

# The Return

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*This is a work of fiction. Any similarity of this story to reality would be just a strange coincidence.*

## Chapter 1

# Discovery

It was a quiet, sunny day in the South of France. Geoff was drinking in the last few moments of pleasurable relaxation before he had to leave this centuries old chateau. It had been a wonderful two weeks of much needed down time. As an investment banker, who had the battle scars of the last few years, he had to scramble to re-build in the new financial era.

Jacques Chevalier, his host, had been a great mentor and wise friend through all of this. He was the one who insisted that he take this break. It had been a time to stop, clear his head, and put things in perspective. This estate was the ideal place to do this. Here, Geoff felt a sense of history. It was as if important things had happened here.

He rose from the couch in the study from a quick nap before his departure. Somehow, he managed to wake up with a small kink in his back. Geoff leaned with his back against the nearest bookcase with the back of his head up against a shelf. He grabbed the sides of the bookcase with each hand in an attempt to work out the kink in his back. He heard a “click” but was sure that it didn’t come from his joints.

Suddenly, he started to slide backwards and heard a gentle “whoosh” as the bookshelf gave way. He almost lost his balance as the secret bookcase door swung inwards to reveal a dark musty room. Its stale air made him cough. He ran his hand against the nearest wall searching for a light switch.

Success! A small lamp on a far table snapped on to reveal a small secret library with one leather chair, a small table, and the walls lined with books. It looked like this room hadn’t been used in years. Even though it had been sealed off, there was a thin layer of dust everywhere.

Intrigued, he scanned the bookshelves to see if he could recognize any of the titles. Most of the volumes were bound in leather. His eye caught a glimmer of light reflecting from a gold embossing on the spine of one of the books. He carefully removed the book from the shelf and examined it.

The gold stamped insignia looked familiar. It was the cross pattee. A symbol associated with the legendary Order of the Knights Templar.



There was no title, neither on the spine nor on the front of the book. He opened it carefully and dust formed a small cloud before him as he opened the volume. The parchment was dry and yellowed. There was an inscription “To the worthy, a task of love fitting to you, and may it bring a better future for all.” After several blank pages, on the frontispiece, there again was the insignia that had attracted him to the book

Then, the title of the book read: “The Order Today– An Introduction.”

It was penned in ink by someone who was skilled in the ancient art of calligraphy. Good penmanship had become a lost art in today’s world of computers and telephones.

A few more pages and then the manuscript began with the words:

“Being, first and foremost, the mission of our hallowed order, we have endeavored to secure the safety and longevity of .....” He could not make out the next few words. It was blurred as if a drop of water had destroyed them.

“To do this, it was evident that this protection and sustenance would require a steady source of wealth that would not be diminished by time, nor subject to the vagaries of the follies of men or their vices. In keeping with this mandate, our beloved Brother Bernard , now passed on to our Lord, had devised a plan that would provide the bounty of wealth creating more wealth to provide a continuous flow into a most secure repository for future use.”

His mind reeled. What was so important that it would require money for centuries to come? Where had this money gone? And where is it today?

This really intrigued Geoff as he was a banker himself. Money lending goes back to the time of Christ but had since been refined and institutionalized even made respectable.

He flipped through the pages, gasping at what he was seeing. It seemed a novitiate manual of The Order of the Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, the secret society more commonly known as The Order of the Knights Templar. It clearly outlined the primary mission and additional goals of the Order, their rules of conduct, as well as a general history of the founding of the order.

For centuries people had been speculating about the Templars. What secrets had they found? What was their real purpose? Do they still exist? Here before him lay some of the answers. It was a remarkable find.

But did Jacques, his host, know of this room? The chateau had been in his family for centuries. Perhaps he has walked past that bookcase his entire lifetime not knowing what secrets lay behind it. Or, maybe he does know. Maybe he is even a Templar! Aagh! He started feeling the paranoia easing its way into his thoughts. The Templar story seemed to do this to people.

He thought, "What other treasures of Templar knowledge lie in these other volumes?" He did not have time to find out. He was due to leave for the train station in fifteen minutes. His bags were packed and appointments were set. He quickly grabbed his digital camera that was in one of his bags in the hallway outside of the study. He returned to the secret study in the library and snapped photos of as much of the contents of the Templar manual as possible. He couldn't get the whole book but he thought he got the most important pages. He carefully returned the volume to the shelf, switched off the lamp, and closed the bookcase door. He looked at his watch, grabbed his bags, and hurried quickly to his car.

He had planned on taking the train back to London from Provence, but his recent discovery prompted him to fly instead. Geoff wanted to get back as soon as possible

to check out some historical references and relationships that his newly acquired information seemed to imply. His mind was racing, formulating theories. This was no task for a computer search. These references are arcane. They would be found only in dusty old books and fragile manuscripts which lay undisturbed in the obscure regions of several special libraries in England. Some of these texts may have not seen the light of day for hundreds of years.

When he arrived at the airport in Nice, he found a flight and quickly purchased a ticket. He boarded the plane noting it would be a relatively short flight. If he was lucky, he might make it back by late afternoon and could reach one of the libraries today. The plane was not full. There were primarily some businessmen and a few tourists onboard.

In flight, Geoff looked out the window wondering about the Templar's influence on the country below him. How much of it was or, should he say, still is owned by the Templars through chains of corporations and financial institutions? This might never be known. After all, they are the ones who invented banking and an array of financial vehicles to help them manage and conceal their assets; assets which would help them fulfill their mission; their whole *raison d'être*.

Now that he had had a glimpse into their objectives, he started to get a glimmer of why things might be the way they are today. With time, some intensive research and a little bit of luck, he might be able to verify and refine some of his newly formulated theories.

The flight was uneventful. He landed at Heathrow around four p.m. and hailed a taxi. He would first stop by his flat, drop off his luggage, and quickly change into a fresh set of clothes. Then he could make a dash for the British Library. The phone messages and emails would have to wait.

## Chapter 2

# Research

It was a rainy day in London, a perfect day to be hidden away in the bowels of a library. And, that was just what Geoff was doing.

Since returning from Provence, he had been devoting as much time as he could manage, apart from work, to follow up on his Templar research. Geoff spent days and nights in libraries.

