

THE SCROLL AND THE PARCHMENT

A Novel

By: Jerome Ostrov

Author's Note

This book is dedicated to my wife Bobi and our beautiful family who have benefitted immeasurably from her wisdom and dedication: our daughter Becca (her husband Dan, and their daughters Sadie, Willow and Mia), our son Max, and our daughter Julia (her husband Bobby, and their son Oliver).

The story is a work of religious historical fiction. Some of the events described actually occurred. Many, in particular, those involving the character Judah and his family, did not. Throughout I have tried to be sensitive to the faith traditions described in the story. If I have misspoken in any respect, it was not intentional, and I apologize in advance.

Any resemblance in name or action between one of more of the fictional characters in the story and any one or more real persons is unintended and coincidental. Aside from the Epilogue, this story precedes the pandemic.

Luke: 2:21

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

Matthew 2:13-14

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt.

Book One: The Past and Present Converge

Chapter One The Steinthaler Mansion, Scarsdale Week One, the Present

The man stopped for a moment after getting out of his rental car at the parking area designated for visitors. He looked past the long, winding driveway and focused on the stately 1927 Tudor mansion that stood before him, a magnificent edifice framed by tall hedges and meticulous landscaping. Though it was winter, he had left Egypt hastily and hadn't had time to purchase an overcoat suitable for New York's wintry February weather. But even as he shivered, he remembered his one earlier visit to the mansion. It had been with Boutros. Then, it had been a warm fall afternoon and the grounds were still decorated with late-appearing crocuses and numerous varieties of anemones, asters and day lilies.

Even in the cold, he was tempted to linger and admire the surroundings. But he was tired from his long flight and knew he had to return as soon as possible to help Boutros. A medium-sized briefcase at his side, the man walked alongside the driveway until he reached the front door of the Westchester home of financier Maury Steinthaler and his wife Anita.

The man took a breath, rang the bell and waited expectantly before the door was opened by a smiling Maury Steinthaler. Though it had been short notice, Steinthaler had been expecting his guest and greeted him cordially. He then motioned for the man to follow him to the solarium wing of the house, a three-story glass enclosure, profuse with floral arrangements and statuary, that doubled as both a botanical garden and study.

“Yousef, it’s so good of you to make this long trip. It’s too bad Boutros couldn’t come as well.”

“He would agree and sends you his best.”

Steinthaler was eager to see what Yousef had brought with him. But he knew from experience that cordiality would have to come first. They sat down on two couches separated by a coffee table, with Steinthaler facing his guest. Anita had known that the visitor was important. In addition, she had wished to make amends even by the smallest of gestures and had placed her husband’s favorite hors d’oeuvres on the table. She had also put out two crystal highball glasses, a small crystal pitcher of water and a bottle of Macallan 18, her husband’s favorite scotch. Despite his distress over his wife’s recent disclosures, Steinthaler was pleased with her considerate peace offerings. Yousef watched appreciatively as Steinthaler poured a generous amount of the amber fluid into each of the glasses and then splashed in just the right amount of water before handing one of the glasses to his guest.

Steinthaler’s mannerisms were not those of a man who had arrived at an exalted station in life. There was no suggestion of superiority or class status. Had he been entertaining in a less gilded environment, an observer would have had difficulty dissociating Steinthaler’s body language and his speech from his modest beginnings in the traditionally Jewish, Queens apartment he had shared with his two working class parents. His climb from so modest a beginning to the height of the financial world was legendary and often discussed in the business press and among his almost cult-like followers in the world of commerce. He did enjoy the accoutrements of wealth as evidenced by his grand home and the costly hobby that had brought his visitor to see him that evening. However, it had not gone to his head and that was the real secret of his success.

Steinthaler poured a second drink for himself and raised his glass to toast the arrival of his visitor. Obliging, the man

responded. “It’s good to see you my friend and once again to enjoy your fine spirits. Where I come from, Copts have been killed for selling alcohol. So, I usually try to avoid drinking in any type of public setting. Not, that I could find anything close to what’s now in my glass!”

“As you’re aware, I’m well familiar with the plight of the Egyptian Copts.”

“Yes, over the years, Boutros and I have marveled at how your interest in the antiquities of our country has evolved into your considerate support for the Copts.”

After his visitor had finished his glass of the delicately perfumed scotch, Steinhailer couldn’t wait any longer. “I don’t want to come across as ungracious, but, I’m eager to see the crowns.”

“Of course.” At that, Yousef removed two velvet pouches from his briefcase and took out two majestic crowns, ornaments traditionally mounted on the staves of a *Torah*, the Five Books of Moses.

Despite his delight, Steinhailer’s eyes narrowed warily. “I take it Boutros has satisfied all of the authorities.”

“Yes. I have the customary certificate of authenticity right here.”

Yousef handed the document to Steinhailer who scanned it with a practiced eye. “Thank you. These are indeed perfect.”

“I’m glad you approve. Also, since Boutros and you spoke, we’ve uncovered information suggesting the crowns may be older than we had supposed. In fact, they may not even be Egyptian, as we originally thought. If you look closely, you can see the crowns are onion-shaped, a style suggesting their much

earlier Persian influence. Boutros is looking into the matter with a view toward obtaining an amended certificate for you. ”

“Yousef, you wouldn’t be trying to bargain up the price?”

“By no means. Boutros regards your friendship as worth far more than what he might fancifully be able to squeeze out of one of America’s savviest businessmen. In addition, there’s another purpose for my visit and Boutros doesn’t want petty bargaining to get in the way.”

“Yes. You did mention another matter when you called.”

“Simply stated, Boutros has a request for you, an important one!

“Fine. But, why didn’t he call? He knows I have a secure phone I use almost exclusively for making calls to him. I have it right here in case I had any questions about the crowns. Perhaps, I should call him now.”

“I don’t think that would be wise at the moment.”

“Now, you’ve really piqued my curiosity. Why wouldn’t it be wise?”

The man gave Steinthaler a pained but purposeful look. “If you give me a moment, I’ll show you.”

Chapter Two

The Twilight of the Reign of Herod the Great Jerusalem, 4 BCE

Judah marveled at the scene in front of the Temple. It was the 15th day of the Hebrew month of *Tishrei*—the time the *Torah* prescribed for the harvest holiday of *Sukkot*. It was fall and the previous summer's harvest had been unusually late, resulting in bountiful offerings of grain that had been drying in the fields. The *Torah* commanded that, during *Sukkot*, farmers make offerings from these harvests to the Temple priests. From all over Palestine—the name given to the narrow slice of land between Egypt and Phoenicia by the conquering Greeks four centuries earlier—Jewish farmers had come to Jerusalem in compliance with the *Torah's* command.

In front of the Temple, a chaotic scene had unfolded, as farmer and city dweller alike celebrated the *Sukkot* holiday. For Judah, it meant more grain business as well as more people seeking his talents as a healer. In truth, Judah did not need the income from the extra patients, but he couldn't resist helping the sick and the wounded.

Judah's father Gideon had been a *Sadducee*—the well-positioned and pious religious caste that included both priests and non-priests. When Gideon died many years before, he had left Judah well off, with a profitable grain storage and distribution business as well as carefully cultivated ties with both the occupying Romans and the priesthood.

Gideon had also left Judah with another gift—a rarity in its day among the Jews of Palestine—the gift of literacy. Judah could read and write in both Greek—the *lingua franca* of the Roman Empire—and Aramaic, the language of the people. It was his ability to read Greek that brought him in contact with written accounts of Grecian healing treatments and remedies, a field that had provided him with fascination at a time when

healing often fell under the religious authority of priests or even magicians.

At this time in his life, Judah should have been content, and, in most respects, he was. He had a beautiful young wife, Lila, who was in her sixth month of pregnancy with their first child, a scholarly devotion to the almighty admired by many of his Sadducee peers, a flourishing grain business and patients who came to him from near and far for his healing skills. But his mind was preoccupied with the progress of one patient.

Two days earlier, a Roman tribune had sent a messenger requesting that Judah look at the tribune's broken arm, which he had experienced as a result of a fall. There were only a few dozen tribunes in all of Palestine and most would only consider taking their ailments to Roman healers. So, when the request came to visit the tribune's quarters, Judah was initially excited. He was no fool when it came to the Romans, but he had always followed his father's lead and tried to ingratiate himself with the occupiers whenever he could.

Unfortunately, the tribune had waited too long. When Judah arrived at the Roman encampment, he could see the wound surrounding the broken bone was infected and had begun to fester. But Judah had no choice but to do his best under highly adverse circumstances. He first cleansed the wound in the hope it would help the healing. Then he employed traction and stabilized the broken bone with splints tied with cloth bandages. All the while he balanced the need to set the wounded limb in the proper way without inflicting too much pain on his already overwrought patient. When it was done, he felt satisfied with his work.

The injured man of course wanted to know about his prospects. Judah tried to be as upbeat as he could with the tribune, while encouraging him not to use the arm for several months so that the bones could knit properly. But, inwardly, Judah worried about the infection. As a precaution, he left one

of his servants in the Roman camp to tend to the tribune and report back if any problems arose. It did not take many days for the servant to relay word that the tribune's condition was deteriorating. Even worse, as the servant reported, the tribune had instructed his men to hold Judah accountable if anything bad happened.

Judah knew what it meant to be held accountable to the Romans and it was not a pleasant thought, particularly since he knew the tribune's infection could cause serious problems for the man. So, on the spur of the moment, Judah made a decision. He would have to leave Jerusalem, at least temporarily, and he would have to leave fast. But, where to go? Lila's family was in Jerusalem and the thought of fleeing to someplace where she had no relatives filled him with dread. He had little family of his own. He did have an older cousin on his father's side whose name was Joseph and who lived in a far-off village called Nazareth. It would be a perfect place to go due to its remoteness. Also, Judah knew that Joseph's wife Mary was pregnant and expecting a child about the same time that Lila was due, a circumstance that would make Lila happy. But Judah hesitated. A trip to Nazareth would take several days and such a trip might not go well for Lila.

In addition, Joseph was closer in age to Judah's father Gideon than he was to Judah. So, Judah had not had a lot of contact with Joseph other than attending his marriage to the much younger Mary and receiving word of Mary's pregnancy. With such scarce contact, Judah wondered nervously whether Joseph would provide him with any kind of hospitality or aid. Judah was particularly concerned that Joseph would be put off when Judah revealed he was fleeing from the Romans. On the other hand, there had been a strong bond between Joseph and Gideon, and, because of the many pilgrims who were traveling to and from Jerusalem for the festival, the roads would be busy enough for Lila and him to travel without being noticed. So, Judah decided the benefits outweighed the risks.

Early that night, Judah told Lila of his plans. Judah hoped the episode would blow over in a few months, whatever happened. So, he emphasized to Lila that they would be away for only a short while. Understandably, Lila was unnerved by the news. Judah had all he could do to reassure her as her tears spilled out uncontrollably.

Soon, Lila accepted the need for urgency and began collecting their most important possessions. Judah removed the stones from the hiding place where he kept an emergency horde of denarius, Roman coins, and gathered together his healing tools and writing materials. Judah then packed one of the small wagons the servants used for grain deliveries.

Judah had not kept the gift of reading and writing to himself. He had taught his devoted servant Ephraim how to read and write in Aramaic, tools that served the appreciative Ephraim well for he was Judah's right arm in the management of the family grain business. Judah found Ephraim and instructed him on management issues while Judah would be away. Obviously, there would be questions about Judah and Lila's absence. Judah directed Ephraim to say that Judah was investigating grain storage facilities outside of Jerusalem for possible purchase and wanted Lila to be with him in case her condition warranted Judah's healing talents. Finally, he instructed Ephraim to make more substantial withdrawals from the family's money changer who also acted as keeper of the family's wealth, and to await instructions by messenger on the disposition of such funds and any other needs Judah might have.

As dawn arrived the next day, Ephraim helped Judah hitch one of the family's donkeys to the packed wagon. Judah lifted his pregnant wife on to the wagon, making her as comfortable as possible, and set out on the road to Nazareth.

Chapter Three
The Steinhailer Mansion, Scarsdale
Week One: The Present

Steinhailer was understandably perplexed, but he tried to remain patient as Yousef set up a Bluetooth connection that would unlock a secret compartment in his briefcase. Anxiously, Steinhailer attempted to distract himself by admiring a resplendent display of “ocean spray” orchids. For an impatient moment, he pondered the brilliant blue flowers.

Yousef finally retrieved a small thumb drive from his briefcase. “May I plug this into your computer?”

“Of course. While my computer is open, I can also make the funds transfer to Boutros.”

“Thank you. I’m sure he’ll appreciate that.”

Steinhailer turned on the computer, entered his password, scrolled down through his bank accounts, found the personal account maintained for his wife and himself and arranged for the agreed-upon sum for the crowns to be sent. He then tapped on the auxiliary drive icon to bring up the contents of the thumb drive and immediately observed two video files. Eagerly, Steinhailer brought up the first of the two videos.

Yousef asked Steinhailer to put the video on pause. “Before we continue, do you recall reading about the Isis bombing of two Coptic churches last year?”

“Yes. In fact, my congregation has raised funds for the survivors. I’m pleased to say that I helped spearhead the effort. I believe one of the targeted churches was somewhere near Cairo and the other in Alexandria.”

“Correct. The first blast was in the City of Tanta about 90 kilometers from Cairo at the Mar Girgis church. Twenty-nine

people died. The second blast struck St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church in Alexandria, seat of the Coptic Holy See, killing 18."

"What's happening to the Copts in Egypt is despicable. I was hoping to see the end of it, but then there was that bus attack last November that killed seven worshippers on their way to the Saint Samuel monastery."

"The bus attack was an unfortunate reminder of the fragile position of the Copts--enough so that the authorities have felt compelled to suppress coverage of a more recent attack against another Coptic target."

"What target?"

"Another church-related structure. To be more exact, a church-owned residence near a remote monastery. The residence was occupied by a retired, but revered, Coptic religious leader, someone well known to Boutros."

"But, why was news of the event suppressed?"

"If word leaked out that one of the great fathers of the church had been targeted, the already high level of panic within the Coptic community might have become even more widespread. The Egyptian authorities had already punished the perpetrators of the church bombings and they were not interested in any further bad publicity."

"But wouldn't the Copts have wanted the attack publicized to shine an additional spotlight on what's going on?"

"In the ordinary case, you'd be right. But, in this case, the Coptic leadership was quite content to leave the incident unpublicized."

Steinthaler couldn't suppress his puzzlement. "What was different about this attack?"

"The residence had significance beyond its celebrated occupant and concealed a number of church artifacts and codex's, some going back to the beginning of the monastery. One of the codex's was the scroll about which Boutros recently contacted you."

Maury stiffened at the reference to the scroll. "You know I followed through on Boutros's request and made the inquiry he had asked me to make. But, after reporting back to him, I never heard anything further."

"I'm afraid that's true. But, as you will see in the video, the attack on the residence made it necessary to discontinue matters."

"Then, let's get to it." Steinthaler quickly un-paused the first video which set out in greater detail the content of the scroll and the attack on the residence. He then ran the second video. After a presentation of about fifteen minutes, Steinthaler understood why Boutros needed his help.

After watching the second video, Steinthaler let out a whistle. He turned to Yousef who was waiting expectantly for his reaction. "Tell Boutros I'm sure we can help. In the video, he said he was going someplace where he would be safe--to the place where it all began? What did he mean? Is he really going to be okay?"

"Other than advising he is indeed fine, I don't think I can be of assistance in answering your questions."

Steinthaler was puzzled, but he knew not to pry. In addition, he was eager to place his new prize in the collection room in the basement. Excusing himself for a moment, he headed for the basement stairs, crowns in hand. He arrived at

the door to the collection room and carefully tapped in his password, which then activated an identification pad. He placed the fingers from his right hand on the pad. Almost immediately, his fingerprints were recognized and the door to the room opened. He had prepared for the arrival of the crowns and placed them on the velvet-coated display case specially designed for them.

Steinthaler had also obtained a clear plastic viewing case for the certificate similar to the viewing cases that accompanied the other pieces in his collection. It was his custom to initial the lower left corner on the back of the certificate and write in a short notation as to the significance of the piece. He hadn't yet decided what he wanted to say, and he didn't want to keep Yousef waiting. So, he merely initialed the back of the certificate and then slipped it into the plastic case where it could be read. Taking one last glance at his new acquisitions, he closed the door to the collection room behind him and headed upstairs.

He returned to the solarium, poured another drink for Yousef and himself and then accompanied his visitor to the front door. "Let me walk you to your car? This absurdly long driveway is one of the few things I dislike about this house. It makes all my guests who have to park and then make the trek to the front door feel like delivery boys." Steinthaler held the door open and the two began to walk along the footpath bordering the driveway leading to the parking area.

Chapter Four
The Dawn of the Common Era
Nazareth, 4 BCE

Judah had been right to worry about Joseph's reaction to putting him up, particularly with the Romans possibly in pursuit. However, Mary had been much more sympathetic, particularly given Lila's condition. She had respectfully reminded her husband of the Torah's injunction to treat strangers, not to speak of family, kindly. In the end, Joseph had relented if only for the sake of Lila's unborn child. It was a tight fit as Joseph, an artisan, lived in modest circumstances, much the same as everyone else in Nazareth. But they had made it work.

More than two months had gone by and the Hebrew month of Kislev, the third month in the calendar, had arrived. During that time, Judah had heard from Ephraim that the tribune's infection had resolved itself. Judah would have liked to return to Jerusalem right away. However, Lila's pregnancy continued to pose problems and Judah thought it unwise for her to travel.

Then, unexpectedly, a census decree was issued. The decree directed every male in the empire to return to his place of birth for the census count. Joseph, who was originally from the small town of Bethlehem, just a day's walk southwest of Jerusalem, was torn about what to do since Mary was close to giving birth. But Joseph maintained a wary respect for Herod and his Roman backers and didn't want to do anything that might jeopardize his family. So, he announced that Mary and he would be traveling to Bethlehem.

Judah, of course, also knew about the census. However, he held to his disinclination to travel with his pregnant wife. Instead, he planned to remain in Nazareth and send a messenger to Ephraim directing him to cooperate with the Romans and to pay whatever bribe was necessary to induce the authorities to ignore Judah's absence from the census count. However, Lila

had prevailed upon Judah to travel with Joseph and Mary, reminding Judah of Joseph's hospitality and of the fact that Mary might need Judah's healing skills if anything bad happened on the trip. Judah had relented and, together, the two couples set out for Bethlehem.

The trip had gone well and the tavern owners along their route had gone out of their way to make the expectant mothers comfortable. However, their relatively uneventful trip took an unexpected turn as the foursome reached the outer limits of Bethlehem. All of a sudden, Mary's water gave out and she began having severe and frequent cramps. There were no inns nearby and the only structure within site was a farmhouse. Luckily, the farmer and his wife were kindly people and offered to shelter the four travelers in their manger. It was there, with Judah's help, that Mary gave birth to a baby boy who seemed to glow as he lay in his mother's sheltering arms. Judah had some money remaining, but not a lot. So, Judah sent a messenger to Ephraim, who forwarded additional funds, enabling Judah to find better living arrangements for the four of them.

Joseph and Mary's joy knew no bounds. Remarkably, they soon discovered that their joy was shared by others. Soon, three men bearing gifts arrived from the east, saying a star had led them to the new king of the Jews.

The baby boy born to Mary was given the name Yeshua. Eight days after his birth, Judah circumcised him. Judah had presided over many circumcisions and each time he had been moved by the significance of his task. But this circumcision had been different. It was as if his hand had been independently guided. When it was over, Judah lay down the knife he had used—a fine instrument with a haft made of ram's horn. As he looked to the heavens in prayer, he reflected on the voice he had heard during the ceremony.

Very soon after, Lila gave birth to a bubbly little girl name Dinah. There was no longer any reason to stay away from Jerusalem, or so Judah thought, and he was eager to return with

his wife and new daughter. However, two events of great consequence intervened.

First, Joseph received a vision that he should flee the country with his family for Egypt. He had gone to Judah to discuss his plan to leave that very night, just as a courier arrived with a message from Ephraim regarding the three men from the east. The men had been in Jerusalem before coming to venerate Yeshua in Bethlehem. In Jerusalem, Herod had asked about the purpose of their trip. He had been alarmed at their response, but concealed his anxiety. Instead, he had asked the three men to report back to him after finding the new king of the Jews. Instead, they had left Bethlehem without saying a word.

Herod was not one to be crossed. He was respected for his massive construction projects that had brought prosperity to the land. However, as everyone knew, the last few years of his rule had been stained by paranoia and cruelty. Not only had he killed his wife Mariamne, along with her two sons, brother, mother and grandfather, but, in addition, he had also murdered his first born, Antipater. It was in this frame of mind that Herod had heard about the newborn king from the three travelers from the east. He had no interest in a contender to the throne, newborn or otherwise.

When the three men failed to report back to him, Herod's anger at their deception had been without limit. As reported by the courier, his wrath had been so great he had decreed all male babies in Bethlehem were to be executed.

As Judah and Joseph agonized over the decree and how Joseph would make his escape, Judah was reminded of the voice he had heard while consecrating the child—the voice directing him to protect the baby and safeguard his well-being. As he pondered the path directed by the voice, another courier arrived with a communication from Ephraim. As Judah, listened to the messenger, he realized the directive contained in the voice and his own fate were now intertwined.

The message had pertained to the tribune. Though his arm had escaped infection, he had ignored Judah's instructions and had used it too quickly. Beset with a misshapen arm, he had irrationally blamed Judah and had sought revenge. He had been to Judah's house. Upon not finding Judah at home, the tribune had flown into a rage and torched Judah's main storage facility, killing one of his servants. The tribune's anger was still not sated, and he had also vowed to find and kill Judah. Now, Judah, too, would have to act quickly to escape the Roman establishment. Once again, Lila and he, now with their baby daughter, would be on the road with Joseph and his family. However, this time, Judah would not hesitate at having Joseph and his family by his side. For it was clear to Judah that the need to flee the tribune's revenge was not a random circumstance, but rather the means by which he would be able to accompany Yeshua and fulfill the charge given to him by the voice.

Judah returned his attention to Joseph. He advised as confidently as he could that all would be well and that their families would be traveling together. But Joseph was uneasy. In the vision, Joseph had been told to leave that night. So, Judah hastily devised a plan that would enable Joseph and his family to leave immediately but still regroup with Judah for their escape. Soon afterwards, Joseph and his family left for a pre-arranged safe location where they would await further word from Judah.

Chapter Five
The Steinhailer Mansion, Scarsdale
Week One, the Present

The Steinhailer mansion had been built at a time when garage bays were designed for much smaller vehicles than those that inhabit today's highways. So, there were no cars in the two-car garage in the front of the house. Instead, the driveway had been extended to the side of the house. There it ended in a covered carport big enough for three cars.

From the carport, the intruder had a full view of the driveway all the way to the street. He had employed a sophisticated aerial GPS system to determine that the carport provided his best vantage point. But, even if he had not, a simple online search would have given him an aerial view of the premises, the location of the carport and the best way to penetrate the property.

It had not been easy beating Yousef to the Steinhailer mansion, but luckily the intruder and his accomplice knew exactly which flight Yousef would be taking from Cairo to New York and they were able to secure seats on an earlier flight. They had been relieved when Yousef arrived at the mansion exactly at the time he had estimated in his overheard conversation with Boutros. Helpfully, they had been provided a picture of Yousef so there would be no mistaken identity.

The intruder scanned the carport for surveillance cameras and saw none. The most accessible vehicle was a late-model, white Mercedes convertible. The intruder easily disabled its security system. Cautiously, he slipped into the vehicle, careful not to leave any prints or other telltale evidence. Luck was with him. The electrical key was sitting in plain site on the passenger seat. He wouldn't have to jump start the car.

If, before entering the vehicle, he had any question as to its primary driver, all doubt disappeared as he took in the heavily

perfumed interior of the vehicle. It clearly belonged to Anita Steintaler. He rolled that realization around in his mind as he contemplated what he was about to do. He knew his standing in the organization depended on the success of the operation. Unbidden, memories of his ill-fated attack in London came to mind. He wouldn't allow a repeat to happen today.

Methodically, he disabled the two front air bags. He then awaited word from his accomplice who was sitting in a car inconspicuously parked on the street within view of the Steintaler's driveway. Finally, a text message appeared on his phone: "Target plus Steintaler walking to target's car."

He had not expected Steintaler to walk the other man to his car. The plan had been to eliminate the man called Yousef as he left the house and then go back and take care of Steintaler. Now, however, there were two men walking toward the car. A new thought came to the intruder. It seemed so serendipitously perfect. He was in Anita Steintaler's car, the very woman whose scandalous extramarital affair had been so widely publicized even the intruder's superiors had briefed him on the Steintalers' fragile marriage. Chillingly, he thought to himself: *Why not run down both Steintaler and the other man! With Anita Steintaler's car as the instrument of death, the authorities would not have to look too far for a suspect and a motive!*

Smiling, the intruder put the Mercedes in gear, then gunned the engine. Hearing the oncoming vehicle, Steintaler and Yousef only had a moment to look back. Uncomprehendingly, the two saw the white Mercedes bearing down on them and they had no time to run. When it was over, the intruder calmly checked both victims to ensure they were dead. Carefully avoiding the pooling blood on the blacktop, he pried the briefcase from Yousef's clenched fist. He didn't bother to remove Yousef's passport or cell phone. As was the case with his own passport and cell phone, he had been told the man would travel under counterfeit credentials and would purchase an untraceable, disposable cell phone at the airport.

With the briefcase in hand, he texted his companion to pick him up and take them both to the safe house that would be their home until reaction to the murders began to subside.

Anita Steinthaler had been busy at work in her studio at the other end of the house. It had been a pleasant evening. So, earlier, she had opened one of the studio's windows. She was interrupted in her work by the sound of the vehicle speeding down the driveway followed by a thud. She quickly put on her slippers. Hurriedly, she left the studio and headed toward her husband's study.

When she arrived, the room was empty. However, she noticed that her husband's private phone was on the desk and that his laptop was in full, open position. She knew her husband would never have left either item that way unless he planned on returning immediately. She wondered where he might be. When he failed to return, she investigated the rest of the house. Still unsuccessful, she gathered her resolve and decided to look out front at the source of the noise. She grabbed a flashlight and headed for the driveway.

What she saw turned her stomach. There, on the driveway, was her car with its grill smashed in. In front of the damaged car and lying on the blacktop were her husband and another man, both motionless and both bleeding profusely. She went to check on her husband and almost slipped on the bloody blacktop. A mournful scream escaped from her mouth as she realized he was dead.

In her haste, she had left her own phone in her studio. She didn't wish to disturb her husband by checking his body for a cell phone. She remembered seeing his private phone on his desk and his study was much closer than her studio. She collected herself as best she could and raced to the study. She picked up her husband's cell phone, but realized it was password protected.

Her panic was now rising steadily. Sobbing, she ran back to her studio, found her phone and began to tap in numbers. But, instead of calling the police, she tapped in the number of her older son, Malcolm, who lived nearby.

Blessed with an engaging manner, the dark-haired and blue-eyed, Malcolm Steinthaler had worked in his father's company for two years before attending business school at Columbia. Malcolm had already shown strong signs of following in his father's footsteps even before graduate school, but he had wanted to work for another investment firm before returning to work with the elder Steinthaler. Instead of choosing a Wall Street firm, Malcolm had chosen a boutique hedge fund in nearby Greenwich Connecticut where he had been a valued funds manager for several years since graduation.

It was much easier to commute from Westchester to Greenwich than from Manhattan to Connecticut. So, Malcolm had decided to rent an apartment near home, which provided him with the benefit of having access to his father for business advice. It also enabled him to be near his girlfriend, Wendy Sonnenzweig. An upstate New Yorker from a modest Jewish family, Wendy had studied education at the nearby State University of New York at New Paltz. She taught in the Westchester school system. She loved her job, the synagogue she attended and her Malcolm. From outward appearances, Wendy's and Malcolm's relationship seemed picture perfect. But, despite Malcolm's efforts to bridge the divide between their backgrounds, Wendy had always felt ill at ease in the gilded world of the Steinthaler family. One day, it got to her and, sadly, she left a note for Malcolm swearing her everlasting love but insisting it was never to be. Malcolm had done everything he could think of to bring them back together, but it had been to no avail. Fortunately, he had his work which served as a balm against the emptiness he felt.

After finishing work, Malcolm had lingered at the downstairs security desk where he had chatted with Carlos, one of the nighttime security guards. Carlos' daughter Alana would be the first in the family to attend college. But, not just any college! She was going to Vassar, Malcolm's alma mater, on a full scholarship. She was smart enough to get into Vassar on merit. But, taking no chances, Malcom had coached her on how to apply and had pulled a few levers in the process. Her prospects had not suffered as Malcolm was already becoming one of the school's youngest and most prolific benefactors.

With news of Alana's progress in hand, Malcolm said good night to Carlos, got into his car and headed for Balducci's food market in Scarsdale to pick up prepared food for dinner. He then drove the one mile to his nearby apartment and barely had time to open the door when his cell phone rang. He picked up his cell phone and saw that it was his mother calling.

Malcolm was savvy enough to recognize there are often two stories behind every embattled relationship. As a result, he had remained close to both of his parents and had refrained from taking sides. He knew his mother still loved his father. However, he was also aware that, as his father's success in both the business and philanthropic worlds required increased amounts of his time, his mother had felt more and more abandoned. She had sought an outlet and had immediately regretted it.

His father, of course, had been hurt, his wounded state having been compounded by the prying eyes of Westchester Jewish society. But, he had graciously acknowledged his own choices may have contributed to Anita's and his fraying relationship and to his wife's sense of abandonment. His guarded realism had kept the door open for some progress toward reconciliation.

During this difficult time, Malcolm had served as comforter and arbiter to both of his parents, an unenviable role for a child, even one as sophisticated as Malcolm. His father had been unusually appreciative, even to the point of letting down

his guard and taking Malcolm into his confidence. He had told Malcolm that, after the disclosure of Anita's affair, he had changed his will. Malcolm was now set to receive a controlling interest in the hedge fund. Despite being on the outs with his father, Malcolm's brother Alex would also be taken care of, but in a different manner, with his bequest held in trust.

The rest would go to Anita if she remained married to Steinthaler. Malcolm had many questions about his father's intentions, not to speak of what rights his mother might have under state law. But he chose not press matters in the interest of preserving the confidence his father had placed in him.

Anita had also turned to Malcolm. She had told him many times that it was his support and reassurance that had enabled her to get past the guilt and fear. So, Malcolm was not surprised to hear from his mother and assumed the call related to his parents' difficult reconciliation. On the other hand, he wasn't looking forward to talking to his mother at this moment. He assumed the conversation would relate to her earlier call about the shouting match Maury and she had had earlier that day. He was anything but ready for what he was about to hear.

At first all Malcolm heard was sobbing. Then, his mother became more intelligible. "You've got to come here quickly. I need you. It's awful."

"Mom calm down. What's awful? Have you and dad had another fight?"

"Malcolm. You have to come. It's dad! He's dead and so is another man. Their bodies are on the driveway."

Malcolm knew his mom was not prone to hallucination, though she might dramatize from time to time. Still, she was so insistent! "Mom, I'm not sure I heard you correctly. Please start over."

At length, Anita calmed herself to the point where she could tell what she knew without sobbing. When she had finished describing more fully what she had seen on the driveway, emphasizing that she had checked her husband's body for signs of life and had found none, Malcolm could hardly utter a word. His father! Dead! He couldn't believe it. In addition, there was another man lying on the blacktop. What could have happened. "Mother, have you called the police?"

"No. I'm too frightened."

"I'll be right over. Should I park on the street, rather than the driveway?"

"Yes. But you'll have to walk past what happened. Please prepare yourself."

"Okay. Where will you be?"

"In your dad's study."

Malcolm of course was not prepared for what he saw. There was not even any reason to check the bodies as the amount of blood on the pavement was staggering. Besides, his mother had already done that. He rushed to his father's study where his mother was sobbing, a half-consumed glass of scotch in front of her. Malcolm hugged his mother as reassuringly as he could. But he could not hold back the tears. When he stopped crying, he surveyed the room where his father had met with the other murdered man. He noticed the open computer and his father's cell phone just as his mother had. But he also noticed something else. There was a thumb drive in the USB slot of the computer. He thought it strange that his father had used such a dated device as he was practically a computer nerd and would have downloaded any files he required. Almost without thinking, Malcolm removed the thumb drive, careful to leave no marks, and put it in his pocket. "Mother, we have to call the police. We also have to call Alex and, if, for once, he chooses to answer his

phone, let him know what happened and get him to come home. I'll also have to forewarn Phil Mintzes at the company. The fallout tomorrow is going to be crazy.”

Chapter Six
The Dawn of the Common Era
Bethlehem, 4 BCE

Following the Assyrian invasion of the lower kingdom of Judah in 597 BCE and the assassination of Gedaliah, its king, large numbers of Judeans sought safety any place they could find sanctuary. As a result, Jewish communities sprang up throughout the fertile crescent as well as in Egypt. Over the centuries, these exilic groups developed into full-fledged Jewish communities. Memphis, the largest of these communities, had a temple exceeded in size only by the great temple in Jerusalem.

Judah had never been to Egypt. However, he knew of many of the centers of Jewish life in Egypt through his dealings in the grain business and he wanted to discuss possible destinations with Joseph. The next day, Judah found Joseph at the pre-arranged hiding place. He found Judah repacking the family's two thatched traveling cases that had hastily been thrown together the preceding evening. Despite the cold weather, Joseph was perspiring, stress written on his face. Judah approached him. "It looks like your packing is well on its way. How are Mary and the baby?"

"Mary is heartsick. She understands the seriousness of the situation, particularly in light of the vision I received, but leaving last night without any real time for preparation was very unsettling for her. Every time little Yeshua cries, Mary dissolves into tears at the thought of subjecting him to the dangers of travel. That's why I'm doing the packing and not Mary."

Judah put his arm around the shoulder of his older cousin. "I fully understand. Lila acted the same way when I told her we, too, would have to leave Jerusalem to escape that fool of a tribune. But Mary will come around. Lila will see to that. In the meantime, have you given more thought to our conversation and where in Egypt you want to go?"

At hearing the question, Joseph's shoulders sagged. Without looking at Joseph, he managed a muffled reply. "I really don't know where to go. Egypt is so far away. Even with camels, it will take days and we each have newborns. Also, the route is dangerous and I don't have that much to spend."

"That's why I came to talk. Tonight, after dark, Ephraim will be coming with sufficient funds to enable all of us to travel to Egypt and get settled once we arrive. I have some ideas where we should go."

After hearing Judah's ideas, Joseph's face lit up, but he still sought reassurance. "Will there really be enough for all of us and can we count on being safe?"

"Yes! In addition to shekels and denarias, Ephraim will also be bringing two of my most trusted servants. Both will be armed and one, a man named Ehud, is a skilled archer. The other, a man named Mattan, is quite strong and knows how to take care of himself. They will serve as body guards. Ephraim is also bringing a woman named Sari, whose husband and newborn baby were both killed in a tragic accident. She'll help nurse the babies, particularly, if either Mary or Lila have problems. The two servants and the wet nurse have all been given generous sums and will receive additional pay once we arrive at our destination. They'll have enough to return to Jerusalem if that is their wish."

"Mary will be so relieved. But, how will Mary and Lila travel? They're not in any kind of shape to walk all the way to Egypt."

"That's where my experience as a trader in grains comes into play. I have a pretty fair idea of how the commercial caravans work and where they stop to trade. I don't think it will be difficult for us to bypass Jerusalem and join a caravan heading for Egypt. Ephraim is already securing two camels who will serve as pack animals and rides for Mary, Lila and the babies. I've

worked with injured people, particularly those with back problems, who needed to travel by camel. Years ago, I developed a camel hammock that rides high on either side of the animal, helping to avoid back stress. Ephraim will be bringing two sets of hammocks with him. Further, with so many people moving around due to the census, there should be added activity on the established routes, reducing the possibility of being attacked by bandits. What do you think?"

Joseph had listened attentively, and, with each word of reassurance from Judah, he had acquired new confidence. "You've thought it out so well. But, what route will we take?"

"A good question. Our journey to Egypt should take us south along the coastal route and then west across the desert. Where we actually wind up will be determined to a large degree by the destination of the caravan we join. Once in Egypt, we can work our way south and look for the Jewish communities I mentioned. We'll have sufficient funds and my servants should keep us safe during the journey. The weather will be cool due to the season. So, travel should be bearable, and our wives and babies will be riding at all times."

"A moment ago, I was feeling despair. However, you've filled me with renewed optimism. It's been such a crazy time since Yeshua was born. First, the unexpected birth in the manger. Then, those three elders who referred to the baby as king. Then, I had that vision telling me to flee to protect Yeshua. All of it happened so fast. But, thankfully, we are all healthy and you, dear Judah, have found a way for us to remain safe. No need for Lila to talk to Mary. I'll go to her now. I'm sure I can make her understand.

That night, Ephraim arrived with the two servants, the wet nurse, the money they would need and two very imposing looking camels. Reassuringly, the servants were experienced in

the handling of camels, a skill Judah's station in life had never required him to master. Equally importantly, Ephraim had heard about a caravan from Damascus that would be passing through Bethlehem on the way to the coast and then to Egypt.

In the morning, Ephraim and one of the two servants rode out to meet the caravan and negotiate with the caravan master. Fortunately, the caravan master, a man named Naramsin, had not heard of Herod's decree. So, he was unaware he might be taking on fugitives and was willing to strike a reasonable bargain.

The next day, Judah paid Naramsin half of the negotiated amount. The two servants helped load the camels and prepare them for their new riders. Though Judah had managed the entire process for everyone else with aplomb and efficiency, he now had to decide about his own belongings and what he should pack.

The servants had not arrived empty handed. At Judah's request, they had brought his medical instruments and a large basket of medicines Judah employed in the treatment of a variety of ailments. As he evaluated the instruments, he carefully picked up the knife he had used to circumcise Yeshua and admired its newly inscribed handle. Returning the knife to its proper place, Judah next examined his collection of medicinal remedies.

In neatly wrapped cloth, there was frankincense to be used as an antiseptic in the treatment of wounds such as the one incurred by the tribune, myrrh for the treatment of digestive problems, borage to be used as an anti-inflammatory and for the treatment of rheumatism, fennel, also for use as anti-inflammatory, pomegranate for the treatment of ulcers of the mouth and dysentery, tarragon leaves that could be brewed into a soothing medicine for the treatment of upset stomachs and cabbage leaves that could be used as a poultice in the treatment of wounds. In addition to these commonly used medicines, there were also lesser-known medicines Judah had learned about from his reading of Greek medical texts.

Judah smiled at the collection of herbs and medicines and carefully laid them out on a table before reorganizing them and returning them to the basket. But pleased as he was to bringing his collection of healing agents, he was even more pleased at one other set of items Ephraim had packed for him.

Judah lived in a time when most writing was done on papyrus. Papyrus had excellent characteristics as a writing medium. It was inexpensive and light in weight. In addition, lengths of papyrus records could be glued together. So, there was no limit to its length or the size of the rolls into which it was wound. But it was bulky.

Some years earlier, Judah had come across a new writing medium that was beginning to establish itself in his part of the world. Made of cured animal skins, parchment was heavier than papyrus and limited in size to the animal skin from which it was derived. However, it was more durable than papyrus, more compact and it stood up better to the elements. By poking two holes in the left or right side of each sheet of inscribed parchment and threading twine through the holes of many sheets, one could create an expandable, multiple-page document that could readily be flipped through to find a sought-after entry. Rapidly, parchment had become Judah's preferred means for recording his personal and medical records.

Judah carefully sorted through the twine-bound parchment records that lay neatly stacked in front of him. Carefully, he chose six bound collections containing his most important medical and business records. He could bring no more as the camels were already burdened with riders and personal belongings. The rest of the parchment records he returned to Ephraim to take back to Jerusalem.

Chapter Seven
The Steintaler Mansion, Scarsdale
Week One, the Present

The property tax rate in Scarsdale is among the highest in the country. However, for their substantial tax outlays, Scarsdale residents enjoy a public-school system second to few, perfectly executed public services such as trash pickup and a police force teeming with polite, well-educated officers. Detective Sergeant Miles Hemingway was no exception to the rule. Meticulous, well-spoken and courteous to a fault, Hemingway had earned his stripes through attention to detail and a carefully-cultivated friendly manner. There had been murders in Scarsdale during Hemingway's time, but never had he observed a scene like the two lifeless bodies that lay sprawled on the Steintaler's driveway. The site had so appalled him that he was finding it difficult to summon the enthusiasm that usually accompanied his first round of questioning in a criminal investigation.

But, in this case, there was no avoiding it. Indeed, the department had moved more quickly than it ever had before. Already, fingerprint and DNA samples had been taken from the Mercedes, the bodies, Steintaler's study, his liquor cabinet, his laptop and his cell phone. News of the double murder had spread rapidly within the law enforcement community. In response, the police lab and coroner's office would open early the next morning and forensics was already abuzz. Everyone knew that, by morning, the press corps would get wind of the murders. So, work would have to be concluded early to avoid the madhouse that was likely to emerge in front of the Steintalers' driveway.

Hemingway would have preferred to question Anita Steintaler by herself. However, Malcolm had persuaded him that his mother was in no condition to field questions alone and, given the lateness of the hour, it would be in the best interest of

the investigation if he were present during Hemingway's questioning of his mother.

Anita now sat on a couch in the cathedral-ceilinged family room of the Steintaler mansion. Malcolm sat beside her and Hemingway sat opposite her. "Mrs. Steintaler. Please accept the condolences of the entire Scarsdale Police Department at the loss of your husband. He was a great man. My colleagues and I give thanks every day for the police recreation center that your husband and you gave to the Department. If we can do anything for you, we are at the ready."

"Thank you, Sergeant Hemingway. As you can imagine, I'm still in shock."

"I understand completely. I do have some preliminary questions for you. But, if you feel it's too much, we can wait until morning."

"Thank you again. But, I'm wide awake now and while things are fresh in my mind I'd like to go ahead before the reality settles in. In addition, the rabbi is coming over in the morning to discuss funeral arrangements and I want to give Maury's funeral and burial as much attention as I can."

"Very good. When do you expect the funeral will take place? I believe the men and women of the department will be happy to provide security as a sign of respect for your husband."

"Thank you," Malcolm interjected. "We may take you up on the offer. As you may be aware, under Jewish tradition, burial is to take place as soon as possible. However, in this case, we don't know when that will be due to the need for an autopsy."

"Of course. If it's of any help, the arrangements for the autopsy are already underway. I think you can plan for the funeral two days after tomorrow."

“Very good to know. That is soon enough to satisfy the spirit of the law and should also give my brother time to get home.”

Hemingway’s attention had been directed at Malcolm during their brief exchange. It had been a good opportunity to formulate an initial reaction to the older Steintaler son and Hemingway had come away with a positive impression based on his brief observations. Mrs. Steintaler was a different story entirely. Hemingway was a professional. He had the training and capability to investigate the brutal murder of Maury Steintaler without being influenced by what he and everyone else had read about the Steintalers’ marital difficulties. Even so, his instinct told him to be on high alert as he turned toward Mrs. Steintaler and began his questioning.

“Do you know the identity of your husband’s visitor? We’ve already checked his passport and cell phone, and both lead to dead ends.”

“I’m afraid I don’t. Until I saw him sprawled on the driveway, I had never laid eyes on the man.”

“Which raises an interesting point. Is there anyone else who might have seen what happened?”

Anita began to say she didn’t believe so, when Malcolm interjected: “What about the Franzman’s? They’re right across the street.”

“Malcolm, dear, I wish they could be of help. But you’re probably not aware that since Al retired two years ago, Cindy and he have been spending half of the year in Israel. That’s where they are now.”

Hemingway acknowledged what Anita said with obvious disappointment. “That eliminates a lead I had hoped to pursue.

Getting back to your husband's visitor, do you at least know why he was here and what business he had with your husband?"

Anita had known the question would be coming, but she still hesitated. Only after Malcolm prodded her did she reply. "My husband was a collector of antiquities."

"Yes."

"Many of the artifacts and works of art in his collection came from Egypt."

"Go on, please."

"Egypt as you are aware is a poor country. Among its few riches are artifacts from its past—artifacts that are important to its self-image and to its tourist trade."

"Makes sense. Please continue."

Anita shifted uneasily, then replied. "Because of the importance of the artifacts, they are strictly controlled by the Egyptian authorities. However, some are allowed to leave the country for a variety of reasons part of which has to do with the hard currency they can draw."

"Are you telling me that your husband was dealing in contraband artifacts in violation of Egyptian law?"

"No, not at all. Maury always told me he did everything he could to comply with the law and to insist that his sources did the same. But, even at that, the rules can be abused by some who see an opportunity to profit. The man who was killed tonight along with Maury was bringing him artifacts from Egypt."

"Do you know what they were?"

“No. But if the man obtained the artifacts by inappropriate means, it’s possible his actions led to his and Maury’s deaths.”

At his mother’s reply, Malcolm shifted uneasily. “What you’re saying is serious and could have painful implications for father’s reputation. Maybe, you should take a break or, perhaps, have the company attorney listen in on Sergeant Hemingway’s questions.”

“Thanks Malcolm. I know what you’re saying, but for years now, I’ve been worried about how Maury built his collection and now my worst fears may have been realized. Sergeant Hemingway, please continue.”

“Thank you. You’ve obviously opened a whole new avenue of inquiry. But, for the moment, can you tell me where you were when your husband was meeting with his guest and why weren’t you there to greet the man along with your husband?”

“The short answer is that I rarely, if ever, met visitors pertaining to my husband’s collection.” Anita rubbed her eyes as tears began to swell. “The longer answer is that my husband and I had had a fight earlier in the day and he had made it clear he didn’t want to see me until he had thought things over.”

“I don’t want to pry. But, are you at liberty to disclose the reason for the altercation with your husband?”

Anita used her hanky to wipe her eyes. “Yes, I am. It’s no secret that Maury and I were having marital difficulties owing to my stupidity in seeing another man.”

“You are referring to Ralph Gittelson, whose name has been in the press?”

“Yes. Ralph is a nice man and the fault in seeing him was all mine.”

“I see. Are you up to continuing?”

“Yes. It’s not exactly a secret. In any event, when the story broke, I ended it with Ralph. Maury and I have been in couples’ therapy ever since.”

“How was that going?”

Anita cast a pained look in Malcolm’s direction and shook her head self-reproachingly. She hesitated for a minute and, after dabbing her eyes, continued. “Things weren’t great but seemed to be improving. That is, until today.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’d been missing an expensive bracelet and thought I might have left it at Ralph’s house during one of the occasions when I was with—I mean, when I visited—him. So, yesterday, for the first time since we broke up, I went over to his place to help him look for the bracelet. Maury must have been monitoring my calls and, this afternoon, he confronted me with the fact I had visited Ralph. I tried to explain, but Maury was in a fighting mood and had no patience for explanations.”

Again, Malcolm admonished his mother that she didn’t have to continue. But, as if her answers were a palliative for all she had caused herself and her husband to endure, Anita insisted on continuing. “He said he was going to activate the terms of our marital agreement and make sure that I would never be part of Westchester society again!”

“Mrs. Steinthaler, how old were Maury and you when you got married?”

“Let’s see. He was 28 and I was 26.”

“Was he wealthy at the time?”

“Oh, no. He came from a modest Jewish family and was the first in his family to go to college. He showed a lot of promise, even then. But he had nothing. For that matter, neither did I.”

“Wasn’t it unusual for a young couple as poor as Maury and you to have entered into a marital agreement?”

“Oh, we didn’t sign a marital agreement when we got married. That would have been stupid. In addition, we were madly in love and a marital agreement never even entered the equation.”

“Well then, when did you enter into a marital agreement?”

Again, Anita dabbed her eyes before responding. “Twelve years ago, when I wanted to keep Maury more than anything.”

“I don’t understand!”

“It’s all going to come out. The affair with Ralph was not my first. Twelve years ago, Maury caught me with another man. The only way Maury would agree to take me back was if I signed a marital agreement as insurance that I would never dishonor him again.”

Chapter Eight
The Mediterranean Coast
The Dawn of the Common Era, 4 BCE

Both Judah and Joseph were eager to get going. However, at the last moment, Lila ran a temperature and Judah was reluctant to start the trip while she was ill. Fortunately, Naramsin had sent another message to say the caravan had been stalled and the designated meeting time had been put off to the following day. As a worried Judah wondered whether there would be any more setbacks, Lila's temperature suddenly broke.

It was already late morning when the babies were nursed and raised on to the camels with their mothers. Judah said goodbye to a tearful Ephraim and the small contingent was on its way. When the group of seven adults and two infants arrived at the place designated for meeting the caravan, Judah could see the caravan had been delayed again. A camel has collapsed causing the baskets it was carrying to smash to the ground. Naramsin was livid. But soon, a new camel and baskets were finally secured, the contents of the destroyed baskets reloaded, and the caravan was finally on its way.

From the rendezvous point, the caravan proceeded southwest to the Mediterranean. Judah had seen the great sea many times when he went to Yoffa to inspect shipments. On one occasion, Lila had accompanied him and so had been exposed to the marvels of a body of water so vast it almost defied description. Joseph, too, had also seen the Mediterranean many times as a carpenter and builder for the new port cities the Romans were building along the north coast of the country. However, Mary had never seen the Mediterranean. On the morning of the fourth day of the trip, when the caravan made its first stop at Ashdod, Mary could hardly contain herself. The sparkling blue surface of the Mediterranean and the surf crashing against the shore was something that defied all her expectations.

In addition to the elation of seeing the sea in all its glory, Mary and everyone else expressed relief at finally being a several-days ride from Jerusalem and Herod's vengeance. At Ashdod, the caravan exchanged spices for food supplies, stocked up on fresh water and, after a night's rest, proceeded south along the sea.

In due course, the caravan made trading and resupply stops at Ashkelon and Gaza. If Ashdod and Ashkelon were busy port cities, Gaza was another matter entirely. Earlier a busy Nabotean port, Gaza had been sacked and destroyed by the Hasmoneans a century earlier. Then, in 63 BCE, the city had been rebuilt by the Romans and had prospered as a busy port with ships sailing to and returning from the North African coast of the Mediterranean. Everywhere in the port area, there were barrels of olive oil, cargos of produce and woven products, all ready to be shipped. Olive oil, in particular, was an extremely valuable commodity as it could be used as both a food substance as well as fuel for lamps. It also had medicinal properties and the residue of the pressed olives served as animal feed. While ships carrying precious cargos of olive oil headed out of the city, other ships carrying wheat from North Africa made port.

As the caravan passed the port area, Naramsin decided to stop amid the hubbub to see what trade potential existed. Judah would have liked to continue without stopping at another Roman port, but even he had to admit the odds of any word of their caravan getting back to Herod were small.

From Gaza, the travelers continued south along the Mediterranean Sea past Raphia, the gateway to Lower Egypt. From here, Naramsin planned to continue west into Egypt toward the fortified city of Pelusium, a trading port on the easternmost bank of the Nile. There, he hoped to trade for some of the region's high-quality flax. The beer made in Pelusium was another attraction.

This would be the most challenging part of the trip as the route to Pelusium, long used by invading armies as the gateway to Egypt, was also notorious for bandits who preyed on caravans, particularly those flush with trade goods acquired on the Palestinian coast.

Naramsin had instructed everyone to prepare for an early start the day of their departure. Judah found him early the next morning tending to one of the camels who had acquired an open sore as a result of being spurred too aggressively by its rider. The wounded camel had sat down and refused to budge. Naramsin was concerned that it would have to be destroyed, a costly and time-consuming proposition since a replacement animal would have to be found.

“What are you applying to the wound?” asked Judah.

“Why camel fat, of course.”

“That works well to a point. But I have something better. I prefer to dress such wounds with aloe and henna paste, rather than camel fat. Give me a minute. I’ll be right back.”

Judah returned and began his ministrations. While he was rubbing the balm on the camel, he noticed that a toe nail of the animal was uncomfortably long. He found an appropriate stone and filed down the offending nail. Soon, the sad-looking animal was back on its feet, grateful to be returning to its dreary life.

“Thank you. I’d heard you were quite a healer. But, surely, you didn’t come by for that reason!”

“Correct. I’m worried about a bandit attack. I know you’re in charge. But I thought you should know about Ehud’s and Mattan’s talents before thinking through your strategy.” Judah then proceeded to tell Naramsin about Ehud’s ability with a bow and arrow and Mattan’s command of the sword.

Naramsin was sincerely appreciative. “You’re correct. Most bandits view caravans as easy prey, never expecting men trained in combat, not to speak of an archer. If an attack does come, I’d like your archer to hang back where he can’t be seen and only unleash his arrows when he can’t miss his targets. If he can knock off one or two of the leaders, the rest will almost assuredly turn around and run. There are plenty of caravans and none of these jackals is going to risk his sorry hide just to lay his hands on our modest group of travelers.”

“I’m glad we had this talk. I don’t know what I’d do if anything happened to our baby girl or to little Yeshua.”

Judah then walked back to where his group was making preparations for the day’s ride. Quietly he took Ehud and Mattan aside and told them about his conversation with Naramsin. Ehud was the first to speak. “Both Mattan’s father and my father served your father, Gideon, and we in turn have served you for a long time—long enough, so you should know there is nothing to worry about. We’ll do whatever it takes to keep your family safe.”

Almost on cue, the attack came later that morning, seemingly out of nowhere. As the riders urged their camels on, their swords flashed in the bright sunlight. With the sun at their backs, they were hard to see except for the dust kicked up by their mounts.

Ehud and Mattan were prepared. As Mattan rode out with two of Naramsin’s fighting men, Ehud crouched low behind one of the camels. Instead of being daunted by the caravan’s counter attack, the marauders were, instead, encouraged as they had the numerical advantage. But just as they were about to overwhelm the caravan’s outnumbered defenders, Ehud unleashed a flurry of arrows unseating two of the three lead attackers, who fell to the ground writhing in agony.

As Naramsin had predicted, when the riders saw their leaders fall to the ground, they decided to cut their losses and hastily retreat. That is all except for the one remaining lead rider. With vengeance in his eyes, he urged his camel forward as fast as it would go. As all could plainly see, his intended victim was Ehud, the archer who had downed his two fellow attackers.

The charge of the lone camel rider had caught Ehud off balance. It was one thing to pick several targets among many in an open field. However, standing one's ground for a clean shot as a camel-mounted foe was bearing down on one's position was something else entirely. Ehud froze. The camel and rider kept coming, his rider's sword raised over his head ready for the kill. At the last moment, Ehud found shelter behind one of the caravan's tethered camels—enough to avoid a killing blow. Even so, the bandit's sword delivered a wound to his shoulder, causing him to wince in pain as blood began to flow.

The man was preparing to dismount and finish the job, when, all of a sudden Mattan sprang into action. He rammed his camel into the attacker's camel, dislodging the unprepared rider, who fell to the ground. Now, it was Mattan who prepared to dismount and finish the job. However, he had lost his sword. As the attacker prepared to get up and grab his fallen sword, Mattan knew he only had a moment to react. Quickly, he pulled out a knife he had been carrying under his robe. Before the attacker could get into a fighting stance, Mattan lunged at him and thrust the knife into his neck.

With the attack repelled, all eyes were on Ehud, who was sitting on the ground in obvious pain. Judah surveyed the wound and, to his dismay, observed it was very much like the wound of the Roman tribune he had treated. But, unlike the episode with the tribune, no time had elapsed before Judah had been called to help. Judah carefully washed the wound, gave Ehud a mixture of ground anise and water to keep his temperature down and then applied a poultice to stop the bleeding. With the aid of Mattan, Judah then applied traction to the fractured area and

used a garment to create a shoulder sling. Finally, Mattan and he used staves and burlap-like covering to create a tent to shelter Ehud from the sun.

Judah had done everything he could and had high hopes for Ehud's recovery. A grateful Naramsin agreed to hold the caravan in place for the few days Judah said would be needed for Ehud to make a full recovery. However, it was not meant to be. From the start, things did not go well, and Ehud suspected the attacker's sword had been exposed to or dipped in some agent that was causing Ehud's worsening condition. A brave man, Ehud knew how to hold in his cries. But even he could not fight infection without moans of anguish. As the second day turned into the third, Judah could see that Ehud was not making any progress. Soon, also, they would have to make a decision about resuming their journey.

Judah knew that Ehud was Lila's favorite servant and suggested a visit by Dinah and her might be beneficial to Ehud and help lift his spirits. Lila agreed. She had taken to walking with Dinah in the afternoon to help lull the baby to sleep while the caravan was waylaid under the desert sun. Mary and Yeshua had also accompanied Lila and Dinah on these walks. Since it was walk time, Lila suggested that Mary bring baby Yeshua along.

The two women and their babies walked across the small clearing where Ehud still lay on the ground, now quite delirious. As had been Judah's wont these last few days, he was also at Ehud's side applying wet compresses and doing what he could. The two babies had been quiet up until that time as the motion of their mothers' short walks had put them into a mood for sleep. However, as soon as Mary and Yeshua approached the seriously ill Ehud, Yeshua started to howl.

Alarmed that Yeshua's crying might upset Ehud, Judah was getting ready to help Mary escort Yeshua away from Ehud's sick bed. However, as he got up, he noticed something strange.

As Yeshua' crying intensified, Ehud's moaning lessened. Then, to Judah's delight, Ehud opened his eyes and asked for water. Instead of asking Mary and Yeshua to leave, Judah asked Mary if she would be willing to sit by Ehud with Yeshua, who by now had stopped crying. Mary complied without hesitation and held Yeshua close to Ehud so he could look at the baby. There, Mary and Yeshua stayed all night. In the morning, Ehud was cured.

Chapter Nine
Vassar College, Poughkeepsie New York
Week One, the Present

It was a beautiful day when Malcolm parked his car in the VIP visitors' lot at Vassar College. His father's funeral would not be until the next day and Malcolm had business he wanted to take care of before greeting the many friends and relatives who would be at the funeral.

The drive had only taken an hour and fifteen minutes, better than usual. Since graduation, he had not been a stranger to his former campus, known, among other remarkable accomplishments, for being the first degree-granting institution in America to offer baccalaureate diplomas to women. Unfortunately, Malcolm's daily commute to Connecticut and his extraordinarily long hours at work had all conspired to reduce the frequency of his personal visits to his alma mater. Of course, he maintained a regular online presence, especially after his father told him about the substantial gift he was leaving to Vassar in honor of Malcolm's love for the school. In his worst nightmares, he would never have imagined that the gift would become a reality so soon. But, it was now a reality and the cause for the first of two important meetings on campus today. It would also serve as a convenient camouflage for the meeting to follow.

Malcolm had arrived early enough to walk around campus before his first meeting, in part to reminisce and in part to feel the pulse of the school. The extraordinarily beautiful school grounds were so indelibly etched into his memory, he barely felt the need to soak up the physical surroundings. Rather, he wished to get a sense of the makeup of the student body, the announcements posted on the bulletin board in Main Hall and the way in which students from different backgrounds interacted. Despite his regular online contacts, everything always seemed different.

With each visit, the student body felt increasingly like a cross section of humanity, with students not only representing different communities in America, but also the entire world. Cantonese and mandarin could be heard in abundance as could accents from every corner of America, both rich and poor. The announcement sheets in the campus student union echoed these themes as they trumpeted an amazing array of events sponsored by student clubs and organizations.

Pleased with what he saw, Malcolm headed for his meeting with Dean Allison McKeaver, director of major gifts in the college's development office. Malcolm may have been the only person on campus wearing a suit, something he had never done as a student. But, given the importance of both of his missions, he felt more comfortable in business attire, although he studiously had avoided putting on a tie.

A receptionist welcomed Malcom and advised Dean McKeaver over the intercom that he had arrived. In short order, an attractively attired woman in her mid-forties came out to greet Malcolm. She had a huge smile and an inescapably winning manner. Malcolm had spoken to her by phone and communicated with her by email but had never met her in person and hadn't anticipated so well put together an administrator. He was happy he had worn his suit.

"Good morning," said Dean McKeaver, her extended hand at the ready. "I speak on behalf of the entire Vassar community, when I say we were shaken to the core at the loss of your father. Please accept our condolences and convey our heartfelt sorrow to your mother. Maury, as he seemed to be known to everyone, was a wonderful representative of both the world of business and the world of philanthropy. I might also note that, given your personal history of generosity toward the school, I'm delighted to meet you in person."

"Thank you Dean McKeaver for your words of comfort and support. Losing my dad was quite a blow. He was not only

my role model, but my mentor as well. In any event, the pleasure of being here and meeting with you is of course all mine.”

“I’ll take that,” said McKeaver, “provided we can operate on a first name basis.” With that, she ushered Malcolm into her unexpectedly compact office, a factor that pleased Malcolm, as his father had taught him to be wary of the exploding overhead cost that characterized many parts of the nonprofit and educational worlds.

Malcolm was the first to speak. “I’ll get right to the point. Vassar, as you know, is one of my great loves. Happily, my enthusiasm rubbed off on my father who considered my success here one of his great achievements. My father was a product of the New York City public schools which he has generously supported. But Vassar seemed to click with him. During my four years here, he followed my progress and made friends of several of my teachers.”

“I know. Jeff Liebowitz in our classics and archeology department considered your father a great friend and supporter.”

“You’re correct. The two of them have been online chess opponents for years. My father never had time to do all the things he wanted. But, almost every day, he set aside a half hour or so to knock heads over the chess board with Dr. Liebowitz.”

“I didn’t know that. What a charming vignette.”

“As I’m sure you’ve surmised, I’m here to advise you of a material expression of my father’s appreciation of the school. Most of his wishes are embodied in a living trust, which normally would be kept private. But, under the circumstances, I thought it would be just a matter of time before the press found out about everything. I wanted you to know before they did.”

“You’re very kind.”

“Well, here it is: As soon as my father’s debts are satisfied, and the inevitable investigations are completed, Vassar will be given the sum of \$20 million dollars to establish a center for Middle East conflict resolution. I believe this will be the largest gift the college has ever received from a non-alum.”

“I’m truly flabbergasted. Of course, I had guessed the purpose of your visit. But the sum is so huge and the use so noble. Thank you so much. Are there any restrictions?”

“None. My father had some concerns. But I talked him out of allowing his concerns to get in the way of his good intentions.”

For only a flickering moment, McKeaver’s upbeat manner gave way to surprise. Quickly, however, her smile returned, and she asked the obvious question: “What were his concerns? We can’t just ignore them in the face of so generous a gift.”

“Agreed. As you’re aware, my father was a great supporter of Israel. He also went to school at a time when multiculturalism had not yet reached the college campus and in an era when Jewish college kids only had to think about studies and careers. As a result, he didn’t fully understand the competing tensions on many of today’s campuses, particularly on the issue of Israel.”

“You’re talking about the anti-Israel demonstrations here at Vassar, as well as at many other places.”

“Yes, and, more particularly, the trend toward stifling pro-Israel speech.”

“I understand and we’re aware of it. We’re totally supportive of free speech. But, sometimes it’s difficult to draw the

line between the expression of one point of view and suppression of another.”

