

Chapter One

THURSDAY

November 20, 2008

1

Isabella

Finally, after thirteen grueling hours of interrogation, I cuffed the Campus Killer in the interview room of the New Haven Police Department. Baiting me was clearly the suspect's evening entertainment. In response, I'd played good cop, bad cop, bored cop, smart alek, dumb blonde—I'd have played the village idiot to make him confess.

I was exhausted.

In my short tenure in the old boys' club at the police station, I thought I'd seen all the faces of evil—evil in business suits, evil in the gutter, evil with fists of iron, evil in the imagination of Internet porn masters, evil flowering in every neighborhood, in every race, in every class of human being.

Not so. This particular specimen was an in-your-face elitist. Clueless as to why he wasn't naturally entitled to murder twelve women on a whim. He had flaunted a silver Thunderbird around town while I tracked him. As I snapped the cuffs in place I noticed his immaculate manicure. He wore a fawn-colored designer cardigan and hand-sewn leather shoes from Italy.

"You'll enjoy your new orange outfit," I said.

Towering above me, he looked down with eyes blue and cold as glaciers. He said, "I'll be out on bond tomorrow." Then he smiled, revealing perfect, pearly, ten thousand dollar teeth, and whispered, "You're number thirteen."

"Not in this lifetime, you sick scumbag." Heart beating hard, I wanted to kick him where it hurt. Instead, I kicked the metal door shut after him. Then I took a couple of deep breaths, gathered my purse and my composure, and stepped out into a corridor where my colleagues gave me an ovation. "Way to go, Isabella!"

"Excellent work," said Richard Crenshaw, my boss. Crenshaw was the only man I knew who could make a pair of casual jeans look like a Marine uniform.

Everyone patted me on the shoulders with congratulations. I could barely stand up I was so tired. Suddenly, Ted, one of the uniforms, sang, loudly and off-key, a line from one of the Beach Boys' golden oldies, "Well, he had fun, fun, fun—till Isabella took his T-Bird away now."

In one split second, the tension and horror from the last days—weeks—months dissolved into bubbles of laughter, then gulps of guffaws. Everyone in the corridor cracked up, even Richard Crenshaw. We had caught Connecticut's worst serial killer in history. Belly laughs, great convulsions of relief, finally wound down with chortles and snickers.

I couldn't remember the last time I'd laughed like that. Eight years at least.

The next day was a different story. The New Haven PD was lined up in formal attire behind the District Attorney in the courtroom. Except for me. I sat on the back row wearing a black suit and spike heels, the perfect look for a funeral. Or a national press conference, which I had managed to survive earlier without eating my own foot. Looking around the courtroom, I caught glimpses of the families of Harold Spicer III's twelve victims, scattered throughout the courtroom, their faces worn down with grief, but their eyes alive with the hope for justice.

I stuck around at the arraignment long enough to hear Judge Cronin say the three magic words that would guarantee a good night's sleep tonight: "Remanded, without bail."

The courtroom erupted into pandemonium. The victims' families cheered; the defendant's mother wept; a platoon of defense lawyers clamored for attention; and police officers hustled Harold Spicer III, shackled and cuffed, out the side door into the maws of the national press. But not before he had a chance to turn his head and leer again at me. He mouthed, "Just wait."

I had hoped to sneak out the back of the courtroom unnoticed, but I should have known better. I snagged one of my stiletto heels as I opened the courtroom door, almost landing nose first into the microphone of a CNN crime reporter I recognized from earlier in the day.

"Detective O'Leary! Can you comment on the judge's decision for remand over a \$3 million bond? Any new insights on the Campus Killer?"

A dozen other reporters closed in, straining to catch a sound bite. Still unaccustomed to the bouquets of mikes thrust in my face, I said, "The wonderful thing about America is that justice can still be served, even if the defendant's father and grandfather served on the State Supreme Court."

I smiled for the strobe show of cameras and then got lucky—the horde of photographers and reporters spotted the D.A. and I escaped. I left New Haven's imposing Neo-Classical courthouse for the sanctuary of my Mini Cooper, parked half a block down Elm Street.

The New Haven Green, two blocks of spacious grounds surrounding a few old churches, was a patch of land preserved from earlier centuries—a small, manicured green belt separating town from gown. I ignored the usual crowd of men at the bus stop, who ogled like they'd never seen a pair of legs before. Once inside my Mini Coop, I headed toward the Interstate.

At the light, I glanced down on the seat next to me at the large front-page color photo from the newspaper Crenshaw had given me. Yesterday, a lone photographer from the *New Haven Transcript* had captured the moment when I'd handcuffed the Campus Killer, a sadistic psychopath who had murdered twelve Yale students and terrorized the city of New Haven for over a year. The story had made the AP.

My picture shared the space above the fold with a photo of a Yale dean named Guildford donating some ancient manuscripts to the Divinity School. The *Gospel of Judas*. At one time, I would have been interested, but not lately and certainly not today.

Moving through the light, I drove east over the harbor bridge as the sun was beginning to set, my car gunning just ahead of the congested traffic that would be leaving New Haven shortly.

Relief from the stress of the past few days felt like a hot shower on a cold day. With the killer locked away, I might actually sleep tonight instead of twisting the covers into a knot.

What a year. The Campus Killer had stalked young females alone at night in secluded areas on campus, or jogging along the dark stretches of Grove Cemetery nearby. He strangled his victims, and then branded them on their thighs with a Y.

Not one of the victims had survived to describe the attack. No witnesses. No DNA. No nothing.

After a student found the fourth girl in the stacks of Sterling Memorial Library in yet another clean crime scene, I knew we were dealing with a really, really bad guy. A perp with a deadly combination of ruthlessness and brains. He was either a natural genius at covering his tracks, or he'd studied law and criminal forensics (probably unsuccessfully) right under our noses at Yale University.

I took him on. This nasty piece of humanity was not going to win. I spent months reading FBI psychological profiles, books, and articles. Then I made friends with Ruth Capshaw, the Yale Law School secretary who'd been around longer than Henry Ford's first car. She helped me investigate every male who had failed the program or been expelled. After ten tense months, I'd dropped fifteen pounds to a size four—with no new evidence and no new clues.

Finally, I caught a break. Almost a year after his first crime—just as I was about to give up—I found him. Harold Spicer III, son and grandson of Rhode Island Supreme Court Judges, Harold Spicer I and II. Unemployed for years, he lived at University Towers, a large co-op high-rise at 100 York Street, conveniently located—for his purposes—between the old campus and the Yale Medical School and hospital.

During that first semester, Harold Spicer III had been expelled after exposing himself to three different female law students, on three different occasions, inside the women's restroom of the YGS dining hall.

It took thirteen hours of seemingly guileless questioning to get the confession. I'll never forget the looks of disdain he gave me. He didn't realize that through a fluke of nature my IQ probably outranked his by thirty points—and he was no dummy. He gave himself away over a small heart tattoo on the inner thigh of one of his victims.

Reaching Branford, the next town east on Rt. 1, I approached the Olde Branford Inn, where I planned to relax.

Alone.

Behind the Olde Branford Inn, daylight still lingered on the horizon. A bank of dark, ugly clouds moved in. After turning off the car's motor, I took one more look at the picture on the front page. Who had I become over the last eight years? I saw a tough detective with a small frame but deceptively strong muscles. Dark, shoulder-length hair. Smooth olive skin. In the photo, the brown eyes my Italian mother called "cioccolata" looked almost black with determination. Obsidian black.

I had changed, but the inn had not. After eight years, it still looked like a large New England rock house straight out of Norman Rockwell, with a view of the ocean and a fireplace in every bedroom.

Entering the quiet, quaint bar paneled in dark wood, I asked for the same table I came to every year on the anniversary of the Thursday before Thanksgiving—the table next to the hearth and a window where I could watch the waves rolling in. The hostess, a young teenager in a slinky black dress too big and too sophisticated for her, looked me over. "Are you the lady detective who caught that—"

I nodded. Word got around fast when your face stared out from news bins on every corner.

"Wow. First drink's on the house."

"Thanks." I ordered a Perrier, and then two more, one right after the other. Outside the window, the sun disappeared and the storm rolled in, starting with a light spatter of rain.

Somebody once told me the male personality was like a well-organized tackle box, storing different aspects of life in specific, labeled compartments. The female personality, on the other hand, resembled that one special drawer in the kitchen where twine, paperclips, coins, broken knobs, nuts, bolts, and all the rest of the miscellaneous odds and ends of life were thrown together.

I was getting pretty good at compartmentalizing, especially at work, but not tonight. I couldn't separate the euphoria at collaring the biggest criminal of my career with the sadness that Ronny wasn't here to share it.

I had not spoken Ronny's name aloud for years.

Ronny O'Shaunessy asked me to marry him at this very table, nine years ago today. Tall, buff, with short blonde hair, and smelling like Irish Spring soap—Ronny had fumbled the ring and chased it under the table on his hands and knees. We quit dinner halfway through the filet mignon and took a room upstairs.

After a Christmas wedding—a cream satin gown, red poinsettias—we had a reception back at my parents' house, with more manicotti than the whole neighborhood could eat.

God, I loved Ronny O'Shaunessy. I would never admit it, especially to the guys downtown, but all I ever really wanted out of life was to raise a family.

Out the window of the Olde Branford Inn, darkness from the rising storm gnawed away the rest of the daylight. The Perrier offered no relief from my stomach, tight as a walnut.

Then the wreck. Exactly a year later, I was as big—elephant big, rhinoceros big—with our first child. Ronny and I came back to the Olde Branford Inn for an anniversary drink. He let me out at the door while he parked the car, and all I remember was two headlights coming straight at me before I hit the ground. Some drunk had come out of nowhere.

Two weeks in a coma. When I woke up, Mama was sitting next to my hospital bed, praying the rosary. She looked ten years older around the eyes, like she'd been attacked with tear gas, they were so red. She cried incoherently when I opened my eyes, and immediately I wanted to go back into the soft, dark place from which I had just emerged. Mama dropped the rosary and grabbed my hand.

"The baby," I said.

From the jumble of English, Italian, and tears, I gathered the baby had died on impact; and by the time the ambulance arrived, it looked like I'd bled out. After I got to the hospital, they were filling out paperwork for the morgue when the head of the ER came in to certify time of death. He said, "Just a minute."

Between sobs, Mama called it a miracle. The doctor had revived me and performed an emergency hysterectomy to take the baby.

Mama stopped talking. Even in my drugged state in the hospital bed, I knew there was more bad news. Mama was wringing my hand right off my wrist.

