



## The Fallen Angel

By Daniel Silva  
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### Introduction

After narrowly surviving his last operation, Gabriel Allon, the wayward son of Israeli intelligence, has taken refuge behind the walls of the Vatican, where he is restoring one of Caravaggio's greatest masterpieces. But early one morning he is summoned to St. Peter's Basilica by Monsignor Luigi Donati, the all-powerful private secretary to His Holiness Pope Paul VII. The body of a beautiful woman lies beneath Michelangelo's magnificent dome. The Vatican police suspect suicide, though Gabriel believes otherwise. So, it seems, does Donati. But the monsignor is fearful that a public inquiry might inflict another scandal on the Church, and so he calls upon Gabriel to quietly pursue the truth with one caveat.

"Rule number one at the Vatican," Donati said. "Don't ask too many questions."

Gabriel learns that the dead woman had uncovered a dangerous secret—a secret that threatens a global criminal enterprise that is looting timeless treasures of antiquity and selling them to the highest bidder. But there is more to this network than just greed. A mysterious operative is plotting an act of sabotage that will plunge the world into a conflict of apocalyptic proportions. . . .

### Questions for Discussion

1. Of what interest and significance is it that the story begins in St. Peter's "mighty Basilica," with the caretaker Niccolo Moretti?
2. Consider the detailed description of the painting Gabriel Allon is restoring, Caravaggio's *The Deposition of Christ*. (12) What does that choice add to the novel?
3. Caravaggio's Giacomo Benedetti suggests that part of *The Deposition of Christ* perhaps shouldn't be restored, (13) an opinion that foreshadows the larger issue of the handling of art and antiquities. What are the pros and cons of restoring aged art?
4. Not unlike the many artifacts and antiquities mentioned throughout the novel, Gabriel Allon is at times referred to as a "damaged" object himself, (13) and with "a damaged canvas of his own" (302). In what ways does this seem true and how is it important to his character?
5. Monsignor Luigi Donati is described as following the Machiavellian idea that "it is far better for a prince to be feared than loved" (19). In what ways is this appropriate or not to his responsibilities? Machiavelli is also named to describe the deal Gabriel Allon strikes with General Ferrari. (87) How is this similar or different?
6. On a number of occasions it is suggested that Monsignor Luigi Donati and Gabriel Allon, despite their obvious differences, are quite alike. (19) In what ways is this true and why do you think they have established such a close relationship?
7. At the Villa Giulia, Gabriel Allon realizes the Euphronios krater, "one of the greatest single pieces of art ever created," is kept where few people ever see it (89). Dr. Veronica Marchese later talks of getting many works from her husband's collection into museums. (118) What is the proper place for antiquities? Should they be privately held? Do countries of origin have a rightful claim to them?
8. The Euphronios krater depicts "Sarpedon, son of Zeus, being carried off for burial by the personifications of Sleep and Death" (91). What do the similarities of this scene to Caravaggio's *The Deposition of Christ* add to the novel?
9. At one point, Veronica makes the claim that Gabriel Allon "would have made an excellent priest" (94). What qualities might she be referring to?
10. Consider Monsignor Donati's early involvement with "liberation theology" as he describes it to Gabriel Allon. (105) What does this add to your understanding of his personality and actions throughout the novel?
11. What does it add to your understanding of Monsignor Donati to learn of his crisis of faith during which he left the priesthood and fell in love? (106)
12. Consider Rivka, the often-mentioned woman whose skeleton Eli Lavon discovered in temple ruins. (141, 355, 379) What does she represent? What does Eli's emotional attachment add to the narrative?
13. Consider the similarities between the tragic deaths of Rivka and Claudia Andreatti.
14. Archeologist Eli Lavon is said to be "waging war in those excavation trenches beneath the Western Wall" (224). How does archeology play a role in history and modern politics?

15. Gabriel Allon admits "a grudging respect" for Massoud, a terrorist leader, and even says, "in a parallel universe [he] might have been a renowned jurist or a statesman from a decent country" (250). What qualities might he be referring to?

16. Momentarily "paralyzed by memories" outside a restaurant where he once dined with his former wife Leah and their son, Gabriel Allon admits to being lost to a woman who looks to help him. Given that he knows where he is at that moment, in what other ways might he be lost?

17. Although Gabriel Allon admits to loving Israel "dearly," and his wife Chiara claims that it feels like home, Gabriel is reluctant to return there to live. What are some of the reasons? Do you think he should return?

18. Many famous paintings are mentioned and described throughout the novel. (12, 13, 14, 18, 76, 77, 120, 164, 170, 389) What does the subject matter of each, and art in general, add to the particular scene or the novel as a whole?

19. Where should Gabriel Allon go next?

### **About the Author**

Daniel Silva is the number one *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Unlikely Spy*, *The Mark of the Assassin*, *The Marching Season*, *The Kill Artist*, *The English Assassin*, *The Confessor*, *A Death in Vienna*, *Prince of Fire*, *The Messenger*, *The Secret Servant*, *Moscow Rules*, *The Defector*, *The Rembrandt Affair*, and *Portrait of a Spy*. He is married to NBC News Today correspondent Jamie Gangel; they live in Washington, D.C., with their two children.