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This is a work of fiction apart from the bits that aren't

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Preface

Mike Bertram had overslept. He only had an hour to make it to his flight. Frantically grabbing his cell phone, he pressed Marty's name. "Hey Man, can you help me out?"

Marty French groaned, "Jesus man, you woke me up."

"Sorry, but I overslept and have to be at the airport in just under an hour."

"Okay man, I'll be over in ten."

"Thank's my man, you're a lifesaver,"

Marty French drove madly from Manhattan to Newark in just 35 minutes. They screeched to a halt outside Terminal A at 7:40 am. Bertram leapt from the car, lugging the old, red-and-gold canvas bag he'd used as a rugby player at the University of California at Berkeley a decade earlier. United attendants reopened the door to the boarding ramp and let him on the plane. It was lucky for him that Flight 93 was 41 minutes late or he might have missed it.

Tom Clayton saw something he wasn't supposed to see. Alighting from his charter plane on September 11, 2001, he saw something that struck him as rather odd. An airliner, which turned out to be Flight 93, was being boarded by the second group of passengers on the same apron as the charter plane. Tom had seen the group boarding at the terminal at Newark. Then, much to his surprise, he saw the second batch of passengers boarding the same plane, via a jet bridge. Who was this second lot of passengers being boarded, Tom wondered? He didn't treat it as more than a curiosity at the time. But as events unfolded on that fateful day what he had observed became more than mere curiosity.

Mark Bertram couldn't understand why Flight 77, the plane he boarded at Dulles, made an unscheduled stop at Newark. He asked a flight attendant. Carol, that was what her badge said, made some remark about landing because of a technical fault. It also puzzled him that they had to change

planes and join the passengers on Flight 93. When he asked a steward why he had to change planes, he was told that the technical fault was more severe than first thought.

Meanwhile, Maria Marconi, a frequent flier passenger, found it strange that her Flight 11 and Flight 175 had merged into one flight. In all her years of flying with Delta, she had never experienced this. Then she and the other passengers were told that the flight number had been changed to Delta Flight 1989. This interruption to the regular programme confused her further. But like all the other passengers she meekly accepted the changes without raising any questions. After all the airlines knew what they were doing, didn't they? Maria boarded the plane, settled down and enjoyed the uneventful flight until they had to make an emergency landing at Cleveland's Hopkins Airport. Maria got caught up in the rumour that the unscheduled landing took place because of a bomb on board. She thanked God once they got shepherded into the safety of the terminal. Maria watched through a window as sniffer dogs and their handlers boarded the plane. This was exciting, so she took some photos. It turned out to be a false alarm. The flight – Delta 1989 – had not been hijacked, and there was no bomb.

As Maria saw the dogs emerge from the plane her attention was drawn to another drama unfolding before her. It seemed as though another aircraft was engaged in an emergency landing. The new aircraft screeched to a halt away from the terminal. Maria couldn't make out the airline from that distance, but the plane was soon surrounded by military personnel. Shortly afterwards the airport was evacuated. An announcement over the tannoy system ordered all staff to leave the airport without taking their cars or catching airport transit buses.

Maria and all her fellow passengers were told to assemble outside the terminal, where they would be given further instructions. They had to do so, without going through security or collecting their baggage. Once outside the airport terminal Maria and her fellow passengers were gathered together by security guards who carried out a roll call. Once it was established that all passengers were present and correct, they were marched to the west end of the airport, where they entered the NASA Glenn Research Centre. Maria, puzzled and concerned, wondered why, when she should have been greeted by her darling grandchildren, she was being questioned at a NASA facility, primarily as no FAA presence was visible. She felt troubled and confused as she and the others entered the now evacuated NASA research facility. Her mind said, Why are we being taken here if it was considered unsafe for the NASA personnel.

(The official report from the control tower was that screaming was heard from inside the plane as it made an emergency landing. In a later report the screams were not mentioned.)

Bart Green, from the Akron Beacon Journal, took statements from eyewitnesses. He knew one of the planes was Delta 1989. The other one was a mystery. About one hour later Flight 93 also landed at Hopkins Airport.

As Maria Marconi was being questioned by the FBI at the NASA facility, she became deeply concerned for her future. Unbeknown to her she wasn't to have one. She'd already died, when Flight 11 ploughed into the World Trade Centre. Maria wasn't alone in this bizarre 'Schrodinger cat' like scenario. All the passengers on the original four flights on 9/11 disappeared while in held in custody by the FBI, not knowing they were already listed as being officially dead.

Flight 93: Forty lives, one destiny - old.post-gazette.com.
<http://old.post-gazette.com/headlines/20011028flt93mainstoryp7.asp>

Chapter 1

Joab Rackham's first impression of Washington DC was not at all what he expected. Known for its high murder rate the journalist wasn't looking forward to going there. But, much to his surprise, it turned out to be a beautiful city with cherry blossoms in full bloom. Locally DC was known as the city of trees, and Joab could tell why. But he was there to follow up an assignment and had little time to enjoy the visual and historical delights of the city.

It had taken a lot of planning, trying to correspond with the people with whom he had organised interviews, concerning places, dates and times. Finally, everything was arranged, and a hotel was booked by High Light, the Swiss-based magazine for whom he was currently freelancing. Doubletree Hilton, with its revolving rooftop bar, proved to be upscale in downtown DC. It was just five blocks from the White House but, more important to Joab, it was only a 12-minute walk from the Metro at Dupont Circle.

Having booked in, Joab relaxed in the stylish bistro, where he sampled his first taste of contemporary American cuisine. Looking at the list of amenities the hotel offered Joab underlined the fitness centre. After all, this was DC, so it was probably safer jogging indoors. The waitress, Paula, a pleasant girl with a fresh open face, told Joab about the massive snowstorm they'd had just two weeks before. A week later and the cherry blossoms would not have been blooming.

Back in his suite Joab scrolled through his phone contacts until he came to Camilla. Her phone rang a few times, but she eventually picked up. "Hi Love, It's Joab here."

"Where's here,"

"DC. Karl got me a plush hotel this time. It even has its own gym."

"So, what's Washington like?"

"Give me a chance. I've only just arrived. But the place is full of cherry blossoms."

"Oh, that's surprising."

Joab, remembering the passionate night they'd spent together before his flight, said, "I wish you were here."

"Think I've seen that written on a postcard sometime ago."

"Come to think of it if you were here I'd probably get too distracted."

"As long as you don't get distracted by those hot American woman."

"Not going to happen, Cami."

"I should hope not." She paused then said, "So where are you going to start your investigation?"

"Shush, phones have ears."

“It's all hush, hush then.”

“By love. Gotta go. I'll phone again soon.”

Patricia Hamilton fresh from her Quantico training was on her first case. Her target had been red-flagged as soon as he landed at Dulles. She had been sent out on his trail. Her job was to observe, gather intel and report to Special Agent Danvers. She'd heard he's spent some 30 years in the field before taking on the role of recruit training. He was quite the legend in FBI circles, especially to young, impressionable rookies like her. But if truth be known he was burned out and was working his last two years before retiring in a softer role.

Patricia had sat two tables away from Joab in the bistro. She already knew his name, nationality and birth date. His file said he was a subversive journalist who wrote anti-American articles. As such he needed to be monitored. Her assignment was to gain his trust and find out why he'd come to Washington.

Chapter 2

Paul Rivers had worked for NASA for 25 years as a photo analyst. In his job, he used 2D imagery to build 3D products for extraction of depth data. Ten Years back he'd been acclaimed for his extensive study of Apollo imagery, but The Face On Mars project brought him ridicule. His job had been to prove it was a hoax. His investigation into the phenomena proved otherwise, and the award-winning Stereoscopic imager fell foul of his contemporaries. Paul had another project, one he'd kept the secret concerning the planes that hit the towers on 9/11. He never told a soul about his private investigation, until he met Joab Rackham, at the The National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution, which held the most extensive collection of historic aircraft and spacecraft in the world.

Wearing a baseball cap bearing the NASA logo, Paul was easy to spot among the throng of visitors in the museum. Joab held a copy of Highlight magazine, the agreed to sign to show it was him. After introductions, Paul started talking about his Mars imagery. “When NASA went to Mars in 1975 to look for life, what do you think we discovered?”

Joab shrugged, “I don't know. A lot of sand?”

Joab, we discovered that the Cydonia region of Mars is accurately replicated at Avebury and Stonehenge in England, as well as in the layout of the passages and chambers of The Great Pyramid in Egypt.”

The journalist said, “That's new to me.”

“It's unknown to most folks. Joab, I know it's true because I was in charge of the photography.

“No shit!”

“Joab, I'm telling you all this because it shocked me that the FBI came and confiscated all our records and data about our extraordinary discoveries. This information should be in the public domain, as should the information about the enhanced, close up images of the planes that hit the towers.”

This was what Joab was there for. Switching on his phone note taker, he said, "That's what I need to know about."

"Let's go somewhere less crowded, Joab. I may be becoming paranoid, but just lately I get a strong sense that I'm being tailed."

The Martian climate and geology section, not the most significant tourist crowd puller, was almost empty making it easier for the pair to talk. "How did you get these pictures?" Joab asked looking at the close-ups of the aircraft just before it hit the north tower.

"I got them of CBN news on YouTube. I just slowed down the footage till I could see the plane frame by frame."

Joab stared at the images, unbelieving. They clearly showed the aircraft that hit the north tower was grey with no airline markings. It also had a strange looking pod under the fuselage. He looked at Paul. "This is incredible. Can I use these images in my story?"

"Yes, but you mustn't use my name."

"Agreed. Can you email the pictures to me?"

"Sure, but keep me out of it."

"Paul, you have my word."

The scientist looked around, checking for eavesdroppers before continuing. "Joab, I'm sick and tired of the way the government cherry picks what it will allow the people to know. But this 9/11 business goes beyond the pale. These images clearly show it wasn't a commercial aircraft that hit the tower. Unfortunately CBN didn't get any footage of the plane that hit the south tower, but I can only assume it would have been some sort of military drone as well."

"It would seem logical. But what happened to all the passengers who were booked on those planes?"

Paul shrugged. "All I'm telling you is what I know to be true. The rest you have to work out for yourself. And I must say, good luck with that."

"Do you have any theories about the plane that hit the Pentagon?"

"Do you mean like was it a plane?"

"Some people claim it was a missile?"

"Yes, but why would we purposely damage the Pentagon?"

"An excellent question. But the official story has so many holes a Swiss cheese would be jealous."

Paul said, "Yes, well you'll have to ask someone else about that."

"Anyone, you know?"

"Not really." Paul looked at his watch. "Look, I've got to go. Best of luck with the article."

"One more thing. Why did you respond to the blog I set up to get to the truth of 9/11?"

"You asked for witnesses to come forward and state what they experienced. You didn't seem like a nut job so I thought it'd be interesting to fill you in on what I knew."

“And you believed the airliners were swapped for military drones?”

“It's the only logical way it could have happened.”

Joab smiled, “From what you have shown me it certainly seems that way.”

Rivers said, “I'm a loyal American citizen. I'm not out to make the American Government the bad guys. But Alqaeda couldn't have swapped United Airlines planes for drones and flew them into the towers. Someone else had to be responsible for that.”

Joab nodded, saying “And I intend to find out to find out who.”

Patricia, fresh from being brainwashed by the Quantico Rhetoric, had stars and stripes in her innocent eyes. The romantic notion of white hats and black hats with a clear demarcation between the two was something she still believed in. Patricia Hamilton watched the man wearing the NASA cap as he left the exhibition. She brought up his details on her phone. Agent Hamilton was too far away to hear the conversation, but a NASA scientist meeting with a controversial journalist was enough to alert her. She phoned Agent Danvers, requesting to have his hotel room bugged. Danvers knew it was a tricky business and said he'd think about it. Meanwhile, she was to carry on what she was doing.

Joab determined to keep an open mind and used the official version of events concerning 9/11 as the framework for his investigation. Presently, he didn't know what to believe. The terrible saga had more blind alleys and dead ends than downtown Shanghai. There seemed to be more theories floating around the Internet than there were conspiracy theorists. His article had to cut through all the hype to find an agreeable truth. The blog was merely a starting point to stir up interest but 14 years had gone by, and the populace generally found it much easier to either accept the official version of events or live with quiet indignation about the whole thing. Joab's quest was to discover what happened to those passengers? Did they perish in the explosive inferno? Or did they end up somewhere else?

Chapter 3

It was a pleasant spring morning in DC with the scent of cherry blossoms in the air. Joab sat in the park, waiting for his source to arrive. It was a small park located on both sides of the Washington DC side approach to the Key Bridge. During the day it is a bit noisy but as it was only 7 am Francis Scott Key Memorial Park was pretty much deserted. Joab sat in the shade of the mature and fully foliated trees as he watched out for Jerry Kramer, the man he was there to meet. The agreed to location, the Ukrainian Embassy, next to the park, was straightforward for Joab to find.

Jerry Kramer, an emergency dispatcher in Pennsylvania, had agreed to meet with the journalist to fill him in about what he knew to be true concerning Flight 93. Joab stood to greet the man. Hi, I'm Joab. Thanks for coming.”

“Good to meet you,” the man said, shaking Joab's proffered hand.

