



**DEAD
LAWYERS
TELL
NO TALES**

RANDY

“[SINGER] IS EVERY BIT AS ENJOYABLE AS JOHN GRISHAM.” —PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

SINGER

PRAISE FOR RANDY SINGER

“Singer skillfully loosens the strings and reweaves them into a tale that entertains, surprises, and challenges readers to rethink justice and mercy.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY on *The Last Plea Bargain*

“Another solid, well-crafted novel from an increasingly popular writer. . . . Its nonfiction origins lend the book an air of reality that totally made-up stories sometimes lack.”

BOOKLIST on *The Last Plea Bargain* (starred review)

“*The Last Plea Bargain* is a superbly written book, hard to put down, and easy to pick back up.”

THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

“Singer’s superbly researched plot charges out of the starting gate on page one and doesn’t rest until literally the last page.”

CROSSWALK.COM on *The Last Plea Bargain*

“If you’re looking for a mystery full of rich details and realistic scenarios, you will enjoy Singer’s latest. It is easy to see why Singer reigns with Christian legal thrillers. You’ll be guessing till the end.”

ROMANTIC TIMES on *The Last Plea Bargain*

“Intricately plotted, *Fatal Convictions* is . . . an exciting legal thriller with international overtones. In addition to the action and rich cultural information, realistic characters carry the action to its exciting conclusion.”

FAITHFULREADER.COM

“Singer’s legal knowledge is well matched by his stellar storytelling. Again, he brings us to the brink and lets us hang before skillfully pulling us back.”

ROMANTIC TIMES on *Fatal Convictions*

“Get ready to wrestle with larger themes of truth, justice, and courage. Between the legal tension in the courtroom scenes and the emotional tension between the characters, readers will be riveted to the final few chapters.”

CROSSWALK.COM on *Fatal Convictions*

“Great suspense; gritty, believable action . . . make [*False Witness*] Singer’s best yet.”

BOOKLIST (starred review)

“A book that will entertain readers and make them think—what more can one ask?”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY on *The Justice Game*

“Singer artfully crafts a novel that is the perfect mix of faith and suspense. . . . [*The Justice Game* is] fast-paced from the start to the surprising conclusion.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

“At the center of the heart-pounding action are the moral dilemmas that have become Singer’s stock-in-trade. . . . An exciting thriller.”

BOOKLIST on *By Reason of Insanity*

“Singer hooks readers from the opening courtroom scene of this tasty thriller, then spurs them through a fast trot across a story line that just keeps delivering.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY on *By Reason of Insanity*

“[A] legal thriller that matches up easily with the best of Grisham.”

CHRISTIAN FICTION REVIEW on *Irreparable Harm*

“*Directed Verdict* is a well-crafted courtroom drama with strong characters, surprising twists, and a compelling theme.”

RANDY ALCORN, bestselling author of *Safely Home*

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Designed by Dean H. Renninger

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PROLOGUE

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO
DAMASCUS, SYRIA

THE SCREAMS WOULDN'T STOP.

They were ear-piercing, pathetic cries for help. Pleading. Begging. The voice belonged to Fatinah Najar, the woman he loved. Once a beautiful and enchanting voice, it was now distorted by pain and fear, pleading rapidly in Arabic, denying that she knew anything her interrogators were asking about. She was in the next cell over, another dark, mildew-covered hellhole just like his, smelling of feces and vomit. They had set it up so he could hear everything.

The Syrian guards questioned her in low growls.

“Do you work for the American CIA?”

“You are in love with Mr. Phoenix, no?”

“What have you told him?”

There was a sinister rhythm to their interrogation techniques. Sean

heard them ask questions, then make accusations, their voices calm and deliberate, letting Fatinah know emotions were not part of the equation. Her denials were breathless, racked by sobs. She begged them to believe her. This would go on for half an hour, maybe more—accusations and denials. The calm voices promising her that if she just told the truth, it would all end.

But she never did. She stayed strong. Loyal.

Eventually new voices were added to the mix, loud and threatening. They cursed at Fatinah and described what was coming next, their words crescendoing into angry shouts.

Then the voices would drop again in resignation. “We can’t help you if you don’t tell the truth.”

That’s when the man in Sean’s cell, a giant Syrian military officer with an unkempt black beard, his body covered with hair, would snuff out his cigarette and remove Sean’s gag. Sean’s legs were spread, his ankle irons bolted to the floor. His arms were stretched wide and his wrists shackled to the wall so that his entire body formed an X.

