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THE
ENTHRALLING
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FRIENDS, LOVERS, ENEMIES

A NOVEL



Ballantine/Fiction/37720 (Canada \$5.99) U.S. \$4.99



Friends,
江苏工业学院图书馆
Lovers,
藏书章
Enemies

Barbara Victor

BALLANTINE BOOKS • NEW YORK

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 90-56048

ISBN 0-345-37720-6

This edition published by arrangement with Donald I. Fine, Inc.

Manufactured in the United States of America

First Ballantine Books Edition: January 1993

More praise for Barbara Victor and FRIENDS, LOVERS, ENEMIES

"Barbara Victor skillfully develops the romantic relation between Beale and Aviram but also provides an insight into the feelings, beliefs and lives of Karami and his wife."

The Pittsburgh Press

"The love story behind the headlines. One of the most realistic and passionate accounts of the Arab-Israeli conflict ever told in fiction. FRIENDS, LOVERS, ENEMIES captures the pain and tragedy of a century-old war and the love of a man and a woman tangled up in the violence. Terrific—a compelling read. You'll be hooked from the first page."

LINDA SCHERZER

CNN Jerusalem Correspondent

*In loving memory of another Gideon who remains the
inspiration of all things past and present.*

*And for the women in my life: Barbara Taylor Bradford,
whose gift for words is only exceeded by her gift of
friendship. Susan Watt for her steadfast belief and
support. Lynn Nesbit whose sense of morality and loyalty
is unique in any time, place, or profession.*

Acknowledgments

The good-guy list is a list of people without whose talent, guidance, generosity, and wisdom, the author would be unable to write a grocery list let alone a book. The good-guy list is also a list of those same people without whose love and encouragement the author would be unable to walk, talk, have a laugh once in a while or make a sandwich while grocery lists and books are being written.

As all lists have beginnings, middles, and ends, it would be easy to claim that the order of names on this good-guy list is purely haphazard and has nothing to do with emotional preference. That is not the case. The order of names on this list has everything to do with emotional preference. But that is not to say that to be listed at the beginning of this list is better than being listed at the end or somewhere in the middle. For what do any of us really have that is ours alone except a secret order of emotional preference in our heads? And, if we're very lucky, a good-guy list of people without whom our lives would be less full.

Amelia de Marcos, who doesn't realize how much she is appreciated and needed. And for José de Marcos, thank you.

Sabine Boulongne for knowing when to keep my words and when to throw them away.

Jean Rosenthal, again, for the very beginning.

Michel Alexandre for his continued friendship.

Brigitte Jessen, my very best friend on two continents.

Mark Schiffer, a new face in an old crowd.

Roz Scott because she takes everything to heart and makes us all so secure.

Lisa Healy, a find as a friend, a gift as an editor.

Tom Wallace for his astounding faith.

Robert Solomon for all the years of patience.

Beth Tedesco for her unfailing dependability in a sometimes chaotic world.

Jeff Thau for all his optimism.

Alain Carrière, the Gérard Depardieu of French publishing; my hardest, toughest and most favorite editor.

Sally and Erich Heinemann for their generosity and love.

Cathy Nolan for being present and accounted for during all the ups, downs, and sideways of life.

Lisa Berkowitz, my very best friend on three continents; for her support, belief, loyalty and loads of laughs from New York to Florida—the fourth continent.

David, Ellie, and Benjamin Schiffer with loads of love and kisses.

Lennart Sane, my worldwide and moonwide agent, for his tireless effort and devotion.

Dmitri Nabokov, with affection and love, my still-best friend.

Herzog.

And for Stephanie Schiffer who gets the sister of the decade award. Here's to another five or so decades.

And for the good guys on both sides of the struggle, a special thanks for all the help and a profound wish for a lasting peace.



Chapter One

WHEN THE BOMB exploded in front of the Alitalia office on the Via Veneto, Sasha Beale had just pulled on one thigh-high beige suede boot and was about to pull on the other. Had she paused several seconds longer outside Giovanni's Bootery to decide whether or not to spend money on this latest fad, she would have undoubtedly lost a leg. Or, had she accepted the offer of a second espresso at Harry's American Bar from the man who smelled as if he had toppled into a vat of Giorgio cologne, she might have found herself crossing the street just as the bomb detonated and would have surely lost her life.

