

THE STATUE

R.D. Mayor

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DEDICATION

To my wife of 38 years, for putting up with the lunacy that I sometimes bring into our lives.

To my daughters and son for loving me and giving me a reason to keep going in life.

To my family and friends for all their love and support.

Thank You and God Bless

R.D. Mayor

ONE

Some of you may call me crazy and some of you will say that my story could never have happened. Nevertheless, this is my story and at the end, you can be the judge.

Many years ago, there was a small town in the old country, where people had been killed in many horrible situations, almost daily. Speculations in the town by many considered the deaths a curse. There was a small group that would say it was an evil entity.

My name is Roger Dearman, and I was one of those to actually bear witness to some of the horrific deaths in my small town. One such death was that of Ramon, our local blacksmith's son, on a dark, chilly, and rainy night.

Ramon had just closed shop and was on his horse headed home. As Ramon was riding, the horse was spooked and reared back, knocking the young man to the ground. The horse took off leaving Ramon on the ground in the southwest part of town.

I watched from a distance, from the front doorway of a tavern I frequented often. Ramon stood up and I noticed a black, spirit-like entity, with red blood dripping from its eyes, getting closer to Ramon.

I could see that Ramon had seen something lurking in the area around him. By his body language, I could tell that he was scared to death. Despite Ramon being a big and strong young man, the site of the entity had his knees knocking.

Just then, I heard a rattling sound coming from my right side as it passed right in front of me. I could see that the sound came from chains gliding in the air, pulled by something that wasn't there. The ends of the chains, four in all, rattled on the ground. Ramon heard and saw what was coming at him. Before Ramon could take another step, the four chains

grabbed both of his arms and his legs by the wrists and ankles. Then as soon as the chains connected, Ramon was stretched in mid-air several feet off the ground—arms and legs fully extended.

I shook my head twice, not believing what I was witnessing. Suddenly, Ramon's arms and legs were torn from his body. To this day, I can hear the thump of Ramon's torso and head hitting the ground. His scream echoes through my memory. Through the thunder and lightning that dominated the night, that scream awoke everyone in the near area. I saw candles lighting up through windows, and torches began to arrive through doorways everywhere. Those that were still in the tavern began coming out, asking me if I had seen anything.

This first time I said nothing, nothing at all. Four more people were slain in similar fashion in the next six days. Thankfully, I had not been a witness to these events.

On the eighth day I was looking for a way to pass the night away. Since that night, when I had witnessed poor Ramon, the blacksmith's son being torn into pieces, sleep had become something of a nightmare for me. I had left my home and headed toward the tavern. I was a block away when I saw the black, ghostly figure with the red blood dripping eyes. Terrified, I hid behind the wall of a nearby entryway. I heard a loud scream coming from two doors down.

I was scared half to death, but I had to look. I was on my knees and slowly peeked around the wall to see a head roll in the middle of the road. It came within twenty paces of where I was kneeling. I moved quickly back, around the wall, standing up immediately and ran smack into the front door. The door bowed a little, knocking me back into the middle of the road, where I stumbled within fifteen paces of the head that lay there facing me. I then saw the specter with the red blood dripping eyes, looking, and moving directly toward me.

I tried to move but I couldn't; my legs weren't doing what my mind wanted. Just as the hideous thing got within twenty paces of me, a roaring sound came from behind me, and I turned to see what was coming. A four-horse carriage traveling at a very fast pace was headed directly at me. My legs finally moved, and I dove off the road. The carriage missed me by an inch and continued its path toward the evil entity.

When the carriage and the entity collided, the carriage went straight up in the air about thirty feet. It came down with such incredible force and exploded upon hitting the ground. Pieces and blood from the horses, the carriage and the three people within it were everywhere.

From my right, I could see the thing moving toward me again, staring right at me with those red blood dripping eyes. I heard a noise behind me again. This time, thank the Lord; it was the townspeople coming with torches. I turned back quickly, and the evil entity was gone. I was relieved to see all the townspeople coming down the road. All I could do was sit there with my arms wrapped around my knees.

The innkeeper from the tavern asked if I had seen anything. I told him I'd only seen a head rolling down the path. I stood as everyone approached asking if anyone at all had seen what had happened. No one would come forward and say that they had seen anything. It was almost dawn by the time everything was cleaned up and the commotion in the street kept increasing as many more people in town started to wake.

When the sun finally came up, our group of town elders called for a town meeting. Everything had closed for the day, and everyone was in the town square for the meeting. Newton, who was our town's senior elder, raised his voice so that everyone could hear what he had to say.

