

## Chapter 1

Nine people witnessed the abduction of Yaniv Meidan from Charles de Gaulle airport, not including the hundreds of thousands who watched the security camera footage once it had been posted online.

The initial French police report described him as “an Israeli passenger, approximately twenty years old”, although a week earlier he had celebrated his twenty-fifth birthday. His colleagues described him as “mischievous”, some calling him “childish”. They all agreed that he was “fun-loving”.

He disembarked, noticeably cheerful, from El Al flight 319. As he left the plane he tried his luck again with the flight attendants, and at passport control he played the fool with the French police officers, who regarded him with blatant hostility before stamping his passport and waving him on.

That is how it had always been. Ever since kindergarten, everyone had forgiven Meidan for everything. He had an exuberant, partly juvenile spontaneity about him which succeeded in charming every employer he had ever worked for, as well as winning over quite a few women, if only for a while. “It’s easy to forgive Yaniv,” a teacher once said to his mother.

Nothing else distinguished him from the other two hundred Israelis who had come to Paris to participate in the CeBit Europe Expo. With a buzz cut and matching stubble, wearing jeans and a T-shirt with the logo of a previous year’s computer fair, he wore the uniform of all young men in a country self-described as a “start-up nation”. In the footage he was seen forever fiddling with his mobile.

He was in his second year as marketing manager of the software

company B.O.R., and that made him the most senior member of the team sent to the event. There were six of them, including him – a small team compared to the other, larger companies. “What we lack in money, we make up for in talent,” he called out to his colleagues, who viewed him with a mixture of amusement and affection.

The baggage claim was in a dimly lit, cramped hall. Meidan picked up the pace of his jokes. The longer they had to wait, the more bored he became, and he ambled to and fro, chatting, drumming against the motionless conveyor belt. He hated waiting. He hated being bored. His success as a marketing manager was directly linked to this quality, his need to inject interest into any given moment.

There was no sign of the suitcases. At one point he began photographing himself in different poses, and uploaded a picture of himself next to the billboard of the Galeries Lafayette department store sticking his tongue out at the nude model, having no thought that the photograph would appear the next day on the front page of the most popular Israeli newspaper, *Yedioth Ahronoth*.

The marketing managers of the rival companies sat down with their laptops and made use of the time to work, rehearsing their presentations for the fair. “It’s all about connecting,” Meidan told his team, and whipped out a Visa card to pull a funny face in front of an American Express billboard.

Suddenly suitcases were shuffling onto the conveyor belt, and their luggage was among the first to appear. “Don’t worry, guys, the fair will be there tomorrow too,” Meidan jeered at the other passengers, and led his team towards the exit with a triumphant swagger.

They passed through the green customs line, he in the lead, his five colleagues in his wake. The automatic exit doors opened at once, and he was met with a row of a dozen greeters bearing signs, chauffeurs waiting for this or that passenger. Half of them looked

like gangsters, but among them stood a breathtaking blonde in a red hotel uniform holding up her sign. Meidan at once approached her, sure that there was time for one last horsing around in front of the guys, just one more opportunity for tomfoolery, and that would be it.

It was 10.40 a.m., Monday, April 16.

## Chapter 2

Meanwhile, in Tel Aviv, Lieutenant Oriana Talmor was being rushed into the special meeting.

It was the first time she had been asked to represent her unit at Camp Rabin, Tzahal's\* headquarters in HaKirya. She looked around in wonder at the huge Israeli Defence Forces compound, while the athletic military policeman who had been assigned as her escort walked briskly ahead. Lieutenant Talmor followed him through a labyrinth of brutalist concrete barracks and futurist glass towers, along roads bearing incongruous names like "Iris Walk" or "Greenfields Lane", towards their destination.

It took twenty minutes and several security checks for them to reach the floor that houses the executive offices of Tzahal's Chief of Intelligence. The lobby was already full of people. They spilled out into the corridor, and a heavy-set major bearing a pile of folders sat himself on the receptionist's desk, all the while ignoring her angry glares.

Oriana found a seat by a window overlooking Tel Aviv. In front of her, a mass of low-rise buildings, occasionally dotted with green, spilled towards the pale Mediterranean coast. The sea was nowhere to be seen, bleached by the sun and eclipsed by residential towers and hotel blocks.

Across the street from the huge military compound people were lining up at gourmet restaurants, riding stylish electric bikes, and exchanging greetings, confidential addresses, family news and vegan recipes. Closer to the gates, a few women dressed in black called

\* A glossary of Israeli military organisations can be found on page 427

for the end of military occupation in Palestinian territories and were politely ignored by the American tourists and Israeli generals disappearing into the shopping mall ahead. By the car park, dozens of stray cats hovered around the dustbins, waiting for the duty soldier to dump the military food waste.

Although she was so high up, Oriana could sense the intensity of it all. Tel Aviv was celebrated now as the coolest city on earth. It was also the only place in Israel she had never really liked.

