

Chapter 41

Night momentarily turned to day, as the symphony of chirping insects was interrupted by a bright flash and a deafening boom. The flashbang grenade had been thrown at the trucks by the sprinting driver. The sentries, as expected, scurried to their vehicles leaving clouds of dust behind as they took off in pursuit of their attacker. Svetlana, already plastered against the darkest side of the two story building, began her climb to the top. “Go!” Sascha shouted, the sound of the blast echoing in the distance.

As Weylin and Sascha neared the front door, two robed figures emerged and scanned the horizon, their automatic rifles held at the ready. “Down!” Sascha hissed. “They are responding to the blast, not us. There is no moon tonight, we are almost invisible.”

“What do we do now?” Weylin said, while in the prone position twenty yards from the door.

“Keep quiet and wait, we want them all inside.”

They lie motionless, their presence unnoticed by the two Arabs standing before the front entrance, blocking the trickle of light that would otherwise mark their existence. Suddenly, several high pitched tones were heard. One of the Arabs reached into his robe, withdrew a

communications device and repeated several words, while laughing and signaling his partner to follow him back inside.

“Good,” Sascha said, “give them a few minutes to get settled and then we go.”

“What about the rest of the team?”

“If there is no other way in, several will penetrate through the side window, the rest will follow our path. Svetlana and the team member who has by now joined her will swing down through the upstairs window. It is our only option, we must catch them by surprise.” Sascha issued several clicks over his headset microphone, a prearranged signal to the rest of the team announcing his imminent entry and requiring them to toss several grenades through the window.

“Now, wait for the blast, then run like hell,” he said.

They ran the short distance to the front door and without stopping, barreled through with their fingers compressing their Tavor’s triggers. Stunned by their concussive impact, the few occupants left standing after the grenades failed to react to the uniformed intruders and succumbed to the ensuing hail of bullets. Sascha quickly turned the bodies face up while Weylin nervously scanned the smoke filled room. “He’s not here,” Sascha shouted, with raw anger.

“He must be upstairs,” Weylin replied, while heading for the staircase.

“No, wait! I hear nothing from above.”

Staring at each other, they listened but nothing was heard. Several other team members had been moving about in the room and Sascha raised his hand. “Quiet, stand still,” he ordered.

Suddenly, the sound of a slow halting stride was heard coming down the staircase. They dropped to their knees, weapons pointed towards the approaching footsteps and then, “Hold fire, clear, clear,” Svetlana shouted, as she reached the ground floor with her team member.

“We heard no sound from above?” Sascha said, anxiously.

“It was deserted,” Svetlana replied.

“But the driver said he heard music and laughter from above?” Sascha questioned.

“From the thick layer of untouched dust, I doubt that anyone has been up there for some time,” she replied.

Turning to face Weylin, Sascha shook his head. “Remember what I once told you,” he snarled with bitterness, “nothing is as it seems.”

“What do you mean?” Weylin asked.

“The driver, he misled us.”

“I assumed that he was a trusted source.”

“Nothing is ever as it seems,” Sascha repeated, as he led the team from the still smoking building.

Once outside, they regrouped in the shadow of darkness to discuss the next phase. “There is only one remaining option,” Sascha revealed. “To our good fortune, we have no casualties. Therefore, we will push on to map grid three. I can only assume that this little masquerade was concocted for the purpose of dissuading any further search for Mahmud.”

“If you are correct,” a team member said, “he has had plenty of time to relocate. Grid three will be empty, or worse, another trap.”

“I disagree,” Sascha replied. “I doubt that they counted on our survival. In addition, my sources have indicated that their relationship with Hezbollah is on shaky ground ... they have nowhere else to go on short notice.”

“How far is it from here,” Weylin asked.

“Less than a kilometer,” Sascha replied, “we will leave now and with any luck, catch them off guard.”

The terrain leading to map grid three, splintered with concrete boulders from destroyed buildings and bomb produced craters, hampered the teams passage and speed. Stopping one hundred yards from the target structure, Sascha signaled for the team to seek cover. He lowered his night vision goggles and turned to face Weylin and Svetlana. “Good news and bad,” he said. “These obstacles will not permit a lightening attack, however, they will provide excellent cover.”