"I am old and really doubt that I will see many more sunrises," said Newton. "I do know though, that what has been happening here in our town has got to stop—no matter how many of you think that this is a curse. Twelve deaths in the past month can no longer be taken for an accident. I will not allow my town to sit by while someone or something continues to destroy our lives."

I ask all of you, has anyone seen anything or has anyone been a witness to anything out of the ordinary during any one of the killings?"

I could hear the silence as everyone stood still and it seemed that not even a breath had been taken.

"I think that maybe someone has seen something but may be hesitant to say what they have seen for fear of backlash from some of the townspeople. We, your elders," said Newton, "will promise you that no one will give you any trouble. Will anyone come forward?"

Again, nothing but silence came from the crowd.

“Well then, we your town elders have agreed on calling on the four religious group leaders from nearby towns to come and see if any of them can help with this madness that is killing off our people,” Newton continued. “Jonathan, can we use your hall for the meeting when the other religious leaders arrive?”

“You know me, Newton,” answered Jonathan, “I would do anything for the well-being of our town.”

“Thank you, Jonathan,” said Newton. “Now if any one of you would like to speak to one of the elders, please feel free to follow us and we will hear you at Jonathan’s. Until this mystery is resolved there will be a curfew at sundown for everyone.”

“What if we want to go to the tavern?” called out one of the men from the crowd.

“Then you shall stay there until sunrise,” said Newton. “Anymore questions?” After a silent pause, he continued, “Well then let’s proceed to Jonathan’s and everyone keep your eyes open for anything out of the ordinary.

“Does everyone agree?” he yelled.

“Agree,” yelled the town in unison.

As the crowd dispersed to start their day, there was an eerie feeling in the air. Newton and all the town’s elders, six in total, followed Jonathan and his son Hugh to their meeting hall. I followed them lagging a little. Newton stopped just before entering Jonathan’s place and turned, surveying behind them. He noticed me quickly moving behind a wall to hide myself. Newton turned back around and proceeded into Jonathan’s place with all the town’s elders. Since it was the biggest room in town, any celebrations that took place were held at Jonathan’s.

As they walked in, Jonathan and Hugh started setting up chairs around the different tables that were already set up in the great hall. When Newton noticed that Hugh was done, he asked him, “Can you please go outside, make a right and when you bump into Roger Dearman, tell him that Newton would like to speak with him privately.”

Hugh looked at his father and got his look of approval to do as asked; he then headed for the door. As he walked out, he made the right

turn as instructed, looking directly ahead. Three doors down, he noticed me in the doorway.

“Roger,” he said. “What are you doing?”

“Nothing,” I answered.

“Well,” said Hugh, “Newton asked me to come and get you. He would like to talk to you in private.”

More than a little reluctant and scared, I walked behind Hugh to his father’s hall. As we entered, Newton was not in the room, as I was hoping that he would be.

Jonathan noticed my expression and said, “You will follow me, Newton is in the back room.”

“Thank you,” I said as I followed Jonathan.

Jonathan opened the door to the back room, and I noticed Newton in the corner of the room sitting in a chair, with another chair in front of him, empty.

“Sit,” Newton directed, and I did.

“I,” said Newton, “I’ve known you since the day you were brought into this world, and I can see that something is bothering you. Would you like to talk to me about what is on your mind?” I sat there just staring back at Newton. “Roger, you have always gone from job to job without ever staying with one job for more than a couple of years,” said Newton. “But I do know that there isn’t a more honest man than you in this town. Please, my boy, talk to me.”

“Dear Newton, I don’t know how to explain to you the thing that I have seen, not once but twice,” I said.

“My boy,” said Newton, “the only way that we can better this situation is to know what we are facing.”

After what seemed like forever, I had to explain what I really would love to forget. With his kind attention, I was able to tell him everything in detail, as if living it all over again. When I was done, Newton just sat there looking into my eyes, not really looking at me but through me. After a long time, Newton finally spoke.

“Black ghostly entity, with red blood dripping eyes...my Lord, I knew this entity would one day be set free again. I should have known from the start of this what we were facing—but how and what would allow this monster to escape?” he said, almost to himself.

Then he focused on me again. “That’s all I,” he said, hesitating, “go out and sit with the elders. I will be out shortly.”

I got up to leave and Newton spoke again, “Don’t say anything unless I tell you to speak.”

“I won’t,” I said, as I left the room.

