



DIRECTED VERDICT

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Directed Verdict

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“There is plenty of room in evangelical Christian fiction for fresh voices,
and debut novelist Singer is a promising one.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

ON *DIRECTED VERDICT*

“A riveting courtroom drama . . .”

CBA MARKETPLACE

ON *DIRECTED VERDICT*

“Realistic and riveting, *Directed Verdict* is a compelling story about the
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“Randy Singer’s novel of international intrigue, courtroom drama, and
gripping suspense will challenge readers to examine anew issues of faith
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BOOKLIST

ON BY REASON OF INSANITY



PART I
PERSECUTION

1

“SARAH, THE MUTTAWA FOUND US! They’re coming. Maybe tonight.” The caller paused, his voice trembling. “Arrests. Interrogations. Executions. They’ll stop at nothing,” he whispered rapidly in Arabic.

Sarah tried to answer, but the words stuck in her throat. She clenched the receiver so tight her knuckles turned white. She was suddenly out of breath, yet she knew she could not allow the man on the other end of the line to sense her fear.

“Sarah, are you there?”

“Is this Rasheed?” she asked in her own low murmur. She too spoke in Arabic.

“You must cancel the services tonight. And, Sarah?”

“Yes?”

“Get the kids out of the apartment.”

The kids. Twelve-year-old Meredith. Ten-year-old Steven. Of course she would find a place for the kids. But what about her . . . and Charles? They couldn’t just run and hide at the first hint of an investigation. But if this were not a false alarm . . .

“Sarah? Remember, we are not given a spirit of fear but of power and love and a sound mind.”

“Um, okay . . . we’ll be all right.” As she spoke her voice grew steadier, but she still whispered. “Pray for us.”

“I will,” he promised, and the line went dead.

Sarah kept the phone against her ear, not yet ready to hang up and face Charles and the kids. A million questions screamed for answers. It was Rasheed’s voice, but how could he possibly know about the Muttawa? And if they were coming tonight, what did they know? Who told them? And why?

She tried to gather her thoughts, calm her fears, stop the spinning sensation in her head. She lowered the phone and stared down at it.

“Is everything all right, hon?” Charles asked. He crossed the kitchen and began massaging her shoulders. She closed her eyes and felt his fingers penetrate the knotted muscles. They did not relax. “Hey,” he said gently. “What’s got you so tight?”

Sarah turned and let Charles embrace her. She trembled in his arms, then stood on her toes and whispered in his ear. “The Muttawa have found us. They may be coming tonight.”

Tilting her head to look at him, she searched his eyes for the comfort and strength she had found on so many occasions during their twenty-three years of marriage.

Instead, she saw nothing but terror.



There were few empty seats in the cavernous courtroom, and the marshals were on full alert. The middle aisle divided the spectators into two camps. They had nothing in common.

The left side, behind the prosecutor’s table, was jammed with the local defenders of a woman’s right to choose. Employees of the Norfolk Medical Clinic were there, as were leading pro-choice advocates from across Virginia. Joining them, so as not to be associated with the fanatics on the other side, were court personnel who had taken time off to see the defendant get what he deserved.

The other side of the courtroom—the right side—was populated with members of Chesapeake Community Church. Many kept their heads bowed in silent prayer as their pastor, the Reverend Jacob Bailey, came to a critical point in his testimony. The church members were joined by some hard-core veterans of the pro-life movement, men and women who had served time for chaining themselves to each other or to abortion clinics. They had seen some irate judges and pit-bull prosecutors in their day. But, as they eagerly told any reporter who would listen, they had never seen a judge as biased as this one—the Honorable Cynthia Baker-Kline. And in this case, with no jury, she had the sole power to convict or acquit.

Two sketch artists, drawing fast and furiously, sat with the reporters on the left side of the courtroom. The woman wearing the robe was easy, a sketch artist’s dream. Behind her back, the lawyers called her Ichabod Crane.

She had angular features—a long pointed nose, wire-rimmed glasses, accusatory bony fingers, a perpetual scowl, and a jutting jaw—the quintessential schoolmistress. She had not smiled the entire case.

