

GETTING OUT



BOOK ONE

Al Strano

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Getting Out - Part One

Chapter One How Bad Can Things Get?

The place where Anthony lived was getting worse every day. He lived with his mother and little brother in a small, yet neat, apartment, renting from a slumlord who provided little maintenance. Anthony's father had left when he was twelve. Anthony's mother said, "He just didn't want to be a father." So Anthony had been the 'man' of the house for four years. His mother was on welfare, not that she wanted to be, but she couldn't find work nearby. And the cost of transportation and babysitting would have made no difference in her income over welfare.

There had always been a gang in the neighborhood that sold drugs and collected protection money; it seemed like a part of life. All the gang members had relatives in the neighborhood, so it was like stealing from yourself. Then a new gang moved in. This gang killed the leaders of the old gang and Orlando, the leader, demanded more protection money and the drug trafficking took over, smothering people's hopes. Those who could, moved away, their places being taken by drug users and crack houses.

The police did little to curb these activities, since no one would testify against Orlando and his gang. Anthony's mother did everything she could to keep her son away from the gang. He was under constant pressure to become a gang member and was threatened if he didn't. Anthony loved basketball and played on the church team. Father Dominic coached the boys and had two rules. They must come to 9 o'clock mass and not be gang members. Anthony used this excuse to fend off Orlando's threats. Orlando decided he would confront the priest – the holy man was keeping several gang recruits out of his grasp. No puny holy roller was going to stop his recruitment. Orlando showed up at the rectory with some of his thugs as a show of force. When Father Dominic opened the door he immediately took charge of the confrontation.

"Paul, Jimmy, Peter," referring to three of the thugs as if they were little boys. "Why haven't you been to mass? Have you been sick?" This tactic disarmed the boys and they sheepishly looked away.

Orlando puffed out his chest and said, "I told them not to go."

The priest looked him straight in the eye and demanded. "And who are you to keep these boys away from the grace of God? I haven't seen you in my church. Do you go to Saint Helen's?"

“I don't go to any church, I don't need it.”

“What does your mother say about that?”

“Leave my mother out of this.”

“Does she go to church?”

“Enough of this stuff. I want all the boys in this neighborhood in my gang. It's bad for business to have them not.”

“Well my business is with God and his business is a lot more important than yours. I expect to see you all in Church on Sunday.” And with that he closed the door in Orlando's face. The gang chief was flabbergasted. No one treated him like that. He stormed off threatening mayhem. His henchmen meekly followed.

Anthony and the other boys got the word that Orlando planned to get even with the priest for insulting him. This was not good, man of God or not, evil people were still capable of bad things. Anthony had two things on his mind. One was to get out of Orlando's clutches and the other was to get out of the neighborhood. He had been thinking about this for a long time and had come up with a plan.

Chapter Two Anthony's Plan

For the first part of his plan Anthony needed a partner – a policeman. Most of the local cops were corrupt, afraid of Orlando or both. He needed a senior officer from outside the neighborhood, preferably a narcotics detective. This narrowed his list and discouraged him until fate took a hand. As part of a community outreach program, just the guy he was looking for came to school and gave a drug prevention lecture. As the meeting broke up, Anthony approached the officer. Looking around to make sure no one from Orlando's gang was nearby, he said, “Sir, I have a plan to get rid of the gang around here that is pushing drugs. I need your help.”

This, of course, surprised the officer. He was used to the kids ignoring his talk, especially in an area like this. But, from the look on Anthony's face, he knew he was serious. “This is not the best place to discuss this.”

Anthony agreed, “We need to be a long way from here, that's for sure.”

“Tell you what, why don't you come to my house for dinner tonight, we can talk in private.”

Anthony concurred, but when the detective gave him the address, he had no idea where it was and was embarrassed to admit it. After school he managed to find a phone book with maps. Not an easy task, since most of the phone booths along with the directories had been destroyed. To his horror the address was on the other side of town. Nonetheless, at five o'clock he set out on foot for the six o'clock appointment. At 6:30 the detective was sure he was being stood up. But just as he was telling his wife to serve dinner there was a knock at the door. When he opened the door, there stood a heavy-breathing, sweaty Anthony.

“I'm so sorry. I got lost and went the wrong way on Brewster Street.”

“That's all right. Where did you park?”

“I didn't, I walked. I don't have a car or driver's license.”

“Walked from where you live? That's got to be 5 miles. Come in, my wife will get you some iced tea. You look like you could use it.”

The pleasant looking woman quickly brought the tea asking if he wanted, “Sugar or lemon?”

Anthony had never had lemon in tea, so he thought it would be cool to try it.

“I hope you don't mind kosher food?” she asked.

Anthony knew Jews ate kosher food but didn't know what it was. “Anything will be fine,” he answered.

The dinner was roasted chicken, potatoes and carrots. It looked a lot like what they had at home, except the portions were bigger. Anthony was on his best behavior and the Shapiros were impressed with his table manners. Anthony's mother would be pleased, if she knew. She had no idea where he was and would have been horrified if she had known.

After dinner, it was time to get down to business. “So tell me about this plan of yours.” The detective was skeptical that a sixteen year old could come up with a plan to get to a gang lord. But part of his job was to build good relations with the public. So far it had been difficult, everyone was afraid to speak with him. He wasn't going to turn away the one person who was interested in helping.

Anthony began, “Orlando is trying to recruit me and I don't want to be a gang member. He also wants to hurt Father Dominic because the priest is trying to keep the boys away from the gang. I want to play basketball for the church. Father Dominic, who is the coach, has two rules: no gang members and the players must come to mass every week. My plan is to approach Orlando with a deal that if I can play basketball I will be his spy and keep an eye on the priest and the other players. I will tell Orlando if he hurts the priest it will be a big mistake. The church is very powerful. It even has it's own army, 'The Swiss Guard.' If the priest is harmed, they will come after him. Killing a priest is worse than killing a cop. Besides, if that isn't enough, I will promise to get close to the priest and accuse him of being a pedophile. That will hurt the priest without involving Orlando.”

Detective Shapiro was stunned. He never imagined a kid could come up with such a plan. “Wow, that's quite a plan. What do you need me for?”

“If I can get close to Orlando without being a gang member. I can learn about their planned activities like drug sales and gun running. I can then pass this information on to you.”

“Why not use the local police? Won't that be easier for you?”

“I don't trust the local cops. Most of them are afraid of the gang and the others are crooked and on the take. If I go to them I'll be dead in a week.”

“Well, this is a daring plan. I can see some potential. However, I'm not sure my superiors will want a minor to be a confidential informant – it'll be too dangerous.”

“Every day of my life is dangerous. And I don't see anybody helping me.”

“O.K. I'll take this up with the chief of narcotics and see what he says. In the mean time keep a low profile.”

“That may not be easy. Orlando is really angry and wants to hurt the priest.”

“I'll try to get a quick answer, but there are channels for this. Give me a week. Why don't I give you a ride home; it's late and you have a long way to go.”

“O.K. But not too close. How about Belmont Park, that's outside of Orlando's territory in neutral ground.”

“That's fine. Why don't we agree to meet at the place I drop you off at 6 pm next week. You can come to dinner again?”

Another dinner didn't sound bad to Anthony, more kosher food would be interesting. When he left, the detective's wife insisted on giving him a package of leftovers. He would have to ask the priest if he had to go to confession for eating kosher food.

The next time Anthony saw Father Dominic he asked him if it was a sin to eat kosher food. The priest laughed and said, “Not at all. It's probably better for you than a cheeseburger.”

Chapter Three

Forced into Action

Two days later, three of Orlando's boys came to fetch Anthony. He had no choice but to go with them. Arriving at Orlando's crib, Anthony was roughly pushed through the door. The goons were showing off for their lord.

“O.K., Anthony, I'm tired of messing around. You are joining our gang. I can't have you wandering around without a gang tat, it will give other young punks bad ideas. And as your initiation, you will shoot the priest.”

Anthony swallowed hard, this was moving too fast. He hadn't had time to work out his plan. He would have to wing it. “I think those are bad ideas. Shooting the priest will bring down the wrath of the whole Catholic Church on you.”

Orlando smirked. “Wrath of what church – a bunch of pansy priests and nuns?”

Anthony looked him straight in the eye and said. “Nuns? Have you never heard of the Swiss Guard?”

“What do the Swiss have to do with it? All they do is make cheese.” His thugs thought this was hilarious and all laughed. Anthony shook his head in pity.