I walked out and some of the religious elders from the other towns were already gathering in the hall, with only one group missing. We waited a long time before the last group arrived and Jonathan went to the other room to get Newton. Meanwhile, everything was moved into five sections, one for each religious group, as Newton had instructed.

Newton looked over at me with his kind face, to calm my nerves.

Every group had four representatives of their respective town. All the elders in charge were from different religious beliefs. We had the biggest group of our six elders and me. Jonathan and Hugh were asked to leave the room by Newton.

Newton stood up and said, “All my brethren, I thank you for coming on such short notice. I know I must have upset most of your town’s people, but when I tell you what has come before us you will understand the urgency for this meeting. I say, what I am about to say, with a heavy heart. Our town, for the last month has had an evil entity killing many men in unbelievable, horrific ways.”

All eyes in the room lit up and the silence was hypnotic, as Newton continued. “I am the eldest of all in the room and can recall most of the evil that, with each other’s help, we have been able to abolish or contain. Some of you in the room will remember this entity. I have prayed for years that I would never have to mention his name.”

Newton lowered his head and in a quieter voice said, “Monstri Rocknia.”

The room exploded with talking back and forth amongst everyone in the room. The only ones who stayed quiet were Newton and me.

Finally, one of the elders, Monsignor Luigi, stood up and spoke. “My friends, how and who has allowed this horrific creature to walk this world again? We lost so many, and the attempt to capture him cost every town too many lives.”

As soon as Monsignor Luigi was done speaking, everyone started talking again. Newton raised his voice over the loud talking.

“Monsignor Luigi, we have no idea who let this beast out,” he said.

Rabbi Janovich, an elder from the Jewish faith, stood up and said, “Who has seen Monstri Rocknia? We must be sure that we are not mistaken.”

Newton again had to quiet everyone down.

“I have,” I said, as I looked around the room and then quickly sat down, not believing that I had stood up.

Everyone in the room started throwing out questions and some started praying for my soul. Little did I know at that time, that everyone who had witnessed a killing by Monstri Rocknia had themselves met their own death. One of the elders explained it to me as the other elders were talking. I started to get very nervous, now that I knew for sure that Monstri Rocknia would probably come after me.

Newton stood again and as everyone became calm and quiet, he told them everything that I had told him earlier about my two experiences with Monstri Rocknia.

All eyes, and the silence, outside of Newton talking, had everyone looking on intently.

I was about ready to pass out from the fear that I felt, deep down inside.

When Newton was done, Rabbi Janovich stood up and said, “My boy, I would like to take this time for all of us to say a prayer for your soul.”

Everyone bowed their heads except me. My knees started knocking and I was afraid I would collapse from fear in front of the distinguished assembly. After the Rabbi was done Newton again began to talk to the elders.

“I believe,” he said, “that we should first go to the place where we had Monstri Rocknia contained, to see if there is any evidence of how or what has set it free. Time is of the essence. I am too old and weak to travel. I would like a vote to see if I may appoint Roger Dearman as my eyes and ears.”

Everyone again blew up in conversation, till Monsignor Luigi stood up and called for a voice vote of all that agreed.

The whole room together said, “Aye.”

Newton had no doubt that they would agree, but he had to give them the chance to disagree. All the elders were talking amongst themselves as a knock came from the main door. Everyone stopped talking and looked toward the door. The door opened and Jonathan and Hugh walked in.

Jonathan began speaking, “Newton, you asked me to tell you when noon had arrived; it is that time.”

“Thank you,” said Newton.

“What is the purpose having Jonathan come in and tell us what time it is?” I asked, as everyone else in the room had the same question and looked to Newton for an answer.

“I had Jonathan tell me the time,” he replied, “so that the group that will go to the place where we contained Monstri Rocknia can go check, with plenty of time to investigate and return before nightfall. Those of you who witnessed the first time we dealt with this entity know that he will only come out at night.”

“This is true,” said Monsignor Luigi. “Ten men will go and investigate, two from each town.”

“Agree,” said Newton.

“Agree,” said they all.

Newton turned and looked over to me and said, “You will be one of the two from our town.”

“Oh, Newton, I don’t want to go,” I said.

“You have very little choice, my son,” said Newton.

He looked over to the youngest of the elders from our town. His name was Samuel.

“Samuel,” said Newton, “I think you would be the right one to go.”

“I am honored.” said Samuel, “and will do everything in my power to do what’s best for our town.”

“Thank you,” said Newton.

After a couple of minutes every group had picked out the people they wanted to go on the investigation.