The Reverend Jacob Bailey would prove more difficult for the artists. Try as they might, neither had succeeded in making the defendant look like a criminal. His face was thin and pale. Twenty days of a fluids-only fast had rendered him gaunt. Static electricity charged his wispy and unmindful blond hair, and he slumped forward as he testified, his bony frame engulfed by the witness chair. He talked so softly that Ichabod had to keep reminding him to speak into the mike.

The man presently questioning Bailey was defense attorney Brad Carson. He fared better with the artists. He was thin, possessing a runner's build, a chiseled jaw, deep-set and expressive steel blue eyes, and jet-black hair. He had the comfortable bearing of a man without pretense and a quick and easy smile that charmed both witnesses and spectators.

The artists put down their pencils as Carson got to the crux of the matter.

“What were you doing outside the abortion clinic on September 13, Reverend?” Brad addressed the witness from behind the podium. Yesterday his efforts to pace the courtroom had generated a stern lecture from Ichabod on proper decorum.

“Praying,” the reverend said, softly and simply.

“Were you talking to God or talking to men?”

“I pray to God,” the reverend answered, “in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ.”

Brad had not put that last part in the script, and he shot Bailey a reproofing look. “Did you have your eyes closed as you knelt to pray?” Brad emphasized that the reverend was on his knees; it would make his conduct seem less threatening.

“Yes, of course.”

“Did you even know whether anybody else was around?”

“Not really,” the reverend said. “When I pray, I try to focus on God and block out everything else.”

Another bonus answer. Brad got the impression that the pastor was juicing it up a little for the congregation.

“Were you within one hundred feet of the clinic?” Ichabod asked sharply, leaning forward so she hovered over the witness.

Her question, though an easy one, seemed to startle the witness. He looked up meekly at the judge. “Yes, ma’am,” he said.

Brad watched Ichabod make a check on the legal pad in front of her. The criminal statute applied to any speech or activities within one hundred feet of a medical facility.

He moved quickly to regain the initiative. “May I approach the witness, Your Honor?” Brad started walking toward the witness box.

Ichabod glared at Brad and waited a few painful seconds. He stopped. “Yes,” she said, when she had his full attention. Brad sighed and moved forward. Out of the corner of his eye he watched Ichabod return to doodling on her legal pad, doing her best to look bored.

“I’m handing you a copy of the criminal statute in question,” Brad said as he extended a single sheet of paper to the reverend. The paper trembled as Bailey held it. Brad knew this would happen. It was part of his plan to generate sympathy.

“Look down at the second paragraph,” Brad continued, moving back to his own counsel table and pulling a pair of reading glasses from his suit coat pocket, “and follow with me as I briefly read the things this statute prohibits. Did you try to obstruct, detain, or hinder anyone from entering the facility?”

“No.”

“Did you knowingly come within eight feet of any patients for the purpose of passing out a leaflet or handbill?”

“No.”

“Did you knowingly come within eight feet of any patients for the purpose of engaging in oral protests or persuading the patients not to proceed with an abortion?”

“No,” the Reverend Bailey said, his voice picking up some confidence even as his hand continued to tremble. Brad was pleased with the witness; it had not been easy to convince the pastor to answer so succinctly.

But Ichabod was not through.

“When you pray,” she asked, looking thoughtfully out toward the audience, “does your religion require that you pray at a certain spot?”

“No, Your Honor,” Bailey admitted, looking befuddled.

“So you can pray anywhere in the country, and God will still hear?”

“Yes, of course. He’s omnipresent.”

“And can your God hear you whether you pray out loud or to yourself?” the judge asked, still staring off into the distance.

“Sure,” Bailey said. He had leaned too close to the mike, and it squealed. He jumped back as if it had bitten him.

“On the date in question, were you praying out loud or to yourself?” Ichabod queried.

“Out loud.”

“Loud enough for others to hear?”

“Yes.”

Ichabod made a few more check marks on her pad. Then she turned and gave the witness an icy stare. He shifted uncomfortably.

Brad felt like he was watching a train wreck develop in slow motion and was powerless to stop it. He took off his glasses and began gnawing on them.

“Then do you expect this court to believe that you just *happened* to pick this spot to pray and just *happened* to pray out loud, but really had no intention of persuading the women who might just *happen* to walk by?” Ichabod raised her inflection and eyebrows in a show of disbelief.