His arms had long ago gone numb. But the guards hadn’t yet laid a finger on *him*. He was an American. A suspected CIA operative, to be sure, but an American nonetheless. And he knew that at this very moment the State Department was quietly negotiating his release. Its success would depend, in no small part, on whether he and Fatinah could maintain their composure and not give the Syrians anything to work with. He hoped against hope that the State Department would negotiate Fatinah’s release as well, although that part was complicated. Either way, they wouldn’t stand a chance if Fatinah admitted anything.

He reminded himself of this in the most anguishing moments of all, the silence that engulfed both cells as his captor extinguished his cigarette and stood to untie the gag.

He got right in Sean’s face, his breath nastier than the ambient stench of the cell, and he quietly demanded information. He had a tape recorder and made no effort to hide it.

“Do you want to know what happens to your girlfriend next?” he

asked. His voice was casual and conversational, as if the matter was of small importance.

“She hasn’t done anything. She doesn’t know anything. Let her go. Keep me.”

The Syrian grunted. “Ah, you Americans. So noble. So heroic.” He shook his head in mock sadness. “But so unable to keep your hands off our women.”

It was Sean’s fault that Fatinah was enduring this torture. He had befriended her, then recruited her, and ultimately he had fallen in love with her. She now worked with Sean and the CIA. She had used her charm and beauty to extract confidences from one of Syria’s most powerful leaders. Her name, in Arabic, meant “captivating, a restless intensity that defies relaxation.” She had proven to be that and much more to the Syrian general, a man who liked to boast about his exploits to a lover he was desperate to impress. But when he caught this same woman with Sean, the gig was up, and lust turned into rage.

Now the rage had turned into a psychological experiment. How could Sean and Fatinah be broken? How could they be made to talk?

“Your lover is feisty; she likes to fight back. But we bring in fresh men every time,” Sean’s captor said. He smirked as he talked, finding a perverse enjoyment in the pain he read on Sean’s face. “And you have such power, my American friend. You can stop all this—all these things I must describe to you in detail so you will know what is coming next. You are the one man in all the world—” he made a broad, sweeping motion with his hand, a little faux drama as he toyed with Sean—“who could stop this poor creature from suffering more.”

He placed both hands on the wall behind Sean and leaned in toward his captive. “Do you work for the American Central Intelligence Agency?”

Sean shook his head.

“Do you love the woman in the cell next door?”

“I’ve told you. We’re in love. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“Has she shared any secrets?”

“We all have secrets.”

“Clever. But you know what I mean.” The big man took a step back, sighed, and then began describing, in exquisite detail, the abuse and torture that would happen to Fatinah next. Sean closed his eyes and tried to shut out the images being implanted in his brain.

When the Syrian was done painting his brutal picture, he gave Sean a few more minutes to think it over. Sean took advantage of the opportunity to shout encouragement to Fatinah.

Shaking his head, the Syrian stuffed the gag into Sean’s mouth and taped it back in place.

When Sean’s shouts could no longer be heard, the Syrian spoke to the men in the next cell. “Mr. Phoenix claims to know nothing,” he shouted. “He says we should ask Fatinah instead. He says we should do whatever we want with her.”

The man sat down and lit up another cigarette. A few minutes later, the piercing screams began again.

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The interrogation continued for two days before Sean Phoenix was released. Unharmed. Untouched. His national security secrets still safe.

He was debriefed at the U.S. embassy, where he learned that the State Department had disavowed any knowledge of Fatinah Najjar and her relationship with Sean. They had not tried to negotiate her asylum or pressure Syria into releasing her. The only issue they had addressed with Syria, in the strongest possible terms, was their desired release of an innocent American businessman named Sean Phoenix. He was not a spy, according to the State Department. And falling in love with a Syrian woman was not an international crime.

The strategy had been determined at the highest levels. The director of the CIA had personally instructed the American negotiating team to admit nothing. He was confident that Sean and Fatinah would not crack. The director’s right-hand man, a lawyer and bureaucrat who had

never put his own life in harm's way, had convinced his boss that trying to negotiate Fatinah's release would be tantamount to admitting she was a spy. It would create an embarrassing international incident. Sometimes you had to sacrifice one for the good of all.

