

“Intrigue”

By Dave McClain

What seems like an ordinary meeting of two friends at a coffee shop becomes much more.

A bearded man in a black jacket sat alone at a table in the back of the half-empty coffee shop, near the counter. He watched the door, glancing back and forth between it and his cup of black coffee, which he barely touched. Every minute or so, he briefly glanced around him at the other tables and their occupants, careful not to make eye contact with anyone. His right leg bounced nervously beneath the table as he whispered a few times to himself: “You gotta pay for quality.”

A bearded man in a gray jacket entered the coffee shop, looked around and walked toward the counter. He stopped near the first man’s table, looking up at the menu.

“Everything is so expensive here,” said Mr. Grey.

Mr. Black perked up. His leg stopped bouncing. Without looking directly at Mr. Grey, he responded, “Well, you gotta pay for quality.”

Mr. Black tentatively glanced up at Mr. Grey’s eyes which continued to look at the menu.

“How do you want to...” Mr. Black started in a half-whisper.

“Not here. Outside,” interrupted Mr. Grey in a similar tone, a look of displeasure on his face.

“Oh,” said Mr. Black quietly. He quickly stood up, bumping his table and making some of his coffee slosh out over the side of his cup. He left the building and sat down at a table just outside.

A few minutes later, Mr. Grey followed suit. Looking around and seeing no one else within ear shot, he sat down across from Mr. Black and took a sip of his coffee.

“Do you have it?” asked Mr. Black, breaking the brief but uncomfortable silence.

“Yes. Do you have something for me?”

“Yes, right here,” said Mr. Black, patting his jacket pocket.

“Slide it to me under a napkin,” instructed Mr. Grey quietly.

“Wait. Ummm,” Mr. Black hesitated, as if he was trying to remember something. “I want you to tell me exactly what I’m getting.”

Mr. Grey looked around and across the parking lot and then through the window at the coffee shop patrons. He saw a few couples, a small group of friends at a large table and a pair of Middle Eastern-looking men in the far corner, but no one seemed to be paying any attention to the two men sitting at that table outside. Mr. Grey spoke slowly and even more quietly than before.

“All of the manning documents and security procedures at the plant, plus the cookbook.”

“The cookbook?”

“Yes. All of the options and protocols of the emergency management plans. All the ingredients. We call it the cookbook.”

“Right. Good. Got it,” said Mr. Black. He paused briefly before continuing. “Let’s see it.”

“No. Money first.”

Mr. Black took a folded piece of paper out of his jacket, placed it under his napkin and slid it half-way across the table. Mr. Grey reached forward, slid the napkin towards him, took out the piece of paper and looked at the numbers written on it.

“That’s the account number and the access code. It’s all there, just as we agreed,” said Mr. Grey.

For the first time in his brief meeting with Mr. Black, Mr. Grey smiled. Then he stood. Mr. Black looked confused as Mr. Grey extended his hand.

“Well, it was very nice to run into you.”

Mr. Black stood and shook Mr. Grey’s hand. Mr. Black felt the outline of a small computer thumb drive in his palm. He withdrew his hand and placed the drive in his pocket. Mr. Grey nodded at Mr. Black and turned as if to leave. Then, suddenly, Mr. Grey quickly whirled around. He had a gun in one hand and an open wallet in the other. His badge gleamed in the sun.

“FBI! You’re under arrest!” shouted Mr. Grey.

“What?!? Wait! I thought this was just a...”

“You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you...”

As Mr. Grey continued reading Mr. Black his rights, he bent him over the table and handcuffed him as several more FBI agents emerged seemingly out of nowhere, guns drawn. With terror and confusion in his eyes, Mr. Black looked around him frantically and then into the coffee shop, scanning the faces of the people who were now standing at the window staring back at him.

“Malik! Malik! Where are you? Malik! Help me! Malik!”

Mr. Black’s cries continued as Mr. Grey placed him in the back seat of a car and it drove away.

The two Middle Eastern-looking men in the coffee shop were looking out the window with the rest of the patrons, but they were standing behind everyone else, just beyond Mr. Black’s view.

“Malik?” said the first man.

“That’s what I called myself when I met him,” said the second.

“Who is that man?”

“A wannabe actor I hired,” explained the second man. “I told him I have a friend who is very much enamored of spy novels. I said I decided for his birthday to hire an actor to participate in a role play, so my friend could pretend he was a spy for a day. I gave him just enough lines to memorize so the FBI would move in and arrest him.”

The first man laughed and then he turned back towards his companion, “How did you know that it was a trap?”

“Americans are very arrogant and the FBI is often sloppy. It is why our cause will triumph in the end. Insha’Allah.”

“Insha’Allah,” replied the first man.

“Now that we have taken care of this, we can get back to work. I have developed a new source of information about the plant’s operations. A true brother in jihad.”

The two men quietly slipped through the crowd and left the coffee shop. As the second man passed by Mr. Grey, the first man glanced at Mr. Grey and they each nodded slightly at the other.