Two out of the chosen ten were old enough that they had taken part in the first containment of Monstri Rocknia. Seven of the religious men had no idea what they were facing, and that left me among the three who had witnessed Monstri Rocknia. Nasry Mahmoud, the oldest of the group, was present the first time they contained Monstri Rocknia. As we were heading out the door, I asked him if he could tell us all from what, or where, had Monstri Rocknia come from.

Nasry Mahmoud was extremely smart, if not the smartest of the Islamic Muslim, group. His apprentice Muhamid Abu would also go with them. Rabbi Janovich chose Rabbi Swartz and Rabbi Menstein for the Jewish group. Monsignor Luigi chose Father Ramon and Father Torri for the Catholic group. The Buddhist group chose Damini Dharti and Malina Rahani. For our Christian group, you know that it was Samuel and me.

When everyone walked outside, Newton had us bow our heads for one last prayer. When he concluded the prayer, Newton thanked all the groups one at a time.

Everyone headed to the barns to get their horses and gear ready for the mission at hand. The rest of the elders walked across the road to the inn to stay and wait until we returned from our mission. When everyone was saddled up and ready to go, Newton and the other elders came out of the inn, with a quick prayer in each of there own respected languages.

When we got to the outskirts of town Nasry started to tell us the story of when they first captured Monstri Rocknia years earlier.

Nasry spoke, “Many years ago, a man, named David who lived twenty miles north of Rogers Town, had two sons. One was a good, God-fearing son, whose name was Daniel and the other a bad, evil-minded son, named Damien. Some say that Damien was the cause of his own mother’s death. They were sheep herders, and they would take turns watching their herds at night. One night Daniel had his night to watch

over the sheep and all through the night his herd had been restless. Daniel searched for whatever it was that had them going from one pasture to the other. All night, whatever it was had Daniel going crazy.

When daylight finally came around, Daniel came walking toward his house as his father, David and his son Damien came walking out the front door. David noticed that his son Daniel looked exhausted and ran over to him as Daniel collapsed in his father's arms.

"My son," cried David, "what happened to you?" but received no reply.

David carried his son Daniel to the front porch and laid him down on a wicker table and told his son Damien to fetch some water and a towel to wipe the sweat and dirt from Daniel's face. Damien did as he was told, seeing that his father's tone meant, now. Within minutes Damien was back and his father started wiping the sweat and dirt from Daniel's face.

He gave Daniel some water, a little at a time, till Daniel finally came to.

"What happened?" David asked him again.

"There was something spooking the sheep all night long and I kept trying to keep them contained," Daniel answered feebly.

"What was it?" asked his father.

"I never did see it, but I did count this morning and there were two sheep missing," Daniel replied.

After wiping Daniel's face again, David told Damien to grab Daniel's feet so they could take him in the house.

When David saw that Daniel was well enough to be left alone, he called Damien and told him to get their bows and his axe together. Damien jumped to it; within seconds he was back.

David and Damien walked outside, and Damien told his father that he hoped they could kill something.

David smacked Damien on the back of the head. "Let's just hope, whatever it is, we can handle it," he told Damien.

They got to where the sheep had been grazing and the first thing David did was count the sheep to see if any more were missing. All were accounted for but the two that Daniel had said were missing.

“Thank God,” said David.

David and Damien searched the area for any sign of something out of the ordinary. As David went around the right side of the grazing area, he noticed a trail of blood on the ground. David started to follow the trail of blood and the ground was swiped as if something had been dragged. David called Damien and showed him what he had found, and they continued to follow the trail.

As they were following the trail, they noticed something about a hundred paces ahead. There was an opening to what looked like a cave. David looked at Damien quizzically as he knew the entire region and was confident that there had not been a cave in this area. As they got closer, David and Damien noticed three big stones that were probably big enough to have covered the entrance to the cave.

They looked down and saw that the blood stains were going directly into the cave.

“I will stay here,” said David. “I need you to go back to the house and get a torch and a lantern. Hurry, and check on your brother.”

Damien ran as fast as he could, excited that whatever was in the cave would be a guaranteed kill. He got to the house and ran inside, not realizing that his brother Daniel was walking toward the door. He opened the door with such force that he knocked Daniel back. As Daniel fell, his head hit the side of their dining table and he collapsed to the ground.

Damien saw Daniel hit the table, stood there, and called out his name, with no response. Damien ran in the back of the house, grabbed a torch, and then ran to the window to grab the lantern. Damien ran to the front door and looked back at his brother Daniel. He called out his name again. With no answer, Damien slammed the door shut. Within minutes he was back with his father and dying for a kill.