In the Templar manual, he had found a pledge that seemed to sum things up:

*“We pledge all that is our being to the protection and preservation of the sangreal and also to keep safe the Ark of the Covenant between our Lord and Man.”*

He had made some progress piecing together historical events and people, now that he had a framework on which to hang them. It was like a giant historical puzzle and he had had a brief glimpse of part of the overall picture.

Sangreal means “royal blood.” That was the key. Geoff had read some popular novels claiming that this was the name for the Holy Grail. It was a good story, a bestseller in fact, but it was based upon a modern day hoax. Books had been written, movies made, and legends abounded about the Holy Grail. Some believe it to be a cup used to collect the blood of Christ at the crucifixion before His death. Others interpret it to mean His bloodline passed on down thru the ages from the children borne by his wife, Mary Magdalene. What was the real story?

Library after library, he poured over books and manuscripts. Pieces were starting to fall into place but he still had major blank spots in the picture. He still needed to connect the grail as bloodline, the Ark of the Covenant, the contents of Solomon’s temple, and the invention of banking, among others. The Templars were founded around 1118. What about the previous eleven hundred years?

His research led him to the Bodleian Library at Oxford University. It was one of the largest libraries in the United Kingdom. But, more importantly for Geoff, it also contained some of the rarest books.

He had come to read from an obscure 9<sup>th</sup> century book, “Life of Mary Magdelene” by Rabanus Maurus. There, he found an account of the trip of Joseph of Arimathea after the death of Christ. Joseph, Christ's wealthy uncle, along with Lazarus, Mary, and Sarah, and others first travelled to Marseilles in the south of France. After he arranged for a safe habitation in France for some of them, Joseph and the rest of the party continued on to Britain.

Yes, this would fit. It was rumored that Joseph had a lucrative tin trading business with Britain. Some even claim that he took Jesus on trips there when He was a boy. Joseph would surely not want to stay in France and draw attention to those he was trying to hide. He could operate freely from Britain without arousing suspicion and yet be close enough to keep track of the family in France. And just as important, he could continue making money by operating his business so as to assure the support of the family.

But, how did this connect to the Templars? And, what about the Grail as a cup? Geoff also had kept coming across the instruction “seek ye Zion”, a word indicating Jerusalem, the Holy Land, or more specifically the area of the temple of Solomon. Other interpretations were “the dwelling place of the Lord.” Perhaps he needed to go to Jerusalem for more research and hopefully more answers.

And, what about all the years after 1307? The stories he read were entangled with hoaxes, facts, and faulty research.

It was getting late. He exited the library out into the rain. He hailed a taxi, and as he was entering it, he thought he saw someone out of the corner of his eye. Was he being followed? By whom and why? Or, was this just more Templar paranoia setting in?

## Chapter 3

# Friends

Peter Christos was in his wood paneled office in London. It had been his father's. It had that wonderful smell of leather and wood oil. There were models of ships on the credenza and photos of ships on the walls.

Sitting at his massive desk, he answered the phone. "Hi, Geoff, it's great to hear your voice. When did you get back?"

"A couple of weeks ago," he replied "but I've been holed up in libraries since then."

"Peter, when I was in France at Jacques' place, I found something truly remarkable, a book, an old book that contained secrets about the Knights Templar."

"Yeah, right and I am Saint Nicholas," Peter answered.

"No, this is for real. Can I come by? I really need to talk to about this but I think it is better we continue this conversation in person."

Peter replied, "I've got an hour or so around four. Is that o.k.?"

"Yes, I'll see you then."

At four p.m. Geoff entered Peter's office. It was good to see his old friend again. Peter was a very grounded person and would be a good sounding board. Geoff trusted Peter. They go a long way back and had been through a lot together.

"You're not going to believe this. It's like something straight out of a movie. I was at Jacques's house in the south of France for a two week vacation. Just to chill out, slow down, and reflect. And on the last day, I, inadvertently, found a secret bookcase door that lead to a secret room full of books. I only had the time to look at one of the books. But what a book it turned out to be! It was a book written by Templars for new Templars; an orientation book of sorts.

“It outlined their mission, mentioned the Ark of the Covenant, and even seemed to verify that they, indeed, were the founders of Swiss secret banking. It was old, but not that old, and written in modern English. That would seem to imply that the Templars, as an organization, are alive and well today. The implications are staggering.”

Practical as ever, Peter asked, “So what does that have to do with you?”

“Well, seeing as I am the one who found this information, I might be in some kind of danger. Since I’ve been back, I think I have seen someone following me.”

Peter interjected, “Or, it could just be your imagination.”

“But what if they know, that I know, about them existing now?”

“I guess it would depend upon what you are going to do with this information. Are you going to write a book and expose them?”

Geoff had been so excited by his find and his further research that he hadn’t stopped to think about it. What, indeed, was he going to do? Should he approach Jacques? Should he just keep it as a secret? Even with all his new found information, he still was missing large parts of the picture.

“I really don’t know what I should do,” he told Peter. “I guess that’s why I am talking to you. What do you think?”

“Let me sleep on it. And, in the meantime, I would advise you to keep a low profile, just in case.” Peter replied. “Also, go home and get some sleep. You look like you’ve been spending far too much time in those libraries.”

Geoff left his friend’s office. As usual, Peter put things in perspective.

## Chapter 4

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Sitting at his beautiful Louis XV desk, which was in magnificent condition, Jacques Chevalier's phone rang in his Paris office. He answered it promptly. A familiar voice on the other end said, "We might have a problem. It has come to our attention that a friend of yours, a Geoffrey Allen, may have come into possession of some of the Order's confidential information. Since he recently stayed at your estate in Provence, we were wondering if somehow he gained access to this information while he was there. Have you checked your private chamber lately?"

"No," he replied. "I haven't used it for years. But that room has remained undetected for the centuries that the house has been in my family". He asked, "What makes you think that this might be the case?"

"Some of our monitoring systems reported that your house guest changed his travel plans and rushed back to London. There was no communication traffic to indicate any reason for this. I fear he may have stumbled onto this at your place."

