


THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

THE SECRET SERVANT

DANIEL
SILVA

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera on a modern, curved metal bridge. In the background, a large, classical-style building with a prominent dome is visible, set against a hazy, sunset-like sky. The bridge's structure consists of a series of parallel metal beams.

'AN ESPIONAGE NOVEL IN THE
TRADITION OF JOHN LE CARRÉ' GO



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The Secret Servant
by
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On present demographic trends, by the end of the twenty-first century at the latest, Europe will be Muslim.

– BERNARD LEWIS

The threat is serious, is growing and will, I believe, be with us for a generation. It is a sustained campaign, not a series of isolated incidents. It aims to wear down our will to resist.

– DAME ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER,
DIRECTOR GENERAL OF MI5

If you send a prisoner to Jordan, you get a better interrogation. If you send a prisoner, for instance, to Egypt, you will probably never see him again.

– ROBERT BAER, AS QUOTED BY
STEPHEN GREY IN *Ghost Plane*

PART ONE

Death of a Prophet

I. Amsterdam

It was Professor Solomon Rosner who sounded the first alarm, though his name would never be linked to the affair except in the secure rooms of a drab office building in downtown Tel Aviv. Gabriel Allon, the legendary but wayward son of Israeli intelligence, would later observe that Rosner was the first asset in the annals of Office history to have proven more useful to them dead than alive. Those who overheard the remark found it uncharacteristically callous but in keeping with the bleak mood that by then had settled over them all.

The backdrop for Rosner's demise was not Israel, where violent death occurs all too frequently, but the normally tranquil quarter of Amsterdam known as the Old Side. The date was the first Friday in December, and the weather was more suited to early spring than the last days of autumn. It was a day to engage in what the Dutch so fondly refer to as *gezelligheid*, the pursuit of small pleasures: an aimless stroll through the flower stalls of the Bloemenmarkt, a lager or two in a good bar in the Rembrandtplein, or, for those so inclined, a bit of fine cannabis in the brown coffeehouses of the Haarlemmerstraat. Leave the fretting and the fighting to the hated Americans, stately old Amsterdam murmured that golden late-autumn afternoon. Today we give thanks for having been born blameless and Dutch.

Solomon Rosner did not share the sentiments of his countrymen, but then he seldom did. Though he earned a living as a professor of sociology at the University of Amsterdam, it was Rosner's Center for European Security Studies that occupied the lion's share of his time. His legion of detractors saw evidence of deception in the name, for Rosner served not only as the center's director but was its only scholar in residence. Despite those obvious shortcomings, the center had managed to produce a steady stream of authoritative reports and articles detailing the threat posed to the Netherlands by the rise of militant Islam within its borders. Rosner's last book, *The Islamic Conquest of the West*, had argued that Holland was now under a sustained and systematic assault by jihadist Islam. The goal of this assault, he maintained, was to colonize the Netherlands and turn it into a majority Muslim state, where, in the not-too-distant future, Islamic law, or *sharia*, would reign supreme. The terrorists and the colonizers were two sides of the same coin, he warned, and unless the government took immediate and drastic action, everything the freethinking Dutch held dear would soon be swept away.

The Dutch literary press had been predictably appalled. Hysteria, said one reviewer. Racist claptrap, said another. More than one took pains to note that the views expressed in the book were all the more odious given the fact that Rosner's grandparents had been rounded up with a hundred thousand other Dutch Jews and sent off to the gas chambers at Auschwitz. All agreed that what the situation required was not hateful rhetoric like Rosner's but tolerance and dialogue. Rosner stood steadfast in the face

of the withering criticism, adopting what one commentator described as the posture of a man with his finger wedged firmly in the dike. Tolerance and dialogue by all means, Rosner responded, but not capitulation. 'We Dutch need to put down our Heinekens and hash pipes and wake up,' he snapped during an interview on Dutch television. 'Otherwise, we're going to lose our country.'

The book and surrounding controversy had made Rosner the most vilified and, in some quarters, celebrated man in the country. It had also placed him squarely in the sights of Holland's homegrown Islamic extremists. Jihadist Web sites, which Rosner monitored more closely than even the Dutch police, burned with sacred rage over the book, and more than one forecast his imminent execution. An imam in the neighborhood known as the Oud West instructed his flock that 'Rosner the Jew must be dealt with harshly' and pleaded for a martyr to step forward and do the job. The feckless Dutch interior minister responded by proposing that Rosner go into hiding, an idea Rosner vigorously refused. He then supplied the minister with a list of ten radicals he regarded as potential assassins. The minister accepted the list without question, for he knew that Rosner's sources inside Holland's extremist fringe were in most cases far better than those of the Dutch security services.

