

THE CURIOUS CASE of
the MISSING HEAD

Jack Rogan Mysteries Book 5

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London: 15 June, 1:00 pm

Partially concealed from the road, Teodora, Silvanus and Aladdin were sitting in a grey delivery van parked in a driveway with a clear view of the two ambulances stationed behind Westminster Abbey. The carefully chosen driveway was in a rare CCTV surveillance blind spot. Nearby, Nadia waited on a powerful motorbike, also with a clear view of the Abbey. Wearing black leathers and a black full-face helmet, it was impossible to recognise her. The others were also dressed in black leathers and had helmets at the ready that they could put on quickly to conceal their faces.

After walking out of Westminster Abbey just before the service began, Aladdin had made his way to the van to join the others. The fateful handshake with Stolfus had started an unstoppable chain of events that was about to unfold, and time was racing. The point of no return had arrived. The next phase, the most critical and risky by far, required them all to work together in unison as there was little room for error. It all depended on speed and precision timing.

Aladdin had managed to climb unnoticed into the back of the van and immediately discarded his disguise. Father Alexopoulos became Aladdin again and he was ready to play his part in the ingenious and carefully crafted plan with many moving parts that would require improvisation and split-second decisions to deal with the unexpected. And they always had to count on the unexpected.

Each one of them was armed with a powerful Glock 18 – a semi-automatic machine pistol and the group's preferred firearm, which they had obtained on the thriving black market through a trusted source in London. Reliable, safe, accurate. While Spiridon 4 always tried to avoid unnecessary violence because it could increase the risks, it was often unavoidable and became a necessary element of the assignment. For that reason, none of them shied away from violence as such, but used it carefully and always with a clear purpose in mind. Any casualties were viewed as collateral damage. 'Shit happens,' Teodora always reminded them; the important thing was not to choke on it.

'Here they come, guys,' said Teodora and started the van's engine. Accompanied by two

armed police officers, the two paramedics were pushing the ambulance stretcher towards the waiting ambulance. The major was walking beside them with a hand resting on the stretcher. 'She knows something's up,' said Silvanus. 'Just look at her body language. She's looking around all the time, watching ...'

'You're right. I had the same feeling standing close to her in the Abbey,' said Aladdin.

'Don't worry, boys, we can deal with her. Don't forget, she isn't armed. No weapons allowed in the Abbey, remember?' Teodora reminded them. 'The more important question here is, who will travel with her in the ambulance? She will obviously go, but will one of the armed police officers go as well?'

'I don't think so,' said Silvanus, shaking his head. 'Their posts are right here.'

'What is she doing?' asked Teodora, pointing towards the ambulance. As the paramedics were lifting the stretcher into the back of the ambulance, the major ran up to a policeman sitting on his motorbike nearby and talked to him briefly.

'Exactly what you would be doing,' said Aladdin. 'She's arranging an escort; watch.'

Moments later, the major hurried back to the ambulance and climbed into the back. The policeman started his motorcycle, pulled out from the kerb and positioned himself in front of the ambulance.

'Did you see that, Nadia?' asked Teodora.

'I did.'

'You know what to do?'

'I do.'

'Can you hear the sirens?' said Teodora, pulling out of the driveway. 'Good luck, guys! Here we go.'

As expected, the London traffic was heavy and despite the ambulance sirens and the motorcycle policeman's best efforts to clear the way, progress towards the nearest hospital was slow. This allowed Nadia and Teodora, who were counting on this, to position themselves directly behind the ambulance. When the ambulance approached a congested intersection and slowed down, Teodora decided it was time to make a move.

Now, Nadia; do it right now! said Teodora and put on her helmet. The others did the same. Nadia accelerated until her bike almost touched the bumper bar of the ambulance, pulled the Glock with silencer fitted out from her vest, quickly took a shot at each of the

vehicle's two rear tyres and then pulled back. Within moments the tyres began to disintegrate, with shredded rubber peeling off the rims. Just before entering the intersection, the ambulance lost control, veered to the left and collided with a parked car. Nadia overtook the stationary ambulance with its siren still going, and accelerated towards the policeman on the motorcycle, who had observed the crash in his rear-view mirror and was slowing down.

The policeman quickly turned his bike around and was now coming towards Nadia. As he was about to pass her, Nadia lifted her gun and shot him twice in the chest. The policeman let go of the handlebars and lost control of his bike, which mounted the footpath, narrowly missed a woman with a pram, and then crashed into a shopfront, the heavy bike coming to rest on his legs. Nadia was certain he was dead and turned her bike around.

'Okay, guys, you know what to do,' said Teodora, carefully watching the chaos unfolding around her. Screaming people on the footpath, broken glass everywhere and the shrill, ear-piercing sound of the siren added to the confusion. Teodora smiled. This was exactly what she had been hoping for. Chaos had always been their best friend.

