

## P R O L O G U E

*Monday, August 18, 2014*

The Saudi prince wiped his coke-coated nostrils and squinted as he strolled out of the Four Seasons Hotel George V in Paris, surrounded by his entourage. The sunlight was a shock, even though he was wearing a head scarf and black sunglasses. He'd been holed up in his cluster of eight suites on the seventh floor—an insult. He deserved the entire floor. Especially considering he was related to the owner, and he was here (partially) on business.

Earlier in the day, he had visited the Saudi Embassy but otherwise kept to the night, frequenting the clubs of the Eighth Arrondissement. Now it was what, 5:00 p.m. on a Monday? Not that weekends meant anything, they were just days to Prince Mishaal bin Abdulaziz al Saud, distant relative of kings but not too distant to matter. Mishaal was a middle-aged, plump playboy who considered himself an aficionado of blow, thirty-year-old Scotch, and \$15,000-a-night prostitutes.

*Your decadence is a perfect cover for action*, his father had said. His father was always saying things like that, trying to turn Mishaal's lifestyle into an asset.

His father, Prince Abdulaziz, was an ambitious man, the seventh son of the second wife of a minor prince who refused

to enjoy the advantages life had afforded him. Mishaal could never understand it. His father had a hundred million dollars and three beautiful wives (in addition to the two ugly ones he'd married for their connections), and yet he worried—about his position, his influence, his legacy.

His younger brother, Farhan, was worse. He cared only about the Koran, wasting his life on prayer rugs in madrassas filled with the desperate poor. Both men could have had anything they wanted, and both chose illusions. His father craved power and his brother piety.

*Better to enjoy life before you die*, Mishaal thought. But instead he was popping antacid tablets, worrying about his father's lack of respect for him.

Maybe respect wasn't such a bad thing, though, especially when you could get it so cheap. Mishaal had smuggled thousands of kilos on his private jet in his life, usually cocaine or Captagon pills. For the first time, his father entrusted him with something important: picking up this briefcase.

*Guard it with your life*, his father had instructed. *And do not open it.*

Mishaal had no idea what was inside, nor did he care. His father finally treated him seriously, that was what mattered most. Young men enjoy being an embarrassment to the older generation, but there comes a time when it's no longer a badge of honor but instead a mark of shame. Mishaal was forty-two.

"Drive fast," he demanded, as his bodyguard opened the door of his rented all-black Mercedes Viano minivan. He slid into the back and laid the metal briefcase beside him on the seat. Ten minutes ago, a group of well-attired men had come to his suites. A trade was made. Five billion in big blocks of cash, €500 notes, for this aluminum briefcase and whatever it contained. It was

only twenty kilometers to Bourget Airport, where his Hawker jet was waiting to take him home to Riyadh.

Already, the ten-car convoy was on the Champs-Élysées, pushing aggressively through the rush-hour traffic. The prince watched absently from the fourth car as the tourists swept past, then the convoy was rounding the Arc de Triomphe and accelerating as it turned toward the Périphérique ring road. All these white buildings, all these stones. The prince thought of blonde girls, and champagne, and his fire-breathing father, who had never availed himself of either. He reached for his cocaine. He could hear the pressure thumping behind his eyes as he snorted, so he closed them and leaned back, feeling the world speed up beneath him, letting himself drift.

He didn't come out of his trance until the Mercedes jerked sideways, causing his head to bump the window. He opened his eyes. They were speeding 120 kilometers per hour, passing cars as if they were standing still. He watched as the driver swerved onto the shoulder following the lead car. It was mesmerizing, almost peaceful, as if the other cars were being pulled backward, allowing them to pass.

And then he saw the black BMW. It had tinted windows with no plates, and it was racing up the left side of the convoy, pausing at each vehicle before punching forward to the next one. It pulled alongside the minivan, artfully dodging traffic, and hovered. Mishaal leaned forward, but all he could see was his own reflection in the BMW's dark windows. He looked like hell, clean-shaven and swollen from self-abuse, until the minivan jerked suddenly and his image disappeared. The convoy was on a local road now. It blew by a traffic light and sped through a working-class neighborhood, nearly clipping a pedestrian.

