds of cavitation as the *Renaissance* bobbed on the occasional swell. *At least we'll have*

a decent wind, he thought, throwing back the thin sheet and scooting out of his rack.

He placed his feet on the polished mahogany floorboards and took a slow breath, relishing the smoothness of the wood on his skin. He had loved the feeling of going barefoot on deck since he was a boy handling lines and trimming sails on his father's Valiant 40. But he had paid a price for it. The soles of his feet were a patchwork of scars.

He opened the door to the saloon and slipped stealthily into the living quarters. Dim light from the harbor filtered in through the curtains covering the windows, but the saloon and galley were still shrouded in darkness. He stepped around the weak spots in the floor and took care not to wake his son, Quentin, who was sleeping on the settee berth across from the dining table.

He flipped on the accent lights in the galley. The LEDs glowed softly under the cabinet rails, illuminating the gas stove and granite countertops. He heated a pot of water and filled his French press, waiting precisely four minutes before pouring the steaming coffee into his Naval Academy mug. His father had given him the mug at the rechristening ceremony of the *Renaissance*, along with a hearty laugh and a slap on the back. It was as much a gag as a gift, for Daniel had gone to Boston College instead.

He opened the main hatch and inhaled the moist island air. Across the water sat the city of Victoria, tucked like a jeweled blanket between mountains of granite and the hem of the sea. He rummaged in the locker by the stairs and retrieved his writing chest—a genuine gift from his father, an antique from Zanzibar, in honor of their voyage. He collected the mug and went topside.

On an ordinary morning the sight of sailboats at anchor crowned by winking stars would have brought a smile to Daniel's face. But this morning he scarcely noticed them, troubled as he was by the portents of the dream. He sat down in the cockpit and put the mug on the bench beside him, opening the carved wooden chest and laying out paper and pen on the life raft container, which he used as a writing surface. He lit

a battery-powered lantern and took a sip of coffee, struggling to suppress the dread her words had inspired. They were wrong. They had to be. The smile, the dress, the violin, the concert hall—all were exactly as he remembered. But her words had carried a different meaning. They had been ironic, not tragic; a welcome, not a farewell.

His mind raced on the current of memory. New York City. April 1993. Daffodils blooming in Central Park, buds on the dogwoods and azaleas, a blaze of sunlight chasing away the early-spring chill. He had seen the handbills posted all over Columbia University—the Juilliard Orchestra performing at Carnegie Hall. He wouldn't have given the concert a passing thought, if not for the photograph of the soloist. Her name was Vanessa Stone, and she was a student at Columbia, not Juilliard—a double major in biology and music. She was pretty but not remarkably so in New York City's hall of mirrors. It was her expression that made him pause—then halt—his mad rush to a law school seminar to which he was already late. He took down one of the fliers and studied her more carefully. She held her violin tenderly, her bow just touching the strings, and looked at the camera almost curiously. The question in her eyes was as frank as it was astonishing: *Why are you staring at me?*

Two days later, Daniel walked into the grand lobby of Carnegie Hall clutching the handbill and the face he couldn't forget. His seat was on the parquet level of the Stern Auditorium and close to the stage. He settled into his chair and listened to the musicians tune their instruments, annoyed at the butterflies crowding his stomach. At last, she appeared with the conductor at her side. She was dressed in a diaphanous gown that complemented her auburn hair. She nodded to the audience and then placed her violin beneath her chin, waiting for her cue.

His eyes never left hers from the beginning of the performance to the end. The music was Beethoven, his first and only violin concerto, and she played it immaculately, even the most virtuosic passages in the Kreisler cadenza. At the close of the third movement, the audience gave her a rousing ovation. She received it with an almost perfunctory bow and exited the

stage with a swiftness that confirmed Daniel's suspicion. She had come to be heard, not to be seen. The magic was in the violin.

The receiving line outside the auditorium was long, and Daniel took his place at the end. While he waited, he tried on phrases like costumes until he felt more confused than confident. When the moment came and she offered her hand, thanking him for coming, he spoke purely by instinct.

"You play like your name," he said.

"I beg your pardon?" she asked, taking back her hand.

"Vanessa in the old Greek. It means butterfly." Something changed in her eyes, but she didn't reply, so he forged ahead. "It's like you're somewhere else—in the air, dancing with the sun."

She stared at him for long seconds before her lips spread into a smile. "It doesn't last," she said, surprising him with her candor. "It fades like everything else."

"But it's why you play, isn't it? Even when it makes you uncomfortable."

He saw it then: the inquisitive look she wore in the flier in his pocket. She tilted her head and her eyes glittered in the light. "Do I know you?"

He shook his head. "I'm Daniel."

"Are you a student?" she asked, trying to place him anyway.

"Columbia Law," he affirmed.

"Law. I would have guessed poetry." Suddenly, she caught the eye of the conductor as he bid farewell to his last guest. "I'm sorry. I have to go. It's nice to meet you."

She said it almost regretfully, and he took courage. "When will you play again?"

He saw it a second time, her instinctive curiosity. "I'm graduating in May."

He nodded. "So am I."

She glanced at the conductor again. "I really have to go. There's an after party."

"Right," he replied, feeling the moment slipping away.

Then she said the words that changed his life. “I practice at Schapiro Hall. Maybe I’ll see you there sometime.”