Silvanus was the first to reach the ambulance. He opened the back doors and pointed his gun at the major. 'Put your hands in the air where I can see them,' he barked. The major did as she was told. She knew this was not the time to make a move, but her eyes kept searching for some kind of weapon nevertheless. By now, Nadia had got off her bike, opened the driver's door of the ambulance and pointed her gun at the two terrified paramedics sitting in the front. She could see they weren't injured. 'You two, get out – *now!* Take the patient on the stretcher out of the back and put him into the van behind us. *Move!*'

Aladdin opened the back doors of the van from the inside just as the two paramedics lifted the stretcher with Stolfus strapped in, out of the ambulance. 'Have a safe trip back to the States, Major,' said Silvanus. 'Stay right here and don't try anything silly. This will be over in a minute.' Then he climbed out of the back of the ambulance and quickly closed the doors from the outside.

The motorcycle policeman wasn't dead. Under his tunic was body armour he had been specially issued with for security detail around the Abbey that day, which had absorbed the impact of the two bullets at close range, badly bruising his chest and breaking a few ribs. He had briefly lost consciousness when he crashed his bike, but he was coming to as the

excruciating pain from his crushed legs, hammered against his brain.

As his eyes began to focus, he surveyed the scene around him. He was only metres from the ambulance and could see the two paramedics wheeling the stretcher with the patient to the back of the van. Nadia was walking along beside them, gun in hand, covering them and looking around.

Slowly, the policeman reached for the Glock he had been issued with for security during Hawking's memorial service. At first, he couldn't release it from its holster because he was pinned down by the heavy bike. But when he turned his body slightly to the left, he managed to free it.

By now the paramedics had reached the back of the van and were about to lift up the stretcher when Nadia moved into the policeman's line of sight. She was now standing directly next to the stretcher with her back towards him. The policeman lifted his gun, his hand shaking, took aim and fired. The bullet hit Nadia in the back and went straight through her heart. With his eyesight fading the policeman fired again, but by now Nadia had fallen forward and collapsed. The second bullet missed her and hit the person on the stretcher instead, embedding itself in Stolfus's chest just as the paramedics were pushing the stretcher into the back of the van.

'Jesus! *She's been hit!*' shouted Silvanus. He could see the policeman lying on the ground under the bike with his weapon pointing towards him. Silvanus lifted his gun and shot the policeman between his eyes, blowing away the back of his head.

'Put the stretcher inside the van and come over here,' shouted Silvanus, addressing the paramedics. He knelt down beside Nadia and felt her pulse.

'What's going on?' shouted Teodora, adjusting her earpiece. 'Tell me, someone! She was reluctant to leave the van with the engine running and have a look herself, thereby jeopardising the getaway and putting everyone in danger.'

Aladdin secured the stretcher, jumped out of the van and ran across to Nadia, lying on the road. The paramedic kneeling beside her shook his head. 'She's dead,' he said.

Silvanus looked at Aladdin, alarmed. 'Let's put her in the back and get out of here – *now!*' he shouted, and slipped his gun into his belt. Aladdin and Silvanus lifted Nadia off the road, lay her in the back of the van and then climbed in beside her. 'Let's get out of here!' shouted Aladdin, slamming closed the back doors of the van.

Tyres screeching, Teodora crossed to the opposite side of the road, mounted the

footpath to avoid traffic, which had come to a complete standstill at the intersection, and then turned into a side street and accelerated, barely missing an oncoming garbage truck.

‘My God, she’s dead,’ whispered Silvanus, cradling Nadia’s head in his lap. That’s when he noticed the blood dripping from the side of the stretcher next to him. ‘He’s been hit as well!’ he shouted, pointing to Stolfus. ‘How bad is it?’

Aladdin leant across to investigate. ‘Difficult to tell. There’s a wound in the right side of his chest. Lots of blood. *What are we going to do?*’

‘We stay calm and proceed as planned,’ replied Teodora, trying to concentrate on the traffic. ‘We go to the warehouse and change vehicles. Then we can have a closer look and evaluate the situation.’ Teodora knew that the next few minutes were critical, as all hell would break loose behind them as soon as the authorities realised what had happened. They had to get to the abandoned warehouse before helicopters were in the air looking for them.

Nadia’s dead, thought Teodora, tears streaming down her face. *Dear God, it can’t be!*

‘She’s gone,’ said Silvanus quietly, climbing over from the rear into the front seat beside Teodora. ‘Stolfus has been hit as well ...’

This is a catastrophe, thought Teodora, her mind racing. They had been in tight spots before, but never one quite this bad. She knew it would take all of her ingenuity, determination and self-control to get out of this one. This was not the time to become emotional. There would be time to grieve later. To steel herself, Teodora thought of that other moment of great tragedy many years ago in Albania. She could see her dead mother lying on the table, her chest wide open with a man leaning over her, holding a scalpel. Then the man’s face swam into focus. The face she would never forget.

Now refocussed, Teodora looked at Silvanus sitting next to her. ‘We’ll make it, you’ll see,’ she said. ‘I still have things to do. Get the first-aid kit ready, we’re almost there.’

****** End of Chapter Excerpt ******

You've just scratched the surface of this chilling medical conspiracy. What dark secrets will Jack Rogan uncover next? The truth is more shocking than you can imagine. Continue the journey in *The Curious Case of the Missing Head*. Get your copy to unravel the mystery.

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