



The Messenger (Gabriel Allon)

By Daniel Silva

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Allon and his colleagues soon find themselves in a deadly duel of wits against one of the most dangerous men in the world—a hunt that will take them across Europe to the Caribbean and back. But for them, there may not be enough of anything: enough time, enough facts, enough luck.

All Allon can do is set his trap—and hope that he is not the one caught in it.

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Editorial Review

Review

"*The Messenger*'s blood-spattered, true-to-life backdrop pumps up this thrill ride of a story, but its underlying messages about fundamentalism, revenge, oil dependency and cultural differences are what will keep you awake at night."—*USA Today*

"Exhibits Silva's usual intelligence, style and research...Silva uncorks another, even more dramatic climax."—*The Washington Post Book World*

"The enigmatic Gabriel Allon remains one of the most intriguing heroes of any thriller series, a wonderfully nuanced, endlessly fascinating creation...Entertaining and well written."—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

"Silva [is] the modern-day Robert Ludlum, and his lead character Gabriel Allon should remind readers of Jason Bourne (without the amnesia, of course)."—*Florida Times-Union*

"Gripping details...Silva maintains tension and suspense with a story that travels all over the world."—*The Denver Post*

"So entertaining... a spider web of a plot."—*The Baltimore Sun*

About the Author

Daniel Silva is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Unlikely Spy*, *The Mark of the Assassin*, *The Marching Season*, and the Gabriel Allon series, including *The Kill Artist*, *The English Assassin*, *The Confessor*, *A Death in Vienna*, *Prince of Fire*, *The Messenger*, *The Secret Servant*, *Moscow Rules*, *The Defector*, *The Rembrandt Affair*, *Portrait of a Spy*, *The Fallen Angel*, *The English Girl*, *The Heist*, *The English Spy*, and *The Black Widow*. His books are published in more than thirty countries and are bestsellers around the world.

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Chapter 1

London

IT WAS ALI MASSOUDI who unwittingly roused Gabriel Allon from his brief and restless retirement: Massoudi, the great Europhile intellectual and freethinker, who, in a moment of blind panic, forgot that the English drive on the left side of the road.

The backdrop for his demise was a rain-swept October evening in Bloomsbury. The occasion was the final session of the first annual Policy Forum for Peace and Security in Palestine, Iraq, and Beyond. The conference had been launched early that morning amid great hope and fanfare, but by day's end it had taken on the quality of a traveling production of a mediocre play. Even the demonstrators who came in hope of sharing some of the flickering spotlight seemed to realize they were reading from the same tired script. The American president was burned in effigy at ten. The Israeli prime minister was put to the purifying flame at eleven. At lunchtime, amid a deluge that briefly turned Russell Square into a pond, there had been a folly having something to do with the rights of women in Saudi Arabia. At eight-thirty, as the gavel came down on

the final panel, the two dozen stoics who had stayed to the end filed numbly toward the exits. Organizers of the affair detected little appetite for a return engagement next autumn.

A stagehand stole forward and removed a placard from the rostrum that read: GAZA IS LIBERATED—WHAT NOW? The first panelist on his feet was Sayyid of the London School of Economics, defender of the suicide bombers, apologist for al-Qaeda. Next was the austere Chamberlain of Cambridge, who spoke of Palestine and the Jews as though they were still the quandary of gray-suited men from the Foreign Office. Throughout the discussion the aging Chamberlain had served as a sort of Separation Fence between the incendiary Sayyid and a poor soul from the Israeli embassy named Rachel who had drawn hoots and whistles of disapproval each time she'd opened her mouth. Chamberlain tried to play the role of peacekeeper now as Sayyid pursued Rachel to the door with taunts that her days as a colonizer were drawing to an end.

