

AN UNEXPECTED HOUR

WITHIN & WITHOUT TIME
BOOK SEVEN

D. I. HENNESSEY

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“What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”

Matthew 24:3

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come,
except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed,
the son of perdition...”

2 Thessalonians 2:3 KJV.

“Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Matthew 24:44

CONTROL

"Gentlemen, I assure you, everything is under control..."

~ Bahal

Colonial Princeton

October 1767...

The morning air was crisp with the promise of autumn. It whipped at Jimmy's coat as he helped unload the last of the barrels from the wagon. Sweat beaded on his brow, but a smile split his face. "There," he grinned, slapping his son on the back, "that's the last of it."

VJ, his face flushed with exertion, managed a weary smile. "Thank you, Pa... And Ma, you too. I don't know how we'd have managed without you."

Anna dismissed his comment with a smile. "It's what family does. Besides," she added with a twinkle in her eye, "You could both use

some help learning the finer points of housekeeping in this new place."

VJ's young wife, Patricia, smiled at Anna's offer with a grateful nod. "I'm eager to learn. I confess, I'm a bit overwhelmed."

The small stone house was sturdy, but looked dwarfed by the vast expanse of untouched forest and open fields beside it. Although it was not far from downtown Princeton, it was a change from being in the heart of the bustling Princeton village that they'd left behind, a place where neighbors were always within earshot and help was never far away.

"Don't worry," Jimmy reassured her. "The land here is rich, and you'll soon have a crop bursting with life. And when winter comes, we'll be close by, just a short ride away." Jimmy and Anna still knew a thing or two about farming, cherishing the idea nostalgically.

As the day wore on, the house began to take shape. Jimmy, with his mechanical aptitude and years of experience with home repairs, quickly fixed a loose floorboard and reinforced the latch on the front door. Anna, a whirlwind of activity, transformed the barren interior. She hung simple curtains of homespun linen, laid out a patchwork quilt on the rough-hewn bed, and filled the hearth with fragrant pine needles.

As the sun began to dip below the horizon, casting long shadows across the road outside, a sense of peace settled over the small family. They gathered around a crackling fire, sharing a simple meal of bread, cheese, and steaming stew.

"To a new beginning!" Jimmy raised his mug of cider.

"To a new beginning!" echoed VJ and Patricia, their voices filled with hope and a touch of apprehension.

Anna watched with a surge of pride. Their son and his wife were young and inexperienced, but they were strong, resourceful, and fiercely independent. They would make a good life here, she knew it. As the flames danced in the hearth, casting flickering shadows on the walls, she imagined the life that awaited them, praying that their home would be filled with the sounds of children's laughter, the scent of woodsmoke, and the quiet rhythm of the seasons. It was a life far

removed from the comforts of their old home, but it would be a life of their own making, a life built on love, courage, and the enduring strength of their faith and family.

Princeton Village

November 1767...

JIMMY AND ANNA sat enjoying a quiet evening together beside a warm fire in the parlor of their Princeton home. It had been just a few short weeks since VJ and Patricia moved to their new house and Jimmy and Anna were adjusting to having no children with them at home for the first time in a quarter of a century. They were enjoying this chapter in their lives more than they'd imagined, especially the opportunity to spoil their two year old granddaughter, Lena Marie's daughter Anastasia, whenever they had the chance.

This evening, Jimmy was feeling nostalgic, as memories of their lives there over the past twenty-six years cascaded through his mind. His time at the college had been rewarding beyond anything he could have dreamed and the friendships he and Anna had forged were truly heartfelt.

The thought of friendships drew his mind to memories of other dear friends from what seemed like another lifetime. He could still see the faces of Mike and Lena, Pete and Angela, PJ and Baibina, and so many others, whose influences had left an indelible mark on their lives. Thoughts of those early years came rushing back as he recalled the challenges of losing his parents and the years he spent in hiding under Athaliah's terrible regime.

As his thoughts jumped from one stream of memories to the next he visualized the hidden springs; smiling as he recalled the days with VJ and his friends carving and preparing the secret passageway. It had already been ten years since he'd located the cavern. Their work on it was now completed and secured.

Of course, there were other memories as well — memories of the

travels that filled his Journal. His heart was stirred as he thought of all he'd seen, knowing the trouble that those coming days would bring to so many of the people he loved.

WITH ALL OF that on his mind, it is not much of a shock when a sudden flash of light changes his surroundings. He finds himself standing beside the open doorway of a smoke filled room, with Radison at his side. He recognizes their surroundings from previous visits; they are in Geneva. The supernatural travelers look at each other in a silent greeting, wondering what new piece of the puzzle would be revealed this time.

THE NIGHT HAS SWALLOWED the city in more than darkness; it lies engulfed in a familiar cloak of shadows and mystery. The city that was once equated with peace now hums with the subdued energy of secret deals, and whispered betrayals. Deep within the labyrinthine halls of power, they spot Bahal, moving like a regal emperor, at home in the corridors of influence and deception. His impeccable charm is the perfect camouflage for his true identity — a master manipulator orchestrating chaos from the shadows.

