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an innocent
among them.

a novel by

jack allen.

An Innocent Among Them

Jack Allen



Detroit • Michigan

AN INNOCENT AMONG THEM

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Chapter 1

The moon was partially obscured by the streak of a thin, wispy cloud that drifted lazily across its face. Ismail Rafjani longed nostalgically to see it from the top of the hills outside the village in Pakistan where he lived as a boy. There the face of the moon was pale, clear and white. Here in the city it was tinged with the yellow of the smoke and dirt that hung in the sky.

The bad taste in his mouth made him scowl. All cities in America were polluted, but New York was the worst. The air smelled. The people smelled. The whole city was filthy and much too big for its own good.

He would never let this happen in his land. The cities of Persia were much too beautiful to be allowed to suffer corruption like this. He shivered. Merely being in the city made him feel dirty. He could not wait to leave.

Seated beside him in the driver's seat of the rented car was Kafik, a young man of whom Rafjani had grown very fond. Kafik was still young, in his early twenties, and he was very handsome. His good looks and his easy going charm were part of what made him so good at what he did. And his skills made him an invaluable asset to Rafjani's goals.

Kafik came to him as a boy only a year or two before, and in that time grew to be a man and his closest and most trusted ally. And tonight he would prove his worth once more.

It was Kafik who arranged this entire event. It was his idea to begin with, and Rafjani immediately fell in love with it. Its

potential for success could not be denied. Their wealth would virtually double overnight. And, the best part of the plan, it would be at the expense of the money grubbing South Americans.

A Mercedes-Benz limousine turned the corner and approached. It was black with black tinted windows and shiny gold wheels and trim. Rafjani was disgusted by its appearance, but he said nothing.

“They arrive,” Kafik said, almost to himself.

He seemed nervous. Rafjani could understand why. The men they were about to face would kill on a whim. He felt nothing himself. He had no fear of these or any other men. He did not fear them because he knew what they should fear of him.

The limousine stopped near their rented car and the lights went off. For a few moments they sat.

“We will get out first,” Kafik suggested.

Rafjani nodded. This was Kafik’s operation and he had decided to let the young man lead. He was there himself to finalize the transaction, but it was Kafik who would make it happen. Rafjani felt proud of his protégé, as if he were his own son.

Kafik opened the door and got out. Rafjani got out on his side, carrying a slender leather case. He came around the car and stood beside Kafik, both facing the black limousine.

A door on the far side of the Mercedes opened. A very tall man in a white suit with black hair, a black moustache and an angry expression got out, glaring at them. He had the dark skin and features of a South American. In his oversized hands, like a child’s toy, he held a small black machine gun. He moved toward the front of the car, but stayed on the far side.

Another man and a woman got out, both with machine guns. They, too, had the South American coloring and features Kafik had described. Colombian, he called them. The South American Drug Lords.

They might think of themselves as royalty, but to him they were nothing more than another species of the scavenging vermin that was attracted to polluted and corrupt cities such as this, like rats feasting on piles of trash. For them he felt nothing more than he

felt for those filthy rats, and he would not hesitate to wipe them away with the rest of the heathens who threatened his world.

The passenger door on the near side opened and a neatly dressed man got out. His thin, receding hair was slicked straight back on his head. He had shallow, small eyes, soft features and an oval face. He wore a very stylish European cut charcoal grey suit with pinstripes and a straight collar shirt with no tie. Rafjani noticed another man sitting inside the limo, wearing sunglasses.

“Bel’doro,” Kafik said to the Colombian.

“Kafik,” he replied with a curt nod. His small eyes turned to Rafjani.

“Please meet my superior, Ismail Rafjani.”

Bel’doro nodded curtly again. “Gentlemen, we have business.”

He spoke with just the hint of an accent. He stepped back and held his hand out, inviting them to enter the car. Rafjani and Kafik got in and sat down, facing the man in the sunglasses.

“Good evening, gentlemen. I am Ramon Caldeira,” he said with a smile as Bel’doro got in and closed the door.