“Shortcut,” his bodyguard said, but his gun was out.

“Who was—” the prince started, but before he could finish the BMW reappeared, screeching around a corner and blocking the road. The convoy’s lead vehicle slammed its brakes, skidding out of control. The next two cars swerved to avoid hitting each other, and the prince’s Mercedes skidded clockwise as the driver frantically pumped the brakes.

The prince clutched the briefcase as the centrifugal force seemed to lift him in slow motion from his seat. He thought of his father, with his hand raised in anger. He thought of his mother eating oranges and laughing. He thought of the fountain in their courtyard in Riyadh and the taste of beautiful girls. Then his seat belt caught him and snapped him backward, slamming his head into the hard leather seat.

The driver threw the Mercedes into reverse as another BMW swooped in behind them, blocking their exit route. Glass shattered and metal crumpled as the Mercedes smashed into the BMW’s left side. The prince’s head whiplashed, shooting pain through his neck. People were shouting in Arabic and French. The air smelled of burned rubber.

He heard gunfire. He saw his bodyguard turning to fire. He saw the handcuff attached to the briefcase and knew it should have been around his arm, but before he could reach it his bodyguard lunged on top of him, pinning him to the floor. He heard an explosion. He felt his window shatter.

And then the Mercedes was moving, tearing away from the ambush site. The prince could feel the car careening on two wheels as it barreled back onto the highway. They were free. They had escaped. But he couldn’t get up, his bodyguard still on top of him.

Then the minivan swerved sharply, and the bodyguard’s weight lifted. The engine revved as the vehicle jumped a curve

and accelerated down a side street. The gunfire faded behind them. A hand grabbed his shoulder, pulling him up. The prince felt it: lightness. Relief. They had escaped.

The bodyguard slumped forward, dead. The man sitting next to him wore a black balaclava, and Mishaal saw the driver wearing a black ski mask, too. The attackers must have slipped into the car during the firefight, when he was facedown. He had been kidnapped.

*No*, the prince thought. *We're in the middle of Paris in daylight!*

He clutched the briefcase. He saw the handcuff dangling from it like his father's disapproval and snapped it around his wrist.

"*Mauvaise idée*," the kidnapper said calmly. Bad idea. "We'll have to saw it off. And the steel is stronger than your wrist."

The man in the balaclava smiled. All the prince could see were eyes and teeth. "Don't worry. We need your bio-coded fingerprint to open the case, so the hand won't go to waste."

Instinctively, the prince rubbed his wrist. His head was pounding. He tried not to think of his father.

"*Je suis désolé*," the kidnapper said. "Your men flinched . . . once they saw these." He waved his Heckler & Koch MP7 submachine gun with silencer. "I'm afraid you're on your own, Prince Mishaal Abdulaziz. Perhaps it's time to talk? Or will I be needing this?"

It was a bone saw.

A thousand miles away, Prince Farhan's mobile phone was ringing. Not the one in his hand, but the satellite phone. The specially encrypted one given to him by his father, Prince Abdulaziz, head of Saudi intelligence. Only three of its kind existed. His father and brother, Mishaal, held the other two.

He didn't bother to answer it. He knew it was the signal. Two rings. The caller hung up.

*This is it*, he thought, rising from the couch in the lobby of the Four Seasons Sultanahmet Hotel in Istanbul, Turkey. Farhan stood six feet tall, a muscular build with dark beard and eyes. He smoothed his thawb, a long white tunic common to Arabia, and walked toward the stairs. He held out his hand to stop his guards—please, some privacy—and started down.

*I have only minutes*, he thought as he vaulted down the stairs, three at a time. One floor below was a conference room complex. He rushed to the staff door at the far end and darted down a long, tunnel-like hallway. The Four Seasons Sultanahmet was a former prison, surrounded by a dry moat on two sides and perched on a hillside next to the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque. It had several courtyards, but only one entrance for guests. This staff tunnel would exit him a hundred meters from the main entrance.

