

The Run

Solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant

Roughly translated as:

They (the Romans) make a wasteland and call it peace.

Roman Historian, Tacitus, in *De vita et moribus Iulii Agricolae* AD 98

Europe and the Middle East



Chapter 1

September, 1973. Donegal, Republic of Ireland

He isn't big.

The kerosene glow of the shaded hurricane lamp glistens off his waders and the open oilskin coat. It floods upwards from the smooth beach stones to highlight his face. With his back to the darkness of the land, he looks young for his years ... and for the power he wields.

'I hope,' his lilting voice breathes the words out slowly, almost cheekily, 'that I am not too much of a disappointment to you.' Beneath his mop of curly locks, he watches the woman – newly-arrived on the shore – and waits with a quizzical gaze for her response.

She gulps ... as if her throat is too dry to speak and flicks a glance at the sound of a gull, suddenly shrieking through the night sky. It soars ghost-like into the inky void, heading towards the dull shapes of the dunes to the north.

Time seems to have slowed.

With her goosebumps prickling, the woman senses the cold Atlantic waves beating their gentle rhythm behind her. She listens, detached, to the latest surge of water swooshing off the rocks and rattling up the shingle beach ... appearing to reach out for her ... only to recoil, as if frightened by the scene just glimpsed so briefly.

A seaweed tang fills her nostrils. She adjusts her beret absently over the long auburn hair, and stares at the Irishman, giving her pulse a chance to settle.

'Padraic Hennessy, I presume?'

His men scuffle and humph past them, up the loose pebble shore, then over the rocks onto the low mossy pads above the tide line. They carry one after another of the heavy crates brought by the inflatable, from which she has just landed.

The muted navigation lights of the mother fishing boat flicker over the wavelets as it rolls at anchor, forty metres or more out in the bay. On-shore,

pencil torch beams show the path of the men, through the gloom, away from the scrunching shingle of the beach and as far as what looks like marram grass hummocks beyond.

The Irishman's cheeks have just started to puff into a grin at her query when a female voice screams – once, only the once – from behind him in the darkened beachhead; followed by the loud crack of a single gunshot slicing through the sleepy night.

Its echo seems to freeze all life into an eerie silence.

Then, as if nothing has happened, the indifferent tramp of steel-tacked waders break the spell, resuming their weary plod up the loose gravel.

Any hint of a smile has dissolved from Hennessy's face. He speaks in barely a whisper. 'These are hard times, Maeve's daughter. Don't be a judge now ... until you understand.'

Chapter 2

June, 2013. Rotterdam, The Netherlands

‘He’d be well into his seventies today – indeed, nudging eighty. That’s if he’s still alive.’ Sven Gulbrandson strokes his chin, between speaking his doubts. ‘And that’s a tall order, given the life he’s led.’

‘True. Very true.’ Arthur Blair acknowledges his partner’s point with a tilt of his jaw. ‘But Padraic Hennessy was always a survivor and this business has the mark of *The Cat*. The Provisional Irish Republican Army days might be gone but the Hennessys of this world always find a new mudhole to play in. Whoever is doing this is trained in those cold callous methods. Our initial clues point towards the Mediterranean ... and to that particular old Irishman, bizarre as it seems.’

Gulbrandson frowns, giving an unconvinced shake of his head. ‘Arthur, I’m wary. You should be too. This brief is so vague – potentially too open-ended, exposing us to public glare. We’ve always operated on the quiet – behind and beyond the formal rules of national governments; focused on establishing specific valid evidence. You understand that better than any of us. It’s been our mantra.’

With a sigh, Blair brushes the back of his finger-nails through his greying hair. Facing the picture window which overlooks the roofs and river docks of Rotterdam, he takes in the late afternoon view from their Maasboulevard headquarters. He always likes the muted tones of grey, mauve, blue and red; especially when they are refreshed and glistening after the recent rain.

‘Doesn’t that burst of fading sunlight just fair lift the colours?’ Blair’s arm swings across the scene, changing the focus of their talk.