"Tell me."

"Later, mi bambina. Enough sadness for now. You are alive."

"Tell me now."

Mama picked up her rosary from the floor. She began to pray.

One of the nurses came in to fill out the chart. After a flutter of excitement when she found me awake, she left again to call the doctor.

"Mama."

"Please, no. Not yet." Mama had started crying.

"Mama, tell me. Now. I need to know. Where's Ronny?"

Finally, Mama whispered the rest of the story. At the scene of the accident, a rookie EMT had felt for my pulse. Ronny overheard him say, "She's gone. Her and the baby both."

Following the silent ambulance back to New Haven, Ronny had stopped his car on the harbor bridge. With the car still running, he first left a message on my mother's answering

machine, telling her he couldn't live with having lost his wife and baby. We were his only family. Then he jumped off the bridge.

Now, eight years later, I took one last sip, paid the bill, and stepped outside the Olde Branford Inn into a cold, driving rain.

The church had refused Ronny a Christian funeral because suicide was a sin.

When would I stop waking up in the middle of the night seeing the car's headlights coming straight at me?

I spent a year at Yale Divinity School, where God slowly sublimated like old dirty snow instead of comforting me with the answers I craved (why had the drunk turned in at that very second? Why didn't the rookie EMS tech keep his mouth shut, leaving Ronny a window of hope? What in the hell was the point of so much suffering?)

The image persisted of God as a tyrannical school master—giving perks to a few pet students, and allowing bullies to make life miserable for the weaker ones. I left the divinity school and, instead, sped through the Ph.D. program in criminal psychology at Yale, followed by training at the Police Academy. I made detective in record time.

Today was the eighth anniversary of Ronny's death. I was almost thirty years old, barren, and had the social life of a nun.

But I was good at catching criminals. At least my job gave my life meaning and paid the bills.

Outside the Olde Branford Inn, near-freezing pellets of rain stung my face. Although each year my suffering eased a little, I still lived with a canker of anger somewhere near the center.

2

Gabriel

In another part of town, Gabriel ran his finger along the shiny blade of the axe he had bought on the way back to New Haven from New York. Small for an axe, this one had an oak handle, sanded smooth, and a fresh steel blade, honed to a razor's edge. The blunt end of the steel wedge flashed with red paint.

Gabriel recalled his first axe, a small scouting hatchet he used on campouts to chop firewood when he was nine years old. He also used it to cut down random trees, fences, and signposts when he took long walks in the woods as a child. His father had taken the axe away when he discovered that Gabriel had chopped a neighbor girl's playhouse into splinters, just for fun.

After that, Gabriel had saved his allowance money and bargained with an older boy for a machete, a sharp, deadly instrument that Gabriel kept hidden under his bed for years.

As he watched dusk and lowering clouds approach outside his window, Gabriel pondered the chain of events that had led him to this threshold of a new start in life. By his late twenties, he was jaded. He'd done it all. He had gotten three girls pregnant and paid for three abortions. He had seen one old woman on the streets murder another old woman over a stick of gum. He had worked in an advertisement firm as an intern and come up with a million dollar idea to sell toilet paper—right before he was fired for telling his boss he'd rather pick nits from a wedgie than work for him.

And he had almost, but not quite, learned to live in the wasteland of his inner life, a Sahara Desert of disappointments, disenchantments, and failure.

Then he was inducted into the Sethian Brotherhood, and his life turned around in a profound and remarkable way.

Gabriel's watch said 4:57. In a little over an hour, he would make the first strike in an international plan that had been several years in the making.

Gabriel sharpened his hatchet, then laid the steely blade next to him on the bed and waited. He closed his eyes, and remembered.

Right after Gabriel was fired from the ad company, he received a phone call from an older man, requesting to meet him in a dim, smoke-filled bar in a neighboring town. Gabriel had gotten there first and downed five or six Scotches while he waited. Although he rarely drank, he was determined to drown his sorrows if it killed him.

When the man arrived, he sat down at the far end of the bar, ordered more drinks, and, when Gabriel joined him, said, "Heard about your job."

"Great." Gabriel felt empty-headed, but he knew he had to say something. He couldn't just sit there. He tried to articulate clearly so he wouldn't slur his words. "I mean, I take a job at this ad company, trying to make everybody happy. So I come up with a million dollar idea to sell toilet paper—the whole idea was a joke. Like the world can't live without triple-ply toilet paper."

The man listened while Gabriel laughed. "Then I'm canned for telling my freaking boss the truth about the way he treats people."

Gabriel drank his Scotch neat, enjoying the smoky taste as he rolled the amber liquid around in his mouth.

"What are you going to do now?" asked the man.

Gabriel's tongue was turning numb. "Don't know." Words and emotions were running around like a pack of devils inside his head—wild, uncontrolled. Gabriel knew he had to start forcing them to make sense, but at the moment, hate was the only emotion he could express. He didn't know whether he'd be able to make himself understood or not, and felt himself on the verge of tears. Yet he felt compelled to start talking, saying anything. "Everything I hate is more powerful than me."

The man nodded. The man was a good listener. The man cared. He had proven that in the past. As Gabriel sat hunched over the bar, the man waited, patient, sipping his own drink with care. He asked, "What is it that you hate?"

Chasing down his thoughts was becoming a major problem. Gabriel leaned forward and with the slender remains of sobriety, forced himself to summon command over the chaos inside him. "What do I hate? Let's start with America. Americans really are as greedy as the Muslims claim they are. Pathetic. Shallow. Hypocritical." He paused. "Did I say greedy?"

The man waited, watching Gabriel.

Gabriel sighed. Gradually, he felt the stampede inside begin to circle into a familiar pattern; he recognized the restless herd of all the grudges and wounds he'd suffered since he could remember. Beasts he could never get rid of. "What do I hate? You really want to know? Okay, I'll tell you. I hate life. I can't do anything right. I hate God. I just about hate everything."

The man lowered his voice, "Do you hate me?"

"Of course not. You're about the only thing I don't hate." He took a slug of his, what—seventh?—Scotch. "You know it's been drummed into my head since I was two years old that

I'm supposed to make a difference in this world. If I've heard it once, I've heard it a million times."

"I know."

"So you tell me—how do you make a difference with one crappy, insignificant life? I'm thinking the only way to make a difference is to blow my brains out. That's the only thing I can do to make the world a better place." He finished off his drink and signaled for another. He hadn't meant to get so personal, but there it was.

The man turned his own Scotch around and around on the damp napkin, but didn't say anything.

Gabriel said, "Aren't you supposed to give me advice at this point? Being older and wiser, and all." He was trying to be flippant, but he couldn't disguise his desperation.

Silence.

"Aren't you even going to try and talk me out of it?"

The man watched him, expressionless, as if he were making a decision. Finally, he said, "To make a difference, you band together with other people trying to make the world a better place. Men with high professional profiles, but who meet in secret to take action when action is required."

The bartender filled Gabriel's glass yet again with Scotch from the Highlands. Gabriel wondered if it would be possible to drink himself to death right here on this bar stool. He closed his eyes, inviting the friendly darkness into his mind.

The man said, "Look at Al Qaida. We can learn from their techniques. If you wanted to get the world's attention, what would you do?"

What? Al Qaida? Gabriel opened his eyes and stared at the man. He was too drunk to follow him, but he wasn't too drunk to recognize that the conversation was taking an unusual twist. Why was he talking about terrorism? "The twin towers are already decimated," he said. "They got both of them." Maybe it was the power of suggestion, but Gabriel thought he was seeing two identical men sitting with him at the bar instead of one.

"Yes, but they're not the only monument to what's wrong with the world." The man paused. "Would you agree that the Western World has disintegrated?"

Gabriel laughed. "Yeah. That's a pretty safe statement." Everything had disintegrated as far as Gabriel was concerned.

"What about the government?"

Gabriel rubbed his forehead. "Don't get me started. I don't want—"

"What about the church? Is it safe to say that America is in a spiritual crisis? Pick up any newspaper and read about the latest pillar of the church going to jail for child pornography, for embezzling, you name it."

"The church." Aha. Gabriel recognized how deftly the man had turned the conversation to the man's obsession, the church. Gabriel wasn't in the mood for a tirade, but out of respect, he played along. "Religion is a dead man walking."

"Correct."

Gabriel placed his chin in his hands. Now all he wanted to do was go home, but he knew he was in for a lecture. The man was hung up on spiritual stuff, and had yammered to Gabriel on several occasions about how Christianity got it wrong. How for two thousand years the church misled and tyrannized the people. He closed his eyes again.

"Pay attention!" shouted the man.

Gabriel jerked himself alert. Something was different today. The man was more intense than Gabriel had ever seen him.

“Yes, sir.” He tried to focus. Was Gabriel being tested? Was this the moment of truth the man had hinted at the last time they had talked? Please, not now. Gabriel had already forgotten the question. He nodded because he didn’t know what to say.

The man leaned toward Gabriel and almost hissed. “The lies must be stopped.”

“Exactly.” Gabriel hoped he wouldn’t fall off the stool. He was struggling to keep his grip on both the bar stool and the conversation.

“So what needs to happen?”

Gabriel closed his eyes. His head felt dizzy, but he was beginning to pull together strands of their previous conversations. It was almost there, almost coming together. He stalled while he tried to focus. Finally, he said, “The true faith has to make a point.”

“And how do we do that?”

Al Qaida. The man was fishing. Something about 9-11 and what it had taken to get America’s attention. Gabriel felt suddenly inspired. “A lot of people need to die.”

The man nodded and smiled. “And first we must prepare the way.”

“Exactly.”

“But now we need to get you an ice pack.”

What was he talking about? thought Gabriel as he stumbled out of the bar.

Gabriel felt a quiver of anxiety pass through him as he lay on the bed waiting for the action to begin—now his source of fear was whether or not he would be able to fulfill his vows to the Brotherhood.

That night in the bar, the man had paid the bill and whisked Gabriel home. The next day, Gabriel found himself on an airplane to Scotland with a letter of introduction, a list of instructions, and a headache that felt as if someone had smashed his frontal lobe into a bloody mess.

Within twenty-four short, life-changing hours, Gabriel—stone cold sober—had entered into one of his own fantasies. He had penetrated a veil between the reality of his everyday life, and another reality he thought possible only in his own mind, or the mind of Hollywood.

Twenty-four hours after the scene in the bar, and nothing about him was the same. Emotionally, he had ascended from the dark, claustrophobic coffin of despair into an eagle’s aerie above the clouds. Spiritually, he was baptized into a faith that tapped his core in a place deeper than he knew existed inside himself.