She moved away from the window and lingered in front of the strange objects displayed on the walls: a cowboy hat, a gift from the then head of the C.I.A.; a sword of pure silver, a present from Zimbabwe's head of security services; a vintage Toblerone poster from the head of Swiss counter-intelligence. She tried to guess what gifts the Israeli Chief of Intelligence had given in return.

At 12 p.m. on the dot, the heavy wooden door opened and everyone filed into the conference room, where the air-conditioning unit was on full blast. Oriana took a seat at the corner of the table close to the door.

A commotion erupted when representatives of intelligence-gathering units moved to take the chairs at the head of the table, while the research department staff loudly exclaimed that seating was pre-assigned. In his early twenties, Oren was the ambitious adjutant to the Chief of Intelligence. Clearly under pressure, he reprimanded both sides indiscriminately. The representative of the naval intelligence division, the only other woman in the room, casually sat down next to the seat reserved for the chairman of the meeting, her white uniform lending her the appearance of a bride on her wedding day. Slipping in through a side door, the head of research, less than impressed, demanded she move aside. From their row of portraits on the walls, the intelligence chiefs of generations past gazed down at the ruckus, secure in their black and white stateliness.

When everyone was finally seated, the adjutant opened with a roll call, a classroom ritual that only added to the childish atmosphere.

“Information security?”

“Here.”

“Air intelligence group?”

“Here.”

“Naval intelligence department?”

“Here.”

The research divisions were called out by number, followed by the intelligence-gathering units, including two that Oriana had not even known existed. No fewer than three representatives from the Mossad were in attendance.

“504?”

“Here.”

“8200?”

He pronounced the name of the unit like a rookie: “eight thousand two hundred” instead of “eight two hundred”.

“Here.”

All eyes turned to her with what felt like overly appreciative glances, some ogling unabashedly. Oren had a different problem.

“This is a meeting summoned by the Chief of Military Intelligence, General Rotelmann. He explicitly asked that the head of 8200’s Special Section be here today.”

“There is no head of section at the moment, Captain. I am the deputy and acting head,” Oriana said. The general’s adjutant was a captain, only one rank above her, but his position conferred on him much more power. Running through her mind was the advice she gave herself at moments like these: “Do not smile apologetically. Do not repeat what you have already said. If they are waiting for you to elaborate, let them wait.”

The adjutant was the first to break. “Lieutenant Colonel Shlomo Tiriani is head of Unit 8200’s Special Section,” Oren said, his eyes scanning the room for the lieutenant colonel. “Are you saying he’s on leave?”

“He was released from duty yesterday,” Oriana said. “His replace-

ment is currently on a training tour abroad. He is expected to take up his duties when he returns,” she said.

“We understood that Tiriani was coming,” the young man said. He had big eyes and lips that formed the shape of an “O” even when they weren’t moving, as if still hungry for the maternal breast. The paratrooper’s wings on his chest completed the image of a child in fancy dress for Purim.

“I regret the disappointment my presence has caused you,” Oriana said. Laughter erupted across the room, but Oren was quick to silence it. He completed the roll call, got up to open an inner door, and called out, “We’re ready.”

## Chapter 3

The scene at Charles de Gaulle Terminal 2 was becoming unmanageable, and Commissaire Jules Léger of the Police Judiciaire wanted the day to be over and done.

His head hurt. Not a muffled headache, not the kind that stays politely in the background; not a hangover type of headache, the kind that's accompanied by comforting memories of the previous night. Not a headache that derives from hunger, heralding hope for a heartening and healing meal. And certainly not a headache that disappears of its own accord within a short while, like after drinking a granita in the summer. No, this was a genuine headache, verging on a migraine, and there were many reasons for it, which Commissaire Léger now tried to articulate to himself.

First, there was the simple and indisputable fact that a passenger had disappeared from one of the most secure locations in France, not half an hour after his flight had landed.

Second, and this was sheer injustice, the scene of the event had fallen under his domain completely by chance. The airport's chief of police was on a week's holiday, and Commissaire Léger had received an order that in the chief's absence he was to preside over investigations at the airport as well. He did not know the investigators around him, and he was not familiar with the scene either. His attempts to organise a semblance of police activity exacerbated his headache: the wail of police sirens outside competed with the noise of the radios inside, and together they pounded mercilessly against his aching temples.

Third, and high on the list of reasons for his headache, two

Israeli officials, who without warning had appeared on the scene, were now demanding to be allowed to participate in questioning the witnesses.

Léger vaguely recognised the one named Chico, an older man with a mop of red hair, not necessarily natural, who was the representative of the Israeli police in Europe. Léger had met him in meetings to discuss the security of Israeli institutions in Paris, but to the best of his recollection he had never requested to be involved in an investigation before.

