



CHAPTER 1

RAMALLAH, ISRAEL

SWEAT DRIPPED FROM ABU FAYYAD'S BROW as he stood at the top of the darkened stairwell and listened. From the hallway below he heard the shuffling of footsteps. A door opened, then slammed shut. Somewhere a baby cried. There was the clank of a pot and the laughter of a child.

Crowded in the stairwell with Fayyad were Ahmed Haniya and Azzam Jubari. Easily half Fayyad's age, they had been recruited a year earlier from an Iranian-sponsored Madrasah in the Palestinian town of Jenin. Brought up on a diet of hate for America and the Jews since the day they were born, the nineteen-year-olds were easy prey for Hamas's recruiters. Since coming under the wing of Fayyad, they had been secluded at a house in the hills north of Ramallah near Bir Zeit, away from family and friends, where they underwent rigorous training in the latest techniques of urban warfare. Now they were ready to put that training to use.

Cradled in their arms, each of them carried a Russian-made Kornet missile loaded inside a self-contained launch tube. Designed as an anti-tank weapon, the Kornet had proven highly effective against a vast array of targets both on the ground and in the air. Its effectiveness and

versatility made it the weapon of choice for Fayyad and his tight-knit group of Jihadists known as Jund Ansar Allah.

Fayyad blinked sweat from the corners of his eyes and looked down the steps at Haniya. “What time is it?”

Haniya took a cell phone from his pocket and pressed a key to light up its face. “Two o’clock,” he replied. “We cannot wait here any longer. Someone will see us.”

Fayyad eased open the door and listened, then quietly pulled it closed. “We must wait for them to arrive. That is the plan.”

From outside came the heavy thump-thump-thump of a helicopter as it circled overhead. Jubari looked up, his eyes wide. “That helicopter is 667?”

“Yes. Israeli Security Service.”

“They will see us when we step outside. They will be watching.”

Haniya smirked. “Did you think they would not be here? It is the prime minister’s motorcade. Of course they are here. Ehud Roham never travels without his security detail.”

Jubari rested his head against the wall and closed his eyes. “Now I am worried.”

Fayyad glanced over at Haniya. “Where is the motorcade?”

Haniya took the cell phone from his pocket and checked the screen for a text message. “They are leaving the airport. South of town.”

Jubari looked back at Fayyad. “How long will it take from there?”

“Not long.” Fayyad patted him on the shoulder. “Take heart. Allah is with us.”

“I do not like waiting. They have helicopters in the air. They have informants everywhere.” He looked down the stairway. “Even here.”

“Stay calm,” Fayyad replied. “This will all be over in just a few minutes. Half an hour from now, we will be far from this building.”

“You sound so certain.”

“We have studied this carefully,” Fayyad nodded. “They are scheduled to begin negotiations at the Mukata’a in thirty-five minutes. The Israelis have arrived precisely on time for every session—in Washington,

Jerusalem, and Cairo. There is no reason to think they will not be on time today.”

Haniya checked a switch on his launcher, then glanced over at the one resting in the crook of Jubari’s arm. “Turn your power to standby.” He pointed. “You do not want to run down the battery.”

Jubari flipped a switch and wiped his hands on his pants. “It is hot in here. Even my palms are sweating.”

“That is your nerves,” Haniya chuckled.

Jubari ignored him and looked back at Fayyad. “Will the plan work?”

“Trust in Allah,” Fayyad replied. “When the missiles go off we will have plenty of time to get down the stairs and out of the building. The car will be waiting in the alley.” Fayyad gave Jubari a somber look. “Just remember your brother. Remember what they did to Saeb. That is the kind of peace the Israelis want. One where they can shoot anyone’s brother, or mother, or sister, at any time, with no one to hold them accountable.”

“They are close to obtaining it, too.”

“That is why we must see that they never reach the negotiating table again.”

Haniya took out his cell phone and checked the screen. “They are coming down Al-Shurafa Street now.”

“Okay.” Fayyad looked at them both. “This is it.” He flipped a switch on the launcher. “Arm your missiles and follow my lead.”

Fayyad pushed open the stairwell door and stepped out on the rooftop. Across the street he caught a glimpse of a soccer field. Farther to the west, down Al Nahdha Street, the buildings of Ramallah’s old city glistened in the sunlight, but he paid them no attention as he hurried across to the parapet wall and crouched out of sight at the roof’s edge. Haniya and Jubari followed close behind and took up positions beside him. Moments later, the squawk of a siren came from the street six floors below. Fayyad looked over at them. “Remember, they will slow as they cross Al Nahdha Square and turn onto Al Qasem. I get the lead

SUV.” He pointed to Haniya. “You get the one in back.” Then he looked Jubari in the eye. “And you get the prime minister. The one with the tiny flag in the corner of the window. Just like we practiced.” Jubari nodded. Fayyad patted him on the shoulder. “Wait until we shoot, but do not hesitate.”

Fayyad turned away and crouched on one knee, his muscles taut and ready. Then, as the motorcade of SUVs passed in front of their position, he raised himself up to see over the wall. In an instant, he sighted the lead car in the crosshairs of the missile launcher and squeezed the trigger. Fire and smoke billowed from the back of the launch tube as the Kornet missile shot through the air. A moment later, it struck the vehicle in the driver’s door and exploded, sending a fireball rolling into the air.

As Fayyad’s missile exploded, Haniya rose from a sitting position and sighted on the last car in line. He pressed the trigger and launched the second Kornet. A stream of smoke trailed behind as it hurtled through the air, struck the side of the car, and exploded.

Fayyad waited a moment, expecting to hear the third missile hit its mark. When he heard nothing, he glanced to the left to see Jubari in tears. “Shoot!” Fayyad shouted. “Shoot the missile.”

“I cannot!” Jubari screamed. “It will not fire!”

Fayyad snatched the launcher from Jubari’s hands, checked to make certain the switches were in the correct position, and raised himself above the wall. Down below he found the prime minister’s black SUV trapped between the two burning vehicles. Through the car’s tinted windows he saw the men inside, frantically pointing and shouting at the driver. Fayyad calmly sighted the crosshairs on the tiny Israeli flag at the corner of the passenger door, and squeezed the trigger.

He waited to see the missile gliding through the air toward its target, but nothing happened. He squeezed the trigger again, then again, but still nothing. Desperately, he lowered the launcher from his shoulder and flipped the power switch to off and back to on, then raised the launcher once more to his shoulder. This time, he squeezed the trigger

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and held it down. Thick, acrid smoke billowed from the launch tube and swirled around Fayyad's head. An instant later, a deafening roar pierced his ears. Pain shot through his head.

Suddenly, Fayyad was engulfed in the orange glow of a searing hot fireball as the missile, still in the launch tube, exploded. Through the flames he saw Jubari and Haniya, their clothes instantly consumed, leaving only raw, burning flesh. And then everything went black.