The Sethian Brotherhood’s holy chamber in Scotland was a former dungeon lit with candlelight flickering from sconces strategically placed every two feet or so around the cavernous space. Was Gabriel hallucinating? No. A cold breeze sliced his bare legs and feet, and the dense scent of perfumed incense seeped from old stone walls.

Gabriel had trouble making the leap from the ad agency’s plucky cubicle with a cheesy fake wood desk and glaring fluorescent lights into the magic of this ring of black-hooded men standing around a stone altar with a huge gold—solid gold—symbol of the Sethian Brotherhood gleaming in the shimmering light. How could two so different worlds exist on the same planet?

Instantly, Gabriel knew that the old workaday world of the West’s rat race for achievement, its self-serving opportunism and greed was dead to him. True power was spiritual.

After his initiation ceremony, the Grand Patriarch looked Gabriel in the eye and rasped, “I have christened you Gabriel, the Messenger of Life. You have proven yourself fit for the

tasks that lie ahead, and you have sworn before the brothers, signing the Book of Life. Now you must listen, for the time is at hand, the dawn of a new age.”

Gabriel had knelt on the cold stone floor of the holy chamber while the Grand Patriarch told him the story of the brave wounded monk, Brother Caedmon, who was almost killed by Henry VIII’s men. Caedmon had hobbled and stumbled twenty-five miles across the English border of Scotland to entrust his sister’s husband with an ancient lineage and to warn the Brotherhood of the disappearance of the only complete copy of their sacred book, *The Gospel of Judas*.

At that moment, nothing else existed for Gabriel outside the dark stone walls with the flickering light. Gabriel had been hand-selected to become part of a sacred tradition two thousand years old. Chills of excitement ran up and down his legs.

Then the Grand Patriarch outlined the plans for this coming week, the week before Thanksgiving. He pointed to the dancing candle flames along the walls. “See how small flames create giant shadows in the light. We are the fire, Gabriel. We are the fire. But the light and shadows that we cast will be very big.”

The Grand Patriarch’s gaunt and lined face glowed. Gabriel was close enough to smell his breath, spicy from what must have been cabbage and vinegar. Gabriel could hardly breathe himself from excitement—combined with terror and revulsion at the old man’s smell and yellow fingernails.

Two days later, Gabriel woke up in his own bed, terrified that the deepest sense of purpose he’d ever experienced was an alcohol-induced reverie, and that the castle in Scotland was a dream. Then he remembered the plan.

Now, as he waited on the bed for the plan to unfold, Gabriel felt his pulse pounding to the rhythm of time itself. *Gabriel was about to make a difference.*

The Sethian Brotherhood had been active for centuries in covert operations against traitors to the truth. The world would never know the Brotherhood’s role in the Kennedy assassination, or the support it was giving Al Qaida. Gabriel would never have public accolades, but he would always have the pleasure of knowing that at a crucial juncture in history, he’d been chosen to help change the world.

Now. Gabriel’s watch said 6:18. Instructions had been specific. The timing was crucial.

Quietly, he hid the hatchet up the sleeve of his topcoat, placed the slip of paper in his pocket, grabbed his leather briefcase, and let himself out of the room.

3

Victoria

Victoria Guildford stopped in the twilight at the outskirts of New Haven to get a newspaper. Sure enough, there was an article on the front page about the manuscript donation tomorrow. The story featured a picture of her brother-in-law, Dean Andrew Guildford, standing in front of the Yale Divinity School.

The article was eclipsed by a color photo of the detective who had captured New Haven’s most notorious serial killer. Victoria studied her photo. The detective, a woman named Isabella O’Leary, looked more like a model than a detective, and wore good clothes.

Victoria hopped back in her Jaguar and headed for St. Ronan Street. Her husband’s nephew, Paul St. Clair, was flying in tonight for the manuscript event this weekend. Her

husband Malcolm was going to pick up Paul at the airport and take him out to eat. He didn't expect Victoria back from New York until tomorrow.

Good. She would surprise them.

By now, the evening clouds had condensed into a bitterly cold night shower. Victoria pulled into her driveway under the porte-cochere where she could dash inside without getting wet.

As freezing rain pummeled the roof, Victoria pulled her heavy bag from the trunk. She thought she heard the tinkle of sleet against the bay windows on the front of the house.

Fumbling with her keys, Victoria let herself into the dark brick mansion. When she flipped on the Italian chandelier in the foyer, sparkling light revealed her new marble floors and rich cherry wainscoting. She set down her suitcase and turned toward the alarm box. It was disarmed. Maybe her housekeeper Gabby was still here after all.

Or not. The house seemed too quiet. If Gabby had already gone, this was the third time this month she had forgotten to arm the system. Victoria hung up her coat on the rack next to the door. She would have to be firmer with Gabby. No one in New Haven could afford to take chances. Not after the Campus Killer. A jogger had discovered one of the women's bodies only three blocks away. Fear lingered in the streets, even though the killer had been caught.

Just as Victoria started down the marble hallway that led through the house toward the kitchen, she heard the sharp sound of shattering glass. She jumped as a jolt of adrenaline surged through her body—what had broken?

Her nerves were suddenly on edge. But then her no-nonsense reasoning kicked in. It must be the storm, of course. The wind and sleet had probably torn one of the thick branches of the elm tree near the library, sending it crashing into the bay window. Malcolm had already lost one branch—and two windowpanes—in the blizzard of 2005.

Victoria heard someone moaning. In spite of her attempt to remain rational, her pulse began pounding in her head. She walked faster down the hallway toward the library, past a formal living room. Could it be Gabby? But what was Gabby doing in the library? At Malcolm's request, she cleaned there only on Mondays, and today was Thursday.

This time when Victoria heard another groan and a crash from within, a pang of terror shot through her like an icicle. This was not the wind, or a tree branch. She stopped breathing, paralyzed. It sounded like an axe.

Then she softly placed her bag on the floor and took off her Ferragamos.

4

Isabella

Home was a small frame house in the same Hamden working class neighborhood where I grew up. When I first bought the house, my dad helped me paint the outside light sage green with evergreen shutters. We also added a new brass knocker on the door, and did the inside with floral wallpaper and a matching border.

Inside, the furniture was functional. The hallway walls practically sagged with pictures of my parents, four brothers, and my nieces and nephews. Other than that, two prints of the Italian countryside hung over the couch.

I liked my nest. It was clean, uncluttered, and all mine.

The first thing I did when I got home from the Olde Branford Inn was to take off my suit and pull on a deep red, fleece turtleneck. The irony of my life didn't escape me: a world-class figure, totally useless for reproduction.

That first year after Ronny's death, I slept with anything in pants. Don't know what I was trying to prove, but it didn't take long to figure out that each superficial encounter (I didn't want to know their names or anything about them) didn't make me feel better. It just made the canker of anger grow bigger.

Then I went to work on the police force. At first the men called me "the ice queen," but over the last couple of years, they'd accepted me as one of the guys. I focused on catching criminals, sparing myself the unnecessary pain of relationships.

I took off the high heels and wiggled my toes inside my running shoes.

Hungry for the first time in months, I went to the kitchen and munched on leftover spaghetti. Usually, I loved to cook, but tonight I wasn't in the mood. There was the newspaper, which I flipped over, glancing at the article about Yale Divinity School and the Guildford family. The manuscripts were valued at six million dollars. That caught my eye.

The Yale Divinity School. Someone told me that Dean Guildford had turned the place into an international theological center. I hadn't set foot on the property since I sold my books to the incoming, starry-eyed students and left for another part of campus.

The landline rang. This number was unlisted. Only family had access, and I was expecting Mama to call, excited about the article. I picked up the receiver. "Hey—" Alarm spread through me as a smooth, oily voice only too familiar after the last few days said, "Did you enjoy the arraignment?"

I slammed down the receiver. How had Harold Spicer III gotten this phone number?

5

Victoria

Honestly. Get a grip, Victoria Guildford told herself as she tiptoed toward the door of the library. It was silly to be afraid, especially since she didn't know what she was fearing. Still. The blood continued to pound in her brain.

Clutching her cell phone like a weapon, Victoria slowed down and stopped ten feet from the entrance to the library. Its double French doors were closed. She couldn't quite see through the panes of glass from this far away, but she hesitated to creep closer.

Maybe Gabby was exploring where she shouldn't be and had tripped and crashed into something. Dim light (probably from the Lalique lamp on a side table) filtered through the panes of glass from behind the doors.

Victoria heard the moaning again, this time louder and more tortured.

What if something unspeakable were happening to Gabby? Victoria's head began to spin as it had once when she stood up too soon after giving blood. In stocking feet, she crept close enough to peer into the room from an angle. She saw hunter green carpet, the corner of an Oriental rug, and the east wall of books, all intact. Gliding on her toes, she tiptoed up another foot for a wider angle view. Her hand shot to her mouth to cover a gasp. The corner bookcase had been moved away from the wall, and the safe Malcolm had created from a dumb waiter was exposed and empty.

The jewelry her mother had given her. Malcolm's gold coin collection. The \$100,000 cash they kept for emergencies. Malcolm's stocks, bonds, legal documents and other valuable papers. Gone.

A scream escaped her throat in spite of herself.

Inside the library, the moans turned to groans, and Victoria heard crashing and grunting along with sounds of breaking wood and lamps shattering. It was definitely an axe, she thought as she pictured Malcolm's desk—from the seventeenth century—splintered into pieces.

Who was in the library? Chills shot down her spine.

In a panic, Victoria turned and began to run back down the hall toward the front door of the house. Dialing 911 with one hand, she tried to brace herself against the wall with the other. Judging from the noise, whoever was in the library seemed determined to trash the place as well as take her and Malcolm's valuables.

Halfway to the front door, she slipped on the slick floor and pitched into a silver samovar resting on an antique sideboard in the hall. She landed full force on the hard marble, hearing the sound of a bone cracking as her body thudded on the floor.

The phone scudded out of her hand.

Horried, she saw a bone jutting out near her right wrist. She had no time to examine her arm. For a split second, she thought she would black out from the pain. She took three deep breaths. Still trying not to scream, she scooted with her legs toward the front door and the phone, every inch torture for her arm. She could feel her body starting to go into shock.

Almost there. Almost within reach. She strained so hard she nearly passed out again.

For one brief second the racket in the library stopped. In the silent lull, she pushed off against the floorboard in the direction of the phone, desperate. There. She grasped it with her left hand. Fumbling, she tried to turn it around, right side up to get the numbers within dialing range of her awkward left thumb.