Ali Massoudi, graduate professor of global governance and social theory at the University of Bremen, was the last to rise. Hardly surprising, his jealous colleagues might have said, for among the incestuous world of Middle Eastern studies, Massoudi had the reputation of one who never willingly relinquished a stage. Palestinian by birth, Jordanian by passport, and European by upbringing and education, Professor Massoudi appeared to all the world like a man of moderation. The shining future of Arabia, they called him. The very face of progress. He was known to be distrustful of religion in general and militant Islam in particular. In newspaper editorials, in lecture halls, and on television, he could always be counted on to lament the dysfunction of the Arab world. Its failure to properly educate its people. Its tendency to blame the Americans and the Zionists for all its ailments. His last book had amounted to a clarion call for an Islamic Reformation. The jihadists had denounced him as a heretic. The moderates had proclaimed he had the courage of Martin Luther. That afternoon he had argued, much to Sayyid's dismay, that the ball was now squarely in the Palestinian court. Until the Palestinians part company with the culture of terror, Massoudi had said, the Israelis could never be expected to cede an inch of the West Bank. Nor should they. Sacrilege, Sayyid had cried. Apostasy.

Professor Massoudi was tall, a bit over six feet in height, and far too good looking for a man who worked in close proximity to impressionable young women. His hair was dark and curly, his cheekbones wide and strong, and his square chin had a deep notch in the center. The eyes were brown and deeply set and lent his face an air of profound and reassuring intelligence. Dressed as he was now, in a cashmere sport jacket and cream-colored rollneck sweater, he seemed the very archetype of the European intellectual. It was an image he worked hard to convey. Naturally deliberate of movement, he packed his papers and pens methodically into his well-traveled briefcase, then descended the steps from the stage and headed up the center aisle toward the exit.

Several members of the audience were loitering in the foyer. Standing to one side, a stormy island in an otherwise tranquil sea, was the girl. She wore faded jeans, a leather jacket, and a checkered Palestinian kaffiyeh round her neck. Her black hair shone like a raven's wing. Her eyes were nearly black, too, but shone with something else. Her name was Hamida al-Tatari. A refugee, she had said. Born in Amman, raised in Hamburg, now a citizen of Canada residing in North London. Massoudi had met her that afternoon at a reception in the student union. Over coffee she had fervently accused him of insufficient outrage over the crimes of the Americans and Jews. Massoudi had liked what he had seen. They were planning to have drinks that evening at the wine bar next to the theater in Sloane Square. His intentions weren't romantic. It wasn't Hamida's body he wanted. It was her zeal and her clean face. Her perfect English and Canadian passport.

She gave him a furtive glance as he crossed the foyer but made no attempt to speak to him. *Keep your distance after the symposium*, he had instructed her that afternoon. *A man in my position has to be careful about who he's seen with*. Outside he sheltered for a moment beneath the portico and gazed at the traffic

moving sluggishly along the wet street. He felt someone brush against his elbow, then watched as Hamida plunged wordlessly into the cloudburst. He waited until she was gone, then hung his briefcase from his shoulder and set out in the opposite direction, toward his hotel in Russell Square.

The change came over him—the same change that always occurred whenever he moved from one life to the other. The quickening of the pulse, the sharpening of the senses, the sudden fondness for small details. Such as the balding young man, walking toward him beneath the shelter of an umbrella, whose gaze seemed to linger on Massoudi's face an instant too long. Or the newsagent who stared brazenly into Massoudi's eyes as he purchased a copy of the *Evening Standard*. Or the taxi driver who watched him, thirty seconds later, as he dropped the same newspaper into a rubbish bin in Upper Woburn Place.

A London bus overtook him. As it churned slowly past, Massoudi peered through the fogged windows and saw a dozen tired-looking faces, nearly all of them black or brown. *The new Londoners*, he thought, and for a moment the professor of global governance and social theory wrestled with the implications of this. How many secretly sympathized with his cause? How many would sign on the dotted line if he laid before them a contract of death?

In the wake of the bus, on the opposite pavement, was a single pedestrian: oilskin raincoat, stubby ponytail, two straight lines for eyebrows. Massoudi recognized him instantly. The young man had been at the conference—same row as Hamida but on the opposite side of the auditorium. He'd been sitting in the same seat earlier that morning, when Massoudi had been the lone dissenting voice during a panel discussion on the virtue of barring Israeli academics from European shores.

Massoudi lowered his gaze and kept walking, while his left hand went involuntarily to the shoulder strap of his briefcase. Was he being followed? If so, by whom? MI5 was the most likely explanation. The most likely, he reminded himself, but not the only one. Perhaps the German BND had followed him to London from Bremen. Or perhaps he was under CIA surveillance.

