

BLACK POPE



Chris Deggs

This is a work of fiction apart from the bits that aren't

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Foreword

Pierre Berzot had not noticed it before. However, it was the first time he had turned the mattress and there it was before his eyes. If the mattress had not been lumpy in places he may never have discovered the small book. Pierre wondered if the innocuous little volume was left behind on purpose. Had he left it where it was, his life would have continued as usual. However, curiosity got the better of him, and his life irrevocably changed, from that of an inconspicuous French archaeologist, to that of a fugitive, in hiding. Staring at the book, he wondered what it was doing there and who had left it behind?

As his work, in the Andes Mountains, took up most of his time, his rented room, in which he slept, also doubled as his office, in which he wrote up his research. Pierre had no idea that overnight guests rented his room while he was looking for Inca relics, so he did not know that a Jesuarian priest had stayed in his room, who upon his departure, had forgotten the little book. The small volume, written in Latin, would have been perplexing to even most academics. However, being able to understand the archaic language, he soon realised what he had in his hand. Beads of sweat formed on his forehead as, with trembling hands, he read out the rules of the highly classified Jesuarian manual of procedure, which was only for the eyes of the trusted leaders of the Jesuarian Order. The seal signature and attestation of the General Secretary of the Order in Rome told him it was a document of the highest importance. For the next few days, the Frenchman laboured furiously translating the work in stenographic notes, into French. He then replaced the book and returned to his dig, in the mountains.

A number of days passed before the Jesuarian realised he had lost his precious book. His horrifying discovery filled him with panic and terror. He would soon feel the strangulation cord tighten around his neck if he did not retrieve the sacred rulebook. Praying that nobody had discovered it, he diligently retraced his tracks, until he came to the Peruvian cottage where he had spent the night. A puzzled landlord showed him to the archaeologist's room. Dismissing the cottage owner, the Jesuarian quickly turned over the mattress and, to his enormous relief, discovered the book where

he had left it. Closer inspection told him it had been moved, which meant somebody had seen it. His hands became clammy. Some unauthorised person had viewed the secret document. He steadied himself and confronted the landlord, asking him if anyone else had stayed in the room since his departure. Upon learning about the archaeologist, he wondered if the man understood Latin. Despite reasoning that it was unlikely, he could not risk leaving it to chance. So he set about looking for the French scientist.

Upon his return to the cottage, Pierre's landlord confessed his double renting fraud and warned the Frenchman that somebody was after him. Pierre's mind went immediately to the little black book. He rushed to his room and overturned the mattress. Sure enough, the book was missing. His mind filled with questions: Who was the owner of the book? How did he know it had been moved? What would he do if he found Pierre? The last question did not bear thinking about. Merely gazing upon the secret would be enough for him to be hunted down. Pierre knew there was only one plan of action for him to take. He had to grab his belongings and leave Peru as soon as possible. He would have more chance of surviving in mother France.

Extremely concerned that an outsider had seen the secret instructions, the Jesuarian attempted to hunt down the scientist, but to no avail. However, much time was already wasted, so, convincing himself that the Frenchman would not have known Latin, he continued on his journey northward.

It happened that the Jesuarian finally reached his destination, San Francisco, where he slipped completely undetected into the office of the Secretary of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry. There, he entrusted his precious but dangerous burden to Edwin A Sherman, the Secretary of the Scottish rite of Freemasonry in California.

Chapter 1

St. Peter's Square, May 13, 1981

Cardinal Pawlowski hurried into the spacious Roman apartment, with astounding news. Breathless and panicky he looked for his long-time friend and spiritual counsellor, Cardinal Furni. "GIACOMO," he yelled, "WHERE ARE YOU?"

Emerging from the bathroom, still wet from his shower, Cardinal Furni replied, "What's all the yelling about?"

"It is terrible news, my friend. An assassin has just shot The Holy Father!"

The elderly cleric stood stock still, dripping onto the plush carpet. "What do you mean - shot?"

"I mean just that. His Holiness the Pope was outside meeting the faithful as they celebrated 'Our Lady's Feast Day' when a gunman's bullets struck him in the chest."

In shock, the old Cardinal collapsed into an armchair. After regaining his breath, he uttered, "This is terrible Julian. Is he alive?"

"I believe so, but I'm not sure." Then, thinking about recent troubling events, he added, "You know what this means, don't you?"

The elderly cleric knew very well to what his friend alluded. "Yes I do, but surely you don't think they were behind it, do you?"

Julian did not want to believe it, but the attack on the Pontiff seemed too much of a coincidence. He answered, "We were there just three weeks ago when we made the decision. At the time I didn't think Arross would go quietly."

Giacomo shook his head unbelieving. "Surely even they would never go this far!"

Julian thought back to the events three weeks previously. "Both you and I voted Arross out, so can we take the chance?"

The old cardinal, realising the seriousness of the situation, asked, "What can we do to protect ourselves?"

"We have to get out of the Vatican City for a start."

Giacomo, with his comfortable lifestyle in mind, was fearful of change. "Aren't you overreacting a little?" he asked.

"Overreacting!" Julian Pawlowski exploded. "Within just three weeks of that private papal conference, to relieve Arross of his powers, John Patrick II is struck down by a gunman's bullets! That is some coincidence, don't you think?"

"Everything I have is here, and everything I am is here. I cannot just run off and start again. I am no threat to anybody, so why should Christ's Army bother me?"

"You know how they work. There will be a witch hunt!"

Cardinal Furni became panicky. So fixed in his habits was he that any change to his daily patterns filled him with dread. "Julian, go if you must but leave here me in peace."

Looking Giacomo straight in the eye, Julian suggested, "Why don't we just take a short break? I have a brother in Gdansk. We can stay there until the college resolves this tragic business."

Giacomo felt a damp coldness overcome him. "What happens if, God forbid, the Pontiff dies? We must be here for the vote."

Gently touching his friend's shoulder, Julian said, "One step at a time Giacomo."

The ageing Cardinal shook his head despondently. "I cannot leave here just like that. You go Julian and, God willing; I shall be here when you return."

The man, who shot the Pope, Mehmet Ali Agca, sat unmoved in front of his police interrogators. Agca (pronounced Ah-Ja), one of Turkey's most notorious Right-wing professional killers, kept his silence as the Rome police fired questions at him.

Inspector Capelli faced him down, holding his stare. "We know you are with the National Action Party, so why don't you admit it?"

Agca stayed silent. He would admit nothing.

Capelli scratched his head. It had been a long interview, and he desperately needed a break. Leaving another officer in charge, he went to get coffee.

As the dark liquid ran into the plastic cup Commander Quatravelli, approaching him, asked, "Have you broken that scum bag yet?"

Capelli shrugged. "What exactly are we supposed to achieve here sir? We have him. We have the Browning automatic he used. Why do we need his confession?"

"The NAP will have high-powered lawyers defending him, so an admission would certainly help -- that and the names of his associates."

Heavy-eyed, the inspector, sighed deeply. "You and I know that's not going to happen."

Agca sneered at the Guard watching him, as he luxuriated in his private thoughts. These fools knew nothing about him. After his arrest, for 'the crime of the century', according to the Turkish media, he had become quite famous. The crime in question, the gunning down, on February 1, 1979, of Mr Abdi Lipskie, editor of the liberal daily, a moderate voice in the country, shocked the nation. Following his arrest, Agca, at the time a young man in his middle twenties, had his first serious taste of a Turkish prison. However, despite his brutal subjection to torturous interrogation, he kept his silence concerning his client, Count Von Hollenbeck, a German nobleman. Every day in that Turkish hell-hole, he yearned to be free to enjoy the riches promised him for keeping quiet.

He remembered how tough it was as a kid. Like many other Turkish boys, he had committed crimes to survive the murkier side of Istanbul. His early teenage years were spent participating in various street gangs, where he got his training in petty crime. Later he had made his money as a smuggler between Turkey and Bulgaria. The Turkish police had cracked down on smuggling, resulting in the arrest of some colleagues. Agca had been fortunate but, before his luck ran out, he had decided to move to Syria, where he received weaponry and terrorist tactical training, which was, he claimed, funded by Bulgaria.

It was in 1978 while working with a far-right extremist group, the 'Turkish Grey Wolves', that Agca killed the editor of the left-wing newspaper. After serving just a small part of his life sentence, with a little help from Von Hollenbeck's associates, he managed to escape in November 1979 and flee to Bulgaria.

Capelli was going over the records. He needed something concrete with which to confront the assassin. He read:

A self-proclaimed mercenary, Agca made it known he was willing to perform any crime for the right price. On the Eve of the Pope's visit to Turkey in November 1979, Agca escaped from a top security prison. The circumstances were never fully explained.

Highlighting this statement, he continued:

Agca had written a hate letter, to the Turkish press, vowing to kill the Pontiff. Due to the strict security measures put into place, Agca's assassination attempt proved ineffective, and the Pope's visit passed off uneventfully.

Capelli then scanned a copy of Agca's letter. It read:

Western imperialists, afraid of Turkey's unity of political, military and economic power with the friendly Islamic countries, are sending Crusader Commander John Patrick under the guise of a religious leader. If this ill-timed and meaningless visit is not called off, I will shoot the Pope. Fulfilling this mission is the only reason I escaped.

Agca also remembered the letter. He smiled as he recalled the pleasure writing it had given him. Once he had learned the Papal visit was going ahead as scheduled, he was smuggled out of prison in a warder's uniform, helped by a Turkish prison guard with gambling debts. After a short stay in a safe house, associates of Von Hollenbeck had him smuggled out of Turkey and into West Germany. Once there, to avoid deportation, he married a German girl. He later discovered a list of Turkish extremists ordered to return to Turkey immediately or face the loss of their Turkish citizenship included him. He did not comply.

Soon after his arrival in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Secret Service, he claimed, contacted him and offered him over \$3 million to kill the Pope. The reason for the planned execution was the Pontiff's support of the Poland Solidarity movement. He also claimed Zillow Tassilev, then the Bulgarian military attaché in Rome led the assassination plot. Tassilev denied any connection with Turkish extremists and no connection with the crime was ever proven.

Capelli doubted the accuracy of Agca's story and felt he had yet to discover his real motive for trying to kill the Pope. It was now his job to find out the real reason for the Turkish assassin's actions.

Feeling refreshed, the police inspector returned to the interview room to ask Agca more questions. He began, "After you left Germany where did you stay, before coming to Italy?"

The terrorist decided to play along, to let the police officer think he was getting somewhere. He answered, "In Spain, France and Switzerland."

Capelli pressed his advantage. "When did you arrive in Italy?"

Agca shrugged, "Milan several days ago and Rome three days ago."

"Where are you staying in Rome?"

"In what you call a pension, just a few blocks from your Vatican."

"Under what name did you rent this pension?" Capelli pressed.

He didn't need the alias anymore, so he answered, "Ozgun Faruk."

Capelli leant close into the Turk's face. "You're lying. You have been in Italy for some time. How else could you learn to speak Italian?"

Uncaring, Agca laughed in the inspector's face, "I got a diploma at the University for Foreigners, in Perugia."

Chapter 2

Gdansk, Poland, May 20, 1981

Julian Pawlowski, following a lengthy absence, returned to his roots. Looking over Gdansk Bay, his memory went back to when, as a child, he and his younger brother Jarek, would come and watch the ships sail in and out of the harbour. He and Jarek had been very close during his brother's formative years, as they grew up in the cramped apartment in which he and his family lived. His family was poor, and there had been little to spend on toys for him and his brother, so they made their entertainment, playing on the mounds of sand and gravel left down by the docks. He remembered the sound of church bells each Sunday as St Peter's Church pealed out its attention-getting message, to gather in the faithful. The church, which as the priest often informed him, was the largest brick church in the whole world; it was only two blocks from his home. Perhaps it was the constant reminder of the Church's overwhelming presence that guided him, in the first place, to become a priest.

Jarek worked with specialised cargo handling equipment, to process the grain, fertilisers, lumber, ore, steel and containers that arrived and left the port each day. He was still a schoolchild when his brother, ten years his senior, entered the Church to become a priest. He missed his brother dearly and resented him going away to Warsaw to join the seminary. Jarek had not seen him for over 20 years and did not know how to handle the unexpected reunion. The only contact he had with his brother was the rare phone call and sporadic birthday and Christmas cards. He wondered, why, after all, that time, was it important for Julian to see him. Perhaps his brother would tell him. If not, he was not going to press the issue.

They met after Jarek's shift. Despite having just finished a second shift moving cargo, his face broke into a huge smile, as he approached his older brother. "It's good to see you again, Julian," he grinned, as they shook hands stiffly, feeling pleased but uncomfortable in each other's presence.

Jarek broke the ice, saying, "I could not believe it when I heard about the assassination attempt on the Pope. I was so relieved when I found out that he would survive."

Julian smiled feebly, "He is very tough, but much shaken by the attempt on his life."

"I am not surprised, brother; he is no longer a young man."

Changing the subject, Julian asked, "How is your family, Jarek?"

Jarek smiled, "The children are doing well. Julek is at University now, studying art."

As Jarek unlocked his car, Julian asked, "And Ania how is she now?"

The younger brother sighed, "It's hard sometimes, but she is much better since the treatment."

"I look forward to meeting her again."

Sighing again, Jarek replied, "You may not recognise her now. The illness has taken a lot out of her."

Father Augustyn wrapped his robe about him, as he rushed to the persistently ringing phone. Who could be ringing him at 11:30 at night? He picked up the receiver. "Hello."

The voice was cold and straight to the point. "Good evening father. We have a job for you."

"Who is this calling at this late hour?" the cleric asked, angrily.

"Pepsi-Cola."

The one-word answer sent a chill up his spine. "He asked, with trepidation, "What do you want?"

"Cardinal Pawlowski is visiting your town. Meet with him and gain his confidence."

"Am I to know why?"

"He has become something of a liability."

Then the phone went dead.

Alexsander Augustyn knew the Pawlowski's, better than he did most of his parishioners. He respected Julian Pawlowski for the way he had risen through the ranks, to become a cardinal of his beloved Mother Church. However, it seemed that the Cardinal had fallen afoul of the Jesuarian Brotherhood. He didn't know why but it was not wise to question the Jesuarian inner circle. As the priest got ready to go back to bed, he wondered why Julian had returned to Gdansk, particularly in a time when the Holy Father's life weighed in the balance?

At the same time, the priest received his cryptic telephone message, in Rome, Giacomo Furni, having checked that all was okay, was leaving the Sistine Chapel in the dead of night. As he walked back to the seemingly deserted Apostolic Palace, he thought he heard footsteps behind him. Startled, he turned to look but couldn't see anybody in the dimness. There was only the flickering shadows thrown out by large, burning candles. Assuring himself there was no threat, he walked towards the exit. Hearing the footfalls, he turned around again, but he still could not make out anybody in the darkness. Giacomo, thinking he imagined things, said a prayer, and continued walking. Then he heard the sound again, this time closer. He turned and there before him, stood a man in a black monk's habit, the cowl obscuring his eyes.

The monk accused, "Giacommo Paolo Furni You have sinned against the Papal Father, the penalty of which is death,"

"I have not sinned," The elderly cleric answered, shakily.

Withdrawing a strangulation cord from his dark habit, the executioner asked, "Will you recant and support his Holiness, Pedro Arross?"

Standing his ground, Giacomo Furni stated, "I cannot support a man who would hide behind false robes while getting others to carry out his murderous bidding."

"You would have him stretch the cord around your scrawny neck, Giacomo?"

"He already has. You are just his instrument of death," the old Cardinal, said, with defiance in his quavering voice.

Chapter 3

Gdansk, Poland, 1981

Although Aleksander had been the priest of St. Mary's Church for over ten years, he never ceased to marvel at its architectural magnificence. Its triple aisle transept and large vaulted ceiling held him in awe, with the latter partly restored, since World War II. As he walked to the altar, he paused, looking at the art masterpieces gracing the sidewalls, the most notable of these being 'The Last Judgement' by Flemish Painter, Hans Memling. St. Mary's was a huge church. With the aisled hall being 105.5 m long and the nave, 66 m wide, there was ample room for 25,000 people. Also, although the church was not often filled up, Aleksander had enough regular parishioners, to provide him with a handsome stipend. His position as Priest of St. Mary's, a much sought after one by the clergy, was mainly due to his covert role as a Jesuarian.

His mind took him back to the early days when he had just become a 'Soldier of Christ'. Once young Aleksander was under the influence of the Jesuarian Society, he submitted to the difficult four-week course of induction. His training to become a 'Soldier of Christ' then began, in earnest. While in training, Aleksander was completely isolated from the world and its ills. Under the direction of an adept, he systematically carried out exercises that subjected him, ultimately, to the will and habit of vivid contemplation and imaginative realisation. As a young disciple, each of Aleksander's arduous daily tasks, divided into five, hourly meditations began with a preparation prayer, which was followed by two preludes. In common with monastic orders, Jesuarian vows then bound him to the Jesuarian General's will. Added to these was an exceptional promise, 'to go, without questioning or hesitation, wherever the pope commands'. However, the pope referred to here is not the Pontiff in the Vatican. The pope he gave complete loyalty and obedience to was the Black Pope, the Jesuarian General, currently Pedro Arross.

Jarek had gone to work, and Julian used to being an early riser, sat nursing a mug of coffee, which, as it was a chilly morning, warmed his hands. Ania, who had brewed the coffee, sat down at the table, near him.

She broke the silence, saying, "We were surprised when you told me you were coming here, particularly in this troubling time."

"It is a terrible business, but I felt the need to get away from the Vatican."

Offering him a piece of toast and a spread of cold cuts, she asked, "But why at this particular time?"

Not wanting to be drawn into a detailed explanation, Julian answered, "Oh, it's just political stuff, nothing to worry about."

"I see," she stated. After another long silence, she said, "I have to go and work in the bakery, so how will you spend your day?"

Julian smiled, "I will just wander around, reflect on old times, that sort of thing."

Ania brightened, "Why don't you visit the church. They've done wonders with it since you were here last."

Smiling, more warmly this time, Julian answered, "That is a good idea. I may do just that."

Julian wandered around the city, remembering its many fine buildings, some of which went back to the Hanseatic League era. Feeling more like a tourist than a returned local, he visited the many attractions located along or near Ulica Duga (Long Street) and Dugi Targ (Long Market). There, he jostled his way through crowds in the pedestrian thoroughfare, surrounded by buildings reconstructed, primarily in the 17th Century, style. The pedestrian way, flanked, at each end, by elaborate city gates, was a part of Gdansk sometimes referred to as the Royal Road, historically named as such owing to its former function - the path of processions for visiting kings.

Without his clerical collar, and his long absence from the area, nobody recognised or bothered the cardinal, as he walked around the city. He stood and watched people moving through the 'Golden Gate', one of the most notable tourist attractions in Gdansk and a focus of interest during his young years. Built in 1612-14, in place of the 13th-Century Gate (Brama Dugouliczna), and located at one end of Duga Street (ul Duga), where, together with Brama Wyanna and Wiewa Wzienna, it formed part of the old city fortifications. As he walked through the gate, Julian marvelled at the old figures, which symbolised the citizens' highest qualities: peace, freedom, wealth, fame, agreement, justice, piety and prudence. He became saddened by the realisation that these qualities were missing in his life.

On his way back to Jarek's home, as he passed St. Mary's Church, he remembered the clock that fascinated him during his childhood. He entered the almost empty church and made his way to the enormous astronomical timepiece. As he stood in deep contemplation of the mechanical wonder before him, he heard footsteps approaching. Turning, he found himself facing Father Augustyn.

Without any introduction, Aleksander explained, "It dates back to 1464. Its complicated dials indicate the time and date, phases of the moon, the location of the moon and sun in comparison to the zodiac signs, and the calendar of saints." he then added, "Although, it's far too complicated for me to work out."

Julian, pleasantly surprised by the priest's interest, replied, "It is indeed a magnificent time piece. It has been many years since I last laid eyes on it."

The tall, robust priest eyed his visitor. Noticing a resemblance to Jarek Pawlowski, he asked, "Are you Cardinal Pawlowski by any chance?"

Grinning, Julian answered, "Then, my disguise is not that useful."

"Disguise - Oh, I see, - your Eminence." He bowed to kiss the Cardinal's ring.

Julian stepped backwards, saying, "There's no need for that, Father, and I am not here in my clerical capacity - merely as a tourist."

"Yes, Your Eminence, of course." After a brief pause, the priest asked, "Would you take afternoon tea with me in the Presbytery? I need to know the news of Rome."

“You probably know as much as me about the shooting. Even more so if you follow the news,” Julian suggested, as he and the priest sat drinking tea together.

“Yes, I have been following the course of the tragic events unfolding in the Vatican City. Of course, it's a miracle how the Holy Father has survived.”

“Indeed it is,” Julian acknowledged, not wanting to say any more about it.

Passing Julian a slice of Sernik cake, Aleksander pressed, “Do they know what motivated the killer? Was he part of a team or did he work alone?”

Trying to avoid the subject, Julian answered, “You'll have to ask the police about that.”

“He had been threatened by the man before, hadn't he?”

Julian, seeing that Aleksander wasn't going to give up, answered, “It's common knowledge that, on the eve of the Pope's visit to Turkey, in November 1979, the would-be assassin escaped from a top security prison with the intention of killing him,”

“How did he do that?”

Julian became suspicious. He had a gut feeling that the tea and cake was a baited trap. Guarded in his answer, he replied, “I don't know. No full explanation has ever been forthcoming. Although, there were reports in the Turkish press that Agca had written a hate letter vowing to kill the Pontiff.”

Aleksander smiled, “I see what you mean. So, you don't think the attempt on the Holy Father's life had anything to do with the vote to take power away from his Eminence, Pedro Arross.”

Shaken by the conversation's sudden change in direction, Julian answered, “No. Why would you think such a thing?”

The priest poured more tea and handed the cup to Julian. “I don't know. It's just that I heard there was some ill feeling about John Patrick's decision to remove powers from the Jesuarian General.”

Julian countered, “It wasn't the Pontiff's decision, father. It was the result of a Democratic vote.”

The priest nodded, “Yes, of course, it was.”

Passing Julian another slice of the Polish cake, Aleksander stated, “Although, it did appear to be a brutal decision.” Getting no response from the cardinal, he pressed, “In any case what had Pedro Arross done that such a cruel fate should befall him?”

Now Julian knew Aleksander was fishing. Keeping his guard up, he responded, “It was a conflict of loyalties, I suspect.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Fr. Arross is more concerned with social activism than he is with spiritual matters. He had little regard for papal authority.”

Not wanting to cross the red hat, the priest agreed, “That's true I suppose. However, don't you think the Vatican treated General Arross shabbily?”

Now, very suspicious of Father Augustyn's motives, Julian acknowledged, “Possibly Father, but it is not for me to say.”

With that said, Julian finished his tea and got up to leave.

Alexsander, not knowing where the Cardinal's support lie, tried pressing him further. "Your Eminence, you have an ear much closer to the Holy See than my humble self. Does the Holy Father have much support in his move against the Jesuarian Society?"

Julian became terse. "Father, it's dangerous to talk about such things. You should be more careful."

"Do you mean to say the Church has spies in Gdansk?" he laughed.

"I suspect not, father, but Chinese whispers carry a very long way."

Back at Jarek's home, troubled by the priest's interrogation, Julian pondered the conversation while lying down on the camp bed in the small spare room. He looked up at the crucifix on the wall. "What have they done to your church?" the Cardinal asked quietly. He thought back to when he first became a member of the 'College of Cardinals'. He could never quite get used to the idea of being a 'Prince of the Church'. However, it was an honour to be one of the only three Archbishops chosen by the Pope that year. After being elevated in the Consistory, Julian Karol Cardinal Pawlowski became one of the heads of the Roman Curia. He felt hugely honoured to be part of that august body. But now its reputation had become tarnished.

Julian was jolted back to the present, by a knock at his door. "Come in," he invited, thinking it was his brother home from work.

Ania entered, tentatively, "I am sorry to disturb you Julian, but there is somebody on the phone for you – from the Vatican."

Taken by surprise, he quickly sat up. "A phone call from the Vatican! Did they say who was calling?"

"No, but he said it was urgent."

The cardinal followed her to an old phone, its receiver removed from its cradle. Picking it up Julian wondered who could be calling, especially as he had not told anybody, of his plans. Putting the receiver to his ear, he said, "Hello. Who is speaking? There was a short pause, and then he asked, "How did it happen?" There was another brief pause. He then responded, "Yes, of course, I will, as soon as I can. Thank you for letting me know." He replaced the receiver and collapsed into the nearest chair.

Ania asked, "Is something the matter?"

Struggling for words, he answered, "I don't know. I mean yes, but I don't know what to make of it."

Ania, seeing her brother-in-law was in shock, got him some water, "What is it?" she asked, gently.

"A good friend and Colleague, Cardinal Furni, has died in the Vatican. I have to go back."

Ania couldn't believe it. "Go back, but you have only been here two days, and you've hardly spent any time with your brother!"

Julian staggered up and gently embraced her. "I'm sorry Ania but I have to get back to Rome, tomorrow."

She backed away from him. "Julian you cannot leave just like that! Jarek will be heartbroken to find you have gone. You two haven't seen each other for twenty years, and you want to leave here just after you arrive!" Ania stated angrily.

"It's not that I want to leave here, Ania. It is a case of having to go back."

"Nobody is forcing you!"

"You don't understand but ..."

"You're right Julian, but you can do nothing for your dead friend. However, you can do some good where your live brother is concerned."

Julian answered, "It is out of my control. I will return when this mess is over."

"What, in another twenty years?" Ania said, cynically.

Julian stayed silent, stunned by her sharp words.

She put her hands together as though in prayer. "Please just stay this weekend and spend some time with your brother. It would mean so much to him if you attended mass with him on Sunday."

Julian shook his head. "It's not that simple Ania. This situation has nothing to do with making a choice."

"Life is all about making choices," she responded, tearfully. Grabbing a handkerchief, she wiped her eyes. "Jarek will be here soon. You can tell him yourself," she stated, disappearing into the kitchen, to hide her sadness.

Monsignor Praitti said it was a heart attack, but Julian was not convinced. There were dark forces at work in the Vatican, a malignancy corrupting the very core of the Roman Catholic religion. He had to get back and find out how his friend had met his end. There were three other 'Princes of the Church', apart from himself, who voted the Secretary General down. He had to find out if they had received any threats. To do that he had to be in Rome.

As they sat down that evening, to Barszcz soup and Bigos stew, there was a chilly unease in the Pawlowski household. Eventually, Jarek spoke up. "So you are leaving us soon."

"It is most unfortunate, but I have to go back to Rome."

"I see," Jarek, answered stoically.

Following stony silence, Ania said, "Tell him your news, Jarek."

"What news is that?" Julian asked, relieved to change the subject.

Jarek looked squarely at his brother. "What's the point of telling you? You won't be here, anyhow."

"I am still interested in your news," Julian stated.

After a short pause, Ania broke the silence. "You men are incorrigible. Jarek saw Father Augustyn on the way home. He said to ask you if you would take mass on Sunday."

Julian eyes widened, showing surprise. "The priest asked what?" he spluttered.

Jarek answered, "He said he deemed it an honour."

"Why would he do that? I mean ..."

"It would be a beautiful thing for all of us Julian," Ania beamed.

Julian wondered what the priest's angle was. After a short pause, he said, "Under different circumstances, it would be an honour for me but ..."

"Surely your deceased friend would support you in this," Ania pressed.

"It is not only Cardinal Furni's sad demise that beckons me back to the Vatican."

"Then what reason?" Ania asked.

“Let it be, Ania,” Jarek interrupted, “If Julian has to go, he has to go.”

“Julian felt a lump rise in his throat. “You have both been very forgiving and very kind to me.”

“You are family Julian. FAMILY means a lot to me.” Ania stated, emphatically.

Catching her meaning, the Cardinal felt a pang of guilt. He turned to her. “Ania, as you said I cannot help the dead. Nevertheless, other, colleagues may be in danger as I speak. I have to help them if I can.”

“You do not have to explain yourself to me, brother. You have to go where your heart takes you.”

“Thank you for your understanding.” Then, looking at the pair, he added, Perhaps, though, the shock of Giacomo passing on made me overreact.” Julian smiled wanly, “I should not act so rashly, without thinking things out. I will stay with you over the weekend.”

“Are you sure?” Jarek asked, pleasantly surprised.

“Of course he’s sure,” Ania, answered excitedly, giving Julian a big hug.

Chapter 4

2003, London, England

The London Book Fair, the world publishing community’s leading spring assembly for booksellers, publishers, librarians and book production services worldwide, was a complete maze to Joab Rackham. During the three-day event, the Earls Court literary expo space was chock-a-block with all things concerning the reading matter. Bookselling, being a vastly competitive market, had each exhibitor attempting to outdo his or her contenders. The publishers of 'High Light' magazine were no exception.

By pushing through the jostling crowd, while perusing the floor plan printed on the official flyer, Joab eventually found himself at the ‘High Light’ promotion stand.

Karl Haas, the magazine’s editor, shook the journalist’s hand. “Glad you could make it, Joab.”

“I very nearly didn’t make it here,” Joab responded. “Karl, this mob almost swallowed me up.”

“Ja, it is a very busy time for us.”

Joab grinned. “So what did your people think of the story angle?”

A frown played on the German’s florid face. Looking downcast, he answered, “Sorry Joab. We cannot run with this one.”

Joab, shocked, responded, “What do you mean Karl? It’s dynamite!”

“Yes, and we may well be the one’s who get blown up! I’m sorry Joab, but it is a very hot vegetable.”

“Potato Karl, you mean potato. Referring to the surrounding ambient noise, Joab having difficulty in conversing with his editor, said, ‘Look, it’s bloody difficult trying to hear ourselves in this cacophony. Isn’t there somewhere quieter we can talk?’”

Indicating his female assistant, Karl replied, “This is Astra, and she is the only available representative I have, to look after the stand. She is young, and this is her first expo, Joab. I don’t think I can leave her alone.”

“You should be able to leave her alone, you dirty old man!” Joab laughed.

“This is British humour, Ja.”

“Only my sick kind, Karl. Don’t worry about it.”

Looking at his watch, the Editor said, “Okay Joab, we can talk, but I can only give you ten minutes.”

“Look Karl. This job is big news. It’s 24 carat,” Joab persisted, as they sat drinking coffee.

“Nothing is 24 carat Joab.”

“Well, this is the closest thing to it. I have a source who used to be one of the inner circle. You just won’t believe the story this man has to tell!”

Karl slowly shook his head. “These people are extremely powerful and influential. They could bring a lawsuit against us and close us down.”

Joab looked the German straight in the eye. “Where’s the ‘print and be damned’ Karl I know and love?” Joab asked, half joking.

“It’s not like it used to be. Publishing, these days, is run by accountants and lawyers.”

Not put off, Joab said, “Didn’t I read, in your mission statement, High Light, above all else, exists to expose the lies?”

“Ja, that is true. However, it is not that simple Joab. If the story finishes us what good are we to ourselves or any of our readers?”

Joab persisted, “This is the big one Karl. Are you going to run away from it because it is too hot to handle?”

Karl, trying to reach a compromise, suggested, “If you wrote it as fiction we could ...”

“Don’t even go there, Karl. This story is bloody fact, and I need to write it that way. Look, why not let me do a draft copy and show it to you?”

Nodding, Karl agreed, “Okay. I think we can go with that.”

“There’s something else, Karl.”

The editor sighed, “What do you want now?”

“I need a fee for my source.”

“How much are we talking about?”

“Ten thousand pounds.”

“I don’t know. It’s a lot of ...”

“Come on Karl, ten grand for putting his life on the line. I would say that’s cheap!”

After a short silence, Karl said, “Okay, I’ll see if we can budget for it.”

Joab grinned, “Then there is my fee of course.”

Karl stared at the journalist. “But you said it would only be a draft copy.”

“Okay, a drafting fee then. Say five grand, in euros.”

“Joab, you are pulling me too far.”

“You mean pushing, not pulling.”

“It is still too much!”

Joab grinned, “Have you seen the price of funerals these days?”

“Don’t even joke about it, Joab!”

Chapter 5

London, 2003 / Gdansk, 1981

Joab Rackham stood outside Ealing Broadway tube station, waiting for his arranged lift. Derek Philips had made it clear that his survival was at stake, so Joab went along with his instructions, although the precautions did seem extreme. Derek told him to take Travel London bus route 3 to Oxford Circus. Then he was to travel on the central line tube to Ealing Broadway. Once there he had to phone the number, Derek gave him, and wait on the opposite side to the Arcadia Centre, for his lift. As he waited, Joab watched as a few teenage stragglers came loudly up the steps from the underground station. They came towards him, but offered no threat. They were just letting off harmless steam, as they passed him by. Soon, a car pulled up to the Curb on his side of the road. The headlights flashed three times. That was the signal, so Joab got in.

“Are you absolutely sure you weren’t followed,” Fr Derek Philips asked, as he edged his car out into the night traffic.

“I didn’t notice anybody, but on public transport it’s difficult to tell.”

“We cannot be too careful. I am a wanted man, you know.”

“Wanted for what?” Joab asked, peering through the misted windscreen.

“I will explain once we get home.” Derek answered, sombrely.

Soon Derek and Joab were sitting, drinking herbal tea in the lounge, at the monk's Windsor Road residence.

“Who would be following me?” Joab asked, re-engaging with the conversation they'd had on the way to the Jesuarian's home.

Ignoring the question, Derek said, “Did you follow my instructions?”

“To the letter, which is why it took so long for me to get here?”

Derek went into deep thought for a minute. Then he asked, “Joab, who do you think is the most powerful man in the world?”

Joab thought about the question. At length, he suggested, “Bill Gates would probably be right up there.”

“I said the most powerful, not the richest. There's a big difference.”

“Could it be George Dubya then?”

Derek shook his head. “No, Bush is owned by this guy”

“I’ve no idea then. Who is the most powerful guy in the world?”

“The Black Pope.”

Joab, perplexed, said, “I thought he was white. Besides, I don’t think we’ve ever had a Negro Pope.”

“Not a coloured Pope, Joab. I am talking about The ‘BLACK’ Pope.”

Joab switched on his recorder. “Just who is this Black Pope then?” he asked.

Derek looked about him, nervously. “Before I talk about this, have you organised my fee? I know it sounds mercenary on my part, but it is just that I need enough money to disappear fast.”

“I understand that, Derek, but first I have to see what’s on offer.”

“Only the biggest story you are ever likely to have, Joab.”

Joab had heard that before. “Okay Derek, if that's the case you will be paid quickly. However, I have to show the magazine something concrete before they will cough up the dough. So give me something to whet their appetite, and we will take it from there.”

Derek chewed nervously on a toothpick. “This starts way back in history. Are you familiar with the Khazarians?”

“Not really, no”

“Well, in medieval times, 652-1016 AD, a large empire called Khazaria was established north of the Black and Caspian Seas, occupying vast tracts of land in what is today the Ukraine, Russia and Kazakhstan. It's not far from Poland on the west and Iran on the south. The Khazarians converted to Judaism in the 8th or 9th century, and surely applied the term 'Jew' to themselves.”

Joab scratched his head. “What do you mean they called themselves Jews?”

“They invented the word Jew to disguise their adopted heritage; to distinguish them from the biblical Judeans, or the role played by the Banksters.”

Joab sneered, “Banksters, that's one of those conspiracy theory terms, right?”

“They're no mere theory,” Derek huffed. They control the economies of the world. They control the Council on Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission, the Bilderbergs and the Committee of 300. They are, in effect, the 13 wealthiest, so-called 'elite' families in the world. They include the Rothschild's in England, the Rockefellers in America and Bronfman's in Canada.”

“Derek, no offence, but the Internet is rife with this stuff. I need something more concrete.”

Before responding Derek’s eyes checked out the room for any eavesdroppers. Satisfied that nobody could hear them, he continued, “They comprise the physical power structure of the New World Order. They themselves are merely puppets under the direction of darkly motivated, other-dimensional 'master deceivers' commonly known as Lucifer or Satan and their 'fallen angel' cohorts.”

Now it was becoming too much for the journalist. “I'm sorry mate but do me a favour. Satanic rituals!”

“It is much darker than just rituals.” Then, looking straight at the journalist, Derek asked,

“So do you want this story?”

Joab, so far unimpressed and thinking it a waste of time,, answered,” No disrespect Derek, but you haven’t told me anything I couldn’t find using Google.”

“And you haven’t come up with any money. I’m sorry to be mercenary about this but a new identity is not cheap!” The Jesuarian retorted.

Joab took a minute to weigh things up. Then he said, "Tell me more about these Khazarians - just for background."

"Okay," Derek nodded. "The Jews of Khazaria recounts the eventful history of the Turkic kingdom. They lived in southern Russia and flourished as an independent state from around 650 to 1016 AD. As a major world power, Khazaria enjoyed diplomatic and trade relations with many people and nations, including the Byzantines, Alans, Magyars, and Slavs."

"So, historically speaking, they were quite significant."

"Yes, very significant. In fact, if it were not for the Khazars, much of Eastern Europe would have been overrun by the Arabs and become converted to Islam."

"I'm not that big on history, but I seem to remember, from school, that it was Charles Martel and his Franks that stopped the advance of Muslims, at the Battle of Poitiers, in the West?"

"Yes Joab, but that was only possible because the Khazars blunted the northward advance of the Arabs that was surging across the Caucasus, in the 8th century."

Satisfied with the explanation, The journalist said, "Okay Derek, what happened next?"

"What happens next is you show me some serious cash!"

Joab smiled, "As soon as I have the story I will have the ten thousand pounds transferred to your account."

Derek stopped short. "That won't be enough I'm afraid!"

"What do you mean not enough? That is the sum, we agreed on, Derek," Joab responded, angrily.

Folding his arms, the Jesuarian defended his stance. "I'm sorry but new identities cost more than I thought. For a start there's travelling expenses."

"This is not good enough Derek! " Joab responded angrily. "Do you know the coercing I had to do to get you your fee?"

"I'm sorry Joab; perhaps I should take the story to one of the nationals, or even TV"

"What story? You haven't told me anything yet!"

Derek stared at the writer. "The Black Pope is very real, very powerful and extremely dangerous!"

Joab switched off his recorder and thought it over for a moment. He sensed his source was genuine, and he certainly did not want to lose the story. Nevertheless, Karl, who had gone out on a limb, would go mental if asked for more money. He could invest some of his own fee of course. Looking Derek in the eye, he asked, "So what's your new bottom line?"

"Fifteen thou' should do it."

Thinking of his disappearing fee, Joab countered, "twelve and half is the best I can do. Take it or leave it."

Derek sat and stroked his chin, thoughtfully. "Okay, I'll take it. However, I want half in my account before I tell you the full story."

Joab glared at him, "Don't fuck me around," Joab warned.

"It will be worth it, believe me."

Cardinal Pawlowski, in borrowed priest's vestments, took mass in front of his proud brother and around 1,000 parishioners, who were attending the church service. Having taken up Father Augustyna's offer, Julian began celebrating the Eucharist. His voice rang out and echoed around the huge church. "God our Father, your gift of water brings life and freshness to the earth; it washes away our sins and brings us eternal life. We ask you now to bless this water, and to give us your protection on this day, which you have made your own. Renew the living spring of your life within us and protect us in spirit and body that we may be free from sin and come into your presence to receive your gift of salvation."

The congregation replied, "Amen."

The Cardinal blessed the water. Then, as he moved through the church sprinkling holy water over the congregation, while the choir sang an antiphon, he espied a man, he was sure he had seen before, around the Vatican. He quickly averted his gaze and concentrated on the holy ritual.

He went back to the altar and recited the next part of the mass. "As we prepare to celebrate the mystery of Christ's love, let us acknowledge our failures and ask the Lord for pardon and strength. Coming together as God's family, with confidence let us ask the Father's forgiveness, for he is full of gentleness and compassion for you, my brothers and sisters, to prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries, let us call to mind our sins."

After a moment's reflection, Julian looked up. To his surprise, the seat occupied by the stranger from the Vatican was now empty. Julian steadied himself and continued, "Lord, we have sinned against you: Lord have mercy."

"Lord, have mercy," was the response.

"Show us your mercy and love."

The congregation replied, "And grant us your salvation."

"May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life, amen."

As was the religious custom, Julian stood at the main door of the church, greeting his flock as they left. When it came to his brother's turn, Jarek, with clouded eyes, shook his brother's hand, with no words spoken - they were not needed. Ania stood lightly erect displaying a huge smile. It was as though a huge weight had risen from her shoulders.

Father Augustyn, the last to leave the church, shook Julian's hand. "Thank you. It was a very moving service, especially your sermon about lying and deception."

The Cardinal responded, "Speaking of which, can I talk to you privately?"

"Of course your Eminence, come into the presbytery."

Once seated, Aleksander suggested, "Perhaps some coffee and cheesecake."

Julian declined the offer, explaining, "No, I can't stay long. I just need to ask you about a man who was at the service."

"What man are you talking about?"

"I don't know who he is. It's just that I vaguely remember seeing him around the Vatican."

"You have seen him around the Vatican! Is he a priest?"

"I am not sure, but if he is the one, I haven't seen him dressed as such."

Playing on Julian's uncertainty, the priest suggested, "Perhaps you are mistaken Your Eminence."

“Perhaps father, but I don’t think so. I know it probably sounds odd to you, but just after I spotted him, I looked again, and his pew was empty.”

“Did you see him after the service?”

Julian, thinking it was an odd question, as though Aleksander was fishing for information, said, simply, “No, I didn’t see him again.”

“He must have left the church then?”

Julian shrugged, “Possibly, but I didn’t see him go.”

“Even if it was somebody you recognised, what's the problem?”

“I would like to know why he is here.”

“I can’t help you there, your Eminence.”

Getting up to Leave, Julian smiled, “No, of course not Father. Thank you for listening to an old priest rave on.”

Once Julian had left, the man he had seen at the service entered through the back door of the presbytery. Now, dressed in a black, monk’s habit, the mysterious emissary asked, “What did the Cardinal want?”

“To learn about you.”

“What did you tell him Father?” the man asked, reaching for the last piece of cheesecake.

“Nothing, of course.”

“Good, then we will go ahead as planned.”

Aleksander felt uneasy. “Does it have to be this way?”

“Ours is not to question the will of the Holy Father, Aleksander.”

“I know, but it could be a mistake. I have spoken to the Cardinal at length, and I have not seen anything that suggests he is a threat to the society.”

Scowling, the monk remonstrated, “How dare you question the Pope’s will?”

“It’s not that, it’s just that ...”

“Perhaps a spell as parish priest of Polonezköy will help you to stand by your vows.”

Picturing the small remote village, close to Istanbul, Aleksander cowered, in fear. The mere thought of removal from his comfortable lifestyle brought him to heel. He quickly agreed, “Of course you are right. Thank you for showing me the error of my ways.”

Later that day, while Julian sat, reminiscing with his brother, he received a phone call. It was from Father Augustyn. “How can I help you?” he asked.

“It’s more a case of me helping you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I have something important to tell you before you return to Rome,” Aleksander answered, giving nothing away.

"I do not have much time, so it will have to be quick,"

'How right you are,' the priest thought. "Meet me in 30 minutes at the Jacek Tower."

Julian paled as he replaced the receiver.

Seeing the blood drain from his brother's face, Jarek asked, "Who was that and what did they want?"

Julian, not wanting to get his brother involved decided he had to go alone. "Can I borrow your car?" he asked.

"Why do you need my car?"

"I have to meet Father Augustyn at the Jacek Tower in - looking at his watch - "twenty-six minutes."

Jarek jumped up and grabbed his coat. "I'll drive you."

"That's a good idea," Ania stated, looking up from her sewing.

Jarek laughed. "Anybody would think you are trying to pair us off."

Julian, his mind preoccupied with the ominous call, didn't see the funny side.

He and Jarek then went outside to warm up the ageing Volvo.

As they stood by the tower, waiting for the priest to arrive, Jarek asked, "Did he say what it was about?"

"No, he just sounded urgent."

Looking at his watch, Jarek complained, "He is running late." Then he asked, "Why did he want to meet you here anyhow?"

"He didn't say. He just stated that he had something important to tell me."

Becoming distracted, Jarek said, "Just wait here. I will be back soon," as he started to walk away.

"Where are you going?" his brother asked.

"Ania told me to find her some mushrooms, and I just spotted a mushroom seller. I'll be back in a minute."

"Okay, but don't be away long." Watching his brother depart, Julian looked out for signs of the priest.

Shortly afterwards, he saw a man wearing a black habit approaching. Upon closer inspection, Julian realised who it was. He was looking at the man who had left the church during the Eucharist rite - a blasphemous act in Julian's book. He immediately became suspicious. Why had a monk from Rome mysteriously turned up in Gdansk?"

The black-garbed monk smiled, "Good evening, your Eminence. I have a message for you."

Julian's mind was in overdrive. Instinctively he knew something was wrong. He quickly scanned the street for his brother, but to his chagrin, he was alone. "Where's Father Augustyn?" he asked.

The monk cracked a weak smile. "He is indisposed at present. He asked me if I would convey a message to you. He said it would help clear up the troubles in Rome."

Julian, his heart beating faster, asked, "Haven't I seen you before, though not in a monk's habit."

“It is entirely possible your Eminence; I do get around.”

“Even, around the Vatican?” Julian asked,

“Only as a humble tourist I’m afraid.”

Julian nervously scanned the area, but there was still no sign of his brother. “What’s this message you have for me?” he asked, trying to control the situation.

Beckoning Julian, the monk said, “I have it in my car - come with me.”

Julian declined, saying, “You get it and bring it here.”

The monk flashed a sly smile. He said, “If that’s the way you want it Cardinal.” He then, with the pretence of leaving, quickly turned on Julian, a strangulation cord pulled tight between his hands.

Julian, taken completely by surprise, froze, terrified, as the monk whipped the rope over the Cardinal’s, Survival mode instantly kicked in. He instinctively defended himself, thrusting, his right elbow back, into the monk’s soft stomach, his assailant, emitting an involuntary gasp, momentarily loosening his grip. The respite was only momentary and Julian soon felt the bite of the cord again, as the monk regained his advantage.

At that moment, Jarek arrived and, seeing the predicament his brother was in, he yelled out, “LEAVE HIM ALONE!” He dropped his bag of mushrooms and rushed to his sibling’s defence.

Julian turned instantly in response to Jarek’s timely call, and the cord, instead of garrotting him, caught him around the face. The pain was excruciating, but not fatal. The assailant, unable to kill the cardinal with the cord, dropped it and grasped his victim’s throat, with his bare hands. Jarek lunged at the black-habited figure, striking him in the back, throwing him off balance. Both the assailant and Julian stumbled and fell. Jarek, who was fitter and stronger than his brother, tried holding the killer down. A struggle ensued in which the flailing assassin managed to twist free and gain his footing. Jarek lunged, attempting to stop the monk in his tracks. He was too slow and the thug took off as fast as his feet would carry him, past the Jacek Tower.

Jarek was about to give chase when Julian restrained him, saying, “Let him go, brother, the danger is over - for now anyhow.”

After gaining his composure and his breath had settled into a comfortable rhythm, Julian gasped, “Thank you Jarek. You probably saved my life.”

Jarek crouched down to retrieve the fallen fungi. Looking up, he said, “What was that about?”

“I shouldn’t have come here. I have brought you trouble.”

“What are you talking about?”

Julian fixed his brother in his gaze, saying, “You cannot trust Father Augustyn, Jarek.”

Jarek, puzzled, asked, “What has he got to do with this?”

Julian reached down and picked up the fallen strangulation cord, “A choice weapon of Jesuarian assassins,” he stated.

Jarek was dumbfounded. After a minute, he found his voice, asking, “Do you think Father Augustyn had something to do with this?”

“Think about it brother. Father Augustyn organises a meeting with me here. He does not turn up but his friend, dressed as a monk, shows up instead, with murderous intentions on his mind.