Getting straight to the point, Joab said, “So tell me about Flight 93.”

Jerry sat down on the seat beside the journalist as the Englishman set up his voice recorder.

Kramer explained, “I was on duty in the control tower when I received a phone call from a passenger on Flight 93.”

“What was it about?”

“He'd locked himself in a toilet. He kept repeating “We're being hijacked!” Then he said, “We're going down. I heard something that could have been an explosion. Then the caller said, “There's white smoke. Then the line went dead.”

Joab looked straight at the man. “And that call definitely came from Flight 93?”

“Correct”

“Could there have been more than one Flight 93 that day?”

“No, I don't think so.”

“Then how come Flight 93 carried out an emergency landing in Cleveland?”

Kramer shrugged. “I only know what I know. And that plane crashed. I'd stake my life on it.”

“Did you see it crash?”

Kramer, rubbed his clean-shaven chin thoughtfully, “I wasn't exactly an, but the wreckage was there for everyone to see.”

“Yes, but did anybody actually come forward and say they saw Flight 93 crash?”

Jerry hesitated, then admitted, “Look, I know of two people – I won't mention names – that heard a missile,”

“A missile!?”

“They both live very close, within a couple of hundred yards, of the plane going down. One guy served in Vietnam, and he told me he recognised the noise they make. Also, F-16s were flying close by. So the chances are that's where the missile was fired from.”

Joab, queried, “You said Flight 93 crashed, Are you now suggesting it was shot down?”

Kramer thought for a moment, then said, “Yes. It crashed after the missile hit it. That's why the debris was scattered over such a huge area.”

“Was the plane identified as being Flight 93?”

Kramer chuckled nervously. “Shit man, there was hardly enough of it left to recognise it as a plane.” Kramer scratched his head. “Joab, that's all I know,”

“Why won't you give me the name of this Viet Vet?”

“He's sick, and I don't want him disturbed.”

Jobbed nodded slowly.

“In any case, I told you what he said. But you're going to have to find more conclusive evidence than that.”

As Jerry got up and left, Joab realised the enormous task he had in front of him. Each person, like Jerry, was a piece of the jigsaw, each knowing their own little bit of the real 9/11 story. But this was a jigsaw made of many pictures, not just one. Ten people could have witnessed the same thing, each with their own interpretation. Then there was all the disinformation out there, designed to throw unwary journalists off the scent.

Patricia, feeling bored just following Joab around, decided it was time to meet her target. It would have to seem like a chance encounter, a brief connection. The FBI dossier had Joab down as being polite and courteous, especially where women were concerned. But then the English middle classes were famous for it. So it was time for her to go into 'damsel in distress mode'.

Julie Stopp, the name she used for the assignment, waited patiently in the bistro, for Joab to show.

The short psychology course she attended during her Quantico FBI training showed that most people are creatures of habit and that 'pleasurable' patterns can form very quickly. Sure enough, as she finished her second cappuccino, Joab strode in. She rose from her seat and hurried towards him, making sure they collided. Dropping her purse as she bumped into him, Patricia went into helpless woman mode

Joab, falling for her ploy, taken aback, said "Oh, I'm sorry," as he stooped to retrieve her bag. She had more than a passing resemblance to his favourite female movie star. Drew Barrymore.

"That's very kind of you," she said, giving him a dazzling smile.

"You're welcome," he said, as she exited the bistro.

Recognising Paula, as she delivered his burger and fries, Joab said, "Hi,"

"Hi yourself. How are you enjoying our city?"

"Haven't seen much yet. Maybe you could show me around," Joab winked.

Paula giggled, "I get off in an hour."

"I'll wait for you outside."

Joab and Paula met as arranged. Paula's knowledge of the city, as well as the historical context of its monuments and significant buildings, made her an excellent guide. Together they saw many of the embassies, monuments, Georgetown, Arlington, and Chinatown all in 4 hours. Joab, feeling tired by then, hugged Paula goodbye and headed back to his hotel, and bed. As he approached the Doubletree, he did a double take. The woman who nearly collided with him at the bistro was headed in his direction. Joab, confident it was her, grinned as she passed, "Twice in one day in a city this size. I guess that must mean something."

"Oh, it's Sir Galahad. So, what do you think it means?"

"Don't know but maybe we can figure it out over a coffee."

"It's a bit late for coffee, and this girl needs her beauty sleep. We could meet in the bistro tomorrow morning. I'll need a caffeine fix by then."

"How about 7.30?"

"Bit early but I can make it."

Agent Danvers had six new recruits to train in the field, including Patricia Hamilton. He had to find each of them assignments to cut their teeth on. The had to be real but of little importance. For Danvers, Joab Rackham came in that category. After a couple of days, he'd pull the rookies in and see what they had learned. But Hamilton seemed to be ahead of the game. Her report, which he received around 11 pm, said she'd made contact with the target and they were going to meet at the bistro in the morning.

Chapter 5

Somerset County Airport appeared closed to Joab as he pulled up at the terminal. The adjacent Texaco gas station was open, and the very reasonable fuel prices inspired him to gas up. The cab rank was mostly empty that time of day so temporary parking was easy.

Seeing his bright orange 75 AMC Pacer, she said, "You really are on a low budget."

"Hey girl, don't knock it. This is a classic."

"I didn't know museums did car hire," she grinned, showing her charming, cheeky smile. Chucking her case and bag in the rear hatch, she jibed, "Will this thing get us back to Shanksville?"

"It'll get me back, but any more of your insults to the old girl and you'll be walking."

"You know you're doing this without pay, don't you?" Joab clarified as the pair drank coffee, brewed by Nick King, the new owner of Ida's General Store. He added, "I will pay for your room though."

"That's mighty big of you, sir," she said, with a tinge of cynicism.

"Yes, well two of us won't really fit into these small rooms."

Julie looked Joab in the eye. "I've been checking you out, Mr Rackham. You've got a string of books under your belt so you must be raking in the royalties."

"Most of them are in remainder bins at 2 bucks a pop."

"Oh, come on Joab, I come pretty cheaply."

Leaning forward, so Nick didn't hear, he said, "Do you think I'd be staying here if I had money to spare."

"Oh yeah, Shanksville is positively bursting with motels." she scoffed.

"You've got a point there," he grinned.

"So what are you doing today?" Julie asked, finishing her coffee.

"Seeing a coroner about a plane crash."

"What do you want me to then?"

He thought about it, rubbing his unshaven chin. "Okay, you can find out who the officer was who scrambled the military jets and ordered them to shoot down the hijacked commercial aircraft headed for Washington."

"Flight 93."

"If it was that flight."

The Somerset County Medical Examiner & Coroner's office, which was almost 10 miles from Shanksville, was based in Somerset. Famous for the 'Whiskey Rebellion' of 1794, the town became the focal point for the first major test of the federal authority under the newly adopted US Constitution under President George Washington. Joab parked his car near 555 Tayman Avenue and

entered the building. Just to the left was a sign reading 'Somerset County Medical Examiner & Coroner's office'. It seemed to be empty. Then a woman appeared at the desk. Seeing the stranger, she said, "Yes, can I help you?"

"Yes, I'm here to see Walt Masters."

Eyeing him with suspicion, she asked, "Do you have an appointment?"

"Yes, a verbal one over the phone. Is Walt Masters in?"

"What do you want to see him about?"

Joab, becoming annoyed, said, "That's between him and me."

Betty Smallwood, Joab soon discovered, was not one to be tangled with. When it came to defending her territory, she was a mixture of a mother hen and Attila the Hun. "Don't you come in here with that attitude, young man. If I don't know what you want I don't know who to refer you to."

"I've already told you who I've come to see,"

Just then a bespectacled middle-aged man with thinning dark hair entered reception. "What on Earth is going on, Betty?" he asked.

Joab said, "I've come here to see a Doctor Masters."

Betty jumped in, "I was just trying to find out why he's here, doctor."

"You must be the man Bill was talking with about the crash."

"Yes,"

The coroner turned to his receptionist. "It's okay Betty." Then to Joab. "Come on through to my office."

Betty glared at Joab, as he followed the doctor.

"So what do you want to know about the crash, Mr Rackham?" Walt Masters asked as they sat in his office.

"I'm interested in the whole thing to do with Flight 93."

Walt handed Joab a document. "This is this official report."

Joab flicked through the stapled pages. Stopping at a particular section, he read:

On 9/11/2001 Captain Jason Dahl taxied United Airlines Flight 93 Boeing 757- 200 at Newark International Airport, ready for its 8:01 AM departure but heavy runway traffic, delayed departure until 8:42 AM. Besides the 2 pilots, there were 5 flight attendants and 37 passengers aboard.

He came to another pertinent section:

The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology DNA lab in Rockville, Maryland, were later to identify the human remains, from the crash site in Shanksville."

Joab looked up at the coroner. "Were you involved in identifying the remains, Dr Masters?"

"Walt, please. To answer your question no I wasn't. I'm not a pathologist. You'll have to talk to Jon Patterson. He's with Freedom of Information/Privacy Act Office, U.S. Army Medical Command."

“What's the chances of that happening?”

Walt shrugged. “No idea. Pretty slim I'd guess.” Then he said, “About them getting DNA from the remains of the passengers and crew, they never found the remains of the 4 alleged hijackers.”

“Why was that?”

“I was told that to make a DNA identification we need something from the victims or their family members – personal effects, or blood samples – to match. We didn't have that kind of information about the terrorists.”

“That makes sense I guess,” Joab said, thinking, that's if there were any terrorists to identify.

“Bill Crow said you got to scene of the crash before him. So what was it like?”

“Nothing I'd ever seen before. I've been involved with a few air crashes over the last 35 years as coroner, but this one was very odd indeed.”

“In what way?”

“Well, it seemed as though the plane didn't so much crash a disintegrate above the ground. Quite honestly I looked around the site and didn't see anything I could identify as human remains at all.”

“So how did the military pathologists come up with the DNA?”

“Search me. And I'll tell you something else. There didn't appear to be any pieces in the debris big enough to show it was a plane.”

“Surely even in the worst air disasters human remains and plane parts are recognisable.”

“Well with this one it was as if the plane had stopped and let the passengers off before it crashed.”

Joab looked at Walt, “That possibility may not be as stupid as you may think. In fact, several theories go along with that line of thinking.”

Walt shook his head, “Well, I don't know. But Tom Spallone, one of the crash sight state troopers from Greensburg, told me the impact of the crash was so severe that the biggest piece of debris he had seen there is no bigger than 2 feet.”

“So what do you reckon caused the crash?”

“Oh, there's some talk of a missile hitting it, but I don't know.”

“Wouldn't that explain the tiny pieces of debris spread over such a vast area?”

“Well, there's this young guy, Eric Peterson, from Lambertville. He told me he was working in his shop in the morning when he heard a plane. He said there was a crater in the ground that was really burning. Strewn about were pieces of clothing hanging from trees and parts of the Boeing 757, but nothing bigger than a couple of feet long, he said. Many of the items were burning.”

“Did he happen to see any military planes in the vicinity?” “He never mentioned it. But he also saw no bodies and no sign of any life.”

Back from Somerset. Joab sat at a small desk in his room, bringing his notes up to date on his laptop, when Julie entered. “Hi Julie, how did it go?”

“Huh, They're admitting nothing.”

“Yeah, I thought as much. Never mind I've got a new angle.”

She stared at him speechless. Then she said, “I spend all day trying to speak to somebody in the USAF who can shed some light over what happened, and all you have to say is 'never mind'.”

Joab grinned, “Welcome to the wonderful world of journalism. Now I want you to find out about this guy,” he said, handing her a print copy of Dr Jon Patterson. He explained, “He's with Freedom of Information/Privacy Act Office, U.S. Army Medical Command. Now, this is the thing. Only military pathologists were at the plane crash site, and I want to know why?”

“Why do you think only the Army Medical Command were involved, Joab?”

“Possibly because the plane was shot down by a missile.”

“Even if Flight 93 was shot down I seriously doubt you'd get anyone to admit it.”

“I know that Julie, but the first rule of journalism is 'assume nothing'.”

“What are you going to do now?”

“I'm going to see a guy called Ted Bollinger.”

She looked at him. “Why was this one shot down but not the other three?”

“If it was shot down?”

“But I thought you said...”

“...The official line says it developed engine trouble and had to crash land, but the evidence doesn't suggest any crash landing. It's almost as though it was sprayed over the area.”

Changing the subject, she said, “Who's Ted Bollinger?”

“Never mind. Try to talk with Dr Patterson.”

After Joab had left, Julie dialled agent Danvers' number.

“Patricia, how are you going with your case.”

“I am now the target's official researcher, currently in Shanksville.”

Danvers chuckled. “Well done. So what have you learnt?”

“He wants me to contact a Dr Patterson. He heads up the Freedom of Information/Privacy Act Office, US Army Medical Command.”

“Then you'd better organise it, agent Hamilton.”

“As me, or as Julie Stopp.”

“As you of course.”

“But what if he tells our target that I'm an FBI agent.”

Danvers laughed. “Just tell him you made out you were a Fed to get him his interview.”

Driving back to the Flight 93 Memorial, Joab had immediate feelings of both peacefulness and sadness.