Daniel picked up his pen in the waning dark and began to write her a letter. “Dearest V: Is love like the body? Does it begin to die the day it is born? Is it like the breath of transcendence you feel when the Bissolotti is in your hands—evanescent, a chasing after the wind?” The words flowed onto the page like spilled ink, as the sky brightened and the dawn came. The first light caught him by surprise and pierced his eyes when he looked toward the east. He took another sip of his now lukewarm coffee and watched the sun rise above the distant masts of a large ship. The advent of day transformed him, lifting his spirits. He looked down at the unfinished sentence before him and thought, *She doesn’t need this.*

He folded up the pages he had written and placed them in the chest. He took out fresh paper and began again, telling his wife about Quentin, about climbing boulders with him on the island of La Digue, about the transformation he had seen since they set sail so many months ago. He signed his name and wrote out the address on an envelope. It would take three weeks to reach her. By then he and Quentin would be in South Africa—her last chance to join them before the long passage to Brazil.

“Morning, Dad,” Quentin said, appearing in the companionway dressed in board shorts and a T-shirt, his wavy brown hair past his shoulders now. He had been growing it long since he met Ariadne in the South Pacific. The Australian girl had transformed everything about him—well, the girl and the sea. Every day, he seemed surer of himself, less afraid. He was even calling himself Quentin again, after years of going by “Quent.” The eighteen-year-old boy was slowly becoming a man.

“I checked the Passage Weather report,” Quentin said, taking a seat in the cockpit. “Steady winds out of the north at eight to ten knots, seas

less than a meter, and no tropical activity in the forecast. We should make decent time with the gennaker up.”

“Ten days if it holds,” Daniel replied. “More if it doesn’t.”

Quentin pointed at the letter. “Do you think she’s going to come?”

“She might,” Daniel said, giving voice to a hope he didn’t feel.

Quentin placed a postcard beside the envelope. “I wrote her something, too.”

“Good man,” Daniel said. “I’ll get the harbormaster to mail them.”

“Hey, did you hear about the Navy ship?” Quentin asked. “It put in yesterday with a bunch of Somali pirates. They’re going to be tried here.”

Daniel was intrigued. “An American ship?”

Quentin nodded. “The *Gettysburg*. François says it’s a cruiser.”

Daniel looked toward the sunrise and focused on the silhouette of the ship just visible above the port. He saw details he had missed earlier: the gray paint; the twin superstructures, bristling with masts and antennae; the raked bow and athletic lines. “Did François say anything else?”

Quentin nodded. “He said the Navy caught them off the coast of Oman after they tried to hijack an oil tanker. They’ve been in the brig until now.”

“François seems to know everything that happens in this place,” Daniel said.

Quentin smirked. “The guy’s got more friends than marbles in his head.”

Daniel laughed out loud, thinking of the garrulous and absent-minded captain of the catamaran *La Boussole* anchored nearby. Inside, however, he felt a vague disquiet. The number of pirate attacks had dropped off substantially in the past year, thanks to patrols by international naval forces and armed security teams on merchant ships. But the pirates were still a threat from Egypt to India to Madagascar, a vast area of ocean that included the Seychelles. Since August, he had been monitoring reports from maritime organizations in London and Dubai to see whether the end of the Southwest Monsoon—a period of high winds and heavy seas around the Horn of Africa—would trigger a fresh wave of hijacks, as it had in years past. But for two months the pirates had been largely quiet,

their attacks infrequent and distant. Looking at the *Gettysburg*, Daniel felt the weight of his responsibility. Quentin's life was in his hands. No matter what it took, he would bring his son home.

"Something wrong, Dad?" his son asked, examining him carefully.

"It's nothing," Daniel demurred. "Are we set for supplies?"

Quentin nodded. "I went through it all yesterday."

"How about a system check?"

"I did a full workup. Engine, generator, instruments, radio, everything's good to go."

"And our course?"

"I plotted it twice. Outside the harbor, we take the channel south, avoiding the shoals near Isle Anonyme and the Isle of Rats. After the airport, we turn south and follow the coast of Mahé to Point du Sud. Once we're clear of land, we sail almost due south for a thousand miles to Réunion."

Daniel smiled. "Well done, Captain Jack. There's just one thing you forgot."

"What?" Quentin looked puzzled.

"Breakfast. It's your turn. I'd like an omelet and some fresh-squeezed papaya juice when I get back from the harbormaster."

"I was actually thinking of spam," Quentin deadpanned, "and some of that Vegemite Ariadne's mom left with us. I remember how much you loved it." He laughed when his father threw his pen at him, and then disappeared into the cabin below.

"Make it quick," Daniel called after him, taking the letter and postcard in hand. "Anchors aweigh at eight."



It's called crossing the bar, when a ship leaves the harbor and puts out to sea. For Daniel, the feeling it evoked was the same in all latitudes—an epinephrine shot of intoxication and danger. The blue horizon beckoned like the sea stories his father had read to him when he was a boy. Voyaging

under sail was an adventure unlike any other, the ultimate test of courage and will. The risks were enormous, but the rewards were greater still.

He stood in the cockpit of the *Renaissance*, feet wide apart, one hand on the helm, as the 46-foot yacht glided effortlessly through the cobalt waves, bow pointed just south of east, toward the open sea. The custom-built sailboat was lithe and graceful in the water, with the high mast and spare rigging of a sloop and a bulb keel of a racing craft. Manufactured in Sweden to the exacting specifications of her original owner—a surgeon from Maine—she was the most pleasant boat Daniel had ever sailed. She had also proven herself to be exceedingly durable, surviving two knock-downs in a Force 10 storm off the coast of New Zealand with only minor leaks and a few tears in the mainsail, and shrugging off a lightning strike in the Strait of Malacca that might have split the mast of a lesser boat.

Daniel watched as Quentin worked the main sheets and let the boom out to port, allowing the mainsail and gennaker—a headsail much larger than a jib—to drive the *Renaissance* forward on a leisurely four-knot run. The winds off Mahé were as fair as predicted, which surprised Daniel. In the Seychelles, November was a month of transition between the dominant monsoons, which meant that anything was possible, including a perfect calm. Two days ago, Daniel had topped off the fuel tanks, expecting to motor-sail all the way to Réunion. Now, however, he powered down the engine and enjoyed the gentle swish of the wake dovetailing behind him.