The satellite phone started ringing as he ripped off his red-and-white-checkered keffiyeh, the head scarf common to Saudi Arabia. The ring seemed louder this time, maybe because of the concrete passageway. Or maybe because he knew it was his father calling, displeased. Farhan powered the phone off; it was too late to turn back. He tossed his keffiyeh in a trash can, followed by his thawb, and pushed open the metal door.

The two janitors smoking outside the employee entrance startled as he banged onto the sidewalk. He ignored them and looked back at the main entrance, scanning the situation. Two doormen were arguing with an Asian woman lugging an impossibly large pile of pastel luggage, especially for the taxi with its trunk open in the middle of the street. A perfect distraction.

He walked the other way. It was one block to the Hagia Sophia. Halfway there, he glanced back. One of his bodyguards

was in the road, trying to help with the luggage. He walked faster. On his second glance back, he noticed the black Land Cruiser pulling away from the curb, lights off. It came toward him, slowly, like a lion stalking prey. When he saw it accelerate past the taxi, Farhan knew they were coming for him. He turned and ran.

He didn't see the crash. He heard the impact, like a car bomb. He smelled smoke. He looked back. The Land Cruiser had been crushed on one side by a small green Renault. His contact was in the Renault driver's seat, body slumped over the steering wheel. The man's courage had bought him time, but he'd also crashed the getaway car.

Gunshots. The prince didn't look back to see who was shooting. He turned and sprinted full speed past a barricade into a small parking lot full of taxis and minibuses. The drivers stared as he passed, cigarettes dangling from their lips. A few shouted, but he didn't slow down as he hit the edge of Sultanahmet Park, where the ancient hippodrome once stood. The Blue Mosque was at one end of the park, the Hagia Sophia at the other, but ahead was a central pedestrian path, wide enough for cars, and two acres of flat ground filled with tourists, roasted corn vendors, and women with their heads covered on their way to prayer.

He heard shots being fired behind him. Tourists scattered in panic; policemen rushed past toward the shooting. He used the shadows and ducked into the nearby building, the pink-and-white-striped Ayasofya Hurrem Hamami, a Turkish bathhouse built hundreds of years ago by the favorite wife of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent.

He hurtled through the entryway and into the central domed sitting area, with its vibrant white ceiling and multistory wooden staircases and inlaid ceramic tiles. Men stood up from the heated marble benches, clearly shocked by a man in clothes.

Farhan heard shoed footsteps chasing him, and he bolted into the steam room, the heart of the bathhouse. Women lay face-down on white marble slabs, some being scrubbed with soapy foam by attendants, some being splashed with water from a shallow wooden bowl. A woman sat at the far end, washing herself. She stared at the prince, letting the water run over her shoulders and down her bare torso, far less ashamed of her nakedness than he was.

He looked away like a good, observant Muslim, and his feet slid out from under him. He slammed into the floor hard, as the men entered, pistols in hand. In an instant, Farhan was on his feet. The first man leveled his pistol at Farhan, but the prince stepped behind a pillar, breaking the gunman's line of sight. Another man lunged for him. Farhan's training kicked in as he sidestepped, grabbed the assailant's arm in a joint lock, pivoted his hips, and threw his attacker into the wall, leaving a red stain on the marble. The first man charged, but this time Farhan was ready, delivering a powerful kick to the man's thigh. The man went down and Farhan pounced, landing a solid punch to the bridge of his nose, shattering it.

The man screamed, holding his bloody nose as Farhan grabbed the man's 9 mm pistol, extra clip, and radio.

Two more men burst through the doorway. Farhan sprinted out the far end of the room, past a row of showers. He emerged into the courtyard at the back of the hammam, with its reflecting pool and snack tables and decadently half-robed people on recliners, taking in the late afternoon sun. There was a wall. He didn't slow down. He bounded up the fountain and vaulted the wall in a smooth leap, but he fell harder than he expected on the other side.

