

**Gabriel's Trumpet**

**By**

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## Chapter 1

Caesar Casale and Antonio Bertoli were restless. They'd been waiting in the car in the narrow alleyway off Via Rasella for nearly two hours. Caesar glanced at the Rolex on his wrist, a souvenir from a previous mark. It was approaching 1 o'clock. He looked up at the rectangular silhouette of the second storey window above the street. There was no sign of occupancy. When the American did finally arrive home he would have to drive right past them to enter the garage at the rear of the property.

Antonio pulled a small silver case from his suit pocket and placed a cigarette to his lips.

"What do you think you're doing?" asked Casale.

"You know another way? What the fuck does it look like I'm doing? I'm having a smoke."

"Not in here you're not. I don't want to be breathing in your passive smoke, and" Casale waved his hand across the side of his seat, "these seats are leather. I don't want my new leather stinking of your cigarettes. Besides, my wife doesn't like it".

"Your wife doesn't like it? Are you serious?" Antonio shook his head "Maybe you should change your wife."

"I'm thinking about it. Anyway, maybe if you gave it up, you'd live longer?"

"That's bullshit. They've never proved if you quit you live longer. It just *feels* like longer. Besides, there's studies that prove even if you quit, it makes fuck all difference to what's gone into your lungs already. So, I've got nothing to lose now. I'm committed."

Caesar shrugged. "It'll kill you."

Antonio's eyebrows knitted together. "Are you fucking kidding? Have you looked at what we do for a living? Last week it was those six guys in the restaurant. In a fucking restaurant for God's sake! I've got half of Saxony looking for my ass, and now, tonight, we've been sitting in a car for two and a half hours waiting for some guy to come home so we can blow a fucking great hole in his head, and you're worried about inhaling fumes from my cigarette! Would you rather I used this?" He pulled the small Beretta 92 from his suit jacket and attached a silencer to the barrel. "It'll be quicker."

"At least I'd die healthy."

Twin beams of light arced across the windscreen as a small car pulled into the alley in front of them. Caesar and Antonio instinctively hunched low in their seats as the vehicle passed by. The iron gates to the rear of the property opposite hummed as they slowly swung inward. The little hatchback passed through and descended down toward the garage underneath the building. Antonio and Caesar waited until they heard the engine stop. For a moment everything went still. The quiet darkness, briefly disrupted, was once again restored. Then the electric hum of the gates pierced the silence once more and the large iron barriers began to swing closed.

“Ok, let’s go.”

Caesar Casale and Antonio Bertoli slipped silently out of the parked Mercedes and with inches to spare, passed through the closing gates and into the shadowy courtyard of the apartment compound.

They reached the relative cover of a large topiary. Casale raised his hand, the Rolex glinting in the moonlight, and they waited. Moments later a light went on in a second floor window. Casale made a note of which room before they scurried across the courtyard taking up position either side of the front door. Antonio drew the Beretta from his jacket pocket, while Caesar crouched down and inserted a small gun of his own into the keyhole. The electronic pick made short work of the lock housing and with a faint click the door swung open. The two of them crept into the entranceway. A narrow hallway led toward the main living room at the front of the property. To the left of the hallway, facing the front door, a wooden stairway ascended to the bedrooms upstairs. As they reached the foot of the stairway Caesar drew the thin wire from his pocket and looped one end around his wrist for grip. This would be quick and easy, but just in case, Antonio could finish the job. They started slowly up the stairs.

Just then, a phone began to ring in Caesar’s jacket pocket.

“What the fuck!” Antonio hissed.

Caesar whipped the phone from his pocket. An instant before rejecting the call he registered the caller; *Bommarito*.

“Damn it!” He cursed under his breath, scurrying back for the door.

Out in the cool night air he muttered into the phone. “What is it? We haven’t finished the job yet!”

“Another more pressing matter has come to light. When you have finished there I need you to get to Fiumicino. I have another task for you”.

“At the airport?”

“No. Not at the airport, idiot. When you arrive head to the US Airways desk. There will be tickets waiting for you for US Air flight 719 to Philadelphia. I need you and Bertoli for an assignment in America.”

“America? But why...”

“They have found the Trumpet.”

The hum of the dial tone replaced the echo of Don Bommarito's last words in Caesar's ears.

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Dan Messenger's thoughts wandered back over the past week's vacation. It had been nice to unwind with his parents in Chicago and enjoy a break from the craziness of the campaign trail. Outside the cab, the neighbourhood blocks of his childhood rolled by. Streets where once he had played hockey as a youngster in between passing cars. Now, in the grey November twilight a group of teenagers played football in a parking lot in the shadow of Wrigley Field. Through the window the last leaves of fall drifted from the trees, like his memories, in shades of red and gold. They passed by his old high school, where Martin Luther King's 'Dream' had first entranced him in the power of speech to rally the passion of people. Tomorrow in Washington his first day back in the office would officially begin his tenure as Press Secretary for the new President Elect. Despite the election victory, the outgoing administration had made it clear that they had every intention to hold on to power until the last possible moment before the January 20<sup>th</sup> inauguration day ceremonies. In the meantime, Dan was already working through ideas for his new boss' inauguration day address. Martin Luther seemed fitting. The tall black woman from New Orleans had been swept into office on the promise of greater social reform. Now President Elect, Mary Whitman had already scheduled a meeting with her new team for first thing in the morning. Dan leaned over in the back seat and placed the black briefcase that had been sitting beside him on his lap. He carefully turned the little dials of the combination; 8-2-3 then 1-1-3. He flicked back the twin latches, opened the lid and sorted through some of the notes he had begun for the next day's address.