“The Swiss Guard has protected the Pope and his priests for a thousand years. They are highly trained commandos. Anyone hurting a priest has to deal with them. Why do you think you never hear about priests being killed. It's worse than killing a cop.”

All of this caused Orlando to have a confused look on his piggish face. “You're sure about that. I've got a big gang you know.”

“The church has a billion members and is one of the richest organizations in the world.” Anthony had really gotten into it, but Orlando was desperately trying to save face.

“O.K. You don't have to kill him, but you still have to join the gang.”

It was time for Anthony's last ploy, “I have a better idea. I don't join your gang officially, no tat, but I work for you undercover and find a way to have the priest accused of being a pedophile. That will get him disgraced and the church will send him someplace else, like South America.”

After thinking for a minute, a real task for him, Orlando responded with, “Well, no

basketball.”

Anthony gulped and thought quickly, which was easier for him than Orlando.

“That won't work. How can I get close to the priest if I'm not playing. And what about my career, I'm really good, you know. I could make the NBA, those guys make millions.” Anthony really wasn't that good but Orlando didn't know that and the word millions really impressed him. Now all Anthony needed was to get the cops on board.

Chapter Four

A Surprise Dinner Companion

The night to meet the detective finally arrived. Anthony was at the appointed place early and was thrilled when the detective showed up. He quickly jumped into the unmarked car and slouched down; he couldn't be too careful. The policeman smiled and asked, "How was your week?"

"It was very productive. I am now an unofficial member of Orlando's gang."

"I told you to keep a low profile. If we're going to work together you have to listen to me."

"I didn't have a choice. Orlando sent three of his goons after me and I had to talk my way out of shooting Father Dominic. It actually all worked out. I convinced Orlando that if he killed the priest the Swiss Guard would get on him."

"The Swiss Guard? Where did that come from?"

"I made it up. He never heard of them, but if he checks he'll find out they're real. But, hopefully, no more than that."

"You've been a busy boy. The good news is, so have I. It took some bargaining and begging but you're a confidential informant. Here take this." He handed Anthony a cellphone. He had never held one in his hand and was surprised how small it was. "That's your way to communicate with me. Even though we're being careful, it's still dangerous for us to meet. I want you to call me once a week at this time. But if anything important like a drug deal, robbery or a hit is about to take place, call me immediately. Keep this well hidden. You're not to use it for any reason other than to call me. And nobody is to know you have it, not even your mom or brother. And find a secure place to use it. My number is programmed into it." Anthony stared at the phone and obviously wasn't sure how to use it. Shapiro noticed the boy's concern. "O.K. Turn it on by pushing the red button. Then the select button on the right side, only one number will come up then push the call button." There was an immediate ringing sound coming from the hands free phone mounted on the car's console. The cop smiled at Anthony's expression and said, "Hello, Anthony. Now hit the end call button, it's illegal to talk on the phone while driving." Just then they arrived at the Shapiro's driveway. As they climbed out of the car, the door to the house flew open and a attractive teenage girl ran down to the car and hugged her father. "Surprise, Daddy! I'm home early. Who's your friend?" All this said in one breath.

"Anthony, meet my daughter Sara. She's attending prep school and wasn't due till

tomorrow. Anthony will be eating with us and you must be sworn to secrecy.”

“OOOH, that sounds mysterious.”

“It is, so keep your lip zipped. Let's go in, I'm sure your mother is ready to serve dinner.”

Anthony's second kosher dinner was matzoh ball soup, which he found delicious, especially since Father Dominic told him it wasn't a sin to eat it. He was also captivated by Sara, she was fifteen and precocious, dominating the conversation. This didn't bother the detective, the less talk about Anthony the better.

The way back to dropping Anthony off was very quiet, provoking the cop to ask, “What do you think of Sara?”

Anthony stuttered a little before saying, “I think she's beautiful and really funny.”

Not the worst answer and he let it pass. Anthony was given his final instructions and reminded to call the next week if nothing occurred in the meantime.

When the detective returned home his wife had a slightly different take on the matter. “Ben, I like Anthony, but I'm glad he won't be coming back to dinner, at least while Sara is here. She thinks he's dreamy and wanted to know where he lives. I know you don't want her nosing around your case.”

“Wow, I didn't see that coming, but nothing to worry about, Rachel. It would be dangerous for him to come here and I'm sure Sara will forget him as soon as she returns to school.”

“Well, I hope so. I don't want my grandchildren raised Catholic.”

Ben's jaw dropped and that was that. At least for then.

Chapter Five Working Undercover

Back at home Anthony didn't need to wait long to hear from Orlando. Once again some of the crew came to escort him to the gang leader's den. "Well? How's it going? When do we get rid if the priest?"

Anthony was not surprised by the question, he knew Orlando would be impatient. "It's not something you can do by snapping your fingers. I'll need to get three or four younger kids to testify that the priest is making inappropriate advances. Then they'll have to go to their parents with the story. I'll let you know how it's going."

"Well in the meantime I need you to do some work for me. As an unofficial gang member you can work as a lookout, nobody will suspect you. We're planning a jewelry store heist on Third and Grant Street. You need to be on the corner of Third and Patterson. Look both ways. If the coast is clear, signal Angelo by taking your hat off. Make sure you wear a red hat so he can see it. If you leave your hat on, that's the danger signal – cops are coming. Got it?"

Oh boy, now this was getting real. "O.K. When do I need to be there?"

"Are you anxious or something?"

"I'm excited to do a job for you, you can trust me."

"The job is at four o'clock tomorrow. Be there at 3:45 with your hat on."

Anthony was very nervous when he left Orlando, he didn't want to commit a crime but it had to look good to Orlando. He went directly home and retrieved the phone from under the pigeon coop on the roof of his building. Ben answered on the first ring.

"Anthony, what's up? Is this important?" Anthony quickly explained the situation. "O.K. We can handle this. Let me contact the local precinct, they know the territory better than I do. Call me back in two hours and I'll have a plan."

Two hours later, they did indeed have a plan. The next afternoon at 3:45 Anthony stood on the corner with a Philadelphia Phillies hat on. He looked down the street and here came a black and white squad car. So he kept his hat on and looked down the street at Angelo. Angelo relayed the danger signal to the robbery team. Orlando was not with the team, he left the dirty work to his underlings. Everyone waited. The cops pulled into a doughnut shop across the street from the jewelry store. After half

an hour they were still there. Angelo came down the street to where Anthony stood with his hat firmly on his head.

“The job's off. Those cops must really love their doughnuts. Report to Orlando.”

When Anthony arrived, Orlando was having a fit. “Who was the idiot that picked a jewelry store across from a doughnut shop? Every cop in the precinct probably eats there.” Nobody had the guts to tell Orlando that he had picked the place. Anthony was in the clear and had prevented a robbery.

Chapter Six

A Major Operation

Anthony was given two more assignments. And both times, due to his information, the crimes were thwarted without any direct action by the police. The police would seemingly accidentally show up, but no suspicion was aimed toward Anthony. Nonetheless, Orlando decided to exclude him from the next operation. However, Angelo accidentally mentioned a pawn shop that had a lot of guns. Orlando was trying to arm his crew to fight off a rival gang that was trying to move into his turf. Anthony passed on the info and the cops planned a sting. Two undercover cops were placed in the hock shop posing as employees. When the robbers turned up they threw up there hands but when the crooks told them to open the gun cases they told the bandits that they didn't have the keys and they would have to come back after lunch. It looked for a moment like they would, until a full SWAT team showed up at the front door and the gang meekly surrendered.

Orlando couldn't believe this run of bad luck; he began to suspect Angelo of being a rat. So, when they planned the next big job, Angelo was out and Anthony was in. This was the job the police were waiting for. Orlando had ordered a large shipment of guns from a dealer in Georgia. It was so large he wanted be there to receive the shipment and Anthony had a key job. A shuttered gas station on the block next to Anthony's home was to be the pickup point. Orlando gave him a cellphone, then told him his job was to go up onto the roof of his apartment block to keep a look out in both directions. If he saw any police in any direction, he was to give Orlando a call. It was very convenient of Orlando to place Anthony on the very roof where he kept the police cellphone. As soon as Anthony saw the truck with the guns pull into the garage he called detective Shapiro, who launched an all out assault of SWAT teams, FBI and ATAF agents on the garage. Anthony waited until the cops were almost there and called Orlando. "Cops, cops! They're everywhere!" He made the call to cover himself, but he really hoped he would never see Orlando again.

