

FAI LED PROTOCOL

CINDY BONDS



Scrivenings
PRESS

Quench your thirst for story.

www.ScriveningsPress.com

Copyright © 2025 by Cindy Bonds

Published by Scrivenings Press LLC
15 Lucky Lane
Morrilton, Arkansas 72110
<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy and recording— without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-458-1

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-459-8

Editors: Suzie Waltner and K. Banks

Cover design by Linda Fulkerson - www.bookmarketinggraphics.com

All characters are fictional, and any resemblance to real people, either factual or historical, is purely coincidental.

NO AI TRAINING: Without in any way limiting the author's [and publisher's] exclusive rights under copyright, any use of this publication to “train” generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to generate text is expressly prohibited. The author reserves all rights to license uses of this work for generative AI training and development of machine learning language models.

*Thank you, Jesus, for giving me a restless mind that can write things
for You and Your glory!*

PROLOGUE

Grabbing the bleeding man's collar, Lance Corporal Kenton Matthews yanked him from the chair and carried his limp body through the door and down the hallway.

"We can't make it," the man slung over his shoulder muttered.

Kenton ducked into a room, shutting the door and surveilling the broom closet's materials. Shoving the man into a large trash bin, he slipped on the janitor's suit and pulled a hat down over his face.

"Keep quiet," he whispered, pressing the lid on the container.

Stepping out of the closet, he tipped the canister and rolled it behind him, several trash bags in hand. Turning the corner, he paused as a few men rushed by.

After winding his way around the corridors, he entered the loading bay. His team would be waiting just outside the fence, past the trees.

But before he could get the package to safety, two armed guards approached, yelling about being on the loading dock.

“Just doing my job,” he said in Arabic, keeping his head down.

A hand seized his arm. In one move, Kenton put one man on the ground and gripped the other’s throat. With both silenced, he pulled the package from the trash barrel and carried him down the dock, past the lights of the bay, and into the night.

A siren pierced the evening air. At least they were out of the building.

“I ... I can run.”

“No. Quiet,” he mumbled.

The man might be able to move, but keeping up would be impossible after what he’d been through.

The rushing of water guided his steps as he sprinted from the small encampment much too close to Turkey’s Georgian border. Pausing at a grove of trees, he sat the man down and studied his injuries. Most were superficial, but the gaping wound in his chest still bled. The dogs would find them quickly.

Packing the chest wound with everything in his kit, Kenton wrapped his belt around the man’s middle to keep it all in place. Barking echoed in the distance. Taking out the sulfur powder from his belt, he poured it around the area.

With a deep breath, he lifted the man back on his shoulder and rushed upstream. The rest of the team would be waiting.

An explosion rocked the ground as fire erupted into the night sky, highlighting the desert land.

“No.” He fell to a knee.

“Just go. Leave me here.”

“Shut up,” he ordered, pushing to stand and changing direction.

Secondary exfil it is.

Nearing the shore of the small inlet that would lead to the Black Sea, gunfire ripped through the trees and bushes.

“Put me down and go!” The man’s raspy voice mumbled from his back.

Stepping into the water, he grabbed the man in a safety hold and jumped in. The frigid current carried them downstream, still a better option than the gunfire or the dogs that got past the sulfur.

Bobbing up and down, he kept the man afloat. As they neared the trail to the exfil, Kenton pulled to the side, his body shivering and quaking.

He checked the silent man, afraid he had succumbed to the cold. Finding a steady heartbeat, Kenton pulled him back onto his shoulder, carrying him up and over the embankment. A light banished the darkness, and he dropped, covering the man and pulling his weapon.

“We know you’ve made it, sir. Might as well come out now.” The all-too-familiar Turkish accent-laced words made his temper rage.

“Halil Rashid is behind this?” he hissed.

It couldn’t be. Not this time.

“I have already disbursed your comrades, as I’m sure you know by now. I was expecting you. Come out, or the dogs will find you.”

Mind racing, the only thing Kenton could think to do was return to the water. As the light swept away, he pulled the man up, carefully dragging him back to the river. Slipping in quietly, the sound of gunfire exploded, and he dove in.

The fast current bumped and rolled over rapids. Kenton pushed off and dodged as much debris and rock as possible.