Looking behind her, Victoria saw the tip of an axe crash through the glass on the front of the French doors as someone hacked his way through the panes from the library. The grunts and growls he made sounded like a madman.

Victoria grasped the phone, turned it around, and managed to dial a "9" with a thumb shaking from terror. Her other hand, uselessly attached to a catawampus arm, was no help in stabilizing the phone. Nerve endings shrieked up and down her forearm in agony. Gritting her teeth, she forced herself to hit the "1" button. She almost had it.

Again. The phone slipped, but this time her thumb reached up and hit the "1." One more time.

A man in a manic state stepped through the jagged glass and emerged from the library.

Just one more number, just one more. Determined, Victoria stretched her thumb again and pressed another "1." She heard the phone ringing on the other end. "Hurry!" she screamed. "For the love of God, answer!"

When the man heard her screaming, he turned in her direction and charged down the hall, an axe in one hand and her Lalique lamp in the other.

A voice on the end said, "What is your emergency?" Victoria screamed again as the man approached. "No! No!" Her own shrieks almost drowned out the voice on the other end of the phone, telling her to calm down and speak slowly. "Stop!" she yelled, as desperate cries scraped her throat raw. "You don't want to do this!"

The young man ran toward her, raising both the axe and the lamp above his head as he screamed nonsense about a true faith and Pleroma in an insane rage.

"Please stop! No! No!!"

When he reached Victoria lying helplessly on the ground, he swung the lamp, not the axe, at her head, fracturing her skull and killing her instantly.

A disembodied voice from the phone said, “Ma’am, can you give me your location? Ma’am? Ma’am? Are you there?”

6 Gabriel

Gabriel walked down St. Ronan toward downtown carrying the briefcase with the stolen goods and a large green umbrella. He took deep breaths and tried to calm himself down. Nobody was supposed to be at home. *How badly had he messed up the first part of an intricate and carefully choreographed drama?*

The beast of failure began to growl in his belly. No, no. Gabriel would not let this beast eat away his elation. His watch told him he had exactly thirty-two minutes to walk before he arrived at his destination. Rain pelted his umbrella, and his boots were wet. He turned left at Canner Street and walked down Whitney, where he would be less conspicuous.

Gabriel reviewed and analyzed the scene at the house. He’d had no choice. He’d had no time to think. He had to act. Instinctively, he had bashed the woman’s skull with the lamp. Only now did he figure out why—because he didn’t want to soil the axe blade with human blood. As a tool, the axe had been around as long as the Brotherhood. It was a noble instrument. Gabriel hated the shallow materialism that the woman stood for. She was not one of the chosen, and she deserved to be killed with her fancy lamp—the perfect symbol of what was wrong with the Western world.

As he walked down Whitney, the rain began to let up. Cars passed him as if he were an ordinary human being walking down the street like the other ordinary human beings he passed. Yet on the inside, Gabriel could hardly contain the conflicted rush of emotions he felt surging through his veins.

He would have to contact the Inner Circle with news of the dead woman—a glitch in the plans. A pretty big glitch, he had to admit. Yet he convinced himself he was justified. He knew he’d had no choice. He had to kill her. She had gotten a good look at him.

Gabriel also knew the Grand Patriarch would understand. He’d sized the old man up immediately as so totally committed to the Brotherhood that he was ruthless to the core. He’d even given Gabriel permission to “use his head” if an emergency arose, and Gabriel knew exactly what he meant.

However, dealing with the American Patriarch was different. He had told Gabriel emphatically, “Plans must go without a hitch.”

Unfortunately, the chain of command forced Gabriel to communicate only with the American Patriarch. To ensure secrecy, Gabriel was never to contact the Grand Patriarch directly.

As Gabriel walked, he replayed the moment when the woman had first spotted him, when he knew in his groin what he must do. In his imagination, he swung at her skull again and again.

For years he had known the thrill that a hatchet could bring, but he was shocked at the deep titillation he felt when the lamp made contact with her head and she fell to the floor, lifeless.

As he approached downtown New Haven, he felt his confidence grow. Yes, he had no doubt he could fulfill the rest of his assignment.

The surprise was how much he would enjoy it.

Paul

Dr. Paul St. Clair saw his uncle, Malcolm Guildford, waiting for him inside the New Haven Regional Airport. Malcolm's pilot had flown him in from Dallas, and Paul had been too excited to sleep or read.

"Victoria is still in New York. We're going to the country club for dinner," said Malcolm when Paul walked through the door. Malcolm wore a hand-tailored pinstriped suit. His nephew wore crisp khakis and a sport coat. The two men were clearly related, with square-jaws and gray-blue eyes, but Paul was six feet, while Malcolm stood an inch shorter and had gray hair. Though a generation apart, Paul and Malcolm were both handsome, striking men who exuded an unconscious air of the kind of breeding that dominated the boardrooms of well-established firms.

"Is the new chef any good?" Paul carried his bag to his Uncle's Town Car. His right leg was stiff as he walked across the tarmac.

"Not as good as your Aunt Victoria, but certainly better than the last chef."

At the New Haven Country Club, LeRoy Gautonniere greeted them with his customary dip at the waist. "Hello, Mr. Guildford and Dr. St. Clair. The special tonight is grilled salmon." LeRoy was a young waiter in his late twenties who'd been with the club since he was sixteen. LeRoy was the Guildfords' favorite waiter. He led them straight to Malcolm's reserved table.

"Tell me, LeRoy," said Paul as he seated himself, keeping his right leg straight in front of him. "How are your plans for opening your own restaurant?"

LeRoy hung his head. "Not too good. My mother got sick and I had to spend the money on her hospital bill." LeRoy's light blond was parted down the middle.

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Malcolm. "Maybe good fortune will come your way soon."

"I hope so, sir."

After Malcolm and Paul had both ordered the salmon and a bottle of 2005 Rombaure Chardonnay, Carneros, Paul looked out over the lighted landscape of the golf club his family had joined when the club was founded in 1898. The sleet had stopped, but drops continued to dribble from the tree limbs.

"Big night for Uncle Andrew tomorrow," said Paul. "He'll be remembered for decades as the Dean who donated those manuscripts. They're his legacy."

Malcolm agreed. "Big night for you, too."

"True." Paul could hardly sit still. The *Gospel of Judas* was all he'd thought about the last six months. The discovery had turned Paul's world upside down. He'd be at the center of a scholarly firestorm for months after this conference. He was ready.

LeRoy returned with the wine, and he and Malcolm played out the ritual of tasting, approving, and pouring.

Malcolm nodded. "The new showcase and security system were installed today."

"Is the governor coming for the ceremony?"

"Are you kidding? He wouldn't miss the national publicity." Malcolm scooped a handful of smoked almonds. "First a cocktail party in the YDS Common Room. I hope they have those shrimp and olive things."

Paul laughed. The food lover had, at last, married a woman perfect for him. Victoria had her own cooking show, "Victoria's Secrets to Cooking Game."

Malcolm continued. “Then the hoopla. The governor, the president of Yale, and the **Beinecke** Library expert will say a few words. The manuscripts will be revealed in all their glory.” Malcolm paused, tossing a couple of almonds in his mouth.

Paul watched his uncle’s face. Since Malcolm had married Victoria two years ago, he looked relaxed, happy. He no longer had the calloused second skin that had hardened through thirty years of solitude after his first wife Mary had died.

Paul was bursting to talk about the manuscripts. “After tomorrow, religious circles will go crazy. With the 2004 fragments, the hot topic was Judas as obedient instead of betrayer. This time, the battle will be over suffering. I can’t wait.”

“Frankly, I think most people wonder about suffering—how God can allow pain.”

Paul nodded, excited. “True, but there’s much more to it. The *Gospel of Judas* has opened a different can of worms. Not purely theological.” He leaned toward his uncle. “Friday’s keynote will be an atomic bomb. Dr. Bonnie Barnes from Oxford.” Paul reached for the almonds.

“A bomb?” Malcolm’s eyes lit up. For seven generations, the Guildford family men had rotated among three careers: scholars, Episcopal priests, and lawyers. Malcolm was the token lawyer in his generation, but his hobby was ancient manuscripts. Andrew and his nephew Paul had both gotten Ph.D.’s in ancient literature. “So what’s her topic?”

Paul accepted another glass of wine. “Based on our *Gospel of Judas*, Professor Barnes claims she’s traced a secret Gnostic group—the Sethians—from the third century until the present.”

“Can’t be. The Sethians died out in the third century.”

“That’s why her topic is a bomb. She claims they’re alive and well, and have been up to nefarious activities for centuries.”

Malcolm’s eyes widened with interest. “Really!” He threw back the rest of the almonds. “A secret group. How intriguing. What do you know about this sect? Are they like the—” Malcolm scratched his head. “Oh, you know. That medieval group of knights.”

“The Templars?”

“Yes, the group with the secret jewels in Jerusalem, and the Holy Grail and all that business.”

Paul shrugged. “Dr. Barnes will tell us everything tomorrow night.” He paused. “She thinks she’s uncovered enough evidence to prove they exist. Frankly, I have my doubts. I mean, what’s the purpose in the twenty-first century? Why the cloak and dagger stuff?”

LeRoy materialized at their table, carrying plates of salmon, asparagus, and the club’s famous cheese garlic potatoes. Malcolm nodded at LeRoy, then said to Paul, “One of our interns is a Gnostic. Interesting fellow. Clyde Sneed. A Brit. A little older than most interns, late twenties, but shows real promise.” Malcolm paused. “I wonder if he’s a Sethian Gnostic.”

Paul took a bite of the salmon, delicately cooked and seasoned. He said, “I’d like to talk with him. See if he has any secret Sethian tendencies.” He paused. “Gnostics are everywhere, all over the Internet—regular Gnostics, that is.”

Malcolm said, “Give me a good Episcopal liturgy any day.”

Paul knew how stuffy and traditional his uncle was. “Oh, come on. You’d be surprised how attractive it is to believe God is purely spiritual. Bad things happen on earth, but there are no messy questions of ‘why?’”

Malcolm said, “I’m not suffering at the moment, thank you very much. And I plan to stick with Sunday morning at Trinity on the Green.”

At the end of the meal, Malcolm thanked LeRoy as they got up to leave. “If you ever get your restaurant, we’ll be your first customers,” added Paul.

Going out the main door, Paul and Malcolm ran into Winthrop Smythe, Malcolm’s law partner and Paul’s godfather. He had Clyde Sneed, the young intern, in tow.