The other Israeli did not look like a policeman at all. He was tall, in tight black jeans and a white shirt whose price Léger estimated to be more than his monthly salary. Blue eyes gazed out beneath a shock of black hair dashed with white, offset by a horizontal scar on his chin which prevented his face from appearing altogether too gentle for a man. He stared straight past Léger. The commissaire had encountered several of his kind throughout his career, usually in fraud investigations. He was familiar with the Israeli's obscure I.D., a laminated card with a photograph that looked too recent, this one bearing a foreign name and military rank. If Léger chose to believe the card, he was Colonel Zeev Abadi. Léger's urologist was named Abadi too, a fact that did not alleviate his concerns. The emblem of the state of Israel was proudly displayed on the back of the card, with the request, in English and French, that all law authorities across the globe "aid in any way the carrier of this card", whom it defined simply as "Investigator".

"Anyone could make a card like this at home," Léger said, looking up to meet Abadi's eyes. Military, he thought. *Intelligence?*

"I'm in Paris partly by chance," said the mysterious Israeli, and put the card back in his wallet, as if by doing so he had replied to Léger's comment.

His French was slow but precise, almost poetic. "*Un peu par hasard,*" Léger thought, and it was only his headache that prevented him from remembering if it was borrowed from a poem. He

wanted to ask Colonel Abadi – if that was indeed his name – how an investigator could stumble *partly by chance* upon a crime scene thousands of miles from his office, but instead he turned to the airport inspector. “Let’s get them over to their witnesses.”

## Chapter 4

It was soon after midday in Tel Aviv, but you would not have guessed it from inside. There were no windows in the giant hall, which was illuminated day and night by white neon bulbs. The hands of a dozen conflicting clocks, each bearing the name of a distant city, advanced on the main wall. It was seriously cold. Even at the height of summer the soldiers sat huddled in coats, and spent entire shifts rubbing each other's shoulders. Over the years, numerous complaints had been submitted to the ombudsman, but the air-conditioning units kept rattling on: in the central nervous system of Israeli military intelligence, the welfare of the computers came before the welfare of people.

The reports poured in at a dizzying pace, dozens every minute, from every military intelligence unit. In 99 per cent of the cases, the algorithms distributed the reports to the relevant sections without the need for human intervention. In other cases the report appeared on one of the screens, and the soldier had to decide within seconds whether it warranted the shift manager's attention.

The volume of data was enormous. The computers were capable not only of screening the reports but also of determining their level of importance according to the credibility of the source and sensitivity to keywords. They also identified similar reports and linked them, so that at 12.14 p.m., the screens lit up in concert in front of the soldier at Station 23.

To: CENTRAL  
From: HATZAV OSINT Europe  
Priority: Very Urgent/Unclassified

Passengers at Charles de Gaulle airport currently reporting on social media police forces sweeping Terminal 2A (*El Al terminal*, duty officer's comment).

To: CENTRAL

From: El Al/Security/Chief Security Office

Priority: Immediate/Restricted

El Al chief security officer Paris reports possible abduction of Israeli citizen from Charles de Gaulle airport. Further details tk.

To: CENTRAL

From: Police/National Headquarters/Foreign Intelligence

Priority: Immediate/Secret

Israeli police representative in Europe reports Israeli citizen described as missing person by Paris police. Circumstances unclear. Police representative at location with military attaché's representative. Further information as available.

To: CENTRAL

From: Aman/Central Intelligence-Gathering Unit/U.S. Intelligence Liaison Unit

Priority: Immediate/Top Secret

Clearance level: Code Black

French Police canvassing Terminal 2A Charles de Gaulle airport in search of Israeli passenger Yaniv Meidan, approx. 20 y/o, visiting Paris to attend CeBit Expo. Disappeared disembarking El Al flight 319. (*Initial lead is criminal*, duty officer's note.)

The soldier in front of the screen did not take unnecessary risks, and pressed the forward button. Ten feet behind him, on an elevated podium, the shift manager sat in front of a giant screen that covered the entire wall. That day it happened to be a sergeant only days from her release date whose thoughts were fixed on her upcoming trip to the beaches of Sri Lanka.

“It seems criminal to me,” she said.

“Why would a techie be involved in criminal activity?” the soldier said. “The U.S. liaison guys automatically label as ‘criminal’ any event that isn’t Palestinian-related. Does their source even exist, and at that clearance level?”

Most of the reports from the U.S. intelligence liaison unit arrived from American listening posts, usually managed by the N.S.A. How could their duty officer even know whether it was a criminal or security event? The soldier’s question was certainly apt, even if the sergeant would gladly have done without apt questions at that moment. The only questions she longed to hear were: “Would you like a special meal on your flight?” or “Would you like anything from the duty-free cart?”

“What do I need this shit for, forty-eight hours before my discharge?” she said to the soldier, who was sweet and understanding. She smiled at him and pressed the button.

“Executive office, this is Central,” she said into the microphone. “We have a Code Black report for the chief, immediate urgency.” On the top floor of the general headquarters building next door, two soldiers sprang up from their bench and raced downstairs.