The memorial to those who died on Flight 93 is unique in that it isn't located in the middle of bustling New York City or next to a military facility just outside of Washington, DC, but instead, in an empty field. Having reached the memorial area Joab encountered groups of visitors standing around signs giving information about the site's significance and the names and faces of those onboard the ill-fated plane. He passed a small building where park rangers (the place was now a national park) offered very detailed sanitised accounts of the events of 9/11. Joab saw Ted Bollinger waiting outside.

Ted, a flight dispatcher for UA, middle-aged, smartly dressed, noticed the highlight magazine the journalist carried. He approached the man. "Hi, are you Joab Rackham?"

"In the flesh," Joab grinned. "You must be Ted."

"I must be." Ted smiled. "Do you mind if we talk and walk?" "Not at all."

Ted became pensive, trying to find the words. Then he began, "We'd just heard about the attacks on the World Trade Centre. I warned the Captain on Flight 93 at 9:19am to be alert. Captain Duval responded at 9:26 to request clarification. The next thing we hear is that terrorists had successfully infiltrated the plane's cockpit. We received two mayday calls amid sounds of a struggle. At 9:32 a hijacker, later identified as Ziad Jarrah, was heard over the flight data recorder, directing the passengers to sit down and stating that there was a bomb aboard the plane. The flight data recorder also shows that Jarrah reset the autopilot, turning the plane around to head back east."

"Towards Washington."

"Yes. The course would take the plane over the Dome." Joab stopped to let a group of tourists overtake them. Once they'd passed, he said, "What happened then?" Some of the passengers made phone calls to loved ones telling them about the high-jacking. Maybe they were informed about the other three planes, but some guys decided to go down fighting." "What do you mean?"

"As far as we could make out at 9:57 passengers and crew aboard Flight 93 began their counter-attack. We retrieved this info from a cockpit voice recorder. Apparently, the hijacker piloting the plane began to roll the aircraft, pitching it up and down to throw the charging passengers off balance. We heard voices chanting 'Allah is Great' The plane then rolled on its back and ploughed into this field."

Joab nodded. "Thanks, Ted. Now there are a few things I need to be clear on. First, are you absolutely certain that it was Flight 93?"

"Sure. Why"

"Another version of events states Flight 93 landed at Cleveland and was grounded there, an hour or so after it was supposed to have crashed here."

Ted stared at Joab. "Impossible!"

"Well, witnesses said that there was a Boeing 767 kept in a secure area of Hopkins International Airport. The initial reports were that this plane was hijacked and that there was a bomb on board. The control tower reported screams heard from the plane as it made its emergency landing in Cleveland."

“Well now, How the hell could it have crashed here and been in Cleveland?” “An excellent question. So are you sure the plane crashed or could it have been shot down with an air to air missile?” Ted Stared at the journalist. “Of course it crashed.” “Did you know that the Shanksville police chief has eyewitness reports that a military aircraft seen in the area at the time of the crash.” “No.”

“Why do you think the hijackers crashed the plane in an empty field when they could easily have gone down over Shanksville?”

Ted shrugged. “Maybe a crew member got to the controls.” “Possible I guess. But it's unlikely anyone could break in and take over the controls with the terrorists in the cockpit.” “I guess we'll never know the answer to that.”

Joab turned and shook the air dispatcher's hand, “Thanks Ted, you've been a great help.” “My pleasure Joab. I don't envy you trying to make sense out of all this.” “I don't mind telling you that getting to grips with the 9/11 disaster is like trying to kill a hydra. Every time I think I have a handle on the story, another theory, just as plausible or implausible jumps out in its place.” Many people who witnessed the site where United Airlines Flight 93 is supposed to have gone down on September 11, 2001, have said how little it resembled what they expected the scene of a plane crash to look like.

According to official accounts, Flight 93, the fourth plane to be hijacked on September 11, crashed in a field in Pennsylvania after its courageous passengers and crew members attempted to retake control of their aircraft. However, numerous individuals who spent time at the supposed crash site have described seeing almost nothing resembling wreckage from a plane there. Some witnesses have recalled seeing little, or no human remains at the site. And although Flight 93 was reported as “heavily laden with jet fuel” when it crashed, investigators found no contamination from jet fuel in the soil and groundwater around the site.

There is a lot of suspicious evidence relating to the crash of Flight 93, which casts serious doubt on the official account of what happened. This evidence suggests that what witnesses saw might actually have been the result of an attempt to fake the scene of a plane crash in an appalling act of deception, rather than the site of a genuine accident. The relatively small amount of debris that some witnesses noticed could have been planted. If this is what happened, it would mean the fate of Flight 93 is still unknown.

Back at the general store Joab and Julie found that piecing together the witness statements to see the big picture was like trying to put the crashed plane together again. Fortified by a few beers, the pair worked into the early hours collating the information. “Many of the people who witnessed the site where United Airlines Flight 93 is supposed to have gone down on September 11, 2001, said how little it resembled what they expected the scene of a plane crash to look like,” Joab commented.

Julie agreed, “Numerous individuals who spent time at the supposed crash site have described seeing almost nothing resembling wreckage from a plane there. Some witnesses of them recalled seeing little, or no human remains at the site. And although Flight 93 was reported as 'heavily laden with jet fuel' when it crashed, investigators found no contamination from jet fuel in the soil and groundwater around the site.”

Joab sighed, “There's a hell of a lot of evidence relating to the crash of Flight 93 that casts serious doubt on the official account of what happened. Some witnesses even go as far as to suggest that

what they saw may well have been the result of an attempt to fake the scene of a plane crash in an appalling act of deception, rather than the site of a genuine crash.”

Julie looked up at Joab, a worried frown on her face, “Do you seriously think the FBI or whoever would go to such lengths?”

“I don't know, but one detail suggesting debris was planted at the alleged crash site is the locations where Flight 93's 'black boxes' were found.”

“What do you mean?” Julie asked, shifting her legs into a more comfortable position.

“They were found in the crater at the alleged crash site but at different depths in the ground. FBI agent Wells Morrison stated it was strange because the black boxes are right next to each other on the aircraft, yet one was found 13 feet deeper into the crater than the other. He said it seemed as though they had been placed at different depths in the soil. He was also surprised they weren't found sooner.”

Julie stretched, saying, “I'm feeling bushed.” getting up, she added, “I'll see you sometime tomorrow.”

“I hope you mean today,” Joab grinned, lightening the mood.

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Paying Your Respects at the Flight 93 National Memorial in <https://uncoveringpa.com/flight-93-memorial>

Flight 93 - Facts & Summary - HISTORY.com. <https://www.history.com/topics/flight-93>

93 Landed in Cleveland - 911myths. http://www.911myths.com/html/93_landed_in_cleveland.html

Chapter 6

Joab woke around 10 am. By the time he'd staggered downstairs for one of Rick's famous burgers and black coffee, Julie plopped down beside him. “I forgot to tell you that I contacted Dr Patterson and he has agreed to meet with you.”

“You must have a silver tongue,” Joab grinned. “So when and where?” “He's coming to Shanksville today and said he'd give you a few minutes by the Glessner covered bridge at 10:30.”

“Shit! It 20 past now. You might have given me more notice.”

“Sorry, Joab. It slipped my mind.”

Putting the old Pacer through its paces, Joab reached the Stonycreek River, next to the iconic bridge, just two minutes after ten. Dr Patterson was waiting.

Joab, apologetic, said, “Sorry I'm late. I only got your message a few minutes ago.”

Patterson, a nonsense man, said, “Why do you want to see me?”

"I'm interested in why military pathologists dealt with collecting evidence at the Flight 93 crash site." "And you're interested because?"

"I'm an investigative journalist writing an article about that flight."

"I see. Well, under the Freedom of Information Act you'll need to apply to get access to any and all information, under the United States code 552, about the crash."

"I'm sure you can do better than that, Dr Patterson. You could have told my researcher that over the phone."

"Agent Hamilton told me you needed to see me. That's why I'm here."

Agent Hamilton! Who the hell was that? Joab wondered. All I want to know is why civilian pathologists weren't used."

"Simple. It was an emergency connected with terrorist activity. That made it our concern. Plus the fact we are the only medical organisation with the means and the manpower to deal with such a disaster."

"Is it true that you were able to find enough of the human remains to get DNA samples for matching with live relatives?" "Yes."

"Excepting the DNA of the alleged terrorists."

"Yes, we had nothing to match with from the Terrorists DNA."

"If there were any terrorists."

"Of course there were terrorists. They caused the crash." Joab changed tack. "There is evidence that Flight 93 was hit by a missile fired from an F16. That being so it would account for the tiny pieces of aircraft scattered over a large area, would it not?" Patterson remained calm. "It's one of many crackpot theories." He turned to leave, then said, "there's nothing sinister about the army medical corps being involved. You have to go through the FOIA to access the information you're looking for."

At first, Patricia Hamilton thought Joab would turn out to be just another gung-ho sensationalist reporter looking for a straightforward story. Now she knew different. He was a thoroughly fastidious journalist searching for a truth based upon rigorous research. The more she looked at eyewitness statements, the less sure she was the Uncle Sam was a straight up guy. Perhaps there was something to some of the conspiracy theories after all. Feeling herself becoming aligned with the thinking of her target she mentally pinched herself. She had a job to do, her first assignment with the Bureau. Being successful had to be her only objective. She phoned her trainer's number.

"Hi, Agent Hamilton. I'm glad you called because its time to engage in the next phase." "The next phase?"

"Once your target trusts you and sees you as an ally you can start passing him bits of disinformation."

"I think my target is too smart for that."

"Just little titbits. Things that agree with the way he is thinking." "Oh, I don't know..."

“You're his researcher. He wants to listen to you.” “Okay, I'll give it a go.”

“So who's Agent Hamilton?” Joab asked upon entering Julie's room.

The words caught her off balance. “Shouldn't you knock before entering a lady's boudoir?” she responded, trying to make light of his question.

Joab grinned, “I thought this was the research office.” Then he added, “Well done, Julie. It was a stroke of genius. He really thought he was talking to a FED.”

Relieved, she said, “Wouldn't have gotten him otherwise.” “That's probably true. Now I need you to find out about FOIA access.” She looked up at him. “I found out something exciting while you were away.”

“Oh!”

“Vice-President Dick Cheney confirmed that seek-and-destroy orders were issued. So it's entirely conceivable that fighter jocks encountered the Flight 93.”

“Or what passed for it?”

“Apparently F 16s tailed the aircraft once it pulled a 180-degree turn and flew straight towards Washington.”

“There are witness statements that say one, two or even three F-16s were seen following the aircraft.” “Did they fire on it? That's what we need to know.” She shrugged.

“I don't know, but I came across something intriguing. A white, unmarked business jet is said to have been tailing the doomed flight. With all non- military flights grounded, why was a civilian still aloft?”

“Good question. Maybe it wasn't a civilian plane. I found out that Customs teams use white business jets to bring down drug runners, with top-secret jamming equipment. Mind you officials deny such equipment even exists.” She added, “And if it did, why would they use it when Sidewinder missiles were available on those F-16s outside Washington?” Joab sighed, “The Hydra grows even more fucking heads.” Grabbing a beer from the small bar fridge, he said, “From what I can gather we have many possible scenarios for UAL 93: It never existed in the real world only on a government press release. The actual flight 93 was swapped with another flight number, and the passengers (many of whom were Government employees) were 'encouraged' to secrecy.

The plane was shot down by a USAF fighter pilot who disregarded stand down orders, and the Shanksville crash site is where the most significant piece(s) fell.

93 was a remote control drone, it malfunctioned and was destroyed (self-destructed) intentionally before it could crash leaving extensive evidence.

The plane actually did crash dived into the field buried itself into the ground and entirely disintegrated from the intense heat which did not burn the nearby grass.”

“Which way do you swing, Joab?”

“That's a personal question. What, are you, my tailor, now?” Julie burst out laughing. Joab joined in. Soon they were both busting their sides. It was good. It broke the tension.” Becoming serious

again, Julie said, "It's not easy pursuing the truth." He shook his head, perplexed. "I don't know if we'll ever get to the truth." Then changing the tone, he said, "Anyway, I'm hungry. Let's get some lunch."

During their hamburger lunch, Julie surprised Joab with an outburst, born of America's shared frustration over 9/11. She gushed, "Bush, Rove, Cheney and Rumsfeld all knew that 9/11 would happen way before time. They're the ones feeding us all this bull crap. They're fucking criminals and should be arrested for their crimes."

Joab said, "If your claims are true they should be paying for their crimes against American citizens. Yet they're free, living high off the hog, still peddling this charade for all these years."

"It doesn't stop there. Politicians not directly involved just look the other way allowing sociopath murderers to keep running America, the greatest show on Earth. Christ, Joab, the American people know this, yet they choose to look the other way as well."

Joab took a bite of his burger, wiped his mouth and sipped his juice. "Politics is a dirty business."

On her own tangent, Julie said, "And now, because of Bush's unnecessary, unholy war the entire Economic System of our Western Way of Life had crumbled before our eyes."

Swallowing a mouth full of burger, Joab looked at her. "Wow, that's quite a statement. Although I think is a bit of an oversimplification."

"Surely you don't swallow that hog shit about Alqaeda being behind it."

"Julie, I'm only interested in available factual evidence."