Jacques responded, "He probably had an inspiration for a new deal he wanted to nail down before anyone else thought of it. Maybe something in the news triggered it. After all, he is a banker."

Joseph replied, "Several days later, our telecom monitoring network picked up traffic using some keywords: "secrets", "Templar", "book" and your name. They were part of a telephone conversation that Mr. Allen had with a Peter Christos in London."

Jacques thought to himself, "How could this be? If true, did Geoff find his secondary hiding place? Hopefully not, as it contained sensitive Templar information including his access codes to the Money Matrix."

“Joseph, you have always been a little paranoid, but considering the sensitivity of the information that the room houses, it probably is wise to check it out.”

“Well, I’d feel more comfortable if you would check for any signs of intrusion. If you would like, I can send one of the jets for you. I could have one for you in 2 hours. Can you break away?” It was apparent that the Grand Master of the Order considered this to be a potentially real situation and break in security.

“Yes, I’ll be on my way immediately.”

Jacques started to worry. Could it be true? It probably was, as the modern day Templars had most of the finest technology in the world and used it extensively and effectively. Their telecommunications monitoring stations made the NSA’s Echelon program look like a child’s toy.

What was worse was that Geoff had talked to someone about it. How much did he know? How much did he pass on? Would he suspect that I know about the secret library room? Does he suspect that I am a Templar? And, most importantly, what will Geoff do next?

He picked up his phone and asked Rose, his personal assistant, to clear his schedule for the trip. A limousine arrived minutes later and delivered him to the Le Bourget airport. The jet had just touched down minutes earlier and was waiting for him. If anything, the Templars ran a tight ship. They were experts at logistics as well as finance. After all, they had centuries to refine operational procedures.

He hopped onboard and let the pilot know he was ready to leave immediately. The plane taxied and was in the air in minutes. Well, he might as well make productive use of his flight time. All Templar executive jets are equipped with state of the art communications equipment and computers. They are fully functional flying luxury offices. He started reading some reports, but his mind wandered off.

## Chapter 5

### Sarah

It was a massive gala event. The turnout was even better than Sarah Morales had hoped. Socialites, businessmen, actors, celebrities, and even heads of state were there. It was a veritable United Nations of concerned people. It looked like she would raise more than her goal of 50 million dollars. With that amount, the charity could make a real difference in the lives of these kids.

The party aspect of the event was also a smashing success. People were actually having fun. Most of these types of events that she had attended were pretty dull. Maybe it was the mix of people. There were some pretty dynamic and interesting people here. J.K. Rowling, Brad and Angelina, Tony Blair, Bono, all of the Bushes, George Clooney, Tina Turner, Warren Buffett, and Jon Huntsman were just a few of the luminaries there.

Among her generation (she was 29), Prince William, Maria Sharapova, Chris Pine, Paris Hilton and Athinia Onasis Miranda were there as well. Of course, there were many more with less familiar names. The room was packed. As chairwoman, Sarah made it a point to mingle and personally thank as many people as possible. Her old friend from college days, Geoff Allen, had flown in from London just to be at her event. He was now living there and worked at an investment bank. He had brought along one of his closest friends, Peter Christos.

Peter was a second generation shipping magnate of Greek heritage. He was handsome and charming. Why hadn't Geoff introduced her sooner? Although it had been a brief conversation, Sarah sensed there was something special about Peter. Maybe it was his sense of philanthropy. He had made a generous offer to provide all the ships she would need to get the relief supplies to their destination.

No, that wasn't it but she couldn't put it into words. Her eyes kept going back to him wherever he was in the room. Maybe it was just the champagne. Anyway, it was time to go to the stage and thank the people for their generosity.

At the podium she spoke, "Ladies and gentlemen, as chairwoman, I would like to thank you for attending this event and your overwhelming generosity. I want to assure you that we will make sure that every dollar that you have donated to The Ethiopian Children's Relief Fund will go to helping those kids. Again, thank you very much. I hope you will continue to enjoy the rest of the evening's festivities".

Her message was short but sincere. Sarah returned to mingling with the crowd. Her friend Geoff pulled her aside, "You sure made an impression. My friend Peter has been peppering me with questions about you all night. But then again, I've always known that you're special." Sarah beamed. The night just kept getting better.

The next morning, when she arrived at her office, there were several floral arrangements awaiting her. The attached cards read, "I hope these flowers would brighten your day as much as you brightened my evening. Peter Christos"

She picked up the phone and called the hotel at which Peter was staying. She remembered his mentioning it. "Thank you for the gorgeous flowers. You've made my day."

Peter replied, "Are you available for dinner tonight? I know it is short notice but I have only two days left here." She accepted. Life is good and it only seems to be getting better everyday!

Sarah was glad he didn't pick some pretentious restaurant but a small quiet one where they could talk and get to know each other better. The food at Triomphe was simple but excellent. She had the scallops with porcini mushrooms.

Dinner went smoothly. She and Peter talked about summers in France and Mexico for her and the Greek Islands and Britain for him. Childhood dreams and current aspirations, favorite books and foods filled out the conversation. "This is someone I want to get to know better," each thought.

But that was not going to happen for a while. Peter was flying back to London. He had a thriving business to run. And, she had work to do to put those newly raised funds to good use for the children of Ethiopia.

## Chapter 6

# Zion

“The dwelling place of the Lord” was the definition of Zion. Geoff had found many admonitions and instructions to “Seek ye Zion.” The Templars had heeded that advice and went to Jerusalem. They found many things there in the temple of Solomon. With the secret information they discovered, it gave them Knowledge enough to confront the Pope and have the Church stay away from them for many years. To be able to shift the power of the papacy was truly an example of the age-old saying, “Knowledge is Power.”

So Geoff, too, would go to Jerusalem. Perhaps being there would provide him the inspiration and further clues as to the current activities of the Templars.

Jerusalem was not what he expected. It was a blend of centuries old mud habitations and a modern day city.

After days of exploring the Temple Mount, visiting museums of antiquities, searching libraries, talking to local historical scholars, and questioning numerous people, Geoff came the conclusion that he, among many others throughout history, had misinterpreted the word Zion. It turns out that Zion was a reference for or synonym for the Ark of the Covenant as the resting place of the Lord. He should be seeking it.