“Speak of the devil,” said Malcolm as he shook hands with the young man and introduced him to Paul. Paul looked him over. He and Clyde Sneed were about the same height, except Clyde had a heavy five o’clock shadow and reddish hair contrasting with Paul’s lighter hair. Clyde wore the standard conservative suit, but he had loosened his tie.

Winthrop gave Paul a hug while Malcolm ribbed him. “You two are quitting work early. It’s only 9:30.”

Winthrop replied, “That’s the pot calling the kettle black. Clyde spent the day in depositions in Hartford. He showed up for work an hour ago. Since Elizabeth’s at some charity dinner, I told him I’d take him out.”

Malcolm lowered his voice and asked Winthrop about his son. “How’s Jeeter?”

Winthrop shook his head and looked at the ground. “I don’t know what I’m going to do with that boy. Elizabeth and I put him on a plane yesterday to a treatment center in Arizona. If they can’t fix him, nobody can.” Winthrop turned to Paul. “Give me a call if you have a chance.”

Paul and Malcolm said goodbye and drove home.

Patches of water on the streets had started to ice over as Malcolm drove carefully home, pulling into his garage at the side of the house. A 1926 Model T roadster gleamed in the berth next to Malcolm’s Town Car, followed by an empty space for Victoria’s Jaguar and a white Buick Century, Malcolm’s extra car that Paul used when he visited.

“Everything is ready for you upstairs,” said Malcolm, clicking the remote and locking the garage door behind his car.

“Thanks for dinner,” said Paul. “Sleep well.”

8

Paul

In the old carriage house over the garage, Paul opened the door to a suite of rooms decorated in rich fabrics, expensive wood, and a fireplace with a fire already going. Paul walked through the sitting room and tossed his suitcase on the huge gilded four-poster bed in his bedroom, his home away from home.

Paul couldn’t wait for the Jacuzzi jets in the bathtub. His leg was killing him.

Sixteen years ago, a stallion on his father’s ranch in Texas had shied at a rattler on the trail, spooking the horse. Mayday had thrown Paul down a ravine and dislodged a boulder, which crushed Paul’s leg. Paul spent the rest of high school in the hospital. He underwent seventeen surgeries, followed by years in physical therapy.

Ranked the number one tennis player in the U.S. at age seventeen, Paul lost his athletic career in one split second. Though his leg still went stiff on him after long plane flights and after sitting too long at his desk, at least he walked—a feat for which he was grateful daily.

Now, sitting on the bed taking off his shirt, Paul heard pounding on the stairs. “Paul!” his uncle called in a distressing voice.

Something was wrong. Terribly wrong.

When the doors opened, Malcolm burst into the room. “Oh, Paul!” he said. For the first time in his life, Paul saw his uncle weep.

9

Isabella

I called the station and reported the Campus Killer’s phone call. Apparently Spicer had been given Internet privileges after the arraignment because of his family connections. Took him two minutes to hack into the phone system and retrieve my unlisted number. The guards moved him into a private cell and put an extra guard on him.

At this point in his career as a prisoner, the only thing Harold Spicer III had going for him was his computer talents, and he had just lost those privileges. He had no friends, in or out of incarceration. I wondered how long he would last in the penitentiary. His “special” status as a relative of two high-powered judges would likely get him killed by the other inmates—convicts stashed in prison for life by his dad and grandfather.

I settled into my recliner, determined to relax. I deserved it. Mindlessly, I flipped to the opening of a made-for-TV movie starring a new male tabloid star and an older actress recycled in her dotage.

My cell phone rang. Caller ID said it was Crenshaw. Probably calling to reassure me Spicer was double guarded.

“Yes, Chief.”

“ASAP. 1500 St. Ronan.”

“What?”

“Get there. Now. Call the top crime scene team.”

“I’m on my way,” I said, but Crenshaw had already hung up before the words were out of my mouth.

Now what? Had Spicer escaped? Crenshaw never minced words, but this call was unusually cryptic and terse. Why was Crenshaw personally involved? I noted the time: 9:56.

Without changing back into my work clothes, I grappled with a jacket, trailing a scarf that I threw around my neck as I rushed out the door and to my car.

In reverse, I shot my Mini Cooper out of the driveway, then shifted into drive and hit the gas. My pulse began to race. The drive down Dixwell seemed to take forever.

The address was one of the mansions on St. Ronan.

Turning the corner, I spotted the CSI van, the Chief’s SUV, and two patrol cars out front of 1500. Forensics had beaten me to the crime scene. Bob and Maria must have hightailed it from downtown. Someone had already set up a yellow and black perimeter around the entrance.

I ducked under the tape and stepped inside an elegant foyer. *A murder.* A middle-aged woman lay sprawled on the marble, her face and head in a puddle of blood. The tableau was a familiar one, but the setting was not. Few murders took place in homes like this, not in New Haven anyway. The two CSIs knelt by the body, taking pictures, measurements, and fingerprints in the hallway.

“What have we got?” I asked Maria, a young Hispanic forensic tech snapping shots of blood spatter on the floor and the walls.

“Woman, mid-fifties, bludgeoned with that lamp there, or rather what’s left of it.” Maria pointed to a glass lamp, the base shattered. The shade and the light bulb were still intact.

“Looks like the vic’s blood and hair on the lamp fragments.”

“What’s with the axe?” I pointed to a brand new axe lying close by, placed with care next to the lamp base and the vic’s shoes and bag. “Hers?”

“Nothing on the axe. The axe is what murdered the library.”

I took in the slick floors, the victim’s shoes (hmm, Ferragamos) neatly placed next to a small designer suitcase and purse. A chic overcoat hung on the rack. The vic wore a black silk pantsuit. The bone sticking out from the skin of her forearm had torn a hole in the delicate fabric. The vic’s other arm clutched a cell phone with a “911” the last number. I’d have to get the tape, if the woman had gotten through. I shook my head. “I don’t get the axe.”

Bob, a handsome black CSI supervisor with a shaved head was dusting for prints. He said, “Door wiped clean. Axe wiped clean. Prints so far on the shoes, purse, phone, and suitcase belong to the vic.” He added, “No forced entry at the front or from the side. Side door’s been jacked, though.”

I looked around. “Alarm system?”

“Disarmed. Never went off.” Stepping over the blood pooled under the victim’s head, Maria motioned to me. “Come this way.” We walked past a room on the right, high and spacious, with three separate sitting areas and gold threads running through the upholstery fabric. A dining room on the left. “Looks like nothing there, either room.” Maria indicated. She pointed to a door up ahead, past the grand room on the right. “Here.” We stepped among glass shards and splinters of wood.

I looked into the ruins of a library. “We haven’t processed it yet,” said Maria, handing me a pair of shoe booties.

After covering my running shoes, I followed Maria inside. Four walls, ceiling to floor, housed both ancient and contemporary books arranged in some system, probably by topic, judging from the titles. History, theology, literature. None of the books had been damaged, but the furniture—a mahogany desk, reading chairs, tables—had been hacked to pieces, as well as the French doors.

“Anything missing?” I asked.

“Doesn’t look like it. We’ll know in a minute. Mr. Guildford is in the back with his nephew. They’re talking with the Chief.”

I was trying to assess the situation. “Is this related to the Campus Killer? Wait.” I paused. “Did you say ‘Guildford’?”

Maria nodded. “Big wigs. They probably know the Spicers, but I don’t see—”

“Of course.” The article on the front page. The donation to Yale. I walked back to find a kitchen the size of the whole downstairs of my house. Window seats, a desk, huge pantries, professional refrigerators and dishwashers, as well as an island equipped with everything one could possibly need for culinary adventures.

Then the other shoe fell. Guildford. This was the home of Victoria, the chef on “Victoria’s Secrets.” I’d caught Victoria’s show a couple of times. I loved Victoria’s bubbly personality and sense of humor.

I sighed, weary all over again with death. Beautiful home, beautiful life, beautiful woman—another dark beast had slithered into Eden.

To the left, I heard voices, and followed them back to the master bedroom. It was connected to a sitting room with a built-in movie theater and enough technological gadgets to stock Best Buy. Obviously, the intruder wasn’t after electronics.

Two men a generation apart sat on the end of the bed. Father and son from their looks, but Maria had said nephew. Still in his dress uniform, Crenshaw had taken a wingback chair to the side. Big wigs, no question. But I'd already figured that out.

"Got your call, Chief."

Crenshaw looked at my casual attire and nodded. "Thanks for getting here so fast." I sensed he was thinking the same thing I was. We all needed a break, but weren't likely to get one tonight. The older man, Mr. Guildford, held his head in both hands with his eyes closed.

The nephew's blue-gray and anguished eyes met mine for a second. Yet another grieving family. I didn't know if I could take it.

Just then, a third man burst into the room, a rounder, fairer version of Mr. Guildford. "Oh, my God! What has happened?" Nobody said a word; they just all looked at each other in disbelief.

"Uncle Andrew," said the young man.

"Some monster has broken into my home and killed Victoria...my Victory," shouted Malcolm, with red-rimmed eyes.

Crenshaw stood up and introduced me. "We've got the best detective on this one. She's the one who caught the Campus Killer."

"We know," said the man whose picture was next to mine in the morning paper, Dean Andrew Guildford. "Thank you."

I blushed, still not used to notoriety. All the men also stood up, good breeding overcoming their grief.

"Dean Guildford, Mr. Guildford, Dr. St. Clair." I shook each hand.

"Call me Andrew, please."

"I'm sorry for your loss," I said sincerely. "I promise you, this case already has my full attention."

Andrew offered me the other wingback chair before sitting down on the bed himself. I heard the arrival of more street cops, sirens screaming as they pulled up. Good, they could help keep the neighbors and gawkers off the property and deal with the press who would no doubt be arriving any minute.

I pulled out the notebook I had hoped to retire for at least a day or two. "Tell me the facts."

10

John

Glenairie Castle lay nestled in the Scottish hills between Glasgow and Callendar to the northwest. John McCullough, Member of Parliament and Grand Patriarch of the Sethian Brotherhood, sat hunched over a computer in his private study at the far end of the only wing he kept open, except for visitors. Cold almost year round even in summertime, the air of the castle felt especially dank tonight. The November wind whistled and sighed outside his leaded glass window, rattling the hinges in an irritating way.

He would hear from the American Patriarch in two more hours, at 5:00 in the morning Scotland time, midnight on the east coast of the United States—and thirty minutes or so before his housekeeper, Mrs. Wallace, got up to light the fires and get breakfast going. He had time for a catnap, but he was too excited.