"Joab, sitting on the fence is going to drive you insane. You either believe the official line, or you don't."

"As a journalist, I don't have that luxury."

She wondered if she'd overdone the outrageous act. But was it all an act. She found herself believing what she was saying as she said it. Joab had undoubtedly bought it, hook, line and sinker.

She sighed, "Sometimes I honestly don't know why we bother. The fact is that what we believe is what we really deserve. We have had all these years to do the right thing and put Bush and Cheney behind bars, but chose to look the other way like everybody else. Right?"

"Cheney, Rumsfeld and Bush are bulletproof. You'd have to find some pretty damning evidence to change that. And even if you did who are you going to get to arrest them?"

Silently congratulating her self for a job well done, she said, "I guess you're right, but it's intolerable."

"Gnashing teeth doesn't help."

She sighed, "So where do we go from here?"

He said, "According to a source of mine in the Air Force, Armed fighters fly on picket duty outside Washington. So they were already patrolling and would have been alerted about a high jacked plane in their backyard. That would account for their presence."

"True."

"So why did that air controller tell me nothing showed up on the radar? Why the unnecessary cover-up? It doesn't make sense."

"Are you going to talk to the controller again?"

He smiled. "I'd love to talk with the pilot of the F-16."

"Good luck on that."

Joab, not one to look at the teeth of a gift horse, couldn't believe his luck at finding Julie. She was a great help and comfort. Investigative journalism can be a very lonely occupation at times.

As he drove off to follow up another lead, his mind went over aspects of evidence. The official story removed all evidence of a shoot down, citing specifically the phone call reporting an explosion and smoke on board the aircraft while it was in flight. The same media that carried early reports of evidence of a shoot down now parroted the official version without question. It seemed that Uncle Sam had whispered in the media boss' ear. However, for Joab, the important point wasn't the shoot down. Most people would agree that under the circumstances, it was the best course of action. The point is he saw was clear evidence of the manipulation of information being fed to the public regarding 9/11. Joab stopped his car to answer a phone call. The caller, giving no name, said he'd heard the reporter asking for statements concerning the four planes and their passengers on 9/11.

1. Joab immediately became suspicious. "Yes. What have you got for me?"

"An Mp3 copy of the recording of the air traffic controller during the moments leading up to the crash of United's Flight 93. It lasts 3 minutes and 58 seconds."

Joab's heart missed a beat. Could it be genuine? "I might be interested." "If you want a copy it's gonna cost you big bucks." "How big?"

"Oh, let me see. Let's say ten grand."

"That's a lot of money. I'll have to hear it first."

"Once I've been paid."

"We meet. I listen. If it's useful, you get paid. That's the only way that'll work. Now, what's your name."

"Andrew."

"Seeing that the Journalist wasn't backing down, the caller organised a meet at Stonycreek River.

Joab waited by the river for Andrew to show. He wasn't happy about the venue. It was far too open with few people around. He knew his research could be ruffling feathers and, that after his brush with the CIA in Iraq, they could well be onto him.

A man in his early thirties, clean shaven and with a spring in his step, tentatively approached Joab.

"You the journalist I phoned?"

“Are you Andrew?”

The man nodded and handed Joab his iPod.

Joab listened. There was a very noticeable tone overlaying the supposed communication from United's Flight 93. This tone Joab estimated to be around 400 Hz, the frequency of aircraft alternating power. Listening very carefully he thought he heard the same sound at a much lower register, as though from another aircraft's communication. Joab made a mental note to get an audio expert onto it. Then he heard what sounded like a list of demands, spoken in a Middle Eastern accent. The speaker spoke reasonable English, but the poor audio made it difficult to hear what was actually said. Joab realised that if the transmission really did come from Flight 93, then the hijackers were planning to land the plane at some point and trade hostages for whatever those demands were. Joab couldn't hear the details, but it seemed, from what he could make out, they weren't planning to crash the plane into a Washington building. That seemed odd, considering the other three, allegedly, high jacked planes had buildings as targets.

Then he came to the most essential part. From the list of demands to the first report of a puff of smoke in the air was a mere 45 seconds. From this, it was clear to Joab that the hijacker pilot was untroubled by any unruly passengers. Joab knew the plane was flying at 35,000 feet altitude, because that the Flight 93 pilot confirms this to the air traffic controller as the tape recording began. He mused the only way that United Airlines Flight 93 could have crashed in the 45 seconds after the second transmission regarding the list of demands would have been to point nose directly down and power down the whole way without any interruption.

Joab took out his earphones. He looked straight at Andrew, a puzzled expression on his face. “There was no time for the passengers to burst through the door, or the hijacker pilot to react. Any struggle over the controls would have sent the plane spiralling across the sky, pointed up as much as down.”

Andrew grinned,

“Yeah, that's right. So where's my money?”

“How do I know the radio transmissions are genuine?” He stared at the journalist. “Look, Joab, we now know two facts. The hijackers were talking about a list of demands, not suicide. And the story of the passengers crashing the plane during a fight with the hijackers simply could not have happened that way.” “They're mere details, not worth lying about.”

“Whoever made the recording thought it was.”

“Whoever! So you don't think it came from Flight 93?” “Look, man, I work in the tower, and I know it's not genuine.” Seeing uncertainty on the journalist's face, he pressed, “Think about it, Joab. Why is it that the radio transmitting from what is supposed to be United Flight 93 has such a clear tone. When compared to the other aircraft (indeed to other air traffic tapes from other incidents such as TWA 800) it's clear that something is very unusual about this radio transmission. It's easy to suspect that we do not really hear from Flight 93 at all but instead from an unshielded aircraft radio somewhere on the ground, quickly wired to an aircraft power supply to 'spooof' the controllers.” Joab hesitated, then said, “Why would somebody go to all that trouble to falsify the record, especially as the recording refers to a hostage high jack situation, not a suicide mission.” Andrew grinned.

“What if this recording already existed before 9/11 and was the best they had to suit the Flight 93 scenario?” “It's possible but...”

Anticipating the journalist, Andrew said, "The demand and hostage scenario is the most common high jack experience, Nothing like 9/11 had happened before. They had to go with what they had."

"But why?"

"To make it seem as though the passengers and crew were on board." Joab stood open-mouthed.

"Cat got your tongue, Joab?"

"Joab uttered, "But 34 of the 44 people alleged to have been on Flight 93 had been DNA identified."

"How is that possible when no human remains were found at the crash site?"

"Andrew, all I've heard is that the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology collected samples of human and took them to a lab in Rockville." "Do you believe it?"

Joab answered, "If the passengers and crew were on board, why the bullshit on the recording?" Andrew put his hand out. "Give me back the iPod." Joab hesitated. "Will you negotiate on the price?"

"Just give me the fucking iPod. I'll sell it to someone else."

"I didn't say I wasn't interested."

"Yeah, but you don't have the money, do you?"

Joab, grabbing his phone, said, "Look don't be hasty. Let me make a call to my editor right now." Joab said, handing Andrew his recording.

Karl picked up the ringing phone, said, "Joab, what do you want?" "I have a recording of what went on in one of the planes just before it crashed." "Goot, it could be useful."

"There's more to it than that, but I have to pay a man to get the recording."

"Pay for it if you think it's worth it."

"Ten Grand."

"Ten thousand American dollars for a recording!"

"I know it sounds a bit steep but Karl, this is fucking dynamite. I need your go ahead right now, or we lose it."

"That decision has to be made by the financial department. I will put it to them, but I don't hold out a lot of hope."

"Karl, I haven't got time to fuck about with this. I need that recording."

Karl, exasperated, said, "Vy is it so important?"

"Because it seemed to be a fraud and was most likely recorded before the plane took off."

"I don't understand, Joab."

"Just trust me on this, Karl."

"All right I fast track money. You get it in the morning."

"Great! You won't regret it."

“I already do.”

Joab turned to Andrew. “I’ll have it for you tomorrow morning.” Andrew smiled, “Then you get the recording tomorrow morning.” “But I need to transcribe it tonight.”

Andrew shook his head. “No way man.”

Chapter 7

“Why can’t I come with you?” Julie complained as Joab headed for the old AMC.

“I need you to find out what you can about a General Algernon Stubbington. I’ll be back in an hour or so.”

“Who are you going to see?”

“Does it matter, Julie?”

“It does, yes.”

Joab, wondering why she was so persistent, said, “Somebody who has something important to my article.”

“And that’s all you’re going to say about it,” she huffed. “I thought we were a team.” “Jesus, Julie, you’re my researcher not my partner. You’re the one who asked to help me. If you’re not happy with the way I work, then feel free to leave.” Realising she’d gone too far, she mentally backpedalled.

“Of course Joab. Sorry.”

Joab waited by Stonycreek River, peering into the water to pass the time. 15 minutes had passed, and there was still no sign of Andrew. For the third time he phoned, and each time he only got the man’s message bank. Where the hell was he? Joab wondered. Shit! He’d probably gone to another player – one with the cash, Joab thought, pessimism clouding his thinking. Fuck! He’d had it with those skinflints at High Light. He remembered Andrew worked as a flight controller. That’s if Andrew was his real name. It’s all he had to go by so he phoned the airport. When a voice answered, he said, “I’m trying to locate one of your air traffic controllers. His name is Andrew.”

“Do you know his last name, sir?”

“No, but how many Andrews do you have working there?” “Please hold. I’ll have to go and find out.”

“No. Wait. I didn’t mean that as a question. I just meant there can’t be too many people called Andrew working in the control tower. So if you can just put me through to the tower...”

“...I can’t do that, sir. What’s the nature of your call?” “I was supposed to meet up with him this morning, but he didn’t show. So if you could just contact the tower and ask for Andrew.” “Andrew who, sir?”

Jesus. It was like pulling hens’ teeth Joab thought, closing his phone.

Mentally kicking himself as he drove, by the time Joab had reached his lodgings he was in a black mood.

“How did you go?” Julie asked, cheerfully.

“Don't ask,” he growled, going into his room.”

“Not good then, I'm guessing,” she said to his back.

Ten minutes later she knocked on his door. “Coffee Joab.” “Thanks. Come in.”

Putting down the steaming mug, she said, “What's wrong with you?” “He didn't show.”

“Well, this should cheer you up. I contacted the old warhorse. The general has agreed to meet with you.”

“Right,” Joab said, distracted. Using find and trace.com he keyed in Andrew's cell phone number. The address came up. Ricky Clark, 6 Mulberry St. Berlin.

“So, are you interested in seeing this general?”

“Sure. Set up a time and place.”

“I have. You meet with the general in Pittsburgh, at the old observatory in Riverview Park. He'll be there at 2 pm.”

“Great. But right now I have to find my contact. Meanwhile, see what you can find out about the Nasa Centre at Cleveland Airport.”

“But I've made us...”

“I gotta go,” he said, heading out of the door.

“...breakfast.”

About the only thing that stood out for Joab in Berlin was an off-season agricultural machinery sculpture standing sentry by the roadside. It added a touch of colour to the Appalachian Plateau. Joab pulled up outside 6 Mulberry St, to find nobody home. He tried his cell again but still got a recorded message. Joab went round the back of the air controller's house. The back door was locked, but there was no screen. Checking to see no one was looking, Joab pushed hard against the door. It wouldn't budge. He took a step back and kicked it hard. The lock didn't shatter like they do in movies. Taking a deep breath he took an even harder kick. This time the bolt broke, and he was inside. He had to find the recording. Searching room by room he came up with zilch. What if Rick, Andrew's real name, had already sold it? What if he had it with him, wherever that was? What if he was hanging out for more money? Busy going through Rick's things Joab didn't hear the knock at the door until it became louder.

“Open up. Police.”

“Shit!” The cops were at the front door. Joab headed for the back door – to be confronted by an overweight police officer, his gun drawn.

“Freeze, Down on the floor. Hands behind your back.” Joab dropped. “I can explain, officer. It's not what it looks like,” Joab tried, knowing it was exactly what it looked like and he was in deep trouble.

With the hand restraints on, the cop dragged Joab to his feet and pushed him onto a chair.

Officer Brealey, having busted through the front door, joined his larger partner. He turned to Joab. Him. "What's your name boy?"

"Joab Rackham. Look I was just..."

"You was just what? Breaking into the place to see what you could find?" Officer Smedley said, "You didn't waste much time." Joab looked from one cop to the other. "What do you mean." Breally said, "Dead man's shoes."

"What?" Joab said, puzzled.

"What were you after?" Smedley asked.

"I have business with the guy who lives here."

Smedley asked, "What sort of business, boy?"

"I'm a journalist. Ricky had a story for me. But he wasn't here." "So you just break in."

"Look, he was supposed to meet me this morning but didn't show. So I came here to find out why?" Breally said, "I can tell you why."

"Why then?"

"Because Ricky Clark was found shot dead this morning in his car at Somerset County Airport." Joab, wide-eyed, mouthed "Dead!"

Smedley dragged Joab to his feet. "You're under arrest for breaking and entering with further charges pending." Mirandised, Joab got pushed into the back of the patrol car, which then drove away.

It had been two hours since Joab had been left alone in an interview room at Shanksville police precinct, and no cop had been into the old, windowless room. Joab, excruciatingly bored, knew this was a ploy to wear him down. But wear him down for what. He'd already told the police what happened and he was caught red-handed breaking into the place.