Since the fifth or sixth century, the Ark had disappeared from Jerusalem. Theories abound about who took it, why, and where.

It had been a wild goose chase, but he had learned from it. So it was back to London and more research. He would track all the known references to the Ark and see if he could be pointed in the right direction.

But Geoff's trip had not gone un-noticed. Jerusalem was a city of spies and surveillance. Israel's existence depended upon it. Palestinian terrorists threatened to wipe Israel off the map of the world. Arms merchants dealt in the shadows.

During one of these deals, Sheik Ali bin Ali had heard a conversation among some of the terrorists to whom he was supplying money, that there was some American banker snooping around and asking a lot of questions. At first he was concerned that someone would discover his flow of funds and his involvement. But he was relieved when they said it turned out that the man was just one of those fools seeking the secrets of the Knights Templar. Still, in doing so, whether the man had realized it or not, he had exposed some of the sheik's contacts who used the selling of antiquities as covers for their activities. To be safe, he should report this to his boss. He would investigate to see if the man's activities posed any threat to their plans.

## Chapter 7

# November

Sarah spent the month of November planning the relief effort, prioritizing the needs and balancing those against the resources she could purchase or get donated. Logistics planning was a lot more intense than she had anticipated. There were so many details, but it was an experience tempered by caring. It was also good that it required so much of her attention as she was missing Peter.

He had returned to London to run his shipping business, Xristos International. Peter had called her immediately upon his arrival and they had continued talking since. But she missed being with him.

He missed her as well and decided that he could make it back to New York on Saturday the 12<sup>th</sup> but would have to return Sunday afternoon. It was short time to spend together but it would have to do for now. They both had a lot to get done.

Peter took a late night plane from London and arrived in the middle of the night. He checked into the New York Palace hotel to get a few hours of sleep and to freshen up for his date. At eight a.m., he met Sarah at the restaurant in his hotel for breakfast. She had the lemon blueberry pancakes. He had the corned beef hash. They decided to go to the Metropolitan Museum as it would give them a chance to sample each other's preferences in Art and just be together without constantly having to say something.

After hours of roaming the galleries of painting and sculpture, they had enough of the high brow and were ready for some plain old fun. So Peter escorted Sarah back to her apartment so she could change for dinner. After dropping her off, he headed back to his hotel to do likewise. He'd pick her up for dinner at eight and then they could go dancing later.

They had dinner at Grace's Trattoria Café & Grill. Again, Peter had picked a quiet restaurant so that they could talk. They seemed to have endless things to say to each other. There was just so much to explore. It was becoming obvious to each other that feelings were beginning to emerge. Romance was in the air.

Hours later they left and headed out to club Marquee. Clubs were always coming and going but Marquee had managed to stay popular over the years. With its wishbone staircase and vaulted ceilings, it was a sleek and classy lounge with a great dance floor.

Both of them were not "party people" but did enjoy dancing. For them, it was a glorious celebration of still being young and enjoying life. They danced almost until dawn. He took her back to her apartment where they had a cup of coffee and made plans for later that morning.

Sunday morning until early afternoon was all the time they would have left together for now. They decided to do the Live Jazz Brunch down in the West Village. At night, it was one of the city's most romantic spots, but during the day, it was a little more casual. They just wanted to relax for now and savor their last hours together.

The time passed all too quickly and before they realized it was time for Peter to grab his bag at the hotel and get to JFK airport. Sarah went with him to the airport to maximize their time with each other. She was sad that he had to leave so quickly but glad for that warm feeling she had when they were together. At the gate, they kissed a warm farewell kiss.

She invited him to Thanksgiving dinner at her Mom's co-op in New York. It was a holiday that he wasn't accustomed to celebrating but it was a good excuse to see her again. Sarah hoped that she wasn't pushing things by bringing him to meet her mother so soon, but she valued her opinion, especially when it came to men.

Back at work, Sarah had seemed to have hardly blinked and before she knew it, it was time for Peter to return for Thanksgiving. He came in on Wednesday night and checked into the same hotel.

He was a little apprehensive, meeting a girl's mother was always a little unnerving. You knew you were going to be given a thorough inspection for suitability. "Oh, well just be yourself and hope that she likes you at least a little," he said to himself.

Thanksgiving was a quiet affair. Like himself, Sarah had lost her father several years ago. It was apparent that her mother missed him a lot. She set a place for him at the table just for memory's sake.

Maria Morales served the traditional turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce, corn, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin pie dinner. It was apparent that she was a woman of fine taste, from the elegant table setting, to the gourmet execution of an American classic dinner.

Like her daughter, she had black hair and brown eyes and a slim figure. But, she had a slight French accent that Sarah did not possess. She was an elegant lady. His mother would like her. They had some common traits. Besides being gracious, she seemed to be down to earth and have a good sense of humor.

He wondered, "What was her assessment of him?" Later, when they left, Sarah whispered in his ear, "I think she likes you."

Unfortunately, he wasn't going to be able to stay for the weekend. He had to get back to London. They went to a little café nearby just to share their remaining few hours before they would be apart again.

## Chapter 8

# More Research

Back from Jerusalem empty handed, Geoff hit the libraries again. He still had many holes to fill in his knowledge of the Templars and their predecessors. He would start at the beginning. Obviously Joseph of Arimathea was connected to the Templars, somehow. In the thousand years before their formation, he had to have set up some sort of organization(s) to fulfill his self-appointed charge of protecting the holy family and its descendants. Since he had wealth, he would have had the means to do this. It would necessarily need committed individuals that could be trusted. Concealment and dis-information would also be necessary for the protection of the Family.

A back-up plan would also be need. Just in case the primary organization failed or became corrupted, there would always have to be a fount from which to start another group to carry on the mission. That means there must have been at least two secret organizations existing throughout this span of history! They must be separate but parallel. It would be helpful if they had minimal contact, if any, so as to protect the whole plan from being at risk.

How to connect the pieces? Joseph, the Holy Grail, the Ark of the Covenant, Rosslyn, and the Knights Templars.