At noon on that Friday in December, Rosner was hunched over his computer in the second-floor office of his canal house at Groenburgwal 2A. The house, like Rosner himself, was stubby and wide, and tilted forward at a precarious angle, which some of the neighbors saw as fitting, given the political views of its occupant. If it

had one serious drawback it was its location, for it stood not fifty yards from the bell tower of the Zuiderkerk church. The bells tolled mercilessly each day, beginning at the stroke of noon and ending forty-five minutes later. Rosner, sensitive to interruptions and unwanted noise, had been waging a personal jihad against them for years. Classical music, white-noise machines, soundproof headphones – all had proven useless in the face of the onslaught. Sometimes he wondered why they were rung at all. The old church had long ago been turned into a government housing office, a fact that Rosner, a man of considerable faith, saw as a fitting symbol of the Dutch morass. Confronted by an enemy of infinite religious zeal, the secular Dutch had turned their churches into bureaus of the welfare state. *A church without faithful*, thought Rosner, *in a city without God*.

At ten minutes past twelve he heard a faint knock and looked up to find Sophie Vanderhaus leaning against the doorjamb with a batch of files clutched to her breast. A former student of Rosner's, she had come to work for him after completing a graduate degree on the impact of the Holocaust on postwar Dutch society. She was part secretary and research assistant, part nursemaid and surrogate daughter. She kept his office in order and typed the final drafts of all his reports and articles. She was the minder of his impossible schedule and tended to his appalling personal finances. She even saw to his laundry and made certain he remembered to eat. Earlier that morning she had informed him that she was planning to spend a week in Saint-Maarten over the New Year. Rosner, upon hearing the news, had fallen into a profound depression.

‘You have an interview with *De Telegraaf* in an hour,’ she said. ‘Maybe you should have something to eat and focus your thoughts.’

‘Are you suggesting my thoughts lack focus, Sophie?’

‘I’m suggesting nothing of the sort. It’s just that you’ve been working on that article since five-thirty this morning. You need something more than coffee in your stomach.’

‘It’s not that dreadful reporter who called me a Nazi last year?’

‘Do you really think I’d let her near you again?’ She entered the office and started straightening his desk. ‘After the interview with *De Telegraaf*, you go to the NOS studios for an appearance on Radio One. It’s a call-in program, so it’s sure to be lively. Do try not to make any more enemies, Professor Rosner. It’s getting harder and harder to keep track of them all.’

‘I’ll try to behave myself, but I’m afraid my forbearance is now gone forever.’

She peered into his coffee cup and pulled a sour face. ‘Why do you insist on putting out your cigarettes in your coffee?’

‘My ashtray was full.’

‘Try emptying it from time to time.’ She poured the contents of the ashtray into his rubbish bin and removed the plastic liner. ‘And don’t forget you have the forum this evening at the university.’

Rosner frowned. He was not looking forward to the forum. One of the other panelists was the leader of the European Muslim Association, a group that campaigned openly for the imposition of *sharia* in Europe and the

destruction of the State of Israel. It promised to be a deeply unpleasant evening.

'I'm afraid I'm coming down with a sudden case of leprosy,' he said.

'They'll insist that you come anyway. You're the star of the show.'

He stood and stretched his back. 'I think I'll go to Café de Doelen for a coffee and something to eat. Why don't you have the reporter from *De Telegraaf* meet me there?'

'Do you really think that's wise, Professor?'

It was common knowledge in Amsterdam that the famous café on the Staalstraat was his favorite haunt. And Rosner was hardly inconspicuous. Indeed, with his shock of white hair and rumpled tweed wardrobe, he was one of the most recognizable figures in Holland. The geniuses in the Dutch police had once suggested he utilize some crude disguise while in public, an idea Rosner had likened to putting a hat and a false mustache on a hippopotamus and calling it a Dutchman.

'I haven't been to the Doelen in months.'

'That doesn't mean it's any safer.'

'I can't live my life as a prisoner forever, Sophie.' He gestured toward the window. 'Especially on a day like today. Wait until the last possible minute before you tell the reporter from *De Telegraaf* where I am. That will give me a jump on the jihadists.'

'That isn't funny, Professor.' She could see there was no talking him out of it. She handed him his mobile phone. 'At least take this so you can call me in an emergency.'

