

YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED...

A red-tinted cityscape at night, likely New York City, with the Empire State Building prominent on the right. In the foreground, a person in a dark coat stands on a rooftop ledge, looking out over the city.

# ULTIMATUM

# SIMON KERNICK

THE *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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## About the Book

**A THREAT HAS BEEN MADE.**

**AN ULTIMATUM DELIVERED.**

**INNOCENT PEOPLE ARE IN MORTAL DANGER.**

8am: an explosion blasts through a cafe in central London.

Minutes later a call is made to a local radio station:

‘We’ve just detonated a bomb. Another will explode shortly.

The British Government has until 8pm tonight to meet all our demands, or a far greater attack will take place somewhere in the country that will bring fire down on all your heads.

You have been warned ...’

## About the Author

**Simon Kernick** is one of Britain's most exciting thriller writers. He arrived on the scene with his highly acclaimed début novel, *The Business of Dying*, which introduced Dennis Milne, a corrupt cop moonlighting as a hitman. His big breakthrough came with his novel *Relentless*, which was selected by Richard and Judy for their Recommended Summer Reads promotion and rapidly went on to become the bestselling thriller of 2007. His most recent thriller is *Siege*

Simon's research is what makes his thrillers so authentic. He talks both on and off the record to members of the Met's Special Branch and Anti-Terrorist Branch and the Serious Organised Crime Agency, so he gets to hear first-hand what actually happens in the dark and murky underbelly of UK crime.

To find out more about his thrillers, visit:

[www.simonkernick.com](http://www.simonkernick.com)

[www.facebook.com/SimonKernick](http://www.facebook.com/SimonKernick)

[twitter.com/simonkernick](http://twitter.com/simonkernick)

*Also by Simon Kernick*

The Business of Dying

The Murder Exchange

The Crime Trade

A Good Day to Die

Relentless

Severed

Deadline

Target

The Last 10 Seconds

The Payback

Siege

Wrong Time, Wrong Place (available 1st February 2013)

For more information on Simon Kernick and his books,  
please visit:

[www.simonkernick.com](http://www.simonkernick.com)

# Ultimatum

SIMON KERNICK



arrow books



For my daughters, Amy and Rachel.

# One

## 07.25

HIS WHOLE WORLD collapsed exactly three seconds after the door opened.

In the first second, her pale, beautiful face peered through the gap, then disappeared as she moved aside to let him in. The next second saw him walking into the cramped front room and, with a rather foolish flourish, lifting up the small bunch of petrol station flowers he'd brought her. And the third was when the man in the hood appeared out of the shadows to his left and pointed a gun at his head while Mika closed the door, plunging the room into semi-darkness.

'What's going on?' asked Akhtar Mohammed in a voice several octaves higher than usual. 'Take my money, but—'

'Sit down and shut your mouth.'

Akhtar stole a glance at Mika – his beloved Mika. She was standing in the middle of the room in just a nightdress, her pale skin almost translucent in the dim light, her face set fast in an expression of pure fear. Tears ran down her cheeks and Akhtar wanted to reach out and hold her, tell her that everything was all right, but the gunman grabbed him roughly by the back of his shirt and shoved him towards the nearest chair.

'I said, sit down.'

Akhtar stumbled into the seat and turned to his assailant, putting his hands in the air so that the other man knew he wasn't going to do anything stupid. He was neither a brave man nor a foolhardy one, and he was fully

aware that the only way he was going to get out of here was by cooperating.

The gunman stepped towards him and pushed the barrel of the gun against the side of his head. It felt cold and hard, and Akhtar swallowed. Was this some kind of divine punishment for his adultery? If it was, then he prayed God would be merciful. He'd never intended to hurt his wife or his children, nor to bring shame down on his family's head.

'I don't want any trouble,' he said, conscious of the fear in his voice.

'I'm going to give you a task, Mr Mohammed,' answered the gunman in a tone that was worryingly calm.

His accent was English, so Akhtar knew he wasn't Mika's pimp. So who on earth was he? And how did he know who he was? Even Mika didn't know his last name.

'If you carry it out as instructed, you'll be free to go and you'll never hear from me again. If you fail to do what you're told, however, I will kill your girlfriend here. Slowly, and very painfully.'

