

EIGHT

15 OCTOBER
PARIS, FRANCE

Alayan lounged in the broad, arched doorway of an Art Nouveau apartment house, trying to look more casual than he felt with his heart pounding like a marathon runner.

The target—Dujardin—was across the street in Number 15, an undistinguished turn-of-the-century apartment block over a shabby *phó* café. Vietnamese restaurants and shops lined this down-at-its-heels side street in the 13th *arrondissement*. Walkers were few and in a hurry to get home at this hour, heads down under the evening damp shining on the pavement.

He checked his watch. Just before midnight; Dujardin and the woman had finished their noodles three hours before and disappeared behind the apartment block's twin blue doors. Alayan hoped Dujardin didn't decide to spend the night, although he could understand if the Frenchman did. The woman was a beauty in that fine-boned Vietnamese way, slim and graceful, an odd match for the chunky French Jew running out of borrowed time.

They'd lost momentum on this action. They couldn't afford that. They had a deadline.

Rotterdam and Hamburg had gone so well. Schoonhaven had made things ridiculously easy for them—five days and done, a perfect warm-up exercise. The German woman, Grusst, had been only slightly more difficult because of her erratic schedule; eight days from the start of their surveillance to the moment Gabir flew her down a stairwell at her

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university and snapped her neck.

This was day eleven in Paris, and just thinking about the delay twisted Alayan's insides like a wet towel. Dujardin had been out of the city for the first three days Alayan's men had stalked him, then immersed in a synagogue for Yom Kippur. (Day of Atonement, indeed. Did the Zionists ever atone for what they'd done to his country? His family?) The French architect worked in a home studio and never seemed to come out of it; the building had better security than Alayan was willing to risk. Tonight was the first time he'd come out of his cave. They had to take him down now, even if it meant an all-night wait.

The blue door cracked open, spilling a shaft of warm light from inside. Dujardin edged out, flipped up his coat collar, paused to light a cigarette.

Alayan keyed the radio in his pocket. "Target's out." He'd automatically used French, caught himself, repeated the warning in Arabic. Too much time spent in this city.

"Moving," Ziyad's voice replied.

Alayan glanced to his left. Ziyad's dark shape headed his way on Dujardin's side of the street, lit only by lightspill from windows and the occasional neon sign. Rafiq paralleled Ziyad on Alayan's side. They were blockers, ensuring the target couldn't slip away to the east.

The Jew turned west and began to make his way down the sidewalk toward the Maison Blanche Métro station, just three blocks distant. *Insha'Allah*, he'd never make it. Alayan slid from the doorway, began to follow quietly.

The target strolled past a closed Vietnamese *pâtisserie*, empty trays in the dark window. Alayan stopped, slid the tiny video camera from his pocket, then fingered his radio. "Go."

Sohrab staggered from the deep-set doorway of Number 19, weaved into the sidewalk mumbling a Persian pop song. Alayan focused the camera, held his breath. Dujardin veered left to get around this obnoxious drunk, but Sohrab crashed into him with a grunt. Alayan glimpsed a silver flash in

Lance Charnes

Sohrab's hand. The two men stood together for a moment, until Dujardin melted to the ground. Sohrab snatched the man's wallet from his coat pocket and began to drag him into the nearby doorway.

"Pick us up," Alayan instructed Gabir on the radio. He reviewed the video: dark, but acceptable. His heart stretched, sighed, and relaxed. Another perfect action.

Nine to go.