Jarek had been in a few brawls over the years, but this was entirely different. A man had tried to kill his brother in broad daylight. He asked, "Okay Julian, so why did he want to kill you?"

Julian looked at his brother. "There are things, evil things, happening in the Vatican. That's why I had to leave for a while."

Evil acts taking place in the Vatican! Jarek uttered, wide-eyed. "Is it safe for you to return to Rome?" he asked.

Julian sighed, "I do not know, but I must return to do my duty."

Chapter 6

Vatican City, 1981

To all intents and purposes, the portly, balding man looked harmless enough but beneath his friendly uncle-like exterior, there existed the devious brain of a man who held court among royals and world leaders alike. Pedro Carlos Arross, the Catholic power broker, looked out of his office window, over St. Peter's Square - the vast open space outside the Basilica. Completed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini in 1667, under the direction of Pope Alexander V11, the vast square allowed the greatest number of people to see the Pope give his blessing. That day, however, Pedro noticed only a smattering of tourists making their way to the Apostolic Palace. Then, a loud knock at his door diverted his attention. His summons "Enter," preceded the presence of a fat, grey-haired man of middle years, wearing a priest's cassock. Greeting the prelate, he asked, "MonSenor, what do you have to report?"

"Many things Your Eminence. May I sit down?"

"Yes, of course. Sit down while I pour us each a sherry."

"That would be most welcome," the Jesuarian agent answered, settling his bulk into a comfortable armchair.

The Jesuarian General picked up the crystal decanter containing the elegant Puerto Fino and poured two generous measures. As their cut crystal glasses clinked together, Pedro toasted his colleague. "Salud, my friend. Now give me your report."

Hans cleared his throat. "I am happy to report that there will be no further problems with Father Bill Witherstone and Brother Don Patterson. Their cable forum, called 'Exposing the Spiritual Controllers', has been scrapped."

Arross smiled, "That is good news. Now, what of news from Poland?"

"Our friend in Gdansk is no longer wavering in his loyalty to you. He has been shown the error of his ways."

"Very well, my friend. Is there anything else I need to know about?"

"Only that Cardinal Pawlowski is arriving in Rome later today."

Pedro's eyes widened, "I thought he had been dealt with, Hans."

"Unfortunately your man failed in his mission. We had to abort the operation in Gdansk to protect the priest's cover. We thought it more prudent to handle it here, once he returned."

Arross nodded sagely. "I see what you mean. Just make sure that the path is clear for me to ascend to the next level."

“It is all going according to plan, your Eminence.”

“Then all is well my friend.”

The agent levered himself out of his chair and stood up. “Not quite, your Eminence. A Ricky Martinez has been creating a controversy about our society in the ‘New York Times’.”

Pedro reacted, “What sort of controversy are you referring to?”

“Apparently he posted an article asking ‘who is America's No 1 enemy? Also, he wrote ‘Do all roads lead to the Vatican?’ However, his ‘Does the Pope take his marching orders from the Jesuarian General known as the Black Pope?’ is the most damning article yet.”

“How is this sort of thing possible when we have our P R people to deal with the likes of Ricardo Martinez?”

It is okay, your Eminence, I had them deal with it.”

“How did they deal with it, Hans?”

“They put out a statement saying, the Jesuarian General is a close confidant of the Pontiff. Although he is called the Black Pope, it has nothing to do with anything sinister or evil. It only has to do with the black clothes he wears all the time.”

Arross looked out of his window at the almost deserted square. He then turned to his agent. “We are becoming far too open - too exposed. I think it’s time to close ranks.”

“If I may offer another view, your Eminence.”

“You know I value your counsel.”

“I believe we should become more open. We need positive publicity, about the good work the Jesuarian Society is doing in the third world.”

Pedro thought about it, before answering, “Yes, I see your point. Okay, see to it will you?”

“Of course, your Eminence.” the prelate answered, moving towards the door. As he reached the portal, he turned, saying, “Oh, there's one more thing.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“The Bilderbergs meeting date will be announced soon.”

Having flown to Rome, Cardinal Pawlowski collected his luggage and climbed the two flights of steps that led to the Railway Station. Since his friend’s mysterious death, he had been jumping at shadows. He was not sure if anybody was following him, but, at times, it certainly felt that way. His eyes darted about, nervously, as he looked for the ticket office. His once secure world shattered, leaving him feeling vulnerable and at risk. The Jesuarian octopus had long tentacles that could reach him just about anywhere on Earth, and especially in his beloved Vatican City.

MonSenor Praitti had arranged to pick him up from the Central Rome terminal, so he had to travel by rail. Depositing 11 Euros into the ticket machine got him his pass, which was validated before he boarded the train.

Ever since leaving the airport, Julian sensed that somebody was following him. Was it his overactive imagination, he wondered, or was he being tailed. A backwards glance, to see if the middle-aged man in the tan coat was still behind him, proved negative, so Julian relaxed a little, sat back and enjoyed the journey.

Although the new Rome Termini and the ancient Roman landmark, a temporary wooden shed, which, located at the end of a railway network, had the name 'termini' in common, the station title had nothing to do with this peculiarity. Termini derived its name from 'Therma', which referenced the fact that the location was close to the Diocletian hot Baths. It was near these Roman Baths that Julian awaited his lift. However, instead of arriving in his Fiat, Monsignor Praitti met Julian on foot. Julian raised his hand, signifying his presence. Praitti smiled in recognition, but before the Cardinal could say anything, the Monsignor put his finger to his lips, stipulating silence. He then whispered, "Please follow me."

"Where are we going?"

"Do not ask any questions, Julian. Please just do as I say"

Not knowing what to make of the Monsignor's odd behaviour, Julian held back on the many questions he wanted to ask, and instead complied with his friend's directive. He followed the priest through, what in Roman times was the massive thermal complex that housed a central building with caldarium, tepidarium and natatio (rooms for hot or warm baths and swimming pools filled with cold water), which, Julian discovered, were still partly preserved.

They passed through the cloister built by Michelangelo with its 400 sculptures, displaying the whole range of artistic styles found in ancient Rome. Then the pair walked through the modern Piazza Della Repubblica, which traced the line of the large exedra of the Baths. Finally, they came to the caldarium, tepidarium and basilica, which Michelangelo transformed in 1561, and it became the church of St. Maria Degli Angeli.

The church appeared to be empty, so Julian and Ricardo walked down the aisle to the altar, which was originally a Roman sundial. The church's entrance primitively separated the caldarium baths from the tepidarium. Another altar was straight ahead on the short axis of the nave. Vanvitelli had lavishly decorated the overwhelming bulk of the original baths, which ran in both directions, toward the altars on either side. For Julian, the effect of this crossing at the centre was breathtaking, for both its vast size and elegant proportions. Usually, Italian state funerals got held there, and during the Christmas and Easter seasons, concerts of religious music took place.

Checking that no one was listening, Monsignor Praitti apologised, "I am sorry about this subterfuge, but it is becoming too dangerous to speak openly in the Vatican."

"Why? What has happened?"

"I have reason to believe there has been a cover-up concerning Giacomo's death."

"What sort of cover-up, Ricardo. What have you heard?"

"Did he often pay late visits to the Sistine Chapel?"

"It was his favourite space for meditation."

"If you knew this, others could have known it also."

"So, what do you know Ricardo?"

"At around 11 pm one of the Swiss Guards heard the Apostolic Palace door close. He told me he saw a figure leaving the building. It was dark so he could not see much. However, he was certain the figure was dressed as a monk."

Julian felt a chill go up his spine. "What would a monk be doing in the Apostolic Palace, especially late at night?"

"I don't know the answer. However, that's not the most significant part."

“What do you mean?”

Praitti leant closer and spoke quietly. “The guard could not see the man very clearly, but he did see where he went.”

“So, where did he go?”

“Across the square, to the headquarters of the Jesuarian General.”

“Pedro Arross, the Black Pope!”

“Precisely Julian”

The Cardinal took a deep breath. Then he asked, “Do you suppose there was foul play?”

“The police have not been involved. In fact, they don’t even know what happened.”

“Who then is carrying out the internal investigation?”

“Captain Firenze. Although he has already reached his conclusion, about how Giacomo died.”

“I guess, his findings put Giacomo's death down to a heart attack?”

Praitti nodded, “You guessed it right.”

Julian, remembering what the Monsignor had told him, asked “What about your witness. Didn’t he inform Captain Firenze about what he saw?”

“I don’t know about that.”

“Then why did you not tell him what the guard told you?”

“He had already closed the case.”

“Who was the medical examiner?”

“Prossi, but you know he is a yes man for Arross.”

After a moment’s thought, he asked, “Does His Holiness know about this?”

“John Patrick is only on light duties. We try not to bother him with such things.”

Julian nodded, “I understand that Ricardo. So, who has taken over in the interim?”

“The Pontiff’s secretary.”

“Carolingi, but he is just an administrator, not a leader.”

“John Patrick asked for him because he won’t rock the boat.”

Looking around the ancient church for signs of any eavesdroppers, Julian asked, “Have you spoken to the other three?”

“What other three are you referring to?”

“I mean the other three members of the Collegiate, who voted Arross down.”

Praitti began to sweat “What has that got to with ...? You don’t think ...”

Julian interjected, "There could well be a connection. After all, Giacomo was one of the members of the College of Cardinals who helped to take away some of Arross’s power.”

The MonSenor became nervous, his eyes darting around the church. "Surely you are not suggesting the Black Pope had a hand in Furni's demise."

"I just think we should inform the other three who voted against Arross."

Praitti queried, "That makes only four votes against the Black Pope. Another vote would have been needed to carry the decision."

"That is correct Ricardo. The other vote was mine."

Chapter 7

London, modern day

As he sat on the crowded bus, Joab had to wonder if Derek was just a bit too paranoid. The directions were even more complicated this time. Take First London, route ten from Kings Cross to Hammersmith. Then, take the Piccadilly Line to Ealing Common. Next, take a cab to Ealing Broadway. Finally, take the First London E9 route to Yeading, Barnhill estate. Go to 36b Sunrise Towers. Give three fast knocks, two slow knocks, a three-second delay, and then three quick blows. Joab nearly told Derek to shove it, but he gritted his teeth and went along with the Friar's instructions, praying the story would be worth it.

After three frustrating hours on buses, tube trains, and a cab, Joab carried out the knocking sequence at the door. To the journalist's surprise, an attractive redhead opened it. Joab felt her eyes scanning him, as though he was some document she was loading on a computer. Feeling uncomfortable, he broke the ice, saying, "I'm looking for Mr Derek Philips."

"And, who would you be?" she asked.

After his tedious journey, Joab was not in a mood to be interrogated on the doorstep. He stated forcefully, "I happen to have an appointment with Mr Philips. Is this the correct address?"

"It's okay Anne. I'm expecting Mr Rackham," Derek said, approaching the front door.

"Do come in," Anne smiled, lowering her guard.

"I hope the directions weren't too hard to follow," Derek said, ushering the journalist into his room.

"You certainly don't make it easy. It took me around three hours to get here."

"My apologies, but when you hear what I have for you, you will understand my reasons for caution."

"So let's get to it, Derek," Joab said, flopping down on a comfortable fireside chair.

Derek smiled, "Certainly. Oh, by the way, thanks for the boost in my bank account."

"Now, perhaps you will give me the story."

Sitting down opposite his guest, the Jesuarian said, "We can talk privately there."

"Does she know anything?" Joab asked as he warmed his hands in front of the gas fire.

"No, Annie does not know anything about this. She's just letting me stay here a few days."

"That's all very well, but I don't like a third party involved."

“Relax Joab; she is not participating. We just help each other out from time to time. Now it’s her turn.”

Joab set up his recorder. “Now, tell me why we are doing this here.”

Derek explained, “I had to leave my last place after I received a Society of Jesus’ newsletter at my home address.”

Joab, switching his recorder on, asked, “And that was a problem?”

“It could have been if I had stayed there. You see I hadn’t given the Order my address.”

“Then we’d better get started before they trace you here.”

“This is not a joke! My fucking life at stake here!” Derek stated harshly.

“Calm down and tell me what you know.”

Derek made them a coffee. He then sat down and began. “This story will unfold in details. While all of those details contribute to an understanding of the ‘Larger Picture’, what I am about to tell you fills in a most critical Missing Link in this entire structure.”

“So what is this ‘Missing Link’?”

“To call what I am talking about 'controversial' and 'sensitive' would be the granddaddy of all understatements. In fact, this missing link changes the scenario, where all world politics and power grabbing is concerned.”

“In what way does it change things?”

“After months of anticipation and weeks of preparation, I was finally able to speak with one of the Vatican Assassins.”

Joab became alerted, “Are you telling me that the Roman Catholic Church employs assassins?”

“No, not the Papacy itself, as far as I know. It’s the Jesuarians that have assassins.”

“What did you learn?”

Derek looked at Joab. “Because I have been a Jesuarian Friar for many years. During that time, I have turned a blind eye to many things, but I drew the line at becoming an assassin.”

“So, you were going to become one of the Catholic’s killers?”

“I was offered the position. Of course, I turned it down.”

“Then what happened?”

I had to leave, in a hurry. I knew too much, and the Order had to try and stop me from talking.”

“So, what did you know too much about?”

“Let me refer to what I have to say as the 'Jesuarian-Vatican connection' to the unfolding New World Order agenda. Do you know why the secret Vatican library is so extensive and yet remains hidden from any outside intrusion?”

“No, but, I would certainly like to know.”

“The Library houses, among other things, comprehensive records, covering, literally, all aspects of global control by the Jesuarians dating back to 1540.”

“Do you know this as a fact, or is it hearsay?”

Derek bristled, responding, "Please try to grasp the gravity of this. Every point I bring before you could be a death sentence for me."

"That weighs very heavily, Derek, you are a brave man."

"Bravery has nothing to do with it. Your publication could well be the only thing that keeps me alive."

"I see what you mean. Please continue."

"What the world doesn't know is that literally, every major global conflict and political assassination has links with the Jesuarian Order. Many other clandestine groups, the Zionists, for example, are unwitting pawns in this Jesuarian Agenda."

"In what way are they unwitting pawns?"

"I'm going to start in the present to pull the threads together. Then I will take you back in time and from their origins, we will work our way back to today. However, I want to start here because it will give a foundation for looking at this historically."

"Okay Derek, go ahead."

"Today, the Superior General of the Jesuarians, the so-called 'Black Pope' is Peter Hans Kunar

"Why is he referred to as the Black Pope?"

"The term 'black' refers to hidden, evil activities, not to race or colour. The Jesuarian General gives orders to the reigning Pope. John Patrick 11 Stood against this power and Jesuarian agents assassinated him for his courage."

"I thought he survived the shooting!"

"True, but he did not survive the blood poisoning resulting from the contaminated transfusion."

"Wasn't that an accident?"

"No Joab, it wasn't," Derek said, soberly. "Because the assassination attempt was unsuccessful, the Black Pope had to go to plan 'B'"

Joab, wide-eyed, gasped, "Are you saying the Jesuarians were behind the assassination attempt on the Pope?"

"They organised it."

"What proof do you have?"

"I am coming to that."

The journalist became silent. Then he asked, "So, where does this Black Pope reside. Does he live in some hidden location?"

Derek gave a contradictory giggle. "On the contrary, he resides in Rome, at the headquarters of the Jesuarians, called the Church of Jesu."

"So, this Church of Jesu, is it hidden somewhere in Rome?"

"No Joab, it is actually in the Vatican city, not far from the Vatican itself."

"Not far from the Vatican!," Joab spluttered.

"That's correct. It is in the same general area. It is the headquarters of the Knights of Malta."

Joab, becoming very interested, said, "Hold that thought while I change tapes."

With the new tape in place, the recording resumed. Joab opened with, "You mentioned about the Jesuarrians being evil. What do you mean by that?"

"Don't get me wrong. The average 'Soldier of Christ', is doing a good job, often in the Third World. However, the upper echelons practice devil worship."

"Have you been involved in any of these satanic rites?"

Derek grinned, "Yes, but it's not all goat's horns and pentacles. It can be much more subtle than that."

"Okay, so where does Satan fit into this picture, and what is the ultimate goal of the Jesuarrians, the so-called Society of Jesus?"

"The Jesuarrian General, and the other high Jesuarrian officers are occultists. They are Luciferians, who worship Lucifer, the false light. They don't believe in Satan; they believe in Lucifer."

"I thought they were one and the same."

"It all depends on your perspective." Then Derek added, "Lucifer comes from light and Satan is always seen as being the darkest of entities."

"I have heard that the Illuminati worship Lucifer."

"Yes, they are also tied up in this evil cartel."

"And you say you have witnessed this yourself?"

"Yes, I have. You see I became a top Jesuarrian, in the late 90s, and as such, I was invited to a 'Black Mass' in Spain, where quite a few top Jesuarrians were present."

"Was it actually referred to as a Black Mass?"

"Not in so many words. However, when you're involved in a 'Black Mass', you're involved in the worship of Lucifer - all dressed in black capes and so on."

"Derek, I'm fascinated by this Black Pope, because, as far as I know, nobody outside of the Vatican seems to know who this person is. I've certainly never heard the title used before."

"Let me show you a picture of him and his top Jesuarrians. Wait a moment while I find the book."

"Yes, that would be useful for the article."

The book, called, 'The Jesuarrians: A Multi-Biography, by Jeremy Lacombe, was placed before the journalist. Derek explained, "It was published in 1995. Lacombe was a communist." He handed Joab the book. "Open it at the last page, which has pictures in it."

Joab did so, and he gazed upon the group photograph.

Derek explained, "Now, next to page 343 you can see General Pedro Arross. He was the Jesuarrian General at the time."

"He doesn't look very evil to me,"

"Deception is Satan's most powerful tool." Derek grinned, "Pointy tails and horns are too easy to spot."

"So what is the process of choosing a successor to the Jesuarrian General?"

“Once the great Jesuarians elect him, it's for life, unless he becomes a heretic. That's what they call me now.”

Joab grinned, “So you have blown your chances of making it to Black Pope.”

Derek frowned. “That's not funny.”

“No, you are probably right. Now, these High Jesuarians, are they tied in with secret societies, like the Freemasons, for example?”

“The only time I have mixed with them was at the black mass I mentioned. However, I would say that these elite are the 'professed', the high 4th Degree. When a Jesuarian is professed, he is under the Jesuarian Oath; he is under the ‘Bloody Oath.’”

“Did you take that oath?”

“I had to, yes.”

“What is this bloody oath?”

Suddenly, Derek's demeanour changed. Without any warning, he sat up straight-backed, as still as a statue. He put a finger to his mouth, indicating the need for silence. He got up quietly and listened at his door.

“What's the matter?” Joab whispered.

“It's okay now. I thought I heard something.”

Realising Derek was on the verge of paranoia, to keep the interview on track, Joab asked, “What did you have to swear in the oath?”

Again, taking his seat, the Jesuarian replied, “Well, it's similar to the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion.”

“Now wait a minute! Weren't the Protocols written by the Zionists?”

“Yes, they were.”

“So what have the Jews got to do with the Jesuarians?”

“The Zionists and the Jesuarians are one and the same.”

Joab sat open mouthed with no words forming. Then he uttered, “One and the same! What have the Jesuarians got to do with Judaism?”

Derek stared at the journalist. “Look, this is a big misunderstanding. Zionism has little to do with Judaism, but has everything to do with the Jesuarians.”

“This web becomes more convoluted as we progress. So let me get this straight. Are you suggesting that the Jesuarians wrote the protocols?”

“Yes Joab, the Jesuarians obviously wrote the Protocols because they have carried out every protocol in that little handbook.”

“And you are saying the Jews had nothing to do with it?”

“No, of course, they didn't. The Jews didn't have enough influence to carry through such a plan. It was just the Jesuarians because they are the only ones with enough power and influence to bring this New World Order to pass.”

It was getting too much for Joab to comprehend. "Are you now suggesting that the Jesuarians are behind this NWO business?"

"Look, Joab, it stands to reason. They are the ones in the government. They are behind professional sports. Key Knights of Malta own all the top ball clubs. The Pittsburgh Steelers and the Detroit Lions, for example, are run by these Knights."

"Why is that important to them."

Derek grinned, "They're conjurors. It all sleight of hand and distraction. Their role is to get the people all stirred up in this trivial excitement over games and sports, while they're secretly creating their tyranny."

"So all this hysteria over sport is designed to create a distraction from the main game?"

"Of course, Joab. This ploy is one of the aspects of the Protocols -- that we'll create 'amusements'. Another person they used was Walt Disney, a member of one of the Illuminati bloodlines and a 33rd-degree Freemason. Disney world and Disneyland are not only pleasant distractions, but they are also designed to brainwash children from a very young age."

"Walt Disney! That's another of my sacred cows blown out of the water. Who would have thought of Mickey being an agent for evil?"

"Ask yourself, why was he painted as a black mouse?"

Joab sneered, "That's stretching the bow it too far, isn't it?"

"Not at all! If you study this, you will see that the Jesuarians do everything for a reason."

Joab inserted another mini-tape into his recorder. Then he asked, "Do gambling venues like Las Vegas factor into all of this?"

"Of course they do. Las Vegas - well, for the most part - is controlled by the Mafia. However, all the high Mafia families are Roman Catholic, which means they are all subordinate to the Pope or to the Cardinal of New York, who is currently Cardinal O'Connor.

Stunned by these revelations, the journalist sat silently as the damning information percolated through his brain.

Derek added, "Look, Joab, the Mafia Commission resides in New York. Frank Costello was a member of the Mob Commission, and he's personally connected with the Knights of Malta, Hollywood mogul, Joe Kennedy, and nothing has changed on that score."

"Joab clicked off his recorder. Looking Derek square in the eye, he said, "This is looking more and more like some half-baked conspiracy theory to me. If I am to run with this, I need some solid facts."

Derek bristled. "Solid facts! Switch it back on, and I will give you solid points."

With the tape running again, Derek continued, "Look, Joab, it doesn't take a vast stretch of the imagination to see how the 'High Knights' are good, dear brothers with the High Mafia Dons-the Gambinos, the Lucchese, the Columbos - all of them."

"Okay, I can see how there could be a Catholic connection."

"Did you know that they control Hollywood - not the Jews. The Jews are only the front men. They are all working for the Mafia and for the Cardinal. Whereas, in politics it would be Arlen Specter."

Joab shrugged, "Who's this Arlen Specter?"

“Arlen Spector was Spelly's - Cardinal Spellman's - Jew in the assassination of President Kennedy, although he would never mention a word about it.”

“I’m not surprised that he would wish to keep it quiet. However, his silence doesn’t mean he committed any crime.”

“Arlen Spector intimidated witnesses, fabricated testimony and sold the Warren Report his one-bullet theory. He is as guilty as sin!”

After a short pause, Joab said, “These are astounding allegations, Derek. If what you say is true, once we publish it, you are putting yourself in grave danger. So, if there is any part of this ...”

Derek Interrupted, “Don’t you get it, Joab? There is already a contract out on me. I just pray that you get this published before they get to me. So write what you want because it needs to be said.”

“Okay, now let’s get back to this Black Pope. What does he do? Who is he? Let us talk about his position as 'General'. How does he exercise this control over the Pope? Does the real Pope know he's a pawn in this papal game?”

“Whoa Joab, ask me just one question at a time please.”

Joab smiled, “I guess I was getting a little carried away.”

“So which question do you want me to deal with first?”

“Let's just focus on the Black Pope.”

“The Jesuarian General, okay.”

“Derek, let's start there, and you tell me everything you can about his position.”

“The Jesuarian General is the absolute, complete, and total dictator and autocrat of the Order. When he speaks, his provincials jump. The provincials are his principal subordinates. There are around 83 provincials right now.”

“Why are there 83 provincials?”

“As I understand it, the Jesuarian Order has divided the world into 83 regions. For each region, there is a Jesuarian provincial. There are ten provincials in the United States. There is one for Central America. There is one for Ireland. They've divided up the world into these provinces.”

“So it's like the old Babylonian provincial government, being centred in Nebuchadnezzar.”

“Yes, but with the case of Catholicism, the Jesuarian General himself.” He let that sink in, then added, “So, you see, it's strictly a Roman republic type of government where all the states or provinces are subordinate to this common sovereign. Therefore, despite Gibbons theories, the Roman Empire did not fall. It became the Roman Catholic Empire instead.”

“Different name, same game!”

“Precisely, Joab.” Then, clearing his throat, Derek said, “I don't know about you, but I need a cold drink. I’ve only got lemonade, if that’s okay.”

“Sure Derek, that's fine by me.”

Derek took a refreshing sip and continued, “The Jesuarian General exerts complete power over the Order. He meets with his provincials. When they decide to start a war or an upheaval, he gets the intelligence from the provincial of that nation, about how best to go about it. His provincial informs

him of the demeanour of the people, and then he uses legitimate grievances to form an agitation - like the 1964 Civil Rights Movement, which was all Jesuarian agitation.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“Completely, because the result was more consolidation of power in Washington with the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which was written by [the long-time President of the University of Notre Dame, the Reverend] Theodore Hesburgh.”

“Are you saying that the Jesuarians have enough power to start wars?”

“Of course they do. You have no idea how much power the Black Pope has. The Jesuarian General rules the world through his provincials. The provincials then, of course, rule the lower Jesuarians.”

“These lower Jesuarians, are they part of the power play?”

“Yes, although probably unknowingly so. As there are many Jesuarians, who are not 'professed', many of the lower Jesuarians haven't any idea about what goes on at the top. They have no concept of the real power of their Order.”

“It sounds like Freemasonry.”

“Joab, it is just like Freemasonry. The lower ranks have no idea that the High Shriner Freemasons are working for the Jesuarian General. They think that they are just doing good community works and being good people.”

“Wait a minute Derek! Did you just say the top Freemasons are working for the Black Pope?”

“Why should that be such a big surprise? Yes, the high-level Freemasons are subject to the Jesuarian General, because he, along with Fredrick the Great, wrote the High Degrees, the last 8 Degrees, of the Scottish Rite Freemasonry,”

“Why would he do that?”

“He worked with Frederick the Great because the emperor protected them when the Pope suppressed them in 1773.”

“I thought the Prussians were enemies of the Jesuarians.”

“Conflicts can create strange bedfellows.”

Joab felt a shudder run up his spine. He uttered, “The implications are horrifying.”

Just then, Derek’s mobile phone rang, interrupting their conversation. “Sorry about that,” Derek apologised, answering his phone. He mostly listened, and when he did answer, he spoke quietly. Putting the phone away, turning to Joab, he said, “Sorry, but I have to go.”

“Go - but we haven’t finished ...”

“It’s urgent. I will contact you later.”

“But!” Joab attempted, watching Derek grab his coat and leave at a brisk pace.

Joab tried to catch him up with the fleeing Jesuarian, but he was long gone. Instead, as he fled the room, he very nearly bumped into Derek’s redhead friend.”

“Are you two in a race or something?” she asked, sharply.

“Sorry about that. He just left in a hurry, and I was trying to follow him.”

“Why were you following him?”

“Because...” Joab began, while he tried desperately, to come up with a plausible reason.

“He hasn’t done this for a while,” Anne stated.

“What hasn’t he done?” Joab asked.

“Do you know him well?” Anne asked, suspiciously.

“Pretty well,” Joab lied.

“Then you would know that he has a tendency to disappear from time to time.”

“And you think this is one of those times,” Joab bluffed.

Anne sighed, “I guess we need to talk. Do you fancy a coffee?”

“I would appreciate that, thank you.”

Joab sat in Anne’s lounge as she prepared the coffee. His journalist’s eye scanned the room for any clues that could tell him who she was. A photograph caught his eye. On closer inspection, it was a group photo with Anne towards the centre. The photo, taken outdoors, showed an old Gothic-style building in the background. There was part of a door with some sign on it.

“Are you interested in photography?” Anne asked, entering with the drinks.

“That all depends on the photos, miss?”

“Anne, please. So what name do you go by?”

“Joab ...”

“That’s biblical, isn’t it?”

“Yes, he was a cousin of King David. Although, he disagreed with him a lot.”

“A rebel against authority then?”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“Are you a rebel, Joab?”

“I rebel against corruption and tyrants.”

“Derek would agree with you about that.” Then, probing for clues about the stranger sitting in her home, Anne asked, “Would you say Derek was a man of high principle?”

Joab knew she was fishing. But then why wouldn’t she? She didn’t know him from Adam. “From what he has told me I would have to say yes.”

Anne studied his face, without a word.

After a pause in which she was silent and thoughtful, Anne said, “As one of his few friends I feel you need to know something about Derek.”

“What do I need to know?”

“I hadn’t seen Derek, Father Derek, as I used to call him, for around 10 years. Then he turns up here one day and tells me he had quit the Church. I couldn’t believe it.”

“Did he say why?” Joab probed.

Testing him, she asked, “Didn’t he tell you, you being such a close friend and all?”

Looking into her beautiful olive green eyes, Joab asked, “Is this some test?”

Anne, a bit embarrassed, responded, “No, but Derek is a dear friend who seems quite vulnerable at present. I guess I'm a bit overprotective.”

Joab smiled, “Yes, I've noticed he's very jumpy at times. Did he say why he left the priesthood?”

“He won't talk about it. He keeps pretty much to himself, and I am becoming worried about him, especially when he goes rushing off without any warning. It freaks me out. What made him bolt this time?”

“I don't know, Anne. We were just talking, and then his phone rang. He answered it and then he was gone. I was trying to follow him when ...”

“Talking about what? Oh, I don't mean to pry Joab. It's just that...”

“You thought there might have been a clue in the conversation to suggest where he might have gone.”

“Yes, that is exactly it.”

“I can't think of anything specific. However, I think I know why he left the priesthood,” Joab added, trying to gain Anne's confidence.

“Oh, please tell me.”

“From what I can gather there were some practices he did not agree with.”

“What sort of practices?”

“He didn't have a chance to explain them to me. But I got the sense that it had something to do with his rising through the Jesuarian ranks.”

Anne's green eyes widened. “Jesuarian! Is he a Jesuarian?”

Joab showed genuine surprise. “You mean you didn't know?”

“Aren't they sort of Church military?”

“Something like that.” Joab then changed the subject. “Do you know if Derek has received calls like that before?”

“No, I am not aware of any. Although, he does seem to be very guarded lately.” Anne shook her head sadly, “It seems there is a lot about him I don't know.”

“Well there's nothing we can do at present,” Joab said, rising to his feet. “I have to go now. Thanks for the coffee.” Then he left her his phone number, saying, “Ask Derek to ring me when he gets back.”

Chapter 8

Vatican City, 1981

“There are, I suggest, two steps that can easily take place,” Cardinal Solano stated, removing his standard broad-brimmed red hat.

“What steps are those, Cardinal Etching answered, moving to his window, to look out over the vast square.

“First, the process of choosing bishops in a diocese other than Rome could be made more open and democratic.”

“Hm, decentralising power, Angelo, may not go down too well. Canon law at present expects 'soundings' to be taken, and forwarded to Rome by members of the Vatican's diplomatic staff. The process works, so why change it?”

Cardinal Solano fiddled with his signet ring, an obvious sign that he was thinking about something. At length, he said, “Because, as things now stand, diocesan bishops themselves are regularly expected to suggest the names of possible future bishops to Rome. It is questionable whether Rome ought to have any say in this process at all, but that is a different issue.”

“Then, what do you propose?”

“I recommend that the process is made far more transparent and that Rome, in normal circumstances, accepts the decision arrived at in each diocese. The obvious way of doing this is by a democratic election of bishops.”

Cardinal Etching frowned slightly. “The process would not be without its problems, Angelo. Why, when one such democratic election took place in Rome – albeit in the 4th Century – it left over 150 people dead. That may not be typical, but the evidence, such as it is, suggests that the system didn't work too well.”

“I would hope we are a little more enlightened and rational now, Roger.”

“Maybe the situation has changed, but I doubt that the church is going to be ready for so much democracy any time soon. Possibly, an adequate means of encouraging greater democracy in the Church, at least for now, is a process of widespread consultation followed by a decision taken, not by the nuncio or in Rome, but in a diocesan synod.”

Just then, a knock at the door froze the conversation. Cardinal Solano went to see who the caller was. Opening his door, he was surprised to see Julian Pawlowski and Ricardo Praitti standing there. “Julian, Ricardo, come in and join us. We're discussing something you might be interested in.”

Cardinal Etching came forward, “Julian, you old dog. Where did you disappear to?”

Handing each Cardinal a lead crystal glass, Angelo asked, “would you like some Chianti?”

“Thank you, Angelo, that's most kind of you,” Julian answered.

Watching the fruit of the vine fill his glass, he said, “There's a question we need to ask you?”

“What question would that be?”

“Have you or Roger received any threats or been subject to any threatening behaviour?”

“Threatening behaviour, here in God's city! What on you on about Julian?” Roger asked, puzzled.

“What do you know about Giacomo's death, Roger?” Julian asked.

“He worked too hard and died of a heart attack.”

Turning to Cardinal Solano, Julian continued, “Was there an autopsy carried out by the Vatican pathologists?”

“Yes, it was performed by the Bishop of Ostia. He handed the report to me. Why do you ask, Julian?”

“What did the pathologist report say as to the actual cause of death?”

“What is all this about Julian?” Roger interrupted.

“This is important!” Julian persisted.

Angelo answered, “The report confirmed what we already thought. Namely, that Giacomo Cardinal Furni died of natural causes while in the Apostolic Palace. I presented this version of events to our lawyer Nicola Santini, who agreed with the report.”

“Who was the person to discover Giacomo's body, Angelo?”

Roger became agitated. “Julian, what is all this about?” Are you suggesting something untoward happened to our friend?”

Turning to Ricardo, Julian prompted, “Tell them about the Swiss guard.”

“What has a Swiss guard got to do with this?” Angelo asked.

Ricardo, who had only taken Julian into his confidence, was reticent and stayed silent.

“Go on Praitti! Tell them what you said to me!”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Roger asked, raising his voice.

Praitti scowled at Julian. Having been put on the spot, he was compelled to reply. “I was told by a guard that, at the time of Giacomo's death, a man in a monk's habit exited the palace and entered the Black Pope's office.”

There was stunned silence. Then Angelo asked, “Who was this guard and where is his report, Ricardo?”

“I don't know who he is. He declined to give me his name. He seemed somewhat scared, but he felt he had to tell somebody.”

“It all seems a bit strange,” Angelo, the Dean of Cardinals, added. “It's an uncorroborated report of an alleged event. There was nothing about this in the official findings. Judge Maccranni examined the autopsy report, and the Vatican announced the matter closed.”

“We have to find this guard,” Julian demanded.

“Why are you so persistent about this?” Roger asked. “Are you suggesting that this mysterious monk had something to do with Giacomo's death?”

Cardinal Pawlowski replied, “The monk was there at the time of Cardinal Furni's demise. Even if he was not involved, he might have seen something. And why did he go to Arross's office straight after Giacomo died?”

Roger piped up, “This is ridiculous Julian. Even if this mysterious monk had something to do with the incident, why would anybody wish to harm Giacomo?”

Julian took a deep breath. Now was time to explain his fears. “Because he voted against the Jesuarian General in the meeting we had with the Holy Father.”

“What does that have to do with anything Julian?” Roger said. “I also voted Pedro down at the meeting, and I'm perfectly fine.”

Besides, it was a closed meeting with a secret ballot vote,” Angelo added.

“I know this probably sounds crazy, but please listen to me,” Cardinal Pawlowski pleaded. “When I heard the news of the Holy Father's shooting, Giacommo and I felt dark forebodings. I had to get

away from The Vatican to gather my thoughts. I asked Giacomo to come away with me, but he refused.”

“Dark forebodings, that’s being a bit melodramatic, isn’t it?” Roger laughed.

“Please let him continue,” Praitti appealed.

“I had long thought that Arross had a spy in our meetings. Then, when the assassin shot John Patrick just three weeks after the Black Pope had been relieved of certain powers, it all began to add up.”

Roger just couldn't believe it. “Are you seriously suggesting that the attempted assassination had something to do with the Jesuarian General, Julian? Now you have lost it!”

“I felt vulnerable,” Julian explained. “I went to see my brother in Gdansk. While I was there, I was attacked by a monk in a black habit, a monk I had seen previously at the Vatican.”

A pin hitting the floor would have been deafening. At length, Angelo asked, “What happened to you, Julian?”

Showing the Bishop of Ostia the strangulation cord he had picked up at the scene of the attack, Julian explained, “He turned up as a proxy for a priest I had arranged to meet. He wanted me to go to his car with him where he was to give me certain information. Suspicious of this stranger’s motives I refused. He then tried to strangle me with this,” he explained, indicating the cord.”

“Thank God and all the Saints he didn't kill you, Julian,” Angelo uttered.

“He would have strangled me if my brother had not been there to help me.”

“My God Julian that must have been awful for you!” Angelo sympathised.

“Did you question the assailant?” Roger asked, now taking the matter more seriously.”

“No, he was bigger and much stronger than I. He managed to struggle free of my brother, and he ran away.”

“Why would a stranger dressed as a monk try to kill you, Julian?” Roger asked.

“I also voted against the Black Pope, along with Giacomo. That's why I asked if anyone had threatened you two in any way.”

“Not I” Angelo answered.

Roger remained silent. Then he admitted, “I didn’t think much of it at the time, but I did get an odd phone call.”

“An odd phone call, Roger. What do you mean?” Angelo asked.

“A voice just said, be very careful Roger. The Vatican City can be a dark, dangerous place. Then he hung up.”

“Did you do anything about it?” Praitti asked.

“No Ricardo, I did not. I thought it was a crank call and paid little heed to it. However, in the light of the attack on you, Julian, it takes on a much more sinister perspective, because I also voted against Arross.”

Again, quietness pervaded the room. MonSenor Praitti asked, “So what do we do now?”

“Watch out for a monk with murder on his mind,” Angelo suggested.

“We need to find evidence to see if the monk murdered Cardinal Furni. To do so, we need to find out who found his body, the name of the Swiss Guard, who saw the event and the identity of the monk that he saw,” Praitti stated.

“Yes, and we need to do this before the monk finds us.” Julian declared.

“Do you think it was the same one who attacked you in Poland?” Angelo asked, picking up the cord.

Julian replied. “Yes, why else did he attack me shortly after Giacomo's death?”

“It does seem somewhat of a coincidence,” Roger stated.

Julian slowly shook his head. “Yes but we still don't know for sure that the mysterious monk who entered the Jesuarian HQ was the same one who attempted to strangle me in Gdansk.”

Chapter 9

London, modern day

Joab sat on the short grass as joggers, dog walkers and baby pushers took advantage of the unseasonably warm weather. It was such a pleasant day that some of the hardier, unabashed office workers lay sunbathing around him, in their underwear. However, his mind was elsewhere. Where could Anne be he wondered? She had said Green Park, not St. James Park, which was nearby. Anne was a beautiful woman, and he was thrilled that the cute redhead had agreed to meet with him. Apart from getting to her better, Joab hoped she would be able to shed some light on Derek's disappearance, but he also wanted to spend more time with her, for personal reasons.

Unlike the police, lawyers, auditors and regulatory bodies, investigative journalism isn't limited as to target, isn't legally founded, and is closely connected to publicity. This gave Joab Rackham more leeway than lawyers and civil servants when following the information provided by his sources. However, if his source went missing - as seemed to be the case - Joab hadn't heard anything from Derek for three days - asking questions concerning his whereabouts could become very risky. The journalist was becoming increasingly concerned, for two reasons. He was worried, firstly, for the ex-Jesuarian priest's safety, and secondly, the loss of a potential dynamite story. In addition, he hadn't heard anything from Anne. In the end, he had decided to phone her. She had agreed to meet with him, and they made arrangements to do so. This agreement was the reason the journalist sat on the grass in the peaceful refuge of the park, amid the joggers, picnickers and sunbathers, as he waited for Anne Sergeant to show up.

Then he saw her walking towards him, and his heart skipped a beat. She looked completely stunning. The short green dress with its beautiful orange floral pattern was in perfect contrast with her short ginger hair, which shone in the sunlight.

She approached and greeted him. “Hi Joab, it is a beautiful day, isn't it?”

Joab punned, “Yes it is. Pull up some grass and sit down.”

Anne chuckled at Joab's witty comment. He had not balled her out for being late, and she liked him for that. Demurely adjusting her dress, she sat beside him on the grass. “Have you been here before?” she asked, folding her legs beneath her.

“No, I can't say I have.”

“It has a fascinating history.”

“Really,” He responded, wanting to get over the small talk.

“Yes Joab, Green Park was first recorded in 1554 as the place where a rebellion took place, against the marriage between Mary I to Philip II of Spain. It was also a famous duelling site until 1667 when Charles II bought an extra 40 acres, after which it became known as Upper St James's Park.”

Joab just nodded. Then he asked, “Have you heard from Derek?”

“Oh, yes, He rang me a few days ago to say he’s okay and not to worry.”

Joab, relieved and annoyed, responded, “Why didn’t you let me know this before now?”

“Because, once he told me he was fine I didn’t see any urgency in contacting you.”

Joab’s journalistic instinct kicked in. “Did it not occur to you that he may have been coerced to say that to keep me off the scent?”

“Why should I be suspicious? He sounded just fine, if a little tired.”

“Tired! He may have been drugged.” Cutting to the chase, Joab asked, “Where is he, Anne?”

“He said he was somewhere in Spain.”

“Spain! Did he mention where?”

“He didn't tell me that.”

“And you didn't think to ask him?”

“He tells me what he wants me to know. He said no to worry.” As she sat there, she picked some daisies. Then she said, “He often takes off without a bye or leave. So why does his being in Spain surprise you?”

“Surprise me! He just gets up and leaves me in the middle of an important conversation, and the next thing I know is that he is in Spain!”

“That's our Derek,” she shrugged.

“Did he say anything else?”

“He told me to pass on his apologies for leaving you in the lurch.” Then, passing Joab an envelope, she added, “He sent this to me with instructions to pass it on to you.”

Joab opened it. Inside there was a key and a piece of paper with specific instructions. Looking up at Anne, Joab held the key. “What’s this for?” he asked, puzzled.

“Search me! Derek just told me to give it to you.”

“Did he say why he is in Spain?”

“No, and I have no idea. Although, he did mention he was staying with a friend who needed his help.”

“Did he mention who this friend was?”

“No Joab he did not.” She began to feel as though she was under interrogation. “I’ve delivered the message, now I must be going.” With that, Anne got up and smoothed down her dress.

Joab rose to his feet. He did not want Anne to go. Wanting to spend more time with her, he blurted out, “What about coffee?”

“What about it?” Anne smiled.

“Do you have time? I mean ...”

Anne backed away, saying, “I have to go. Best of luck with the key. Let me know if you find out where he is.”

“Yes, well, same to ...” It was too late though because she had left.

The address Anne had written on a scrap of paper 16/18 Circus Road, St John's Wood London NW8 6PG, was that of Metropolitan Safe Deposits, one of three branches of the UK safe deposit company. After giving a computer operator necessary information Joab shown the vault, where a lock that fitted his key was waiting amid the stacks of safety deposit boxes, which mostly contained jewellery, works of art, cash, etc. After tracking down his box number, he was left alone to retrieve the contents of the metal drawer. Much to his surprise, all it contained was an unlabelled DVD. Joab had no idea as to its content, but whatever information it held was important enough for Friar Derek Johann Philips to conceal it in the box.

As soon as Joab reached his flat, he switched on his computer and inserted the disk. After a short while, a video of Derek talking filled the screen. Derek said, “Joab, when you receive this, I may already be dead. Even if I am alive, I will undoubtedly still be in serious trouble. Please use this information wisely. I hope that its exposure will bring to justice the most dangerous person in human history. I pray that no one else will have to endure what seems to be my fate. Please give my love to Anne. Tell her I have always loved her.”

As the picture faded, so did Joab's hopes of seeing Derek again. He sat stock still taking in the message. Many questions came to mind, such as, where was the errant friar, and was he really in danger? Also, who was the most dangerous person, to whom he referred? Was it the sinister Black Pope he went on about?" Joab wondered whether to phone Anne and tell her about Derek's message? He decided against it. He then clicked on the folder icon entitled, 'Evil in the Vatican'. The file opened revealing Derek's message. Joab was agog as an astonishing story unfolded before his eyes.

Chapter 10

Vatican City, 1981

Julian Cardinal Pawlowski was neither a journalist nor a detective. He knew nothing of researching and preparing reports. All he knew was that something was terribly wrong with the handling of his friend's death. The Rome police were uninformed; the mysterious monk was missing; the Swiss Guard had not come forward as a witness, and the autopsy took place quickly and in a perfunctory manner. “Don't worry; I will find out what dark deeds befell you,” Julian spoke out to the memory of his dead friend.

The Pope's colourfully uniformed guards may have appeared to be on show for the public, but these Swiss mercenaries, protecting the Pope, were an elite, company-sized military force, who had defended a series of Popes for more than five centuries; not always without bloodshed.

Recognisable by their Renaissance-era striped uniform, which according to legend was designed by Michelangelo, they are also well known for their armour, halberds and helmets plumed with Ostrich feathers. Visitors best knew the Swiss Guards as the armed men who stood watch throughout the Apostolic Palace. They also stood guard at the doors to the Pope's private apartments as well as at the outer gates of the Vatican.

One of these guards challenged Monsignor Praitti, as he asked to see the officer in charge. “Why do you want the Captain, Monsignor?”

“There is something that I need bring to his attention, young man.”

The guard said, “I will find out if he is available to see you. Wait a minute please.” Then, catching the attention of a passing guardsman, he ordered, “See if Captain Fuhrman is free to see Monsignor Praitti?”

As the Monsignor entered his office, the captain commented, “Your presence here is somewhat unusual Monsignor Praitti. Why do you wish to see me?”

“I would not be here Captain if it were not of the utmost importance.”

“Then perhaps you will be kind enough to tell me what's so important, Monsignor.”

“You may have heard of the death of Cardinal Furni.”

“Yes, what of it?” the officer asked, brusquely.

“It turns out that one of your guards was privy to events outside the Apostolic Palace at the time the cardinal died.”

“Exactly what events are you talking about?”

“Captain, one of your guards told me that a monk left the Palace and walked over to the Black Pope’s offices, after which he opened the door and went inside.”

Captain Fuhrman did not like what the Cardinal told him. He remembered the oath he had taken when he had enrolled as a member of the guard:

“I swear I will faithfully, loyally and honourably serve the Supreme Pontiff - whoever that is at the time - and his legitimate successors and also dedicate myself to them with all my strength, sacrificing if necessary also my life to defend them. I assume this same commitment about the Sacred College of Cardinals whenever the See is vacant. Furthermore, I promise to the Commanding Captain and my other superiors, respect, fidelity and obedience. This oath I swear upon the Holy Book! May God and our Holy patrons assist me.”

Michael Fuhrman had always tried to live up to that oath. However, neither he nor his men had stopped the bullets that had hit the Pope that fateful day. Also, if that was not bad enough, one of his men had been at the scene of the death of a cardinal and had not reported the incident. Previously, the only blemish on the Swiss Guards record had occurred in 1798, when Napoleon invaded Rome, captured and deported Pope Pius VI and subsequently disbanded the Guard. However, Napoleon did deploy other, non-Papal Swiss Guard units, also noted for their combat prowess, within the ranks of his 'Grande Armée'. Now, under his watch, there were two black marks in quick succession.

Wishing the incident to be dealt with swiftly and quietly, the Captain asked, “Who is this guardsman you speak of?”

“He would not give his name. He just told me what he saw.”

“Why have you only just seen fit to report this, Monsignor?”

“I thought the soldier would report the incident himself, but when there was no mention of this monk in the coroner's report I thought I had better inform you personally.”

Sporting a thin smile, the officer stood. “Thank you for informing me. Now please write down the time and date, and I will question my men.”