Farhan lay in a heap, expecting a baton to the head, or a gun in the back, but nothing came. He looked around, cautiously,

expecting to see three or four men bearing down on him. There was nobody. Or rather, there were hundreds of people snapping photographs of their loved ones with the Blue Mosque lit up in the evening background, but nobody seemed to notice him. He was just another Arab lying prone on the street.

He hobbled off, his right ankle throbbing. He must have twisted it when he fell. But he had to move. The police would be here . . . or the men trying to kill him, or, worse, his father's men.

He limped into a narrow alley, away from the crowds, and put on the radio's earpiece. They were his father's men, shouting in Arabic. They were on his trail, so he picked up the pace.

He kept going, into a copse of Dumpsters behind a restaurant, hobbling faster. He thought he heard shouting from a nearby alley, but couldn't be sure.

He staggered past a few sleeping dogs and into the old Jewish Quarter. There were shops and crowds, and men urging him to sample their merchandise.

"You walk like a man who intends to buy a rug," someone laughed, grabbing him by the elbow. He ignored the pain and turned the next corner, almost running into two policemen. Over the radio, he heard his father's men searching this bazaar. He ducked into a store.

"A hookah for you? Perhaps a set of decorative plates? Rugs? We have many rugs," the owner said, beckoning to the shop's interior. Neither of them were native English speakers, but it was the modern lingua franca. "We are a family business. We make our own rugs. See." The man pointed at a loom.

Farhan knew that wasn't true. They couldn't make a rug a month on that ancient relic, even if this man knew how to use it. He pushed past the shopkeeper into the pestemal section; the traditional Turkish blankets were stocked all the way to the ceiling.

“Best quality,” the man said, fingering a blue patterned pestemal. “Everything here made in Middle East. All authentic goods.”

Farhan squeezed all the way to the rear of the shop and looked back. He couldn't see the front. He waited. Silence. No one else came into the shop. He pulled a cash roll from his pocket and undid the rubber band. “Do you have a car?” he asked in Arabic, then switched to English.

The man looked at the roll. It was €100 bills. Crisp.

“I am not a criminal,” Farhan whispered.

The man sized up Farhan with a salesman's acumen and nodded. He led Farhan through a curtain that concealed the back portion of the shop. It was stacked with boxes stamped in Mandarin. The man snapped something in Turkish to an old woman dozing in a chair, and then the two men went out the back door and into a closed courtyard full of cats. The man took the prince through another door, apparently a small apartment, also full of cats, and out onto a narrow street. He pointed to a small van.

Farhan handed him half the money. He could hear the drone of the *adhan*, the Muslim call to prayer, starting in the distance. It was joined by a second call from farther away, and finally a mellifluous chanting from the Blue Mosque. Reflexively, Farhan faced Mecca and almost got down on his hands and knees to pray. He had an *urge* to do it, but now was not the time. He had broken his father's trust; he had forsaken his birthright. If he left now, he would be dead to his family. He could never return, not even for his mother's funeral. But he had a more important calling.

“Drive for ten minutes,” Farhan said, as he climbed into the passenger's seat. “Get as far away from here as you can. Then I will tell you where to go.”

The man nodded. “I am not a criminal,” he said, echoing Farhan's earlier words.

“I know.”

“I am a Muslim. We are duty-bound to help those in need.”

“I know,” Farhan said, as the man shoved the money into his robe. “So am I.”

In the port city of Gwadar, Pakistan, a rusty scupper sat unmoored and waiting. The captain, a Methuselah of a man, tossed his cigarette into the water as his satellite phone rang. He looked at his watch. Exactly on time. He answered, but said nothing. The deal was on. He hung up and nodded to the first mate, a man he'd known since they were both children on the docks of their small hometown in the Azores Islands, a thousand miles in the sea. The mate nodded back. The stack billowed smoke and, quietly and efficiently, they headed out to sea.