Once the river narrowed, he pulled the man to the shore once again. An entry to an old tunnel opened from under the brush into the side of a mound. Lying on his belly, Kenton pulled the man in, his breathing waning. Hypothermia.

“Great, just great.” Kenton pulled the man farther into the

tunnel, turning and twisting through the system, trying to find a safe place to hide.

The aged tunnel system consisted of dirt walls and crumbling ceilings from the barrage of weapons that had racked the land. These were older than any tunnels he'd yet seen. Forgotten hiding spots from wars long ago.

Lying the man on a makeshift bed in the dirt, Kenton worked to warm him with nothing but the leaves and grass that accumulated within the hole.

Car engines above them made him still.

"Find them, now!" Rashid's voice bellowed, and Kenton gritted his teeth.

Once Rashid let the dogs loose, they would be found, and something worse than death would await.

The injured man groaned.

"Quiet," Kenton whispered.

"The ... the guard."

"What?"

"The guard is us."

"Which one?"

The man's words could be ramblings from the cold, but at this point, there were no other options.

"Red ... red scarf."

Kenton pulled a knife from his boot and pushed it into the man's hands. "Just in case."

He slid on his belly through the system, cold air leading him to a small hole. He searched the darkness. Twelve heads stood out from the lights. In the dark, it was impossible to tell if any had a scarf, much less a red one.

Drifting slowly back to their hiding spot, he found the man leaning back, rubbing his arms and legs.

"Can't see. Too dark," Kenton whispered.

The man nodded. Stripping off the janitorial coverall,

Kenton wadded it up and pushed it against the man's blood-stained chest, hoping to keep the wound from seeping.

Mortars exploded farther south, shattering the silence. The tunnels wouldn't hide them long. As soon as the sun came up, the missed areas would be discovered.

Someone had to have tipped off Rashid. Otherwise, Kenton's team would be loading them up, and they'd be across the border by now. How were they found so quickly?

"Codeword, Mason," the man's hoarse voice cracked.

Kenton nodded. The problem was getting to use that word would mean capture, and by then, it would be useless.

Digging at the piled dirt, Kenton pushed through to an adjoining tunnel, searching for a better exit. Coming to a dead end, he slid on his belly back to the man.

A sudden impact from above sent pain surging through his hip and leg. He gritted his teeth, forcing himself to keep from screaming.

"You've hit a hole. Move it back." The Arabic words echoed in the night air.

The tunnel had collapsed from the weight of the vehicle above, trapping his leg. His hip seared in pain as dirt held him in place. Turning as much as he could, he hit and pushed at the dirt and rock. Grunting at the pressure, he heaved a sigh as the dirt shifted enough for him to roll out.

Taking long, deep breaths, Kenton ignored the black spots dotting his vision as he slid on his belly back to the man.

"What happened?" The man shuddered through chattering teeth.

Kenton collapsed prone, breathing into the dirt as bile burned his throat. Feeling around his hip, he felt a puncture wound seeping blood. "It's cut."

. . .

“LET ME SEE.” The man’s British-laced words echoed in the tunnel as hands searched the area.

Ripping his outer shirt, he handed it over.

“This is going to hurt.”

Grabbing a root from the ground, Kenton pulled it up and shoved it between his teeth just before a blinding pain made his body go limp as he passed out.

WAKING WITH A START, Kenton searched the area, groaning to find himself still in the hole, still hurting and still trapped.

“You’re alive.” The whispered voice shuddered. He turned, surprised to see the Brit still awake.

“Didn’t think you’d be.” Kenton forced himself to sit up, wincing at the burn through his hip.

“You’re lucky it was a small wound,” whispered his fellow spy.

Pushing into the small crevice with the man, he leaned back against the rock and exhaled heavily.

“We should pray.”

Kenton looked over the ragged man. Although he didn’t have the man’s name, he knew he was important. Important enough for his government to intervene while in-country on other matters. “No point.”

“No?”

Kenton shook his head, breathing through his mouth and trying to slow down before he hyperventilated.

“God is more real than you know.”

He chuckled low. “Sure, an all-powerful God that allows the kind of evil in this world we’ve seen.” He sighed. “We’re dead either way, man.”