But it was the fourth possibility that made Massoudi's heart bang suddenly against his rib cage. What if the man was not English, or German, or American at all? What if he worked for an intelligence service that showed little compunction about liquidating its enemies, even on the streets of foreign capitals. An intelligence service with a history of using women as bait. He thought of what Hamida had said to him that afternoon.

"I grew up in Toronto, mostly. "

"And before that? "

"Amman when I was very young. Then a year in Hamburg. I'm a Palestinian, Professor. My home is a suitcase."

Massoudi made a sudden turn off Woburn Place, into the tangle of side streets of St. Pancras. After a few paces he slowed and looked over his shoulder. The man in the oilskin coat had crossed the street and was following after him.

HE QUICKENED his pace, made a series of turns, left and right. Here a row of mews houses, here a block of flats, here an empty square littered with dead leaves. Massoudi saw little of it. He was trying to keep his orientation. He knew London's main thoroughfares well enough, but the backstreets were a mystery to him. He threw all tradecraft to the wind and made regular glances over his shoulder. Each glance seemed to find the man a pace or two closer.

He came to an intersection, looked left, and saw traffic rushing along the Euston Road. On the opposite side, he knew, lay King's Cross and St. Pancras stations. He turned in that direction, then, a few seconds later, glanced over his shoulder. The man had rounded the corner and was coming after him.

He began to run. He had never been much of an athlete, and years of academic pursuits had robbed his body of fitness. The weight of the laptop computer in his briefcase was like an anchor. With each stride the case banged against his hip. He secured it with his elbow and held the strap with his other hand, but this gave his stride an awkward galloping rhythm that slowed him even more. He considered jettisoning it but clung to it instead. In the wrong hands the laptop was a treasure trove of information. Personnel, surveillance photographs, communications links, *bank accounts*...

He stumbled to a stop at the Euston Road. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw his pursuer still plodding methodically toward him, hands in his pockets, eyes down. He looked to his left, saw empty asphalt, and stepped off the curb.

The groan of the lorry horn was the last sound Ali Massoudi ever heard. At impact the briefcase broke free of him. It took flight, turned over several times as it hovered above the road, then landed on the street with a solid thud. The man in the oilskin raincoat barely had to break stride as he bent down and snared it by the strap. He slipped it neatly over his shoulder, crossed the Euston Road, and followed the evening commuters into King's Cross.

Chapter 2

Jerusalem

THE BRIEFCASE HAD REACHED Paris by dawn, and by eleven it was being carried into an anonymous-looking office block on King Saul Boulevard in Tel Aviv. There the professor's personal effects were hastily inspected, while the hard drive of his laptop computer was subjected to a sustained assault by a team of technical wizards. By three that afternoon the first packet of intelligence had been forwarded to the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem, and by five a manila file folder containing the most alarming material was in the back of an armored Peugeot limousine heading toward Narkiss Street, a quiet leafy lane not far from the Ben Yehuda Mall.

The car stopped in front of the small apartment house at Number 16. Ari Shamron, the twice former chief of the Israeli secret service, now special adviser to the prime minister on all matters dealing with security and intelligence, emerged from the backseat. Rami, the black-eyed chief of his personal security detail, moved silently at his heels. Shamron had made countless enemies during his long and turbulent career, and because of Israel's tangled demographics, many were uncomfortably close. Shamron, even when he was inside his fortresslike villa in Tiberias, was surrounded always by bodyguards.

He paused for a moment on the garden walkway and looked up. It was a dowdy little building of Jerusalem limestone, three floors in height, with a large eucalyptus tree in front that cast a pleasant shadow over the front balconies. The limbs of the tree were swaying in the first cool wind of autumn, and from the open window on the third floor came the sharp odor of paint thinner.

Shamron, as he entered the foyer, glanced at the mailbox for apartment number three and saw it was absent a nameplate. He mounted the stairs and tramped slowly upward. He was short of stature and was dressed, as usual, in khaki trousers and a scuffed leather jacket with a tear in the right breast. His face was full of cracks and fissures, and his remaining fringe of gray hair was cropped so short as to be nearly invisible. His hands

were leathery and liver-spotted and seemed to have been borrowed from a man twice his size. In one was the file.