“True enough. But, here’s how my father saw it: For many Jewish students, support for Israel is a core part of who they are. So, when Israel is demonized on campus and its legitimacy challenged, it’s not just an uncomfortable political statement for many Jewish students, but also an attack on their very identity.”

“A fair point. I promise. We won’t let your father down.”

“I know that. Again, it was a pleasure meeting you. After a short walk, I’ll be on my way.”

“Again, our condolences to your mother and we won’t breath a word of your good news until you authorize us to make an official announcement.”

Chapter Ten
Farma and Mostorod, Egypt
The Dawn of the Common Era, 4 BCE

With the experience of the bandits far behind them, the weary travelers arrived at their next stop, Farma. If the travelers were tired, the camels were even more so. Judah had always been fascinated with the beasts of the desert and watched as the parched animals drank up several gallons of water within seconds. Judah then examined the animals who had carried Mary and Lila for chafing. Wherever he found open wounds, he applied the same henna paste he had used on Naramsin's camel.

In Farma, Judah sought out Jewish families without much success. However, one man said he had traveled throughout the area and had observed Jewish communities in Migdol, Tahpanhes, Noph, and Pathros, but that the largest was in Memphis. Serendipitously, Naramsin announced their next stop would be Mostorod, where he had special business, but that, following Mostorod, the caravan's final destination would be Memphis, instead of Pelusium.

The route to Mostorod proved to be eventful beyond expectation, but in an infelicitous way. The caravan was moving west toward the Nile and passing through a small, but high-walled ravine. The steep walls of the ravine had captured Judah's attention, both because of their rugged beauty, and also because of the loose rocks that posed a threat to anything below.

All of a sudden, Judah observed a small cloud of dust high up on the ravine wall to his right. Quickly, he yelled for everyone to dismount, take cover and pass the word down the line. He confirmed that Lila and Dinah were out of harm's way and looked around for Joseph and his family. To Judah's consternation, they had lagged behind while trying to calm the panicky camel carrying Mary and Yeshua. Joseph had managed to remove Mary and Yeshua from the camel but was now having difficulty escorting his distraught wife and baby to safety. As

Judah watched with alarm, he was overwhelmed by the same unearthly sensation he had experienced during the circumcision. Whatever else was at stake, Judah knew he had to save Yeshua. Quickly, he swept in, as the rocks began to crash around the baby, grabbed the hysterical Yeshua and motioned Joseph to help Mary to safety.

Everyone else in Judah's group had followed his instructions and headed away from the dust cloud and loud rumbling sound. However, Naramsin's men were not as quick to act. They had heard the warning from Judah's contingent, but they were only accustomed to taking orders from Naramsin, who only became aware of the threat when the rumbling sound became inescapable. By then, it was too late for him to respond effectively and timely.

Everything was now in chaos, with some men frantically trying to untether their animals, while others simply ran in any direction that promised protection. Judah was observing this scene of chaos when the first of the boulders struck, pinning down two animals and destroying their load. Luckily, no men were hit, but the damage had been done. The two animals had been carrying the water supply for the entire caravan, save for the small water bags that Judah's two camels carried. The motley group of travelers now faced the frightening prospect of traveling without water until they reached Mostorod.

Under Naramsin's direction, the caravan quickly regrouped, and the travelers began picking their way among the fallen stones. A hard and worrisome day's journey lay ahead until they reached Mostorod and its inviting stream.

The avalanche had not only wreaked havoc with the caravan but had also left an obstacle course of strewn rocks and stones in its path. To ensure the safety of the camels, all of the riders had dismounted so the animals could be directed through the maze of fallen debris. Once out of the ravine, the caravan had made excellent time despite being without water, and

everyone was looking forward to slaking their thirst in Mostorod's cooling waters.

Naramsin was familiar with the location of the stream and had directed his weary travelers to dismount and follow him. However, when they arrived at the stream, the scene that greeted them placed a cloud over whatever expectation of relief they may have had.

In Naramsin's memory, the stream had been a forceful waterway, with ample life-giving water available for anyone who needed it. Now, what he saw was anything like that. Instead of a strong flow of water, the stream offered barely a trickle—not nearly enough for the many water-bucket-carrying townspeople who had gathered in need of water.

The town's leaders were calling for calm and had announced they had sent out teams to determine where the stream's blockage had occurred. But their message was going unheeded. Many of the townspeople were now shoving one another to get at the small pool of water that remained, and fights had begun to break out.

Naramsin looked for someone willing to sell him a small amount of water. But there was no one to be found. Judah and his contingent were not far behind Naramsin and concernedly observed Naramsin's frustration. Sizing up the situation, Judah began to despair. The babies had been well fed during the last trying day. But both Lila and Mary were weak and in need of water and Judah's small supply had run dry.

Judah decided he would play on the mercy of the water hoarders by having Mary and Lila hold their babies as they walked toward the stream. Judah accompanied them, keeping a protective eye on both his beloved baby daughter and the baby Yeshua. Fortunately, the babies were quiet as Mary and Lila dramatized their circumstances. But, as Judah looked around, he realized they were not alone. Dozens of other mothers had

brought their own pitiful offspring and the place was bedlam with the sound of crying children.

Apparently, the noise from the other children had disturbed Yeshua who, up until that moment, had remained quiet as his mother paraded forlornly in front of the parched stream bed. All of a sudden, little Yeshua began crying in the same inconsolable manner as when his mother had carried him past the ailing Ehud.

As if in unison with Yeshua' tears, the sound of rushing water became apparent. How it had happened, no one knew, though some, looking for answers, glanced curiously at Yeshua. In a few short minutes, the stream was full, and people began to yell in excitement and head toward the resurgent waters. Soon, the water-parched crowd began to swell as men and women began running toward the stream. Without thinking, thirsty townspeople began pushing and elbowing one another in an effort to reach the stream, lest its waters dry up again.

Judah had kept a firm gaze on both babies during the entire episode. As the noise of the rushing water reached him, he had continued his fixed gaze on the babies. What he saw startled him beyond measure. As the sound of cascading water reached Yeshua, he suddenly stopped crying and, almost instantly, was peacefully at rest. *Had it been a coincidence, he wondered, or was this a reprise of what had happened at Ehud's bedside?*

Mary, who was relieved that Yeshua had stopped crying, was focused solely on her son and did not see the rush of townspeople coming in her direction. As they surged toward the stream, arms flailing and water bags swinging in the air, one of the water bags caught Mary behind the head. In an instant, Yeshua was on the ground, exposed and at risk of being trampled by the heedless crowd. Dazed by the blow, Mary looked around helplessly for the baby.

The stampeding crowd had obscured Judah's view of the two babies and their mothers. Soon, however, he located Lila and Dina and saw they were both safe. Now, as he looked for Mary and Yeshua and, to his horror, saw what had happened to them. Whatever force had called to Judah at the time of the circumcision and the avalanche now summoned him again and he knew what he had to do. Without hesitation, he quickly ran in the direction of the fallen Yeshua and threw himself on top of the defenseless child. As he sheltered the baby with his own body, he felt more and more townspeople piling on top of him. As his own breathing became more and more labored, Judah feared for both the baby and himself. But then he remembered the voice at the circumcision and he hugged the child with even greater determination.

Suddenly, Joseph came running in their direction swinging a stick to disburse the crowd. His actions were sufficient to divert the onrushing townspeople from where Judah and Yeshua lay. Fortunately, neither Judah nor the baby cradled in his arms had been seriously injured.

Soon reason returned to the undisciplined townspeople. Without any instruction, the men of the town had formed two lines. One line for passing empty water bags toward the stream where they would be filled by other townsmen, and the other line was for passing the full water bags back in the opposite direction.

As the events involving Yeshua, Mary and Judah were taking place, another man had observed the entire episode—both the power that Yeshua seemed to have exerted over the stream and Judah's heroism in his daring rescue of the child.

The man's name was Ahmed and, as the only person in Mostorod who could write, he served as the town's historian, scribe and supplier of mercantile documents. He had already recorded the events of the drought. Now, he intended to

chronicle the events leading to the return of the water. He wasted no time in taking out a scroll and a writing instrument, but then he hesitated. *Would his observations be believed? Had others seen what he had seen.* He thought he had detected some recognition. But he couldn't be sure. But he knew what he had seen. So, he wrote. He wrote of the apparent connection between the crying Yeshua and the return of the stream's waters. He wrote of how Yeshua had been thrown to the ground and how Judah had unselfishly used his own body to protect the helpless child. And, then he wrote of how profoundly the experience had affected him.

When he finished, he took pains to ensure that the scroll was stored in a safe place.

Chapter Eleven
Vassar College, Poughkeepsie New York
Week One, the Present

Malcolm left McKeaver's office deep in thought. Instead of taking the walk he had announced, he instead headed straight for the classics and archeology building and the office of Jeffrey Leibowitz, the longstanding holder of the Farnsworth Distinguished Chair in Classical Studies. Despite his eagerness to meet with his former professor, Malcolm could not resist the urge to visit some of his old classrooms and relive what for him had been the happiest phase of his growing-up years. Finally, he urged himself on. Leibowitz immediately responded to Malcolm's knock and the two hugged as the professor ushered in one of his favorite former students. A pot of coffee was waiting, perched awkwardly on one of the few open spaces in an office crammed from floor to ceiling with books in every imaginable ancient language.

Malcolm had been here many times dating back to his student days. But, every time he entered Leibowitz's cloistered academic surroundings, he bemusedly thought of the Sean Connery character, Henry Walton Jones, Sr., Harrison Ford's professorial father in the Indiana Jones movie, "Indiana Jones and the last Crusade." The characterization was not so far-fetched as Leibowitz's knowledge of ancient Greece, Egypt, Rome and Palestine and his enormously productive trips to the region had earned him the admiration of archeologists and religious leaders alike.

"I'm so glad to see you, but obviously saddened by the circumstances. Is your mother okay?"

"As good as can be expected, I suppose. But only time will tell."

“I suppose that’s to be expected. How about you? Are you okay?”

“I guess I’m okay,” Malcolm managed to reply, with an obvious absence of conviction.

“Are you sure? You don’t sound very convincing. In addition, your call was a bit mysterious, particularly in light of the circumstances of your father’s death. Have you been threatened in any way?”

“No. The Scarsdale police force has volunteered to provide security at the funeral. Also, I’ve hired a highly-regarded security company to look after my family. Phil Mintzes, my father’s second in command, is also on the security company’s call list if anything comes up.”

“Good. Now let’s see the videos you have for me.”

“Before I do, are you still comfortable watching the videos, knowing that their subject matter might have been the reason why my father was killed?”

“Silly boy. You know I’m an old and an incurable snoop. Besides, you said that no one knows you have the videos. What’s your next question?”

“Related to the first. The videos are on a thumb drive presumably brought by the man who was murdered along with my father. For your safety among other reasons, I want to make sure there’ll be no electronic trail of the video on your computer. Is there any chance it will accidentally or automatically get copied?”

“None. We’ll just play it as an external drive.”

“Good. Here it is.”

Malcolm handed the thumb drive to his old professor, who dutifully inserted it into the USB outlet on his computer and called up its contents. As Leibowitz played and replayed the two videos, his reaction was much the same as had been that of the elder Steintaler. Astonishment!

Finally, Leibowitz looked up from the screen. “Recently, Maury passed along a message from an antiquities dealer in Egypt who wanted to know if I’d be willing to validate a scroll that possibly dated back to the first century CE. It seemed that two experts at prominent Egyptian universities had looked at it and couldn’t reach agreement. In my business, one has to be a skeptic. Even so, I was intrigued by the description of the scroll, so I said I would be available. As it turns out, I was never contacted with regard to the matter, and nothing ever came of our discussion. That is, until now. Clearly, the scroll described in the first video is the one Maury wanted me to evaluate.”

“I didn’t know about that. Now that you’ve seen the videos, what do you think?”

“The similarities between the contents of the scroll and the thrust of the codex described in the second video are amazing. If they’re both authentic, they would corroborate one another. That, my friend, would be something truly remarkable. For Jewish-Christian relations, one might even say, transcendent.”

“That’s quite an assessment!”

“It is indeed, and I believe I’m not overstating the importance of the two discoveries. But, let me ask you a question. Why haven’t you handed the thumb drive over to the authorities so they can check it out?”

At this, Malcolm winced. “I know it’s stupid, but the world is a porous place and I think my family and I are safer if no one yet knows I have this thumb drive. Also, my father left

me a lot of resources and I think I can use them to find his killer without having to worry about foreign intrigues or political mine fields. Finally, my father's reputation is very important to me. I don't know the full extent of his dealings in the world of antiquities, but I'm sure something will come out during the forthcoming investigations. My fear is that a revelation of the videos may lead some to conclude that my father was playing with fire and got what was coming to him. I couldn't take that. My father was too fine a man. ”

“I understand. I never quite understood why Maury chose not to let me see his collection, but I'm not drawing any conclusions. In any case, I'll take his good side any day. So, let's proceed as you wish.”

“Thank you.”

“No thanks necessary. But, if we're not going to bring in the police for the time being, our next step is going to be figuring out a strategy for authenticating what you just showed me. Do you know anything about this man Boutros or where to find him?”

“I'm afraid I don't. My father didn't discuss his collection activities very much and I never pried on the theory that it was his hobby and, if he wanted privacy, that was fine with me.”

“Without a last name, it's going to be difficult finding the man, unless he comes forward on his own initiative. The video also mentioned a retired Coptic metropolitan bishop living on the site of a remote monastery. Do you know who he is?”

“Again, I draw a blank.”

“Well there can't be many retired Coptic church officials who meet the description in the video. However, the video indicates he's hiding as a result of the attack on his residence. That means finding him may be all the more difficult.

Nevertheless, I'd say that's where we start. Are you in a position to travel, if necessary?"

"My company has been very accommodating since my father's death. In addition, my days there are probably numbered, particularly as I get more involved in transition planning with Steiner Diversified Investments, which you may know from my father as SDI. But, while I'm in limbo, I would say the answer is yes."

"Good. Because I think we're going to have to move quickly. Being a so-called distinguished professor gives me a little leeway around here, as well. So, if need be, my bags are packed and, of course, my lips are sealed."

"As my father used to say, 'in for a dime, in for a dollar'. In the meantime, perhaps you can give me your theories about why finds of this consequence would have been shrouded in mystery, not to speak of the reason for my father's death."

"That's the Malcolm I remember! Let's try to go at these questions as quickly as we can. But we're not going to resolve everything today. So, we have to set up a secure form of communication. For the time being, let's use disposable phones."

"Intriguing!"

"Not, if you consider your father was just murdered. Switching gears, isn't Arnold Bradstein the rabbi of your synagogue?"

"Yes, the funeral's been delayed so the county could perform an autopsy. Also, there was some grisly business about the need to bring my father's body to the house, so they could use his fingerprints to open the collection room in the basement. Now that both of those matters are out of the way, Arnold will

preside at my dad's funeral tomorrow and will lead the *minyán* tomorrow night at my parents' house. Interested in coming?"

"I may find a way to talk to Bradstein in the future. In the meantime, I think I should lay low."

"Nice try. I know prayer services are not your thing and I know you miss my dad, whether or not you come to the *minyán*. I should have a few minutes with Arnold tomorrow evening after most people have gone. What should I ask him?"

Chapter Twelve
Memphis and Mostorod, Egypt
The Dawn of the Common Era, 4 BCE

While the caravan was taking on provisions in Farma and Mostorod, Judah had made a point of interacting with the small Jewish populations in both of those locations. What he heard heartened him. In not many days, he was told, they would come to the prosperous city of Memphis with its equally thriving community of Jews. Judah had longed for the comradery of fellow Jews and had yearned for a place where he could pray and carry out Jewish ritual. It didn't matter that the Jews of Memphis were not Sadducees. Nor did it matter that their customs, hewn over many centuries separated from Palestine, would be different from his own. Judah only wished to study *Torah* and to do it in a way that would show the greatest respect for God. He was grateful that sufficient funds remained for Naramsin to take both Joseph's and his families to a Jewish community.

Naramsin had alerted everyone to the wonders they would behold before arriving in Memphis--the three colossal pyramids of Giza. Early on the third day, as they rounded a bend on the west side of the Nile, the three pyramids rose up against the morning sun. Any one of the three would have been jaw dropping. But it was the northernmost and oldest of the three--the Great Pyramid--that left Judah speechless. Rising to a height approaching two and half times that of the Great Temple in Jerusalem, there was nothing like it in the ancient world.

Soon, however, awe gave way to sadness and contemplation. Judah could not have known precisely who built the Great Pyramid. However, the remarkable structure served as a reminder that, 1,500 years earlier, another and much larger community of Jews had been forced to build pyramids like the three they were now viewing. *But for God's intervention*, thought Judah, *the Jews of Egypt might still be slaves.*

Judah was not the only one affected by the sight of the pyramids. Every member of his small band of exiles stood in awe at the presence of the giant structures. While the adults were mesmerized in this manner, Dinah and Yeshua began to stir. As Dinah took in the Great Pyramid, she, too, appeared dazzled and looked on quietly in her own way. However, baby Yeshua immediately started crying piteously.

As was now his routine practice, Judah had been watching over Yeshua. The woeful sound coming from the wailing child was heart rending and out of proportion to anything so young an infant might be feeling. Thought Judah, *it was as if the baby could sense and feel the suffering of his ancestors.*

Mary was doing her best to quiet the inconsolable child. Yet Yeshua continued wailing in the most mournful manner. It was only after Mary placed a gauzy veil over the child's eyes, obscuring his vision of the Great Pyramid, that Yeshua calmed down and returned to a comforting sleep.

Judah pondered what had just happened. However, he was forced to let the thought linger and then pass as they would soon be arriving at their destination in Memphis and preparation was required.

Once in Memphis, it took little time for Judah and Joseph to establish themselves. As with any community, Memphis was in need of good healers and Judah quickly developed a reputation for his healing arts. Good artisans were also high in demand in this growing city and Joseph's skills as a carpenter were also highly valued.

As promised, Judah told Ehad, Mattan and Sari they were free to return to Israel. However, the three had decided to stay and make a new life for themselves. Sari, in particular, was

happy to remain and leave behind the tormenting memory of her husband's and child's deaths.

Judah had decided not to spend any of the funds he had brought with him so as to avoid both envy and the possibility of theft. But, in addition to the fees he received from healing, he needed a source of income for himself and his former servants. The camel slings he had improvised for Lila and Mary provided the answer. With Egyptian cotton and Nile Delta reeds in abundance, Judah experimented with different methods for designing strong and cost-efficient slings. When he came up with the solution, the demand for his product was so great he was able to put both EHUD and Mattan to work.

Some months later, word arrived that Herod had died. However, Joseph and Mary chose to remain in Egypt for the time being since they wanted to learn more about Herod's successors, especially Herod Antipater, the tetrarch of Galilee, before returning to Nazareth. Nor was Judah in a hurry to return as there was no way to know for the present how Herod's death may have affected the standing of Judah's nemesis, the tribune.

As time went on, the little community of exiles began to expand. Sari had indeed found a new path to life in the person of Mattan. Not long after arriving in Memphis, the two were married and, in due course, Sari's dreams were fulfilled as she gave birth to a baby boy.

Judah and Lila had also found contentment in Egypt and Judah's range of activities had widened. Judiciously drawing upon his well-hidden funds, Judah had begun investing in the export of Egyptian cotton, olive oil and grain, and the results were very gratifying. The only annoyance was that Judah's work required travel, sometimes as far away as the Mediterranean port city of Alexandria.

Some months passed without Judah traveling on business. He was particularly gratified to be home because Lila

was pregnant with their second child. In addition, Joseph's work had also required that he, too, travel, even more so than Judah. So, Judah's presence at home was a comfort to both families. But eventually Judah's business required that he visit Mostorod.

Judah had decided to bring Ehad with him to Mostorod, leaving Mattan to provide protection for all of the families. Judah marveled at how quickly Ehad was picking up the finer elements of negotiation and how well trained his eye had become when it came to evaluating grain and olive oil for shipment. Judah and Ehad had been busy from the moment they arrived in Mostorod, bargaining with local farmers and arranging for the transportation of purchased grains and olive oil to Alexandria. Their shipments required a certain amount of documentation and, for that purpose, they sought out the town scribe, a man named Ahmed.

Quickly, Ehad and Judah found their way to Ahmed's shop. As they walked in, they observed Ahmed at his writing table, putting the finishing touches on a commercial document written on papyrus. Ahmed was focusing so intently on his work that he initially didn't look up when his two visitors entered the shop. When he did look up and observed Judah and Ehad, he had such a start that Judah could not avoid taking note. Even at that, Judah chose to interpret Ahmed's reaction as the startled look of a man who had been deep in thought.

"Master scribe, I hope we didn't alarm you. We need some commercial documents."

Ahmed had indeed been startled. But he chose not to say anything further about his reaction, at least for the moment. "No need for concern. I was so consumed by my work that a butterfly would have caused me to jump."

"I'm relieved. That's exactly what I thought."

“Now, that we’ve taken care of our awkward introduction, let’s see how I can be of service.”

Over cups of refreshment, Ahmed carefully wrote out the documents requested by Judah, all the while sneaking a glance at his guests whenever he could. Finally, the work was done, Judah gave it a quick review, paid Ahmed and, with Ehud, started to leave. However, no sooner had Judah and Ehud left the shop when Ahmed rushed out the door and beckoned them to stop. Ehud could not interpret Ahmed’s movements or discern why he was waiving in his hand. So, immediately, the servant assumed a defensive stance. However, Ahmed’s body language soon made it clear that he wished to get their attention and nothing more.

“Master Judah, I have to confess I saw you some time ago when your caravan was in Mostorod. That’s why your appearance in my shop startled me. Until this moment, I wasn’t going to say anything.”

Judah was understandably perplexed. “I don’t recall seeing you. But that means nothing since I was preoccupied. That was quite an eventful visit for our water-parched group of travelers. We almost thought we would have to continue our journey to Memphis without water and then, miraculously, the spring restored itself.”

“Yes. I happened to be looking in your direction the entire time. I observed how the cries of the baby seemed to direct the return of the spring’s waters. At first I thought it might be a coincidence. But then I saw you look at the baby with the same amazement I had experienced, and I knew what had happened was no coincidence.”

The memory of that moment now returned to Judah as if it happened that morning. “I had arranged for my cousin Joseph and his wife Mary to join us on the caravan that arrived in Mostorod that day. Mary had recently given birth to Yeshua,

the baby whose cries you heard, just before we joined the caravan. I agree with you. Something did happen at the spring—something miraculous, something that defies explanation.”

“There may be no explanation, but I think we both believe there is. Perhaps some meaning can be derived from the quick action you took at the risk of your own life to save the child from the stampeding crowd.”

“I would like to take credit,” replied Judah, as a clear image of the endangered Yeshua appeared in his mind’s eye. “But I was merely the instrument of a much stronger force that, again, I can’t explain.”

“I thought as much.” Ahmed then unfurled the roll of papyrus he had been waiving as he ran to catch up to his two guests. “Perhaps, my account of what happened that day will help you appreciate, if not understand, what happened. It’s all here. I think you should read what I wrote.”

Judah read as he was directed. Both Ehad and Ahmed noticed how Judah’s hands trembled ever so slightly as he returned the scroll to Ahmed. “Thank you for what you’ve done. You’re correct. It’s all here!”

Chapter Thirteen
Shivah at the Steintaler Mansion, Scarsdale
Week One, the Present

The following day had not started well for Phil Mintzes. He had been wearing many hats. In addition to keeping the press at bay and putting out countless announcements to SDI's investors, Mintzes had also been tasked with locating Alex Steintaler. Mintzes knew Alex hadn't been close with his father. As a result, he hadn't been looking forward to making contact with the Steintaler's younger son. However, Alex had pleasantly surprised him.

Alex's relationship with both of his parents had been rocky. However, Anita had backed him when he insisted on going to Arizona State instead of following his brother to Vassar which he knew was more of a pressure cooker than he could handle. For this expression of support, Alex had been truly grateful. So, upon hearing from Mintzes, he had not hesitated in saying he would attend his father's funeral out of respect for his mother. Carrying out his good intentions was another matter entirely.

Mintzes had arranged for Alex's first-class airfare home as well as a limo to take him from the airport to the Steintaler residence the evening before the funeral service. However, Alex had never made the plane. So, at great expense and aggravation, Mintzes had placed Alex on a charter flight to Westchester Airport that would get him to Scarsdale the next morning just before the funeral service began.

Air traffic had been heavy, and Alex's flight had been delayed. As a result, the funeral service had been put on hold, leaving an impatient, capacity congregation wondering what was happening. As he waited for his younger brother to arrive, Malcolm kept looking around the room, hoping he might spot Wendy Sonnenzweig. Despite her overall discomfort being around the Steintaler family, she had liked Maury. So, there

was a chance she would make an appearance. However, after a while, it was pretty clear she wasn't going to show, and Malcolm was feeling a double sense of loss.

Malcolm's thoughts returned to his brother. He had always thought Alex had talent, though he recognized it was not well channeled. Malcolm understood his brother's temperamental manner was an act of rebellion and looked forward to the day when he would no longer feel the need to act out his frustrations. He didn't have much opportunity to dwell on this last thought as, finally, Alex arrived looking bleary eyed from his early morning flight. The congregation's palpable irritation now gave way to a collective sigh of relief and to the solemnity of the occasion that had brought them together.

From that point on, everything seemed to go smoothly despite Alex's less than elegant entrance. Rabbi Bradstein revealed a knowledge of the deceased that impressed even Malcolm. It seemed that Steintaler's philanthropic activities were almost without limit. Even more surprising, many of Steintaler's charitable initiatives were made without any fanfare and arose from informal meetings Bradstein and he had had over the years. The tapestry of Steintaler's life made vivid by Bradstein's remarks was one of a man whose grace and style in his private life was overshadowed by the gruff manner he displayed in his public life where he was constantly called upon to make impossibly difficult financial decisions.

After the service, select family members and friends formed a funeral procession and left for the cemetery. What had been a cloudy morning evolved into a pleasant, sunny afternoon. The county police had done an enviable job of keeping the funeral procession intact without unduly disrupting traffic, the canopy near the place of interment provided adequate shelter from the sun and Alex managed to avoid any major mishaps.

The burial complete, the funeral party returned to the Steintaler mansion for *kiddush*, the traditional repast after

prayer services and life cycle events. Soon, it was time for the evening *minyan*, the customary prayer service that takes place at sundown, and begins the traditional seven days of mourning. After the *minyan*, Malcolm did not have to seek out Bradstein, as the rabbi quickly took him aside for a private conversation.

“How’s your mother holding up? She looked better than I would have expected at the funeral.”

“It’s hard to tell. There’s so much innuendo going on and, without letup. In addition, she’s going to have to face a serious and draining investigation. Not only that, Alex causes her blood pressure to rise and I mean that literally.”

“I’ve always had a fondness for Alex, but he can be challenging. I thought I was going to have get out my juggling act to keep the crowd at bay until he arrived this morning. But he did make it. I’ll try to talk to him tonight. If not, while he’s in town, I’ll try to meet with him.”

“Good luck with that. He does have a loveable side when he chooses to reveal it. So, I’d be delighted if you get through to him. He’s staying at the Epilogue Hotel.”

“I’ll do my best.”

“Thank you and thanks so much for the service. There’s no one who could have painted a better picture of my father. He had a lot of layers and you did a great job of unpeeling them. We’re really indebted to you.”

“You’re very welcome. He was much beloved in the community, and, in recent years, I got to know him pretty well through our study group on Jewish-Christian relations.”

“That’s kind of interesting. My father and I have often discussed Middle East issues. So, I knew he had fairly good command of the dynamics involving the Jewish and Muslim

worlds. But I didn't know he'd been in a study group on Jewish-Christian relations."

"Oh, yes. Your father's interest in Jewish-Christian relations was quite extensive. Not only was he involved, but he was also quite generous in his support for open-minded Christian organizations. You'd be surprised at how well his name was known in the Jewish-Christian community. You might also be surprised to know he'd been written up in the Christian press and had even been asked to speak on several occasions."

"I am indeed!"

"At the synagogue, we've been meeting regularly since the worldwide observance of the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate, In Our Time*, four years ago."

"I didn't follow it closely. But, didn't *Nostra Aetate* have to do with the Gospel passage that Mel Gibson wanted to include in his movie about Jesus?"

"That's an unusual way of referring to it. But, yes. The passage is from Matthew 27:25 in which Caiaphas, the high priest, is said to have declared: 'His blood be on us and on our children.' In other words, all Jews of the day and all future Jewish generations would be held responsible for Jesus' death. The passage was removed from an early version of Gibson's 2004 film, *The Passion of the Christ*, only after focus groups, many made up of priests, thought its inclusion would be too hurtful and reignite claims of Jewish collective guilt and deicide."

"I was too much of an adolescent to be tuned in at the time. But I do remember my parents' consternation when the advance footage of the film was released. I also remember my father attending a couple of fiftieth anniversary events for *Nostra Aetate*. Maybe you could fill me in since it was apparently very important to my father."

“Of course. In October 1965, Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council, known as Vatican II. As a Vatican representative to three Eurasian countries, Turkey, Greece and France, during World War II, the future pope had experienced firsthand the torments inflicted on the Jews of Europe. Indeed, he had once said, ‘I have heard the groans of the Jews.’ The conference he convened drew 2,000 bishops from all over the world and focused on the relations between the Vatican and other religions, but, it largely focused on Vatican-Jewish relations.”

“That must’ve been quite a moment in time!”

“It was. After four drafts, the Council issued *Nostra Aetate*, which absolved the Jews of today, and even the uninvolved Jews of Jesus’ time, of the of collective responsibility for Jesus’ death. Further, the statement also condemned anti-Semitism as a church doctrine. I’ve taught the operative statement so many times, I have it memorized. It says: ‘True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. The Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures.’”

Malcolm took in the rabbi’s words appreciatively, if not amazement at how much he had learned from his impromptu question. But, he was still curious. “Did the fiftieth anniversary observance produce good results?”

“There was a real feeling of good will personified by Pope Francis, himself, with many Jewish and Catholic organizations holding conferences and symposia to discuss the progress made since the announcement of the doctrine in 1965.”

Although he tried to hide it, Malcolm’s face betrayed a little of the skepticism he was feeling. Bradstein picked up on it quickly. “Something’s troubling you?”

“I didn’t think I was so obvious. I just find it intriguing that there would have to be fifty years of *progress* over what was supposed to have been settled church doctrine in 1965. Also, I find it ironic that, despite the good will, as you put it, there has been a serious uptick in anti-Semitism both here and abroad, and that doesn’t even take into account the slaughter of the eleven Jews at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh.”

Bradstein smiled. “Ah! Now, you’re getting to the purpose of the study group. There’s no question in my mind as regards the sincerity of Frances and the Vatican officials who treat Catholic-Jewish relations with utmost seriousness. But anti-Semitism is the oldest prejudice on the planet and prejudices don’t die easily. Not every church official was excited about the *Nostra Aetate* pronouncement in 1965 and, I suspect, in some quarters of the Catholic world, many are not happy about it today. Indeed, to find the support for this view, all one needs to do is follow the Anti-Semitic parties that have gained traction in places like Greece, Hungary and Poland.”

“Not news of course. But the way you express it really puts an exclamation point on the issue.”

“I hope so. As Jews, it’s our job to disabuse our detractors of their negative views. The best way is to lead through good example. In the most basic terms, our success as a people depends on it. That’s one reason why Maury urged our congregation to raise funds on behalf of the victims of the Coptic Church bombings in Egypt.”

Malcom had lapsed into deep thought as Bradstein spoke about Jewish-Christian relations. However, Bradstein’s reference to the Coptic Church bombings had brought Malcom back to the present. He looked at Bradstein questioningly. “Why the Copts?”

“Good question. I don’t have to tell you there are a lot of religious tragedies taking place in the world, of which the perils being faced by the Copts are certainly high on the list. But the Copts are not exactly frontpage news here in America, nor are they particularly supportive of Jewish interests. As a result, there were a lot of people in the congregation who weren’t happy. But Maury was very insistent. All I can tell you is he once confided that he had associates in Egypt who made him aware of the plight of the Copts.”

Chapter Fourteen
Memphis, Egypt
The Dawn of the Common Era, 2 BCE

Mary and Lila gave birth again within two months of one another. First, Mary delivered a healthy baby boy named James. Judah would have been happy to assist with the delivery. But, in Memphis, there were ample Jewish midwives who were available for such occasions. In addition, Sari had proved herself to be quite versatile and had assisted both women in their deliveries. So, Judah contented himself with the task of performing James' circumcision, which proved to be as uneventful as Yeshua's circumcision had been momentous. Not long after, Judah had the added joy of performing another circumcision on his newly arrived son Binyamin.

With five small children crawling and scampering about, what had started as a guarded group of exiles was rapidly turning into a small enclave. As with any Jewish community, all work came to a halt at sundown on the Sabbath. After appropriate prayers of thanksgiving, Lila, Mary and Sari would serve the Sabbath feast and the three families would eat together, often sitting outside as they observed the vast constellation of stars visible throughout the desert sky.

Judah was totally besotted by his new son Binyamin and played with the baby as much as his other responsibilities would allow. But even Judah had to acknowledge that the bond between Joseph and James was something to behold. The two were inseparable. Judah was delighted for Joseph. Judah was also a little surprised since Joseph's relationship to Yeshua had been entirely different. There, he had deferred completely to Mary and it showed. Mary and her first born were never apart and had a way of communicating with one another that was almost imperceptible. It was as if an invisible connection bound the two of them in a relationship only they could understand.

However, as time went on, new construction began to decline and Joseph, increasingly, found himself without work. By contrast, caravan travelers passing through the area from Palestine described giant construction projects as the Romans built new cities along Palestine's northern Mediterranean coast. Joseph began to long to return to Palestine where he believed he, too, could find work.

One day, Joseph experienced the same type of vision he had experienced when he was told to flee from Herod. In the vision, he was directed to return to Palestine and told it would be safe. The timing was auspicious and, more importantly, Joseph felt a need to follow the direction of the vision just as he had before. After some consideration, Joseph approached Judah. With sadness in his voice, he told Judah about the vision and his decision to take his family back to Palestine where he could find work.

Judah had come to like his older cousin and, more importantly, knew that Lila would be crushed if Mary and her two boys were to leave. Judah tried every argument he could muster and offered Joseph whatever funds were needed to get him to stay. However, girded by the voice, Joseph was determined to leave.

After several months of planning, word arrived of a suitable caravan that would be passing through Memphis bound for Palestine. Joseph and Mary immediately started packing. However, as they completed preparations for the journey, small sores began to appear on baby James' face. Joseph immediately called in Judah. Fear showed on Joseph's face as he led his friend to where the crying James lay. Immediately, Judah recognized the spots as the dreaded small pox. Judah knew the disease was not only a mortal threat to James, but, in addition, it could spread fast and posed a deadly threat to all who came in contact with the child. Turning to Joseph, Judah saw tears streaming down his friend's face.

“What’s wrong with him?” asked Joseph forlornly?

Judah hesitated for a second. He would have liked to be judicious. But there was no time for trying to calm Joseph. Judah knew he had to act fast.

“You have to keep James separate from everyone else.”

“But we’re supposed to join the caravan! What are the sores on my boy’s face?”

“Small pox. There is no known treatment. We just have to let it run its course and hope. But you must keep James separate.”

“Who will stay with him? Should I get Mary?”

“No. I think I know who to get. I’ll be right back.”

In a moment, Judah return with Sari at his side. “Sari told me she had once had small pox and survived. So, she should not be at risk. She’s agreed to stay with Judah.”

That night, Sari swabbed James and did her best to comfort the baby as he cried piteously. Finally, James fell asleep and Sari welcomed the quiet as she could not keep her eyes open.

Somehow, during the course of the night, the toddler Yeshua had found his way to his brother’s side. When Sari awoke the next morning, she found Yeshua with his arms around his brother. Sari knew of Judah’s injunction to keep James separate from everyone and she was deathly afraid for Yeshua. However, after further examination, she realized her fears were misplaced. Not only was Yeshua fine, but, in addition, James had shed his sores and was cooing contentedly in his brother’s presence.

Soon, Mary came running toward Sari. Consumed with grief over James illness, Mary was now beside herself with fear over Yeshua's absence. When she saw her two children lying peacefully together, she could not hold herself together and broke down and cried uncontrollably. The ruckus had awakened everyone in the compound, though little would have been required to awake either Joseph or Judah, both of whom had found it difficult to sleep. When the two men arrived running, they experienced the same rush of relief as had overtaken Mary.

When the crying was over, Judah tried to reflect on the situation. He had never known a small pox victim to recover as quickly as had James. Nor, for that matter, had Judah ever heard of a toddler Yeshua's age escaping from a protective mother to provide comfort to a stricken sibling. As he pondered these matters, images entered his mind of the stricken Ehad, the reawakened spring at Mostorod and Yeshua's pain in seeing the pyramids. But he had little time to reflect as a spontaneous celebration was taking place where James and Yeshua lay.

James' continued to improve and displayed a healthy appetite. It appeared his escape from small pox was permanent. That evening, Joseph and Mary resumed their packing. The next day, they tried valiantly but unsuccessfully to hold back tears as they joined the caravan bound for Palestine. Judah knew something remarkable had occurred during the family's flight from Palestine and its time in Egypt. He wondered what lay ahead for the young Yeshua, but somehow guessed the child's course had already been laid out. Lila's thoughts were otherwise. All she could think about was losing Mary, as close a friend as she had ever had.

Chapter Fifteen
The Executive Suite
Steinthaler Diversified Investments
Week Two, the Present

Phil Mintzes hadn't gotten much sleep since Maury Steinthaler's death. However, the initial headaches were behind him. All in all, he was pleased with how events affecting the company had transpired since the death of his friend and mentor. Maury had always appreciated the need for transition planning and, with Mintzes' help, had orchestrated a succession plan in the event of his death or inability to continue working. The plan called for a series of immediate public relations moves and for the activation of a pre-picked transition team, under Mintzes' direction, which would guide SDI until Malcolm was ready to take the helm. The measures had gone a long way toward calming both the company's jittery investors and the equally skittish managers of its properties and investments.

The Steinthaler family was something else entirely. Malcolm was aware of his new status as heir apparent of the company. However, the older Steinthaler son was savvy enough to appreciate the wisdom of his father's transition plan. He also recognized he was neither emotionally nor experientially ready to take on executive level responsibilities at SDI. Alex was another story. But, Mintzes had spent a lot of time with Alex and, so far, he seemed to be having some success. Anita, however, worried Steinthaler.

Shivah at the Steinthaler mansion was now over. With the end of *shivah*, the informal grace period adopted by the Scarsdale police had also come to an end. At about the same time that Mintzes was feeling concern for Anita, she was talking to Detective Sergeant Hemingway. He had called to say the county police had completed their forensic examination of the house, the car and the driveway. Now, he was hoping Anita might come to his office for a chat. Without thinking, Anita had agreed and

had not bothered to inform either Malcolm or Mintzes. Nor, had she taken any precautions to avoid exposure to the cameramen who seemed to have taken over the Village of Scarsdale.

She had arranged for a driver to take her to the main police station. Once there, she had innocently emerged from the car only to find herself in the cross hairs of what seemed like dozens of cameramen. The scampering for position by the cameramen and the questions hurled at her by the various reporters who had also been camped at the police station caught her off guard. While trying to avoid one particularly aggressive questioner, she had lost her footing. Fortunately, she was not alone. A young officer, who had been standing nearby, picked her up and escorted her into the police station.

Hemingway had heard the commotion and had run down to the station's reception area as fast as he could. He had offered to take Anita home and meet with her another day, but the prospect of going through the press gauntlet a second time was more than Anita could manage. So, instead, she had asked for a glass of water and a cup of coffee and tried to organize her thoughts as she waited for Hemingway to return with the requested refreshments. After a few minutes of questioning, she realized she might have made a mistake.

Hemingway had started slowly without touching on anything noteworthy. "I'm aware of your tradition of seven days of mourning. I hope it was a comfort being with friends and family."

"Thank you, detective. Everyone was as nice and supportive as I could have hoped."

"That's good," said Hemingway, although Anita's manner suggested that her answer and her true feelings were at odds with one another. "But I sense from the strained look on your face that you might have been hoping for more."

“You do know how to read your subjects. I’m afraid your right. It was the constant undercurrent of innuendo that drove me crazy and still does.”

“I’m so sorry to hear that. It must be hard. May I get you some more water?”

“No thank you. I’m really fine.”

Continuing to look as nonchalant as he could, Hemingway decided the time was right to ramp up the tenor of the questioning. “Pardon me for asking, but, by innuendo, I take it you were you referring to your relationship with Mr. Gittelson?”

Though she had brought it up, Hemingway’s question hit a nerve. Without thinking, she replied testily. “Of course, that’s what I meant. Need I say more!”

Hemingway immediately recognized his question had lacked tact and could sour Anita on responding to his remaining questions. He tried to sound as contrite as he could. “I’m sorry. I felt I had to ask.”

Anita, too, recognized her response had been out of place. Contritely, she looked at Hemmingway. “It’s okay. I did mention it during our talk last week. The sad part is my relationship with Ralph would have ended soon enough. But, when Maury found out, there was no way I could back out gracefully. Now, people are suggesting all kinds of things.”

Hemingway decided not to pursue the matter, but, instead, chose to approach his objective a different way. “When we first met, you told me about a marital agreement your husband and you had entered into after an earlier incident involving you and another man.”

“That’s a polite way of putting it. Yes, you’re correct.”

“Mrs. Steintaler, I don’t mean to probe, but could you tell me the essential terms of the agreement?”

Now, Anita’s despondency had turned to concern. However, as she looked out of the window next to where she sat, she could still see the gathering of reporters and cameramen, and she didn’t feel like leaving at that moment. She also assumed the terms of the agreement would all come out anyhow. “What is it you would like to know?”

Anita managed to leave the police station without incident, but as she thought about Hemingway’s interrogation, she became increasingly alarmed. So, rather than go home and take on the mountain of matters that required her attention, she, instead, headed for Mintzes’ office.

Mintzes receptionist had not been much of barrier. After confirming that Mintzes was alone, Anita had bypassed the receptionist, knocked on Mintzes’ office door and without announcement let herself in.

Mintzes had tried to be as polite as he could. “Anita. Did we have a meeting scheduled for this afternoon?”

“You know we didn’t. So, stop trying to play the diplomat.”

“Okay, what’s on your mind?”

“I really messed up this morning with Detective Hemingway.”

“I didn’t even know you were meeting with him. Why didn’t you call Malcolm or me before agreeing to such a meeting?”

“Is this about recrimination or are you going to help me?”

Feeling a bit embarrassed, Mintzes tried to lower the temperature of the conversation. “You’re absolutely right. I didn’t mean to snap at you. Now, tell me what happened.”

“It was going quite innocently and, all of a sudden, Hemingway asked me about my marital agreement with Maury.”

“Go on, please.”

“He wanted to know what it said.”

Mintzes looked at Anita with concern. “You, of course, know the agreement is confidential.”

“Yes. What’s your point?”

Still feeling uncomfortable, Mintzes again tried to respond without sounding too judgmental. “I guess I don’t have much of a point. I was referring to the fact that you’re protected from revealing the terms of the agreement. Even so, under the right circumstances, the police could find a judge to direct it be opened. But it was still a pretty bold request on Hemingway’s part, considering you didn’t have counsel present.”

“I brought it up myself the night of the murders. So, I didn’t think I had any choice.”

“What did you tell him?”

Anita felt sick and foolish as she responded to Mintzes. “I told him everything, including the provision that enabled Maury to limit my inheritance if he found out I was involved in another affair.”

“Did you tell him Maury hadn’t activated the provision because he was trying to work things out with you?”

“No. I couldn’t!”

“Why not?”

“Because the fight Maury and I had the day he was killed was about the agreement.”

“What do you mean?”

Anita’s eyes began to water. “I wish I could do the whole thing over. Maury found out I’d been in touch with Ralph again. I assured him it was innocent. But Maury wasn’t buying it. He said he was going to make me bleed and that, under the marital agreement, he had every right to do so.”

“Did you tell that to Hemingway?”

“No.”

“Well, don’t. Not until we find you a proper lawyer.”

“Did he ask you anything else?”

Anita paused for a moment as if to catch her breath. Hesitatingly, she responded. “Yes. He asked me what I knew about a large wire transfer that had been made from Maury’s and my personal checking account on the day of the murders.”

Chapter Sixteen
Memphis, Egypt
49 CE

Life had been extraordinarily good for Judah. At age 75, he retained his health, his desire to help others and his extraordinary commercial empire. His two sons, Binyamin and Gideon, had grown up devoted to God's teachings. Thankful for his blessings, Judah was convinced that no Sadducee in Palestine could claim a greater commitment to the *Torah* than the members of his family.

Every afternoon, after he was finished studying the day's *Torah* portion, he would devote several hours poring over commercial records and contriving new ways for expanding the family's prodigious export business. Travel was another thing entirely. Whereas his healthy appearance belied his septuagenarian status, his aches and pains were a continual reminder of his age. For many years, Binyamin and Gideon had done all of the traveling for the family's business affairs, with most of their activity centered around the Mediterranean port city of Alexandria.

One spring evening, as the sun was beginning to set, Binyamin and Gideon returned from a long stay in Alexandria. After visiting with their welcoming families, they went to see their father to say evening prayers and to report on the business they had transacted as well as the affairs of the day.

Judah greeted his sons in the way he always did—first hugging Binyamin, the older of the two, and then embracing Gideon. He never ceased to marvel at how much alike the two boys looked and, more importantly, how well they got along in both business and family life.

Their prayers completed, Judah got down to business: "How was Alexandria?"

Binyamin was the first to respond. “Business was excellent. I’m sure you’ll be happy with the results.”

Judah was indeed happy with Binyamin’s description of the business transactions that had taken place over the past several weeks. He intended to congratulate his son, but he hesitated because it was apparent that Binyamin still had more to say, although he was having difficulty expressing it.

Binyamin’s hesitancy was surprising to Judah as he was not accustomed to seeing his older son hold back about anything. “Is there something else you want to tell me? Did something else happen in Alexandria?”

“As a matter of fact, yes. But I think I’ll let Gideon explain as he was there the entire time and I only came late.”

“The entire time! Now, you’ve got my interest. Gideon, what’s this all about?”

“It was very curious to say the least. At first, we dismissed it. But then we decided you should hear.”

Though easy-going man for his age, Judah was now feeling a little impatient. “Well, here I am. Why don’t you try just telling me!”

“Sorry, father. Three days ago, I had finished my work, but Binyamin was still talking with a merchant. Normally, I would have stayed with him. But I hadn’t felt well, and I wanted to get some fresh air. So, I stepped outside. All of a sudden, a small throng of people gathered near where I stood, and a man named Mark began to address the people. In itself, that didn’t strike me as unusual since there are all kinds of people in Alexandria trying to get other people’s attention. But, out of curiosity, I decided to listen to what Mark was saying.”

“Go on.”

“Of course. But, let me ask you a question.”

“Anything, if it will help you get this story out of you.”

Gideon ignored the mild reproach from his father. “When we were children, didn’t you tell us you had helped another family come to Egypt with mother, Dinah and you?”

It was now Judah’s turn to hesitate. However, his curiosity won the moment. “Yes,” he replied.

“Didn’t you also tell us that the other family had a baby boy named Yeshua?”

Judah hadn’t thought about his cousin Joseph and his family in quite some time as there had been no contact from Joseph following their departure from Egypt so many years ago. However, instantly, Gideon’s reference to Yeshua brought back memories so clear it was as if they had occurred the previous day.

“Yes. Joseph was my cousin. His wife had just given birth to a baby boy Yeshua. He was very unusual, and his unusualness had placed his family and him in danger.”

“How is that possible—he was an infant?” wondered Gideon out loud.

“It’s a complicated story and one I should have told you earlier. Yeshua was born in Bethlehem not too far from Jerusalem. Dinah was also an infant at the time, and we had just arrived in Bethlehem along with Yeshua and his family. Shortly after Yeshua was born, three men came to Jerusalem looking for Yeshua. There they encountered King Herod, a Roman lackey, who wasn’t even born Jewish. The three men said they were heading to Bethlehem to bring gifts to Yeshua who would one day grow up to be king, presumably replacing Herod.”

Gideon’s astonishment didn’t surprise Judah. Indeed, the remarkable nature of the story was the reason why Judah had never recounted the events to his sons. But he knew he had to continue.

“Herod instructed the three men to get back to him when they located Yeshua, to which they agreed. However, even though they did find Yeshua in Bethlehem and acknowledged him as the future king of the Jews, they never reported back to Herod, further stoking Herod’s fears. Out of insecurity and jealousy, Herod decided all baby boys in Bethlehem were to be slaughtered. Yeshua’s father Joseph had received a premonition of Herod’s edict. So, understandably, he had already decided to flee with his wife Mary and the baby Yeshua. I also had reason to flee. Further, for reasons I’ll explain later, I felt a duty to protect Yeshua. So, I arranged for Joseph’s family and our family to join a caravan headed for Egypt.”

“That’s quite a story.”

“Admittedly it is. Now it’s your turn! Why did you ask?”

Gideon took a deep breath and continued. This man Mark turned out to be an evangelist and claimed the messiah had come. He said he came by his knowledge through a man named Peter. Peter had been traveling through Asia Minor proclaiming the majesty of the messiah when Mark met him. Mark was so impressed with Peter that he agreed to be his interpreter and secretary so that Peter could more efficiently spread his message. With Peter’s blessing, Mark left Rome where Peter had established a large following and headed for Alexandria to start his own ministry.”

“Who was this messiah?”

“A man named Yeshua.”

An involuntary gasp escaped from Judah as he focused every ounce of attention he could muster on his son. “What did he say about this man? Yeshua is a very common name. Did he indicate how old this Yeshua was or where he came from?”

“He said Yeshua was a rabbi from Nazareth who had been executed at the height of his rabbinical ministry about twenty or so years earlier when he was around 30 .But, here’s the strange part. According to Peter, this Yeshua had had been called to heaven three days after his execution. Frankly, the whole description sounded strange to me.

“Your reaction is quite understandable. The arrival of the messiah is certainly a central tenet of our faith. But there’s nothing in our tradition about the messiah being executed or being called to heaven before his redemptive work on earth was completed. Did this Peter indicate how Yeshua died?”

“Yes. According to Mark, Yeshua had scandalized the Jewish authorities by proclaiming that a new kingdom would arrive on earth presided over by Yeshua. But, even more so, the Roman establishment viewed him as an insurrectionist and viewed his claims as treasonous. As a result, the Romans crucified the poor man and there the story might have ended but for the claim that Yeshua was exalted to heaven.”

Gideon hesitated, but seeing that his father was listening carefully, he continued. “According to Mark, Peter also claimed Yeshua was the son of God and had died to absolve mankind of its sins.”

“Since Yeshua had died, how would that happen?” asked Judah, in a way that signaled interest rather than dismissiveness.

“That was the hard part for Binyamin and me. Mark claimed that all who believed in Yeshua as their savior would have their earthly sins absolved and, like Yeshua, would one day, rise to heaven.”

“And, what of *Torah* observance? Doesn’t that of itself determine a man’s destiny.”

“I don’t think it mattered that much to Peter or Mark. That’s why I didn’t know what to make of what Mark was saying. How could anyone claim to possess redemptive powers without deriving those powers from the principles of the *Torah*?”

“Was there anymore?”

“Only this, for which I feel quite awkward. As I mentioned, people in Alexandria are always making claims. Even so, as I listened to Mark, I was very much taken by him. It was as if his inspiration came from a source only he could see and hear. I think Binyamin, who heard only some of what Mark had to say, would agree.”

“I do agree. There was something about the man that made me want to know more about his professed messiah, difficult as it may have been to accept. I guess that’s why we felt you should know our reaction to what we observed and heard.”

“It’s a remarkable story. Even more remarkable is the fact that Joseph was from Nazareth and when he left Egypt after hearing of Herod’s death, he intended to return to Nazareth with Mary and their two sons, Yeshua and James. As I mentioned, Yeshua is a popular name, but Nazareth has always been a very small place. There can’t be many persons named Yeshua who came from there and whose age at death matched up with the age of the Yeshua we knew. I have a feeling about what the two of you have heard. Perhaps, I can help us learn more. When will you be in Alexandria again?”

“In about a fortnight.”

“Good. I will compose a letter for you to give to this man Mark. The letter will describe certain matters that date back to

the birth of Yeshua and his time with us. Let's see what Mark has to say after he receives the letter.”

Two weeks later Binyamin and Gideon were on their way back to Alexandria with their father's letter in hand. It did not take them long to find Mark who was addressing another group of listeners in a crowded part of the city. Mark was again speaking of Yeshua, the man he called messiah. Each time he invoked Yeshua's name, he made a sign with his right hand—the sign of the cross on which Yeshua had been crucified. As he did so, each member of the gathering before him did the same, but with even more reverence than that employed by Mark. The effect was quite stunning.

Spellbound, the brothers watched the ritual of the cross. As they watched, each felt something special. They would later describe it to their father as a sense of awakening. After Mark finished and the crowd had disbursed, they approached Mark. Following a few words of introduction, they handed Mark the sealed parchment letter Judah had given them. Mark broke the seal and began to read. When he finished, his response surprised the brothers. “There is only one man who should be in possession of what your father describes. That person is Peter, my mentor, who is now in Rome and heads the presbyter there. You must go to him. Now, my sons, allow me to embrace you for your father has provided an inestimable gift in the service of our lord.”

Chapter Seventeen
Malcolm's Apartment, Scarsdale
Week Two, the Present

Now that the funeral and *shivah* were over, Malcolm decided he needed time to think. No one was expecting him at work, and he knew his mother would be sleeping late. In addition, his brother was staying at a hotel near the house and Malcolm thought it would be good for Anita and Alex to spend some private time together. Still in his night clothes, Malcolm went to the kitchen of his apartment and filled his eight-cup coffee maker with water and coffee.

It was still hard for Malcolm to accept that his father was gone and even more difficult not to know who had murdered him and why. The clues he had were primarily derived from the thumb drive he had discussed with Jeff Leibowitz. The man named Boutros was still a mystery. *But what was it that Leibowitz had said about the retired metropolitan bishop residing near a remote monastery? There couldn't be that many remote Coptic monasteries in Egypt! Why not start there?* he thought.

As with many young professionals, Malcolm's work day often continued when he arrived home. In recognition of this fact, his company had outfitted his apartment with the most up to date electronics and computer equipment, including a proprietary, high-speed search engine. Malcolm poured a cup of steaming coffee and headed toward his work desk. He entered his password and waited for a very short while as the two thirty-inch computer screens on his desktop lit up. He decided the best place to start was at the beginning. He typed in the words "Coptic Monasteries in Egypt."

To his astonishment, his search brought up eighty-six monasteries spread across twelve dioceses and the See of Alexandria, which, he thought, must be the centerpiece of Coptic life in Egypt. He knew that monasteries in America were

practically non-existent and wondered what gave Coptic monasteries their staying power.

He began to scan the list of dioceses to get a better feel for where the monasteries were located. Twelve were located in Cairo and another five were located in Alexandria, another densely populated metropolitan area with a population exceeding five million. It would be reasonable, he thought, to eliminate all of the monasteries in these two jurisdictions since they obviously were not located in remote areas.

He wondered if he could eliminate other monasteries using the same analysis. In college, Malcolm had studied about both Luxor, the site of ancient Thebes where the Pharaohs had reined, and Aswan, site of the modern-day Aswan Dam and also Egypt's commercial hub since antiquity. The diocese for both cities were on the list. But Malcolm didn't know the size of the two cities or whether either of them was spread out enough to incorporate a remote monastery. In addition, he knew that both Luxor and Aswan were located in the southern part of the country which suggested they could have a rural element to their populations.

Another quick search indicated that Luxor had a population in excess of 500,000 residents and that Aswan had a population approaching 300,000. In addition, with a few more clicks, Malcolm was able to determine that both cities were densely concentrated on the east bank of the Nile. *Remoteness not likely* here, he thought. By eliminating the eight monasteries located in Luxor and the two located in Aswan, along with the seventeen for Cairo and Alexandria, Malcolm's was able to reduce his list from eighty-six to fifty-nine.

He thought to himself, *now I'm getting someplace!* But he knew that much of Egypt's population was located along the Nile and its delta, as well as along the Mediterranean coast. So, for other regions where diocese were located, he didn't know how far he could take his search approach and ensure he would not

miss monasteries located on the outskirts of high population areas. Nevertheless, he decided to explore further.

Assiut, one of the diocesan cities, had a population in excess of 400,000 residents. In addition, his research indicated that it was fifty percent Coptic. Also, Minya and Sohag, two other diocesan cities, each with an overall population in excess of 200,000 residents, were also about fifty percent Coptic. He hoped that high Coptic density meant non-remoteness.

Eagerly, he looked up Assiut and discovered it was a modern port city on the Nile and was the location of Assiut University, one of the largest in Egypt. He also noted the city was the terminus for two pipelines, the Ras Shukheir-Asyut oil pipeline and the Cairo-Assiut gas pipeline, and was located next to the Assiut Dam which crossed the Nile in the neighboring port of Al-Hamra. Satisfied with the results of his search, Malcolm felt comfortable in eliminating Assiut's six monasteries from the list.

Next, he looked up Sohag and discovered that it, too, was a modern city located on a fertile plain on the west bank of the Nile and served as the capital of the Sohag Governate, one of Egypt's twenty-seven governates. In addition to local trade, the city served as an administrative and educational center and also had a pharaonic museum as well as a university. Again, satisfied with the results of his search, Malcolm decided to eliminate Sohag's fourteen monasteries from the list.

He next checked out Minya. As with Sohag, Minya was the capital of its governate, the Minya Governate, and was located in the southern part of the country. It was also situated in a large agricultural area, suggesting there could be rural regions where a remote monastery was located. Malcolm decided to look further. His search paid off. While the Minya Governate was indeed agricultural, the city of Minya, by contrast, was highly industrialized with many state-run industries such as those producing cement, chemicals, and

fertilizers. There was also mining and a fair amount of private sector manufacturing. Again, content with what he had found, Malcolm decided to eliminate Minya's six monasteries from his list.

Finally, Malcolm investigated Qena, an Upper Nile city of about 230,000 residents, about thirty-five percent of whom were Coptic. Located thirty-five miles north Luxor, Qena had an urban and commercial profile similar to Sohag and Minya. With the elimination of its seven monasteries, Malcolm was now down to twenty-six monasteries. Still, he knew he had to eliminate many more if the list was to be whittled down to a viable number.

As he was pondering this thought, he again looked at the list of monasteries and practically kicked himself for his oversight. Thirteen of the monasteries on the list were said to have been abandoned and three of the monasteries were in disrepair. By eliminating these additional sixteen monasteries from his current list of twenty-six, he was down to ten and that was, indeed, progress.

Only the Nitrian Desert diocese of Wadi El Natrun, and the Diocese of the Eastern Desert remained. Malcolm decided to look up each of the monasteries for these two regions. When he did, it looked like all of the Wadi El Natrun monasteries were near population areas and within easy reach of Cairo. With that conclusion, he was able to eliminate the Paromeos, Saint Pishoy, Saint Marcarius, Virgin Mary, Saint George and Saint Thomas Coptic Orthodox Monasteries.

He was now down to the four monasteries in the Eastern Desert. Both his eyes and fingers were getting tired, but as he stared at the short list of remaining monasteries, he again noticed an oversight. Two of the four remaining monasteries were Greek Orthodox and not Coptic Orthodox. He was now down to two and couldn't wait to discuss his findings with Jeff Leibowitz. But that would have to wait. At the moment, he was tired and

wanted to rest before seeing his mother and brother. So, contentedly, he put his work away and lay down on the couch.

Chapter Eighteen
The Waters off the Roman Port City of Berenice
50 CE

Soon after their meeting with Mark, the two brothers returned to Memphis more confused than ever. They couldn't shake the impression left by Mark but couldn't explain why. Further, they didn't quite know whether they had succeeded or failed in their mission. They would soon find out as they sought out their father.

Judah had been very careful not to betray the excitement he was feeling within. His sons were committed Jews of the highest order and what Mark was preaching went against the grain of every religious precept Judah had ever learned and against every lesson he had ever passed on to his sons. Before he said or did anything that might shake their beliefs, or for that matter, his own, he wanted more assurances of Yeshua's identity and of his divinity. In his sons' absence, this need had metamorphized from an uneasy, gnawing curiosity to a full-blown obsession.

As his two sons stood before him, Judah knew from years of observation that he would not be receiving the assurances he sought.

“The two of you look troubled.”

Gideon spoke first. “We showed the man named Mark your letter. After he read it, he embraced us and, as he did so, it felt as if a force was calling us.”

“Then what's the problem. From your description, I would have liked to be there to observe the spell cast by this man.”

“The problem is it did not end there. After reading the letter, Mark insisted his mentor, Peter, who has remained in

Rome, should receive the items you referenced in your letter and that they would be a great gift in the service of Yeshua.”

“Did he tell you how to reach Peter in Rome?”

“He did. Are you thinking of going there?”

“Actually, I was thinking the two of you might go to Peter for me and present him with my gifts, as Mark described it. The trip wouldn’t be so bad. Most of our grain and olive oil is shipped to the Roman port of Ostia Antica near Rome. So, we already know many of the ship captains whose vessels ply the waters between Alexandria and the Italian peninsula, and they could be counted on to treat you well. In addition, it would be interesting to see how our grain is distributed once it reaches its destination. More than that, Ostia Antica is known for the salt it produces from its nearby salt flats. Some of the ships returning from Italy bring back wine, but often they return empty or at least partially empty. I’ve often thought it would make sense to fill those returning ships with salt from the Ostia Antica salt flats.”

Binyamin and Gideon were practically tongue-tied at the audacity of what their father had in mind. True, they were curious after having experienced Mark’s spell. But, neither of them had ever been aboard ship, let alone a vessel that would take them across the Mediterranean. Binyamin spoke first. “Ostia Antica is easily a many-day sail from Alexandria and we’ve never been on a ship. There is the additional uncertainty that Peter may have moved his quarters since the last time he was in touch with Mark. Further, we don’t even know what you said in your letter to Mark, let alone what you may have that bears on the divinity of Yeshua. How can we be expected to travel so far without knowing the purpose of our mission?”

“All fair questions. I can only tell you this. What you experienced in the presence of Mark is only a shadow of what I am feeling inside. I don’t want to go into detail without a better

understanding of what we have all been feeling because at stake is our entire belief system—our belief in the centrality of the *Torah*. I wouldn't ask you to go on this mission unless I thought it was worth it. More importantly, once Peter sees what you will be bringing him, I believe all your questions and mine will be answered.”

Now, here is what I would like you to do. Arrange for the shipment of twenty jugs of olive oil. However, in one of them, pack what I prepare for Peter. I will wrap the contents in an empty water bag so that nothing will get in. Place the water bag in one of the jugs. To distinguish the jug from the others, mark it on the outside with a distinctive marking.

“Why don't we mark it with a cross,” volunteered Gideon, “since that seems to be the symbol of Mark and Peter's faith.”

“Excellent idea. When you reach Italy, the two of you can arrange with the ship's captain to dispose of the nineteen jugs containing olive oil. But you should personally take custody of the one marked with the cross to Peter.”