Rosner slipped the phone into his pocket and headed downstairs. In the entry hall he pulled on his coat and

trademark silk scarf and stepped outside. To his left rose the spire of the Zuiderkerk; to his right, fifty yards along a narrow canal lined with small craft, stood a wooden double drawbridge. The Groenburgwal was a quiet street for the Old Side: no bars or cafés, only a single small hotel that never seemed to have more than a handful of guests. Directly opposite Rosner's house was the street's only eyesore, a modern tenement block with a lavender-and-lime pastel exterior. A trio of housepainters dressed in smudged white coveralls was squatting outside the building in a patch of sunlight.

Rosner glanced at the three faces, committing each to memory, before setting off in the direction of the drawbridge. When a sudden gust of wind stirred the bare tree limbs along the embankment, he paused for a moment to bind his scarf more tightly around his neck and watch a plump Vermeer cloud drift slowly overhead. It was then that he noticed one of the painters walking parallel to him along the opposite side of the canal. Short dark hair, a high flat forehead, a heavy brow over small eyes: Rosner, connoisseur of immigrant faces, judged him to be a Moroccan from the Rif Mountains. They arrived at the drawbridge simultaneously. Rosner paused again, this time to light a cigarette he did not want, and watched with relief as the man turned to the left. When he disappeared round the next corner, Rosner headed in the opposite direction toward the Doelen.

He took his time making his way down the Staalstraat, now dawdling in the window of his favorite pastry shop to gaze at that day's offerings, now sidestepping to avoid being run down by a pretty girl on a bicycle, now pausing

to accept a few words of encouragement from a ruddy-faced admirer. He was about to step through the entrance of the café when he felt a tug at his coat sleeve. In the few remaining seconds he had left to live, he would be tormented by the absurd thought that he might have prevented his own murder had he resisted the impulse to turn around. But he did turn around, because that is what one does on a glorious December afternoon in Amsterdam when one is summoned in the street by a stranger.

He saw the gun only in the abstract. In the narrow street the shots reverberated like cannon fire. He collapsed onto the cobblestones and watched helplessly as his killer drew a long knife from the inside of his coveralls. The slaughter was ritual, just as the imams had decreed it should be. No one intervened – hardly surprising, thought Rosner, for intervention would have been intolerant – and no one thought to comfort him as he lay dying. Only the bells spoke to him. *A church without faithful*, they seemed to be saying, *in a city without God*.

2. Ben-Gurion Airport, Israel

‘What are you doing here, Uzi?’ Gabriel asked. ‘You’re the boss now. Bosses don’t make midnight airport runs. They leave that sort of work to the flunkies in Transport.’

‘I had nothing better to do.’

‘Nothing better to do than hang around the airport waiting for me to come off a plane from Rome? What’s wrong? You didn’t think I’d really come back this time?’

Uzi Navot didn’t respond. He was now peering through the one-way glass window of the VIP reception room into the arrivals hall, where the other passengers from the Rome flight were queuing up at passport control. Gabriel looked around: the same faux-limestone walls, the same tired-looking leather couches, the same smell of male tension and burnt coffee. He had been coming to this room, or versions of it, for more than thirty years. He had entered it in triumph and staggered into it in failure. He had been fêted in this room and consoled by a prime minister; and once, he had been wheeled into it with a bullet wound in his chest. But it never changed.

‘Bella needed an evening to herself,’ Navot said, still facing the glass. He looked at Gabriel. ‘Last week she confessed that she liked it better when I was in the field. We saw each other once a month, if we were lucky.’

Now . . .’ He frowned. ‘I think Bella’s starting to have buyer’s remorse. Besides, I miss hanging around in airport lounges. By my calculation I’ve spent two-thirds of my career waiting in airport terminals, train stations, restaurants, and hotel rooms. They promise you glamour and excitement, but it’s mostly mind-numbing boredom with brief interludes of sheer terror.’

‘I like the boring parts better. Wouldn’t it be nice to live in a boring country?’

‘But then it wouldn’t be Israel.’

Navot relieved Gabriel of his leather garment bag and led him out into a long, harshly lit corridor. They were roughly equal in height and walked with the same purposeful gait, but the similarities ended there. Where Gabriel was angular and narrow, Navot was squat and powerfully built, with a round, turretlike head mounted atop wrestler’s shoulders and a thick waist that attested to an affinity for heavy food. For years Navot had roamed western Europe as a *katsa*, an undercover case officer. He was now chief of Special Operations. In the words of the celebrated Israeli spymaster Ari Shamron, Special Ops was ‘the dark side of a dark service.’ They were the ones who did the jobs no one else wanted, or dared, to do. They were executioners and kidnappers, buggers and blackmailers; men of intellect and ingenuity with a criminal streak wider than the criminals themselves; multilinguists and chameleons who were at home in the finest hotels and salons in Europe or the worst back alleys of Beirut and Baghdad. Navot was new to the job and had been granted the promotion only because Gabriel had turned it down. There was no animosity between them. Navot

was the first to admit he was a mere field hand. Gabriel Allon was a legend.