As the law enforcement troops blasted through the garage doors shouting, "Police, FBI, ATAF drop your guns and put up your hands!" The gangbangers, of course, ignored them and started to fire. The police wore helmets, armored vests and carried high powered weapons. Anthony could hear the fusillade from his perch on the roof. He held his breath for as long as he could. Finally, the shots died out, soon replaced by screaming sirens, ambulances, paddy wagons and coroner vans quickly filling the intersection. First, wounded police were escorted out, all able to walk on their own. Then wounded gang members were brought out, most of then on stretchers and lastly the body bags, which, from the lack of respect shown to them, obviously contained the bad guys. Anthony lost track, but once the vans were full they left and the rest were laid on the sidewalk waiting for a return run. Anthony couldn't wait any

longer. He pulled out his police cellphone and placed a call. Usually, detective Shapiro answered on the first or second ring. This time it had reached the fifth ring and was about to go to voice mail, when he finally heard Ben's voice.

“Hi, Anthony. I'm O.K. My cell phone was under my flack jacket and it took me some time to dig it out. Thanks to you it's been a clean sweep, only three officers wounded, none seriously. At least 15 gangbangers dead, probably more to follow and 15 arrested, including the wounded. And before you ask, Orlando is among the dead.”

A wave of pure relief flooded Anthony. The reign of Orlando's terror was over. Now the people of the community needed to reclaim their neighborhood. And he knew just the man to lead the way.

Chapter Seven A New Beginning

When Anthony arrived at the rectory, Father Dominic was relieved to see him. “Come in, my son. Come in, tell me what has happened?”

“Orlando and most of his gang are dead and many of the others are in jail or hospital. They were receiving a large supply of guns with which they wanted to start a war against a rival gang. They and members of a gun running gang were cornered by a combined force of lawmen. When they resisted, a shootout started and the lawmen won. Now is the time for the people to reclaim their neighborhood and you're the man who can lead us, Father.”

The priest was taken aback. As a man of God, his first thought was of the families of the dead. He knew many of them were members of his flock. “I must learn the identities of the dead so that I can console their families.”

“I'm sure the police will be able to help you, but my thoughts are of the living. The gang that Orlando was planning to go to war with will look on this as an opportunity to move in. They could make things worse than they've been. We need to pull the people together and resist them. You are the only person with enough respect to do that, Father, and you must act soon.”

“Whoa, young man. What can be done? Orlando easily took over. What could I do to stop the new gang.”

“How about you do what you do best – hold a mass for the whole community, a mass of celebration. Hold it in the square outside the church, followed by a feast of thanksgiving.”

The priest was stunned. A 17-year-old boy was coming up with this plan while he floundered. But the young man was right, this was an opportunity that had to be taken. “I can organize the church ladies to prepare food and invite the bishop.”

As the priest got in to the spirit of things, Anthony had plans of his own. “We'll need to invite some of the police. They put their lives on the line for us.”

“Yes, but who can handle that? I'm not familiar with any policemen.”

“Don't worry, Father, I can handle that part. When can we do this?”

The priest mulled it over and his face lit up. “A week from Saturday is the feast day of

Our Lady of Loreto, I always have trouble getting people into church any day except Sunday, that will work perfectly.”

Anthony now carried his cellphone wherever he went, so as soon as he left the priest he dialed his only number. As usual, Ben answered on the first ring. “Hopefully, this is a social call. I can't handle another crime scene right now.”

“Far from it. I just left Father Dominic. He is planning to hold a mass of celebration a week from Saturday followed by a feast of thanksgiving. He would like to invite you and some of the police who were involved in the shootout so that the people can say 'thank you.'”

“Why do I think you're behind this and there is more behind it than that?”

“Of course there is. With Orlando dead there is nothing to stop a rival gang from moving in. We can't let that happen. If you and your men are there, it will be a perfect way to cement community relations and prevent the bad guys from causing trouble.”

“How old are you again? This sounds like a lot of thought went into it and community relations is my job. I'll talk to the chief, but it should work. The whole department is basking in our success. And it's about time people learned who's been responsible for all this.”

Anthony swallowed hard and then popped this. “Oh, and you can bring your wife and Sara.” This caught Ben by surprise, he thought this complication had gone away. Ben then put his foot in it.

“Well, Sara will still be away at school that week.”

“No, she'll be back on this Sunday.” (Second foot in another mouth.)

“And how do you know that, have you been talking to her?”

“No we've been writing to each other via snail mail.”

“How did you get her address? I never told her where you lived.”

“She sent a letter to my church, care of Father Dominic. Apparently one of us mentioned his name that night at dinner and she did some research. You're not the only detective in the family.”

“Very funny. I'll talk to her mother about it. But since she was told not to contact you,

she'll probably be grounded.”

This just about broke Anthony's heart. Besides that little set back, things moved along. The police chief agreed to come. Anthony couldn't remember inviting him and would much rather that it be Sara. The police even donated cases of soft drinks to the affair. The mass went well, though thanks to Anthony's urging, it was shorter than Father Dominic wanted. As the festivities were about to move to feasting, there was a murmuring in the crowd – twenty color-wearing gangbangers were marching five abreast toward the assembly. It was just what Anthony feared, and was why he had invited the police. But, before the police could react, a large number of women formed up and blocked the path of the mean looking men. One of the women spoke out. “Go away! You are not welcome here. Go away and don't come back.”

The gang leader started to react, but when he saw a large group of policemen forming up behind the ladies, he thought better of it and announced to his minions, “Let's go. That food's probably rotten.”

They left to a chorus of jeers and hoots. As the joyous crowd descended on the food. Ben asked Anthony to accompany him to the rear of the stage, which had been erected for the mass. The Chief of Police was there along with Ben's wife Rachel and daughter Sara. The Chief held two small presentation boxes. The first box contained lieutenant's bars, signifying Ben's promotion, and the second was for Anthony.

“This award deserves more of a ceremony, but our Lieutenant Shapiro wants to keep your role in this operation secret for your own safety. I happily present you with this Civilian Medal of Honor for your actions over the past few months. In addition there is a place for you in the police academy when you're ready.”

The first one to clap was Sara. Her mother was the first to glare at her newly promoted husband, who had cleverly arranged this little episode. She would have to get over it. And what would happen between Anthony and Sara is up to fate.

Getting Out - Part II

Chapter One Anthony's New Life

The week after the Thanksgiving ceremony, the first thing Anthony and his mother did was to look for a new home. Anthony had been receiving payments as a confidential informant, which he kept to himself because he didn't want his mother to worry about his activities. When he showed her the money, she was in tears. She suddenly realized how much danger he had been in. But, she also realized that this money would change their lives.

Mom and Anthony eventually found a nice, three bedroom apartment in a friendlier neighborhood. Anthony's brother switched schools, but Anthony decided to finish his last year in his current school, while continuing to play basketball for the church. Detective Ben Shapiro had arranged for Anthony to remain a CI, which meant he would receive a small payment every month.

Despite all the gang turmoil, Anthony had kept a good grade average and graduated in the top third of his class. Sara, the detective's daughter, had wanted to come to his graduation, but her mother, Rachel, forbade it; she was still angry about the medal presentation that her husband Ben had not told her about. Rachel was one of the last "old school" holdouts that were against inter-religion marriages. Ben tried to convince her that keeping the two young people apart just strengthened their resolve to see each other.

After Anthony entered community college he was able to access the internet and he and Sara communicated daily. Being on the school campus quickly opened several areas of illegal activities about which Anthony dutifully relayed information to Detective Shapiro. There was no real gang activity, but plenty of drug trafficking that soon slowed. Anthony kept a low profile to avoid discovery.

When Anthony was invited to join an Islamic study group, he hesitated, 'what would Father Dominic say?' So he called detective Shapiro for advice and received a positive response. "I think it might be a good idea. I'll check with the higher ups."

Sure enough, the anti-terrorist group was very interested in placing someone into the Muslim community. And the fact that Anthony had been invited made it easy. The first few sessions were pretty straight forward: the history of Muhammad, stories from the Koran and battles fought centuries ago. But then some guest lecturers addressed the group and the tenor of information became more radical. Following his instructions, Anthony pretended to be interested, but not in a way that brought attention to

himself. He dutifully passed on what he heard to Ben, who then shared it with many interested parties. Ben continually cautioned Anthony as to the secrecy of his calls – and then dropped a bomb. “And make sure when you e-mail Sara that you password what you're doing and delete her responses.” Ben couldn't see Anthony's face but he could imagine the look of shock. The two young people had thought their communication was private, but obviously her father was a pretty good detective.