In the ensuing weeks, that turned to months, Geoff scoured the libraries, caroming from one manuscript to another and then to a dead end, only to start the process all over again. He had stories, half-truths, timelines that didn't mesh, and every once in a while, a fact or connection that seemed to ring true. Having read the secret Templar manual helped as well. Eventually, he was able to construct a plausible scenario.

In the early years, Joseph and his sons and their sons were able to protect the Holy Family in France. They maintained their operation in what would eventually become England and grew their wealth. As their wealth increased, they moved to Glastonbury and disguised their activities as being religious. Being far from Rome, the Pope would never know.

Also, to divert attention away from protecting the holy blood, they concocted a story of the holy blood being shed into a cup. This “holy grail” had been moved many times and needed to be found to be preserved. It would be much better to have people out searching for a cup instead of the descendants of Christ.

It worked. There were “grail quests” after “grail quests.” Arthur and his knights searched for it. The story appeared in books. Conflicting accounts emerged.

As time wore on, it became apparent that this cover operation could be vulnerable. They would need to split it and move the other part to a secure location. A name change would have also been useful. So the move was made to a small place in Scotland in the North which would later come to be known as Roslin or Rosslyn. In the process, the family also changed their name to St. Clair to add additional cover.

But the additional distance meant that it would be more difficult to look after the Holy Family. It would be necessary to form a local group to watch over them. So they formed a group consisting, at the start, of nine French noblemen from the area where Joseph had settled the family. This group of trusted men was funded handsomely by Joseph’s descendants to ensure that the family would be well cared for. They also insisted that the group expand this wealth so that they could operate independently, in the future, come what may.

Hughes de Payen and Andre de Montbard, who was the relative of Bernard of Clairvaux, were among them. It was called The Order of the Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon. What a perfect disguise; an order of monks supposedly sworn to poverty that had access to significant wealth to fulfill their mission.

Part of this mission was to return to the Temple in Jerusalem. Protecting travelers to the Holy Land during the Crusades was the ideal cover story. It concealed their real goal of retrieving manuscripts and other things that Joseph had not been able to remove at the time of the original move.

Mary Magdalene had told Joseph of the secret contents of the Temple and he had vowed that he, or his sons, would one day return and move them for safe keeping. The contents, he was told, would be helpful to Christ when He returned.

So far, so good. But what became of the Templars that history says was disbanded and that he personally knew still existed?

## Chapter 9

# Tis the Season

December was another month of whirlwind activity for Sarah. She attended meeting after meeting with experts assessing the needs and priorities and obstacles to be anticipated. This was combined with the daily checking of costs and availability of the needed supplies and service personnel. Until now, she hadn't realized the amount of work that was required to be truly helpful.

The good news was that she would be joining Peter for Christmas in London. Although Peter's family wasn't particularly religious, Christmas had always been a special holiday for them. His father, Alexander, who had died seven years ago, had observed his family's tradition of celebrating the twelve days of Christmas. His mother, Christina, and he, carried on the tradition, but it just wasn't the same without him. Sarah understood.

This year could be different. Introducing new people into a tradition sometimes gives it new life.

The celebration would be at his mother's house, as it always was, in the exclusive Kensington Palace Gardens. Peter had made arrangements that she would stay there. It was a large house that had room for many guests. At Christmas time, the house decorations would be changed everyday for the 12 days to reflect their theme for the day.

Sarah was a little nervous and apprehensive about meeting Peter's mother. But, he had told her so much about her that she had a good idea of what to expect.

To avoid the holiday travel crush, Sarah decided to arrive two days earlier. That way not only could she avoid the travel congestion but also get a little work done on

her project. There were people she could squeeze into see before they left for the holidays.

Wednesday, the 21<sup>st</sup>, she arrived at Heathrow on the red eye flight from New York. She had her meetings already set up for today and Thursday. She would have Friday to herself for a last minute shopping for a few more gifts.

Saturday, Christmas Eve, mid-morning, she checked out of her hotel and caught a taxi to the Christos' mansion. The security gate was expecting her and the butler was waiting at the door when her taxi pulled up to the house. It was an impressive house. A stately, four stories of red brick and white stone and elegantly decked out in tasteful Christmas trimmings. The butler took her luggage from the taxi and rang for Mrs. Christos.

Christina Christos was an elegant lady of French heritage. She was slim and about five foot six with blonde hair. She greeted Sarah warmly. Her accent was a charming blend of French and English. "Welcome to our house, Sarah. Peter has told me so much about you. Victor will show you to your room so you can get settled in. We'll have plenty of time to talk and get to know each other in the next few days."

Her room was on the third floor complete with its own en suite bathroom as luxurious as any spa she had seen. It was a spacious room with a wonderful view of the well manicured gardens below. Such a large amount of green space was truly a luxury in the heart of a large city. Coming from New York, she could appreciate that.

Peter arrived around 7 p.m. at his mother's house. He had been out of town on a business trip and came directly from the airport without stopping at his flat.

He embraced Sarah upon entering the reception room in which she and his mother were sitting and talking. It was obvious that they had missed each other very much. He gave his mother a big hug and went up to his old room to change for dinner.

Dinner was at nine since it was a tradition to have a late intimate family dinner on Christmas Eve. It was Peter's task to get the Yule Log burning and keep it burning for the next twelve nights. It was an old Greek custom to ward off the goblins

(killantzaroi) that only tried to visit during the 12 days of Christmas to do their nightly mischief. Sprinkling basil water was another way to ward them off.

They had filet mignon and lobster followed by a festive flaming cherries jubilee. The evening ended with a snifter of cognac, slowly enjoyed.

Sunday morning was quite a surprise for Sarah. She had awakened to the cooing sound of birds. When she came down for breakfast, she saw that the main floor of the house had been filled with potted pear trees with partridges sitting on their branches. She had never seen such a celebration of the 12 days of Christmas, especially on this scale.

Peter sang the Christmas lyric at breakfast, "On the first day of Christmas, my true love sent to me a partridge in a pear tree." This year, for the first time in her life, these words held meaning for Sarah.