It had started. The final showdown between the followers of Judas, and the remnant of the faith that had ruled the world for so long. John had trained his whole life for this week.

With time on his hands, he reviewed some of the smaller successes in his life-long mission to undo the damage that Christianity had done. In 1979, Bishop Crike of Durham had died suddenly after giving a BBC broadcast on the subject of John 3:16. McCullough thought, if God so loved the world, then he wouldn't have let his own son die, forcing people to believe that Jesus' suffering—or their own—was how you got eternal life. Getting to heaven was much simpler and easier, but you had to be willing to receive the secret knowledge.

John McCullough had personally overseen the crumbling of a major television evangelist's empire. The vampire had been sucking the blood of millions of people who had paid him their hard-earned money to be healed from crippling pain.

Then there were the two Christian scholars who toured the major universities after the discovery of the *Gospel of Judas* fragments in 2004. They got worldwide publicity debating against brilliant Judas scholars who understood Judas as the only true disciple. The Christian scholars claimed that the *Gospel of Judas* was worthless then and worthless now. Neither of them survived a fire in their hotel room in Chicago.

Just in the last year, John had used his position as MP to great advantage for the Brotherhood. He had won a battle to add extra taxes for church property, making it just a little more difficult to sustain the Christian system of hypocrisy. He had also placed a member of the Brotherhood on the Archbishop of Canterbury's council to encourage the dismantling of redundant churches.

Not to mention a score of mysterious and unsolved deaths over the last fifty years, Christian leaders from pulpits all over the world, beating people into misery by binding them to sin and guilt.

What John couldn't understand was why people continued to allow themselves to remain hostage to a system that denied them true spiritual freedom.

But now. John McCullough was primed to lead an assault that would finally cripple the dying religion. The challenge was to let the world know who was responsible for this new age of spiritual enlightenment and why....while keeping the Brotherhood itself safe and invisible to the outside world.

Osama Bin Ladin had achieved this delicate balance, and McCullough planned to do the same. With the help of God, Pleroma.

Roaming his favorite Holy Land sites on the Internet, John McCullough felt again the kindred spirit with those denizens of the desert lands. John McCullough possessed an ancient paper that verified what his pulse told him—he had originated in the desert. Only blood could explain the instant and overpowering connection he felt with the sand, the Jordan River, and Qumran.

Ahh, Jerusalem glittered before him on the screen. The Dome of the Rock shone gold in the sun. A mere two months ago, he'd returned from Holy Land heaven to the wet, cold dreech of Scotland. Travel to the Middle East was getting more and more difficult, but he didn't care. He wanted to die there instead of in this God-forsaken castle he'd inherited.

However, he had put his inheritance to good use. Four times a year the international Sethian Brotherhood gathered at the castle for meetings and worship. John McCullough ran the international network from this cold, dark room surrounded by some of the world's finest art—sketches, oils, statues of young, naked men.

John McCullough loved the night. A dweller in darkness, he slept during the day in a room with the windows sealed so no light could trickle in. On warm nights he went outside and

looked up at the black universe, picking out the brightest star. “Mine,” he’d whisper. The darker the night, the brighter the star.

Gabriel, the Messenger of Life. Now there was a pleasant thought. A young man in tune with the universe: strength, passion, brains—and perfectly malleable for the Grand Patriarch’s purposes. John had outlined the coming week’s plans to him as he knelt in the holy chamber. He told him only once, but Gabriel repeated every detail back to him perfectly.

Gabriel was the son he’d never have. He must have been a beautiful young boy to have turned out so perfectly as a young man.

John McCullough listened to the steady beat of his heart. After his heart attack six months ago, he sped up plans for the Brotherhood. He knew his days were numbered, and he felt the urgency of fulfilling his legacy. John smiled to himself. The culmination of his life’s work had already begun. In two hours, he would hear the good news from the American Patriarch.

The Gospel of Judas would at last return to its rightful inheritors.

11

Isabella

In the house on St. Ronan, I took notes and listened. True listening involved bringing all senses—not just hearing—to bear on the person talking. And the context. For instance, when I first walked in the door, I had smelled the coppery odor of spilled blood, but had also noted the scent of recently cooked veal, magnolia potpourri on the hallway’s sideboard, as well as the quiet ticking of a large clock in the kitchen.

A vague scent of menthol wafted through the bedroom where we sat. Sitting closest to me, Malcolm smelled slightly like wine, fine wool, and the saltiness of grief. “Victoria had no enemies,” he said. “People loved her. Her personality was so sunny, it almost grated on your nerves.” Malcolm’s eyes were red and swollen in a strong and handsome—but deathly gray—face.

“Any cranks from her show would have ransacked and destroyed the kitchen, not the library, don’t you think?” added Andrew, whose clothes added the scent of a fireplace to the mix. His emotions seemed barely contained by his skin.

“She wasn’t even supposed to be home until tomorrow.” Malcolm blinked hard, unsuccessfully holding back his tears. This poor man. Distinguished, yes. Wealthy, yes. Happy, no. I knew exactly what he was going through.

Usually the spouse was the number one suspect, but Malcolm’s grief seemed genuine. More importantly, both he and Paul had an alibi for the time of the murder. Grief could be faked, but you can’t fake a solid alibi.

Paul left the room, heading toward a bathroom I’d spotted off the bedroom. His khakis were still starched at the bottom, but creased behind the knees and in the lap area, as if he had been sitting a long time. His leg seemed stiff as he walked. An injury? A congenital defect? He wore an expensive blazer, a Saville Row shirt, tie loosened; and he and his uncle Malcolm both wore cufflinks. He returned with a box of tissues.

Maria appeared in the doorway. “We’ve finished processing the library and the rest of the downstairs. One hair, some trace, and a partial indentation from a hiking boot,” she added.

Paul said to his uncles, “Let’s go check the safe.”

“What safe?” I asked.

“What safe?” repeated Maria.

“In the library. We don’t know if the intruder found it and robbed us or not. Besides, there might be fingerprints on the lever,” said Paul.

Both his uncles stared at each other in shock. Paul was the one with the presence of mind to mention the safe. I looked up at him. His facial features were refined, especially the way his patrician nose met full lips. As he moved past me, I caught a whiff of clean skin, and urgency.

“Yes, the safe,” said Malcolm. “But the bookcase was in place. You don’t suppose—”

Andrew stood up, wringing his hands. “The safe! I was so caught up with Victoria, I forgot the safe. Oh, no. I’m afraid there’s going to be some very, very bad news in the library.”

Andrew started rambling about an Associate Dean named Bill Pepperling who was—thank God—going to be out of town for the conference. Bill Pepperling had made a snide comment today about people who could afford to buy their way into positions. It had been a horrible day—just terrible—and now this.

Every person reacted differently in shock and grief over the last year. I figured Andrew was the type whose nerves went straight to his mouth.

I followed the brothers back through the kitchen and down the hall. At this point, Crenshaw took leave of the family. “We’ve got our best people on this,” he said, and placed his hand on Malcolm’s shoulder for reassurance. He turned to me. “Keep me posted.”

Under my breath, I asked him, “Do you think this case is related to the Campus Killer?”

“Doesn’t seem to be, but it’s too early to tell. Could be just lousy timing.”

He got that right. I watched him march down the hall and out the front door, then I followed the family into the library.

Malcolm walked toward the center of the bookshelves on the left side of the room. He pulled out an old, leather-bound volume, and searched behind it to reveal a metal lever, a little larger than a light switch, coated with brown plastic perfect for fingerprints.

“Just a minute,” I cautioned as Malcolm reached for the lever.

Bob approached with his fingerprint duster, pulling out several of the books surrounding the switch. Maria shone her small flashlight so he could see what he was doing. After he’d pulled the sticky tape off both sides of the lever, he held it up to the overhead light. “Looks like a partial from the bottom. Nothing from the top.”

I nodded to Malcolm. “Okay.”

“Stand back,” said Malcolm. He reached behind and switched the lever. The corner set of bookshelves swung out, revealing a two-foot by two-foot opening blocked with a sheet of steel and a key code pad next to it.

Bob stepped up and repeated his routine on any surfaces that might produce a fingerprint. Then Malcolm punched in three letters. The steel door slid to the left and disappeared.

Empty. Malcolm closed his eyes and his whole body wilted.

Andrew shouted, “Oh, God, no!” He clutched his chest as if he might have a heart attack. “I knew it, I just knew it.”

Bob began dusting inside the safe. He said weakly, “Maybe this time we’ll get lucky.”

Maria shone the light toward the back of the safe. “Hold on, Bob. There’s something here that looks like a business card.”

“A business card?” Malcolm and Andrew craned their necks to see.

I stepped in. “I know you gentlemen are eager, but could you give them room to work?”

They moved back with obvious reluctance. I sensed their frustration. Men like these two were used to running the world. It must be tough for them to step aside and let the experts do their jobs.

Bob handed Maria a baggie. She lifted the paper carefully with a gloved hand. "It's not stiff, though. Looks like stationery paper." Once she'd secured the top of the bag, she handed it to me.

Again, the gentlemen craned their necks to see. One typed line on the slip of paper read: "Death: hero on this orb."

A shiver ran through my body. Unlike the Campus Killer who had left every crime scene spotless, this killer had left a deliberate clue.

Why?

Everyone stared at the slip of paper as if it carried anthrax. Considering the dead woman in the hallway and the ransacked safe—the general response seemed to be disgust at what was probably either a taunt, a very bad joke, or a misdirection.

I turned to Malcolm and broke the silence. "Did you have this in your safe? Is it part of the stolen papers?"

"I've never seen it before in my life," said Malcolm.

Andrew shook his head no.

"We'll run it for prints, paper type, and ink," I said. Forensics would help us get started, but then the hard work would begin. We had to figure out 1) what the message meant, 2) why the killer had left it for us to find, and 3) get into the killer's head and discover what the note was trying to hide. My head started to ache thinking about the hours of research I was in for.

Paul stepped up to look. "Trace evidence is good, but what? Why? There's got to be more to it. Death is a hero? Death was not a hero to Victoria. She was happy. She was healthy. Somebody stole her life from her years before she should have died."

Yes. Paul was already on my wavelength while his uncles were still staring at the paper.

"Maybe it's a code," he added.

Andrew looked up. "You're good with puzzles, Paul," he said. "See if you can figure out what the killer was trying to say."

Paul stared at the paper. "I'll have to think about it." He repeated, "Death: Hero on this orb."

"I'll get it to the lab," said Maria.

"Meet you there later," said Bob to me as he packed up his kit to leave.