Mika gasped. She was still standing in the middle of the room, unmoving, and Akhtar wondered why she didn't try to escape. Then he saw the restraints round each of her ankles, separated by barely a foot of thick chain, and he realized she was as helpless as he was. He gave her a small, hopeful smile and she stared back at him with those big oval eyes of hers that had so bewitched him in the first place, and he wished by all that was holy that he'd never met her.

'And just in case Mika dying slowly isn't enough to motivate you,' continued the gunman, still keeping the gun pushed down on Akhtar's head, 'there's this.'

He held out a remote control and switched on the TV. For a couple of seconds the screen was blank and then an image of two people having sex on an unmade bed appeared – the woman on all fours facing the camera, the man kneeling behind her, his eyes closed. The gunman

pressed another button and the couple began moving frantically on the screen, their joyful moans filling the room.

Akhtar cringed as he recognized himself. Had Mika set this all up? Had she hidden a camera when they'd been making love? He looked up at her and she shook her head silently. This was nothing to do with her.

The gunman switched off the TV and the room fell quiet once again. 'I have more than an hour of footage taken on three separate occasions, showing you in various acts with Miss Donovic here, all of them as explicit as this. Some of them even more so.' The gunman chuckled. 'But then you knew that, didn't you? If you don't carry out the task, I'll have copies of the footage delivered to your wife, your mother, and the imam at your mosque.' He calmly reeled off the names of all three, and the addresses to which the copies would be sent. All of them were correct.

Akhtar felt his breathing increase and he began to tremble. If this happened, his life would be finished. No one would forgive him for such a rank betrayal of everything his community held dear. He'd be shunned. Exiled. Worst of all, his children would grow up knowing the terrible, sordid sins he'd committed.

'What do you want me to do?' he whispered.

'It's a very simple job that will take you less than an hour. You're to deliver that' - he pointed to a plain black backpack sitting on the floor next to the fleabitten sofa - 'to the address on the contacts section of this phone.' He dropped a BlackBerry into Akhtar's lap. 'It's a twenty-minute drive from here, half an hour if the traffic's bad. You need to be there for eight a.m., and I know you've got a TomTom in your car, so if you leave now you'll make it on time. Park right outside, then as soon as you're ready to go in, call me immediately. Do you understand?'

Akhtar nodded. He had no idea how this man knew so much about him, but the fact that he did made it imperative

that he did what he was told. Then perhaps he could emerge from this nightmare unscathed and go back to living his life again. He would miss Mika – God, he would miss her – but in the end it would be a very small price to pay.

The gunman lowered his weapon and took a step backwards, motioning for Akhtar to get to his feet.

Pocketing the BlackBerry without even checking the address, he grabbed the backpack and hauled it over one shoulder, surprised at its weight. He wondered what was inside. Initially he'd thought it would be drugs, but it was far too heavy for that.

The gunman seemed to read his thoughts. 'Under no circumstances look inside that bag, Mr Mohammed. However tempted you are. Because if I find out you have – and I will find out – then our agreement's void, and I'll carry out my threat.'

The gunman stepped aside and Akhtar walked past him. He glanced briefly at Mika, and she gave him a hopeful look back.

'Please do what he says,' she whispered. 'He means it.'

'I will,' said Akhtar, opening the door and stepping out into the gloom. 'I promise.'

But not for you, he thought. For me.

## Two

**08.00**

MARTHA CROSSMAN OPENED the door to her local coffee shop and stepped inside.

The place was busy with the pre-work crowd - mainly businesspeople - and a powerful blast of coffee, conversation and central heating hit her straight away. The normality of the scene filled her with an intense jealousy. When Martha had last been here a few days ago, her life had seemed so normal and straightforward. Not happy - she hadn't been happy for a long time - but at least back then she hadn't been burdened by the secret she was now carrying.

She took a deep breath. She wanted to throw up. To run out of the café, find a cold, quiet spot where no one could see her, and vomit up the few scrappy contents of her stomach. If it wasn't for her daughter, she'd end it all. There was no question. What had happened - what she'd found out - was so devastating that, in one single stroke, it had destroyed her will to live. But Lucy - dear, beautiful Lucy - was what kept her going.

