

Chapter 39

The following morning, breakfast was interrupted by a gentle knock at the front door. The villa's occupants were not accustomed to unexpected visitors, particularly prior to a complicated mission. The team members, save for Weylin and Momma, left the table in a flash and took up defensive positions on either side of the entrance. Following Sascha's careful scrutiny of the visitor via closed circuit TV, the door was opened and a trembling young girl came into view. "What brings you to my door," Sascha inquired, menacingly, while scanning the horizon.

"My father asked that I bring you this package," she said, with a quivering voice, as she removed a thick sealed envelope from her jacket pocket.

Taking the package from her small hand and opening it to view the contents, he smirked. "Why do you dress like a boy?"

"So the boys won't tease me," she replied, while adjusting her baggy blue slacks and oversized peacoat.

“Some day, it will be your turn to do the teasing,” he said, with a warm smile.

“Sir?”

“You will understand when you are older,” he remarked, as he thumbed through the forged I.D.F. and Palestinian documents, closing the envelope and stuffing it into a pocket when he had finished. “Tell your father that I am pleased with his work,” he said. He locked the door, returned to the dining room and reached for his unfinished cup of coffee. “What was that all about?” Svetlana asked, as Sascha nonchalantly drained his now cold beverage.

“Our documents have arrived,” he replied, waving the envelope above his head.

“Then we are ready,” she said.

“I believe so.”

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At eight P.M. sharp, immediately following dinner, the entire team assembled in the basement situation room. Commercial flight arrangements to Tel Aviv had been made, compliments of Momma, and as the team took their seats, Sascha handed each one his respective ticket. “What, we are not flying first class?” the bearded member joked.

“Be happy you do not have to walk,” Sascha sneered, as he tossed the package of documents into the center of the table. “Here are your papers, learn your new names well. One slip and your dead. Oh yes, there has been a slight change of plans,” he added, as he walked towards the wine cellar.

Weylin turned to Svetlana, who was seated at his side. “You didn’t mention any changes?”

he said, with concern.

Just then, Sascha returned carrying a chilled bottle of vodka and placed it alongside of a large silver tray containing the appropriate number of crystal glasses. “Fill your glasses,” he ordered, “we drink to our successful return.”

With the empty glasses now resting upon the table, Weylin approached Sascha with a quizzical expression. “What did you mean by a *change of plans*?” he said.

“Ah yes, we leave tomorrow for Tel Aviv but our destination is Haifa.”

“Why is that?”

“It is closer to the border.”

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As the door to the stone walled room closed behind him, Weylin experienced a strange sense of foreboding that peaked by the time he had reached the landing. Not a good time to be having second thoughts, he pondered, while walking into the kitchen hoping for solitude and cup of coffee. His quest was interrupted by the simultaneous arrival of Momma. “What are you doing in my kitchen?” she asked.

“I could use a cup of coffee.”

“No, it is not coffee that you need,” she said, as she opened a cupboard, removed a bottle of aged brandy and placed it on the counter. “Pre-mission jitters. I have seen it many times before and have even experienced it myself.”

“Yeah,” he sighed, I guess you’re right, but something seems different this time, I have

the same conviction but ...”

“You are worried about Svetlana, yes? Don’t be, she is a devil in the field, worry about yourself.”

“No equipment or bullet proof vests this time?” he asked, after downing the entire glass of brandy in one gulp.

“Not worth the risk of getting caught by security. You will get what you need on the other side but,” she said, while reaching into her smock, “here is a little something they won’t bother with.” She handed him a ball point pen that he had carried in his pocket on a previous mission. It contained a small capsule hidden between a two part refill.

“The exit of last resort?” he chuckled, a phrase she had used before his last mission.

“Yes, but we have replaced the cyanide with something more efficient.”

“What is it?”

“Are you sure you want to know?”

“Yes.”

“*Saxitoxin.*”

Speechless, he stared at her with an expression of incredulity, placed it in his pocket and left the room.

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Their seats, scattered throughout the Lufthansa flight’s cabin, afforded them the appearance of anonymity. Momma, however, had carefully chosen those of Weylin and Svetlana

and had placed them side by side. “How thoughtful of Momma to choose these seats,” Weylin remarked, as he checked the closure on his safety belt.

“Do not be fooled by the motherly appearance, her every decision is the product of cool calculation. I suspect she felt that a woman traveling alone would raise some questions,” Svetlana advised.

“How will we get from Haifa to ...?”

“Shush,” she replied, with her finger across her lips, “until we are behind closed doors, there will be no mention of our trip’s destination or purpose. Here,” she added, “take these travel brochures and pretend to study them.”

“Sorry,” he replied, feeling like a child who had just been chided by his mother.

There was no contact from Sascha or the other team members during the initial or connecting flights. Their arrival at Haifa’s Tower Hotel was staggered by design; Weylin and Svetlana were the first to check in.

“Are you serious,” Weylin complained, standing at the front desk, “taking separate rooms will destroy Momma’s plan for the couple image.”

“It was she who made the reservations,” Svetlana whispered, while the clerk checked their passports. “We must maintain the appearance of individuality. It has been a challenge to keep things together with a father and daughter, the equation must not change. At least until our job’s completion,” she winked.