“Motor’s off,” he called to Quentin, as his son spider-walked to the foredeck, the strains of Bob Marley’s “Get Up, Stand Up” wafting out of the cabin below.

Quentin gave him a thumbs-up sign and sat down beside the bow rail, his long hair flowing out behind him. Seeing his son so at peace with the world brought Daniel a joy he could scarcely describe. It was as if Quentin had been sent back into the womb and reborn. After three quarters of a year at sea and twenty countries sprinkled like fairy dust around the equatorial belt of the earth, the years of parental anguish he and Vanessa had suffered almost seemed like someone else’s history.

Quentin had been a challenge from birth. As a newborn, he had squalled while other children cooed. As a child, he had made impossible demands and thrown tantrums when they weren't met. In adolescence, his moodiness had grown into low-grade misanthropy. He was extremely bright—his IQ was in the genius range—but he had treated people like irritants. After years of struggling, Daniel and Vanessa had sought professional help, but the therapy and medication had only confused him further. He was highly sensitive and emotionally immature, the psychologists said, but he was too functional to be autistic, too socially capable to have Asperger's, and too stable to be bipolar. His agitation wasn't mania, just intense frustration with a world that never met his expectations. He was, in short, undiagnosable, which left everyone around him floundering.

There were only two things in Quentin's life that brought him consistent happiness: sailing and music. He was a gifted pianist. When his fingers were on the keys, he entered a state that seemed almost dream-like—especially if Vanessa was accompanying him on the violin. And on the water, with the deck of a sailboat beneath his feet, he came alive. Sailing was pure, Quentin had said at the age of fourteen. So were Mozart and Mendelssohn, Vivaldi and Dvořák. The world, on the other hand, was a wretched place, full of injustice and suffering. People were the problem. They were petty and vain and desecrated the beauty around them. Those were his exact words, and they had given Daniel a rare insight into his son's heart. Quentin carried on his shoulders a burden greater than a person could bear. Like Atlas of old, he felt the weight of the world.

Then came the train wreck that was his junior year of high school: the Harvard-bound dancer who paid no attention to him, the senior computer whiz and wannabe anarchist who hooked him on first-person shooter games, and the drug deal that landed him a suspension and—but for his grandfather's intervention—might have put him behind bars. It was in that place of abject humiliation that Daniel had conceived of the circumnavigation. It was a second chance, a radical departure, and the fulfillment of a dream Quentin had first voiced when he was six years old. Many had

called Daniel crazy to leave his law practice and sail around the world with a troubled teenager. But the doubters had been wrong. *If only they could see him now*, he thought. *If only Vanessa could see him.*

They rounded the Isle of Rats at half past nine and turned south on the course Quentin had charted. The deep blue of the ocean stretched out before them, as did the rest of their lives. His son was not the only one who had changed in 21,000 miles. Daniel felt like a different man, the man he could have become two decades ago if only he had taken the risk and followed his dream. He sensed them again—the rays of optimism breaking through the storm clouds of the past. The future was open. Anything was possible. Even with Vanessa.

He glanced at the GPS unit in front of him, checking depth and drift, and helped Quentin tighten up the sheets, bringing both sails closer to the yacht's centerline and perpendicular to the wind. They were on a beam reach, making four and a half knots along the east coast of Mahé. At moments, Daniel was tempted to turn on the engine again and supplement the wind. But each time he let the thought go. They were on a timetable of sorts. They had to return to Annapolis by May so Quentin could prepare for college. But that didn't mean they were in a hurry. If Mother Nature had seen fit to give them a decent wind, they would sail at her pace.

"Dad!" Quentin cried suddenly, pointing toward the bow. "Dolphins!"

Daniel put the helm on autopilot and followed his son to the foredeck. He saw the pod right away. They were swimming alongside the sailboat, their gray bodies glistening in the clear water. They took turns in the lead, one jumping, then another. Occasionally, they would dive below the surface, only to reappear seconds later. The dolphins stayed with them for almost a mile, never straying more than twenty yards from the hull. When at last they broke away, they swam in a lazy circle, fins in the air.

"Look at that!" Quentin exclaimed. "They're waving farewell!"

"It's a good omen," Daniel said, putting his hand on his son's shoulder. Together, they waved back.

PAUL

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

November 7, 2011

The party was too formal for Paul Derrick's taste, the people too self-absorbed to really be interesting. He sipped the wine—an excellent red from Stellenbosch—and listened to conversations around him, noting the timbre of laughter that was genuine and that which was feigned. He stood by a window that overlooked the terrace and the lights of Clifton Beach and minded his own business, except when his sister, Megan, saw fit to introduce him to someone. He wasn't antisocial—far from it. By profession he was a student of human beings, a kind of behavioral scientist, a connoisseur of the mannerisms that reveal hidden feeling—the place where truth resides.

He watched a woman in her late twenties chatting with a large man in a pinstripe suit. He was a film producer and a windbag, a bloviator accustomed to having an audience. She was a pretty girl, in the fresh-faced, Drew Barrymore sort of way, but she had dressed like a vamp in a red shift as slinky as lingerie. By the way she touched the man's arm and laughed at his jokes, it was obvious what she was offering. But she was also self-conscious, tucking her brown hair over her ear, fingering her necklace, shifting her weight between heels, and straightening her dress. She was

playing the seduction card to the hilt, but it was a false note in her personality. Paul felt sorry for her. The man he held in contempt.