The Swede gives a tolerant grin. His colleague’s Scottish dialect can still amuse him, even after all the years of working together. Sven is a former Swedish counter-espionage operative. He and Arthur founded IIB, the International Investigations Bureau, in 2004 as an adjunct to the International Courts of Justice, only a few kilometres away in The Hague. Arthur still retains a substantial public reputation there, from his days as a senior prosecutor of *crimes against humanity*.

Blair turns dramatically, with a lawyer's pleading persuasion. 'Sven, it feels so like the *Mediterranean Run* back in the seventies with Bill Maclean and Maureen Jazy.' Gulbrandson gives a shrug as if trying to dismiss names which he knows are important to his partner, Blair, from the past. 'Hennessy was part of that too, latterly. Maclean only died in 2005. We come from the same stock, the same background. I had many chats with him over in London about his espionage days, long before we formed IIB. We covered those *behind the scenes* agendas. There's a synergy, on several levels. Believe me, this is how it worked back then, and it still is now, for those who have enough ice in their veins to bluff and bully at that high level.'

Gulbrandson meets Blair's eyes, patiently acknowledging their shared understanding. Indeed, in this specialist field of international justice, they learned early about the challenges of high-level manipulation. They are only too well aware of the difficulties in collecting court-admissible evidence against criminals who work across international borders using the restrictive rules of legal ethics to their advantage. It was why they had created IIB in the first place.

Sven's eyebrows lift slowly over his cynical smile. 'I have a vague recollection of reading the files about that British spook and his Mediterranean business.'

Blair grins in mock disbelief. 'C'mon. You've always read everything. I know that. Your famed Viking prescience is not some psychic power ... it comes from you scanning every intelligence brief and listening to all the agents' reports for patterns, coincidences ...'

'My point exactly.' Gulbrandson interrupts. 'We are researchers, Arthur, and listeners, first and foremost – establishing initial irrefutable proof to let the national police response teams take over the more public arrests. The chatter we are hearing at the moment is certainly real, but it doesn't give us grounds to move our agents against a geriatric Irishman; that is, if he is still even alive.'

The Scotsman shrugs, as if he has made his point anyway.

The Swede lowers his head into new contemplation.

Eventually, Gulbrandson's expression indicates that he has sorted through more of his mental records. 'Hennessy's mob of vigilantes ... they had a

notoriety in their time. Even we, in Sweden's counter-espionage section, had heard of them; a watching brief, of course – just in case they linked with our underworld. But, Arthur, they were just one of many Irish gangs, on both sides, who used all that Ulster pseudo-politics-cum-religion as an excuse to run wild.' He scratches his head to jolt a final fact from his memory. 'Didn't they call Padraic, the *Cougar*, back then?'

'They did, Sven. Well remembered. You're good.' Arthur gives an appreciative smile. 'But it was actually a corruption of his Irish Gaelic code name, *An Cogar*, which really means *the whisperer*. He always spoke very quietly – pure danger in a velvet glove; killed with no compunction, for *The Cause*. And now he may be orchestrating his disciples to do the same for current causes.'

Sven stares at the floor again, pondering Arthur's words. 'Perhaps – although I think, perhaps not. I accept your instinct but it's still a hunch, unless we get more to go on.' His head lifts. 'We have our agents in place: Sam Hall is in Cyprus at this moment checking things out and we have a couple of teams ready to move, if and when needed. As we speak, Emma Jazy is bringing her father, Jacques, from Switzerland to Rotterdam to give us some background insights into the thinking of her late step-sister, Maureen. The intel from the usual areas of Israel, Palestine and Lebanon shows their accustomed readiness for a fight. Egypt and Libya are still engrossed in their own problems. Syria and Turkey are the hot spots at the moment.'

The Scot interjects, with a throw-away flick of his hand. 'Bloody Arab Spring – social media inciting the mob into a frenzy at past grievances. You can respect their rebellions but there needs to be some thought into what happens after the dust settles. And Egypt could blow again too.'