"Good." As Bob and Maria left, I ushered the family into their dining room, a space that reminded me of the Vanderbilt's dining room I'd seen once on a mansion tour in Newport, Rhode Island.

Once we were seated, I said, "I'm sorry, but I need to ask you some questions. It appears Mrs. Guildford interrupted a burglary, so let's focus on that. What was in the safe?"

"Victoria's jewelry, a coin collection, a few legal papers, \$100,000 in cash—"

Andrew broke in, his face flushed with emotion. He was beginning to perspire, and he was no longer able to hold in his distress. "The *Gospel of Judas*," he said. "The original Greek document—what was left of the papyrus, as well as a Latin translation on vellum."

"You were going to donate both manuscripts to Yale tomorrow. Is that right?" I kept my voice even, calm, professional—an anchor for the rough waters around me.

"Yes." Andrew continued, "Those documents were the most valuable thing in there. Cash, no big deal, loose change."

Maybe to this family \$100,000 was loose change, but someone in a lower tax bracket could live off that kind of loose change for a long time. I said, "Even so, the money might be a motivation for someone who needed cash in a hurry."

“Maybe,” said Malcolm. He began tracing the grain of wood on the table.

“What about the jewelry?” I asked.

“He could hock it, I suppose,” said Malcolm.

“We’ll put a watch on all the pawnshops in this area and New York. I’ll need a list of Mrs. Guildford’s items, and pictures, if you have them.”

Malcolm nodded. “Our safety deposit box at the bank has the expensive stuff and pictures. We just kept things she liked to wear around town, and documents we might need. Passports, things like that.”

“What are the chances of recovering the manuscripts before tomorrow?” Andrew bobbed up from his chair and started pacing, rubbing his hands together as he walked.

I said, a little more cynically than I intended. “Do you believe in miracles? It’s happened, but the odds are against it.”

“This is a nightmare, a terrible, terrible nightmare.” Andrew pulled at his earlobe. “I’ll have to hold a press conference and call off the governor. No sense in unveiling an empty case.”

“So the whole city knows about this manuscript.” I kicked myself. I should have read their article instead of being self-absorbed in my own news.

“Yes,” said Malcolm. “The story traced the documents’ movements from the **Beinecke** Library’s expert, Dr. Wolfgang Timmerman, to Germany, and back to us. It announced that YDS had ordered a new showcase with special security. The thief probably figured it would be easier to steal from our home than from the new security system.”

Andrew groaned. “Tomorrow night was the high point of everything I’ve worked for. We must find those documents.” He seemed more upset over the theft than over his sister-in-law’s death.

“How did your family come by the manuscripts in the first place?” I asked.

“I found them,” said Paul.

12

Isabella

I watched as Paul leaned forward at the table. If Malcolm and Andrew were Paul’s uncles, there had to be another sibling floating around out there—Paul’s mother or father. All three men in front of me could have been cloned from the nineteenth-century gentleman whose portrait had been hoisted above the fireplace in the living room.

“Summers in college, I came to New Haven with my mother. Athletics was out because of an accident,” said Paul.

So his stiff leg must have resulted from an accident. He still looked athletic and strong—a thoroughbred racer, not a **quarter horse**.

“This house was built by the Guildford family after the Civil War, with a basement filled with boxes of old stuff nobody wanted to go through. Pappadad—my grandfather—decided he wanted to catalogue the books and ancient papers. It gave me summer projects,” continued Paul.

“I see.”

“This house fell apart once Mom died,” said Malcolm. “When Victoria and I married, we moved Dad to an Alzheimer’s unit near the country club. The police had found him wandering around the Yale campus in his pajamas singing at the top of his lungs. He didn’t have a clue who or where he was.”

I had to work at not smiling, remembering the detectives on that case. They’d called him “Wee Willie Winkie”—a fact I was not going to mention now.

“Victoria and I gutted the house and refinished it two years ago. That’s when we built the library,” continued Malcolm.

“And the safe,” Andrew interjected, “Our father kept his valuables in his socks drawer. We discovered an old dumbwaiter that carried food from the kitchen to Aunt Matilda’s bedroom upstairs.”

“It was the perfect location, so we walled in the rest of the shaft and put the safe there,” said Malcolm.

“Who knew about the safe? Who knew the combination for the key pad?” I asked.

“Only the family,” said Paul. “We all knew in case something happened to both Victoria and Malcolm.”

“The company that installed the safe knew, too. Failsafe Security,” said Andrew.

“What’s the code?” I asked

Andrew rolled his eyes in a way that neither other relative could see. “MIG.”

“MIG. Like the jet?”

“Yes,” said Andrew. “Malcolm’s initials. We begged him to use something a little more complicated or less obvious. Anybody could figure it out.” He looked displeased, and started pulling at his earlobe again.

“Did you write the code down anywhere?”

“No, that’s why I picked something I could remember easily. I didn’t want to end up like Dad with no memory at all.” Malcolm became defensive as he looked at Andrew, shooting him an angry glare.

It appeared even the best families weren’t exempt from sibling rivalry.

Hmm. An inside job? In spite of the looks exchanged by the brothers, I didn’t think so. More likely, one of the family members had disclosed the secret to someone who had told someone else.

“Back to the manuscripts,” I said.

“Paul found them in the basement. They’d come over on the Mayflower with our ancestors from England,” said Andrew.

“Not the Mayflower,” corrected Malcolm.

“It doesn’t matter. They were crated with a bunch of stuff from the sixteenth century. Paul discovered them when he was cataloguing the library.”

“The Latin title caught my eye and I started reading the translation. It sounded interesting, but I was swamped with all the old books, so I filed it away for later.

“Then, a couple of years ago, the Maecenas Foundation bought the Egyptian *Gospel of Judas*. Remember? Rodolphe Kasser announced it in Paris in 2004. Huge international news.”

Andrew continued. “Paul brought our copy from the basement. By that time, he had his Ph.D. in New Testament and was teaching at SMU. Perkins Seminary.”

So Paul was a university professor. Maybe it was the cufflinks or the tailored blazer, but I would have pegged him as a business executive or a lawyer in a big firm.

Andrew sat down again and gesticulated with his hands. “We’d been sitting on a gold mine in our basement this whole time and didn’t know it. We sent both documents to the **Beinecke** Library just to make sure they were authentic.”

“Wasn’t there some scandal at the **Beinecke** a few years back over a Viking manuscript?” I interrupted.

Andrew agreed. “Yes, that’s why they hired a new expert from Germany, Wolfgang Timmerman. Even after he’d determined we had the real deal, Timmerman hand-carried the

documents to **Christian Himmell** at Basel, top specialist. Timmerman met with Malcolm and me when he got back from Germany. He was so excited I thought he'd pluck his goatee off."

"That's when we decided to donate them to the Yale Divinity School," said Paul. "The 2004 Judas manuscript is fragmentary. Quite a bit is missing. Also, the provenance is questionable. Our manuscripts piece everything together and fill in the gaps."

Andrew interrupted again. "It's the biggest find since the Dead Sea Scrolls. We wanted to make it available for scholars all over the world." He clutched his chest and slumped down in his chair.

"Were the documents insured?" I asked.

"Of course," answered Malcolm.

"Money isn't the point," said Paul. "Our family has been associated with Yale for three hundred years. Because Andrew was dean, we all agreed it was the right thing to do to donate them."

"It might have been the right thing to do," said Malcolm. "But it's gotten Victoria killed." He started to stand up and leave the table.

It was time to wrap up for tonight. "Can you think of anything else I should know? About the stolen jewelry, the cash, or the manuscripts?" I met the gaze of each man, three sets of gray-blue eyes in varying expressions of grief. All three men shook their heads no.

"Tell you what." I stood up and gathered my purse. "Tomorrow when I hear back from the lab, I'd like to interview anyone who might give some insight. Neighbors. Friends. A housekeeper maybe."

Malcolm nodded. "Gabby."

"Tomorrow evening was going to be the hottest international news in the academic world since Paris. People are coming from all over the world." Andrew's voice was sounding hoarse with distress.

I turned to him. "I'll hold a press conference with your family here tomorrow. If money's not an issue, maybe you can offer a reward for the documents' safe return."

Andrew's face slowly brightened as he looked back at me. "A reward. Yes. Maybe a reward would bring it back." For the first time he looked as if he would survive the night's disaster. "We'll pray somebody returns it for the money. You can always count on human greed."

"Nothing will bring my Victory back," said Malcolm, his voice shaking.

I passed out three copies of my card. "Call me if you think of anything. Otherwise, I'll be back tomorrow morning."

Paul escorted me to the door, as Victoria's body was being zipped up in a body bag. We walked outside through the crowd of police officers and spectators, raising and ducking under the yellow perimeter tape. Members of the press poked microphones at us, and I recognized some of the same reporters from this afternoon. "Detective O'Leary! Can you tell us what happened?"

"The family will give a statement tomorrow morning."

"Is this case connected to the Campus Killer?" More microphones pressed at me until I started to feel hemmed in.

I gave them the standard professional brush-off. "No comment at this time. Please, let us pass."

Paul dodged their cameras and pressing bodies, shielding me.

“Walk with me for a minute, will you?” I asked Paul, motioning for two patrol officers to keep reporters at bay. “I need some basic facts about the *Gospel of Judas*. Your copy. The complete copy.” Like what was in it worth killing over.

I remembered the furor surrounding the 2004 fragment’s discovery, especially the part that claimed Jesus had instructed Judas to turn him in. Obedience or betrayal? Scholars had debated for months.

After the church refused Ronny a funeral, I’d quit attending mass. But when the Judas craze was at its height, I had run into my priest in the vegetable section of the grocery store and asked him what he thought. “In the first place, this new document is not reliable. Besides, it doesn’t change the truth of the gospel.”

His arrogance made me angry. I hated the smugness of people who had it all figured out. Gathering steam, I challenged him, “It makes perfect sense that Jesus told Judas to turn Him in.”

“It doesn’t work that way,” said the priest, selecting a peach.

“How do you know it doesn’t work that way?” I had insisted.

“Jesus had to be betrayed, turned over to the authorities. Otherwise, there was no struggle at Gethsemane. He had to make the choice to accept the crucifixion.”

“Not so. Jesus had already made the choice to die.”

“No. Judas acted out of evil motives. That is how Jesus conquered evil.”

I had stuffed more tomatoes than I needed into a plastic bag. I knew my priest intended well, but I also knew where good intentions led—to hell, a place I already lived. Since the tragedy, my life was a war zone between wanting to believe in a good God, over and against the evidence of a God who stood by and let innocent people suffer.