After his debriefing, Sean returned to his flat in downtown Damascus. He had been told to pack his belongings for a flight back to the U.S. the following day. Instead, he put together a battle plan. The Syrians had confiscated his guns and ammunition when they had captured him, so he would have to buy new weapons on the streets of Damascus. He wasn't an explosives expert, but he knew how to make crude bombs out of fertilizer. In the wee hours of the morning, he would launch his one-man attack on the prison. He knew his odds of success were infinitesimal, but he would rather die trying to free Fatinah than live with the knowledge that he had done nothing.

At midnight, three agents burst into his flat and told Sean that his flight had been moved up. There was a loud argument, followed by a fight. They carried him out unconscious. He woke up on an airplane headed to Germany.

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Within thirty minutes of setting foot on American soil, Sean was meeting with the CIA director personally. The man called Sean a hero and talked about the sacrifices that had to be made so that the rule of law could prevail. He regretted that he couldn't award Sean a medal, but he knew Sean would understand. Anonymity was part of the bargain. He was sorry they hadn't been able to do more for Fatinah. She had not made it out alive.

The director talked about giving Sean some time off and a new assignment at higher pay. But Sean turned in his credentials. He walked out of the director's office and made a list of every person, both Syrian and American, who had played a role in Fatinah's death. He vowed to cross those names off the list, one at a time, as he exacted his revenge.

Sean was tired of hearing about the rule of law and the cost of freedom. He was sick of pompous men who lived and worked in luxurious

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surroundings spouting off about high-minded concepts that would cost them nothing.

Patriotism. Democracy. Freedom. They were all ploys to get men like Sean to do the bidding of those in power. And when the power brokers had their backs to the wall, people like Sean and Fatinah became expendable. Assets to be written off. Another casualty or two. Another exercise in damage control.

Sean Phoenix was done with it. There had to be a better way.

1

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

LANDON REED EMERGED from his two-year prison sentence into the muggy warmth of an August morning wearing the jeans, gray T-shirt, and sandals that Kerri had dropped off the day before. He squinted as he left the dingy interior of the Fulton County jail and stepped into the crisp, brilliant light of the sun. He held a paper bag containing the suit and shoes he had worn to court two years earlier when he pleaded guilty. There were sunglasses in the bag as well, but Landon had decided not to wear them, concerned they might send the wrong message—a former all-star college quarterback still trying to play it cool.

He had been sentenced for his role in a point-shaving scandal, and it was not surprising that only one former teammate came for his release—his best friend and center, a mountain of a man named Billy Thurston. While Landon served his time, Billy had been drafted by the Green Bay Packers.

The media formed a semicircle around Landon, cameras rolling to capture the scene. The same reporters who had crucified him two years earlier were back to record his moment of freedom and to rile up the Southeastern University fans all over again. Landon didn't hold it against them. He had changed in prison, his bitterness replaced by contrition. But he didn't expect people to understand.

He held it together as he hugged his mother and older sister. They didn't say anything, mindful that the cameras would capture every word. Kerri waited in line, just as she had waited for two years, true to her word, enduring the scorn of most of her old friends. On her hip was the little girl Landon knew would grow into the same kind of strong-willed, independent, beautiful woman her mom was. Maddie had been born after Landon started serving his term. He had never held her outside the prison walls.

Landon and Kerri had scripted this moment. There would be a brief hug; then Landon would say a few words to the press about how much he appreciated Kerri's loyalty. He would answer a few questions. They would keep it low-key. The emotional dam would burst later.

But when Kerri stepped forward to hug him, the script no longer mattered. She started crying, though they had agreed she wouldn't cry and neither would he. Unbidden, tears rolled down his face as well. Kerri buried her head on his shoulder, and they held each other for much longer than they had planned, with little Maddie right there between them, an arm around each of their necks. For the old Landon, the hotshot quarterback of three years ago, this public display of emotion would have been embarrassing. But the new Landon was beyond all that. Once you've been humiliated in the national press, crying in public is no big deal.

The questions started even before the little family disengaged. Kerri handed Maddie to Landon, and when he turned to face the reporters, his little girl turned her back to them, hiding her face in Landon's chest, holding on for her life. It was all overwhelming for an almost-two-year-old.

"What're your plans now?"

“Are you going to play football again?”

“What do you have to say to your teammates and coaches?”