'Sure. There's tension ... more than enough sensations to confuse the world press. But I take it that you think they're all missing a much more dangerous agenda.'

'I do, Sven. Indeed, I do. The sense I have is that Hennessy's main game, if he *is* behind this, is not about feeding the world's media with images of riots. This is much more about the quiet fear that numbs people into compliant silence. Given the phone-call to Emma Jazy's father from Hennessy back in 2011 and the *modus operandi* so far, now added to the

background gossip about the *Cat*, it smells of the Irish experience. I know he has made no headlines in decades – that is how he works – but he was involved with Gaddafi and he was there in the Yugoslav conflicts. He knows most of the key resistance leaders in the Middle East. I wouldn't be surprised if he has been quietly stoking fires in Pakistan, Iraq and some of these new revolutionary movements throughout the Arab lands.'

Sven Gulbrandson demurs respectfully again. 'But you're working on intuition, Arthur ... and that Emma is one of our agents. It's too close. We need accurate independent evidence before we make such leaps into action. Sam is already checking out your hypothesis on the ground. I've no problem with having our agents discreetly in place before any others – happy to foster the illusion of prescience for prospective government customers.' He chortles briefly at reputation they have. 'That's why our Bureau is in demand. I'm all for the speculating *but* ... we need to separate the espionage noise from the genuine threats, before the firming up of our plan.'

He glances across at his canny partner for a sign of agreement ... and sees an almost imperceptible patient nod, before he continues, 'So, I'm across the current dramas in the Mediterranean. Cyprus has been flagged but it's more than that – farther north too, if the chatter is right. Give me some context on this Hennessy character then. What did Maclean tell you about him?'

'Okay.' Arthur gives a conceding nod. 'I'll take you through Maclean's perspective. To do that, I'll need to go back to how Bill and Maureen Jazy met in Lebanon in 1973. But ...' he considers for a few seconds. '... this business is really niggling me, Sven. I agree with you ... it's mainly intuition. But ... my gut instinct is that something really big is worrying the European agencies, something much bigger than gangs of thugs.'

'I feel it's about Israel, largely because of Hennessy's phone-call and Maclean's background. There's *noise* in the Adriatic too, and up through Switzerland; even farther north. It's a sense – an Arctic wind moving over the continent, invisible, but there. That's what the chill felt like during the Irish *Troubles*. I remember it well.'

He sighs in frustration, refocusing his attention. 'Alright. Let me give you the feel for Maclean's world of the early seventies. He was, as you know, a

British agent trying to get a handle on the spate of terrorist groups in the Middle East ...'

The Swede's phone vibrates. 'Just hold for a second.' He glances at the small screen. 'Cyprus. I need to check this. Don't lose your thoughts. I'll be back. This might bring some clarity.'

He gives Arthur an encouraging grin as he leaves the room, but the Scotsman is already at the computer screen, face screwed in concentration at the challenge – the bloodhound on a scent, searching for tangible leads around some ethereal threat. Such is the world of IIB.

Chapter 3

June, 2013. Ypsonas, Cyprus

Even as Sven and Arthur have been discussing his task in Cyprus, Sam Hall has been moving silently through the orange plantation just south of the red-roofed old town of Ypsonas, near the port of Limassol.

The air on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus is dry and warm, even in those early twilight hours. Sam's 185 centimetres is bent over in the stoop of a farm worker. His normally blond hair is dyed brown and the artificial tan merges with rough woollen clothes and cap to produce little more than a shadow under the dark foliage of the sprouting citrus.

He carries no mobile phone nor identification of his true purpose. This is to be a verbal briefing from a very skittish local network leader speaking to a contact with links to The Hague.