It was Christmas and the day was much more lively, with friends dropping by for afternoon Christmas cocktails and caroling. They would be invited to stay for an early dinner of Christmas goose and turkey and lamb. The table had loaves of the traditional Christopsomo, "Christmas bread", decorated with symbols in dough of ships, since that was Peter's profession.

Their mutual friend, Geoff, was among them. Peter hadn't seen too much of his friend in the last couple of months. Geoff had been holed up in a variety of libraries tracking down his references to the Knights Templar. Sarah hadn't seen him or spoken with him since the fundraiser in New York and was surprised to learn of his obsessive search for the Templars.

In the early evening Peter had arranged a video call on the big screen in the media room. It was to Sarah's mother Maria who was participating with her laptop back in New York. She was missing Sarah but was glad to see that she was happy. This call gave Christina and Maria a chance to briefly meet each other.

Christina said, "Maria, it is silly for you to be sitting there alone in New York, non? Please come and join us here for New Years and stay for the Epiphany." Maria agreed.

The next few days passed quickly with turtle doves, French hens, and, yes, five golden rings among the ever changing decorations. Maria arrived on the 31<sup>st</sup> to be met with six geese in the main reception room. She, too, had never seen the 12 days celebrated this way.

The New Years Eve party at the Christos house was very festive with about a dozen of their closets friends. Geoff was among them. At midnight, they had a Champagne toast out in the conservatory where they could get a good view of the fireworks display overhead. "Happy New Year and good cheer to old friends and new!" They all toasted aloud.

Over the next several days Maria and Christina spent the time exchanging their childhood experiences growing up in France and their stories of how they met the men they loved and lost to death.

January 6<sup>th</sup> came quickly. It was Friday and the celebration of the Epiphany, the day the Magi came to visit the child Jesus bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrah. It was the tradition of the Christos family to visit the local orphanages that day and give the children gifts. Peter, Sarah, Christina and Maria spent the day doing this. They had been blessed and were happy to share.

The Christmas season had gone well. Sarah and Peter were happy to have been able to share the experience together. Maria and Christina seemed to truly like each other and had a sense of family that made up a little for the holes in their lives.

Sarah decided that she would stay on for a little while to set up a staging warehouse as a distribution point for the relief supplies that she had been ordering. This had the added benefit that it would give her more time to spend with Peter.

They could celebrate Chinese News Years together on the 23<sup>rd</sup> before she would need to return to New York.

## Chapter 10

# Rosslyn

It was a quick trip to Rosslyn Chapel, a few miles south of Edinburgh, but one that Geoff felt he needed to make. Even though the Collegiate Chapel of St. Matthew was built one hundred and fifty years after the Templars were officially disbanded, it still was associated, in the minds of many, with them.

There was no hard evidence to link the two, but still, in its own right, it was a mysterious place. It was filled with carvings and symbols, some of which, seemed to indicate that its builders knew much more about the world and, perhaps, its history. Some claimed the Grail was hidden in a subterranean vault beneath it.

The latest claim was that 213 carvings in the ceiling represented some sort of musical sequence that would reveal a secret. When they were de-coded into musical notation and played, no secret was revealed. No doors opened.

Sir William St Clair, the Third Prince of Orkney, had it built around 1446. It has been in the ownership of the St. Clair family since then. Now, The Friends of Rosslyn owns the land surrounding it and it is administered by the Rosslyn Chapel Trust. Access was limited due to concerns of damage due to weather conditions. He was allowed to tour the Chapel and was impressed by what he saw.

But, Geoff was not expecting to find much. It had been thoroughly inspected over the years and, even more so, since it played a pivotal role in that popular movie. No one had found the secret, if one even existed. Yet, it did keep cropping up in his research. No, he was just trying to connect the dots.

How did Joseph of Arimathea connect to Rosslyn and how did it connect to the Templars? He had read that the St. Clairs had helped the Templars during the Inquisition and later. But, he had also read that they actually testified against them.

He had decided to take a walk around the grounds to get a different perspective on the Chapel and how it nestled into the peaceful hills of Lothian.

During his walk, he had, however, found a small, old cemetery, quite a distance from the formal chapel gardens. It had been neglected over time and was overgrown with thistles and various other weeds. It contained quite a few headstones, some in better condition than others.

A line of them caught his eye. It was a series of headstones, all marked with the family name DAVIDSON. Each stone had twelve names on them except for the last one which only had ten with room left for two more. He surmised that they were in chronological order beginning with Mary, followed by Sarah.

The curious thing was that all of the names were those only of women. Maybe that was what, subconsciously, caught his attention. Also, there were no dates attached to them denoting either birth or death. They were just a list of names. The two most recent were Maria, followed by Sarah.

“How odd” he thought “that there were no men’s names.” He just shrugged it off as a curiosity and continued his walk and returned to the Chapel.

After making inquiries in the nearby village of Ballantradoch, also known as Temple Village, and which had been the headquarters of the Templars in Scotland, Geoff realized that he wasn’t going to be able to determine how this family of women fit in with anything associated with Rosslyn or the Founders on this trip.

So, it was back to London and back to the libraries. But he did not leave empty handed. He now had a new question. Who was the Davidson family and why were they buried at Rosslyn?

## Chapter 11

### A Child's Verse

He was staring out into the dark night sky from his elegantly appointed office. His reverie was interrupted by the ringing of his cell phone.

“You may have an opportunity to acquire some secret Templar information.” It was the voice of Sheik Ali bin Ali. “My people tell me that an old Templar book has been discovered. I’m told that it was by an American banker by the name of Geoffrey Allen who lives in London. He’s been all over Jerusalem lately asking a lot of questions.”

He asked the sheik, “Was he trying to sell it?”

“No, he was trying to find out information about the Ark of the Covenant. I made sure that he hadn’t disrupted any of my “antiquities deals”.

The Templars had been a thorn in his side for all of his life. He was always looking for away to neutralize them. They were hiding a secret that would allow him to be victorious. With it, power and dominion could be his.

He knew he was running out of time. Signs were mounting quickly. Prophecies were starting to be fulfilled. Soon his mortal enemy would return.

Yet, there was still hope. When he was little, he had been given a verse to memorize. He had been told that it held a key with which he could make the other prophecies wrong. It would show him a way to prevail over those weak human beings and their Holy Messiah.