Becoming the Black Pope had been a gradual process for Pedro Arross, akin to white, in the chromatic scale, gradually becoming black, by passing through infinite imperceptible shades of grey. Born in the Basque Country or Euskal Herria (land of the Basque language) - as the three million Basques call their nation - he grew up in a village that straddled the French-Spanish border along the western Pyrenees. History had not been kind to his people. Through the centuries, waves of Romans, Visigoths, Arabs, French and Spanish had overrun his country. Nevertheless, the proud, passionate Basques endured, often taking their traditions to the hills and forests for safe keeping. Ironically, though, the same Pyrenees that separated Spain from the rest of Europe also united the Basques.

A combination of high unemployment and a Jesuit education conspired to point young Pedro towards common work in the Church. However, having spent his childhood and adolescence close to the French border, where he could practice his French as well as his native Basque language, it gave him a certain linguistic bent. The parish priest, seeing the boy's potential, took a personal interest in young Pedro and groomed him for the priesthood. Next, the local cleric took him to a Society of Jesu meeting. This experience, his introduction to Jesuit beliefs, was the next, slightly darker shade of grey.

Pedro Arross, the Black Pope, shaken from his reminiscences, by a staccato knock at his door, did not immediately respond. Instead, he gazed upon the twisted cross on his mantelpiece. During the whole rule of both Popes Paul VI and John Paul II, the Pontiffs held the Satanic Twisted Cross before the adoring masses of Catholic faithful, who were not aware they admired a symbol of the Antichrist. How easily lead and gullible people are, he thought, adoring the distorted image in front of him. At his suggestion, both Popes proudly held up this mockery of the crucifixion without even realising the macabre significance of it.

There was a second knock, this time of shorter duration. Responding to the second signal, which was an arranged code, Pedro, knowing it was Count Hans von Hollenbeck waiting outside his study door, shouted, "ENTER," .

As the Count entered Pedro ordered, "Hollenbeck, look upon the wondrous cross."

"I constantly do, your Eminence." The Germanic aristocrat, answered, bowing deeply.

"Do you share my belief that our gullible flock will soon be totally preconditioned by such supernatural power as produced using such a powerful symbol as the Twisted Cross."

"I believe it is so, your Eminence."

"Yes, it is such an ancient and powerful symbol. Did you know Luciferians used it as far back as the sixth century? Its meaning became lost over time, so much so that we revived it at the time of Vatican 2 without even the Pontiff realising its ancient significance". Pointing to the crucifix on his mantelpiece, Pedro stated, "Unlike this one the symbol used by John Patrick is a sanitised version."

Count Hollenbeck gazed on the bent, broken cross, upon which was displayed a repulsive and distorted figure of Christ. Even he was a little disturbed by the demonic icon, which had been used by black magicians and sorcerers of the Middle Ages, to stand for the Biblical name 'Mark of the Beast'."

Arross laughed haughtily, "Not only Paul VI, but his successor, John-Patrick carry our symbol and hold it up to be revered by the faithful multitudes, who have no idea what it represents."

"Yes but John Patrick's dictate to lessen your papal powers in the Vatican has held up the transition, your Eminence."

"Don't worry, my friend I have taken care of that hiccup. " Now, these are your instructions," the Jesuit General stated, handing over an envelope.

It was late at night when Julian received the call. He was breathless, having rushed sleepily, to grab the receiver. The voice at the other end of the line, cold and metallic, conveyed its message. "Congratulations Julian Cardinal Pawlowski. Your meddling has just earned Angelo Cardinal Solano and Roger Cardinal Etching their death sentences. Their deaths will occur before yours, as a reminder of your unwise tampering in things that are none of your business." Then, before he could answer, the phone went silent, leaving the receiver a dead weight in his cold, clammy hand.

Chapter 11

London, modern day

Joab sipped his coffee as he read the information on his monitor screen. Derek's allegations, if true, held huge ramifications for the future of humanity. Was it possible that the Jesuarians wielded such awesome power he wondered? While reading the document:

Truman finished the American war against Japan with the hoax authorising the infamous nuclear strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He orchestrated this to perpetrate a greater hoax - the Cold War. This duplicitous manoeuvre enabled the Vatican to knock over nation after nation, replacing the leaders with dictators, subordinate to the Black Pope. That was the reason behind the Cold War. When Harry Truman, in 1950, signed into law, the Emergency War Powers Act, the Cold War was in full force. Propaganda was rife, Governments built bomb shelters, and the fear and paranoia caused by the propaganda churned out by the media threw nations into a frenzied state.

When Harry Truman did this, it put the United States under martial law, which is why in every courtroom the 'Stars and Stripes' at state and federal level, were altered to incorporate the gold fringe trim now seen around all state and U-S flags. This change indicated it was the flag of the Commander-in-Chief, or in the case of the state, the flag of the Governor, as Commander-in-Chief. Therefore, all American courts come under the jurisdiction of military rule. They all progress with concise routines. The jury has no power of jury invalidation. Moreover, they are just enforcing the laws of the Empire, under the highly questionable 14th Amendment America, which is a military-style, King of England-type country.

A ringtone interrupted Joab from his reading. He grudgingly reached for his mobile phone. Pressing the tiny green phone button, he said "Hello, who's speaking?"

"Is that Joab Rackham?"

"Yes, and who are you?"

"Forgive me for calling, but I need to speak with you."

Joab, annoyed, snapped. "Look, who am I talking to?"

"My name is Jerome Zahir. It is important that we meet, for Derek's sake."

Joab, immediately suspicious, asked, "Who is this Derek you're talking about?"

"Don't play coy with me Mr Rackham; there is no time for games."

That much the journalist agreed with him. He asked, "Do you know where Derek is?"

"Yes, but I cannot speak of such things over the phone."

Joab thought about it. It was risky, but it could just lead him to the missing Jesuarian. “Okay, where do we meet and how do I recognise you?”

“You may feel more comfortable if you choose the location for our rendezvous.”

Joab thought about it. It needed to be a busy public place. He picked the first building that came to mind. “Okay Mr Zahir, the Barbican Art Gallery at 11 am tomorrow.”

“I will see you there.”

Joab asked again, “How will I recognise you?”

“Don’t worry Mr Rackham; I will find you.”

Joab wondered just who this Jerome Zahir was. Perhaps Anne would know, he reasoned. Drawn to her, Joab wanted to see her again, and this ploy gave him a legitimate excuse. The journalist dialled her number. She was not home, so he left a message. Then he went back to Derek's document and continued to read:

Going deeper into the Jesuarian background, we are dealing with the Monita Secreta. The Monita Secreta is the handbook given to the professed Jesuarians, those under extreme oath. It informs them how to carry out their plans, repressing people and nations for the Jesuarian General, and thus, to strengthen the Pope's temporal power. It also tells how they are to deceive and swindle rich widows out of their fortunes, as they did with Astor's second wife, who survived the Titanic catastrophe. It further shows their general approach on how to do things. Outsiders are forbidden to read this particular book, and if anyone ever publishes it, the Jesuarians will hunt them down while denying its existence. However, when you see the works that the Jesuarians have done, it is in complete agreement with the Monita Secreta.

Joab gasped as he read the next statement. Derek wrote:

I have a copy of the MONITA SECRETA SOCIETATIS JESU. Apparently, it is the first copy known of outside the Jesuarian Society. A French archaeologist discovered the little black book in South America. He translated the Monita Secreta from Latin before a ranking Jesuarian, who’s mission was to hand it over to a Masonic lodge, retrieved the manual. The French scientist managed to escape to France with the damning evidence. Once there, hounded by a Jesuarian assassin, he managed to find a willing Swiss publisher, to print some copies, before retiring to the anonymity of the Pyrenees.

There are certain low-level Freemasons, who believe that the Jesuarian Order is their enemy. They are encouraged to believe this, although, the high-level Masons, of course, work with them, which is why the high degree Mason at the lodge, received the Monita Secreta. However, once the Frenchman knew about the Monita Secreta, it was published, first in Switzerland, then Holland and then, in 1857, it was reprinted in England. But after some of the publishing houses burned down editions of the book died out.

As I said, I have a hidden copy, but it is time some brave soul exposed it to the world. If you are that brave man, I will give you instructions concerning its whereabouts. Once you have the Monita Secreta in your hands, you have the most powerful weapon to bring down the Black Pope. For this reason, you must be careful and, because it is a two-edged sword, mention it to no one. I have to know if you are the one to carry out this mission. I will pray to God to help make your heart stout and your mind alert! May you be the one, because, God knows, somebody has to be - before it is too late!

Before Joab had a chance to assimilate the scary message, the phone rang. It was Anne. Distracted from his black thoughts, Joab said, “Hello, Anne. Thanks for ringing.”

“What do you want, Joab?”

“Did Derek ever mention anybody called Jerome Zahir?”

“No, I don’t recall that name. Why do you want to know?”

“Jerome Zahir called me. I’ve arranged to meet him tomorrow.”

“Is that wise?”

“It’s my only lead to Derek.”

“Oh, I see,” Anne responded. Then, hesitantly, she uttered, “Be careful Joab.”

“Anne, there’s one other thing.”

“What’s that?”

“We need to meet.”

“Why is that?”

“I can’t explain over the phone.”

“When do you want to meet?”

“Tonight, before I see this Zahir character.”

“Tonight is difficult Joab.”

“It’s critical. I wouldn’t ask this of you otherwise.”

After a brief hesitation, she sighed, “Okay, I guess I can cancel my plans for tonight.”

Anne Sergeant liked everything ordered and regulated in her life, tied up neatly, with no loose or straggly ends. However, Joab was such a messy end. He had popped into her life, by default, and now he was getting her to rearrange her schedule. Derek, although somewhat aloof and unpredictable, was a dear and loved friend, for whom she made allowances. If he was in trouble Anne wanted to help him, but it was his life, his spiritual journey, as he often called it. If he came back into her life, again she would give him support and succour to help him get his life back on track. The worst aspect of being involved in his chaotic world was that Derek wouldn't let her in. He wouldn't share the burden of the tortured thoughts and feelings that clouded his true self. In a strange way, the chaos he brought into her well-ordered life caused her to re-evaluate her staid patterns, but she could only handle the disorder in small doses.

Anne thought her dealings with Derek Johann Philips had prepared her for anything he could lay on her. Nevertheless, she soon realised she was wrong. Even without Derek's physical presence, the DVD Joab showed her that evening put her into emotional turmoil. Although the video was of short duration, the effect on her was long lasting. As Derek spoke of the dire situation he was in, with little hope for his survival, Anne fought back the tears. However, it was his remote declaration of love for her that tipped Anne over the edge emotionally. She never had, in all the years she had known Derek, heard him utter those simple but powerful words. It was all too much for her to bear. Years of pent up, suppressed emotion finally broke through the solid wall of her pragmatic dam and, with all her emotional defences blown, Anne burst uncontrollably into tears. She was not aware that Joab was hugging her as she sobbed into his shoulder, at least until the heaving sobs subsided. Pulling away, Anne apologised, “Sorry about that outburst.” Sniffing, she added, “That’s not like me.”

”He must love you a lot Anne,” Joab commented.

For many years she's been protective towards him, even mothering Derek at times but she'd never actually worked out how she felt about him. It was probably best that way, and she certainly was not going to share her deepest emotions with this stranger, even if she could untangle them. To break the uneasy silence, Anne asked, "Do you want coffee?"

"Yes, that would be good."

As they drank their beverage together, Anne asked, "How long have you known Derek?"

Joab liked Anne a lot. She was beautiful, sexy and, by the way, she cared for Derek, she had a good heart. He didn't want to lie to her, but the truth was likely to rock the boat. Taking a deep breath, he said, "Not that long."

Taken aback, she queried, "What do you mean by, not that long?"

"He contacted me a month or so ago to talk about his departure from the Jesuarians."

"Only a month ago!" Anne responded, her jaw muscles tightening. "You gave me the impression you and he were long term buddies!"

"I'm sorry if ..."

"If what? Sorry that I have exposed you for the deceiver you are."

"Anne, it's not like that."

"Not like what?" She asked sullenly, a pained expression on her Face. The thing that hurt most of all was that Derek, her best friend, had never spoken to her about such things, even though she had often asked, had divulged his innermost secrets to a mere stranger.

"Anne, he needed someone to get his story to the media."

Feeling used by the journalist, Anne exploded, "YOU LIED TO ME! You said you were a good friend of his. You coerced me to share what I know about him, by tricking me. HOW DARE YOU DO THAT TO ME, JOAB?"

Joab, speechless at first, wore her attack. "I can explain," he expressed, feebly.

"I don't want your explanation, Joab. I do not want to hear any more of your more lies! I want you out of my house right now!"

Joab, trying desperately to repair the damage, responded, "I'm truly sorry Anne. Please let me at least tell you why he came to me."

"Give me one good reason why I should believe you!" she retorted.

"At first it was just the story I was interested in, but now I want to help Derek."

Anne's eyes narrowed. "Help him! It's probably your probing that's gotten him into this mess!"

Joab was silent.

Glaring at him, she said, "You're nothing more than a lying reporter."

Joab stared at her. "Derek knew I wrote for 'High Light', a magazine that exposes the truth. He needed to prove what was going on in the Vatican, and he didn't know who else to turn to."

"He could have turned to me! "

"He didn't want to put your life at risk Anne. He cares for you too much."

"So he tells you, a complete stranger!" Anne huffed, showing here contempt

“He knew I was his best chance of getting this story out into the world.”

“You lied about being his good friend, so what else are you lying about?” Anne accused.

“I am not lying to you Anne. Would you have talked to me if you knew I was a journalist doing a story on him?”

“No, of course, I would not! Certainly not without Derek's permission!”

“Exactly. That' what I thought.”

“So you decided to trick me instead!”

Joab looked into Anne's striking green eyes. With only one slight chance with which to redeem himself, he answered, “Like I said, I had to talk to you and spend some time with you.”

“Spend time with me! Why is that so important to you?”

Joab blurted out, “Because you are a beautiful, woman, and I wanted to get to know you better. There, now I have said it.”

Anne just sat open mouthed, staring at him. Then she said, “So you were using your interest in Derek to spend time with me!”

Realising his proverbial foot had sunken even deeper, he responded, “It wasn't like that, Anne.”

She exploded, “HOW THE HELL WAS IT THEN?”

Joab cringing, just stood silent.

Anne, with tears glistening in her emerald eyes, blurted, “JUST GET OUT OF MY HOME AND NEVER CONTACT ME AGAIN!”

Chapter 12

Vatican City, 1981

Julian Pawlowski felt terrible. His blundering interference had put the lives of two of his friends in jeopardy. The Cardinals had received threats only after he had involved them in his half-baked theories. Despite the fact that Roger had received an anonymous threat long before Julian had returned to the Vatican, Angelo Solano was now a target because of his involvement in Julian's snooping. Although the Black Pope probably had Angelo and Roger targeted for death, the same as they had Giacomo Furni, Julian still felt terrible about the part he had played in the affair.

Making Cardinal Pawlowski feel guilty was also part of Jesuarian assassin's plan, and, as Julian felt wretched, he had certainly achieved that end. No matter how many ways he found to justify his actions, he always came up feeling terrible. Julian felt responsible for what was likely to befall his friends, and he knew he could do little to protect them. Cardinal Pawlowski had to warn them at the very least.

Gustav Pricic was determined not to make the same mistake again. He had only just escaped with little time to spare in Gdansk, and he was looking forward to his next and last encounter with the meddlesome Cardinal Pawlowski. As he put the final touches to his new cord, his mind travelled back to his troubled childhood in war-torn Sarajevo. The personal horror and losses from that violent conflict he left him feeling empty and numbed from the deep scar it had left on his soul. It

was an intangible void, eating at him from within. Like a bottomless love/hate concoction of forbidden emotions, a nullifying sense of loss left an empty shell, in the shape of a man. For Gustav sometimes this void was a bottomless pit of nothingness, and at other times it was so full of grief and pain, he could hardly stand it. Even prescribed sleeping pills only allowed him intermittent bouts of rest.

Sporadically, Gustav remembered the times before the war his father, Bedrudin, took him fishing in the local rivers. The memories were too painful to revisit, now that his dad was gone. His father, a respected dentist in Sarajevo, who provided well for his family, was sorely missed. Before the Balkan wars, they had lived in the affluent Mejias neighbourhood, in a decent apartment and owned a Yugoslav-made Lada automobile, in which the family took fun weekend drives.

The cursed war changed everything, including their home, when a rocket crashed through the apartment, destroying much of what they owned. However, as terrible as the experience was, it was not the real reason for the destruction of young Gustav's family. A single bullet shattered his immature world. Gustav remembered the day when, sitting on his father's knee, the sound of the shot and the accompanying shattered windowpane wrecked his childhood. It looked as though his daddy had just fallen asleep, except for the blood running down his face from the fatal wound where the sniper's bullet had entered.

The family tragedy left Gustav lost and totally disoriented. How could his young, unreasonable brain assimilate the ramifications of the tragic events that destroyed his family? Who knows what would have happened to him if Father Nagisa had not rescued him from the Sarajevo orphanage that had been his home for many years. The Catholic priest later adopted young Gustav and, as the post-war years progressed, guided him towards a life of priesthood. Gustav, having learned to read and write, embraced the life of the Church, which afforded him a sense of peace and security, elements missing in his life since the war days. One day his adoptive father took him aside and explained about The Society of Jesus, of which he was a member.

Outwardly, Gustav grew up a kind and intelligent young man. Inwardly his emotions boiled and froze in chaotic swirls. The hole his loving family had filled was gaping and nothing, not even his adoptive father's love, could fill it. It was only his living faith in Lucifer and his dedication to the severe spiritual exercises that gave him any solace from the ever-present nightmares that haunted his sleep. Nothing mattered in his life except his God of Light, and doing his God's will. His God spoke through the Black Pope, and he existed solely to carry out the Jesuarian General's orders.

Angelo Cardinal Solano, being the current Dean of the Sacred College of Cardinals was also its president. Although Angelo was not the longest-serving member of the College, it didn't preclude him from taking that Holy Office. As head of the college, he was responsible for choosing the new Pope. Although the vote was democratic, he exerted an extraordinary amount of influence on the elections.

Angelo's election, as Dean of Cardinals, was not without its problems. As a Catholic Bishop, he had taken a softer stand against Islam than the rest of the Cardinals in the College. However, Cardinal Solano was a blessed man, who had worked hard and skillfully for the Church. As a young priest, he had spent his career reaching out to people and trying to make the church more inclusive. Although Cardinal Solano was considered, by his peers, as being too liberal, Angelo still adhered strictly to the pope's teaching and made several harsh statements towards keeping homosexuals out of the priesthood. He also argued for careful readings of the Pope's pronouncements.

Angelo was perusing one such statement in the 'Palace of Holy Office' when it happened. The dictum he was studying was a recent update on the abortion issue. The Pope had recently addressed the question of the "good standing" of Catholic clergy who supported abortion rights. The Holy

Father's dictum left little room for interpretation: pro-choice clergy should face outright excommunication from the Church for supporting 'the killing of a human child.' The Pope's declaration came in response to comments from the spokesperson of the Mexican bishop's conference, who said politicians who pushed through a New Mexico City pro-choice law should be excommunicated. So engrossed was he, in the Papal Bull, that he failed to hear the slight noise behind him until it was too late. His first and last recollection of the attack was the constriction of his throat as the strangulation cord tightened.

Chapter 13

London, modern day

Joab walked into the massive Barbican Centre, an impressive complex that displayed many different art genres. The journalist was still smarting from Anne's reaction. The realisation that he had blown any slim chance of getting to know her better affected him deeply. He hated women to think badly of him, and she saw him as a manipulative liar, and that wasn't exactly the best foundation on which to build a romantic relationship.

Pushing such self-pitying thoughts from his mind, Joab focused on the matter in hand, the meeting with the mysterious Jerome Zahir. Joab chose the Barbican Arts Centre because it was the first public space that came to mind. However, being as it was, the largest multi-arts centre in Europe, that featured art, film, music, theatre, dance and education, all under one roof and one creative direction, it was very complicated and crowded, making it difficult for him to find his way around. He had passed the Barbican Hall, the Barbican Theatre and the Pit Theatre before he located the Barbican Art Gallery on the third floor, where he was to meet Jerome Zahir. Joab didn't have any particular perceived image of the man in his mind, but Jerome Zahir was not what he expected at all.

The man approached him, saying, "Good morning Mr Rackham, I'm Jerome."

Joab would never have guessed. From the voice on the phone, his mental image of the man, did not come anywhere near the reality. The tall Negro with a stubbly white beard smiled and said, "What a delightfully entertaining venue you have chosen." Then, noticing Joab's slightly longer than socially accepted stare, he laughed, "I'm not what you expected, am I?"

"Not really, no."

"Don't worry young man, I quite often receive such a response. Not only am I accustomed to it, but I am also somewhat amused by the varying reactions. Now, let's find somewhere private to talk."

Joab felt disarmed by the man of colour's demeanour. Knowing nothing about the man put him on his guard.

As they stood in front of a large abstract painting, Joab asked. "How do you know Derek?"

Jerome answered, "We met in a monastery in Spain." He then suggested, "Why don't you let me explain a few things while you listen and record them."

"Okay, I'm happy to start there."

"Very well Mr Rackham. Although I am a little uncomfortable talking here with all these people about," Jerome said, indicating a bus tour, which had just arrived in the gallery.

Acknowledging this, Joab followed the black person to a more secluded area.

So as not to draw unwanted attention to themselves, as they moved around the large gallery, Jerome and Joab pretended to be talking about the art.

Jerome began, "Mr Rackham I don't know how well you know Derek, but I suspect you have not known him for very long. Myself, I first met Friar Derek Philips at St Teresa's Carmelite Monastery in Toledo."

Switching on his electronic note taker, Joab asked, "What was he doing there?"

"He had been five years in Avila. At only 35, he was already an assistant director."

"Director of what?"

"He was training to be a spiritual director."

"A spiritual director?"

"Yes, Mr Rackham. Derek is a man after St. Teresa's own heart, possessing holiness, experience and learning, the qualities she deemed essential in a good confessor. Only one-step remained for him to complete his development as a spiritual director: the purifying hand of God in his interior life. Friar Philips experienced this cleansing, in of all places, a prison cell in the Carmelite monastery at Toledo, which is where I first met him."

"What was he doing in a prison cell?" Joab asked, surprised.

Jerome smiled, "He hadn't committed any crimes, not that I know of anyhow. The cells doubled up as psychiatric wards."

"So, how did you come to be there, Mr Zahir?"

"I was his psychoanalyst, Mr Rackham."

"Are you a psychiatrist?"

Jerome turned on the journalist. "Is that so surprising?"

Joab, embarrassed at his assumptions, changed the subject. "What was your assessment of him, doctor?"

"In my professional opinion, his was suffering from delusions and paranoia."

Joab's journalist instinct told him something wasn't ringing true. He responded, "You don't think I'm buying this, do you?"

Jerome stayed silent.

Joab's attention, momentarily caught by the vivid reds in the artwork before him, asked, "What is going on here?"

"Exactly what I have told you. What reason would I have to lie?"

"I have only just met you. So how do I know your version of events is accurate?"

Jerome smiled again, "Why not let me complete the story before you judge it?"

"So where is he?"

"Mr Rackham, I will come to that if you desist from interrupting."

"Sorry, please continue."

“Look, although we doctors tend to see medical conditions as labels, each case is different for each patient. As I came to know Derek better, I realised that he sincerely believed that someone or something was threatening his life. He said the dark ones were out to get him. He said he knew too much and was horrified by what he knew.”

“Who were these dark ones he spoke of?”

“He didn’t give specifics. Although He did say it had to do with him being a Jesuarian priest.”

“Did you believe he was under some threat?”

“He had paranoid schizophrenia.”

“So you had no reason to believe there were dark forces out to get him.”

It's not as simple as that. As Derek's psychiatrist, I couldn't discount anything out of hand.” He paused, then said, “Now, may I continue?”

“Yes, go ahead.”

“I wondered if these delusions from which he was suffering stemmed from the disciplines he had to undergo in the Society of Jesus.”

“What decision did you come to?”

“First I had to do some digging. Mr Rackham, do you know much about the origins of the Jesuarians?”

“Not much, no.”

Noticing a couple of visitors nearby, Jerome ushered the journalist to an almost empty sculpture gallery.

As they approached an impressive looking minimalist sculpture, Jerome continued, “Allow me to enlighten you. When Ignatius Loyola, founder of the sect, underwent his remarkable conversion, he recorded the movements and reactions of his spiritual faculties in detail. He was inspired to organise them in a fashion that would guide others undergoing the same profound experience of God, which he had. He experienced, composed and presented the Exercises as a layman, and was ordained much later.”

“What sort of exercises are you referring to?”

“His Exercises were not a series of religious sermons or edifying notes to be read; they were prescriptions that were meant to put a person in direct communication with God. The exercitant who undertakes the Exercises becomes a self-learner by incessant self-activity. In this way, he strives to dispose himself to God's grace, to attain the end for which he is created.”

“What did you discover about Derek from this?”

“Derek Philips, not only experienced the Spiritual Exercises but made them the operative principles of his life, as well as a lifelong process. The Exercises divide into four distinct sections called 'weeks'. They begin with 'The Principle and Foundation. The First Week of the Exercises addresses the ultimate purpose of life and the created universe, making retreatants realise that the goal of their lives is to live with God forever; that God is not only their creator but is to be their eternal companion.

“How did Derek cope with that?”

“An excellent question, Mr Rackham. Some people can do that while separating themselves from God, but Derek was not able to differentiate. Either God was he or he was God. To Friar Philips, it

followed that he should use everything at his disposal to help him attain that end. Everything should be ordered to God's plan for him, and he should not be too quick to make life decisions until he first saw if the outcome will lead him closer to what God willed for him.”

“What was the next step?”

“The First Week follows with considerations about the heinousness of sin and the havoc it wreaks in the individual and society. This 'week' is about God's constant love, and about the urgency of turning from one's old ways and attitudes to gratitude and love, to a more devout life.”

Joab commented, “Admittedly it seems a bit extreme, but what harm did it do him?”

“At first he saw that everything he did had to fit in with God’s plan, whatever that was. The next stage was for him to believe everything he did was part of God’s plan. Then it came to the point when he could no longer differentiate between himself and God’s plan. In effect, in his mind, he had become God’s plan. Therefore, he was God and, as such, was perfect and could do no wrong. Now do you see the danger?”

“Yes, I certainly can. However, you could just be telling me this so that I disregard what Derek has said”

Jerome thought about Joab’s remark as they confronted a landscape triptych. “Yes, that could well be true? However, can you trust what he has told you? Your credibility as a serious journalist is on the line here, Mr Rackham.”

“You don’t know what he told me!”

“I don’t have to know. I have come across numerous cases of acute paranoia Mr Rackham. They always blame the rich and powerful for everything, claiming they are the slaves of Satan.”

As they walked around the gallery, Joab asked, “Why are you here talking to me about this, if not to make me distrust Derek’s sense of reality.”

“Because Friar Philips is a patient of mine and he has disappeared, and that concerns me.”

Joab turned on the doctor, asking, “How did you know he had disappeared?”

“He has my phone number, and Derek has often rung me to help him get back on track.”

Joab changed the subject. “You said you were going to tell me where he is.”

“All I know is that he said he is in Spain. Under the circumstances and given his history, it seems entirely feasible.”

Joab, irate, snapped, “I already know that much, so why did you contact me when I don’t know any more about Derek’s whereabouts, than you?”

“Perhaps if we pool our resources we stand a better chance of locating him.”

“Perhaps, but I still don’t trust you”

Jerome just flashed one of his disarming smiles.

Joab wondered if he was becoming paranoid, but it seemed as if a clergyman was following them around the gallery. Joab, pointing this out, said, “I could be imagining it but ...”

“Portly man with horn-rimmed glasses, middle, aged with a clerical collar. He’s been following us for a while now, but he’s not alone.”

Joab glanced behind him. The clergyman was looking at an oil painting. Joab asked, "What do you mean?"

"There is a youngish woman, casually dressed, long maroon skirt, mousy hair. There could be others but I haven't picked them."

"Who are they and why are they following us?"

"It could just be coincidence, but I would suggest it has something to do with Derek."

"Okay, so what do we do now?"

"The best plan would probably be to exit separately and meet up at the Barbican Station, near the old signal box. You get going and I will follow shortly."

As Joab made his way to the stairs, the woman Jerome had described, was just a few metres behind him. He began running down the stairs, taking two steps at a time. On the second floor, Joab ducked into the Waterside Cafe to see if the mystery woman was still tailing him. He saw her, but she could not see him. She seemed lost, unsure where to go. She took out a cell phone and made or received a short call. Then she took a seat in the foyer. Who was she and why was she following him? Joab wondered. Why had she sat down? Had she guessed he was still on that floor? Then Joab realised whoever they were; they probably had lookouts posted on each floor. This staking out meant their pursuers were well organised and they outnumbered him, and Jerome. He thought about calling her bluff by demanding why she was stalking him. However, she would probably have just denied it, and he could not prove a thing. In the end, Joab ordered a coffee and only mulled things over, while he kept an eye on her. The more he tried to figure out what was going on, the more the questions outweighed the answers.

She was still there when he looked again. In the end, he decided to play it casually. Without even looking in her direction, he walked over to a security guard. "D S Collins," Joab said, quickly flashing his press card wallet. "We've heard that two art thieves are casing the gallery upstairs, One of them is down here now, that hippie looking bird over there. Her accomplice is probably still upstairs, a Middle-aged priest wearing horned rimmed glasses."

The guard, bored with his routine, uttered, "Strewth mate, what can I do?"

"Get some back-up and hold them for us, while we gather the evidence."

Finally, with something interesting to do, the security guard jumped at the chance. "Right mate, I'll get on to it," he said, reaching for his radio.

Joab felt very pleased with himself, as the protesting woman got marched away. Now he was free to leave the building. He made his way through the common entrance to the Barbican Underground Station. Access was through a 1990s building, which leads to the much older station platforms. Once on the platform, Joab located the old signal box, beneath the remains of the supporting structure for a glass canopy, which, in its heyday had spanned the four platforms. He made his way there.

Jerome Zahir was waiting. Seeing Joab approach, he said, "Mr Rackham did you know that the meat for Smithfield meat market was at one time delivered by rail and there was a substantial goods yard under the market."

"I don't have time for trivia doctor."

"Oh, I find such facts interesting." He fixed Joab with his gaze. "Facts like, a defamation suit, by the Jesuarians, against your 'Highlight' magazine, would ruin it."

Joab prickled. "Is that some sort of veiled threat?"

“On the contrary Mr Rackham, but it would be a good idea to make sure that your facts stand up in court over the duration of a protracted legal case. I know these people. They are incredibly powerful and, if threatened, very, very dangerous.”

“So you work for them, and you have come here to warn me off. I thought as much.”

Jerome smiled, “Not as such, Mr Rackham. Like your good self, I am an independent observer. Although I do specialise in treating the negative effects brought about by extreme religion.”

“But you are contracted to the Jesuarians, aren’t you?”

“Don’t you think that could work to our mutual advantage, Mr Rackham?”

“It could if I knew I could trust you.”

“Your point is taken. Of course, I have to trust you, a journalist, as well. So let us take this a step at a time. You give me a little of what you know, and I will do likewise. That’s fair, isn’t it?”

“I guess so. So, where are we to start looking?”

“Perhaps a trip to Spain would be in the offing.”

Chapter 14

Vatican City, 1981

A cleaner discovered Cardinal Solano's body slumped over his desk, around 6 am. After the initial shock, he wondered what to do. Not being used to papal protocol, concerning such matters, he phoned the Rome police and reported the death.

The officer on the desk duty jotted down a few details. However, as soon as there was mention of the Vatican, he quickly patched the call through to Lieutenant Giovanni Repetto, who took the call from the nervous cleaner. After listening to the man's story, he leapt into action. Grabbing Mario Feccinni, one of his team, he said, “Meet me at the car pool pronto. We have got an investigation to deal with.”

It wasn’t like his boss, who usually dealt with cases calmly, to be so animated. He asked, “What investigation chief?”

“A suspicious death at the Vatican.”

“Holy shit!” Mario responded, remembering what happened the last time they interfered in Vatican business.

“Yes, and we’ve got to get there before they lock it down.”

The Fiat driven by detective Feccinni raced, without flashing lights or siren, along Larga di Porta Cavalleggeri before turning left into Piazza del Sant’ Uffizio. It came to a halt in the parking space between the Audience Hall and the Palace of Holy Office. The police officers quickly alighted from their vehicle and approached Guido Passadini, the cleaner who found the body. Ascertaining him as the caller, the three men quickly walked to the Palace entrance. Guido took them to see the dead prelate. While detective Feccinni took details from the cleaner, Repetto looked at the deceased figure, slumped over a desk. He was not there two minutes when the papal police turned up.

“GET OUT OF HERE!” shouted the Vatican police sergeant, ushering the lieutenant to the door.

Repetto protested, "I am here to investigate a reported suspicious death, sergeant, so if you're not going to be useful stay out of my way."

The Vatican officer, sure of his position, stood his ground. "If there is any investigating to be done here, we will do it. You are trespassing on papal land, and you must leave immediately."

Repetto retaliated, "Sergeant when we get called out to investigate a suspicious death we do just that."

"What do you mean - a suspicious death? You weren't in there long enough to establish what happened."

"Just how long does it take to know that somebody strangled the deceased?"

The sergeant, stunned, became silent. After a moment he ordered, "You stay outside, while I take a look." He scrutinised the body slumped over the desk, noting the thin line of bruising around the back of the neck. He lifted the head of the corpse and saw that bruising continued, encircling the throat. The eyes, which were streaked with broken blood vessels bulged like those of a fish. Despite the disfigurement, Sergeant Montaglio recognised the dead man as Angelo Solano, Dean of Cardinals. Crossing himself, he phoned his headquarters.

Domenico Priani kept his predecessor's framed picture on his desk as a reminder of what it meant to be the Vatican Police Chief. Camillo Cincinnati held the record for miles jogged alongside a moving pope mobile. Nevertheless, he made his last run around St. Peter's Square the day John Patrick fell victim to the gunman's bullets. He felt he had failed, and he retired shortly afterwards, only a week from his 78th birthday. The Papal Secretary accepted Cincinnati's resignation as director of security services and civil protection for Vatican City State and named 43-year-old Domenico Priani as his successor.

In effect, the Vatican's chief of police, who is also the director of Vatican security, when the pope was in public view at home or abroad, was the number one papal bodyguard. New to the job, Domenico was just finding his feet. Since the attempted assassination, the reality of his testing role hit him fully. Just then, his phone rang. He spoke into the receiver, "Hello, Chief Priani speaking."

"Sergeant Montaglio here, sir. The Dean of Cardinals has been found dead."

Domenico was stunned. Regaining his composure, he asked, "Have you contacted the Medical Examiner?"

"Yes sir, but it looks like a suspicious death."

"Can you be more specific?"

"The bruising around the Dean's neck strongly suggests strangulation as the cause of death, sir,"

"Right, secure the scene. Make sure that nobody outside the Vatican knows about this."

"It's too late for that sir."

"Too late! What do you mean, too late?"

"Two detectives from Rome were already here when we arrived. One of them, a Lieutenant Repetto, was examining the scene."

Domenico couldn't believe it. "How did the Rome police know about this before you knew what had happened?"

"Apparently a cleaner found the body this morning. The worker phoned the Rome police."

The case was already becoming too complicated. As director of papal security, it was Domenico's job to see that what went on in the Vatican stayed in the Vatican, at least until The Papal advisors had sanitised the story. Now it looked as though he would have to do some 'fast spinning' with the detective from Rome. "Keep the detectives there. I'm on my way."

Repetto fed up with waiting to continue his investigation, gritted his teeth. He had to be very careful, being, as he was, inside a city-state, which had its laws and statutes, entirely separate to those of Rome. As frustrating as it was, Repetto had to comply and go through all the tedious protocols, he called 'papal bull' before, carrying out his job. Despite this, he still had to put on a show of indignation. "How long are you going to keep me waiting?" he asked the papal officer guarding the door to the crime scene.

"The young guard remained silent, as ordered.

Sergeant Montaglio approached Giovanni. Addressing the lieutenant, he stated, "We are to do nothing until Chief Priani gets here."

"Does that include me?" the medical examiner asked, having just arrived at the scene.

"I guess so, doctor," the sergeant shrugged.

This fatal incident, Domenico's first suspicious death since becoming chief, filled him with trepidation. Upon his arrival at the scene, he saw his man and the Rome detectives conversing and smoking. His sergeant snapped to attention as soon he approached them. Addressing his officer, he asked, "Sergeant, who is the detective in charge here?"

"Lieutenant Repetto sir, he answered, indicating the officer.

Facing Giovanni, Chief Priani said, "I think we should talk."

"When am I going to be able to carry out my job here?"

"There is no need Lieutenant. We'll take over from here."

"What do you mean, Chief? We were first on the scene."

"That was a mistake on your part lieutenant. You have breached our protocols."

"What are you talking about?"

"Do not play coy lieutenant. You know very well that you have to inform my office before we sanction your investigation."

"In the case of a suspicious death, we have the mandate ..."

"Priani smiled, "And how did you know it was a suspicious death before you got here?"

Giovanni hesitated before answering. He was aware that he was on very shaky ground. He tried to think what the cleaner had said over the phone, but he could not recollect the exact words. "I didn't," he answered at length."

"Just I suspected. So you went ahead with an investigation outside of your jurisdiction."

"But the guy's been strangled!"

Mimicking Giovanni's casual terminology, Domenico replied, "Our guy, our jurisdiction. It stays in-house lieutenant. We will deal with it. Thank you for your help."

Giovanni felt like smashing the supercilious police chief in the face. "I still have to log a report," Giovanni stated defiantly.

“Your report is invalid, and if you or your partner breath a word of this outside the Vatican City you will find yourself in big trouble. Do I make myself clear, Lieutenant?”

Giovanni, seething, snarled, ”You think you are pretty smart, don’t you?”

“I am just doing my job. Make sure you do yours correctly next time.” Then, as a parting shot, he said, “It is a pleasure to meet you, Lieutenant. I’m sure you know the way out.”

Giovanni saw red. How dare that pretend cop talk to him that way? He was about to grab the chief when his partner restrained him. “It’s not worth it boss. Let’s just get the hell out of here.”

Cardinal Pawlowski heard the news from two prelates talking together. A chill ran up his spine as soon as he heard the words Solano and dead mentioned in the same sentence. Interrupting the conversation, he asked, “Did you say that Angelo is dead?”

One of them answered, “That is what we heard your Eminence. Over at the Palace of Holy Office.”

Julian rushed over to the palace, to find it surrounded by papal police. His age and lack of regular exercise left him with aching lungs and a sore back. Panting heavily, he realised the hopelessness of his situation. Julian could not do or say anything that would help his late colleague! Still, he felt the need to see Angelo. Julian needed Angelo's forgiveness, to make amends in some way. How could he make amends, though? His friend and mentor was dead – and, the way he saw it, it may just as well have been by his hand.

There again, the rumour mill may have got it wrong. It might not be Angelo lying in the office, dead. It could be someone else instead, God rest his soul. However, Julian had to know for sure, so he hurried to the crime scene.

Approaching one of the officers outside of the cordoned off area, Julian asked, “Why are the police here?”

The young police officer was told not to speak to no one except those involved in the case. Nevertheless, this man was a Cardinal, who could one day be the Pope. He answered, “We are investigating a death.”

“Who is the deceased?” Julian asked, a lump already forming in his throat.

“It's the Dean of Cardinals, your Eminence.”

“My God,” he muttered, the bile beginning to rise in his throat. Hurriedly, he found a small open space between the Palace and the Audience Hall, where he retched and vomited.

The medical examiner, having scrutinised the body, gave his verdict to Chief Priani, “He has been strangled.”

“I see, Doctor. So what do we tell the media in cases like this?”

“It is Vatican Policy to say as little as possible. What do you want me to put on his death certificate?”

Caught on the hop, he said, “What do we usually put as the cause of death?”

“Natural causes.”

“But what about the marks around his neck? The Rome police have already seen them.”

The M E smiled, "That's not my department, Chief Priani."

Just then, the Jesuarian General, in a swirl of black robes, made his presence known. He quickly confronted the police chief. "What's going on?" he demanded.

"Cardinal Solano has been found dead, your Eminence,"

"How did he die, Chief Priani?" the Black Pope asked, brusquely.

"He appears to have been strangled, your Eminence."

"How do you know that?"

"Lividity around his throat," the medical examiner answered.

Pedro Arross wasn't there by accident. He was kept well informed of events that fateful day. "Let me see," he demanded, brushing Priani aside.

Upon a cursory inspection he announced, "I have seen these marks before."

"What do you mean, your Eminence?" the Chief inquired.

"This is a terrible thing for me to divulge."

"If it sheds some light on this crime I need to know about it,"

Arross smiled thinly. Priani was playing into his hands. "It may not have been a crime. Angelo came to me in strict confidence. Do I have to tell you?"

"If it has any bearing on the case, yes, your Eminence."

"Very well, if I have to," Arross continued, feigning respect for the dead prelate. "Angelo suffered from deep depression. Being the stoic he was, he kept the dark moods to himself. One day he tried to commit suicide by hanging himself. I caught him just in time. He begged me not to say anything, and I agreed. So you see these marks were there before last night."

The Chief was relieved. "Then it was natural causes."

"Precisely," Pedro agreed.

Chapter 15

Toledo, modern day

Joab slept through most of the 35-kilometre journey, from Madrid Airport, where he and Jerome had picked up their hire car. He awoke just as the iconic windmills came into view. Stretching, he asked, "Where are we?"

Keeping his eyes on the road, the doctor answered, "We are arriving in La Mancha, Mr Rackham. Rosella, a dear and trusted friend, has kindly offered to let us stay at her place."

"La Mancha isn't that where that old knight, in that famous story, attacked windmills."

"Yes, the region, was made famous by Cervantes in his 'Don Quijote'."

As they drove through Quintanar de la Orden, Joab saw many of the iconic windmills for which La Mancha is famous. In a strange way, they reminded him of his mission. If what Derek said about the Jesuarians were true, then Joab, like the legendary Don Quijote, would only be tilting at windmills.

Jerome, who loved to show his local knowledge, explained, "It hasn't changed much. You can almost imagine that geriatric knight mistaking windmills for dragons." Then, pointing at a hospital they were passing, he continued, "That's the Hospital Nuestra Señora de La Caridad, founded by Cardinal Cisneros. It's one of the most famous monuments here because inside there are five paintings by El Greco."

The pair eventually arrived in Consuegra, at the Plaza de Espana. Jerome parked their car, after which he led Joab to a house, with a wooden gallery. After knocking at the front door, they waited for a response. The door opened to reveal a dark skinned, gypsy-like woman, with a face as bright and open as the gold hoop earrings she wore.

She wrapped her arms tightly around Jerome. "It's nice to see you again Jerry," she beamed.

Breaking from her embrace, Jerome indicated Joab. "Rosella this is my friend, Mr Rackham."

"Welcome to my home Senor Rackham. I am Rosella Louisa Vercantes."

"I am pleased to meet you. Call me Joab, please."

"Very well, Senor Joab, follow me please."

The pair followed the generous Senora into her home.

"Have you been here before, Senor Joab?" Rosella asked as they sat eating 'la Comida' the Spanish midday meal.

Taking a sip of the delicious Sangria, Joab answered, "No. I've never been to Spain."

"This is such a magical place Senor Joab. You must visit the old fortress and, of course, the windmills."

"Alas, I don't think there will be much time for sightseeing. We're here to help a friend."

Jerome interceded, "You can't come to this extraordinary place without some play time, Mr Rackham."

Joab hated the formality with which Jerome addressed him, but for some perverse reason, the Negro doctor insisted on it.

"Playtime comes later. First, we have to find Derek!" Joab persisted.

"Perhaps I can help you there, Senor Joab. I have many friends. If he is around here, they may know something."

Patting her on her hand, Jerry said, "Thank you, Rosy, my love, but if he is around here, he won't be out in public. Besides, it's best if you don't become involved."

"But I would like to help," Rosy persisted.

"You are doing more than enough by providing this excellent hospitality, my love. I will make some inquiries myself." Rising to his feet, he stated, "I will leave Mr Rackham to your tender mercies, while I get on the trail."

Getting up, Joab said, "Wait for me, I'm coming with you!"

Jerome countered, "It's best if you stay here for now. People around here are very suspicious of strangers. They are more likely to talk to me if I am on my own. I won't be long, and I will report everything to you upon my return."

From the window in his room, Joab had a clear view of the old fortress and the close by iconic windmills. He had only been in Spain a few hours, and it was already having a profound effect on him. There was something very earthy about the place. Joab plugged in his laptop and booted it. As he waited for it to complete its settings, his mind went back to the evening before. He had phoned Anne to keep her abreast of events. As soon as she had heard his voice, she'd slammed the receiver down, cutting him off. This behaviour happened twice more and, for the next hour, he just kept getting an engaged signal. Then, just before retiring, he tried one more time. She answered and this time gave him a chance to explain the reason for his call. She even thanked him for keeping her informed and wished him luck in his quest. Having spoken to her Joab felt much better and was able to focus more clearly on the data containing all the serious allegations, on the disk Derek had left for him.

Derek alleged that:

It's quite likely that the Jesuarian General ordered President John Kennedy's assassination, which, it is believed, was carried out by the 'American Pope', Francis Cardinal Spellman. To cover his tracks Spellman employed the Knights of Malta, Shriner Freemasons, Knights of Columbus, and Mafia Dons, including the FBI and CIA, to carry out the Papal directive. Kennedy wanted an end to the Vietnam War, and he wanted to terminate the rule of the CIA and their drug smuggling in the Golden Triangle. There was another reason though – Executive Order 11110, in which he proposed to control the Federal Reserve Bank.”

Joab made a note, If so, that begs two questions: Did Rome want the Vietnam War? And, did Rome control the CIA?”

On the disk, Derek said:

“We know, on the face of it, that the Vietnam War was called 'Spelly's War'. He went over to the war-front many times, and he called the American soldiers the 'Soldiers of Christ'. Also, the Commander of the American forces was a Roman Catholic, CFR member and possibly a Knight of Columbus member also. His name was General William Westmore. Westmore was Cardinal Spillman's agent to make sure that the war was properly executed. Also, another overseer of Westmore was Cardinal Spillman's boy, President-elect, Lyndon Baines Johnson, a 33rd-degree Freemason.”

A lot of research was needed to back up Derek's version of events. Derek further alleged that:

“Johnson, who was also allegedly part of the assassination plot, along with J. Edgar Hoover, another 33rd-degree Freemason, was completely at the disposal of Cardinal Spillman. His contact was through Cartha DeLoach, the 3rd-in-control of the FBI. According to Curt Gentry, in his 'Hoover: The Man and the Secrets', DeLoach had a phone at his bedside direct to Johnson, who could call him anytime. DeLoach, a Knight of Malta, was subject to Spellman. Derek claimed Spellman, who, controlled by the Fordham Jesuarians, wanted the Vietnam War because of the people of Vietnam, the Buddhists, would not convert to Catholicism, so they did not need Rome.

A Jesuarian presence had been prominent in Vietnam for centuries. The Jesuarians decided a million or so Buddhists would have to be 'purged'. They later continued this purge of Cambodia, with Pol Pot, and the purge is yet to occur for Thailand.

Another thing, according to Derek's reckoning, was that:

“Rome had the job of controlling the drug trade. There had been an alliance between the English and Dutch royal houses to run the Opium Wars, and it had gone on since then. The Vatican was given control all of the heroin, opium, cocaine - everything going around in Columbia. Columbia, a Catholic country, had a concordat with the Pope. Hitler also had a concordat, along with Mussolini and Franco. They now want to set up a concordat in America, which was the reason for Reagan,

allegedly the greatest of American traitors, formally recognising the sovereign state of Vatican City in 1984.”