“How can we be sure he’s in there?” Weylin said.

“We cannot,” he replied, while raising his goggles once again to surveil the building, “but take a look at the security, they are surely guarding more than their kibbeh.”

“The national dish of Lebanon,” Svetlana said, responding to Weylin’s quizzical glance.

“You two wait here, behind this boulder,” Sascha ordered, “while I go tell the others of my plan.”

“Without informing us?” Svetlana exclaimed, with a tone of surprise.

Sascha stared at his daughter for several seconds, touched her face and smiled. “I will tell you when it is time,” he said.

With an angry Russian retort, she took a seat on the rock strewn ground beside Weylin. “I did not like this,” she admitted, “he is planning to do something that I would not approve of.”

“You know,” Weylin remarked, while gazing up at the moonless sky, “all those stars and

no street lights—reminds me of my Texas boyhood.” When she did not respond, he moved closer and pressed his body against hers. “I’d like to take you there some day,” he said.

“He is planning to do something by himself,” she said, ignoring Weylin’s remark, “that is the only explanation!”

Realizing, that caught up in her own thoughts she had not been paying attention, he lowered his Tavor and took her hand. “Is that unusual for him?” he asked.

“Yes,” she replied, appearing distraught.

“Let’s see if we can convince him otherwise,” he suggested, while tenderly touching her face.

“We can try,” she answered, “but his decisions are final.”

Sascha returned five minutes later, leaned his rifle against the boulder and sat before them on the ground. “The others are ready,” he said.

“What are you planning to do, father?” she said, between clenched teeth.

“The only thing possible. We cannot penetrate with the building surrounded by guards, I will create a diversion.”

“That’ll be suicide,” Weylin interjected.

“Not if I keep moving and eventually lead them back towards the building.”

“What do you mean?” Svetlana asked.

“With your goggles, you will notice a truck less than one half kilometer away from this site.”

Lifting her night vision glasses, she hesitated then lowered them to her lap. “OK, I see it,” she said.

“I am going to blow it up and run around firing my weapon like a mad man trying to make them believe that they are about to be attacked by a small army.”

“But father, they will see it is only you.”

“I have been watching them closely, they do not have night vision equipment but if they do,” he said, holding up a large chunk of plastic explosive, “they will be blinded when this goes off.”

“OK, then what?” Weylin asked.

“You and the others will have already moved closer to the building. When they hear the blast and the guards run to investigate, the team will penetrate through the front and side doors. Otherwise, the plan is the same as before; they will kill anything that moves.”

“You keep saying *they*, what are *our* orders?” Svetlana insisted.

“You two will remain outside and guard the perimeter.”

“What about you, father?”

“If all goes well, I will lead the guards back towards the building into a prearranged ambush.”

“And who will create this ambush?” Weylin asked, with a grimace.

Sascha leveled a steely glance at Weylin. “I am certain you know the answer to that question,” he replied.

Now crouching, while supporting herself with the Tavor, Svetlana nodded. “It might just work,” she agreed.

“It is time, move in as close as possible without being seen. Oh yes,” he added, as he rose to leave, “when you see me running your way, aim elsewhere.”

Hidden by absolute darkness and the sounds of music and laughter emanating from the building, they waited in a shallow crater twenty meters from six well armed guards. The blast was enormous, filling the night sky with an intensely bright yellow glow. The guards, initially relaxed, came alert with weapons raised. If the explosion failed to get their attention, the sporadic automatic weapons fire that appeared to come from different locations, surely did. The six men guarding the building's front took off towards the truck while six more followed from within. The entrance was left unguarded. All at once, the peaceful calm of their hiding place evaporated, shattered by a barrage of muzzle flashes and the saw like sound of automatic weapons fire. Tension grew as they watched and waited and then suddenly, the front door flew open, disgorging a white robed man who ran off carrying an AK 47. Svetlana, emerging from the crater with catlike agility, took off in pursuit leaving Weylin as the sole perimeter guard. As he watched her disappear into the night, he was distracted by something he saw in his peripheral vision; a flicker of movement coming from the left side of the building. Lining up his Tavor's sight with the movement's approximate locus, he waited. Am I hallucinating, he wondered. No, there it is again. Crawling from the crater, he slowly inched his way towards the left side of the structure. His heart raced and sweat poured from his body as he hesitated to move the short distance that might bring him into contact with the enemy. It's now or never, he said to himself. Quickly and silently he moved towards the source of his fear while assuming a crouched position, Tavor at the ready. A barely visible white robed figure stood not five feet before him peering through a broken window towards the building's interior. In a heartbeat, chaos reigned. As the man turned, raising his weapon, Weylin fired a burst of three rounds into his chest. He fell with a thud. Just then, a wraithlike figure emerged from a concealed ground hatch. Weylin, still facing