One day, as Anthony approached the Muslim meeting room, his path was blocked by a severe looking man who told him he was not welcome, that the meeting was for devout Muslims only and he should come back next week. The men in the room seemed very excited and were shouting “Allahu Akbar!” One of Anthony's friends saw him and hollered, “We are going to paradise!” The man at the door angrily told the boy to shut up and ordered Anthony to go away. Anthony did, returning to his room to call Detective Shapiro.

“Something's going on. I wasn't allowed in the meeting and they all appear to be in a frenzy shouting 'Allahu Akbar' and my friend said, 'We are going to paradise!’”

“You're absolutely right – don't go back there. Maybe you should go visit your mom. I've got things to do.”

And he sure did. A task force of law enforcement agencies had been on alert for a possible terrorist attack and this seemed like it. The meeting room had been under observance for sometime, but they hadn't gotten that close. Extra support was brought in and, when the Islamic group left for another location, they were kept under close scrutiny. An open search warrant was sitting on a judge's desk just waiting for an address. As soon as the group entered a warehouse, the address was added to the warrant and the agents moved in. They arrived none to soon. Twenty men were in the process of donning suicide vests. Fortunately, they had not had time to arm them and only a few had weapons.

A brief exchange of gunfire resulted in five dead terrorists and no law enforcement casualties. Arrests not only included the college students but two outside organizers who were on the F.B.I.'s watch list. The damage that could have been done by twenty bombers is horrendous. But, thanks to Anthony, it was avoided. Once again he was to be an anonymous hero. Not even his mother or Sara could know. It could be fatal to him, if any terrorists found out who ruined their plot. However, a well-earned bonus from Homeland Security was graciously received. Anthony continued his studies and semi-secret communication with Sara.

One day, detective Shapiro returned to his house to find his home in a tizzy. His wife appeared very distraught and Sara was in tears. Before he could ask what was

wrong, his wife confronted him and cried, "This is all your fault! You should have never brought that Catholic home with you. He's ruining Sara's life."

Sara through her tears cried, "Mom's spying on me."

"I am not! I was checking the pockets of her jeans the way I always do before I put them in the laundry. And I found a folded slip of paper. So, I opened it and it contained an email address belonging to that Catholic boy."

Instead of backing off, the detective fired back. "You're the one ruining her life. You and your ancient prejudices. Anthony is the finest young man Sara could meet. He's a brave intelligent boy who I would be proud to have in our family. But you are way ahead of such things. If we allow them to have a normal relationship there is a good chance they will find out they are not compatible and will go their separate ways. But as long as you insist on making them email in secret they won't have a chance and will believe each other to be perfect."

Of course his wife was taken back by his outburst but wasn't about to give up. "You knew about the emails? How could you allow her to sneak behind my back?"

"Because you're wrong and the only thing I did wrong was to allow *this* to continue. Sara should be allowed to pick her own friends no matter what their religion. Your kind of prejudice is out of the dark ages and it should stop."

From that day on, Sara was allowed to see Anthony one day a week on the weekends. It was barely satisfactory, but better than before.

Chapter Two

A New Assignment

So far, Anthony's cases had come to him, he had never sought out a particular task. Because Anthony had become so effective, the authorities decided to ask him if he could infiltrate a white supremacy group operating on campus. Whoever thought that up had never met Anthony, who was as clean cut a young man as you could find. The skinheads wanted no parts of him. But fate was on the side of the bureaucrats. Fritzy, the top skinhead's sister, took a fancy to him. She wasn't a student, she just hung around campus and dated some of the supremacists who tended to treat her roughly. Hoping for a more pleasant relationship, she latched onto Anthony. Fritzy was a lot more aggressive than Sara and got very amorous on their first date. Anthony was very nervous about asking Captain Shapiro for advice, but he had no one else to turn to. He certainly couldn't ask Father Dominic. Shapiro calmed him down telling him that his undercover work had to be kept separate from his real life and then assured him he wasn't being unfaithful to Sara. He also advised him not to tell her about Fritzy."

Two nights later, Fritzy was very excited. She and Anthony would be able to use her brother's room for the afternoon. All the skinheads would be busy robbing a bank. All of a sudden, Anthony had access to some important intelligence. However, he needed to know the details of the robbery and then get the information to the authorities, accomplishing this without getting Fritzy suspicious. So, he pretended to want to go on the robbery.

"Wow that sounds cool. Maybe I could help on the job? I was a lookout for the gang back in my old neighborhood." This was true of course, but he didn't tell her he had reported everything to the cops.

"No way. The job goes down in two hours at closing time at the Federal Credit Union. I'm not letting you go, I'm going to show you the time of your life." With that she started to take Anthony's pants off.

"Whoa. I, I, I need to pee." Anthony jumped up and ran to the bathroom pulled out his cell phone and hit the emergency number. Ben answered immediately and Anthony breathlessly told him what he knew. There was soon a pounding on the door.

"Get out here. I'm hot to go and I need you to put out my fire."

Anthony meekly opened the door and there stood a completely naked Fritzy. She grabbed him pulled down his pants and pulled him onto her. Anthony was unable to hold her off and soon lost his virginity. Fritzy actually made him perform twice more

and it was all he could do to drag himself out of the room.

Meanwhile, a hastily assembled task force was waiting for the skinheads and managed to arrest them without casualties to the police. Two skinheads, including Fritzzy's brother, were wounded and placed under guard at the hospital. When she heard the news, Fritzzy wasn't as dumb as the police thought. She confronted Anthony at his dorm room and threatened to have him killed. An unmarked police car arrived quickly and Anthony was whisked away. Then quietly transferred to a private junior college out in the country. Sara was never convinced it was due to his scholastic achievements, but being a policeman's daughter went along with the program.

The private school turned out to be fairly free of crime and provided Anthony with a first rate education; so much so, that after he completed his freshman and sophomore studies, he was awarded a full scholarship to an Ivy League university where he excelled. After his junior and senior years, he graduated with honors. The whole Shapiro family joined Anthony's mother, brother and Father Dominic at the ceremony. When Father Dominic learned that Anthony's next step was the Police Academy he was dismayed.

“You're wasting a wonderful education, you can do almost anything.”

Anthony smiled as he answered, “I know. That's why I'm becoming a cop. I want to help protect the people of the city.”

As promised, Anthony's acceptance to the academy was immediate and he started his studies in the next class.

After 28 weeks of formal studies and 10 weeks of field training, Anthony received his numbered badge and official uniform. The same group of well wishers was present, but this time Anthony had a surprise. As Sara approached to congratulate him, he dropped to one knee, pulled a small box from his pocket and asked, “Will you marry me?”

Sara was shocked and started to cry and sobbed, “Of course I will, silly.” Even Sara's mother who had grown to love Anthony cheered.

And they lived happily ever after, not really. The question of a marriage ceremony by who, where and when was not easily answered. The two young people were right in the middle of contentious situation. The drama was so intense that Sara asked Anthony to run away to get married. Captain Shapiro talked to his wife, since she was a large part of the problem. She had said that she had finally accepted Anthony,

but still wanted a Jewish wedding. However, Father Dominic was solidly against it. Both were really worried about how the children to come would be raised; the wedding ceremony would be the first step.

Ben started the debate. "If you and the priest continue to haggle, the kids will run off and get it done by themselves. That would save a lot of money on the wedding and we could use it to help the kids get started with furniture or appliances."

His wife was not about to give in easily. "If we have a big Jewish wedding and invite all our rich relatives, the kids will get money and presents from them. Anthony's relatives are poor, so they won't give the couple as much. My relatives won't come to a Catholic wedding, so the kids will lose out."

A compromise was finally reached, a civil ceremony was held with just the immediate families, followed by a blessing from both Father Dominic and the family Rabbi. Then that was followed by a large reception with everyone invited. To many people's surprise, the Jews, Catholics and everyone else had a great time. The pile of gifts and envelopes was profuse. The happy couple headed to Hawaii, it was a gift from the law enforcement agencies Anthony had helped.

Getting Out - Part Three

Chapter One A New Assignment

Normally, the top ranked police graduates would have their choice of assignments. Because Anthony finished number one in his class, he intended to ask to be a patrolman where he had grown up. He yearned to keep the gangs out of his old neighborhood so his childhood friends could still have a peaceful existence. However, the police commissioner had other ideas. Anthony's contributions as a confidential informant had made him more valuable to the force than walking a beat. Therefore, Anthony was assigned to the intelligence division, a post normally given to senior officers, not to rookies. Unfortunately, this meant he would not wear his uniform that he had worked so hard to earn.