Joab found it difficult to believe what he was reading. He wondered about Jerome’s assertion that Derek was suffering from paranoia. He had nothing to back up the accusations, but he continued to play the disk.

Derek’s voice continued:

“If Rome did not want the drug trade out of Columbia, they would end the concordat. High Mafia families out of Columbia, subject to the Jesuarian General, run the business.

The Vietnam War came about to consolidate and control this massive drug-trade, with the aim of inundating every American city with drugs, being brought in by the CIA. They work with the Mafia in the drug trade. After being trafficked by Air America, I believe the Trafficante family distributes the drugs, throughout the United States.”

Joab sensed that Derek had become furious while recording the accusations. The journalist was concerned about the missing friar’s rationale, but he continued listening.

Derek voiced:

Kennedy was trying to end the reign of the CIA, which had betrayed him by not giving the cover to the Cuban patriots to retake Cuba from that Roman Catholic, Jesuarian-trained, grease-ball bastard, Fidel Castro. The air cover of the Bay of Pigs invasion was stopped to make Kennedy appear a traitor to the Cuban people.

In retaliation, he signed a memorandum in which he gave the powers of the CIA to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, greatly displeasing the Jesuarian General.

The ‘Knights of Malta’ built the CIA. One of the founders, 'Wild' Bill Donovan, an Irish Roman Catholic, fanatic, had a brother who was a Dominican priest. This high Roman Catholic, the first person, to solidify the Catholic and the Vatican control of American secret intelligence, founded the CIA.”

Joab took a deep breath. The story was dynamite but was it kosher? Was Derek’s mental state to be trusted?”

Just then, he heard Jerome laughing with Rosella. Jerome’s part in the affair raised many questions for Joab. Could he be trusted? What was his agenda? Did he know where Derek was? Was he Derek’s psychiatrist? Pushing these anxious thoughts aside, he decided to join the pair.

As Joab walked into the room, Jerome had his arm around their host, “Isn’t this lady just beautiful, Mr Rackham?”

“Don’t embarrass Senor Joab, you naughty man,” she giggled.

“Have you got any leads Jerome?” Joab asked, staying focused.

“Two, but we can’t do anything until tomorrow. So tonight we party!”

To emphasise the meaning, Rosella shimmied her hips, flamenco style.

“Go Baby go.” the Negro applauded.

Catching her breath, Rosella asked, “Will you join us, Senor Joab?”

“Join you in what?” Joab asked, puzzled.

Rosella explained, "Tonight is the exaltation of the Holy Cross. We are having a big festival, and you are here with us."

"Just wait until you see it, Mr Rackham. It's very special."

Not to be distracted, Joab pressed, "Okay Jerome, tell me about these leads."

"I'm sorting one out tonight, during the festival."

"Have you found out where Derek is yet?"

"The man I see tonight may well be able to give me that information."

Joab felt frustrated not knowing what was going on. "I don't like being left out Jerome."

"It is unfortunate but it is the only way I can safely operate."

"Don't forget that I am also part of this mission."

"As soon as I know something, Mr Rackham, you will be informed."

As the red sun sank and the artist's palette sky surrendered to the inkiness of night, Consuegra began to come alive. The crowd was building, as the aura of excitement grew. Rosella had found herself, Jerome and Joab, a good vantage point from which to view the parade. The "Exaltation of the Cross", a traditional celebration that occurs on the last day of April and the first few days of May, emanated a rapture of love and nature reborn. People sang joyously, proclaiming the fertile land and the harvest it would soon yield. The influence of Christianity on these ancient rituals brought the inclusion of statues of the Virgin Mary - for example in the mayos songs - and the cross. Joab soon came to realise the celebration was in dedication to these symbols.

"Why is it called the Mayos?" Joab asked.

Rosella explained, "Mayos means Mary or the month of May. However, it also means the frames made in different parts of Galicia. Adorned with fruit and vegetables they are usually conical or in the shape of a cross."

Joab nodded, "Thanks for explaining that." Then, after a short pause, he asked, "What's happening now?" as the crowd became more animated, with the occasional firecracker going off.

Rosella explained, "You cannot see from here, but the Virgin Mary is offered the mayos. Now watch, and you will see what I mean, Senor Joab."

Joab watched as the male participants paraded in front of the young single girls in the crowd. Some of the young men went to the girls' houses, which displayed crosses. Turning around, Joab noticed Jerome was missing. He turned to his host, "Rosella, where has Jerome gone?"

"He has gone to see a man. Maybe he goes to find your friend, si."

"What man has he gone to see?"

Rosella shrugged, "I don't know, Senor Joab."

"Have you known the doctor long?"

She looked vague for a moment. Then she clicked. "The doctor? Oh, you mean Senor Jerome. Many years, but he comes and goes. I never know when."

Joab wondered why she hesitated. Was he pretending to be a doctor? "What sort of doctor is he?" he asked.

“He has not told you? Head doctor you know - sick mind doctor.”

“Psychiatrist?”

“Si Señor Joab, psychiatrist.”

In the midst of a crowd of believers was a man posed as one of the faithful. He stood behind Rosella, and Joab; his presence was unknown to them. As the excited people of Consuegra celebrated the holy cross, the man touched the one around his neck. He wore the ‘Twisted Crucifix’, which the Pope had been using since Vatican two, its significance being lost on all, except adepts of Satanism. According to legend Satanists created the Twisted Cross in 666 AD, to imitate the traditional Roman Catholic Crucifix, but it was soon adopted it as one of the many emblems for the Antichrist. Faithful Catholics, including those around him, had been unknowingly bowing down to this symbol of Antichrist since 1963 when Pope Paul VI allegedly started using it for his public engagements. At that time, occult adepts of all secret societies realised this sigil suddenly utilised by the Paul VI meant only one thing: the Jesuarian/Illuminati had control of the Vatican! Finally, after over 200 years of struggle, the Black Magic forces of the Masters of the Jesuarian/Illuminati controlled the Vatican, vanquishing the White Magic practitioners who had held power since the time of Constantine.

Seeing Dr Zohir leave his friends, the man with the crooked cross, followed him to the outskirts of the town. It was too risky to follow his prey across the dark open space, towards the fortress, so he took out his mobile phone, dialled and waited for a response. Once connected, he spoke, “Parties one, two, and three are in Consuegra. Party one has left parties two and three and he is on his own. What are my instructions, your Holiness?” The man listened, then he answered, “Your will shall be done.” Then, speaking into the dead of night he muttered, “Your luck is in doctor. You are granted another night on this earth.”

The psychiatrist, meanwhile, met with his contact on the outskirts of the town. Their meeting place was a disused ‘Molinos de Viento’, or wind mill, which, although cold, dark and uncomfortable, served its purpose.

“Are you sure he can help us?” the cleric asked, adjusting his horn-rimmed glasses, which had slipped down his nose.

Jerome paused thoughtfully, “He’s our best chance.”

“Well he is intelligent, I suppose. He pulled off a clever trick at the Barbican.”

Jerome smiled, “Yes, it was a brilliant ploy on his part.”

“Three hours we had to spend in that cursed police station,” the cleric complained.

Jerome chuckled, “I bet you weren’t expecting that.” The black man added, “Nevertheless, our ploy worked as well. At least he trusts me now.”

“This had better be worth it.”

“I’m sure it is. Once we find Friar Philips, then we will have our prize.”

“What if he is already dead?”

“I don’t think that is the case, not unless he has already given it to them. If, however, they have killed him, we will have to rely on the reporter.”

“That is all very well Jerome, but what if the reporter does not know where it is?”

“We will have to cross that bridge if we come to it.”

“So what are you plans now?”

“Tomorrow we will visit the hospital.”

“Time is against us Jerome. I pray to God we are not too late to act.”

“Have faith my brother. Once we have the evidence, the ungodly will be exposed.”

The priest did not depart until Jerome had exited the windmill and disappeared, blending with the black of night. In the distance, he could just discern the glow of the celebration of the holy cross taking place in the town. The covert priest marvelled at the innocence and purity of the simple townsfolk. How shocked would they be, he wondered, if they knew how evil the ‘New Church - Vatican Two’ had become, in the clutches of the Modernist New Order? It was becoming harder and harder to deny the claims by Jesuarian insider Fr Derek Philips, and others, that there was evidence of satanic practices in the ‘New Church’. Since Toledo’s Father Manassa, was convicted of murder the priest had been involved in the ‘Save-the-Church’ movement. Charged with the murder of a New Church nun, Juanita Ann Pallas, he was the first Jesuarian member convicted of such a serious crime. What scared the priest though was the trial evidence, which indicated that the murder had satanic connections. However, the most unsettling aspect of the case was that the Law had to act because, although the ‘New Church’ was furnished with the facts of the case, it just stood by and did nothing.

Chapter 16

Vatican City, 1982

The official story was that Angelo Cardinal Solano had died from natural causes. Julian, not believing his eyes, read the ‘Papal News’ again. It said death from natural causes. “NO, NO, NO!” he yelled, his fists tightly clenched. It was murder, pure and simple. They must not get away with it, Julian kept repeating to himself. Nevertheless, what could he do? Roger had taken the news very badly and, Angelo's friend had wordlessly disappeared from the scene. Julian recalled the abject terror he had seen in the Cardinal’s eyes. A fear based on the assumption he would be the next victim. Julian felt scared and alone, with only Monsignor Praitti to confide in.

However, when he spoke to Ricardo about it, he was not much help either. He insisted, “It is no good going to the Papal Police because they are obviously part of the cover-up.”

“Then I will go to the Rome police. I will speak to that officer who came here.”

The Monsignor frowned, “If they find out, they will have you excommunicated my friend.”

Julian sighed deeply, “Sometimes, these dark days, I think it would be a blessing.”

Taking a sharp breath, Ricardo said haltingly, “Julian, do n't talk like that. You are distraught, and you don't know what you are talking about!”

“Alas, things are not like they used to be Ricardo.”

“Nothing ever is my friend.”

“I don't mean fundamental changes. Don't you feel it around here these days?”

“Feel what?”

“It 's hard to explain. A lack of clarity is the best way I can put it.”

“Clarity about what?”

“About what all this stands for today,” Julian answered, spreading his hands for emphasis.

Ricardo, wearing a perplexed look, responded, “Surely the Church still stands for what it has always stood for!”

Julian replied, sharply, “No Ricardo, that's just it, it doesn't. Already two pious men have sacrificed their lives, and for what? Pedro Arross is as powerful as ever. He even has private daily meetings with the Holy Father.”

“I am sure the Pontiff knows what he is doing. It is not up to us to question his judgement.”

Looking his friend straight in the eye, he said, “Ricardo, I can only pray that the Holy Father doesn't know what he's doing.”

The Monsignor's eyes widened. “What on earth do you mean?”

“If he knows what he is doing then he has to be in league with the Black Pope. Such a possibility is too horrific even to contemplate.”

The Black Pope had just left Oslo airport, on his way to the Rica Park Hotel, Sandefjord, Norway, where the secret venue of the Bilderberg Summit was hosting the latest ‘New World Order’ (NWO) meeting. The ‘Bilderberg Group’, created in 1954, by Denis Healey, Joseph Ratzinger, David Rockefeller and former Nazi SS officer Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, was a by-invitation-only, conference for the incredibly wealthy and powerful.

Bilderberg, the name of the Dutch hotel where the meeting first took place, had occurred at regular intervals ever since. Those who attended had to promise not to reveal any of the discussions; security was extremely tight, and the press and public were barred. For the small minority of those outsiders aware of Bilderbergs, the conference was the subject of outrage and protest. For many global world citizens and even religious groups who vehemently objected to Bilderberg's disturbing ‘New World Order’ agenda and influence. Meetings were vastly expensive, controversial and always held in different venues around the globe.

Pedro Arross, one of the regular members, was the only religious leader present at the conference. He felt safe sitting back in the comfort of the bullet-proof limousine that took him to the resort, the venue for the ‘Summit on Globalisation’. To procure the best security the Bilderberg Group paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to reimburse the Norwegian government for deploying military forces to guard their privacy and for armed helicopters to seek out intruders. The Bilderberg executive, having ordered the lock-down of the resort for a full 48 hours before the conference began, felt confident that they could conduct their world business privately and safely, free from prying eyes. Discussions were highly classified and were not for media consumption either before or after the meeting. As some of the members owned the media, this dictum was not hard to carry out. The Bilderberg Group had been the subject of a variety of conspiracy theories, which for the most part, emanated from political extremist organisations, Right and Left. The ‘Radical Right’ tendered to view Bilderbergs as an integral component of the ‘International Zionist-Jesuarian conspiracy’. While, at the other end of the political spectrum, the radical Left, perceived Bilderbergs to be a branch of the ‘Rockefeller-Rothschild grand design to rule the world’. The Joke being that they are both one and the same, two sides of the same coin. How else could they be assured of taking total control?

Arross listened avidly as the Chairman, Rodriguez Inciarte, outlined the agenda for the conference. Every time the words ‘New World Order’ came up, the assembled members, raising their fists in the air, echoed the call, turning the meeting into a facsimile of the Nuremberg Rallies. Excitement

built up, as the membership of this elite gathering, one of the most secretive organisations in the world, comprising presidents, members of royal families, ministers, top industrialists, financial leaders, and the head of the Roman Catholic Jesuarians, got into full swing. The self-proclaimed elite, in The Rica Park Hotel, Sande Fjord, Norway, continued setting the agenda as they decided on the fate of the world. In their minds, nobody else could be trusted to make such important decisions. Each representative body saw themselves as the driving force, but they kept that notion from each other. Arross grinned evilly, comfortable in the knowledge the Jesuarians comprised the oldest and most influential group and, as such, directed policy. He was amused at the irony that those powerful global groups: the financiers, governments, secret societies, etc. all answered to the Vatican, and many of them didn't even know it.

The principal feature of Bilderberg is that it seeks one global government- a structure similar to the European Union - while counteracting nationalist sentiment, which is supposedly its greatest battle. Before the assembly, Pedro Arross had engineered renewed calls for the United Nations to directly tax the world citizenry, ensuring it was open for discussion in Sandefjord. The ruling elite only held Bilderberg meetings when and where the host could provide the highest levels of security for their guests. Arross, as did all Bilderberg participants, their staff members and resort employees, wore photo identification tags, colour coded to identify the wearer as a participant, staff member or employee. An embedded computer chip 'fingerprint' assured the identity of the card's wearer.

Arross, dressed in civilian clothes, wore his participant's badge with pride. As a key player in the conference, he helped set the world agenda. He smiled to himself when he thought of all those Catholics around the world who assumed the Pope was running the show in Rome.

Lieutenant Repetto was still smarting from being railroaded by the Papal Police. And, to make things even worse, he had been disciplined internally for investigating the Cardinal's death in the first place. He wanted nothing more to do with the case. Therefore, when he got the call from the front desk that a man who declined to give his name wished to see him concerning the suspicious death of Cardinal Solano he could already feel the red hot potato burning his hands.

Detective Feccinni, seeing the worried look on his boss's face, asked, "Who was that sir?"

Without thinking, he answered blandly, Sergeant, There's somebody from the Vatican to see me."

Mario blanched at the thought. "We agreed that place is bad news, sir. I was just reading that despite it being the world's smallest country Vatican City has one of the highest crime rates in the world, twenty times higher than here, in Rome."

"I know that Mario, but I'd better listen to what he has to say."

Lieutenant Repetto ushered Julian Pawlowski into the starkly furnished interview room. Once seated on one of the only two chairs, Giovanni asked, "Okay who are you and why are you here?"

Julian hesitated, then answered, "This is a very sensitive issue Lieutenant. I did not want to come here, but I have no other course of action left to me. Two people have recently died in the Vatican City under suspicious circumstances, yet the official report claims they died from natural causes."

"How do you know this, Signor?"

"Because they received threats, just before their deaths."

"Threatened, by whom?"

"By an assassin from the office of the Black Pope, The Jesuarian General."

Lieutenant Repetto, hiding his surprise as best he could, said, "What possible motive could the Jesuarian General have to threaten these cardinals?"

"It has to do with Vatican policy."

The lieutenant sighed slowly, "What are we supposed to do about it, Signor?"

"Pawlowski. Julian Cardinal Pawlowski. Please call me Julian."

Lieutenant Repetto's eyes widened. He had no idea the elderly man he was dealing with was a 'Red Hat'. Smiling wistfully, he stated, "There is nothing we can do about it, your Eminence."

Julian could not believe it. "What do you mean, nothing? You are the police! Surely if a serious crime is committed..."

The officer, cutting him off, responded, "...Senor Pawlowski you're from the Vatican, so you know the rules. We do not have any jurisdiction there."

"Surely there is something you can do."

"Not unless we are invited by the Papal Police commander to investigate a crime that has taken place in the Vatican."

Julian, not to be deterred, replied, "I understand that officer, but other people have received death threats - including me."

The Lieutenant, taken aback by the cardinal's surprising remarks, queried, "You have also received death threats?"

"I was attacked!"

"Attacked! When and where?"

"In Gdansk, last year - shortly after the attempted assassination of the Pope."

"Do you know who your assailant was?"

"All I know is he wore monk's habit and he tried to strangle me."

"Did you report the incident to the Polish Police?"

Julian hesitated, and then answered, "No, I am afraid I did not. I'd just received disturbing news from the Vatican and had to hurry back there. A police investigation would have delayed me."

"Then there is no official record of the incident."

"I'm afraid not, no."

Giovanni scratched his chin. Let me get this right. A monk nearly strangles you, yet you didn't report your attacker."

Julian explained, "Cardinal Furni, a close friend and colleague had died, in the Vatican, under suspicious circumstances. As I said, I couldn't get caught up in an inquiry in Poland."

The police officer considered Julian's information. He needed support from higher up the chain. He stood up, "Excuse me, Julian, I will return shortly. Pushing a pad towards the Cardinal, he added, "Please write down what you have told me."

With increasing trepidation, the Repetto approached the door to the Commanders top-floor office. Why did this case have to fall in his lap, he wondered? Why had it fallen to him to deal with the cleric? He knew the sensible thing to do would be to turn around and forget the whole thing.

However, once he knocked at the door, there was no going back. He took a deep breath and rapped his knuckles on the timber frame.

“Sir I have an important issue to discuss with you,” the Lieutenant began, as he approached Commander Quatravelli.

“Oh, it’s you, Repetto. What do you want?” his superior uttered, glancing up from the report he was scrutinising.

“I have a Cardinal downstairs who claims he is on a death list.”

The commander stared at him. “A death list! What the hell are you talking about?”

“He claims that someone working for the Jesuarian General has murdered two Cardinals in the Vatican City. And the deaths have been covered up.”

His superior officer’s response was pretty much as he imagined it would be. Nevertheless, Repetto had to run the story by him.

Glaring at Repetto, the commander snarled, “Haven’t you learned your lesson yet Lieutenant? Vatican business is the Vatican’s business! End of story!”

The commander’s blast prompted Repetto to turn tail and leave. At the door, he turned, saying, “I knew you would take that line sir but I thought you should be aware, for the record, just in case he is telling the truth, and this all comes out later.”

The commander, annoyed at the interruption, sighed, “Tell him to report it to Chief Priani, Giovanni. If he requests our help, then we will act. Until then it’s hands off.”

“Sir, I have had dealings with Chief Priani. He was well aware that Cardinal Solano’s death was not by his hand, yet he and the Vatican covered it up. So he is most certainly not going to request our help.”

The commander just shrugged, “Then our hands are tied.”

“But sir ...”

“Repetto, you have already been burned over this. Do you want to be roasted as well?”

“Sir, the Vatican has a crime rate statistically 26 percent higher than here in Rome.”

“That is not our problem, Lieutenant.”

Repetto argued, “It is when our criminals use the Vatican City not only as a sanctuary but also as the perfect place to commit their heinous crimes. Sir, taken statistically, criminality in the Holy See, is at such a high rate that 87.2% of the population commits civil offences, and penal offences run at a staggering 133.6%. So it becomes our problem sir.”

Glaring at his subordinate, the commander responded, “Lieutenant, we have a good working relationship with Papal authority, and we will continue to do, so providing we adhere to their policies and protocol. That stunt you pulled over there took a lot of smoothing over. Now you expect us to ride in roughshod and arrest the Jesuarian General. Have you completely taken leave of your senses.”

Repetto persisted, “Sir, with respect to the Holy See, the only reason this relationship works is that they call all the shots. They’re happy for us to use our jail space and court time to deal with their pickpockets and thieves but when it comes to murders committed by their people, on their patch, that’s a whole different story!”

The commander remained adamant. "Nevertheless that's the way it is, Lieutenant! Now if there's nothing else close the door on your way out."

Giovanni Repetto felt so frustrated that he wanted to hit out at something - anything. He tried one last attempt. "If we cannot do our job then it's time for a change in policy. They cannot have it both ways. We need to get together with this new chief and lay down some rules of our own. We need to tell them it is all or nothing. If they don't let us investigate crimes committed by their people, we won't use our gaols and courts to deal with petty criminals who commit crimes in their territory."

Silently agreeing with Repetto, and seeing the lieutenant's suggestion as a way to save face, the commander agreed, "I will talk to him and see if we can set up a meeting."

Lieutenant Repetto was in a better frame of mind when he took Julian's statement from him. Checking it was signed and a contact number was indicated, he said, "Thank you for coming in Signor Pawlowski. We will contact you if we need to talk to you again."

Julian didn't hold out much hope. "I have done all I can, Lieutenant," he said, sadly. "It's now up to you."

Chapter 17

Modern day, Toledo, Spain

The old city, Joab discovered, was located on a mountaintop, surrounded on three sides by a bend in the Tagus River. 'Toletum', as the Romans called Toledo, was the capital of the Carpentani. It became incorporated into the Roman province because of its strategic location along the Tagus." Jerome explained as they entered the old city.

"Where are we going?" Joab asked as he eyed the cramped houses and narrow cobbled streets."

"We are going to the Zocodover. It's the central marketplace."

"Why are we going there?"

"Because it is the centre of the action," Jerome stated, indicating the huge square they had just entered. "This is the central point of the city, where locals and visitors get the chance to meet each other."

Joab, noticing plenty of sightseers but seeing no sign of any vendors, asked, "Where are all the tourist shops, Jerome?"

Jerome grinned, "Come here for the Martes, the traditional Tuesday Market, and then you will see plenty of vendors."

As impressive as the local information was to him, Joab felt they were wasting time. He asked, "So, how is this helping us to find Derek?"

"The person we are soon to meet has news for us. Come with me."

Joab followed the doctor past the rail station where the tourist train picked up passengers for a ride around Toledo. As they walked past the small station, the doctor kept up small talk. "The Muslims used this area as a cattle market," he commented, just as a bit of throw-away trivia.

The square, illuminated at night by decorative street lamps, had rows of big free-standing umbrellas along its perimeter. These, Joab learned, provided shade or shelter to stall holders and street

vendors. He and Jerome passed the huge parasols and exited Zocodover through an archway that was part of a five-story building block.

Halfway through the brick arch, Jerome put his hand on Joab's shoulder, "We wait here, Mr Rackham."

"Is this where we are to meet your mystery contact?" Joab asked, cynicism showing in his voice.

"Joab, don't treat this lightly. Understand, there are those that do not want us to find Derek, and they will do anything to stop us locating him. Therefore, we have to tread very lightly and with great care. They may already be on to us, so we must be vigilant. You must stick with me and do as I tell you."

"Who is this 'they'?"

"They are agents of the Jesuarians. Their mission is to stop us achieving our goal by any means at their disposal."

Joab was silent, so Jerome continued, "Understand that these people are totally mind-controlled by their masters."

"What about Derek's safety?" Joab persisted.

"Yes, of course, that is important. However, Mr Rackham, they won't kill Derek unless he gives them the information they need, to stop us exposing their plans."

"So they could be torturing him for that information?"

"Unfortunately, knowing their methods, that's highly likely."

"And when they break him, they kill him?"

"That, regrettably, is also likely."

"Then I pray we can find him first."

At that moment an old crone in drab clothes and a well-worn shawl approached the pair, "Looking at one, then the other, she said, "It as dark here."

Jerome replied, "But not as dark as night."

Beckoning Jerome, she directed, "Follow me, Senior"

"Who is she. What is she saying?" Joab asked.

"We are to follow her, so stay with me."

They followed the old woman down a narrow street, shaded by apartments on either side. Joab noticed washing hung from lines stretched across balconies, while colourful flowers, displayed in window boxes, brightened up the old stonework around them. The trio descended stone steps that lead to an alley. Part way along the driveway the woman stopped and unlatched a wrought iron gate. The pair then followed her to an arched timber door, which she unlocked and opened. She showed the couple inside, and then she said something in Spanish, to which Jerome replied, "Si Senora." She then left the couple alone, closing the door behind her.

The already dark chamber became markedly darker. "Great! So where the hell are we now, Jerome?" Joab asked, annoyed.

Jerome was busy lighting an old torch that fitted in a metal frame on the wall. The extra illumination revealed that they were in a kind of stone antechamber.

“Have you been here before?” Joab asked, noting that Jerome knew where the torch was.”

“Once, but it was quite a while back.”

“So where are we?”

“In an old disused church.”

“So, what do we do now?”

“We wait for Gustav.”

“And who is this Gustav?”

“He's an old friend of Derek's.”

Shortly afterwards, there was the sound of a creaking door opening. A shaft of light flooded the area around the door. Then Joab saw the limping figure in a monk's habit. As he shambled towards them, Joab could just make out the man's lined old face, creased with pain. With a forced, toothless grin, the monk extended a shaky hand, which Jerome shook gently. “Gustav, you old dog, how have you been?”

“No better than I deserve Senor Jerome.”

Seeing that the old man spoke passable English, Joab asked, “Do you know where Derek Philips is?”

“The old man looked concerned and puzzled.

Jerome, annoyed at Joab, for his directness, interjected, “Please leave the questions to me, Mr Rackham?”

“Turning to the old man, Jerome asked, “Gustav, do you have the item I seek?”

“Si Senor.”

“Then please take me to it.”

Joab had many questions on his mind but, feeling somewhat chastened, he kept quiet. He just followed the pair into the old disused church, which, stripped of its religious paraphernalia, was an empty shell. The old monk hobbled to a door at the side of the empty altar. He turned to the pair and grinned crookedly. He then opened the door and guided them into a cramped, darkened room, where he pointed to a worn piece of matting. Jerome pulled it back to reveal a trapdoor with an iron ring attached to it. Grasping the ring, he lifted the trapdoor and revealed the first few steps of what appeared to be a narrow winding staircase, descending into darkness.

“Are we to go down there?” Joab asked, with trepidation.

Gustav nodded. He then took a flashlight out of his worn habit and handed it to Jerome, who received it and took the lead. “Follow closely, Mr Rackham,” he warned; as Joab took his first tentative steps to whatever awaited them below.

The dark, derelict church provided many good hiding places, including the space behind the bare altar. Here a crouching figure waited until the trio had disappeared down the cellar. Then he made his move.

The space at the bottom of the steps looked to Joab like a monk's cell, simple but functional. There was a cot with a straw filled mattress in one dark corner; a small wooden table with an oil lamp on it; a table and chair in the centre of the small, inhospitable space; and a crude bookcase with around two dozen used books.

Jerome lit the oil lamp and switched off the torch. It was then that he saw the small book on the table. "At last!" he exclaimed, excitedly, clutching the book to his chest.

"What is it?" Joab asked

"The 'Monita Secreta' Mr Rackham, the secret instructions published in 1612, as an accurate and authentic account of the inner workings of the Society."

Joab's heart missed a beat. "This is what Derek was talking about!" he stated, excitedly.

"Yes, it most certainly is," the doctor agreed.

Quickly facing Jerome, the journalist said, "Then he was telling the truth. He is not mad, as you asserted."

"I declared no such thing Mr Rackham. I merely suggested his indoctrination may have left him delusional." Then, caressing the mysterious volume, he continued, "Now, the important thing is this instruction manual because it is proof of the Black Pope's hidden agenda." Holding up the manual Jerome said, "The Jesuarians deny that this exists but no longer, not while we have this."

Joab said, "It seems pretty harmless."

"It nonetheless provides a view of the worldly wisdom and underhanded tactics of the Society of Jesu. This book, Mr Rackham, gives us the proof to expose them for what they are. I have searched long and hard for this, and now I finally have it."

"So how is that going to help us find Derek, Jerome?"

"It was his copy."

"The text he told me about on the disk?" Joab queried.

"I don't now about that, but ..."

"Wait a minute Jerome. On the disk, he said the copy was for me only," the journalist interrupted his face a mask of puzzlement.

"I know nothing about your disk, but I would certainly like to see what is on it."

"Why?"

"To verify if what you say is true!"

"I am not a liar!" Joab stated, his eyes narrowing.

"And I, Mr Rackham, am not a thief," the doctor rejoined.

Gustav, not wanting to be part of the ensuing argument, stayed quietly in the background.

Just then a heavy thud from above brought the pair to attention. The dimness in the small cell became even darker as the trap door closed on the trio below. Next, an ominous scraping that sounded like a heavy weight being dragged over the hatch froze Joab to the spot.

Then a voice, gruff and menacing, asked, "Do you like your tomb Doctor Zahir?"

"WHOEVER YOU ARE LET US OUT OF HERE!" Jerome demanded loudly.

"Shouting will only use up your precious oxygen much faster doctor." The anonymous voice taunted. "By my reckoning the three of you have about two hours to live."

"Why are you doing this?" Joab asked, trying to mask his growing panic.

“Because you have something I want.”

“Jerome, knowing what it was, responded, “You cannot have it. I will never give it to you!”

“Wrong answer, doctor. Keep the book, for a while anyhow. I shall simply come back in a few hours and prize it from your grasping corpse.”

Joab felt his gut tightening, and he yelled, “NO, WAIT! YOU CAN HAVE THE BOOK!”

“NO HE CANNOT!” Jerome exploded, gripping the rare manuscript to his chest.

Joab turned on the doctor, “Are you crazy? You heard what he said. Why should we die of suffocation when the man up there is going to take it anyhow? So give me the book!” he demanded, reaching for it.

Jerome, pulling it away from the reporter, yelled through the closed trapdoor, “I WILL DESTROY IT BEFORE I LET YOU GET YOUR EVIL HANDS ON IT!”

The anonymous voice replied, “Come, come doctor, you and I know you are bluffing. You would never destroy it. It’s your only bargaining tool for getting out of here.”

Joab, turning to Gustav, asked, “Is there another way out of here?”

The old man nervously shook his head.

The voice from above said, “I’m going now.”

NO, DON’T GO!” Joab cried out. Making a desperate grab for the little book, he exploded, “Jerome, just give him the fucking manual!”

The doctor appeared calm. “No, Mr Rackham. I will never hand it over to the likes of him.”

In fright-induced desperation, Joab shouted, “IF YOU WANT TO BE A FUCKING MARTYR THAT IS UP TO YOU, BUT YOU ARE NOT TAKING ME WITH YOU!”

Jerome, ignoring Joab, removed the oil lamp cover and went to touch the book to the flame. He yelled at their gaoler, “I AM BURNING IT NOW, YOU EVIL BASTARD. YOU AND YOUR DEVILISH KIND WILL NEVER HAVE IT!”

There was a short pause, then scraping noises, followed by the creaking of the trap door, as it opened. A dark figure began to descend the staircase.

Joab’s mind was in overdrive. If their gaoler had a gun, they would not stand a chance in such a confined space. If they gave him the book, he might well kill them anyhow. However, there were three of them against one of him, so the odds were in their favour. As the shadowy figure reached the bottom of the steps, Joab noticed a snub-nosed pistol in the intruder’s right hand. His skin went cold, but some innate survival urge galvanised him into action. In desperation, with just a few moments to spare, he grabbed the oil lamp and hurled it at the armed man.

The gunman ducked, as the light shot over his head, smashing, into the steps behind him, plunging Gustav’s cell into complete darkness. The gunman, having recovered from the initial shock, headed back up the stairs.

“Very well you fools; you have secured your fate!” The gunman growled. However, in his haste to close the trap door on his victims, he tripped and stumbled in the dark, cracking his shin on the corner of a stone step. “Arghh!” the man groaned, rubbing his injured leg.

Joab heard a gurgling noise, like someone trying desperately to get their breath. Then he heard Gustav’s raspy voice. “Help me, someone. I cannot hold on any longer.”

Jerome, following the voice found Gustav holding on to the strangulation cord he had wound around the would-be assailant's throat. He took the ends of the cable from the old monk and applied more pressure. Soon the gunman's hand went limp and the weapon clattered harmlessly down the stairs.

"What's going on?" Joab demanded, scared for his life.

Jerome reassured him. "It's okay Mr Rackham. We are safe for now and, more importantly, we have the only known liberated copy of the Monita Secreta in the world."

Chapter 18

Vatican City, 1982

For Chief of Police, Domenico Priani, it was enough to have to deal with the scandal that landed on his desk without having to kowtow to Rome's Police commander. He had known Calvi Personally. Not as a close friend, but professionally in business dealings with him. Domenico had been more stunned than sorry when he learned of the Vatican banker's murder. However, that was just the beginning of a trail of corruption and murder that led right to the Apostolic Palace itself. This crime unleashed a media frenzy that exposed a massive scandal that left a big stain on the Holy See. It turned out that both Calvi's 'Banco Ambrosina' and the Vatican's Istituto per de Riligione (IOR) became conduits for laundered money of all sorts. Under the direction of American Bishop Paul Paruskus, head of the IOR, money was flowing through the Holy See's ledgers from some sources, including the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, himself a money conduit for organised crime figures.

"This is terrible, worse than that, a scandal of colossal proportions Domenico, How are we going to ride this one out?" John Patrick's private secretary asked as the pair discussed the shocking news in Priani's office.

"You have the ear of the Holy Father. How does he want this dealt with?"

"We have to distance the Holy Office from this, Domenico. You need to look at all the facts, and if the media gets a whiff of anybody involved in this Calvi mess, closely connected to the Holy See, you have to use, I believe the American term is, plausible denial."

Priani protested, "That is not going to be at all easy. The International press and police are all over it. They are way ahead of us!"

"Then you have some catching up to do" The Papal Secretary replied, smiling thinly. We are banking on you, Domenico."

"Not the best phrase, under the circumstances, I would think," Chief Priani answered, being humorous despite himself.

After the Secretary had left his office, Domenico sighed heavily, and then he reached for his phone, before speaking to the officer at the front desk. "Sergeant, phone Commander Quatravelli of the Rome Police and set up an appointment."

Julian lived in fear. He wondered when the black monk, as he referred to his attacker, would strike again. He had not heard anything from Cardinal Etching and did not even know if the other marked cleric was dead or alive. Since Angelo's death, the two had not communicated. Julian knew his turn was soon to come. He could not talk to anybody about it, for fear of them also becoming victims of

the killer monk. Adding to the Cardinal's worries was the guilt that consumed him. If it wasn't for his tampering in the Black Pope's affairs Julian believed Cardinal Solano would still have still been alive. Shocked by the Dean's murder, Julian had given up playing the amateur detective. But it was too late for Cardinal Solano. It was only his reptilian brain's survival instinct that stopped him from going over the edge, and, although it is a cardinal sin in the Catholic faith, committing suicide was an option that had become very enticing to him, since his journey to his homeland. At least then, fear and guilt would not plague him. 'Fight or flight' his old brain screamed at him. Staying still was no option. Moving targets are harder to hit. Fight! How could he possibly resist? Flight! Where could he fly to, where the Jesuarian octopus didn't have its tentacles?" Then the words came to him. 'Know thy enemy'. Yes, he thought, get to know your enemy. So how could he get to know the black monk? He appeared out of nowhere, did his murderous deeds, and, it seemed, disappeared back into thin air. He would have to talk to someone who knew the black monk whereabouts.

Alexsander recited, by rote, The Jesuarian Ethical System, sixty-five propositions - beliefs - of the Jesuarian Order, as written in an old Jesuarian compendium. He contemplated them when he found his faith flagging, and this was one of those times. Of late, he had grown to detest any call from the Black Pope's Office, as it only meant further coerced involvement in spying and unexplained covert activities, such as his part in the attack on the Cardinal. His wavering faith had nothing to do with his belief in the Holy Mother Church, which was as strong as ever. It was his weakening confidence in the questionable Jesuarian ideas that concerned him. Ideals, which of late had troubled his sleep. He would do anything to further the Catholic cause in the heathen world, but when those dictates resulted in an attack on a prominent cleric, he began to question the Jesuarian's motives. He sighed and stood up. There were mundane things to attend to in the church. As he left his presbytery, the phone rang. Tentatively picking up the receiver, Alexsander asked, "Who's speaking?"

"Cardinal Pawlowski here, father. I have some questions to ask you."

Taken aback, but pleased to hear that the Cardinal was alive and well, the priest answered, "How can I help you?"

"It is very simple Father Augustyn. I want the name of the man who attacked me."

"You were attacked?" When? How?"

"You know very well that the man you sent to our meeting in your stead was out to do me harm, so please don't try to deny it!"

"I'm sorry your Eminence, but I have no idea what you are talking about."

"Why did you not turn up for the meeting as arranged, Father?"

"Something came up at the last minute that I had to attend to urgently."

"So who did you send in your stead?"

"I don't know his name. He is just a colleague, of a monastic order. He was visiting and offered to convey the message to you."

Not believing a word, Julian pressed, "So who was this monk?"

"I don't know."

"Do not lie to me!"

"I am not lying, your Eminence." I truly do not know his name. He was just passing through."

"So you give a perfect stranger a message to be conveyed to me."

"He was a friar so ..."

"So nothing Father. He is a Jesuarian assassin, and I have his strangulation cord to prove it. Since then he has murdered the Dean of Cardinals, and I am next in line. So for the sake of your damned soul tell me who he is!"

"I'm sorry your Eminence but I cannot!"

"Tell me, damn you!"

"All I know is he uses a code name."

"Then, for heaven's sake tell me what it is!"

"You are sentencing me to a painful death, Cardinal. Do you want that on your conscience?"

"Tell me, Father, before it is too late."

There was a pause on the line.

"Are you still there, Father?"

The pause continued. Then Julian heard one word spoken quietly. That single word was, "Pepsi-Cola."

Commander Quatravelli, impressed by the magnificent setting, walked around the fountain that was in the centre of the path leading to the Commissariat Borgo - the Vatican police headquarters. He entered the huge, five storey, orange brick building and announced his arrival at the desk. The duty officer buzzed through to the chief's office then took the Commander through to building to see the Vatican's top cop.

Upon entering Chief Priani's opulent office, the commander commented, "You do much better here than I do in Rome."

"Commander Quatravelli I am pleased to meet you at last. I have heard much about you. Please take a seat and tell me how we can help you."

Quatravelli came straight to the point. "You can assist by allowing us to investigate a suspicious death that occurred here recently."

"Ah, you would be referring to the untimely death of our dear Dean of Cardinals, commander."

"Have you had any others since then?"

Domenico chuckled, "No, of course not. What makes you think it there are suspicious circumstances concerning his passing?"

"We are acting on information received."

"Received from whom might I ask?"

"I can't tell you that Chief Priani. However, I can say this. The evidence given to us is very reliable. In fact, it's so solid I can't think how you could have missed it."

Domenico was beginning to feel distinctly uncomfortable. He needed time to think. Interrupting the conversation, he asked, "Perhaps a coffee for you commander."

"That would be good, a Cafe Latte for me."

Priani switched on his intercom. "Get me two coffees, Sergeant. My usual and a Cafe Latte." Looking up at the commander, Domenico queried, "Now, where were we?"

"You were about to explain how you mistook apparent foul play for an alleged natural death."

"Commander, what evidence do you have to back up your statement by this mysterious informant?"

"Strangulation marks around the neck for one thing."

"Commander, did you not read the statement we gave to the news services?"

"Oh, indeed I did, Chief. A heart attack your medical officer said. Oh, and there was something about the marks around the neck being the result of an earlier suicide attempt."

"That's what happened, commander."

Just then, the coffees arrived, and the conversation ceased until the Sergeant left the Chief's office. Then Priani said, "Sugar chief?"

"No, Just a little cream for me. Picking up the thread, Quatravelli continued, "From the statement I have, a witness explained that, apart from the lividity around the throat, which you say was from an earlier self-inflicted injury, The Cardinal's eyes were bulging and had burst blood vessels. Are they normal symptoms of a heart attack?"

Domenico's mind was racing, as he tried to recall who had been present at the death of the Cardinal. He had to know who had informed the Rome police of what he considered was a private

matter "You would have to ask the medical examiner that."

"Who would that be and where can I find this person?"

Realising he'd made a mistake, he answered, "I afraid you cannot talk to him."

"Why can't I talk to him?"

"Because to do so goes against Vatican policy, commander." Then, wanting to end the interview, Priani said, "Tell me who your informant is, and I will look into it."

Quatravelli smiled, "As I've already stated, I'm afraid I can't do that."

Priani stood up. "Then it would seem we have a 'Mexican standoff'. I have heard what you have to say, commander, but unless I can verify what you have alleged by talking to this informant, I cannot help you. Moreover, as far as the Vatican is concerned, this case is closed. Now, if you don't mind I have more important things to attend to."

Quatravelli remained un-fazed. "Thank you for your time Chief Priani. However, there is another thing we need to discuss."

"And what would that be commander?" Domenico asked, agitated.

"As you probably know there has been a big increase in crime on the streets of Rome and our legal resources are being severely stretched."

Priani, relieved at the change of subject, responded, "I agree on Commander. Here in the Vatican City petty theft, especially pick pocketing, has increased tremendously. Although I cannot see why you are raising this subject now."

"Oh, while I am here I just wanted to inform you of a proposed change in our policy where crimes that take place in the Vatican are concerned."

Priani, taken by surprise, asked, "What are you talking about?"

“I am referring to a new proposed policy concerning any crimes committed here.”

“I’m sorry commander, but I still don’t understand what you are driving at.”

“In future it is proposed that any crime committed in Vatican City will be dealt with by yourselves without involving us or the Rome legal services, courts, prisons, etc. That goes for any crime Chief Priani. Do I make myself clear on this point?”

“Any crime commander?” Priani queried. “Are you saying that you will no longer handle pick-pocketing cases and other forms of petty crimes committed here?”

Quatravelli smiled, “That’s what the new proposal says. Of course, you are entitled to some input concerning its application. However, to keep things as they are there will have to be a bit of give and take.”

“Such as?” Domenico retorted, knowing where the discussion was heading.

“As an example, the Rome Police will be able to conduct investigations in the Vatican City of crimes reported to us.”

Domenico’s face reddened. Incensed, he responded, “Do you think you can threaten and bully us into changing our policy Commander?”

“Cut out the theatricals Chief Priani. This compromise is how we carry out things in the real world. It’s what’s known as quid-pro-quo.”

Indicating the door, Priani said, “Good day Commander. Your arrogant attitude has done nothing to promote stronger working relations between us.”

Chapter 19

Toledo, modern day

As a former reporter for the ‘Acton Times’ and later the ‘Daily Mirror’ Joab Richard Rackham had seen death natural or otherwise. However, he had not been involved in the act of causing somebody’s death, albeit in self-defence. Growing up around Portabello Road, a rough area in the heart of London, young Joab had gotten involved in pub brawls. Also, as an ironmonger’s assistant in the Portabello Road Markets, he occasionally became involved in scuffles between competing stallholders and their territorial rights. Nevertheless, he had never feared for his life before. To have a loaded gun held by a man with murderous intent in his eyes was something, Joab, even as a journalist found difficult to describe. Although it had all happened so fast -- one second the gunman was sure to kill him and his colleagues. The next, his life had been miraculously spared, at the cost of the assailant’s mortality. Joab didn’t feel any remorse for the dead man, just an immense relief that his existence continued.

For each person present, the experience had left its indelible mark. Jerome, having never killed anyone before, couldn’t believe he’d just extinguished a man’s life. There had been no malice in his hands as they tightened the cord around the assailant’s constricting throat, just the instinct for survival that had kept the human species existing and proliferating for countless thousands of years. There was also the aspect of going to Gustav’s aid, whose aged arthritic fingers were losing their precious grip on the cord. At the time, pure adrenalin had propelled Jerome to finish off the gasping killer, to make sure his presence was no longer a threat. As a psychiatric doctor, Jerome Zahir dedicated himself to helping people. But the ‘Hippocratic Oath’, that all medical students had to take to become doctors, meant little to Jerome when he was fighting for his life.

For the old monk, it was different. Aggression had always been a large part of his life. Violent death was not new to him. It had started during the 'Balkan Wars', in Sarajevo, where family members and close friends had died, seemingly needlessly and uselessly. Then later, almost as though dictated from the moment of his birth, he temporarily assuaged the looming darkness within by helping to purge the world for the 'Society of Jesu', the only cause he had ever believed in. In those acts, down the years, he had always been the assailant, the 'Holy Assassin' as he thought of himself. He had killed many people without question or hesitation, strangled them from behind, on the orders of the 'Society'. However, this was the first time he had helped kill somebody as an act of self-defence.

It was only after the injury to his leg that left him unable to continue with his professed sacred duty, that Gustav Pricic left Rome and became a monk in Spain. The Jesuarian General, who did not want any loose cannons around, had organised this safe position for the lame killer. Curiously, nobody had asked any questions concerning the assassins past. Ironically, though, it was through this change of lifestyle that prompted Gustav to question it. The members of the monastic brotherhood he joined, showed care and compassion towards each other, qualities in humans he had not experienced since childhood. Slowly but inexorably the dark demons lurking in his soul began to rear their loathsome heads. In the thick darkness of night, Gustav, alone in his austere cell, would wake up in a cold sweat, trembling and short of breath. The realisation that had taken over his semi-conscious mind was one of abject horror. His victims had turned up in his nightmares many times over the years, but this was different. It was the cold realisation that maybe he had been wrong to kill them. For the first time since becoming part of the covert Jesuarian order, Gustav Pricic had doubts about the justification for his actions. For the first time since joining the order, he felt uncertain about its motivations. He had always been encouraged to see himself as a martyr to the Jesuarian cause. Now, his self-view had dramatically changed, and he saw himself to be a murderer instead of God's hit man. He managed to hide his damaged psyche well when he was in the company of his fellow monks, but in the nightly solitude of his cold stone compartment, Gustav lay plagued by the dark deeds of his past.

For the first time, he had killed as an act of self-defence, and for the protection of those with him. He felt an enormous mental and emotional weight lifted from him. That one instinctive act to overcome the injured killer on the stone steps of the disused chapel once again gave purpose to his life.

"So what do we do now?" Joab asked at length, as the trio sat in a pew, the only furnishings left in the sadly abandoned church.

Jerome, who was deep in thought, responded, "I suggest we get away from here as soon as possible."

"What do we do about him?" Joab asked, indicating the body they had left in the cellar."

Jerome rubbed his chin. "We could report his death to the authorities but ..."

"What do you mean, we COULD report it. I would have thought that went without saying!" Joab reacted, surprised.

"It's not as simple as that Mr Rackham. Apart from the fact that we would have a lot of explaining to do, such as why we were in this building in the first place, we would not be able to pursue our primary goal.

Joab hadn't thought of that. "Yes, I suppose helping Derek is our priority."

Jerome let Joab's reasoning ride. "It's best if we leave the dead guy and get away from here as soon as possible."

"What happened to the gun?" Joab queried.

“I haven’t done anything with it. I guess it’s still where it fell.”

“Ask Gustav if he touched it,” Joab demanded.

After talking to the old monk, Jerome shook his head. “No, he doesn’t know anything about it. Why is it so important?”

“Fingerprints. If it only has the killer’s fingerprints on it, it will be easy for us to show we were under threat.”

Jerome laughed, “You obviously do not understand the mentality of the Spanish police my friend. Believe you me we are better off putting all this behind us.”

Joab responded, “We have just killed a man, and you think it will just go away!”

Jerome pointed out, “He was a Vatican assassin. As such, he would be using a false identity. If ever the police discover the body, it alone should keep them running round in circles for quite a while.” Jerome paused, then added, “There is also another aspect to consider, Mr Rackham.”