The corridor led to a secure door, and the door to a restricted area just off the main traffic circle outside the terminal. A dented Renault sedan stood in the reserved parking place. Navot opened the trunk and tossed Gabriel's bag inside. 'I gave my driver the night off,' he said. 'I wanted a word in private. You know how the drivers can be. They sit around down there in the motor pool all day with nothing to do but gossip. They're worse than a sewing circle.'

Gabriel got into the passenger seat and closed the door. He looked into the backseat. It was stacked with Bella's books and files. Bella was an academic who specialized in Syria and drifted in and out of government service. She was far more intelligent than Navot, an openly acknowledged fact that had been a source of considerable tension in their long and turbulent relationship. Navot started her car with a hostile twist of the key and drove it too hard toward the airport exit ramp.

'How did the painting turn out?' he asked.

'It turned out just fine, Uzi.'

'It was a Botticelli, wasn't it?'

'Bellini,' Gabriel corrected him. '*Lament over the Dead Christ.*' He might have added that the sublime panel had once formed the cyma of Bellini's remarkable altarpiece in the Church of San Francesco in Pesaro, but he didn't. The fact that Gabriel was one of the world's finest art restorers had always made him the target of professional envy among his colleagues. He rarely discussed his work with them, even with Navot, who had become a close friend.

‘Botticelli, Bellini – it’s all the same to me.’ Navot shook his head. ‘Imagine, a nice Jewish boy like you restoring a Bellini masterpiece for the pope. I hope he paid you well.’

‘He paid me the standard fee – and then a little more.’

‘It’s only fair,’ Navot said. ‘After all, you did save his life.’

‘You had a hand in it, too, Uzi.’

‘But I wasn’t the one who got his picture in the paper doing it.’

They came to the end of the ramp. Overhead was a blue-and-white traffic sign. To the left was Tel Aviv, to the right, Jerusalem. Navot turned to the right and headed toward the Judean Hills.

‘How’s the mood at King Saul Boulevard?’ Gabriel asked.

King Saul Boulevard was the longtime address of Israel’s foreign intelligence service. The service had a long name that had very little to do with the true nature of its work. Men like Gabriel and Uzi Navot referred to it as ‘the Office’ and nothing else.

‘Consider yourself fortunate you’ve been away.’

‘That bad?’

‘It’s the night of the long knives. Our adventure in Lebanon was an unmitigated disaster. None of our institutions came out of it with their reputations intact, including the Office. You know how these things work. When mistakes of this magnitude are made, heads must roll, the more the better. No one is safe, especially Amos. The Commission of Inquiry wants to know why the Office didn’t realize Hezbollah was so well armed and why our

vast network of well-paid collaborators couldn't seem to find Hezbollah's leadership once the fighting started.'

'The last thing the Office needs now is another power struggle and battle for succession – not with Hezbollah gearing up for another war. Not with Iran on the verge of a nuclear weapon. And not with the territories about to explode.'

'The decision has already been made by Shamron and the rest of the wise men that Amos must die. The only question is, will it be an execution, or will Amos be allowed to do the deed himself after a decent interval?'

'How do you know where Shamron stands on all this?'

Navot, by his edgy silence, made clear that his source was Shamron himself. It had been years now since Shamron had done his last tour as chief, yet the Office was still very much his private fiefdom. It was filled with officers like Gabriel and Navot, men who had been recruited and groomed by Shamron, men who operated by a creed, even spoke a language, written by him. Shamron was known in Israel as the *Memuneh*, the one in charge, and he would remain so until the day he finally decided the country was safe enough for him to die.

'You're playing a dangerous game, Uzi. Shamron is getting on. That bomb attack on his motorcade took a lot out of him. He's not the man he used to be. There's no guarantee he'll prevail in a showdown with Amos, and I don't need to remind you that the door to King Saul Boulevard for men like you is one way. If you and Shamron lose, *you'll* be the one who ends up on the street hawking your services to the highest bidder, just like the rest of the Office's washed-up field men.'

Navot nodded his head in agreement. 'And I won't have a pope to throw me a little work on the side.'

They started the ascent into the Bab al-Wad, the staircaselike gorge that leads from the Coastal Plain to Jerusalem. Gabriel felt his ears pop from the altitude change.

'Does Shamron have a successor in mind?'

