

LIBERTY AND JUSTICE

Carla, a 30-year-old social worker from Brooklyn, questions a 34-year-old Northwestern medical residency student in a darkened New York jail cell. Dr. Rahman was brought to this undisclosed location due to his suspected involvement with terrorists who, more than a week ago, caused bioterrorism. When he willingly left his condo with FBI investigators eight days ago, Mohammed told his wife he'd take her out to dinner that night. He had no idea that he would endure hours of interrogation in the county jail. He thought that the FBI would quickly discover their error. After all, he had a wife and two small children and worked very hard to pass his medical boards. The gravity of the situation came into full focus when he was flown from Chicago to a darkened cell in New York City. An armed convoy escorted him there. Carla, a social worker, has been assigned to his case. Since the attack on the World Trade Center, she has suffered her own personal losses. Carla tries to put aside her feelings in order to do her job—which has expanded far beyond its original description—but she is not happy about the assignment.

CARLA: *(Peering into his cell.)* I'm here to ask a few quick questions, Dr. Rahman. My name's Carla Spinelli. Is it okay if I come in? *(He nods. She gestures for the guards to open the cell door and enters.)* You speak English, right?

MOHAMMED: *(He nods cautiously.)* Are you my lawyer?

CARLA: *(Chuckles.)* No. *(She pulls up a chair.)* I'm a social worker turned civil liberties spy. *(Mohammed looks puzzled.)* Confused? Everybody is. I used to work full-time in the Brooklyn Correctional Facility. Handled family problems, drug rehab, made sure inmates got dental care . . . things like that. But because of the terrorism—recent

changes in laws concerning detainment, due process—all that, some social workers in government facilities are assigned to check out conditions. Ask a few questions.

MOHAMMED: May I ask you one? *(She nods.)* Do you think I'll be out in time to take the medical boards? I'm here studying to be a trauma surgeon. I'm on a grant. It's very important—

CARLA: *(Stunned.)* Doctor! You've got a lot bigger things to worry about than your medical boards. You do realize that you are in an FBI holding cell? A cell used to detain potential terrorists?

MOHAMMED: But I'm not a terrorist! I need a lawyer to discuss this with, but no one tells me anything. I don't even know my guilt.

CARLA: Feeling a little like Kafka?

MOHAMMED: Who's Kafka? Is he involved in this last attack?

CARLA: No. He's a novel—doesn't matter. Basically I'm here to make sure civil liberties don't go to hell. Not that it's in my job description. But then again it's not in a mail carrier's job description to wear latex gloves. I guess we're all crossing lines.

MOHAMMED: Did you say Brooklyn facility? Am I in New York?

CARLA: State. Yep. That's right. But I can't tell you where exactly. I'm here to ask a few questions. I can't explain anything to you in full detail, and I don't expect you to defend yourself in any way. Save it for the authorities, the FBI, and your lawyer.

MOHAMMED: Why did they bring me here? Why couldn't they hold me in Chicago?

CARLA: Don't like the accommodations, Doctor? I'll tell you. It's better food here than at the big city hospitals. Food supplies in twenty-three hospitals have been contaminated. Isn't that cute? So on top of the disease and sickness we're facing, we also have food poisoning. Yep, I'd say you have it pretty good. *(Beat.)* They brought all of the suspects in this

last contamination incident to New York. I'm sure they have their reasons.

MOHAMMED: Does my wife know where I am?

CARLA: Your lawyer will notify her.

MOHAMMED: When? I have not met him. Or her. I asked for a lawyer from the start.

CARLA: Well, they're working on it.

MOHAMMED: With all respect, ma'am, it's been days.

CARLA: Doctor, do you know what's going on right now?

MOHAMMED: Of course I cannot know. I've been locked away.

CARLA: Smallpox was released in Chicago, New York, and Washington D.C.—

MOHAMMED: That is all I had heard when the FBI arrived at my door eight days ago.

CARLA: Well, it wasn't contained. It's everywhere. They quarantined 50,000 people last week. Emergency units are going all day long. We had the public schools and the federal buildings shut down. There have been threats and information leaks that say more hijackings, more contamination, threats of the nuclear kind. Do you understand the situation? Nothing's working like it's supposed to. So if you gotta wait a couple extra days for a lawyer, I don't give a damn. At least you aren't in a hospital bed trying to hang on to your life like thousands of people. Like some of my closest friends in fact.

MOHAMMED: I'm sorry. I didn't know. I can't imagine how this . . . how is my wife, my children?

CARLA: They're quarantined, like everyone else. They're fine. At least, I haven't heard otherwise.

MOHAMMED: I don't mean to be difficult, Miss, but it is my right to have a lawyer when I'm questioned.

CARLA: Who told you that?

MOHAMMED: *(Beat.)* Well . . . I . . . I heard. I mean . . . I've seen it on television. It's one of my rights.