The man just shook his head with a raised eyebrow. “Not me. Perhaps you.”

He chuckled again.

“Marcus Moore. And you are?”

Normally, giving out names wasn't part of the deal. But then again, since they were about to die ...

“Kenton Matthews. Why didn't your government intervene?”

Moore frowned.

“Tats are always a bad idea.” He nodded to where the man's chest had been opened. “I saw the ink when I was packing the wound. Doesn't SAS take care of their own?”

Moore sighed. “Already tried. You must have caught him off guard.”

He smiled. “That's how Army Recon does things.” He winked and laid his head back.

“We get out of this, Kenton, I have something to share with you about God.”

“We get out of this, I might just believe it was a miracle.”

Another mortar hit, farther away.

“They're looking closer to the river. We might have a chance if I could run.”

The moonlight edged in through the various holes around them. Something sticking up from the tunnel caught his eye.

“Was that there before I passed out?” Kenton glanced at Moore, who turned to look and then shook his head. Pulling himself on his belly across the tunnel, he snatched it from the light and brought it back for Moore to see.

“Our man.” Moore fingered the tattered red fabric. “He must've heard us or seen the opening we came through.”

Grabbing Moore's arm, Kenton indicated for him to follow, crawling back through the tunnel to the small opening. Slowly pushing at the dirt, he pulled and prodded to make a larger hole. He could now see a few men facing the water. The brake lights of a truck started for their location, and he ducked down. Men's voices became audible.

“Get that truck away. The ground isn’t sturdy. One already fell through.”

“Yes, sir.”

This was their only chance.

Heaving Moore to his feet, Kenton pushed him through the hole, then followed. In one move, he tossed Moore into the truck and jumped in the back as well, sinking as low as possible as the engine revved.

After a few minutes, the truck suddenly stopped. Footsteps neared and then departed as the weight of two duffle bags landed on top of them. Kenton cut into the nearest bag and pulled out a uniform similar to the assailants’. Wriggling into it was sheer pain.

He paused at the sound of a vehicle approaching, hat halfway to his head. From behind the bags, he could just see a box truck pull in front of them.

He slid from the back and into the driver’s seat, securing the hat firmly in place and cranking the engine to follow the truck down the road. Gritting his teeth, he slowed, hoping to give Moore enough time to get hidden or disguised.

The bouncing and jerking of the drive lasted another ten minutes, causing pain to slice through his lower body. As they approached the gate, he let out a deep breath. They were almost free.

In the passenger seat, a black book sat next to the gearshift. Pulling it open, he angled it in the moonlight to see a grainy picture of a man. Wouldn’t do if Rashid’s men looked close, but it was better than being in that hole.

The guard let the box truck through. It turned left, going back upriver and to the gated compound.

“ID?”

He handed the book over with a huff, hoping his anger would dissuade the guard from asking too many questions.

“What do you have?”

“Clothes. We found clothes in the water, and I’m supposed to take them upriver to the dogs. We can’t find them here.” He worked his accent, hoping to hide the American drawl that always seemed to come out.

The guard nodded as he walked to the back of the Jeep, pushing at the duffle bags. The guard pulled out the janitor’s suit from the back, still dripping blood.

“Might not be alive to be worth the trouble.” The guard chuckled.

Returning to the front, he handed Kenton the book and sent him through.

He turned right on the road and sped up, looking for the train crossing. The train’s horn echoed in the air. He needed to get over the tracks to put space between them and Rashid.

The road appeared in the headlights, and he swung left. The light of the train engine shone in the distance, and he hit the accelerator.

Marcus appeared next to him.

“Hang on, Marcus. This is going to be close,” he yelled over the engine and the sound of the train.

Gunfire erupted from behind, but he ignored it and focused on the road. Bumping and jumping back and forth, he struggled to stay upright while maintaining their speed.

Blasting through the wooden guardrails, the truck gained air before slamming into the ground on the other side. As they fishtailed, the wind of the train blasting past made him shudder.

“Well, not so close.”

He laughed at Marcus. “What do you call close?”

“Been much closer.” Marcus patted him on the shoulder. “Now, we need to have a discussion, Kenton.”

He laughed again, straightening the truck and driving down the road to freedom.