The door was ajar when he arrived on the third-floor landing. He placed his fingers against it and gently pushed. The flat he entered had once been meticulously decorated by a beautiful Italian-Jewish woman of impeccable taste. Now the furniture, like the beautiful Italian woman, was gone, and the flat had been turned into an artist's studio. Not an artist, Shamron had to remind himself. Gabriel Allon was a restorer—one of the three or four most sought-after restorers in the world. He was standing now before an enormous canvas depicting a man surrounded by large predatory cats. Shamron settled himself quietly on a paint-smudged stool and watched him work for a few moments. He had always been mystified by Gabriel's ability to imitate the brushstrokes of the Old Masters. To Shamron it was something of a parlor trick, just another of Gabriel's gifts to be utilized, like his languages or his ability to get a Beretta off his hip and into firing position in the time it takes most men to clap their hands.

"It certainly looks better than when it first arrived," Shamron said, "but I still don't know why anyone would want to hang it his home."

"It won't end up in a private home," Gabriel said, his brush to the canvas. "This is a museum piece."

"Who painted it?" Shamron asked abruptly, as though inquiring about the perpetrator of a bombing.

"Bohnam's auction house in London thought it was Erasmus Quellinus," Gabriel said. "Quellinus might have laid the foundations, but it's clear to me that Rubens finished it for him." He moved his hand over the large canvas. "His brushstrokes are everywhere."

"What difference does it make?"

"About ten million pounds," Gabriel said. "Julian is going to do very nicely with this one."

Julian Isherwood was a London art dealer and sometime secret servant of Israeli intelligence. The service had a long name that had very little to do with the true nature of its work. Men like Shamron and Gabriel referred to it as the Office and nothing more.

"I hope Julian is giving you fair compensation."

"My restoration fee, plus a small commission on the sale."

"What's the total?"

Gabriel tapped his brush against his palette and resumed working.

"We need to talk," Shamron said.

"So talk."

"I'm not going to talk to your back." Gabriel turned and peered at Shamron once more through the lenses of his magnifying visor. "And I'm not going to talk to you while you're wearing those things. You look like something from my nightmares."

Gabriel reluctantly set his palette on the worktable and removed his magnifying visor, revealing a pair of eyes that were a shocking shade of emerald green. He was below average in height and had the spare physique of a cyclist. His face was high at the forehead and narrow at the chin, and he had a long bony nose

that looked as though it had been carved from wood. His hair was cropped short and shot with gray at the temples. It was because of Shamron that Gabriel was an art restorer and not one of the finest painters of his generation—and why his temples had turned gray virtually overnight when he was in his early twenties. Shamron had been the intelligence officer chosen by Golda Meir to hunt down and assassinate the perpetrators of the 1972 Munich Massacre, and a promising young art student named Gabriel Allon had been his primary gunman.

He spent a few moments cleaning his palette and brushes, then went into the kitchen. Shamron sat down at the small table and waited for Gabriel to turn his back before hurriedly lighting one of his foul-smelling Turkish cigarettes. Gabriel, hearing the familiar *click-click* of Shamron's old Zippo lighter, pointed toward the Rubens in exasperation, but Shamron made a dismissive gesture and defiantly raised the cigarette to his lips. A comfortable silence settled between them while Gabriel poured bottled water into the teakettle and spooned coffee into the French press. Shamron was content to listen to the wind moving in the eucalyptus trees outside in the garden. Devoutly secular, he marked the passage of time not by the Jewish festivals but by the rhythms of the land—the day the rains came, the day the wildflowers exploded in the Galilee, the day the cool winds returned. Gabriel could read his thoughts. Another autumn, and we're still here. The covenant had not been revoked.

"The prime minister wants an answer." Shamron's gaze still was focused on the tangled little garden. "He's a patient man, but he won't wait forever."

"I told you that I'd give him an answer when I was finished with the painting."

Shamron looked at Gabriel. "Does your arrogance know no bounds? The prime minister of the State of Israel wants you to be chief of Special Operations, and you put him off over some five-hundred year-old piece of canvas."

"*Four* hundred."

Gabriel carried the coffee to the table and poured two cups. Shamron scooped sugar into his and gave it a single violent stir.

"You said yourself the painting is nearly finished. What is your answer going to be?"