CARLA: *(Chuckles.)* Well, Dr. Rahman, I wouldn't believe

everything you see on TV. Of course you would be entitled to a lawyer if you were an American citizen. But you're not. You're allowed a lawyer if you can afford one. But nobody's going to rush to get you one. You're not all that popular thanks to what the papers are calling you. If the authorities have any evidence at all that you are connected with these terrorist attacks, and even if they aren't certain, they can detain you for days.

MOHAMMED: How many days?

CARLA: Public opinion is growing in support for drastic measures. They'll probably make sure you have a lawyer once exact charges are drawn up against you. However, you still could continue to be detained even afterwards. Do you understand?

MOHAMMED: Are you saying that there have been charges made against me?

CARLA: Not exactly. But let's get to the questions first.

MOHAMMED: What is my guilt?! I told them. I only came here to study to save lives. I could be in the hospital now, helping these people. Look at me. I'm not the type to hurt anyone.

CARLA: How are we supposed to know that?

MOHAMMED: I weigh one hundred pounds. My wife jokes that she could conquer me. I don't know how to make these, these contaminates. I did not study this in my country.

CARLA: But you could have connections—chemists in Saudi Arabia.

MOHAMMED: Who? I know no one who studies this. Who says this?

CARLA: Just me. I'm just guessing why they might think you're involved. Like I told you though, I'm not here to determine your guilt. I just know what I read in the papers.

MOHAMMED: And these papers are ruining my name! My reputation! I did not do this. I need to speak to friends, and to a lawyer. Can you help me?

CARLA: How do you know this chemist in Saudia Arabia that they report about?

MOHAMMED: I explained that to the FBI. He is a distant friend of one of my old professors. I met him once. And once only. I wired him a great sum of money from Saudia Arabia because I bought a house from him through this connection.

CARLA: And your brother who hijacked the plane from Boston last year?

MOHAMMED: I have no brother! I explained this too. My name is so common there. It's like John Smith here. People who have my name go by their second name because it's so common. I don't know that man at all. Never did. This should have already been looked into.

CARLA: Maybe it has. I'm not in on the big information distribution list. I shouldn't even be talking about this with you at all. (*Taking out a pen.*) Now, let's get to those questions.

MOHAMMED: Will you help me with getting a lawyer? I just want to protect my wife and children.

CARLA: First things first.

MOHAMMED: I am a religious man, Miss Spinelli.

CARLA: Well, I wouldn't use that as an argument. It's religion that started all of this.

MOHAMMED: I mean that I pray for peace. I'm religious, and I pray for peace.

CARLA: Well, you can pray for peace all you want. I pray for peace too. But the fact is, some guys came over here and killed 5,000 innocent people just heading to work.

MOHAMMED: I'm sorry. I mourned those people too. I had nightmares over and over about a man falling from the sky. I ran to try to catch him, but I run out of time. No matter how I tried. I wanted so bad, as a doctor, to save him, but I couldn't. Would a terrorist have that sort of dream?

CARLA: You could be an angel or a devil for all I know. You know how many guys I've met in the correctional facility? The ones that made me think, "Wow, that guy actually

seems nice, really polite and sweet." I come out of the cell and his guard says, "Yeah? That guy stabbed his mother sixty times in the chest." I'm not naïve anymore. I know I can't tell the bad from the good.

MOHAMMED: And that is true of this war too. The enemy is not a nation. You can't know who is the bad one. It's individuals.

CARLA: Individuals in countries and in nations that allow them to hide there. We're looking at contamination of 50,000 people. A lot of good people have died already. I lost my uncle in the train bombing. He lived to "save lives"—as you like to say. He was a fireman. These countries and nations must pay for who they harbor. If you want to pray for peace, aim it in their direction. Because we have to react. We have no choice. (*Beat.*) I think it's best if we just get to my questions now.

MOHAMMED: I think it is horrible—all of it. But do you think there is only unfair suffering here?

CARLA: The first question on my list is if the FBI clearly identified themselves when they arrived at your doorway, Dr. Rahman?

MOHAMMED: There are innocent women and children who are dying in many Arab countries. There have been thousands and thousands of Palestinians who are killed for defending their own land.

CARLA: Did you hear my first question, Doctor?

MOHAMMED: Even my people in Saudi Arabia are denied rights because of the government there—an intolerant government of the elite that your country supports.

CARLA: Well then complain to your government or create a new one. Hell—declare war on us, but don't send some lunatics on a suicide mission to kill innocent citizens. You do see the difference, don't you? If you don't, you're an idiot.

MOHAMMED: Of course I do. We do complain to the government, but we are not in a democracy. We have no real

voice. How do you overthrow an aristocracy? My people come into the tents of the royalty. They hand slips of paper to royalty begging for medical assistance for their mothers. The royalty then chooses who they help. This is the only voice they know. Do you understand? It's no voice at all. (Long pause.) Yes.

CARLA: Yes?

MOHAMMED: They clearly identified themselves as FBI.

CARLA: Good. What happened from there?

MOHAMMED: I let them in. My wife was terrified. I made a point of being calm even though I felt nervous. They asked me about plane tickets. All I explained. They told me that I needed to come with them. I asked for a lawyer. The oil company, Saul Armo's, has sponsored me here. They would have provided money for a good attorney. Or my family.