The meeting place is an innocuous break in the fourth line of trees – the irrigation line must have failed at some point and two trees had died. Without the nourishment from the Kouris Dam, none of the lemons, grapefruit, oranges or table grapes would flow from this area to grace the tables of Sweden or the Czech Republic. Water is everything. It has been so, on Cyprus, since the earliest times – tapping wells into the aquifers. Now, in the modern era, a host of dams irrigate the plantations and recharge the summer water courses downstream, as well as catering for the domestic use of expanding cities.

Sam is early. His large frame merges into the shade and he waits, eyes scanning the tree rows, mind floating between an appreciation of the priorities of this ancient island and the word that a man called Nikkos might have information about the *Cat*.

For two days, he has been slipping stealthily through both the Greek and Turkish parts of Cyprus, trying to pick up scant whispered intelligence from nervous informants. He wants confirmation of rumours – some detail to pursue. Certain sources are keen to enlist a perceived association with the International Courts of Justice, but like so many of the other contacts, there

has been nothing tangible, until perhaps now. Now, he has the name of Nikkos, who would only meet him in this lonely location.

The word, both in Cyprus and from the analysts in Maasboulevard, is that something big is about to happen in the eastern Mediterranean.

That, in itself, is scarcely surprising. Such has been the history of the area for millennia. The early twentieth century had exacerbated the situation as the colonial powers of the Ottoman Turks, Britain and France played their power games, using the local tribes as foils between the armies of empires. After World War II, the creation of the State of Israel had resulted in the displacement of the resident Arab peoples into the remnants of Palestine and neighbouring countries. Terrorist and military activities had escalated to new levels.

A quiet mewling interrupts Sam's thoughts. Perhaps one of the many roaming wild cats – or maybe something else. He replies with a similar call.

A shape moves to the edge of the break in the orange-tree line. Sam steps out slowly too, so that he can be seen.

Almost as a cough, he growls, '*Echates.*' Cats, in English.

The reply comes, '*Poulia.*' Birds.

'Nikkos?'

'*Nai.*' Yes. 'Sam?'

Sam moves over to the break in the line. The light is fading fast, just enough to see a smaller nuggety man, unshaven, cap, loose jacket – but with careful darting eyes.

'I can speak English. Easier for you. No misunderstanding.'

'Thank you, Nikkos. Please start.'

'My word is that there was a man came to Nicosia about two months ago, an old man. May still even be here, on the island. We can't confirm. He has met with leaders over a period, men who were brought to see him one at a time; beys, chiefs, sheiks, resistance group leaders. Our watchers didn't understand what they saw – to join the dots, as you say. But, these are very important men, from across the region. All came in quietly – with only their own bodyguards. None together.'

'To talk about?'

Nikkos juggles his hands to convey his doubts. 'Finance. Alliances. Weapons. Attack?'

'Mmm. Against whom?'

'Israel would be one obvious target. But that has not been said – or at least heard, by any of our people. There is great unrest in many Arab lands. No agreement anywhere. The only common enemy has been America, but maybe some Europe countries too. And there is more. An Arab man, Bashir Dorda, has been found bleeding in a Nicosia street, in the Turkish section, with his tongue cut out and his hands severed. Whoever did it tied tourniquets round his wrists. They intended him to be found in agony but unable to communicate. He died not long after. The word is that he was a spy – an agent, telling tales on the gang. This is retribution ... and a message.'

'Where was the Arab man from?'

'Libya, I'm told. If so, probably, he was a gun runner – been happening out of there for decades. He would be part of some new underground movement on our island – from the Turkish side though.' He spits at the ground. 'Not usually seen but very active, by reputation.'

'You say he was an agent. For whom?'

'I can't confirm anything yet – and it seems odd for an Arab – but they say he was being paid by the *Mossad*.'

'An Arab? Working for Israeli Intelligence?'

'People do many things for money, Sam. They would need sources of information like anyone else. Perhaps it was *Mossad* who finished him off. Who could know?'

'Agents are spying and dying all the time. What's so new about this one?'