By now, Bahal has spent years embedding himself within the highest echelons of government and corporate power. He has gained influence serving as a fixer, the kind of man who is called when problems need to disappear, and solutions require more than mere diplomacy. But his ultimate goal all along has been far grander than most suspect — he is a power broker who thrives on the brink of war, pushing nations to the edge and pulling them back; becoming rich from billions in arms sales to all sides as he continues to gain power and influence on the global stage.

The exclusive, dimly lit cigar lounge is at the heart of global diplomacy. Tonight, as they see Bahal step through the door it is clear that

he feels the familiar thrill of the game. Unseen, the invisible travelers follow him inside.

The room seems veiled in a haze of expensive smoke and hushed conversations, a playground for the influential and the corrupt. Bahal has obviously orchestrated this meeting with meticulous precision, ensuring that only the right players are present — those he is sure will unwittingly dance to his tune.

At a corner table veiled in shadows, a small group of influential leaders sit waiting, their faces etched with concern and anticipation. Bahal approaches them with a disarming smile, his eyes gleaming with calculated confidence.

“Gentlemen,” he greets, his voice a smooth blend of sincerity and authority, “thank you for meeting on such short notice. I believe we have much to discuss.”

The German Chancellor, Jensen Krause, glances around nervously before speaking, “What’s so urgent that you had to drag us out here at this hour?”

Bahal takes a seat, leaning forward conspiratorially as he speaks to all three of them. “It’s about the escalating tensions in the Middle East. I have it on good authority that a new player is entering the fray, one that could tip the balance of power dramatically.”

Ashton Knighton, the British Prime Minister looks to the American ambassador, Billy Frost, seated beside him and then at Alain Dubois, the French President; Frost shakes his head, unclear what Bahal could be talking about. The Prime Minister’s brow furrows. “And who might that be?”

“They are a shadow organization,” Bahal replies, his tone grave. “They’ve been financing insurgent groups, destabilizing governments, and now, they’re looking to ignite a full-scale conflict. We need to act before this spirals out of control.”

The leaders’ eyes narrow suspiciously. “And what’s your proposal?”

Bahal leans back, allowing tension to build in the awkward silence. “We need to preemptively strike. Take out their leadership, cripple their resources, and neutralize their influence. It’s risky, but if we don’t, we’ll be facing world war on an unprecedented scale.”

Dubois shakes his head. "It sounds like you're advocating for a covert operation. It is crucial that our countries are not implicated."

"Leave that to me," Bahal says, his voice dripping with assurance. "I have contacts, assets in place. But I'll need your support to authorize the necessary actions."

Knighton, Dubois, and Krause exchange a wary look with Frost before nodding slowly. "All right, Bahal. We'll back you. But understand this: if anything goes wrong, it's your head on the block."

Bahal smiles, a predatory gleam in his eyes. "Gentlemen, I assure you, everything is under control." He lifts the drink that has just been delivered to him in an ad hoc toast, "To our mutual interests."

The others lift their glasses reluctantly with nods that do little to conceal their suspicions. They don't trust Bahal, but know that they can't afford to ignore him either. Bahal smiles, fully aware of their distrust. He knows they need him. Nothing is more intoxicating to him than his growing sense of power and influence.

AS HE LEAVES THE LOUNGE, it is clear that Bahal can barely suppress the exhilaration bubbling within him. He enjoys being the unseen hand, the puppet master pulling the strings. While nations hurtle towards the brink of war, he revels in the chaos he has sown. For Bahal, the thrill of power and the art of manipulation are just pleasant rewards in this dangerous game. His sights are set much higher, on an even greater prize. He can nearly taste it now — unlimited power will soon be in his grasp.

THE SCENE'S UNSEEN OBSERVERS, Jimmy and Radison, share a glance as it fades, soon finding themselves back in Radison's room at the City Mission.

"Tell Badrick what we've seen," Jimmy instructs his young friend. "He needs to get a message to Nyle. Bahal will be making his move soon."

Radison nods with a promise as he watches Jimmy fade from sight.

Lyon, France

Mid April, Current Day...

THE FLICKERING NEON sign of the *Rose des Montagnes* tavern casts long shadows across the old city's narrow streets. Inside, the air is thick with suspicion and the scent of cheap alcohol. This den of questionable repute, far from the spotlight, is the meeting place chosen by Private Eye, Frank DeMassi's contact.

Known simply as "Scorpion," the master of disguise and infiltration slips into the dim booth across from him, his eyes scanning the room for any sign of danger. Frank studies the man's face, a face etched with the lines of a thousand secrets, noticing how his eyes flicker nervously.

"Information... as promised," the man rasps in broken English, sliding a small, encrypted data chip across the table. "Their preparation is almost complete."

Frank carefully pockets the chip. "And the location?"

"It is hidden facility in Damascus. Heavily guarded, of course."

Frank nods, his mind already racing. This may be bigger than he had anticipated. Scorpion is delivering proof of a team of radical insurgents that is being unwittingly controlled by Ghost, Bahal's AI entity. It's another indication that Ghost is quickly gaining in its ability to manipulate entire populations. Before long it would be unleashed upon the world. They have to stop it somehow.