He turned toward a large group clustered around Simon Lewis, a celebrated British-born photographer and Megan's husband. He had always liked Simon. He was a person who wore his success lightly and had an accurate estimation of his own worth, which is to say he understood the world would go on with barely a hiccup if he suddenly stopped breathing. He was witty, ironic, and self-deprecating, and his photos were actually quite good. But Paul's admiration didn't rise to the level of respect. For all his sangfroid, Simon was a hedonist who refused to be domesticated, even after tying the knot. His womanizing was something Megan had come to accept, or so she claimed. But Paul knew otherwise. The wound in her heart was real. Simon would never be hers alone.

"Paul! There you are," Megan said, approaching him through the crowd, a young woman in tow. "I want you to meet Anna Kuijers. Anna, this is my brother. He plays the shy part, but he's actually quite charming."

"Afrikaans?" Paul asked Anna, giving his sister a look only she could interpret.

"How did you know?" Anna asked dryly. She was tall—nearly six feet—with a friendly face, blonde hair, and blue eyes a shade lighter than her sapphire dress. "Pleasure."

"All mine," Paul replied.

"Enjoy your conversation," Megan said cheerily. "I just saw someone I need to greet." In seconds, she was across the room again.

"She throws the best parties in Cape Town," Anna said. "To our national shame."

"I'm sure it has nothing to do with her famous husband."

"No, I mean it. She's the most hospitable person I know. She's always going out of her way for people. But I suppose you know that."

Paul was intrigued. "That's the most unpretentious thing I've heard all evening."

Anna smiled wryly. "It's the curse of the artistic crowd. We like to talk

about ourselves.” She paused. “You’re twins. I thought you’d look more alike.”

“We played with a wishbone in the womb. She came out with the bigger half.”

Anna laughed. “I imagine you’ve heard that before.”

“A few times.”

She looked out at the night. “I’d love some fresh air. Care to join me?”

“By all means,” he said and followed her onto the terrace. “Is the sky always so clear here?” he asked, leaning against a stone railing that overlooked the sweep of the sea. “The stars are so bright.”

“Not in the winter. You came at the right time.”

“Too bad I’m only here for a week.”

Anna’s eyes widened. “That’s not much of a holiday.”

Paul nodded. “It’s an occupational hazard. I don’t get away very often.”

“Megan told me you’re with the FBI.”

His expression turned coy. “Do I look like a special agent?”

Anna examined him thoughtfully, taking in his charcoal suit, white shirt, green tie, and blond surfer’s hair. “Not really.”

“Then Megan did a good job. We spent all afternoon at the mall.”

Anna laughed. “You work in Washington?”

“I work in a lot of places. But I have an office near DC”

“You’re a hostage negotiator,” she said. “I’m fascinated.”

“You make it sound sexy. Most of the time I don’t even carry a gun.”

Anna shook her head. “I disagree. There are too many guns in the world.”

He gave her a frank look. “Now you have my attention. What do you do?”

“I’m a publicist. I work with authors.”

“Which means you make them look better than they actually are.”

Anna smiled. “Like your sister did?”

“Touché,” he said with a laugh. He studied her in the dim light. She was an attractive woman—intelligent, insightful, and comfortable in her

own skin. But it didn't matter; he wasn't interested. He hadn't been in a relationship in a decade, ever since his divorce. Love was a game that women played and men lost. And sex without love was complicated and disappointing. His job was his mistress. What the Bureau demanded he could give without reservation, unlike Kelly, who had left enough poison in his heart to paralyze someone less acquainted with pain.

"This is good wine," he said, redirecting the conversation toward something less personal.

"I know the winemaker," she replied. "I'll tell him you said that."

"You publicists get around."

"We have a lot of occasions to drink." She looked him in the eye. "The winery isn't far away. They have an excellent lunch menu."

And there it was: the proposition. He had to play this carefully. He didn't want to offend her. "Sounds tempting. I'll mention it to Megan. We're taking the Garden Route this weekend."

"I can take you if you like," Anna replied, bringing her intentions fully into the light.

"That's nice of you," he said, delivering the blow softly. "If only I had more time."

Anna stepped back gracefully. "Of course. Well, if you're ever bored, Megan has my number."

"I'll keep that in mind." He held up his wine glass. "Cheers."

"Nice chatting," she replied, and left him with a smile.

When she was gone, Paul turned toward the sea and listened to the distant sound of the surf. A gentle wind blew off the water and stirred the trees around the villa. The property was owned by one of Simon's many friends—a fund manager in London. He allowed Simon to use it as a base for his photographic excursions in Africa, and Megan joined him when her trial calendar permitted. She had invited Paul on a whim the last time she had visited his apartment in DC

"What kind of life is this?" she had asked, running her fingers over the top of his oversized plasma television and holding up a year's worth of dust.

“This place is a dump. The only things that are worth anything are your entertainment system and your piano.”

As if on cue, he sat down at his Yamaha baby grand and banged out a jazzy rendition of “What a Wonderful World” sans vocals—he’d never been able to sing.

“You just proved my point, Ray Charles.” She put her hands on his shoulders. “Look, I believe in what you’re doing as much as you do. But you need something permanent to come back to. You can’t be living here in twenty years.”

He had accepted her offer of a getaway, both because he loved her more than anyone else and because the Bureau owed him more vacation days than he could count. But Cape Town, for all its splendor, had done nothing to assuage his restlessness. It was like a drug, the adrenaline he had been living on since September 11, 2001. As a special agent with the FBI’s New-York-based extraterritorial squad, he had worked the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania and developed an interest in Islamic radicalism. Over the next two years, he had turned that interest into an expertise, taking courses on Middle East studies at the City College of New York. With the help of his SSA—supervisory special agent—he had also cross-trained as a negotiator, attending the two-week course at the FBI Academy taught by the Crisis Negotiation Unit, or CNU, the most respected team of high-stakes negotiators in the world. After distinguishing himself in the training, he had come to the attention of the CNU’s director during an exercise in which he played the role of lead negotiator.