“Your Honor,” Brad said quickly, drawing attention away from the witness box. “I find myself in the unusual position of objecting to the court’s own questions.” He flashed a disarming grin that the judge did not return.

“While I’ve got a suspicion that my objection will be overruled,” he continued, “it does seem improper for you to be asking argumentative questions of this witness. Particularly when the question implies that this statute prevents someone from praying out loud on a public sidewalk. My reading of the statute does not suggest that interpretation.”

“Is that your objection?” Ichabod turned her icy stare to Brad.

“For now,” he added quickly.

“Overruled. The court is entitled to develop a full record. Now, Mr. Bailey, answer the question.”

Reverend Bailey hesitated and exhaled deeply. “Honestly, Your Honor,” he said in a soft-spoken plea, “I felt burdened to pray about this.” He paused and looked down at his folded hands, his voice softening even further. “This sin that is plaguing our nation . . . this killing of unborn children. And I felt led by God to do so in front of the clinic, regardless of the consequences.”

Attaboy, Brad thought. *Show a little spine*. Brad jumped on the chance to regain control.

“Why did you feel so burdened?” he asked, leaning forward, feigning interest.

The question elicited a quick response from the prosecuting attorney, a

severe-looking woman in her midforties named Angela Bennett, who rose immediately to object. She could have saved her energy, because Ichabod, the self-appointed guardian of the Norfolk Clinic, was all over this one.

“Mr. Carson,” Ichabod hissed, staring at him over the glasses perched on the end of her nose, “that question’s improper, and you know it. I’ve told you before, we are not going to get into the reverend’s personal views on abortion—”

“But, Judge, motivation is key. The statute requires that Reverend Bailey intentionally come within eight feet of abortion patients for the *purpose* of persuading them not to—” The judge held up her hand and Brad stopped in midsentence.

“Mr. Carson!” she snapped. “I am not finished!”

“Sorry, Your Honor,” Brad said, without the least hint of remorse.

“You *will not* inject the issue of motivation into this case. This is basically a trespass case. He either violated the law, or he didn’t. His purpose for being there—and whether it was to persuade women not to have an abortion—can be determined from his actions. His motivation for being there does not concern me. Is that clear?” She gave Brad her most intense federal judge stare.

He wanted to tell her she was splitting legal hairs, that she was a disgrace to the bench. He wanted to tell her off the way he had in his dreams, the way he had while driving to work, the way he had a thousand times this morning in his own mind. He felt the heat rising in his neck, and he knew how good it would feel to unload. But he also knew it would be pointless.

His plan called for a far different approach. And his client’s future hinged on Brad’s ability to keep his cool and execute the plan.

So he just glared back, his eyes flashing with equal intensity.

“Mr. Carson, I’m speaking to you,” Ichabod said, her voice nearly cracking.

“Sorry, Judge,” he replied at last. “I just wanted to make sure you were finished this time.”

His impertinence caught her speechless. Her eyes were mere slits, with the nostrils on her enormous nose puffing in and out. When she finally did speak, it came in short, staccato bursts.

“Don’t you ever . . . treat this court with such disrespect again! Next time . . . I’ll hold you in contempt. And, Mr. Carson?”

He raised an eyebrow, determined not to speak.

“Get back behind that podium and resume your examination from there.” She watched warily as Brad retreated to the podium. “Your juvenile shenanigans do not impress me.”

Brad shuffled his notes on the podium, then leaned down to whisper in the ear of the heavyset woman seated at the counsel table, his longtime assistant, Bella Harper.

“Watch that vein on her neck,” Brad whispered. “I’m going to make it explode.” Even as he spoke, the prominent vein on the right side of Ichabod’s neck was pulsing visibly, in and out with every heartbeat.

“Don’t be a hero,” Bella whispered.

But Brad realized he no longer had a choice. He could not win this case in front of Ichabod. She had already made up her mind and would not be confused by the facts. His best chance now was to demonstrate her bias and set her up for reversal on appeal.

To do so, he would have to provoke the full fury of the judge and put his own reputation at risk—a reputation that had taken twelve years to build. It would make matters unbearable at trial but give him a shot on appeal. As an unpleasant by-product, it would make him the poster boy for the Christian Right, a martyr for a cause he did not embrace.