'The terror. It is new, Sam. There is a fear in so many people. Dorda was not the first, just the worst so far. All very recent. Since the old man arrived, it seems. Bashings, knifings ... of innocents. Threatened for information and obedience – not killing but vicious cruel. It is not just rumour. It is real.' His quick eyes look behind him as if searching for danger. His hands shake involuntarily for a couple of seconds. 'Whoever is planning this has everyone too scared to *not* be in it ... and too scared to speak, when they *are* in it.'

'We've had terror before, Nikkos. All these splinter resistance groups have been brutal with informants.'

‘Yes, yes. I know. I *live* here.’ He gives a sad patient smile, before continuing with urgency ... to make the man from Holland understand. ‘But this feels different because no-one knows why it happens ... or who is doing these terrible things. Not local, or I would know who they are. Not Cypriot, you understand me? And bad news.’

‘Worse than the drug cartels?’

‘That is my sense.’

‘The police?’

‘They try, but this is bigger than local police. International. Spies. Agents. And quiet fear, like a blanket of dust over the people.’

Sam nods his acceptance of the information. ‘Then you are a brave man for being here. When will it start? And where?’

‘It is strange, what we hear. Is to be in many places. Not just an attack on one country or one group. And when? Soon, I think. Weeks, at most.’

‘What sort of attack? Infrastructure? Iconic buildings? Planes? People?’

‘No word on detail. Only that it will be ... big.’

‘And why?’

‘Why is it always? Payback. Anger. A cause greater than human life. Who knows why? But, in many countries.’

‘Why here in Cyprus?’

The Cypriot shrugs.

‘Who is the old man, Nikkos?’

‘No name. *Cat* is a codename we have heard.’

‘*Cat*? That is all? Is he Arab?’

‘No. I’m told ... European. Could be from anywhere. Even Chechen and Russians are considered Europe here.’

‘The money. From where? Al Qaeda?’

‘I hear it is many sources. South America. Lots of cash for causes there and on-going market for their drugs. Arab funds too, certainly. Many raise money on the web. All hidden behind disguises.’

‘Okay.’ Sam slowly absorbs the significance. ‘Okay. That is all?’ At the Cypriot’s nod, he hands over a bundle of notes and a Dutch call-centre contact number for later. ‘*Ef charisto*. Thank you, Nikkos. Stay low. I will be in touch.’

‘You too, Sam. We need the help of The Hague. This very dangerous, I think. I feel it.’ He rubs his stubbled chin, gives a semblance of a parting wave and disappears amongst the shadows of the tree line.

The scrambled secure line is relayed through a dummy call-centre in Amsterdam to Maasboulevard in Rotterdam.

On it, Sam passes the information from Nikkos. ‘He is worried, Sven, and he’s a tough little man. *In many countries*, he is saying. But no detail, just that Bashir Dorda murder. Well beyond the abilities of the local police, he thinks.’

‘Mmm. The most concerning aspect for me is that this nameless old man was meeting them, one at a time. Why? What’s his game? Is he playing one off against another? If it was for security, wouldn’t he just meet them in different cities? Nicosia doesn’t even have an international airport anymore, after the UN partition from nearly forty years ago.’

‘No answers for that yet but we are here in Cyprus because of the chatter. If Israel is a target, it could be a launching pad for an offensive.’

‘But the Israelis would know that too, Sam. They’d pick up any attack in minutes and blow it out of the water or the air.’

‘I agree, but that’s all we have here at the present.’

‘Sam, the mention of the *Cat* is intriguing me ... and Arthur too. They have nothing more? The *Cat*?’

‘So it seems.’

‘Okay. Leave it with us. Get back here to Maasboulevard as soon as you can. We have planning to do. That tortured man escalates things.’ He pauses, apparently thinking through something. ‘Y’know, Arthur might just be onto something with his theory of the old Irish *modus operandi* revisited.’

‘But Nikkos said it would be big, Sven. Not just in *one* place.’

‘You’re too young to remember the IRA. They hit Britain and all over Europe. Listen for a man called Hennessy.’