He had burned it into his memory. It went:

*The Grail will be found in the thistles, but it is not there.*

*If you break it, victory is yours.*

*Else, you battle the first son for 27 revolutions for the prize of a thousand years.*

Yes, he was sure he would prevail. His power had grown over the years.

His predecessor had successfully infiltrated and corrupted the Church of Rome. Many of its top Cardinals, monsignors, and priests were now among his minions. He, himself, had formed an alliance with the Russians. Their former KGB agents, whatever they called themselves today, worked for him. He had influenced a group of Muslims and convinced them that they had to wage “jihad” on the world and bring chaos to it. He held sway over a powerful group of Iranian zealots awaiting their 12<sup>th</sup> Imam, the Mahdi, who was to come at the time of world chaos.

Then there were the drug cartels that were under his influence. He had fostered the expanded use of certain drugs to enslave the masses and most of the key drug lords were unknowing pawns in his overall plan.

He had also deceived quite a number of gullible, so-called, “intelligent” people into believing in global warming and that they were actually doing something useful in trying to counter it. Little did they know that he had bribed some of his disciples by telling them that milking this concept was their way to wealth and power. And, his ranks were growing larger and stronger every day.

Perhaps this was the lucky break for which he had been waiting. He would have it checked out.

## Chapter 12

# Regina

The two Cardinals and the Monsignor were in a meeting at one of the Vatican's offices. Sister Regina, Cardinal Angelo Rossetti's private attorney for special matters was present, dressed in her nun's habit. The discussion was about rumors that had surfaced regarding the discovery of some secret Templar information recently. If true, this could be disastrous. The Church had long considered the Templars as their mortal enemy because they reportedly possessed secret information, found in the temple of Solomon; information that could possibly destroy the Church. That's why Pope Innocent II backed off when confronted by the Templars years ago, and granted them special privileges.

The phone rang. Cardinal Rossetti answered it. A familiar voice said, "We might have a problem. My sources tell me that long hidden information that could be damaging to our plans has been discovered. I'm told that it is a banker by the name of Geoffrey Allen. I don't know how much he has learned yet but this could possibly be explosive. He is a wild card as he probably doesn't know the implications of some of the information he may have found. And, more importantly, we don't know what he will do with it.

"We must find out what he knows and what he plans to do with it. He is currently based in London. Send someone to discretely follow him and find out what he knows. That is all for now." He hung up the phone abruptly.

Cardinal Rossetti then spoke to the others. "It has just been confirmed that a banker in London has indeed discovered some secret Templar information. It is extremely important that we investigate the matter thoroughly.

“Sister Regina, I believe that you, and your special talents, would be best suited for this task. Please leave immediately. You will have one of the papal jets at your disposal. Go anywhere, do anything, but find out what this Geoffrey Allen knows!”

The meeting broke up and Sister Regina left to change for the trip. Back in her room, she removed her nun’s habit. Doing so revealed the bright red leather corset that she always wore, along with a studded black leather thong and thigh high black boots. Around her neck, she also wore a studded leather collar from which a silver pendant hung. The charm was the shape of a five pointed star. It was the symbol of the one from whom she really took her orders.

Little did Cardinal Rossetti know that her boss was also his boss, the mysterious voice on the other end of the phone. She quickly donned a conservative grey pin-striped suit and a white turtleneck blouse. This would disguise her true identity, allegiances, and sexuality.

Moments later, onboard a papal jet, she laid back in her reclining seat to contemplate her mission and to savor the pleasure that her latest assignment might bring her. It would be an exquisite pleasure to hunt this man down and extricate his knowledge from him. Hopefully, he would present a challenge as it would only heighten her pleasure that much more. A quiver of excitement rushed through her body as she also considered what additional pleasure she might derive from the reward she would receive from her master, the secretive man to whom she referred to as “My Lord” or Sire”.

Sister Regina arrived in London later that day and checked into Claridge’s. She registered under the name of Regina Vergen. In her room, the phone rang. A familiar man’s voice said, “Ah, Regina, my pet, I trust you will enjoy this assignment but don’t let your methods interfere with the objective. What he knows is very important to me and my plans and the future of the world as they will know it.”

She answered respectfully, “Yes, My Lord” and hung up the phone. Regina again reviewed the information that had been downloaded to her laptop in Rome. She

needed to proceed carefully so as not to arouse any suspicion before her mission was accomplished.

She thought she would start very discretely by approaching Mr. Allen in her capacity as an attorney to present him with a potential business deal involving the Vatican. Perhaps he would be interested in structuring the deal. There would be handsome fee involved. Yes, that would be a good starting point. Then she would have a chance to personally assess him so she could decide best how to proceed.

## Chapter 13

# The Deal

The secretary stepped into Geoff's office. "Sir, there is a Regina Vergen here saying that she is representing the Vatican and needs to speak with you regarding a sensitive matter."

"Yes, please show her in."

In entered a beautiful young woman with dark hair and a distinctively sultry look. Definitely, this was not what he was expecting as a representative of the Vatican! Her tailored pin-striped suit revealed a most appealing figure and her high heel leather boots added a certain sexiness to her business outfit.

"Mr. Allen, Regina Vergen. I am the counsel to the Vatican for Special Matters. Sometimes we find the need to use outside people in pursuing transactions that are of a very sensitive nature. This affords us a certain level of anonymity by going outside the normal channels." she said directly.

Immediately she had started sizing him up. He was younger and much more handsome than she had anticipated. He seemed very business like and very well dressed, especially for an American.

"Which brings you to me. What can I do for you?" Geoff asked.

Regina replied, "We have an opportunity to acquire a piece of real estate that has been eluding us for centuries. Its provenance includes being owned by the Templars. Our acquisition poses certain public relations problems, as you might well imagine. Are you familiar with the Templars?"

The Templars! That sure got his attention. It seemed that they were being magnetically attracted to him all of a sudden. It was a curious sequence of events that was developing in his life.

“Yes, I have heard of them and know a little bit about their relationship to the Church. I can appreciate your caution,” Geoff replied.