Judah had been correct. There were a number of ship captains who had enjoyed Judah's business in the past and who were happy to further endear themselves to him by taking his two sons onboard for a voyage to Ostia Antica. However, after interviewing a number of these captains and viewing their ships, the brothers had chosen an unfamiliar captain and his ship, a large *navis oneraria*, or merchant ship.

The ship's trade route normally took it between northern Italy and Spain and as a result it was noticeably more-sturdy looking than the other ships in the harbor. It had a capacity of about 200 good-sized clay containers. It was in North Africa because the grape harvest in Spain had been unusually good and a wine merchant in Alexandria had made it financially

advantageous for the captain to bring a large shipment of wine to Egypt. Now, the ship was preparing to head back to Italy and the captain was looking for cargo. The brothers were easily able to obtain the captain's agreement to ship 20 clay containers on the vessel and to provide the brothers with a sheltered area to be used as their sleeping quarters.

The brothers made sure the jug marked with the the cross was safely secured. They then climbed onto the ship. Once onboard, they were relieved to find that the ship sailed completely under power of sail and didn't depend on additional oar power. The thought of dozens of slave rowers chained to one another in the hold had filled Binyamin and Gideon with dread. No longer beset by that spectacle, the brothers settled into the quarters that had been provided for them in the ship's hold.

The brothers had known in advance that the course laid out by the ship's captain would take it west along the North African coast until it reached the prosperous port of Berenice, named after the wife of the third century BCE pharaoh Ptolemy III. The journey had proved uneventful and often quite beautiful as the blue waters of the Mediterranean contrasted magnificently with the arid north African coast. Fancifully, the brothers even kidded one another about having become sailors. The fourth night of the sail was grey and the moon hazy as they approached Berenice. Unfamiliar with the waters of the southern Mediterranean, the captain was alarmed at the low visibility. However, as dawn began to emerge, the moon broke through the haze for a moment and the captain was relieved to see his destination in the distance. However, due to his inexperience with the waters off Berenice, he knew his most challenging moments lay ahead.

The two brothers were elated at the thought of spending a little time on land and of being that much closer to Italy and Peter. They sought out a prominent vantage point on the bow of the ship and looked wondrously at the approaching shoreline. All of a sudden, the ship lurched menacingly as the captain's

worst fears came to pass and the hull of the vessel struck a submerged cluster of rocks.

Before the brothers knew what was happening, the ship began taking on water, as panicked crewmen tried to assess the damage. Soon, men began jumping overboard as the ship began to list menacingly, amidst the sound of cracking timber. Mortified, Binyamin and Gideon looked at the chaotic scene before them. Neither knew how to swim and they were still far from shore in deep water, perhaps as deep as two hundred feet. They tried to assess their prospects amidst the pandemonium. They had little time to think for, at that moment, the ship lunged to the side and they were thrown overboard.

The water was warm, but terrifying. Despite being close to shore, there were still swells, not to speak of more concealed rocks. Flailing in the wave-capped water and gasping for air, Gideon could not even find the composure to say a parting prayer. His thoughts—if the panic-stricken waves of emotion passing through his mind could be called thoughts—told him what he already knew. The end was near.

Fate, however, had a different ending in mind. Out of the corner of his eye, Gideon saw an injured sailor desperately clinging to a large piece of hull timber, coming his way. Then, apparently overcome by his wounds, the sailor suddenly let go and slipped under the frothy waves. As he did so, he caused the timber to lunge in Gideon's direction, enabling him to grab it.

Gasping, laughing and crying at the same time, Gideon dared not believe he had been saved. After a few seconds, he directed his thoughts to Binyamin. Much relieved, he discovered that Binyamin had also found purchase on a piece of the ship's wreckage, but one that would not hold him for long. Binyamin pushed off with his legs and, though he had never before paddled, found a way of propelling himself toward his brother. The two were so happy to see one another that they lost their concentration and almost fell back into the water. However,

once they both gained stability, Gideon hauled his older brother onto the more reliable, larger piece of wood.

Luck continued to be with the brothers. Local fishermen had observed the ship in distress and were rowing out looking for survivors. Kicking with every ounce of energy at their disposal, the brothers headed toward the fishermen. It seemed like forever, but finally they were in the safety of the fishing boats.

Once on shore, Binyamin and Gideon again assessed their situation. Both of them had taken the precaution of strapping coin belts inside their garments. To their relief, the belts had held firm in the water, and they knew they would be able pay for passage back to Alexandria. But, what to do after that? They considered heading to Rome and Peter. However, the jug with their father's contents was now at the bottom of the sea. Without the jug, such a trip seemed pointless, not to speak of the fact they were exhausted. So, they decided to head home. They were nevertheless heartbroken. Not only had the jug with their father's special package been swallowed by the sea, but, in addition, so had nineteen other jugs of theirs, each filled with valuable olive oil. Equally unsettling, they might never have another opportunity to fully investigate Mark's message or to experience the spiritual doors Peter might have opened. But their lives had been spared and they were grateful beyond measure.

The voyage back was not nearly as eventful as their ill-fated sail to Ostia Antica. In short order, they were back on Egyptian soil and on their way home. As they neared Memphis, their joy at seeing their families was tempered by what they would say to their father. They knew word of the disaster at sea would not have reached their father or their families before their return. So, they had time to rehearse what they would say, knowing that their jubilant families would be expecting exciting news. However, as they approached their homes, instead of

jubilant, they saw their wives' long faces. They knew then that further rehearsal was unnecessary. Judah had died during their absence.

Chapter Nineteen
Vassar College, Poughkeepsie New York
Week Two, the Present

The lawyers for Maury's estate had advised Malcolm he could authorize Vassar to publicize word of Maury's twenty-million-dollar gift to the college. He couldn't wait to call Dean McKeaver at Vassar and pass along the good news. As might have been expected, McKeaver received the news with jubilation. The two had talked about how the college would stage the announcement so as to get as much coverage as possible. After a few minutes of discussion, Malcolm and McKeaver agreed that the college would make a formal announcement at a press conference attended by Malcolm and various dignitaries. The press conference would be followed by a reception and cocktail party.

Malcolm was enthusiastic about having the opportunity to highlight his father's generosity and to demonstrate affection for his alma mater. The press had hinted that Maury might have been involved in shady antiquities dealings and Malcolm looked forward to showcasing his father's legacy in a far more favorable light. Further, he was looking forward to discussing his research results with Jeff Leibowitz sometime during the day of the press conference and the thought filled him with excitement. But he would have to moderate his enthusiasm as the dates available were limited and the one chosen by Dean McKeaver was a day when Leibowitz would be away.

On the appointed day, Malcolm showed up at McKeaver's office for a briefing on what to expect. McKeaver greeted him warmly and began to describe the day's events. When she got to the press conference, her speech became guarded. As tactfully as she could, she verbalized what she was thinking. "Malcolm, there will be students present from both the Vassar press and various student organizations. Some of them are anti-Zionist and may not be happy about a gift from a

staunch supporter of Israel, as your father was during his lifetime. There could be a demonstration.”

“How does the college feel about the gift? Are you still supportive?”

“Absolutely, the opportunity to start a center for conflict resolution has been one of our dreams. We couldn’t be more excited.”

“Then, there’s nothing to worry about. If there are demonstrations, we can use them to illustrate the importance of arbitrating different points of view in a fair and open environment.”

“Good for you. That’s what I was hoping to hear.”

In the event, there was nothing to worry about. Only one student, a junior named Rashid, raised the question of how a center for conflict resolution financed by a pro-Zionist donor could be expected to address issues on the Middle East in an impartial manner. Malcolm’s response was succinct and convincing.

“Thank you for your question, Rashid. I understand your concern. But, please consider two things. There are many academic centers for Middle East studies throughout the country financed by Arab donations, many of which have been criticized for having an unapologetic anti-Israel bias. Yet, these centers are permitted to operate because we believe in free speech in this country and because of the presumption they have something to offer. By contrast, the center envisioned by my father will welcome any point of view, whether pro-Israel, anti-Zionist or anything else, provided that such viewpoints are presented civilly, open-mindedly and in the interest of solving, rather than, fomenting conflict. In addition, my father’s gift comes with no strings attached. The college is free to administer the program in any way it sees fit and to invite scholars of any viewpoint to

participate, provided their scholarship is of the highest order and open to reply.”

After his appearance at the press conference, Malcolm was clearly pleased with himself. He had never thought of himself as a public speaker but was quite proud of the job he had done and was looking forward to the reception for feedback.

McKeaver had sent out fliers in advance of the press conference to friends of the college and interested alumni. In particular, she had made a point of inviting a number of Malcolm’s classmates, most Jewish, to the reception, causing the event to resemble a homecoming for her newly minted star donor. Many had been following the anti-Israel rancor pervading the collegiate landscape and were grateful for an academic center, the avowed purpose of which was to dampen the vitriol and produce dialogue that was thoughtful, scholarly and, importantly, not shrill. Others were more skeptical regarding the center’s prospects but were delighted to see one of their favorite college classmates occupying the center stage of their alma mater. But all were effusive in their praise for Malcolm’s performance.

Malcolm was enjoying the spirited discussion at the reception as well as the spirits that were flowing freely. In the short time available, he had managed to spend time and exchange toasts with just about everyone McKeaver had invited to the reception. He was feeling pleasantly high from the alcohol and from the overall success of the day, when he noticed an unfamiliar face—an attractive, unfamiliar face. The woman was talking with two other male guests, both of whom seemed to be relishing her company. She was affecting attentiveness almost to the point of being playful, but she was clearly looking in Malcolm’s direction when the opportunity presented itself.

Malcolm tried to be discreet and avoid staring. He really hadn’t paid much attention to women since breaking up with Wendy and was still feeling wounded. However, despite his

wounded state, the look of this woman was clearly causing him to feel aroused. All of a sudden, he not only found himself making eye contact, but his face broke out into an uncontrolled sheepish grin.

To Malcolm's delight, the grin was returned as the woman behind the unfamiliar face began walking in his direction. Unconsciously, Malcom began fidgeting with his tie and tidying up his suit jacket to ensure he would be presenting himself in the most favorable manner. However, as it turned out, he had nothing to fear. Purposefully, the woman quickly moved in his direction. When she reached Malcolm, she extended her hand. As Malcolm reciprocated, she smiled graciously and introduced herself in a perfectly- rendered British accent.

“My name is Roshni Khan. I enjoyed your answers at the press conference this afternoon and have been trying to find an opportunity to speak with you. However, you appear to be a very popular commodity and getting through to you hasn't been easy. I'm glad we now have the opportunity to talk.”

Chapter Twenty
Alexandria, Egypt
202 CE

In 193 CE, Septimus Severus became the emperor of the Roman Empire. By then, Christianity had spread to all quadrants of the Empire. For the most part, the faith prospered and there was no widespread persecution of Christians.

As with many of his predecessors, Severus had obtained his position by force and ran the Empire as a military dictatorship. In his rise to power, he had ordered the execution of a distressingly large number of senators, making numerous internal enemies along the way. He had also dismissed the Praetorian Guard—the security force for Rome’s high-ranking officials—and replaced them with his own security personnel, causing further antagonisms.

To deal with the many tensions within the Empire as well as the political intrigues that were constantly arising, Severus came upon the idea of unifying his fragmented Empire by harmonizing the belief systems of his many subjects. He sought to do this through syncretism, a merging all of the religious traditions in the Empire. As syncretism required a compromise of church values in the service of the Empire, Severus’ edicts put many Christian communities on edge.

Since the time of Mark, Alexandria had emerged as one of the great seats of Christian learning. Its Catechetical School, the first of its kind in the Empire, was renowned for its Christian scholarship and for the teaching of Christian ethics. School leaders, such as Pantaemus drew upon some of the great teachings of the past, Greek stoicism among them, in providing Christianity with a blend of revealed religion and philosophy.

At the beginning of the Third Century CE, Titus Flavius Clement was the leader of the Alexandria Catechetical School. His intellectual powers attracted other great scholars as did the purity of his thought. It was the latter that got him into trouble when Severus insisted upon blending all of the religions within the Empire. In the year 202 CE, Clement fled the city and wouldn't return for four years when the threat of religious persecution had subsided.

During Clement's absence, the activities of the Catechetical School started to unravel, and anxieties began to heighten as Severus' edicts became more demanding. One day, a group of the school's leading scholars decided to be proactive in the face of the gathering Roman persecution.

The school's library of scholarly works was its most prized possession and the easiest target of any form of religious persecution. The organizers decided the protection of the library's contents was their most important duty. So, they appointed one of their own, a young acolyte named John, to seek out lesser-known Christian communities to house the school's documents until the threat of persecution subsided.

John took his duties seriously and, with an aid, scoured the Nile Delta and other areas of Lower Egypt. At length, his journey took him to Mostorod, a fair distance from Alexandria. In Mostorod, John discovered there had been a Christian community dating back to the time of Mark. Even more importantly, in talking to the church leaders, John discovered the Mostorod Christian community had maintained continuously a library of various documents pertaining to the church.

John asked one of these leaders, a man named Nasius, whether he could store texts from the Alexandria school with the Christian community of Mostorod. Nasius was flattered, but hesitated. The scrolls within the Mostorod library had become unwieldy and were in desperate need of organization. Nasius was

concerned that adding even more books to the Mostorod collection would only aggravate an already bad situation. Nasius conveyed his concerns to John, who quickly allayed his fears.

“If organization is what worries you, I think I can be of help. If your community would accept me for however long the persecution lasts, I would stay here to ensure the scrolls are properly treated and organized. During that time, I would not only oversee the proper organization of our scrolls, but yours as well. Think of me as a dedicated librarian.”

Nasius was of course delighted with John’s response. He also knew it might be some time before John felt comfortable in returning the scrolls to the Catechetical School in Alexandria. During such time, Nasius envisioned that Mostorod would become a center of learning in its own right. So, after consulting with the other leaders of the community, Nasius gave John his consent and urged him to return to Alexandria as quickly as possible.

John lost no time in returning to Alexandria and conferring with his colleagues. They were encouraged by his report and agreed to relocate a sizeable part of the school’s collection to the Mostorod library.

John had been made to feel very welcome in Mostorod, but he was beginning to think he had taken on more of a job than he bargained for. Reorganizing and cataloguing the Alexandria collection was a substantial task in its own right. But, doing the same for the Mostorod texts was a task of an entirely different order. Some of the scrolls went back one hundred and fifty years and many were in poor condition. His task was made more difficult because he lacked a context for the Mostorod texts. In many instances, he had to read scrolls from the beginning to understand their setting and meaning.

As with any set of documents, John found many to be uninfluential at best and frivolous at worst. In addition, the texts had been written by a variety of scribes and reading some of the handwriting was truly a daunting task. Fortunately, Nasius and his son, Axus, were eager to help. Axus had made a point of rising earlier than usual so he could complete his tasks before the sun became its strongest. He would then head over to where John was working and start culling through the scrolls John had not yet reviewed.

One day as John and Axus were working together, John unrolled a papyrus scroll. It had been well taken care of. So, the papyrus had not cracked. Even so, John could tell from its appearance that it was old and began to unwind it with great care.

At first, John was a little disappointed as the scroll seemed to be a succession of records pertaining to commercial transactions recorded by a scribe named Ahmed. Then, as John continued reading, he realized that Ahmed, though advanced in age, had been one of Mostorod's first converts to Christianity. John was of course curious about what one of Christianity's earliest adherents had to say about Yeshua's divinity and the beginnings of the religion. But nothing seemed to indicate why Ahmed had embraced Christianity. *What had led Ahmed to Mark in the first instance?* he thought.

As John probed the pages of Ahmed's accounts, he stumbled across a seemingly innocuous reference to an event that had occurred during Ahmed's tenure as the city's scribe. It seemed innocent enough, just an episode having to do with the local stream drying up and creating havoc for the townspeople who depended on it.

Reading further, John turned to the scribe's account of the contingent of Jews who had arrived by caravan only to discover a dry stream bed. All of a sudden, a huge shiver went up and down John's spine. He was now reading Ahmed's

description of the miraculous return of the stream's life-giving waters—a miracle that seemed to have been instigated by the cries of a Jewish baby in the caravan, a baby named Yeshua.

Chapter Twenty-One
The Scarsdale Police Station
Westchester County New York
Week Three, the Present

Events were moving along for Anita. She was showing herself in public and visiting friends outside of the house. At Mintzes' insistence, she had met with and retained a criminal lawyer named Horrace Feinbloom. However, it had been a few days since she had heard from Hemingway and she had even persuaded herself the questioning may have ended. So, the call from Hemingway asking her to come to the station for further questioning was even more distressing than it might have been, particularly when he suggested she might want to be accompanied by counsel.

Quickly, she called Feinbloom, who did a surprisingly good job of calming her down. However, the reality remained. Lawyer or no lawyer, she was going to have to suffer through another session of questioning. Further, she couldn't get past the fact that Hemingway had suggested she bring her attorney! The implication of that made her sick.

Fortunately, most of the press had disbanded since the "Scarsdale double murder," as it was being referred to in the press, was losing some of its appeal. However, reporters still lingered, and Anita had all she could do to get out of her car unimpeded. As she emerged in front of the police station, Feinbloom quickly appeared and offered her both a helping hand and a consoling word. Even so, she was distressed at the questioning that awaited her and could tell her lawyer was quietly concerned.

The two were ushered into the nondescript room where Anita had previously met with Hemingway and awaited his arrival. They did not have to wait long, as Hemingway quickly appeared. To Anita's eye, Hemingway was dressed more formally than he had been during their last session. She

wondered whether that was because he was expecting a lawyer to accompany her or whether he dressed in such a manner whenever he had bad news. As Hemingway entered the room, Feinbloom arose to introduce himself and shook hands with the detective.

“Mr. Feinbloom, thank you very much for coming today. Let me set the rules of our meeting so there is no misunderstanding. Your client is not being accused of causing the death of her husband, but she is a person of interest. With your permission, I’d like to conduct this interview under camera.”

As she heard what Hemingway was saying, Anita’s shoulders sagged, and she began to protest. Feinbloom was not surprised by Hemingway’s announcement. But he had all he could do to quiet Anita. Despite having briefed Anita before their meeting, his client was clearly feeling blindsided and was now lashing out at Hemingway, asserting she was being victimized by the police. “Mrs. Steintaler, Detective Hemingway is not accusing you of anything.”

“I know. I’m sorry for the outburst. But this whole experience has been so draining and I don’t understand why I have to be videotaped?”

“I know how you feel and I’m sure the detective does as well. As we discussed, making a video of the session is common practice and no one, except for Mr. Hemingway’s colleagues, will see it.”

Hemingway had no interest in a skittish interviewee and also did his best to defuse the situation. “Mrs. Steintaler, why don’t you take a drink of water. Your lawyer is correct, the video of this session is as much to protect you as anything else. No one’s going to see it except on a need to know basis.”

With effort, Anita regained her composure. “Thank you. I’m ready to proceed.”

“Mrs. Steintaler, I’d like to continue where we left off the other day and talk about the wire transmission that was made on the day of your husband’s death and the terms of your marital agreement with Mr. Steintaler.”

Anita exhaled heavily and looked toward Feinbloom. “Mr. Hemingway, my client is prepared to answer any questions you may have. But I wish to express for the record that she is voluntarily waiving the confidentiality provisions of the marital agreement for purposes of this session only, but for no other purpose.”

“Fair enough. Mrs. Steintaler, we’ve determined that an electronic transfer of three and a half million dollars was made the afternoon your husband died and that it originated from your joint bank account. However, we have not been successful in identifying the recipient of the funds. We know that the wire ended up in Switzerland, but the trail ends there. Would you please tell me what you know about the transfer?”

Since she honestly knew nothing about the transfer, Anita felt she was on more solid footing. Confidently, she responded: “I really have no knowledge. I assume it was used to pay for whatever my husband purchased that afternoon.”

“That was also our supposition. Interestingly, however, we found no purchase documents, or any other sign of a transaction having taken place the day he died. We’ve checked his antiques collection, and everything is so consistently maintained that it’s impossible to tell if anything was newly added. Do you happen to know what he might have purchased?”

“I’m afraid I don’t. We had a disagreement that afternoon, as I believe you are aware, and, sadly, I never saw him after that.”

“Yes, we’ll get back to that in a moment. But, before then, I’m curious about the joint account your husband and you held. Did you have access to it?”

Anita looked at Feinbloom, who motioned for her to respond. Still, she was feeling a little put out. “Are you suggesting that somehow I transferred three and half million dollars the day my husband died?”

“Mrs. Steintaler, I’m not suggesting anything. I’m just trying to establish some relevant facts. I would appreciate it if you would answer the question.”

“The answer is I did not have access to the account. Every transaction, whether incoming or outgoing, was password protected and I didn’t know the password.”

“That’s a little bit surprising since it appears you used the account not long ago for a purchase at Saks.”

“What do you mean?”

“Our investigation shows that the account was used to obtain a refund for the return of an expensive woman’s coat and that the refund instructions originated with you. How could you have done that without knowing the account password?”

Feinbloom looked at his client with some concern as Anita had not mentioned anything about such a transaction. He was relieved when Anita seemed to display confidence as she responded. “Oh that! Maury and I didn’t go shopping very often, but I had seen an expensive coat and I wanted his approval before purchasing it, so we went to the store together. It was to be an anniversary present and I was very grateful. He liked the coat and must have used our checking account for the purchase. But, my timing was bad because, before I took delivery, Maury found out about Ralph and me. He was beside

himself with anger and insisted I call the store and reverse the purchase. He scribbled the account password on a piece of paper in case I needed it and then stormed out of the room.”

“Very interesting. What did you do with the scribbled piece of paper?”

“I tore it up and threw it away.”

“You tore it up, just like that?”

Feinbloom gestured for Anita to withhold her response. “Detective, Mrs. Steintaler has already answered the question. Please don’t badger her.”

“I apologize. I forgot myself. Mrs. Steintaler let’s move on to your marital agreement. You said you had entered into the agreement some time ago as a result of an earlier affair.”

“That’s correct.”

“In your words, what was the gist of the agreement?”

“I was so ashamed at the time that I would have entered into anything.”

“I understand.”

“Basically, it gave Maury authority to divorce me for a nominal amount if I stepped out of line again. Otherwise, I would be assured a substantial part of his estate if he died before me.”

“Any idea what those numbers would be in today’s terms?”

“Yes. It’s a bit embarrassing. It would be the difference between about a half million and one hundred million dollars.”

“That’s quite a spread. After Maury found out about your relationship with Ralph Gittelson, had he threatened to divorce you and activate the agreement?”

“He was very hurt, but to his credit, he agreed to couples’ therapy and to hold off until I had a fair chance to demonstrate once again my commitment to him.”

“How was that going?”

“It was going well until Maury found out that I had seen Ralph again. As you know, that’s what caused the fight earlier on the day he died.”

“You’ve said the reason you resumed contact with Mr. Gittelson was to recover a bracelet you may have inadvertently left with him.”

“Yes.”

“Was there any other reason for seeing him?”

“Why, no!”

“We’ve interviewed Mr. Gittelson. As you suggest, he did say you asked to see him to help recover the bracelet.”

“Of course.”

“He also said that as soon as you and he were alone, you started to disrobe and that he was too weak to resist.”

“Mrs. Steintaler, did you resume the affair with Mr. Gittelson in the way he described and did your husband find out about it?”

Chapter Twenty-Two
Alexandria, Egypt
275-325 CE

It had been many decades since 206 CE, the year Clement returned from his four- year exile to the Catechetical School of Alexandria. It had also been many years since the Mostorod library had been incorporated into the rebuilt Catechetical library of Alexandria.

In the intervening period, the school had been the home of scholars of incomparable talent. There had been the philosopher Origen who viewed scripture as allegorical and whose 2,000 treatises on Christian subjects was rivaled only by his renowned asceticism. Origen had been followed by his pupil, Gregory Thaumaturgus, whose wonderous deeds had earned him the name Gregory the Miracle Worker, and then by Dionysius the Great, who had received a vision commanding him to subdue the heresies facing the church, as well as the astounding Didymus the Blind, whose prodigious memory enabled him to overcome his disability and excel as a Christian theologian.

However, even as the school prospered, the tumultuous forces of the middle years of the Third Century CE began to seal its fate. In 235 CE, Severus Alexander, the last Roman emperor of the Severian Dynasty, had been assassinated by his own troops, setting in motion a titanic struggle for power within the Empire. In the fifty years that followed, civil war followed civil war, the imperial monetary system began to fray, plagues proliferated, and foreign powers began to eat away at the very substance of the Empire.

One such power was the Palmyrene Empire. Centered in the Syrian mercantile city of Palmyra, the Palmyrenes were renowned for their commercial success and for their prowess as city builders, particularly along the trade routes of the day. In 260 CE, the Palmyrenes defended themselves against the mighty

armies of Persian Emperor, Shapur I. Emboldened by their success against the Persians, they then engaged in a campaign of expansion south and west into the Roman provinces of Palaestina and Arabia Petraea. In 270 CE, the Palmyrenes absorbed Egypt and its port city of Alexandria. However, in 273 CE, during the reign of the Palmyrene queen, Zenobia, the Palmyrenes met their match and were defeated by the Roman Emperor, Aurelian.

Aurelian's forces were stretched thin. However, the Romans methodically countered the Palmyrene forces with impressive ease. First, they moved against the well-fortified Palmyrene capital of Palmyra. Once having subdued the capital city, Aurelian set his sights on the Egyptian port of Alexandria, site not only of the Catechetical library of Alexandria, but also of those portions of the Great Library of Alexandria that, though inactive, remained standing. There, during the early part of 274 CE, Aurelian's troops waged a scorched earth battle against the city. Soon, the Great Library was in flames.

As the fire crept through the city, the leaders of Catechetical School raced about in panic. They were not worried about themselves. Since Septimus Severus' oppressive rule earlier in the century, there had been only a few periods of persecution, primarily during the reigns of Decius and Valerian when Christians had been compelled to offer sacrifices to pagan gods. But, since 260 CE, there had not been any similar acts of oppression and the school community felt reasonably secure despite the fighting. However, their library was another story and, as had been true during the reign of Septimus Severus, the prospect of it being destroyed terrified them.

The school's leaders had posted lookouts throughout the city to report on the progress of Aurelian's assault. All of a sudden, one of the lookouts, a young teacher, came running into the school's main courtyard just as the sun was beginning to peak overhead. "The flames will be here by the end of the day," shouted the young teacher. "We have to save the scrolls."

After some initial confusion, the school's leaders rallied and formed a brigade for the removal of the scrolls to volunteers who were waiting with donkeys and carts. In this manner, the school managed to save thousands of its scrolls. Unfortunately, there had been no time to plan and many of the scrolls were taken to nondescript sheds and warehouses.

As time passed, the school began to recover from the devastation of Aurelian's attack. Soon, the school's leaders built new classrooms and started the process of recovering the widely dispersed scrolls. Retrieval proved to be challenging, for many of the scrolls had been spirited away from the city by well-intentioned church leaders who were intent on finding suitable, if not well-documented, places for them while the school recovered.

Over time, the leaders of the Catechetical School were satisfied they had recovered most of the far-flung scrolls. Unfortunately, the Mostorod scrolls were not among them.

It had been an exhausting five years for Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria. His belief in the Trinity—that God was one, but consisted of three coeternal, consubstantial persons, the father, the son and the holy spirit—invigorated his life and gave meaning to everything he did and saw on earth. However, his antagonist and fellow Alexandria church leader, Arius, had been a constant thorn in his side.

Arius' view that God had granted Jesus the dignity of becoming his son—thereby, relegating Jesus to subordinate status to God—had been rejected by the Mareotis Synod convened by Alexander in 320 CE. However, Arius was very persuasive, and his views continued to find acceptance among many of the prominent church leaders of the day. Alexander's frustration finally reached a boiling point and he called for another Synod where Arius' beliefs were again rejected and Arius, himself, was excommunicated. However, Alexander's

actions only served to anger, not humble, Arius, who decided to take his case to Constantine I.

Constantine had been the sole Roman emperor since 312 CE, when he defeated his rival for the throne, Maxentius, at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, giving Constantine an unopposed path over the Tiber to Rome. For Christianity, Constantine's victory was momentous as the emperor attributed his victory to a sign he had received from the sky—a cross bearing the words “in this sign you shall conquer.” Not only had Constantine instructed his men to adorn their shields with the sign of the cross before going in to battle, but, in addition, after his glorious victory, Constantine had converted to Christianity.

Constantine needed all of the unity he could muster to rule his unwieldy empire. He saw the dispute between Alexander and Arius as having the potential for creating a schism within the church. The last thing Constantine needed was a civil war among one of the largest communities within his realm. So, he called for a council of over 300 bishops to convene in Nicaea, a city in Anatolia. At the council, the bishops would consider Arius and Alexander's competing views and render a decision on which was correct.

As Alexander contemplated the upcoming conference, he liked his prospects. After all, his views on the Trinity derived directly from the very first lines of the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” *What could be a stronger endorsement of his position,* he thought. However, he didn't want to take any chances and wanted to be ready for one lingering conundrum should it be raised by Arius—how to reconcile Jesus being coeternal and consubstantial with God during the time Jesus was a baby and helpless?

Alexander had heard about Ahmed's account of the stream waters at Mostorod. If Alexander could produce a first-hand account of Jesus performing a miracle as a baby, he knew

this troublesome theological problem would likely go away. So, he called his student and heir apparent, Athanasius.

“Do you recall my telling you about the Mostorod scrolls that were never found?”

“I do.”

“I need one of them for the great council that Constantine has announced. There was once a rumor that the scrolls had been taken to the monastery dedicated to Anthony.”

“The one located in the eastern desert southwest of Memphis?”

“Yes. I desire you to go there. If the scrolls are in the possession of the monks, I need the one that makes reference to the miracle at the Mostorod stream. Do whatever is required to bring it back to me.”

Athanasius was in no mood to make such a long journey and also needed time to prepare for the Council, as he would be presenting the case in support of the Trinity. So, he gently attempted to push back. “I know why you desire the scroll, but our position is unassailable, and my sources advise that Arius has little chance of being victorious.” Alexander, too, had heard the same rumors, but wished to leave no stone unturned. So, in the end, Athanasius left for the monastery.

Built on an oasis, the monastery had been constructed in 300 CE to honor the memory of Anthony, the Christian ascetic who had endured indescribable hardship in the wilderness while leading a life of Christian contemplation and reverence.

The Mostorod scrolls had indeed been taken to the monastery. The monks whose abstemious lives left little room for

pleasures other than reading Christian texts enjoyed having the scrolls and soon they became part of the fabric of monastery life. However, when Athanasius arrived and explained why Alexander needed the scroll with Ahmed's account, the monks quickly understood that relinquishing the "miracle scroll," as it was then known to the monks, was for the greater good.

Athanasius' journey back to Alexandria was long and exhausting. He despaired that he might not return in time to accompany his master to Nicaea. However, armed with the knowledge that, at Nicaea, Alexander and he would be defending a position of inestimable importance to the church, Athanasius was able to make good time.

When he arrived in Alexandria, he immediately sought out Alexander who eagerly began reading the scroll. Soon he found the passage pertaining to the miraculous restoration of the stream and his eyes lit up with pure joy. As he observed his mentor's delight, Athanasius knew the journey had been worth it. Suddenly, however, Alexander frowned as he read the description of Judah's rescue of the infant Jesus. His mood had now turned sour as he turned to Athanasius. "I don't think I'll be taking the scroll with me after all. Now that I have seen it, I prefer to leave it at rest, lest it raise more issues than it resolves." With that, Alexander instructed Athanasius to file away the scroll in the library of St. Mark's church and prepared for what he expected would be his victorious appearance at the council.

Chapter Twenty-Three
Vassar College, Poughkeepsie New York
Week Three, the Present

Malcolm guessed that the exotic woman who stood before him was about his age. Her dark complexion framed light hazel eyes and her silky brunette hair flowed down to her shoulders unrestrained by any kind of hair covering. She was an alluring mix of east and west and Malcolm was impressed, if not smitten. Jokingly, he thought to himself: *Now is not the time to drool.*

Thankful that he had not yet done anything to embarrass himself, Malcom offered his best smile and extended his hand. “Ms. Khan, it’s a pleasure to meet you. Apparently, you know who I am. But I’m eager to find out more about you. Let’s start with why you’re here and why you want to talk to me.”

“Excellent starting points. Let’s begin by agreeing to use first names, if that’s okay with you.”

“Of course. Roshni, it shall be. It’s quite beautiful. What’s its origin?”

“Qatari.”

“Okay, you’ve stumped me. What is a Qatari woman with perfectly executed English doing at Vassar on the day my father’s gift to the school is being announced? And, excuse my unfamiliarity on these matters, but I’m surprised your hair is not covered. Not that I object of course.

“The head-dress is called a hijab. When I’m in Qatar, I wear it. However, in London where I work and here in America, unless I’m with fellow countrymen, I’m comfortable without it. But, more to the point, my mother was a Connecticut Yankee, a wasp I might note, and a proud Vassar graduate. Her family had taken her on a tour of Egypt when she was young, and she was

fascinated by the culture of the Middle East and the Arab world. When she finished college at Vassar, she decided to do graduate work in Middle-East studies at the University of Cairo. There, she met my Qatari father and they fell in love.”

“That must have been a shock to both families.”

“It was indeed. But my mother had studied Islam in college and was fully prepared to convert and lead the life of a devout Muslim woman. In addition, my father was a member of the royal family. Though the marriage to an outsider might have been frowned upon on the Qatari street, rank has its privileges. In the end, it was only my Anglo grandparents who had a difficult time accepting the marriage, especially since my mother had eschewed the religion of her birth and had chosen to live five thousand miles away in Doha, Qatar’s capital.”

“That’s quite a story. Where’s your mother today?”

“I’m afraid my mother is deceased. She died some years ago, leaving my poor father to contend with me.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. It’s an indescribably painful experience to lose a parent as I’m finding out. I’m guessing that your mother having been a Vassar graduate has something to do with the reason you are here?”

“Yes, at least in part. My mother loved Vassar and during her life was a substantial contributor to her alma mater. I’m a graduate of Cambridge and the London School of Economics. Even so, my father and I have continued my mother’s gift giving to Vassar as a tribute to the college she loved so much.”

“Impressive credentials and a nice sentiment. You still haven’t answered what you’re doing here and how you found out about the press conference?”

Roshni let out a playful sigh. “I knew at some point we’d get to the heart of the matter. I’m in New York on business. I work for Northfield & Willis in London. You may have heard of them.”

“Of course. One of the most prominent investment houses in Europe.”

“Thank you. It’s not a coincidence that I work for Northfield as they manage a fair portion of the assets of the Qatar sovereign wealth fund, what we call the Qatar Investment Authority, or the QIA.”

“Wow, the QIA! If I recall correctly, it’s one of the top ten sovereign wealth funds in the world, with something like a quarter of a trillion dollars at its disposal!”

“It’s not a secret. The QIA is responsible for more than three hundred and twenty billion dollars in assets. Northfield, at the direction of the QIA’s executive director, is responsible for investing about forty percent of that amount. At Northfield, I act as the executive director’s liaison.”

“Now you’re really impressing me. But I thought Qatar was a male-dominated society where women play a very limited role, let alone occupy positions of importance in governmental and business dealings.”

“Most people think that way, probably because Saudi Arabia, which is considerably more conservative when it comes to women, gets most of the press in the Sunni world. However, Qatar has been making great strides in the advancement of women’s roles in all sectors of society. I’m not saying we’ve arrived, but we’re way ahead of many Arab countries. Just recently, our Emir appointed four women to the Shura, one of the most important advisory councils in the country, and you may know that Sheika Alya bint Ahmed al-Thani, a woman, is our representative to the United Nations. We have the right to

vote and we even have a female judge. Her name is Sheika Maha Mansour al-Thani.”

Malcolm was genuinely intrigued by Roshni’s response. Even more so, he was concerned that he might have offended her and undermined the favorable impression he was trying to make. “My humble apologies. I guess I’ve been put in my place and properly so. Now that we’re well acquainted and I’m desperate to reclaim the high ground, how can I be of help?”

“I never thought you’d ask! As with many sovereign wealth funds, ours supports a charitable foundation known as the Qatar Development and Rescue Fund. The fund runs and supports humanitarian and educational programs primarily in the Arab world and also supports development and relief programs in many underserved areas. Of course, it also promotes Quran centers, particularly in less accessible areas.”

“I’m not aware of the Qatar Development and Rescue Fund.”

“I didn’t think so, but I hope to educate you with regard to the merit of our fund, particularly with what I have in mind.”

“I’m all ears.”

“As I’ve said, the Fund supports traditional philanthropic activities. But, I’d like to expand its activities to include conflict resolution and mediation, particularly in the Middle East.”

“I know I’m on thin ice in saying this, but that’s not exactly the kind of activity I would associate with Qatar. After all, doesn’t it support Hamas, a terrorist organization, at least in the eyes of the United States? And, isn’t it still on the outs with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States because of its support for terrorism in the region?”

“You’re not on thin ice at all. I didn’t expect you to be ignorant of the way Qatar is portrayed in the West. Frankly, a lot of it is true. That’s the reason for my initiative. I’d like to change the culture that underlies such support. When my mother was alive, she was very interested in moving the country in the direction of problem solving rather than problem initiating—a goal very much shared by my father. Much of the money my mother donated to the school was intended to support conflict resolution. Dean McKeaver knows of my continued interest in this arena, and, more particularly, of my goal of drawing upon the Qatar Development and Rescue Fund’s resources to support Vassar’s conflict-resolution work. So, she contacted me to find out if I would be in town around the time of the planned press conference for your father’s gift. When I told her that I would be here this week, she arranged for the press conference to take place today.”

“Ah. The plot thickens. Now, I know why she said that the available dates for the conference were limited.”

“Yes. But it was for a noble cause. You see, I intend to use the resources of the Qatar Development and Rescue Fund to support a matching gift to Vassar.”

“No kidding!”

“Yes. My goal is for the Fund to contribute twenty million dollars to Vassar to stand alongside your father’s gift. McKeaver believes our combined gifts could support a brand-new center on campus intended to promote serious dialogue on Middle East issues. Such a center would be a major advance in supporting the public good and a real boon to Vassar. Ideally, it would facilitate a more open and civil discussion of the issues, particularly as applied to the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Because of our common interests, McKeaver wanted to make sure the two of us would have a chance to meet. So, here I am.”

“Hats off to you. One question.”

“Shoot, as you Americans like to say.”

“With the conservatism that still exists in your country, is there any support among the Fund’s leaders for what you propose?”

“Fair enough. Let me first mention an important consideration: When I’m not working impossibly long hours at Northfield, I serve as the deputy chair of the Fund and have many allies within the organization. But there are also many skeptics. That’s where you come in.”

Completely caught off guard, Malcolm tried to react with a look of humored puzzlement. But it only came off as a dumbfounded stare.

Roshni took in the reaction with a mix of amusement and anticipation at what Malcom would say. “I’d like you to come to London. The board of the Fund will soon be convening there, and I need your help in convincing them to go to bed with you, to the tune of twenty million dollars.”

“To describe what you have in mind as surprising would be quite the understatement. But, tell me, is there any reason to believe your board members would react favorably to a Jewish guy from Westchester County?”

“You’re not going to get off the hook that easily. I’ve been floating the idea of a conflict resolution center for a while. Until a short while ago, I would have said my efforts were received very tepidly and that what I have proposed to you would not likely be worth the effort. However, very recently one of our most influential board members began to show interest in the idea, particularly after I mentioned the gift your father had made to the school and the possibility of teaming with your family. His support gives me hope that I can also bring the others around.”

“Does your board member have any connections to my family or to any of my father’s activities?”

“Not that I know of. But for the time being, I’m not asking any questions. I believe the opportunity is there and I’d like you to be the closer.”

Malcolm was intrigued, but quickly his fascination gave way to thinking about everything else that was going on in his life. He tried to communicate the earnestness of his concerns: “I don’t see how I can do it. There are so many moving pieces to my father’s estate, our company—SDI, and the police investigation. In addition, my mother’s a nervous wreck and there’s really no one other than myself to help her through the legal and emotional thicket. Frankly, I don’t”

Malcolm never got a chance to finish his sentence as Roshni put two fingers to his lips and then slowly brushed the side of his face as she removed her hand. “I neglected to mention that several of the Fund’s board members are also on QIA’s board of investment advisors. Investing is SDI’s business, is it not?”

“Of course.”

“Good. In addition, I hope it’s also obvious that I would consider it a personal favor.”

Chapter Twenty-Four
Cairo, Egypt
1956

It had been a remarkable run for the Schinazi family of Cairo. According to family lore, the Schinazi's had distinguished themselves from the beginning of the Ottoman Empire and, more importantly, had survived. It was said that a Schinazi sat at the feet of the great cabalist, Isaac Luria, during his years in Egypt, and that no viceroy worth his standing would have conducted affairs of state without a Schinazi at his side serving as financial adviser. For centuries, Schinazi's had figured prominently in both the religious life of the Karaite Jewish community of Cairo and of its professional class.

As the members of the Schinazi family had increased during the last three centuries of the second millennium, so, too, had the number of Jews in Egypt at large. British rule of Egypt following Britain's victory in the Anglo-Egyptian War of 1882, marked a particularly welcome time for the Jews of Egypt, a condition that continued as the nineteenth century merged into the twentieth century. Jews lauded the country for its openness to Jewish worship and culture. By the beginning of the first world war, the Jews of Egypt numbered 80,000, not an overwhelming number for so large a country, but indicative of the Arab nation's receptivity toward its Jewish population.

As Chaim Schinazi, scion of the family, well knew, the welcome mat began to fray with the outbreak of World War II. Reflecting the support given to the Nazis by powerful Arab leaders such as Haj Amini al-Houesseini of Palestine, the Arab world began to look distrustfully at its Jewish inhabitants. In Cairo, Chaim and his family had weathered periodic pogroms, culminating in the deadly Cairo pogrom of 1945.

By the end of the war, much of the Jewish population of Egypt had been depleted. More would leave during the debilitating years leading up to the United Nations November

29,1947 vote to partition Palestine between Arabs and Jews, followed by Israel's declaration of independence on May 14, 1948. As Jews and Arabs fought one another following the declaration, similar actions were taking place in other parts of the Arab world. In Cairo, bombings during 1948 killed 70 Jews, wounded nearly 200 and destroyed the venerable, Jewish-owned Cicurel department store.

During July 1952, a 34-year-old army colonel named Yousef Abdel Nassar engineered a coup against the ruling Egyptian monarchy. His vision of pan-Arabism left little room for the Egyptian Jewish community which, by then, had decreased to about 45,000. Yet, Chaim and his family remained, wanting to be realistic but doggedly reluctant to leave the family's ancestral home. However, matters took a downward spiral in 1954 as four Jews—including two Israeli undercover agents--were captured in a bombing campaign intended to create chaos and provide the British with justification for retaining their troop positions on the Suez Canal. No deaths and little damage resulted from the bombings, but two of the captives had been sentenced to death in what was generally regarded as a show trial. The remaining two had taken their own lives.

After the botched bombing campaign, Nassar needed little excuse to squeeze the country's remaining Jews. That opportunity arose in 1956. Following Nassar's nationalization of the Suez Canal, Israeli commandos landed on Egyptian soil--precursors to a follow-on French and English invasion designed to liberate the Suez Canal from Egyptian nationalization. It might have succeeded had not Russia intervened. As the invading forces completed their withdrawal, Nassar issued a proclamation stating that "all Jews are Zionists and enemies of the state."

Chaim Schinazi had had enough. He remembered the rage that had overtaken the country following Israel's

declaration of Independence. Few Jewish families had been spared the death and destruction that ensued. Schinazi, a widower with one child, a daughter named Sarah, knew he had been very lucky. Even so, he did not regret staying for his services as a surgeon had been instrumental in treating the survivors of the bloodshed. With Jewish medical personnel depleted by emigration, Chaim's sense of responsibility dictated that he remain and continue providing for his community. Now, however, the signs were inescapable. If he didn't take action soon, the opportunity for Sarah and him to leave might be squandered.

Community organizers were helping the remnants of Cairo's Jewish population gather their belongings and exit the country. However, the continued hostility on the street made any form of transport dangerous. For many, even with organized assistance, escape was an agonizingly slow affair. The day, however, arrived when the organizers told Chaim that Sarah and he should get ready to leave. The two set to packing even as the sound of gunfire shattered the air outside the walls of their home.

Still Chaim felt ambivalent about leaving the home where his wife of blessed memory had died during childbirth and where he had raised his only child. He would also miss his neighbors, both Jews and Copts. In most areas of Cairo, there was little interaction between the two minority religious communities. Through his work, however, Chaim had gotten to know many members of the Copt community as his normally Jewishly averse neighbors had sought him out for medical care. Sarah, who helped her father, had also made friends in the Copt community as a result of the good will created by her father.

One of Sarah's friends was a boy her age named Toumy. She didn't know his last name, but she knew every aspect of his face, including a smile so toothy and ingratiating that she always

felt good when she saw him. Forbidden though it may have been, she had a crush on the dark-skinned and floppy-haired Toumy.

As Chaim helped his daughter finish their packing, they were interrupted by a banging on their front door. Concerned about what was going on outside, Chaim was reluctant to answer the door, but the banging was persistent, and he worried it might be the organizers. Hesitantly, Chaim opened the door and was surprised by the sight of Toumy. Sarah, too, had come to the door. She wanted to smile when she saw Toumy, but the look on his face made her back off immediately. His agitation was obvious.

“What is it?” asked Chaim.

Toumy began to sob. “My mother had to go out to get something. It was bad outside because of the rioting. But she went out anyway. She said she was caught in a crossfire on her way home and was hit by a bullet.”

“Where is she now?”

“She’s at my house with my little brother and she’s bleeding badly. She needs you. Please come.”

Chaim began to say that they were leaving the country. In mid-sentence, he glanced at Sarah. She was looking at her friend, her heartthrob, with alarm written all over her face. Toumy’s father had died a few years ago and Sarah knew his brother and he had no one else to look after them.

As Chaim observed his daughter’s reaction to her friend’s plight, his heart began to rule his mind and he wavered from his planned course of action. He knew if he delayed, he would be jeopardizing Sarah’s and his escape from increasingly dangerous circumstances. Yet, Toumy’s face conveyed how much his mother needed him. *Perhaps the organizers would be*

delayed, Chaim thought. There had been no set time for them to arrive for them.

As he stood at his doorway, beset with indecision, he suddenly knew what he had to do.

Chapter Twenty-Five
The Rabbi's Study, Westchester Community Synagogue
Week Four, the Present

As he sat in his study reviewing his calendar of the week's events, Arnold Bradstein felt burdened. It was not just that Maury Steintaler had been a good friend and a strong supporter of the synagogue. Arnold had counseled enough people to understand the dynamics of unexpected loss—the empty feeling, the incomprehensibility, and, for a rabbi, the utter difficulty in explaining how a kind, knowing god could let it happen. But there was also something else—the way in which Steintaler had died.

From what Arnold had seen in the press and from his subsequent discussions with Malcolm, it appeared the police were pursuing two theories. The first, unfortunately, had to do with Anita, an avenue the rabbi couldn't begin to comprehend, having known her through thick and thin and having experienced her personal commitment to a number of noble causes, both Jewish and secular.

The second theory was the one befuddling him—that, in consequence of the Middle-East appearance of the other victim, the perpetrators must also have come from the same region. In this view, the murders—or, at least, one of the murders—might well have been part of a Middle-Eastern plot. Arnold didn't dismiss the possibility and recognized it was a reasonable working theory. However, what if the origin of the other victim was just an incidental consideration, a mere coincidence? What if the murders had been the product of a hate crime perpetrated by a classic anti-Semite bent on killing Maury? *The other man*, thought the rabbi, *might merely have been collateral damage, to put it in inelegant terms.*

The more he thought about it, the more he believed he was on to something. The rise in right-wing hate crimes against Jews had risen dramatically in the last few years, both in America

and in Europe. With the polarized environment that existed in the country, much of it fanned by nationalist rhetoric, he wondered whether it was just a matter of time before there would be another incomprehensible attack against the Jews, another Pittsburgh or Poway massacre.

Moreover, opinion poll after opinion poll showed that age-old conspiracy theories against the Jews were taking root from college campuses to survivalist outposts. In such a supercharged environment, it was no surprise that old shibboleths relating to Jewish power and influence were being invoked at a breathtaking pace, even in Congress. *Who would have been a better symbol of perceived Jewish influence, thought Arnold, than Maury Steinhilber, one of the most visible and wealthy Jewish financiers in the country? In addition, if the foregoing didn't make Maury a perfect target, then his well-publicized efforts on behalf of Jewish-Christian relations might well have caught the attention of a disaffected member of the church—someone who wanted no part of a man like Maury being accepted as a friend of the Christian community.*

As these thoughts were going through his mind, the irony that Maury might have been the victim of a senseless anti-Semitic plot also began to take hold. It was ironic because of something Maury had said only two days before his death at Arnold's biweekly study session on interfaith relations.

Arnold's presentation had focused on anti-Semitic church attitudes during Christianity's early years. Arnold had begun his talk with the year 132 CE. In that year, the Jews of Judea, led by Simon Bar-Kochba, had risen up against their Roman overlords in one last desperate effort to break the Empire's stranglehold on the country. A flagging economy, the ubiquitous presence of Roman garrisons and religious tensions all had contributed to the rebellion. The people had borne their oppression until they could stand no more. That point, as Arnold noted, came when the authorities built a temple to Jupiter on the

Temple Mount—the plaza and retaining walls on which the Second Temple, destroyed by the Romans sixty-two years earlier, had once stood.

The rebellion had claimed more than 580,000 Jewish lives, with many more sold into slavery. In the end, overpowering force defeated religious conviction. Known as the *Bar-Kochba Revolt*, the rebellion proved to be the last gasp for the Jews of ancient Israel. With cruel efficiency, the Romans forced the Jews from their ancient homeland. Henceforth, the Jews would be in diaspora—a diaspora that would last the greater part of two millennia.

Arnold had described the years following the Roman expulsion. As the Jews bid farewell to their homeland of more than fifteen hundred years, they looked for sanctuary and acceptance. Instead, they found rejection and hostility, in particular, rejection by the Christian world. A succession of early church fathers had viewed the wretched state of the exiled Jews as just deserts--punishment for their having rejected Jesus as God. In various ways, these leading lights of the church, even as they, too, experienced episodes of harsh Roman persecution, had contributed to the suffering of the broken Jewish community.

Arnold had concluded his account of early church attitudes toward Judaism with a description of the renowned church scholar and leader, Augustine. Despite having written that “Judaism, since Christ, is a corruption; indeed, Judas is the image of the Jewish people: their understanding of Scripture is carnal; they bear the guilt for the death of the Savior, for through their fathers they have killed Christ,” Augustine had been impressed with the staying power of Judaism and had focused on the question why God had not slain the Jews as a result of their rejection of Jesus? His answer was that God intended to keep the Jews in a wretched state—as a stateless people bearing the stain of Cain—as a testament to their perfidy in rejecting Jesus. So, rather than promote the annihilation of the Jews, Augustine’s

teaching had saved them, but at the cost of consigning them to exile and rejection. Augustine's influence was vast, and his answer to his own question is what may have discouraged the harsh treatment against the Jews advocated by his fellow church luminaries, most notably John Chrysostom.

For the next fifteen decades, noted Arnold, the rejection envisioned by Augustine had continued. Jews had not been allowed to own land in much of the Christian world as that would have suggested their entitlement to permanence against God's will. As the years and centuries had passed, observed Arnold, anti-Semitic attitudes had evolved nightmarishly as Jews were slaughtered during the Crusades, expelled for hundreds of years from England, France, Spain and Portugal, burned during the Inquisition, excoriated by works such as Martin Luther's infamous screed, *The Jews and Their Lies*, restricted to crowded and unhealthy ghettos, subjected to the pogroms of Eastern Europe, libeled in publications such as the apocryphal *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and ultimately brought to the brink of European extinction by the Nazi Holocaust.

Arnold had concluded the lesson on a high note, recalling his own involvement in the heady series of seminars, colloquia and conferences that had occurred in 2015 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary year of *Nostra Aetate*. But even as he had sought to be upbeat, he was brought back to reality by a question from Maury. His friend had raised his hand and recited his own positive experience in Christian-Jewish relations. But, perhaps presciently, he then asked whether the welcome change in the church's posture was enough to deter those who were intent on harming Jews—persons for whom hatred of the Jews was based on irrational prejudice rather than religious doctrine. Arnold had not been able to provide Maury with a satisfactory answer at the time and it still haunted him as he thought about who may have killed his friend.

Troubling as were the thoughts racing through Arnold's mind, there was something else that was disturbing him—something hiding below the surface. Then it occurred to him: months earlier Maury had mentioned a large donation he had made to a progressive Christian interfaith group that had broken away from the more conservative religious moorings of its former parent organization. However, instead of appreciation, Maury's gift had caused an outbreak of resentment expressed by members of the parent organization. To Maury's astonishment, his gift was being denounced as a brazen attempt to buy influence within the Christian world. Arnold thought back on what Maury had said at the time. *It's almost as if they had been waiting for an opportunity to pounce.*

Chapter Twenty-Six
Cairo, Egypt
1956

As Toumy looked on expectantly, Chaim gathered his thoughts and decided what he needed. He had few instruments at home for complicated surgery. But if he was lucky, the bullet would be in an accessible location and he could remove it with the instruments he carried in his medicine bag--a scalpel, scissors, retractors, forceps and wound closures. His worry was there might be extensive bone damage or internal bleeding that he couldn't control.

Chaim knew he would need assistance and Sarah was the obvious person to help him. She had already shown promising signs of being a future doctor and she was not averse to blood. In addition, Chaim did not want to leave his daughter alone, not with what was going on all over the city.

Quickly, Chaim and Sarah finished their packing, so they could make a hasty retreat when they returned from Toumy's house. Chaim then checked outside their front door to assess conditions on the street and was heartened to see that the rioting had subsided and there seemed to be quiet in the neighborhood. He grabbed his instrument bag, summoned the two children and followed Toumy's lead.

Walking briskly, the three covered the four blocks in good time. As they entered Toumy's neighborhood, the surroundings changed dramatically. Instead of the well-maintained stucco-fronted buildings in Chaim and Sarah's neighborhood, the dwellings where Toumy lived were multi-tiered and rundown. The poorly-tended streets showed signs of neglect and the few stores were tiny, more like alcoves than stores.

Toumy's apartment was on the third floor of an aging walkup. As the three climbed the dank staircase, Chaim

observed signs of blood where Toumy's mother must have bled as she struggled up the stairs. He couldn't tell how much blood. But his heart nevertheless sank as he contemplated the condition of the woman who awaited him.

Toumy opened the door and yelled to his mother and brother. His mother responded weakly. She was still alive. Toumy might have fainted at that moment, but for the fact his brother came rushing to him, his face drowned in tears. Toumy comforted his brother, then turned to his mother.

Chaim and Sarah were also now in the apartment. Both recoiled at the overpowering smell within the small apartment and the wan appearance of Toumy's stricken mother. Chaim looked around to get his bearings. Aside from a pair of tarnished candle sticks that reminded him of his mother's, the apartment was bare and featureless. Fortunately, it had running water, something he should have asked about earlier.

He then approached the woman who sat in a well-worn armchair, her right hand covered with blood as she tried to staunch the wound on the upper left side of her body. Her pallid face indicated both loss of blood and shock. Chaim needed to establish a rapport. He turned to Toumy. "Toumy, what's your mother's first name?"

"Talida."

Chaim then turned to his patient. "Talida, I'm Dr. Chaim Schinazi." A faint smile crossed Talida's face. Encouraged, Chaim touched his patient gently. "May I call you Talida?" When she nodded appreciatively, Chaim told her what he proposed to do. He then assured her he would take every precaution to minimize the pain, but that it could hurt. He asked her if she understood and she nodded her head weakly, but with clear awareness.

Chaim took out his scissors. He then carefully moved Talida's hand from the wounded area so that he could cut away that part of her blood-soaked blouse that was sticking to the wound. As he did so, Talida gasped and both Toumy and his brother cried out in a chorus of concern. Without any urging from her father, Sarah placed her arms around both boys and began comforting them, enabling her father to continue without distraction.

Chaim began to cut away the bloody cloth that covered the wounded area. He was relieved when his patient did not yell out despite the pain she must have been experiencing. Chaim did not have any anesthesia and he knew Talida would need far greater resolve for the intense pain she was likely to encounter. He asked Sarah to bring him a bowl of warm water and began to clean the wounded area.

Gently, he cleaned the injured tissue, removing dirt, cloth and other debris from the wounded area. As he did so, he told Talida she could cry out if she wanted. Obliging, she released a pent-up scream, but quickly desisted.

Once the opening to the wound was cleaned to Chaim's satisfaction, he sat back and surveyed his patient's condition. The wound was perilously close to Talida's heart. Chaim noted to himself he would have to employ extreme care in removing a bullet lodged so close to vital arteries. On the positive side, the bullet appeared to be lodged in muscle with little if any bone damage. As he completed his assessment, he thought to himself that he might be able to pull it off. But then there was the issue of no anesthesia.

Reluctantly, he turned to the two children. "Toumy, I'm going to help your mother but it's going to hurt, and she's going to experience a lot of pain. I think it would be best if your brother and you waited in the next room. Sarah, would you please help the boys and then come back here. I'm going to need you."

In a moment, Sarah returned. Concern mixed with admiration showed on her face. “They’re brave boys. I think they’ll be okay.”

“Good. Now I have a big challenge for you. I believe I can remove the bullet and then close up the wound. But, as I said, it’s going to be painful for Toumy’s mother. As strong as she is, she’s not going to be able to overcome the pain and I can’t afford to have her move or involuntarily lash out during the procedure. I’m going to leave her in the armchair while I operate. I’ll sit on a kitchen chair on her left side where the wound is located. I’m going to need you to hold down her shoulders from behind the chair. It may be the difference between success and failure. Can you do it?”

“You know I want to be a doctor like you when I grow up. I have to start doing the hard things some time. It might as well be now.”

“Thank you, sweetheart. That’s my girl!”

The procedure took longer than expected. Amazingly, Talida persevered in a more stoic manner than Chaim could have imagined, making Sarah’s job that much easier. In the end, Chaim felt good about the outcome. He knew his patient was not out of risk, but fortunately he had penicillin on hand that would sharply reduce infection. Now, luck would have to take over. Talida had lost a lot of blood and there were any number of variables that could alter her condition.

Chapter Twenty-Seven
Scarsdale Metro North Train Station
Week Four, the Present

Before lying down, Malcolm had set his cell phone alarm to wake him in an hour and a half. When his phone rang, he mistakenly thought it was his alarm and found it hard to believe that ninety minutes had already passed. Groggily, he looked at his cell phone and realized the sound was coming from an incoming call and not his alarm. He looked at the number and did not recognize it. Still tired, he was tempted to ignore the call and go back to sleep. However, he was rarely disturbed by unwanted calls and there was enough going on his life that he felt obligated to answer. The voice on the other end of the phone was unfamiliar causing Malcolm to regret he hadn't returned to his nap. After a few seconds, however, he changed his mind.

“Malcolm, this is Horace Feinbloom. If you don't recognize the name, I'm your mother's new lawyer. Her new criminal lawyer to be exact.”

Still a little dazed, Malcom could only utter a vague “oh, right!”

“I just came from a meeting with your mother at her house and she asked me to contact you so we could talk and I could fill you in on what's going on.”

“That would be great.”

“I'm now at the Starbucks at the Scarsdale train station. I had planned to get the next train back to the City for a meeting, but just found out the meeting was cancelled. So, I thought I would take a chance at contacting you to see if you would like to meet while I'm here in Scarsdale. It would save you a trip downtown and we could talk while everything was fresh in my mind.”

Malcolm thought for a moment. There was nothing he had to do other than visit his mother and brother and that could be put off for a couple of hours. So, he saw no reason not to meet. “Where would you like to meet?”

“Why don’t you come here. It’s a nice day out. We can walk to a nearby restaurant that has outdoor seating and talk comfortably in private without being overheard.”

“Good. I’ll be there in fifteen or twenty minutes.”

“Malcolm, before we get together, I want to mention one thing, so you can give it some thought on your way over here. My meeting with you will not be protected by attorney-client privilege.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means that, if I am later questioned by the police and they ask questions pertaining to our meeting, I have to answer truthfully.”

“Does my mother know our meeting will not be privileged?”

“Yes, she does. She said she had nothing to hide and it was more important to her that you be fully aware of her circumstances. Even so, please be careful in what you say during our meeting. I’m wearing a navy-blue suit and a red and blue striped tie.”

Malcolm had no difficulty finding Horace Feinbloom. The two of them then walked to one of the cozy cafes that made downtown Scarsdale an attraction to its residents. They found a shaded table on the perimeter of the outdoor-seating area and ordered cold drinks and light snacks.

“I’ll get right to the point. Hemingway, the local detective, has designated your mother as a person of interest in your father’s death. She has not been formally charged, but he’s asked her not to leave the area without first informing him.”

“Oh, how awful. She must be pretty shaken up.”

“She is.”

“My mother had her differences with my father. But what could be the basis for so outrageous a charge.”

“I’m afraid those ‘differences’ as you put it are at the core of the matter. I know you’re aware of your parents’ marital agreement.”

“Yes.”

“Did you know that, under the agreement, she stood to lose almost one hundred million dollars if she ran afoul of its terms, that is to say, if she took up with someone else and your father, at his discretion, chose to cut her out.”

“I know of the provision because my father told me about it. But I didn’t know the penalty was so severe. In addition, my father knew of my mother’s relationship with Ralph Gittelson and, though he was very hurt, he was also hoping they could work things out.”

“Granted. But, did you know your mother had again visited Gittelson and that your father found out and confronted your mother in a heated argument the day he died?”

“I knew about the argument. But that’s all.”

“Well, I’m not going to go into the details of their altercation because I would like to keep that privileged.

However, I'm sure you're getting a feel for the direction in which Hemingway is heading."

"My mother's not stupid. Surely, she would have known the police would find out about the meeting with Gittelson and that, if she contemplated foul play, her meeting would lead the police right to her."

"I agree, and, if there weren't more, I might even stand a chance of getting Hemingway to agree."

Despite the shade, Malcolm was beginning to feel both the heat of the day and heat coming from their conversation. Uneasily, he asked "what else is there?"

"Let's start with the fact your mother waited almost half a day before contacting the authorities."

"She was in shock and wanted to talk to me first."

"Of course. But it doesn't look good. In addition, there's the large transfer of funds that took place out of your parents account the day of his death."

"That was undoubtedly for whatever my father purchased from his visitor, and, in addition, my father's computer was password-protected."

"I agree completely with your view that the transferred funds paid for whatever your father bought that day. Unfortunately, the recipient of the funds remains a secret. All we have is an account number. Further, we don't have a record of any purchase. Nor, can we otherwise identify what may have been purchased. There are no invoices, no emails, no bills of lading. In addition, though your father's computer was password protected, it appears he was a romantic at heart. The police were easily able to determine that his password consisted of the numerals of your parents' anniversary, something your mother

might equally easily have guessed assuming your father hadn't already shared it with her."

