

## Chapter 8

The next morning Abdullah awoke to the sound of a whistling tea kettle. He bolted upright, holding up his hand to block the sunlight from his eyes. He realized he was still wearing yesterday's black slacks and black formal Muslim dress shirt he'd worn to the funeral. But that didn't matter right now.

*Who is in my kitchen?*

His first thought was Bali... Then memories of the last two days came crashing in on him, like surging waves threatening to pound him on a rocky shoreline. The surf pummeled him; the current dragged him under into its swirling darkness. He flung out his hand for something firm to hold on to and found a thought.

*Something woke me up.* He remembered the sound of the kettle.

*If not Bali, then who?* There was no way his wife would have come back, not after what she'd said on the phone. Unless... Sari?

He forced his mind and body to stand up, then nearly tripped over his open carry-on bag in the hallway. "Sari? Is that you?" No answer.

Leaning his head through the kitchen doorway Abdullah noticed the kettle on the gas burner. The fire was off. He silently slipped into the room and touched the kettle, burning his fingertip. The faint smell of coffee lingered in the air.

*Someone was here.*

Instinctively he reached for a kitchen knife and palmed it hidden behind his forearm. Then he crept toward the living room.

"Awakening to a new world is just moving from one dream to the next.' Forgive me, I've forgotten who said that." Sitting in the wicker chair across from Abdullah's green couch was an old man. Abdullah quickly sized up this potential threat: the man was extremely thin, with receding white hair, wearing the type of *batik* shirt common to civil servants, with a steaming cup of coffee in one hand and no weapon in the other. In his peripheral vision he saw no one else in the room. Nevertheless, Abdullah kept the knife ready in case he'd missed something.

"Who are you? Why are you here?"

The old man took a sip of coffee. "Pardon my intrusion. I waited on your front porch for nearly an hour and decided if you were planning to sleep all day I'd just have to make the coffee myself." He took another drink. "Not terribly good, but it'll have to do." He set the mug on the coffee table in front of him. "Why don't you have a seat so we can talk?"

"You didn't answer my questions yet." Abdullah remained standing in the kitchen doorway.

"Ah, you're right of course. But first let me ask a more important question—who are you? Are you the one named Sutrisno who trained under Mullah Omar and fought with Al Qaidah in Afghanistan?" He paused, one eyebrow raised.

Abdullah's muscles went on high alert, even as his face remained passive. "You've come to the wrong house."

"Or have you changed your name to Abdullah, and changed your circles to now include a certain prominent politician running on a platform of religious tolerance and peacemaking? Jihadist or peacemaker—which one are you?" He paused again, but this time Abdullah gave no answer.

“By the way, I was so sorry to hear about your son Iqbal’s death. Tragic. Your younger son, Syukran, as well. Terrible, terrible blows for a father to face. My condolences.” He took another drink of coffee.

“You seem to know a lot about me. I’d prefer you start talking about yourself or find someone else’s house to break into.”

“We have much to discuss, you and I. Sure you don’t want to get some coffee for yourself and have a seat?” Abdullah remained motionless.

“Very well. Let me explain. My name is Joko. I work for the National Intelligence Agency, or BIN. I know much more about you than you can imagine. And I am convinced that you may be the only person who can help us with a very desperate situation.” Joko leaned forward. “I’m here to ask for your help, not to hurt you. So if you could please leave your weapons in the kitchen and come sit down?” He motioned to the couch and waited.

Abdullah lay the knife back on the kitchen counter and stepped fully into the living room but didn’t sit down. “My son just died. I’m tired. I can’t help you. I’d appreciate it if you’d leave now.”

Joko pursed his lips. Abdullah noticed a tic in the old man’s left eye. But he kept sipping the coffee and made no effort to leave.

“I understand this is a bad time for you. Arriving too late to save your son must weigh heavy on your heart. But let me ask you, how do you know those men won’t come back to Sari’s house to finish what Iqbal interrupted? Do you want to be late again? Or would you like to do something that could potentially save Sari’s life and thousands of other innocents like her? We can help each other get what we both want—I am confident that you would do anything to protect Sari, am I right? And I want to protect the thousands of other Saris out there while we’re at it.”

Once again Abdullah felt Sari’s head leaning against his upper arm, how tightly she clung to him. After all that she had suffered because of his failures, he knew he couldn’t let anything happen to her. His legs moved of their own accord and he felt himself sliding onto the vinyl couch.

“Do you know who did this to my son?” he croaked out.

“That’s why I need your help. Our intelligence network has recently picked up an alarming amount of chatter about a group called ISIS moving into Indonesia. This jihadist group began in Iraq and Syria with the goal of creating a new Islamic State that encompasses a large portion of the Middle East. However, as their size has increased, it seems their goals have grown more ambitious. With vast resources of both finances and weaponry, they are establishing bases in several Muslim nations outside the Middle East. It seems they want to create instability that fundamentalists can take advantage of in order to bring the entire Muslim world under unified caliphate leadership.