Then al-Qaeda attacked the homeland and America went to war in Afghanistan and Iraq. No one quite expected that the wars would trigger a new wave of international kidnappings. But they did. As Western contractors flooded into the conflict zones, the insurgents saw opportunity and began to stage abductions, extort ransoms, and conduct brutal public killings. In June of 2004, soon after the jihadist cleric Abu Musab al-Zarqawi beheaded Nick Berg, an American businessman, the director of the CNU

had brought Paul onboard as a full-time negotiator. Two weeks later, he had been deployed to Baghdad as an advisor to US and coalition troops.

For the past seven years, he had been a human pinball, bouncing from one hostage crisis to the next and racking up over a million airline miles. In his down time, he taught negotiation skills to police agencies around the world and did research on hostage scenarios. He had a gift, his bosses said. He could see through people—especially people in distress. They made him the number one international hostage negotiator in the Bureau. It was the job he had coveted since watching the Waco tragedy unfold in college. But it came with a steep price. He had no life outside of it.

“Hey, good looking,” Megan said, appearing beside him. “I’m disappointed. I was sure you and Anna would hit it off.”

“We did,” he replied, smiling at her. She was an elegant woman with raven-dark hair, hazel eyes, and a face that smiled easily. In the right light, she looked like Vera Farmiga. “You know me well.”

“But you’re not interested.” She said it simply, without judgment.

“My job isn’t conducive to a relationship.”

She shrugged. “Neither is mine, but Simon and I make it work.”

You work while Simon takes his photography students to bed, he thought but didn’t say. At the age of forty, Megan Derrick was one of the most respected criminal defense attorneys in Washington. After graduating second in her class from Virginia Law School, she had clerked on the US Supreme Court before joining a boutique litigation practice run by a former Solicitor General that specialized in high-profile criminal cases and constitutional appeals.

“I’d be interested in you, if you weren’t already spoken for,” he said, giving her a sly look.

She laughed in a deep, authentic way. “Do you remember when we were kids? We used to joke about marrying each other. We’d had a nine-month courtship in utero and were best friends. What better foundation for a relationship?”

“Now we live in the same city and go months without seeing each other.”

She smiled. “I don’t need to see you to know what you’re thinking.”

“A telepathic lawyer,” he said with mirth in his eyes. “That’s about as terrifying as a clairvoyant car salesman.” He paused. “So what am I thinking?”

She eyed him seriously. “You really want to know?”

“I know already.” It was a game they had played many times, but they never tired of it.

“Okay.” She stared out at the night sea. “You’re still thinking about Anna. Maybe not actively, but in the back of your mind some part of you wishes you were free enough to enjoy her.” She looked into his eyes. “You are, you know? I’ve driven the Garden Route before.”

As usual, she was spot on, but Paul pretended otherwise. He shook his head. “I was thinking about my last assignment.”

“Nonsense,” she retorted. “I know it’s hard to believe, but not every woman is like Kelly.”

The name of his ex-wife landed like a spear in his gut. He covered his emotions with jest. “It’s decided then. You should leave Simon and we should elope.”

“I mean it. Your music and your film collection will never warm your bed.”

He let out a slow breath. “I’ve missed you, Meg. You’re the only person in the world who understands me.”

She gave him a hug. “I’ll always be here for you. But the Bureau shouldn’t have your soul.”

“I’ll think about it,” he said, and held her tight.

I S M A I L

THE INDIAN OCEAN

09°04'45"S, 56°52'34"E

November 8, 2011

The cargo ship was a gray ghost on the western horizon, a smudge of coal against the backdrop of the pre-dawn sky. Ismail looked across the tropical sea draped with the shadows of twilight and clutched the stock of his AK-47. The wood was clammy in his hands, the metal barrel sweating in the warm, salt-laden air, but he had no doubt that it would work. The Soviet-era carbine—a throwback to the days of Siad Barre and the Somali National Army—was as trusty as an old camel.

He sat in the bow of the second skiff as it raced across the dark water. His ears were full of sound—the roar of the large outboard engine, the bone-jarring percussion of the bow as it leapt the waves, the wind moaning like a herd of cattle disturbed from sleep. They were eight miles from the ship and closing fast, their speed just under twenty-seven knots. The Omani *dooni*, or dhow, they had lived on for the past three weeks was miles behind them, its painted hull no longer visible.

He felt the twist of nerves in his gut along with the gnawing void of hunger. For two days he had eaten only bread and rice. The goat meat they

had brought from the village—a gift from the clan elders, most of whom had a financial stake in the mission—had run out. There were nineteen men aboard the dhow: fourteen Somalis and five Omani fishermen who were both hostages and indentured servants—essentially a charter crew acting under duress. They would be released as soon as their “passengers” caught a ship, but not before.

Ismail looked into the faces of his companions, gauging their commitment, their willingness to risk life and limb in service of the mission. He was one of twelve attackers—six in each skiff. All were armed with vintage Kalashnikovs and motivated by a singular desire: to take something valuable from a world that had given them nothing. Their commander went by the nickname Gedef, or “mask” in Somali. His story was famous among the crew. He was a veteran of the Central Regional Coast Guard, formed in 2003 by the world’s most notorious pirate kingpin, Mohamed Abdi Hassan, or “Afweyne.” On Gedef’s first mission in command, he had brought back an extraordinary prize—a Saudi oil tanker carrying over \$100 million in light sweet crude. Yet of the \$3.3 million ransom paid by the ship’s owners, he had received only \$46,000 and a Land Cruiser. He had left Afweyne in contempt and formed his own gang, obtaining financing from his father and other relatives in Somalia and the diaspora. Since then, he had hijacked two more vessels, one of which—a Singaporean freighter—had netted a \$2.3 million ransom. The second—a Malaysian container ship—was currently at anchor near Ceel-Huur while the negotiators in Hobyo and London haggled over the price.