“And that is?” Joab asked.

“Whoever sent that killer after the book will be checking on him. I for one do not want to be around when they come looking.”

Never having been in such an awkward situation before, Joab was not sure how to respond. Then he asked, “What about the old one,” he asked, pointing at the shabby Gustav.

“What do you mean Mr Rackham?”

“Doesn’t he live here?”

“Oh, yes. I see what you mean.” Jerome spoke to Gustav, who answered him in Spanish.”

After some discussion, Jerome related, “Gustav said he would claim to be the only one here and that he had to kill the assailant in self-defence.”

“Why would he say that?”

Jerome shrugged. “He has his reasons Mr Rackham, whatever they may be. Now let’s get away from here.”

Dr Morales had his instructions. He was not in the habit of using pacifying drugs on healthy people but to keep his position as Head of the Department of Psychiatry he had to follow the superior's orders. During his 25 years at the ‘Provincial Hospital of Toledo’, Dr Morales had occasionally altered patient reports to suit the requirements of a Vatican directive, but this was different. This patient had no need to be in the psychiatric ward, but given the medication, he was on, he soon would be. As he entered room 6B, Dr Morales found an orderly called Perez with his patient. “How are you today Senor Philips?”

Derek mouthed, “Why am- I here. What - do you - want with me?”

”Senor you are here because you are sick and I want to help you.”

”I don’t feel - sick, just - sleepy.”

“It is your mind that needs healing Senor - not your body. Sleeping is good. It helps the healing process.”

“There is - something I have - to do doctor?”

“What is that, Senor Philips?”

“That’s - the crazy - part. I do not - know. All I - know is that - I have to do it.”

“What you need to do is rest. I’ll call by later and see how you are doing,” Dr Morales said, turning to leave.

Derek called him back, “Doctor.”

The doctor turned to face his patient. ”Yes, what is it?”

”It’s about - something I - have to do.”

“The thing you can’t remember?”

“Yes. Bits - of it keep coming- to me - in flashes.”

“As soon as you are well you can ...”

“Am I here - to stop me - from doing it?” Derek, in his confused state, asked,

“Don’t worry about that. Just get well.”

Joab was feeling both horrified by what had happened and oddly exhilarated, owing to the adrenaline rush he’d experienced as he, Rosella and Jerome sat eating bowls of Chorizo with crusty bread. The journalist was not a great fan of squash, but the overall taste was strong but quite pleasant to his palate.

“Have you had an exciting day, Senor Joab?”

“You could say that, yes,” the journalist, answered, with a sideways glance at Jerome.

“So what have you two naughty boys been up to?” she asked, nudging Jerome in the ribs.

Jerome shrugged it off, keeping silent.

“What is the matter, Jerry? You’re not much fun tonight!”

Jerome, becoming irritated, said, “Knock it off Rosella. I am tired. I think I’ll have an early night.”

“That just leaves you and me, Senor Joab,” she smiled

“To do what?” Joab asked.

Rosella winked at him, and then she produced a quality red from Rioja. “We can drink under the moon and speak of Amar es Tiempo Perdido, si no se es correspondido.”

“What does that mean Rosella?”

“Something like, of all pains, the greatest pain is to love, but love in vain.”

Sensing that the Spanish woman needed to share her wine and her emotions, Joab acquiesced.

They sat in Rosella’s wooden gallery and supped wine while looking at the moon. The inky night had a chill to it, so she pulled her shawl around her shoulders. After some silent contemplation, she began “Senor Joab, I am concerned about Jerome,”

“Why is that?”

“He’s not himself tonight.”

“One of his patients is missing Rosella. He is concerned.”

“No, it’s not that. Let me tell you something, Señor.”

“Sure, go ahead.”

“More wine for you, Señor Joab?” she queried, reaching for the bottle. “I think I need more lubrication for this,” she smiled.

Passing his empty glass, Joab said, “Why not, the night is young.”

She poured and began talking. “I was born in Guernica.”

“That’s a famous painting by Picasso, isn’t it?”

“Si Señor. My mother, she told me the story. She says it was market day in Guernica when the church bells of Santa Maria sounded the alarm. It was in 1937, during the rule of that Franco pig, an ordinary afternoon. People from the surrounding hillsides crowded the town square. My father, he had a market stall. They attacked when there were many people there. The Fascist monsters knew when their bombing would kill the most people. When there are more people, more people will die. My father, he was one who died there.”

“They were German planes, weren’t they?”

Rosella sighed deeply, and then she took a sip of wine. “They were the Pope’s planes!”

“The Pope’s planes?”

“The Black Pope, not the Holy Father.”

Joab, taken aback, spluttered, “Do you mean, the Jesuarians?”

Rosella nodded vigorously. “Si Señor. Anyone not Catholic they try to kill.”

“Was your father a Communist?”

“No Señor. He was good Catholic. Many good Catholics die that terrible day. The bombers could not discriminate between them and others. For over three hours high-explosive and incendiary bombs fell on my village, slowly and systematically pounding it to rubble.”

“Why did they pick on your village, Rosella?”

“Guernica is cultural capital of the Basque people, the seat of our centuries-old independence and democratic ideals. It had no strategic value as military target. They try to break the active Basque resistance. Guernica had served as testing ground for new Nazi military tactic - blanket bombing a civilian population to demoralise the enemy. It was wanton, man-made holocaust.”

“So, as a Basque, why did you leave there?”

Rosella poured them more wine. “My mother was a brave woman. After my father’s death, she took on the job of denouncing Franco’s dictatorship. She saw herself as the responsible keeper of the memory of the cruel and destructive Fascist attacks endured by the Basque country people. The Jesuarian Devils targeted her, but her local priest finds out and warn her. She come here and live in exile. I grew up here Señor Joab. It is my home now.”

“Your mother sounds like an amazing woman Rosella. What happened to her?”

“My father was love of her life. They destroyed him and took him from us. After that, my mother devoted her life to working for a free Basque Country by vigorously promoting the Basque culture.”

“So why were the Jesuarians targeting her?”

“Because she saw through their pretence at being altruistic and was, therefore, a threat to them. She was expert in denouncing and pouring shame on those who put obstacles in the way of her dream. The Jesuarians were responsible for her deepest feelings, her most intense and most sensitive suffering, because of their conduct during and after the Spanish Civil War.”

“How did she know the Jesuarians were to blame?”

“She found out all about the conduct of the high ranking Jesuarians during the Spanish Civil War. She told me many of the good brothers of the Society of Jesu, were confused and disorientated by what their Church was doing. However, as soon as the Black Pope picked up the baton, his entire brother Jesuarians everywhere blindly followed him. The Vatican’s Fascist agents caused us much hurt and grief, but the most painful thing was that they stole the very name of the Basque Country. They divided the Southern Basque Country (under Spanish jurisdiction) between Castella Orientalis and Castella Occidentalis. What an insult!”

Joab took a sip of wine and contemplated what Rosella was saying. Then, remembering her Spanish quote, he asked, “So what is this about love being in vain?”

“It is Jerome.”

“So, how did you two meet?”

Rosella was not sure how much to tell him. To test what he knew, she asked, “Did he tell you about his father?”

Joab shrugged, “No. What about him?”

“He was a correspondent during the Spanish Civil War. He took photographs of the action.”

“How come he was in Spain?”

“Why do you ask, Senor Joab?” Rosella asked querying his question.

“Jerome, being a black American ...”

Rosella laughed, saying, “Many people mistake Jerome for African American but his father was Moroccan.”

”So that’s why Jerome is here.”

“Jerome was born here. His father was young and eager for success, and he understood that the surest way to get it was to make pictures better than anyone else. To do that he had to take greater risks, bigger ones than anyone else was willing to take. Jerome told me he used to say if your pictures aren’t good enough, you’re not close enough.”

“Was he successful, as a war correspondent?”

The Spanish woman avoided the question. She explained, “Before he becomes journalist, when he was 11 he went to the school the Jesuarians ran, and still run in Tudela, to complete his bachelor's degree. He spent four years there and on his fifteenth birthday entered the Sanctuary of Loyola, where he stayed from 1921 to 1926.”

All this talk of the Jesuarians had Joab more interested. “Did he join the Order?” he asked.

“No Senor Joab, but one of his friends did. He later became the Black Pope.”

Joab’s fuzzy mind latched on this point. “ now that is interesting!”

“Yes, Senor Joab it is because Pedro Arross was fellow student and friend of his.”

“You seem to know a lot about Jerome’s father. Did you ever meet him?”

“When I was young, yes. That is how I met Jerome. I also met Pedro Arross.”

“When was that?”

“Perhaps 10 or 11 years ago. I was visiting the Sanctuary of Loyola, and he was there, visiting as well.”

“He must have been a Jesuarian by then.”

“He was the Black Pope. But, at the time, I did not know anything about that.”

“So, how did the two of you meet?”

“We just got talking. Pedro mentioned Going to college in Tudela. I say I have friend who goes there. It just went on from there.”

“What was he like?”

“Very nice. No horns or pointy tail that I could see,” Rosella laughed, drinking more wine. She then continued, “First of all we went to the chapel, on the spot where Pedro used to sleep as a novice or junior Jesuarian. From his old bedroom windows, we saw the garden for the dead. From a distance, the white tombs were in stark contrast with the green of the fields and surrounding hills. Aged Jesuarians visit the cemetery every day, helped by all kinds of walking sticks, to pray for the old friends laid to rest there and to see the final resting places for their mortal remains.”

“Was this Black Pope old by then?”

“Elderly, yes, but the Pedro Arross, who accompanied me, had not lost his natural vitality, despite his age. He had no difficulty speaking and even though he needed a walking stick, his energy came through the way he was talking, as well as through his gestures and body language. He tells me when he was young, those big fields, which were then just lawns, were far different: Bunches of grapes used to hang there. On Sundays and other Holy-days, when the Jesuarians strolled in the vegetable garden, they were allowed to look at the plants, but they were not authorised to eat them.”

“So when did you find out who and what he was?”

“Pedro Arross give me his contact details to give to Jerome’s father, who by then was old and frail. I give it to Jerome to give to his father. Jerome, he was very mad. He tells me what an evil man Pedro had become. He said his father must never know. I was shocked at his outburst, but when he explains to me, I understand.”

There was silence between the pair for a while. Then Rosella sighed, “I love him Senor Joab, but I love in vain.”

“I think he likes you too Rosella, in his peculiar way.”

“Si Senor Joab, but he has a greater love.”

“Which is?”

“Do you know why he became a mind doctor?”

“No, why?”

“Because he wants to get inside the heads of Jesuarians, to find out how they mentors so successfully brainwash them to carry out the most heinous acts. His greater love is exposing the Jesuarians for their dark deeds and dangerous agendas.”

“Yes, Derek told me such things.”

“Yes Senor Joab, but his obsession about exposing them, that is dangerous.”

“What do you mean?”

“He will do anything to expose the devils, even if that means sacrificing himself or others for the cause.”

Chapter 20

Vatican City 1982

Who could Pepsi Cola be? Julian wondered as he thought about the secret name Father Augustyn had reluctantly given him. Pepsi Cola was a strange code name for the killer, but that is the nature of code names, he reasoned. By playing around with the letters of the two words, Julian discovered that a different configuration of the letters spelt the word Episcopal. It was a curious anagram, but it did not mean much to him. He looked up the meaning in a dictionary, and he was surprised to find an Episcopal clergyman invented the carbonated soft drink called Pepsi Cola. Bringing his mind back to the problem in hand, he realised that Arross might have a record of his assassin's name. But how could he get access to the Black Pope's files? Even if he did access the private files, how would he know where to look? It was becoming all too much for Julian. Perhaps he should just leave his life and death to the fates.

To take his mind off his growing concern for his, and others, safety, Julian sought respite in his clerical duties. As he scrutinised reports from his diocese, his phone rang. He picked up the receiver and heard the ominous voice, “Cardinal Etching is no longer a problem. You are next.”

The cardinal's skin went clammy as the receiver teetered in his shaky hand. Summoning what courage he could muster, Julian replied, “You will pay for your sins.”

“I may well be damned, but you will die.”

Although shocked by the coldness of the guttural voice threatening him, Julian quickly responded. “You will burn in hell, Pepsi Cola.”

The line was silent for a moment. Then it went dead. Julian returned the receiver to its cradle and slumped into a chair. He did not know if the words he had spoken had been the reason the killer became silent, but something had stopped him from continuing the conversation. There was a definite pause, as though the caller was taking something in before he put down the phone.

Then Julian's mind flashed to the missing cleric. What did the assassin mean about Cardinal Etching no longer being a problem? Had the Black Monk killed him also, he wondered? If so, where was his body? The thought of Roger's corpse lying alone in an unknown grave was too horrible to contemplate. Of course, he might not be dead, Julian reasoned. The term ‘no longer a problem’ could mean many things. Perhaps he was in hiding and no longer a threat. There again, the black monk could be bluffing. Whatever the truth of the matter, it was still a cold comfort to Julian's tortured conscience.

Gustav seethed inside, his clenched, white-knuckled fists needing something to hit. How had that troublesome old cardinal discovered his code name, he wondered, feeling robbed of his secret identity. Completely taken by surprise, he scanned a mental list of all those who knew he was called Pepsi Cola, a code name given to him by his Jesuarian master. Not many people were aware of his

real name, let alone his secret one. There were only General Arross, Count Hollenbeck and one or two others, all of whom were above suspicion. Then his brow furrowed, etching deep worry lines, as the realisation hit him. There was only one other person he could think of - the troublesome priest in Poland. As this awareness dawned, he was already mentally stretching the cord around the cleric's throat. Then he wondered, what else the traitorous priest had said about him. For the first time since he had been carrying out his 'Holy Purgings', as he referred to his murders, Gustav felt vulnerable. Owing to the traitorous priest, he no longer had complete anonymity.

Those few simple words that Julian Cardinal Pawlowski had spoken to the killer had an effect far greater than anyone could ever have imagined. That short sentence, the only one that Julian ever spoke to his friend's murderer, turned out to be mightier than any sword. The tiny ripple of energy that his words sparked, unfolded into a tsunami of cosmic proportions. The initial effect of those uttered words caused Gustav Pricic to become distracted, diverting his thoughts away from the Cardinal. For the first time since becoming a Jesuarian assassin, his motive for murder was revenge, pure and personal. The priest had to pay for his indiscretion and betrayal of the Jesuarian oath.

Commander Quatrivelli waited for the Minister to see him. His summons by the Minister of the Interior was not exactly fortuitous, and the commander became more apprehensive about it with every tick of the clock, above the officious secretary's desk. "Take a seat," she had told him, hardly looking up from her computer monitor. He did so, with the semblance of a manufactured smile. Affronted by the careless attitude of the minor official, he bit his tongue and refused to show it.

As the minutes ticked by, with no response from the secretary, the police chief became increasingly agitated. Julio Amani, as Interior Minister, held a lot of power over bodies such as the police force, so he tried to wait patiently in silence. However, the pressure became too much for him. So, refusing to put up with the secretary's off-handedness, he stood up, asking, "Does the Minister know I am here?"

The secretarial response was a brief smile followed by, "He'll see you when he is free."

The Commander had worked hard to reach his current pinnacle in the Rome Police. As a young man in the Guardia Finanza, he became part of the military corps that patrolled Italy's waters. Just as the commander was contemplating his next step up the slippery ladder the government bureaucrat invited him into the Ministerial office.

The politician, a man about his age, adjusted his gold cuff links, then extended his right arm and grasped the Commander's hand firmly. "Sit down commander. We need to touch base on a couple of things."

"Oh, and what would they be, Minister?" Commander Quatrivelli asked, inviting the inevitable verbal bombshell to fall.

"I've been scrutinising your proposals to slim down the force and make budget cuts."

The Commander waited silently.

"On the whole, they are innovative and commendable."

Not to be fooled by political-speak, the Commander asked, "On the whole, Minister. What does that mean?"

"You were always one to come straight to the point, Commander Quatrivelli. I like that."

"So what aspect of my proposals worries you, Minister?"

Julio Amani fiddled with his cuff links, and then pushed the report across his desk, to the top cop. "Commander Quatrivelli, It's this business of letting the Vatican City deal with their criminal element that's a bit of a worry."

So Chief Priani has your ear, the commander thought. "Why is that Minister?" he asked.

"Commander, although the Vatican City is 106 acres in area with a population of only 455, last year we hosted 397 civil cases and 608 criminal ones. We did this because outsiders that came from Rome committed most of those petty offences. The places most affected are the museums and the basilica of St Peter's, through which millions of people pass every year."

"I have seen those statistics, Minister."

"Yes, well do you know how much income the legal and penal system derives from this?"

"I don't have the figures with me."

"No Commander, neither do I. However, I'm sure you will agree it's a considerable amount of income for the Rome legal profession."

"Yes, it is. But I don't see ..."

"What you see or don't see, Commander is not the issue here. This decision isn't open to debate. I just wanted to let you know why I have not authorised those changes." With that, the Minister gestured the Commander to his door.

Commander Quatrivelli just stood staring at the politician.

Julio Amani gave a sickly smile, "Thank you, Commander, that will be all."

The senior police officer was livid. How dare that pompous upstart dismiss him in such a discourteous manner? Still, he must not let the politician know he was rattled by such an off-hand dismissal. "Minister, Why is it?" he began saying, then he changed his mind. He was not going to give the Minister the satisfaction.

"Why is what, Commander?"

Flashing a knowing smile, the Commander said, "Nothing Minister. I know the answer anyhow."

Julio was puzzled, but let the comment ride.

The Commander, thinking he had handled that well without giving any ground, turned to leave. Then as an afterthought, one that would have been best left unspoken, he commented, "Give my regards To Chief Priani when you are next dining together."

"What is that supposed to mean Commander?" the Minister queried, knowing the purpose of the comment.

"Just being courteous Minister. He is doing a great job over in the Vatican."

Ligature strangulation had always been Gustav Pricic's favourite form of execution. He saw it as being the clean way to kill his target, leaving no mess and blood. It was neat, quick, silent and he had no trouble getting his weapon through customs at airports. However, with the priest, it would have to be different. The victim could not give him the information he required while being garrotted. This consideration added further complication to his mission that was not part of Gustav's usual 'modus operandi.' This line of thought brought to mind one of the vows he had taken as a Jesuarian:

(...and that I will spare neither age, sex or condition; and that I will hang, waste, boil, flay, strangle and bury alive these infamous heretics, rip up the stomachs and wombs of their women and crush their infants' heads against the walls, in order to annihilate forever their execrable race'. That when the same cannot be done openly, I will secretly use the poisoned cup, the strangulating cord, the steel of the poniard or the leaden bullet.)

In dealing with the priest, the poisoned cup would be too final and the leaden bullet too unpredictable. His poniard, a specially crafted slim dagger with an assortment of detachable blades was his weapon of choice.

Chapter 21

Toledo, modern day

Dr Morales received his visitor in his office. He closed and locked his door, and then he sat down. "How can I help you?" the doctor asked.

The visitor got straight to the point. "You have a patient here by the name of Herr Derek Philips, Ja?"

"Yes, that is correct. Excuse me, but the nurse never told me your name."

"That is because I never told her. Who I am is of no consequence, Herr Doktor. Now, my principals need a progress report on this patient."

Dr Morales looked at the stranger. He was of medium build with cropped fair hair going to grey. His eyes were cold, and there was a crooked scar on his left cheek, giving him the look of a Prussian officer of bygone days. "A progress report?" he queried.

"You were given certain instructions concerning Derek Philips, Herr Doktor. Has he given you any valuable information yet?"

"With all the drugs I have been told to give him, the little talking he has done has been incoherent and impossible to understand."

"Then take him off the drugs for now."

"Okay, but it will take a while for him to become rational."

"How long will it take for him to be able to talk clearly on a video?"

"I don't know for sure. 48 hours, maybe. Why do you ask?"

"Because, the message has to come from him."

"What message would that be?"

"There is no need for you to be concerned about that, Herr Doktor. Just have him ready later today."

Dr Morales objected, "But that only gives us a few hours. It is not enough time to..."

"...That is not my problem. Just have him ready, Herr Doktor."

"What do you know of Pedro Arross, Jerome?" Joab asked as he and the doctor ate Spanish rice for breakfast.

“He was the Jesuarian General in Rome during the 80’s and 90’s. Why do you ask?”

Joab needed to confide in Jerome, but he did not know how much to tell him. “Derek began to tell me about the Jesuarians. What he said to me seemed unbelievable.”

“The Jesuarians are very, very powerful. The attacker in the church was sent by the Vatican.”

“The Vatican! Why?”

“To get hold of the ‘Modesta Secreta’ of course. I now have the only copy in existence outside of the inner circle of the brotherhood, one that has Pedro Arross’ signature. As the Jesuarians deny the book’s existence, they have to destroy this copy to maintain their lie. That’s why we cannot, under any circumstances, let them have it.”

“So when are you going to give it to me, Jerome?”

“Give it to you! Why would I do that?” Jerome asked, surprised.

“Because Derek wanted me to have it. I need it to get it published by my magazine ‘High Light’ which is doing the article on him.” Joab responded.

“Since when?” Jerome asked, abruptly.

“Since I picked up the disk from his safe deposit box. It contains all his instructions, one of which was for me to get the ‘Modesta Secreta’ and use it in the story.”

Jerome asked, suspiciously, “Where is this mystery disk, Mr Rackham?”

“In safe keeping, back in London.”

“I would like to see what’s on it.”

“And I would like the book,” Joab retorted, “I need to see the disk first.” Joab, suspicious of the Moroccan’s motives, replied, “I can arrange that but don’t do anything with the book until you see Derek’s request.”

“I don’t intend to, Mr Rackham.”

As the pair finished their coffee, Joab commented, “Jerome, something is puzzling me.”

“Oh! What is that?”

“That old guy in the church. How did he get hold of the book?”

“I do not know. Derek must have given it to him, I guess.”

“So why him? Why would Derek trust that old monk, who was more than likely a Jesuarian assassin in his day?”

“What makes you think that?”

Joab rolled his eyes. “Oh come on! Are you telling me he just happened to have a strangulation cord and was able to use it to great effect – in the dark?”

“You may well be right in your assertion, Mr Rackham. But why do you see that to be significant? We have the book; that’s the important thing.”

“Perhaps it isn’t. It’s just that I am trying to get a handle on things.”

Jerome nodded, sagely.

“And another thing,” Joab began, pressing for further information, “how did that guy we killed,” he asked, haltingly, “know where to come for the book?”

“I don't know the answer, Mr Rackham. Maybe they got the information off Derek?”

“Off Derek!” Joab repeated, open-mouthed. “Do you mean by torturing him?”

“Unfortunately that is a strong possibility. Mr Rackham, please understand we are dealing with not very friendly people here! They will do anything to get what they want. When the Jesuarians gained power in the Vatican, they became aligned with the most powerful Freemason they had in the craft, Frederick the Great.”

“I didn't think they saw eye to eye.”

“Power and corruption give rise to the strangest of bedfellows. I will furnish you with a little history about this. In 1776, the Jesuarian College of Ingolstadt initiated the sect, known as ‘the Illuminati of Bavaria,’ which was founded by Adam Weishaupt. However, Weishaupt seems to have played a subordinate, though prominent role, in its organisation. So, on May 1, 1776, the Order of the Illuminati was officially founded in the old Jesuarian stronghold of Bavaria. The Company, as it was known, later used the Jewish House of Rothschild to finance the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon, a high degree Freemason, along with his Jesuarian-trained advisor, Abbe Sieyes. In spite of the historical writings of the Jesuarian Abbe Barruel, who blamed the Rothschild's and Freemasonry for the Revolution, little regard was paid to his diligent research. He claimed the Society of Jesu used the influence of the Illuminati to carry out the Revolution and punish the monarchs who dared to expel the Jesuarians from their dominions. Jesuarians, having been expelled from the Spanish Empire, found refuge in Corsica. From there they raised up their great avenger, Napoleon Bonaparte.”

“Are you suggesting that the Jesuarians controlled Napoleon?” Joab asked, finding it hard to believe.

“Yes, and there is an irrefutable conclusion to be drawn from this.”

“What conclusion would that be?”

“That the Napoleonic Wars and the French Revolution were both carried out by Freemasonry, under the auspices of the Jesuarians. Everything Napoleon did, and the Jacobins, whatever they did, completely benefited the Jesuarian Order.”

“My God Jerome, it's all been so coldly contrived!”

“Yes it has, and it is to this end that Alexander Dumas wrote his ‘The Count of Monte Cristo’. The Count, in the story, is the Jesuarian General. Alexander Dumas was talking about the Black Pope getting revenge for when the Jesuarians were suppressed, with many of them consigned to an island, three hours sailing, West, off the coast of Portugal. Therefore, when the Jesuarians finally regained their power, they punished all of the monarchs of Europe who had suppressed them, drove them from their thrones, including the Knights of Malta, using Napoleon as their primary weapon.”

Joab, taken aback by the revelation, responded, “There's much more to the story than I imagined.”

“Yes, Mr Rackham. Did you know that Alexander Dumas, fought for the Italian patriots in 1848, to free Rome from the temporal power of the Black Pope. In fact, he wrote many books, but ‘The Count Of Monte Cristo’ was written to expose the Jesuarian agenda. So, when you read that book, bear in mind that it is really a satire on the Jesuarian Order regaining their power in France. In the story, despite fighting against the odds, the Count of Monte Cristo has an intelligence apparatus that the Black Pope couldn't beat.”

“So he triumphs in the end?” Joab surmised.

“The Jesuarian Order - yes. Nevertheless, the Count does not get what he wants, or his last wish granted, the love of the woman he most desires. He gains back all of his political power; he gains back everything he lost except the love of his life.”

Joab was puzzled. He asked, “Why do you think Dumas made that such an important point in his story?”

Jerome smiled. “That is just like the Jesuarian Order. They have no women. They have no love of women because to have a wife, to have a woman, means you have an allegiance to your wife and family, so you cannot just be at the Black Pope's beck and call. That's why Jesuarians can never be married, and that's one of the great keys to their brutal success.”

Joab stopped, stunned. “My God, Absolute power with no morals. It's unbelievable!”

“On the contrary, Mr Rackham, it's entirely believable. That is what makes it difficult to take in.”

Rosella came into the kitchen for coffee, wrapping woollen shawl tightly around her, to ward off the morning chill. Jerome stood up and wrapped his arms around her from behind, “How are you my Darling?” He asked.

“Still a bit sad from last night,” she said, “I hope you are feeling more sociable today, Jerry.”

Jerome fell to his knees, assuming penitents pose, his hands clasped to his heart. “I apologise for my behaviour last night. It was unbecoming of an officer and a gentleman, my lady of my dreams,” Jerome responded, kissing her hand.

“Unbecoming of a shrink as well,” Joab laughed.”

“That too,” Jerome grinned. “Now let me get you some coffee, my sweet Rosy.”

Rosella sat down. “So what were you boys talking about when I interrupted?”

“Oh, just how the Jesuarians think they are a law to themselves,” Joab answered.

She responded, “They are. They have done just what suited them for 300 years. They can betray a nation and walk away. They can betray all the Irish Catholics getting on the Titanic, and walk away. They can betray the American service members in Vietnam and walk away. They can betray us every time we go to the hospital and are radiated and cut and drugged, and walk away, because it's 'for the greater glory of their God.’”

Jerome added, “Majorem Dei Gloriam.”

Joab, not up on his Latin, asked, “What does that mean?”

Jerome replied, “The greater glory of the god who sits in Rome.”

”So what is the ultimate goal of the Jesuarians?” Rosella asked, pouring her coffee.

“Their ultimate goal is to control the whole world!” Jerome answered, soberly.

Later that morning Rosella and Jerome went shopping for vegetables. Joab opted to stay back to transcribe his notes. He was carrying out this task when the phone rang. At first, the reporter, being deeply engrossed in his research, did not hear it. Then, as soon as he became aware, he rushed to grab the receiver. “Hello, can I help you?”

“I want - to speak - to Joab - Rackham.”

“Speaking. Who am I talking to?”

“It's Derek - Philips,” the caller answered, his voice noticeably slurred.

“Derek! How are you? Where are you?”

“Joab, I need - you to do - something for me.”

“What’s that?”

“I need you - to get me - the book. It is a matter of life and death - mine.”

“The Book! Do you mean the ‘Modesta Secreta’?”

“Yes, Joab. Please - bring it to - me as - soon as you can. And tell - no one about this.”

Joab, wondering if it was a trick, asked, “How do I know it is you talking?”

“In a couple - of days you will - receive a video - tape showing me, the date, and - the time. Watch the - tape and follow my - instructions.”

The phone went dead, leaving Joab with his troubled thoughts. Derek sounded as though he was drugged, which meant he was probably being controlled, held somewhere against his will. That being the case giving him the book would mean giving it to his captors, which means the Jesuarrians would have their hands on it. Derek sounded desperate in his request for the book. If Joab didn’t take the book to where The Jesuarrians held Friar Philips captive, They would probably kill him. And if he did get Derek the secret rule book, the bad guys would get their hands on it, and his story would be dead in the water. Even worse, having gotten what they wanted, the Jesuarrians may well kill Derek anyhow. Joab found himself in an awful dilemma, and he could not even ask Jerome for his advice on the matter.

Just then, Joab heard Jerome and Rosella returning from their shopping trip. He went to greet them and help with the shopping. As Rosella put her shopping bags on the old timber kitchen bench, she asked, “Senor Joab, were there any phone calls while we were gone?”

Taken by surprise by the question, the journalist responded, “Phone calls?”

“It’s a simple enough question. Did anybody call here while we were in town?” Jerome pressed.

Not wanting to tell a lie and yet not being able to speak of the conversation with Derek, Joab replied, “Yes, there was one call.”

“Who was it from?” Jerome asked.

Somebody from his past, he could not remember who had told Joab, sometimes telling a lie is the correct thing to do. Joab had never really grasped that contradiction until that moment. He said, “I don’t know. I didn’t get to the phone quick enough.”

“It was probably one of my girlfriends,” Rosella suggested. “It had to be somebody who knew my number.”

That in itself was a worrying thought for Joab, something he hadn’t considered. How did Derek know where he was? Also, if he knew, then the people holding him also knew. This meant they knew where he was staying. Without raising any alarm, Joab calmly suggested, “Why don’t we go out, maybe drive to Toledo and visit the Alcazar.”

“Have you never been there Senor Joab?”

“No, but I would certainly like to.”

Turning to Jerome, she asked, “Do you fancy a trip to Toledo today?”

Jerome, having already secretly organised a meeting there, answered, “What a good idea. Let’s go.”

Chapter 22

Toledo, modern day

As the trio approached the Alcázar, from the Plaza de Zocodover, Rosella explained, “Senor Joab, it is built on site of an earlier Roman fort and laid out in a square with those black, steeple corner towers you see.”

Viewing the towering edifice in front of him, Joab was very impressed. “It certainly is an imposing structure, Rosella.”

“Si Señor. Covarrubias and Herrera built it in 16th century.”

“She likes to show off,” Jerome laughed, poking Rosella playfully in the ribs.

“Don’t take any notice of that Philistine, Rosella. I find it absorbing.”

Undeterred, the Spanish woman continued, “The French burn it down in 1810. The Spanish restore it and in 1882. It became military college, and in early days of Civil War, Nationalist garrison held out for more over two months against Republican forces, who eventually blew it up, forcing defenders to surrender. After restoration, it became museum commemorating the Civil War, and is still regarded by Franco supporters as a monument to heroism of its defenders.”

Joab queried, “Didn’t I read somewhere that one of Franco’s officers sacrificed his son, Rosella.”

“Si, the Republicans took Colonel Moscardó’s 16-year old son Luis, hostage and demanded surrender of Alcázar or they would kill him. Luis told his father “Surrender or they will shoot me!” His father replied, “Then commend your soul to God; shout ‘Viva Cristo Rey’ and die like a hero.”

“Nice dad,” Joab commented

As they walked around the castle, Joab, amazed at its reconstruction, commented, “It’s hard to believe it got almost entirely destroyed in 1936.”

Rosella responded, “Yes it is, Senor Joab. Today it is site of Toledo’s Army Museum. The building goes back to the Roman period. Under rule of Alfonso VI and Alfonso X the Wise. The building was redesigned to become first fortress to have a square floor plan with towers on each angle. Later, under Emperor Charles V, rebuilding took place, this time by architect Alonso de Covarrubias.”

Waiting for Joab to catch up with her, as he worked his way through a bunch of tourists, Rosella, stopped. Once he caught up, she pointed out more architectural features, “One of the façades is in the Renaissance style, while second one is Plateresque. The third façade (east), on the other hand, is medieval, with crenulated towers and battlements, while the fourth is Churrigueresque, built following the designs of Juan de Herrera. Following its last restoration, this building went on to be the site of the Army Headquarters and Museum.”

“You certainly have done your homework, Rosella.”

“I find our history absorbing Senor Joab. Now let us go into museum,” she suggested excitedly.

After seeing the well-maintained collection of war memorabilia, including an impressive sword collection, and various scale models of the castle, displaying its ruined state, Joab noticed that Jerome was walking away. “Hey, Jerome. Where are you going?” he asked.

“You two enjoy yourselves. I just have to do something in town.”

Remembering the threat inferred by Derek's phone call, Joab wanted to stay with the book. He suggested, "I think we ought to stick together."

Jerome flashed a big smile. "I won't be long. See you guys soon," he stated, walking away.

Joab, fed up with Jerome's secretive meetings, felt enough was enough. Turning to Rosella, he said, "I have to follow him."

"Follow him! Whatever for, Senor Joab?" Rosella asked, puzzled.

"Sorry Rosella but I have to go. I can't explain, but it is something I have to do."

She protested, "But Senor there is so much still to see."

"Another time," he answered, heading off in Jerome's direction.

Pushing his way through some German tourists Joab, keeping his distance so as not to be observed, followed Jerome over the bridge and through the tower gate. In the distance, he saw the doctor cross the road that leads to the keyhole-style city gate of Toledo. Joab continued to tail his target through the 'Plaza Zocodover' to the 'Calle Del Comercio', Toledo's main shopping street, where customers could buy anything from swords to marzipan. Jostling his way through clusters of visitors, Joab was able to keep his quarry in sight. It was a long walk in the early afternoon sun, but Joab persisted, and he followed the doctor to a small, otherwise insignificant church in the Jewish quarter. On any other occasion, Joab would have stopped to admire the masterwork of art it contained. However, he had no time for such distractions, his mission being to discover the agenda of the enigmatic doctor. Keeping his distance, Joab, espied a priest at the main door of the church. He greeted Jerome as though they knew each other and then invited him into the religious building. Joab popped inside the church, just in time to see Jerome follow the cleric into the presbytery. He followed them down the aisle, his curiosity growing by the moment.

The presbytery door was slightly ajar, so Joab pushed it open just enough for him to see what was going on, without being detected. The priest looked vaguely familiar, although Joab couldn't remember from where. The cleric and Jerome were chatting away, as though they were old friends. Jerome removed something from inside the lightweight vest he was wearing. Then Joab saw what it was. He couldn't believe his eyes. It was the 'Modesta Secreta', for which they had risked their lives. The very book he needed to help save Derek. Joab horrified that the doctor was giving the book to the priest, was at a loss for what to do. Had this been Jerome's plan, all along, the journalist wondered. Then Derek's plea for help came to mind, and he knew he just had to retrieve the book somehow.

Joab then saw Jerome shake hands with the priest and leave the church by the back door. The priest put his treasure into a leather satchel and donned a broad-brimmed sun hat, after which he walked back along the aisle of the church. Noticing the priest heading his way, Joab ducked into the shadows to let the cleric pass. Glimpsing the priest as he passed, Joab knew where he had seen him before. The man had been following Jerome and himself through the Barbican Gallery. Jerome's betrayal felt like a kick in the gut. Not only had the psychologist lied, but he had also betrayed Derek. Determined to discover the underlying cause of the doctor's duplicity, Joab followed the cleric out of the church and into the old Jewish quarter. An integral part of Toledo's History. The Jewish Quarter, as such, disappeared in 1492, owing to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Although, as Joab discovered, the Jewish people had indeed left their mark on the city.

Tracking the priest through the crowds of tourists was not at all easy. However, with diligence and caution he managed to follow his quarry into the 'Pasoe de San Cristobal Boulevard, past the Transito Synagogue, El Greco's house and museum, to a Mudejar style apartment building, where the priest stopped. Joab knew he had to confront the man before he went inside. Plucking up his

courage, he approached the priest just as the cleric unlocked the front door. "Excuse me, but you have something of mine," Joab challenged.

The priest turned, surprised by the stranger's announcement, "I don't know what you are talking about!"

"That book. The one you have in your satchel. It doesn't belong to you."

Turning round to go into the hallway, the priest tried brushing Joab off, "You're mad. Go way!"

"Not without the book Father," Joab responded, making a grab for the cleric.

In a panic the priest yelled, "HELP ME! THIEF!"

Seeing two men responding to the cleric's call, Joab had no choice but to act swiftly. Pushing the priest roughly to the ground, he grabbed the satchel and ran off, with two Spanish men in hot pursuit. Joab, terrified, raced blindly, grasping his prize. He couldn't believe what had just happened. He had just mugged and robbed a Catholic priest in broad daylight. A quick glance showed that his pursuers had not given up the chase, and they were gaining ground. Joab turned left and ran down a narrow, stepped, side street, dodging tourists as he went. The crowd slowed him down but at the same time enveloped him, hiding him from his pursuers. Checking behind him and seeing that the coast was clear, Joab sat down outside a cafe and ordered a cold drink.

As his heart rate returned to normal, Joab looked at his options. He could take the book back to Rosella's place and hide it there. However, the Jesuarians already knew where he was staying. In any case, the priest may well have contacted Jerome to let him know what had happened. Alternatively, he could put the book in a safe deposit box or secure locker somewhere, but where?" As Joab could hardly speak any Spanish, going to a bank would raise too many questions. There was always the train station or possibly the bus station; they usually had security boxes to rent. Joab got out his street map of the city and spreading it on the table located the railway station.

The Toledo train station, like many other stations in small communities around Spain, was somewhat antiquated. It was reminiscent of many train stations built in American small towns during the 19th century. Joab didn't have to worry about which left luggage window to use (there were only two). So he joined the ten people already in line, and he watched the minutes slip by, as the person at the head of the line appeared to be arguing with the ticket agent. Finally, the line started moving. Various garbled announcements (in Spanish) penetrated the hot air. Some passengers appeared to be getting edgy, possibly, Joab thought, because they might miss their train. Then all of a sudden, the people in the line seemed disgusted and left with their luggage, leaving the journalist in front of the ticket window. With the help of a Spanish passenger behind him, Joab was able to get the satchel secreted in a locker. Putting the locker key safely in his pocket, he exited the railway station and oriented himself in the direction of the Alcazar fortress.

The taxi that Joab took was thick with the stench of spilt beer and the driver's overdone cheap cologne. He was feeling nauseous by the time he reached the Alcazar car park. It was late afternoon, and Jerome's car had gone. A quick inspection of his wallet showed that Joab didn't have enough money to take a taxi back to Consuegra. That only left hitching a lift.

It was getting dark by the time Joab reached the CM-42, which took him back to Rosella's place. There was not much traffic around, and Joab finished up with walking to Nambroca. After waiting a while, he got a lift with a truck driver going to Madrid. It was after Joab was dropped off outside Consuegra that he began to think about his inevitable confrontation with Jerome.

As he walked back to Rosella's place, Joab tried getting his head around what had happened that day. What was Jerome's relationship with the priest and why had he passed the book to him? Did Jerome know what happened between him and priest? Feeling exhausted from the day's stresses,

Joab hoped that Jerome and Rosella would be asleep when he arrived. With such thoughts in his mind, he trudged through the poorly lit streets on the lookout for any familiar landmarks.

Joab, tired and hungry, eventually reached Rosella's door. Through the lace curtains, he saw that the lights were still on. That meant he would have difficulty avoiding a confrontation with the doctor, before getting some much-needed sleep.

He knocked at the door, and Rosella opened it. "Hi Rosella," Joab greeted.

"Senor Joab, where have you been?" she responded, concern showing on her face. "We have been worried about you!"

Before he had a chance to respond Jerome hovered angrily in the lounge doorway.

His customary coolness and gentility gave way to uncontrolled wrath and indignation. "What the hell are you up to?" the doctor asked.

Joab, responding to the verbal blast, went on the offensive. "I might well ask you the same question, doctor. Who gave you the right to give that book to the priest?"

Fronting up to Joab with menace in his voice, Jerome stormed, "SO YOU DECIDE TO MUG AND ROB AN INNOCENT PRIEST!"

Rosella couldn't believe it. "Senor Joab, did you hurt a priest?" she responded, her face a mask of horror and puzzlement, as she crossed herself.

"I didn't mean him any harm, but he wouldn't give me the book."

"So you just assaulted him and took it from him by force!" Jerome retorted angrily.

"What's going on?" Rosella asked, amid the intense argument. "Why are you two here?" she pressed, knowing little of Jerome' and Joab's actual mission in Spain.

"So, where is the book, Mr Rackham?" Jerome asked, menacingly.

"In a safe place, until I decide what to do with it." Joab retorted.

Incensed by the reporter's response, Jerome lunged at him. Pushing him roughly, Jerome thrust him hard against the wall, causing the journalist to bang his head. "That's not the right answer. NOW WHERE IS IT?"

The Spanish host, horrified by her guest's unruly behaviour, yelled, "STOP THIS RIGHT NOW YOU TWO!"

Dazed, Joab shoved hard against Jerome, pushing him back with all the force he could muster. "That book belongs to Derek. He is the one who decides what happens to it - not you!"

"YOU BLOODY INTERFERING FOOL! YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU HAVE DONE!" Jerome yelled, thrusting Joab back against the wall."

"STOP IT!" Rosella shouted forcefully, bringing the clash to a halt, stilling the antagonists as though in a frozen tableau.

As things quieted down, Rosella suggested, "Sit down and discuss your differences calmly, instead of acting like a couple of schoolyard bullies."

Having calmed down a little, Jerome explained, "I know I haven't exactly been forthcoming with you Mr Rackham, but I had to know I could trust you."

"Trust me! You knew who that priest was at the Barbican, yet you gave me some cock-and-bull story about him following us."

"Please let me explain!"

"It's about time you were honest with me!"

"Very well, I will tell you everything I know. When Derek Philips found out about the real agenda of the Jesuarian inner sanctum and the methods they use for getting their way, he was heartedly sickened. He wanted to report his findings, but he had no proof. So he lived in his own private nightmare and, was eventually sectioned and put into the cell, where I met him."

"Did he confide in you?"

"Yes, but I didn't believe him at first. I thought he was delusional and paranoid."

"So what made you believe him?"

"In desperation, he used his ace card."

"Which was?"

"The Modesta Secreta, with the Black Pope's signature. He had a copy but he would not let anyone know about it. Eventually, he divulged this to me. I persuaded him to lend it to me. I read it and then I began to understand. However, not having clerical training, there were certain aspects of the writing that I could not comprehend."

"So what did you do?"

"I needed verification from an independent expert source. The problem was that any credible expert would know how rare the book was and it would no longer be safe."

"So, what did you do?"

"It was Derek who came to the rescue."

"How?"

"He knew a priest who was sympathetic to his views. Apparently, this priest had a brother who had joined the Jesuarians. He reported unsavoury practices that took place at the Jesuarian College where he taught. Shortly afterwards, he met with a nasty accident in which he died. Although the priest could never prove it, he blamed the Jesuarians for killing his brother. So this priest authenticates the book, and it becomes our secret weapon to expose the dark forces running the Society of Jesu."

Then it dawned on Joab. He said, "Let me guess, this priest is the one I took the book off today."

"Precisely Mr Rackham. Now you know what a colossal error you have made. Tomorrow you will show me where the 'Modesta Secreta' is and we will take it back to the priest, to whom you will apologise profusely,"

"Under normal circumstances, I would agree with what you say, but it's not as simple as that."

Jerome, confused, asked, "What do you mean, Mr Rackham?"

"That phone call I received earlier today - I did get to it in time."

"Oh! And who was it from?"

"Derek."

Jerome couldn't believe it. "Derek phoned here, and you didn't tell me?"

"Those were his instructions. He asked me to take the book to him. He said it was a matter of life and death. So when I saw you handing over the book to the priest I had to get it back."

"So you intended to take the book to Derek?"

"That's what he asked me to do, to save his life."

Jerome slowly shook his head. "You bloody fool, Mr Rackham. Don't you see that the only reason he was still alive to make the call is because his captors do not have the book?"

"So you think ..."

"I don't think Mr Rackham, I know. Once they have the book they will kill Derek because they will no longer need him."

Joab went cold. "But If I don't take it to him they will kill him anyhow."

Jerome paused before answering. "Let me explain something to you about the nature of our select little group. We that is Derek, the priest, and I each pledged that the mission to expose the darkness within the Holy Roman Church is more important than our individual lives. Derek would never have willingly put the quest at risk to save his carcass. He knew the risks and ..."

"That's not what he said to me. It's all very well for you to spout such idealistic bravado when you are not under threat like he is!"

"NOT UNDER THREAT! You have no idea how careful we have to be. We cannot let our guard down for a moment. Which reminds me? From what you said, they know who we are and where we are. Rosella's home is no longer safe for any of us."

"Yes, I can see that, but I cannot accept leaving Derek to his fate."

"I know it's hard to cope with, but there is nothing we can do. If we give Derek the 'Modesta Secreta', he will die, and if we don't, he will die."

"So why don't we rescue him?"

"For a start, it would be impossible."

"Being a mental health doctor you could easily get into the hospital."

"On what pretext? Don't you think they would be suspicious of a physician they don't recognise?"

Joab was adamant. "Well, I'll have a go then. We can't just leave him to..."

"Let's discuss it in the morning. I'm off to bed." Jerome stated, yawning.

Chapter 23

Gdansk, 1983

Nineteen Eighty-Three was the year that Solidarity, a private workers' committee threatened a work slowdown unless the Communist authorities resumed talks with Lech Walesa, the founder of the banned independent trade union. It was also the year Lech Walesa, the charismatic leader of millions of Polish workers, who later became the president of Poland (1990–95), received the Nobel Prize for Peace. On a lesser note, except for those directly affected, it was the year that Gustav

Pricic arrived in Gdansk with a warped sense of revenge on his mind. Father Augustyn had betrayed him and, in his book, the priest had to pay the price.

Sitting on the single bed in his budget hotel room, Gustav retrieved the toiletry bag from his suitcase. He was amused at how he had fooled the customs people at both airports. Placing unlawful sharp metal blades with acceptable sharp metal manicure items was a stroke of Genius. Little did they know that the wooden crucifix he carried with him doubled up as the hilt of his deadly poniard. His chosen death-dealing mission gave Gustav a rare thrill he did not understand, but it also charged him with energy. He had never before acted on his volition. The Society of Jesu had not sanctioned his current assignment. In fact, they were not even aware of it.

Gustav spread his weapons of torture on a silk cloth as though they were sacred objects, rare relics of incalculable value. He took his wooden crucifix and, by removing the top of the cross, he inserted a razor sharp blade, thereby turning the symbol of love and compassion into an instrument of torture and death. The anticipation of the ritual the assassin was to carry out, filled him with excitement. Nevertheless, much preparation was needed, so he could not afford to dwell on such things. His planning had to be complete, with nothing left to chance. His strategy had to be sound and his timing perfect. Yes, there was much work to be completed, in preparation for his sacred mission to right the wrong perpetrated against the Holy Order. For Gustav, it was a simple case of balancing of the books. The meddlesome cleric had betrayed him, so he had to punish the betrayer.

After hiring a Polski Fiat, Gustav searched for a suitable location to carry out his deed. He would not dream of spilling blood in the Holy Mother Church. Besides, dealing with the Priest in St. Mary's would be far too risky. Gustav decided to take a drive around the river, down near the docks. An empty shed or office would suffice his needs.