"Not great, I admit."

"Finally, there's the issue of fingerprints. Your mother's fingerprints are on the decanter from which your father and his guest drank. They're also on both your father's cell phone and computer, the latter suggesting your mother may have used the computer for the funds transfer."

"But, all of that is easily explained. After all, my mother lived in the house."

"She did indeed. But, how often was she in your father's study, particularly of late when their relationship was so tense?"

"She said she had neglected to take her cell phone with her and that she went to my father's study because it had the closest phone." Even as he answered, Malcolm knew his mother's claim sounded too convenient. Nevertheless, he pressed on. "Surely, all of this is circumstantial and there's nothing that directly links my mother to my father's death."

"Nothing, except for the damning facts that it was your mother's car that was used for the murders, that there was no sign the car was broken into and that only your mother's finger prints were on the steering wheel. In addition, she admits having been to the scene of the killing, albeit she understandably claims she worriedly hurried there after hearing the sound of the impact."

"I'm sure you didn't ask to talk to me just to make the case for the police. Is there any good news?"

"Yes. The good news is that none of it makes sense. I've been in this business for a long time and have a good nose for guilt. There's a lot of circumstantial evidence against your

mother. But she's not guilty. Is there anything you can tell me that I can use on her behalf?"

Malcolm had not focused on the thumb drive until that moment. As he now thought about it, his instinct told him to hold his counsel and not to say anything, particularly since his conversation with Feinbloom was not privileged. He looked at Feinbloom who was putting on his suit coat and replied with what he hoped was a straight face: "I wish I had something to offer."

Chapter Twenty-Eight
Cairo, Egypt
1956

Chaim had been so consumed by the surgery that he'd almost forgotten about his own plight. When reality set in, he was again confronted by a dilemma. There still might be time for Sarah and him to meet up with the organizers. However, Talida was running a significant fever and Chaim knew the next 24 hours would be determinative. He had no choice.

He asked Toumy what food was available and was gratified when the boy was able to rummage up enough for all of them to eat. After they had eaten, Chaim suggested that the children get some sleep. Teary-eyed, Toumy hugged him before falling into a dead sleep on a nearby couch. Sarah took Toumy's little brother into the bedroom that Talida shared with the two boys and soon they, too, were fast asleep.

Satisfied the children were asleep, Chaim also tried to get some rest. It was a fitful night as his thoughts were with his patient. Chaim awoke early with the sun. Careful not to make too much noise, he walked over to where Talida was also stirring. Nervously, he evaluated his patient and felt great relief as she appeared to be on the mend. But he knew he could not leave yet.

Chaim and Sarah stayed with the Salib's until mid-afternoon. As each hour passed, Chaim checked Salida's vital signs. Finally, around three o'clock, Chaim was satisfied Talida was going to recover. He left bandages and disinfectant on the kitchen table and instructed Toumy on how to change his mother's dressing. After urging Toumy to find help, Chaim began packing his medicine bag. As his back was turned to his daughter, he failed to see her place the gentlest of kisses on Toumy's lips.

When Chaim was ready, he walked over to his patient who was alert, although exhausted. “You’re going to be okay thanks to Toumy’s quick thinking.”

Talida held Chaim’s hand and could only cry. After a moment she released his hand and motioned Toumy to go to the cupboard. In a moment, Toumy returned with cash which Chaim declined. He would soon have no need for Egyptian money. Even if he did, there was not enough money in the world worth breaking the sense of happiness he was feeling. Once again, Talida cried and once again Chaim assured her everything would be okay.

Before descending the stairs, Chaim looked out the window to make sure all was clear. He had been oblivious to what was going on outside and didn’t have a feel for whether the unrest had come to end. After looking for a while, he satisfied himself that it would be okay to leave. He instructed Sarah to follow him and cautiously the two proceeded down the stairs.

Chaim then looked out the front door of the building. Again, the street appeared calm and Chaim motioned Sarah to follow. As they walked a few steps, Chaim looked around and was surprised to see no one else on the street. His observation disturbed him as he knew the neighborhood to be a busy one during the day. He couldn’t explain it, but he was overcome with a sense of dread. His concern was not misplaced.

Suddenly, five young Arab men came out of a side alley. Chaim looked at the men trying to assess their intent. He did not have to look long, as the men began walking in their direction, foul play written all over their faces. Soon they formed a circle around Chaim and Sarah.

Instinctively, Chaim tried to protect Sarah, but his effort was in vain as two of the men roughly grabbed him from behind. As the two men restrained him, two of the other men threw Sarah to the ground and began removing her clothing. Chaim

did all he could to break away from the men who were holding him, but to no avail. As he struggled and screamed, he saw the first of Sarah's attackers slap his beautiful daughter as the other pulled off her skirt.

In one super human burst of energy, Chaim managed to free himself from one of the men who was restraining him. But, again, it was to no avail, as the second of the two pulled out a gun and hit Chaim on the head with a gun barrel. Mercifully, Chaim was rendered unconscious so he could not see the two men holding Sarah fall on his daughter and brutally rape her.

Toumy had been at the window to wave goodbye to Chaim and Sarah one last time as they left the building. In disbelief and horror, he saw what was happening. Toumy did not know what to do. His first thought was for his brother. Gently, he told him to go in the bedroom and stay there until Toumy advised him to come out. Then, ignoring his mother's worried cries, he ran down the stairs armed with fury but with no other way of incapacitating Chaim's and Sarah's five assailants.

Crazed with both anger and fear, Toumy emerged from the door of the building ready to fight. His attack did not last long as he was immediately stopped in his tracks by one of the men who had a gun trained on his head. Paralyzed by the gun, Toumy began to cry. His crying only intensified for, to his horror, he was forced to watch the girl who had just kissed him being raped again and again.

After it was over, the man with the gun kicked Toumy hard in ribs and, as he lay on the ground, told him to keep his mouth shut. Then, as if nothing had happened, the five thugs straightened themselves out and walked away, leaving all three of their victims on the ground. Toumy was the first to get up. He was embarrassed beyond measure upon seeing Sarah's half naked body. He did the only thing he could and took off his shirt

to cover the part of her that was exposed. He then helped revive Chaim.

Chaim took one look at his daughter and threw up. It was clear that Sarah could not walk. Toumy volunteered to help. He ran up to tell his mother he was okay, checked on his brother who was still in the bedroom and then returned downstairs to help Chaim carry Sarah back to their house.

The three reached their destination without further mishap. As Toumy was preparing to return home, Sarah summoned her composure and embraced him tearfully. This time it was Toumy who did the kissing, a kiss that expressed both the sorrow he was feeling as well as the realization Sarah was leaving. As Chaim observed the two children, he chided himself for not realizing earlier the two were not just friends.

Toumy was the first to break away. As he started to run home, he looked at Sarah. He would have liked to say more, but all that came out was “I’m going to miss you.”

As Toumy ran, his emotions raw with grief, he made two fateful decisions. If he could not have Sarah, he didn’t want anybody. More importantly, he didn’t want to be part of a world where people treated one another so inhumanely. It had never occurred to him before, but now it was so obvious. When he was of age, he would enter into the service of God.

Toumy also knew he would never forget Chaim’s selfless act in saving his mother, knowing he was at risk for the very sort of thing that had taken place. He tried to think how he could ever repay the man. Again, the answer seemed obvious. He would do whatever he could to help Jews everywhere and he would make sure that his brother Boutros felt the same way.

Chapter Twenty-Nine
The Steinhailer Mansion, Scarsdale
Week Five, the Present

Malcolm was understandably disturbed after his meeting with Feinbloom. He walked to his car, checking his text messages along the way. He noted a text from Jeff Leibowitz saying he was back in town. Malcolm would have loved to talk to Leibowitz at that very moment. But he felt a duty to visit his mother and discuss what Feinbloom had said. So, he quickly replied to Leibowitz saying he was going to visit Anita and asking when in the near future they could get together. He noted Jeff's reply, especially his request that Malcolm convey his sympathy to Anita, and then got into his car.

When he arrived at his parents' house, he found Anita and Alex sitting on a couch in the den engaged in serious conversation. He didn't want to interrupt and would have turned around, except that his mother had seen him enter the room and motioned toward him.

"Hi Malcolm. How are you? Alex and I were just talking about your father."

"The topic of the day, I'm afraid. I was just texting with Jeff Leibowitz he wanted me to convey his sympathies regarding father's passing."

"It's nice to hear from him. Have you seen him since Maury's death?"

"Yes. After discussing father's gift with Dean McKeaver at Vassar, I had to drop off something with Leibowitz."

"Like what?"

"Oh, nothing much. How are you two doing today?"

“As well as can be expected. It’s no secret your brother and Maury had their differences.”

“That’s a polite way of putting it,” interjected Alex, agitation and amusement both written on his face.

Anita tried not to let her younger son’s sarcasm throw her off course. “I’ve told Alex that he had grounds for complaint. Maury had many faults and I might note so did I. However, since the funeral, I’ve heard countless accounts of the good things Maury did during his life, most of which he did so quietly that even I didn’t know about them.”

“I’ve heard the same and it’s a real source of strength.”

Still feeling nonplussed, Alex again entered the conversation. “Maybe I should take a stroll or get a cup of coffee while you two are having this love fest over my practically flawless father.”

“Actually, I think you should stay because I want to talk about mother.”

Anita reacted quickly. “Is that right? What do you have in mind?”

“I just came from a meeting with Feinbloom.”

“That didn’t take long. When I asked him to talk with you, I didn’t say it had to take place instantaneously.”

“It wouldn’t have except that he had a meeting cancellation and, while he was here in Scarsdale, he thought it would be a good time for us to get together.”

“Is that the man who was leaving as I arrived?” asked Alex.

“Yes,” replied Anita. “He’s the criminal defense lawyer whom Phil Mintzes recommended I retain to get me through this mess.”

“Why do you need a criminal defense lawyer?”

“Because our poor, benighted police force doesn’t have a clue and, for want of any other perpetrators, they’ve decided I might have killed Maury.”

“That’s ridiculous,” responded Alex.

“Of course, it is. But, for the time being I’m a ‘person of interest’ and I’m not supposed to leave the area without permission.”

“But, how can they possibly think you did it?”

“Tell him, Malcolm. You just came back from meeting with our new legal brain trust.”

For the next hour and a half, Malcom recited what Feinbloom and he had talked about and answered Alex’s many questions, most of them surprisingly insightful. As they were concluding their conversation, Alex focused on the one thing that kept bothering him. “If mother is right and the second person was here to deliver an artifact, then it couldn’t have disappeared. Shouldn’t we be able to find what he brought.”

Malcolm, too, had been coming back to this question. So, he didn’t mind Alex’s question even though they had gone over the issue, along with many others, several times. “Feinbloom said the police had made a thorough search of the house. They even had gotten into father’s collection room and had gone over its contents and still couldn’t find anything that obviously looked newly purchased.”

“Since I’ve been staying at the hotel, I haven’t been around all the time. How did they get into the room? I thought it had layers of security, including a finger print pad required for entry.”

“It does. But while mother was away, they brought father’s body here and used his fingers to open the collection room.”

“Wasn’t it also password protected?”

“Yes, But, they had earlier figured out the password. It was the same as the password father used for his computer, which the police determined was mother and father’s anniversary date.”

“No kidding. Did you know that?” asked Alex, as he gave Anita a quizzical stare.

“I didn’t. When I found out, I was quite surprised. I would have guessed Maury used a fancy algorithm. I was quite touched when I heard he had used our anniversary date.”

“Touched, is right,” responded Alex. “What’s happened to the collection room since the police searched it. Did they confiscate everything?”

“I believe everything is still there,” responded Anita. The police brought me there during their search to ask me a few questions and then left. They said they would be back again to deal with the collection. In the meantime, they didn’t want to lock the door because of the unpleasantness of opening it. So, they asked me to make sure nobody interfered with the contents of the room and placed a yellow crime scene ribbon across the door opening.”

Alex’s face lit up. “If we all think father’s visitor brought something, then, as I see it, the obvious place to look is the

collection room. Now that it's been conveniently left open for us, why don't we go down and take a peek."

Chapter Thirty
Jerusalem, Israel
2005

On March 26, 1979, Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Menachem Begin of Israel stood on the White House lawn next to President Jimmy Carter. At the appointed moment, Sadat and Begin shook hands ushering in a historic peace treaty between their two countries. In January 1980, the two countries exchanged ambassadors, and, in February 1980, they initiated flights between Cairo and Tel Aviv. Even following the tragic assassination of Anwar Sadat on October 6, 1981, the peace treaty held.

Despite it being called a “cold peace,” by 2005, countless Israeli tourists had visited Egypt and many Egyptian delegations had flown from Cairo to Tel Aviv. However, during that time, no official Coptic Church delegation had ever arrived at Ben Gurion Airport. The reason could be attributed to Coptic Pope Shenouda III’s 1979 edict opposing normalization with Israel as long as Jerusalem was defined as occupied territory. That policy had continued without interruption. As a result, the arrival during the summer of 2005 of a visiting Coptic bishop at Ben Gurion had sparked considerable interest.

What really excited the Israeli press was that the visitor was the widely-respected church theologian, Metropolitan Bishop Touma Salib. At a time when the Catholic Church was opening up to the Jewish world, the Coptic Orthodox church still held to ancient anti-Jewish orthodoxies. Touma Salib, however, was different. His message was one of brotherhood with persons of all religions, especially the Jews. He had even made several visits to the Vatican to discuss Church-Jewish relations with the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

At Ben Gurion Airport, a few members of the press corps had been eager to talk to Touma. However, he demurred saying

he was eager to get to Jerusalem. But he promised the journalists he would speak with them the following afternoon at two o'clock in the guest quarters of the Coptic Bishop of Jerusalem.

The following morning, Touma got up early. He was excited and anxious. Accompanied by the Coptic Bishop of Jerusalem, he would soon retrace the final journey of Jesus on the way to his destiny at Golgotha.

As they started their walk at the place where it was thought Pilate had condemned Jesus to die, Touma imagined his savior trying to walk while being weighed down by the cross he carried. By the time Touma reached the ninth station, the place where Jesus was said to have fallen down for the third time, he could no longer hold in his emotions. Consumed with sorrow for the ordeal of his savior, Touma fell to the ground weeping and kissed the stones beneath his feet.

As he lay prostrate on the ground, his thoughts strayed to his own lifetime where he, too, had encountered many trials. He had been a young boy when his father died, and he had almost lost his mother to a stray bullet when he was fourteen. That event had led him to the monastery and then the priesthood where his intellectual talents catapulted him to the top of his calling. However, this same intellect had caused him to doubt, and his bishop had suggested he take a leave of his priestly duties, so he could confront his religious demons. Reluctantly, he had complied and soon found his way to England where he studied religion and philosophy while earning two degrees. England had opened his eyes to the wider world, but it had also exposed him to life's perils and the importance of God in solving mankind's most intractable problems.

He had returned to the church nourished and filled with hope. His studies had enabled him to pursue the great undertaking of his life—a complete history of the Coptic church in Egypt. For that, he had risen to the rank of metropolitan bishop. But now a different kind of doubt had insinuated itself

into his priestly life. This trip, he hoped, would lead him to the answers he sought.

Touma raised himself to a standing position and put away his thoughts as he refocused on Jesus struggling along the ancient Via Delarosa, the way of suffering. After recreating Jesus ordeal, Touma headed back to the Jerusalem bishop's guest quarters.

Refreshed by a good lunch, Touma walked to the reception area of the guest quarters. He was pleased to find that five journalists had come to hear from him.

“Gentlemen, it’s so good to see you. I think I know what’s on your minds, but please go ahead and ask.”

The journalists had designated the senior member of their small group to query Touma first and he began his questioning in the manner expected. “Bishop Touma, the Coptic Church has not sent a delegation to Israel since Sadat and Begin signed the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979. How is it that you are here?”

“Thank you for asking that question. Let me start by saying I’m not here in an official capacity. I’m the product of a monastery and I’m here on a personal pilgrimage—to find spiritual strength by visiting the monasteries in Israel.” As he looked around, he could see his answer had not fully satisfied his listeners. “I see my answer did not register with all of you. I guess I have to confess. In my case, rank has its privileges. Many of the priests within our order have now studied from my history of the church, enough so that the church hierarchy is willing to treat me as an eccentric, and an aging one at that.”

Touma was happy to see his audience had appreciated his attempt at levity. In fact, he had had to draw upon

considerable influence to make this trip, one that had been a burning desire for some time. His answers to the next two questions would reveal the nature of that need.

The questions came from the youngest of the five journalists. “The Coptic Church’s attitude to world Jewry and Israel in particular is quite guarded. Yet, you have consistently preached a message of conciliation and respect for the world’s Jews. How do you come by your views and how have you been able to press your point of view in the face of a resistant church?”

“Now, we’re getting somewhere,” Touma replied with an impish look on his face. He then turned serious again. “As to your first question. Almost fifty years ago, my mother was severely wounded during the anti-Jewish demonstrations that followed the invasion of the Suez Canal. She was badly hurt and would have died without medical assistance.

Consumed with fear, I sought out the physician father of a Jewish friend who was very dear to me. They were preparing to leave the country at the very moment I encountered them. Their bags were literally packed. Yet, at risk to himself and his daughter, the physician came to my mother’s rescue and stayed with her for two days until she was out of danger. Unfortunately, the same good fortune my mother experienced did not extend to my friend as she returned home with her father. As I watched with horror from my window, my friend was beset by five men who defiled her mercilessly as her father watched helplessly before he was knocked out. I tried to help but what was stopped at gunpoint. It was then I committed my life to the church. But it was also then I started grappling with what I had been taught about the Jews. I wondered then and still wonder now why there is so much hatred toward the Jews, particularly when there are Jews like my friend’s father who was willing to risk all in the interest of doing good.”

Touma’s audience had turned quiet and he might have said no more. However, he had more to say. “When I was in

England, I studied not only ancient Christianity but also the religion into which Jesus was born. My studies took me to the Talmud, the three hundred years of rabbinical discourse on Jewish religious law that arose after Rome's expulsion of the Jews from ancient Palestine and the resultant fragmentation of the Jewish commonwealth. Ranging from the laws of agriculture to the laws of marriage, I saw that the Talmud painted a picture of a society steeped in law, humility and respect. I knew then that the doctor who had saved my mother was not an anomaly, but rather a representative of a worthy people. Over the years, I've made my position known to the members of my faith, some of whom I will admit have been skeptical. As with the Catholic Church and *Nostra Aetate*, I'm confident that in the not too distant future there'll be many Coptic delegations arriving at Ben Gurion, all with an outstretched hand."

After Touma had finished, the journalists had a few remaining questions. But they had heard enough, and they were eager to return to their desks to write up the bishop's story for the next day's editions.

The next day's newspapers did indeed carry front page articles of Touma's wrenching story about how his mother had been saved. One of the readers of the story was a trauma physician about Touma's age. She lived by herself in a Jerusalem residence not far from where the article said the visiting bishop was staying. Despite being in her sixties, she had maintained a near-breathless schedule at the hospital where she worked and ordinarily had little time to read. However, against her wishes, the concerned chief of the trauma section had insisted she cut back on her blistering pace if only for a few weeks. So, wondering what she would do with the rest of her day of leisure, Sarah Schinazi opened the door of her apartment to pick up the morning newspaper which usually went unread. She scanned the front page and noticed the story about Touma's interview the previous day. As she finished the article, she shivered as it dawned on her the story was about the Toumy of her youth. At

that moment, she had only one thought: *Toumy is here. After all these years, Toumy is here.*

Chapter Thirty-One
The Steintaler Mansion Collection Room, Scarsdale
Week Five, the Present

Malcolm had hesitated at the thought of crossing a police crime scene tape, but in the end he had decided his brother had made a good point. Whatever his father's visitor had brought must be somewhere in the house and the most likely place was the collection room. He asked Anita if she had handkerchiefs they could use when touching anything in the room. She quickly produced three handkerchiefs considerably more ornate than required for the task at hand.

Together they all entered the doorway to the basement stairs and walked down the one flight to the collection room. To everyone's relief, the crime scene tape was loosely attached to the door opening, making it easy for each of them to slip in. Although Anita had been in the room about six months previously, the boys had not been there since Maury had its display area redecorated long before Anita's visit.

As Anita turned on the light switch, both boys released a collective gasp. The room was breathtaking in both its décor and contents. There were five banked display levels each with perfectly placed floor lighting. The effect was electrifying as each piece was illuminated for maximum visibility and appreciation.

Two staircases segmented the five display levels. Each display level was deep enough for the viewer to stand in front of a given piece, while reading the certificate of authenticity. Visual impact was clearly the goal of the room's designer and the contents on display caused the impact to be dazzling. There were statues and busts from a variety of periods, some even hailing back to the Roman era. Ancient pottery and working implements were so plentiful that many were often squeezed into one display. Gemstones and coins were polished to a high luster and made the room feel like a large jewel box. But, the most impressive part of the collection was its antique Judaica.

Three of the five rows were devoted to Jewish relics and antiques. There were numerous silver *menorahs*, candlesticks used during the Chanukah festival, a variety of ornamental *yads*, pointers used by a reader as he or she chanted from the *Torah*, meticulously-crafted spice boxes used for the concluding ceremony at the end of each sabbath, and *seder* plates used during the Passover services. Three antique *Torah* scrolls, two in wooden cases, were prominently displayed as were a variety of *Torah* crowns and breast plates, the adornments that were placed on a *Torah* as a sign of its majesty. A corner of the room held antique shadow boxes that displayed the interiors of synagogues, many destroyed during the *Holocaust*. As Anita and the boys would soon discover, most of the exhibited articles had come from Egypt with some originating in other parts of North Africa as well as Eastern Europe.

Few museum displays could have rivaled the overall impact made by the room and its exquisite contents, and none of the effect was lost on its three visitors.

“There must be several hundred displays here,” exclaimed Malcolm.

““Yes,” replied Anita. “I’ve only been in here a few times. But even before Maury redecorated the room and installed the new security system a few years ago, he told me at that time he had well over two hundred pieces on display. I haven’t been in the room very often because your father treated it as his private sanctuary. He would often come down here to meditate when he was under pressure. Now and then as he added special pieces, he would bring me down here to show them off. But, until this moment, I’ve never really appreciated the overall impact of the room. It’s really a shame that he kept it so secret, but he must have had his reasons. ”

“It really is quite extraordinary,” echoed Alex as he began walking around the room somewhat aimlessly.

Malcolm did not approve of Alex's purposeless meanderings. "Alex, why don't we make a plan before we start wandering about."

"Sure bro. You're the boss."

"That's not what I meant. This was your idea. So, let's make the best of it. There are five rows and three sections to each row. Why don't you take the five rows on the left, I'll take the five rows in the center and mother can take the five rows on the right. None of us knows what we're looking for, but maybe something will pop out. If anybody finds anything of interest, just yell out and we'll all come over to take a look.

Methodically, the three started examining the displays in the manner suggested by Malcolm. The process took longer than expected because it was impossible not to linger and read the certificates of authenticity that accompanied the exhibits. As Malcolm reached the fourth row, it dawned on him that every item he had looked at in his area had a certificate of provenance. Yelling to the other, he inquired: "Are there certificates of authenticity for each of the exhibits in your areas?"

Alex and Anita reported there were. Alex broke into a wide grin. "Do you know what that indicates? It means everything father bought and brought down here was legitimate and not the result of his involvement in an illegal antiquities market. I hope the police have already figured that out. If not, we'll have to think of a way of making them aware."

"I'm a bit ashamed," exclaimed Anita. "There were so many night time visitors. Without giving it much thought, I just assumed Maury was involved in questionable activities. It seems I had it all wrong."

"Don't reproach yourself," replied Malcolm as he put his arm around his mother. "I suspected the same. I could have

easily asked father, but, instead, I was content to think of it as a great man's small transgression."

"Enough with the recriminations," injected Alex. "We're here to see if we can find something to exonerate mother. Let's keep moving."

Agreeing with Alex, all three resumed their search. Malcolm tried to put his discovery aside. But he was so excited that he failed to watch where he was going. As he headed for the stairs leading up to the fifth display row, he lost his footing and was thrust forward. His momentum hurled him to the floor. After yelling to Anita and Alex that he was okay, Malcolm took stock of where he was. From his low vantage point, he was able to see the backs of each fourth-row exhibit as well as the backs of each corresponding certificate.

Viewing the room from the top of the stairs was not nearly as impressive as looking up at the lighted displays from the floor level. However, the perspective captivated him for a moment. As he was gazing around the room, he glanced at the exhibit closest to him. He could clearly see the back of the exhibit and the back of its certificate of authenticity. Up until now, he had only focused on the front of the displays. What now fascinated him was what he saw on the lower left corner of the back side of each certificate--a handwritten notation in his father's writing. The one closest to him read: "Lucky post-Iron-Curtain purchase," and displayed the date and Maury's initials. Malcolm glanced at the back of several other certificates that were within comfortable visual range. They also appeared to have notations.

Malcolm signaled for Anita and Alex to join him on the walkway. Neither had found anything useful and they were happy to hear the enthusiasm in Malcolm's voice. They hurried to where he stood. Alex pointed to the back of the certificate where he had previously made his discovery. "Check out this notation. Let's see if the backs of all the other certificates have

the same kind of notation and dating. If they do, maybe one will bear the date of father's murder. But it may take a little bit of bending or kneeling since the row behind a given exhibit is one level higher.

"Let's get to it," said Alex. "Mother, are you up to a little exercise?"

"Of course, I am. You may recall it's my derriere that's on the line!"

Carefully, the three got down on hands and knees and started checking the backs of the certificates. They had been at it for a while and discouragement was beginning to set in. All of a sudden, Alex yelled out, "I've found something peculiar."

"What is it," responded Malcolm.

"The notation on the back of this certificate only has father's initials. There's no date or message."

"That is something. I've just about finished all of the exhibits in my third of the room and every one of them follows the same pattern as the first one I discovered, with a date and a message."

"Me, too," said Anita. I'm also just about finished.

"Let's complete our search and see if there are any more like the one Malcolm found," suggested Alex.

But there were no more. The three congregated around the exhibit with the truncated notation. It was a splendid set of Torah crowns.

"I'll bet this is what father received from his visitor and he just didn't have time to finish the notation before he was murdered."

“I think you’re right,” intoned Anita. “This may be just what I need to get Hemingway off my case.”

“Let’s not get carried away just yet,” voiced Malcolm.

“What do you mean? I thought the complete set of certificates as well as the particular one you found would really help me.”

“They may well. The missing date and notation offer a really interesting theory which we should push for all its worth. But Hemingway is a skeptical one and may not buy into the theory, at least for now, since we can’t prove what caused father not to complete the notation. As for the full set of certificates, they are certainly strong evidence father was not involved in shady activities. That’s great for his legacy, but not necessarily great for you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Simply this. If father’s collection was acquired legitimately, then there’s probably no underworld connection to his activities and his death. That still leaves Hemingway looking at you.”

Alex was now exasperated. “If we found what we were looking for and that won’t do it, then what will?”

Resignation marked Malcolm’s response. “Something happening to one of us!”

Chapter Thirty-Two
Jerusalem, Israel
2005

Sarah put down the newspaper and pondered what she needed to do to find Toumy. She didn't know how to reach him by phone, but she did know where he was staying. She called the guest house, but the receptionist wouldn't give out any information regarding the bishop's whereabouts or schedule. As Sarah thought about her next steps, she absentmindedly checked herself in the mirror. *That will never do*, she mused, and began taking out makeup from her medicine cabinet.

This is silly, she thought. *I haven't worn makeup in years*. Even so, she continued with what she was doing and stopped only after she had put on the finishing touches of eye mascara and lip gloss. She evaluated herself in the mirror and, with a nod of approval, grabbed her bag and headed toward the guest house.

The guest house was in a pleasant part of the city where most of the dwellings had been built in the early part of the twentieth century. Sara admired the building for a moment and then knocked on the door. She was greeted by a middle age woman who was most likely the unhelpful receptionist with whom Sarah had already spoken. Sarah summoned her most confident tone and advised the woman she wished to see the archbishop.

The woman eyed Sarah warily. "Do you have an appointment?"

"I'm afraid I don't, but I do think the archbishop will want to see me." She fished in her bag for a business card and handed it to the woman. "Please tell the archbishop that Sarah from Alexandria is here to see him."

In a few minutes, Metropolitan Archbishop Touma Salib, robed in a traditional black cassock, walked into the waiting area. He told the receptionist that his guest was someone he knew, and she could return to her work. Left alone, the venerable clergyman held out his arms in a gesture of welcome. “Is it really you?”

“I’m afraid it is, although my appearance may have altered after almost fifty years.”

“Your appearance couldn’t be better. Now, my arms are extended for a reason. Please come here. I want to hug you to make sure you’re real.”

Sarah started to approach her long-lost friend and then hesitated for a moment. “I don’t even know how to address you. The newspaper article referred to you as ‘eminence’. Would that be appropriate here?”

“What do you take me for—some kind of stuffy clergyman? You may call me eminence, Toumy or anything else you like for that matter. When a person has been in my thoughts as much as you have, convention is the last thing that matters. Now, where’s my hug?”

Sarah stepped forward and allowed herself to be enveloped by Toumy’s robes. The sensation was surprisingly comforting. As she stood there embraced by her friend of old, Sarah’s thoughts began to fly back to the last time they had seen one another. However, her thoughts were interrupted as Toumy let go, appraised her for a moment and then spoke. “I see from your card you are a physician. We have many things to talk about, but what kind of medicine do you practice?”

Smiling, Sarah replied, “I suspect I have as many questions as you, but I’ll start first. You of course know that my father was a doctor.”

“I’m sorry to interrupt, but when did your father pass away?”

“It was a long time ago. After the incident, my father’s attitude changed. He was still a devoted physician, but he carried a hatred that ate away at him. He wanted to avenge what had happened to me by fighting Israel’s enemies and the enemies of the Jewish people. His was not an unusual obsession for a country made up of survivors of the worst atrocity ever perpetrated on a people. But it was all-consuming. As soon as he was comfortable with the language, he joined the Israeli Defense Forces as a combat physician and was decorated for heroism during the Six Day War in 1967.”

“Was he able to regain a sense of balance after Israel’s victory in the war?”

“Yes. During the euphoria following Israel’s victory, I saw signs that his bitterness was beginning to recede. He even began dating a woman, a survivor of the camps. Then, in 1973, Israel was caught flatfooted as the Arab armies swooped down again intent on destroying the country once and for all.

“I’m aware of that. Please continue.”

“All over the country, there was a hurried deployment of personnel. My father was assigned to a combat hospital in the southern part of the country. He might have easily weathered hostilities from the safety of his field hospital, except he heard something that triggered an impulse he couldn’t resist.”

“What was that?”

“The daughter of friends of ours, a young woman named Gilda, had been assigned as a lookout with the responsibility of monitoring an important, but penetrable, desert pass. Women were not assigned to combat units in those days, but she was as intrepid as a combat fighter. When word of a possible invasion

through the pass reached her, she left her assigned position to get a better look. She was wounded by a sniper who spotted her movement. Before being captured, she managed to radio her location and condition to the field hospital where my father was working. When my father heard what had happened, I imagine he thought of me being wounded and surrounded by those thugs back in Alexandria. In any event, he insisted that the team assigned to rescue Gilda needed a physician. Before the armored halftrack he was in reached Gilda's last known position, the vehicle was hit by tank fire. My father was killed instantly.

“I'm so sorry to hear that.”

“It was a blow. I had completed my IDF service and, at the time, I was in medical school. When they killed my father, they killed my world, or so I thought at the time. However, Israelis are well experienced in dealing with grief and the people on the medical school faculty were understanding and reassuring. I managed to stay with my studies and in time I had established my old rhythm. However, the course of my medical career had been set. As with my father's attempted rescue of Gilda, I also wanted to rescue women who had been wounded, both physically and emotionally. I suppose I was also thinking of my own experience. I did, however choose a different route than my father. I remained a civilian physician with a specialty in trauma. For the last three decades, I have dedicated myself to helping women who have been the victims of both domestic and random violence.”

“Domestic violence! That surprises me. You have a problem with that sort of thing in Israel?”

“I'm afraid so. Now that I've told you a little about myself, it's your turn. But I have an idea. It's a beautiful day outside. Why don't we go for a walk and you can tell me how my friend Toumy became Metropolitan Archbishop Touma Salib.”

“That’s an excellent idea. However, I don’t think it would sell well if I were identified by my fawning public walking with an unknown woman at my arm. Give me a moment while I change into street clothes, so I won’t be so easily recognizable.”

“Can you do that?”

“Technically, no. But, as I advised the members of your press yesterday, I’m regarded as an eccentric. In addition, I would love to see Jerusalem without a following.”

As promised, Toumy returned to the reception area dressed in business attire. The startled look on Sarah’s face caused Toumy to grin widely. “I’ll take that look as one of approval. Earlier, the receptionist showed me a back door to the building in case I needed privacy. Shall we take it?”

Chapter Thirty-Three
Office of Jeffrey Leibowitz, Vassar College
Week Five, the Present

Malcolm arrived at Vassar at the time Jeff Leibowitz had suggested in his text. He knocked on the door of Leibowitz's office and was greeted warmly.

"How was your trip?"

"Great. Greece is always exciting for me. There's so much to discover there. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to finish my work and I'll have to fly back in a week or two."

"That's interesting because I'm considering flying to London in a week or two. Maybe we can coordinate."

"Is your trip work related?"

"In a way." Malcolm then proceeded to tell his new confidante about the press conference to publicize his father's gift and the captivating Qatari woman who seemed to appear out of nowhere and her request that Malcolm meet with the board of the Qatar Development and Rescue Fund in London.

"I would still counsel a healthy dose of caution in assessing the Qataris' motivation. But the possibility of a twenty-million-dollar matching gift is very attractive. If I were in your shoes, I would be very tempted to give the lovely and exotic Roshni an affirmative nod."

Leibowitz's playful jab had the desired affect and Malcolm blushed. "I suspect you already guessed that I said yes! I just wanted reassurance from you."

“You’ve got it. Now, have you been able to find out anything regarding our mystery metropolitan bishop or the remote monastery?”

“Nothing about the metropolitan bishop, but I think I may have made some progress with the monastery.”

“Good, give me a minute to get out my atlas and find a map of Egypt.”

As Leibowitz turned to the map of Egypt, Malcolm took out two copies of a power point diagram showing his findings. Malcolm explained his methodology in eliminating the various monasteries in populous areas and Leibowitz painstakingly confirmed the location of each.

About half way through the process, Leibowitz looked up. “I think you’ve been approaching the task in the right way. Let’s see what else you have.”

After an hour and a half, the two had gone over Malcolm’s entire list eliminating all but the two Eastern Desert monasteries—the ones Malcolm thought best fit the description of a remote monastery.

“What’s the name of the first one?” asked Leibowitz.

“St. Anthony’s.”

A frown crept over Leibowitz’s face. “What’s wrong?” asked Malcolm.

“I’m not an expert in this arena, but St. Anthony’s is famous. It may be tucked away in the Red Sea Mountains, but it’s the oldest monastery in the world. It’s well known and has modern access. There are probably countless pilgrims who go there every year. It’s just not the sort of landmark that I would describe as remote.”

“I hadn’t thought of that. I guess that leaves us with one: St. Paul the Anchorite.”

Leibowitz showed little additional sign of enthusiasm. “I don’t like being the naysayer in this arrangement, but you’ve got the same problem with St. Paul’s. It’s almost as old as St. Anthony’s and was founded in honor of St. Paul, the first Christian hermit who was said to have lived in a cave for eighty years. If I recall correctly, there are now three churches that exist on the monastery and it’s a very busy place. Here, let me look them up.”

Leibowitz swiveled his chair toward his computer and after a few moments reported his findings. “Yes, in addition to the church honoring St. Paul, there are two other churches on the monastery grounds, one named after Saint Mercurius and the other after Archangel Michael.”

At this point Malcolm was feeling a little crestfallen and embarrassed at having wasted so much of his time on what appeared to be a futile effort. “Does that mean we are back at base one?”

“Not necessarily. A thought just occurred to me. Didn’t you say you eliminated abandoned monasteries from your list?”

Malcolm’s face perked up as Leibowitz’s question suggested he might have a helpful idea. “Yes, that’s correct.”

“Were any of the abandoned monasteries located in the Eastern Desert?”

Malcolm checked his outline and a smile crept over his face. “Yes. The monastery of St. Parsoma.”

“Parsoma, if I recall, was another Christian hermit in the mold of St. Paul.”

Malcolm's spirits had lifted noticeably. "Yes, and the monastery was built over a cave occupied by Parsoma when he lived in the wild."

"Hold that thought while I look up the monastery."

Leibowitz swiveled in his chair and checked his computer. When he finished, his face had brightened as he turned back to Malcolm. "Unless I miss my guess this is the site, we're after. Part of the original structure was underground and connected to the grave containing the remains of Parsoma. And, it's probably accessible since it only closed a few years ago."

"That's great."

"There's more. In the Coptic religious hierarchy, every metropolitan bishop must first have been a monk and then usually a bishop abbot before becoming a metropolitan bishop. It should be easy to find the names of the abbots who most recently served at St. Parsoma before it closed. It should be a very short list. Once we have that list, we should be able to find our man."

Malcolm felt reassured and was not of a mind to ask Leibowitz for any more assistance. However, Leibowitz relieved him of the concern. "You know it's a short hop across the Mediterranean from Greece to Egypt. That's why there are so many Greeks living in Cairo. Why don't I make a visit to our candidate monastery after I'm finished with my work in Greece? My assignment there shouldn't take too long and I'm curious."

"That would be fabulous. But we don't know what kind of dangerous elements we are dealing with and I wouldn't want to subject you to the risk."

"When I told you last time that my bags were packed, I didn't condition any travel on winding up in a cushy location.

That's not to say I don't appreciate the evil nature of the people who killed your father. I do and won't take any unnecessary risks."

"Speaking of culprits," responded Malcolm, "I have something interesting to report."

Malcolm then described the family's visit to the collection room and the discovery that every exhibit had a certificate of provenance attesting to its authenticity and chain of ownership. "The bottom line is that the certificates demonstrate that my father's acquisitions were above board and that he wasn't dealing with an underworld element."

"Interesting. I'm happy for both of us. Importantly, your find would seem to eliminate a huge population of culprits as suspects for your father's murder."

"Exactly my thought. Unfortunately, it does tend to refocus suspicion on my mother!"

Chapter Thirty-Four
Jerusalem, Israel
2005

Sarah and Toumy left the guest house and emerged into a beautiful Jerusalem day. While asking her old friend what direction he would like to take, Sarah had an opportunity to look at him in the light of day. For a man who had spent most of his days in contemplation and prayer, Toumy looked to be in pretty good shape. And, his hair! His long beard was light grey. But, with his bishop's hat off, Sarah could see his hair was a wavy jet black. Sarah lamented that her hair had been grey for some time, but then dismissed the thought. "Where shall we go eminence?"

Toumy frowned playfully.

"Okay, no more with the titles. So, what would you like to do?"

"Everything. In particular, I would like to spend a little time in the Old City, but in a non-devotional way. Yesterday, I traced the Stations of the Cross. It was quite moving. But today I'd like to be a tourist."

"Great. First, we'll go to the *shuk* and then to an Arab restaurant that's a favorite of mine. The *shuk* is probably not that different from the marketplaces you have in Egypt. But it's nevertheless a lot of fun to see the Arab merchants interacting with the Jewish tourists. If you like, we can go to the Western Wall on our way back."

"That all sounds wonderful."

"Okay. Let's turn in this direction."

For a moment, the two walked in silence, with each trying to manage a lifetime of thoughts. Finally, Sarah spoke.

“Toumy, I read a little bit about how you wound up in the clergy. But, you’ve yet to tell me in your own words.”

“You’re right. I’m very happy with the life I’ve led, but how it came about brings back sorrowful memories—memories of what happened to you.”

Toumy stopped for a brief moment, his head bowed in reflection. Sarah said nothing, not wanting to invade Toumy’s thoughts. Soon, he continued. “After the assault on you, I devoted myself to helping my mother regain her health and my brother reclaim his mental balance. But what I really wanted was to escape from the world that had unleashed those five thugs on you. I thought a monastery would provide me with salvation and an opportunity to make amends for the evil that had befallen you.”

“It clearly wasn’t your fault and I never thought so. All I knew was I had just been raped by five men, I was leaving the only home I had known, my father had been beaten and you and I had been separated. If I could have figured out how to do it, I think I would have walled myself off as well. But I don’t think it would have been a religious refuge. I wasn’t feeling too good about God at the moment.”

“I understand your confrontation with religion. I did take several years before I became a novice. During that period, I had a lot of opportunity to think about what I was doing. But I had made up my mind and never really wavered. As it turned out, I was a pretty good monk and took my vows as a priest at a younger age than anyone who had gone before me.”

“That’s impressive. The newspaper account said you spent time in England as a young man. I think they said it was a time of reflection for you.”

“It was a difficult, but an ultimately restorative part of my life. Let me ask you a question. Do you know how long the

Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches have been separated?”

“Not exactly my field. But I’d guess about a thousand years.”

“Excellent. It was in the year 1054 to be exact. But, relations between the Latin-speaking Roman branch and Greek-speaking Byzantine branch of the church had been deteriorating since 800 when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne, King of the Franks, as Holy Roman Emperor. The Byzantine church was not happy with Charlemagne’s ascension, particularly since Byzantium had been the protector of Christendom since the fall of Rome in 476 and now it was being marginalized. In 1054, matters came to a head when the Normans overran Greek-speaking southern Italy and introduced Roman practices of worship. The head of the Orthodox branch of the church, the Patriarch of Constantinople, retaliated by putting an end to Latin-style worship in the east. Ultimately, each church excommunicated the other, a circumstance that lasted for more than nine centuries until 1965, a few years after my ordination.”

Sensing a need to lighten the moment, Sarah responded jokingly: “Not to be facetious, but they sure knew how to hold a grudge.”

Her comment elicited a grin from her companion who continued with the same degree of seriousness, but with greater ease. “Exactly, and that was my problem. Over the years, practices and traditions between the two churches changed. Theologically, the Catholic church emphasized the humanity of Jesus as well as his divinity, whereas the Orthodox church was more concerned with his divinity. But, at bottom, the two churches worshipped the same God with only minor differences in each’s view of the holy trinity. The schism got me to thinking about how mankind had influenced the course of religion, just as religion has influenced the course of mankind.”

“Not an uncommon realization, from my point of view.”

“Yes. But, for a young churchman, it was an uncomfortable one. My interest was in the origins of Christianity. The more I studied, the more I realized how humans had struggled in understanding the nature of God and how, as a result, imperfect human thought had influenced the evolution of Christian theology. I tried not to dwell on my concerns, knowing that far-greater theologians than I had grappled with this same dilemma over the centuries and had still found comfort in the sanctity of Christ. Ultimately, I concluded that I needed guidance from a higher authority and took my concerns to my bishop. We had a number of searching sessions together. Finally, the two of us agreed it would be useful for me to take some time off to reflect. I was a very good student and my talents eventually enabled me to take formal studies at Oxford.”

“Don’t keep me guessing! How did you resolve your inner conflict and return to the priesthood?”

“It took a while and two Oxford degrees, but I cherished every moment. Ultimately, I determined that the majesty of Christ exceeded all other considerations and that mankind’s feeble efforts to understand the incomprehensible shouldn’t be allowed to detract from this cornerstone principle. In addition, my pursuits had taken me to areas of historical study that brought clarity to my understanding of church doctrine. I wanted to share that clarity with younger theologians. My bishop knew I would always be of the questioning sort, but he was open-minded enough to welcome me back. And, here I am. Now it’s your turn.”

“We’re almost to the Jaffa Gate. So, mercifully, my response won’t be nearly as elaborate as yours. Nor, as interesting, I’m afraid.”

“Don’t be so sure. As a man of faith and a witness to what befell you, I can only imagine the mental and spiritual obstacles you had to overcome, and the strength needed to deal with your father’s sudden death.”

“You’re right there, except I was never really able to get past the emotional barrier I erected to deal with my past. I did have a few relationships, but emotionally I was hollow and never was able to open myself to any man. As time went on, I just threw myself into my work and didn’t bother searching for a partner. Ah, here, we are. Let’s head to the *shuk*. After lunch, we’ll go to the Western Wall and tour the incredible tunnels that run along the base of the wall.”

A few hundred yards from the Jaffa Gate, the main *shuk* of Jerusalem wound through the Arab market in an endless display of stalls offering everything from fragrant spices, to leatherware to rugs and carpets. Unlike many of the *shuks* in the middle east, the Jerusalem *shuk* catered to both a local population and an almost endless stream of tourists. As Sarah and Toumy negotiated the ancient cobblestone path between the stalls, Toumy’s expression changed from interest to amazement. “In Israel, even the Arab *shuks* are better than at home. If you can recall the *shuks* of our childhood, you would have a good idea of the *shuks* of today. By contrast, the orderliness here and the variety are both outstanding.”

“There’s a reason for what you’ve observed. When there are boundless tourist dollars to be had, orderliness, even if out of character, is a small price to pay. On a related subject, all of the smells in the *shuk* are making me hungry. The place I have in mind is a traditional Moroccan restaurant. What do you say we head for lunch?”

After a splendid meal of squash soup and vegetable tagine, Sarah and Toumy headed to the Western Wall, the foundation wall for the temple mount and the holiest location in Judaism. As they walked through security, Toumy again

marveled at the orderliness of the approach to the wall and its overall sense of peacefulness. None of what he was observing corresponded with the impression conveyed by either Arab or European television.

At the wall, Toumy left a traditional note in one of the crevices between the huge stones, ranging in size from two to five tons, out of which the wall had been constructed. The two then went to the entrance to the tunnel that ran almost five hundred meters along the Western Wall. During their walk they observed a number of stairways that, in ancient times, connected the city of Jerusalem to the Temple Mount.

After finishing their tour of the tunnel, Sarah asked Toumy if he had the energy to take in one or two more sights. She knew he was tired but was heartened at his enthusiastic response. Sarah then led her guest to the City of David complex not far from the Western Wall, where the views and exhibits provided a historic and archeological roadmap to Jerusalem's past. After completing the self-guided tour of the City of David, Toumy threw up his hands in mock submission. "One more tourist site and I may welcome returning to my robe."

"I did have other things in mind. Is there anything you would like to do before we return to your guest quarters?"

"Yes. I would like to see where a typical Israeli doctor lives!"

"I'm afraid you won't be impressed. We have one of the highest percentages of doctors per patients in the world. As a result, we aren't very highly paid and where we live reflects our pay status."

"A pretty feeble excuse if you ask me. If your place isn't too far, I'd like very much to see it."

“If you insist. It’s not far at all and I make a mean cup of tea. Let’s go.”

Soon they arrived at Sarah’s building and ascended the two flights of stairs that led to her third-floor apartment. It was in fact considerably more stylish than Sarah had suggested and Toumy was quite impressed. After entering the apartment, Sarah invited Toumy to take a seat in the living room while she prepared tea. While she was warming the water for tea, she decided to serve the sponge cake she had purchased the previous day.

As she happily sliced the cake, a piece fell to the floor unnoticed. After arranging the slices on a tray, she decided the cake needed some decoration and began to prepare a topping of whipped cream. While all of this was going on, Toumy waited patiently in the living room. However, after a while he became impatient and headed into the kitchen where Sarah was working. He didn’t see the piece of cake that had fallen on the floor and, as he was about to announce his entrance into the kitchen, he slipped. Before he knew it, he was sliding in the direction of the counter where Sarah was working.

Toumy was relieved beyond his most dire forebodings that he hadn’t fallen. But now he was confronted with another dilemma. His momentum had taken him to the area where Sarah was working and, to prevent himself from falling, he had grabbed hold of his hostess’ arm. He now found himself leaning against Sarah and experiencing a sensation he never imagined he would feel—the sensation of a woman’s body.

They were now eye to eye with their bodies still in contact. They were both spellbound and neither wished to move. As their loins rubbed against one another stirring the most exquisite of primal sensations, their lips met.

It was Toumy who broke away—an act that filled him with both the greatest of relief and the greatest of regret. “Sarah,

dearest, we may be destined to be with one another in another life, but not in this one. I think I should go.”

“I’m not sure I have that many lives to go around, but I respect your wishes. Please promise me you’ll be in touch and that you’ll let me know if ever the life you’ve chosen no longer suits you.”

“I’ll be in touch. Thank you for a lovely day.”

Chapter Thirty-Five
The Epilogue Hotel, White Plains New York
Week Five, the Present

Alex had left the collection room feeling frustrated. He knew without doubt his mother could not have killed his father and yet that seemed to be the prevailing assumption. He was also trying to comprehend what Malcolm had meant when he said their mother would likely be exonerated only if something happened to one of them. He wondered whether Malcolm was being unnecessarily alarmist, but, he had to admit, his brother did have a point. If an attack occurred that could not be attributed to their mother, she would probably fall off of Hemingway's radar screen.

Alex wanted to do everything he could to help his mother. However, his propensity for impatience was beginning to take over. The hotel was nice enough, but he was beginning to feel cloistered and he had no interest in moving in with Anita. Fortunately, the Irish bar located off of the main lobby served as an acceptable diversion—and, in most respects, an extension of Alex's hotel room.

Alex had worn a sport jacket and slacks while visiting at his mother's house. Once back in the hotel, he changed into something more casual. Suddenly exhilarated at the thought of downing a few Irish whiskeys with beer chasers, Alex loped out of his room and headed for the bar.

The Epilogue Hotel was a five-star hotel at four-star prices and was situated a very short walk to the White Plains train station where one could catch a train to New York City and be in Grand Central Station in thirty minutes or so. For those reasons, the hotel had become a favorite of small conference and convention planners. Attendees could luxuriate in the hotel's oversized rooms without breaking their expense accounts and still be little more than a half-hour from all New York City had to offer.

During his time at the hotel, Alex had staked out a favorite bar stool where he could easily get the bartenders' attention, watch sporting events and observe the comings and goings of the various conference participants. He was comfortably perched on the stool as he downed his first shot of Irish whiskey when he noticed that an entirely new group of people were entering the bar. He assumed a new conference had hit town and that the people streaming into the bar were there to decompress after a day's events or were loosening up in anticipation of the conference's beginning the following day. In either case, he was pleased to see that most of the people heading toward his end of the bar displayed considerable energy and were fairly youthful.

One woman in particular caught his eye as she seated herself at the bar. He guessed she was about five years older than he, but she had a fresh quality he found appealing. Like Malcolm, Alex was tall and good looking. But, unlike Malcolm who had constantly pushed himself academically and professionally, Malcolm had devoted himself to less lofty but more satisfying pursuits such as breaking the ice in a room full of people.

After catching the eye of the newly seated woman, Alex calmly walked over to her and asked if he could buy her a drink. He was pleased when accepted. "It's been a long day and I could use one. My name's Mackenzie. What's yours?"

"Alex. That's quite a name, beautiful and ambiguous at the same time."

"Look, if you want to keep this conversation going, you'll have to do better than then that! In addition, I can assure you I don't need a name to eliminate any ambiguity about my gender."

“Okay. Sorry, I really stepped into that one. How about this: Where are you from?”

“That’s better. I’m from Cincinnati, but for the last few years I’ve been spending so much time at conferences that I’m not sure I could tell you where I’m currently from. How about you?”

“I pretty much hang out in the Southwest around Santa Fe.”

“That sounds fantastic. I’ve heard Santa Fe is one of America’s neatest small towns. What brings you east?”

For a moment Alex winced thinking about what had happened to his father. Quickly, he regained his focus. “A death in the family.”

“Sorry to hear that. If I’m not intruding, what happened?”

“You’re not intruding at all. My father died.”

“I’m so sorry. Was it sudden?”

“Very. He was murdered.”

Mackenzie felt both embarrassed and solicitous. Tenderly, she leaned in and placed her hand on Alex’s shoulder. “Oh, how awful. Do you want to talk about it?”

As he considered his reply, he dwelled on her touch and took in the faint smell of her perfume. His mind was made up. “Sure, I’m okay talking about it, but there really isn’t much to say at this point as the police are still investigating the murder.”

“Are there any suspects?”

“I’m afraid there’s one, my mother.”

“That’s awful.” At that moment their drinks arrived, and Mackenzie took a sip of her Bloody Mary. The taste of the alcohol emboldened her more than she had expected. “Did she do it?”

Alex was usually prepared for all variety of barroom banter, but Mackenzie’s question caught him off guard, causing the need for him to regroup for the second time that evening. He hoped Mackenzie hadn’t notice.

“She couldn’t have. She has her faults, but she’s not a murderer, and I think she really loved him.”

Alex gulped his drink and ordered another. Mackenzie asked if she, too, could have another. Alex nodded to the bartender. While he was placing the order, Mackenzie took a moment to assess him. He wasn’t bad looking. More importantly, she had known him for only a short while and already the conversation was more intriguing than any she could recall while on the road. She decided to prod further. “I believe you. But, if what you say is true, why do they think she did it?”

Having had his second drink, Alex was feeling a little less guarded. So, he decided to tell Mackenzie about the long hours his mother was alone, the affair, the marital agreement, the wired money and the fight his parents had had just before his father was killed. When he told her that his mother’s car had been used in the murder and that a second man had been killed in addition to his father, Mackenzie almost jumped off her stool. “Wait a minute. What did you say your last name was?”

I didn’t. It’s Steinthaler.”

“Oh Alex, I’m so sorry. Was your father the financial tycoon whose murder made all the papers?”

“You’ve got me there!”

“Now, I really need another drink and I’m sure you do as well. It’s pretty busy here, but, if I haven’t lost my charm, I should be able to get the bartender’s attention.”

Buoyed by another Bloody Mary, Mackenzie pursued her questioning and with each of Alex’s responses, she felt greater empathy for his misfortune. More importantly, she found herself being drawn to him. “Alex, I’ve been there. I don’t mean that I’ve murdered anyone. But my husband was never around, and I got involved with someone. It happens. But murder! You poor thing!” With that, she parted her lips, reached over to Alex and kissed him tenderly.

Alex was almost dizzy with excitement but managed to retain his cool. “If I had known that was coming, I might have knocked off my father myself.”

“Now, don’t be macabre. Let’s think this through. If your mother’s innocent, what can we do to prove it?”

“Honestly, I don’t know. My brother thinks the only way to take the spotlight off my mother is if something happens to one of us.”

“Let’s make sure that doesn’t happen. I’m getting interested in your family, not to speak of you.” Again, they kissed and, with drinks in hand, headed to the elevator.

Chapter Thirty-Six
Budapest, Hungary
2011

By any reasonable standards, Farkas Heszlényi should have been counted among life's most fortunate. He was tall, with an athlete's physique. His flowing blond hair framed a manly, if not attractive, face, and he had been equipped with good intelligence. Even his given name, Farkas, meaning "wolf," conjured images of the bold Hungarian lineage from which he sprang. His great-grandfather, Botond, whose given name meant "warrior," had died on the battle fields of France during World War I. His grandfather, Gellert, whose name meant "spear head," had fought valiantly in the Second World War alongside the family hero, General József Heszlényi, who had committed suicide rather than submitting to his Russian captors. However, the line of warriors seemed to have withered with Farkas' father, Andris Heszlényi, and, with that withering, so had Farkas's future.

Andris had grown up during the barren years of Soviet Communist dominance. Almost uninterrupted, times were difficult in Hungary from the country's defeat during World War II through the more than forty years of Communist rule that followed. No one felt the severity of the times more than Andris. He had hoped to be an artist. But his work had been rejected by the boorish Communist establishment that knew nothing about art but knew how to reject anything that didn't extol the ruling government with sufficient adoration.

Because it wasn't wise to criticize the Communist overseers, Andris turned to the time-honored Hungarian form of finger pointing for assigning blame. His troubles, he concluded, were caused by the Jews. He blamed them for having spawned the Communist movement and its suppression of creativity such as his own. At the same time, he railed against the Jews for controlling the banks and the media, enabling the capitalist world to hold his own dear country in a vice-like grip.

That the two views might have been in conflict with one another didn't bother Andris, just as other irrational forms of anti-Semitism had not been a concern of his parents' or grandparents' generations.

Anti-Semitism had been a rich tradition in Hungary for many centuries. In more modern times, during the Hungarian revolution of 1848, anti-Semitic atrocities were inflicted on the country's Jews in more than thirty cities throughout the country. The arrival of the Austro-Hungarian Empire less-than twenty years later in 1867 produced a more hospitable time for the country's Jews. But, as with the change in every political order, the dual monarchies had produced both winners and losers. The losers were quick to blame the Jews with violent pogroms erupting in the early 1880's. The shortages of World War I and the eventual collapse of the dual monarchies brought a renewed need for a scapegoat and once again the Jews were singled out.

As early as 1913, right-wing groups, such as the Association of Awakening Hungarians, promoted the expulsion of all of Europe's Jews—a theme that would resonate with Nazi Germany not many years later. Except by then, expulsion would no longer suffice. Nothing less than the slaughter of Europe's Jews would satisfy a maniacal Hitler. By 1944, when the bulk of Hungary's remaining Jews were taken to their deaths in the gas chamber of Auschwitz-Berkenau, an astonishing 565,000 Hungarian Jews had perished.

None of this phased Andris as he damned the cruel fate that had led him to a life of unfulfilled artistic talent and the Jews who were to blame. Luck however turned his way when he met the young Angela, a barmaid at a local watering hole. Surprisingly, Angela was a good influence on the alcoholic Andris. He had made a real effort to reform his ways and in time they were married.

Soon the couple had a beautiful baby boy they called Farkas, to whom they were both devoted. No sacrifice was too

great if it meant advancing the best interests of their son. But, even in post-Communist Hungary, the life of an unrequited artist was not easy. Andris pursued any number of low-level jobs, all the while buoyed by thoughts of his son, but consumed by the need to assign blame for his misfortune. At dinner time, as often as the conversation focused on Farkas achievements at school, it also turned to Andris' outspoken contempt for the Jews and how they had always been a national blight.

Soon, even Farkas' accomplishments were not sufficient to assuage his father's bitterness at the hand life had dealt him and the Jewish croupiers who had been the dealers. He was aware of his susceptibility to alcohol and resolutely summoned all the strength he had to avoid returning to his adult-long vice.

The years had gone by and soon it was 2003. In Hungary, some university students had started a new right-wing group called JOBBIK, short for *Jobboldali Ifjúsági Közösség*. JOBBIK's conservative philosophy appealed to Andris as did its anti-Semitic tendencies. When one of the party leaders founded Magyar Gárda, the "Hungarian Guard", in 2007, Andris was elated at the thought of following in his father and grandfather's footsteps by becoming a guardsman. However, soon party politics fractured JOBBIK and Andris was one of the casualties.

Beset by one too many reversals, Andris returned to alcohol. He was still able to hold a job, but night after night he flew into bouts of rage as he again engaged in drunken warfare with the system that had denied him so much in life. His wife tried to be a calming influence but Andris was inconsolable. Dinner was no longer a time to eat, but rather a time to search for blame. More and more, he looked to the Jews as the cause for his distress and, as he did so, he made a point of inculcating his now impressionable teenage son in the evil of world Jewry.

At first, Farkas did not know what to make of his father's screeds. He had heard about the Jews from his schoolmates and knew they possessed some kind of inherent evil. But he was still

young and even his impressionable adolescent nature required time to formulate the kind of impassioned hatred his father preached almost relentlessly. However, over time he began to internalize the message of his father's diatribes and it began to eat away at him and distort his way of seeing the world. Farkas' fulminations against the Jews were so heavy handed that even his conservative-minded classmates were put off. Undeterred, he continued his personal crusade of hatred until he was left with few friends.

Farkas hated his father's drunkenness and had eschewed anything to do with liquor. However, as his friendships began to falter, he began to look to his father's bottles for solace. Due to his size, he was able to pass for someone much older. One day, his desire for drink took him to a local bar where he quickly became inebriated. Despite his drunken state, he was able to overhear the conversation of two men who were having a drink after work. As he listened, he heard one of the men refer to the other by his last name. Mistakenly, he took the name for a Jewish surname and something within him snapped. He lunged at the man and hit him in the face. As the man fell to the ground, Farkas jumped on him and continued to rain punches on him. Luckily, the man survived the assault. But, Farkas, who was seventeen at the time, was tried in court as an adult due to the viciousness of his crime and was sentenced to eight years at hard labor.

Chapter Thirty-Seven
Doha, Qatar
Week Five, the Present

Dareen Issa had led the kind of life that most Palestinian girls could only dream of. Her father was one of Yasir Arafat's key lieutenants. After the Palestine Liberation Organization, the PLO, had been expelled from Jordan during the Black September days of 1970 and then driven from Lebanon in 1982, her father had followed Arafat to Tunis. There, Dareen's family had lived in relative luxury. Their whitewashed stucco villa in the suburbs of the city offered a commanding view of the Mediterranean and a safe environment for Dareen and her younger sister Najat to play and study.

Each school day morning, the same driver would pick up the two girls and take them to the nearby international school where the curriculum was taught in both French and Arabic. Both girls did well, but it was the affable Dareen who excelled both in and out of the classroom. Her sunny disposition and quick grasp of her studies found favor with her classmates and she was always surrounded by friends. Najat, by contrast, had a much darker disposition bordering on melancholy. Her dour manner made it difficult for her to attract friends and often alienated her from many of her classmates. Fortunately, she always had Dareen to turn to whenever she lacked companionship

Dareen's outgoing nature and her facility with mathematics and science impressed her instructors. At her teachers' urging, Dareen's parents not only allowed her to advance academically but also took delight in the accomplishments of their gifted daughter.

In this manner, Dareen might have passed her adolescence blissfully gazing upon the waters of the Mediterranean when she wasn't working on her favorite math puzzles. However, her father's work soon put an end to her

youthful idyll. After negotiating for many months with his Israeli counterparts, Daren's father, Hamad Al Sada, had come home during the late summer of 1993 and announced the PLO would be returning to Palestine. Daren knew her father had been working toward this goal for a long time and she didn't want to disappoint him. So, outwardly she rejoiced with Hamad and the rest of the family. Inwardly, she knew that her halcyon days by the Mediterranean were about to come to a close.

As the family sat in front of the television set, Hamad's immediate superior and Yasir Arafat's chief negotiator, Mahmoud Abbas, stood on the White House lawn and shook hands with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Dubbed the "Oslo Accord," the hand shake meant that the PLO would soon be returning to the West Bank and Gaza. In return, the PLO had renounced terrorism and had recognized Israel's right to exist. A new governmental authority would be established in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and, after a five-year period of interim governance, the PLO and Israel would enter into discussions regarding permanent borders, refugees and the status of Jerusalem.

Soon after the Whitehouse ceremony, Daren's family picked up stakes and moved from the sun-drenched suburbs of Tunis to the comparatively austere West Bank town of Jericho. As Daren looked around at her new surroundings, her first reaction was disappointment. Jericho was a dusty backwater by comparison to Tunis and there was no ocean breeze to sweeten the air and cool the rising temperature as the spring of 1994 approached. In addition, she observed that few of the girls her age were encouraged to continue school beyond eighth grade, let alone pursue a scientific track. But she had one major thing going for her. She had no brothers for her parents to dote on. Instead, Hamad and his wife Sama made every effort to soften the adjustment problem they knew their daughter was experiencing and to help her continue with her studies.