"I haven't decided."

"May I offer you a piece of helpful advice?"

"And if I don't want your advice?"

"I'd give it to you anyway." Shamron squeezed the life out of his cigarette butt. "You should accept the prime minister's offer before he makes it to someone else."

"Nothing would make me happier."

"Really? And what will you do with yourself?" Greeted by silence, Shamron pressed on. "Allow me to paint a picture for you, Gabriel. I'll do the best I can. I'm not gifted like you. I don't come from a great German-Jewish intellectual family. I'm just a poor Polish Jew whose father sold pots from the back of a handcart."

Shamron's murderous Polish accent had grown thicker. Gabriel couldn't help but smile. He knew that whenever Shamron played the downtrodden Jew from Lvov, something entertaining was certain to follow.

“You have nowhere else to go, Gabriel. You said it yourself when we offered you the job the first time. What will you do when you’re finished with this Rubens of yours? Do you have any more work lined up?”

Shamron’s pause was theatrical in nature, for he knew the answer was no. “You can’t go back to Europe until you’re officially cleared in the bombing of the Gare de Lyon. Julian might send you another painting, but eventually that will end, too, because the packing and shipping costs will cut into his already tenuous bottom line. Do you see my point, Gabriel?”

“I see it very clearly. You’re trying to use my unfortunate situation as a means of blackmailing me into taking Operations.”

“Blackmail? No, Gabriel. I know the meaning of blackmail, and God knows I’ve been known to use it when it suits my needs. But this is not blackmail. I’m trying to help you.”

“Help?”

“Tell me something, Gabriel: What do you plan to do for money?”

“I have money.”

“Enough to live like a hermit, but not enough to live.” Shamron lapsed into a momentary silence and listened to the wind. “It’s quiet now, isn’t it? Tranquil almost. It’s tempting to think it can go on like this forever. But it can’t. We gave them Gaza without demanding anything in return, and they repaid us by freely electing Hamas to be their rulers. Next they’ll want the West Bank, and if we don’t surrender it in short order, there’s going to be another round of bloodletting, much worse than even the second intifada. Trust me, Gabriel, one day soon it will all start up again. And not just here. Everywhere. Do you think they’re sitting on their hands doing nothing? Of course not. They’re planning the next campaign. They’re talking to Osama and his friends, too. We now know for a fact that the Palestinian Authority has been thoroughly penetrated by al-Qaeda and its affiliates. We also know that they are planning major attacks against Israel and Israeli targets abroad in the very near future. The Office also believes the prime minister has been targeted for assassination, along with senior advisers.”

“You included?”

“Of course,” Shamron said. “I am, after all, the prime minister’s special adviser on all matters dealing with security and terrorism. My death would be a tremendous symbolic victory for them.”

He looked out the window again at the wind moving in the trees. “It’s ironic, isn’t it? This place was supposed to be our sanctuary. Now, in an odd way, it’s left us more vulnerable than ever. Nearly half the world’s Jews live in this tiny strip of land. One small nuclear device, that’s all it would take. The Americans could survive one. The Russians might barely notice it. But us? A bomb in Tel Aviv would kill a quarter of the country’s population— maybe more.”

“And you need me to prevent this apocalypse? I thought the Office was in good hands these days.”

“Things are definitely better now that Lev has been shown the door. Amos is an extraordinarily competent leader and administrator, but sometimes I think he has a bit too much of the soldier in him.”

“He was chief of both the Sayeret Matkal and Aman. What did you expect?”

“We knew what we were getting with Amos, but the prime minister and I are now concerned that he’s trying to turn King Saul Boulevard into an outpost of the IDF. We want the Office to retain its original character.”

“Insanity?”

“Boldness,” countered Shamron. “Audacity. I just wish Amos would think a little less like a battlefield commander and a little more like . . .” His voice trailed off while he searched for the right word. When he found it, he rubbed his first two fingers against his thumb and said, “Like an *artist*. I need someone by his side who thinks more like Caravaggio.”

“Caravaggio was a madman.”

“Exactly.”

Shamron started to light another cigarette, but this time Gabriel managed to stay his hand before he’d struck his lighter. Shamron looked at him, his eyes suddenly serious.