After driving around 'Targ Drzewny,' Gustav eased the car down 'Podwale Staromiejskie', where he turned right into 'Targ Rybny' that ran parallel with a river. Gustav cruised slowly along the road and, half way along, he found what he was looking for – a disused shed. The old warehouse, abandoned for many years was boarded up with rusty corrugated sheets. However, upon closer inspection, it appeared, on occasion, to be used as a temporary respite from the night cold by itinerant homeless people. The presence of rats was also evident, which wasn't surprising to the monk. Apart from some broken wooden crates, a few wooden chairs and an old bench, the place was empty. Satisfied with the location, which had no houses nearby, Gustav drove to a hardware store to purchase the two remaining items he needed, a robust self-supporting flashlight and some stout rope.

As Father Augustyn had not heard anything from the Cardinal or the man who was known simply as Pepsi Cola, he had not given the phone call from Julian Pawlowski much thought. His life seemed to progress much as usual without any major complications taking place. He went about his chores around St. Mary's Church, in a routine fashion. It was during one of these regular functions, the current one being replacing the burnt-out votive candles with new ones, that his flower woman interrupted him.

She said, "Father, I'm sorry to disturb you, but there is a monk in your office, asking for you."

A monk! A cold chill shot up his spine.

Seeing his troubled frown, she said, "Are you alright, father?"

"Yes, robust. Thank you, Anja, I will attend to it."

One the way to his office the seriousness of his situation forcibly struck him. She said a monk was waiting. He only knew of one monk, and his presence was terrible news. Surely, Pepsi Cola would not have come back to Poland, unless the Church had some form of covert task for him to

undertake. Then his skin went clammy. He realised it was about the phone conversation he had with the meddlesome Cardinal. Surely the red hat would not have let on about the black monk's secret identity! Why else would the Jesuarian assassin be there awaiting him? The He felt a cold clamminess. The black monk was there to punish him for not keeping quiet about his identity.

As much as he dreaded entering his office the priest really had no choice. Taking a deep breath, he steadied himself in readiness to face his fate. However, he was surprised to see the figure in the black habit smiling at him.

The Friar said, "Hello Father Augustyn, we meet again."

"Yes Friar, so how can I help you?" the priest asked, shielding his fear.

"As always you are straight to the point, Father. Now, we require your local knowledge to help us carry out a critical mission."

"My local knowledge," Aleksander replied, puzzled. He wondered if he had misjudged the situation after all.

"Yes Father, I have the address here," he answered, handing the priest a piece of paper with the location details on it. "Do you know how to get there?"

Looking at the address, Aleksander nodded, "I used to play around there, as a kid.

"Good, I have a car out the back, so let us go."

The priest hesitated, "I can't leave right now. Can we do it later?"

Realising the cover of darkness would be more to his liking, the monk said, "I will pick you up here at 7 o'clock."

"Why are we going there?"

The monk shot him a dark look. "Church business." was all he would say.

Upon arrival at the dark and derelict warehouse, Aleksander asked, "What are we doing here?"

"Asking questions again, are we, Father?" Gustav sneered, covering Aleksander's mouth and nose with a cloth soaked in chloroform.

Immediately, Aleksander realised the monk's real mission, his instinct for survival took over, but after his initial and useless struggle, the priest slumped against the car.

The monk then pushed open the door. Using a small torch, he shone the beam around to make sure no tramps were using the building to doss down. Satisfied the shed was empty, he retrieved the powerful self-supporting flashlight from the hired Polish Fiat and set it up on the bench. He then hauled the unconscious cleric into the warehouse, where he tied him to a chair. Everything was going like clockwork, and soon the priest would be very sorry for betraying his identity.

When Aleksander began to come to, the first thing he realised was that The monk had tied his wrists and ankles to his wooden chair. His second realisation, a much scarier one, was of the black monk, arranging torture implements on a bench, the way medical instruments are set out before an operation. "Why have you tied me up?" the frightened cleric asked.

There was no emotion in the monk's voice. "I have immobilised you so that you cannot move father, except your mouth, which you will need for screaming."

Alexsander felt the cold clamminess of his skin. Then, realising the helplessness and horror of his predicament, he expounded, "My God! What are you doing to me?"

Although Gustav felt his adrenaline rising, he kept his voice cold and calm. "You betrayed me, Father Augustyn, and for that, you will pay dearly. But first I must learn of what you told Cardinal Pawlowski."

Gripped by fear, the constrained cleric spluttered, "he phoned me for information, but I had none to give him."

"You told him my secret name," the monk said, menacingly.

"Yes, I mentioned your code name, but that was all," the priest gasped, as the black monk approached him, a sharp thin bladed knife, in his right hand.

"I don't think you are telling the truth, Father," Gustav responded icily. Then, pulling the priest's cassock out from his neck, he carefully sliced the garment open down the front.

Alexsander, in abject fear, could only manage a feeble, "Please don't, I beseech you."

The blade then cut away the priest's singlet, leaving him bare-chested. "It's out of my hands now Alexander. It is merely a process of retribution. Now, what else did you tell the Cardinal about me?"

"Nothing, I swear on the Holy Mother Church I told him nothing!"

"Then I have no choice," the black monk said calmly while drawing the razor-sharp blade across the priest's chest, leaving a trail of blood in its wake. Even before the cleric's scream died down another knife stroke was performed, this time from the throat to the navel, leaving Alexander looking like a bloody, hot-cross-bun."

"Now let us try again, Father. What did you tell the Cardinal about me?"

Grimacing with the pain, Alexsander pleaded, "I didn't want to do it. He pressured me to tell him. In the end, I just told him your name was 'Pepsi Cola. That is all I said; I swear on the Holy Bible."

"Blaspheming liar," Gustav accused. "Perhaps by loosening one of your fingers, it will loosen your tongue."

"Christ, for the love of God, No. Please don't torture me!"

Ignoring Alexander's pleas, Gustav changed the blade to one shaped like a small cleaver. Turning to the priest, he held it up, so the light, from the powerful torch, glinted on its blade. He then advanced upon his victim.

As the wicked looking blade got closer to his left hand, Alexander struggled desperately to free it from its bonds - but to no avail. Then he felt his little finger being stretched out; then a flash of agonising pain; then nothing.

At first, Alexander wondered what was causing the coldness he was feeling. He then realised it was water, splashed on his face. The priest coughed and spluttered, as he was shocked back into reality. He felt the excruciating pain in his bleeding left hand. But there was no time for him to dwell on the searing agony because the face of the monk loomed closely, a maniacal grin on his thin lips. "The truth priest!" he snarled.

Alexsander pleaded, "For the love of God and all that is Holy I am telling the truth."

"I do not believe you."

"This is crazy. I cannot prove what I did not say."

“I want to know what you did say,” Gustav replied, fitting a serrated blade to his poniard.

“Dear God! No!” Alexander uttered as he felt the ring finger of his left hand being stretched out. As the rough serrated edge touched his finger above the second knuckle, the priest, in desperation, summoned enough inner strength to propel himself forwards. His action took the monk completely by surprise. As he crashed forward, onto his face, the combined weight of his body and the solid wooden chair hit the monk above the knees, making him lose his balance. Caught completely off guard, Gustav, dropping his knife, instinctively put out his right arm to stop himself from falling. Almost at the same time as his right collarbone snapped, the impact of man and chair shattered the bones in his lower right leg. It was his turn to cry out in excruciating agony. But Alexander didn't hear it. His head had smashed against the concrete floor, instantly rendering him unconscious.

Gustav, trembling in shock and intense pain, desperately tried to free himself from the weight on his legs. Using his good leg and his good arm he managed to inch his way clear, his only thought now being that of self-preservation. Forgetting his warped sense of revenge, Gustav used the bench to pull himself up inch by agonising inch. Sweating profusely, Gustav scanned the dimly lit warehouse for a crutch of sorts. Espying an old broom nearby, he used it to hobble back to his car. Dragging his way to the door, each step a living nightmare, he stumbled outside into the cold, dark, inhospitable night.

Alexander gained consciousness around dawn. His throbbing left hand brought him back to his present plight. The loss of blood had weakened him. All he could see and smell was dried blood and dirt on the cold concrete floor. By wriggling from side to side, he managed to tip the chair over. Apart from the pain from his knife wounds, the priest was suffering from an acute headache. Two feet away he saw the poniard with the serrated blade. There was no sign of the monk. By jerking his body and wriggling from side to side, he eventually got close enough to the knife to grasp it with his good right hand. The sharp blade quickly cut through the rope where it attached his wrist to the chair. Soon he was free - woozy, but liberated. He couldn't understand why his captor had gone and why he had left his knives behind. He put it down to a miracle. God's intervention had saved his life.

Chapter 24

Toledo, modern day

The package duly arrived, addressed to Joab Rackham. Rosella, collected and signed for it, then she placed it on the kitchen table. Jerome and Joab had gone out, but they had not told her where. Although she was curious as to what the package contained, she left it untouched, until they returned. Rosella was pleased that the two men had made up but concerned about what they had gotten themselves into, and – more to the point - her involvement, by association. She had no idea what was going on, but from what she had picked up from the pair, it was not good. Rosella did not want to have to leave her home and stay with a friend, but if she had to go, she was determined to find out why.

As soon as Joab and Jerome returned the three of them set up the video that had arrived in the post. It was a short movie showing Derek holding a copy of *El Mundo*, indicating the date two days before. Derek's message was simple. “I am in the psychiatric ward at the Toledo General Hospital. They are treating me well, and that will continue to do so as long as you follow my instructions. I need you to bring me the ‘Monita Secreta’, no questions asked. I need it as soon as possible.”

After watching the tape, Joab stated, “Well, that's pretty clear.”

“Not to me!” Rosella said, “What is this ‘Monita Secreta’ he is talking about, Senor Joab?”

Jerome interrupted, "It's the handbook of the Jesuarians. It proves their hidden agenda. We have the only known copy that exists outside the inner sanctum of the Society of Jesu." Then, looking straight at Joab, he added, "Under no circumstances must they get their hands on it."

Joab contested, "You heard what Derek said, Jerome. If we don't take it to him, he will probably die."

The psychiatrist sighed slowly, raising his eyes. "I thought we had been through this Mr Rackham. Once they have the book, all our efforts, and sacrifices, including Derek's, have been for nothing."

"So, what are you saying Jerome? We just leave him to die?"

"Alas, there is nothing that we can do to help him, Mr Rackham."

Rosella interrupted. "What exactly is going on Jerry? First, you say I have to leave my home! Now you say this Derek have to die. Explain to me please!"

Jerome took a deep breath. "Briefly, I am involved with a select group of people whose aim is to expose a great evil in the world. The perpetrators of this evil will go to any lengths to stop us. Unfortunately, you have got caught up in this."

Rosella flashed daggers. "You came to my home and stay here without telling me this! You put my life at risk without telling me! I cannot believe that you - my friend - would treat me in such a despicable way!"

Jerome back-pedalled. "I am truly sorry things turned out this way Rosy, but I only wanted to protect you."

"Protect me! You are the one who put me in danger!"

"We didn't have anywhere else to stay near Toledo. I did not think things would have got out of hand like this."

"So you come and stay here, knowing that you are putting me at risk!"

"My dear Rosy, I would do nothing to put you at risk knowingly."

Joab, frustrated by their argument, interrupted the pair. "We can help Derek!"

"What do you mean, Mr Rackham?" "While you two have been arguing, I've been thinking and I have a solution. It is simple really. We rescue him."

"Rescue him! Just how do you propose to do that?" Jerome asked, shocked at such a suggestion.

"You're a psychiatrist, so you can get in there and tell him what we are going to do."

"Oh, excellent Mr Rackham, but there is just one little thing you seem to have overlooked."

"Look, I know it's not the perfect plan yet, but ..."

"They know I am not one of their psychiatrists, which will make them very suspicious. Apart from that, they know me, and they would like to have my head on a platter. So, do you have any more bright ideas, Mr Rackham?"

Joab undeterred, said, "If you don't care about Derek I will spring him myself."

The Moroccan laughed scornfully, "And just how do you hope to get past their security, liberate Derek, and get him out of the hospital, without being caught? I know you mean well but it's just not possible."

“You may laugh Jerome, but I will think of something, because I cannot stand by and let them kill him, without at least attempting to do something to help!”

“Noble sentiments indeed, Mr Rackham. However, if you go in there half-cocked, it will not only be Derek who will pay for your blunder. It will be Rosella and I and of course, you. Are you prepared to risk all our lives as well?”

“Do you think, if they caught me I would tell them anything about you two?”

Jerome smiled, “With absolute certainty, Mr Rackham. If they were able to turn Derek, you would be no trouble to them at all.”

Count Ludvig Von Hollenbeck hated loose ends, especially if those loose ends were also loose cannons. Loose cannons, as every seaman knew, tended to crash around the yawing decks of men-of-war, causing all kinds of unpredictable damage. Moreover, damage control was the Count's forte. So whenever the Jesuarians had a problem with exposure, they called upon his services. This incident was one of those times, which was why he was in a taxi, travelling through Toledo's narrow streets to the Iglesia de San Idelfonso. This particular religious building, which is close to the Palacio de Lorenzana, is also known as the "Jesuarians' church", the venue where the private meeting was to take place.

Father Juan Gonzales had been the parish priest of the Iglesia de San Idelfonso for 22 years, and this was the first time the Holy father's envoy had visited the Jesuarian church. It was with a mixture of excitement and trepidation that the cleric awaited the Count's arrival. The missive from Rome hadn't furnished him with any details concerning the purpose of the visit, but he had a good idea the murder that had taken place in the disused chapel had something to do with it. Father Gonzales had not known the deceased, other than at the one brief meeting that took place between them. The man said he had come from the Jesuarian general's office and he had a signed letter to prove it. All the Spanish priest had to do was organise a room and board for the man. When he had not turned up for dinner, Juan Gonzales just assumed he had gone back to Rome. It was not until the television news item that he realised someone had killed the man. Now it looked as though Rome was investigating the incident.

The Von Hollenbeck's had served the Black Pope for three generations. Ludwig's father, Hans had dropped Von from the family name, seeing it as being too pretentious, but his son had reinstated it. Just as Hans had served under Pedro Arross, Ludvig now worked for the current Jesuarian General, Peter-Hans Krunare. Upon his arrival at the church, Count Von Hollenbeck got shown through to Father Gonzales' study. He introduced his interpreter, who translated, “Father as you do not speak German and I am not conversant in Spanish this man will translate for us.”

“Very well Von Hollenbeck.”

An avid student of early church history, Ludvig asked about the church. “When was this church built, Father?”

Expecting to get straight to the point of the meeting, Juan, who, taken by surprise by the German's interest, answered, “Building commenced in 1628. It was built by the Jesuarians as 'San Juan Bautista' because it used to be the parish church of St. John the Baptist.”

“Fascinating, Father. I am a great fan of the Baroque style and your beautiful city, which, from what I have observed so far, has many building from that era. Unfortunately, I don't have lots of time for site seeing as I am here on the General's business.”

“So I was lead to believe.”

The German came to the point. "So, Father, how does a man who is left in your care end up murdered?"

Becoming defensive, Father Gonzales answered, "I wasn't his keeper, Von Hollenbeck. I was told to find him somewhere to stay; that was all."

"What do you know about the old monk who confessed to killing him?"

The priest shrugged, "Very little, except the police report says it was self-defence."

The Count laughed derisively. "Yes, so we have heard, father. Now, do you seriously think it likely that an aged disabled monk would be able to overcome an armed man, who is fitter and younger than himself?"

The priest shrugged again. "I do not know the circumstances. But I am disturbed to learn that the dead man kept a gun in the home I organised for him."

Ignoring the priest's concern, Hollenbeck asked, "Do you think others could have been involved and the old monk is covering up for them?"

"I have wondered about that Senor, but why would the monk cover up for any accomplices and take the blame himself?"

"You will have to find that out, Father."

The priest's raised eyebrows showed his look of astonishment. "Me, Von Hollenbeck!"

"You are a priest. As his spiritual advisor, you will be allowed to talk with him in private."

"And if he will not see me?"

Hollenbeck's eyes narrowed. "Father, I am not asking you to do this, I am telling you to do so." Then, adding weight to his order, the German said, "Remember your oath of allegiance to the Society of Jesu, Juan Gonzales."

Realising he had no choice in the matter, Juan conceded, "Very well Don Hollenbeck. I will see what I can do."

"There is one other thing I want you to do Father. The monk is a loose end and a potentially dangerous one. When you have learned what you need to know, make sure that he can tell no one else."

Chapter 25

Toledo, modern day

The Toledo General Hospital, Joab discovered, was a huge building with a maze of rooms and corridors. Ordinarily, this would not have posed a problem for the journalist, but as the directions board listed everything in Spanish, a language with which he was not very conversant, he was at a loss. As he scrutinised the directory for a hint of anything that suggested a psyche ward, he heard a voice behind him speaking English. "You look lost."

Turning around, he came face to face with a pretty young nurse. He said, "It's the psychiatry ward that's lost. Why don't they put English subtitles or something?" Then, thinking she may be able to help, he asked, "Do you work here?"

Flashing a big smile, she answered, "No, I just dress up as a nurse to turn the blokes on."

“Joab laughed, “I guess it was a stupid question. I’m looking for the psychiatry unit.”

The beautiful nurse quipped, “People are usually taken there in straight- jackets. They don’t usually come in on their accord.”

“amusing miss,” Joab laughed. “This is serious, though. A friend of mine is being held here against his will.”

The nurse gave an amused smile. “Just about everybody in the psyche ward is there against their will, including some of us nurses.”

“Yes, I guess so. Only this guy is not here for his health!”

Seeing he was serious, she asked, “What’s the patient’s name?”

Wondering if he had gone too far he hesitated, and then he said, “Philips, Derek Philips.”

She wrote it down. “How can I contact you if I find out anything?”

Joab jotted down his mobile phone number. “I appreciate your help miss.”

She smiled, “Camilla please.”

“Okay Camilla, I’m Joab”

She looked at her watch. “I’ll see what I can do. I have to go now. I have got lots of male patients to turn on.”

Joab watched her as she hurried off. She was so funny, sweet and helpful, the brightest soul he had spent time with in quite a while. He wondered if he would see her again.

Joab went to the cafeteria and ordered coffee, while he sat down and mulled things over. He needed to know the layout of the hospital. Not only did Joab need a map but also the directions had to be in English. Only then, he would be able to move about the hospital without security guards challenging him. After that, assuming he found Derek; he had to get him out of the hospital without being caught. Seeing the many difficulties involved, Joab began to understand why Jerome was against the mission impossible. The journalist was about to abandon his quest when an idea began to form in his mind. He would need help on the inside, but where would he find it? Then he thought about Camilla. Perhaps the English-speaking nurse could help him. He had instantly taken to her and, at the very least, it would give him a legitimate excuse to see her again.

After his coffee, Joab located hospital reception and asked if anyone there spoke English. A receptionist directed the Englishman to a middle-aged Spanish woman.

“How can I help you Señor?’ she asked.

“I was speaking to a nurse earlier. I want to know when she comes off duty.”

“What is her name?”

“I only have a first name – Camilla.”

The Spanish receptionist opens a book, saying, ”Excuse me, Señor, I will look for you.”

“Grassi Senora,” Joab answered as he waited for the woman to check the duty roster.

Upon returning to the desk, she asked, “Is her name Camilla Bradford?”

Joab shrugged, “I only know her first name. How many Camilla’s are on duty?”

The receptionist answered, “Only one, as far as the list tells us.”

“Then I guess that must be her. So what time does she get off?”

“8 o’clock, Señor.”

“Checking his watch Joab noted that he had five hours to wait. “Right, I’ll be here at 8 o’clock then.”

“Si Señor. Would you like to leave a message for her?”

“That would be great. Just say it’s the guy who needs subtitles.”

With a few hours to spare Joab decided to do some sightseeing, in Toledo, a city with a history of Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths. With so much to see of the three religious cultures in the city, Joab chose the Catedral Del Toledo. He was not sure what drew him there. He was not a Roman Catholic, so he was not attracted to it because of his faith. The temple, built on top of a Muslim mosque, had, like most massive religious edifices, a feeling of intense commitment and dedication to it. Joab thought of the vast resources and the extraordinary cooperation and teamwork that go into erecting such a large structure. Centuries old, it showed an endurance reflecting the dedication of those who built it. Such faith and devotion astounded the journalist. Although now it looked as if this blind faith was misplaced. The Shepherd had gone wrong, without the flock noticing. Joab wondered what would happen if all the faithful sheeple, after a lifetime of dedication realised they'd been duped by the Roman Catholic Church? He concluded, probably nothing because they would never believe it, no matter how much hard evidence got placed before them. To think their Church had conned them would mean that they had wasted their lives for nothing and most of the sheeple could not handle such a realisation. If their faith is a driving force in their lives, the sheeple could never admit it was a false hope because to do so meant they would be lost, with no spiritual direction in life. It was a case of it is better the devil you know, or more appropriately – the Church you know. Therefore, if even the exposure of Church corruption at the highest level would not sway the sheeple from their seeing eye God in Rome, Joab wondered why he was risking life and limb to publish the Monita Secreta and Derek’s story. He grinned. He was he was a journalist, and somebody had to tell the story.

Joab saw Camilla waiting at the reception desk of the hospital, as soon as he entered. He noticed her wonderfully warm smile, even after caring for patients for many hours. Walking up to her, he said, grinning, “Thanks for waiting.”

”I’m wasn’t waiting for you Mr I-need-subtitles. It just that neither George Clooney nor Brad Pitt has turned up yet. So I guess you’ll have to do.”

“Thanks for the compliment,” Joab laughed. However, you are much better off with me. After all, I’m real, whereas they are just reels.”

Camilla laughed at his wit. This guy could be fun, she thought as they left the hospital together.

Joab hadn’t thought about what they would do that evening. Once they were outside the hospital, he was at a loss.

Seeing the puzzled frown he wore, she asked, “What’s the problem real guy?”

“How do you know I have a problem?” Joab asked, wondering what signals she had picked up from him.

“I don’t need subtitles to know you’re in confusion mode,” she answered.

“It is just that I don’t know this town, so I don’t know where to take you, or what to do.”

“Well Mr real guy, I’m starving.”

“So where would you like to eat?”

“Back at my place.”

Joab, surprised, said, “What, not in a restaurant, where you get waited on hand and foot.”

“Not when I can eat two-day old paella back at my place.”

“It sounds very tempting Camilla. It’s just that I wanted to treat you to something as a way of saying thank you.”

Camilla smiled wearily, “It’s been a busy day. I just want to get home.”

“Well, at least I can offer you a lift. That is if you don’t have a car, of course.”

“I usually walk, to keep my stunning figure in trim,” Camilla laughed. “Although, tonight I will take you up on your kind offer.”

“I live just over there on the left,” Camilla explained, as they drove along Hernan Cortez St.

“Are all these streets named after conquistadors?” Joab asked

“What do you think I am, Mr Subtitles - the brain of Spain?”

Joab laughed, “I was just wondering what ‘dor’ means.”

“It’s the means by which we go through walls,” Camilla punned. Then she asked playfully, “Any more questions before you let me go in?”

“It’s just the Spanish language is full of them.”

“Full of what – words?” Camilla laughed.

“Dors,” Joab answered.”

Turning round to face him, Camilla playfully poked Joab in the ribs, “Just what is it with you and doors, Mr?”

“Matadors, Picadors, Toreadors, Conquistadors.”

“Come on Mr Weird. Let’s go inside before I starve to death.”

Upon entering the small living area, which, Joab observed, was mostly taken up by an over-sized teddy bear, Camilla switched on a standard lamp.

She said, “Make yourself comfortable while I freshen up a little.” With that, she left Joab alone, to amuse himself.

As he waited for Camilla, Joab noticed her bookshelf in the corner. Being a writer, he was curious about what other people read. Book collections said a great deal about their owners. Camilla’s private library consisted mainly of medical books, mostly about mental health, entertaining novels by female authors and New Age books about alternative healing methods.

Joab was thumbing through a coffee table book, about Spain, when Camilla re-emerged, dressed in track pants and a sloppy joe.

Noticing Joab’s appraisal of her, she said, “I had to find out if it was me or the nurse’s uniform that turned you on.” Playfully pouting, she added, “So, now I supposed you are going to leave.”

“Not before I have sampled the two-day old Paella you promised,” Joab laughed.

“Damn and curses and there were me thinking I could turn you off and have it all for myself,” she replied, eliciting more mirth from her guest.

As they sampled some of her home-made Sangria, Camilla pointed out, “I don’t usually bring strange men home, but you looked more like a lost puppy.”

“I assure you miss my intentions are honourable, and I promise not to pee on the carpet.”

Camilla responded, “They had better be mister, or Mr Ted, over there, will tear you limb from limb with his 'bear' hands.”

“He looks pretty harmless to me.”

“Oh yeah, well you can’t see the loaded Uzi he’s packing inside those baggy pants. Now, if you behave yourself I will warm up yesterday’s dinner.”

“I thought you said it was two days old.”

“Can’t put anything past you, can I?” she laughed. “But I did have some of it yesterday.”

Joab felt very relaxed, lounging with Camilla in her untidy but comfortable apartment. Having finished off the leftover Paella and Sangria punch, their appetites were sated. After dinner, as they sat watching American soapies on TV, in Spanish with English subtitles, Joab felt very content. Camilla was good company, and he felt comfortable sitting with her. He said, “You’re good fun to be with Camilla. I haven’t felt so relaxed in a long time.”

“Well, you’ve had your food, drink and subtitles, so you ought to be contented.”

“I certainly am. So how did you, an English nurse, end up in Spain?”

“I loved the flamenco dancers when I was a kid and Antonio Banderas when I got a bit bigger.”

“Did your name have anything to do with it?”

“Bradford isn't Spanish.”

“I mean Camilla.”

“I don’t know. Maybe my mum liked Flamenco dancers and bull fighters too.”

“So, when did you decide to become a mental nurse.”

“Mental health nurse, if you don’t mind. On second thoughts, you could be right. You have to be mad to work there.”

Joab was silent for a while. All evening he had been enjoying himself so much that he put off dealing with his real reason for being with Camilla. Forcing himself, he brought up the subject, “Camilla, I have a confession to make.”

Her eyes widened. “Oh, you’d better see a priest then.”

Joab became serious “This isn’t a joke, Camilla.”

Feigning surprise by flopping back on the small lounge, with her hand sweeping across her eyes, Camilla responded, “I knew it was too good to be true. I know what it is. You married with two wives ten kids and five dogs to support.”

“No, it’s not that.”

“Oh, my god! It is even worse! You have a terminal disease, and you need a nurse to help you through your final weeks on earth.”

“No Camilla. It’s that I have an alternative motive for being here with you.”

“Oh really! Well mister good intentions don’t say I didn’t warn you about Mr Ted”

“It’s nothing like that,” Joab, grinned. “I need your help as a mental health nurse to get me to the hospital to see one of your patients.”

Camilla stared at him for a moment, and then she asked, “How exactly am I supposed to do that? Hide you under my dress?”

“No, of course not. What I need is a plan of the hospital with directions in English.”

She thought about it, and then she said, “That should not be too difficult. But I did check, and there is no Mr Philips listed.”

“He told me that is where they took him, so he must be there.”

“Unless of course, he’s been put in the top security section. I can’t go in there.”

“That must be it then. Look, Camilla, are maintenance people allowed in there.”

“If maintenance is required, then yes.”

“Then I need a maintenance man’s uniform and ID.”

Camilla, becoming worried, asked, “What is all this about?”

Joab didn’t want to drag Camilla into it. She had a right to know if she was going to help him. He decided to give her a sanitised version of events. “It’s a long story, and it is my reason for being in Spain. I am an investigative journalist for a magazine called ‘High Light’. Derek Philips came to me with a story. However, he mysteriously disappeared before he could tell me everything. Then I find out that he is in Spain, with somebody holding him against his will at your hospital.”

Camilla corrected him. “It’s not my hospital. I only work there. So what was this story about, and what the hell is your real name?”

“Joab Rackham and the story is about exposing corruption in the Catholic Church.”

“What’s new about that?” Camilla chuckled.

“The thing is, he told me he is in danger so I have to get him out of the hospital.”

Camilla looked at him, quizzically. You are a dark horse, Joab. I had you figured for an accountant or an auditor, but never a reporter.”

“Investigative journalist, if you don’t mind.

“Touché.”

“Bless you!”

Camilla laughed. Then she became sombre. ”This is a surprise turn out for the evening Joab. You’ll have to give me time to think about this.”

“Yes. Of course,” Then, glancing at his watch, Joab said, “ It’s late so I’d best be getting back.”

“Back to where?”

“Consuegra.”

She thought about it for a moment. It was good to share an evening with a pleasant person for a change. Then she thought it would be nice for them to have breakfast together. She said, "You seem like a nice fellah, so you can stay the night if you like."

"That's great Camilla, I wasn't looking forward to driving back tonight." He then stepped towards her and put his arms around her. She responded likewise and they stood wrapped in a close embrace. She felt good to Joab. It had been a while since he had felt the warmth of a soft female body against him. "You're very nice too," he crooned in her ear. "Thanks for a beautiful, crazy evening."

"You're welcome young man." She said. Then, gently pulling away, she added, "You can sleep on the sofa. Mr Ted is there for you to cuddle up to if you get lonely."

Joab responded, grinning, "I don't fancy sleeping beside a bear with a loaded machine gun."

"Noting the disappointment in his voice, Camilla explained, "You're sweet Joab, but I don't know if you are that nice. Sleep tight and don't let the sofa bugs bite." She then yawned and went to her room. She turned around at the doorway, saying, "and don't go wandering in the night Joab. Mr Ted gets very nervous."

Chapter 26

Getafe, modern day

Father Juan Gonzales decided to combine his prison visit with the regular journey he made to Madrid, to pick up church supplies. He never looked forward to the trip home. The priest thought it was an uninspiring trip from Madrid to Toledo. After around 25 minutes south on the N401 he arrived at Getafe, which, due to its proximity to Madrid, underwent a great industrial revolution at the beginning of the 20th century, resulting in the city's conversion from agricultural city to industrial commuter town. The city suburb also boasted an airbase, as well as a police barracks and significant prison. Gustav Pricic was on remand, in this prison.

The prisoner didn't want to see anybody, so Juan's first attempt at getting Gustav to see him failed dismally. Eventually, though, with a little coercion, the prisoner relented and allowed the visit. As a priest, Father Gonzales, in the role of confessor, had little trouble seeing the prisoner alone.

His first impression of Gustav Pricic was that of a frail old man with a morose expression. Approaching the old friar, he announced, "I am Father Gonzales. I have come on behalf of the Church to see you."

"Why have you come here to see this old broken-down bag of bones, Father?"

"Because the Church wishes to know what happened to you."

"Do you not read the news father? I have been a minor celebrity of late."

"The man you confess to having killed was sent by the Church. He even stayed at my friend's house. So why did you strangle him?"

Fixing the cleric in his rheumy gaze, Gustav said, "You know nothing about me, do you Father?"

"Only what I have read in the papers."

The monk laughed weakly and coughed, "It was for my redemption. Can you understand that?"

“Why did you feel the need to redeem yourself?”

“Father, just imagine dedicating your life completely to something you believed in entirely, only to find out, much too late, that it was wrong.”

“Such a proposition would be unbearable.”

Gustav laughed, emitting a rattle in his chest. “Oh, it's bearable. It has to be so, you see, if we wish to go on living. It was not that I wanted to go on existing in my eternal hell. However, as a Catholic, suicide was out of the question for me. My life was a black hole Father, but then it has always been so, for as long as I can remember.”

“So how did killing that man redeem you?”

“Because, the reason for doing so this time was different.”

“Different to what?” Juan asked, fed up with the riddles.

The old monk took a breath and coughed, “Different to all those times before.”

A look of perplexity masked Father Gonzales face. “Are you saying you have killed before?”

“Many times Father, but only in the service of the Holy Father.”

The priest, shocked, sputtered, “Are you saying you have killed people for the Pontiff?”

“No, not His Holiness! I mean the Jesuarian General, the Black Pope! Therefore, you see, Father, I didn't strangle that man for some misguided idealist principle. I did it to help somebody.” He smiled crookedly, “I managed to fill the void of my miserable life with something other than blackness. For a short while anyhow. Then I knew that if the cards dealt to me had been different if my life had taken a different path... But what is the point of thinking such things, father? We can't change what has happened.”

“The Church needs to know who you helped.”

Gustav turned on the priest. “And you expect me to tell you. My dear Father have you not listened to what I have been saying. The people who sent you here to question me are the false ones. It has taken me many years to realise that.”

“What do you mean by ‘false ones’?”

“Hopefully their falsehood will soon be revealed. Then you will know, even though you won't believe it.”

Juan became sterner. “Are you refusing to tell me who this person is that you helped.”

Looking the priest directly in the eyes, Gustav uttered, “Yes.”

“After a slight pause, Father Gonzales said, “Friar Pricic we have a problem then. From what little you have told me it is evident that you are a loose end, a liability to the Church. We cannot allow your case to go to court.”

The old monk laughed hoarsely, “This old bag of bones is not going to be around much longer. I don't think your Church has much to worry about from me.”

“Never-the-less we have to make sure,” Juan stated, passing Gustav a small plastic container, inside of which was a capsule. He added, “It is relatively painless. Just take it in water.”

“You must force it down my throat, father, for I will not swallow it willingly.”

“Please don't make this any more awkward than it has to be.”

The old friar fixed the priest in his fading gaze. “Once you kill for them there is no turning back.”

The priest was silent. He just put the container in the monk’s hand.

The monk took it. He stared at the capsule for a moment. “You do understand, don't you?”

Feeling uncomfortable, the priest, adjusting his dog collar, answered, “It is for the best.” He picked up a glass of water, forced open Gustav's mouth and washed the pill down with water.

The old friar took Juan's hand, gasping, “Thank you father, your selfless act has brought me bittersweet relief.”

Joab awoke in strange surroundings with ringing in his ears. Once his befuddled brain recognised the sound as his mobile ring tone, he reached for his phone. “Hello.”

“Where the hell are you Mr Rackham?” Jerome asked.

“I am at a friend’s place, in Toledo.”

“Friends place! You do not have any friends in Toledo! Oh, never mind, where’s my car?”

“With me, of course.”

“Come and pick us up right away.”

“I can’t do that Jerome. I have to go back to the hospital.”

“What do you think you will achieve on your own? Apart from getting caught, that is. Then you'll just make things even worse.”

“Does that mean you are going to help me, Jerome?”

“We have come up with the semblance of an idea. Now get over here right now!”

Camilla, woken up by the noise, stumbled into her living room, still half-asleep. Joab’s heart skipped a beat. Seeing her standing there with tousled wavy shoulder length hair and wrapped in a hastily tied terry cloth robe, she looked even more beautiful to him in the early morning sunlight that danced in rays through the kitchen window.

“What’s going on,” she asked. Then, with a grin she added, “What, are you still here?”

“I have to go back to Consuegra, to pick up my friends.”

“Well, a man’s got to do what a man’s got to do,” she drawled, like Calamity Jane.

Joab responded, “Yes I guess so.” He grinned, “Look’s like I’ll never find out what left-over food you are serving up for breakfast.”

She cupped her face with her hands in mock surprise. “You can’t wait to run out on me like this. I knew I should have kept the nurse’s uniform on.”

“I hate running out on you Camilla. You’ve been like an island of sanity in my ocean of madness.”

“Come here you lost puppy,” she said, spreading her arms to give him a hug. As they held each other close Camilla laughed, “I’ve never been accused of bringing out sanity in people before.”

They held each other a little longer than friends would normally hug each other. Then their lips brushed each other, and Joab pulled her even closer. He closed his eyes, savouring the moment, shutting out any negative thoughts about the stressful day that lay ahead.

“Mmm, that was better than breakfast,” Joab whispered at length.

”Are you coming to the hospital later on?”

“Yes, I am. Have you given any thought to what we talked about last night?”

“Do you mean about Mr Ted and his Uzi?”

Poking her playfully in the ribs, he laughed, “No you nut! I mean about you helping me get into the hospital psyche ward.”

“There’s a maintenance guy called Jose who owes me a favour. I will go to the hospital this morning and speak to him.”

Joab, relieved, smiled. “That would be great, Camilla. How about I catch up with you at the hospital cafeteria around 10 am?”

“How about that?” Camilla giggled.

It was around 8 am when Joab arrived at Rosella’s home. She wore a deep, frown as she opened her door, to let him in. “Where have you been Senor Joab? We have been worried about you,”

“I’ve been working on a plan to rescue Derek.”

“I can’t wait to hear what you have cooked up Mr Rackham,” the doctor said sarcastically.

“It’s simple. I disguise myself as a maintenance worker, get into the security ward where they are holding Derek and get him out of the building.”

Jerome burst out laughing, “Oh my that is priceless, Mr Rackham. Now let me see how it goes. You pose as a Spanish hospital worker who cannot speak Spanish and doesn’t look like his ID picture. You wander around a building you don’t know and which has all the directions written in Spanish, which you can’t read. Now, for argument’s sake let us say you did manage to get to Derek. You then assist the escape of a man, drugged, up to the eyeballs, and will not know which universe he’s in, let alone what day it is. Yes, I can see how that could work.”

Rosella. Trying not to giggle, straightened her face. “At least Senor Joab try to come up with a plan.”

Joab responded, “Okay Jerome, it may not be perfect. I admit it has a few flaws, but at least I’m not sitting here and doing nothing. Now, I have to be back at the hospital at 10 am, so we haven’t much time to lose!”

“You aren’t seriously thinking of carrying out your plan, are you Mr Rackham?”

“Have you got a better one?”

“That’s what we wanted to talk to you about.”

Chapter 27

Vatican City, 1984

Among the College of Bishops, the Catholic Church has a long-standing tradition of raising individual bishops and archbishops to the College of Cardinals. Cardinals who, traditionally seen as the 'Princes of the Church' owing to their special devotion and holiness, are called to assist the

Holy Father in the governance of the Church. Most Cardinals, who are either Archbishops of the largest dioceses in their countries or regions, or the heads of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia (the Pope's Ministers of State), elect one among their ranks as the Dean of Cardinals. Since the premature death of Angelo Solano, that role fell to Julian Cardinal Pawlowski.

Julian was very surprised and disturbed when he got the call. At first, he did not think himself worthy of stepping into Angelo's shoes, after all, he was, in a way, responsible for his friend's death. No matter how much he tried, Julian could not shake off the dark mantle of guilt. He knew nothing of the events that took place in Poland between the black monk and Father Augustyn and he was still waiting for the assassin to make good his threat. However, nearly a year had passed by, and Julian was not only still alive and well, but he had also gotten elevated to the role of Dean of Cardinals.

As Dean of the 'Sacred College of Cardinals', Julian held the rank of Cardinal Bishop, as well as being President of the college. For centuries it had been customary for the longest-serving of the six Cardinal Bishops to become the Dean, and this was in fact required by canon law from 1917 until Pope Paul VI empowered the six to elect, in 1965, a new Dean, who was not the longest serving member, from among their number. Owing to this change in canon law, Julian's peers were able to vote Cardinal Pawlowski into office, as the most suitable candidate for the job.

Dean of Cardinals is primarily a titular role in the Church. As such, Julian had no power of governance over the other cardinals. Instead, he functioned as 'primus inter pares' (the first among equals). Julian took his new honorary role very seriously. He came to dwell less and less on the angel of death looming over him, and he was determined to use his new lease on life as a means to strengthen his faith in the Holy Mother Church. To this end, Julian put aside all ideas of conspiracy. Sure, there were bad apples in the Vatican state, he justified, just as there are in any country around the world, but it was not his job to expose them. His job was to support the Holy Father, his pontiff who, in his eyes, was beyond reproach. Prying into the Jesuarian General's affairs had bought Julian nothing but heartache and grief. He wanted nothing more to do with it. He just wanted to spread the good word and support the Holy See.

By concentrating only on the positive aspects of the Church, Julian was able to cast aside any lingering doubts about hidden agendas within the Vatican. That was until the day he met John Cardinal Mulligan. Julian was in quiet contemplation in the Vatican gardens when the Irish cardinal interrupted him. At first, he did not register the presence of the cleric who addressed him.

Seeing his Mentor sitting in silent meditation, John Mulligan was loath to disturb him, but this was important, and he had to voice the issue in private. "Dean I have something I need to discuss with you."

Apprising the younger man, Julian responded, "Really, and what would that be?"

"It's difficult for me to say this. I didn't know who to talk to, so I hope you don't mind this intrusion,"

Julian smiled, "What is it that troubles you, my son?"

"At first, I did not pay it much heed. But then I became intrigued and carried out some research."

Becoming a little annoyed, the senior cleric said, "Will you please get to the point, cardinal."

John Cardinal Mulligan explained, "It's the cross that's troubling me."

"The cross! What cross?" Julian asked, baffled and frustrated by the mysterious nature of the conversation.

The younger man explained, "The cross that the Holy Father holds up during mass."

“What about it?”

“It’s bent, distorted. As I said, at first I did not think much about it. I figured the twisted cross was a modern version of the Crucifix, a part of the modernisation of the Church since Vatican 2, but as Satanists used it in early times as a symbol of the Antichrist, I am not so sure.”

Julian, becoming concerned, said, “I don't know where this is leading, so please explain what you mean.”

“Like I said I did some research and, much to my horror and surprise, the symbol that the Holy Father holds up to the adoring masses is an Antichrist emblem from the 5th century.”

Julian felt a chill rush down his spine. ‘Not again!’ his mind screamed, as the Irishman fixed him with his gaze. “I don’t like where this conversation is heading. John, I suggest, for your sake, that you put any such thoughts out of your mind. It is not for us to judge what the Holy Father does or does not do. To harbour, such doubts concerning the Holy Father’s faith will only serve to torture your mind and challenge your faith. Believe me, John, for I know this to be true.”

Looking straight at the Dean of Cardinals, John replied, “Don’t you think I have wrestled with this in my mind and prayed that I am mistaken? The proof is there, Dean! So how can I ignore it?”

“I think you are reading much more into it than is there. I do not wish to hear any more about this, John. Dwelling on it will only bring harm to you, so forget it.”

John Mulligan felt let down. He had divulged his deepest feelings to the Dean of Cardinals, and his concerns had fallen on deaf ears. Feeling that it was a waste of time, John Cardinal Mulligan left Julian to his contemplation in the garden.

Although Cardinal Pawlowski was unaware of it at the time, his conversation with John Mulligan was to have a profound impact on his psyche and his life. Unbeknown to the Dean, John's concern had sown a seed in his mind. If Julian had not provided nutrient, it would have withered and dried up, left in the dark recesses of his subconscious. However, with each recollection of the conversation it grew and grew until Julian found himself intrigued by the ludicrous idea that the Pope displayed satanic symbols. Then, determined to avoid such madness, he attempted to discard such dangerous thoughts. They had brought him nothing but grief. Two of his best friends had died because of his meddling, or at least because he involved them in his amateur detective work. He determined it would never happen again. However, trying not to have doubts had, for him, the same effect as having them, and the seed continued to grow, like a synaptic tumour, becoming enlarged and taking over his thinking processes.

Julian normally loved to hear the Pontiff speak at mass, but this time he was troubled. As he sat with his brother cardinals watching the Pope, as he celebrated the Easter Vigil mass in front of thousands, in St. Peter's Basilica, he became very uneasy. The pontiff blessed a large white candle at the start of the three-hour service. He then lit it and carried it, in the dark, down the main aisle of the basilica. Slowly, worshippers around him lit candles, the famous church became illuminated by the increasing luminosity, as more and more worshippers lit their candles. Then he held up the staff, topped by the crucifix. It was the first time Julian had concentrated on the symbol atop the metal staff. To his horror and surprise, it was as John Mulligan had stated. Instead of the robust figure of Jesus hanging on the solid cross, a distorted, emaciated form of a defeated Christ figure hung laggard upon a twisted cross. What could it mean? Julian asked himself as he followed the Easter mass.

The Pope said in his homily, "Love is a stronger force than death or evil and that the resurrection of Christ, celebrated at Easter, has given hope to the human race over the years, even in hard times."

The Pontiff raised his voice for the congregation of thousands to hear. "In the resurrection of Jesus, love has been shown to be stronger than death, stronger than evil."

Julian was confused and nauseous. How could the Holy Father speak such pure and wholesome sentiments while adoringly holding the symbol of the Antichrist up to the masses? It just did not make any sense, unless of course, dark forces were subtly manipulating the Pope from behind his holy throne. However, that being the case, who were the manipulators in question?" Julian became very confused and uncomfortable. He felt physically sick. The Dean was feeling dizzy and just had to leave the service. Squeezing his way past other cardinals, he staggered up the aisle towards the main doors of the church. Once Julian was outside in the open air, despite taking deep breaths, nausea persisted. He staggered around the side of the church, out of sight of the multitude of tourists celebrating Easter in the square, and vomited. 'What have they done with my Jesus?' his brain screamed as he doubled over in pain.

Chapter 28

Toledo, modern day

"What do you mean; you've changed your plans?" Camilla asked sternly. "After all, I've been through for you this morning, cajoling Jose and organising your disguise, you have the cheek to tell me it was for nothing!"

Joab, contrite, found it difficult to face her. "I'm sorry Camilla. It's just that we've upgraded from a plan that won't work to one that just might," he explained, as they drank coffee in the hospital cafeteria.

She looked at him darkly. "It's all right for you. You didn't have to put up with Jose, the randy Spanish cleaner, coming on to you."

"That's true. So where was your furry chaperone, the machine-gun toting teddy bear on steroids, when you needed him?"

Camilla couldn't resist laughing at the reporter's wit.

In the lightened atmosphere, Joab remarked, "That's much better. That's the smile of the crazy girl I adore."

"Watch it buster! I haven't forgiven you yet!"

'There's still hope then.'

"We'll see, but right now there is a lecherous cleaner waiting to lend you his uniform for the sum of 20 euros."

Joab protested, "But, don't need it now!"

"You tell him that!"

Joab grinned, "I don't think he'd understand me."

"He knows that you owe him." The nurse made to leave, saying, "Look, just give me the money, and I will deal with it."

Draining his coffee, Joab stood up. "I'll come with you."

"Why do you feel the need to do that? Don't you think I have learned to handle myself against horny hombres?"

“I just want to make up for stuffing you around.”

“It’ll take more than that, mister!”

Dr Jerome Zahir approached the hospital reception and asked where he could find Derek Philips.

“What is your name Senor?” the receptionist asked.

“Dr Zahir. Mr Philips is one of my patients.”

“Oh, doctor. I am sorry. I didn’t realise.”

“That’s okay. Now where can I find Mr Philips?”

“Ah, yes, “ she replied, consulting her patient's list. Having located him, she directed, “Go to the lifts. On the second floor, you will see a sign to the psychiatric ward. Ask there, and they will tell you where to find him.”

Jerome reached the psychiatric ward without incident. There was only one receptionist, and she was busy on the phone. As soon as she was free, Jerome said, “I’m Dr Zahir to see Derek Philips.”

The receptionist looked up. “Wait a moment doctor.”

He nodded and took one of the seats nearby. As soon as he sat down, an orderly approached him.

“Are you the guy looking for Derek Philips?”

“Yes, that is correct. Can you show me the way?”

With a suspicious mind, the orderly asked, “Why do you want to see him?”

Who was this minion to question him, Jerome wondered? “I am his doctor, not that it is any business of yours. Now show me where he is,” He demanded, going on the offensive.

The orderly standing his ground, said, “You’re not his usual doctor.”

“That’s right, but he has requested to see me. Now, get me somebody in authority.”

Unmoved, the hospital worker pressed, “Why has he asked to see you?”

Jerome, fed up with being prevented entry by the intrusive orderly, asked sternly, “Is it the policy of this hospital to give visiting doctors the third degree?”