the fallen Arab, was not positioned to react and expecting the worst, turned to face his executioner. Standing before him, with a small automatic weapon pointing steadily at his head, was a sinister looking veiled, black robed creature. “Stay where you are,” it said, in perfect English and repeated in what he assumed to be Hebrew.

Overcome with fear, he froze, dropped his weapon and thought, a woman’s voice?

The wraith was not alone. It was quickly joined by a larger companion who, immediately upon exiting the underground refuge, initiated what sounded to Weylin like a heated discourse in Arabic and then, for reasons unclear to him, shifted to English. “What are you waiting for, kill him and get it over with,” the wraith’s companion argued.

“No,” the wraith shouted, “can’t you see that he is I.D.F. The Israelis will trade for him.”

“We don’t have time for that—he has come to kill and so must we. Move away, I will do it.”

Something in the woman’s voice struck a cord. Weylin lifted his head, his face illuminated by the trickle of light escaping from the opened hatch. At that moment, having adapted to the darkness, Weylin detected a look of shock upon the woman’s face as her eyes widened beneath the veil. With great speed, she swung her weapon carrying arm in an upward fashion causing her companion to release his rifle and at the same moment ran towards Weylin. The companion, regaining his balance, recovered the weapon and fired once, missing its intended target as the wraith moved to shield Weylin. He fired again and again, hitting his comrade twice. As she fell, an I.D.F. uniformed team member came sprinting towards them firing on full automatic. The companion flew through the open hatch and disappeared.

“Thanks,” Weylin sighed, as the team member came closer.

“You were not supposed to leave your post,” Svetlana said angrily. “Who is that?” she asked of the veiled figure now lying in his lap.

“She saved my life,” he said, while removing her veil with a horrified gasp. “Oh G-o-d no! Macy!” he howled, as tears rolled from his eyes.

Barely alive, with labored breathing and blood escaping from the corner of her mouth, she whispered, “I said we would meet again.” And she was gone.

As Svetlana fell to her knees to console Weylin, a bedraggled Sascha appeared by their side. “What has happened?” he demanded.

“It is Weylin’s friend, Macy, she died saving his life,” Svetlana replied, as Weylin, thoroughly overcome with grief and shock, continued to cradle his fallen ex-boss and lover.

After offering his sympathies, Sascha gazed off towards the now assembled team members. “The best we can offer her is a descent burial,” he said, “but we must hurry.”

Weylin froze, unable to avert his eyes from Macy’s motionless form. “No,” he shouted, “we have to take her with us.”

“Be reasonable, we cannot cross the border with a dead Arab!” Sascha complained, with growing irritation.

“Then I will do it alone,” Weylin announced.

Sascha threw his hands up in anger while walking to the side of the building and encountering Weylin’s fallen prey. Turning the body face up with the point of his boot, while painting it with his flashlight, he whistled. “Who is responsible for this kill?” he barked.

“It’s mine,” Weylin shouted.

“You have done well. This, my friend, was Mahmud. Alright,” he said with a big sigh, “we have had one casualty, he must be left behind. Svetlana will dress this woman in his uniform and we will carry her with us.”

She rose and followed her father to their fallen comrade and together they began to remove his uniform. “How did you manage to escape from the guards?” she asked.

“It seems they took the opportunity to run, I never saw them.”