“There are several suspected cells in Indonesia now. We don’t know what they’re planning yet, but we believe it will happen soon. ISIS is different—most of the jihadists in Indonesia have been happy to take a shot at a Western hotel or night club until now. But ISIS wants to rule territory. Their attacks will be destructive and catalyze such chaos that the government is shown to be ineffective. Their code for this ‘event’ is ‘Five Five.’ We haven’t deciphered what that refers to. But what we do know is that one city mentioned multiple times is Banjarmasin.”

“And you think the men who killed Bali are with ISIS?”

“Truthfully, we don’t know that. It could be an isolated event. Ever since your son Syukran’s recruitment and subsequently Sari’s mother’s death thwarting that terrorist attack last year,

we've been keeping an eye on things here, particularly on potential revenge attacks against you or Sari, and this event troubles me. From what you saw, do you think they were your neighborhood's normal hooligans? What if they were part of something more sinister? Do you see now why I think Sari could be a flashpoint of something larger?"

As Abdullah reflected on what happened, he knew Joko was right. He had initially wondered, 'Why Sari?' but he already knew the answer—it could be connected to her mother, or worse, connected to him. He couldn't take a chance this was just a prank. He had to protect her at any cost.

"Ah, I see you agree," Joko continued. "Shall we make some more coffee?"

"Just tell me what you want me to do." Abdullah braced himself for the worst.

The Intelligence agent leaned back in the chair with his hands pressed together tapping his lips. "If ISIS is indeed here, I want you to find their terrorist cell and take it down. And I want you to do this..." he paused, "...non-violently."

*Was this old guy insane?* "How am I supposed to do that?" Abdullah asked.

"I can't tell you who they are and I can't tell you how to stop them non-violently, though I have some ideas I'll share with you as we go along. But I can tell you why—because taking them down violently isn't working. If we kill them, the radicals' anger grows, and ten more volunteer in their place. If we capture them, our prisons become fertile ground for *jihad* recruitment. There has to be a better way."

Abdullah's mind was spinning. "Has anyone ever tried this before?"

"Actually, yes," Joko answered. "While our American counterpart, the CIA, with its inhumane prisons and interrogations, has created one of the most effective marketing campaigns for terrorist recruiters in history, resulting in an over fifty percent increase in radical groups since 2010, there are a few dissenting voices, and the FBI has tried some softer tactics with cells in America and had some success. I'll share the ideas I'm gleaning from them at another time."

Joko tipped his cup to drain the last coffee drop before continuing.

"Here in Indonesia we have a similar conundrum: the more 'hard power' the Detachment 88 Special Forces use in combating terrorism, the harder it is for the moderate majority to discern who are the good guys and who are the bad guys. Well, eventually Detachment 88 will get access to the intelligence we have, and they'll show up in Banjarmasin, guns blazing. I'm sure you've seen the footage of Israeli soldiers combing Gaza for Hamas fighters? If ISIS is truly here and planning something, Detachment 88 could turn this city into a war zone where both sides cause civilian casualties. This is not the Middle East yet, where defeating ISIS requires all-out war. ISIS is just beginning their invasion of Indonesia. We have a limited window here, to find these groups and motivate them to disband before they feel it's 'kill or be killed.'

"That's why we need you. You know this city. You have the background to understand what motivates these men. You speak their language. You're also committed to non-violent resolutions to problems. You're our best chance for peace."

Abdullah shook his head and ran both hands through his short-cropped hair. "I still think it's crazy. So are you offering me a job under BIN?"

"Actually, no. My theories are still unproven, so I have limited official resources here. I'm asking you to do this as a civilian. You need to understand that you're basically on your own—I can't call in Special Ops to rescue you. But I will give you all the intelligence leaks I can, and maybe a foot soldier or two if I can wrest them away from other duties."

"On my own," Abdullah mumbled. *What else is new?*

“I’ve got a flight out at noon.” Joko glanced at his watch. “We’ve got intel hotspots popping up all around the country. I’m trying to figure out which threats are real, and which are imminent. I believe the threat here is both. I’ll try to get back here to you as soon as I can.”

Abdullah’s hesitation seemed to send Joko’s eye tic into near spasms. Joko looked into his empty coffee mug, then back up at Abdullah. “Because of what Sari’s mother did, Sari may be a very specifically chosen target. She will never sleep soundly, and neither will you, unless you succeed.”

“But how am I supposed to even find this cell? Where do I start?”

“I’m going to give you a name and address of a local expert on Islamic groups. I suggest you start there. And here’s my phone number, call me anytime, day or night. But do not tell anyone about me, or about BIN being involved. Oh, and one more thing...”

“Yes?”

“I would keep a closer eye on Sari if I were you.”