That, and the need for justice to be done.

The man she was meeting, Philip Wright, was already there, sitting in a booth in the far corner next to the gleaming silver coffee machines on the counter, facing the door, with a large cup of coffee in front of him. She recognized him from the photos straight away, and it was clear he recognized her too. He gave a small nod, and she tried a smile in return as she walked over.



'Mrs Crossman, it's good to meet you,' he said, getting up from his seat and shaking her hand. He was a big man in his early sixties, and his grip was firm.

'Thanks for seeing me,' she said, taking off her coat and sitting down opposite him.

'Can I get you a drink of anything?' he asked. He had a gentle demeanour, and for the first time in days she felt her burden beginning to lighten.

'I'm OK for the moment, thanks.'

'You said on the phone that it was extremely urgent.'

She looked round the room, making sure no one was watching her. 'It is.'

'I have to admit, I'm surprised. As you know, my expertise isn't in an area where urgency tends to be an issue. And as we don't know each other, I'm assuming this isn't something to do with my personal life.'

'It's not. It's your professional opinion I need.'

He wrinkled his brow, still not quite understanding. 'Well, ask away.'

She put down her handbag but kept it close to her. It made her feel sick knowing what it contained, but at some point she was going to have to give it to him, otherwise there was no evidence. She looked him straight in the eye, saw a warm intelligence there, coupled with many years' experience in what he did, and felt reassured.

Leaning forward in her seat, she started talking, keeping her voice low.

# Three

## 08.03

AKHTAR MOHAMMED PULLED up on double yellow lines several yards past his destination. The traffic had been bad and he was three minutes late. He still couldn't believe what was happening to him. It was like being stuck right in the middle of a nightmare.

He stared at the backpack on the passenger seat next to him, desperate to know what was inside, but not daring to look. He was scared out of his wits. He just wanted to get this thing delivered so he could get on with his life again, but he also knew it might contain something bad - something that could get him into even more trouble.

He cursed himself for ever getting involved with Mika. He cursed himself for—

The BlackBerry he'd been given started ringing, the ringtone a blaring horn. Akhtar spent a few seconds trying to find it with shaking hands before pulling it out of his back pocket. He pressed the green answer button.

'Where the hell are you?' demanded the gunman. 'I told you that you needed to be there by eight o'clock.'

'I'm here now,' said Akhtar. 'I've just parked.'

'Tell me the street, and the name of the shop next door to the right.'

Akhtar looked round hurriedly. 'I'm on Wilton Road. Just behind Victoria Station. There's a hairdresser's to the right of the coffee shop.'

'Good. Now I want you to stay on the phone while you go inside the coffee shop with the backpack. And I want you to

act completely normally.'

Keeping the phone to his ear, Akhtar picked up the backpack with his free hand and pulled it over one shoulder. 'OK,' he said, getting out of his car and walking unsteadily over to the coffee shop door. His legs felt weak and he could hear his heart beating in his chest as he stood to one side to let two smartly dressed young women in the middle of a lively conversation come out with their takeaway coffees.

'I'm going in now,' he continued, squeezing through the door with his rucksack, the heat and noise of the place hitting him right in the face. The place was busy with commuters ordering their caffeine fixes, but he hardly saw them. They were just a blur.

'Can you see a woman in her early forties with shoulder-length hair sitting anywhere? She'll either be on her own or sitting with a man with a grey beard.'

Akhtar scanned the room, forcing himself to concentrate on faces as he slowly approached the queue of people at the counter. He saw two people in the far corner. The woman had her back to him and appeared to be talking intently to the man, who had a deeply troubled expression on his face. 'Yes, I can see them.'

'I want you to take a seat as close to the woman as possible.'

'You don't want me to say anything to her?'

'Just do as you're told. Take a seat ... nice and close.'

It was those three words that set off alarm bells. *Nice and close.*

It hit him then. He was carrying a bomb. He had to be. As soon as he found a seat close to the woman, the gunman would detonate it somehow - Akhtar had seen it done on all those TV shows - killing him, the woman, and everyone around them. And he, Akhtar, would end up getting the blame, because he would have been the one carrying the bomb, heaping even more shame on his family.