He glances at his watch. Time is of the essence. He has to get back to Nyle and brief him in order to plan their next move. This is probably a suicide mission, but Frank knows how important it is. Ghost is about to awaken, and the outcome could destabilize an already explosive Middle East. The fate of the Middle East, perhaps even the world, hangs in the balance.

As Scorpion slips back into the shadows, Frank makes his way out and hails a cab.

THIRTY MINUTES LATER, Frank climbs into his rental car, reaching for his secure satellite phone to call Nyle.

“Here,” Nyle answers. He has been anxiously expecting the call.

“As good as there,” Frank responds, completing their catch phrase. He is inserting Scorpion’s memory chip into his laptop as he speaks. “I’m uploading the file now...”

Nyle sits staring at the open contents on his screen, including dozens of smuggled photographs and detailed logistics for a blizzard of planned terrorist attacks.

“It looks like Ghost has learned how to be a world class terrorist mastermind,” he notes in awe.

“So much for Ghost being just a teenager,” Frank jabs.

“Yeah, those were the good old days,” Nyle agrees with a sigh.

He sits thinking for a minute... *“The message from Radison said Bahal was using this to increase his power and influence. If Ghost is this involved it’s a sure sign that Bahal is behind it.”*

“I’ll get the team on it,” Nyle vows. *It looks like they’re planning a major move in Damascus.”*

“I’ll book my flight,” Frank says without hesitation.

“This’ll be a dangerous one,” Nyle worries.

“Since when are any of them not dangerous,” Frank observes, matter-of-factly.

Damascus, Lebanon*Days Later...*

THE LIGHTS of the centuries-old city are casting an eerie glow on rain-soaked streets, they are weirdly quiet except for the sound of distant sirens. The amount of rainfall is unusual in this part of the middle east this late in the rainy season.

Frank DeMassi sits in his car, watching the dark scene with the eyes of an experienced detective. His gaze is focused on an unassuming storefront, a small travel agency with posters in the windows that are decades old. His intel tells him that this is the front for a shadowy terror organization called the Black Viper. They're orchestrating something big — targeting key infrastructures to incite war in the Middle East.

His earpiece connects him to Nyle and the Koller team back in Center Springs. Cyber security experts Billy Mansell and Evelyn Carter study the forensic digital data streaming across their screens. They've been searching for the group since being tipped off by Radison. Jimmy's Journal also described the event that Radison and Jimmy saw together — Bahal's secret meeting with powerful world leaders in that dimly lit cigar lounge.

It was Evelyn who uncovered the first whispers of Black Viper — the shadowy organization that has been weaving chaos in the Middle East.

FRANK GLANCES at the screen of his laptop, showing a series of photos and names.

"Otto Nietzick has arrived," he reports, snapping a photo of the man entering the building as he compares it with a picture on his laptop. Nietzick is the group's leader; ex-Russian Intelligence.

Frank's jaw tightens. He has tangled with syndicates before, but this feels different, more insidious. "What's their endgame?" he asks, eyes locked onto the dark storefront.

"Power, control, chaos, money," Nyle replies. *"They're leveraging the instability to tighten their grip on the region and getting rich in the process."*

The street's silence is broken by a rumble of thunder as a fresh downpour falls, drenching the city.

Two more cars arrive. Three men emerge, surrounded by armed body guards.

"Ravana Altham, Aaron Nicholas and Ilipo Svenson," Frank announces, quickly identifying the new arrivals with his powerful zoom lens. "That's all of them. The syndicate's top leadership is all here. They just went inside."

HE HAS NO SOONER SAID this when a **horrendous explosion** rocks the quiet night, sending debris from the storefront in all directions. The blast is so powerful that it lifts the building from its foundation before collapsing in a pile of rubble that consumes the street in front of it. Car alarms are suddenly blaring up and down the street.

"FRANK! WHAT JUST HAPPENED?" Nyle asks, hearing the terrible blast over the line.

Frank's mind races as he puts his car in drive and stomps on the gas. "Looks like a hit, a big one. The whole building is gone," he says. The adrenaline surging through his veins is palpable in his voice.

"Get out of there!" Nyle urges. *"You can't afford to be caught at the scene."*

The sound of screeching tires has already hinted that Frank knows the danger. After a few blocks he slows to a normal speed and blends into traffic on one of the city's busier streets.

"Good thing they don't have cameras here," Frank says with a sigh of relief. If this had happened back in Geneva he would have been seen for sure.

. . .

“SO MUCH FOR our investigation of Black Viper,” Nyle says, wrestling with the puzzle of why it had ended this way.

“This was obviously Bahal’s covert operation,” Frank discerns. “He took these guys out to bolster his own influence. I wouldn’t be surprised if he’s the one behind their efforts in the first place; he set them up.”

“Wow, That’s pretty cold,” Nyle says, realizing that Frank is right.

“Yeah, not exactly the kind o’ guy you’d want running the world,” Frank says with a note of ominous sarcasm.



Watch for,

An Unexpected Hour

Within & Without Time Book 7

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