Over the next few years, time flew by for Dareen and soon she was sixteen. She had continued to excel in her studies, raising the question of what she would do when she completed high school. There were a number of colleges and universities in the West Bank, but most were new, and none offered programs suited to a young woman of Dareen's talents.

One day after Dareen had come home from school, her mother said she wanted to have a talk. Sama had a brother named Baseem who, with his wife Enaas, lived in Detroit. Sama and Enaas had become very close over the years and the two corresponded regularly and even spoke on the phone from time to time. One such telephone conversation had taken place the preceding day and had kept Hamad and Sama up all night talking.

Baseem and Enaas had found success in America, but they had never been blessed with children. They both knew of Dareen's achievements in school and of her limited opportunities in the West Bank. During the prior day's telephone conversation, Enaas asked Sama what they planned to do about Dareen's studies after she graduated from high school. When Sama responded that the family was at an impasse, Enaas made a suggestion that Sama knew she had to consider.

"Why not have Dareen come live with us during her last year of high school. This could be an opportunity for us to be surrogate parents. Baseem adores Dareen, and I know he would love the idea. While living with us, Dareen could establish residency and apply as an in-state student to the University of Michigan, which, as I think you know, is one of the great universities in the world. Her grades should get her admitted and, once there, she could take any courses she wanted. The university is always looking for interesting students and might even offer her a scholarship. Even without financial assistance, the tuition is very manageable for in-state students. We live outside of Detroit, only about a half hour from Ann Arbor where the University is located. Dareen could live with us and

commute to school or she could live in one of the dormitories and easily visit us on weekends.”

Sama was at first stunned by the proposal, but it only took a moment or two of reflection for her to realize it was the best thing for her daughter. Sama had watched many Palestinian friends leave for Europe or America and, each time it happened, she felt a sense of emptiness. She was not judgmental about people abandoning the fight against the Jews and understood why some would want to leave. But each time a friend departed for a distant land, Sama’s feeling of loss was great. She hated the idea of Dareen being so far away but comforted herself with the knowledge that her daughter would be happy and in good hands.

With her parents’ blessing, Dareen soon found herself at the airport ready to take off for America. She hugged her teary-eyed parents and then turned to Najat who was so disconsolate she couldn’t make eye contact. “Don’t worry little sister. I’ll always be there to take care of you no matter how many miles may separate us.” With that, Dareen boarded the plane and allowed her excitement to rise.

Dareen settled into Michigan suburban life quickly. She loved her uncle and aunt, but she was homesick and wasn’t crazy about the small community in which they lived. There were a number of Muslim children in her high school, but the town felt very cloistered. However, when she visited the University of Michigan for her interview, all of her concerns seemed to melt away. She had seen pictures of the university, but nothing had compared her for the actual fact.

As the student tour guide led her through the main campus across to the law school quad and then to the football field, all Dareen could think of was the day she would arrive on campus. Her palpable excitement coupled with her winning manner and excellent grades made a strong impression on the admissions officer who interviewed her. Not long after, Dareen

was on the telephone telling her mother and father she had been admitted to the university's school of engineering and had received a scholarship that would enable her to live on campus.

Campus life appealed to Dareen. She studied hard, attended athletic events on weekends and socialized among the ranks of the university's diverse Muslim population. It was during her junior year at an event sponsored by the Muslim Student Union that Dareen met Khalid Al Muhammadi, a recent transfer to the university. Khalid was from a moneyed family in Qatar and had never had to wish for much. Fortunately, he was a good student and hadn't squandered his growing up years on the many frivolous pastimes pursued by his more indulgent peers.

Dareen and Khalid's relationship started off slowly, but by the time they both decided to apply for graduate school at the university—she in chemical engineering, he in business and finance—they knew that their lives were bound together. Dareen was so wrapped up in her studies and her growing affection for Khalid that she scarcely paid attention to the unrelenting stream of distressing news from back home. She hardly took notice of the failed Camp David talks where Yasir Arafat was said to have walked away from a new Palestinian state. Even the uprising that followed, known as the *Second Intifada*, didn't dampen her spirits. She was in love and politics would have to take a respectful seat to the rear.

As the second and final year of their graduate studies approached, Khalid said the time was right for Dareen to meet his family. Dareen had waited for this moment, but she was nervous at meeting Khalid's relatives and worried that her modest background might be a deterrent to their liking her. Khalid, however, was very reassuring and, soon, the two were on a plane bound for Qatar's capital, Doha.

Dareen had been right to worry about the reaction of Khalid's family. The Al Muhammadi clan had married within their tribe for generations and Khalid's parents were predictably cool to the idea of him marrying a non-Qatari, not to speak of a poor Palestinian. They were sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinians, but it was more a matter of adhering to Muslim orthodoxy than a feeling of true empathy. However, as Dareen's infectious upbeat manner began to grow on them, the family soon got past their reservations about her social standing and suitability.

Dareen and Khalid returned to Ann Arbor, buoyed by the acceptance of Khalid's family. Upon completion of their graduate studies the two were married in Doha in a ceremony attended by both of their families and more than a thousand additional guests. Perfumed and adorned with henna, Dareen proudly sat by her new husband on the wedding stage as wave after wave of well-wishers came by to offer their best hopes for good fortune and a long life together. For years, good fortune did indeed follow each of them as Dareen rose within the ranks of Qatar's petro-chemical industry and Khalid took his rightful place in the highest ranks of the Qatar Investment Authority, the QIA.

As the two of them enjoyed quiet moments sitting on the expansive balcony of their forty-second story apartment overlooking the Persian Gulf, or more electric moments slicing through Alpine powder at St. Moritz, politics remained an alien thought and television accounts of the Israeli-Palestine conflict were dismissed with a sigh and little more. Were it not for Najat's regular visits, this indifference to what was happening on the world stage might have continued indefinitely. But Najat did visit and each time she came, she reported on the increasing despair of her fellow Palestinians—despair engendered by the view that Israel was not ready for peace and reinforced by the relentless anti-Israel incitement of an unelected, bloated and nepotistic Palestinian administration.

Najat had not always felt hopelessly entangled in a never-ending political drama. As the Second Intifada was winding down in 2005, there had been some hope of progress as the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia, the so-called “Quartet,” proposed a “road map” that would have led to a Palestinian state. An Arab peace initiative followed. It would have provided for a Palestinian state based on a return to the pre-1967 armistice lines—a proposal that had little chance of Israeli acceptance given the indefensibility of the 1967 border.

Even so, from 2006-2008, Israeli president Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas met more than thirty-five times in the hope of arriving at the basics of an agreement. Their talks culminated in Olmert’s proposal to return 93.7 percent of the West Bank to the Palestinians along with land contiguous to Gaza that would have made up for the shortfall. But the negotiations ended in squabbling over geography and the seemingly intractable issues of Jerusalem, refugee status and security. Then, any hope of a unified Palestinian position shattered as an emboldened Hamas, flush with an electoral win in Gaza, ejected all remnants of Mahmoud Abbas’ Fatah party. There followed the unproductive United States-induced ten-month moratorium on Israeli settlement construction and wave after wave of unproductive United States shuttle diplomacy. In the end, the parties threw up their hands and so did Najat.

For two people as intelligent as Dareen and Khalid, indifference can only last so long. If anything, Dareen’s love for her moody sister had increased over the years and Khalid, too, had acquired a strange kind of affection for his quirky but earnest sister-in law. So, as they saw her descend into deeper despair over circumstances in the West Bank, they began to take note. Their television watching and journal reading took on a whole new meaning as they followed events with the intense interest of

newly-commissioned partisans in the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. However, even this newly acquired interest might not have been enough for them to do more than sit up and take notice. But that was not meant to be.

One sunny day as the two were taking lunch on their balcony and admiring the shimmering light bouncing of the intensely blue waters of the Persian Gulf, the telephone rang with gut-wrenching news. Najat had clandestinely joined a suicide squad. That morning, she had put on a suicide-belt, calmly passed through Israeli security and purposefully blown herself up at an Israeli supermarket. That Najat had taken with her the lives of an innocent mother and her two young children was of little concern to Dareen and Khalid. All that mattered was the foul system that had led Najat to take such a desperate act. From that moment on, both swore they would do all they could to defeat the Zionist entity and to end the pernicious rule of its Jewish miscreants.

Dareen was pregnant with twin girls. So, Khalid was in the better position to take action and he did. Khalid was now an important figure in the European branch of the QIA and sought to use his influence to stoke the increasingly hostile attitude of many European Union countries toward Israel. Since much of the EU's propaganda against Israel was conducted by commissioned NGO's, Khalid also decided to involve himself in the NGO world. Seeking a position on the board of the Qatar Development and Rescue Fund was a natural choice and one welcomed by his peers who established policy for the Fund.

As a result of Khalid's increasingly far flung connections, he soon was introduced to that part of the Qatari establishment responsible for supporting Hamas, the fundamentalist overseers of Gaza, and he generously contributed to the pro-Hamas effort with both his time and his wallet. However, he soon found working within the government to be too slow and politically cumbersome. So, he used his wallet for one additional purpose. Joining with four other like-minded and wealthy Qataris his age,

the five ideologically driven young men created *Saif Fulath min Antiqan*, “the Steel Sword of Vengeance.” The SFMA, as it was known from within, was neither publicized nor registered with any authority. Instead, it functioned under the strictest secrecy and because of this it grew rapidly. Soon, its well-paid operatives were strategically placed throughout the Middle East and Europe. It existed for one purpose only—to thwart and ultimately destroy Israel by whatever means necessary.

As Khalid reviewed the agenda for the forthcoming meeting of the board of directors of the Qatar Development and Rescue Fund, his thoughts were repeatedly drawn to Daren and the twin girls she was carrying. He did not want to go to London for the meeting, but he was new to the Fund and couldn't afford to miss so important a gathering. In addition, he was troubled by the scheduled presence at the meeting of the Jew from America, Malcolm Steinthaler. So, he forced himself to focus on the subject at hand and methodically reviewed each item in his agenda packet as if his family's wealth depended on it.

More than six thousand miles away, Malcolm and Roshni were also discussing the meeting of the Fund and the role Malcolm would assume at the meeting. As they excitedly put their ideas into a planned course of action, they could not have known that an implacable foe would be one of the participants in the meeting.

Chapter Thirty-Eight
Egypt
2018

In 1945, an Egyptian boy stumbled upon an earthenware jar near the town of Nag Hamadi. The boy opened the jar and discovered within it thirteen bound papyrus books. These, he took home to his mother who used most for kindling. However, 52 sacred texts from the books not consumed by the flames were sold to antiquities dealers and eventually became the Nag Hamadi library.

In late 2018, a year and a half after the Palm Sunday bombing of St. Marks Coptic Orthodox Cathedral that claimed the lives of seventeen worshippers, another boy was about to make a similar discovery. While playing in the rubble produced by the bombing, the boy suddenly felt some of the debris give way and found himself in a small depression. Frightened and happy to discover he had not been hurt, the boy brushed himself off and looked around. To his surprise, when he looked down at his feet, he discovered the top of a red earthen ware jar sticking out of the ground. With a little effort, he was able to free the rest of the jar from the ground. Expectantly, he opened the lid hoping to find buried treasure. Instead, he found a papyrus scroll and three small papyrus scraps with writing on them. The boy could not have known, but St. Mark's had just disgorged the scroll filed away by Athanasius in a distant fourth century version of the cathedral—the scroll containing the scribe Ahmed's account of what had taken place at Mostorod.

Disappointed but still curious, the boy took out the papyrus scroll and the scraps to see what he could make of them. He had learned to read in school. He first fingered the scraps totally mystified as to their significance. Then he moved his fingers across the text of the scroll, but the writing yielded no clues as to what he was observing. Finally, he brought the jar home to his mother.

His mother was also literate. However, she, too, could not make out any of the writing on the scroll. But, unlike her Nag Hamadi predecessor, she sensed the scroll had value and did not use the parchment for kindling. Instead, she brought the jar and its contents to her local priest who also could not read the writing on the papyrus. However, the priest had once served under Metropolitan Bishop Touma Salib who he knew to be a great scholar of ancient writings and with whom he had maintained contact even during the Metropolitan's retirement. So, with the mother's permission, the priest packaged the jar and its contents and arranged for them to be sent to the small residence near the remains of the St. Parsoma Monastery where the Metropolitan was spending his retirement years in study and contemplation.

The package arrived while the Metropolitan was taking his daily walk and was opened by his assistant, Ilyas Ghobriel. When Ghobriel discovered what was in the package, he ran to find the Metropolitan and blurted out the news of the newly arrived scroll. Together, they rushed back to the residence where the Metropolitan laid out the scroll and the three scraps of papyrus on a table and began to read. As he read, his eyes widened with amazement.

After studying the writings for the remainder of the day, the Metropolitan summoned his assistant. "Ilyas, do you know what I believe we have in front of us?"

"No, Eminence. However, I gather from your reaction that it must be important."

"Important it is, but the term does not do it justice. Of course, the writings have to be validated by others, but the handwriting—what we call the "hand"—is strongly suggestive of other writings I have studied that date back to the beginning of the first millennium. If I read this document correctly, it is a testimony to the essential role played by a Jew named Judah in guiding the infant Jesus and his family through the Egyptian

desert as they fled from Herod, and, even more importantly, in saving the baby's life."

"Eminence, that's indeed quite a discovery."

"It's much more than that for it reflects God's will in choosing a Jew as his instrument in safeguarding the baby Jesus so he could grow to manhood and complete his earthly duty. In a way, it's a validation of the stand I've taken on behalf of the Jews all of these years."

"Why is that?"

"In the simplest terms, it cannot be that the Lord would have chosen a Jewish man for the mission of saving the life of the infant Jesus if his intent was to hold the man's descendants accountable when the adult Jesus fulfilled his destiny."

Ghobriel looked at the Metropolitan a little sheepishly. "You make an important point and, now that you've explained it, one I should have recognized immediately."

"The last thing I want is for you to feel awkward, particularly in response to this discovery. What's important is that the scroll has the potential for changing the way our church looks at the Jews and their role in Jesus's life and death. As you know, since *Nostra Aetate*, the Roman Catholics have been evaluating their relationship with the Jews. But, even there, the change of attitude has to do as much with policy as theology. Here, however, we have the makings of a real and lasting doctrinal change in the church's relationship to the Jews."

Salib then looked around for a storage case about the size of the papyrus scroll. He took out a document that had been housed in the storage case and carefully replaced it with the papyrus scroll and the three papyrus scraps.

As Ghobriel watched with interest, he couldn't help blurting out his delight. "I don't think I've seen you so happy in a long time. This must be very fulfilling for you."

"It is. But, before I allow my enthusiasm to run away, I must have the scroll and the scraps reviewed by respected antiquities specialists. That's where you come in. Please call Professor Habil Ramzy from Assiut University and Professor Milad Barakat from the University of Cairo, tell them I am in need of their assistance and ask them to come here at once. These men are trustworthy Copts with whom I have worked over the years. I don't think they'll hesitate if you tell them it's important."

A week later, the two academics arrived at St. Parsoma and were introduced to the scroll and the three scraps of writing. The Metropolitan had made photo copies of the scroll and gave one copy to each of his visitors. As each surveyed the ancient writings, his reaction was similar to the that of the Metropolitan's. Ramzy was the first to speak: "Eminence, it goes beyond saying that the age and content of these writing could open a whole new chapter in our understanding of the early days of Christianity. Importantly, from what I see here, the hand used in the writing looks representative of that early period. I would love the opportunity to study the document further."

"Agreed," said Barakat, who was no less impressed than his colleague in appreciating the potential immensity of what he was observing. "We would have to do both a paleographic and carbon-dating analysis before rendering any kind of judgment. But, as of this moment, it looks very promising. Is there a way we can perform such an analysis?"

"There is indeed. However, first I must insist upon absolute confidentiality from both of you and your promise not to expose this find before its rightful time. I have chosen you two because I am confident of your professional skills, your probity and your reverence for the mother church. Can you both give

me your assurance that you'll not breath a word of this discovery except to trusted members of your departments whose work is important to your analysis?"

When both agreed, the Metropolitan told each of his visitors to take one of the photocopies of the scroll they had been studying to be used for paleographic analysis. He then gave each of them one of the three scraps found with the scroll so the two professors could perform the appropriate age and material evaluation using carbon-dating spectroscopic analysis.

The Metropolitan said goodbye to his visitors and wished them good luck in their analysis. Now alone with the scroll and the one remaining scrap, he could hardly contain his excitement. He knew some days would go by before he heard from the two academics. But that did not help to allay his impatience and his next week was filled with restless nights.

Professor Habil Ramzy had called his spectrometry laboratory and requested everything be set aside so that, on his arrival, his staff could conduct the appropriate age and carbon dating analysis of the scrap. Once at Assiut University, he gave instructions for conducting the carbon dating. Reverently, he then read the words of the photocopy over and over and compared the writing style and content with photocopies of other documents from the early First Century. With each comparison, he was more and more convinced that what he had in front of him was truly authentic.

He then checked on the laboratory performing the carbon-dating analysis of the writing scraps. He of course knew that C-14, the unstable carbon isotope measured by carbon dating, has a rate of decay of 5,730 years--the time required to reduce the C-14 in a spent organism by half. As a result, he was well aware that carbon dating the papyrus scraps was a tricky undertaking since the reliability of the technique tended to

decrease when the subject matter was less than 2,000 years in age. However, he took comfort from the fact that the Dead Sea Scrolls were of a similar age and, as early as 1991, a laboratory in Zurich had been able to carbon date the Dead Sea Scrolls within a range of thirty to sixty years.

Satisfied that the carbon dating was proceeding in an appropriate manner, he eagerly waited for the results. When the report of the carbon-dating placed the writings in the first half of the first century CE—the same time frame as his paleographic analysis had indicated—he was overjoyed. Without hesitancy, he allowed his enthusiasm to pour over as he got on the phone and dialed the number for Ilya Ghobriel at St. Parsoma.

At the University of Cairo, a different scenario was playing out. There, after comparing the hand used in the scroll with photostatic copies of other writings from the early First Century, Barakat had arrived at the same enthusiastic conclusion as his Assiut colleague. However, unlike Ramzy, Barakat had not been content to rely upon his own analysis and had sought confirmation from within the department. One of his colleagues, a professor named Abdullah Al Mostafa, was the obvious choice in that he was skilled in both paleography and carbon-dating analysis. Barakat quickly arranged a meeting with Al Mostafa and asked his colleague to perform both a paleographic comparison of the writing on the photocopy of the scroll and a C-14 spectrometry analysis of the scrap.

Barakat could not have imagined the joy he had felt in reading the scroll would cause an entirely opposite reaction in his colleague. But that was indeed the case. As Al Mostafa repeatedly read the account of how Judah had come to the rescue of the baby Jesus, he arrived at the same inescapable conclusion as the Metropolitan—the document before him had the potential for rewriting in the most favorable terms the way the world's Christians viewed their Jewish brethren. This, he

could not abide as any cementing of Judeo-Christian relations was anathema to his own views and those of the anti-Zionist cell to which he reported. He obviously couldn't change the wording of the photocopied scroll and knew he would have to be reasonably forthcoming when reporting his paleographic analysis to Barakat. Even there, he could, however, sew some doubts. The carbon dating was another matter entirely.

The university's accelerator mass spectrometer was far more sensitive than the one used in the spectrometry laboratory at Assiut University and necessitated that the utmost care be used in the preparation of samples used for carbon dating. Even the smallest amount of contamination could distort the analysis, either giving a reading that was too old or too new. Al Mostafa was aware of this consideration as much as anyone. For that reason, he had developed the most exacting protocols to ensure against such contamination and was quick to admonish younger associates whenever they varied from his required routine.

Normally, when papyrus was being prepared for C-14 analysis, Al Mostafa would have insisted on a variety of solvent washes, followed by an additional series of washes with mineral acids and bases to remove contaminants from human handling, as well as possible ground contamination from carbonates and humic acids. Al Mostafa knew that the papyrus scrap had been touched extensively by the boy who found it, which, in the ordinary course, would have necessitated removing the effects of such handling. However, the ordinary course was not what Al Mostafa had in mind. As he prepared the scrap for analysis, he was, instead, careful to employ inadequate washes and then made sure that residues from the washes remained in the sample. Predictably, the result was a false reading that provided a much later date than should have been the case.

Al Mostafa now had the data he needed to create doubt in the mind of Barakat. But, before reporting to his superior, he made one telephone call. At the other end of the line in Doha, his SFMA counterpart listened with interest and consternation

as Al Mostafa reported on the papyrus and his findings. When the call was completed, Al Mostafa's listener made a second call, this one to a man the locals who lived in the vicinity of St. Parsoma knew only by his nickname, "the Qatari."

Chapter Thirty-Nine
The Epilogue Hotel, White Plains New York
Week Six, the Present

It was dark out, but the light from the moon gave a hint of the panoramic view from the balcony off Alex's thirty-first floor room. He took out a joint from his pocket, lit it and handed it to MacKenzie. Appreciatively, she took a puff and handed it back to Alex. "Thanks. There's not much needed to add to the beauty of the night, but that sure helps."

As MacKenzie stood by the railing, Alex placed his arms around her and the two stood there silently, their cares pushed to the side by the strong marijuana and the attraction they were feeling for one another. After a while, Alex broke the silence. "What happened to your marriage?"

MacKenzie kept looking in the distance and then responded. "It's not something I enjoy talking about, but it's a fair question and I'd like you to know about me. First, I should get off the table the fact that I'm older than you."

Alex tightened his embrace to make clear her admission was of no concern. Reassured, MacKenzie continued: "My husband and I were high school sweethearts, and we both went on to Miami University. That's the one in Ohio, not in Florida. I studied health care management and he was pre-law. After graduation, he went to law school at Case Western and I worked. We were married after his second year of law school and everything was fine. He did well in school and landed a plum job in one of Cincinnati's most prominent firms. I was so proud of him."

"Since I know the ending of the story, I guess you're going to tell me it didn't last."

MacKenzie sighed, but quickly returned to her recitation. "At first, it was wonderful. My husband was a rising

star in the firm, and they showered him with attention. We were invited to parties normally reserved for senior associates and partners, and, eventually, they even gave us a golf membership to a very prestigious club. But there was a downside. As my husband rose up the ranks, they heaped more and more responsibility on him. When he was home, we barely had time together because he was so busy. Even worse, they put him in their litigation department, and he started spending weeks on end at out-of-town trials and depositions. I was eager to start a family, but on those rare occasions when my husband and I were alone, he showed little interest in either sex or the prospect of children. I began to suspect he was having an affair, although I couldn't prove it."

Alex again tightened his arms around MacKenzie and, sympathetically, urged her to continue.

"The long and short of the story is I became lonely and one day I did something about it. It was stupid, but I was feeling forlorn and, as much as I hated to admit it, I could see the days with my husband were numbered. I never was able to establish my husband was having an affair, and, ultimately, I was the one who got caught. So, I got very little from our divorce and found myself on the road, waiting to meet someone like you."

"I'm flattered but I have my own issues."

"Who doesn't. Is it with your family? Is that why you're staying in a hotel and live so far away?"

"Case closed. I love my mother and want to help her in any way I can, particularly with regard to the charges she may be facing. I might have considered staying with her, but I'm still mad at her for not standing up to my father when he was showing displeasure toward his wayward second son."

"Why was your father mad at you?"

“Because I wasn’t a great success like him or my older brother who walzed his way through Vassar with straight A’s and then went on to an Ivy League business school before joining a prestigious investment firm. Hell, even my mother has her own company and does well at it. I understood my father’s disappointment and could have dealt with it, but there was no let up to his criticism. So, instead of trying harder, I went in the opposite direction. Since I had gone to college in Arizona, nearby New Mexico seemed like a good place to go after graduating. It had the great advantage of being far from my family. As it turns out, I love Santa Fe and do okay providing guide services and working at photography whenever I can. Until my father’s passing, I was feeling pretty content. I usually kept my phone off and only interacted with the real world and, in particular with my family, when necessary. But I have to admit, now that my father is gone, I feel very empty and wish I had worked harder to make him appreciate me more.”

It was now Mackenzie’s turn to communicate her sympathy. She turned and cupped her hands on either side of Alex’s face. “I can tell you to a certainty that loss brings out all kinds of emotions. I’m sure you’ve heard that from others. But it’s true and it’s taken me a long time to get over my broken marriage and everything that followed and to stop berating myself. I think your life in Santa Fe sounds wonderful—certainly better than being on the road and going to nonstop medical administration conferences. You may not feel it, but I’d like you to know you’re a success in my book. There haven’t been many guys with whom I’ve felt as comfortable as I do now. I think it’s time for me to show it.”

They might have made love on the balcony, but for the absence of a soft place to lie down. As it was, their bodies were so entwined they hesitated to let go despite the need to leave the balcony and head for Alex’s bed. Their love making was joyous and performed with abandon. Time and again, they brought one another to ecstatic climaxes before, exhausted, they both fell asleep.

MacKenzie was the first to awaken. She had conference-related business to complete before the meetings began and was preoccupied with what she had to do. But something else had been working its way through her thoughts and had gotten in the way of her continued sleep. Gently, she nudged Alex who was sleeping soundly. Groggily, he looked at MacKenzie and smiled. “Don’t tell me its already time for you to go to work.”

“That’ll come soon enough, but there’s something else I wanted to talk to you about.”

“Sounds serious. Should I be sitting up?”

“No. Just relax. Do you remember saying that you wanted to help your mother in any way you could?”

Now both alert and perplexed, Alex did, indeed, sit up.

“Yes. But, what does that have to do with anything?”

“Simply this. I was thinking about what your brother said about something happening to one of you.”

“You mean as a way of deflecting attention from my mother?”

“Yes. And, I thought, why don’t we arrange for something to happen to you, but in a good way.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, how about we stage your disappearance! But, instead of being taken by the bad guys, you’d be taken by me. I have paid hotel rooms booked for the next few weeks and plenty of per diem for both of us. After that, I have time coming to me and we could head to Cincinnati for a little R & R. There’s no crime in disappearing and what if people jump to conclusions

and assume that something bad has happened to you! If nothing else, it might cause the investigators to get off their butts and look in different directions. You've already said you rarely answer your phone. So, your failure to respond to people calling about your whereabouts shouldn't get you into trouble. You could leave your luggage with me and then take off. I'll pack your things in my car and meet you following this afternoon's meetings. I could change my hotel reservations to less frequented places to make sure none of my coworkers see you and to give us lots of privacy."

"That's quite a plan!"

"Don't think it isn't out of self-interest. The only thing I'm worried about is your hotel bill. I don't want you to stiff the hotel."

"Don't worry about that. My father's business associate is taking care of all my bills."

"Good. Then, its decided."

"Your wonderful and your plan is wonderful. I love the idea of spending time with you, but I'm not sure I'm completely sold."

Playfully, MacKenzie climbed on top of Alex. As she began to undulate, her breasts swinging seductively, she looked down at Alex who was now emitting sounds of pleasure and totally involved in the ecstasy he was experiencing. "Well, lover boy, maybe this will help to sell you!"

Chapter Forty
St. Parsoma, Egypt
2018

Finally, Touma's anxious wait was over as he received reports from both Ramzy and Barakat. Understandably, he had hoped both reports would solidify his conclusions regarding the papyrus scroll and the writing scraps. The report from Assiut was a shot in the arm as it provided supportive conclusions from both the paleographic and carbon-dating analysis. Elated, Touma shifted to the Cairo report and was immediately disappointed as it raised minor but troublesome issues with regard to the paleographic analysis, but more importantly advised that the carbon dating could not place the papyrus in the first half of the first century.

Touma called Ramzy to discuss the conflicting reports and was encouraged at Ramzy's insistence that his department had conducted a thorough evaluation and that he was confident in the result. Even so, Touma knew he could not release the scroll to the world while its provenance was open to conflicting views from recognized authorities. What he needed was a tie breaker of unimpeachable character and credentials. He had heard of the noted authority, Jeffrey Leibowitz, from Vassar College in the United States, but didn't know whether he could trust the man to maintain a wall of silence while studying the remaining scrap and another photocopy of the scroll. Pondering his dilemma, he knew who could help him.

Picking up his cell phone, Touma called a number that provided the most welcome of associations. At the other end of the phone, Boutros answered. "Hello brother. It's nice to hear from you. How's one of the country's most revered spiritual leaders doing?"

Touma had made sure his younger brother had been well educated. When Boutros chose to study both classic Greek and Coptic history, Touma hoped that Boutros would follow

him into the church. However, that was not meant to be. Boutros' interests took him in an entirely different direction, one where his expertise would enable him to become a commercial success—buying and selling antiquities. Even so, Touma was proud of his brother, proud enough to ignore some of the rumors about Boutros's business dealings.

“As they say, flattery will get you everywhere. I'm doing well but let me return the favor. How are things at your end?”

“My health is fine, and business is doing quite well, but I'm sure you didn't call about that.”

“Actually, in this case, my call is business related.”

“Well, that's a pleasant change.”

“Don't get carried away. I've recently come upon an ancient papyrus scroll whose contents could make a revolutionary contribution to our knowledge of ancient Christianity. I've asked two noted authorities, both Copts, to evaluate the find and I've received conflicting reports. I need a tie breaker and the name that comes to mind is Jeffrey Leibowitz. He's the occupant of the Farnsworth Distinguished Chair in Classical Studies at Vassar.”

“I've heard of him. But, if you know who you want, why are you calling me?”

“The scroll in my possession could create a tidal wave of passion when it's released. I don't want it revealed until the proper time and until I'm convinced of its authenticity and age. For that reason, I have to be sure of Leibowitz's discretion and reliability. You've told me about a trusted and well-placed client in the United States. I was hoping you could contact him and inquire of Leibowitz's dependability.”

“I’d be happy to do that. My client, Maury Steintaler, is a man of great renown in his own right. I’m pretty sure Steintaler knows Leibowitz because his elder son went to Vassar. So, he should be well equipped to provide whatever assurances you need. But, before I make the call, please tell me about your find.”

After hearing from Boutros, Steintaler immediately called Leibowitz to discuss the nature of the task Touma had requested. But, as Leibowitz listened with increasing fascination, events were taking place in St. Parsoma that would preclude Leibowitz’s involvement even before it began.

Following Al Muhammadi’s call to Doha, an SFMA operative contacted Ali Hussain. The instructions given to the Qatari were precise and simple. Search the Metropolitan’s living quarters and look for the scroll, but, if it could not be found, level the quarters to the ground so that no one else would ever be able to find it. The Qatari relished the role in life he occupied and took great pride in his work. He collected the necessary explosives and began to surveil the Metropolitan’s residence. Immediately, two things became clear from his surveillance. The first was the Metropolitan’s morning walk and the second was Ilyas Ghobriel’s daily trip to the market. Each took about an hour and the two had coordinated their activities, so they were out of the house at the same time.

The Qatari was well disciplined. He would have preferred to act quickly, but he had to be sure the Metropolitan’s and Ghobriel’s morning routines did not vary. When he was confident of the predictability of their morning absences, he took action. The door to the residence had been locked but posed little problem for the Qatari as he entered. He had received a full description of the object of his search and anticipated little problem in finding what he sought. However, he had not

bargained for the many ancient documents that were housed within the residence and that slowed his search considerably. As he rummaged through numerous ancient writings, he could not have known that his search was destined to be of no avail as Ghobriel, at Touma's request, had hidden the scroll in an underground passageway leading to a secret artifacts chamber under the monastery.

As the clock ticked and the Qatari's frustration grew, he decided he had to execute his fallback instructions. Deftly, he placed the plastic explosives around the foundation of the building, walked a hundred yards from the structure, activated the explosives and drove off. The sound was deafening and caused the ground to shake under the feet of the Metropolitan who was returning from his walk. As he got closer, the Metropolitan was shocked upon seeing the smoldering ruins of the structure that had been his home. He sat down on a pile of rubble and cried.

It was in this condition that Ghobriel found his master upon returning from the market. Ghobriel quickly discerned that the Metropolitan, though shaken, was okay. Soon he had composed himself enough to ask about the scroll.

Ghobriel was reassuring. "I know where I stored it and there are some tools in the shed which is still standing. Hopefully, the camouflaged opening to the tunnel wasn't destroyed. Perhaps, with a little digging, we can find it."

"Let's not delay! But, remember, there are many articles of value stored in the artifacts chamber. So, we have to be careful not to leave a trail for scavengers. But, short of that, let's get going."

Two hours later, the two diggers uncovered a part of the camouflaged secret door leading to the tunnel that connected the residence with the artifacts chamber. The digging had been back breaking and, much as he would have liked to continue, Touma

was forced to put down his shovel and leave the remaining work to Ghobriel. Ghobriel continued to work until he had fully exposed the tunnel door with its veneer of stone camouflaging. Fortunately, the door was cleverly leveraged so one man could lift the door despite the heavy camouflage covering it.

For a passageway built almost two centuries earlier, the tunnel had held up remarkably well. Equally fortunately, the tunnel lighting that had been installed years earlier when the ventilation and temperature control systems were installed had also held up to the blast. However, Ghobriel could see that long stretches of the supporting walls had been impaired. How badly, he did not know. In addition, years ago ancient pits covered by trap doors had been built into the floor to interdict intruders. Ghobriel knew where the triggering mechanisms were located, but he worried they might have been compromised by the blast or that he might inadvertently trip one. Even so, he had to take a chance. Carefully, he moved aside some of the fallen overhead beams. The work was hard and he might have been bathed in sweat had not the ventilation system been working, making his labors more tolerable.

After several hours of toiling in the tunnel, Ghobriel's hands were shredded with cuts. However, as he pushed aside a pile of small rocks, all concern for his hands melted away. Before him was a familiar stretch of the tunnel, largely intact. With a little more digging, he soon discovered the hiding place for the case containing the scroll and the remaining scrap of writing.

Happily, Ghobriel brought the case to the surface and handed it Touma. After opening the case and assuring himself that the scroll and scrap were intact, Touma dialed an infrequently used number. After concluding his conversation, he then called Boutros with instructions.

After the calls, Ghobriel and Touma drove to a tourist hostel where the Metropolitan was not known. There, the first thing Touma did was shave his beard and exchange clothes with

his assistant. Next, he instructed Ghobriel to contact the church authorities about rebuilding the residence and refortifying the tunnel and artifacts chamber under the monastery. Touma instructed Ghobriel to keep watch until crews from the church arrived to do the construction work. Finally, Touma advised Ghobriel he would be in touch at the appropriate time. Until that time arrived, Ghobriel was to maintain silence except for a short list of persons whom Touma trusted and whose names were known to Ghobriel.

Chapter Forty-One
Budapest, Hungary
Week Six, the Present

For Farkas Heszlényi, prison life was unrelentingly boring. Some days he couldn't imagine how he would survive any longer in confinement. However, in some respects, it hadn't been so bad. He had bulked up, made a number of friends who shared his contempt for the Jews and managed to avoid any lasting injuries. More importantly, he had worked his way into one of the prison's most prominent gangs and he had hopes of utilizing his gang connections when he got out.

Compliments of his gang affiliation, he came in contact with a variety of inmates who were happy to talk about the skills that represented their way of life but had also gotten them into trouble. From these encounters, he picked up a near-encyclopedic knowledge of illicit activities, from making explosives to computer hacking and electronic eaves dropping.

Finally, the day arrived when he was to be released. As he replaced his prison garments with civilian clothes, he looked at himself in the mirror one last time and was happy with what he saw. He had grown into a man during the eight years he had served his time. His height and physique made him a formidable presence and he liked the way his eyes signaled alertness to any observer. He was delighted when one of the gang members picked him up outside the prison gate and treated him to a few beers at a local bar. But, after that, he heard nothing from the gang's extensive network and was perplexed. As his bewilderment grew, so did his frustration.

Added to his frustration was the fact he was again living at home and now had to endure his parents' endless battles over his father's drinking. Luckily, as a welcome home present, they had purchased a computer for him. It wasn't the best computer, but it did provide him with a window to the world beyond both

prison and his parents' house and it also afforded him an excuse for burrowing into his room over long periods of time.

Initially, Farkas was able to use the computer to find odd jobs and he had carefully husbanded his earnings looking to the day when he would be able to afford a place of his own. But, finding work as an ex-convict wasn't easy, and enduring the menial positions he did find wasn't any easier. Soon, his initial supply of jobs vanished and there were none to take their place.

With each passing day, he became more and more desperate about his prospects of escaping from his parents' house. He had never been contacted by anyone from the gang and had all but given up hope that something would come his way. But he did have a couple of telephone numbers he had obtained from fellow gang members while in prison. He decided to use them even though he had no idea who would be on the other end of the phone or in what direction the numbers would lead him.

Sadly, neither of the calls paid off and, once again, he was relegated to searching the internet looking for work. Most of his searches followed a familiar pattern. He would type in the kind of work for which he thought he was qualified and would then follow up by phone or email. His searches ran the range of convenience store clerk to computer technician. But each time as he got closer, his record would either disqualify him or put off a would-be employer.

As Farkas doggedly plodded on, he invariably came across sites that he hadn't anticipated. One of these, a site called "are you really looking in the right place," caused a thought to germinate in his mind. *Maybe he was pursuing the wrong skill set. Maybe he should be pursuing the skills he really understood—the ones he learned in prison.*

With this insight as a guide, he started to expand his search into new and different areas. Ultimately, he investigated

a site called “looking for adventure” and began scrolling through the options in the various pull-down menus. Suddenly, one of the options almost stopped him in his tracks. It read, “Tired of the Zionist conspiracy.” Eagerly, he clicked on the option and started reading from the new screen before him. As he continued reading, he thought it was too good to be true and went back to the top of the screen to read it again. “Are you tired of the Zionists taking over the world and want to do something about it? Do you have a sense of adventure and are willing to travel? Could you use some real pay while you are performing important work? If so, the following email address could lead you to a life-changing experience.”

He didn’t hesitate and with heightened expectation clicked on the link to the email address. He wasn’t disappointed. By return email, he received a questionnaire with a preface indicating he should fill it out and await developments. He scanned the questionnaire, with its myriad questions about the nature of his hostility toward the Jews and his willingness to take risks. He knew he was the type of person they were seeking and hoped the questions pertaining to his prison record wouldn’t turn them off as it had turned off so many other prospective employers.

Quickly he filled out the form and sent it on its way. His assessment of his attractiveness hadn’t been misplaced. Before long, he received an email asking him some additional questions and requesting his cell phone number. He breathed a sigh of relief as no mention was made of his prison record.

The next day, Farkas received the type of call he might only have dreamed about. The caller spoke a highly accented Hungarian and was pleased when Farkas confirmed that he could speak in German. The caller then asked Farkas a series of preliminary questions. Pleased with the answers he received, he then asked whether Farkas would be willing to travel to London, all expenses paid, to discuss how to mesh the organization’s

interest in putting down the Zionist conspiracy and Farkas anti-Semitic proclivities.

Farkas could hardly believe his good fortune. Of course, he was interested, and he did his best to convey his enthusiasm as unambiguously as he could. Three days later, Farkas received an e-ticket for a direct flight to London, a voucher for three nights at a hotel in the heart of the city, an Uber card and a contact number for when he arrived. He looked up the hotel and was pleased to see that it was rated four stars out of five and was located in close proximity to the sites he had always heard about.

Farkas had been on a plane only once before in his life and, as he waited in line to board the flight to London, he felt both nervous and excited. He knew the people he was about to meet would never have fronted the bill for so expensive an excursion unless they were really interested in him and he intended to do whatever it took to confirm their good judgment.

At Heathrow, Farkas collected his luggage, summoned an Uber and headed for the Gunniston Hotel. Upon arriving, his Uber driver helped him with his luggage, and gamely, Farkas handed the man a tip in recognition of the man's attentiveness and Farkas' imminent good fortune. Farkas strode up to the registration desk and gave the man his reservation form. In return, he received a double set of keys and an envelope. Farkas decided not to open the envelope until he got to his room. He walked into the elevator, pressed seven and hurried out when the doors opened. Eagerly, he found his room, opened the door and, without looking around, opened the letter and began to read its contents.

Chapter Forty-Two
Tripoli, Libya
2018

In August 2012, a maritime excavation team responding to reports by local fisherman that pottery shards were showing up in their nets began to investigate the waters off the Italian province of Liguria. A remotely-operated vehicle, an ROV, was deployed to investigate the seabed where the shards had been found. As the operators of the ROV gazed at the images on their computer screen, they discovered to their astonishment that they were looking at a nearly intact ship of indeterminate age.

Divers then began an exploration of the 200-foot deep seabed and what they found was even more astonishing. The ship, a *navis oneraria*, or Roman-era merchant vessel dating back as much as 2,000 years, was largely intact, but so was its perfectly-preserved cargo—200 four-foot high, uniquely-shaped clay pots known as *amphora*. When the pots were opened, some were discovered to contain pickled fish in garum, a popular sauce of the time made of blood, herbs and salt, all perfectly preserved. Other *amphora* pots contained perfectly preserved grain, wine and olive oil.

Researchers believed the seabed mud had enabled the cargo to remain intact over two millennia. The discovery encouraged other teams to scour the Roman sea lanes throughout the Mediterranean for more such buried vessels. In late 2018, the labors of one such team paid off. Investigating similar stories of shards interfering with fishermen's nets, a team of North African marine excavators working off the coast of Benghazi Libya identified what again was believed to be a *navis oneraria*. Their underwater exploration soon confirmed that what they were looking at was indeed a commercial vessel dating back to the first century CE.

There was, however, a problem—the daunting military landscape created by the ongoing Libyan civil war. Along the

Mediterranean coast, Libya was a latticework of war lords and competing political factions, but, even more menacingly, Libya's oil rich territory had become a potential flashpoint for competing foreign interests. In Tripoli, far to the west, Turkey, with its origins in the Muslim Brotherhood, backed by Qatar, supported the Muslim Brotherhood influenced Government of National Accord (the GNA), mostly with imported Syrian proxies. Much further to the east, the anti-Muslim-Brotherhood government of Egyptian General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, backed by Greece, supported the anti-GNA Libyan National Army (the LNA). The LNA was led by General Khalifa Haftar, who had fled the murderous regime of Libyan Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi, but who had returned to Libya vowing to rid the country of terrorists. Under Haftar's leadership, the LNA had taken Benghazi in the eastern Mediterranean and, equally important, the coastal city of Sirte, the strategic gateway to 60% of Libya's major oil fields.

As the Turkish-backed GNA savored its victory at Al-Wishka, a town near Sirte, Turkey refused to meet with Haftar to discuss a cease fire. Responding, Egypt announced that Sirte was a red line which it would not allow Turkey to cross. Italy, not wanting Turkey to unleash a flood of Syrian refugees from their refugee camps in Libya, had also taken an interest, as had Germany, which along with the rest of the EU, paid Turkey to prevent additional Syrian refugees from reaching Western Europe. Not to be outdone, Russia, which was concerned about Turkey's hegemonic ambitions in the Mediterranean and also had ambitions for a naval base in the area, was also on high alert. The threat of conflict was everywhere.

Throughout the country, civil strife persisted, often compounded by grisly acts committed by insurgents of all persuasions. This was particularly true for an activity as sensitive as the salvaging of an ancient ship that might have tremendous historical and archeological value.

The excavation company working off Benghazi was aware of this dangerous reality and had identified the local potentate, a war lord named Daou Hamroush, whose palm would need to be greased both for protection and to ensure the work would be allowed to go forward unhampered. The company was unaware—although it would not have mattered—that Hamroush had a second passion almost as strong as his love for money. He was a member of the SFMA network, devoutly committed to Israel's destruction.

Despite having taken care of Hamroush, political considerations—not to speak of the danger of armed interference—were on everyone's mind. There was also an additional problem that added to the tenuousness of the mission—the crew. Normally, the excavation company would have employed crew members from its network of experienced divers and excavators based in Greece. However, few of these professionals were interested in a mission off the coast of Libya due to the civil strife in the country. So, the company had been relegated to hiring local workers and divers who were largely inexperienced and, in the main, only spoke Arabic. The arrangement had produced a chaotic work environment and a lack of the discipline normally associated with such an important undertaking.

One of the few professionals who had agreed to join the mission was its excavation engineer, a Copt who also spoke Arabic and Greek. Paisus Bishoy, an Alexandrian from a noble Coptic family had never been religious. However, he had always enjoyed the religious insights of his older cousin, the great Coptic Metropolitan, Touma Salib. He also admired the commercial success of his other older cousin, the somewhat mysterious Boutros Salib.

Paisus' relationship with both of his cousins had been close owing to the common interest all three had in antiquities. When Paisus had chosen to study archeology, both older cousins had applauded the decision, with Boutros hoping to acquire an

understudy and Touma confident that Paisus' studies would lead him to an increased interest in early Coptic history. Of the two, Touma had been more correct, although Paisus maintained close contact with both of his cousins. Over the years, Paisus and Touma had spent many happy hours together with the unobservant Paisus teasingly asking his cousin unanswerable theological questions and the more pious Touma responding with equally playful threats of excommunication.

Despite the political chaos engulfing the country, the excavation had been going well and everyone knew they were onto something truly remarkable. Paisus had recommended that the amphora pots be left in the mud until a museum crew could instruct them on how best to protect the pots once removed from the water. However, he had been overruled by the excavation organizers who were too eager to bring their find onto land. When the first few pots came up, Paisus looked at them in amazement. From his study of the 2012 find off the coast of Italy, he knew he was looking at truly old examples of Roman era storage vessels.

Paisus walked over to the pots to get a closer look. His first reaction was concern for the lax security surrounding the pots. His second reaction was how heavy the pots were. Without anyone asking him what he was doing, he tilted one of the pots from side to side. The tilting action produced a swishing sound indicating to Paisus that the liquid content of the pot was what made it so heavy. Paisus repeated the exercise with several of the other pots and, upon hearing the swishing sound emanating from each, arrived at the same conclusion. Then, he noticed that one of the pots had something etched on it. On closer inspection, he was astonished to see that it looked like the sign of the cross. As he stared at the etching, he absent mindedly tilted the pot from side to side as he had done with the others. The pot was not nearly as heavy as the others. Even more surprising was the sound it made when he moved it from side to side. Instead of making a swishing sound as the others had, this pot, by contrast,

made a non-liquid sound, the sound of something brushing against the inside of the pot.

As with the other crew members, Paisus had agreed to maintain secrecy about the mission's findings, but his excitement got the better of him. He looked around and, believing he was alone, dialed the one number that had immediately popped into his head—the number of the greatest classicist he knew, his cousin the Metropolitan Touma Salib.

Touma answered the phone on the second ring and was delighted to hear from his cousin. He listened with heightening interest as Paisus excitedly told him about the amphora pot he had discovered. When Paisus finished, Touma's excitement matched that of his nephew. Touma didn't want to alarm his nephew by telling him he was in hiding and could do nothing. On the other hand, he didn't want to let the matter rest. So, he did the next best thing and told Paisus to call Boutros and assured him that Boutros would know what to do.

Touma had been correct. Upon receiving Paisus' call and hearing a description of the jar with the cross inscribed on it, Boutros immediately saw the importance of getting possession of the jar. His questions to Paisus began flying. Among other matters, he asked about the security surrounding the jars and, although Paisus was uncomfortable with the question given his vow, he confided to his cousin that security was lax. Then, near the end of the conversation, Boutros asked the question he had been holding off asking until the end. "If you're in Libya, the company is paying someone for protection and the opportunity to do the excavation. Do you know the identity of that person?"

When Paisus answered that he had sent some excavation specifications to the man and knew who he was, Boutros was overjoyed. Paisus put down the cell phone for a moment and came back with copies of two documents. The first was a request for information the company had received from Hamroush and the second was a copy of the company's transmittal letter to

Hamroush accompanying the requested information. Together, they provided Hamroush's physical and email address, as well as his cell phone number.

As Paisus passed along this information, Boutros copied it down. When he was finished, he had a surprise announcement for his younger cousin. "I'm going to get in touch with Hamroush and make him an offer for the pot with the cross etched on it. Unless I miss my guess, I believe Hamroush will find it very profitable to persuade the excavation organizers to turn their back on that one pot. I'll be in touch after I speak with him."

Chapter Forty-Three
The Steinhailer Mansion, Scarsdale
Week Six, the Present

Sid and Kitty Franzman had been having dinner at one of Tel Aviv's many boardwalk restaurants when they received a call from a mutual friend with news of Maury's murder. The Franzman's and the Steinhailer's had been good friends. So, the news of Maury's death was not only shocking but extremely saddening as well. As soon as she had digested the news, Kitty had called Anita to offer her condolences. Anita had not been in very good shape to talk but expressed her eagerness to see her neighbors the next time they were home.

A little over five weeks later, Kitty stood at the front door of the Steinhailer mansion and rang the doorbell. As soon as Anita opened the door, she collapsed into her friend's waiting arms and began to cry inconsolably. Kitty comforted the sobbing Anita and helped escort her back into the house, where tea was waiting for them in the solarium. The weather was still unseasonably warm but, as they looked outside through the glass walls of the solarium, the leafless trees made it clear that winter had arrived.

"Thank you so much for coming by. I can't tell you how happy I am to see you. But, why leave Israel's nice weather for a wintery Westchester?"

"You've probably forgotten. We make it a point of returning to the States during December so we can celebrate Chanukah with our grandchildren."

"Of course. How are they?"

"Adam's a dynamo and tearing up kindergarten. He only turned six last summer and he can already read. The little one is just as smart, but still has a couple of years to go before she'll begin to make out letters."

“Not surprising, given their mom’s genes. How is Darcy?”

“You mean the 2019 *Lean In* mother of the year. She’s doing an impressive impersonation of Sheryl Sandberg, balancing two young kids, a 24-7 job in the prosecutor’s office, community service and a physician husband who is just as busy.”

“She’ll do fine. You know I always had a soft spot for Darcy and don’t know how Malcom could have overlooked her.”

“It always surprised me as well. But the past is the past. Is Malcolm still seeing that attractive school teacher?”

“You mean Wendy Sonnenzweig. Sadly, that ended a few months ago. Everything seems to be ending these days! Malcolm’s talking about taking a trip to London that may last a number of weeks. Even Alex has suddenly disappeared and it’s not clear what’s happened to him.”

As Anita began to cry again at the thought of her son being the victim of foul play, Cindy again hugged her until she was able to collect herself. “You’ve been through so much. But, don’t worry about Alex. He’s always been good at disappearing acts.”

“I know, but we were doing so well together. I could really feel the empathy and suddenly he was gone without a trace. I’m really worried.”

“Is anyone investigating his disappearance?”

“Yes. The FBI has been here three different times, always with the same questions.”

“You poor thing. Now that I’m back for a while, I’ll help you work through it. Is there anything new on Maury’s murder or who might have done it?”

Anita might well have begun crying again as she considered her friend’s questions. But, instead, they jolted her into a state of heightened reality. “Apparently, you haven’t heard!”

“Haven’t heard what?”

“They think I may have done it.”

“Go on! How could anyone accuse you of such a thing? You’re not even capable of swatting a mosquito let alone killing your husband. Where’d such an absurd notion come from?”

Anita hadn’t wanted to get into her affair with Ralph Gittelson. But she knew she couldn’t avoid it. “It’s due to my affair with Ralph and because I stood to lose a lot under the terms of a marital agreement I had with Maury.”

“I know things weren’t going well with Maury and you, and that your affair with Ralph was as much a cry for help as anything else.

“I’d like to think it was. But I really messed up. Even after Maury showed a willingness to listen, I saw Ralph again.”

“Oh, no!”

“To make things worse, it was the day before Maury was murdered. That’s why they think I may have done it.”

“This is crazy. Isn’t there anything to exonerate you?”

“I had hoped so. We even identified two Torah crowns in Maury’s collection that we think he received from the other

murdered man the night they were both killed. We thought it might open the door to determining why the other man was here and why he and Maury were murdered. But, instead of launching into an exhaustive investigation, the detective on the case, a man named Hemingway, seems to be more interested in pursuing me. So far, the most exonerating consideration has been Alex's disappearance and the possibility that whoever killed Maury may have taken Alex."

"That's awful. Weren't there any witnesses to the murder?"

"No. I wish there had been."

"Have they at least identified the other man?"

"Not yet, I'm afraid."

"What about security cameras? I know you have them. Did any of your cameras capture any pictures that might lead to an identification of the killer or anything else that might get you off the hook?"

"No. You're right about our having plenty of security cameras. But Maury was a penny pincher when it came to some things. In this case, he only arranged for security cameras where there were windows and doors. So, there were none in the car port where the killer got a hold of my car. Nor, were there any in the driveway where Maury and the other man were killed. I asked Maury on many occasions to beef up our security installations and he agreed, but he never got around to installing security cameras in the carport area or the driveway."

"Don't blame him too much. There hasn't been an attempted robbery on this street for ages. Even so, Sid and I have always believed in as many security cameras as possible. Unlike you, we arranged for them to cover our driveway as well as the pool area behind the house."

At Kitty's response, Anita's eyes lit up. "Kitty, do your security cameras cover the full length of your driveway all the way to the street?"

"Yes, they do. What of it?"

"What of it! You may have just saved my life. Were your cameras on and recording while you were away?"

"Why, yes."

"Then, they must have been recording the night Maury was killed and they may have caught images of what was happening across the street in our driveway."

"You know, you might just be right. I'll ask Sid to have the company isolate the footage from the night Maury died."

Chapter Forty-Four
Jerusalem, Israel
2018

Sarah Schinazi had retired from her job at the hospital and now worked part-time in a facility that treated battered women. Since Toumy's visit in 2005, Sarah had been in regular contact with him by email and, on rare occasions, by cell phone. She did not have a picture of him, but he occupied as vivid a picture in her mind's eye as did her own father.

As she composed her emails over the years, Sarah often reminded herself of the irony of being a Jewish woman in a country of Jews, while reserving the deepest place in her heart for a Coptic bishop. A Metropolitan no less! Irony notwithstanding, her senior years were now filled with memories of her childhood-friend-turned bishop and what might have been in a different dimension.

To stave off the ravages of arthritis, Sarah had taken to doing yoga in the morning. When the weather was nice, she would perform her exercises on the balcony. On the morning she received the call from Touma, she had been trying to master a new yoga position. She heard her cell phone ring from inside the apartment and almost didn't answer. Her yoga time was sacrosanct and normally she would not have responded to the phone. However, on this morning, she felt obligated to respond. One of the women she was treating at the center had sustained a concussion from a domestic quarrel that had turned violent. When Sarah left the clinic the preceding evening, the women was showing disturbing signs of dizziness and Sarah had asked to be updated.

As quickly as she could, Sarah got up from the yoga mat, dashed into the apartment and made a grab for the phone. To her surprise, it was not the clinic on the other end of the phone, but Toumy. She tried being cordial, expressing her delight at

hearing his voice and avoiding any inquiry why he was calling so early in the morning. However, she could sense the tension on the other end of the phone and decided to switch tactics. “Toumy, are you okay? Is there something wrong?”

Sarah waited for a seemingly interminable period of time before she heard Toumy’s voice again. “There’s been an attempt on my life.”

Stunned, Sarah could only blurt out: “Was it those fanatics who’ve tormented your community the last few years?” She was quite surprised by Toumy’s answer.

“I don’t know. But I’m sure it has something to do with an ancient scroll that has recently come into my possession.”

“What does it say?”

“I promise I’ll tell you all. But I need a big favor.”

“Anything. Your one of the reasons I dismiss my aches and pains as minor inconveniences for the rewards life otherwise offers.”

“A lovely compliment. But, before we go any further, I have to ask you an impertinent question. Do you live alone?”

“That’s quite a question for a man sworn to celibacy!”

“I don’t mean it that way. What I do mean is this: I’d like to bring the scroll to Israel, but I have no safe place to stay. May I stay with you?”

For a moment, Sarah thought she was going to swoon at the prospect of Toumy staying with her. However, she quickly reproached herself for so lascivious a thought. Clearly, Toumy was not making a proposal of any kind, but rather asking for sanctuary. “Of course, you can stay here.”

Sarah could hear Toumy sigh with relief at the other end of the phone before expressing what was now foremost on his mind. “It may be dangerous and you’re the last person I want to put in danger.”

Sarah knew that, if nothing else, a brave response was required. “Toumy, if there’s one thing we know about in Israel, its danger. More importantly, we know how to deal with it when it comes. When will you arrive?”

Sarah had offered to pick up Toumy at Ben-Gurion Airport. However, Toumy advised he would take the new high-speed train from the airport and meet her at the train station in Jerusalem. As the hour of Toumy’s arrival approached, Sarah found herself planted in front of the bathroom mirror. After what seemed like hours of indecision, she forced herself to give up. Had she been skilled at such matters, she might have made some headway. But she’d never been concerned about appearance, and she knew she was unlikely to make a dent now that she was well into her seventies.

Sarah was not unmindful of the danger confronting Toumy and his fellow Copts, but she couldn’t have been happier as she entered the train station. She positioned herself so that she could see all of the arriving passengers and settled in for fifteen minutes before the train’s scheduled arrival. To her consternation, she saw no one emerge from the train with a long beard let alone the robe of a Coptic metropolitan.

She was about to give up in disappointment when one of the passengers approached her. He was trailing two pieces of luggage behind him—one shaped like a large tube. Absentmindedly, Sarah looked up at the approaching man and then looked again. *Could it be?* she wondered. The man who was standing in front of her was the same height as Toumy and also looked to be about the right age. But he wore no priestly

garments and he was clean shaven. Her quandary was soon put to a rest as the man removed the hat he was wearing and extended his hand. “Is my modest disguise so effective you don’t remember me?”

Sarah stared at the man’s clean-shaven face and then looked at his eyes. There was no question now. In front her was Toumy, perhaps a little different in appearance, but unquestionably the same person. Without thinking, Sarah threw herself into Toumy’s arms and was delighted when he didn’t resist. “It’s so good to see you, but I’ve been so worried. And, your face! I almost didn’t recognize you. Where shall we go? How can I help?”

“It’s great to see you as well. Let’s head for your apartment. Does anyone know I’m coming?”

“I didn’t tell anyone. I’ve been at a loss as to how I would explain the arrival of a Coptic bishop who will be staying with me. But, now that you’ve affected this new persona, I have many more options available to me if anyone asks. How would you like to be my cousin from Greece? If I recall the newspaper accounts of your earlier visit, you speak modern Greek to go along with your study of ancient Greek.”

“Greek it is. Now, let’s head for your place and I’ll explain all. I’m eager to unburden myself of the precious cargo I’m transporting and to take the next step.”

As the two climbed the stairs to Sarah’s apartment, she was relieved that no one had observed the arrival of her guest. Once inside, she showed Toumy to her spare bedroom and waited while he unpacked. Soon, he came out with an iPad which he opened to pictures of the scroll. “These are pictures of the original scroll that is in the tube I brought. You may know that Greek was the written language of the educated class during Roman times, particularly at the time of Jesus.”

“Yes. It’s hard to escape history of all kinds in this country.”

“I’m sure. Now, I’m going to fast forward a few pages. See this section. This is the writer’s description of himself and his account of an episode he observed in his home town of Mostorod, Egypt, shortly after what we believe to be the birth of Jesus.”

Sarah had tried to be patient about her concern for Toumy, but her nerves now got the better of her. “Before you continue, I’m worried. Please tell me about your shaved face and your civilian clothes and the danger you’re in.”

Her concern would have to wait, as Toumy laconically replied “all in time.”

“Then, at least tell me how you know the scroll is authentic and written at the time you claim.”

“One of the reasons I’m here is to find someone who can help me answer your questions. In Egypt, I examined the scroll extensively and concluded it was authentic. But, to be sure of my conclusions, I entrusted camera copies of the scroll as well as original writing scraps found with the scroll to two academics, who swore to maintain silence until I indicated otherwise. They both compared the writing on the scroll with online library copies of other Greek writings from Roman times and then performed carbon dating on the scraps. One reported back excitedly, saying he was confident the document was authentic and that the carbon dating had traced it back to the time of Jesus. The other had questions arising from the results of the carbon dating performed in his laboratory. I didn’t want to release so important a document to the world while there was disagreement as to its origin. My plan was to send a set of pictures and the one remaining writing scrap to a noted expert I

had read about and who teaches classics at Vassar College in New York, a Jewish man named Jeffrey Leibowitz.”

“What happened?”

“You remember my little brother Boutros?”

Sarah laughed. “I certainly remember him as a little boy but can’t say any more than that.”

“Point taken. Boutros is a dealer in antiquities with extensive contacts in America. He had told me about one of his clients, a well informed and influential financier named Maury Steinhaler who, despite being Jewish, had been very supportive of the Coptic community. I wanted Boutros to contact Steinhaler and ask him to find out whether Leibowitz was reliable and could keep his findings confidential. Boutros agreed to help. Soon, he reported he had been in touch with Steinhaler who knew Leibowitz quite well. Steinhaler not only vouched for Leibowitz but, in addition, agreed to approach Leibowitz to see if he would agree to do the analysis.”

“Quite a story.”

“Yes, but only the beginning. When Boutros reported that Leibowitz was available and eager to help out, I was about to arrange for the writing scrap and pictures to be sent to America. But then my residence was bombed. I had led a quiet life since I retired and couldn’t imagine how I could be in someone’s cross hairs for political or religious reasons. So, I quickly concluded the bombing must have had something to do with the scroll. I left my assistant to attend to the largely-destroyed residence, called you to see if you could put me up and then called Boutros to let him know I was heading to Jerusalem with the scroll and the remaining scrap. So, here I am.”

“I’m so glad you’re okay. As I said, that’s quite a story. From your description, it does sound like there has to be a link

between the scroll and the bombing. What could it possibly say to provoke such an attack and, even more pressing, who might have done it?"

"Your first question is easier to respond to than your second! I don't have to tell you about the two-millennium-long Christian persecution of your people, owing to the Gospel accounts of the Jews' role in the death of Christ."

"I thought that, after *Nostra Aetate*, all was forgiven!"

"Within the Roman Catholic hierarchy there has been a real about face in Church attitudes toward the Jewish community. But, even among Catholics and clearly among Copts, many throughout the world are still influenced by ancient prejudices, based largely on centuries old church dogma. The increase in anti-Semitism around the world is certainly evidence of that."

"As you can imagine, here in Israel, we're very concerned about the increase in anti-Semitism."

"As am I. That's why I'm so excited about the scroll. The account has the potential for depriving anti-Semites of their most potent weapon—the contention that Jews are to be despised as Christ killers. The account is by an Egyptian man who lived in Mostorod, one of the cities of ancient Egypt through which Jesus and his family are said to have traveled while they were fleeing from a murderous Herod. In Coptic tradition, Jesus caused a spring to rise in Mostorod. The writer's description is a little different. He first notes that Jesus and his mother and Joseph were traveling through Mostorod under the patronage of a Jewish man named Judah. They must have been short of water, for the caravan of which they were a part immediately headed for the spring that ran through the town. However, when they arrived at the spring, they found no water. The spring had gone dry and the townspeople were in despair."

“Why were Jesus and his family traveling under the protection of Judah?”

“We don’t know the whole story from this account. However, the writer, a man named Ahmed, says he recognized Judah when Judah returned to Mostorod a few years later. He describes a conversation he had with Judah at the time, in which he quotes Judah as saying Joseph was his cousin.”