In either case, had she dawdled, she might have noticed the chocolate brown Mercedes as it pulled up in front of Alitalia, and the short, muscular man step out. But then again, she might not have paid any attention since he was typical of so many Italian males who dressed all in black, adorned by gold chains, watches, and rings. Still, if questioned, she might have described him as a "bodybuilder" type, distracted perhaps, even rude, obviously in a big hurry but certainly not someone who would have caused her any alarm. Or, if really pressed, she might have said that he looked like any one of those sleazy natives who hung around hotel lobbies hawking his wares and hoping for a taker in the body of a lonely tourist. What Sasha wouldn't have done was to describe the man as a terrorist. She wouldn't

have known that he was actually a Palestinian carrying a false Libyan passport. Nor could she have known about the false bottom in the pigskin briefcase that he left just inside the double glass entrance door of the Alitalia office. *

The blast knocked Sasha to the floor of Giovanni's when it blew out a portion of the plate window. Despite what felt like a twisted back and bruised elbow, she was far luckier than some of the others who were thrown sideways instead of down and who, as a result, suffered cuts, concussions and one partially severed leg.

From the instant of the explosion—and it wasn't impossible that Sasha lost consciousness for several minutes—everything seemed to happen in slow motion. The traffic outside seemed to coast to a halt, the light seemed to change from *avanti* to *stop* at least four times before anybody moved, the bodies seemed to float through the air like so many pieces of fluff from a hundred dandelions. Yet, when she managed to crawl toward what was left of the door, she had the distinct impression that an unseen hand had turned on klieg lights and pumped up the speed from thirty-three to seventy-eight while an unheard voice had yelled, "Action." For within seconds of the time that it took her to stand up and step into the glorious Rome sunlight, sirens were blasting and people were screaming and running in all directions. And what struck her then and what she would never forget was that everywhere she looked, all she saw was a carnage of humanity, a grotesque stew of the dead and dying.

Wandering through the rubble, the only rational thought she had was of the indignity of such violent death. She was acutely aware of the contents of briefcases and purses and shopping bags that were scattered everywhere, papers blowing in the gentle spring breeze, lipsticks and pens rolling around in the gutter, bread

and eggs crushed under the feet of those who had managed to run away. Her movements were on automatic as she stopped to talk to or touch the injured who were moaning in fear and pain.

In numbed silence, she watched as a man picked his way through the flesh and dust, his arms outstretched, tears rolling down his cheeks. She waited with a woman whose body was bent into a seated position like one of those plastic figures that fit into one of those plastic cars, until several medics lifted the woman onto a stretcher. Backing away, she turned her head, her eyes focusing on fragments of a red jacket that was strewn over a car and partially hooked over its radio antenna. Moving forward, she looked down to notice the small boy lying facedown in the gutter, his arms somehow still in the jacket's sleeves. Through more bits of clothing and rubble, she reached him, kneeling down to stroke his hair. He was barely alive, making gurgling and rasping noises as he labored to breathe through a hole in his chest. Eight or nine years old, she judged; mortally wounded, the words bounced around inside her head. Cheek nearly touching his, she soothed him with lies, whispered words that were useless as he slipped away. "Mummy!" he whimpered only once before there was silence. Several policemen gently removed her. "Where are you taking him?" she heard herself asking, unable to wipe away the tears fast enough. Eight or nine years old. It was questionable how long she could remain standing.

"*Morto*," one of the policemen tried to explain.

"Yes," she wept, "*morto*. But where, *dove*, where?"

"*Morto*," someone else added as if she might have still been unsure.

She wept softly as she watched someone cover the child with a blanket that someone else had pulled from the trunk of a car. It was then that she turned her head to notice the body of a woman—a piece of that same

fabric clutched in one of her hands—trapped under the wheels of a car that had obviously screeched out of control, but not before its front axle had rolled over her broken body. Sasha rushed up to the medic who attended the woman and again tried to make herself understood. “The boy, *bambino*,” she pointed to the small covered figure being slid into the back of an ambulance. “Red jacket, look,” she cried. As if it mattered. “*Morto*,” the man repeated gently before he said it all in English. “They are both dead, *Signorina*, both of them.”