“We need you *now*, Gabriel. Two hours ago the chief of Special Operations handed Amos his letter of resignation.”

“Why?”

“London.” Shamron looked down at his captured hand. “May I have that back?”

Gabriel let go of the thick wrist. Shamron rolled the unlit cigarette between his thumb and forefinger.

“What happened in London?” Gabriel asked.

“I’m afraid we had a bit of a mishap there last night.”

“A mishap? When the Office has a mishap, someone usually ends up dead.”

Shamron nodded in agreement. “Well, at least there’s something to be said for consistency.”

“DOES THE NAME Ali Massoudi mean anything to you?”

“He’s professor of something or other at a university in Germany,” Gabriel replied. “Likes to play the role of an iconoclast and a reformer. I actually met him once.”

Shamron’s eyebrows went up in surprise. “Really? Where?”

“He came to Venice a couple of years ago for a big Middle East symposium. As part of their stipend the participants got a guided tour of the city. One of their stops was the Church of San Zaccaria, where I was restoring the Bellini altarpiece.”

For several years Gabriel had lived and worked in Venice under the name Mario Delvecchio. Six months earlier he had been forced to flee the city after being discovered there by a Palestinian masterterrorist named Khaled al-Khalifa. The affair had ended at the Gare de Lyon, and in the aftermath Gabriel’s name and secret past had been splashed across the French and European press, including an exposé in *The Sunday Times* that referred to him as “Israel’s Angel of Death.” He was still wanted for questioning by the Paris police, and a Palestinian civil rights group had filed a lawsuit in London alleging war crimes.

“And you actually *met* Massoudi?” Shamron asked incredulously. “You shook his hand?”

“As Mario Delvecchio, of course.”

“I suppose you didn’t realize that you were shaking hands with a terrorist.”

Shamron stuck the end of the cigarette between his lips and struck his Zippo. This time Gabriel didn’t intervene.

“Three months ago we got a tip from a friend at the Jordanian GID that Professor Ali Massoudi, that great moderate and reformer, was actually a talent scout for al-Qaeda. According to the Jordanians, he was looking for recruits to attack Israeli and Jewish targets in Europe. Peace conferences and anti-Israel demonstrations were his favorite hunting grounds. We weren’t surprised by that part. We’ve known for some time that the peace conferences have become a meeting place for al-Qaeda operatives and European extremists of both the left-wing and right-wing variety. We decided it would be wise to put Professor Massoudi under watch. We got to the telephone in his apartment in Bremen, but the yield was disappointing, to put it mildly. He was very good on the phone. Then about a month ago, London Station chipped in with a timely piece of information. It seems the Cultural section of the London embassy had been asked to provide a warm body for something called the Policy Forum for Peace and Security in Palestine, Iraq, and Beyond. When Cultural asked for a list of the other participants, guess whose name appeared on it?”

“Professor Ali Massoudi.”

“Cultural agreed to send a representative to the conference, and Special Ops set its sights on Massoudi.”

“What kind of operation was it?”

“Simple,” Shamron said. “Catch him in the act. Compromise him. Threaten him. Turn him around. Can you imagine? An agent inside the al-Qaeda personnel department? With Massoudi’s help we could have rolled up their European networks.”

“So what happened?”

“We put a girl on his plate. She called herself Hamida al-Tatari. Her real name is Aviva and she’s from Ramat Gan, but that’s neither here nor there. She met Massoudi at a reception. Massoudi was intrigued and agreed to meet her again later that evening for a more lengthy discussion of the current state of the world. We followed Massoudi after the last session of the conference, but Massoudi apparently spotted the watcher and started to run. He looked the wrong way while crossing the Euston Road and stepped in front of a delivery truck.”

Gabriel winced.

“Fortunately we didn’t come away completely empty-handed,” Shamron said. “The watcher made off with Massoudi’s briefcase. Among other things it contained a laptop computer. It seems Professor Ali Massoudi was more than just a talent spotter.”