The cab arrived at O'Hare airport and Dan shut the case again, paid the driver, and made his way through the big glass doors toward the American Airlines check in desk. He'd scarcely made it to the end of the queue, and placed both his vacation suitcase and his briefcase of notes down beside him, when he was suddenly knocked sideways, by a large man in a dark

woollen trench coat. Dan instinctively pushed his hands forward to save himself from toppling completely to the ground.

“Oh God, I am so sorry!” The man turned around. “Honey, I’ll have to call you back in a minute”, he said curtly into his mobile phone. The stranger snapped the clamshell shut and placed his own bag on the ground next to Dan’s, freeing up his hands, one of which he now extended.

“Here let me help you, it’s the least I can do”, he said. “God, I really should learn to look where I’m going!”

Dan reached out for the extended hand and pulled himself up from the floor, brushing himself off.

“It’s ok” Dan said. “No harm done.”

“Well, ok, but I am really sorry”, the heavyset man repeated. Now that Dan was standing he saw the man’s cheeks were flushed and he was breathing heavily. He was balding, and beads of sweat were forming around his temples.

“Honestly”, Dan repeated. “I’m fine”.

“So long as you’re ok, actually, I’m in a bit of a hurry myself...got a flight of my own to get to!” The man picked up his case again and disappeared back into the crowd of waiting travellers.

Dan shrugged the incident off and eventually made it to the counter to check his vacation case before retreating to the relative quiet of the American lounge. Inside the retreat of the lounge a TV was playing the late evening news.

“Russia today stepped up its claims to territory in the Arctic, citing that the area, marked on Soviet maps as Russian territory since the 1920s, contains an underwater extension of the Siberian continental shelf. The move has been widely criticised by the current Whitehouse administration, who state the Russian claim aims to gain monopoly control of newly accessible energy reserves underneath the Arctic Ocean and control of the fabled North West passage, which could soon become a reality as global warming contributes to shrinking ice flows. The action has escalated tension on already deteriorating East/West diplomatic relations, sparking fears of reigniting a new Cold War.”

“In other news the death toll is expected to climb, as authorities continue the search for survivors in the aftermath of Saturday’s 8.2 magnitude earthquake in Indonesia...”

Dan's flight was called. He turned from the TV and made his way with a handful of others to the gate.

As he found his seat he looked down at his briefcase. He'd been full of good intentions to make a start on his notes before tomorrow's meeting, but then, would an extra couple of hours really make a difference? Besides, he thought, he was technically still on vacation until tomorrow. He pushed the briefcase into the locker above him and decided to forget about it until the morning.

The plane pushed back and the engines whined into life as it rolled out onto the taxiway. Dan pushed back in his seat. Although it'd only be two hours before he arrived in Washington he might as well get some sleep now. From tomorrow the weeks leading up to inauguration were going to be long ones.

As Daniel Messenger drifted off and American Airlines flight 2357 climbed out of Chicago O'Hare towards an altitude of thirty thousand feet on a calm Sunday evening in America, in the early hours of Monday morning in Rome, a black Mercedes Benz was speeding silently down the Autostrada Roma Fiuminico.

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In his office of the SVR headquarters building in Yasenevo, just outside of Moscow, Dmitri Korsakov put down the phone. The SVR Director was pleased. The call to the Italian had gone well. He suspected little, and soon the Trumpet would be back in Korsakov's hands. Using Bommarito's men would ensure there were no comebacks pointing back to Russian involvement. Furthermore, it would reduce the risk of any further leaks, like the one which had lead to the Trumpet falling from their hands in the first place. This latter thought played on his mind. The agency had been compromised, and hopefully using the Italian would flush out where the hole existed. Still, there could be no mistakes this time. Bommarito's men may not realise the importance of the task at hand, but already Bommarito would be questioning why they weren't just doing the job themselves. Korsakov decided against taking any chances. Let Bommarito's men do the dirty work, but as soon as the Trumpet was recovered they would be eliminated from the picture. This would require a resource he could trust. He would need to assign one of his most experienced operatives. He picked up the secure telephone on his desk again.

“Get me Belobrov.”

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Antonio stood silhouetted in the open doorway.

“What the fuck was that!” He hissed. “How many God damn jobs have we done, and you forget to switch off your fucking mobile!”

“Is it done?”

“Yes it’s fucking done”, he said, replacing the Berretta back into the jacket pocket it had come from, “no thanks to you, motherfucker! Are you *trying* to get me killed?”