In every direction that Sasha turned, there was nothing left. Each way that she looked, the street was blanketed with shards of glass, twisted metal and the leaves from magnolia trees that had been shaken loose in the explosion, a bizarre mosaic of what would be called debris in tomorrow’s newspapers.

She would never be able to explain why at that moment all her instincts surged to the surface to overcome the shock. Suddenly she felt herself gathering every last ounce of strength that she had to race toward the Flora Hotel on the corner. Running inside and up to the front desk, she searched around for a telephone until she spotted a row of them on the opposite wall. There was the usual slot for a five- ten- or thirty-lira piece. After spending two weeks in Rome, Sasha knew enough to put the proper coin in the slot so her call would go through to the Federated Broadcast Network’s Rome Bureau. This inexplicable ability to think clearly in a disaster was something she would either regret later or congratulate herself on. Technically, she was on vacation from her job as a crime reporter for the local nightly news, on leave to recover from a divorce that had sapped every bit of humor and pragmatism she possessed, on holiday before taping would begin for a brand-new documentary that she was slated to host. After witnessing what she had just witnessed, however, recovering from

a divorce seemed insignificant. Suddenly Carl Feldhammer, esteemed member of the American Psychiatric Association, witty, charming, handsome and able to make love all night every night—although not necessarily always to her—just didn't seem paramount to her very survival.

It wasn't the first time that Sasha called the Rome Bureau since arriving there. Either loneliness or duty or respect had prompted her to check in with Bernie Hernandez, the Rome Bureau chief, shortly after checking into the hotel. Hello, this is Sasha Beale and I just wanted to let you know that I was here in case you needed anything or wanted me to take anything back to the States for you. A family of sorts, she reasoned, a home away from home, or as it turned out, a canteen in a war zone.

Bernie had invited her to the office, complimented her on her cheekbones and legs, offered her the predictable Cinzano from the usual refrigerator in the corner of the office, and settled back to recount his experiences as a foreign correspondent, or as Bernie put it, the man who single-handedly covered every rotten, lousy piece of news that ever broke in Western Europe. Bernie wore tough, crusty, almost vulgar skin, was built like a Mayan Indian, had apparently slept through integration and feminism in the United States, and generally loved every minute of who he was and what he did. He'd seen it all, he bragged shamelessly, done it all, he winked, so that now he only stepped in to help the regular reporters cover the really big stories. Only Bernie called them events.

Sasha wasn't impressed. At thirty-four, after a six-year marriage to a Freudian psychiatrist and a ten-year career in the news business, she found it difficult to relate to a man whose walls were covered with membership certificates to various airline clubs and whose

desk was cluttered with photographs of himself in a belted trenchcoat posing with famous people.

But she was polite, even charming. Bernie Hernandez wasn't her problem, she reasoned, and the possibility of ever having to work with him was remote. She was only passing through, consider this a courtesy call, and she hoped she hadn't disturbed him, but no, she wasn't able to see Rome nightlife on this trip, but how nice of him to ask. They parted after only half an hour, he with the expectation of dinner before she left, she with the intention of never seeing him again. And here she was now, standing in the lobby of the Flora Hotel and calling him because they both happened to be in the business of catastrophes and what just happened certainly qualified as one of the bigger ones.

"Bernie Hernandez," Sasha said into the receiver.

"Who's calling him?"

"Sasha Beale."

The bored tone, "I'll see if he's in," didn't exactly make her calmer.

But Bernie was on the line instantly. "Sasha, you got my message."

"What message?"

"I left a message at your hotel because there's been a terrorist attack."

"I know, I was there when it happened. I mean, I'm here now."

"Holy shit! That's fantastic!"

She shut her eyes. It didn't compute.

"What're you doing there?" he went on excitedly.

"I'm not sure," she replied, her voice unsteady.

"Are you hurt?"

"No, I'm all right," she said softly, the image of that child before her eyes.

"Look, Sasha," he began urgently, "don't go getting hysterical on me because I need you."

"Bernie, I can't," she started to say but he was still talking.

"Just stay calm, do you hear me?"

Calm wasn't the solution in her mind right then. What she wanted was to find out about that little boy.

"I need you, Sasha," he repeated.

"Me?" she managed, "why me?"

He cleared his throat. "That's why I called you. I just got off the phone with New York and they, uh, they want you to . . ."

"They what?"

"They want you to cover it."

"Me? Why me?"

"Hey, don't think I didn't ask them that."