His acceptance by the older members of the unit was not to be easy. All of the other members had put in many years to earn their spots and resented the untried rookie; they assumed his father-in-law had influenced the posting. Captain Shapiro had had nothing to do with it, but it made Sara happy that Anthony would sit behind a desk and not be patrolling the streets. Being a "good soldier," Anthony accepted the assignment. What none of the other officers knew was that Anthony had majored in Arabic Studies at university and spoke a smattering of Middle Eastern languages, as well as memorizing important verses of the Koran.

His first task was to become familiar with all the mosques in the city. He spent days roaming the streets and befriending many of the Muslims he met. Eventually, he was invited to attend a service and brought his own prayer rug. The mosque he attended was very liberal and many of the worshipers spoke out against Muslim terrorists. The civil Muslims were suffering abuse and harassment from other citizens who saw them as the enemy. Anthony kept quiet and only visited the mosque occasionally. He had made friends with one of the imams who was happy to explain things to him. One day, the imam called him aside and asked quietly, "When are you going to tell me you're a policeman?"

Anthony was stunned. "Where did you get that idea?"

"You have tried to integrate yourself into our family, but you don't really want to be a Muslim. You have nothing to fear and you certainly are welcome to continue to visit us, but you might as well be honest about your purpose."

"You're right, I am a cop, but I mean no harm to your flock. I am trying to learn why some Muslims become radicals when the Koran preaches peace."

“My people have the same problem. I would like them to share their feelings with you and come to some understanding.”

So the imam set up a meeting with the senior members of the mosque. It was slow getting started since many of them distrusted Anthony. He, on the other hand, having observed them for several weeks, was very open and soon gained their confidence. The whole session boiled down to one question. What could they do to improve their image in the neighborhood?

Anthony's answer was, “Keep your eyes and ears open. If you see things in your community that don't look good, come to me and I will investigate them without involving you.”

This was to be the start of an intelligence gathering group, which would eventually bear fruit.

Chapter Two Sara's Story

Sara had not been idle while Anthony was becoming a cop. She completed her degree in pediatric nursing and rather than working in a large expensive hospital she chose to work in a storefront clinic. Most of her patients were low income families and many were Muslims. Even though her specialty was children, she provided care for the Muslim women who couldn't go to male doctors. She inadvertently heard a lot of the local gossip as the women chatted to each other. Of course, if the Muslim women or their husbands ever learned that she was Jewish, they would stop coming to the clinic. No one ever asked and she was happy to remain mute on the subject. Occasionally, she would hear something she thought would be of interest to Anthony. Since she now knew that he was a CI, she would tell him about it. Anthony enjoyed the fact that Sara took part in his assignment. Keeping the city safe was his top priority.

Most of the gossip Sara heard was unimportant, but one day the ladies seemed very upset and Sara paid closer attention. What she heard was alarming. Apparently one of the mosques was entertaining an ISIS recruiter and some of the younger people were getting interested in going to Syria. Sara heard the name of the Mosque and, as soon as she could, told Anthony. He organized a surveillance and notified his superiors, who dutifully contacted the FBI, which had jurisdiction. They, in turn, arrested the ISIS recruiter, obtained a search warrant and searched his possessions. The FBI were also able to arrest several other unsavory individuals, preventing these young people from joining the terrorists. When asked where the tip came from, Anthony solemnly admitted it was a confidential informant.

As more and more terrorist events occurred all over the world, Anthony and his fellow intelligence officers were on high alert. Anthony was pleased that his network of cooperating mosques continued to grow, proof that American Muslims cared about their country and wanted to keep it safe. Sara was also pleased with her position and was learning more of the languages spoken by the mothers of her patients.

One Saturday, two of her favorite women came to the clinic without their children, which was unusual. "Sara, you must not go to the market tomorrow. It will be very dangerous." Sara was shocked, then asked, "Which market are you talking about?"

"The one in front of the cathedral. All the Christians go there after services." Of course, Sara didn't go to the cathedral; she very seldom went to the synagogue, much to her mother's dismay. "Thank you. I won't go to the market."

Sara immediately called Anthony. "Something is very wrong. Two of my best Muslim

friends have told me not to go to the Cathedral Market tomorrow, that it will be very dangerous. Have you heard anything?"

"No, but I'll check with my mosque contacts."

Anthony did not get a chance. His phone rang as soon as he hung up with Sara. His best contact was on the line.

"There is big trouble. A group from Syria has infiltrated the Elm Street Mosque. They are planning to attack the Sunday Market."

Anthony was to receive three more calls from different mosques, all with the same message. He literally hit a panic button that had been installed to all of the agencies in the terrorist task force. He was soon connected to a multiparty conference call. He quickly related what he knew. Of course, some of the participants were skeptical and questioned his sources.

"I've got four different mosques and my confidential informant all saying the same thing. My informant nailed the ISIS recruiter and I'm sure this info is good. We have to act now. The market opens in less than 24 hours."

Several minutes of grumbling exasperation followed, before it finally settled down. The senior FBI agent took command, then asked for suggestions. Naturally, a plethora of ideas came out, which simply muddled the issue. At last, he stopped the uncontrolled discourse.

"OK, one at a time. Anthony, it's your tip. What do you think?"

"We use high powered microphones to listen into the mosque and put the place under discrete surveillance to find out what we can learn."

Another voice soon broke in. "What if we don't learn anything before tomorrow morning?"

"We cancel the church service and market, then flood the square with SWAT forces."

"OK, we keep surveillance until midnight. If we don't know anymore by then we go with the cancellation plan."

Of course, one of the more senior men had to dissent. "What goes on? We now take orders from some rookie? I for one think we shouldn't trust any of his sources, they're all Muslims, and I sure don't trust any of them."

Anthony had to speak up. "That attitude is what's caused a lot of our problems and given ISIS a propaganda advantage. I've worked hard to gain the confidence of these people. My contacts are Americans first and Muslims second."

The senior FBI agent took over. "Anthony's plan is solid, so we'll follow it. Ahem, unless there are other suggestions." There were grumbles, but no suggestions.

With the microphones in place and several interpreters listening in, every word spoken in the mosque was recorded. Finally, about 9 p.m., a voice was captured outlining the plan.

"At 3 a.m. we will load both vans with four shooters each equipped with assault rifles and 100 rounds of ammunition, drive to the square and park with the rear doors facing into the square. After their service, the infidels will leave the church. Then, at my signal the doors will be opened and all eight shooters will open up firing all of their ammunition, killing as many Christians as possible. When all of the ammunition is fired, we will close the doors and escape back here."

One of the shooters questioned, "Won't they know where we have gone?"

"Yes, I hope so. When we get back here, we will seek sanctuary."

"Won't they come after us anyway?"

"Once again, I hope so. If they violate the sanctuary of the mosque there will be a call to all Muslims to attack every church and synagogue. We will have started a civil war, which is what we want."

After listening to that, the agents were temporarily stunned to silence, but soon started shouting suggestions from blowing up the Elm Street Mosque to surrounding it and starving the terrorists out. One more time, Anthony came up with a plan.

"We know what they're going to do. We even know the timing. We discreetly follow the vans to the square. Once they're parked, we surround them, break the windows and toss tear gas in both the rear and front windows and wait for them to come out. Any resistance should quickly be eliminated."

Of course there had to be disagreement. "How do we know there are rear windows on these vans?" Was said smugly by a CIA agent.

"We have surveillance pictures from the mosque. There are two identical vans

parked in the rear of the mosque which are being guarded.” Enough said.

At 3 a.m. the vans left on schedule, parked in the square and the occupants prepared to wait for morning. They didn't have that long to wait. Thirty heavily armed SWAT members surrounded the vans, smashed out the windows and threw in canisters of tear gas. Gasping terrorists poured out of the vans and were quickly subdued and placed in police vans for a ride to FBI headquarters. The twelve would-be murderers would be tried under terrorism laws, receiving long prison terms.

Anthony took great pride in thanking his mosque informants, but warning them to stay silent. Sara couldn't thank her informants, so they would never know that they had saved many lives.

At the task force debriefing, Anthony was the star and just about stifled any more criticism of his youth and lack of experience. Captain Shapiro was part of the team and very proud of his son-in-law, but ignorant of the role his daughter had played.

Chapter Three A Blessed Event?