He looked over at the woman. She looked totally normal. White, attractive, well bred, with expensive clothes – and he wondered if he was wrong. Whether he was just being paranoid.

And then the woman turned his way and their eyes met, and even from twenty feet away he could see the fear and tension in them. He turned away quickly.

‘Are you sitting down yet?’ demanded the gunman.

‘I’m trying to find a seat. It’s crowded in here.’

‘How close are you?’

It was a bomb. It had to be.

‘Not too far, but she’s sitting near the counter and there are a lot of people in the way.’

‘Get as close as you can.’

The fear was so intense now that Akhtar could hardly walk. If he stayed here, he died. No question. If he put the bomb down and tried to evacuate the place, the man on the end of the phone would detonate it, and he still died, along with everyone else. And if he hung up, he also died. He was completely trapped, and only seconds from death. He had to make a decision.

Joining the end of the queue at the counter, he put the backpack down on the floor then, looking round briefly to check that no one was watching him, he walked towards the coffee shop door, making way for a young student couple coming the other way, trying not to look at their faces, knowing that he could be sentencing them to death.

He reached the door. ‘OK. I’m just about to sit down.’

‘How far away?’

‘Five feet,’ he replied, holding the phone against his jacket to block out the sounds of the street as he stepped outside and immediately broke into a run.

When Martha Crossman caught the Asian man with the backpack staring at her, she thought the worst, but as he turned away and joined the queue she told herself to stop

being so foolish. No one knew she was here. And even if they did, they wouldn't kill her in a public place.

She turned back to Philip Wright. His demeanour had changed since she'd told him about her secret. Beforehand he'd seemed reassuring yet cool, as if he was half-expecting to be wasting his time coming here. Now, the tension cutting across his features matched hers.

'You're talking about murder here, Mrs Crossman,' he told her. 'You're going to have to talk to the police immediately. I can't help you with this.'

'I don't want to involve the police yet. Not until I'm absolutely sure that what I've discovered is actually what I think it is.'

'OK,' he said, nodding slowly. 'I can understand that. And it's something I can authenticate very quickly. But I'm going to need to see it.'

She motioned towards the handbag on the seat next to her. 'It's in there.'

He frowned. 'You've brought it *here* with you?'

'I wanted you to see it as soon as possible. Listen,' she added, looking round, unable to see the Asian man any longer, 'I'm feeling a bit claustrophobic. Can we go somewhere quieter and more private? Please?'

He nodded. 'Of course.'

Martha felt faint, the need to vomit even stronger than it had been when she'd first come in here, and she stood up unsteadily.

He stood up too. 'Are you OK?' He put a hand on her shoulder. 'Let's go to my car. I'm parked up the road.'

She needed no encouragement. The room was spinning, and she could feel the beginnings of a panic attack – the first she'd had in years. With Wright holding on to her she hurried towards the fresh air and salvation.

'Excuse me, sir,' said a voice behind them. 'You haven't paid for your coffee.'

Martha turned back towards the waitress at just the moment the bomb exploded, the force of the blast caving in the windows and the Plexiglas counter and sending jagged projectiles hurtling through the enclosed space at more than two hundred miles per hour.

The bomb - five kilos of PETN plastic explosive surrounded by the same weight in assorted shrapnel - was designed to rip to shreds everything in its immediate proximity.

Neither Martha nor Philip Wright had time to react, or even understand what was happening. Wright was struck in the left eye by an industrial railway bolt that immediately pierced his brain, killing him near enough instantaneously, while Martha saw a single, all-consuming white flash, heard a roar like a great wave crashing over her, and then a sixteen-inch-by-ten-inch shard of Plexiglas that until a second earlier had been covering the muffin cabinet sliced effortlessly through her neck as if it was butter, taking her head, and her secret, with it.



## Four

### 08.06

DC TINA BOYD was sitting in an unmarked CID car just down the road from the home of a wanted burglar, who'd beaten his most recent victim with a hammer and then promptly skipped the bail he'd been given by some half-witted magistrate, when she heard the explosion – a huge, decisive boom that sounded like it was some distance away but was still loud enough to make the car vibrate on its chassis.