Once secure in the sanctuary of their rooms, Sascha’s orders forbade them to leave. Dinner was provided by the small hotel’s room service. At one A.M. local time, Weylin was awakened by a soft knock on his door. Expecting a surprise visit from Svetlana, he padded to

door clad only in a hotel supplied robe and quickly opened it. To his surprise and dismay, Sascha barged in with a scowl. "I would have expected greater caution from you," he scolded. "If you prize your life you will not be so anxious to greet the unknown."

"I apologize, but I thought ..."

"Yes, yes," he interrupted, "I can imagine what you thought, but now you must listen. Empty your suitcase. There is a couple staying in room sixty-three," he said, while gazing at his wristwatch. "In exactly twenty minutes from now, you will knock on their door three times, then two, then five and wait. It must be as such, or they will not open or worse, they will react violently."

"What then?"

"Say nothing when you enter. Hand them the suitcase and they will fill it with the items necessary for our mission. When they have done so, leave immediately. I have timed each team member's visit precisely, both for their protection and ours."

"OK, and then?"

"You are trying my patience, Weylin. Return to this room and wait. Either I or Svetlana will tell you what to do next. I am awaiting further information from my contact, that is all I can tell you now." He turned and left.

He quickly dressed, dumped the contents of his suitcase on the bed and headed out to find room sixty-three.

Thirty minutes later, he sat on the edge of the small room's bed staring down at the opened suitcase. I'm surprised that the handle didn't break, he remarked to himself, as he inventoried the contents. Here's a strange looking weapon, a Tavor, he pondered, while

familiarizing himself with its mechanism. The remaining items consisted of an Israeli Defense Force uniform in his correct size, five grenades, three stun and two fragmentation, a serrated titanium military knife, miniaturized communications gear, night vision goggles and a holstered pistol. Various and sundry small articles, including tricolored (red, green, blue) pencil beamed flashlights, were attached to a light weight webbed belt. A sealed envelop sat at the bottom of the now empty suitcase. Written on its outside, in small print, were the words *Departure instructions, do not open until Zero hour.*

Prior to their embarkation from Geneva, Momma had purchased an odd collection of clothing from a local second hand shop, making certain that each item was at least one size larger than its new owner was accustomed to. The I.D.F. uniform would be worn underneath.

Two hours later, three-thirty A.M., a series of knocks added to his building anxiety. With Sascha's warning fresh on his mind, he approached the door with caution. There was no peephole; he opened the door a sliver and found an exasperated Svetlana glaring at him through the slit. "Who were you expecting at this hour, the devil?" she asked, with a sharp edge to her voice.

"Your father has already read me the riot act for my lack of caution when he knocked several hours ago."

Frowning as she pushed her way in carrying a small black box, she plopped down on the bed. "Lock the door," she instructed.

"What have you got there?" he asked, while pointing to the box that now exhibited a pulsating red light.

"It is a bug detection device. Now, please be quiet and let me clear this room."

She rose from the bed and waved the device around the room while lifting lamps and tipping the solitary chair. Satisfied that the room was free of listening devices, she put the box in her pocket, approached Weylin and gave him a sexy French kiss. Finally disengaging, she smiled coquettishly. “That is the best we can do until this is all over.”

“I don’t think I can wait that long,” he said, pulling her closer and placing his hands on her buttocks.

“This is serious business, Weylin, we must stay focused. There will be plenty of time later.”

I sincerely hope so, he thought, as she took a seat on the edge of the bed.

“Weylin, are you certain of your decision to join us on this outing?”

“It’s on my behalf, I have to go.”

“Our’s is a world of danger and deceit. Although you have done well on the last two missions, this time could be different.”

“I’m prepared to accept the consequences ...”

“No matter who it may involve?” she interrupted.

They gazed at each other for several seconds in thoughtful silence. “The idea of something happening to you ...,” he said, as his voice trailed off.

“You must accept that possibility, Weylin. I am committed and I cannot, will not let you or my father down!”

“Alright then, what’s the plan?”

She reached into her blouse and withdrew a folded piece of paper on which was drawn a small map of the area surrounding their point of entry into Lebanon. “We will pass through the



Fatima Gate,” she said, while pointing to a spot on the map. “Arrangements have been made for easy passage but we won’t have much time, fifteen minutes at best.”

“The Israeli guards have been bribed?”

“No, they are not the problem, it is Hezbollah that we must fear. They have been told that we are returning loyalists.”

“What about the alternating location issue?”

“One of our team will do the necessary reconnaissance once we have crossed over. We will have twenty-four hours or less to get in and out—alive.”

“When do we leave?”

“We will sleep,” turning to face him, she added, “separately, during the day tomorrow and leave after dark.”

Comparing his recollection of the tourist map with the one provided by Svetlana, he shook his head in disapproval. “We are not going to walk there are we?” he asked.

“Our contact has provided a military vehicle for that purpose but remember, if we are stopped on the Israeli side, present only your I.D.F. papers and do not speak.”

“That’s it?”

“Yes. The remaining details will depend upon the reconnaissance and that is why this mission is more dangerous than the others.” Rising from the bed, she added, “I must go now. Memorize the small map and then destroy it. Oh, by the way, how was the room service?”

“I’m still alive.”

“Let us hope that breakfast, lunch and dinner will be as kind to you; we cannot leave our rooms until hour zero.”

“And when will that be?”

“Twenty-one hundred Zulu.”

“Translation?”

“Nine P.M. local time,” she answered, while shaking her head in disbelief.