As time went by, Sara became much friendlier with her patients at the clinic. The Muslim women seemed to appreciate her services more and more. She had cared for one little boy, Abdullah, since he had been born. His mother was one of her favorite patients. Lately, however, Rasha looked very tired, which actually is not unusual for the mother of a two-year-old. When Rasha missed her scheduled appointment, Sara was a little surprised, but not concerned. The following week, Rasha appeared without Abdullah. Instead, she was accompanied by a smartly dressed Muslim woman, who turned out to be a lawyer. Rasha looked terrible. The lawyer opened a briefcase and produced some official looking papers.

Finally, Rasha spoke, "Sara, I need a great favor from you. I am dying. I have liver cancer, which was probably caused by the chemical weapons used by the Syrian government. I will be dead very soon. My husband died in the civil war. I have no relations in America and I cannot send Abdullah to Syria. He was born here; he is a citizen. I want you to adopt him and raise him for me. You are the kindest person I know."

Sara was stunned. She and Anthony had talked about children, but the religion problem had prevented them from going beyond the discussion phase. While Sara mulled the situation over, the lawyer displayed the papers.

"These documents will give you the right to proceed with the adoption of Abdullah. Rasha has signed them and they have been notarized. All you need is for you and your husband to sign them."

Sara finally got her voice. "All I need? This is a huge decision. My husband and I need time to discuss the possibility of such a move."

The lawyer smugly said, "You probably need to decide by next Tuesday. Rasha will be going into hospice then. Someone will need to look after Abdullah."

"Well, I will talk with my husband tonight. We'll think about it."

Rasha raised her head and gave Sara a pleading look. "Please, Sara, I can't die without knowing Abdullah will have a good home?"

When Sara presented the documents and sob story to Anthony, he was less than thrilled. "Are you mad? A Muslim baby? We can't decide on having either Catholic or Jewish kids and you want to adopt a Muslim?"

“If you knew Abdullah and Rasha, you would know why. What will become of him if we don't help? I'm afraid to think about it.”

“I need to think about this and talk to Father Dominic.”

The priest was very understanding, but was concerned about raising a Muslim in their already mixed religious household. Anthony had thought about the situation all night and was leaning toward saying “yes.”

“Well, Father, I think it's a good idea. It solves the Christian or Jew question – it's neither.”

When Anthony got home, he told Sara he would do it, if she really wanted to. And Sara smiled and said, “Now I have to tell my mother. You have to tell yours and my father also.”

Sara's mother continually asked when she and Anthony were going to have a baby. The answer had been that they weren't sure. After all the problems about the wedding they didn't believe they could handle how to raise a child. Eventually, a solution would present itself.... Sara decided this was it. So, she quickly made a point to talk with her mother and told her, “We are about to become parents.”

“Oh, wonderful! Do you know when? What it will be?”

“Yes, tomorrow. And he's two years old.”

“You're adopting? How will he be raised? Is he Jewish?”

“No, he's not Jewish.” Sara was enjoying herself.

“Oh, he's Catholic. I should have known.”

“No, mother, he's Muslim, his name is Abdullah, which, according to the Koran, is the name most pleasing to Allah.”

For once, Sara's mother was speechless. What else could disassemble all her life's beliefs and practices?

“We're going to call him Abi.”

After several minutes of reflection, Sara's mom found her voice. “How can you be

adopting a baby you know nothing about?"

"I've known him his whole life. He is one of my patients. He's the son of a Syrian refugee. His father was killed in the Syrian civil war. His mother immigrated to the U.S. before he was born, so he's an American citizen. His mom is dying from liver cancer; she goes into hospice tomorrow and she has asked me to look after Abi. Anthony agrees and has spoken to Father Dominic, who has given his blessing."

"And I'm the last to know about this. It's a mother's curse."

"Yes, well, I knew how you would react."

Rachel burst into tears and flew from the room, slamming the door behind her. Sadly, Sara went home not sure what to do.

That evening, Rachel confronted her husband. "I guess you approve of this adoption nonsense. How could Sara betray us like this?"

Ben slowly shook his head. "Why don't you ask yourself how could she betray a woman, who is about to die, her last wish? You raised her to be a caring person. That's why she became a pediatric nurse, so she can help children. Besides, Anthony is spending a lot of time in the Muslim community, appreciating the kindnesses of these people, so the adoption fits in with his dedication to the city. I see nothing but good coming from this."

Rachel's resolve melted away. Not wanting to be shut out of the growing family, she gave the situation some soul searching, thought hard, swallowed and phoned Sara, "Well, so much for what *you* know, I will happily welcome Abi into our family. Abi even sounds Jewish."

The next day, Sara greeted her mom with a heartfelt hug. If only all relations between the different religions could be solved so easily.

Getting Out - Part Four

Chapter One A New Opportunity

One day, Anthony came home to find Sara jumping up and down with glee. "What's up?"

"We're having dinner with the President," she said as she waved an official looking document.

Needless to say Anthony was dubious. "Let me see what it says."

Sure enough it was an invitation to dine at the White House the following Tuesday. The policeman in Anthony was not so sure. "This has got to be a prank. One of the Secret Service guys I showed up in the task force is trying to get even."

"No, no," cried Sara, "it's official. Look at the postmark. Office of the President of the United States."

The letter stated, "You and a guest are invited to attend dinner at the White House on Tuesday, the third of May, which will follow the presentation of Distinguished Service Medals to the following persons." The list contained six names, five men and one woman. Anthony's name was third on the list.

Anthony was still wary. "Why me?"

"You helped save hundreds of lives at the Cathedral among other life saving activities."

Anthony was finally ready to believe it and decided to have some fun. "Now, who should I take with me?"

Sara immediately began to beat him about the shoulders as he laughed uproariously. Just as they settled down, the phone rang. Sara was still laughing when she answered. It was her father. "I take it you received the invite."

"Yes, did you get one?"

"Not me. I'm just related to the hero by your marriage." (Someday he would learn that he was related to a hero by blood. But for now, Ben was happy.)

Anthony inquired, "How do you know about it?"

"The White House informed the commissioner and he called me."

"What will I wear?" cried Sara. "I need a formal gown."

Anthony was a little shaken. Hero or not, he was still paid a policeman's salary.

Ben tried to help out, "I don't think it's formal. In fact, it's a private ceremony. All of the recipients are to remain anonymous for protection purposes. I believe a protocol officer will be contacting you with the details."

Everything was going well. The ceremony was simple with just a few officials in attendance. The President and First Lady were very gracious and flattered Sara on her dress, which her mother had insisted on buying. After turning scarlet, she enjoyed the rest of the evening. As the evening drew to a close Anthony was approached by a distinguished man whom he recognized. They shook hands and Anthony introduced Sara to the Director of the FBI.

"I'm glad you made it, Anthony. The award is a well-deserved honor. But it took a little pull to make it happen." Anthony was puzzled and the Director noticed. "Oh, this award is normally given to members of the military, like Seals, Delta Force and Rangers who must remain anonymous. You don't fall in the category, but you definitely deserve it. I wanted to talk to you in private. Could you come to my office tomorrow?"

"I believe I'm back on duty tomorrow."

"I've already fixed in with the Commish. How about 10 a.m.?"

Chapter Two

An Offer He Couldn't Refuse

Anthony turned up at FBI HQ on time. When he introduced himself, the receptionist dialed a number, then told Anthony the Assistant Director would be right with him. 'What happened to the Director?' Anthony thought. True to her statement, an attractive middle-aged woman appeared and shook Anthony's hand. "Sorry, the Director is busy on an important issue, but he briefed me on what he wanted to address with you. He and many in the Bureau are very impressed with your performance, so much so, that we would like to invite you to join us."

Anthony was quick to respond. "I'm very happy in the police department."

"I'm sure you are. In about 10 years you might make as much as we are able to pay you now. The police department is a civil service organization. Your advancement is controlled by seniority. You have to wait till you have five years of service before you can take the Sergeant's test. If you pass, you then have to move up the list before you're promoted. The position the Director wishes to offer you is Special Assistant to the Director. It's a GS 20 job that pays twice your police salary."

Instead of being impressed, Anthony got angry. "What is this, some kind of bribe?" The Assistant Director was miffed at his response.

"This is certainly not a bribe. The Director wants you to head up a special division to duplicate your success with the Muslim Community, but on a much larger scale. He believes you are uniquely qualified for this job and worth every penny."

This gave Anthony pause for thought. Could he really be of help to more people in the FBI than the police force? He then thought, 'Where will we live?' "Will I have to relocate to DC?"

"Probably, but that can be decided if you will seriously consider the job?"

"I will have to talk this over with my wife and family."

"Of course, take your time. If you decide to join us, it will take awhile to arrange a transfer. We would want to preserve your seniority."