Just then, alerted by the verbal altercation taking place in the reception area, a physician arrived on the scene. “What’s going on here, Perez?” he asked.

Before the orderly could respond, Jerome, pointing at him, stated forcefully, “This 'orderly' is preventing me from seeing one of my patients. Now, I demand to see him at once.”

“And you are?” Dr Morales asked.

“Dr Jerome Zahir. Now, take me to see Derek Philips.”

The doctor looked at Jerome quizzically. “Do you have something for him?”

“Yes, I have, as a matter of fact.”

Extending his hand, the doctor smiled, “Very well, give it to me, and I shall see that he gets it.”

Jerome flashed an even bigger smile. “I’m afraid it doesn't work like that.”

“What do you mean?”

“You get what I have once I have seen the patient, and not before.”

“That’s not going to happen, doctor.”

“Oh yes, it is,” Jerome argued, fronting up to the smaller man. Fixing his gaze, he said, “I will tell you exactly how it is going to work and if you want the book you will comply with my instructions to the smallest detail.”

Dr Gonzales countered, “If you want to see your patient again doctor you will give me that book right now!”

In the next instant, Dr Morales summoned Perez, as well as second orderly, who had just arrived on the scene. “Grab him and search him!” the doctor ordered.

“The two heavies, being used to restraining violent mental patients had no trouble overcoming the black physician. As they rifled through his pockets, he protested, “There is no need for all this macho nonsense Dr Morales. I don’t have the book on me.”

The doctor scowled at Jerome. “Where is it?”

“Call your gorillas off, and I will tell you.”

“Okay, let him go,” Dr Morales acquiesced. “Now where is the book?”

Free of the orderlies, Jerome adjusted his clothes. He then said, “I was about to tell you that before your knuckle draggers strongarmed me. My friend has the book. He is waiting for me in the car park. You will bring Mr Philips to the car park. Once he is safely in the car, then you will get the book.”

Dr Morales face darkened, “HOW DARE YOU GIVE ME AN ULTIMATUM, DOCTOR?” Then, achieving greater self-control, he continued, “Phone your friend and tell him to bring the book up here right now - otherwise, some unpleasant things will happen to you.”

This complication wasn't part of Jerome's plan. Facing up to the doctor, he responded, “I’ve had enough of this nonsense.” He turned to leave saying, “Forget it! You don’t get the book!”

“Oh yes I do doctor,” Morales grinned evilly. Turning to Perez, he ordered, “Grab him and hold him!”

This time Jerome was more prepared. Using all the force he could muster, he pushed Perez out of the way and made for the stairs. However, heavy, number two, was fitter and faster than Perez. He quickly caught up with Jerome, grabbed his collar, and yanked him backwards. Jerome swung his right fist at his assailant but missed his target. His attacker ducked and punched the Moroccan in the stomach. The sharp blow to his solar plexus had Jerome doubled up in pain. He slumped to the floor, helpless and winded. Perez then joined in, and the two orderlies dragged Jerome to his feet.

Dr Morales advanced toward him, with a syringe in his hand. “I think that is enough of this bravado nonsense, don’t you Dr Zahir?”

Eyeing the ominous looking needle, Jerome blanched. “What have you got in that syringe?” he asked, scared of the answer.

“It is just a little something to calm you down.”

Pushing the doctor’s arm away, Dr Zahir quickly responded, “There is no need for that, I’m feeling very relaxed.”

Doctor Morales backed off. “Very well, you will now get me the book.”

Jerome had to think fast. He said. "Once you get the book you don't need Derek anymore. Is that right?"

"That is correct, Dr Zahir."

"Then to speed things up, why not make the swap half way, say, at the reception downstairs."

Morales, knowing he had the upper hand, responded, "No Dr Zahir. Let's say the exchange takes place here."

Jerome, running out of options, knowing had to assess Derek's state of body and mind, said. "Okay, I agree, providing you bring Derek out here now."

Dr Morales countered, "You make the call, and I will have him brought out."

Knowing there was no easy way out of the situation in which he had landed himself and Joab; Jerome dialled the reporter's mobile.

Although Joab had no idea how long it would take Jerome to free Derek, He felt enough time had elapsed. He began to feel uneasy, wondering what might have gone wrong. Then his phone rang. He listened as Jerome talked.

"Mr Rackham, change of plan I'm afraid. They won't bring Derek down there. So bring up what they want, and they will release Derek to us. Things are a little tricky at present, so be quick about it."

Joab was puzzled. Jerome knew he didn't have the book with him. So what did he mean by bringing up what they want? However, even more, pressing was the directions to the psyche ward. He asked, "Okay, so how do I get there?"

"Take the lift to the second floor. You'll see the sign to the psychiatry ward."

Joab, at a loss how to take something he did not have, said, "There's just one more thing. It's about the item in question. How ..?"

"Just wrap it in something to protect it," Jerome interrupted, praying that Joab was smart enough to get his meaning.

"But ..!"

"Just do it!"

Jerome switched off his phone. Poker-faced, he said, "He's on his way."

Dr Morales' eyes narrowed. "There had better be no tricks doctor."

"I have kept my side of the deal, so just bring Derek here."

"Only once I have the merchandise."

Going for his phone again, Jerome snarled, "Then there will be no fucking deal!"

Morales, knowing that he would be severely dealt with if he didn't get the book, as ordered, turned to his main orderly, saying, "Perez, bring Mr Philips here now."

What did he mean by, wrap it up to protect it?" Joab wondered. How could he wrap up the rulebook if he didn't have it with him? For a start, there was no time to retrieve it. Apparently, Jerome had run into trouble. Joab knew he somehow had to make out he had the document, but the question was how? The only thing the journalist could find in the car, around the size of the book, was a Spanish map guide that he discovered in the glove compartment. The only thing at hand he could

wrap it with was an old plastic bag. It would have to do. Joab quickly wrapped the book in the bag and went to find Jerome.

Jerome was pleased to see that Derek could at least support his weight, without assistance. He smiled at the glazy-eyed friar. "Hello, Derek. How are you?" he asked as the dazed Jesuarian priest shambled towards him.

"Doctor Zahir, - I - didn't - expect to - see you - here."

"It's okay Derek, I have come to take you with me," Jerome explained briefly, wondering how he was going to achieve such a seemingly impossible feat.

"Where's - Joab?" Derek asked.

"He'll be here very soon," Jerome, answered.

"And he'd better have the book with him, Doctor," Morales interjected.

"Why else would he be coming up here?" Jerome retorted.

Just then, Joab arrived. Before the journalist even had a chance to take in the scenario in the small reception area, Jerome said, "We all want this exchange to go smoothly with no trouble, so, Joab and Derek, I want you both to do as I say."

Joab was as nonplussed as Derek about the strange directive. They both nodded in affirmative, both wondering what the hell was going on."

"Dr Morales extended his hand to Joab, "The book please."

Knowing what was in the bag, Joab hesitated.

"Don't mess me about!" Morales exploded verbally, thrusting his hand out to grab the half-proffered plastic bag.

Jerome knew the moment of reckoning was upon them. He yelled, "GET THEM NOW!"

For a split instance, everybody froze. Then, Jerome sprang at one of the orderlies, knocking the wind out of him as he took him to the floor. Perez, who instantly went to help his friend, did not see Joab swing the plastic bag with the hardcover map guide at his head. It caught the orderly on the right ear and knocked him sideways. Morales, in panic, grabbed the reception phone, to get reinforcements, but Derek who, although weakened by the pacifying drugs he had been forced to take, quickly realising this was a chance to escape, knocked the phone out of the doctor's hand. Then, pulling the shrink away from the desk, Derek hit him in the face, knocking him to the floor. The doctor lay there stunned, all the fight gone out of him.

Although the element of surprise had been on their side, Joab and Jerome soon lost their advantage. The orderlies, who were both fitter and stronger than Joab and Jerome, began to get the upper hand. Perez, suffering from a nasty headache and buzzing in his ears, still managed to drag Jerome off his friend and push him aside. He then planted a well-aimed kick in the Moroccan's ribs, elicited a cry of pain from him. As Perez kicked the doctor a second time, Joab grabbed the nearest weapon at hand, one of the wooden chairs, which he lifted up and brought it down with a sickening thud on Perez's head and shoulders. As Perez collapsed in a heap, the second orderly went for Joab, punching him in the jaw and knocking him backwards. As Joab went down, Jerome grabbed the Spaniard around the neck and hung on for grim life. Joab staggered to his feet and went to assist the Moroccan. He grabbed the plastic bag with the book in it, and hit the struggling orderly over the head, as hard as he could. The blow stunned the Spaniard enough to allow Jerome to loosen his grip. Then, with his hands clasped, he struck the orderly hard on the back of his neck. As the hired help collapsed, Jerome yelled, "FOLLOW ME NOW!"

Joab seized the moment. Following Jerome's lead, he headed for the lift, supporting Derek, who was having a difficult time keeping up with the pair.

Although perhaps only 30 seconds elapsed since the trio broke away from Derek's captors, it seemed much longer. As they waited for the summoned lift to arrive at their floor, Joab heard Dr Morales urging his injured orderlies into action. He knew if they were to escape, they would have to move fast. Indicating the stairwell, the reporter said, "It'll probably be quicker to take the stairs." Then, without for a response from Jerome, he herded Derek towards the staircase. Jerome followed, just as the orderlies reached the lift.

It was slow going, clambering down the stairs with Derek stumbling over his feet. Joab quickly made a decision. "Jerome, you go ahead and bring the car up to the entrance." Hearing the orderlies running down the stairs after them, Jerome agreed and moved on ahead, taking two steps at a time. Joab followed as quickly as he could, encouraging Derek each step of the way. He acted on the basis that if they could beat their pursuers to the central public area, Morales henchmen would not cause a scene. The footsteps became ominously closer and louder as Joab and Derek reached the bottom of the staircase. With their pursuers almost upon them, Joab's mind had to work at lightning speed. Seeing an empty hospital gurney against the wall, he had an idea. Grabbing hold of the wheelie bed, Joab spun it around, ramming it into the bottom stair, just as the forward motion of the orderlies caused them to run straight into it.

Having slowed down his pursuers, Joab ushered the pyjama-clad Derek through reception, much to the astonishment of witnesses. He urged the flagging Derek the final few meters to where Jerome was revving the car.

By the time, the Orderlies had disentangled themselves from the gurney, and set off in pursuit of the escapees; Joab was pushing Derek Philips into the back seat of Jerome's rental car. Joab then clambered into the front passenger seat. Jerome floored the accelerator, and the car roared off, with a screech of tires.

Having regained his breath, Jerome steadied his shaky hands on the steering wheel.

"You two were amazing back there," Derek, stated, full of admiration for them.

"I don't know how we got away with it, but we did," Jerome replied, elated.

"Joab, sporting a swollen jaw, said, "Fuck, that was a close one."

There was a moment silence – then they all burst out laughing.

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN THEY HAVE ESCAPED?" Dr Morales stormed.

The orderlies, bruised and battered, were in no mood to be harangued. Perez said, "They just fucking got away. We couldn't stop them! End of story!"

It was not the end of the story for the doctor. His failure to get the book meant dire consequences for him. Shaking his head in disbelief, he asked, "How did they, a middle aged doctor, a journalist and a half-drugged patient, manage to get away from you?"

The orderlies just shrugged their broad shoulders and went off to have their injuries seen to, leaving Morales to ponder his fate. It didn't look good. He would have to take matters into his hands before the German High Jesuarian found out that he had neither the patient nor the precious book.

Chapter 29

Consuegra / Toledo, modern day

It was late afternoon when the two men arrived in Consuegra. Juan Perez consulted the urban map as Miguel Paloma followed his directions. The car, which was adapted to transport disabled people, pulled up at the kerb. Juan opened the back door and withdrew a wheelchair, which he unfolded. He then pushed the wheelchair up to Rosella's front door. Miguel knocked.

Rosella wasn't expecting anyone to call. She hadn't heard anything from Jerome and Joab, but there had been no arrangements for them to return there. Rosella would not have been home herself had she been quicker at packing her belongings. Jerome had offered to help her pack, but she told him to go. Rosella was furious at having her comfortable life endangered and disrupted by him, and said she did not care if she never saw him again. That was in the heat of the moment, but she was still seething over how a loved one could use her in such an offhand way. She wasn't about to forgive him anytime soon.

She heard the knock again, louder and more persistent this time. She stepped out onto her balcony and looked over the timber railings to see who was below. There were two men in white coats, and they had a wheelchair with them. What could it all mean she wondered? Perhaps somebody had been hurt, and the medical aid workers needed directions. She chided herself for being afraid and went to the door.

As soon as the door opened a few inches, Juan Perez asked, "Are you Rosella Vercantes, Senorita?"

Eyeing the young orderly with some suspicion, she affirmed, "Yes. Why do you ask?"

Miguel quickly thrust open the door and grabbed Rosella before she could escape. "Where are your friends Senorita?" he asked, menacingly.

Rosella struggled, demanding, "Who are you people and what do you want?"

"We want to know where Dr Zahir and the journalist are and you are going to tell us," Juan stated, looming over her threateningly."

Rosella, shaking with fear and fury, showed her defiance. "I don't know where they are and I don't care!" she replied.

"Senorita, we don't have time to waste here. We are aware they are staying with you, so I will ask you nicely one more time, where are your friends?"

"And I will tell you politely, one more time, I don't know. The pair left here this morning, and I haven't heard anything from them since."

Perez, realising she could be telling the truth, changed his tact. He quickly manoeuvred the wheelchair behind Rosella and Miguel pushed her into it.

Taken by surprise, Rosella had the breath knocked out of her. Before she had time to recover, her wrists were strapped firmly to the armrests." Do you have Dr Zahir's contact number, Senorita?" Juan asked

Ignoring his question, she demanded, "Let me out of this chair at once. You cannot treat me like this!"

"The number Senorita, NOW!" Juan shouted, close to her face.

Rosella, scared and confused, answered, "I need my phone."

Miguel got the phone and held the receiver to her right ear. "Phone Dr Zahir and tell him to bring the item to the hospital or he will never see you again. Now, what is his number?"

Joab retrieved the package from his locker and rejoined Jerome at the car.

Derek, recovering from the effects of the drugs, asked, "Joab, is that what I think it is?"

"Yes Derek, and I need to take this to Geneva, as soon as possible."

Jerome frowned, asking, "Why don't you take a copy of it and leave us with the original?"

Joab replied, "My editor will have a tough time getting this story past our legal advisers. They will want to verify the original document."

Jerome protested, "I don't like it, Mr Rackham. We need that book to further our cause."

Derek interrupted. "Joab is the best chance we have of getting the truth out. Let him do what he has to do."

Jerome said, "Then I will go with you, Mr Rackham."

Joab countered, "No Jerome, you go and look after Rosella. Spend some time with her. Derek can come with me."

"Derek is in no fit state to travel, Mr Rackham. He is worn out. It is best if we leave him with Rosella and I will go with you to Geneva."

Joab, becoming annoyed, responded, "Rosella's home is not safe! You know that. Besides, she may not even be there now. No Jerome, you find out where she is, and we will be on our way."

Derek agreed with the journalist. "Look Jerome! They have more chance of catching up with us if we do not get moving now."

"The sooner we get out of Toledo the safer I will feel," Joab added.

Realising he was not going to get his way, Jerome said, "Okay, I will drive you to Madrid Airport," He then started the car.

As Jerome turned out of Toledo, towards the modern Spanish capital, the beautiful skyline of Spain's ancient capital began to disappear into the distance. As the journey progressed, Joab noticed many desguaces, (junk yards) along the way. 6 miles out of Toledo, they came to Castilla-La Mancha at Illescas. Derek and Joab needed a toilet break, so Jerome stopped a couple of miles out of town, at a roadside ceramicist and tourist shop called Galán, which, as always, was crowded with coaches. Dr Zahir stayed in the car while his passengers headed for the toilets.

As Jerome waited for Joab and Derek, his mobile phone rang. "Great to hear from you Rosy," Jerome responded joyfully, realising who was calling.

"Jerry, they have me, and they want the book."

A cold chill ran up the doctor's spine. "Rosy, are you all right? Have the bastards hurt you?"

There was silence on the line, and then a male voice spoke. "If you do not do as I tell you, Doctor, you will never see Rosella Vercantes again. Do you understand what I am saying?"

Jerome, horrified, uttered, "Please don't hurt her. She has nothing to do with this."

"DO YOU UNDERSTAND, DOCTOR?" Perez persisted.

"Yes, of course."

"Now bring the package straight away to Dr Morales, at the hospital and come alone. Any tricks and the Senorita is dead."

“I understand that. There is no need to hurt the lady.”

There was no answer, and the line went silent, leaving Jerome with his anxious thoughts. Damn! How was he going to get out of this mess? He couldn't let them get their hands on the book, but he couldn't let them hurt Rosella either.

Looking out of his window, he saw Derek and Mr Rackham returning to the car. As they got in, he said, “We have to go back.”

“Go back! Why?” Joab expounded.

“I just got a phone call from Rosella. Doctor Morales is holding her hostage. With his drugs, he'll turn her into a basket case, or worse if we don't give him the book.”

There was stunned silence. Derek was the first to speak. “After everything we have been through we cannot just give it to them now.”

Jerome responded, “I know that Derek, but what choice do we have? They have Rosella, my beautiful Rosella. I cannot stand by while ...”

“Jerome, we all took a vow - remember?”

“Derek, Rosella did not make that pledge, and she needs my help. So we go back.”

Joab said, “Let us not be too hasty, Jerome. We need to think this through. Once they have the book and considering what we know, do you think they will let any of us go free?”

“That's a chance I am willing to take, Mr Rackham.”

“No Jerome, I cannot allow it. We have come so far, given up so much!” Derek stated in defiance.

I am sorry Derek, but I love Rosella and cannot allow them to torture her.”

Joab was exasperated. “For God sake you two, let's report her kidnapping to the police!”

“No, they could ask a lot of awkward questions. Don't forget the man we killed, Mr Rackham.”

Derek's eye widened. “You killed somebody? Who did you kill?” Derek asked.

“There's no time to explain that now, Derek! We have to get to the hospital,” Jerome persisted, starting up the car.

“Wait!” Joab said, restraining Jerome from turning the wheel. “There may be a way out of this that satisfies all parties!”

“What are you on about, Mr Rackham?” Jerome asked, agitated.

“We need a copy of the book to give to Dr Morales, instead of the genuine article.”

“He would never buy that Mr Rackham.”

“Why not?” Derek asked excitedly. “He has never actually seen it. It could work, Jerome.”

“And just where do you propose to get a copy this late in the day?” the doctor asked.

“We'll have to wait until tomorrow,” Joab conceded.

“Wait until tomorrow, Mr Rackham! And what happens to Rosella in the meantime?”

“Phone this Dr Morales and tell him you can't get the book to him until tomorrow,” Derek suggested.

“It’s our best all round option,” Joab agreed.

Chapter 30

Washington DC, 1984

Pedro Arross looked out of the tiny Perspex window of the plane at the snaking Potomac 5,000 feet below. The Lear jet chartered by the Carlisle Group landed smoothly at Dulles Airport, where a dark stretch-limo awaited the arrival of the Black Pope. Although no stranger to Washington D C, the magnificent classic style architecture of the Capitol Building, as well as the building design of other seats of the American administration, always held him in awe. In the limo, waiting for the Black Pope to arrive, was the University’s chairman, Knight of Malta and a former Deputy Director of the Black Pope's Central Intelligence Agency, Frank C. Carlotti

The fact that the Jesuarians were in business with the powerful Carlisle group, who controlled America's Military Industrial Establishment known as "the Iron Triangle," didn't deter him in the least. Frank Carlotti welcomed the Black Pope, and they got down to business.

Pedro Arross began, “Before we get down to security issues I need to discuss a troublemaker in our ranks.”

Carlotti responded, “What sort of trouble maker, General Arross?”

“His name is John Cardinal Mulligan.” Pedro handed out a dossier to the chairman.

He took it and read:

John Mulligan, Educated at St. Peters National School, Phibsboro and later studied at the Jesuarian Fathers' second level school, Belvedere College. He trained for the priesthood at Holy Cross College, Clonliffe. He studied Arts at University College Dublin and graduated with a B A in 1946; he got an MA the following year. Between 1947 and 1951, John Mulligan studied theology at St Patrick's College, Maynooth. This field of study led to the award of a Bachelor of Divinity degree.

Having read the dossier, the chairperson said, “He sounds like a bright boy,”

“There is more overleaf if you would like to read that.”

“Certainly, General Arross.”

He continued:

“John Mulligan was ordained as a cardinal priest by Archbishop John Charles McQueen on May 1971 and continued his studies at the Pontifical University of Leuven, Belgium where he was awarded a doctorate in Philosophy in 1973. Following this, Cardinal Mulligan returned to Ireland, and took up a teaching post at the Department of Metaphysics in University College Dublin, where he was to enjoy a distinguished career.”

Carlotti put the file down. “Seems like an exemplary job General.”

Arross fixed him with his gaze. “That's the problem, Frank. We need to find something in his background to disgrace him.”

The chairperson was puzzled. “Why come to me when you have Brits in Ireland who have far better contacts than we.”

“I don’t trust the Brits. You never know where their loyalties lie.”

“So why can’t you deal with him in your usual way?”

“We are drawing too much attention to ourselves from that quarter.”

Carlotti nodded, “Yes, I see what you mean. Leave this report with me, and I will deal with it. If there is any dirt on this guy we will find it.”

Arross smiled thinly. “Oh, there will be dirt. You can count on it.”

John Cardinal Mulligan pondered the document he was holding. He turned to the other person in his apartment. “This is very damning, Dr Didier.”

The tall man with slicked back hair stood silently, as though waiting for some internal directive.

The Irish prelate slowly shook his head in disbelief. “I suspected it was bad, but nothing as extreme as this.”

“Now that I have presented you with irrefutable proof what will you do about it Your Eminence?” the doctor of philosophy asked.

“I will speak with one of the important and venerable fathers Dr Didier. Then we will see.”

The academic, concerned for the cardinal’s safety, said, “John, this is very dangerous information. Be careful whom you tell.”

“That goes without saying doctor. These are indeed very dangerous times we live in.”

“Very well your Eminence.” Eyeing the document, the academic added, “I’ve done my job. It’s in your hands now.”

“So I am the one left holding the proverbial hot potato, doctor.”

“Yes, I am afraid so.”

As soon as the doctor left, Cardinal Mulligan sought out Cardinal Pawlowski and, upon locating him, showed him the book. As Julian read the document, John asked, “What do you make of it?”

“I wasn’t aware that the Jesuarian Oath of Induction got recorded in the Congressional Record of the U S A.”

“Neither was I, but, as you can see, in the (House Bill 1523, Contested election case of Eugene C. Bonniwell, against Thos. S. Butler, Feb. 15, 1913, pp. 3215-3216), there it is.”

Julian looked at the younger man. He asked, “Where did you get this information?”

John answered, “That doesn’t matter. Whoever it came from it is truly damning evidence, Julian.”

Cardinal Pawlowski was silent.

John continued, “It makes me ask the question - is this still the church of Jesus Christ our Saviour?”

It was a question Julian didn’t want to contemplate. He had always believed the Mother Church to be honest and righteous. His unswerving faith was again tested. He sighed, “It makes one wonder. But if it isn’t the church of our Saviour, what does that make it?”

John answered. “The Church of the Antichrist, I fear!”

Julian uttered, “John. I could never even contemplate such an unspeakable possibility.”

“I know that Julian. It says so in the book:

You have received all your instructions heretofore as a novice, a neophyte, and have served as co-adjurer, confessor and priest, but the Jesuarian Brotherhood have not yet invested you with all that is necessary to command in the Army of Loyola in the service of the Pope. You must serve the proper time as the instrument and executioner as directed by your superiors; for none can command here who has not consecrated his labours with the blood of the heretic; for 'without the shedding of blood no man can be saved'. Therefore, to fit yourself for your work and make your salvation sure, you will, in addition to your former oath of obedience to your order and allegiance to the Pope, repeat the Extreme Oath of the Jesuarians.

Julian, pensive, found it difficult to contemplate. Then the impact of it hit him full on. He said, "The extreme oath is the ammunition we have been waiting for John. We now with have a weapon with which to bring down this unholy alliance."

Chapter 31

Washington DC, 1968

The initiation, which was scheduled to take place at the University, filled Derek Johann Philips with a mixture of excitement and trepidation. Derek was taken aside by one of the friars, who taught him about certain issues concerning the society's security. Afterwards, at the entrance of the university, above the arched door of White-Gravenor Hall, he saw two dates relating to significant moments in the institution's history. Further up were the five seals, which mark the three prior incarnations of Jesuarian schools in Maryland, the year John Carrol attended the Bohemia Manor School, and the modern school at Georgetown Heights.

The Jesuarian Order's Georgetown University had, since the fateful day of Lincoln's assassination, become a background powerhouse in the American administration. Under the direction of the Jesuarian B F Wiget, it had become the behind-the-scenes controlling force in Washington D C.

As a Jesuarian of minor rank, being elevated to command, Derek was conducted in the Chapel of the Convent of the Order, to face the three other commanders who were present. The Superior was standing, as customary, in front of the altar. On either side stood a monk, one of whom held a banner of yellow and white, the Papal colours. The other carried a black banner with a dagger and Red Cross above the skull and crossbones, with the word INRI printed upon it. Below this were the words IUSTUM NECAR REGES IMPIUS, the meaning of which, Derek knew to be, It is just to exterminate or annihilate impious or heretical Kings, Governments, or Rulers.

Derek felt the coldness in his knees as he knelt on the red cross on the hard floor of the chapel. He received a small black dagger from the Superior, which he grasped by the blade, holding the point against his heart.

The Superior, still holding the dagger by the hilt, recited,

"My son, heretofore you have been taught to act the dissembler: among Catholics to be a Roman Catholic, and to be a spy even among your brethren; to believe no man, to trust no man. Among the Reformers to be a Reformer; among the Huguenots, to be a Huguenot; among the Calvinists, to be a Calvinist; among other Protestants, generally to be a Protestant; and obtaining their confidence, to seek even to preach from their pulpits, and to denounce with all the vehemence in your nature our Holy Religion and the Pope; and even to descend so low as to become a Jew among Jews, that you might be enabled to gather together all information for the benefit of your Order as a faithful soldier of the Pope.

You have been taught to plant insidiously the seeds of jealousy and hatred between communities, provinces, states that were at peace, and to incite them to deeds of blood, involving them in war

with each other, and to create revolutions and civil wars in countries that were independent and prosperous, cultivating the arts and the sciences and enjoying the blessings of peace; to take sides with the combatants and to act secretly with your brother Jesuarian, who might be engaged on the other side, but openly opposed to that with which you might be connected, only that the Church might be the gainer in the end, in the conditions fixed in the treaties for peace, and that the end justifies the means.”

Derek had no idea the ceremony was going to be that way. The words spoken by the Superior both scared and empowered him. He felt as though he was in a daze, a kind of hazy reality in which he was barely aware.

He stayed silent as the Superior continued.

“You have been taught your duty as a spy, to gather all statistics, facts and information in your power from every source; to ingratiate yourself into the confidence of the family circle of Protestants and heretics of every class and character, as well as that of the merchant, the banker, the lawyer, among the schools and universities, in parliaments and legislatures, and the judiciaries and councils of state, and to be all things to all men, for the Pope's sake, whose servants we are unto death. You have received all your instructions heretofore as a novice, a neophyte, and have served as co-adjurer, confessor and priest, but you have not yet been invested with all that is necessary to command in the Army of Loyola in the service of the Pope. You must serve the proper time as the instrument and executioner as directed by your superiors; for none can command here who has not consecrated his labours with the blood of the heretic; for "without the shedding of blood no man can be saved." Therefore, to fit yourself for your work and make your salvation sure, you will, in addition to your former oath of obedience to your order and allegiance to the Pope, repeat after me the Jesuarian oath:

This juncture was the decisive moment, to pledge total commitment to the Society of Jesuarians. He thought he knew what full commitment to the Order meant, but now realised he did not. He was a monk, a devout man who believed wholeheartedly in the Catholic faith. Nevertheless, he did not hate those of different religious denominations, to the point of eradicating them from the Earth. To refuse the oath meant certain death, as he could not be allowed to know what was taking place unless his lips were assuredly sealed. With a halting voice and a rapidly beating heart, he followed the Superior's lead.

“I, Derek Johann Philips, now in the presence of Almighty God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the blessed St. John the Baptist, the Holy Apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul, and all the saints, sacred host of Heaven, and to you, my Ghostly Father, the superior general of the Society of Jesus, founded by St. Ignatius Loyola, in the pontification of Paul the Third, and continued to the present, do by the womb of the Virgin, the matrix of God, and the rod of Jesus Christ, declare and swear that His Holiness, the Pope, is Christ's Vice-Regent and is the true and only head of the Catholic or Universal Church throughout the earth; and that by the virtue of the keys of binding and loosing given to His Holiness by my Saviour, Jesus Christ, he hath power to depose heretical Kings, Princes, States, Commonwealths, and Governments, and they may be safely destroyed.”

After more prompting, Derek continued, “Therefore to the utmost of my power I will defend this doctrine and His Holiness's right and custom against all usurpers of the heretical or Protestant authority whatever, especially the Lutheran Church of Germany, Holland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, and the now pretended authority and Churches of England and Scotland, and the branches of same now established in Ireland and on the continent of America and elsewhere and all adherents in regard that they may be usurped and heretical, opposing the sacred Mother Church of Rome. I do now denounce and disown any allegiance as due to any heretical king, prince or State, named Protestant or Liberal, or obedience to any of their laws, magistrates or officers. I do further declare the doctrine of the Churches of England and Scotland of the Calvinists, Huguenots, and others of

the name of Protestants or Masons to be damnable, and they to be damned who will not forsake the same.”

Derek couldn't believe what he agreed to. The words tumbled out of his mouth, as though of their accord, like a recording in his brain. He followed the Superior's lead and repeated the words, but they seemed to come from a cold place to him, separate from his actual self. He then recited, “I do further declare that I will help, assist, and advise all or any of His Holiness's agents, in any place where I should be, in Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Ireland or America, or in any other kingdom or territory I shall come to, and do my utmost to extirpate the heretical Protestant or Masonic doctrines and to destroy all their pretended powers, legal or otherwise. I do further promise and declare that, notwithstanding, I am dispensed with to assume any religion heretical for the propagation of the Mother Church's interest; to keep secret and private all her agents' counsels from time to time, as they entrust me, and not to divulge, directly or indirectly, by word, writing or circumstances whatever; but to execute all that should be proposed, given in charge, or discovered unto me by you, my Ghostly Father, or any of this sacred order.

I do further promise and declare that I will have no opinion or will of my own or any mental reservation whatever, even as a corpse or cadaver (*perinde ac cadaver*), but will unhesitatingly obey each and every command that I may receive from my superiors in the Militia of the Pope and of Jesus Christ.”

Derek mouthed the oath of blind obedience, knowing full well he did not mean it, just wanting to get beyond those hateful words. This abomination was not the Society of Jesu he had joined as a young teaching monk. The words seemed to go on endlessly.

“That I will go to any part of the world whither-soever I may be sent, to the frozen regions north, jungles of India, to the centres of civilisation of Europe, or to the wild haunts of the barbarous savages of America without murmuring or repining, and will be submissive in all things, whatsoever is communicated to me. I do further promise and declare that I will, when opportunity presents, make and wage relentless war, secretly and openly, against all heretics, Protestants and Masons, as I am directed to do, to extirpate them from the face of the whole earth; and that I will spare neither age, sex nor condition, and that will hang, burn, waste, boil, flay, strangle, and bury alive these infamous heretics; rip up the stomachs and wombs of their women, and crush their infants' heads against the walls in order to annihilate their execrable race. That when the same cannot be done openly I will secretly use the poisonous cup, the strangulation cord, the steel of the poniard, or the leaden bullet, regardless of the honour, rank, dignity or authority of the persons, whatever may be their condition in life, either public or private, as I at any time may be directed so to do by any agents of the Pope or Superior of the Brotherhood of the Holy Father of the Society of Jesus.”

Derek felt sickened by his involvement. He had just agreed to carry out the most barbarous acts on fellow human beings in the name of God. The Superior no longer seemed a high-principled soldier of Jesus Christ. In the mind of the initiate, behind his mask of righteousness, he had taken on demonic proportions. More in fear than anything else, Derek repeated the words. “In confirmation of which I hereby dedicate my life, soul, and all corporal powers, and with the dagger which I now receive I will subscribe my name written in my blood in testimony thereof; and should I prove false, or weaken in my determination, may my brethren and fellow soldiers of the militia of the Pope cut off my hands and feet and my throat from ear to ear, my belly be opened and sulphur burned therein with all the punishment that can be inflicted upon me on earth, and my soul shall be tortured by demons in eternal hell forever. That I will in voting always vote for a Knight of Columbus in preference to a Protestant, especially a Mason, and that I will leave my party so to do; that if two Catholics are on the ticket, I will satisfy myself, which is the better supporter of Mother Church, and vote accordingly. That I will not deal with or employ a Protestant if in my power to deal with or employ a Catholic.”

The words burned into his soul and tortured his heart, but Derek knew that he had to continue the pretence to get through the verbal ordeal. Following the Superior's words, he repeated, "That I will place Catholic girls in Protestant families that a weekly report may be made of the inner movements of the heretics. That I will provide myself with arms and ammunition that I may be in readiness when the word is passed, or I am commanded to defend the Church either as an individual or with the militia of the Pope. All of which I, Derek Johann Philips, do swear by the blessed Trinity and blessed sacrament which I am now to receive to perform and on part to keep this my oath."

In order not to feel what he was saying, Derek imagined himself as an automaton, an answering machine devoid of all heart. "In testimony here of, I take this most holy and blessed sacrament of the Eucharist and witness the same further with my name written with the point of this dagger dipped in my blood and seal in the face of this holy sacrament." He received the wafer from the Superior and, grimacing slightly, wrote his his name with the point of his dagger dipped in his own blood taken from over his heart, a seemingly obsolete organ where the inner sanctum of the Society was concerned.

"You will now rise to your feet," The Superior commanded. "And I will instruct you in the Catechism necessary to make yourself known to any member of the Society of Jesuarians belonging to this rank. In the first place, you, as a Brother Jesuarian, will with another, mutually make the ordinary sign of the cross as any ordinary Roman Catholic would. Then one crosses his wrists, the palms of his hands open, and the other in answer crosses his feet, one above the other."

Derek mimicked these gestures along with the Superior.

The Superior then continued," The first then points with forefinger of the right hand to the centre of the palm of the left, the other with the forefinger of the left hand, points to the centre of the palm of the right. The first then with his right-hand makes a circle around his head, touching it; the other, then with the forefinger of his left-hand touches the left side of his body just below his heart. The first then with his right-hand draws it across the throat of the other, and the latter then with a dagger down the stomach and abdomen of the first."

Why are there so many signs? Derek wondered, still repeating what the Superior said. "The first then says Iustum; and the other answers Necar. The first Reges; the other answers Impious. The first will then present a small piece of paper folded in a peculiar manner, four times, which the other will cut longitudinally and on opening the name Jesu will be found written upon the head and arms across three times. You will then give and receive with him the following questions and answers: From whither do you come? Answer: The Holy faith."

Next came the part when Derek had to answer some questions correctly. He had previously learned the answers by rote and so felt confident with this section of the macabre ritual.

The Superior began. "Whom do you serve?"

"The Holy Father in Rome, the Pope, and the Roman Catholic Church Universal throughout the world."

"Who commands you?"

"The Successor of St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus or the Soldiers of Jesus Christ."

"Who received you?"

"A venerable man with white hair."

"How?"

“With a naked dagger, I kneel upon the cross beneath the banners of the Pope and of our sacred order.”

“Did you take an oath?”

“I did, to destroy heretics and their governments and rulers, and to spare neither age, nor sex, nor condition; to be as a corpse without any opinion or will of my own, but to implicitly obey my Superiors in all things without hesitation or murmuring.”

“Will you do that?”

“I will.”

“How do you travel?”

“In the bark of Peter, the fisherman.”

“Whither do you travel?”

“To the four quarters of the globe.”

“For what purpose?”

“To obey the orders of my General and Superiors and execute the will of the Pope and faithfully fulfil the conditions of my oaths.”

“Go ye, then, into all the world and take possession of all lands in the name of the Pope. He, who will not accept him as the Vicar of Jesus and his Vice-Regent on earth, let him be accursed and exterminated.”

Extreme Oath of the Jesuits - Arctic Beacon. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://arcticbeacon.com/books/Extreme_Oath_of_the_Jesuits.pdf

Chapter 32

Vatican City, 1984

Cardinal Pawlowski stared into space as he held the letter in his shaking hand. He didn't know what to believe anymore. The damning letter was in the form of a report, prepared under the direction of former Supreme Court Judge Frank O'Malley. It uncovered more than 100 allegations of abuse by 26 priests of the Maynooth diocese. The report covered the years between 1962 and 2002. Based on a government inquiry lasting more than two years, the report on the Maynooth case blamed the police and local officials for failing to follow up aggressively on complaints of sexual abuse. However, the most scathing criticism got levelled at Church leaders who covered up charges, silenced accusers, and ordained 'clearly unsuitable men into the priesthood.'

The government investigation of the Maynooth diocese took place in 2002, shortly after revelations that Father John Mulligan had been reported to Bishop Brendan O'Connor for sexual misconduct with students while teaching at St. Patrick's College, Dublin. Bishop O'Connor became the focal point for complaints about his handling of sex-abuse cases, especially after the 1999 suicide of Father Sean Foster, a priest of the Maynooth diocese, facing criminal charges on a series of sex-abuse complaints.

The preponderance of sexual abuse uncovered in the Maynooth diocese rivalled any disclosures elsewhere in the world. The priests credibly accused of molesting children numbered 26, of whom

eight were now deceased. The report pointed out that this figure represented nearly 10 percent of the total number of priests who served in the Maynooth diocese during the period under investigation. Archbishop Sean Cassidy of Armagh conceded that the allegations contained in the 270-page Ferns report 'made for very uncomfortable reading'. The Irish Primate said: 'The betrayal of trust is horrendous, especially in the case of Father Mulligan who is now a member of the College of Cardinals in the Vatican City'.

The enclosed letter from Judge O'Malley, concluded with, as Dean of Cardinals, I decided you would be the appropriate person to deal with this. Deal with it! He had no idea of how he was going to deal with it. One of his cardinals accused of the most heinous crimes, and it fell to him to investigate the unsavoury matter.

Julian became increasingly troubled by what he saw happening to the Catholic Church. Now, the only person he could share his concerns with got accused of paedophilia. The man who had alerted him to the fact that the Holy Father used ancient Antichrist symbolism in the Holy Mass, now had to be confronted with these serious allegations. He didn't know what to make of it. Although the report seemed genuine enough, it did seem somewhat coincidental that one of the only people to expose questionable practices in the Church was himself under investigation for child abuse.

Cardinal Mulligan sat clenching the report in his white-knuckled hands. Having just read it, he was speechless with fury. At length, confronted by the allegations, he responded. "Can't you see what is going on here, Julian? They know I am onto them, so they are playing dirty to have me discredited and silenced!"

Julian, seeing his brother cardinal's distress, didn't know what to think. He said, "The report is from Judge O'Malley, a highly respected Catholic in the Irish judicial system. What am I to think John?" he asked, slowly shaking his head.

"He has been presented with false information, just as you have."

"I sincerely hope that is the case, John. But, as Dean of Cardinals, I am duty bound to investigate the evidence presented to me."

"This has the Jesuarian dirty tricks department written all over it. Surely you can see that."

"Although that cannot be ruled out John, we would have to prove it to be the case. And what do you think the chances of that would be?"

"Very slim I would think. However, I have to find out who is behind it Julian - I just have to."

"As part of my investigation I will be talking to Judge O'Malley. I will try to find out where he got his information. To be honest, though, I expect they'll stonewall me at every turn, but I promise I will try."

"Thank you, Julian. I do appreciate what you are doing."

Julian was deeply troubled. It wasn't only because The public prosecutor had accused his friend and clerical colleague of disgusting crimes, which was bad enough in itself, but also because he had to investigate the case himself. Whether or not the judicial system had wrongly accused John Mulligan, the unfortunate incident put a hold any further investigations concerning corruption and blasphemy in the Church.

Julian's thoughts went to his murdered friends and the reason they had died. The Black Pope had ordered their assassination because they voted against the Jesuarian General in the private papal conference, in which the Cardinals decided to fire General Arross and take power from the Jesuarians. John Patrick 2, who called the meeting, received two bullets from the Browning semi-automatic pistol of paid hitman Mehmet Ali Agca, just three weeks later. Was that just a

coincidence or was Arross behind the hit? Nobody knew for certain, but Arross certainly had a great deal to gain by the Pope's death. Nevertheless, the Pope miraculously survived and was rushed to a hospital.

Julian wondered if the accusations against Cardinal Mulligan were fabrications, to keep him quiet. Indeed, some of John's views could prove dangerous; especially his theory about the Holy Father's failing health. Julian remembered the question clearly.

"So why was the Holy Father taken all the way to the Roman hospital of Gemelli, rather than the particular hospital unit organised solely for papal use?" John Mulligan asked Julian one day, as they walked in the Vatican garden.

The Dean had turned to his colleague, querying, "Why do you ask?"

John had answered with another question. "Why was he given blood from a public bank, when his private supply was ready and waiting?"

"What are you suggesting?" Julian queried, becoming concerned.

John spoke up close and quietly. "The Holy Father survived two major operations, but he was killed slowly by a transfusion of impure blood, from which he contracted severe hepatitis."

Julian, shocked, had asked, "Are you suggesting that ..."

"Arross was behind the plot to use the tainted blood," John answered, finishing the sentence.

The implied accusation had hung in the air, too dangerous for either party's assumption on the matter.

A troubling question plagued Julian more with each passing day. "Did the Jesuarian General know about John Mulligan's suspicions concerning Jesuarian practices, and, if so, was he behind the investigation of the Irish prelate?"

Cardinal Pawlowski started his inquiry by phoning Justice O'Malley. He was waiting for a response, then he heard the judge's Irish drawl, and he announced, "This is Cardinal Pawlowski. I am phoning from Vatican City about Cardinal Mulligan."

"Hello, Cardinal. Thank you for taking the time to contact me."

"It is my painful task to investigate these accusations."

"I must say, your English is superb."

Thank you. Now, I have a few questions to ask."

"Of course, Cardinal, ask away."

"First, how did you get to know of these accusations?"

"It's in the report. It was Bishop Brendan O'Connor who reported them to me."

"How was the incident brought to his notice?"

"You will have to ask him that."

"So you didn't find that out for yourself?"

"No, there was no need."

Julian thought that strange. He responded, "No need to see if the source of this allegations was credible, Judge?"

"I trust Bishop O'Connor had ascertained that before he informed me."

"You assumed his source was genuine without questioning that source?"

"I had no reason to. Look Cardinal, I understand you would want to support your own, but this is a delicate investigation that requires objectivity."

Julian, angered, said, "This has nothing to do with my objectivity, Judge. It has to do with knowing the facts, and how can these accusations have any basis in fact if we don't know the source and veracity of them?"

The Judge, annoyed by with the Cardinal's questions, responded, "You will have to talk to the Bishop about that. I cannot help you any further."

Then the line went dead.

Bishop O'Connor was harder to contact. Julian eventually tracked him down in the Department of Religious Studies. He was quite stunned to get a call from a Cardinal in Rome. "To what do I owe this honour, your Eminence?"

"It concerns John Cardinal Mulligan. I need to ask some questions."

Bishop O'Connor was silent for a moment. Then he responded, "Let me see now. Cardinal Mulligan. Oh dear, that is a sad case indeed."

"Yes it is Your Grace, but I need to know how you learned of these allegations."

"Well now, it was a while ago. I will have to refer to my report."

"That's fine. How soon can you let me know?"

"I'm busy at present. I'll phone you tomorrow if that is all right."

Julian pressed, "I was hoping a little sooner."

"I haven't got the report with me."

"I see. Well, answer me this. Was it one of the alleged abused children that came forward?"

The Bishop thought about it for a moment. "No, not as I recall."

"Have any of the alleged abused children reported John Mulligan to you for inappropriate behaviour towards them?"

"No, your Eminence, they reported their abuse to the person who informed me."

"That's the person you cannot remember?"

"That's right."

"Your Grace, did you not investigate the veracity of the allegations yourself before reporting the incident to Judge O'Malley?"

"No, I did not. It wasn't necessary as that part of the investigation had been completed."

"So this person who you can't remember had some official standing -- a police officer maybe?"

"No, your Eminence, we report incidents to the police. They don't report to us."

"Perhaps he was of our faith - a Jesuarian maybe?"

"I wouldn't know for sure, but he did have an ecclesiastical bearing about him."

“Very well Bishop, I look forward to receiving your report.”

Julian suspected the bishop knew very well who had reported Cardinal Mulligan to him, but he was not saying. He also had a strong hunch the Bishop wouldn't get back to him as promised. As he read the official dossier once more, Julian wondered why a religious person, probably a Jesuarian, would be the person to report the accusations and not a solicitor working on behalf of the allegedly abused plaintiffs.” Cardinal Pawlowski began to smell a rat. However, smelling a rat and seeing it are two different things. He would have to question the Bishop face to face.

Chapter 33

Toledo, modern day

Jerome thumbed through the Toledo phone directory, while Joab, armed with the numbers, called photocopying businesses. It turned out that, the Hotel Abad, next to the Zocodover, had photocopying facilities. Although its photocopying and fax service was only accessible to the hotel's clientele, the passing of euros between Jerome and the copy shop proprietor solved the problem. Therefore, armed with a reasonable copy of the arcane rules, the trio set off to liberate Rosella. Jerome consulted his watch, saying, “It's time to contact Dr Morales.”

Contact was duly made, and they were to carry out the exchange in the hospital car park. Then, just as Joab got in the car to go to the hospital, he received a phone call. It was from Camilla. He needed privacy, so he got out of the car. Once outside, Joab responded, excitedly, “Hi Camilla. How are you?”

Jerome, angry at the intrusion, urged Joab, “Come on, get in. We have no time to lose!”

Brushing him off, Joab said, “Camilla, I'm busy right now. I'll call...”

“Joab I'm in danger. I need your help, now!”

“Danger! What sort of risk?”

“Are you coming or not?” Jerome demanded.”

“Excuse me a moment Camilla.” Then, turning to Jerome, Joab explained, “Camilla is in some trouble. I have to go.”

“Never mind about her, what about Rosella?” Jerome asked.

“I'm sorry Jerome, but you and Derek will have to handle it.”

Jerome, angry and frustrated said, “This couldn't come at a worse time, Joab.”

Ignoring him, Joab said, “”Yes Camilla. I'm still here. Where are you?”

Derek, who sat in the back seat of the car, urged, “We have to go, to meet the deadline, Jerome.”

“Okay Mr Rackham, I will phone you later.” The Moroccan reluctantly agreed.

“I'm sorry Jerome, but it just can't be helped.” Then, returning to his phone call, Joab said, “Okay, just stay calm. I will be with you soon.”

Although the photocopy of the *Monita Secreta* was of good quality, it was nothing like the original. As Jerome and Derek waited in their car in the hospital car park, the Moroccan doctor raised this point. "Do you think we can fool them, and rescue Rosella?"

Derek thought about it. He answered, "As far as we know, Dr Morales has never seen the book, so he won't be able to compare it with an original."

"I hope you are right, or we are all in big trouble."

Just then, they saw some people moving towards them. As the figures got closer, Jerome saw Rosella sitting in a wheelchair, pushed by Dr Morales. However, there was another man with them, who Jerome did not recognise. He had bristly steel grey hair and a vivid scar, which stood out on his left cheek.