Her colleague, DC Clive Owen, who was trying not to stare at a couple of teenage schoolgirls, who might have been sixth formers if he was lucky, turned to Tina. 'What the hell was that?'

From their position on the edge of an estate of modern mid-rise flats just west of Vauxhall Bridge Road, it was difficult to see too much, but as they looked in the direction of the blast Tina saw a thick plume of black smoke racing up into the sky between two buildings about half a mile away. 'Shit. It looks like Victoria Station. We need to take a look.'

'Hold on, we're on surveillance here, and we've got a good plot. We can't just up sticks and leave.'

Tina gave him a withering look. She'd only been paired with Owen for three days but already she could see he was a jobsworth who didn't like putting himself out, or taking risks. The force was full of people like him these days. They knew all the rules and regulations but seemed to have forgotten how to actually catch criminals. Tina might have

found him more tolerable if he'd actually looked a bit more like his movie-star namesake. At least then she'd have something to look at. But he didn't. Nowhere even close.

'Look, we've been sat here the last two days waiting for our fugitive to turn up at the first place he knows we'll be looking for him, and he hasn't made it so far. I don't know what that tells you, but it tells me he probably isn't going to arrive in the next five minutes.'

'He might,' said Owen firmly.

'Well, if he does, then we'll just come back and get him.'

Switching on the engine, Tina reversed out of the dead-end road they were parked in and turned north in the direction of the smoke. She could do with some action. Since being reinstated to the Met nearly a month earlier (for the second time in her career), and placed as a DC in Westminster CID, the highlights had been scarce. They were currently on what the borough's chief super was calling a blitz on burglary, but there wasn't much of a blitz about it. So far, all three burglars they'd nicked were currently back on the street, and their one big raid on the home of a major suspect, with the local press in tow, had turned out to be the wrong address. By the time they'd got to the right one – the flat next door – the guy had gone out the back window and disappeared into the early morning gloom.

'It's definitely coming from somewhere near the station,' said Owen, peering through the windscreen, the radio in his hand. 'What the hell do you reckon could have happened?'

The smoke was showing no signs of abating as it poured skywards, forming a spreading black cloud. Whatever it was, it was bad.

At that moment the radio crackled into life. 'Attention all units,' said the female operator breathlessly. 'We have reports of an explosion at a coffee shop in Wilton Road, next to Victoria Station.'

Almost immediately another voice came over the airwaves. 'This is PCSO 2049. We've just seen an IC4 male running away from the scene of the explosion. He's heading east on Bridge Place in the direction of Belgrave Road. We're currently giving chase on foot.' The PCSO sounded knackered and Tina wondered if it was the overweight guy she'd seen occasionally down at the station. If it was, it was unlikely he'd be keeping pace for long.

The operator came back on the line. 'Keep a visual, 2049, but do not apprehend. Repeat, do not apprehend. We are calling in armed back-up to make an arrest.'

'Tango Four to base, we're also giving mobile pursuit,' said Owen into the radio. 'We're currently heading north on Tachbrook Street. ETA at Bridge Place, two minutes.'

'Approach with extreme caution, Tango Four. Keep a visual but only intercept if you can confirm he appears unarmed.'

This, thought Tina, was the kind of bullshit that policework had been reduced to. Everything was about health and safety and risk assessments these days. You couldn't just catch the criminals. You had to make sure you jumped through a dozen hoops and filled in all the necessary forms before you could actually finally get round to feeling a collar. It wasn't really any wonder they were losing the war on crime.

'All right, turn right up here,' Owen told her. 'Bridge Place is only a couple of hundred yards away. And for Christ's sake, let's be careful. I know what you're like, and if he's got a gun, I know it'll be me, not you, who ends up with a bullet.'

Tina made a hard right, and found herself driving up a narrow residential road with an unbroken line of cars parked up on either side. She was feeling a real burst of excitement for the first time in months. To her this was what being a copper was all about. The chase; the adrenalin; the collar. If, like Owen, you weren't willing to

take a risk, then as far as she was concerned you should be working behind a desk.