Where to begin? It wouldn't be easy to convince everyone involved, especially since Anthony wasn't convinced. Sara's first thought was to her patients. "I'll lose all my patients and have to start over with new ones."

Anthony was ready for that one. "You deal with babies. When they get old enough, you no longer care for them. And they are replaced by newborns."

Sara's mother had fallen in love with Abi and didn't want to see him go away.

Looking at the big picture, Ben stated, "The FBI will give you greater influence over the Muslims and your local contacts will still be available to you. And there is more room for advancement in the FBI. Plus, I will still be able to use you as a source."

So Anthony decided to at least take it one step further and feel things out. At the next meeting, the personnel woman acted like it was a done deal, which didn't sit well with Anthony. "I need to know more, about where I'll be stationed and how I report to the Director. I doubt I just pick up the phone every day."

"Actually, you will. You'll be required to make a report every day. But the report will be entered on a secure webpage. The director will be able to see it whenever he wants and contact you only when he thinks it's necessary. We'll give you an offsite office and an assistant to handle any paperwork. The assistant will be an agent that will help you to do your job with little or no interference." Anthony was impressed and could see opportunities to protect more people. "OK, when do I start?"

"After you complete training at Quantico."

"I've already been through the police academy; that's pretty thorough."

"Quantico will cover all you learned there and much more. Legal, physical, firearms, hand to hand combat, ethical behavior and forensics. All in all, it's 16 weeks."

Anthony was stunned. He thought he was done with school and when he found out he would have to stay in Quantico for much of the training, he had serious doubts. Eventually, he and Sara agreed it would be a difficult time, but it would be important for their future.

The training was even tougher than the personnel woman had described. But, once again, Anthony was up to the challenge and finished near the top of the class.

While Anthony was in Quantico, Sara spent her time finalizing her stay at the clinic, looking for a new home near D.C., and finding a new position. Her job search included finding a clinic with the right ethnic clientele; she still wanted to be a confidential informant for Anthony. Once she had the clinic location secured, she looked for an apartment in the same area near a mosque. They intended to raise Abi as a Muslim, but expose him to Catholicism and Judaism, eventually allowing him to

chose whichever he found suited him. The two-bedroom apartment was also near a playground and elementary school. So, the small family soon settled into their northern Virginia home.

Chapter Three

Life as a Federal Agent

Anthony's workplace was in a nondescript office building with no evidence that it was an FBI facility. His assistant was a 35 year-old male agent with ten years in the bureau. The personnel department had gone to great lengths to find the right fit. Alex was efficient and held no animosity toward working for a younger man. He looked on the assignment as a step up from his former position. Anthony and Alex spent many hours mapping out a strategy for their operation. Anthony had a letter of introduction from the imam at the last mosque he attended. Plus, like it or not, Abdullah would be involved. There was no way he couldn't introduce the boy to the local imam. They had located the most liberal mosque and Anthony felt they had a good chance for a reasonable level of acceptance.

When Anthony and Adullah arrived at the mosque, they were graciously received. It seemed to them that notice of their intended visit and it's purposes had been communicated by Anthony's old friend. The new imam was still a little skeptical, but was willing to hear Anthony out. He emphasized the importance of Abdullah's education and played down the counter-terrorism part of the relationship. After a long time to contemplate the situation, the imam announced, "Of course, your son is welcome in our mosque. I will need to discuss our cooperation with your information gathering plan with our elders." Anthony was pleased with the outcome and told the imam so.

Things proceeded more or less as they had done previously. Anthony was invited to participate in a meeting of the elders. It didn't take long for one particular graybeard to let his feeling be known. "I do not trust this Christian, he has stolen a Muslim baby and is using it to spy on us."

Anthony was silently enraged but did not show it. He calmly replied, "I did not steal Abdullah. His mother's dying wish was that we adopt him. We agreed to raise him as a Muslim. I have a document notarized by an attorney to prove it."

"I don't trust any document prepared by a Christian lawyer. They are known to be corrupt."

Holding up the document, Anthony stated, "This was prepared by a Muslim attorney. You are welcome to inspect it. Her phone number is on it, you can call her." This was a mistake.

"A female lawyer is worse than a Christian. We should never allow women in such positions."

Fearing the worst, Anthony looked at the imam with pleading eyes. The imam shook his head and addressed the gathering. "It appears one of our brothers has a problem with allowing Anthony access to our mosque. How do the rest of you feel?"

Following some murmuring, one of the younger members rose to speak. "Women are important members of our society. The days of subjugation of females is over. I, for one, would like to speak with this attorney. She may have information that will help with our decision."

To Anthony's surprise a cell phone was produced and, after dialing, was put on speaker. The attorney was very forthright in describing the circumstances of Abdullah's adoption and praising Sara for her care of the family. Her heartfelt plea was well received by most of the attendees and begrudgingly by the graybeard. So, it was agreed to allow Anthony access to the mosque with Abdullah.

Chapter Four

Muslims to the Rescue

As time went by, Anthony's schedule took on a repetitive sameness. Visits to different mosques, meetings with other enforcement agents, reviewing data collected and monitoring social media. It was a little boring, but boring was good. The Director was concerned that Anthony's visits to mosques was exposing him to kidnapping. At the director's insistence, Anthony had a microscopic tracking communicator installed under his skin. In the event he was taken, he could activate it and the necessary units could follow him. It seemed like overkill, but better safe than sorry.

One day, it all changed. Anthony received a phone call from the imam of his local mosque. "Agent, can you please come to the mosque. I have some information for you?"

This innocent sounding request immediately put Anthony on high alert. The use of the word 'agent' was a danger sign previously agreed upon. Something was wrong at the mosque and the imam was not able to speak freely. "Of course, imam, I have a few things to do, but I'll be over shortly."

"Please hurry, agent."

The imam was definitely under duress. Anthony called Alex into his office. He would need to involve the Hostage Rescue Team. "There is something wrong at the mosque. Notify HRT and SWAT. I will activate my tracking device so they'll know where I am."

Sure enough, when Anthony got to the mosque, two rough looking, bearded men and old graybeard were with the imam. As soon as Anthony entered the imam's office, old graybeard shouted, "That's him! the Christian spy!"

One of the men closed the door and drew a gun pointing it at Anthony. The imam pleaded with Anthony to forgive him. "I am so sorry my friend, they have threatened to kill my children. I had to call you."

One of the militants grabbed Anthony and quickly searched him. "What kind of agent is this man. He doesn't even have a gun and he is not wearing a wire?"

Anthony retorted, "What kind of man brings a gun into a house of worship?"

That remark earned Anthony a slap on the head. "We'll show you what kind of men we are."

All of this was monitored at FBI headquarters.

“What do we do?” asked the SWAT leader. “We can't go into the mosque. It would ruin all of Anthony's work.”

The Director was on a speakerphone. “Let's play it by ear, Anthony's a cool customer.”

Back at the mosque, the leader of the militants told his partner, “Tie up the imam and put him in the closet. We'll take this guy to the basement location where our video recorder is and behead him.”

This got everyone's attention back at the FBI. The Director spoke, “Get ready to track Anthony. Hopefully, they'll take him someplace where we can stage a rescue. But don't let the Muslims know we're onto them.”

Being very cautious, the armed units equipped with tracking and listening equipment followed Anthony's signal to another mosque. He was hustled into the basement before the authorities could react. Painfully, they listened as other terrorists joined the first two and started to create a video denouncing the US and preaching violence and the overthrow of Christianity. The assault team was paralyzed. They couldn't attack a mosque and they couldn't let Anthony die. As they pondered the situation, a series of vehicles pulled up to the mosque, each containing several armed men. They all appeared to be Muslim. One of the agents recognized the leader, “That's the Grand Imam. I thought he was a good guy.”

What the units didn't realize was that once freed from the closet, the imam had called his fellow imams and they hastily organized a raiding party. The new group stormed the mosque and suddenly there was gunfire.

“OK, that's our queue. Let's go!” Before the assault got to the door they were halted in their tracks. Anthony stood in the doorway smiling. “Hold on guys, my other friends just came to my rescue. Let's let them take care of things. We don't need the paper work.”

The commanders looked at each other and shrugged. “Fine with us. What's the director going to say?”

As usual, the director was quiet; he didn't need to know.

Another feather in Anthony's cap that no one would know about.

Getting Out - Part V

Chapter One Repercussions

Following Anthony's rescue, he was immediately summoned to the Directors office and it wasn't to be congratulated. When he arrived, he was shown right into the imposing office and told to take a seat. The Director rose from behind his desk and stood in front of Anthony.