CARLA: That was your mistake.

MOHAMMED: Mistake? Isn't that what anyone here in the United States would have done?

CARLA: You're not from the United States. It slowed down the process. There is some gray area about your rights. The FBI had to back off on questioning. You could have been questioned and potentially released immediately.

MOHAMMED: But that doesn't make any sense! You said I have no rights because I'm not an American. Then why did they back off? Why not question me? Why does this slow things down?

CARLA: Just answer the question. Did anyone abuse you in this process?

MOHAMMED: What does that mean? I thought denying me a lawyer for days or keeping me in chains in a very cold cell was abuse. But then if we were in a really dirty country, I couldn't even speak of this. I'd be tortured or dead in minutes.

CARLA: That's right. In China they put you in a cell not much wider than your body. Chop off your hands when they even suspect that you stole something. No proof necessary.

MOHAMMED: Yes. And some governments put you in a cell forever. Never to be seen. But I guess I thought this was a free country.

CARLA: Free? I don't know. Free-er, Doctor. No place is totally free. There's always class and race and religion to get in the way. But I'd forgo some freedom for safety. For my niece at St. Luke's Hospital. I'd forgo some freedom for her. Wouldn't you for your daughter? Give away some presumed innocence?

MOHAMMED: Maybe it's easier to say because you are sitting there.

CARLA: When you arrived here in this cell? (Quietly.) Did any of these gentlemen harm you?

MOHAMMED: No. They screamed, "Zero tolerance!" They put me in chains and moved me so fast—faster than I could go, so my feet dragged down the hall. It was uncomfortable. But abuse? No. And I understand if they thought I was guilty of these crimes. I understand.

CARLA: And the agents that questioned you here?

MOHAMMED: All seemed fair but one. (Carla looks questioning.) Do you know when I arrived here three years ago, me and my wife were so happy? The surgeons I met were geniuses, full of knowledge. I kept looking around at young students and people who felt they could do anything. (Gesturing to her.) Women who are policemen. Poor men sometimes make a lot of wealth. Religious interests—your choice. All choices respected, even appreciated. A man doesn't go to jail for his thoughts, for speaking his beliefs. And I thought—this America—it's a good place. All men are equal—all men have a voice. Liberty and justice for all.

CARLA: Wow, you pile it on thick, Doctor. The *New York Times* has been editorializing about this for a year. Which freedom do we give up? I say, whatever freedom we need to at the moment to get the devils. Not very liberal-God-like of me. But, ya know what? You do what you need to when your family's dying. Right, Doc?

MOHAMMED: When he stood behind me, he asked me my name. The last FBI agent who came in last night. I respond to all questions slowly. I'm like that. I'm not uh . . . quick to—

CARLA: Impulsive?

MOHAMMED: Yes. Cautious. When I didn't answer quickly enough, he kicked me hard and knocked me across the room. I asked him about my wife and children. He said nothing.

CARLA: Would you like to file a complaint? I have the forms. But it tends to slow down the process.

MOHAMMED: No. No complaint.

CARLA: If it's any consolation, Dr. Rahman, I think you will be free in the next month or so.

MOHAMMED: Thank you. Now will you tell me my guilt, please?

CARLA: Sign this. *(She hands him the pen.)* It confirms we had this conversation. *(He reads and begins to sign.)* You know most of their suspicions. They haven't been formally addressed yet.

MOHAMMED: May I ask you something, Miss Spinelli? *(She nods.)* Will you help me with the lawyer? It sounds like a your word will help. *(He writes a name on the paper and rips it off.)* Here's my brother's number. He will get me a lawyer here. Please. I know this is not your job. I know you haven't time to worry about me when your family is suffering, but I have no voice here. The good and the bad you have no need to decide. Your good system decides. Will you help me?

CARLA: I can't.

MOHAMMED: My wife will be persecuted by people who hear of your government's suspicions. Eight Muslims in Chicago have already been shot for no reason. I can't protect my family here. My daughter is four years old. She has done nothing. She is innocent just like your niece.

CARLA: Hey, don't bring my niece into this.

MOHAMMED: I pray for her. *(Kneels.)* Please, please. I beg you. One phone call only.

(Carla takes the phone number from him.)

CARLA: Fine. Now I've got others to see.

MOHAMMED: *(Bowing.)* Thank you. Thank you for your kindness.

CARLA: *(Carla starts to go but stops suddenly.)* Hey, hold on. I thought you said you didn't have a brother?

MOHAMMED: What? Of course I have brothers. *(Beat.)* Oh. No. I said I have no brother *here*. None in the U.S. I meant. *(Carla looks suspiciously at him and nods.)*

MOHAMMED: So you'll help me?

CARLA: *(To the guards.)* Give him a blanket. He's freezing. He's got no body fat.

MOHAMMED: *(Calling out to her as she leaves.)* Miss Spinelli. I just want to be home with my family. Please! I will show you! I am a man of faith!

CARLA: *(Under her breath.)* That's what scares me.