Derek lost his pallor. "I know that man. His name is Von Hollenbeck. He's a high-ranking Jesuarian!"

Jerome, seeing the startled look on Derek's face, asked, "Who is he and what is he doing here?"

He's probably behind my kidnapping and, he most likely has a copy of the *Modesta Secreta*."

Jerome, feeling sluiced with icy water, said, "Then we're fucked!"

"We are certainly in big trouble my friend. Fuck, I wish Joab was here to help us," Jerome cursed.

"They're waiting for the book, so we had better do something," Derek stated anxiously.

"Derek, get in the driver's seat and be ready to drive away, fast."

"I pray it works out."

"Well, here goes," Jerome responded, getting out of the car.

They were around 12 feet from each other when Dr Morales extended his hand, "Give me the book please."

Jerome countered, "Only when Rosella is safely in my custody doctor."

"Do you want to do this the hard way Doctor Zahir?" Morales asked menacingly.

"Do you want to make a scene in a public car park Doctor Morales?" Jerome responded, with braver words than he felt.

This impasse was getting them nowhere, so the man with scar suggested, "Why don't you both meet half way, Herr Doktor?"

Jerome edged slowly to where Rosella was being pushed, in a wheelchair. Then, all of a sudden, he made his move. Boldly tossing the package at the startled Spanish doctor, Jerome, grabbing the handles of the wheelchair, headed back to his car. Morales caught the brown paper bag containing the copy, and he passed it to the German count, who greedily grabbed it.

As Jerome, feverishly pushing Rosella, neared his car, he reckoned he had about 10 seconds at most before the ruse was up. Grabbing her bodily out of the wheelchair, Jerome yelled, "START THE CAR NOW!" As the engine coughed into life, at Derek's hands, Jerome, half carrying, half dragging the drugged Rosella to the car, barely heard the words, "HALTEN! WHERE IS THE ORIGINAL?" Before he heard the gun's report and felt a sharp pain in his back, Jerome pushed Rosella into the car. He gasped, "Go Derek. Get away from here now!"

Seeing the doctor was in distress, he hesitated, "But Jerome..."

Jerome groaned, “Go and tell - the world. Go - now, quickly.”

Jerome then staggered backwards and collapsed, his last image on Earth being the back of Rosella’s head, as Derek’s car screeched out of the parking lot.

Chapter 34

Toledo, modern day

While trying to follow Camilla’s hastily given directions, Joab slowly made his way through the old Roman quarter, along lanes that twisted and turned, up and down. In the end, he admitted to himself - he was lost! Gaining the attention of a vendor, who’s shop, like most in the area, spilt out into the narrow street, Joab, showed him a piece of paper, on which was roughly written, the words, ‘Plaza del Torro’.

The grinning Spaniard just said, “Taxi, taxi”, suggesting to Joab that ‘Plaza del Torro’ was still a long way away. Joab gestured that he didn’t know where to catch one.

The Spanish vendor grinned hugely, displaying some gold teeth, and indicated a small Cantina just down the road.

As soon as he realised he had a fare waiting, the taxi driver jumped up from his bar stool. However, he looked at his passenger askance, once he knew where the gringo wanted to go. He made a circular gesture against his head with his forefinger, suggesting to his amused friends that the gringo had to be loco. Tourists never went to that part of town. Still, if that was where the crazy gringo wanted to go, a fare was a fare.

The driver let Joab off in a seemingly deserted part of town, collected his fee and took off fast, leaving the journalist in the middle of what he soon discovered appeared to be, nowhere. He had to find Camilla, but there was nobody around to help him with directions. Then he saw a tattered poster attached to a power pole. The picture of the bull on the advertisement had obvious connotations, but it was the wording on the sign, that gave Joab hope. The Plaza del Torro was a bull-fighting arena. Although Plaza del Torro sounded very grand, the reality of the stadium did not match the picture in the journalist’s mind. Unlike the artist’s impression on the poster, Plaza del Torro, it soon aspired, was dismally run-down, its corrugated perimeter wall, dilapidated and rusty. Joab looked through a gap in the enclosure. It was an oversized dressage arena covered in sand and grit and surrounded by a few rows of bleachers, which looked about as stable as Joab felt. On top of all this, the locals were setting up for some carnival, like a country fair, but with other crappy rides and booths. After entering the arena, through a broken turnstile, Joab scanned the area for any signs of Camilla. Then he saw her. She seemed to be agitated, constantly looking at her watch.

“CAMILLA” Joab called, gaining her attention.

She ran over to him, and they hugged.

“Where have you been?” Camilla asked as she melted against him.”

“That’s a good question. So what is the problem young lady?”

Pulling back from him, she answered, “Jose got suspicious and reported my meeting with him, to security.”

Joab felt dreadful. He said, “God, no, I’m sorry to involve you like this. So what happened?”

“I find myself on the ‘carpet’ with no credible explanation for my actions. They asked me about you.”

“What did you say?” Joab asked, becoming increasingly concerned.

“What could I say, Joab? I had, to tell the truth.”

“Shit!”

“I’m not good at lying.”

“Then what happened?”

Camilla, feeling faint, said, “I need to sit down somewhere.”

Joab looked around. The only shade from the sun seemed to be a tin building with faded signage
“That place looks like a cantina,” he said, pointing at the shed-like building.

“That’s good. I desperately need something to drink.”

They went over to Plaza del Torro’s, only cantina, hoping to grab a coffee and something to eat. Upon entering the bar, Joab felt he had been transported back in time to the set of a 1950’s Spanish gangster movie. The eatery was dark and dingy, with only one open window, but no breeze. The pair took their place at the only available table, next to one crowded with older Spanish men who had, what was left of their hair, neatly slicked back and their thick grey chest hair was escaping from the tops of the unbuttoned cotton short-sleeved shirts. They were arguing about whatever while drinking beer and eating tapas. There was only one slot machine in the place, occupied by a person wearing khaki linen pants, an unbuttoned white cotton shirt and with hair slicked back to the max. He was wearing sunglasses (in the dark bar) and smoking a joint. To Joab, it was all quite bizarre.

To make the place appear even stranger, the only food they served was seafood that, poorly refrigerated, smelled foul. The pair, eyeing the Crab, sad looking calamari, mussels, etc., exposed to the heat of the day, decided to pass on the food. The English pair found the whole set-up hysterical. They just laughed and drank crappy, warm beer.

“So what happened after they questioned you?” Joab asked again, once a sweaty waiter served their warm beer.

“The Registrar tore me off a strip and the other guy, he was real ugly with a big scar down his face, said he would deal with it.”

“Deal with it! What did he mean?”

“Now Joabie, how am I supposed to know that?”

Joab was pleased that Camilla’s smile was back but it looked as though someone was after him. He took her hand in his, “Thanks for warning me but I have to go now, to complete my mission. As the journalist got up to leave, his mobile phone rang. Joab couldn’t hear clearly with all the background noise, so he excused himself and went outside, to where it was quieter. He listened to the caller. It was Rosella. She was so upset that she nearly choked on her words. “They have killed my beautiful Jerry, Senor Joab,”

Then he heard her sobbing.

“Jerome killed! What? How? Joab’s muddled mind tried putting the pieces together, but it seemed as though his synapses kept shorting out.

“What’s the matter, Joab?” Camilla asked, having followed him outside.

“It’s terrible news. I have to go.”

She grabbed his arm. “What was the call about?” she asked, frightened by the change in him.

Joab's face went ashen. His mouth opened, but no words came out. Then he uttered, "Somebody killed Jerome."

Camilla expressed vagueness. "Who is this Jerome?"

"He was helping me rescue Derek."

"The one in the psyche ward?"

"Yes, Jerome was his doctor."

"Was it Derek on the phone?"

"No, it was not him. It was a woman – the love of his life."

Joab's phone rang again. It was Derek.

"Derek, is it true about Jerome?"

He replied, shakily, "He was shot in the back while getting Rosella into the car."

"I can't believe it."

"Joab, they will come after you now. Get out of Spain and get the item to your publisher."

"What will you and Rosella do now?"

"Joab, never mind about us, get that item to safety as quick as you can."

"Let Anne know where you are, and I will contact as soon as it is safe."

"Joab, there is one more thing. I took a photo of Jerome's murderer. I am sending it to your phone."

"Take care of yourself and Rosella. Look after her Derek. She is a beautiful human being."

Joab opened up the image and stared at the scar-faced persona of his friend's killer.

Camilla, who had been watching, said, "That's him! That's the ugly guy who was with Doctor Morales, while he roasted me."

"And later, he murders Jerome," he mumbled, distantly.

"Joabie, is there anything I can do to help?"

Turning to the nurse, he embraced her. "I have to go, but I want to see you again."

She smiled, "You can see me while I help you."

"No Camilla, I have involved you too much already. I have to go now, but when this is over, I would love to get to know you better."

"As long as Mr Ted can chaperone us," she smiled, weakly.

Chapter 35

Dublin 1984

Desmond Cardinal Rixton, Archbishop Emeritus of Dublin, fiddled nervously with his rosary, as he stood in his study. He was waiting for Julian Pawlowski, the Dean of Cardinals, who was soon to arrive. He wasn't looking forward to answering questions about John Cardinal Mulligan, but Judge O'Malley had left him 'holding the baby', as it were. Having been coached as to what to say gave him cause for concern. It made him wonder if all was above board in the Mulligan case. Desmond had always avoided Church politics whenever possible. He believed in and played the pastoral role of the priest, the grass roots father confessor, always honest and honourable.

Since his ordination on 19 May 1951, he had taken up many posts overseas, but he was glad to be home again. After obtaining a PhD in theology at the University of Louvain, from 1951 to 1953, he became chaplain to three successive communities of contemplative nuns from 1953 to 1966. At the same time, he taught metaphysics at University College, Dublin. Since his professorship in 1972, he was elected Dean of Philosophy and Sociology in 1983. A member of the Irish Hierarchy's theological commission and the Diocesan Committee on Ecumenism, he was elevated to 'Prelate of Honour', by His Holiness the Pope, on 20 August 1982.

The Archbishop greeted Julian and escorted him to an arbour that wafted with the scent of fragrant rose and camellias. As they sat in canvas chairs, Archbishop Rixton began, "It's a sad thing that you have come here for, Julian."

"It is indeed Desmond, but it is all part of the load we have to carry."

"Indeed my friend. So, how was your flight?"

"Flying wasn't made for these old bones. I'm amazed how the Holy Father coped with all that travelling."

"Aye, it is a wonder. Mind you His Holiness probably didn't travel economy," Desmond quipped, nudging Julian lightly."

Julian smiled in response.

"Now that you are here Julian how can I help you?"

"I need to talk with Bishop O'Connor."

"Oh dear, he is out of the country at present. Perhaps I can help. What is the information you seek?"

"He knew I was coming and he knew I wanted to question him," Julian responded, annoyed.

The Archbishop, ready for such a response, replied, "Bishop O'Connor has been called away on urgent Church business. So what do you want to know?"

"I need to know the source of the allegations against John Cardinal Mulligan."

"I could probably find that out for you."

"That would be a great help, Desmond."

The Archbishop smiled, saying, "Now, how about a little refreshment after your long flight?"

"That would be most welcome, thank you."

After a light lunch, Desmond and Julian relaxed with a glass of port. Desmond mentioned, "I met Cardinal Mulligan on a few occasions, you know."

"Oh!" Julian responded, not wanting to give anything away.

"I would never have thought it of him. But then you never do, do you?"

“Why was he targeted specifically?”

Desmond’s eyes widened, “They didn’t target him specifically. He was part of a report that uncovered over 100 allegations accusing over 20 priests. He was just one of them.”

“These allegations, the ones about him, I want to study them.”

“Of course Julian. I will have them brought to you. They are not pleasant reading, though.”

“I am not here to have an enjoyable read, Desmond. I am here to do a very unpleasant job.” After a moment’s contemplation, he asked, “Isn’t it standard practice for the plaintiff’s solicitor, not an ecclesiastical man to report these accusations?”

Desmond became defensive. “Who said it was an ecclesiastical man, Julian?”

“Was he?”

Forced to answer, Desmond replied, “I don’t know, although I can’t see why he should have been an ecclesiastical person.”

Julian sighed, “Why do I feel I’m getting the run-a-round, Desmond?”

“What on earth makes you think that?”

“Because nobody is willing to give me straight answers. If Cardinal Mulligan were guilty of the crime he is accused, the information I need would be forthcoming. Nobody wants to tell me any details about his case. Why is that Desmond?”

“I have no idea. Why do you think it is?”

“Some cover-up, maybe.”

“Cover-up!” Desmond chuckled, “I would say it’s just the opposite, wouldn’t you?”

“Let me use a hypothetical argument.”

“Okay.”

“Let us just say that John Mulligan who, as far as we knew had a squeaky-clean record in the Church, is working on something that is exposing a significant corruption in Rome. Before he has a chance to reveal his findings his credibility gets blown out of the water by these allegations, which, whether true or false, has the desired effect.”

The Archbishop felt floored. “Corruption in Rome! What on earth are you talking about?”

“Was the source of these allegations a Jesuarian, Desmond?”

Desmond’s eyes widened, Stunned, he repeated, “Corruption in Rome! Jesuarians! What on earth is this about?”

Desperately needing someone to confide in, fixing the Archbishop in his gaze, Julian asked, “Can I trust you, Desmond?”

“My dear Cardinal, why wouldn’t you trust me?”

Julian sighed, “I have carried a heavy cross these last years. It is becoming unbearable for me.”

Desmond placed a placating hand on Julian’s shoulder. “My dear friend, please share this burden with me. If I can help you in any way...”

“I am already responsible for the deaths of two dear friends and colleagues, Desmond. I don’t want to add you to that list.”

“What on earth are you talking about?”

Julian asked again, “Was the person who reported John Mulligan, a Jesuarian, Desmond?”

“He didn’t say. Look, what exactly...”

“Did he wear a cross around his neck?”

“I think so, but I can’t be sure.”

“Was it like this?” Julian pressed, passing Desmond a piece of newspaper with a photo of the crooked cross on it.

A glint of recognition registered in the Archbishop’s eyes. “Now you come to mention it, yes. I remember thinking how odd it looked at the time.”

“Then my suspicions are founded. I believe we can safely say that the source of the allegations against Cardinal Mulligan was an agent of the Black Pope.”

“The Black Pope but...”

“I will say nothing else now Desmond. My path is now clear to me.”

“What do you mean Julian? You’re not making any sense.”

Julian rose to leave. “Thank you for your kind hospitality Desmond, but these old bones need a rest now.”

This direction was not how the interview was supposed to go. Archbishop Rixton, not knowing what to do, faltered. It seemed obvious that the Dean was over-stressed, to the point of being delusional. Suppose the man behaved irrationally, even became dangerous, what was he to do? He needed professional advice on the matter. Dr Paul Anderson came to mind. As a leading expert in the area of sexual abuse in the Church, Dr Paul Anderson had been a help to him in the past. Desmond phoned Dr Anderson and got patched through to his rooms. Dr Paul Anderson, who was also Fr. Anderson, an Irish Jesuarian priest and the superior of the Maltesa retreat house in Dublin, couldn't believe his luck when Archbishop Rixton told him a delusional Dean Pawlowski was in his care. The Dean had been on the Jesuarian General’s most wanted list for many years. Fr. Anderson had got flagged about the Cardinal’s visit to Ireland. Of course, he would come and help the aged prelate.

Julian had never been to Dublin before. The view he had from the taxi that brought him from Dublin airport convinced him he ought to see more of the fair city, while he had the chance. Besides, a long walk would help him clear his head in readiness for the arduous task that lay ahead. To gain some local background knowledge, before setting off, Julian consulted his pocket guide to Dublin. He was intrigued to discover that, the Greek astronomer and cartographer Ptolemy provided, possibly, the first reference to the area now known as Dublin, around AD 140. He referred to it as ‘Eblana Civitas’. The settlement was named 'Dubh Linn', perhaps as far back as the first century BC.

He was interrupted by Desmond, who knocked at his door. He heard the words, “Are you awake Julian?”

“Yes, do come in.”

Noticing the guidebook, the Archbishop commented, “So you’re learning something about our fair city.”

“Yes. I thought I’d find out a few things before I take a walk.”

Caught by surprise, Desmond smiled, "A walk, yes, what a grand idea." Then glancing at the wall clock he noted the doctor would soon be arriving. He had to keep his the Cardinal there. He said, "I've lived here a long time Julian, so I know a thing or two about the place."

"I'm sure you do. I didn't realise it went back so far in history."

"It's very ancient, but not as old as Rome of course."

"It must be ancient if Ptolemy visited here."

"That's what some historians say. For me though it began with the building of the first monastery, although the town, itself, was not established until the Vikings built it around 840 AD. They called it 'Baile Atha Cliath."

"Dublin was built by the Vikings?"

"It was that. The Vikings first established themselves at the mouth of the River Liffey in 841. They used it as a trading/pirate base; it survived until 902 when the native Irish defeated and exiled the invaders."

"That's quite intriguing."

"Yes. Two Viking cemeteries uncovered in the Twentieth Century were, some archaeologists think, connected with this settlement."

Just then, the doorbell rang. "Excuse me Julian, but I have to get the door," Desmond stated, leaving the room.

With Desmond gone, Julian put on his coat to keep out the afternoon chill. Just as he was about to leave, the cleric and his visitor entered his room.

The Archbishop said, "This is Dr Anderson, Julian. He wants to talk to you."

Taken by surprise, Julian, becoming defensive, responded, "Oh, about what exactly?"

"I'm a psychologist, Cardinal. Desmond is concerned about your health."

"My health! Do you mean my mental health, doctor?"

"Such a pejorative term, don't you think. Stress can create all kinds of temporary misleading perceptions. I can help you look at these so that you can regain your healthy sense of being."

"My sense of being is entirely sound, thank you, Doctor," Julian answered, tersely.

"Of course, Cardinal, it's just that..."

Interrupting him, Julian said, "I am not wearing red robes, so how do you know I am a Cardinal, Doctor?"

"Desmond told me."

Turning to the Archbishop Julian asked, "What is all this about?"

Desmond answered, "I'm very sorry Julian. It's just that you were irrational and ..."

"Irrational! What do you mean?"

"It's just some of the crazy things you were saying about the Jesuarians."

"Now, what were you saying about the Society of Jesu?" the doctor asked while preparing a syringe.

“What’s in that syringe doctor?” Julian asked.

“Oh, just something to help you sleep.”

“I don’t want anything to make me sleep, doctor.”

“Come now Cardinal, I know what I am doing.” the doctor responded, moving towards the dean, with the needle in his hand.”

Things didn't seem right. The doctor didn't seem right. Julian sat up, pushing the doctor’s hand away. “You’re not going to stick me with that,” he stated sternly, making to leave the room.

Not expecting such a response, the doctor threatened, “I would not do that if I were you.”

Julian, ignoring the doctor, grabbed his guide book. “Doctor I did not ask for your services, and I do not need them.”

“Cardinal, your irrationality could get you into trouble,” Doctor Anderson stated, with a veiled threat in his voice.

“And your lack of ethics can get you into trouble, Dr Anderson,” Julian replied. “Now if you will excuse me I have important things to do.”

Chapter 36

Geneva, modern day

Joab felt greatly relieved as Cointrin came into view outside the plexiglass porthole of the Swiss Air Jumbo jet, in which he was flying. The flight itself had been pleasant, with all on board services carried out with typical Swiss efficiency. But the glances and sideways look in his direction unnerved Joab. He could have been imagining it, of course, but the Jesuarians seemed to have spies everywhere. Once he'd entered the departure lounge at Madrid Airport, without being challenged or searched, he had felt more at ease, and his prize, the one that Jerome had died for, was still tucked away safely in his cabin luggage.

Soon the plane would be touching down at Geneva’s international airport, Working for High Light the journalist had been processed through there many times. He travelled a lot in his job, and Joab considered it to be the best-designed air terminus he had ever experienced. With only just 200m walking distance and Swiss competence, it took Joab around 25 minutes from landing, dealing with all the legal formalities, to catching his train to the city centre.

After picking up a taxi at the city station, Joab sat back and relaxed, while being driven down Rue Voltaire and left into Rue du Mandement, to finally end up in Rue de Ormeaux, where High Light Magazine had its offices. Joab paid the driver and headed to Ormeaux House, where High Light was on the fifth floor. Then he stopped in his tracks. For the first time since landing he felt a chill run through him. The weather was much colder than the temperature in Toledo, and he was still dressed for the warmer Spanish climate. However, apart from the physical reasons, the chill he felt was in his spine, an odd place to feel the cold. Joab stopped outside the office building and, taking out his phone, he dialled Karl Haas’ number. The phone had ringed six times before he heard Karl’s voice. Joab said, “Karl this is Joab.”

“Joab, it’s great to hear you. Where are you now?”

“Just outside your offices.”

“Do you have the evidence with you?”

“Are you alone?”

“Yes, apart from Professor Delz.”

Joab suspicious, said, “Who's he and what's he doing there?”

“He will be able to verify if what you have is the genuine article, Joab.” Karl then queried, “Why all the questions?”

“I don't know. Maybe I'm a bit paranoid after all that has happened in Spain.”

“Come on up out of the cold. I can't wait to see what you have for me.”

Joab took the lobby elevator up to the fifth floor, where a security guard met him and escorted him to Karl's office. He wasn't happy about a third person being there, but he was relieved to be handing over the book into Karl's safekeeping. Despite this, Joab still felt some apprehension as he opened the editor's door, and entered the inner sanctum of High Light Magazine. Karl seemed to be preoccupied with something he was reading and the other man, Professor Delz, had his back to Joab.

The editor, realising his journalist had arrived, rose from his comfortable chair and put down the document he was reading, and shook Joab's hand. “It's nice to see you again my friend. Now give me the evidence?”

Wondering why Karl was so impatient, Joab said, “There are things I need to discuss with you first - in private.”

“Joab, I don't think we need to hide anything from Professor Delz. He has been a benefactor of High Light, since its humble beginnings.” Then addressing the academic, Karl said, “Herr Professor, let me introduce Joab Rackham.”

Joab couldn't believe it when the man turned to face him. It was the image on his mobile phone – his colleague's killer. He would never forget that face, especially the jagged scar down his left cheek. “NO! IT CANNOT BE!” he cried out.

Shocked, Karl asked, “What's the matter with you?”

Pointing at the German, Joab said, “He murdered Jerome!”

The German, playing innocent, sounded startled, “Vat on Earth do you mean?” he responded.

“Are you suggesting that The Professor? ...” Karl began.

“Delz is not who you think he is,” Joab interjected.

“Then who do you think I am, Herr Rackham?”

“Count Von Hollenbeck. You were at the hospital in Toledo where you shot and killed Jerome.”

Feigning surprise, the German nobleman, protested, “I have no idea vat you are on about.”

Karl, completely taken aback, agreed, “No, neither do I, Joab. Now, just give me the book please.”

“No, I cannot do that Karl, not with him here!” Joab objected. Backing out of the office, he headed for the elevator.

Karl came charging down the corridor. Catching up with his reporter, he asked, “What did you mean in there?”

“He is a high-ranking Jesuarian, for God's sake!”

“He is a college professor.”

“If I give him the *Secreta Modesta*, the whole assignment and Jerome’s death will have been for nothing.”

“Give me the book. I will keep it safe.”

“What the hell is he doing here?”

“I told you. He’s a ...”

“Cold blooded Jesuarian Assassin, working for the Black Pope. That’s what he is!”

“Joab, I am losing my patience with you. I pay you to carry out certain assignments. Getting that book is one of these assignments. So now it belongs to me.”

“Karl, I’m confused. I will meet you later and hand the book over to you and you alone. In the meantime, you might want to check on scar face’s academic credentials.”

“I could have my guards arrest you, Joab.”

“I will destroy the book before you get your hands on it!”

Karl thought about his options. In the end, he said, “Okay, have it your way. We will meet and talk later.”

Joab sat drinking strong tea, from the ornate pot on his table and listening to 30’s music in Le Bookworm, his favourite café in the city. He had lost his appetite for the customarily provided biscuits that came with the tea. His stomach churned like a cement mixer with a heavy load. His troubled mind sifted through many disturbing questions, but none of them with answers attached. What was Hollenbeck doing at the offices of High Light? How did he know that was where Joab was going? What connection was there between Hollenbeck and Karl Haas? Also, there was the most troubling question of all. Could Karl be trusted with the book? He looked around at the shelves crammed with secondhand books, the reason for the name of the café, and the reason for him choosing it. Approaching Francois, the woman who owned Le bookworm, Joab said, “I have a small favour to ask of you.”

The 50 something Frenchwoman, her greying hair piled into a bun, smiled sweetly, asking, in reasonable English, “Ow can I help you, Joab?”

“I have to hide a book for a while.”

“Okay.”

He handed her a package with the *Secreta Modesta* inside. “Please keep this safe. It is critical.”

Francois knew he was an investigative journalist. She had helped him before, and she never asked questions. “Don’t worry Joab. It is safe with moi.”

“Thanks, Francois. I owe you.” Then he handed her a piece of paper, saying, “If I am not back here tomorrow, please send the book to this address.”

“I weel see you tomorrow, ‘ave no fear.”

Outside the café, Joab pressed some numbers on his mobile phone. After getting a response, he said, “Alfred, are you still working at Companies House?”

“Who’s asking?”

“Joab. Joab Rackham.”

“Joab! Bloody hell! Where’d you crawl out of the woodwork? Haven’t seen you in ages mate. Still trying to right the wrongs of the world?”

“I wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t important Alfie.”

“So what do you want to know?”

“Can you check up on a company for me? Owners, directors and all that shit?”

“It’ll bloody cost ya.”

“Yes, but can we do this now.”

“Now?”

“It is very urgent Alfie.”

“All right, but the price has skyrocketed mate. Give me the details.”

With the few excellent Swiss restaurants overshadowed by a plethora of French eateries, Joab had trouble finding the one he wanted. It wasn’t that he disliked the local haute-cuisine, which was influenced the recipes of Lyon, just 160km away, but the fact that Catholicism still had such a powerful hold in France and, the Jesuarian spies could be anywhere. Eventually, in the ‘Old Town’, (around the Place du Bourg-de-Four) The journalist picked the ‘Carouge’, a foodie’s paradise, with plenty of pricey choices. He phoned Karl’s number and made the necessary arrangements.

“You must believe me, Joab. I thought he was a genuine academic,” Karl apologised, as they ate Geschnetzeltes while relaxing in a convivial atmosphere, amid the warm Provencal ochre-and-sky-blue décor, of the L’Ange, du Dix Vins Restaurant.

“How did you find out that he was a fraud?”

“I took your advice and phoned the university. They hadn’t heard of of a Professor Delz.”

Joab was still suspicious. “So how did Von Hollenbeck know that I was going to bring the Jesuarian secrets to you?”

“I am sorry, but I am not able to answer that Joab.”

“Perhaps I can help answer it,” Joab said, tossing a printout across the table.”

Karl picked it up and read it. His face went ashen. “Where did you get this?” he asked, shakily.

“A trusted source. Now, I demand an explanation.”

“I have none to give you. I am as perplexed about this as you are.”

“Oh, come on Karl! Do you mean to tell me that you, as editor and part owner of the Magazine, didn’t know about this?”

“On my children’s life Joab, I swear to you I know nothing of this.”

“You never checked to see who was behind ‘Noir Pappas Publications Pty Ltd’, when they took over from the former owners of High Light.”

“Our legal people said everything was okay. Who was I to question them?”

“The question is what are you now going to do about it?”

“I don’t know. But I can no longer be part of a company that is controlled by the Jesuarians.”

“You know I can’t let you have the book, don’t you?”

Karl’s face went ashen. “Mein Gott Joab. I hope it is all worth it.”

“I will have to get the article published elsewhere.”

“Ja, I know. It is a great pity. It could have been our biggest story yet.”

“It would have been pulled or sanitised. You know that, as well as I do, Karl. Then Jerome’s murder would have been for nothing.”

Karl thought about it. Then he suggested, “I have contacts. Maybe I can put you on to somebody.”

Looking the editor straight in the eye, Joab said, “It’s best for you if you know nothing about this.”

Karl sighed deeply, “Ja Joab. You are right. I hope you can get it published.”

“Me too. I will certainly get it into print if I can find a Jesuarian free zone.”

Chapter 37

Dublin, modern day

Desmond Cardinal Rixton knelt down to pray. Bowing his head, he asked for forgiveness in advance, for what was soon to happen. He had spoken against it, but events had progressed too far for him to be able to intercede. Now he just had to weather the guilt.

The Dean of Cardinals, stalled in his attempt to find out the truth of the accusations against his colleague, realised he had to leave Ireland as soon as possible. He did not know whether Desmond Rixton was involved in the plot against him, or whether he was being manipulated, or forced to go along with the Jesuarians plans. Either way, his priority now was to look after his well-being. He was in the middle of packing his few belongings when Desmond came into the room.

“Are you leaving so soon?” the Irish cleric asked, already knowing the answer.

Julian looked up, saying, “There is nothing else I can do here.”

“You do realise that justice has been served, don’t you,”

Julian stared daggers. “I realise nothing of the sort. I’m not convinced that John Cardinal Mulligan is guilty of the crimes for which he is accused.”

“But you have seen the reports.”

“Until I’m able to speak directly with Bishop O’Connor, I will not be taking this matter any further.”

Cardinal Rixton tutted, “I fear that will be out of your hands now.”

Looking the Irish Archbishop in the eye, Julian answered, “You know, in a way, I would willingly relinquish this odious task. But I could not live with myself if an innocent man has is framed, to keep him from speaking the truth.”

Shocked, Desmond Rixton asked, “Whatever are you talking about?”

"I think it best if you don't know. Can you find out when I can get a flight back home, Archbishop Rixton?"

Cardinal Pawlowski was about to leave for the airport when he heard the phone ring. Assuming the call was for Desmond he ignored it. Then he heard Desmond calling him, but he couldn't make out the words. Turning around, he asked, "What do you want?"

"It's Bishop O'Connor on the phone. He has returned, and he wants to speak to you."

Julian looked at his watch. It would mean missing his flight, but he badly needed to talk to the Bishop. He took the phone, announcing, "Julian Pawlowski here."

"Sorry, I wasn't available to see you earlier. Come around to my home now and we can talk."

"Thank you. I will get Desmond to organise transport for me."

"Oh, there's no need for that. I'll send my man around to collect you."

Chapter 38

Dublin, modern day

Although Julian did not know the way to the Bishopric, he was sure the dirt road they drove on was not on the regular route. He became concerned when the car came to a halt in a deserted wooded area. For a few seconds, nothing happened. Then he watched as the driver turned his head and slid open the glass panel between them.

"Get out of the car please," the chauffeur, ordered.

"What is the meaning of this?" Julian asked, horribly suspicious of what was unfolding."

"Just do as I tell you, your Eminence."

"Julian demanded, "Take me to see Bishop O'Connor right now, as you were ordered," Julian demanded, defiantly.

"Did you not know that the Bishop is out of the country? Now, get out of the car," the driver said, pointing a pistol at Julian.

Showing more bravery than he felt, Julian Cardinal Pawlowski, said, "I am staying right here. Let the Bishop see the bloodstains when he returns."

The Jesuarian assassin tightened his finger around the trigger. the assassin said, "Suit yourself, your Eminence."

Resigning himself to his fate, Julian uttered, "Then get on with it."

"I want you to know that I get no pleasure out of doing this."

"What do you expect me to say?"

"Nothing, your Eminence," the man answered, aiming at Julian's heart, as he pulled the trigger.

The fire brigade arrived at the scene and saw the pall of smoke rising out of the woods. Upon investigation, they came across the burnt out car with the unidentifiable charred human remains

inside. Little did they know that the incinerated car was the lonely funeral pyre of a devout and good man.

Chapter 39

Geneva, modern day

Karl loved living in Geneva, but he felt his life was about to change, possibly necessitating a change of location. As an open city, Geneva's incredible power of assimilation and integration made him feel very much at home. The city's genius for maintaining traditional values in a modern context made it unique. These qualities had attracted Karl to the large town in the first place. Now circumstances were forcing him to give all that up. "He could, of course, walk away from the sad situation, and pretend Joab was paranoid. He wondered about these possibilities as he put his plan into action. Steeling himself, the High Light editor walked briskly along Como Rd, to the police department. He could have phoned but it would have been too easy for the police to fob him off. He decided instead to visit the police station in person.

While he waited to see somebody of high rank to attend to him, Karl sat on one of the hard plastic chairs, eyeing the Genevan Coat of Arms. He had never actually taken the time to study it before. For the first time, he noted the obvious array of Masonic and Jesuarian symbolism. The crest, a half-risen sun on the upper edge, bearing the Jesuarian trigram IHS in Greek, was represented by the shortened version of Jesus (Ihesus). Although the Society of Jesu was banned from Switzerland until 1973 and Vatican Two, it then regained its standing. This re-establishment occurred when, with the Illuminati, through the Jesuarians usurped the Catholic Church. They had always had a great deal of influence behind the scenes, but now they showed their arrogance and acted more openly - hence the enigmatic Coat of Arms.

Eventually, Karl was shown through to Inspector Pascal M Seegar's office.

"How can I help you, Herr Haas?" The senior officer asked.

Karl wondered where to begin. Composing his story in his mind, he began, "It has just come to my notice that one of the directors of the Company I work for has been operating under a false name."

"I see, and who is this duplicitous person you are referring to?"

"He calls himself Professor Detz, but his real name is Count Hans Von Hollenbeck."

Inspector Seegar was all too aware of the increasing incidents of identity fraud. Karl Haas' voluntary information caused him to check on Count Hollenbeck, alias Professor Delz. His investigation led him to his Grace Bishop Ambrose (Cantacuzene) the Bishop of Geneva and Western Europe, at the diocese at the Exaltation of the Cross Cathedral in Geneva. Pascal Seegar called on the diocese and asked to speak with Professor Delz, but got told the professor had met with a fatal accident six months before.

The inspector's Alarm bells began ringing. He checked the report relating to the crash. Apparently, the professor was driving alone when his car lost control on a mountain bend. There was enough of the body left intact to make an identification, but that was about it. Pascal had thought nothing more about it at the time, but now that another man had assumed his academic identity, the detective wondered if it had been an accident after all. He certainly had enough evidence to bring the German Count in for questioning.

On the strength of the new information, Inspector Seegar began a check concerning the, now, unsolved suspicious death of one Professor Alfred Delz. He organised his team and went to the address furnished by Karl Haas.

Von Hollenbeck was on the phone as the police approached his apartment. "Yes, your Holiness, I am about to make arrangements to ensure that the book and the meddlesome reporter never reaches England." Then he heard the knocking noise. He said, "Somebody is knocking on my door."

The Black Pope said, "Let me know as soon as the threat is eradicated."

The German Count heard more knocking. "Yes your Holiness, but please excuse me, there's somebody at the door."

The End

Epilogue

Toledo, modern day

Being back in Toledo brought back all the memories. Joab had been too busy working on his book "The Black Pope – Secrets of the Vatican," to dwell on the events in Spain. He had only returned to see Camilla, the only good thing to come out of that nightmare experience. However, now that Joab was back in Toledo, in the waiting room of the hospital, it all came flooding back. He wondered how Rosella was coping with her loss. Perhaps he ought to contact her, to convey his condolences for the brave man who gave his life to let the world know the truth about the inner workings of the Society of Jesu. However, what could he say that could make her feel any better? Perhaps it was best to let things be.

Derek had disappeared to a location unknown. Joab had found this out from Anne, on the one occasion he had spoken to her, upon his return to London. Cloistered monk-like in his home office, Joab had cut himself off from the world, concentrating only on his book; one that he knew may never see the light of day. As the media magnates owned most of the big publishing houses, there was little chance of them publishing the book. Even contacting them could be risky as the Jesuarrians had agents everywhere. They were short on compassion and long on reach. Besides the major publishing houses were only interested in bestsellers that thrilled and entertained their readers. The small publishers were even more wary about publishing a book that could have them ruined by their being tied up in lawsuits for many years. In the end, he decided to post over the internet. It would not make him rich, but at least the information would get out into the world.

Camilla was running late. Although Joab could not blame her for that – especially as she had no idea he was coming to meet her. He sighed and picked up a newspaper from the table. Being written in Spanish Joab could not understand the text, but the pictures on the front page spoke volumes. One was a photograph of Dr Jerome Zahir; the other was the scar-faced man, in court, charged with the doctor's murder. Joab smiled. Maybe there was some justice after all. He then beamed an even bigger smile as Nurse Bradford came into view.

"I ordered Brad Pitt?" Camilla asked, giving the journalist a hug.

"Sorry Ma'am, he couldn't make it, so I came instead," Joab answered, slipping into the repartee that happened naturally between them.

"Well, you are a sight for sore feet," Camilla laughed. "So what is it that brings you back to our beautiful Espana?"

“Oh. I was just passing through, and I wondered if you and Big Ted might like to go out to dinner.”

About Chris Deggs

Chris Deggs was born in 1948 in Bury St. Edmunds, England. For many years he has lived in Australia. He is now happily retired and lives in the Tweed Valley in Northern New South Wales, Australia. He is a colleague of the Science-Art Cancer Research Institute of Australia where he is actively involved as a visual artist and author. He has written many contemporary works of fiction: mysteries, adventure, crime, ethics, conspiracy, global domination etc., as well as reference books for the betterment of the human condition. He has published a number of articles on the Academia Website reflecting this. Writing and painting are Chris' two main passions in life in which he is always looking for new ways to express himself.

Other books by Chris Deggs

Amenti – a quantum tarot journey

Anunnaki – the greatest story never told – book 1 -gods, gold and genes

Anunnaki – the greatest story never told – book 2 - challenge, change and conquest

Anunnaki – the greatest story never told – book 3 – prophesy, power and politics

Democracy on Trial – the verdict

Hack – world bank in crisis

Investigation – the nunnery murders

Millennium – countdown to chaos

Nanofuture – the small things in life

Termination – the eugenics agenda

Vincent – a quantime experience

Ziggurat – the real agenda in iraq

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I hope you enjoyed this story. Here is an excerpt from another Joab Rackham assignments

ZIGGURAT: the real agenda in Iraq.

Joab lay on the bed, suffering from exhaustion. The Grand Ishtar Hotel had an inadequate wall-mounted fan that did little to cool down the hotel room. He wanted to get up but his tired body wouldn't let him. He could hardly raise his head from the pillow. The flight from London he was slowly recovering from hadn't helped either. He looked at his watch. It read 2.30 pm Iraqi time. He was due to meet his contact in 30 minutes. He looked at the Baghdad map on his phone. Luckily the meeting place was not far away. His contact had promised him the interview would be worth his while but wouldn't say any more than that on the phone. After the arduous flight from Heath Row it had better be worth it!

Between the American military and Iraqi police it was difficult to travel around parts of Baghdad without being questioned about your movements. The "Press Member", badge Joab carried allowed him a bit more leeway than most but even so he didn't want to have to divulge his intentions that day. Sticking to bomb cratered back alleys he followed the rapidly given instructions and found his way to the meeting place address. Dr. Humaz greeted him. "Did you have any problems getting here?" he asked.

Joab didn't know what to expect but he could have been face-to-face with Omar Sharif look alike. No, accept combating jet-lag."

"I am sorry to rush you on this but we have move on this quickly."

"Why the rush? What is this all about?"

The Iraqi smiled, "It's quite a story and all will be revealed in time. I am sorry for rushing you." Taking Joab by the arm he ushered the reporter inside the old house, saying, "Please come and share refreshment with me and I will fill you in with some details."

Agreeing, and impressed with the doctor's almost perfect English, Joab asked, "Have you studied overseas?"

"Yes, at Harvard University."

"That's very impressive Dr. Humaz."

The Iraqi didn't comment. He organised some light refreshment and they sat down. He looked at Joab nervously for a moment, and then asked. "Are you sure you weren't followed here?"

"No I wasn't. Would there be a problem if I was?"

"It's difficult to tell these uncertain days. It was bad enough in Saddam's days with his secret police but now we have both the Iraqi secret forces and the CIA to contend with."

With growing concern Joab ventured, "So are we dealing with something sensitive here?"

"Yes and no. I will explain."

“It’s just that I don’t represent one of the major tabloids. It’s just a monthly magazine called “High Light.”

“I know. I have still got copies from when I lived in America.” Then pausing, Dr. Humaz said, “The major tabloids would not publish what I am going to tell you, nor would Western news services.”

“Why not?”

“Because news is not news any more. It is more like propaganda and what I have to say does not fit in with their Anglo Saxon Christian belief systems.” Then, passing food and drink to Joab he continued “Are you cognisant of the works of Zachariah Sitchin?”

“Yes. He was the guy that translated all those Sumerian texts, wasn’t he?”

“He was, yes, and much more besides.” Pointing to a certificate Dr. Humaz explained, “My doctorate is in the study of Mesopotamian antiquities, a subject that has been in my heart for as long as I can remember. This is something I share in common with Saddam Hussein.”

Surprised at this Joab can only manage, “really?”

“Yes but I will enlarge upon this aspect as my story unfolds.” Then he added, “Do you know much about archaeology?”

“Only that archaeologists always end in ruins,” he punned, wishing he hadn’t as he noticed the Iraqi’s blank look.”

“It was a joke,” Joab tried explaining.

“Well what I have to tell you isn’t,” Dr. Humaz responded, tersely. Then he continued, “Archaeology is a very recent science. It was only after Schliemann’s discovery of the ancient city of Troy that we were shown a window into the past that made humans question the invalidity of myths. His discovery set many young amateur archaeological hopefuls seeking fame and fortune by uncovering past civilisations.”

“With respect Dr. Humaz I don’t have time to just listen to your anecdotes. This doesn’t sound like the ground breaking story you promised.”

The academic stopped in his verbal tracks, got up and went to the window. He then turned around facing Joab. No longer Smiling, he said, “This is more significant than you could possibly realise young man. I have to start softly in this way so as to prepare you, and your readers, for the intellectual bombshells I shall drop later. So will you do the courtesy of listening to my preamble?”

Feeling somewhat chided, Joab agreed to be more patient and Dr Humaz continued his story. “So scientific archaeology only happened once a reluctant academia acknowledged the past being dug up in the Middle East digs. By then these archaeologists were running foul of your Roman Church that feared their findings would contradict the history of the Old Testament.”

“And we can’t have that,” Joab added, cynically.

“Well your Church hadn’t had to deal with such a challenge to its authoritative view of religious history before. Even Galileo, in order to have his life spared, had to capitulate his heliocentric view of the solar system when confronted by the dreaded inquisition. Even Giordano Bruno, a catholic monk who held to the Copernican view, having been tricked by his Church’s duplicity, was burnt at the stake in Rome. And that was only 36 years before my old Harvard University was founded.”

Joab, becoming more interested, began recording the session.

Dr. Humaz continued, “By then evidence of the Church’s misrepresentation was clearly being shown for what it was, so Western religion went into damage control.”

“How did they do that?”

“They funded their own archaeologists whose mission was to reinforce the Church’s view of biblical history.”

“But surely their discoveries would belie this.”

“That’s a risk they had to take. In any case if any findings contradicted Church doctrine Rome refused to publish the findings.”

“So it was very selective. But didn’t the archaeologists balk at this?”

“Yes but the Church was their paymaster. One such example of selective truth occurred when Sir Flinders Petrie, the most distinguished archaeologist in his field, discovered a very ancient Anunnaki gold processing plant on Mt Horeb in the Sinai. When he published his findings privately the Church stopped his funding.”

“Now wait a minute. Who are these Anunnaki you just mentioned?”

Getting up, the Iraqi instructed, “Please follow me. I have something to show you.”

Despite the predictable tribulations for the CIA in Iraq and Afghanistan Douglas Cane willingly accepted the post of Station Chief in Baghdad. Baghdad, which was the largest foreign based station ever, still had its problems. Colonel Cane looked up from the report he was reading. “Damn it George what the hell is your team doing?”

George Daniel Mason, Cane’s veteran second in command immediately launched into his defence. “How the hell are we supposed to infiltrate this group when we have very few people who can speak Iraqi?”

"Then use those who can."

"It's not that easy Colonel. Those that can speak the lingo are mostly diplomats untrained in undercover work. Besides the language we can't travel freely because we don't look like Arabs, and you're likely be shot by any one of them."

“Okay so nobody said it was going to be easy. Look I’m getting a lot of flak from Langley over this. They’re wondering what we are doing with our time and their money over here.” For Cane it was really a CYA (cover your arse) exercise. Confronting such problems on critical fronts, had recently seen the removal of his boss the CIA head in Baghdad because of questions about his ability to lead the massive station and Douglas didn’t want to attract the same fate.

He was all too aware that the Company (slang for the CIA) had closed a number of satellite bases in Afghanistan amid concerns about that country’s deteriorating security situation.

Joab followed the doctor into another room where, in a glass case, there were various ancient looking artefacts. Opening the door Dr. Humaz carefully lifted out a clay tablet and laid it gently on a table. It depicted three figures and some cuneiform text. He then explained, “Petrie’s astounding findings never saw the light of day. The power of the Church saw to it that his work was never published and also made sure that the British Library never catalogued the work - one of the most important discoveries in Archaeology. In fact it wasn’t until the startling findings of Sitchin that the truth began to be revealed to the wider world. In Genesis 6:1-4 it reads, “There were Nephilim in the earth in those days”. Nephilim is often translated as “giants” which, although only partially accurate, is never-the-less, a legitimate and appropriate interpretation.”

“Now I’m getting really confused. What do these Nephilim have to do with the Anunnaki?”

“I do apologise. I know it’s a lot for you to take in. As I was about to add, a better definition may well be “those who came down”, “those who descended”, or “those who were cast down.” The Anunnaki of ancient Sumerian texts is similarly defined as “those who from heaven to earth came. Anu meant heaven and Ki, Earth, as translated by Sitchin. Now virtually all open-minded historical and theological scholars agree the Old Testament’s book of Genesis was extracted from the older Sumerian records, if only because of the similarity in their Comparative Religions.”

“Is that now accepted by the Church?”

“Some of the more liberal clerics recognise that “The Enuma Elish”, the Sumerian Epic of Creation, and Genesis share a number of common elements but in general the conservative Church avoids such rational thought like the plague, despite the Stories of a Great Flood and Deluge, also being common to both Sumerian and Biblical accounts.”

“In the light of such overwhelming evidence how can they confidently maintain their intransigence?”

“Such logic does not mean anything to the Church. However, Sitchin’s findings can only lead us to the inevitable conclusion that the Anunnaki were as real as Noah, Moses or Abraham.”

The CIA men looked at one another. They both men knew it wasn’t their fault they hadn’t made any progress infiltrating a cell known simply as Gizatrug. The previously undisclosed moves by the CIA in the Gulf underscored the problems affecting the agency’s clandestine service at a time when it was confronting insurgencies and the U.S.-declared war on terrorism. George Mason responded. “It’s okay for the goons back in Virginia. They aren’t here. We’re not the only CIA officers having to deal with a series of stumbles and operational constraints that have hampered our ability to penetrate these insurgents Doug.”

“I know that George, but we have to do better. Now if you’re not up to the task...”

“Now wait a minute Doug! Our guys are doing the best they can. How come when our station is the largest in agency history, eclipsing even the size our station in Saigon at the height of the Vietnam War, we can’t get a handle on these guys. Handing over a file the Colonel responded, “This might be some help.”

The CIA deputy scanned the document. “This is just some pissant journo from some pissant New Age rag nobody gives a shit about. Are you suggesting he’s privy to this cell were tracking down.”

“Have your people got any info on an Iraqi archaeologist called Dr. Humaz?”

“Yeah, he was one of Saddam’s antiquity experts, wasn’t he?”

“Yes, well we need to know what he knows before he gives this journo the dirt. So get your team onto it George and come back with good news.

Just then the CIA head’s phone rang. George Mason got up to leave. Picking up the dossier on the reporter he determined that he was going to follow up this lead himself.