“That was Bommarito. He has another job for us.”

“I don’t care if it was the Queen of fucking England, if you pull that shit on me again; I’m not doing it.”

“Shut up. He wants us to go to the airport...now.”

“Now? It’s two in the fucking morning! What the hell does he want us to do at the airport? That must be one hell of a shipment.”

“It’s not at the airport, idiot. He needs us to go to America.”

“America? What the fuck for?”

“They have found the Trumpet.”

Antonio was quiet.

#

Alexander Belobrov crossed the large office in the Lubyanka building until he stood before the solid oak bureau.

“You wanted to see me?”

On the opposite side the SVR Director signalled for him to sit, with a motion of his wrist.

“I have a smoking bolt job for you”, he began. “We need you to recover something, an artefact, of great value to the state. Except”, he continued, “you will not be recovering the item directly.”

He passed a large yellow envelope across the table, and gestured for Belobrov to open it. Inside were a number of photographs, a driver’s license, passport, and travel documents to the US. Belobrov spread three photos of three different men across the desk in front of him and studied them intently. The first photo was in colour. It was of a heavyset balding man with fine purple lines etched across his cheeks. From across the desk the Director placed a finger on the corner of the photograph.

“You may already recognise this one”, he said. “Hershel Rubenstein, Mossad.”

“Mossad, what are the Israelis doing in America?”

“Let’s just say for now that the artefact we are after is also of interest to the Jews. One week ago one of our American operatives picked up information that indicated that Rubenstein was carrying the article which we are looking to retrieve. Unfortunately for us Rubenstein was terminated last week in Chicago, before we could get to him.”

“And this article he was carrying?”

“The article was not recovered. But we don’t believe that whoever killed Rubenstein managed to find it either.”

“How can you be sure?”

“We can’t. But, none of the usual channels have shown any indication that any of the other agencies have found anything. Had they discovered the artefact there would have been a change in their communication patterns.”

“Any idea who got to Rubenstein?”

“CIA, most likely, the Americans themselves are desperate to retrieve the article. And it will be especially embarrassing to them that they have not, if it turns out to be in their own backyard.” The Director continued. “We believe that Rubenstein came across the border from Canada where he would have received the artefact, but was tipped off as to our knowledge of it before we could get to him ourselves. We think that he was trying to deliver it to someone in the US.”

“And these two?”, Belobrov moved on to the remaining black and white photographs, one of an older stocky man with thick jowls and silver flecked hair, the other, a younger slim unshaven man with jet black locks.

“Caesar Casale, forty two years old, from Naples Italy. The other is Antonio Bertoli, twenty eight year old Sicilian.”

Agent Belobrov raised an eyebrow.

“Mafiosos?”

“Correct. They will collect the article on our behalf. Only once they have it in their possession, are you to set up a meeting and take it from there.”

“But if this article is so important, why trust it to these amateurs?”

“These are two of Don Bommarito’s most experienced men. They should be quite capable of recovering the artefact without arousing suspicion. But I never said I trusted them. That is precisely why I need you to take care of things. Rubenstein was tipped off by someone. Until we establish who, I am not prepared to take any further risks. The attentions of the

American organisations eyes and ears have been already drawn to the article. It would be of great embarrassment to them if, on Americas own soil, someone else got to it first. This job will require retrieval of the object from right underneath their noses. If Bommarito's men slip up it will not draw focus to our own activities. Only once they have the artefact are you to take possession. Is that understood?"

Alexander Belobrov nodded.

"And how will I recognise this...artefact?"

Director Korsakov slid open a drawer of the bureau and placed a further colour picture on the table. Belobrov regarded it closely. In the photograph was what looked like an elongated gemstone, except unlike any gem he had ever seen this was about three quarters of a foot in length. This stone also appeared to be hollow and splayed out at its base into a wide funnel shape. The other thing that was odd from the photograph was the way in which the light refracted through the crystal, in a kind of kaleidoscope of different colours.

"It is very beautiful. What is it, some kind of diamond?"

"Not exactly, no. But it is a very rare form of crystal, quite unique...and exceptionally valuable. That is all you need know for now. Very few people have ever seen it. I am only showing it to you now so that you know exactly what it is you are looking for."

"So where is it now?"

"That we are not sure. It is possible that Rubenstein may have hidden it when he became aware of our knowledge of his possession of it. But given its value, and his movements, that seems unlikely. It appears that he was very keen to deliver it to someone."

"Any leads as to whom?"

"We have traced back all the likely connections that would have had contact with Rubenstein in the past seven days, so far without success."

"So we have nothing?"

"Not quite. I said we have exhausted all of the likely connections. There is another possibility. We believe that Rubenstein may have panicked and passed the artefact on to a mule. This person may not even know its value, but from them another associate may be able to retrieve it at a subsequent point."

"Do we have anything on this mule?"

The Director nodded toward the yellow envelope on the table.

Agent Belobrov held it up and shook out the remaining photograph, which had stuck inside.

Daniel Messenger's picture landed on the table.