He would do it anyway.

He would do it because he had taken an oath to represent his clients zealously. He would do it because it was the right thing to do.

Brad paused for air and braced himself. Ichabod had not heard the last about motivation.

It was time for Plan B.



On the other side of the world, a warrior stalked his prey.

Ahmed Aberijan was a holy warrior, and he was in a holy war. His official title was director of the Muttawa, the Saudi Arabian religious police. His colleagues called him the Right Hand of Mohammed.

His agency was the last bastion of religious purity in a society ravaged by the cancer of Western culture. For Ahmed, Islamic law was all that separated his country from the degradation of the West. Without it, Saudi Arabia would become America’s puppet, its Arab slave. America sickened him—the haughty women, the crass materialism, the arrogance of the weak Western politicians. He had secretly gloated when the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center collapsed, watching with pleasure as radical Muslims danced in the streets. Like the infidels in the trade towers, all Christians would one day face the fierce wrath of Allah and answer for their transgressions.

In the meantime, they would have to deal with him.

He lived for nights like this one; he could feel the blood racing through his veins, each nerve-ending fully alert. His target was the underground house church of an American missionary named Charles Reed. But his ultimate goal, as always, was purity for the people of the Kingdom.

Prophet Mohammed himself—peace be upon him—had declared that there should be no religion but Islam on the Arabian peninsula. It was holy ground. Sacred. Not to be desecrated by Western infidels.

For that reason, non-Islamic sects were prohibited from holding public meetings or worshiping. And converting from Islam to another religion was still punishable by death.

A young Ahmed had cringed when the Muttawa enforced religious purity with unfeeling brutality, torture, even beheadings. But as he grew in strength and fervor, Ahmed began to understand that advancing the cause of the Great Prophet sometimes required the shedding of blood. He still remembered the first time he had personally exacted revenge for Allah. He was overwhelmed with a euphoric sense of passion and peace. He experienced, like never before, Allah's pleasure. And that day, he dedicated his life to advancing the cause and punishing the infidels.

Tonight, that mission required Ahmed's presence on the other side of town at a run-down apartment complex. Though he could easily have done so, he never dreamed of delegating this task, of sending someone else to do the hard work for Mohammed. And as his caravan sped through the dark side streets of Riyadh, he sat alone in the backseat of the first unmarked car, interior lights on, reviewing the file and savoring his plan.

The Reed file was thin, the information sparse. Page one contained the summary. Dr. Reed's official occupation in Saudi Arabia, as listed on his visa application, was that of a private school teacher. His wife, Sarah, posed as a school administrator. But Ahmed knew the Reeds were, in fact, American missionaries, sent to deceive and proselytize the Muslim people.

According to his source, a loyal Muslim who had feigned conversion and joined the Reeds' church, the combination of Dr. Reed's passionate teaching and his wife's administrative skills had proven effective in leading more than a few Muslims astray. Tonight he would put an end to their crimes.

Page two of the Reed file contained the affidavit from the source. The Reeds and their followers crammed themselves into the stuffy family room of the Reeds' apartment every Friday night at seven o'clock, the source said,

forming one of Riyadh's fastest-growing underground churches. The Reeds were passionate about converting those who attended and equally passionate about the secrecy of the service, which lasted about two hours.

But it wasn't the Friday night service that bothered Ahmed. The names and addresses of those worshipers could be—in fact had been—acquired from his informant. One small church gathering did not merit a minute of Ahmed's valuable time. But the affidavit alleged that the Reeds were also the catalysts for a network of underground churches. They would pray for these other churches on Friday night. Some were led by the Reeds and worshiped at other places. Some were led by other pastors who were in turn mentored by Reed. They never used names, and the informant did not know the leaders or locations of these churches.

But Reed knew. And if he cared about his wife and children, tonight Reed would tell.

Ahmed stared at the passport photos of the couple. The years of pastoring had not been kind to Charles Reed. Ahmed smirked at the pale and pockmarked skin of the pudgy American, the thick glasses, the receding hair, the deep wrinkles that spread like vines from the American's eyes. He would be easy prey. Soft. Pliable.