'There he is!' Owen shouted, as an Asian man ran across the road in front of them fifty yards further on. He immediately grabbed the radio and reeled out an update on the suspect's location to Control, while Tina accelerated towards the junction, not listening to the operator's continued warnings to assess the situation before attempting an arrest.

And then, when she was barely twenty yards from the junction, a four-by-four pulled out from the side of the road, forcing her to slam down hard on the brakes, and flinging both her and Owen forward in their seats.

'Jesus, get back, get back!' yelled Owen as the woman driver sat staring at them with a face like thunder, her oversized car blocking the road. He pulled out his warrant card and waved it out of the window. 'Police!' he screamed. 'Get out of the fucking way!'

The woman yelled back, clearly furious about something, and she wasn't moving.

Bollocks to this, thought Tina, and jumped out of the car, leaving the engine running. She took off up the road at a sprint, knowing she was breaking all the rules, but not caring. A man had run away from a building just after an explosion. She'd like to think the fact that he was Asian, and possibly Muslim, had no bearing on her reaction, but she couldn't help thinking that this could well be terrorist-related, in which case there was no way she could let him escape.

As she turned the corner, Tina saw him up ahead. He was a good forty yards away and running towards the Vauxhall Bridge Road, which struck Tina as odd, since it was roughly the direction he'd come from, suggesting he hadn't spent much time planning his escape. He was already clearly slowing as he tired, so she was confident she could make up the distance between them.

But then he turned and spotted her and accelerated, disappearing up a side street. Tina went to the gym five times a week. Religiously. It was one of her few pleasures these days, and consequently she was very fit, and still young enough to be fast. She picked up her pace, going flat out now, and as she rounded the corner she saw that there was now less than twenty yards between them.

He looked back over his shoulder a second time, which was when Tina got a good look at him. He was youngish, probably early thirties, and smartly dressed in pressed trousers, black work shoes and a shirt and tie beneath his jacket. Which again struck her as odd. As did the look of pure panic on his face. Criminals sometimes looked scared when they were being chased by the forces of law and order, but not like this. This man seemed utterly terrified, as if he was a victim rather than a perpetrator.

‘Police!’ she yelled. ‘Stop now!’

He ignored her, kept running, his arms flailing in front of him. Two Lego-like blocks of flats loomed to her right and standing out in front of them was a large group of schoolboys watching the chase, several of them pulling out mobile phones and filming Tina as she ran past, gaining now. Fifteen yards and counting.

Akhtar’s lungs felt like they were about to burst. He’d been running ever since he’d left the coffee shop. In the sheer chaos of the situation he’d run right past his car, just as the explosion had hit, temporarily throwing him to his knees. Knowing he had to get away from the shop, he’d jumped to his feet and carried on running, his ears ringing from the sound of the explosion, before he’d realized his mistake. By that time it was too late. Two police officers had appeared on the other side of the road and had started chasing him. He’d thought he’d outrun them and then, suddenly, this woman in jeans and trainers was right behind him, shouting for him to stop.

He didn't know how much longer he could keep going for. A part of him even wanted to give up, to throw himself at the mercy of the authorities. But there was no way he could do that now. As far as the world was concerned, he'd planted a bomb in a busy café. A bomb that had almost certainly killed many innocent people. He had to escape. There was no choice. There never had been.

There was a main road with flowing traffic directly ahead of him. If he could get across that, put a bit of distance between him and the woman, he might just make it. Gritting his teeth against the pain, he forced his legs to keep going, not even hesitating as he charged into the road. A horn blared as a car was forced to brake suddenly, and another much louder horn blasted to his left.

He turned and saw a lorry bearing down on him, its pistons hissing as its driver tried to stop.

But it was too late. Akhtar just managed to let out the first second of a terrified scream, throwing up his arms in a desperate protective gesture, before he was struck by a screaming wall of metal, and the whole world seemed to explode.

Tina saw it all. The car skidding as it swerved to avoid him; the man continuing to run across the road oblivious to the lorry coming the opposite way; the impact as the lorry struck him with a loud bang, sending him flying across the tarmac like a rag doll; and then the man being crushed under its wheels amid a futile wail of brakes.