Then two suits entered the room. After introducing themselves to a tape, Lieutenant Coombs said, "Where were you at 1 am this morning?"

"I want my lawyer present."

"Why do you want a lawyer, Mr Rackham? Only guilty people need lawyers." "Okay, I'm guilty of breaking and entering. Now get me, my lawyer." Coombs persisted, "Where were you at 1 o'clock this morning?" Joab sighed deeply, "At Ida's General Store, asleep." "By yourself."

"With a work colleague."

"The name of this colleague."

"Julie Stopp."

"Address?"

"What address? Hers? Mine?"

"Hers."

Joab shrugged, “No idea.”

“When did you last see Rick Clark?”

“Yesterday evening, down by Stonycreek River.”

“Anyone see you there?”

“Possibly. I don't know.”

“What was the meeting about?” Coombs pressed.

“He had some information for me to help me with my story.” “What story?”

“Just a story. I write for a magazine.”

Coombs kept on. “What is the story about?”

Joab took a deep breath. “The Shanksville plane crash on 9/11.” “Mr Clark worked at the airport is an air traffic controller so what did he have to tell you about the crash?” “That's between him and me.”

Coombs leaned into Joab's face. “This is a murder inquiry, and you're number one suspect so don't give me any fucking client privilege crap. So I'll ask one more time, “What did Rick Clark have to tell you?”

“He told me what they heard in the tower just before the plane crashed.”

“Shit! That's not exactly cloak and dagger stuff. I heard it on CCN. And it's certainly not worth killing him for.” “I didn't kill him. Why would I be waiting down by the river to meet with him this morning if I knew he was dead?” Coombs, not letting up, asked, “Anyone see you there?” “Joggers, dog walkers. I didn't take much notice.”

“So, why did you really kill him?”

Joab sat up straight. “ Jesus Christ, I didn't kill him. I'm a freelance journalist, not a fucking gunman.”

“Why did you break into the victim's place?”

“Because he said he had something for me and he didn't show up.” “What were you looking for when the officers arrested you?” Sighing heavily, Joab said, “Okay, I was looking for a transcript of the voice recorder from Flight 93. Look, just check with Julie Stopp. She'll tell you where I was at 1 am.” It was 1:30 and Joab still wasn't back. Julie had been waiting for an hour for them to do lunch together. It hadn't precisely been arranged, but she was looking forward to it. Maybe he'd gone straight to another interview. Well, it was down to him. She'd done her bit. Julie grabbed her jacket and was about to head off for lunch when a loud knock at her brought her to attention.

“Police. Open this door.”

Julie did so to reveal two men in cheap suits.

One of them, Detective Ned Sharples, asked, “Are you, Julie Stopp?” Staring at him, she responded, “Yes. Why?”

“Do you share this room with a – he checked his notebook – Joab Rackham?” “Yes. Why do you ask?”

“Do you know where he was around 1: am this morning.” “Here, asleep I should think.”

“You don't know then?”

“I was asleep at the time. But I'm a very light sleeper. I would have known if Joab was moving around.” She added, “Now if that's all, I have to get back to work.”

Sharples handed Julie a card showing his location details. “Just in case anything else comes to mind.”

“Why are you interested in Joab, detective?”

“Just following up his alibi, miss.”

“Alibi for what?”

Sharples, having enough of her questions, said, “I'm unable to say at present.” The hot, stuffy holding cell had sent Joab to sleep on the narrow bed. But he was soon awoken from his nap by the noise of his door being unlocked. Instantly sitting up, he stared bleary-eyed at the cop addressing him.

“Wake up Mr Rackham. There's a gentleman to see you.” Joab looked at the cop. “Who is he.”

The man, attired in an elegant woven dark suit, stepped forward. Removing his shades, he said, “Federal Agent Rogers. We need to talk.”

“Can you get me out of here?”

“It's possible if you're co-operative.”

“So, what do you want to talk about?”

“For starters what you were doing in Rick Clark's house?” “I've just been all through this.”

“Well now go you get to go through it with me, from when you first met the victim.” Joab sighed deeply. “We met yesterday at the river. He said he had something I'd be interested in. He did, but he wouldn't let me have it until he got paid. I organised to meet him at the river this morning to carry out the transaction but he didn't show up,” “Not surprising I'd say, seeing as he'd been dead a few hours. Tell me, what did he have for sale?” “A copy of a recording from the flight deck Flight 93.” “Why was that of importance to you, Mr Rackham?” “It's useful to my article.”

Rogers pressed, “What article?”

“I'm a freelance writer. I write articles for whoever will pay the most.” “An article about what?”

Joab. Eyes going heavenward, sighed, “That has nothing to do with anything,” he snapped.

“But it does. Mr Clark was an air traffic controller. As such he was privy to classified information. The information he shouldn't have been sharing. So why did you want the recording.?”

Joab tared at the Fed. “Okay, there's a lot of speculation about Flight 93 and what happened to it.” “What happened to it! It's spread all over the fields near Indian Lake.” “Yeah, well I guess the recording would have clinched it. But I didn't get it,” he shrugged.

“Did you get to hear what was on it?”

Joab sighed again. "A list of demands by the hijackers and shouts and screams." "What kind of demands?" Rogers demanded.

"Jesus, I don't know. It sounded like some kind of a list, but the audio was terrible. Then the engines started screeching, and the voice was drowned out. That's all I know."

Agent Rogers shook his head. "It doesn't make sense. The hijackers were fucking suicide freaks, not hostage takers."

"Yeah, that puzzled me too," Joab shrugged. Looking Rogers straight in the eye, Joab sated, "I didn't kill anybody, and I don't have the tape. So please get me out of here."

Rogers scanned the charge sheet he'd been given. "It says here you are charged with breaking and entering. I can't help you with that one."

"Okay, guilty as charged. Now let me go."

Rogers called for the custody officer. They spoke privately outside the cell. Returning to Joab, he said. "Before you're released, someone's going to have to stand \$50,000 bail."

Joab stared at the agent. "\$50,000! Jesus man, I don't have the sort of money." "Well, you're going to have to get somebody to stand surety for you." "I don't know anybody around here. So who the hell's going to vouch for me?" "What about your friend, Ms Stopp?"

"I don't think she's got 50k hanging around."

Rogers opened his hands, smiled, and said, "Then I'm afraid I can't help you." Two hours later Joab got his release. "Who stood surety for me?" he asked the custody officer.

"The party asked to remain anonymous. Just be thankful that someone's looking out for you." Joab was, but it didn't stop him being suspicious.

Joab stepped out of the cab outside Rick Clark's house, which had crime scene tape plastered over the front door. The police hadn't retrieved the recording, so somewhere in there was his prize. He picked up his rental and drove back to Ida's. Julie wasn't there. Nor were her things. So she'd bailed out on him, he figured. He made a well-needed coffee, sat down trying to figure out what to do next. The general's contact details caught his attention. He rang the number.

General Algernon Stubbington picked up his phone at the third ring. "Who is it?" he asked, gruffly.

"Joab Rackham. My assistant said..."

"Where the hell were you today?"

"I'm sorry about that. I was unavoidably detained." "I can't stand tardiness, Mr Rackham."

"I'd like to reschedule."

"I'll give you one more chance. Same place, 7: am. If you're not there, that's it." "I'll definitely be there, general."

That dealt with, Joab wondered where Julie was. He figured that the cops would have called on her. Maybe she freaked and decided to leave him. He wouldn't blame her if she had. Then he wondered who had put up \$50k to keep him out of jail. He couldn't think of anybody who would have done such a thing. He put it down to good fortune, figuring he was owed some of that.

While at lunch with Agent Rogers, in Berlin, Patricia settled on Rey-Azteca. All the dishes looked great, and Agent Rogers went for the Mole Poblano, which was served in very generous portions. He looked over at Patricia. "Mike Danvers said you had some info on Joab Rackham."

She looked at him suspiciously. "Why do you want to know?" "Did he mention a Rick Clark to you?"

"Not that I recall."

"How about some kind of recording to do with Flight 93." "Nope, he didn't mention that either."

Rogers changed tact, "I still remember my first case, as a rookie. It doesn't seem so important now, but at the time it was a huge deal for me."

"I sure it was."

"My target was a grifter working LA. I had to play the mark. Man, was he a sweet talker? Almost got me convinced he had my interests at heart."

"Well, he was a con man."

"They all are, even your journalist, in his own way. Don't let him fool you. He's dangerous and needs to be stopped."

Patricia looked at the agent. "Did Danvers put you up to this?" He spread his hands. "I don't know what you mean?" "Now you're conning me."

He grinned, "Okay, you got me. But I still think it's timely advice. Don't get too close to this guy but find out about the recording."

Joab sat eating his fish, fries and salad, enhanced by Nick's unique homemade Tartare sauce, when a voice said, "Is the food good here?"

Looking up from his meal, Joab saw an impeccably attired middle-aged gentleman with a generous moustache.

"Do you mind if I join you, Mr Rackham?" the man asked politely." "And you are?" Joab asked, puzzled.

"Just call me Cravy, the man said, taking a seat."

"Why are you here Mr Cravy?" Joab asked, looking suspiciously at the man who had an obvious Englishness about him.

Cravy smiled, "I'm here as your guardian angel."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"Where do you think the bail surety came from, the get-out-of-jail fairy?" Joab swallowed a forkful of food, then said, "So you posted the bail. Why?" "Not me old man. My superior."

"Does he have a name?"

"Not for you, no. Now, in answer to your question. your rescuer wants something from you."

"And what would that be?"

The waitress arrived to take Cravy's order.

“What do you recommend?” the man asked Joab.

The journalist shrugged. “I haven't eaten here before.” Rogers scanned the menu and ordered a nachos. Looking at Joab, he said, “He wants that recording.” Joab felt as though even a feather could knock him down. “Yeah, well I don't work for invisible people. I'm a freelance journalist, and I write what I like.” “I'm not suggesting you do, Mr Rackham, but you can't enter the house with the police present, and I don't know what I looking for. But by working together, we have a far better chance of finding it.” “I've no idea where it is. It could be anywhere.”

“It wasn't in Clark's car or on his person. So I'm guessing he hid it somewhere in his home. And, as you've already been snooping there, you might be able to help.”

Joab stared at the man, goggle-eyed. “How the hell do you know all this stuff?” “My superior is well informed. How do you think he knew about your little dilemma?” Joab rubbed his chin, thoughtfully. “Do I get to keep a copy?” Cravy shook his head. “Hardly. My superior needs the only copy.” “What for?”

“That's his business.”

Joab shook his head. “I can't agree to that. I need a copy for my article.” Cravy smiled, “A wave of his magic wand and you're back in jail. So, you see, you really have no choice in the matter.” “You bastards!”

“On the other hand, as soon as he has the recording he can make the B and E charges go away.” “You mean he has influence over the Shanksville police?” Cravy winked.

Joab said, “I'll only help you if the charges are dropped first.” Cravy grinned, “They already have been. Now we can enjoy a relaxing meal.”

Chapter 8

Joab woke around 10 am. By the time he'd staggered downstairs for one of Rick's famous burgers and black coffee, Julie plopped down beside him. “I forgot to tell you that I contacted Dr Patterson and he has agreed to meet with you.”

“You must have a silver tongue,” Joab grinned. “So when and where?” “He's coming to Shanksville today and said he'd give you a few minutes by the Glessner covered bridge at 10:30.”

“Shit! It 20 past now. You might have given me more notice.”

“Sorry, Joab. It slipped my mind.”

Putting the old Pacer through its paces, Joab reached the Stonycreek River, next to the iconic bridge, just two minutes after ten. Dr Patterson was waiting.

Joab, apologetic, said, “Sorry I'm late. I only got your message a few minutes ago.”

Patterson, a nonsense man, said, “Why do you want to see me?”

“I'm interested in why military pathologists dealt with collecting evidence at the Flight 93 crash site.” “And you're interested because?”

“I'm an investigative journalist writing an article about that flight.”

"I see. Well, under the Freedom of Information Act you'll need to apply to get access to any and all information, under the United States code 552, about the crash."

"I'm sure you can do better than that, Dr Patterson. You could have told my researcher that over the phone."

"Agent Hamilton told me you needed to see me. That's why I'm here."

Agent Hamilton! Who the hell was that? Joab wondered. All I want to know is why civilian pathologists weren't used."

"Simple. It was an emergency connected with terrorist activity. That made it our concern. Plus the fact we are the only medical organisation with the means and the manpower to deal with such a disaster."

"Is it true that you were able to find enough of the human remains to get DNA samples for matching with live relatives?" "Yes."

"Excepting the DNA of the alleged terrorists."

"Yes, we had nothing to match with from the Terrorists DNA."

"If there were any terrorists."

"Of course there were terrorists. They caused the crash." Joab changed tack. "There is evidence that Flight 93 was hit by a missile fired from an F16. That being so it would account for the tiny pieces of aircraft scattered over a large area, would it not?" Patterson remained calm. "It's one of many crackpot theories." He turned to leave, then said, "there's nothing sinister about the army medical corps being involved. You have to go through the FOIA to access the information you're looking for."