Regina continued. “The property in question was supposedly a repository of records or some sort of library during their time. Now, it is just some land in the countryside with some ruins on it. It adjoins some of our current holdings and we would like to acquire and annex this property.” That ought to set the hook, she thought.

Geoff was intrigued. Was this another lead to more Templar information? Surely, the Vatican would not let him see anything if it existed on the property. But you can never know the twist and turns that one encounters in life. He will pursue this.

And if he had any luck, he might also pursue Ms Vergen. She definitely had something about her that excited him.

“Because of the sensitive nature of this transaction and its time constraints, I must request that you personally handle this from Rome. Can you alter your schedule and visit me there tomorrow?” She asked.

Her job would be easier if she could get him on her turf. And even easier, if she could get him into her bed or dungeon or both! She started to get excited at the prospect. He would succumb. She would drain him of his knowledge and more.

“Yes, I will shuffle my schedule. I am sure I can be there by tomorrow afternoon. Is that acceptable?”

“Yes,” she replied. “Until tomorrow then,” and she quickly left.

On the plane, returning to Rome, Regina savored the possibilities. The crucial thing was how would she know that he had told all? She would know. She was experienced in these things. But would it be pain or pleasure, she wondered. She would use both, but which would be the one to which this handsome American would succumb? The surprise of it all was part of her delicious fun and excitement.

## Chapter 14

# Zurich

“Geoff, we need to talk,” Jacques began. “Could you meet me in Zurich?”

“Yes, of course. When?”

“The sooner the better. Would Wednesday work?”

“Yes.”

“Good, I will have a car sent to pick you up at the airport. Just call me with your flight information and I’ll arrange it. See you then.” He hung up the phone.

It was a short conversation. Many things had not been said. Geoff surmised what it must be about; the book, of course. But how does Jacques know?

He had an appointment already scheduled for Rome with Regina but Jacques held the key to his Templar discovery. It was obvious from Jacques’ tone of voice that he had something important to say. Geoff would just have his secretary re-schedule and make his apologies.

Wednesday morning, Geoff touched down at eight a.m. at Kloten Airport. The air was cool and crisp. A black limousine was waiting for him. He got in and it sped off. The driver had instructions where to take him but Geoff did not know where he was being taken. He was also not aware of the nun following him in a taxi.

They crossed the Limmat River on an old stone bridge. The marina in it was on his right. It was picturesque with the flock of swans on the river. They kept going beyond the Bahnhofstrasse with its large banks until they passed several cafes and turned onto a quiet cobblestone lane.

When they arrived at their destination it was a small bank building. From the age of the understated, grey stone building, it had to be one of the oldest Swiss banks. A

guard ushered him in through the massive wooden door and led him to a bank manager in the marble lobby, who, in turn, led Geoff downstairs to a vault room.

“Curious place for a meeting,” he thought. Jacques was already there. He rose and greeted Geoff warmly but with an expression of concern on his face. “I chose this place for our meeting because it is one of the few places where we can be assured of having a private conversation along with the utmost level of security.”

He continued. “Geoff, we’ve known each other a long time. I have trusted you in confidential business dealings and my trust has been well placed. But now, I have a concern. It seems you have a secret.

“I know you found something at my country estate during your vacation; something which was not meant for anyone to find. Yes, by my telling you this. You can make some inferences about me.

“Since then, you have been making inquiries all over the place. This is not wise. It could be dangerous to you and to me and to the Order. Yes, it is alive and well. But, your actions could be a major disruption. So, after much deliberation, we have decided to bring you in, so to speak. We believe you have the character to warrant this.”

Geoff’s jaw dropped. He couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Jacques was admitting that the Templars exist today and that he was one of them. Furthermore, they were inviting him to join.

“If you accept, you will be bound by our rules, of which secrecy is one. You must decide now. There are dark forces that are following you, even as we speak. The scope of what is going on is much larger than you probably have been able to piece together. So what is your decision?”

Geoff let out a long, deep breath. “Please forgive me for being so scattered but this comes as quite a shock to me. Yes, of course, I accept. I am honored that you would consider trusting me with this.”

“Good, your introduction and training will begin directly. I will contact you soon regarding the details. Now go, and keep a low profile until then,” Jacques replied.

Geoff left the bank and stepped out into the daylight. He didn't notice the taxi across the street with a nun sitting in its backseat. He was too dazed. He said to himself, "Did that just really happen?"

He got back into the limo and headed straight back to the airport.

## Chapter 15

### Rome

After several days of delay, Geoff finally arrived in Rome to meet with Regina. He apologized and said that pressing business prevented him from making his appointment with her.

Regina replied with a pouting voice, "I must confess, I was very upset with your cancellation. Not only is this an important transaction for us but I was really looking forward to seeing you again. I must admit there is something about you that excites me." And so Regina began to reel Geoff in.

Stunned by her forwardness, he managed to reply, "That makes two of us."

For the next several days they were inseparable, pouring over details of the deal, negotiating terms, sharing meals, and eventually sharing a bed. Geoff felt exhilarated over recent events and never saw it coming.

The next morning, he awoke in a cold, dank, and dark room. It smelled of sweat and candle wax. There was only a small candle burning at the end of the room. By it, he was able to make out the presence in the room. It was Regina, dressed in her red leather corset and black leather boots. She had a scowl on her face.

She said, "Geoff, you've been a very naughty boy. You've been keeping secrets from me. You will have to be disciplined until you tell me them. And, you *will* tell me."

Startled, he replied, "What are you talking about? What secrets?"

She went on, "Don't give me that surprised look of yours. I know you found secret Templar books. I want to know every detail of what was in them." She raised her right arm, and with her red leather flogger, she struck him.

"Ow! That hurt" he yelped.

“Wine and sex didn’t loosen your tongue. So now we will try it this way.” It seemed to him like hours had passed until she stopped slapping and flogging him. Every so often she would kiss him. Other times, she would almost drown him.

She was messing with his mind. Jacques was right. Dark forces had been following him. And, it also seemed true that they had infiltrated the Church. He didn’t know how much of this he could take. Every man has his breaking point. He was afraid that, eventually, he would tell all.