Ismail caught Gedef’s eye across the twenty-foot gap between the skiffs. The commander’s expression was as fierce as it was emotionless, like a bird of prey. Physically, he and Ismail looked nothing alike. Gedef was relatively short and muscular with a countenance as arid as the desert of Galmudug where he was born. Ismail, meanwhile, was tall and athletic with a face that combined his father’s penetrating gaze with his mother’s clear skin and symmetrical beauty. Psychologically, however, they might have been brothers. Though separated in age by over a decade—Gedef

was thirty-one; Ismail twenty—both had fought in the Somali civil war and turned to piracy as a way out. They were thinkers and men of action, desiring peace but wielding the sword to achieve it on their own terms.

Ismail was Gedef's second-in-command, trusted for his fearlessness and valued for his command of spoken English. He had been the first attacker to board the Malaysian cargo ship, the first to commandeer the bridge and subdue the terrified Chinese crew while calming their nerves with fluent reassurances. Gedef called him "Afyareh," or "agile mouth." It was Gedef's intention—expressed the night before they left Hobyo—to give Ismail command of his crew. If the current mission went well, Gedef intended to retire from the piracy business, build a sturdy house near the sea, chew *qat*—a leafy narcotic shrub—and have many wives and children.

Ismail watched the sky brighten in the east. The sun would rise in ten minutes, about the same time the two skiffs would appear on the cargo ship's radar. They had been trailing the vessel all night on AIS—the radio-powered identification system that ships use in international waters—and they had timed the attack precisely. They would ride in on the scythe of light, and if they were lucky, they would be aboard the ship and in control of the crew within half an hour. After that, it would take them about two and a half days to deliver their prey to the Somali coast. They were deep in the Indian Ocean, on the far side of the Seychelles—an unconventional hunting ground but safer than the navy-patrolled Gulf of Aden or the Arabian Sea in cyclone season.

Closing his eyes, Ismail mouthed two lines from the *Fatiha*, the opening sura of the Quran, in Arabic. It was the first prayer his father had taught him when he was a child, before the advent of madness and murder, before the Shabaab—the militant Arab–Somali Islamist group turned cult of blood—had stolen his life and much of his soul. Notwithstanding the gun in his hands and the nature of his mission, he didn't speak the words ironically. Instead, he turned them into a prayer of preemptive repentance.

"*Bismallah-ir-Rahman ar-Raheem* . . . In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. You alone do we worship, and you alone do we

ask for help. I take refuge in Allah. I seek forgiveness from Allah. Glorified is my Lord, the Highest. Amen.”

The sun appeared suddenly, as it does close to the equator, turning night into day and lighting up the cargo ship like a torch. It was a mammoth vessel, with a towering white superstructure and a hull the color of red clay weighed down by hundreds of containers, stacked six and seven high from stem to stern. Ismail picked up his binoculars and surveyed the fantail. The ship was the MV *Jade Dolphin*, from Mumbai, India. The Indians were notorious among the Somali gangs for their hatred of piracy, but their dollars were as green as any other nation. They would surrender, and they would pay. The law of the sea was the law of war—he who has the gun is king.

Ismail watched for the inevitable turn that would signal the ship’s crew had spotted them. As the seconds passed, he grew puzzled. The skiffs were only three minutes out—about one and a half nautical miles—yet the *Jade Dolphin* had yet to conduct any evasive maneuvers. Its speed and course were constant. No water hoses had been turned on, no alarm triggered. There were two explanations: either the ship had a prehistoric radar system that couldn’t detect the skiffs against the clutter of the sea, or the watch officers weren’t paying attention. Ismail smiled thinly. *They’re making it easy for us.*

He glanced across the water as Gedef’s skiff broke away. Their strategy was simple. They would approach the ship like the pincers of a scorpion. Gedef’s team would fire warning shots at the bridge, and Ismail’s team would board the ship just forward of the stern. Ismail and two other attackers would make for the bridge while the rest of his men located the crew. For being the first to board, Ismail would receive triple the *sami*, or ransom share, of the other attackers, except for Gedef, who would take half of the gross to cover expenses and pay himself and his investors.

When the skiffs were less than a mile out, the *Jade Dolphin* finally sounded the alarm. In seconds, the ship accelerated and made a hard turn to starboard, then back to port, churning its wake into waves. This attempt

at evasion came far too late. The skiffs fanned out to avoid the chop and zeroed in on the *Jade Dolphin's* stern, racing across the sea like bull sharks moving in for the kill.

The Somalis drew their guns and aimed them at the tower. Through the binoculars, Ismail saw movement on the bridge—black shadows of men scurrying and gesticulating. Adrenaline surged through his body as he readied himself for the attack. He pictured his sister then, as she was in the world before—the delicate oval of her face, framed by an embroidered *hijab*, or headscarf, her small nose and lips, and wide eyes that glowed when she smiled. Yasmin, innocent as a flower. She was his pole star, his secret reservoir of courage. Gedef knew nothing of her existence, nothing of Ismail's true motivation, or the lengths to which he would go to set her free.

Suddenly, gunfire erupted from Gedef's skiff—the signature *rat-tat-tat* of the AK-47 known in warzones the world over. One burst, then two and three, all directed at the bridge. As Ismail watched, the *Jade Dolphin's* crew dropped out of sight. Then something happened that took him completely by surprise: he heard the high-pitched crack of a rifle. Then another.