At first, Patricia Hamilton thought Joab would turn out to be just another gung-ho sensationalist reporter looking for a straightforward story. Now she knew different. He was a thoroughly fastidious journalist searching for a truth based upon rigorous research. The more she looked at eyewitness statements, the less sure she was the Uncle Sam was a straight up guy. Perhaps there was something to some of the conspiracy theories after all. Feeling herself becoming aligned with the thinking of her target she mentally pinched herself. She had a job to do, her first assignment with the Bureau. Being successful had to be her only objective. She phoned her trainer's number.

"Hi, Agent Hamilton. I'm glad you called because its time to engage in the next phase." "The next phase?"

"Once your target trusts you and sees you as an ally you can start passing him bits of disinformation."

"I think my target is too smart for that."

"Just little titbits. Things that agree with the way he is thinking." "Oh, I don't know..."

"You're his researcher. He wants to listen to you." "Okay, I'll give it a go."

"So who's Agent Hamilton?" Joab asked upon entering Julie's room.

The words caught her off balance. "Shouldn't you knock before entering a lady's boudoir?" she responded, trying to make light of his question.

Joab grinned, "I thought this was the research office." Then he added, "Well done, Julie. It was a stroke of genius. He really thought he was talking to a FED."

Relieved, she said, "Wouldn't have gotten him otherwise." "That's probably true. Now I need you to find out about FOIA access." She looked up at him. "I found out something exciting while you were away."

"Oh!"

"Vice-President Dick Cheney confirmed that seek-and-destroy orders were issued. So it's entirely conceivable that fighter jocks encountered the Flight 93."

"Or what passed for it?"

"Apparently F 16s tailed the aircraft once it pulled a 180-degree turn and flew straight towards Washington."

"There are witness statements that say one, two or even three F-16s were seen following the aircraft." "Did they fire on it? That's what we need to know." She shrugged.

"I don't know, but I came across something intriguing. A white, unmarked business jet is said to have been tailing the doomed flight. With all non-military flights grounded, why was a civilian still aloft?"

"Good question. Maybe it wasn't a civilian plane. I found out that Customs teams use white business jets to bring down drug runners, with top-secret jamming equipment. Mind you officials deny such equipment even exists." She added, "And if it did, why would they use it when Sidewinder missiles were available on those F-16s outside Washington?" Joab sighed, "The Hydra grows even more fucking heads." Grabbing a beer from the small bar fridge, he said, "From what I can gather we have many possible scenarios for UAL 93: It never existed in the real world only on a government press release. The actual flight 93 was swapped with another flight number, and the passengers (many of whom were Government employees) were 'encouraged' to secrecy.

The plane was shot down by a USAF fighter pilot who disregarded stand down orders, and the Shanksville crash site is where the most significant piece(s) fell.

93 was a remote control drone, it malfunctioned and was destroyed (self-destructed) intentionally before it could crash leaving extensive evidence.

The plane actually did crash dived into the field buried itself into the ground and entirely disintegrated from the intense heat which did not burn the nearby grass."

"Which way do you swing, Joab?"

"That's a personal question. What, are you, my tailor, now?" Julie burst out laughing. Joab joined in. Soon they were both busting their sides. It was good. It broke the tension." Becoming serious again, Julie said, "It's not easy pursuing the truth." He shook his head, perplexed. "I don't know if we'll ever get to the truth." Then changing the tone, he said, "Anyway, I'm hungry. Let's get some lunch."

During their hamburger lunch, Julie surprised Joab with an outburst, born of America's shared frustration over 9/11. She gushed, "Bush, Rove, Cheney and Rumsfeld all knew that 9/11 would happen way before time. They're the ones feeding us all this bull crap. They're fucking criminals and should be arrested for their crimes."

Joab said, "If your claims are true they should be paying for their crimes against American citizens. Yet they're free, living high off the hog, still peddling this charade for all these years."

"It doesn't stop there. Politicians not directly involved just look the other way allowing sociopath murderers to keep running America, the greatest show on Earth. Christ, Joab, the American people know this, yet they choose to look the other way as well."

Joab took a bite of his burger, wiped his mouth and sipped his juice. "Politics is a dirty business."

On her own tangent, Julie said, "And now, because of Bush's unnecessary, unholy war the entire Economic System of our Western Way of Life had crumbled before our eyes."

Swallowing a mouth full of burger, Joab looked at her. "Wow, that's quite a statement. Although I think is a bit of an oversimplification."

"Surely you don't swallow that hog shit about Al Qaeda being behind it."

"Julie, I'm only interested in available factual evidence."

"Joab, sitting on the fence is going to drive you insane. You either believe the official line, or you don't."

"As a journalist, I don't have that luxury."

She wondered if she'd overdone the outrageous act. But was it all an act. She found herself believing what she was saying as she said it. Joab had undoubtedly bought it, hook, line and sinker.

She sighed, "Sometimes I honestly don't know why we bother. The fact is that what we believe is what we really deserve. We have had all these years to do the right thing and put Bush and Cheney behind bars, but chose to look the other way like everybody else. Right?"

"Cheney, Rumsfeld and Bush are bulletproof. You'd have to find some pretty damning evidence to change that. And even if you did who are you going to get to arrest them?"

Silently congratulating her self for a job well done, she said, "I guess you're right, but it's intolerable."

"Gnashing teeth doesn't help."

She sighed, "So where do we go from here?"

He said, "According to a source of mine in the Air Force, Armed fighters fly on picket duty outside Washington. So they were already patrolling and would have been alerted about a high jacked plane in their backyard. That would account for their presence."

"True."

"So why did that air controller tell me nothing showed up on the radar? Why the unnecessary cover-up? It doesn't make sense."

“Are you going to talk to the controller again?”

He smiled. “I'd love to talk with the pilot of the F-16.”

“Good luck on that.”

Joab, not one to look at the teeth of a gift horse, couldn't believe his luck at finding Julie. She was a great help and comfort. Investigative journalism can be a very lonely occupation at times.

As he drove off to follow up another lead, his mind went over aspects of evidence. The official story removed all evidence of a shoot down, citing specifically the phone call reporting an explosion and smoke on board the aircraft while it was in flight. The same media that carried early reports of evidence of a shoot down now parroted the official version without question. It seemed that Uncle Sam had whispered in the media boss' ear. However, for Joab, the important point wasn't the shoot down. Most people would agree that under the circumstances, it was the best course of action. The point is he saw clear evidence of the manipulation of information being fed to the public regarding 9/11. Joab stopped his car to answer a phone call. The caller, giving no name, said he'd heard the reporter asking for statements concerning the four planes and their passengers on 9/11.

1. Joab immediately became suspicious. “Yes. What have you got for me?”

“An Mp3 copy of the recording of the air traffic controller during the moments leading up to the crash of United's Flight 93. It lasts 3 minutes and 58 seconds.”

Joab's heart missed a beat. Could it be genuine? “I might be interested.” “If you want a copy it's gonna cost you big bucks.” “How big?”

“Oh, let me see. Let's say ten grand.”

“That's a lot of money. I'll have to hear it first.”

“Once I've been paid.”

“We meet. I listen. If it's useful, you get paid. That's the only way that'll work. Now, what's your name.”

“Andrew.”

“Seeing that the Journalist wasn't backing down, the caller organised a meet at Stonycreek River.

Joab waited by the river for Andrew to show. He wasn't happy about the venue. It was far too open with few people around. He knew his research could be ruffling feathers and, that after his brush with the CIA in Iraq, they could well be onto him.

A man in his early thirties, clean shaven and with a spring in his step, tentatively approached Joab.

“You the journalist I phoned?”

“Are you Andrew?”

The man nodded and handed Joab his iPod.

Joab listened. There was a very noticeable tone overlaying the supposed communication from United's Flight 93. This tone Joab estimated to be around 400 Hz, the frequency of aircraft alternating power. Listening very carefully he thought he heard the same sound at a much lower register, as though from another aircraft's communication. Joab made a mental note to get an audio expert onto it. Then he heard what sounded like a list of demands, spoken in a Middle Eastern

accent. The speaker spoke reasonable English, but the poor audio made it difficult to hear what was actually said. Joab realised that if the transmission really did come from Flight 93, then the hijackers were planning to land the plane at some point and trade hostages for whatever those demands were. Joab couldn't hear the details, but it seemed, from what he could make out, they weren't planning to crash the plane into a Washington building. That seemed odd, considering the other three, allegedly, high jacked planes had buildings as targets.

Then he came to the most essential part. From the list of demands to the first report of a puff of smoke in the air was a mere 45 seconds. From this, it was clear to Joab that the hijacker pilot was untroubled by any unruly passengers. Joab knew the plane was flying at 35,000 feet altitude, because that the Flight 93 pilot confirms this to the air traffic controller as the tape recording began. He mused the only way that United Airlines Flight 93 could have crashed in the 45 seconds after the second transmission regarding the list of demands would have been to point nose directly down and power down the whole way without any interruption.

Joab took out his earphones. He looked straight at Andrew, a puzzled expression on his face. "There was no time for the passengers to burst through the door, or the hijacker pilot to react. Any struggle over the controls would have sent the plane spiralling across the sky, pointed up as much as down."

Andrew grinned,

"Yeah, that's right. So where's my money?"

"How do I know the radio transmissions are genuine?" He stared at the journalist. "Look, Joab, we now know two facts. The hijackers were talking about a list of demands, not suicide. And the story of the passengers crashing the plane during a fight with the hijackers simply could not have happened that way." "They're mere details, not worth lying about."

"Whoever made the recording thought it was."

"Whoever! So you don't think it came from Flight 93?" "Look, man, I work in the tower, and I know it's not genuine." Seeing uncertainty on the journalist's face, he pressed, "Think about it, Joab. Why is it that the radio transmitting from what is supposed to be United Flight 93 has such a clear tone. When compared to the other aircraft (indeed to other air traffic tapes from other incidents such as TWA 800) it's clear that something is very unusual about this radio transmission. It's easy to suspect that we do not really hear from Flight 93 at all but instead from an unshielded aircraft radio somewhere on the ground, quickly wired to an aircraft power supply to 'spoo'f the controllers." Joab hesitated, then said, "Why would somebody go to all that trouble to falsify the record, especially as the recording refers to a hostage high jack situation, not a suicide mission." Andrew grinned. "What if this recording already existed before 9/11 and was the best they had to suit the Flight 93 scenario?" "It's possible but..."

Anticipating the journalist, Andrew said, "The demand and hostage scenario is the most common high jack experience, Nothing like 9/11 had happened before. They had to go with what they had."

"But why?"

"To make it seem as though the passengers and crew were on board." Joab stood open-mouthed.

"Cat got your tongue, Joab?"

“Joab uttered, “But 34 of the 44 people alleged to have been on Flight 93 had been DNA identified.”

“How is that possible when no human remains were found at the crash site?”

“Andrew, all I've heard is that the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology collected samples of human and took them to a lab in Rockville.” “Do you believe it?”

Joab answered, “If the passengers and crew were on board, why the bullshit on the recording?” Andrew put his hand out. “Give me back the iPod.” Joab hesitated. “Will you negotiate on the price?”

“Just give me the fucking iPod. I'll sell it to someone else.”

“I didn't say I wasn't interested.”

“Yeah, but you don't have the money, do you?”

Joab, grabbing his phone, said, “Look don't be hasty. Let me make a call to my editor right now.” Joab said, handing Andrew his recording.

Karl picked up the ringing phone, said, “Joab, what do you want?” “I have a recording of what went on in one of the planes just before it crashed.” “Goot, it could be useful.”

“There's more to it than that, but I have to pay a man to get the recording.”

“Pay for it if you think it's worth it.”

“Ten Grand.”

“Ten thousand American dollars for a recording!”

“I know it sounds a bit steep but Karl, this is fucking dynamite. I need your go ahead right now, or we lose it.”

“That decision has to be made by the financial department. I will put it to them, but I don't hold out a lot of hope.”

“Karl, I haven't got time to fuck about with this. I need that recording.”

Karl, exasperated, said, “Vy is it so important?”

“Because it seemed to be a fraud and was most likely recorded before the plane took off.”

“I don't understand, Joab.”

“Just trust me on this, Karl.”

“All right I fast track money. You get it in the morning.”

“Great! You won't regret it.”

“I already do.”

Joab turned to Andrew. “I'll have it for you tomorrow morning.” Andrew smiled, “Then you get the recording tomorrow morning.” “But I need to transcribe it tonight.”

Andrew shook his head. “No way man.”

Chapter 7

“Why can't I come with you?” Julie complained as Joab headed for the old AMC.

“I need you to find out what you can about a General Algernon Stubbington. I'll be back in an hour or so.”

“Who are you going to see?”

“Does it matter, Julie?”

“It does, yes.”

Joab, wondering why she was so persistent, said, “Somebody who has something important to my article.”

“And that's all you're going to say about it,” she huffed. “I thought we were a team.” “Jesus, Julie, you're my researcher not my partner. You're the one who asked to help me. If you're not happy with the way I work, then feel free to leave.” Realising she'd gone too far, she mentally backpedalled. “Of course Joab. Sorry.”