“Who authorized you to arm those Muslims? Are you starting your own army?”

“No, Sir. I had nothing to do with it. The fact that they are armed is part of their Second Amendment rights. They are American citizens and many of them have been threatened just because they're Muslim.”

The Director half smiled and said, “Since I don't know anything about this episode, I guess I'll have to just wonder what happened.”

“Well, Sir, the morning news will carry reports of a gang shooting in the suburbs with several fatalities. The local police are investigating, but will determine that it was a drug deal gone bad.”

“And where did you learn this?”

“From the SWAT commander. He's been in touch with the local police chief and feels all questions have been answered.”

“O.K. I'm glad to hear that. Are you ready to move on to the next step in your assignment?”

“Yes, Sir. Alex and I have developed a profile of the right individual to approach the Muslims. It will have to be a male no matter what, the Muslims are not ready to accept women. We feel the man could be black or white but not Asian and definitely not a Muslim.”

“Why not a Muslim?”

“We wish our approach to be open and by being a Christian they won't believe we're trying to hide anything. A Muslim might represent a different sect and this would pose a conflict.”

“Well, it seems like you have given this a lot of thought. So what's next?”

“With your permission, we'd like to advertise for volunteers.”

“That will be fine. You'll have to run it through human resources to get the pay grade and other particulars ironed out. We'll have to get you some space at Quantico. And, while I'm thinking of it, you're overdue for pistol qualification.”

“Yes, Sir. I'll make an appointment for the shooting range.”

“Oh, and I'm glad you survived. I would hate to have to start this all over,” he said with a chuckle.

When Anthony got home that night, he was not greeted with a chuckle. Sara threw her arms around him and, with tears in her eyes, gasped, “Thank goodness you're all right. I've been worried all afternoon.”

“What are you talking about?” What a lame way to try and cover up what happened.

“It's all over the clinic. It's all the Muslim women could talk about. A shoot out at a mosque and you were in the middle of it.”

“How could I be in the middle of a shoot out? I don't carry a gun. I did hear about some Muslims being caught up in a drug war. Nothing to do with me.”

“I know you're lying, but as long as everything is all right... Let's go to bed and relax. Abdullah is already asleep.”

Chapter Two A Strong Beginning

After a month of advertising and a month of interviewing. A group of nine new recruits arrived at Quantico for their indoctrination. Initially, there was no formal lesson plan. Anthony was the only instructor, while Alex acted as assistant and general support staff. The sessions mainly consisted of anecdotal stories of how Anthony had succeeded in winning over so many of the imams and a long list of what not to do. Previously, Anthony had treated all of the Muslims equally, seeking out the more moderate groups. But, it had been decided that for the education to be more effective, the classes would concentrate on different sects, starting with Sunni and Shiite, the two main groups that hated each other. For this, scholars from universities were brought in and Anthony became one of the students. After three months of studies, the new Muslim 'experts' were assigned to their respective locations. The fact that they all reported to Anthony did not sit well with some of the AIC (Agents In Charge) but since this was the directors pet project the grumbles were kept to a minimum.

The initial activities went O.K. with all of the growing pains associated with a new organization. The offices allocated to Anthony's group were in an older part of Quantico formerly used by the Marines. They were adequate, except for one small problem, if you can call armies of mice a small problem. Anthony had been told that if he wanted an exterminator to visit, he would have to evacuate the space for at least a week. He didn't want to disturb his organization, so turned to the Marine Commandant for help.

The Commandant was amused by Anthony's problem and decided to have some fun with him. "Well, you FBI guys seem to have a problem, none of the Marine facilities have mice. Do you guys keep cheese in your lockers?" Anthony was not amused.

"The mice were here when we arrived. As my landlord you need to do something." O.K., the Commandant's fun was over.

"How would you like a cat? Each of our units have at least one. They're a special breed with a long history of service. My personal cat is Green Knight, father to many of the other cats."

Anthony was used to high tech solutions. A cat didn't seem very high tech, but he needed to get rid of the mice. So, Snowflake, a six month old white female, became part of the special group and the mice quickly disappeared. Sara had been thinking of a pet for Abdullah, so when the next litter was available Anthony took a black male home, which they name Aladdin.

Chapter Three

Inter-Agency Cooperation

With nine agents in place, Anthony was kept busy keeping up to date on their activities and then informing the Director. It all seemed to be running smoothly, which might seem like good news but all of the agents, including Anthony, craved action. The action started when one of the agents was barred from a Shiite mosque that he had been cultivating. This was frustrating since he had spent many hours on the project. Not to be deterred he sought out a friendly member of the congregation to see why he had been excluded. "It's not your fault, we have a new Ayatollah from Iran who is preaching jihad and war against Christians."

The agent was shocked, so asked, "When did this start? And who is this Ayatollah?"

"His name is Ayatollah Rasa Baba. He arrived two months ago. He lives in the Mosque and rarely leaves."

As far as the agent knew, Iranian ayatollahs weren't welcome under normal immigration policies. He reported this to Anthony, whose first reaction was to contact ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). The ICE agent's response was what he expected. The US has no direct relationship with Iran, they deal through the Swiss. Visas are only granted by exception for things like business relations, international summits (like the UN) and medical care. Ironically, the Iranian revolution occurred when the Shah was receiving medical treatment in the US. The agent checked the immigration records for an Ayatollah Rasa Baba. He found no record of an ayatollah by that name, but he did find a Mister Rasa Baba who had a visa for medical treatment and had two months left on the visa. The medical visa was supported by documents from an Iranian and US doctor. An ayatollah would not be granted a normal visa due to the political position he held in Iran.

Anthony assigned his agent the job of contacting the US doctor, who was of Iranian decent. As soon as the agent entered his office, the doctor began to sweat and quickly confessed.

"I still have family in Iran. They threatened to harm them if I didn't cooperate."

With this information, Anthony sought a way to question the Ayatollah outside the mosque. The FBI felt the mosque to be a place of sanctuary and avoided taking action against one. Surveillance showed that the Iranian left the mosque only to eat at a nearby Persian restaurant. ICE agreed that if Anthony's men gave them enough notice they would apprehend the Ayatollah when he was at the restaurant. The timing would be tight since the Iranian was only away from the mosque for about two hours.

As soon as the Ayatollah left the mosque Anthony's team called the ICE agent on duty who didn't seem real interested in going to the restaurant. A quick call to Anthony and a quicker call to the ICE supervisor put a fire under the agent and he headed to the restaurant. As it turned out, he arrived at the restaurant too late, but was able to grab the Iranian on the steps of the mosque. Baba protested loudly that he was on mosque grounds when he was snatched, but no one paid him any attention. He was arrested for falsifying an immigration form and eventually deported. Anthony would have preferred to throw him in jail. But cooler heads prevailed. After all, he would be a greater menace in prison, where he could spread his evil doctrine to a captive audience.

With this and other early successes, the unit continued to expand. Anthony's responsibilities and position increased proportionally and he became the youngest agent to ever hold his position.

Anthony's next increase came when Sara announced she was pregnant. Anthony was overjoyed, but had to ask, "How will we raise this child?"

Sara grinned and said, "Either Buddhist or Hindu, I guess."

"Very funny. Let's just wait and see."

The Muslim outreach program continued to be a success and expanded across the country. Anthony continued to be in charge and received promotions suitable to his responsibilities. But, he needed to spend more and more time away from home. This didn't please either he, Sara or Abdullah. As Sara's time approached, she became less pleased.

While Anthony was preparing for another trip, she confronted him, "You must be home on Thursday. We have an appointment for an ultrasound to find out the sex of our baby. I will not do it alone."

The appointment was at 10 a.m. When Anthony hadn't shown by 9:45, Sara was fuming. But at 9:55, a sweating and out of breath Anthony burst through the door. "Whew! I made it."

Before Sara could respond, the nurse opened the door and said, "The doctor will see you now."

Once Sara was positioned in the examination chair and her expanding belly spread with lubricant. The doctor began moving the sensor around and the young couple watched in wonder as images appeared on the screen.

“Well, well,” the doctor announced, “Just as I suspected – twins.”

The two parents-to-be both gasped. The doctor continued with a smile, “Let's see: twenty toes, twenty fingers and yes, one penis.”

Anthony and Sara stared at each other. “One of each.” They said together.

“And they both look very healthy.”

“Our problem is solved,” voiced Anthony. “A Jewish granddaughter for your mother and a Catholic boy for Father Dominic's basketball team.”

**Author's Note: I can't think of a better way to end this story.