“Okay. What does Ahmed say in his account?”

“As the townspeople were becoming increasingly desperate over the loss of the spring, Mary, who was carrying Jesus, and another woman, presumably Judah’s wife, who was also carrying a baby, approached the spring hoping that someone might take pity on the babies and share some water. Suddenly, the baby Jesus began to cry and, according to Ahmed, as he did, the spring instantaneously came back to life. The townspeople must have heard the rush of water and, driven by thirst, ran toward the stream stumbling over one another. Judah was standing nearby and saw to his horror that Jesus had been knocked out of his mother’s arms by the stampeding townspeople and was in danger of being crushed. Quickly, he darted toward the unprotected baby and, at risk to his own life, managed to save the child from an almost certain death.”

“That’s quite amazing.”

“What’s even more amazing are the theological implications for Christian attitudes toward the Jews.”

“You mean if God intended the Jews to be despised as Christ killers why would he have chosen a Jewish man to rescue Jesus from Herod and then save the baby’s life so he could carry out his mission in later life?”

“Exactly. The potential for Jewish-Christian reconciliation is enormous. Obviously, not everyone is happy

about that prospect, especially the persons who bombed my residence after presumably looking in vain for the scroll.”

Chapter Forty-Five
Santa Fe, New Mexico
Week Six, the Present

For Alex, the ten days since leaving the hotel had been a whirlwind of delight and discovery. Mackenzie's and his first stop after White Plains had been Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. At first, Alex's nights had been spent making love to MacKenzie and his days lounging in the hotel room. However, after two days of being confined to the small room, Alex had begun to experience cabin fever. He knew it wouldn't be advisable to go to a public place such as the Hershey factory where there would be surveillance cameras, but he reasoned that just being out on the street couldn't hurt.

Rummaging through his duffle bag, he pulled out a pair of running shoes, gloves, a turtleneck jersey and a fleece hoody. They weren't what he ordinarily used to wear while running in cold weather, but they would have to do. He checked his cell phone for a running route, completed his warm-up stretches and took off.

His route first took him past the State Capitol with its Renaissance dome that replicated St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Then, he ran along the trail bordering the bank of the Susquehanna River and ended his run at the historic Fort Hunter Mansion and Park. By the time he was finished, he was both exhausted and exhilarated. The run had enabled him to wear off the tension of his father's death and had served to heighten the exhilaration of being in Mackenzie's orbit.

There had never been a time in Alex's life when he was in want of anything and, for that matter, neither had any of his friends. Now, by contrast, as he lay in bed with MacKenzie and asked her about the day's events, her description of the challenges posed by life on the conference circuit provided him with a new kind of appreciation. Her descriptions of the hidebound personalities and roaming hands she had to deal with

were both sobering and revealing. But there was no bitterness on her part. Often her descriptions were as witty as they were concerning. Most importantly, her assessment of the world around her was genuine and generous. He was finding MacKenzie to be much more than the mere object of fascination she had been when he agreed to leave the hotel with her.

After another day of running during the afternoon and physical and emotional exploration at night, the time had come for the two of them to leave for Mackenzie's last stop before returning to Cincinnati. As with Harrisburg, Columbus, Ohio, was a state capital with its own impressive legislative complex. In addition, it offered numerous running routes through the city's parks and its legendary athletic powerhouse of a university. As Alex ran by the university's horseshoe-shaped football stadium with its seating capacity of almost 103,000 persons, he flashed back at his own time at Arizona State. Not as big as Ohio Stadium, ASU's Sun Devil Stadium had been the scene of many a strung-out Saturday afternoon for Alex. At the time, it seemed quite normal, even liberating. But now that his father was gone, he better understood some of the wasteful aspects of his collegiate behavior and for the first time it bothered him.

That night, he eagerly waited for MacKenzie to return to their new hotel room. There was going to be a cocktail party after the meetings and MacKenzie had said she'd be late. Finally, Alex was relieved to hear Mackenzie's knock. As he opened the door, both MacKenzie and he were surprised to see one of her co-workers come into view. The woman, whose name was Angela, could easily spoil everything. However, Alex and Mackenzie's fears were soon allayed as Angela, too drunk to see where she was going, slipped on the carpet and nearly passed out. MacKenzie helped her to her room and fished out her room key from her pocket book. Nearly insensible, Angela slumped on to her bed and blacked out.

Back in the room, MacKenzie reassured Alex that nothing was likely to come of their encounter with Angela. As

she took off her blouse, Alex hugged her from behind and cupped his hands over her breasts. “I’m a bit jealous of Angela and the others. They get to see you all day and I’m only with you for a few hours in the evening.”

Placing her hands over Alex’s, MacKenzie retorted teasingly, “but, as we used to say in pre-school, it’s quality time.” Alex uttered his agreement and gently began to massage Mackenzie’s breasts. Her excitement began to mount, but she needed to say something first. She turned around and looked at her new beau. “I really mean it. The time with you has been quality time. I’ll admit that running off with you was a bit self-serving. I was tired and feeling worn out and you were there for the asking.” Now kissing Alex, she continued, “but the time I’ve spent with you has opened my eyes to the possibility of something very different—something lasting.”

Mackenzie’s pressed her body against Alex’s. As their parted lips met and their hands frantically searched each other’s bodies, Alex felt himself soaring to a higher place than he had ever been before. He picked up MacKenzie and lay her on the bed as his mouth explored every part of her. She quivered with excitement and her gasps sent Alex to even greater heights. Finally, when he could hold back no more, he entered her and, together, they brought one another to an ecstatic climax.

When it was over, Alex lay on one elbow looking into Mackenzie’s gemstone green eyes. “Today, when I was jogging, I thought about how I had allowed my past to run amuck. It was as if I was reproaching myself for not having led a worthy enough life for you.”

“Don’t be silly. Whatever you’ve done before, all that counts is the present.” Reaching for his thigh, she added playfully, “and, what you do in the present is pretty damn good.”

Alex was not about to be diverted so easily. “I mean it. This may have begun as a way of removing the spotlight of

suspicion from my mother. But, in a few short days, its grown into something much bigger for me as well. I really do want to be worthy of you and I want to begin now. When you finish here, let's drive cross country to Santa Fe. There's something there I want to show you."

MacKenzie began moving her hand on Alex's thigh in slow circles. "Let's do that. But first I have to check in at my office in Cincinnati for a few days. After that, we'll drive to Santa Fe." Alex nodded agreeably as he felt Mackenzie's hand moving up his thigh. As she stroked up and down, his excitement could no longer be contained and, with a last wave of excitement, he soon let go.

Mackenzie's small, studio apartment was not in Cincinnati, but rather in the less-expensive suburban community of Covington, Kentucky. Alex was impatient to begin their cross-country trip, but again entertained himself with river runs, this time along the Ohio River. When MacKenzie announced she was ready to go, Alex could not conceal his excitement. Following the interstate highways across Kentucky and through Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas, the driving time to Santa Fe was more than twenty hours. Taking shifts, they were able to make the journey in less than two days, arriving after dark at Alex's apartment on Summit Ridge near the Old Santa Fe Trail.

The next morning, MacKenzie was up first. She felt the thinness of the air, owing to Santa Fe's 7,400 high elevation. But, more importantly, she was delighted with the view. It seemed as if she could see forever. She was close in her assessment. From its location near St. John's College, the view from Alex's building was stunning. Depending on the time of day and the weather, one could see scores of miles into the distance and the hues that greeted the viewer changed from fiery red to rust to soft shades of pink. As MacKenzie looked off into the distance, the day gave every indication of being one of the city's many sunny gems and,

despite the long drive she had experienced, MacKenzie felt energized and alive.

Soon Alex came outside and joined MacKenzie who was gushing with enthusiasm. “The colors are amazing. I never imagined anyplace could be so pristine, untamed and beautiful.”

“Agreed. That’s what I wanted to show you. Let’s have a quick breakfast. Then, we’ll take a short ride.”

As advertised, the ride was short, with each bend of the road revealing one beautiful scene after another. A small adobe building revealed itself in the distance. Soon, they arrived at the structure. On closer inspection, MacKenzie observed that the building was bigger than she had first thought. The surrounding views were so beautiful that Alex had all he could do to nudge her into the building. However, once inside, MacKenzie had no regrets. What she was looking at was a studio with hundreds of framed photographs on the wall and a full array of photography equipment.

As she looked from scene to scene of snow-covered mountains to crusty, hard scabble desert she marveled at the variation in theme, color and setting of the photographs. The effect was spellbinding, and she was transfixed. “It’s amazing! Is this all your work?”

Happily, Alex nodded his acknowledgment.

“No wonder you wanted to bring me here. This place is marvelous. Who was it who was talking about being unworthy?”

“That’s what I was hoping your reaction would be.”

“Does your family know about this place and your work?”

“They know I bought a place. But I figured they would regard my work as frivolous.”

“Are you kidding? You’re a fabulous photographer. You could open a gallery or go online and make a killing.”

“I was thinking of making this my gallery. You haven’t seen it yet, but there’s living quarters in the back with a beautiful view and a small coral with enough room for two horses.”

“Well, why haven’t you taken action? Do you have anything against being the next Ansel Adams?”

“I guess I was too busy trying to find myself and shake my family’s shadow. Besides, I’m not very good at administrative stuff and I need someone I can trust to run the place while I’m out taking pictures. Do you know anyone who might be able to fill such a role?”

Mackenzie’s face lit up as she heard Alex’s words. “Is that an offer?”

“Actually, I was thinking more in terms of a proposal.”

MacKenzie broke into tears. She had all she could do to steady herself as she watched Alex drop to one knee.

“Before you say anything you may regret, I have to tell you something. Remember the affair I told you about?”

“Yes. But it doesn’t matter.”

Alex, it left me with a daughter. Her name is Colby and she lives with my mother in Cincinnati while I travel.”

“Alex remained on his knee. “I suspected as much.”

“What! How could you possibly know?”

“In Covington, you professed to go into the office each day while we were there. But, inexplicably, you always left your computer at the apartment. Then, one day, I dropped some change next to your bed and as I was scooping it up, I spied a little doll under the bed.”

“Yet, you still brought me to Santa Fe?”

“Of course.”

“Why?”

“In the hope, she would look like you.”

“I can’t believe this. I can’t believe we met just a little while ago. I can’t believe this fairy tale of a place and how talented you are.” Once again, MacKenzie dissolved into tears and would have stood there sobbing had she not reminded herself that Alex was still on bended knee. “Are you really asking me to marry you?”

“I am and my knee is beginning to hurt.”

“Then get up so you can kiss the future Mrs. Alex Steinhailer.”

After they kissed and hugged, Alex momentarily affected a serious demeanor. “I’m thinking it would be nice to become reengaged with my family. Do you think you could become Jewish if only for appearances at the ceremony?”

“I could become cardboard if only for the ceremony and maybe thereafter. But we really should contact your family and relieve them of any anxiety linked to your disappearance.”

“Speaking of my family, I’ve been thinking about what we know of my father’s murder.”

“Do you really want to talk about that now?”

“Yes. What I can’t understand is how there was so little evidence of the meeting between my father and the other man who was killed. Mother said she went into my father’s study and saw the computer open and a cell phone sitting on his desk. But both have been investigated and there are no leads. My mother swears there was nothing else. But even though it feels like a dead end, there had to have been more.”

“Who else had access to the study?”

“Just my brother and he says there was nothing. But, now that I think about it, he did mention offhandedly that he brought something to Jeffrey Leibowitz, my father’s friend at Vassar and a specialist in antiquities. I thought it had to do with my father’s gift to the college. But, as I piece together the timeline, my brother indicated he had already met with the Vassar administration about the gift earlier in the day. Why then would he have remained on campus to show anything to Leibowitz unless it related to the circumstances of my father’s murder?”

As MacKenzie uttered the words, “you have a point,” Alex was already dialing his brother’s number.

At seeing his brother’s name, Malcolm excitedly placed the cell phone to his ear. “Alex, you’re okay. We’ve been so worried about you. We thought you’d been abducted.”

“I’m sorry about my silence. I’ll explain later. But, for now, what did you bring to Leibowitz and what did it have to do with father’s murder?”

Malcolm was caught off guard by his brother’s call. He was so relieved Alex was okay that he didn’t have the resolve to avoid his brother’s question. So, cathartically, he blurted out everything he knew.

Chapter Forty-Six
Benghazi, Libya
2018

Daou Hamroush had indeed been impressed with Boutros' offer, a third of which had been wired immediately and from a discrete source. Further, as Boutros had envisioned, Hamroush had no difficulty in persuading the anxious excavation organizers to release the pot with the cross.

Two days after he spoke to Paisus, Boutros, using the assumed surname, Sawiris, and driving a late-model Land Rover, arrived at the site of the offshore excavation. He would have liked to greet Paisus warmly but, as they had discussed, he did not want to expose his cousin as the source of his intelligence. Boutros inspected the pot with the cross etched on it and expressed satisfaction. Then, as the organizers looked on with seeming indifference, one of the workers helped Boutros wrap the pot in bubble wrap and then place it in the Land Rover. All that remained was for Boutros to pay Hamroush the remaining two-thirds of the agreed upon sum for his services.

Again, Boutros would have liked to hug his cousin, but he knew that a discrete smile of appreciation would have to do. Then, as Hamroush had directed, Boutros got into the Land Rover and followed one of Hamroush's henchmen, a man named Mahmoud, to a sumptuous Mediterranean villa where Hamroush awaited his visit. There, over tea and cakes, Boutros and Hamroush completed the transaction. Following a tour of the villa and an introduction to Hamroush's family, Boutros held the basket of fruit Hamroush had given him for the return journey and prepared to leave.

As Boutros was washing in preparation for his departure, Hamroush took Mahmoud aside. "As we have talked, let's find out what the infidel is up to. Depending on what we find, we

may be able to treat the admittedly generous sum Mr. Sawiris has deposited with us as a mere down payment.”

Mahmoud’s malignant smile signaled a knowing response.

“Have you made preparations to leave and is my Mercedes fully gassed?”

“I have and, as you instructed, the car has a full tank.”

Since all of the funds were wired or in cash, we don’t have Sawiris’ address, and his license plates may be registered to a dummy third party. So, you’ll need a tracking device to find out where he goes. Has one been attached to the Land Rover?”

“It has.”

“Good. And, you have armaments and listening equipment in the car?”

Mahmoud answered in the affirmative once again. “Excellent. Check your cell phone to make sure you have his cell phone number. I forwarded it to you this morning.”

“It’s there.”

“Then we are set. Be careful and keep whatever distance the tracking device will allow. As soon as you have something to report, call me on my cell phone. In the meantime, I have to make some calls of my own to our confederates in Doha. They may have knowledge of our mysterious buyer.

Boutros had not left anything to chance. After leaving the grounds of the villa in his Land Rover, he tapped on his cell phone and called Yousef Tadros, his confidential assistant, all-

purpose IT specialist and occasional security officer. Yousef had agreed to follow Boutros to Benghazi and, at Boutros' direction, had been watching the villa from a distance. "Yousef, do you see anything of interest?"

"Yes. You are being followed by a white Mercedes. From the distance the driver is maintaining, my guess is he must have placed a tracking device on your car."

"Thanks, my good friend. I don't want to do anything about the tracking device right now lest I force his hand. When I'm close to our building, I'll find an excuse to stop and look for the device. Our part of Alexandria is enough of a maze to confuse even we locals. Once there, I'm sure I can lose him in the warren of streets leading to the building. In any event, I'll travel at a slow speed so you can arrive in Alexandria first and provide a reception committee if need be. It'll be a long trip since I don't want to stop overnight as we did on our way to Benghazi."

"Got it. I'm on my way."

What was a long ride under the best of circumstances was made even longer by the slow speed Boutros maintained throughout the journey back to Alexandria. Fourteen hours and a long nap later, Boutros arrived in the vicinity of his neighborhood and immediately headed to the garage that maintained his car. He told the owner, a trusted Copt with whom he had dealt for years, what he was looking for. An attendant then drove the Land Rover into one of the garage's bays and twenty minutes later, the same attendant returned the car to Boutros. He also handed Boutros an envelope with the listening device in it.

From a short distance, Mahmoud was trying to discern why Boutros had stopped at the garage. He was nearby and could see the Land Rover, but he was not close enough to see

the attendant hand Boutros the envelope. As a result, he didn't know the listening device had been disarmed until he tried to follow Boutros from a distance. When he realized what had happened, he frantically tried to catch up to Boutros so he could follow him visually. He breathed a sigh of relief when the Land Rover finally came into sight. But his relief was short lived. Just as Mahmoud thought he was back in control, Boutros pulled his vehicle onto a small side street that led to the building he used as his place of business and residence. Mahmoud was able to react quickly and make the same turn, but, as soon as he did, he knew the chase had ended. All he could see in front of him was a spaghetti complex of small intertwined streets. Boutros' Land Rover was not to be found on any of them.

Despondently, Mahmoud parked the car and called Hamroush, who answered immediately. "I tracked him to what I think is his neighborhood in Alexandria. But just before he arrived here, I followed him to a local garage where an attendant drove the vehicle into one of the garage's repair bays."

"Why did he stop there?"

"I don't really know. I can only guess he wanted to have his car checked after so long a drive. I'm guessing the garage attendant must have stumbled onto the tracking device because when Boutros drove away, the transponder stopped working. I did everything I could to follow but I lost him in the old streets. I'm so sorry I failed you."

"We'll talk about that later. It would have been better if you could have followed him to his doorstep, but you did fine. Our friends in Doha are very interested in Mr. Sawiris, if indeed that is his real name. You still have the listening devices?"

"Yes, I do. Thank you for your understanding."

"Good. Since we know his cell phone number from his original call to me, tapping his phone should not be a problem.

In that regard, here is a number you should immediately call. It goes to a person in Doha who is an expert at hacking cell phones. Ask for Fahad. He will give you instructions on what to do next. If you run out of money, let me know.”

Chapter Forty-Seven
The Steintalher Mansion, Scarsdale
Week Six, the Present

Predictably, the Franzmans' security camera had not been set up to capture events taking place across the street in the Steintalhers' driveway. However, the camera had recorded all the events that had occurred at the foot of the Franzmans' driveway as well as the immediately adjacent stretch of street. Focusing on the footage from the early evening of the night of the murders, it hadn't taken long for the security company's technician to observe something strange.

During the approximate time of the murders, a car had circled past the Franzmans' house on several occasions. As the evening light began to dim, the car parked on the Franzmans' side of the street next to their driveway. Excitedly, the technician froze the screen with the parked car and tried to identify the occupant. However, the camera angle was not well positioned for such an identification. Nor, was the license plate visible.

Having done his best without any concrete results, the technician unfroze the screen and began looking again. Then he sat up with a start as the screen showed a man running from the Steintalher's driveway. After crossing the street, the man looked back for a moment and then jumped into the waiting car which then sped off. Painstakingly, the technician isolated the frame that showed the man taking a last look. In the low light, the camera had captured the man's face. It was not the best picture, but the technician knew it was identifiable. Excitedly, he uploaded the image and forwarded it to his supervisor.

It did not take long for the image to reach Hemingway's desk. Frustrated with the lack of progress in the case, Hemingway had been considering lodging charges against Anita. However, when he saw the image from the Franzmans' security tape, he knew he had to reconsider. He couldn't dismiss the possibility that the running man and Anita had acted in

concert, but his gut told him that was unlikely. Quickly, he sprang into action. His first act was to place the picture on a state-wide high alert so it would be compared to every person apprehended since the night of the murders. His second act was to call Horace Feinbloom and advise him that new evidence potentially exonerating his client had come to light.

Malcolm had been pondering releasing the thumb drive to Hemingway in an effort to alleviate the pressure on his mother. However, he was having misgivings. He had not been impressed with the progress of the case, especially the lingering cloud hanging over his mother, and he had doubts about how the authorities would use the thumb drive. More importantly, since meeting with Jeff Leibowitz, he better appreciated the extraordinary importance of what it revealed and the necessity of finding Boutros before anything was revealed to the world. Still, he felt he needed to do something to help his mother.

As Malcolm was pondering his dilemma, his cell phone rang. An exuberant Feinbloom was on the other line. Feinbloom explained he had already spoken with Anita and that she had asked him to call Malcolm. Malcolm released a great sigh of relief as Feinbloom told him about the Franzmans' security tape. Feinbloom warned that Hemingway had not ruled out the remote possibility of collusion between Anita and the man caught on the security camera. Even so, Malcolm knew the footage of the escaping man coupled with the identification of the Torah crowns as the objects delivered on the night of the murders would be more than enough to shatter Hemingway's case against his mother. He wouldn't have to release the thumb drive after all.

Malcolm picked up his cell phone and called his brother. "Alex, how are you?"

Alex's response was not what Malcom had expected. "I'm great. Do you remember my telling you about MacKenzie?"

"Of course. It sounded like she had some potential."

"There was indeed. I want mother and you to meet her. We're on our way to Scarsdale and should be there by tomorrow."

Malcolm was both stunned and delighted by his brother's announcement, but there was business he wanted to discuss. So, he cordially expressed pleasure in hearing his brother's good news. He then told him about his telephone call with Feinbloom and the likelihood their mother would be removed from suspicion.

The next day, Malcolm drove over to his mother's house where bottles of champagne were waiting to celebrate both the news from Feinbloom and Alex's return.

When Alex and MacKenzie arrived at the house, Anita happily greeted her son in a way she hadn't been able to do since his falling out with Maury. She then graciously extended her hand to MacKenzie who sidestepped the gesture and gave Anita a big hug.

For the next few hours, the four of them drank champagne and talked about how Alex and MacKenzie had met. They then talked about something that had been on hold since Maury's death--the future. Malcolm talked about his forthcoming trip to London and his planned meeting with the Qatar Development and Rescue Fund. Alex, to everyone's delight, described his plans for the gallery and the role MacKenzie would play. Beaming, he noted it wouldn't do to just have anyone manage his photographic work. So, he had decided he could only entrust the role to his future wife.

After a round of serious hugs, Malcolm opened yet another bottle of champagne in tribute to Alex's happiness and to his newfound maturity. It was not only that! Malcolm was now regaling in the fact he had shared an important confidence with his brother, and it had made him feel good.

Aided by the euphoria he felt, Malcolm made a snap decision. When the proper moment arrived, he took his brother aside. "Only Leibowitz, you and I know about the contents of the thumb drive. It likely was the reason our father died. So, what I'm about to ask is a lot."

"Shoot!"

"If I made a copy of the thumb drive, would you keep it under wraps as insurance in case something happens to me?"

"What's going to happen to you?"

"Nothing, I hope. If you agree, I'll make a copy for you before I head to London."

Alex hesitated for a moment, but then his face lit up. "Agreed."

Chapter Forty-Eight
Alexandria, Egypt
2018

Now in his building, Boutros found a hand truck in the garage and carefully strapped the ancient pot to the truck. He then wheeled the pot to his evaluation room and stepped back to look it over. The pot was clearly from the Roman era and would be worth a considerable sum in its own right. But Boutros put the thought aside. His interest was with the contents of the pot. He knew he should consult an expert before opening so ancient a vessel, but he couldn't wait. He comforted himself in the knowledge that the evaluation room was temperature-controlled for just this type of circumstance. Even so, Boutros was worried about exposing the contents of the pot to a new environment. Overcoming his concern, he gingerly unsealed the top of the vessel and, after adjusting to the putrid smell it released, removed its contents.

Boutros had no idea what to expect, but he thought he had prepared himself for any eventuality. He was wrong. He shone his flashlight inside the pot to get a bearing on its contents. When he saw what looked like three bound parchment documents, he gasped. Carefully he removed them and opened one. He would of course have to obtain expert verification, but, to his eye, the writing style was ancient—ancient enough to go back to the Roman occupation of Palestine. Before attempting to read the parchment accounts, he again trained his flashlight on the inside of the pot to make sure he hadn't missed anything. Then he saw it—a small instrument. Using tongs, he removed the instrument and discovered it was a knife with a sharpened blade.

As he evaluated the knife, he realized there were words carved on its haft. The carving was somewhat crude. So, it was hard to read. But, the more he looked at the knife handle, the surer he was about what it said. For the second time, Boutros gasped.

Once Boutros recovered from his surprise, he turned his attention to the three parchment documents. His reading took him well into the night and at times he had to draw upon every ounce of his training in ancient Greek. What he had been reading was a kind of ancient chronicle, the journal of a healer and businessman named Judah. Finally, he finished the first two parchment documents and opened the third, an account of Judah's interactions with the family of his cousin Joseph. The account described his sense of awe at the voice he had heard while circumcising the baby Jesus, his decision to commemorate the event by having an inscription carved on the haft of the circumcision instrument, his efforts to secure caravan passage for Joseph's and his family as they fled Herod and the Roman establishment, and his accounts of Jesus' seemingly miraculous feats. But, as dazzling as each of the foregoing entries had been, what really caught Boutros' eye was Judah's portrayal of how he had saved the baby Jesus from almost certain death. *My God*, thought Boutros, *it's the same account Touma described to me when he asked for help in validating the scroll.*

There was now no question what he had to do. He took out his cell phone and tapped in the number for his brother. "Touma, I haven't heard from you for a while. Are you okay and at your planned place of safety?"

"I am, and, of equal importance, the scroll is safe."

"I'm much relieved. As you know, I've never been a man of religion, but now I'm not so sure!"

"Is this the confession I've been waiting for?" responded Touma half-jokingly.

"Hardly, but you'll understand in a moment." Boutros then described the events of the last few days and what he had learned from the third of the bound parchments. When he got to the inscription on the knife, Touma couldn't hold back.

“What you’ve just described is too extraordinary for words. Two related, earth-shaking finds like the one I have with me and the one in your possession are more than a coincidence. The description of the miracles are amazing in their own right. But, the corroborated accounts of the infant Jesus being saved by the Jew Judah rise above anything I could have imagined. The implications for Christian-Jewish relations exceed anything we’ve previously known. It’s as if a God still shocked by the dark days of the Holocaust had chosen to send a sign to a world again rife with hatred toward the Jews.”

“And, since mother’s death, perhaps a sign for us!”

“Agreed. The thought had certainly crossed my mind. Whatever the case, I’m so much in awe I don’t know where to begin.”

“Dear brother,” replied Boutros drolly, “I’ve often found that starting at the beginning is very helpful.”

Boutros’ gest had the desired effect of lightening the conversation without detracting from its seriousness. After a chuckle, Touma described his living arrangements in Israel.

“You told me you were seeking refuge in Israel. But, Sarah! I can’t believe it. How is she?”

“She’s great and I know she would love to see you. But, back to the scroll. I’m now in the process of validating its age, drawing upon some of Israel’s best minds. I’m hoping the results will be unassailable. But I’m worried about you. The first thing you have to do is get to a safe place.”

“I intend to do that.”

“Good. Secondly, can you use your influential friend Steinthaler to reach Professor Leibowitz at Vassar about analyzing your find?

“I believe I can. But, from what Steinthaler told me after my earlier inquiry, Leibowitz is totally reliable. Why don’t I just contact him directly?”

“There are very important reasons. Leibowitz has to be advised what he’s getting into. For one thing, that Benghazi war lord of yours may be experiencing seller’s regret, if not seeking revenge. In addition, the attack on my residence means there are interests who are very unhappy with the Judeo-Christian reconciliation potential of the scroll. Undoubtedly, those same interests would be even less happy if word leaked out there were two separate ancient writings, each conveying the same monumental account of the Jewish rescue of Jesus. So, even if the professor is willing, we need someone whom he trusts—someone like your well-connected client—to advise him candidly of the risks, despite the potential rewards.

“I understand and don’t think I’m not trembling!”

“As you should be. I don’t have to tell you that every precaution in this matter is essential. Somehow, knowledge of the scroll leaked out and I could have been killed had I been home when the bombing occurred. So, you can’t take anything for granted. I would not even communicate directly with Steinthaler. Find a way to get to him indirectly and alert him to what’s going on. Then, let him design a plan to bring in Leibowitz to analyze your find.”

“Thanks, Touma. I’m more than glad I called.”

Boutros then did two things in quick order. First, he made two videos of himself. In the first video, he described the scroll in Touma’s possession and its account of Jesus’ rescue. In the second, he took pictures of the pot, the three bound

parchment volumes and the knife. He then described how he had acquired the pot and how Judah's astonishing account of the events at Mostorod in the third parchment matched Ahmed's corroborating account in the scroll. Then, Boutros got on his cell phone and called Yousef.

Yousef picked up the phone immediately and listened with utter astonishment as Boutros described the contents of the pot and summarized his conversation with Touma. Boutros then asked Yousef about a set of rare Torah crowns they had found for Steinhailer. "Are the Torah crowns cleared and ready for delivery to Maury Steinhailer?"

"They should be. When I last inquired, only one clearance was outstanding, and I just received notification it had been given. The caller also indicated I could pick up the necessary papers late tomorrow afternoon."

"Good. Bring the crowns to my place so I can check them out. I want you to take them to Steinhailer. While you're here, I'll also give you a message to take to Steinhailer whose help we're going to need to validate the age of the three parchment volumes and the knife haft. How quickly can you fly to New York?"

"Let me check. Hold on for a moment." As Boutros waited impatiently, Yousef checked his customary flight app. Soon he was back on the phone. "I'll need tomorrow to get the clearance. I can leave the day after tomorrow and get an Egypt Air flight that will get me into Kennedy at 5:30 PM. From past experience, taking into account baggage-claim time and rush hour traffic, I should be in Scarsdale between 7:30 and 8:00. I'll book the flight right now and make sure Steinhailer knows I'm coming with the crowns and that I have an important message for him."

“Excellent. I think this is an occasion for your backup passport and make sure you have a cell phone that can’t be traced.”

Yousef acknowledged the instructions and, quickly, drove over to Boutros’ building with the crowns. Boutros looked at the crowns admiringly. “They’re beautiful. Steinthaler’s going to love them, particularly when we advise him they are likely much older than we originally thought.” He then handed Yousef a thumb drive with the two videos on it and explained their contents and the response he needed from Steinthaler.

“I’ll make sure he gets it. If you’ll excuse me for a moment, I want to call the ministry and make sure the clearance papers will be ready tomorrow. Yousef reached for his cell phone. However, seeing his pocket was empty, he realized he had left his phone in the car. “I seem to have left my cell phone in the car. May I use yours for a moment?”

Boutros handed over his phone and Yousef dialed the ministry’s number from memory. However, as the voice at the other end answered, Yousef heard something that gave him a start. He completed the call, but his facial expression indicated he was concerned about something.

“What’s the problem? Has the certification been delayed?”

“No; nothing like that. I’m all set to pick up the clearances tomorrow.”

“Then, what is it?”

“Have you noticed a buzzing sound on your phone?”

“Yes, I have. I was thinking of calling the phone company.”

“Don’t bother. I think your phone’s been bugged!”

“How’s that possible? No one has had possession of my cell phone!”

“You haven’t been watching enough spy movies. For less than one hundred dollars, almost anyone who knows your cell phone number can purchase a remote monitoring app that will enable them to listen in on your conversations as if they were sitting in your lap.”

“Now there’s an unpleasant thought!”

“I don’t blame you for wanting to make light of it, but given what happened to your brother, you may not be safe if your phone has been compromised. You’ve got to go somewhere else to ride this out.”

“Touma said the same thing. So, I’ve been thinking about a good place to lay low for a while. ”

“Where will you go?”

“To my house in Mostorod, on the outskirts of Cairo--coincidentally, the place where Jesus was saved. In a sense, the place where it all began.”

“Do you want me to tell Steinthaler you’ll be in Mostorod?”

“No need. I’ll add words to that effect in the video right now. Excuse me for a second.”

In a moment, Boutros returned and handed Yousef the thumb drive. “Safe travels. I’ll find a way to contact you to see what Steinthaler says.”

Chapter Forty-Nine
The Carpet Room of the Canterbury Club, Mayfair London
Week Seven, the Present

The one hundred and forty-year old board room of the Canterbury Club in Mayfair had been designed to impress even in the opulent era of its founding. Anchored by an immense, palace-sized Tabriz rug of extraordinary shades of rust, green and blue, the Carpet Room had served as the redoubt for the club's well-heeled members from the Victorian era to the present. Portraits of British heroes from the almost endless series of imperial wars waged around the time of the club's founding adorned the room's fifteen-foot-high walnut paneled walls. Contributing to the spacious feel of the room was its barrel-shaped ceiling and the additional three feet of height it added. From the center of the ceiling a dazzling Swarovski chandelier designed for the club in 1899 descended a full five feet. The chandelier shone brightly as its 500 crystals reflected the light from its forty-eight lamps. On the floor, high backed burgundy-colored leather chairs offered a welcome respite to those members wishing to read a newspaper or enjoy a glass of port as they chatted with friends.

The club had always been scrupulous in maintaining the privacy of its members and in limiting access to those outsiders wishing to use its facilities. From the time of its founding three years before the first Boer War, women had not been eligible as members and members wishing to invite persons other than family for dinner were required to submit requests a week in advance for proper vetting. With the exception of an occasional dignitary, the presence of foreigners in the club had always been highly discouraged. However, that was all before the world-wide recession of 2008 had decimated the club's endowment and sent its members scurrying for additional sources of income.

The new income streams came as a result of the club's decision to lease its facilities, in particular its venerable Carpet Room for outside events. Of course, the outsiders would have to

pay outlandish sums to enjoy the club's luxurious offerings and, not incidentally, to be able to namedrop the club as occasion warranted. Among those outsiders who were both accustomed to the luxury provided by the club and capable of paying the going freight for its use were the trustees of the Qatar Development and Rescue Fund.

Since 2009, the trustees had met twice a year in London to enjoy the city and to partake of the delights of the Canterbury Club as they discussed matters pertaining to the Fund. The semiannual trips were not so much business outings as they were an opportunity for the titans who served as trustees to get away from the routine of Gulf life and enjoy recognition for the philanthropic decisions made during their meetings. This time, however, the trustees had something unusual to discuss—a proposal to co-fund a center for conflict resolution at Vassar College by matching a gift of twenty million dollars earmarked for such purpose and recently made through the estate of the deceased Jewish-American financier Maury Steinthaler.

As the time for the meeting approached, six of the seven trustees were finishing a delightful dinner of rack of lamb in the club's Carpet Room. Alcohol was not served. But, given the other delights of the menu, spirits would not have been missed even by those who did not eschew it on religious grounds. As plates of dessert were being handed out, the six men in the room began to discuss the planned events for the evening and the presentation that would soon be made by their seventh and youngest board member—the first woman to serve as trustee of the Fund.

Everyone knew that Roshni Khan had introduced the idea of a conflict resolution center and, single-handedly, had shepherded the concept through the myriad Qatari departments claiming an interest. As a result, the idea had received considerable attention, most of it favorable, before the current trustee meeting had even been scheduled. Now, the talk in the board room was not only about the novelty of the idea, but also

about their young and attractive colleague who had managed to cut through all the red tape in impressive style.

Of the six men enjoying their desert, all took great pride in the humanitarian and development work the Fund performed as it sought to fight global poverty and provide a safety net for vulnerable Muslim communities throughout the world. They had discussed the merits of the conflict resolution center among themselves and five of them were willing to consider Roshni's proposal with an open mind. However, one among their number, had different thoughts as he considered the evening's agenda.

Khalid Al Muhammadi had now been a trustee of the Fund for almost three years. His colleagues admired his generosity and his zealotry on behalf of the Fund's activities. Khalid, on the other hand, found the contacts he was making through the Fund to be very useful in support of his larger ambition—the destruction of Israel. For him, there was little difference between the United States and Israel. They were as the Iranian mullahs were wont to say, “Big Satan” and “Little Satan.” So, he was not pleased with an expensive Qatari enterprise being located on American soil and engaging in activities that undoubtedly would benefit the Americans. The fact that the prospective co-benefactor of the center was the estate of Maury Steinhaller, a Jew, made matters all the worse.

Khalid had considered expressing his views at the evening meeting. But he knew the trustees operated by consensus and he could already see they were in favor of the proposal. So, he decided to hold his counsel and let the others question Roshni. Instead, he would focus his attention on Steinhaller's son, Malcolm, who was scheduled to speak that evening and whose presence Khalid viewed as suspicious. Khalid planned on spending an additional week in London after the meeting and was prepared to spend that time in whatever way was needed should Malcolm cause trouble after his presentation. He had also placed the SFMA on alert.

Roshni had decided to go to the airport so she could pick up Malcolm. Despite unusually heavy rush hour traffic, she managed to get to the airport before he arrived. When she saw him getting off the exit staircase, she reminded herself how attractive she had found him during their first meeting. On the ride to the club, she briefed Malcom on what he could expect at the meeting. Because she had both hands on the wheel and was looking straight ahead, she could not see that Malcolm's gaze was focused almost entirely on her.

Before long, the two arrived at the Canterbury Club and Roshni suggested that Malcolm wait in the pleasant reception area downstairs while she met with the trustees, the "carnivores," as she called them, upstairs. She headed for the guest bathroom, checked herself in the mirror, and, after giving herself a passing grade, adjusted her hijab and headed for the board room.

When Roshni entered the room, she addressed each of her colleagues in the order of their family rank and longevity within the Fund. She observed how good it was to see all of them, asked about their families and then got to the business at hand. She then outlined what she had to say. "If it's acceptable to you, I'll take about 30 minutes to make my presentation. Then we'll have a question and answer period for about 30 minutes, after which I'll introduce Malcom Steintaler who is waiting downstairs. Does that sound okay?"

The six men nodded their assent. Then they grappled over a procedural issue. But, after, ten minutes of unproductive discussion, turned their attention to the proposal.

Chapter Fifty
London, England
Early 2019

Fahad had given Mahmoud precise instructions on how to tap into Boutros' cell phone, using exactly the type of app Yousef had described. Despite Mahmoud's inexperience in such matters, the app had been easy to follow, and the tap had been successful. As he listened in on Boutros' conversation with Yousef, Mahmoud sensed what he was hearing was important. But rather than try to interpret on his own, he instead focused on compiling a summary of what he had heard. Carefully, he reran the conversation two additional times to make sure he hadn't missed anything. He was then ready to call Hamrroush and report on the hacked conversation.

Hamrroush had been eager to hear from Mahmoud and, when the call came in, he listened intently to his henchman. When Mahmoud finished his report, Hamrroush asked several questions about the parchment and the specifics of Yousef's planned flight to see Steinthaler in Scarsdale. Once his conversation with Mahmoud ended, Hamrroush knew the information warranted top level attention in Doha.

Khalid had been in a hurry when the call came in and almost decided to pass on it. But the caller ID indicated Hamrroush was on the phone and Hamrroush was an important player. So, Khalid decided to take the call. As soon as he heard what Hamrroush had to say, Khalid was thankful he had followed his instincts. His next act was to call SFMA's operative in London, a fellow Qatari named Jamal Warsama. In London, Warsama heard his cell phone ring and checked to see who was calling. Observing it was Khalid, he immediately answered the call. "Hello Khalid. How are you?"

"I'm fine. I trust you are also well."

“Thank you. I am. Are you calling about our student?”

“Yes. I have an important mission for him, but, after the fiasco with the EU representative, I’m not sure he’s ready.”

“You and I haven’t spoken since the incident. So, allow me to fill in the details.”

“I was hoping you’d do that.”

Okay. Here it is. Even though the results weren’t satisfactory, as a test of Farkas’ willingness to follow orders, it actually went pretty well. Farkas did all he was told to do with no hesitancy. He did it well enough so the pro-Zionist Dane should have died in the car instead of his wife.”

“Why didn’t he?”

“It was one of those unforeseeable things--faulty equipment! Klaus was in the surveillance car with Farkas and observed Farkas as he attached the explosive to the underside of the Dane’s car. But, when the man got into his car and Farkas tried to detonate the explosive, it didn’t go off.”

“But the wife died? Her death created a mess, with sympathy coming from everywhere, not to speak of the widespread manhunt that followed. How did she die and not her husband?”

“I’m afraid it was part of the unfortunate aftermath of the failed device. We can only surmise, but it appears she got into the car later in the day when her husband wasn’t present. The explosive was still attached to the underside of the car and must have gotten jostled as she was driving. There was nothing left of her and, you’re right, it really did create a mess. Importantly, I think we’ve weathered the aftermath without anything pointing to our organization.

“I needn’t tell you we can’t let anything like that happen again. But for the faulty remote-controlled detonator, we could have silenced that Danish bastard from spewing his filthy pro-Zionist garbage. Now, he’s still alive and everything he says is amplified by sympathy for his wife.”

“I understand.”

How is Farkas now?”

“He’s disappointed, but eager to prove himself. As I mentioned, he’s quite willing to take action based on our direction and seems to feel little reticence regarding the possible consequences.”

“That’s definitely a commendable attribute for our kind of work. But things can go wrong during an operation as he’s already discovered. If he’s apprehended, would he be able to disclose much about the organization?”

“As far as I know, very little. Most of what he’s learned has been through Klaus who, himself, does not know very much.”

“Here’s the big question: I don’t want to put you on the spot, but do you think Farkas is ready for another assignment of even greater consequence than eliminating the Dane?”

“He’s well-motivated and, as I said, he’s demonstrated a willingness to pull the trigger without any apparent hesitancy.”

“It involves going to America and he doesn’t speak English.”

“That’s okay. It hasn’t been a problem so far in London. Besides, Klaus speaks fluent English and he could go with the Hungarian.”

“That’s what I was thinking.” Khalid then briefed Warsama on the thrust of the parchment journals and how they had managed to find out Yousef would be bringing a personal message to Steinhailer regarding the journals.

“We don’t know what’s in the message Yousef will be carrying. But given what we know about the parchment, both men must be stopped before Steinhailer can use his considerable influence to validate the find and, even worse, spread word of its importance. So, here’s what we need Farkas and Klaus to do when they reach the States.”

After listening to Khalid’s instructions, Warsama asked when Farkas and Klaus should leave.”

“We know the flight Yousef will be taking and that it’s the day after tomorrow. Farkas and Klaus have to beat him to New York by leaving on an earlier flight tomorrow. I assume they’ve both altered their appearance and you’ve provided both with doctored passports.”

“Yes, on both counts. Since each of them has a record, it would be foolhardy for them to travel under their own names. Our passport guy is quite masterful in creating new identities and their altered passport pictures reflect the way they both now look. I’ll also make sure they have adequate American dollars.”

“Good. Here are their instructions and the address of the safe house they should go to after their work is done.”

Book Two—The Present

Chapter Fifty-One Coxsackie, New York

After the murders, Farkas and Klaus had driven north to the picturesque, upstate village of Coxsackie, where their safe house was situated just outside of the downtown area. Many absentee owners from the Metropolitan New York area rented houses in this part of the state. So, a couple of unfamiliar faces would hardly be noticed. Even so, Farkas and Klaus were under strict instructions to remain in the safe house and minimize their contacts to outings for grocery and beer purchases. Klaus was the designated outside man since he spoke English.

The two had been told they would be returning to Europe after a week or two. However, as the outcry over the double murders intensified, Warsama directed them to lay low for another few weeks. They tried to object but they had no choice since Warsama controlled their travel arrangements. For Farkas, the waiting was particularly difficult since he didn't understand English and many of the television shows did not have close captioning in German. In addition, his money was running out. He tried to be patient knowing there would be a substantial reward waiting for him in London. However, the restrictive environment of the safe house was getting to him.

One weekday afternoon, when the boredom of confinement was getting to Farkas, he opened the refrigerator looking for beer. After moving things around to see if any cans had been shoved to the back of the refrigerator, he concluded unhappily that no beer remained. Even worse, Klaus was out doing a late afternoon jog and probably wouldn't be back for at least a half hour and then would want to cool down and shower. Farkas new he'd never last that long. So, he grabbed the keys to

their rental SUV, backed out of the driveway and headed toward the local convenience store.

Farkas parked the car in the rear of the parking lot and walked into the store. It didn't take him long to find the beer he wanted. He grabbed a case of twenty-four cans and headed toward the checkout counter. Without much thought to the transaction, the attendant routinely rang up the case of beer and stuck out his hand for payment. Confidently, Farkas opened his wallet and pulled out three ten-dollar bills--all the money he had. He laid the bills on the counter and was about to pick up the case of beer when the clerk began to object, stating that the case cost thirty-two dollars and fifty cents. Seeing that Farkas didn't understand, the clerk pointed to the three ten-dollar bills Farkas had given him and tried his best to indicate Farkas was short two dollars and fifty cents.

Farkas' still believed the thirty dollars he had placed on the checkout counter was sufficient and couldn't understand the gesticulations of the now agitated clerk. His irritation mounted as the clerk became more vocal and began to take back the beer. Angrily, Farkas vented his frustration by banging on the checkout counter, in the process frightening the clerk and the other patrons in the store.

When Farkas could no longer restrain himself, he picked up the beer and left the store followed by the screaming clerk. In the parking lot, the clerk's screams were brought to an abrupt end as Farkas leveled the poor man with a powerful blow. Not looking back at the other customers, Farkas got into the SUV and made tracks for the safe house. Remarkably, the stunned onlookers had been so surprised by the viciousness of the encounter that none had sought to get Farkas' tag numbers, a task that would have been difficult in any event as dusk was setting in. However, that was as far as Farkas' good luck would take him.

When the attendant regained his senses, he immediately called the convenience store's security company. The company, in turn, checked the security camera for the time frame of the confrontation in the store and quickly was able to pull up clear pictures of the man who had assaulted the clerk. The pictures were then uploaded to the local police network for identification. One hundred miles away, a Westchester County police technician was watching his computer when a "most wanted" facial identification registered on the screen. The man put down his sandwich and looked intently. What he saw was a tentative match between the man shown in the Coxsackie convenience store and the low-light image of the man running across the street from the Steinthalers' driveway on the night of the murders. Immediately, he alerted the Greene County authorities, where Coxsackie was located, and a widespread manhunt began.

Back in the safe house, Farkas chose not to say anything to Klaus about the altercation. He had enough explaining to do as to why he had taken the SUV against orders to a public place when he knew Klaus would be back soon and could easily have made the run. Predictably, Klaus was irate at Farkas' indiscretion and let him know it in no uncertain terms. However, once he had voiced his displeasure, he calmed down and the two of them began drinking beer and watching television.

Many cans of beer later, the two drunken fugitives managed to climb into their beds. It never dawned on either of them that at that moment the Greene County Sheriff's office was springing into action. In fact, the questioning of people in the vicinity began while the two were still sleeping the next morning. It had not taken many inquiries before the authorities hit pay dirt and soon several units were dispatched to the safe house.

It was late morning, but inside the safe house, Farkas and Klaus were still out cold. They were rudely jolted out of bed by

the sound of a loud speaker telling them to come out unarmed with their hands held high. Neither was in a position to think straight let alone appreciate the seriousness of the dilemma in which they now found themselves. Instead, crude survival instinct set in and the first impulse of each was to run. Still in their bed clothes, they charged through the back door.

Unfortunately for Klaus, his sprint through the back yard would prove to be his last act on earth as a hail of bullets caught him in the back, propelling his lifeless body to the ground. Farkas was right behind Klaus, but when he saw his comrade go down, he immediately threw up his arms in an act of surrender. As he was being cuffed and escorted to a waiting armored police car, he wondered almost comically whether his bout at the convenience store would mean he would have to return to jail. Of course, jail was now the least of his problems.

Chapter Fifty-Two Rehovot, Israel

Touma had just finished describing Ahmed's account of how Jesus had been saved by Judah and was about to answer Sarah's questions regarding his shaven beard and civilian clothes when his phone rang. Touma answered the phone. On the other end was Professor Chaim Warkovsky of D-REAMS, the Dangoor Research Accelerator Mass Spectrometer at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot.

After a moment, Touma put his hand over the phone and explained the nature of the call to Sarah. "It's Chaim Warkovsky from the Weizmann Institute. He's a papyrus specialist in carbon dating at D-REAMS, their carbon dating center. He'd like me to come over right away with the scroll and the remaining writing scrap. I hate to run, but do you have a car I can borrow?"

"Hate to run! Are you kidding! You haven't explained your appearance yet. Besides, do you even know how to drive?"

"I know you're feeling put out, but I've risked a lot for this meeting. I promise to explain everything when I get back later today. And, yes, I can drive. I may have looked toward heaven all these years. But whenever needed, my eyes were on the road. I have an international driver's license that should be fine in Israel."

Crestfallen, Sarah nevertheless put on a game face. "I've waited this long. I guess I can wait a few more hours."

Touma was not familiar with Israeli traffic and impatiently weathered one traffic jam after another. Finally, he arrived at the Weizmann Institute and felt himself relax.

Completed in 2013, the Institute's carbon-dating center was superbly state of the art. Over the years, scientists had developed two techniques for measuring the carbon 14 content in archeological artifacts—radiometric dating and Accelerator Mass Spectrometry, or AMS. AMS had always possessed the ability to detect with great precision various elements according to their atomic weights. However, it had not been able to differentiate between atomic elements of the same weight, potentially allowing crucial carbon 14 readings to be overwhelmed by background elements of the same weight, in particular nitrogen 14. When the differentiation problem was finally overcome, AMS had come into its own and the D-REAMS center at Weizmann was a direct result of that crucial scientific advance.

As Touma waited for Warkovsky, he marveled at the beehive of activity that surrounded him. The D-REAMS center had no fewer than ten active scientists engaged in projects on the frontier of radiocarbon measurement. Finally, Warkovsky appeared and immediately the small, balding man's agreeable manner confirmed Touma's instinct in contacting him. "Metropolitan, it's so good to meet you. What you described over the phone is remarkable. Have you brought the scroll and parchment scrap with you? I can't recall being so excited about an architectural find and I've seen many."

"I've brought both and, as I'm sure you've surmised, I'm equally excited."

"It's been a difficult few months in Israel and we really could use some good news—at least something that will attract the attention of the world in a positive way."

"I wish at least that. Also, you may soon have more good news."

"And, why is that?"

“There’s a second codex from the same period, this one made of parchment. I’ll explain further after you complete your work on this one. If we can get the second one to a safe place, I think you’ll be even more amazed.”

“I’m already amazed. I won’t press you on the details of the second codex until you’re ready. In the meantime, I’d like to get started on the one we have. As we discussed, we’ll probably not have to use any of the actual papyrus other than the scrap. But, as you requested, we will keep the scroll under lock and key while the analysis is taking place.”

“Thank you. I do have one question and I hesitate to ask.”

“Metropolitan, this is a momentous occasion. You should feel free to ask anything you want.”

“I still feel a little awkward, but here goes. I’m proficient in analyzing the writing in ancient codices of the kind I’ve brought you. But I know little about radiocarbon dating. So, I’ve been trying to learn a little bit about the process. Recently I stumbled on a Cornell University article. The article suggested there may be a problem with carbon dating of artifacts found in climates such as Israel and Egypt because the field of carbon dating has evolved using carbon deterioration analysis associated with more temperate climates.”

“Yes. If you’ve read the article, you probably know the fundamentals.”

“Perhaps, but a simple explanation suited to a lay person might help.”

“Okay. Simply put, when radioactive rays in the atmosphere combine with nitrogen, the result is radiocarbon, an isotope having an atomic mass of fourteen, thus the designation Carbon 14. The C-14 isotope is taken in by plants and by

animals who consume the plants. When the plants and animals die, the C-14 starts decomposing. The rate of decomposition is described by a sliding scale called an IntCal13 curve which, in turn, is based on a series of carefully-documented samples collected over time primarily from the Northern Hemisphere. The Cornell article correctly pointed out that the climate and growing patterns in the Northern Hemisphere are different from southern Mediterranean climates such as Israel and Egypt and may produce a different C-14 decomposition curve than found in this area.”

“So, what’s the answer?”

“The answer is we’ve known about the issue for some time and believe we’ve got it licked. But, only time and much more experimentation will tell for sure. Further, the amount of data on samples as recent as yours is much less than on older samples. So, how the Cornell study affects your artifact is a virtual unknown. For my money, and my word carries considerable weight in the community, I don’t think you have anything to worry about.”

“That’s a relief. How long will it take?”

“A day or two, depending on the condition and composition of the scrap. I’ll keep you posted.”

Touma was encouraged and relieved following his meeting with Chaim Warkovsky. However, the drive back to Jerusalem was anything but easy as he rehearsed what he would say to Sarah upon his return.

Chapter Fifty-Three
Kensington
London, England

Much to the relief of Malcolm and his family, Farkas Heszlényi had been apprehended shortly before Malcolm's departure for London. Hemingway had expressed displeasure with Malcolm leaving the country, particularly since they were still questioning Farkas. However, Hemingway had also acknowledged there was no basis for detaining Malcolm.

It might have been a different story had Farkas revealed anything to which Malcolm might have made a contribution. However, despite Farkas having demonstrated a willingness to cooperate, the interrogation had gone slowly, and the authorities had still been focusing on the circumstances of his employment and the source of his remuneration. He had revealed that some of his handlers spoke Arabic and he had been able to describe the general location of his hideout in London. But that was all.

Before leaving, Malcolm had called Phil Mintzes to ask how the firm was doing and to apprise Mintzes of his plans and itinerary. Mintzes had assured Malcolm that the transition team was doing well and that the news of Farkas' apprehension had been a morale boost for senior management. No longer would they be distracted by the possibility of Anita having been involved in Maury's death. Malcolm had then asked about the nonprofit he had asked Mintzes to form as a vehicle for raising funds for the conflict resolution center at Vassar. Sounding satisfied, Mintzes had advised that the new entity, Steinthaler Conflict Resolution Fund, or SCRF, had received approval from the IRS and was up and running.

With that final conversation out of the way, Malcolm had pressed on his phone's Uber app and was about to request a driver when his phone rang. His heart had leapt as he saw it was Wendy Sonnenzweig on the other end.

Eagerly, Malcolm had answered the call and was delighted to hear Wendy's voice. "Hi Malcolm. I just spoke to your mother and let her know how happy I was that the police appeared to have your father's killer behind bars. She told me you were heading for London. So, I thought I'd take the opportunity to wish you a safe journey."

Malcolm had almost felt light headed, but he managed what he hoped was an intelligible and, most importantly, a cordial response. "You know how much that means to me. It's great mother's no longer a prime suspect or, perhaps, no longer a suspect of any kind. But they really haven't been able to get much out of the man in custody. In fact, one of the things I hope to do while in Europe is follow up on a few leads of my own."

"You're so important to the family. Please don't do anything rash or dangerous. We all want to see you come back in one piece."

We all want you to come back in one piece. What did that mean? thought Malcolm. It wasn't much, but could it have been a sign Wendy might be coming around? For the next minute or two, Malcolm and Wendy exchanged pleasantries and then he had to hang up or be late for the airport. However, the thought that Wendy might have expressed renewed interest in him happily fluttered around in his brain.

Malcolm had met with Roshni Khan before the meeting and had a pretty fair idea of what to expect. However, the sight of seven of Qatar's most influential men wearing brilliant white *thobes*, traditional long Qatari shirts, elegantly embroidered on the shoulders, and striking formal poses in the understated elegance of the Carpet Room of the Canterbury Club, exceeded all expectation.

Roshni sensed Malcolm's uneasiness and immediately took center stage to help take the pressure off him. As she spoke, Malcolm once again found himself beguiled by Roshni. But, this time, it was not merely her appearance. She had a reassuring manner that, despite being a woman surrounded by the princes of Qatari business and society, enabled her to capture the attention of her listeners.

“Gentlemen, I'm pleased to introduce Malcolm Steinthaler whose father had the wisdom to fund the conflict resolution program at Vassar College with which I am proposing we partner. As we all know in this room, our country, through the Qatar Development and Rescue Fund, has expended countless sums on our less fortunate Arab brethren for which we can duly be proud. In addition, our country's relations with the West, in particular the United States, has been exemplary. Our Al Udeid Air Base is host to over eleven thousand US military personnel and serves as headquarters for the US Air Force's Central Command, and we keep on expanding it.”

Roshni stopped for a moment to allow her listeners to take pleasure in what she was saying. She then continued on a less sanguine note: “However, none of our good works or good relations with the West seem to capture the attention of the western press. Instead, what makes the headlines is the claim that we've fomented unrest by financing terrorism—a claim which we of course reject, and which has been overdramatized by the few instances in which we have extended our hospitality to organizations that abused their welcome. Unfortunately, the claim we support fundamentalist, if not terrorist, Islamic movements is magnified by western coverage of our support for Hamas. What goes unnoticed is that our support for Hamas is intended to be strictly humanitarian, and that our best efforts are often frustrated by infighting within Hamas. The same is true for the terrorist watch list we have established which receives no western recognition.”

Again, Roshni hesitated for a moment so the seven men who were intently listening to her every word could express their agreement and frustration. “I can see from your expressions that you in this room understand exactly what I’m saying. I also know all of you have struggled to come up with a way of attaining acceptance of our beautiful country in the Western press and that you wouldn’t be here unless you believed in the potential for achieving that goal by joining forces with the conflict resolution center established by Malcolm’s father.”

Roshni could see her words had clearly made an impression and she waited for a reaction. Deferring to seniority, all eyes within the room turned to the oldest member of their contingent, a man named Ahmed. “Thank you Roshni. You’re right in describing our dilemma. But, how do we know you are equally right in your recommended solution? What assurance do we have that the center will not be used as a vehicle for advancing Israeli interests or vilifying us Qataris?”

“That’s a very good question.” Looking at Malcolm, she added, “If he’s willing, I think Malcolm should speak to that.”

Malcolm was not surprised by the question particularly since Roshni and he had rehearsed his answer before the meeting. Even so, he knew a lot rode on his answer, and he needed to calm the butterflies in his stomach before he spoke. However, when he did speak, the words came out effortlessly and earnestly. “I understand your concern and I don’t doubt that Middle East events could color the views of the academics running the center. In that regard, you’d be taking a risk. However, I want to emphasize several things.”

Just as had been the case with Roshni, Malcolm could see his words had captured the attention of his listeners. So, without hesitation, he continued. “First, my family will play no role in influencing the policies of the center, other than reinforcing my father’s wish that the center not limit itself to any particular conflict in its pursuit of peaceful conflict resolution.

Otherwise, we will offer only advice and not directives. Second, in the arena of Israel-Palestine relations, my father never shirked from criticizing Israel when he thought appropriate. His major concern was that the issue receive a fair airing from all perspectives, including from campus groups who may have had good arguments to make but who undermined those arguments by reflexively refusing to listen to the Israeli side of the story. Third, Vassar is a very progressive school. Again, when it comes to Israel-Palestine relations, the school's academics will likely err on the side of skepticism when it comes to Israel. Obviously, if, contrary to our expectation, the forum becomes a front for Israel bashing, we'll have to back away and withdraw our support. But, like the risk you'd be taking, that's a risk that goes with the territory and one we're willing to take."

Again, Ahmed spoke. "It seems we'd both be taking risks. However, I believe the good will that would accrue to us by supporting a center which considers all points of view will greatly outweigh any perceived risk. Mr. Steinthaler, I believe I speak for my colleagues when I say we have a deal."

Ahmed looked around for a moment and took in the appreciated nods of his fellow doyens. Satisfied, he turned to Malcolm. "Shall we call for a press conference tomorrow after advising Dean McKeaver of our decision?"

Before answering, Malcolm looked at Roshni who was beaming. He then looked at the wise face of Ahmed, his new comrade. "Thank you, sir. I think we should drink a cup of tea to tomorrow's press conference."

The clapping that ensued was freely given and sustained. Among those clapping was Khalid Al Muhammadi for he could not afford to offend any of the assembled members of the Qatari power structure by showing his disdain. However, his thoughts did not match the rhythmic movement of his hands.

Al Muhammadi had been feeling guardedly optimistic since the death of Malcom's father. There had been no public announcements regarding the contents of the pot taken from the ancient ship off the Benghazi coast. Nor, had the authorities released any reports of Farkas Heszlényi disclosing compromising information. In addition, Al Muhammadi's men had been posted outside the Alexandrian neighborhood where Boutros had disappeared and, so far, he had not been seen. So, all in all, there was reason to hope the situation had been contained for the present. But Al Muhammadi sensed that everything could change very quickly and that the young man before him was likely to be the instrument of that change. Quickly, before tea was served, he dodged into the cloak room, got on his cell phone and directed that a two-person team follow Malcolm wherever he went.

Chapter Fifty-Four Alexandria, Egypt

Boutros Salib had not always been a bachelor. Many years earlier, when he was trying to establish himself as an expert in antiquities, he had given a series of talks in the region of Egypt where, according to Coptic tradition, Joseph, Jesus and Mary had traveled during their escape from Herod. Of the thirty sites where Jesus and his family were thought to have traveled, Boutros gave talks in Belbeis, Meniet Samanoud, Sakha, Ain Shams, Matareya and Mostorod. It was in Mostorod that the world opened for Boutros for it was there he met Ilhana, the woman who would become his wife.

At the time, Ilhana was a university student interested in antiquities. She had heard about Boutros' forthcoming lecture in her town and decided to attend. Ilhana had a number of questions she wanted to ask Boutros following his talk. So, she approached the lectern where he had been speaking and the two began to converse. After a few minutes, it was clear to each that their mutual interest went beyond antiquities. They headed for a local café and spent the entire afternoon drinking tea and learning about one another. Their romance quickly took hold and soon they were married.

Ilhana was very close to her parents who lived in Mostorod. After the wedding, Boutros and his bride frequently traveled the 170 miles from Alexandria to Mostorod to visit Ilhana's parents. However, their home was modest and had been barely large enough for the two of them and their only child. Accordingly, accommodations during Boutros and Ilhana's visits were uncomfortably tight. One day, Boutros decided it would be a good idea for Ilhana and him to have a place of their own in Mostorod--one that could serve as a home away from home whenever they visited Ilhana's parents.

After several house-hunting trips to the city, they purchased a two-hundred-year-old dwelling. Over the next few

years, they used all of their available funds to modernize the residence. Once complete, the house was a delight. Modest on the outside but meticulously restored on the inside, the house felt like a living museum—an ode to the past. Boutros and Ilhana spent several happy years staying in the house whenever they visited her parents. Then tragedy struck.

As Ilhana approached the seventh month of her pregnancy, her blood pressure rose alarmingly. Boutros could afford the best treatment for Ilhana, but it was to no avail. In the thirtieth week of her pregnancy, Ilhana experienced a massive stroke that instantly killed her and the child she carried. Boutros was inconsolable and not even the tireless support provided by his brother, who was now a bishop, could help him.

Over time, Boutros managed to escape his despair and resume his life. However, he couldn't bring himself to go to Mostorod to arrange for a sale of the house. Too many memories paved the path to their beautiful home. He decided to keep the house and lease it to others to help pay for its maintenance and to provide for its mortgage. His most recent tenants had moved out earlier in the year and the building was now free.

Mostorod had become a refinery town with an industrial feel. In the ordinary course, there would have been little to induce Boutros to spend any significant time in the city. However, now was not the ordinary course. In addition, the Egyptian Refining Company was completing a massive new facility in the city. As a result, refinery executives and employees would be arriving and leaving. One additional newcomer, surmised Boutros, would hardly be noticed.