Joab waited by Stonycreek River, peering into the water to pass the time. 15 minutes had passed, and there was still no sign of Andrew. For the third time he phoned, and each time he only got the man's message bank. Where the hell was he? Joab wondered. Shit! He'd probably gone to another player – one with the cash, Joab thought, pessimism clouding his thinking. Fuck! He'd had it with those skinflints at High Light. He remembered Andrew worked as a flight controller. That's if Andrew was his real name. It's all he had to go by so he phoned the airport. When a voice answered, he said, “I'm trying to locate one of your air traffic controllers. His name is Andrew.”

“Do you know his last name, sir?”

“No, but how many Andrews do you have working there?” “Please hold. I'll have to go and find out.”

“No. Wait. I didn't mean that as a question. I just meant there can't be too many people called Andrew working in the control tower. So if you can just put me through to the tower...”

“...I can't do that, sir. What's the nature of your call?” “I was supposed to meet up with him this morning, but he didn't show. So if you could just contact the tower and ask for Andrew.” “Andrew who, sir?”

Jesus. It was like pulling hens' teeth Joab thought, closing his phone.

Mentally kicking himself as he drove, by the time Joab had reached his lodgings he was in a black mood.

“How did you go?” Julie asked, cheerfully.

“Don't ask,” he growled, going into his room.”

“Not good then, I'm guessing,” she said to his back.

Ten minutes later she knocked on his door. “Coffee Joab.” “Thanks. Come in.”

Putting down the steaming mug, she said, "What's wrong with you?" "He didn't show."

"Well, this should cheer you up. I contacted the old warhorse. The general has agreed to meet with you."

"Right," Joab said, distracted. Using find and trace.com he keyed in Andrew's cell phone number. The address came up. Ricky Clark, 6 Mulberry St. Berlin.

"So, are you interested in seeing this general?"

"Sure. Set up a time and place."

"I have. You meet with the general in Pittsburgh, at the old observatory in Riverview Park. He'll be there at 2 pm."

"Great. But right now I have to find my contact. Meanwhile, see what you can find out about the Nasa Centre at Cleveland Airport."

"But I've made us..."

"I gotta go," he said, heading out of the door.

"...breakfast."

About the only thing that stood out for Joab in Berlin was an off-season agricultural machinery sculpture standing sentry by the roadside. It added a touch of colour to the Appalachian Plateau. Joab pulled up outside 6 Mulberry St, to find nobody home. He tried his cell again but still got a recorded message. Joab went round the back of the air controller's house. The back door was locked, but there was no screen. Checking to see no one was looking, Joab pushed hard against the door. It wouldn't budge. He took a step back and kicked it hard. The lock didn't shatter like they do in movies. Taking a deep breath he took an even harder kick. This time the bolt broke, and he was inside. He had to find the recording. Searching room by room he came up with zilch. What if Rick, Andrew's real name, had already sold it? What if he had it with him, wherever that was? What if he was hanging out for more money? Busy going through Rick's things Joab didn't hear the knock at the door until it became louder.

"Open up. Police."

"Shit!" The cops were at the front door. Joab headed for the back door – to be confronted by an overweight police officer, his gun drawn.

"Freeze, Down on the floor. Hands behind your back." Joab dropped. "I can explain, officer. It's not what it looks like," Joab tried, knowing it was exactly what it looked like and he was in deep trouble.

With the hand restraints on, the cop dragged Joab to his feet and pushed him onto a chair.

Officer Brealey, having busted through the front door, joined his larger partner. He turned to Joab. Him. "What's your name boy?"

"Joab Rackham. Look I was just..."

"You was just what? Breaking into the place to see what you could find?" Officer Smedley said, "You didn't waste much time." Joab looked from one cop to the other. "What do you mean." Breally said, "Dead man's shoes."

“What?” Joab said, puzzled.

“What were you after?” Smedley asked.”

“I have business with the guy who lives here.”

Smedley asked, “What sort of business, boy?”

“I'm a journalist. Ricky had a story for me. But he wasn't here.” “So you just break in.”

“Look, he was supposed to meet me this morning but didn't show. So I came here to find out why?” Breally said, “I can tell you why.”

“Why then?”

“Because Ricky Clark was found shot dead this morning in his car at Somerset County Airport.” Joab, wide-eyed, mouthed “Dead!”

Smedley dragged Joab to his feet. “You're under arrest for breaking and entering with further charges pending.” Mirandised, Joab got pushed into the back of the patrol car, which then drove away.

It had been two hours since Joab had been left alone in an interview room at Shanksville police precinct, and no cop had been into the old, windowless room. Joab, excruciatingly bored, knew this was a ploy to wear him down. But wear him down for what. He'd already told the police what happened and he was caught red-handed breaking into the place.

Then two suits entered the room. After introducing themselves to a tape, Lieutenant Coombs said, “Where were you at 1 am this morning?”

“I want my lawyer present.”

“Why do you want a lawyer, Mr Rackham? Only guilty people need lawyers.” “Okay, I'm guilty of breaking and entering. Now get me, my lawyer.” Coombs persisted, “Where were you at 1 o'clock this morning?” Joab sighed deeply, “At Ida's General Store, asleep.” “By yourself.”

“With a work colleague.”

“The name of this colleague.”

“Julie Stopp.”

“Address?”

“What address? Hers? Mine?”

“Hers.”

Joab shrugged, “No idea.”

“When did you last see Rick Clark?”

“Yesterday evening, down by Stonycreek River.”

“Anyone see you there?”

“Possibly. I don't know.”

“What was the meeting about?” Coombs pressed.

“He had some information for me to help me with my story.” “What story?”

“Just a story. I write for a magazine.”

Coombs kept on. “What is the story about?”

Joab took a deep breath. “The Shanksville plane crash on 9/11.” “Mr Clark worked at the airport is an air traffic controller so what did he have to tell you about the crash?” “That's between him and me.”

Coombs leaned into Joab's face. “This is a murder inquiry, and you're number one suspect so don't give me any fucking client privilege crap. So I'll ask one more time, “What did Rick Clark have to tell you?”

“He told me what they heard in the tower just before the plane crashed.”

“Shit! That's not exactly cloak and dagger stuff. I heard it on CCN. And it's certainly not worth killing him for.” “I didn't kill him. Why would I be waiting down by the river to meet with him this morning if I knew he was dead?” Coombs, not letting up, asked, “Anyone see you there?” “Joggers, dog walkers. I didn't take much notice.”

“So, why did you really kill him?”

Joab sat up straight. “ Jesus Christ, I didn't kill him. I'm a freelance journalist, not a fucking gunman.”

“Why did you break into the victim's place?”

“Because he said he had something for me and he didn't show up.” “What were you looking for when the officers arrested you?” Sighing heavily, Joab said, “Okay, I was looking for a transcript of the voice recorder from Flight 93. Look, just check with Julie Stopp. She'll tell you where I was at 1 am.” It was 1:30 and Joab still wasn't back. Julie had been waiting for an hour for them to do lunch together. It hadn't precisely been arranged, but she was looking forward to it. Maybe he'd gone straight to another interview. Well, it was down to him. She'd done her bit. Julie grabbed her jacket and was about to head off for lunch when a loud knock at her brought her to attention.

“Police. Open this door.”

Julie did so to reveal two men in cheap suits.

One of them, Detective Ned Sharples, asked, “Are you, Julie Stopp?” Staring at him, she responded, “Yes. Why?”

“Do you share this room with a – he checked his notebook – Joab Rackham?” “Yes. Why do you ask?”

“Do you know where he was around 1: am this morning.” “Here, asleep I should think.”

“You don't know then?”

“I was asleep at the time. But I'm a very light sleeper. I would have known if Joab was moving around.” She added, “Now if that's all, I have to get back to work.”

Sharples handed Julie a card showing his location details. “Just in case anything else comes to mind.”

“Why are you interested in Joab, detective?”

“Just following up his alibi, miss.”

“Alibi for what?”

Sharples, having enough of her questions, said, “I’m unable to say at present.” The hot, stuffy holding cell had sent Joab to sleep on the narrow bed. But he was soon awoken from his nap by the noise of his door being unlocked. Instantly sitting up, he stared bleary-eyed at the cop addressing him.

“Wake up Mr Rackham. There’s a gentleman to see you.” Joab looked at the cop. “Who is he.”

The man, attired in an elegant woven dark suit, stepped forward. Removing his shades, he said, “Federal Agent Rogers. We need to talk.”

“Can you get me out of here?”

“It’s possible if you’re co-operative.”

“So, what do you want to talk about?”

“For starters what you were doing in Rick Clark’s house?” “I’ve just been all through this.”

“Well now go you get to go through it with me, from when you first met the victim.” Joab sighed deeply. “We met yesterday at the river. He said he had something I’d be interested in. He did, but he wouldn’t let me have it until he got paid. I organised to meet him at the river this morning to carry out the transaction but he didn’t show up,” “Not surprising I’d say, seeing as he’d been dead a few hours. Tell me, what did he have for sale?” “A copy of a recording from the flight deck Flight 93.” “Why was that of importance to you, Mr Rackham?” “It’s useful to my article.”

Rogers pressed, “What article?”

“I’m a freelance writer. I write articles for whoever will pay the most.” “An article about what?”

Joab. Eyes going heavenward, sighed, “That has nothing to do with anything,” he snapped.

“But it does. Mr Clark was an air traffic controller. As such he was privy to classified information. The information he shouldn’t have been sharing. So why did you want the recording.?”

Joab tared at the Fed. “Okay, there’s a lot of speculation about Flight 93 and what happened to it.” “What happened to it! It’s spread all over the fields near Indian Lake.” “Yeah, well I guess the recording would have clinched it. But I didn’t get it,” he shrugged.

“Did you get to hear what was on it?”

Joab sighed again. “A list of demands by the hijackers and shouts and screams.” “What kind of demands?” Rogers demanded.

“Jesus, I don’t know. It sounded like some kind of a list, but the audio was terrible. Then the engines started screeching, and the voice was drowned out. That’s all I know.”

Agent Rogers shook his head. “It doesn’t make sense. The hijackers were fucking suicide freaks, not hostage takers.”

“Yeah, that puzzled me too,” Joab shrugged. Looking Rogers straight in the eye, Joab sated, “I didn’t kill anybody, and I don’t have the tape. So please get me out of here.”

Rogers scanned the charge sheet he'd been given. "It says here you are charged with breaking and entering. I can't help you with that one."

"Okay, guilty as charged. Now let me go."

Rogers called for the custody officer. They spoke privately outside the cell. Returning to Joab, he said. Before you're released, someone's going to have to stand \$50,000 bail."

Joab stared at the agent. \$50,000! Jesus man, I don't have the sort of money." "Well, you're going to have to get somebody to stand surety for you." "I don't know anybody around here. So who the hell's going to vouch for me?" "What about your friend, Ms Stopp?"

"I don't think she's got 50k hanging around."

Rogers opened his hands, smiled, and said, "Then I'm afraid I can't help you." Two hours later Joab got his release. "Who stood surety for me?" he asked the custody officer.

"The party asked to remain anonymous. Just be thankful that someone's looking out for you." Joab was, but it didn't stop him being suspicious.

Joab stepped out of the cab outside Rick Clark's house, which had crime scene tape plastered over the front door. The police hadn't retrieved the recording, so somewhere in there was his prize. He picked up his rental and drove back to Ida's. Julie wasn't there. Nor were her things. So she'd bailed out on him, he figured. He made a well-needed coffee, sat down trying to figure out what to do next. The general's contact details caught his attention. He rang the number.

General Algernon Stubbington picked up his phone at the third ring. "Who is it?" he asked, gruffly.

"Joab Rackham. My assistant said..."

"Where the hell were you today?"

"I'm sorry about that. I was unavoidably detained." "I can't stand tardiness, Mr Rackham."

"I'd like to reschedule."

"I'll give you one more chance. Same place, 7: am. If you're not there, that's it." "I'll definitely be there, general."

That dealt with, Joab wondered where Julie was. He figured that the cops would have called on her. Maybe she freaked and decided to leave him. He wouldn't blame her if she had. Then he wondered who had put up \$50k to keep him out of jail. He couldn't think of anybody who would have done such a thing. He put it down to good fortune, figuring he was owed some of that.

While at lunch with Agent Rogers, in Berlin, Patricia settled on Rey-Azteca. All the dishes looked great, and Agent Rogers went for the Mole Poblano, which was served in very generous portions. He looked over at Patricia. "Mike Danvers said you had some info on Joab Rackham."

She looked at him suspiciously. "Why do you want to know?" "Did he mention a Rick Clark to you?"

"Not that I recall."

"How about some kind of recording to do with Flight 93." "Nope, he didn't mention that either."

Rogers changed tact, "I still remember my first case, as a rookie. It doesn't seem so important now, but at the time it was a huge deal for me."

"I sure it was."

"My target was a grifter working LA. I had to play the mark. Man, was he a sweet talker? Almost got me convinced he had my interests at heart."

"Well, he was a con man."

"They all are, even your journalist, in his own way. Don't let him fool you. He's dangerous and needs to be stopped."

Patricia looked at the agent. "Did Danvers put you up to this?" He spread his hands. "I don't know what you mean?" "Now you're conning me."

He grinned, "Okay, you got me. But I still think it's timely advice. Don't get too close to this guy but find out about the recording."