'He wants the Office to be run by someone other than a soldier.'

It was one of the many peculiarities about the Office that made little sense to outsiders. Like the Americans, the Israelis nearly always chose men with no intelligence experience to be their chief spies. The Americans preferred politicians and party apparatchiks, while in Israel the job usually went to an army general like Amos. Shamron was the last man to ascend to the throne from the ranks of Operations, and he had been manipulating every occupant since.

'So that's why you're conspiring with Shamron? You're angling for Amos's job? You and Shamron are using the debacle in Lebanon as grounds for a coup d'état. You'll seize the palace, and Shamron will pull the strings from his villa in Tiberias.'

'I'm flattered you think Shamron would trust me with the keys to his beloved Office, but that's not the case. The *Memuneh* has someone else in mind for the job.'

'*Me?*' Gabriel shook his head slowly. 'I'm an assassin, Uzi, and they don't make assassins the chief.'

'You're more than just an assassin.'

Gabriel looked silently out the window at the orderly yellow streetlights of a Jewish settlement spreading down the hillside toward the flatlands of the West Bank. In the

distance a crescent moon hung over Ramallah. 'What makes Shamron think I'd want to be the chief?' he asked. 'I wriggled off the hook when he wanted to make me chief of Special Ops.'

'Are you trying to drop a not-so-subtle reminder that I got the job only because you didn't want it?'

'What I'm trying to say, Uzi, is that I'm not fit for Headquarters – and I certainly don't want to spend my life in endless Security Cabinet meetings in the Prime Minister's Office. I don't play well with others, and I won't be a party to your little conspiracy against Amos.'

'So what do you intend to do? Sit around and wait for the pope to give you more work?'

'You're starting to sound like Shamron.'

Navot ignored the remark. 'Sit around while the missiles rain down on Haifa? While the mullahs in Tehran build their nuclear bomb? Is that your plan? To leave the fighting to others?' Navot took a long look into the rearview mirror. 'But why should you be any different? At the moment it's a national affliction. Fortress Israel is cracking under the strain of this war without end. The founding fathers are dying off, and the people aren't sure they trust the new generation of leaders with their future. Those with the resources are creating escape hatches for themselves. It's the Jewish instinct, isn't it? It's in our DNA because of the Holocaust. One hears things now that one didn't hear even ten years ago. People wonder openly whether the entire enterprise was a mistake. They delude themselves into thinking that the Jewish national home is not in Palestine but in America.'

'America?'

Navot fixed his eyes back on the road. ‘My sister lives in Bethesda, Maryland. It’s very nice there. You can eat your lunch in an outdoor café without fear that the next person who walks by your table is a *shabeed* who’s going to blow you to bits.’ He glanced at Gabriel. ‘Maybe that’s why you like Italy so much. You want to make a new life for yourself away from Israel. You want to leave the blood and tears to mere mortals.’

Gabriel’s dark look made clear he had shed more blood and tears for his country than most. ‘I’m an art restorer who specializes in Italian Old Masters. The paintings are in Italy, Uzi, not here.’

‘Art restoration was your cover job, Gabriel. You are not an art restorer. You are a secret servant of the State of Israel, and you have no right to leave the fighting to others. And if you think you’re going to find a quiet life for yourself in Europe, forget it. The Europeans condemned us for Lebanon, but what they don’t understand is that Lebanon is merely a preview of coming attractions. The movie will soon be showing in theaters all across Europe. It’s the next battleground.’

The *next* battleground? No, thought Gabriel, it had been his battleground for more than thirty years. He looked up at the looming shadow of Mount Herzl, where his former wife resided in a psychiatric hospital, locked in a prison of memory and in a body destroyed by Gabriel’s enemies. His son was on the other side of Jerusalem, in a hero’s grave on the Mount of Olives. Between them lay the Valley of Hinnom, an ancient burning ground believed by both Jews and Muslims to be the fiery place where the wicked are punished after death. Gabriel had

spent the better part of his life traversing the valley. It was clear that Uzi Navot wanted him to return again.

‘What’s on your mind, Uzi? Surely you didn’t come all the way to the airport just to ask me to join your plot against Amos.’

‘We have an errand we’d like you to run for us,’ Navot said.

‘I’m not an errand boy.’

‘No offense, Gabriel.’

‘None taken. Where’s the errand?’

‘Amsterdam.’

‘Why Amsterdam?’

‘Because we’ve had a death in the family there.’

‘Who?’

‘Solomon Rosner.’

‘Rosner? I never knew Rosner was ours.’

‘He wasn’t *ours*,’ said Navot. ‘He was Shamron’s.’