He jerked the binoculars toward Gedef's skiff, and terror seized him. One of the attackers was slumped over the gunwale, his arm dragging in the water; another was holding his bloody chest. Gedef was shouting at his cowering crew as he fired back at the tower. Then he, too, took a bullet in the thigh. His leg collapsed beneath him, and his gun fell overboard, disappearing into the sea.

At that instant, Ismail knew what he had to do. He dropped the binoculars and took the tiller from the terrified helmsman. His men were screaming at him to break off the attack, their dark faces tortured with fear, but he had no interest in their cowardice. He had heard only one rifle, which meant there was a single shooter. He was good, but he couldn't be everywhere at once. If Ismail could get aboard, he could flush him out. He had done it before on the streets of Mogadishu.

He opened the throttle to the max and pointed the skiff at the fantail

of the *Jade Dolphin*. The huge ship loomed above them like a castle of hardened steel. Ismail focused on the open windows in the vertical stern. They were at main deck level, thirty feet off the water, but they were accessible. The hook ladder his crew carried had been engineered precisely for this purpose.

He heard more rifle shots and glanced toward Gedef's skiff, one hundred yards away. His eyes widened as his brain registered the spectacle. Gedef was crouched in the center of the boat, balancing a rocket-propelled grenade launcher on his shoulder. It was the most powerful weapon in their arsenal, but it was meant only to cement the threat, not to be used against a ship. Ismail waved his arm wildly, trying to catch Gedef's attention before he turned an act of piracy into an attempted murder.

What happened next shook Ismail to the core. Gedef raised the RPG launcher toward the *Jade Dolphin* and pulled the trigger. As the shell launched, its back-blast ignited the skiff's engine and the engine became a bomb. The explosion was so violent that it sent flames high into the sky and flipped the skiff like it was a toy. The waves quickly encircled the broken hull and dragged it under. It sank in less than a minute, leaving behind a scatter of bodies and an oil slick that continued to burn.

In the wake of the blast, Ismail sat paralyzed while his skiff drifted to a stop, bobbing idly in the *Jade Dolphin's* wake. He didn't process the shouts of the men around him. He didn't notice the container ship slipping away. He was in Mogadishu again, crouched behind an overturned jeep on Maka al Mukarama Road, Yusuf huddled beside him, crying. Bullets were flying around, some ricocheting off the jeep, others burying themselves in the house behind them. Men were shrieking in Somali, some injured, some dying, as the government tanks made their advance. Then came the explosion and the black void of unconsciousness. His eyes blinked and he saw the blood again, felt its viscous stickiness on his skin. He heard the shriek escape from his lips—

—and returned to the present just as suddenly. His men were yelling his name.

“Afyareh! Afyareh! What are we going to do?”

They were staring at him, terrified. Guray, aged twenty-four, an illiterate goatherd from the interior whose only talent was wielding a gun; Dhuuban, aged nineteen, the runt of his seven siblings, scarecrow-thin, and desperate to prove himself to his father; Osman, aged twenty-five, headstrong and juvenile, a fisherman with a sixth-grade education; Liban, aged twenty, the trustworthy son of a camel broker, and Ismail’s right-hand man; and finally, Sondare, an introspective boy of seventeen whose mother sold *qat* to feed his five brothers while his father wasted her earnings on his new wife. Without Gedef, they were like orphaned children. They needed someone to lead them.

“We’ll search for the living,” Ismail said, speaking with a voice of authority. It was the only gift the Shabaab had given him—he knew how to command.

He took the tiller in hand and piloted the skiff to the site of the wreck. His men plugged their noses against the stench of burning oil and pointed out the bodies. They found three of them quickly, floating facedown on the water. All were dead, riddled with shrapnel. The fourth they found in a haze of pink some distance away. He was missing half a leg. The sight was so grotesque that Sondare turned away and Dhuuban retched over the side. The rest shouted Gedef’s name and that of his cousin, Mas, into the vastness of sky and sea, but no reply came.

“They’re dead,” Liban said in a voice tinged with shock. “We have to find the dhow.”

“No,” Osman replied fiercely. “We can’t leave them.”

Ismail forced himself to be patient. Osman was Mas’s best friend. “We’ll keep searching,” he said and turned the skiff around again.

He watched the *Jade Dolphin* recede into the distance while his men looked for survivors. The RPG shell had missed. Perhaps Gedef had only meant to scare them. Ismail would likely never know. The attack had degenerated into a fiasco. But the mission itself could be salvaged. The dhow had enough food and fuel for another week at sea. Other pirate

bands had hijacked ships with one skiff. It was hazardous, but preferable to the alternative. They couldn't return to Somalia without a prize. Gedef's investors would have their heads.

"Look!" Osman shouted, staring toward the east and the sun. "It's Mas!"

The young man was floating on a piece of wreckage in water turned molten by the sunrise. He was half drowned, but he turned his head in their direction. Ismail brought the skiff alongside him, and Osman and Guray pulled him into the boat. He curled up in the fetal position, spit drooling out of his mouth. Apart from shock and exposure, he appeared to be uninjured, except for a two-inch-long laceration on his right cheek. *Just my luck that he would survive and not Gedef*, Ismail thought.

Mas was a twenty-two-year-old hothead, jealous and contentious. The only son of Gedef's uncle, he had worshiped at Gedef's feet and questioned Ismail's place in the band. "Afyareh is *fakash*—from a rival clan," he had said many times. "He fought for al-Shabaab. He can't be trusted." Gedef had ignored him. The pirate bands were largely meritocratic. Skill mattered more than clan, daring more than creed. Gedef elevated Ismail because he was gifted at hijacking ships; he didn't care that Ismail's father was Sa'ad, not Suleiman like the rest of them. With Gedef dead, though, Mas could be dangerous. Ismail would have to watch him carefully.

