



SPIRAL OF VENGEANCE

ROBERT MIDDLETON



When a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv kills his family, grief crazed Oscar Jacobs blames the US President, vowing to assassinate him. Rookie FBI Agent Cody Wilson leaves Jackson Hole for Washington, unaware his recent reckless actions in his love life have set off deadly events back in Wyoming. Settling into his position, Wilson investigates a seemingly accidental death, pitching him into a deadly race against time to save the President from a vengeful Jacobs...

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Chapter 1

Friday August 18th 2000 - Tel Aviv, Israel

Sixteen-year-old suicide bomber Mashir Mahmood paused at the side of Allenby Street waiting for a gap in the heavy traffic to cross over to his target, the crowded Shuk HaCarmel market opposite. The afternoon sun beat down, rivulets of sweat running down his back under his clothing and bomb vest. Glancing up at the sky, his eyes narrowed to slits as he used the back of his hand to wipe the stinging sweat away from them.

He tried to calm his shaking by remembering the words of his commander, the Sheikh Bureik, “Mashir you will be blessed as a martyr by God and the people of Palestine will always honour you and your family for your sacrifice. Today you will strike a blow at the heart of our accursed enemy and your action will be one more push in the struggle for justice. Go with God! Have no fears he awaits you in paradise! Remember that he who gives his life for an Islamic cause will have his sins forgiven and a place reserved in paradise.”

The reassuring words reverberated in his impressionable mind calming him. He recalled how that night he had worn a white-hooded burial shroud and lain between the graves at the cemetery preparing for paradise. Then just an hour ago he had made his death speech video; sadness filling him that he hadn’t been able to say goodbye to his parents but he took comfort from how proud they would be of him when they learnt of his heroism against the enemy and how the Sheikh would provide for them.

A gap opened in the traffic and he crossed the road as fast as he could with the weight of the explosives and packed ball bearings in his suicide vest heavy on his chest and shoulders. Urging himself to keep calm he repeated over and over in his mind, Allah is with me! He walked into the throng of people and struggling to keep his balance in the jostling crowd progressed deeper into the market through the packed alleyway.

Hannah Jacobs was a beautiful, raven-haired, woman in her late forties. Even in the thronged market several people paused and glanced admiringly at her as she made her way past the stalls stacked high with produce, a small girl holding on to her hand, so like her, with beautiful long dark hair, brown eyes, and small perfectly formed features.

Hannah made her way towards Mr Hillberg's vegetable stall; she always bought the vegetables grown on his small farm in the occupied territories; he had the sweetest tasting peppers in the whole of Tel Aviv, they were Oscars', her husbands', favourite, well worth the fight to get to the centre of the market.

Heavens it's busy today, she thought, as she steered her daughter Adina through the crowd. It was hot, even for the summer, and people were pressing on each other more than usual but everyone was good humoured, the weekend was fast approaching and like her many people relished the thought of getting to the beach the next day.

Slightly flushed they eventually reached Mr Hillberg's stall. As she leant forward, selecting a particularly beautiful red pepper, someone pushed roughly against her side. She turned in the direction of the push; a young boy was standing close beside her, she began to say 'Sorry...' to him but stopped in mid sentence. The boy looked so ill, sweat poured down his ashen face and he was shaking uncontrollably. She started to say, 'Are you all right...?' He looked at her and she recoiled, his eyes were wide open staring at her blankly, saliva ran down the side of his mouth mixing with rivulets of sweat.

Instinctively she immediately knew who or what this boy was and darting a glance downwards at his hands saw the wire protruding from his right sleeve into his clenched palm. Time stood still, she knew the mortal danger she, Adina, and everybody around her were in, all of them unsuspectingly carrying on with their shopping walking past a living bomb. She looked around for an escape route slowly moving away from the boy being careful to act nonchalant, mustn't scream she thought, don't scare him, pretend I don't know. She edged slowly away, suddenly Adina shouted, 'Mummy, you're hurting my hand!' Hannah froze slackening her inadvertent iron grip on her daughter's hand. She darted a glance at the boy now five feet from her, had he heard Adina shout? She saw he was staring directly at her his eyes wild, he shouted, Allah! Allah! She screamed as looking

straight at her he raised his right hand. The fifteen Kilos of high explosives strapped to Mashir's body exploded with a massive blast hurling a deadly rain of ball bearings with lethal force through the crowded market devastating and shredding everything in their path.

Chapter 2

6th November 2000, Moshe Webach High School, Tel Aviv, Israel

Luke Cohen frowned, the weirdly disturbing sound threatening to shatter his intense concentration. Resisting the impulse to look up he continued clamping the test tube at an angle to the flaming Bunsen burner on the classroom workbench in front of him. All around him his fellow classmates were engrossed at varying stages of the same procedure. Like him, all were aware of the wall clock ticking away the remaining exam minutes. Wiping away a bead of sweat running down the side of his face, he adjusted the heat of the Bunsen flame fearing it was too intense and may ruin his test experiment.