He took them one at a time. “I’m pretty sure my football career is over.” *Who would want me?* “I’m grateful for everyone who stood with me during these last two years.” He put his free arm around Kerri’s shoulder. He nodded toward his mother and sister, standing on the other side of him. His mom, always a slender woman, looked wiry and gaunt, with tears streaking her face. Prison had aged her even more than him.

“I’m sorry that I let my teammates and coaches and fans down. I know I can never undo the damage I’ve done to Southeastern University or my own reputation.”

Kerri held her head high, as if she were standing next to a prince. His mom and sister kept their chins up as well.

“I’m incredibly grateful to Kerri for waiting for me these past two years. I certainly wouldn’t have blamed her if she had moved on to someone else. In terms of what I’m going to do, one of the first things will be tying the knot.”

Kerri had her arm around his waist and gave him a little squeeze. The questions kept coming and he patiently addressed each one. Reporters were a cynical lot. Marriage, yeah, yeah—that’s quaint. But what about a comeback on the gridiron?

“Are you saying you haven’t been contacted by any NFL teams?”

“That’s what I’m saying.”

“Are you planning on attending any tryouts?”

It was Billy Thurston who decided enough was enough. He stepped between Landon and the microphones and made a little announcement. “Let’s respect this family’s privacy and let Mr. Reed go about rebuilding his life,” he said. And then, as he had done so many times in the past, he cleared a path for his quarterback to follow.

The reporters took this as a cue to ask the same questions louder, shouting at Landon and the others as they worked their way toward the parking lot. Landon, no stranger to the spotlight, knew the drill. Once

you've decided the press conference is over, keep your head down, ignore whatever they say, and just keep moving.

They had almost completed the gauntlet when Landon spotted Bobby Woolridge, an older reporter from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* who had always been more than fair. Bobby believed in redemption and had written a piece a few months ago about Landon's jailhouse conversion. Unlike the others, Bobby didn't assume it was just part of a sophisticated PR campaign.

"You going into the ministry?" Bobby asked.

Landon grinned a little and kept walking. "No, Bobby. I hardly think I'm qualified."

"How are you gonna feed your family?"

"I'll figure something out," Landon said. He was tempted to tell Bobby. Sooner or later, it would all come out anyway. But he and Kerri had talked about this. They would keep their plans private until this new wave of publicity had washed over. He had finished his undergrad degree in prison. Now they would start a new life miles away from Atlanta, in a town with lots of history but few SEC football fanatics.

"Good luck," Bobby said.

Billy had double-parked his Land Rover, and they all hopped in, leaving the media behind to snap a few final pictures. As they pulled away, Landon could feel the pressure in his chest begin to loosen. He was a free man again. He could do whatever he wanted.

"Where to?" Billy asked. "Pizza? Burgers? The Varsity?" For Billy, it was always about food.

But Landon had a commitment to keep. "Trinity Church," he said. "We've got our best man and flower girl in the car. No sense giving the bride a chance to change her mind."

Kerri was sitting in the back with Maddie. She leaned forward and placed a hand on Landon's shoulder. "She's had two years to think it over," Kerri said. "She's not getting cold feet now."

They had been planning this day for six months, and Landon couldn't believe it was finally here. It wasn't exactly a dream wedding,

but Kerri didn't seem to care. Even her parents' refusal to attend hadn't fazed her. They would have each other, she had said. What else did they need?

That afternoon, the minister at the small church Kerri had been attending made it official. Kerri Anderson became Kerri Reed. And when they made their vows, pledging to stick with each other for better or for worse, the minister actually paused for a moment and turned to Kerri.

"I think you've already got this part down," he said.

Kerri was beaming, as was Landon. And they didn't stop smiling until long after the minister pronounced them man and wife.

Later that day, Kerri said it was the most romantic wedding she could ever have imagined. With just the seven of them in the small sanctuary, it somehow felt more private and intimate. She had been smiling, she said, because it felt so surreal she almost had to pinch herself. The three of them were officially becoming a family. She was Mrs. Landon Reed. Maddie would have her daddy home.

Landon didn't tell her the reason he had been smiling. Like Kerri, the whole experience had felt like a dream. The entire two years behind bars, he kept thinking that any day Kerri might come to her senses, find somebody else, and bolt. She was beautiful and smart with a larger-than-life personality. But she kept coming back. And now, Landon was married to her.

That was enough to make any man smile. But there was also one other thing.

The honeymoon would start that night.