As Yousef was heading to Heathrow for his scheduled departure to New York, Boutros finished his packing. His Land Rover was obviously marked. But, fortunately, he had another all-terrain vehicle he used when pursuing leads in Egypt's desert regions. He spent a few more hours getting his affairs in order and then, unnoticed, he sped off to Mostorod.

No sooner had Boutros settled into his new quarters than he heard of the deaths of Yousef and Maury. Once again, Mostorod had become the setting for unalloyed grief. For the next six weeks, he contented himself with conducting business affairs using discrete channels and taking daytime walks on the city's busy streets. But during his quieter moments, his sense of sorrow consumed his thoughts as much as his fear of being exposed.

Boutros had been reluctant to contact the Steinthaler family fearing that any form of communication might endanger the family or himself. So, he was unaware of Malcolm's meeting in London with representatives of the Qatar Development and Rescue Fund.

On the day of the meeting, Boutros was watching television. Suddenly he sat upright as he heard a television reporter from London mention the Steinthaler name. At first, Boutros thought the story might be about a break in the murder investigation. But it soon became apparent it was not Maury Steinthaler whose name was being invoked, but rather that of his son Malcolm. As Boutros listened further, he was surprised to hear about the Qatari plan to match Maury's contribution to Vassar College for a conflict resolution center. Because of the importance of an Arab group joining forces with a Jewish-inspired peace effort, the reporter announced that his network would televise a press conference the next day at which Malcolm and representatives of the Qatar Development and Rescue Fund would appear. As a further novelty, the newscaster stated that the press conference participants had agreed to accept telephone questions.

Despite Boutros' concern about contacting a member of the Steinthaler family, he desperately wanted to reach out to the family and unburden himself of what he knew. Further, what he had read about Malcolm had been very reassuring. So, he

resolved to listen to the press conference and use it as a means of communicating with Malcolm. That night, he got to bed very late and was thankful the press conference was not scheduled until 2:00 PM the following day, Egyptian time.

The next day, Boutros turned on his television at the designated time. Almost immediately, the camera quickly panned in on the six dignified-looking Qatari men who were sitting in a kind of gallery. However, to Boutros' astonishment, the actual spokesperson for the Qatari's was a young woman of surpassing attractiveness and, as it would turn out, of equally impressive eloquence. Alongside her was a young man who Boutros assumed was Malcolm Steinthaler.

After an unremarkable opening statement, the moderator directed his first question toward Roshni. "Ms. Khan, as a woman, you must be very proud to represent your country in this very important press conference."

Without missing a beat, Roshni responded. "Mr. moderator, I view my sex as quite supplementary to the important work in which we will be engaged and to the forward thinking of Qatari society as a whole."

"Well put, Ms. Khan. But, what do you have to say to the members of the press corps and our many listeners who wonder whether this venture is a copout to the Israelis?"

"I would say that our expectation is just the opposite. As you know, my country does not have diplomatic relations with Israel and that is not likely to change any time soon. However, we also understand that a refusal to discuss the Israel-Palestine conflict often plays into the hands of Israel's supporters who claim such an unwillingness is indicative of a lack of interest in peace. We intend to counter that argument by engaging in dialogue. By so doing, we believe we will be in a better position

to demonstrate why we oppose Israel's tactics in its conflict with the Palestinians."

The moderator now turned to Malcolm. "Mr. Steintaler what do you have to say in response to Ms. Khan?"

"Simply this: I don't agree with the outcome Ms. Khan foresees. However, I'm willing to take the chance she might be right, although I fully expect our conflict resolution center will enable the Qatar Development and Rescue Fund and others to appreciate more fully that there are two sides to the conflict. My father was an open person who believed in airing all points of view on any issue. That's one of the reasons he was so successful in both the business world and interreligious community. I know it was his wish to use the center as a way of resolving conflict through dialogue rather than force. In the case of Israel, he never shirked from offering criticism where he thought it appropriate and I know he would want the same thing from the new center at Vassar no matter where the chips might fall. So, if the Center produces criticism of Israel in an honest, deliberative and informed way, so be it."

The moderator then entertained questions from the assembled representatives of the press whose members predictably were largely interested in how the new center would deal with the Israel-Palestine conflict. After a series of blistering questions--most questioning what the Qataris hoped to accomplish with their donation, a telephone number was flashed on the screen and the moderator opened the floor to telephone questions from the public. Quickly, Boutros dialed and was advised he was number six in line. He did not know whether Malcolm had been privy to the contents of the thumb drive. Even so, he decided to incorporate a reference to the drive during his online questioning in the hope it would stimulate Malcolm's interest while revealing little to the rest of the viewing audience.

The operator finally advised Boutros to be alert as it would be his turn to speak as soon as he heard a double click. Boutros then heard the moderator announce the next caller was from Egypt. “Mr. Steinthaler,” began Boutros, going straight to his message, “greetings from Egypt where it all began.” Watching the screen for Malcolm’s reaction, he could see him flinch and knew he had gotten through to him. “I was a great admirer of your father and I’m saddened by his loss. How do I honor his memory with a contribution to the center?”

Malcolm had indeed been stunned by his questioner’s opening sentence but tried his best not to show it. “Thank you for your generous comment. In answer to your question, you can either contact Dean McKeever at Vassar or you can go to the website for a new nonprofit my family has established to raise money for the center. It’s called the Steinthaler Conflict Resolution Fund or the SCRF.” On the spur of the moment he added an additional—unplanned—point of contact. “Also, I’ll be at the Imperial Hotel for the next couple of days. You can reach me there.”

Three hours later, Boutros introduced himself over the telephone and verified his identity. “I think it’s important that we meet. How long before you can get to Egypt? I’m in a place called Mostorod, just outside of Cairo.” Without thinking, Malcolm responded “the day after tomorrow.”

Chapter Fifty-Five
Kensington
London, England

Roshni had been eager to spend time with Malcolm following their meeting. However, it was not to be. For the rest of the evening following the meeting, she and the other members of the Qatari delegation had convened in private and spent the entire evening discussing financial matters and the following day's press conference. To provide additional luster to the historic announcement, the six scions of Qatari male society, as the world soon found out, had chosen Roshni to represent them at the televised press conference.

After the conference, there had been an informal discussion session with interested members of the press, followed by the Qataris again huddling among themselves and Malcolm returning to his hotel room in the hope he might hear from the mysterious caller. Finally, Malcolm and Roshni were able to find time together. Malcolm had proposed meeting at an eating club to which his father had belonged and Roshni had accepted.

The tastefully appointed dining room offered both a discrete environment for discussion as well as some of the best food London had to offer. Malcolm had arrived early and had ordered a bottle of wine. He assumed Roshni would not drink, but he had many things on his mind and felt the need for relaxation. Finally, he saw her arrive and speak to the *maître de*. By contrast to the traditional clothing she had worn at both the meeting and the press conference, she was now wearing an emerald green evening dress and the effect was breathtaking. Malcolm rose as the *maître de* seated Roshni and the two locked eyes before speaking. The effect of the wine and the power of Roshni's lustrous eyes left Malcolm almost speechless. To his relief, Roshni was the first to break the ice.

“Well, here we are. I really didn't think we'd pull it off!”
Raising her glass of water, her face aglow with the flush of

success, she continued: “I know my parents are proud and I’m sure your father would have been proud. Here’s to them.”

Malcolm could barely formulate the simplest of replies, so taken was he with Roshni’s smile. Finally, he was able to regain his senses, but was embarrassed by his stammering manner. “Please allow me to apologize. I’d like to say the wine has gotten to me, but I’d be lying. I’m having a difficult time doing anything but looking at you.”

Roshni smiled again, but it was less an appreciative smile than a nervous one reflecting what was on her mind. “You’re very kind. But it is I who must apologize. I’m not so naïve as to be unaware of the affect I have on men. Also, I’ll admit to having been attracted to you. But, in this case, I also knew that anything beyond attraction was a fantasy. Our worlds are too far apart. Even so, I conveyed a different impression to lure you here because of the importance of what I hoped to accomplish.”

Roshni had no difficulty in seeing the look of disappointment on Malcolm’s face. Gently, without condescension, she took Malcolm’s hands in her own. Smiling, she continued. “I’m deeply humiliated by what I did and hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me.”

Malcolm took another sip of wine and looked down at the table. Then a smile slowly crept onto his face. Instead of Roshni’s pronouncement feeling like a blow to his head, it now felt strangely liberating. He had not been able to get Wendy out of his mind since she had called. Now, in a very palpable way, his declaration of just a few seconds ago felt strangely disingenuous. With his hands still in Roshni’s, he looked up and grinned widely. “You do have a rare power and I’ll admit I’ve been under your spell. But, I’m afraid, I’ve also engaged in deception—self-deception. There’s someone else back home and it took your words to knock me out of my current fantasy and remind me how much I care about her. So, with that out of the way, let’s toast our parents.”

As both raised their glasses, Roshni again spoke. “On the subject of our parents, I’ve been insensitive in not asking about your father. How are you doing?”

“The identification of my father’s killer has provided some sense of finality, but I’m still tormented by not knowing who hired the perpetrators and why they hired them.”

Sympathetically, Roshni asked, “I’m so sorry. Are there any leads?”

Malcolm could sense the sympathy in Roshni’s concern and her sincerity felt pleasantly reassuring. Soon, any inhibitions he may have had started to fade away and he began to think of Roshni as a confidant rather than a romantic interest. In a reenactment of the decision he had made to open up to his brother, he now decided to lay bare the issues swirling around in his head.

“No leads that are official, but something has come up. Prior to this evening, I never imagined I would want to share it with you. But your encouraging manner, the feel of your hands and perhaps a little assist from the wine have pushed aside my reservations.”

“That’s very kind of you.”

“Perhaps, not. As you know, another man was killed with my father, presumably because of what they both knew. So, there is a fair risk that anyone who shares what knowledge I possess could be placing himself or herself in danger.”

Instead of showing a look of concern, Roshni again smiled engagingly. “Now that we are partners in the Center as well as confidantes, I have an interest in your well-being. If you’ve learned something that might place you in peril, it

behooves me to know about it in case I can be of help and minimize your exposure.”

“But what about yourself?”

“Do you think I’ve gotten to where I am by avoiding risk?”

“Okay, I can see reason isn’t going to work and I can really use a sympathetic listener. Do you remember the man from Egypt who called in at the press conference?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve since come to find out the name of the man is Boutros Salib.”

“How do you know that?”

“There was a clue imbedded in his question—one that only I would understand. That’s why, when he asked how to reach me, I gave him contact information for my hotel.”

“I did think at the time that was a little too forthcoming given he was a stranger. His name sounds Coptic.”

“It is. Boutros Salib called me this afternoon. As it turns out, he was the employer of a man named Yousef. That man was the one killed with my father.”

“I’m so sorry, but the plot certainly thickens.”

“It does indeed.” Malcolm then told Roshni about the revelations in the thumb drive, the copy of the drive he had given to his brother, the destroyed residence at St. Parsoma, and Jeffrey Leibowitz’s involvement.”

The questions began spilling off Roshni's tongue. "Where's the thumb drive now? "What else did Boutros say?"

Laughingly, Malcolm held up his hand. "One question at a time please. The original of the thumb drive is safe. My father's company has a relationship with a bank not far from here. When I arrived, I arranged to place the thumb drive in their safe deposit vault.

As to Boutros, he said he was in trouble and would be in his second home in Mostorod, Egypt—"the place where it all began," as he referred to it during his press conference inquiry—and he wanted me to come there after our meeting."

"Are you going."

"Yes."

"Then, I should go with you."

"This is not your fight and what would people say about an unmarried Muslim woman traveling with a single Jewish man?"

"You forget what I said a moment ago. We're partners and I have an interest in your well-being. As for my traveling alone, I do it all the time. My family name and financial contacts in Qatar don't hurt. My father is extraordinarily influential and can be very helpful if needed. The key thing is you'll be traveling to an Arab-speaking country and you don't know Arabic, but I do."

Malcolm's appreciation for his new friend and colleague leapt as he reluctantly agreed.

Roshni's forehead began to crease and a frown emerged. "Have you shared any of this information with the authorities?"

"I haven't."

“Is that wise?”

“It may not be. I want to catch the perpetrators more than anyone. I now know my father trusted Boutros implicitly. I’m also impressed by the fact Boutros is willing to risk all to protect the archeological finds. He believes a heavy-handed manhunt could result in their premature release or even confiscation. So, he’s requested I refrain from any public disclosure until he’s had an opportunity to meet with Jeff Leibowitz, verify the find and coordinate with his brother.”

“But we need to have a backstop in case something happens. If the authorities won’t do, my father can be trusted. You might want to think about sharing what we know with him. I can assure you he’ll treat the information with utmost discretion.”

“I don’t know if I want to go that far right now.”

“I understand. But eventually we’re going to need outside help, and it may not be on our terms.”

Malcolm knitted his brow in recognition of Roshni’s point. “How about this? You can give your father a very general idea of what we’re doing and tell him about the thumb drive and the copy in my brother’s possession. He’ll no doubt be worried about you, but you can tell him we’ve no reason to believe anything untoward will happen. However, tell him I’ll arrange for a signal system between my brother Alex and him if we need help.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“While we’re traveling, I want to keep the thumb drive in the safe deposit box. But, of course, Alex has a copy. If you’ll give me your father’s contact information, I’ll pass it along to Alex. I’ll also arrange to send him a predetermined signal at

designated intervals. If he doesn't receive the signal at the appointed time, I'll direct him to send your father the thumb drive or a duplicate of its contents."

"Thanks Malcolm. As they say, that sounds like a plan!"

That next day, Roshni used the Qatar Development and Rescue Fund's transportation office to make air reservations for Cairo. In the interest of avoiding prying eyes, Malcolm made a reservation for a different flight that would arrive in Cairo about the same time.

In Doha, research trolls had discovered archival newspaper accounts of the lectures Boutros had given years before. From there, they were able to learn of Boutros's marriage to Ilhana and, most importantly, his real estate purchase in the Cairo suburb of Mostorod. As Khalid Al Muhammadi pondered this new intelligence, his phone rang and an informant from the Fund's travel office advised him that Roshni had booked a flight to Cairo. Carefully, Khalid took down the flight information.

Chapter Fifty-Six

Isfahan, Iran

Long before the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action—the JCPOA or, as it was more familiarly known throughout the world, “the Deal,” Iran had been on a collision course with mounting unemployment and skyrocketing inflation. American sanctions had accounted for a fair portion of the country’s economic woes but so had a corrupt ruling class composed of the country’s religious establishment and its military apparatus, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

In the past, the mullahs had successfully used proxies such as the Shiite Lebanese militia Hezbollah to pursue their near-pathological quest to annihilate Israel—a strategy that had been both cost effective and successful in minimizing the number of Iran’s own sons killed in battle. But Hezbollah’s militants still had to be paid, if for no other reason than to feed their families, and, for Iran, the cost of financing its extraterritorial fighters kept mounting. So, too, had the cost of Iran’s direct intervention in the Syrian civil war and its support of the insurgent Shiite Houthis in Yemen.

A military stronghold in Syria had always been one of Iran’s ambitions. With such a presence, it could fulfill its hegemonic goal of creating a land bridge from Iran through Iraq and Syria all the way to the Hezbollah-controlled Lebanese coast. But, the price for its expansionist quest kept mounting. In Syria alone, Iran had had to bear the economic cost—not to speak of the militarily embarrassment—of more than one thousand Israeli aerial strikes on Iranian installations. Most of these were aimed at Iranian weapons factories as well as military transports heading overland toward Lebanon with state-of-the-art weapons for Hezbollah. Iran had not acknowledged most of the attacks, but they had all hurt and, even worse, each one had depleted Iran’s shrinking treasury.

The rulers had breathed more easily following the enactment of the Deal and its potential for immediately freeing up over one hundred billion dollars in frozen Iranian assets as well as countless billions of dollars in future oil revenues. They had not liked the idea of placing their nuclear-weapon ambitions on hold for ten to fifteen years. But they were in the game for the long run and the agreed-upon deferral had all but enshrined the country's future right to enrich uranium. Besides, their Western counterparts, intent on a breakthrough no matter how problematic, had acquiesced in Iran's continued development of faster and more effective centrifuges for enriching uranium and had turned a blind eye to its testing of intercontinental missiles capable of carrying Iranian nuclear warheads. Last and most happily for the Iranian negotiators, nothing in the deal prevented the country from continuing its destabilizing political and military actions throughout the Middle East.

However, in the fall of 2018, Donald Trump had ruined everything by pulling out of the Deal and re-imposing sanctions. The designation by the Trump Administration of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, consisting of more than one hundred thousand Guardsmen, as a terrorist organization had brought misery even to the country's ruling elite. The economic straight jacket resulting from renewed sanctions imposed on the country could not have come at a worse time as its bills from the Syrian civil war started to accelerate—bills it had planned to pay using funds unfrozen by the original Deal.

With seventy percent of the country's population under thirty and youth unemployment and drug use at record levels, the mullahs and politicians knew they had to do something, lest the nation's young become an unruly mob and even worse a threat to the theological order. But there was little that could be done. The country was almost totally dependent on revenue from the export of oil and the Americans had threatened that revenue stream by denying Iran and its trade partners access to the US-led international banking system. The European participants in the Deal, especially France which had a large

Renault plant in Iran, had tried their best to preserve the Deal if only to safeguard their substantial investments in Iran. However, without access to US banks, their efforts continuously stalled.

The country's mullahs and generals had attempted to soften the American resolve by retaliating. However, their tactics--the bombing of oil tankers in the Gulf, the downing of an American military surveillance drone and the generation of enriched uranium at levels that violated the Deal--had produced little benefit. Even worse, the American military cyber forces had had the last word. Without shedding a drop of blood, the Americans had decimated the data base used by Iran to target shipping in the Gulf.

The Iranian central city of Isfahan, legendary for its high-quality carpets, had been one of the hardest hit, devastating both families and businesses. The number of people looking for work had leapt to fifteen percent of the population, with unemployment among women exceeding twenty-five percent and under-twenty-five unemployment surging even higher. Now, night after night, representatives of all classes were taking to the streets and berating their leaders for squandering the nation's wealth by engaging in senseless ideological crusades throughout the Middle East.

Soon, the demonstrations had morphed into outright hostility against the mullahs, the country's rigid religious laws and even the Ayatollah Khamenei. Young women began expressing their frustration and indignation with the system by removing their traditional Iranian head scarves and swinging them in the breeze like liberating flags. Stupefied by what was happening, the mullahs instructed the religious police to double down in their interdiction of such behavior. However, as the demonstrations increased and the head scarves continued to come off, the mullahs concluded they had to enact even stricter

measures lest their hold on the religious life of the country start to unravel.

The crackdowns began in Teheran, but soon spread to other cities where unrest was present. Isfahan was one of the last to see the new strongarm tactics and so its citizens had had more time to express their resentment and increase the audacity of their demonstrations. More and more, young women were going out in public without wearing a hijab. Some of the younger female demonstrators had even danced in public, contemptuous of long-held prohibitions.

One of the young women to get caught up in the moment was a nineteen-year old engineering student named Elaheh, the Iranian word for goddess. As she swayed on top of a park bench her hair uncovered and rebelliously blowing in the breeze, she felt the need to make an even greater statement of defiance. In front of her stunned fellow demonstrators, she proceeded to take off her shirt, exposing her brassiere. The genie had now been let out of the bottle as one thousand cell phones tracked Elaheh's every undulation and hoisted her actions onto social media. The mullahs in Teheran could not believe their eyes. An example would have to be made of the insolent woman and the example would have to play out where the rabble could readily see it.

Quickly, word went out to Isfahan's religious police. As Elaheh continued her swaying, eight stone faced police zealots worked their way through the crowd and surrounded her. Still without her shirt on, she was tied to a nearby bench and, as the crowd looked on in horror, two of the religious fanatics took off their belts and began whipping her. They had been instructed to apply twenty lashes each and to continue no matter the urgency of her cries for mercy.

It took only three blows to bring the girl to her knees. She tried to fall to the ground to protect herself but was unable to prostrate herself because of the way she was bound. As the lashes fell, blood flowed profusely from all sectors of her body. Soon

her brassiere came off, but, undaunted, her tormenters continued to lash her, shredding her breasts. It was all the crowd could handle and dozens rushed to the aid of the now unconscious girl who was still being subjected to the lash. As the first would-be rescuers approached the girl, they were suddenly met by nearby armed members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. At first, the Guardsmen held their ground but as the irate crowd increased in numbers, they feared for their own lives and began opening fire. When the catastrophe was over, not only was Elaheh lying dead in a pool of blood, but, in addition, nineteen protestors had also been killed, all before the eyes of the world.

The pictures of what was being called the Isfahan Massacre had gone viral throughout the country—and, indeed, throughout the world. In ten Iranian cities, demonstrators were calling for justice and the mullahs realized that, in Elaheh, they had created a martyr.

Chapter Fifty-Seven
Hezbollah Headquarters
Beirut, Lebanon

Assam Muhammed had good reason to feel proud. As the principle deputy to Hasan Nasrallah, chairman of Hezbollah, Assam had operational responsibility for Hezbollah's military activities in Lebanon and Syria. He had overseen Hezbollah's extensive network of Shiite fighters in Syria and was proud of their role in squelching the rebel forces. However, the number of Hezbollah dead in Syria had begun to pile up. After two years of deception, even Nasrallah had been forced to acknowledge Hezbollah's military activities in the country and its substantial losses. Even worse, public attitudes in the Shiite strongholds of southern Lebanon were noticeably beginning to change. Some Shiite families were even sending their sons abroad to avoid conscription by Hezbollah.

As the Syrian civil war approached its bloody conclusion, many in Lebanon decried the country's plummeting economy, even pointing fingers at Nasrallah as their protests became louder and their demonstrations more widespread. Hezbollah faithful knew they had a problem on their hands. In a rapidly declining economy, they risked shouldering the blame. Clearly, mere slogans would no longer work. So, reliably, they turned their attention to the south and Israel. What was needed was a way of kickstarting a new campaign against the Zionist entity--a new method for terrorizing the country to the south on a massive scale and, in the process, mobilizing the Lebanese people behind Hezbollah's cause.

For a while, the answer seemed to be found in the covert Iranian supported program to convert unguided long-range missiles into precision-guided weapons. The program had been producing dozens of precision weapons with most constructed and stored in the densely populated Shiite areas in Southern Lebanon. But, suddenly, everything had fallen apart as a result of the Israelis exposing not only the site of the production

facilities but, in addition, the principal Iranian and Hezbollah architects of the program. The Israeli revelations had halted the strategy. But now, a humiliated Hasan Nasrallah was looking to his deputy to help save face and accomplish what the precision weapons program had been unable to do.

A few weeks after the precision weapons fiasco, Assam was reading a consulting report written by a sympathetic and well-paid European engineering firm that specialized in hard rock excavation of the type required for tunnel building in southern Lebanon. The report pertained to Hezbollah's failed attempt earlier that year to build a number of attack tunnels modeled after those employed by Hamas in Gaza. Assam had always liked the attack tunnel strategy. It wasn't nearly as high tech as the precision weapons program, but, if executed properly, it could inflict almost as much psychological damage on the Israelis as a barrage of well-aimed missiles. He was also encouraged by the relative indifference the United Nations had shown after the Israelis presented proof of the tunnels they had destroyed. Most importantly, the report indicated there might be a way of avoiding additional Israeli detection of a tunnel system.

But, Assam knew he had to act fast. Already, the Israeli's were deploying new acoustic and seismic sensors in the northern Galilee. Again, he contacted the engineering firm. After further consultation, Assad was assured that ample time remained before the Israeli sensor network was fully deployed. Smiling to himself, Assam commissioned a plan. Funds would be set aside to construct five tunnels similar to those previously detected by the Israelis plus a newly designed sixth tunnel recommended by the consultants. Assam hoped one or more of the first five would be successful, but he had no illusions based upon Hezbollah's earlier unsatisfactory experience. In fact, if any of those tunnels were discovered by the Israelis, it would be all for the better as it might cause them to lower their guard as the sixth tunnel was being completed.

Cost was a major consideration. Estimates indicated the sixth tunnel would require funding in excess of the cost of the first five tunnels combined. Assam knew his patrons in Iran were beset by civil unrest and strapped for hard currency. However, he felt confident he could secure the funds.

In Iran, the Revolutionary Guard Corps had, indeed, seen merit in the plan and had quickly supplied the needed capital. The plan had worked like a charm. All of the first five tunnels leading from Lebanon had been detected by the Israelis and destroyed, causing them to announce that another Lebanese tunnel threat had been vanquished. It was unfortunate, thought Assam, that the tunnels had to be sacrificial lambs. But the sixth tunnel was about to become operational.

The timing was perfect. Iran, in need of a diversion from the ongoing rage over Elaheh's murder, was leaning heavily on Hezbollah to make good on its tunnel campaign. Assam's answer was to open the sixth tunnel the following day. According to plan, as soon as the diggers broke ground in Israeli territory, two dozen carefully-chosen Hezbollah commandos would pour into the country. The mission had one Israeli border village as its operational objective. Intelligence indicated the village was largely undefended. As the commandos reached the village, they would execute a quick strike with the goal of killing as many villagers as possible within the span of a few minutes. They would then retreat back into the tunnel. When the carnage was exposed to the world, Hezbollah's tactical might would be unquestioned, and a grateful Iran would have realized a public relations success.

Further, Israel would be on notice that its borders were penetrable, and its inhabitants exposed. The psychological effect on the infidels would be beyond value. Assam smiled as he thought about the noose that was tightening around his enemies. For too long, Hezbollah had been forced to exercise restraint in challenging Israel from Lebanon. Now, the north of Israel would have much to fear from a resurgent and energized Hezbollah

Assam knew there would be retaliation. But he also knew the Israelis were realists and would think twice before launching anything resembling a full-scale campaign into the heavily populated Shiite pockets of southern Lebanon. In Addition, Hezbollah had more than one hundred and twenty thousand missiles in its arsenal almost all capable of wreaking indiscriminate havoc on Israeli population centers. If Israel retaliated in any manner other than by a predictable limited strike, those missiles, though imprecise, could be lobbed into virtually every inch of northern Israeli territory. Even the Israelis much-ballyhooed Iron Dome defense system wouldn't be able to interdict so many flying weapons.

Of course, as they had previously done, the Israelis would file a formal complaint with the United Nations Security Council. However, as Assam knew, Hezbollah had little to fear as Russia and China could be relied upon to veto any resolution that punished either Syria or Lebanon.

The Israelis could also be counted on filing a protest with the European Union. However, Assam knew anti-Israel hostility had taken on a life of its own in Europe. Fueled by the Muslim left and the neo-Nazi right, attacks on Jews were now common place—the new normal. Desirous of importing Iranian oil and of exporting their goods to the theocratic state, most European states blamed Israel for the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Deal and for the consequential loss of trade. So, Assam expected little more than a hollow shrug from the principle European Union states, .

Of course, some European countries had expressed moral outrage at the Iranian operatives working on European soil to snuff out dissident Iranians. But only England, the Netherlands and Germany had chosen to take forceful measures. Following America's lead, they had designated the entirety of Hezbollah—both its military and political branches—as a terrorist entity. Assam was disturbed by this development. But

he also knew Europe, especially England, had other things to worry about. Further, England's Labour party had shown such pervasive anti-Semitic tendencies that Jewish Laborites had bolted from the party. Even the party's crushing defeat in the parliamentary elections hadn't seemed to change much. As for the other EU countries, Assam was confident they would react to the loss of a few Israeli villagers with little more than pious shrugs.

Chapter Fifty-Eight

The Israeli border with Lebanon

Avi Rogel had many things on his mind as he hopped into the jeep headed for the north of the country. Most importantly, his wife Chavah had just given birth to their third child—a cherubic little girl who had immediately won his heart, despite her unplanned arrival. Next, his eight-year old son had been diagnosed with an abnormal pronation of the arch that would require expensive orthotics. Equally important, his six-year old daughter was participating in her first dance recital and he knew how disappointed she would be if he missed the program. In addition, Avi had recently given notice to the computer application company for which he had worked since graduating from Tel Aviv University and the anxiety of striking out on his own was as much terrifying as exciting. He had left Izzy, his new partner and former platoon buddy, in charge of the fledgling company. He had a lot of confidence in Izzy's technical abilities, but Avi was the business generator and he was concerned about their little company losing momentum while he was completing his reserve duty.

Under the military code, Avi, a captain in the reserves, had to serve one month of reserve duty every three years until he reached age forty. Avi had been forced to put off his service during the current three-year cycle due to the illnesses of both his father and Chavah's father. Both still had problems that required constant attention. But as pressing as were his personal issues, they were not significantly different from those of his fellow reservists who were also expected to fulfill their reserve obligations as a service to the state. Ultimately, he was no longer able to defer his reserve obligation. So, despite the birth of a new baby and his father's rapidly deteriorating health due to diabetes, he contacted his brigade commander. He soon received orders to report to the Northern Command, where he had served almost all of his active and reserve duty in an armored division based near the Lebanese border.

Avi's farewell with Chavah was predictably tearful. Now ten years into their marriage, they were as much in love at age thirty-five as they had been when they were first married following their graduation from college.

Faced with persistent deadly attacks from southern Lebanon, Israel had early on maintained an extraterritorial security zone in Lebanon north of the Israeli border. However, in the face of mounting casualties at the hands of Hezbollah, the country's political leaders had decided to withdraw from Lebanon, completing the task in 2000. The resulting vacuum was almost immediately filled as Hezbollah forces swarmed into the region, implanting fighters and materiel in civilian areas, often under houses and places of worship.

As Iran spread its footprint into Syria during that country's civil war, it had made numerous attempts to smuggle precision weapons to Hezbollah. These had largely been interdicted. But the possibility that Hezbollah might at any time resume the type of precision guided weapons program that had been exposed earlier in the year kept Israel's military planners awake at night. A Hezbollah attack from the north drawing upon tens of thousands of unguided missiles and an indeterminate number of precision weapons was a constant concern—indeed, a constant existential concern—for Israel's Northern Command.

Compounding this overarching worry had been the discovery of the five new attack tunnels bored under the internationally recognized border between Israel and Lebanon. Israeli sonar technology had succeeded in detecting and destroying the tunnels. But the psychological effect of a possible successful tunnel attack sometime in the future had already taken its toll on morale. As a result, since the discovery of the tunnels,

Israeli patrols along the northern border had doubled and every piece of artillery was at the ready.

Three days after Avi reported for duty, the winds began to howl. The morning of the fourth day was unusually cold. As Avi put on cold weather gear, he continued to be preoccupied with business and domestic cares. However, it was his turn to review his battalion soldiers in their forward emplacements. So, unenthusiastically, he bundled up in his cold-weather army fatigues, found his driver, a young man in his early twenties named Shlomo, and sat down in the jeep that would take him on the day's windy tour of his troops.

Avi greeted his driver and asked about any movement along the border. "Shlomo, how does it look today?"

"Pretty much business as usual. I hear your family recently expanded."

"Tell me about it! My little one is going to be unrecognizable after I've been away for a month."

"I know the feeling. After a couple of months, I hardly remember what my girlfriend looks like."

The morning had gone well and Avi had hoped to get back to the base by late afternoon. The only thing on his mind at this point was getting out of the cold. However, a soldier had been injured at one of the observation points and Avi had stopped to supervise the man's removal to a nearby field hospital. By the time the arrangements had been completed, it was already dusk. Even so, Avi was thankful to be returning to the base. Cold and preoccupied with thoughts of how Chavah was doing with the children, his senses were on anything but high alert.

All of a sudden, he was jolted into awareness by Shlomo who was pointing and screaming at the same time. As Avi stared in disbelief, three kafia-clad gunmen came running toward the jeep. Avi turned around and tried to grab his newly issued Tavor X95 semi-automatic from the back seat, but he was thrown back into the jeep as Shlomo sharply veered the vehicle off the road and down an embankment where it came to a halt. Quickly, Avi radioed for help as Shlomo grabbed their two rifles and two additional thirty-round magazines. Together, they jumped out of their assailants' line of fire, and assumed a defensive position on the protected side of the jeep.

Though pinned down, the young driver was able to display a battlefield sense of humor. "Captain, I see you remember what a rifle looks like." Almost as if on cue, Avi managed to fell one of their attackers. "Muscle memory and terror are very helpful in remembering how to use a firearm. Help should be on the way any minute. How long can we hold out?"

"They've added men. As far as I can tell, there are eight of them now. If more of them don't arrive and we're careful in how much we shoot, we should be able to last until help arrives." But more of them did arrive as announced by a hail of bullets that came from a new direction. Avi turned around to assess the danger and to fire on their new attackers. As he reeled off a volley of shots, he heard a sickening sound from Avi's direction. A bullet had hit him in the neck and blood was gurgling from his throat. He would never again have to worry about remembering his girlfriend's face.

Now pinned down on both sides, Avi again called for help and was relieved to hear that a platoon had been dispatched to the area and would be arriving almost instantaneously. Soon, the sound of artillery and the scattering of the attacking invaders signaled the arrival of the rescue unit.

As he was hauled into a halftrack, Avi's only thoughts were of Shlomo and his family. However, at Northern Command headquarters, the Command's senior officers were thinking about something entirely different and something even more devastating. More attackers than just those who had attacked Shlomo and Avi had infiltrated into Israel. The assailants' target had been the agricultural village of Kfar Neradim and they had intended to make an example of it. Indeed, of the forty-eight residents of the village, all but twelve had been gunned down before the invaders retreated to the border. Among the dead were nine children. IDF soldiers had pursued the attackers and in a pitched gun battle all had been killed, but not before two of the dying men, under intense questioning, had identified the origin of the tunnel in Lebanon.

In Jerusalem, word of the massacre had quickly reached the prime minister who had immediately convened a meeting of his security council. An air strike with the tunnel as its primary target seemed to be the most appropriate response despite the potential for civilian casualties. However, the chief of the general staff worried that such a strike would provide Hezbollah with a pretext for an all-out retaliatory attack that could even draw their Iranian sponsors into the fray. Few at the security council table had much faith in UN intervention particularly after the UN's milquetoast response following the discovery of the Hezbollah attack tunnels earlier that year. So, despite misgivings, the decision was made to mount such a strike but only after first consulting with the Americans and Europeans and, useless as it might be, only after lodging an appropriate complaint with the United Nations Security Council.

Chapter Fifty-Nine
University of Cairo
Antiquities Department

Professor Milad Barakat had been feeling perplexed about the results of the carbon dating of the scroll. Something didn't add up and he had made several attempts to contact Touma Salib by cell phone in the hope he could obtain and use the remaining parchment scrap to perform another analysis. He did not have a personal number for the Metropolitan. He had, however, been able to reach Touma's assistant, Ilya Ghobriel. Ghobriel had been authorized to speak with Barakat, but he was not able to offer much help regarding the Metropolitan's whereabouts or how to reach him.

Frustrated, Barakat had gone about his business. Then, unexpectedly, he received a surprise call from Jeffrey Leibowitz. He knew Leibowitz to be a respected classical scholar from America, but that was all. So, he was startled as Leibowitz introduced himself, and was even more puzzled when Leibowitz said he wanted to discuss the scroll. He wondered how Leibowitz had become aware of the scroll given Salib's insistence on silence. But he held his counsel, figuring the matter would be resolved during their meeting.

Leibowitz had known of Barakat since Steintaler's inquiry regarding the impasse over the age of the papyrus. Since then, Leibowitz had looked into Barakat's credentials. From his research, he had determined Barakat to be a first-class scientist and academic. He also knew that Barakat spoke English which would make things easier, although Leibowitz was fully prepared to converse in Arabic.

As Leibowitz walked into Barakat's office, he quickly sized up the man. Tall with a dark complexion, Barakat had the confident look of one whose views were respected. However, his manner was not in the least bit officious. As Leibowitz extended his hand, Barakat reciprocated with his own accompanied by a

huge smile. “Professor Leibowitz your reputation precedes you. It’s a pleasure to welcome you to my office. I hope we can be of assistance to one another regarding the scroll, but first you must tell me how you came to know about it.”

“With pleasure, but as with many things, I may not be able to give you a full picture.”

“I’ll be happy to hear whatever you know.”

Leibowitz did not disclose any of the details derived from the thumb drive. He did, however, provide Barakat with a full description of how, at the instance of Boutros Salib, Steinhailer had contacted him regarding the competing carbon-dating findings.

“That does answer a lot, except for why you’re here today.”

“I’m sure you know of Steinhailer’s death.”

“Yes. I suspect most people have read about it, even in Egypt.”

“Maury was a close friend of mine and his son Malcolm is a former student. Maury was murdered shortly after I received the inquiry about the carbon dating. His son thinks the two may be related, as do I. I knew I was going to be in Greece and promised Malcolm I would make the short trip to Cairo to do some follow up. So, here I am. Perhaps, the best place for us to start is with your examination of the papyrus.”

“Do you mind if we continue on a first name basis. I would consider it a privilege.”

“Not at all.”

“The bottom line is I’m bewildered. I personally did an analysis of the handwriting and, while complete certainty is impossible, I would bet a considerable sum on it having been written during the early part of the first century.”

“That’s quite interesting given the incongruity between your handwriting analysis and the carbon dating. Where do you think the discrepancy lies?”

“I don’t know. We follow the strictest lab procedures to avoid contamination in the carbon dating process and I’m very proud of my staff’s professionalism and conscientiousness. Yet, I was so mystified by the result of the carbon dating that I’ve been trying to reach the Metropolitan to see if I could use the third of his three papyrus writing scraps in another test.”

Leibowitz’s eyebrows arched at the suggestion the Metropolitan might be reachable. “Have you had any luck in contacting him?”

“No. I was actually hoping you might be able to help.”

“Well, I just might. Do you know much about the monastery of St. Parsoma?”

“It’s interesting you should ask. That’s where we met the Metropolitan when he told us about the scroll. It’s accessible by road, but otherwise it’s fairly remote.”

For Leibowitz, the puzzle was finally coming together, and he could barely contain his excitement. “Have there been any unusual, recent occurrences at the monastery?”

Surprisingly, Barakat appeared not to know about the bombing, just its aftermath. “As you’re probably aware, the church can be somewhat secretive about the management of its holy places. However, I’ve heard indirectly that there was some kind of a mishap at the monastery and that there’s been a lot of

construction activity going on. It's hard to assess since there have always been rumors the monastery holds more significance than just its historical import."

When Leibowitz disclosed that the mishap was in fact a bombing, Barakat's eyes lit up in recognition. "Can it be there's a connection between the scroll, Touma Salib's apparent disappearance and the activities at St. Parsoma?"

"I'm afraid so. I, too, believe the monastery is important for more than its history and it's for that reason Touma Salib chose to stay there when he retired. Call it a custodian role. The fact that the scroll wound up at St. Parsoma may be pure coincidence, but the bombing is beyond coincidence. In addition, I've recently become aware of another ancient find that sheds considerable light on the scroll and I believe St. Parsoma is the starting point for investigating both finds."

Even more surprised than he had been a moment earlier, Barakat sat up straight in his chair. "What other find?"

"Milad, I know by your reputation that you're a man of great integrity and one who can be trusted. But, for the moment, I'd rather not say any more. However, if there's a chance you could accompany me to St. Parsoma, I think you'll find out in quick order."

"Given the bait you've dangled in front of me, how could I say no! I'll just have to make some arrangements with my next in command, Professor Abdullah Al Mostafa. I also have the number of Salib's assistant, Ilyas Ghobriel. He's the one who called originally to invite me to St. Parsoma where I became aware of the scroll. I've since spoken to him, but had little luck in finding out how to locate the Metropolitan. I'll give him another call to see if he can meet us there. Perhaps he can be of some help."

“Excellent. Let’s meet in the morning and drive out there. We can use my rental car.”

Pleased at the outcome of their meeting, Leibowitz waited until he got back to his hotel room and then, using the disposable cell phone he had purchased, called Malcolm to let him know of his plans. Not expecting more surprises, Leibowitz sat back in amazement as Malcolm described Boutros’ call-in to the press conference. He was no less amazed when Malcolm announced that Roshni and he planned to visit Boutros in Mostorod.

Chapter Sixty

St. Parsoma, Egypt

It did not take long for word of the bombing at St. Parsoma to reach the top tier of the Coptic hierarchy. At first, the church leaders were baffled at Touma Salib's unannounced departure from the area. However, on reflection, most thought the Metropolitan had acted wisely by getting out of harm's way.

The destroyed residence near the monastery and the tunnel to the storage area, now barely concealed by the remains of the destroyed house, were another story. Too many church treasures lay in the underground chamber below the monastery for the property to be ignored. So, the church fathers had directed that a crew of loyal workmen be sent to St. Parsoma for the purpose of rebuilding the house as quickly and as inconspicuously as possible.

As work progressed at St. Parsoma, two observers watched the rebuilding of the residence with interest, one in the manner of a first-time home owner expectantly watching his new home rising from the ground and the other bent on destruction. The former, Ilyas Ghobriel, had watched every development with the intent of reporting to the Metropolitan should he choose to call. The other, the one the locals called the Qatari, kept a safe distance as he squinted into the sun watching for any activity that might interest his superiors. What struck him as peculiar was the night guard posted at the construction site. Why there was need for a guard at a residential construction site, he had not yet discerned. But he knew one day he might have to take out the guard and he observed his activity as closely as if he were opposing him in a chess match.

In addition to satisfying himself that the tunnel leading to the artifacts chamber was properly concealed, Ghobriel had an even more immediate reason for protectively watching the construction site. Only the day before, Ghobriel had received a special package from Boutros Salib. Boutros had sent the

package by a trusted church-related delivery service, but his concern regarding the safe arrival of the package had been palpable as reflected in his many status calls while the package was on its way.

The package had indeed arrived safely. Ghobriel had called Boutros to convey the welcome news. Much relieved, Boutros had instructed him to hide the package in the underground chamber beneath the monastery.

The next morning was a Saturday , when no workers would be around as they had been excused so they could return home and be with their families on Sunday. After the night guard sleepily finished his assignment and left the site, Ghobriel sprang into action. It took little time for him to find the underground passage leading to the artifacts chamber without being observed. Even the Qatari had not witnessed Ghobriel's early morning foray as he made his way through the weakened, but intact, passageway. As Ghobriel was emerging from the tunnel, he felt his phone vibrate. With some curiosity, he observed the caller was Barakat. He answered the call and was surprised when Barakat asked if a colleague and he could meet Ghobriel later that day at St. Parsoma. Ghobriel had agreed if only out of curiosity.

A few hours later, Ghobriel looked down from his concealed position and observed the arrival of a vehicle and the two men who were getting out of it. As he looked further, he was reassured to see that the one who seemed to be directing the other was Barakat.

Ghobriel had never before seen the other man, but Barakat had vouched for him in his call. Ghobriel was grateful that neither would be observed by the night guard who had long since taken his leave.

As soon as the two men were close enough, Ghobriel revealed himself and hugged Barakat in the traditional manner

of the Middle East. As this auspicious reunion was taking place, the other close observer of the work site, the Qatari, was also feeling good about developments. He of course recognized Ghobriel. Clearly, Ghobriel's enthusiastic embrace of one of the two newcomers meant that something was going on—something his superiors would no doubt wish to know about.

Ghobriel was the first to speak. “Welcome Professor Barakat. I'm eager to learn of the reason for your visit as the Metropolitan did not tell me you were planning on coming here.”

“I suspect that's because he didn't know of my plans which only crystalized when my colleague here, Professor Jeffrey Leibowitz, arrived at my doorstep yesterday.”

“Your name precedes you professor. Unless, I'm mistaken I've heard the Metropolitan mention you in conjunction with a certain archeological find.”

Smiling broadly, Leibowitz replied. “No need to be oblique. I believe you know I was the one whom the Metropolitan wished to resolve the impasse clouding the dating of the scroll.”

As Ghobriel was nodding in acknowledgment, Barakat interjected. “Professor Leibowitz is well aware of the significance of the scroll. But, more than that, the professor has reason to believe there may be a second archeological find that corroborates the message of the scroll and that this place may provide a clue regarding the whereabouts of both.”

Ghobriel's surprise was unmistakable. As he listened further, his face flushed, and he could not disguise his amazement. Barakat, seeing Ghobriel's telltale reaction, decided to press the matter. “Pardon my presumptuousness. But unless I miss my guess, your body language indicates the professor may be on to something.”

“I want to help, but I’m not at liberty to do so until I contact Boutros. Where are the two of you staying?”

“At the Desert Inn about twenty-five kilometers north of here. It’s the closest place that has hot water and a restaurant.”

“I know the place. I’ll try to reach Boutros as fast as I can. After I do, I’ll head for the Desert Inn, hopefully in time to join both of you for dinner. If I don’t make it in time, start eating without me. But I will make an appearance.”

Ghobriel did appear in time for dinner with full authorization from Boutros to share what he knew with his two visitors. The three men were hungry. So, there was little conversation until coffee and dessert. Now, Ghobriel was the first to speak and what he said surprised the two professors with how serendipitous their timing had been. Just four days earlier, he reported, Boutros had contacted him about the second discovery. Even more startling, he noted, Boutros had told him he would be receiving the two artifacts for safe keeping. When he reported their arrival to Boutros the preceding day, Boutros had directed him to store the artifacts in the underground chamber beneath the monastery until further notice as to their ultimate disposition. This, he said he had done that morning and would take his visitors to see the artifacts the following day.

The next day, all three men awoke to a crystal-clear morning. There would be no guard to deal with until evening, giving them plenty of time during daylight hours. Believing they were not being observed, the three men excitedly headed for the opening to the tunnel.

Chapter Sixty-One

Mostorod, Egypt

In Doha, SFMA's internet researchers and hackers had been working overtime to locate Boutros' address, but with no success. It was as if both the man and the place where he lived had vanished after eluding his pursuer days earlier. Then, about the time Khalid Al Muhammadi was about to call off the effort, one of the researchers hit pay dirt. Years earlier, when Boutros had given his antiquities lectures, a young journalist from a local newspaper had managed to interview him. The interview had gone off so well that the paper had printed a half page account of Boutros' remarks. The article had been preserved on microfiche and then copied onto compact disks along with a number of other journalistic reports of the day. As time went on the compact disks were scanned into a huge historical data set for the area and, only recently, the data set had been uploaded to the cloud for use by the public.

It was this data set that the SFMA researcher had stumbled upon. Once he discovered that the interview had taken place in the Cairo suburb of Mostorod, it had not taken much additional effort to search the city records. He was handsomely rewarded as he scrolled through the property tax rolls. There he discovered that Boutros had purchased a residential property a little after the time of his lectures. Even more importantly, the residence had been renovated several times over the years, but never sold. Eagerly, he passed his information along to Khalid Al Muhammadi who received it shortly after being notified that Roshni had booked a flight to Cairo.

Khalid thought about his next move and then contacted Hamroush's henchman, Mahmoud, who had remained near the neighborhood where Boutros had managed to evade him. Once Mahmoud was on the phone, Khalid did not waste time with pleasantries. Instead, he immediately gave the man Boutros' address in Mostorod. He then issued express orders: "We believe Boutros Salib is at his residence in Mostorod. I'll text you the

address. Go there with two other men. If Boutros leaves the city, follow him wherever he goes and immediately report to me.”

As he was about to end the call, Khalid reminded himself that Roshni Khan had flown to Egypt, most likely with the American. Quickly, he told Mahmoud about the two of them. “If you find Roshni Khan and the American with Boutros, don’t harm the harlot, at least for now. Her father is very wealthy, and we may have other use for her. Boutros and the other man are a different matter. I’ll let you know when to dispose of them.”

A sinister smile crept over Khalid’s mouth as he reflected on the fact he had just given orders for the kidnapping of the favorite child of one of the most powerful men in his country—a man whose progressive values he despised. Somehow, it had not occurred to him that others might hold an equally condemnatory assessment of his own jaded values and that the deadly game he was playing might one day backfire.

Boutros had experienced a nerve-wracking two days since speaking with Malcolm. Only after Ghobriel contacted him to advise that the package had arrived intact had he breathed easier. His fears had been further allayed when Ghobriel called a second time to confirm he had safely stored the parchment and the artifact in the underground chamber. Ghobriel’s third call was unscripted causing Boutros to experience a wave of apprehension. However, once he had heard Ghobriel’s voice, he was immediately reassured as Ghobriel reported the arrival of the two professors and asked for authority to discuss the parchment. Having given his consent, Boutros now eagerly awaited Malcolm who had agreed to meet him in Mostorod.

Shortly after three o’clock, Boutros heard the doorbell ring. Cautiously, he looked through a side window and was able to identify Malcolm from his television appearance and from the many online pictures that were available. However, he hadn’t

expected Malcolm to have a companion with him and the Arabic woman he had seen on TV, at that. Quickly, he opened the front door and greeted Malcolm with a hug that expressed both his happiness at seeing Malcolm and the sorrow he continued to feel over the loss of both Yousef and Maury.

After releasing himself from his host's suffocating bearhug, Malcolm managed to find enough breath to introduce Roshni. Still puzzled, Boutros had an abundance of questions about Roshni's background and why she was with Malcolm. Once satisfied, he turned his attention to Malcolm.

"I'm so sorry about your father. He wasn't just a client. He was a great friend of the Coptic Christians and, over the years, he had become a close friend and a confidant to me. As his interest grew in Coptic and Jewish antiquities, so did his knowledge. There were few lay collectors who were his equal."

"Thanks so much. You also lost someone who was close, your assistant Yousef. For that, I'm also saddened."

"Thanks. Yousef was as devoted a friend and aid as anyone could have hoped for."

"I know we have important things to talk about, but before we get started, I have an awkward question to ask."

"No question from Maury's son is too awkward to raise."

"My father's collection—was it above board?"

"Aha! Now I understand your reference to awkwardness. I assume your question is whether he acquired his collection properly or through some illegal means."

Malcolm was feeling teary-eyed as his own question opened the flood gates to a rush of memories and a fear of what Boutros might say.

“The short answer is that every artifact I acquired for your father was obtained from reputable sources and certified to leave the country by government authorities. Having said that, you should be aware that some may take issue with my response.”

“But why?”

“Simply this: there is a dazzling array of regulations associated with exporting antiquities from the country. I only chose those artifacts which I believed had a green light for export, even though my view might have been open to interpretation. More importantly, over the years, I made friends with various government authorities who were known to have an open mind about such matters. I will also admit to having made the lives of their families a little easier from time to time.”

“So, you’re telling me you bribed them?”

“No. Not at all. There was never an expectation that my expressions of generosity would be repaid in kind. It’s just the way things are done. Not only by me, but by everyone else as well. In the end, genuine kindness and the strength and duration of the relationship is what usually carried the day. By all things that are holy to me, I can assure you there is nothing in your father’s collection that will besmirch his memory.”

“I’ll give it some thought, but I think I’m relieved.”

“Good. You should be. Now, for business. When we spoke, you told me the authorities don’t know about the thumb drive and its contents. To me that’s a small miracle, but I’m not too surprised since I haven’t heard any mention of it in the press. In any event, how many people beside the two of you know about the thumb drive and its contents?”

“Just two others. My brother Alex who has an actual copy of the drive and Jeffrey Leibowitz, who doesn’t have a copy but who has viewed the contents of the drive with me.”

“Where is Alex now?”

“Alex is most likely with my mother in New York. He recently became engaged. Since he met his future wife, he’s really opened up to my mother and the two of them have gotten very close. My mother, too, has become more forthcoming since that wretched Hungarian, Farkas Heszlényi, admitted to the murders, putting my mother in the clear.”

“Nice to hear on all accounts.”

Smiling, Malcolm had more to report. “I also thought you’d want to know that Professor Jeffrey Leibowitz is in Egypt and has met with Professor Milad Barakat from the University of Cairo. When I recently spoke to Leibowitz, they were preparing to leave for St. Parsoma. In fact, they should have arrived there yesterday. Leibowitz believes the monastery is the place where both archeological finds come together.”

Now, it was Boutros’ turn to smile, as he responded with self-satisfaction. “Before you arrived, I spoke to Ilyas Ghobriel, my brother’s secretary, who is watching out for things at St. Parsoma and who reported that professors Barakat and Leibowitz did in fact arrive.”

Malcolm was surprised, but also relieved. “That’s good to hear.”

“Agreed. Further, I dare say, your professor may be quite correct, but for reasons you may not have suspected. Earlier in the week, I arranged for two packages containing the second find—the parchment and the related artifact referred to in the thumb drive—to be delivered to Ghobriel for safe keeping. The packages arrived the day before yesterday.”

“What happens to the artifacts now that Ghobriel has them?” inquired Roshni.

“The first step has already occurred. Let me explain!”

“I could use an explanation,” interjected Malcolm.

“This should do it for you. When my brother moved to St. Parsoma, he confided in me knowledge of a tunnel that leads from the residence to an ancient storage chamber beneath the monastery. Ghobriel, too, knows of the tunnel and artifacts chamber. There are currently workmen at the site rebuilding the residence which as you know was destroyed. But all of them left for the weekend except for a guard who is only on duty at night. So, Ghobriel was able to take advantage of the relative quiet and, early yesterday morning, he hid the packages in the chamber.”

Malcolm had known of the destroyed residence from Boutros’ earlier references to the destruction on the thumb drive, but, all of a sudden, everything seemed to come together. Involuntary, he released a whistle of recognition. “The light dawns! What comes next?”

“I thought it wouldn’t take long for you to tie things together. Ghobriel and I were going to discuss the next steps after he showed the parchment and the artifact to the professors. As I think about it, I’m a little concerned because I should have received a follow-up call from him by now.”

“That’s a coincidence, breathed Malcolm warily. “I should also have heard from Jeff Leibowitz by now!”

Concern was written all over Boutros as he spoke. “I have to go to St. Parsoma, but the two of you do not. I know the desert and I can take care of myself, but you two would be in harm’s way. So, I suggest you stay here until I signal that it’s safe to come.”

Malcolm's reply was quick and unhesitating. "I'm coming. Jeff Leibowitz is very important to me. The thought of losing both my father and Jeff is too much to bear." Malcolm now looked at Roshni. "However, this is not your fight. You should stay."

"You forget Malcolm: we're partners. Where you go, I go. But, I do think it would be a good idea for your brother to share the thumb drive with my father if he doesn't hear from us within whatever time Boutros advises."

The two visitors then looked to Boutros for instructions regarding their arrival time which Malcolm relayed to Alex by email. Hastily, Boutros threw some clothing and provisions together and the three placed their travel gear in Boutros's car. As they pulled out of the driveway, it never occurred to them to watch out for someone who might be tailing them. Had they done so, they might have observed Mahmoud and two other men quickly jump into their own vehicle that had been discretely parked a few doors down the street from Boutros's dwelling.

Chapter Sixty-Two

Jerusalem, Israel

Touma was feeling nervous as he approached Sarah's apartment. The aplomb that had enabled him to climb the ecclesiastical ranks and counsel countless church followers had been on auto pilot when he had first arrived. However, now, as he was returning from the Weizmann Institute and nearing her neighborhood, his self-confidence seemed to be abandoning him. After circling the block several times, he found a parking space and hesitantly got out of the car and headed for Sarah's building.

Sarah had been waiting on her balcony and waived enthusiastically to Touma when she saw him approach the building. To the now hesitant Touma, Sarah's affable reception filled him with mixed emotions as he needed time to collect his thoughts. But, bravely, he waived back and put on a game face.

When Sarah opened the door, any thought Touma may have had of an organized declaration all but vanished. Instead, he momentarily looked into Sarah's caring, but concerned, eyes, and then blurted out the first thing that came to him: "May I kiss you?"

Now, it was Sarah's turn to become weak kneed as waves of joy, confusion and curiosity overcame her. How many hours following Touma's last visit had she spent fantasizing about the life they might have spent together in a different dimension? Even with his long beard and bishop's robes, he had affected her in a way that went far beyond their parting hug and transparent expressions of what might have been. And, as Touma stood before her, shaven and in civilian clothing, she dared to think for the first time that her fantasies might become reality.

Somehow Sarah found a way of lightening the moment. "That's a bold request. May I ask for your credentials as a kisser?"

Perplexed for a moment, Touma's face finally lit up. "They are admittedly somewhat lacking as befits an inexperienced former cleric who has spent his entire life preparing for anything but this moment."

"Former cleric?"

"Do you see a beard or bishop's robes?"

"No. But I thought it was for your protection."

"True enough. But even the type of threats I have experienced would not move many in my position to symbolically express detachment from the church by shaving."

"Then why?"

"Two reasons. The first is to better position myself to kiss you."

"And, the second?"

"I'm afraid that comes after my kiss—a matter that is now taking on some urgency as I don't know how long I can keep my lips in a kissing position."

As Sarah moved toward the former Metropolitan, a rush of emotion suddenly swept through her and instead of kissing Touma, she threw her arms around him and sobbed uncontrollably. As she did so, Touma held her tightly. When she had finished crying, she looked into Touma's eyes, placed her hands on either side of his face and kissed him first gently and then passionately. The love making that followed felt other earthly to the previously celibate Touma and astonishingly exciting to Sarah who had not been with a man for decades. After it was done, they lay on Sarah's bed stroking one another's hair and studiously avoiding the signs of age in each of them.

Soon, the joy of the evening gave way to exhaustion and the two fell into a deep sleep.”

The next morning, Touma awakened to the smell of coffee and the sound of an egg beater. He emerged from the bedroom and saw Sarah at work making an egg and cheese casserole. Fresh fruit and vegetables covered the breakfast table and it was clear a feast was at hand. Touma walked over to Sarah and kissed her on the back of her head as she poured batter into a glass cooking pan. Sarah looked up for a moment, smiled and returned to her cooking.

“I had to do that just to make sure you were not an apparition.”

“Far from that I can assure you, just in case last night wasn’t enough.”

For the next few moments, the two looked at one another wordlessly. Finally, the casserole was ready, and Sarah invited Touma to sit down. After serving the two of them, Sarah also sat. As Touma ate ravenously, Sarah just stared in wonder at the first man with whom she had shared breakfast in as long as she could remember. Her happiness was without limit. Finally, Touma finished eating and looked up to see Sarah smiling at him. He of course knew what was coming. “You said you had a second reason?”

“I did. Do you recall when I once asked you if you remembered my brother.”

“Yes, and I said I remembered a boy from our time in Cairo.”

“Now I wish to ask you if you remember my mother.”

“Talida. I’ll never forget her. She was so brave.”

“She was indeed, and, at the time, her name was Talida.”

Sarah’s senses were now heightened not to speak of her curiosity. “What do you mean by ‘at the time?’”

“Talida as you may know is a common Coptic Christian name. But my mother’s name was really Talia, the feminized version of “tal”.

“But “tal” is a Hebrew word. It means dew. A prayer for “tal” is recited during Passover at the end of the rainy season when morning dew becomes very important.”

“Exactly. For my mother’s entire life, I had never heard her use the name Talia until she lay on her death bed. She said there were certain things she had never revealed during her life because she wanted to protect Boutros and me. One of those things was that her real name was Talia.”

“You mean”

“Yes. My mother was a Jew. Following the 1948 war with Israel, my mother’s family had wanted to leave for Israel. But, unfortunately, her father was murdered during the period of national frustration that followed the Egyptian army’s defeat in the war. My grandmother, who I never met, lacked the funds to escape from Egypt. Instead, with her daughter Talia, she went underground and, months later, the two of them reappeared as God-fearing Coptic Christians. My grandmother insisted that my mother never betray her Jewish heritage. My mother obeyed my grandmother’s orders in spirit. But, during her life, the only things that overtly connected my mother to her former life were the candle sticks you may have seen when you came to my apartment—Shabbat candle sticks which she of course only admired but never used.”

“You won’t believe this, but it now all comes back to me. My father wondered about the candle sticks but was too busy to delve into the matter. Also, I remember how your mother smiled when my father stated his full name—a recognizable Jewish name. I thought she might have blanched at being attended by a Jewish doctor. But instead she seemed to be pleased, another matter my father found curious, but didn’t have the time to pursue. But please continue.”

“Surprisingly, my mother never objected when I chose to join the church. I think she understood the pain I felt at the way you were treated and, in addition, thought I would be safe. It must have been terribly difficult for her to keep her secret all of her life.”

“I can’t imagine.”

“For several years I struggled with the reality of who I was. I had always had a warm spot in my heart for the Jewish people as a result of what your father and you did for my mother. But now that warm spot was taking over and causing me to question the way I had seen myself all my life. My visit to Jerusalem, when we were reunited, was not a church visit in the technical sense. Rather, it was intended as journey of discovery. My experience reenacting the stations of the cross was intended to reinforce my relationship with my savior.”

“Did it work?”

“Sadly, no.”

“I wish I had known. I might have been more helpful or sympathetic.”

“You were fine, and you couldn’t have known. When I returned to Egypt, I was able to mask my religious uncertainty for several years. But then it became too much, and I chose to retire. Had not the scroll found its way to me, I might have been

content to remain in St. Parsoma for the rest of my days. But the scroll offered me an opportunity to do something good for the Jewish people and to validate the new sense of religious identity that had been growing in me for some time. The threats on my life provided the perfect pretext for fleeing with the scroll to a place where I knew it and my newfound awareness would both be given their proper due.”

Sarah couldn't help herself. She threw her arms around him and kissed as much of his head and face as her embrace allowed. Softly, she then asked: “where do we go from here?”

Touma's response was unexpected. “There's a second codex of which you are not aware that corroborates the first. My brother has arranged for its safe keeping. But there are forces at large who would destroy it. Our next step is to bring the second codex to safety and verify its authenticity.”

“That's fascinating news and I want to hear all about it. But that piece of information was not what I was talking about and you know it.”

Touma's answer was not as unexpected as his previous one but still a surprise. Lovingly, he looked into Sarah eyes. “When that's done, my next step will be studying up on my newfound religion so I can marry you!”

Sarah's face could not have glowed more. She had never in her most remote imaginings thought she would hear such endearing words uttered by one who had occupied so important a place in her entire being for such a long time. Her look of delight might never have changed but for the ringing of Touma's cell phone. “It's Chaim Warkovsky. The tests have been resoundingly positive. He's now contacting his colleague at Hebrew University for a writing analysis.”

Chapter Sixty-Three

St. Parsoma, Egypt

After Barakat had checked in with Al Mostafa to advise him where Leibowitz and he were heading, Al Mostafa had wasted no time. He had first called Khalid Al Muhammadi in Doha and obtained clearance for what he planned to do. Then Al Mostafa had contacted the Qatari to let him know that Barakat and Leibowitz would be arriving later in the day and that he would follow the next morning. The Qatari assured him he would be waiting for the two professors and would not let them out of his sight. They then arranged for a time to meet the following morning at a place that would enable the Qatari to continue his surveillance.

The following morning, the Qatari watched with grim fascination as Ghobriel led the two professors onto the construction site and into the reconstructed residence. From bright sunlight, the three men entered the much darker interior of the residence and at first all three had to squint. As Ghobriel's eyes adjusted, he checked to see that his companions were comfortable in the dark. He then proceeded to clear some of the debris from the floor which he had left earlier that day to camouflage the entrance to the tunnel.

Happily, the tunnel door's leveraging system worked without any problem and the door to the tunnel opened easily. After Ghobriel flicked on the switch to the underground lighting system, he felt obligated to warn Barakat and Leibowitz that there were risks involved as the tunnel walls were showing signs of stress from the explosion. He didn't think his admonition would deter his guests and, as expected, it did not.