He fetched the handheld radio from the waterproof bag behind his seat and switched it on, pressing the "talk" button. "Abdullah, Abdullah," he began, "come in." He listened to the static but heard nothing. "Abdullah, Abdullah, this is Afyareh, can you hear me?"

He frowned and looked toward the sun. The radio had an effective range of eight miles on the water. *The dooni should be close enough*, he thought. *Why is Abdullah not answering?* His men were staring at him, all but Osman, who was tending to Mas.

"Don't worry," he said confidently.

He took control of the tiller and massaged the throttle, driving the skiff through the low waves. He pointed the bow east and watched the

horizon for a shadow, a discontinuity, anything that might be a glimpse of the dhow. Every few minutes, he let go of the throttle and tried to raise Abdullah on the radio. Each time, he heard only static.

After half an hour, he began to grow worried. His men were watching him anxiously, Osman included. Mas was still semi-conscious, but he had begun to babble. He would soon come to his senses, and when he did, he was sure to provoke a fight.

“Abdullah, Abdullah,” Ismail said for what felt like the hundredth time. “This is Afyareh. If you can hear me, please respond.” A minute later, he decided to lie: “Abdullah, this is Afyareh. Gedef is with me, but his radio is dead. What is your position?”

Liban was the first to ask what Ismail feared. “Do you think they left us?”

“No, no,” Ismail said forcefully. “They are just out of range.”

As more time passed, however, Liban’s question began to fester. Guray and Osman started to complain about Abdullah and Shirma, the guards they had left on the dhow to manage the Omani fishermen. Dhuuban perched himself in the bow and held his skinny knees to his chest, staring at Mas as if he had brought a hex upon them. Liban fingered his Kalashnikov as if it were a talisman. Only Sondare kept the faith, sitting beside Ismail and hanging on his every word, as if at any moment Abdullah’s voice might break through the static and provide a rational excuse for his silence.

But Ismail’s assurance was feigned. Inside, he was profoundly troubled. Abdullah was an experienced pirate and fiercely loyal to Gedef. He wouldn’t abandon them without cause. But with cause . . . Ismail’s mind raced with the possibilities. What if he heard the explosion and saw the flames? The *Jade Dolphin* had surely alerted the authorities about the attack. What if Abdullah heard chatter on the radio about a disabled skiff and a Seychellois coast guard vessel en route to the scene? Or what if the Omanis had mutinied? There were five of them. They might have

overpowered Abdullah and Shirma in a moment of distraction and turned the dhow toward home.

He searched the horizon again, squinting against the glare. He checked his handheld GPS unit for the coordinates. After nearly an hour of cruising, they were close to the spot where they had left the dhow. The day was clear; visibility was excellent. But the dhow was nowhere to be seen.

“They’re gone,” Liban declared, looking Ismail in the eye.

Osman gripped the stock of his gun. “If I ever get my hands on Abdullah, I’m going to put a bullet in his head.”

“What are we going to do?” Dhuuban moaned from the bow.

At once, a shouting match broke out among the men. Ismail allowed them to vent their frustration while he pondered their situation. He knew exactly what they had to do, but he dreaded it at the same time. It would drive him further away from Yasmin—much further. But any distance was better than death.

He lifted his Kalashnikov and fired a burst into the air. “*Shut up!*” he said harshly.

Silence descended on the skiff. Osman and Guray took turns glaring at him, but no one disputed his authority. He looked at the six faces around him, shining with sweat and fear, and told them the truth as clearly as he could articulate it.

“We have no food. We have water for two days at most and three quarters of a tank of fuel. Does anyone know how far that will take us?”

He asked the question to put them in their place. He was the only one among them who had committed the engine specifications to memory.

“Two hundred and fifty nautical miles,” he answered for them. “Maybe two hundred and seventy-five, if the seas are calm.”

No one spoke. He had their complete attention. He held up his GPS unit. “The closest land is Coëtivy Island in the Seychelles. That’s one hundred and twenty nautical miles from here. Mahé is two hundred and seventy nautical miles away. Both islands are in the same direction. I don’t

want to be a refugee, but neither do I want to die. If we ditch our weapons in the sea, we can claim asylum.”

“We are Somali,” Liban objected. “They would say we are pirates.”

“They would have no evidence,” Ismail replied. “We would pretend to be fishermen.” He gestured at Osman. “He can teach us everything we need to know.”

Osman shook his head. “We don’t have nets or bait. And there are too many of us.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Ismail countered. “If we tell the same story, they will have to accept it. Maybe they will send us back to Somalia. Maybe they will let us stay. Either way, we don’t die.”

It was then that Mas spoke, as if from the grave. “I think we should find another ship.”

Ismail didn’t allow his distaste to show. “And how do we do that without radar or AIS?”

Mas clenched his teeth. “I want the Land Cruiser Gedef promised me.”

“And I want a big house by the sea and four wives,” Ismail replied, playing the part of the pirate boss without really meaning it. “We don’t get there if we’re dead.”

Mas didn’t reply, but his eyes smoldered.

“We could do both,” Liban suggested and heads began to nod all around. “Maybe we’ll find another ship closer to Mahé.”

Ismail watched the consensus grow until even Mas seemed placated. It was the plan he had envisioned all along. He had no interest in giving up until he absolutely had to. But he needed their consent to save their lives, and his own.

“It’s a good idea,” he said. “We’ll head toward Mahé. But if we run across a ship”—he looked each of them in the eye—“then, *inshallah*, we will take it.”