This time the sound completely shattered his absorption, the low pitched wailing breaking through into his consciousness sending the hairs on the back of his neck tingling. His head jerked up, the test tube forgotten, the noise frightening him now, a wail but there was an agony about it. His eyes shot towards the sound at the front of the class where his teacher Mr Jacobs stood facing the pupils. He was leaning back against the blackboard his arms rigid at his sides staring out towards the class, tears running down his lined face, his mouth gaping open with the awful sound coming out of it. The agonised cry grew louder and louder. It was the most anguished sound Luke had ever heard in his young life and the fact it was coming from a grown man shocked him to his core. Tearing his eyes away he looked at the other pupils all now staring in stunned disbelief at their teacher all thoughts of the exam forgotten. For a few seconds he was transfixed then instinctively jumping up he ran from the classroom his mind reeling but his intention crystal clear. Running down the deserted corridor he looked from right to left through the classroom door windows until he saw the one he wanted. Bursting through the door Miss Krabitz looked at him in startled amazement as she rose from her desk at the front. ‘Miss! Miss! I’m sorry its...’ he fought for the words, ‘...its...come quick it’s Mr Jacobs’ he grabbed her hand and propelled her towards the door. Eleanor Krabitz, controlled her

apprehension and mustering as much calm as she could looked back at her startled class ‘Everybody stay here, keep reading that passage!’ She turned and ran out with Luke pulling her arm, an excited commotion erupting behind them.

Thirty minutes later Ariel Lebowitz turned away from his third floor window as the ambulance pulled out of the schoolyard and accelerated into the traffic on Hemger Street. Its siren started to wail, the sound echoing, amplified by the crowded buildings, gradually fading as it drew distant. Wearily he sat down holding his head in his hands, his secretary Ruth sitting opposite using her handkerchief to dab away her tears. She shook her head from side to side, ‘A breakdown? I never expected that, he seemed OK...I really thought he was OK...’ her voice trailed off, glancing up at Ariel his face etched with sorrow and anxiety, she continued ‘He always seemed so strong, but...’ She involuntarily shivered remembering the horror of that day three months ago.

Ariel sighed and looked over at her; in his late fifties he had been the headmaster at the Moshe Webach school for more than fifteen years.

‘Me too, poor Oscar...God, I had no idea...’ He got up and paced agitatedly around the office, ‘I’d have never let him come back to work if I’d suspected he was so ill, but how could we tell? I tried but he didn’t want to talk about it, said he was alright, coping with it, he made it very clear he didn’t want sympathy or...’ He broke off exasperatedly, ‘Now this!'

Ruth composed herself aware she had been rocking from side to side and nodded in agreement, ‘He’s a difficult man, I’ve always found it hard to read him’ she blew her nose loudly.

Trying to get to grips with his mixed emotions, Ariel looked across at her his eyebrows raised in a question, ‘Coffee?’

Noting the change in his tone Ruth got up from the chair and straightening her dress put her handkerchief in her pocket and turned towards the door, ‘Good idea, I’ll go make it.’

Ariel sat purposefully at his desk for a moment but try as he may couldn’t settle, getting up he walked to the window to gaze out over the city pondering his next steps.

Ruth returned with two coffees on a tray, which she set down on the desk. He stood watching vacantly, his mind elsewhere as she

handed him a cup. He stirred the drink deep in thought then said, ‘I’ll give it a couple of hours before I call the hospital and give them the background to all this.’

He’s blaming himself unfairly she thought as she took in his care worn appearance. She had never worked for a kinder, more caring person than Ariel and could see he was feeling at fault for not recognising Oscar was close to having a mental breakdown. She sought to reassure him, ‘We can’t blame ourselves for what’s happened Ariel, not you, not me, not anyone on the staff, he obviously never got over what happened to Hannah and Adina, it just didn’t show, he kept it buried.’

He nodded at her words, glad of them, he couldn’t help feeling in varying degrees, blame, guilt, disappointment at failing to read the signs but he knew well enough that all such feelings were futile, there were consequences and problems to solve now without the distraction of that kind of self indulgence. Finding an inner strength he walked briskly away from the window, his face set, a business-like tone in his voice, ‘You’re right, OK, give the Education office a call, we need a supply teacher to cover his classes for the next couple of...’ his voice trailed off as he rubbed his temples, ‘arrange open ended cover and ask Eleanor if his class had finished their exam, I suspect not so that’ll have to be retaken.’

Ruth drained her coffee and got up glad of the chance to do something constructive.

‘I’ll let the rush hour die down before I go to the hospital. No need for you to stay Ruth once all the arrangements have been made, get yourself home early tonight, I’ll let you know what happens tomorrow.’

She nodded, smiled weakly at him and closed the door behind her.



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