As the two academics peered into the tunnel, they began to appreciate Ghobriel's warning. Everything was in place, but there were many crevices in the walls caused by the blast and

some of the overhead beams did not look very sturdy. However, without hesitation, they both followed Ghobriel into the tunnel and began walking toward the underground chamber. Once there, Ghobriel punched in the required six-number combination into the security panel. As his companions watched him enter the six numbers, Ghobriel turned to them: “Do you know what the password numbers—184253—represent?”

Erudite as they were, both professors were stumped. So, after taking in his companions’ puzzlement for a satisfying moment, Ghobriel reported that the numbers stood for the birth and death years of Origin, the greatest Christian theologian of his era.

The Qatari had watched Ghobriel and the two professors enter the residence. When they failed to reappear an hour later, he had wanted to investigate. Instead, he called Al Mostafa who advised him not to take any action until he arrived very shortly. As the minutes ticked away, the Qatari could hardly restrain himself. Finally, as his agitation level threatened to get out of control, he spotted a fast-moving dust cloud in the desert and was happy to see that it was the vehicle Al Mostafa had described.

With barely a greeting, Al Mostafa got out of the car and asked whether there was anything new on the whereabouts of Ghobriel and the two professors. When the Qatari dejectedly moved his head from side to side, Al Mostafa directed that they head for the residence. Once there, they found no sign of either the professors or Ghobriel. Perplexed, Al Mostafa turned to the Qatari who insisted the three men under his watch had entered the building and not left.

While resting on a pile of construction stone, Al Mostafa sat back for a moment while he pondered the mystery of what had happened to the three men. As he thought, light from the

changing angle of the sun streamed through the partially unfinished room where he sat. Clearly, the men could not have gone up as there was no “up” available to them. So, they must have gone down. But, where? Benefitting from the new stream of light, Al Mostafa began to surveil the floor of the room.

Unfortunately, there was dust and debris everywhere, causing Al Mostafa to conclude that finding any trail might be hopeless. Then, under the light of the sun, his attention was drawn to a part of the floor where the dust and debris had apparently been pushed aside. Without too much investigation, he discovered the cleared area that led to the otherwise camouflaged trapdoor. Once the location of the trapdoor was disclosed, Al Mostafa was able to find the spring-loaded mechanism for opening it without difficulty.

Al Mostafa was happy to see that the tunnel was illuminated. Instructing his companion to take out his gun, Al Mostafa directed him to lead the way into the tunnel.

Ghobriel had tried to get the two professors to move quickly after they had retrieved the parchment and its related artifact. However, they were so dazzled by the antiquities that surrounded them that they had persuaded Ghobriel to allow them to tarry as they made hasty notes of what they were observing. Had they left a little earlier, they might have avoided Al Mostafa and the Qatari. Further, had their enthusiasm not translated into noisy chatter, they might have been able to surprise their pursuers. But they were late and they were noisy. As they rounded a bend in the tunnel, they were stunned to see Al Mostafa and another man waiting for them. The other man - Ali Hussain, the Qatari--had a gun pointed right at them.

Barakat was practically speechless but somehow managed to put his surprise into words. “Abdullah, what are you doing here? I thought I put you in charge of the laboratory. How did you find this place and how did you get in?”

“My dear professor, you may have noticed that my confederate is the one holding the gun. So, I will do the questioning. But, first, I see your associate is carrying two packages which I believe contain archeological finds similar to the one I was forced to alter for testing purposes.”

“What do you mean by alter?”

“I’m embarrassed by your lack of imagination. Haven’t you already figured out that I doctored the carbon dating sample so it would produce a misleading result?”

“But, why?”

“All in good time. Ali would you please hand me the gun. Milad would you kindly ask your associate to hand the two packages to Ali. There is no room in this small area to make any false moves. So, it’s definitely in your best interest not to try anything funny.”

Barakat had never stared at the inside of a revolver and was petrified. Without questioning Al Mostafa’s directive, he instructed Ghobriel, who was holding the two packages, to hand them over to the large man who was now moving toward them with his hands extended.

Ghobriel was no more experienced at being on the receiving end of a deadly weapon than Barakat. Further, he hadn’t yet put two and two together. But he assumed Al Mostafa and Ali were somehow connected with the bombing. As a result, he knew what they were capable of and didn’t think his comrades and his chances were very good unless he acted quickly. So as Ali stepped forward with his arms outstretched, Ghobriel also moved forward as if to meet him. When they were about four steps apart from one another, Ghobriel feigned a stumble. As he landed, he quickly scooped up some of the loose dirt that was underfoot and threw it into Ali’s face.

Al Mostafa had been unprepared for Ghobriel's maneuver. Even at that, he had no hesitation about what he had to do. But he was a laboratory researcher and not a marksman. Compounding his lack of experience was the chaotic scene that unfolded when Ghobriel went down and Ali yelled in pain from the dirt getting into his eyes. As a result, the gun waivered in Al Mostafa's hand and his shots went astray.

As Ali and Al Mostafa regrouped, Ghobriel grabbed the two packages and, after urging the two professors to retreat back into the tunnel, was now also reversing his position and following them back toward the storage chamber.

Despite being in great discomfort, it had taken Ali only a few seconds to recover. Quickly Al Mostafa handed him the gun and, together, they began to pursue the three fleeing men back into the tunnel, with the Qatari leading the way. Incensed at having been tricked, Ali flew through the tunnel as if supercharged by some unknown force. Finally, he saw the three men ahead of him and fired. The shot hit Ghobriel in the shoulder, but he continued to run after handing over the two packages to Barakat. As he ran, he looked left and right in an indiscernible pattern. Finally, he saw what he was looking for—a discolored rock situated about four feet from the ground and surrounded by a ring of smaller discolored rocks. It was one of the ancient triggering stones designed to interdict unwanted intruders.

Over his shoulder, Ghobriel observed his two pursuers closing the gap, with Ali preparing for a clear shot. Slowly, Ghobriel came to a halt as if his wound would no longer allow him to run any further. He leaned against the wall near the triggering stone and, as the Qatari raised his gun for one finishing shot, Ghobriel pressed hard on the stone's trap door mechanism.

The Qatari's shot had found its mark. But it was the last shot he would ever take. As he stood in disbelief, he felt the ground beneath him begin to give. To his horror, Al Mostafa observed what was happening to the Qatari. But it was too late. The ground underneath Al Mostafa also began to crumble opening up a large gaping hole. Satisfied, Ghobriel watched stone faced as both Al Mostafa and Ali were swallowed up into the gaping opening in ground.

Ghobriel's satisfaction didn't last very long as the unexpected occurred and the already damaged walls of the tunnel reacted to the loosening ground. In an instant, the walls in the vicinity of the newly-opened holes gave out, sealing off the way in which all of them had entered the tunnel. As he watched in dismay, Ghobriel slumped to the ground as his two wounds began to sap him of what little strength remained.

The two professors had stopped running and had seen everything. Stunned, they watched as their two pursuers were swallowed up live by the receding ground. It was too much for Leibowitz who could not hold in his insides and fell prostrate on the ground retching uncontrollably. Meanwhile, Barakat went over to see if he could do anything to help the dying Ghobriel. As he bent over, Ghobriel motioned to his pocket and nodded his head as Barakat removed a phone from the pocket. Again, Ghobriel nodded motioning Barakat to turn on the phone, as he whispered the security code. Before he could do more, he began to gasp trying to catch his breath. However, a wisp of life still remained in him and he urged Barakat to bend over so he could whisper his last words. But only one word came out before the doomed man breathed his last breath

Still stunned, Leibowitz did his best to compose himself. As he got up, he was terrified as he noted they had been sealed in. Then he observed Barakat taking off his outer shirt to cover the face of the now departed Ghobriel. Saddened beyond measure, he asked Barakat if Ghobriel had been able to say anything before he died.

“Yes. After urging me to remove his phone, he provided me with its security code.”

“Was that all? Did he say anything that might help us?”

“He did look in the direction of the underground chamber and uttered one word.”

“What was that?”

“Duck!”

Chapter Sixty-Four
United States Penitentiary
Lewisburg, Pennsylvania

Farkas Heszlényi had been incarcerated at the United States Penitentiary in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. Even by prison standards, his movement within the prison grounds was severely limited as his jailors didn't want anything to happen to him while his questioning was ongoing. By virtue of his willingness to cooperate, his interrogators had had a free hand. However, the interrogation was still going slowly. Though the authorities had secured a German-speaking questioner, Farkas' accent continuously made the sessions difficult. Much more significant was Farkas' growing fear of what lay ahead. Twice, he had broken down during questioning and the prison psychologist had insisted he would be worthless unless given time to recover.

At last, however, a pattern was beginning to emerge. Through a variety of imaging techniques, his questioners were able to identify the apartment where he had stayed while in London. Unfortunately, a search of the place and extensive questioning of the building's other occupants had yielded little in the way of clues. The authorities had also been able to track down the bank transmittal address for the funds that Farkas had received to cover his London expenses. Once again, however, the lead had not borne fruit.

Time and again, Farkas had been asked about the other man who shared the apartment with him and what he might have heard the man say. But, so far, all his questioners had been able to discern was that the man spoke both Arabic and German and always spoke in Arabic when using his cell phone to talk to others. Because Farkas had no background in Arabic, he was able to provide little information from the other man's cell phone conversations. However, he believed he had heard the words Ali and Muhammed, the names of the prophet's son-in-law and the prophet himself.

At first the questioners thought that the references to the two most important personages in Islamic history were merely theological expressions or oaths. However, one enterprising young questioner noted that Farkas' testimony regarding the frequency with which he had heard the names suggested they might be more than theological references and could be actual persons. Since the names Ali and Muhammed were quite common in the Muslim world, the young interrogator's insight was taken seriously.

Another interrogator came up with the idea of having an Arabic speaker in the room to see if he could draw any additional inferences from the two names Farkas was reciting. The new questioner's name was Nassir and he brought with him extensive experience in translating Arabic into several other languages including English and German. His first act was to ask Farkas to pronounce the two names slowly and then quickly and then to repeat the process. Next, he asked him to pronounce the names loudly and then softly. Soon, Farkas had been put through this exercise four dozen times and he was showing clear signs of tiring. But Nassir insisted he was making progress.

Farkas was now slurring the names causing concern he had had enough and could be lapsing into another breakdown. But, from Nassir's perspective, his blurred words told all. For Nassir was discerning a pattern suggesting the two names Farkas had heard repeatedly were not allusions to the prophet and his son in law Ali but, as previously surmised, were two different names that sounded like Ali and Muhammed.

At Nassir's request, Farkas was given a lengthy break, during which time Nassir made a list of Arabic boy's names as well as popular surnames that sounded like Ali and Muhammed. When Farkas returned to the room, Nassir first read the list trying his best not to employ an Arabic accent. He also flashed name cards as he recited the names. Since there were about seventy-five names in total, the process took a while. Then he repeated the process employing an Arabic accent. As he did,

Farkas eyes lit up almost immediately and Nassir knew he had hit pay dirt. Farkas had not heard the names Ali and Muhammed. Rather, he had heard one name that sounded like Ali and Muhammed—the surname “Al Muhammadi.”

The authorities at Lewisburg had not lost any time in wiring inquiries to Europol, with its more than one hundred security analysts, and to the Israeli Mossad. The Mossad was the first to respond, advising that Al Muhammadi had been on their watch list for quite some time in connection with a shadowy anti-Israel organization which they knew by the name SFMA. Through ongoing surveillance, they had determined that Al Muhammadi was a well-placed Qatari national. They had been following his movements in an effort to identify other operatives within the SFMA network. However, they had not yet found reason to sound the alarm. Aside from Al Muhammadi’s recent trip to London, his trips outside of the country were limited resulting in equally limited intelligence.

Even so, the fact that the Israelis had placed Al Muhammadi within Qatar was a major breakthrough. Armed with that information, the American authorities had immediately contacted the United States intelligence unit at the Al Udeid Air Base outside of Doha and had also reached out to their Qatari counterparts. In no time, the Qatari authorities had checked Al Muhammadi’s cell phone log and found he had made numerous calls to a cell phone number in London, as well as calls to numbers in Benghazi, Cairo and Mostorod. As Qatari intelligence began to identify the registered owners of the cell phone numbers, a disturbing pattern emerged. Except for the calls to Cairo, all of the owners had at one point or another been linked to either illegal or terrorist organizations. In addition, the owner of the cell phone with the London number had at one point listed his address as the apartment that had housed Farkas Heszlényi while he was in London.

More than ample evidence existed to investigate Al Muhammadi's activities and continue to monitor his cell phone. It had not taken long for one of the intelligence officers to listen in on Al Muhammadi's call to Hamroush's henchman, Mahmoud, regarding the fate of Roshni Khan, Malcolm and Boutros. Roshni's name was well known in Qatari circles owing to the importance of her father Ibrahim Khan. Quickly the intelligence officer called his superior who, in turn, called Ibrahim Khan.

Ibrahim was in no mood for bad news when he received the call from Qatari intelligence. Malcolm and Roshni had recognized that their trip to St. Parsoma posed dangers. So, they had put their backup plan into motion and had instructed Alex to email a copy of the thumb drive to Roshni's father if they did not report back in a timely manner. Having not heard from his brother within the designated timeframe, Alex had followed through, copied the video onto his computer and emailed a copy to Ibrahim Khan. Ibrahim was now worried. As he picked up the phone, the caller's voice added to his distress as he recognized it to be the voice of a friend who was a senior Qatari intelligence officer. Even more importantly, he sensed the tremor in the man's voice and knew that trouble was at hand.

The senior official advised Ibrahim of the substance of the call that had been taped between Al Muhammadi and Mahmoud. He further advised that a contingent of Qatari security officials were on their way to take Al Muhammadi into custody. Ibrahim was devastated by the report of the overheard call and confirmation that his daughter was in danger. However, his mind was clear, and he knew he had to act quickly if he was to save his daughter's life. So, he demurred at the suggestion that Al Muhammadi be taken into custody. Instead, he noted he was very close to Al Muhammadi's office and wanted to talk to him before he was taken into custody. Owing to Ibrahim's position within the ruling Qatari community, the intelligence official agreed to give Ibrahim an hour before they took official action against Al Muhammadi.

Quickly, Ibrahim made his way to Al Muhammadi's office. He waived off Al Muhammadi's startled receptionist as he headed directly for his antagonist's office. Al Muhammadi was equally startled to see the senior Khan standing in the doorway of his office. It took little imagination on his part to recognize that Khan's appearance was not a coincidence. Slowly, he lowered his shoulder and began to reach for his desk drawer and the revolver it housed.

"Khalid, I hope you're only reaching for a fountain pen and that you wouldn't be so rash as to be reaching for something more lethal."

"Why would you think that?"

"Because I know how much you love your children and would not want anything to happen to them."

Khalid withdrew his hand. "What is it you want?"

"I think you know. The authorities are aware of the SFMA and of your likely involvement in the death of a prominent American and an Egyptian on American soil. Need I remind you that Qatar's relationship with America is extremely important. We field a standing army of only twelve thousand men and have no arms industry. The Americans have sold us over twelve billion dollars-worth of MIM-104 Patriot Missiles and their presence on our air force base acts as a strategic umbrella. We may not love the relationship, but we can't afford to offend the Americans not to speak of being involved in the killing of an American on American soil. Do I make myself clear?"

"Go on."

"I have a bargain for you. I will do what I can to save your life, but I can't guarantee it. I can however guarantee that if you leave this earth, the world will be made to believe your

death was honorable. None of us wish to humiliate your parents and your family by advertising what you've done. And not incidentally, your children will live."

"In return, what do you want from me?"

"Only a child for a child! I want you to call your henchman in St. Parsoma and tell him you wish to bring my daughter, the American and the Egyptian back to Qatar where a high price will be fetched for their safety."

"Suppose I'm inclined to make the call. How can one man and a couple of low-level operatives bring three people from the Egyptian desert to Qatar?"

"On the way over here, I called our foreign office and requested that our diplomatic mission in Cairo request fly-over authority for a Qatari helicopter with two armed guards on board to land at St. Parsoma, refuel and fly back to Doha. I have no doubt our request will be granted. Assuming it is, I want you to direct your confederate in St. Parsoma to place my daughter and the two men on the helicopter under the custody of the armed guards. I should also mention I made a second call on the way over here. You would not want to meet the recipient of my call in a dark alley. He is currently positioned outside your children's school waiting for confirmation from me that you've agreed to cooperate. Now, do you wish to make a call?"

Al Muhammadi's nerves had clearly reached a breaking point, and he meekly nodded his assent.

"Good. Please use your speaker phone."

Al Muhammadi's hands were shaking so hard he was almost unable to take his cell phone from his pocket. But, finally, he did. Once the phone was out, he placed it on speaker and began to dial. He had to peck away twice at the intended number before making the connection. Relieved beyond measure,

Ibrahim heard his antagonist issue instructions regarding the helicopter and, more importantly, heard the other man confirm he would perform as instructed.

Chapter Sixty-Five St. Parsoma, Egypt

Mahmoud had worried about the two men who were in the car with him as they followed Boutros's car to St. Parsoma. They seemed ruthless enough and their pay would be good, but he was concerned about their ability to keep their mouths shut. He didn't care for killing, but he knew it had to be done as necessity required.

His two accomplices might well be loose lipped, but they were also proficient in following instructions. During the drive to St. Parsoma, Mahmoud had left plenty of distance between his car and the one driven by Boutros. The distance had posed little risk of losing Boutros's car for, after they left the highway, Mahmoud's GPS indicated there were no turnoffs until they reached the monastery. They arrived at St. Parsoma a few minutes after Boutros.

After getting out of the car, Malcom had planned to call his brother as they had originally planned. However, as he prepared to make his call, he saw Mahmoud's car bearing down on him. Not knowing what else to do, he started to run, as did Boutros and Roshni. It was to no avail, as Mahmoud and his two accomplices had little difficulty in overtaking and apprehending the three members of their quarry. Mahmoud had laughed when a shaken Roshni tried to bargain for their release by describing her father's wealth and position. If her father was as rich as she said, then Mahmoud knew he could expect a substantial pay day. But that would have to come from Al Muhammadi and not from the sniveling harlot.

After he finished laughing, Mahmoud decided he no longer had any interest in hearing from his captives. So, he ordered that they be bound, gagged and concealed. He regretted incapacitating them because it meant the men would have no

means of escaping, depriving him of cause to shoot them. But he couldn't afford to have any of them make a run for it, so bound and gagged they would be until he received directions from Al Muhammadi.

The process of incapacitating the three captives and taking them to a place of concealment had taken longer than Mahmoud had planned and his intended call to Al Muhammadi had been delayed. However, the need to make the call soon became unnecessary as Mahmoud's phone began to ring and signified that Al Muhammadi was on the other end. Eagerly, Mahmoud waited for instructions that would seal the fate of the two men, if not the insolent woman. However, as he listened, his forehead furrowed in a frown.

There would be no killing of infidels today. Instead, after confirming that all three captives were alive, Al Muhammadi advised that a helicopter would be arriving shortly and that both men and the woman were to be placed on the helicopter in the custody of the guards who would be on board. Soon enough, however, Mahmoud's frown turned to a smile as Al Muhammadi expressed his appreciation for the fine work that had been done and assured Mahmoud he would be well rewarded.

With the two packages in hand, Leibowitz and Barakat had worked their way to the back of the tunnel and had arrived at the underground chamber. The going had not been easy as the earlier collapse had knocked out all of the tunnel lighting and ventilation. They had illuminated the passage using their cell phones. Even so, large and small dislodged rocks had made the passage treacherous and by the time they arrived at the chamber they were winded and bruised.

Remembering Ghobriel's disclosure of the combination to the touch pad, Barakat carefully tapped in the six numbers and was pleased to watch the door open. Now inside, the two

men sat down in exhaustion and began to assess their circumstances. Leibowitz immediately pointed out that the workmen would be returning the next day. If they could hold out for that short period of time, they might well be discovered. Barakat was not disposed to being negative but was forced to remind his colleague that the chamber was under the grounds of the monastery and the workmen, by contrast, would be focused on the residence that was a significant distance away. In light of that, he suggested they take immediate action to see if they could find a way out on their own.

In the interest of preserving as much battery life as they could, they decided to use only one cell phone flash light at a time. Their cell phones were of no use for communication in the tunnel and Ghobriel had advised that neither would they work in the underground chamber. But their cell phone flashlights did work and were indispensable to their survival. So, methodically, they began to work their way around the chamber. Under ordinary circumstances, they would have dallied numerous times to marvel at the host of artifacts that had been carefully stored within the chamber's confines. But these were not ordinary times.

After an hour of fruitless searching, they decided to take a break. By now, they were parched and disheartened, and their imprisonment had only begun. Exhausted, Barakat placed the cell phone on a small rock, without turning off the phone's flashlight. Immediately he fell asleep, as did Barakat.

Leibowitz was the first to awaken. His mind began racing for solutions and quickly he began to focus on the last word of the dying Ghobriel. Why in the world would he have uttered the word "duck" knowing the circumstances his two comrades would face with the tunnel sealed off. As he pondered this mystery, he accidentally nudged the rock on which the cell phone had been placed. Still pointing upward, the cell phone now cast its light in a different direction. Reflexively, Leibowitz looked at the new pattern of light on the roof of the chamber.

Suddenly, he sat bolt upright, understanding written all over his face.

There was nothing particularly unique about the area now being illuminated by the light beam. Just one very ordinary thing—a ventilation duct. As he gazed at the illuminated roof of the chamber, Leibowitz realized the dying Ghobriel had not uttered the word “duck.” Rather, his last utterance had been the word “duct.”

Leibowitz could not believe his stupidity in failing to unravel the clue prior to that moment. But, now he drew the obvious deduction from his observation: where there was a duct, there would have to be an external source for the air that circulated through the duct. Excitedly, he awakened the still sleeping Barakat who immediately agreed that Leibowitz’s flash of insight had to be correct.

Together, they followed the path of the overhead duct which clung to the roof of the chamber by a series of wire supports. Soon, they came to a point where the duct seemed to merge into the ceiling. “This has got be it,” yelled Leibowitz. “There’s only one place the duct can go, and that place is out.”

They hated to use the storage containers for fear they were compromising priceless objects inside, but they had no choice. Slowly, they assembled a stepladder of containers. Leibowitz was the more agile. So, he climbed the containers until he reached the wire support holding the duct before it blended into the chamber roof. From the ground the wire supports had looked a lot flimsier than they actually were, and, no matter how much he tugged, the supports wouldn’t tear away from the roof. He needed leverage and asked Barakat to look around for something he could use. The answer was nearby in a corner of the chamber. There, stood a shovel which must have been used for recent maintenance work. Barakat handed Leibowitz the shovel and the latter used it as a lever to separate the closest support from the ceiling. Thankfully, the support yielded but the

duct still hung owing to the many other supports that were still intact.

Assessing the situation, Leibowitz believed he could use the shovel as a mallet and cause the duct to detach with repeated swings. The risk however was that he would swing too hard and his momentum would cause him to fall off the pile of containers, risking serious injury. He knew he had to take the chance and swung for all he was worth. When the debris from the ceiling stopped falling, Leibowitz looked up. Where the duct had connected to the ceiling, he could now see a shaft of light. The only thing that now stood in the way was the fan blade used for drawing outside air into the duct, but which had been stilled as a result of the loss of electricity.

Leibowitz again used the shovel as a lever and the blade gave way. The opening in the ceiling was still too high to permit access to the outside. Furiously the two men piled container on top of container and soon the opening was within reach. Leibowitz was the first to emerge and took a few steps from the opening. As he adjusted to the sunlight, he thought he was observing a mirage. In the distance, he saw a helicopter. Even more startling was the fact that one of the people who was boarding with his hands bound behind him was Malcolm. Heedless of his own safety, Leibowitz yelled as loudly as he could. But it was to no avail. His voice could not overcome the distance and the noise of the helicopter's whirling propeller.

Soon, the helicopter took off leaving three men behind. Leibowitz was careful to conceal himself knowing the three men had been Malcolm's captors. As he looked in astonishment, one of the three men pulled out a revolver and shot the other two. The man then took off.

Leibowitz collected himself and walked the few steps back to the opening to the chamber where Barakat handed him

the two packages containing the parchment and the artifact. When Barakat was also above ground, Leibowitz told him what he had observed and the two headed for Barakat's car which had been parked behind the construction area where Mahmoud could not have seen it. They then drove to where the helicopter had landed to check on the shooting victims and see if either had survived. When they arrived, they could clearly see that both men were dead.

The importance of the two packages they now held began to sink in and they discussed what their next move would be considering they had just narrowly escaped death and were leaving five dead men behind. While they were talking, Barakat had been fingering Ghobriel's cell phone in his pocket. He now took it out and punched in the security code. "As I see it, these items were obtained by Boutros. It is he who should make the decision regarding what happens to them. I believe that's what Ghobriel had in mind when he provided the security code to his phone. If we look inside, I'm sure we'll find Boutros' number. The only question is whether he'll be alive at the other end when the phone rings."

Chapter Sixty-Six

Jerusalem, Israel

What Touma and Sarah lacked in youthfulness they had more than offset with an affection for one another that grew in intensity with each passing hour. The three days they had been together had been spent looking at one another disbelievingly but joyously and recounting stories of the people they had known and the experiences they had had. Even so, each astonished the other with an ability to transcend a lifetime and arrive without regret in the present.

Routine matters were of little consequence as the two discoveries in their lives—each other and the scroll—consumed all their waking thoughts and, undoubtedly, their dreams. As the two discussed the importance of the scroll, Touma tried to distract himself from what was most prominently occupying his thoughts—the expected call from the archeological handwriting experts at Hebrew University.

Touma was feeling increasingly uneasy as each hour passed without the phone ringing. To keep his mind off the call, Sarah and he collaborated on preparing a breakfast featuring a sumptuous array of Israeli salads. As Sarah's phone rang loudly, he almost dropped the preparations he was working on. He looked at Sarah and she urged him to go to the phone. Quickly, he pressed the answer button and expected to hear an Israeli accent on the other line. Instead, it was the voice of his brother Boutros calling from Doha Qatar, using Sarah's number which Touma had provided for emergencies.

Boutros first assured him that he was safely under the roof of one of the most prominent families in Qatar. He then reported that Leibowitz and Barakat had been in touch with him using Ghobriel's phone and had described Al Mostafa's perfidy and the death of Ilyas Ghobriel. As Touma tried to deal with the loss of his devoted assistant and to get hold of his emotions, Boutros offered consolation by relaying the description he had

received of the role played by the mortally injured Ghobriel in enabling Leibowitz and Barakat to escape to safety. Of equal importance, advised Boutros, the two professors had assured him that the parchment and the artifact were both safe.

When Touma inquired what was to be done with the two items, Boutros responded in a self-satisfied manner: “I think you’ll approve. The parchment will be evaluated at the University of Cairo under Barakat’s personal supervision. He’ll let both of us know what he finds and get our views before he breathes a word to the outside world. But, he’s already confident based on his handwriting analysis. If he’s right and the radio carbon testing bears out the handwriting analysis, we’ll decide what to do with the parchment. My current thinking is that it should stay in the Coptic region of Egypt as a permanent testament to the places where Jesus’ family trod while they were on their journey.”

“I agree. And, what of the relic?”

Touma smiled at Boutros’ response. “I’m very pleased on all accounts. But what pleases me even more is that you are well. On my end, the carbon dating has already been performed on the scroll with glowing results. We are now waiting for the handwriting analysis. I’ll call you on this number when I have the results.”

After the call ended, Touma turned to Sarah and beamed. “That was Boutros. He wanted me to know he’s safe and for reasons I’ll explain shortly, he’s in Qatar.”

“You’d better. People just don’t end up in Qatar without an awfully good reason.”

“Agreed. But, aside from his being safe, the big news is that the second codex is also safe. I guess now is a good time to tell you about it.”

“I should hope so!”

“Okay, I had that coming. In short, the newly discovered codex is a first-hand account of how the document’s author, a Jew named Judah, escorted his cousin Joseph and his family from Israel to the safety of Egypt in order to protect the infant Jesus from a maniacally jealous Herod.

Slack jawed, Sarah could only respond with a resounding “wow“.

“And you would be correct in that assessment. Even more amazingly, the codex goes on to relate how Judah became increasingly convinced the infant Jesus was endowed with extraordinary gifts and how he saved the child from almost certain death during their journey.”

“Astonishing!”

“Yes. But it might only be amazing and open to challenge were it not for the corroborating account given by the eye-witness author of the scroll—that is, if the scientists at Hebrew University confirm the scroll comes from the same period.”

Sarah was about to speak. However, as if on cue, the call came in from Hebrew University and the voice at the other end resonated with excitement. Three archeological writing experts had evaluated the scroll and all three agreed that it compared to other writings from the Roman Empire dating back to the beginning of the First Century CE. Touma was almost speechless but had the presence of mind to express his thanks to the caller. He also requested that no word of the analysis be released until he received conclusive word that the parchment could be similarly dated.

Again, he turned to Sarah with his face beaming from ear to ear.

“It looks like the results were good.”

“They were, indeed! I’m almost breathless!”

Sarah hesitated as she pondered her next question. But she felt she had to ask. “Don’t you find it ironic you’re considering converting to Judaism at a time when some of the most important Christian discoveries are taking place?”

“I do, particularly from the perspective of a historian.”

“What do you mean?”

“Simply this. The finds validate that Jesus existed in a way that goes way beyond what we have had to rely on up until now.”

“But, what of the Gospels?”

“None of the books in what we call the New Testament, including the Gospels, were written during Jesus’ lifetime or by persons who had firsthand knowledge of him. In addition, we don’t have originals of any of them. Fortunately, there have been a number of references to Jesus dating back to some of the earliest years of Christianity, which have tended to corroborate Jesus’ existence but still lacked the contemporaneous character of the scroll and the parchment. I have in mind the accounts of the Jewish-Roman historian Flavius Josephus.”

“Yes. Most of us in Israel know about Josephus. But what did he say that’s relevant to whether Jesus existed?”

“Two things. In his historical account called *Jewish Antiquities*, written long after Jesus had died, Josephus commented on an unlawful execution instigated by the high priest Ananus during a political vacuum preceding the arrival in 62 CE of a new governor named Albinus. Josephus identifies the person executed as James, the ‘brother of Jesus, who is called

Messiah.’ Since there were many persons named James and Jesus at the time, Josephus’ reference to Jesus ‘who is called Messiah’ may be seen as a practical way to better identify James and, in the process, Jesus. Josephus also wrote another relevant account, albeit one disputed by some scholars, which has become known as the *Testimonium Flavianum*. In this account, he describes a man “who did surprising deeds” and was condemned to be crucified by Pilate.”

“Was Josephus Flavius the only non-biblical source to support the existence of Jesus?”

“No. There were others. But, again, as with Josephus, none of the accounts occurred during Jesus’ lifetime, let alone by firsthand witnesses. For example, the Roman governor Pliny the Younger once wrote to Emperor Trajan that certain sects, presumably, early Christians, were “sing[ing] hymns to Christ as to a god.” Also, the Roman historian Suetonius once noted that the Emperor Claudius had expelled certain Jews from Rome who “were making constant disturbances at the instigation of one they called the *Chrestus*, presumably a reference to Christ. Most notably, around 116 CE, the Roman senator and historian Tacitus, arguably the greatest of Roman historians, wrote a historical account called *Annals of Imperial Rome*. In the history, Tacitus chronicled the burning of Rome in 64 CE, an act widely attributed to Nero who it is thought wanted to level the city so he could rebuild it in a way that pleased him. In his account, Tacitus notes that Nero falsely blamed ‘the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities.’ Tacitus goes on to say that ‘Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius.’ “

“I understand what you’re saying about the importance of firsthand accounts of Jesus’ life. But, what about your belief system? Don’t the scroll and parchment support what you’ve always believed about Jesus being God?”

“Undoubtedly, there will be many who will see the miracles described in the two finds as supporting a belief in Jesus as God. I will never begrudge them that view. But I don’t see the accounts in the two finds as being any more determinative of Jesus’ divinity than the reasons that have already drawn people to that conclusion for two thousand years. More importantly, I have already made peace with my personal faith and my future lies in the religion of my mother.”

At the reference to Talida, Sarah was moved to tears. As she wiped her moist face, she had one more question. “So, do the finds change much?”

“Yes. They change an immense amount. There will no longer be a debate about whether Jesus existed and, that in itself, will likely galvanize Christianity all over the world. I have to admit, in many ways I will miss not being part of that process.”

“What about for Jews?”

“For Jews, of whom I will soon be one, it could be a tectonic shift. There will also now be real grounds for expunging the theological indictment against the Jews that has been the source of two millennia of brutal anti-Semitic persecution, and, as the Church of England recently pointed out, a contributing cause of the Holocaust. As you yourself put it, there can be little basis for blaming Jews in perpetuity for the crime of deicide if it was a Jew who saved Jesus’ life, not once but a number of times, so that his destiny on earth could be fulfilled.”

Chapter Sixty-Seven

Jerusalem, Israel

Though crushed at the death of their daughter, Elaheh's parents were nevertheless ashamed of her disrespectful behavior and had stood side by side with the country's ruling clergy in asking for calm. However, they were of a different generation than the demonstrators and their words had fallen on deaf ears.

Throughout Iran, crowds of young people had gathered in protest demanding that the clergy leave the country to the people. Everywhere protestors assembled, posters could be seen bearing Elaheh's likeness. Soon, others were moved to follow Elaheh's example. In three cities in the country, young women who had removed their blouses in protest had been subjected to public floggings. Two had died engendering further protests and additional deaths.

The ruling mullahs had in the past looked to the rural part of the country to find support. However, a new problem had beset many of these areas traditionally seen as religious strongholds. As if the heavens were protesting along with the young people on the streets, the country had experienced unprecedentedly destructive rains for the second year in a row. In over three hundred towns and small cities throughout the country, more than a quarter of the people had been affected by flooding and more than a million had been rendered homeless. Adding to the despair was the flood-induced destruction of more than eighty bridges, one hundred and sixty dams and one thousand kilometers of rail lines. Eighteen thousand factories and workshops had been destroyed and countless jobs lost. People were desperate and fingers pointed in the direction of the government.

The government had closed down the internet, but still the protests continued as did the mounting death toll. Needing a cause to divert the country's attention from its domestic problems, the mullahs directed that the stage be set for a

confrontation with Israel. The country's Revolutionary Guardsmen responded immediately and showered more money on their anti-Israel proxies than they had ever previously received. On the Lebanese border, at sea where Israeli gas fields were located, in Syria near the Golan, and in Gaza, despite a shaky calm that had taken hold, the Iranian rial spoke and Iran's minions prepared to encircle Israel in an unprecedented pincer movement.

Israel's cities, infrastructure and sensitive areas had so far escaped large scale destruction. But the restraint underlying that circumstance would no longer be a reality. There had been few successes in smuggling precision guided weapons into both Lebanon and southwestern Syria near the Golan. But some had gotten through and now these weapons would be unleashed on northern Israel and the Golan with a destructive fury. Not only would the Zionists suffer unbearable devastation, but in addition the wave of nationalism that would overtake the Iranian heartland would quiet the dissenters and propel Iran's Guardsmen into unchallenged authority.

Assam Muhammed had been correct. The United Nations Security Council had met and perfunctorily expressed its disapproval of the cross-border raid on Israeli soil. Predictably, as if being played on a worn recording, the complaint had been turned on its head and used to draw attention to Israeli incursions into Lebanon. As usual, there had been no effort to distinguish between the Jewish state's actions to protect its northern border and the unprovoked Hezbollah attack from Lebanon. The reaction of the European capitals had been equally tepid, with only Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the four so-called Visegrád countries, expressing outrage against the attack and supporting Israel's right to defend itself by a retaliatory attack.

In Jerusalem, the cabinet security council had convened to consider the apathetic reaction of the United Nations. The

primary intention of the meeting had been to plan a retaliatory attack against Lebanon to knock out the source of the tunnel. However, recent reports had made it clear that the Hezbollah attack against the defenseless village in Israel's north was just one salvo in a menacing pattern of events threatening to engulf the country. All fingers pointed to Iran.

In the south, Hamas had increased the pace of its missile launches into Israeli territory and Israel's Southern Command had reported that a new generation of Hamas missiles was being deployed. In the past week alone, three Hamas missiles had managed to avoid Israel's Iron Dome, with one landing in a citrus grove just south of Tel Aviv. The air raid sirens had wailed in Tel Aviv and the city's terrified residents had headed for bomb shelters. In addition, Hamas had been massing buses for a new assault against the border with Israel and had brazenly announced that the vanguard of the march would be women and children followed by armed fighters.

Israel had been largely successful in interdicting Iranian land transports carrying precision weapons into Syria. However, undetected, a missile transport disguised as a relief mission had stealthily been working its way from Iran into Syria. Now, the Iranian command on the southern Syrian border had revealed the military purpose of the transport and had boasted that, when needed, the newly emplaced missiles could reach Haifa or Tel Aviv at will. Israeli intelligence had been caught off guard and its options were few as the missile launchers were easily disguised and too close to Russian military sites to permit an Israeli aerial attack. The effect of the Iranian announcement on the Israeli psyche had been devastating. The country's citizens now had an additional cause for seeking out bomb shelters and the strain was showing as opposition politicians publicly voiced frustration with the inability of their military leaders to protect them.

Near the Golan, Assam Muhammed had imbedded Hezbollah fighters in the Syrian villages just south of the Israeli border with Syria. In turn, they had recruited financially

destitute villagers to smuggle within one mile of the Israeli line--one precious piece at a time—surface-to-surface missiles capable of hitting any part of the Golan. Israeli intelligence forces had found out about the operation. However, the country had elected not to take action out of fear for Syrian civilian casualties. Now, however, those same Israeli intelligence units were reporting that the smuggled missiles were positioned to threaten the entire Jewish population of the Golan.

Reports of attempted assaults on the Tamar and Leviathan gas fields in the Mediterranean were also now streaming in, giving further urgency to the need for Israeli retaliatory action.

Had there been any question that the threats encircling Israel were part of a coordinated effort to strangle the country, Iran's foreign secretary released a statement that put all doubts to rest. Israel and the West had known that Iran was developing an intermediate range missile capable of carrying a massive payload to Israel's shores. Seemingly, a series of testing mishaps had made it appear that Iran's objective had not yet been realized. But now, the country's foreign secretary was boasting to the world that all technical problems had been overcome and that launchers with six such missiles were being readied at a military site in the interior of the country. No mention was made of whether such missiles would carry a conventional or nuclear payload. But no mention was required. Even if one of the six missiles managed to evade Israel's intermediate range anti-missile defense system known as "David's Sling," the destructive effect on Tel Aviv would be enormous even if the missile was carrying a conventional payload. No Israeli politician or military chief could tolerate such a prospect.

In the West Bank, the aging Fatah organization had decided that Israel was vulnerable and announced it was uncoupling its security apparatus from Israel's. Practically speaking, such a move was unwise because it exposed a weakened Fatah security apparatus to a possible invasion of

Hamas operatives. However, politically, it meant that Israel, in its time of danger, would have to devote precious resources to the lawlessness that would overtake much of the West Bank.

Seeing the storm gathering around it, Israel had called upon the United States and the European nations to persuade the Iranians to stand down and to take forceful action if needed. The Americans had expressed support for the Israeli position. However, the American Secretary of State had made it clear that an American public, now weary of two decades of wars in the Middle East, would tolerate military action only if substantially supported by the Europeans. But, from the European nations, there was little more than hand wringing and platitudes. The financial interdependence between Western Europe and Iran had made it all too convenient for the key countries of Europe to stand down—a posture compounded by the rising anti-Semitism and entrenched anti-Israel hostility already present in many of those countries.

The gloom was pervasive as the cabinet security council and senior military leaders huddled in Israel's situation room. From virtually every Western European capital, Israel's ambassadors had reported an unwillingness of their host nations to confront Iran and a maddening tendency to sit by the sidelines in the hope that the demonstrations within Iran would cause its despised mullahs to lose their grip on power. That Israel might be the mortal victim of the mullahs as they became more and more desperate appeared to be no more than a passing consideration. From the United States, where Israel had used all means at its disposal to get the Americans to issue an ultimatum to Iran, the news was equally bleak. There would be no suggestion of American military action unless the Europeans committed to the same. A stalemate had been reached and bleakly one Israeli cabinet member after another acknowledged that the country was on its own.

The Israel Defense Forces had been trained to wage war on several fronts. But now the country was facing a threat from an almost unending list of foes almost all backed by Iran. The cabinet members looked to the military chiefs as report after report from abroad indicated that a political solution was not in sight. One after another, the military leaders expressed confidence they could hold off a wave of early attacks from Hezbollah, even with its arsenal of one hundred and twenty thousand missiles, operating out of both Lebanon and the Golan region. The same was true, they believed, with regard to interdicting Hamas launched missiles from the south as well as a staving off a surge in terrorism from the West Bank. However, they were less confident about how long they could hold off such attacks. Nor were they upbeat about possible intermediate-range missile attacks from Iran or shorter-range attacks from Iran's minions operating precision missile batteries from Syria.

Glumly, the cabinet officials concluded that the chances of large swaths of Tel Aviv being leveled were unacceptably high. No discussion that had ever taken place in the situation room was as painful as the one that followed. Tel Aviv—Israel's beating heart—could not be placed at risk. The order would go out to one of Israel's nuclear capable aircraft to arm for a nuclear attack on Iran. Only two questions remained before the unthinkable was put into operation. Would the country first issue a warning, and would it choose a harmless site in Iran. In both cases, the answer was in the negative. A warning would enable the Europeans, and maybe the Americans, to exert intolerable pressure against continuing with such a mission. Similarly, a launch against a harmless target would not be a strong enough deterrent against the desperate mullahs if world pressure prevented a follow-up action. The attack would take place against Iran's uranium enrichment facility at Natanz and it would occur following a twenty-four-hour internal notification period so that Israel's diplomats around the world could be properly briefed.

Chapter Sixty-Eight

Jerusalem, Israel

The twenty-four-hour countdown to launch had begun and throughout the Israeli military and political establishment, the enormity of what was contemplated began to set in. The site chosen for the attack, Natanz, was in a low population area, ensuring that relatively few people would die from the blast. But the nuclear genie would be out. No matter how well justified, Israel would forever be tarred as the first country since World War II to use a nuclear weapon.

None of the Israeli decision makers had slept well that night and few expected to sleep well in the days ahead. Although the population was not aware of the decision to launch, everyone knew that something decisive would have to take place due to the existential danger surrounding the country. Gas masks had been issued and bomb shelters had gone through trial runs. The wait had begun and the dread that came with it cast a pall over every segment of the population.

As with everyone else, Professor Chaim Warkovsky was aware of the mortal danger facing the country. Nevertheless, he was trying to focus on the announcement he would be making later in the day regarding the scroll. The announcement would be made in conjunction with two other announcements regarding the successful evaluation and dating of the parchment and the relic. So astonishing was the proposed content of the three announcements that the presenters had had little difficulty in persuading CNN Europe to dedicate one-half hour to each announcement, followed by questioning.

Consistent with established protocol regarding announcements of consequence to the nation, Warkovsky had contacted the prime minister's office with an overview of his presentation. As he contemplated what he would say, he could not have known that, even before its broadcast, his announcement had already had monumental consequences.

Indeed, as soon as the prime minister had been briefed on the import of the announcement and how it might be received by the Christian world, he had immediately directed the head of the air force to delay the nuclear bombing mission for an additional twenty-four hours. The grateful man had nearly broken down in tears upon receiving the prime minister's directive.

At the designated time, CNN Europe interrupted its normal broadcasting to make air time for what it described as an earthshaking series of announcements that would be made in split screen. On one screen, Chaim Warkovsky appeared flanked by the archeological handwriting expert from Hebrew University and Touma Salib. The other presenters broadcasting from their respective locations appeared on the two other screens. After a short introduction, the CNN Europe anchor first introduced Touma Salib who commented briefly on the importance of the scroll and how it had come into his possession. The anchor then introduced Warkovsky who described the radiocarbon testing that had been conducted at the Weizmann Institute. Warkovsky was followed by the Hebrew University professor who described the handwriting analysis performed at the university and, passage-by-passage, then described the contents of the scroll.

As the Hebrew University professor described Ahmed's observations at Mostorod, the anchor could no longer restrain himself. Calling the re-emergence of the spring at Mostorod and Judah's rescue of the infant Jesus "the miracle at Mostorod," the anchor wanted to know more about the significance of the find. The Israeli presenters had agreed beforehand that Touma, despite his religious transformation, would respond to any such questions in his capacity as an expert in Coptic theological history. He had given his prospective answers much thought and he hoped it showed in what he was about to say.

"I think it's important that we hear from the two other sets of presenters as they will provide greater context for the find we are now addressing. But, if as expected, they confirm what you have just heard, the implications are monumental on several

accounts. First, the scroll predates by two generations anything else we know of that refers to Jesus, and, more than that, has stood up to the most exacting radio-carbon testing and handwriting analysis. Second, unlike any of the other early Christian writings known to us, the scroll is an original. Third, the scroll is a firsthand testimonial by a disinterested party not only of Jesus's existence but also of where he traveled as an infant."

"That's quite a bit," observed the anchor almost breathlessly."

"It is. But, in my view, the most significant implication of the find is its description of the Jew Judah as Jesus' rescuer. As you will soon hear from the next two sets of presenters, the rescue was not the first time the man Judah had saved the life of the infant Jesus nor was it a matter of chance. Rather, Judah's commitment to protect the infant Jesus stemmed from a direct command he received while circumcising the child. The command was from the almighty, reflecting God's will that the Jew Judah ensure Jesus' survival so he could go on to complete his intended mission on earth."

"The designation of a Jew as Jesus' protector! That is indeed remarkable," mouthed the anchor, still amazed by what he was hearing.

"Remarkable is not nearly a strong enough word. For if God intended that Judah serve as Jesus' divinely designated protector, he could not have also intended that Judah's descendants be reviled even to this day. This is the awakening we have been moving toward since Nostra Aetate."

Next, the anchor shifted his gaze to the second screen which featured Milad Barakat and Jeffrey Leibowitz. Against the backdrop of the seal of Cairo University, Barakat calmly

described the testing done on the parchment and his team's conclusion that the document dated back to the early First Century. When asked by the anchor, what the contents of the parchment added to the contents of the scroll, Barakat's face lit up and he responded.

“In the ordinary course, the discovery of the parchment would be one of the great archeological finds of all time, if not the greatest. In its contents, we have the first-person account of the Jew, Judah, who felt the presence of God as he circumcised the infant Jesus and in addition heard the almighty direct him to serve as the infant's protector. Shortly afterward, we hear Judah describe how he arranged for Joseph and his family to escape to Egypt along with Judah's family. Still in Judah's voice, we hear him describe what he believed to be three miracles performed by the baby Jesus and of how he saved the miraculous child from certain death on two separate occasions, the second of which was in Mostorod outside of modern-day Cairo.”

“What do you mean by your reference to the ‘ordinary course’ “?”

“Simply this: If we merely possessed the parchment, there might be some who would question whether Judah's account of events was self-serving, whether pertaining to the circumcision, the unique way in which he documented the circumcision, the escape to Egypt, the miracles he observed or his preordained rescue of the infant Jesus. I'm not suggesting any such questioning would be valid, just that there would be an opening for skepticism. By contrast, Ahmed's disinterested third-party account in the scroll is in perfect resonance with Judah's account of the events that occurred in Mostorod. With such precise corroboration of one of the key events reported by Judah in the parchment, we have more than good cause to conclude that everything else he said actually occurred and was not merely a self-serving elaboration of events.”

“That’s quite impressive. If the events you’ve recited did indeed occur, would you agree with Touma Salib’s assessment of the theological implications of Judah having saved the baby Jesus?”

“We may have more to say later, but I’d like to leave the answer to that question to the next set of presenters.”

“You also said something about ‘the unique way in which he commemorated the circumcision’. Would you mind expanding on that?”

Again, I’d like to defer to our next set of speakers.”

Though a bit nonplused by Barakat’s response, the anchor conducted himself admirably. “It seems there haven’t been enough surprises today and that we’re in store for yet an additional revelation. So, without further ado, let’s go to Rome.”

Dramatically, the camera shifted from Cairo to the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican where a table had been set up for the two speakers who would give the third and last presentation. Seated at the table were Professor Armond Bertolucci of the University of Rome and Cardinal Giuseppe Ricolleta of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. On the desk in front of them was the relic that had been found with the parchment.

First, Bertolucci described the carbon dating that had been done on the instrument noting they had been fortunate in that the handle of the object had been made out of a ram’s horn rendering it especially well-suited for carbon dating. He next offered his unqualified opinion based on the testing they had done that the artifact dated back to the beginning of the first century.

As Ricoletta was preparing to speak, the television cameras panned the chapel's ceiling stopping at Michelangelo's most famous artistic rendering, *The Creation of Adam*. The effect was electric. Even Ricoletta, who had studied the ceiling on countless occasions, was greatly moved.

The moderator then invited Ricoletta to speak. With gloved hands, he reverently picked up the artifact from the table. It was obviously a knife. He then invited the cameras to zoom in on the Greek inscription on the haft of the knife. Confirming that the viewing audience would be able to see the inscription, Ricoletta began. "In the parchment, Judah states he was so moved by the voice he had heard during the circumcision of the infant Jeshua, whom we know as Jesus, that he decided never again to use the knife employed during the ritual. Instead, he decided to commemorate the circumcision with an inscription that ran across both sides of the handle of the knife. He provided a local artisan with a written version in Greek of the inscription of the words he wanted to appear on the knife haft and the artisan dutifully inscribed the words I am about to read."

Doing his best to hold back his emotions, the eminent Cardinal, speaking in English, began to translate the first side of the haft. "Sayeth the Lord. This child is dear to me." Ricoletta could no longer hold back his emotions and wept. Recovering, he then translated the inscription on the other side of the haft. "Bring him into my covenant and be his protector."

Struggling to digest what he had just heard, the astonished anchor waited for a moment so as to give the now-sobbing Ricoletta a chance to get hold of his emotions. At length, Ricoletta recovered his composure. Clearly moved by emotion himself, the anchor could barely get out the question he knew the world wanted to hear. "What does it mean?"

Sitting up erectly, the Cardinal responded. "I wish to emphasize that the Holy Father will be making an official statement in the near future. But I believe I speak for him. You

ask what it means. It means that God's beneficence was present when the infant Jesus was brought into the covenant of the Lord. It means that there can be no doubt of the favored status that God conferred on the child Jesus who, in later life, would shoulder the sins of mankind as he died on the cross. It means that Jesus' destiny was made possible through the actions of his divinely ordained protector. It means that, just as the child Jesus was dear to the Lord, his protector Judah and Judah's Jewish descendants are also dear to the Lord. It means that our duty is to protect Israel, the home of the Jews, most immediately from an Iranian aggressor bent on Israel's destruction."

Within hours of the CNN Europe program, congratulations began pouring in from Christian sources everywhere. In the United States, the leaders of the House and the Senate endorsed a resolution demanding that Iran stand down from the state of belligerence it had created against Israel or suffer militarily at the hands of America. In Europe, almost every country endorsed the American anti-belligerence resolution and pledged to support whatever action was required to force the mullahs to call off their henchmen. Only France, Belgium and Sweden demurred owing to their large and restive Muslim populations.

In Iran, greater crowds than had ever before been witnessed began congregating in every major city demanding that the country take action to avoid a war with Israel—a war that could leave both countries devastated. Seeing the light, the nation's religious establishment started transmitting conciliatory statements. But the cat had been let out of the bag. Now, an energized United States, backed by a near-unified Europe, knew that the mullahs had been weakened strategically and politically. From Washington, a list of demands ensued: Dismantle the medium range rocket launchers and terminate all missile testing, open up all sites in the country to anywhere-anytime nuclear inspection and cease all centrifuge development.

The mullahs had waived knowing that capitulating to such demands would end their nuclear warfare ambitions. However, the Russians, their erstwhile ally in Syria, had then weighed in. Now that the civil war in Syria was over and the Russians had accomplished their objectives, they no longer had any need for the Iranians whose attempts at bringing anti-Israel armaments into the country had more than once placed Russian soldiers at risk. Seeing an opportunity to rid themselves of the perils posed by Iran and its anti-Israel precision weapons, the Russians demanded that the weapons be dismantled and returned to Iran.

Feeling themselves hemmed in on all sides, the Iranian religious leaders had removed the six missiles aimed at Israel from their launchers and had sent out word to all of its proxies to stand down in their planned campaigns against the Israelis. To the astonishment of Israel's Southern Command, the Gazans ceased their marches against the border with Israel. In the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority announced it would resume security coordination with Israel. In Lebanon, the country agreed to demolish the attack tunnel and open the demolition process to international inspection. In Syria, the precision weapons recently brought into the southern part of the country were disarmed under the glare of internationally supervised cameras. In the Mediterranean, the attack boats arrayed against the gas fields were called back to port.

In Jerusalem, the sense of relief was overwhelming as the dancing in the street took on a life of its own with crowds abandoning their bomb shelters and heading to public places to celebrate. In the prime minister's office, two directives went out. The first formally terminated the previously issued nuclear order. The second was less consequential but equally satisfying. For the first time ever, the Israel Prize, the country's equivalent of a Nobel Prize, would be conferred on a gentile, the former Coptic Metropolitan, Touma Salib.

Epilogue

Poughkeepsie, New York

Raymond Avenue abuts Vassar College's main gate and its magnificent Gothic library complex. On the non-academic side of Raymond Avenue, a dozen or so structures of varying design and vintage look across the street to the college. One of these, the Scott Darien House, was built in 1894. The prodigious structure, with its large wrap around veranda and imperial ballroom, had long been sought by the college. However, the foundation that owned it had resisted all of Vassar's overtures, instead choosing to preserve the house and its four-acre garden as an event center and museum of the history of the Scott Darien family. However, with finances drained by the devastating coronavirus that had taken hold shortly after the Iranian stand down, the foundation had received an offer it couldn't refuse.

The purchase price had been provided by two large gifts—one from Ibrahim Khan and the other from Anita Steintaler. After rescuing Roshni and Malcolm from St. Parsoma, the elder Khan had listened to their combined vision of a conflict resolution center at Vassar and had decided to add to the funds already committed by the Qatar Development Fund. After that, it took little to persuade Anita Steintaler that a matching gift would be a fitting testimonial to her husband's memory and to the revolutionary archeological discoveries—now acknowledged as the greatest finds of the first two millennia—in which Roshni and Malcom had played such an important a role.

Renamed the Steintaler Khan Center for Conflict Resolution, the former Scott Darien House had seen little activity as the nation fought off the devastating effects of the worldwide pandemic. Now, the green light for large gatherings had once again been turned on. Hurriedly, work crews began refurbishing the facility for the events that would soon take place in its stunning ballroom and flowing gardens.

On the appointed day, the townspeople of Poughkeepsie, weary from the many months of social distancing necessitated by the virus and at last able to congregate, were ready to party. They had good cause for rarely had the community seen a celebration as joyous as the one that would soon play out, nor an assembly of persons as distinguished as those who had gathered for the afternoon's events.

The four hundred invited guests were greeted by a twenty-foot wide *chupah*, an enormous rendering of the traditional Jewish wedding canopy. Entwined with countless garlands of white roses, the *chupah* stood in the open lawn facing the newly-named Tadros-Ghobriel Memorial Gardens. As the string quartet played the last lush notes of Borodin's String Quartet Number 2, the wedding guests ceased their exuberant chatter and all eyes focused on the long velvet carpet that separated the chairs into two groups of two hundred.

As the processional music began, four hundred sets of eyes, among them Roshni and Ibrahim Khan, looked with pleasure as Anita Steintaler, flanked on either side by Boutros Salib and Jeffrey Leibowitz, marched down the carpet toward their places of honor in front of the *chupah*. Then, to the delight of all, three grooms in solemn procession made their way down the carpet and stood in front of the *chupah* as they awaited their brides. The assembled guests then stood as one, as the quartet began to play the Meditation from Massenet's *Thaïs*. As Massenet's ethereal music rose from the musicians' instruments, the anticipation of the audience was unmistakable. Finally, the three brides, each more radiant than the other, walked down the carpet toward their awaiting grooms.

Malcolm was the first to greet his bride. Tenderly, he escorted a beaming Wendy Sonnenzweig up the three steps that led to the *chupah* where the two stood in front of Rabbi Arnold Bradstein, the wedding officiant. Next, Alex greeted MacKenzie Lajoy, who smiled broadly as her eyes met Bradstein's, the man who had presided over her conversion to Judaism. Finally, the

most aged of the three grooms, the former Metropolitan Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt, now known by his Hebrew conversion name, Amital Salib, offered his hand to Dr. Sarah Schinazi and the two ascended the three steps to the *chupah*.

After the last of the wedding guests had left, the three newly married couples, along with Anita Steintaler, Arnold Bradstein, Boutros Salib, Jeffrey Leibowitz, Roshni and Ibrahim Khan and Mackenzie's mother Jocelyn, sat in a circle luxuriating in the velvety Upstate New York evening air. The three brides had taken off their wedding shoes and everyone was enjoying a kicked-back, but contemplative mood. Jocelyn had been taking care of Colby, but now the child slept peacefully in Mackenzie's lap.

Addressing Anita, Wendy was the first to speak. "I guess I have you to thank for helping me see the light. I can't thank you enough."

"I'm overjoyed I was able to help get Malcolm and you together. But I want you to know our sessions were as liberating for me as they were useful to you. It was a welcome catharsis being able to use my own circumstances to demonstrate that even people of influence and wealth suffer from the same cares and exhibit the same warts as everyone else."

MacKenzie then decided it was her turn to speak. "Rabbi, thank you for being a wonderful teacher. I really believe I'm going to enjoy Judaism and being the mother of Jewish children. But, what kind of world will I be bringing my children into? Have the finds in which many of the people sitting here played so important a role really changed attitudes toward the Jews?"

"I guess only time will tell. Already there are those who assert that the rescue of Israel was not worth the political capital

needed to force Iran to stand down, not to speak of the potential consequences of placing the country on the brink of war. In Europe, many of the countries that have commercial ties with Iran are already urging that some of the restrictions imposed on the mullahs be reversed in recognition of the importance of Iranian oil. Other European capitals, as you know, have had to deal with increasingly violent demonstrations from their Muslim constituents who see any aid to Israel as an affront to Islam. And, all of this comes on the heels of the pandemic during which many who sought someone to blame found a convenient scapegoat in the Jews.

Bradstein then looked in the direction of Ibrahim Khan. “How do you see it Ibrahim?”

“I’m from a country that has given almost one billion dollars in aid to the Hamas government in Gaza. I don’t begrudge the funds, although I have become increasingly alarmed that much of the money has been squandered on armaments instead of being spent on infrastructure and other measures needed to help the people. But for many in my country aid to Gaza is an article of faith because of the confrontational stand against Israel represented by Hamas. As a result, the aid will resume, Hamas will continue to be emboldened and, at least on that front, the endless cycle of violence between Arabs and Jews will persist. I don’t see much else changing elsewhere in the Muslim world, although Iranian adventurism could create new alliances that include Israel. Of equal importance, I don’t see what I consider destructive political attitudes in Israel changing soon. That’s why I think the conflict resolution center we have created is so important.”

Bradstein now turned his attention to Amital Salib. “As you and I discussed, I was completely wrong in my crystal ball gazing when it came to the perpetrators of Maury’s murder. Contrary to my theory, Maury’s increasing role in Christian-Jewish relations had no connection to his death. I don’t doubt there were some who saw him through stereotypical lenses and

resented the stature he had achieved within the Christian community. But I think my credentials as a seer on Jewish-Christian relations have been sufficiently damaged that I should defer to you. Besides, you're undoubtedly in the best position to assess the impact of the finds on Christian-Jewish relations. Does the initial outpouring of support from Europe suggest that the Christian community there is seeing the finds in a new theological light?"

"I was hoping to enjoy my long overdue wedding and honeymoon with my new wife before having to deal with such questions. But I guess that was wishful thinking. There are many who still see the finds as a divine expression of God's will and one that requires a sea change in the church's attitudes toward the descendants of Jesus' protector."

Smiling slyly, Bradstein interjected "I sense a 'but' coming!"

"And you would be right. Already there are influential voices who are calling the finds a plot to undermine Christianity."

Bradstein's smile now quickly turned into a concerned frown. "How is that possible? The finds appear to corroborate the Gospel of Matthew's account of Joseph, Mary and Jesus fleeing to the Egyptian desert to escape Herod's wrath."

"True enough. But what has upset some of the more extreme elements in the Christian world is the knife used for Jesus' circumcision and the inscription on the haft of the knife."

At that, Boutros, who had been quiet until then, spoke. "I think I know where my brother is going with this line of thought. You see, for three hundred years following Jesus' death, theologians grappled with the nature of Jesus. Was he at once both a man and a God? If so, was he more divine than human

or more human than divine. Most importantly, was he co-eternal with God or was he of God's creation?"

"Exactly, brother" intoned Amital. "By the beginning of the Fourth Century CE, many of the questions about the nature of Jesus had reached some kind of resolution. But in the year 325, an audacious priest named Arius argued that Jesus was created by God and, therefore, was not co-eternal with God. Arius' view was decidedly the minority view of his time, but he had many followers and the competing concepts of Jesus threatened to sew discord within the Christian world. The thought of Christianity breaking apart did not sit well with Constantine, the Roman emperor who had converted to Christianity. Constantine needed a united Christianity to ensure stability within the empire. So, he convened a council of bishops to meet in the Turkish city of Nicea to debate the question of Christ's nature. The upshot of the debate was to denounce Arius's view as heresy and to declare that Jesus was of the same nature and co-eternal with God. This theological pronouncement, along with other conclusions reached by the bishops, is known as the Nicene Creed. It has represented unalterable church doctrine for seventeen hundred years."

Roshni had been listening intently but was still feeling a little bewildered. "Needless to say, I don't have a background in Christianity. So, I don't understand what the circumcision and the inscription on the knife handle have to do with the Nicene Creed?"

Amital's expression conveyed understanding as he responded. "Most would agree with you. But those who take a different view seem to be speaking with the loudest voices. They cannot take issue with the fact of Jesus' circumcision since it is recited in the Gospel of Luke. But, from their perspective, it is an uncomfortable reference. To them, it suggests that Jesus was consecrated by God and brought into God's realm rather than always having been a co-equal part of the heavenly sphere. I frankly never drew that conclusion and don't find the position

very convincing. As I see it, the circumcision was just an aspect of Jesus having arrived on earth as an infant, a consideration that never interfered theologically with Jesus being regarded as the eternal equivalent of God.”

Roshni’s eyes lit up with understanding. “But, for those who see it the other way, the inscription on the knife haft reinforces their concern because it recites God’s direction to Judah to bring the infant Jesus into God’s covenant.”

“Precisely.”

“But the scroll, parchment and knife all corroborate one another and have been analyzed and tested by three different laboratories all of which are in agreement with one another. So, what can the voices you describe be saying?”

“They say there are enough unexplained coincidences in the three discoveries to suggest a Jewish plot to tear apart the fabric of Christianity.”

“What else are they saying?”

“Sadly, that the plot must be avenged.”