Sarah Reed had aged more gracefully. Her short, wavy blonde hair framed a face of gentle lines and smooth skin. High cheekbones complemented deep blue eyes that glistened with life even in the photograph. Ahmed was surprised that Sarah Reed made no effort to accentuate those features with the detestable makeup or jewelry of the West. Her looks communicated a natural and comfortable warmth, a woman who would become an immediate friend and confidante to the unsuspecting Muslims she was leading into heresy.

He was sure, just from looking at the photographs, that Charles Reed would love his wife deeply and do anything to protect her. He was also sure that the men he had brought for this raid, with their lust for subjugating Western women, would give Charles Reed sufficient cause for concern.



Hours after the phone call, Sarah was beginning to think it was a false alarm.

Shaken by the call, she had first suggested leaving.

"Where would we go?" Charles asked. "Who would we stay with and place in danger?"

Sarah looked down and did not respond.

“Sooner or later, if we’re going to stay in this country and reach these people, we’ll have to face them,” Charles said softly.

Without another word, Sarah picked up the phone and started making calls. She called some trusted friends to take care of the kids. She called every family in the church, explaining the situation, telling them the service was canceled, and asking them for their prayers. Only three members of the church were not home, and though it was against every rule of the fledgling underground movement, she left a vague warning on their answering machines.

When Meredith and Steven were safely out of the house, Sarah and Charles went about the job of sanitizing the apartment of all things religious. Charles started on the computer. He deleted Bible software programs, e-mails, files, and backup files. He transferred lists of church members to flash drives.

Sarah collected all the CDs, Bibles, song sheets, address lists, and papers from the mission board and put them in two large green garbage bags. She even took down the refrigerator magnets with the Bible verses on them. She wrapped the bags in a second bag for safekeeping, then carried them outside.

The Reeds’ apartment building was in a forgotten part of the bustling city of Riyadh. It housed hundreds of residents, mostly foreign nationals, in look-alike apartment boxes distinguished only by the apartment number. The place smelled like stale urine. The apartments had not seen a fresh coat of paint in many years, and the Dumpsters in the parking lot were overflowing. Ignoring the full bins, Sarah walked past them and carried her heavy trash bags to a Dumpster in a complex three blocks away.

By the time they were done with their “spring-cleaning,” the apartment could just as well have belonged to a couple of atheists.

It was time to pray. And for the next few hours, Charles and Sarah sat beside each other and talked—to each other and to God. “Lord,” Charles said quietly as he held Sarah’s hand at the kitchen table, “if it be Your will, deliver us from the Muttawa and keep us safe. But if it is Your will that we suffer, give us the same power and courage through the Holy Spirit that You gave to the apostle Paul. And give us the grace that allowed Paul to say he counted it a joy to suffer for Your name’s sake. Above all else, put a hedge of protection around Meredith and Steven and keep them safe.”

Charles squeezed Sarah’s hand. She squeezed back.

“In the name of Jesus, amen.”

Sarah stood to survey the apartment one more time. It was getting late. Maybe they wouldn’t come. It was nearly eight o’clock. Maybe the Lord had already answered their prayers.

She looked at Charles and forced a small smile. He was trying to act calm, but Sarah had felt the sweat on his palms as they prayed, and the look of terror had never left the depths of his eyes.

As she stood, she jammed her hands into the pockets of her jeans. Then she felt it. Her prayer card. The daily list that reminded her to pray every time her fingers reached into her pocket. She smiled at the way the Lord had just reminded her to get rid of it. She had gone over the house with a fine-tooth comb and totally forgotten about the list in her own pocket.

She pulled it out to read the names one last time as she headed for the door. It would go in the trash bin with the other stuff. But first, she would try to remember. *Pray for salvation*, the list read, *for Hanif and for Khartoum, who has attended, but never—*

She stopped reading midsentence and froze midstep. A noise—maybe a shuffling—from the landing outside her door. Her eyes darted over to Charles, who put his index finger to his lips. She reached inside her blouse and stuffed the list in her bra. Another noise, muffled words . . .



By 8:02, Ahmed and his thugs had crept up the stairs and assembled outside Apartment 3C. He gave his orders in low and hoarse Arabic.

In the next instant, he and his men crashed through the wooden door of the apartment and unleashed the fury of Mohammed on Sarah and Charles Reed.