Now, I wanted to hear what Paul—with a Ph.D. in New Testament—had to say about the *Gospel of Judas*.

“Like what? It’s a complicated document—” Paul began. Frosty air came from his mouth. We hurried down the street away from the crowd.

“Like what could motivate someone to steal the manuscript and murder your aunt. I studied some of the Gnostics in seminary, like the *Gospel of Thomas*,” I said. “But none of them encouraged violence. In fact, the opposite.”

“You went to seminary?” Although I couldn’t see his face clearly in the dark, Paul’s tone reflected surprise. And respect.

“One year, at YDS. A lifetime ago. Correct me if I’m wrong, but to the Gnostics earth is matter—a realm of suffering and misery. God and heaven are purely spiritual.”

Paul nodded.

“Bottom line—God would never be so tacky and disgusting to become part of a sinful earth.”

“Exactly,” said Paul. Now that we had left behind the mob scene in front of the Guildford’s house, we slowed down a little and stopped under the streetlight at the corner.

I pressed on. “Okay. I need specifics. Give me reasons someone is willing to kill to get the manuscripts.” An image of Victoria’s bludgeoned body flitted across my mind. “A bunch of ancient words doesn’t usually add up to death.”

Paul breathed a sigh that sounded deep and troubled. “Correct.” He thrust his hands into his pockets. “The *Gospel of Judas* claims Jesus died because He wanted release from his earthly body, not as a sacrifice. **Christians believe that Jesus died to redeem our sins.**”

The release theory only worked if you wanted death—if you considered life unbearable. “So Jesus died to get off the earth and back to heaven, not to save souls.” I paused. “So why did Victoria die?”

I watched Paul nod under the streetlamp. “Be patient. I’m getting there. For one thing, if the *Gospel of Judas* is right, the painful, humiliating death on the cross wasn’t necessary. Poison would have been more expedient.”

Paul had a point. “Okay.”

“Here’s what I think. The *Gospel of Judas* is dangerous because of what was in it for Judas. Jesus rewards him with the promise, ‘You will exceed all of them.’ Judas will be the greatest of His disciples.”

Paul shifted his weight and leaned forward, intense and eager under the streetlight. Clearly, he loved to teach. If only I’d had him as a seminary professor, maybe I wouldn’t be such a cynic. Maybe my faith wouldn’t have gone up in smoke.

“In the *Gospel of Judas*, Jesus believes in astrology. A person’s destiny is linked to the stars.”

Astrology. Astrology was definitely not promoted in the Bible.

“Jesus shows Judas the stars and tells him, ‘The star that leads the way is your star.’”

“I see. A promise of the brightest star. A reward. A heavenly reward, no less.”

“Yes,” said Paul, nodding. “Jesus’ promises of greatness probably would have been compelling to someone back then.”

“Compelling to someone now.”

“Jesus tells Judas that he’ll be cursed for generations, but that in the end, he will rule over everyone,” Paul continued. “The *Gospel of Judas* is a serious spiritual aphrodisiac.”

An idea began to take shape in my mind. “It’s got to be a religious fanatic of some kind. Maybe a fanatic Gnostic who wants to be a hero now. A hero like Judas.”

“There’s more,” he said. “Do you want to hear it?”

“I’m listening.”

“According to the complete *Gospel of Judas*, Judas Iscariot had twin sons, David and Jesse. David wrote down everything Judas told him. He’s the one ultimately responsible for the *Gospel of Judas*. He recorded everything.”

Paul had my attention now. I started to get chill bumps. “Tell me if I’m wrong, but doesn’t the name ‘Thomas’ mean ‘twin’? Doesn’t the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* claim to be written by Jesus’ twin?”

“Exactly. That’s one reason this find was so astounding. Right before our eyes was another set of twins—the progeny of Judas.”

“What happened to the other twin?”

“His name was Jesse, and he became a Christian. He’s the one portrayed as evil in the *Gospel of Judas*.”

I took a minute to absorb what Paul was telling me. This news would rock the Christian world. *Someone had chosen to act on this information.*

Rubbing my hands up and down my arms, I tried to warm myself. *Somebody out there wanted the brightest star for Judas and for himself.* The motive went to the heart of the human condition. We all have our own version of the brightest star, and spend most of our lives working to achieve it. I said, “No wonder your uncle Andrew was so upset.”

We started walking back to my car, in silence for a full minute or two.

Paul said, finally, “Aunt Victory was a lovely lady. You know, in the *Gospel of Judas*, death isn’t sad. It’s liberation from flesh, that’s all. A release into the light.”

Something clicked. “‘Death: hero on this orb.’ If that’s true, then death is a hero for those trapped in matter on earth. It’s a Gnostic belief.”

Paul looked at me again with surprise and respect. “Yes. Death, the liberator. It’s part of the Sethian creed.” He repeated, “‘Death: hero on this orb,’” then paused. “Just a minute. Can you hand me a pen and paper?”

I dug in my purse and pulled out my notebook and a pen. In the dim light, I watched him scribbling letters on the page. What was he up to?

“I thought so. Look.” Paul moved toward the lights under the porte-cochere. He showed me what he’d written. “‘Death: hero on this orb.’ These are the same letters that form the phrase ‘Sethian Brotherhood’.” He added, “It’s an anagram.”

I stared. “Oh, my God. It is. I would never have figured it out.”

Paul smiled in the dim light, light crease lines appearing in his cheeks. He had just saved me hours of research. “The letters—yes. It’s a perfect anagram. How did you—?”

He handed me back the notebook. “My accident. All those years in the hospital. I worked puzzles for hours. Learned Latin and Greek. Had to keep my mind busy. At that point, I thought I’d never walk again.”

Paul faced me in a cashmere coat that probably cost as much as my salary for a week. He let down his guard, and I saw his eyes go soft for one second.

A flash of something long dead flickered through my abdomen. *Damn it.* For some perverse reason I found Paul attractive, not least because he was an intelligent man (goodness knows, they were hard enough to come by), but because he was schooled in the faith I could no longer accept.

“The Sethian Brotherhood?” I avoided meeting Paul’s eyes.

“One of the ancient Gnostic sects. The *Gospel of Judas* is a Sethian document,” explained Paul.

“I thought they died out a couple of years after Christ.”

“Everybody thought that.” Paul hit his forehead with the palm of his hand as if he had just remembered something. “Except Bonnie.”

“What? Who’s Bonnie?” Paul was clearly excited about something.

“Dr. Bonnie Barnes, the leading Sethian expert. She’s coming into town for the conference. She thinks this group is still alive.”

“Oh, my God. Is she here yet?”

“She’s checking in at the Courtyard early tomorrow. Overseas flight tonight, from England. We’ll call her tomorrow.”

As much as I wanted to talk with this expert now, I was about to hit a second wall of exhaustion for today, and I was glad we’d have to wait. I walked to my car.

Paul opened the door for me, an extra touch of courtesy. Ronny used to open my car door, but few men since had bothered. “Thank you,” I said, beginning to feel major effects of sensory overload. I climbed in my car and closed the door myself.

“You’re welcome,” he answered, meeting my eyes an instant longer than necessary, before he turned around and walked back inside.

14

Gabriel

Gabriel watched the 11:00 news on his small flat screen television. Toward the end of the newscast, cameras panned the scene of a woman described as “the detective who just yesterday nabbed the Campus Killer,” and a man identified as “Paul Guildford, nephew of the deceased.” They were walking out of the house where Gabriel had left the body in the foyer.

Nobody knew anything. The police were clueless. Gabriel wondered how long it would take them to figure out the message in the safe.

The broadcast signed off with an excited blonde anchorwoman promising more information tomorrow on the “breaking news of Chef Victoria Guildford’s tragic death.”

Tonight Victoria’s death was a local story. Tomorrow, the Sethian Brotherhood would be international news.

At 11:50, Gabriel called the American Patriarch. Both used throwaway cell phones, and the conversation was short.

“I had to kill her. She saw me.” Gabriel began to feel the slow creep of failure, the most familiar part of his psyche, as his spirits began to sink. The approaching darkness was accompanied by the prickly fear of imminent rejection. He added quickly in self-defense, “The Grand Patriarch told me to use my head in an emergency, and this was an emergency.” Gabriel held his breath, waiting to see if he would be reprimanded.

“Not a problem,” said the American Patriarch. “Collateral damage. Just be prepared for tomorrow.”

Gabriel closed his eyes, his bloodstream flooded with relief. “Yes, sir. I’ll be ready.”

15

Isabella

One last stop before I could put this day to rest. At the CSI lab Maria was in the process of pulling the slip of paper from the safe out of the bag with tweezers and placing it under her microscope.

“It’s an anagram,” I told her. “Paul figured it out. ‘Sethian Brotherhood.’ Any forensic evidence that might lead us to the killer? Fingerprints? Paper source?”

“Sorry. Looks like garden variety Times New Roman type on common stationery paper.” Maria moved over and I peered into the eyepiece.

I turned the microscope back to Maria. “Look again. We’ll have to test the fibers.”

Maria gave it a closer inspection, moving the paper to examine all four corners and the edges. “Hey, wait a second. Looks like a watermark.” She paused. “Whoa.”

I took another look in the microscope.

“Whatcha got?” asked Bob, crossing the room. He stopped to look over my shoulder. I moved aside and he squinted into the eyepiece. “This is interesting.”

I peered in again. As I flashed the finding on the screen overhead, the picture of a capital “T” emerged, with a snake coiled around it. “Have you ever seen this symbol?”

Bob shook his head. “Reminds me of a caduceus.”

“Yeah,” agreed Maria. “But a caduceus has two snakes, wings, and stands for medicine or something.”

“This one doesn’t look like it stands for anything healthy,” said Bob.

I sat down at a nearby computer and googled “Caduceus.” After a minute, I agreed. “Look. Every image has a pole, two snakes, and wings. The caduceus is an image for ancient physician, as well as the symbol for Hermes or Mercury.”

“So it’s not a caduceus. We need to dig deeper and find a T, not a pole, and one snake with no wings.”

I thought aloud. “We’ve got a motto—death as a hero—and the symbol of a snake.”

“Death and snakes. Doesn’t look promising,” said Bob.

Maria continued to study the picture on the large screen. “I’ll check iconography first, then analyze for rag content and watermark manufacturers.”

“Creepy,” said Bob.

“Let me know if you get a hit on any fingerprints. Just leave a full report on my desk for tomorrow,” I said. “Bonnie Barnes, the Sethian specialist from Oxford, is supposed to be here. We’ll call her first thing.”