It all happened in the space of a few seconds while Tina stood frozen with horror, wondering if there was anything she could have done to stop him, and knowing that once again she'd given her many enemies a stick to beat her with.



# Five

## 08.18

THE GUNMAN WAS watching Sky News when the pretty young anchor interrupted the sports round-up to announce in serious tones that reports were coming in of an explosion near London's Victoria Station. This was immediately followed by live footage from a helicopter of the view above the street in question showing a blazing shop front with people milling about outside, some of them clearly hurt, and several others lying on the ground. There were emergency services personnel on the scene but they appeared to be in short supply.

He switched off the TV. The job was done, but he took no great pleasure in it, even though the whole thing had been a huge risk and had required precision planning. The bomb had been powerful, and plenty of people were dead – cut down for no other reason than that they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. The outrage would be immense. Just as they wanted it.

Mika sat at one end of the sagging sofa, her head resting on one shoulder, a dark bloody hole in the centre of her forehead. She too was collateral damage, which was unfortunate. She'd done her job well, if under duress, but she knew too much to be allowed to live.

He took out the mobile he'd used to detonate Akhtar Mohammed's bomb, and phoned the main switchboard at BBC Radio London. Clearly it was a bit early in the morning for them because it took a good minute before the call was answered by a male operator.

Speaking into the high-spec voice disguiser that made it impossible to detect either his age or ethnicity, he began his short prepared speech. 'A soldier from Islamic Command just struck a blow against Crusader forces by detonating a bomb right in the heart of your corrupt capital city. The British Crusader government has until eight p.m. tonight to make a public statement promising to withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan and cease support for its American puppet government with immediate effect, or a far greater attack will take place somewhere in this country that will bring fire down on all your heads. Remember, the deadline is eight p.m. You have been warned.'

The operator started to speak but the gunman ended the call. He didn't turn off the phone, though. Instead he wiped it down with a cloth and threw it on the sofa next to Mika's corpse. He was pretty sure he hadn't left any of his DNA inside the flat. On the two occasions he'd visited he'd always worn gloves and had tried to minimize his contact with any of the surfaces. To make doubly sure that the police had nothing to go on when they came to this place, though, he picked up a second backpack from behind the sofa and placed it in Mika's lap. It too contained a bomb of similar destructive capacity to the one he'd given to Akhtar, but this one was on a timer, primed to explode at 10.35 a.m., which he'd estimated would be around the time the police arrived, having traced the location of the phone. A second bomb in the boot of a car nearby was primed to explode at the same time. Hopefully, between them the bombs would take out a few of the security forces; but even if they didn't, it wouldn't matter. The point of all terrorist campaigns is to sow fear and especially panic among the civilian population, and there was nothing more effective than apparently random attacks to do just that.

He took a last look round, one final check that he hadn't left behind any telltale evidence, then put on a pair of glasses and a baseball cap, pulling it low over his face, and

left the flat, keeping his head down against the cold February air, confident that even if he was picked up on the inevitable CCTV cameras round here, no one would recognize him.

# Six

## 08.24

THERE WAS NO denying it. Prison decor really was shit.

Prisoner number 407886, William James Garrett, better known to the international media by his codename Fox, sat on his bunk staring at the four grimy, pockmarked walls that marked the borders of his home, and wondered who on earth had decided to paint them lime green. The bright colours didn't make him feel any more positive about his situation, as he was sure they were meant to do. They just gave him a headache.

Fox couldn't stand prison. In his mind, keeping a man in a tiny cage without hope for the rest of his days but giving him glimpses of the outside world through TV and the net was far less humane than killing him outright. What surprised him was the number of men in the cells around him – men who were here for many years, and a few who were in for the rest of their lives – who'd become so institutionalized that they no longer had any desire to experience life on the outside. One old lag had even told him that if the gates to the prison were suddenly to be opened one day, 99 per cent of the prisoners would opt to stay behind bars.

Not Fox. He wasn't going to end up like some sort of zombie, subservient to the establishment as he counted down the days until he finally pegged out, unloved and unmourned, a pantomime hate figure for the masses.

Yet the charges he faced were enough to keep him inside for ten lifetimes. He was the sole surviving terrorist