Joab sat eating his fish, fries and salad, enhanced by Nick's unique homemade Tartare sauce, when a voice said, "Is the food good here?"

Looking up from his meal, Joab saw an impeccably attired middle-aged gentleman with a generous moustache.

"Do you mind if I join you, Mr Rackham?" the man asked politely." "And you are?" Joab asked, puzzled.

"Just call me Cravy, the man said, taking a seat."

"Why are you here Mr Cravy?" Joab asked, looking suspiciously at the man who had an obvious Englishness about him.

Cravy smiled, "I'm here as your guardian angel."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"Where do you think the bail surety came from, the get-out-of-jail fairy?" Joab swallowed a forkful of food, then said, "So you posted the bail. Why?" "Not me old man. My superior."

"Does he have a name?"

"Not for you, no. Now, in answer to your question. your rescuer wants something from you."

"And what would that be?"

The waitress arrived to take Cravy's order.

"What do you recommend?" the man asked Joab.

The journalist shrugged. "I haven't eaten here before." Rogers scanned the menu and ordered a nachos. Looking at Joab, he said, "He wants that recording." Joab felt as though even a feather could knock him down. "Yeah, well I don't work for invisible people. I'm a freelance journalist, and I write what I like." "I'm not suggesting you do, Mr Rackham, but you can't enter the house with the police present, and I don't know what I looking for. But by working together, we have a far better chance of finding it." "I've no idea where it is. It could be anywhere."

“It wasn't in Clark's car or on his person. So I'm guessing he hid it somewhere in his home. And, as you've already been snooping there, you might be able to help.”

Joab stared at the man, go “I never thought it possible that my belief system could shift from total belief in my government to oh my God! What's going on?” General Stubbington said as he and Joab conversed near the old observatory in Riverview Park.

“Are you referring to the plane that hit the Pentagon?” He turned to the journalist “Young man I'm a retired Major General in the United States Army. I was the commanding general of the United States Army Intelligence and Security Command from 1981 to 1984. So I'm not some nutty conspiracy theorist. Having said that let me tell you what I know to be true about the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001.” Joab, switching on his recorder, said, “Please do.”

“Son I saw that hole in the Pentagon with my own eyes, and I swear on a stack of bibles the Pentagon wasn't hit by any Boeing 757. And I can prove it.”

“Prove it! How?”

“All of the sensors around the Pentagon were turned off except one. That one sensor captured an image of the object that hit the Pentagon.” He looked Joab in the eye. “I saw that image, and it looked a hell of a lot like a missile. But, after it went public, the imagery was changed to make it look like a plane.”

“So you're saying that you know for a fact that an American warhead was deliberately fired at the Pentagon and that the CIA or whoever, covered it up to make it look as though an airliner hit it?”

“That's right, son. I couldn't believe it myself but after looking at all possible scenarios, and believe you me I didn't want to be right, the missile hit is the only one that makes any sort of sense.”

“Okay, general, let's look at the imagery changing process. For the footage to look authentic a lot of expertise and time would be needed, right?”

“That's correct.”

“Yet the fake imagery was up and running shortly after the explosion. Which means... “...It was already created before 9/11.”

“That's right. And I know why the perpetrators did it that way.” “Why.”

The elderly officer said, “Let's sit on that bench,” indicating a seat in the shade of an Elm tree. Once seated he turned to Joab. “Let me tell you a story, Mr Rackham, and you tell me if you think it's credible.”

“Okay.”

“The terrorist who flew Flight 77 so expertly into the Pentagon's west wing was Hani Hanjour if you believe the official story. Now this man, three weeks before September 11, attempted to rent a Cessna at an airfield in Maryland. A flight instructor, dubious of Hanjour's pilot licence, wouldn't let him go up without an experienced pilot to chaperone him. This guy couldn't even land a light aircraft without assistance. Now you tell me this. Do you honestly believe that this man, just three weeks later hijacked and piloted a fucking 757, pulling off a very low-level flying stunt that even the most seasoned and experienced airline pilot would find virtually impossible to achieve? This

guy was supposed to have flown that 757 just 20 feet above the ground and perfectly hit his target in the Pentagon.”

“It certainly sounds incredible, general.”

“Well, it didn't happen that way, because it was a fucking missile, not a plane, that hit the Pentagon.” “Where was the missile fired from?”

“Hell, it had to come from a military arsenal. Where else?” “So the military fired a missile at the Pentagon! Why?” The general hesitated. “I'm not getting into speculation. You'd be better off asking what happened to the real Flight 77?” “Do you know the answer to that?”

“Hell man, do you want me to do the whole job for you?”

Joab grinned. Then he said, “As a retired general aren't you making yourself a target for Homeland Security by disclosing this stuff?” The general looked at Joab. “Son, I served this nation to the best of my ability for over 50 years, and I feel totally betrayed by this nation's leaders. I'm 78 years old, with cancer and a dodgy ticker. What the fuck can the bastards do to me? Hell, a bullet would probably be doing me a favour.” He grabbed Joab's hand, “Just get the truth out there. Make sure people know what really happened, and if there's any justice left in this fucking world, Bush and co will be charged for their war crimes.”

Back at 6 Bridge St Joab met up with Crasy. There were no cops, just a checkered tape and a sign saying 'crime scene do not enter'. The man, handing Joab some plastic gloves, said, “So, what are we looking for? A tape? A disk?”

“An MP3 recording on an iPod.”

Joab started in Clark's office, where he'd been disturbed the day before. He checked shelves and any drawers thoroughly and came up empty.

Crasy, meanwhile, concentrated on the kitchen, By the time he's emptied all jars and tins into a garbage bin the room was one big mess. Undaunted he rifled through the drawers and cupboards; looked in the oven, washing machine, dishwasher. But no iPod. Next, he started on the laundry.

Two hours later there was still no sign of their prize. Frustrated, Crasy asked, “Did you search the cistern?”

“Yes, of course.” Joab wondered why the Feds were after the recording, especially as copies were held by news services, which had aired it previously. There had to be something on it, something hidden, something the FBI wanted to remain hidden.

“Have you searched the shed?” the older man asked, exasperated.

“Yes, and the garage.” But there was somewhere they hadn't searched, and Joab wasn't going to let on. He asked, “Did Rick have a locker at work?”

“it's been checked already.” Crasy added, “Besides, he was killed before he clocked in.” “Then I guess we can safely assume his killer took the iPod,” Joab suggested.

Crasy sighed, “I'm afraid you may well be right. Unless of course, you've stashed it somewhere.” “Do you think I'm doing all this shit for fun?”

“I will have to tell my superior I can't find it and he will not be happy. If we discover that you had it all the time, Mr Rackham, your miserable life won't be worth living. Do I make myself clear?”

Driving back to the motel Joab received a call from Julie. “Where'd you get to?” “The cops came round asking about you. I freaked and decided to split.” “Yeah, well it was all a big misunderstanding.”

Not believing a word of it, she said, “The general wasn't pleased.” “It's all sorted. The article's coming together, so I probably don't need you any more.” Patricia wasn't expecting that. She said, “Oh! I was enjoying your company. How about I take you to lunch before I head back to Yonkers?” “Thanks. That'd be good. But it's my treat to thank you.” “No Joab, my treat. I insist.”

Joab had long known it was no good arguing with a determined woman. “Okay, have it your way, Julie. How about we meet at the Rey Azteca. I ate there last night. It was good.”

“Okay. Let's say 9 o'clock.”

It was 7:13. Joab reckoned had just enough time before meeting Julie for dinner. When he got there Rick's place was deserted. So far so good, Joab thought. He went around the back and pushed open the broken door. Stealthfully Joab went to the old stone hearth in the lounge. Reaching up into the flue, his hand encountered something – a small package swathed in bubble wrap. Retrieving his prize, Joab pulled off the wrapping. “Yes!” he said, holding the iPod in his hand. He knew there was something on it the Feds didn't want people to know about. It was also something the 'superior' whoever he was, wanted very badly. To reveal whatever was hidden in the recording required the expertise of a sound engineer. He brightened. Searching in his wallet, he found the business card Michael had given him. Michael Kronsky had sat next to him on the flight from England. He was an audio expert who worked in movies. Joab needed to see him, and that meant going to Hollywood. That would have to wait. He plugged in the earpiece and listened to what was on the iPod. Satisfied it was what he had been looking for, he kissed it and placed it in his pocket.

Julie was already waiting at the restaurant when Joab got there. “So tell me what happened,” she said, as he sat down.

“What do you mean, what happened?”

“Why you were arrested?”

“What do you fancy?” he said, scanning the menu.

“I fancy you're avoiding my question.”

He sighed, “Okay, I went to visit a guy who worked as an air traffic controller at SRA. He wasn't home. The cops saw me there and arrested me.”

“The cops just happened to be visiting while you were there. Why?” “Because my source was found shot dead in his car early this morning. He was supposed to give me something but didn't show. So I went round his place to find out what was going on.” “But he wasn't there, and you went sniffing around for whatever.” “Yeah,”

“Oh my god! And they arrested you as a suspect. Which was why they came round asking about you.”

“Yes. Now can I order my Dinner.”

As they ate, Julie said, “So you met this air traffic controller, and a few hours later he's murdered. And you become their chief suspect?”

Joab shrugged, between bites of the best Nachos he'd tasted, saying “Their only suspect.” “How come they let you go.”

“Because I'm innocent of murder the cops could only charge me with B and E.” “You know what I mean.”

“Someone posted bail?”

“Someone! You don't know who?”

“I suspect it had something to do with an Englishman.” “What Brit?”

Joab ate some food while working out what to say. At length he said. “I have no idea, but the question is, why did he help me?”

“Yes, Joab, but how did he know about your situation?” “I've been asking myself that one. I guess he, whoever he is, knew about me before I was aware of him.” “Which brings us back to why he helped you.”

Joab wiped his mouth. “He wants something from me.” “What?”

He shrugged and continued eating.

Not letting up, she said, “Was he killed because he spoke to you?” Joab rolled his eyes. He'd had it with interrogations that day. “How the hell would I know. Now let's drop it.” Dinner continued in stony silence, Then Julie said, “So how did it go with the old general?” “He told me some interesting stuff.”

“What stuff?”

Joab, casting his eyes around, saying “I'm not talking about it here.” Then, after a silent pause, he added, “I have to go away.”

“Where?”

“Culver City.”

“What's in Culver City?”

“Who?”

“Okay, who's in Culver city you need to see.”

“Christ, Julie, Enough with all the fucking questions.” “Sorry. It's just that ...”

“Look, it's been a shit of a day, and I just want to relax.” After a couple of minutes, she said, “I have to get back to Yonkers.” “Okay.”

With downcast eyes, she said, “You'll be glad to see the back of me. But your English politeness won't allow you to admit it.”

Joab looked her in the eye. “To be truthful, Julie, you scare me a bit.” “Scare you,” she uttered, bemused.

“You're working for me gratis. You put up with my crap. You're too good to be true. To be straight with you, I keep thinking you must have another agenda.”

She stared at him, mouth agape. She had to make it look real. Breaking her silence, she snarled, “Well fuck you, mister.” With that, she stormed off out of the restaurant. All heads swivelled in his direction. Joab smiled nervously, then went back to his Nachos.

Agent Rogers looked at the pathologist in disbelief. “He wasn't shot in the airport car park?” The veteran doctor looked at the agent. “He was shot somewhere else, then driven to the airport.” Rogers shook his head. “Why drive him to the car park?” The medical man shrugged. “That's for you to find out.” He turned to pick up a scalpel. “Now we're going to see what's going on inside.” “I'll leave you to do that. But before you do where do you put the time of death now?” “Obviously before 1 am, which was when he was logged entering the car park. “I'd say around 11 pm.” “Hm, that puts our suspect Joab Rackham right back in the frame.” The pathologist, a stickler for following the rules, said, “Can I borrow your phone?” “What for?”

“Id better ring Shanksville PD and tell them.”

Rogers said, “You could do that, doc, but I'd like to speak with the suspect first.” “Afraid I can't do that. If I hold back on this, it could be my job.” Rogers smiled, “Relax doc. I'll tell the chief for you.” The pathologist shook his head. “Sorry. I have to do that.” Rogers fixed the medico in his gaze. “Okay, I'll lay it on the line but keep it to yourself. The suspect is an FBI asset helping us with a sensitive case of national importance. I need you to keep quiet till morning. Am I making myself clear?” Responding to the big FBI stick, the doctor answered, “Y..yes, perfectly. It does complicate things though.”

“Yes, life can get that way.”

“How the hell do you know all this stuff?”

“My superior is well informed. How else do you think he knows about your little dilemma?” Joab rubbed his chin, thoughtfully. “Do I get to keep a copy?” Cravy shook his head. “Hardly. My superior needs the only copy.” “What for?”

“That's his business.”

Joab shook his head. “I can't agree to that. I need a copy for my article.” Cravy smiled, “A wave of his magic wand and you're back in jail. So, you see, you really have no choice in the matter.” “You bastards!”

“On the other hand, as soon as he has the recording he can make the B and E charges go away.”

“You mean he has influence over the Shanksville police?” Cravy winked.

Joab said, “I'll only help you if the charges are dropped first.” Cravy grinned, “They already have been. Now we can enjoy a relaxing meal.”