The interior of the car was very quiet, except for the low sound of the engine running. Caldeira was a man in his late fifties with wavy, graying hair that was combed away from his forehead. He had a compact, square face accentuated by long, gray sideburns. The interior of the limo was dark, but he did not remove the gold trimmed sunglasses.

“I am Ismail Rafjani. This is Kafik.”

Caldeira nodded with a wide grin.

“It is a pleasure to meet you both. I trust you are enjoying your stay in my city?”

Bel’doro poured an amber liquor into glasses and handed them to Caldeira, Rafjani and Kafik. Rafjani sniffed it and sipped. It was a mild cognac.

“The city has been ... pleasant,” Rafjani said.

Caldeira laughed. Rafjani and Kafik looked at each other. Kafik looked as confused as he felt.

“I hate this city as much as you. These Americans, they have no knowledge of culture. Your people, my people, we are old

people. We know culture. We know good things. These Americans, they do not care,” Caldeira said. He gave a disgusted flip of his hand and sipped the cognac.

“I couldn’t agree with you more,” Rafjani said.

“I knew you would. We are the same, you and I. We are two of a kind.”

Rafjani nodded and continued to smile. Indeed they were two of a kind. This man and he could become friends, even partners. It was a shame he had to kill him.

“Let us begin, shall we?” Caldeira said, rubbing his hands.

Rafjani nodded. He set the glass of cognac down and picked up the slender leather case. Bel’doro took the case and popped the latches open. He reached in, took out a stack of cash, and thumbed through it.

“It is all in twenties.” he said, glaring.

Kafik shrugged. “Forgive us. In our work we deal only in small bills. But it is all there. Fifty thousand dollars, just as you said.”

“It is fine,” Caldeira said, patting Bel’doro’s knee. “Their money is as good as anyone else’s.”

Bel’doro thumbed through a few other stacks, his face an angry scowl, but said nothing. He set it aside and handed a similar case to Kafik.

“Test it, please,” Caldeira said.

Kafik opened the lid. Inside the case was a collection of plastic pouches containing a white powder.

“I’m sure the quality is excellent,” he said and removed a small vial from his pocket.

“Test it just the same,” Bel’doro said.

Kafik selected one of the pouches, opened it, scooped out a sample of the powder with a small spoon, and poured it into the vial. He glanced at Rafjani as he shook the vial, then held it up to the light.

“Your heroin is pure.”

“I hope it suits your needs,” Caldeira said.

“It will suit our needs very well,” Rafjani said.

Caldeira grinned. "Then our business is finished. I thank you, gentlemen. It has been a pleasure doing business with you, and I ask you to think of me when you need more supplies."

He shook their hands and Rafjani and Kafik got out. He looked at Kafik as the limo drove off. He said nothing, but there was a sly smile on the young man's face. They got in their car. The limousine was approaching the street. Rafjani watched anxiously, certain it would have happened before the car got that far.

The limousine was turning the corner onto the street when he saw the quick flash from inside the tinted windows. The car erupted in a ball of yellow flame. Rafjani felt the heat of it through the windshield. The blast shook the ground and their car rocked. Shattered glass from the windows of the surrounding buildings rained on the street like glittering snowflakes. Something smashed their windshield and they both jerked away reflexively.

One person came out of the limousine, exiting from the driver's door. He was barely recognizable as a person. It was a pair of thrashing arms and legs and a body engulfed in flames that didn't get far before it dropped and lay still.

The roof of the limousine had been blown upward, and the doors out. It looked like the gutted, burning carcass of a whale.

"Well done, Kafik. I am proud of you this day."

"Thank you."

"Tomorrow I return to Istanbul. Where do you go next?"

"To Columbus, Ohio."

Rafjani nodded. "And where is this place?"

"It is a few hours west of New York."

He nodded again. He had no idea where these places were, but it did not matter. His ignorance of North American geography meant little to Kafik's success.

"And why do you go there?"

Kafik hesitated. "Because sometimes in order to find the fish it is necessary to go where the fish are." He smiled uneasily.

Rafjani stared at him for a second, then laughed. "You are very clever, my young friend."