Shamron placed the file folder in front of Gabriel and, with a terse nod of his head, instructed Gabriel to open the cover. Inside he found a stack of surveillance photographs: St. Peter’s Square from a dozen different angles; the façade and interior of the Basilica; Swiss Guards standing watch at the Arch of Bells. It was clear the photos had not been taken by an ordinary tourist, because the cameraman had been far less interested in the visual aesthetics of the Vatican than the security measures surrounding it. There were several snapshots of the barricades along the western edge of the square and the metal detectors along Bernini’s Colonnade—and several more of the Vigilanza and Carabinieri who patrolled the square during large gatherings, including close-ups of their side arms. The final three photographs showed Pope Paul VII greeting a crowd in St. Peter’s Square in his glass-enclosed popemobile. The camera lens had been focused

not on the Holy Father but on the plainclothes Swiss Guards walking at his side. Gabriel viewed the photos a second time. Based on the quality of the light and the clothing worn by the crowds of pilgrims, it appeared that they had been taken on at least three separate occasions. Repeated photographic surveillance of the same target, he knew, was a hallmark of a serious al-Qaeda operation. He closed the file and held it out to Shamron, but Shamron wouldn't accept it. Gabriel regarded the old man's face with the same intensity he'd studied the photographs. He could tell there was more bad news to come.

"Technical found something else on Massoudi's computer," Shamron said. "Instructions for accessing a numbered bank account in Zurich—an account we've known about for some time, because it's received regular infusions of money from something called the Committee to Liberate al-Quds." Al-Quds was the Arabic name for Jerusalem.

"Who's behind it?" Gabriel asked.

"Saudi Arabia," said Shamron. "To be more specific, the interior minister of Saudi Arabia, Prince Nabil."

Inside the Office, Nabil was routinely referred to as the Prince of Darkness for his hatred of Israel and the United States and his support of Islamic militancy around the globe.

"Nabil created the committee at the height of the second intifada," Shamron continued. "He raises the money himself and personally oversees the distribution. We believe he has a hundred million dollars at his disposal, and he's funneling it to some of the most violent terror groups in the world, including elements of al-Qaeda."

"Who's giving Nabil the money?"

"Unlike the other Saudi charities, the Committee for the Liberation of al-Quds has a very small donor base. We think Nabil raises the money from a handful of Saudi multimillionaires."

Shamron peered into his coffee for a moment. "Charity," he said, his tone disdainful. "A lovely word, isn't it? But Saudi charity has always been a two edged sword. The Muslim World League, the International Islamic Relief Organization, the al-Haramayn Islamic Foundation, the Benevolence International Foundation—they are to Saudi Arabia what the Comintern was to the old Soviet Union. A means of propagating the faith. Islam. And not just any form of Islam. Saudi Arabia's puritanical brand of Islam. Wahhabism. The charities build mosques and Islamic centers around the world and madrassas that churn out the Wahhabi militants of tomorrow. And they also give money directly to the terrorists, including our friends in Hamas. The engines of America run on Saudi oil, but the networks of global Islamic terrorism run largely on Saudi money."

"Charity is the third pillar of Islam," Gabriel said. "*zakat*."

"And a noble quality," Shamron said, "accept when the *zakat* ends up in the hands of murderers."

"Do you think Ali Massoudi was connected to the Saudis by more than money?"

"We may never know because the great professor is no longer with us. But whomever he was working for clearly has his sights set on the Vatican—and someone needs to tell them."

"I suspect you have someone in mind for the job."

"Consider it your first assignment as chief of Special Ops," Shamron said. "The prime minister wants you to step into the breach. *Immediately*."

“And Amos?”

“Amos has another name in mind, but the prime minister and I have made it clear to him who we want in the job.”

“My own record is hardly free of scandal, and unfortunately the world now knows about it.”

“The Gare de Lyon affair?” Shamron shrugged. “You were lured into it by a clever opponent. Besides, I’ve always believed that a career free of controversy is not a proper career at all. The prime minister shares that view.”

“Maybe that’s because he’s been involved in a few scandals of his own.” Italian soil—

“There’s no need for you to go to Rome,” Shamron said, cutting him off. “Rome is coming to you.”

“Donati?”

Shamron nodded.

“How much did you tell him?”

“Enough for him to ask Alitalia if he could borrow a plane for a few hours,” Shamron said. “He’ll be here first thing in the morning. Show him the photographs. Tell him as much as you need to in order to impress upon him that we think the threat is credible.”

“And if he asks for help?”

Shamron shrugged. “Give him whatever he needs.”

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