But she was far away. "Ask them what?"

"Why they wanted you to cover it." His tone was calmer still. "Look, Sasha, I don't badger New York. I just push the buttons to make it all happen so everybody's happy."

She was back with them then. "Where's your regular reporter?"

He cleared his throat again. "On maternity leave."

Another spear through her heart, that child, that little boy with that baby-smooth cheek. "Why can't you do this? You can't get a story much bigger than this."

"They want you," he said dully.

"But I've been covering street crime," she said wearily, already aware of how ridiculous and lame and dumb it sounded.

"And what do you think that is—a bake-off in Secaucus?"

She leaned her head against the wall and closed her eyes. "No, Bernie, it's no bake-off."

"This is heaven-fucking sent," he whispered with an intensity that made Sasha hold the receiver slightly away from her ear. "Just when New York was thinking about closing the Rome Bureau, we're going to scoop the other

networks right up their asses! So don't fold on me, Sasha Beale, just stay calm and cool and position yourself in the best spot you can find with the sun behind you so when the crew gets there, all they have to do is hand you the microphone and we're in business. Are you with me?"

And she was busy right then, trying to remember all the answers and questions and excuses and smart retorts she might possibly need to find out about that child. To find out if the woman under that car was his mother or at least someone who was in charge of his safety for the afternoon.

"Are you with me?"

She felt herself nodding before realizing that Bernie couldn't see her or the tears that streaked her face or the fear in her eyes. "I'm with you," she mumbled. And she was, "with him," that is. After all, she was the one who had made the phone call in the first place. What did she expect, she wondered, that he'd thank her and tell her to go some place and relax until everything blew over?

"Do you have a white handkerchief?"

"A what?"

"A white handkerchief?" he repeated impatiently.

"Why?"

"Don't ask questions, just answer."

"No," she said, looking down at the crumpled pink tissue clutched in one hand.

"Then go out and find one," Bernie spoke slowly as if to an idiot.

"Where am I supposed to find a white handkerchief?"

"Then go find a white Kleenex," he snapped. "And when you do, hold it in your right hand, up high, so the crew recognizes you when they get there." He chuckled. "The best part about this is those clowns from the other networks won't even know who you are

until it's all over. Now go find a white Kleenex. Do you hear me?"

Again, she nodded, forgetting that he wasn't actually standing right on top of her with his finger pointed in her face. "Bernie, I can't."

"Yes, you can, Sasha, and you will because I'm going to be right with you, feeding while you report."

It wasn't really happening, she considered until she realized that it had already happened and whether she reported it or not wasn't going to change anything. At least that's what Carl would have told her, that whether or not she had come to Rome in the first place or wandered into that bootery or agreed to cover this catastrophe, she simply didn't have the power to alter other people's fate. So, how come he did? How come Carl Feldhammer managed to change the direction of her entire life by walking out one day? Not that any of this made a difference to that little boy who once wore a red jacket.

Bernie's tone was vaguely patronizing when he inquired, "Is your face all blotchy?"

The questions didn't make sense. "Probably," she answered distractedly.

"Then go wash it and comb your hair and put on some makeup—not too much, but just enough to look appealingly wan. Got that?"

A rage was choking her, struggling to the surface and caught somewhere in her throat. "I don't think so, Bernie."

"What does that mean?"

But she had already reached the limit. Every part of her mind and body had gone to war with every other part and it was a draw. "It means we're going to cover this as if it were radio. No props or glamour or makeup or lights, nothing except what's already out there on the street." She wanted to throw up. "And if your crew

goes in for a close-up that invades anybody's privacy, I walk." She blew her nose.

"So," he said slowly, "you're giving me conditions."

She shook her head. "No, I'm just telling you that what happened is horrible enough without turning it into a circus."

"Have it your way," he said after several seconds of silence.

"I'll do a good job," she added, remembering that in this business *A* was for *ambition* and not *anguish*.

"I hope so, because you really fell into it this time."

In all fairness, not that she was obliged to be fair, Bernie hadn't been there when it happened. He hadn't seen what was left or what wasn't from one minute to the next. She hung up the phone, determined to find a white Kleenex and the best possible spot with the sun behind her to do the stand-up. Which was when she glanced down and noticed that she had on only one thigh-high beige suede boot. The other foot was bare.