David lit the lantern and gave it to his son, Damien. Then he lit the torch.

“Stay here and I will go inside,” said David. “If I don’t return in twenty minutes go and check on your brother, saddle up a horse and ride into town and tell the elders what has happened in the past day.”

“No father,” said Damien, “I want to see what is in there.”

David knew, by the look on Damien’s face, that his son would not back down.

“Okay,” he said, “but stay five paces behind me and if anything attacks you, run out and do what I told you.”

They entered the cave at a crawling pace. David had the axe in his right hand and the torch in his left. His son had the lantern in one hand and the bow and arrow in position for a quick strike. The smell in the cave was of sulfur and death. They had gone forty paces when David noticed what looked like an enormous opening. He looked back at his son. When they got to the opening, the first thing he noticed, was the dead sheep.

As they slowly entered the enormous cave, they could see writing on the walls. From a slight distance, they noticed what looked like three boulders on the far side, each in an oval shape. As they got closer, looking all around they could see that the oval boulders were coffins made of a gray stone.

The boulders on the left and on the right had dust and sand on them. The one in the middle looked as if someone had opened it, they could see the seal had been broken.

On the other two, dust covered the seals so completely that they had not noticed that there was a seal until they saw the middle stone. David pointed at the middle coffin and his son Damien understood what his father was seeing. As they got closer, David looked down to see if there was any sign of footprints. He could see that there were and that there was an unmistakable mark on one of them.

David turned around and looked at his son Damien, as Damien walked back a couple of paces. Damien had a smile on his face and his father looked at him, a bit wary.

“Why do you smile?” David asked, as his son pointed at the center coffin.

“You’ll see. Open it,” said his son Damien.

David looked back and forth to the coffin and then back at his son.

“Do you know something that you should be telling me?” asked David.

“Open the coffin and you will see,” his son Damien repeated.

As David looked back and forth, he thought, ‘what evil has my son done.’ The look on Damien’s face seemed very strange to David, as sweat started pouring down his face.

“I will not open it,” said David, “I will go and tell the elders from town.”

“I will open it then,” said his son Damien.

“No, you will not,” said his father. “You will turn around and walk back with me.”

Damien turned, and started running for the opening on the right, where the cave continued.

“Son!” Screamed David, “come back!”

David followed his son for thirty paces, and all went black. David turned to see the light from the lantern in the main room. He called two more times for Damien and when he received no reply, he walked back to the main room, grabbed his lantern, and headed out of the cave. David headed back to his house to check on his son Daniel.

As David entered the front door, he noticed his son Daniel lying on the floor and ran to his side.

“My son,” he said, as he wiped Daniel’s forehead with a rag that was on the table. “What happened?”

As Daniel came to, he told his father that someone had opened the door and that was all he could remember. His father helped him up and fetched some water for them both.

He told Daniel what had happened in the cave, with his brother Damien. After David was done, they both went outside to saddle up their horses and ride into town.

“Father,” said Daniel, “I will stay and watch the sheep.”

“No Daniel, you will come with me,” his father insisted.

“I may have lost one son—I pray not—but I will not allow any harm to come to you.”

They both saddled up their horses and made a mad dash to the nearest town. By the time they had reached the town it was mid-afternoon.

David called on the elders of the town and after he told them what had transpired that day, everyone was silent. The town’s historian spoke and told them that he knew exactly what was in the cave and why Monstri Rocknia was sealed in, with the two other coffins.

The towns historian started by saying that Monstri Rocknia was an evil ruler many years ago who wanted to rule the world. His army killed many thousands of innocent people throughout the surrounding lands. After almost taking full control of the old country there was one town left that he needed to conquer. One of his senior officers was born in that town and his whole family still lived there. He pleaded with Monstri Rocknia not to kill his family. Monstri Rocknia told him that he could refrain from battle if he wished, but if his family fought them, they too would die.

The senior officer, whose name was Glavine, told Monstri Rocknia that he could not stand by and allow him to butcher his family. An internecine war had begun between those loyal to Monstri Rocknia and those who supported Glavine. More than half of Monstri Rocknia’s army were tired of the killing and had great respect for Glavine. Monstri Rocknia set a plan to have Glavine killed but the plan backfired, as those that he thought he could trust were also tired of death and war.

Many stories over the years had been changed or exaggerated, but from what the historian could remember the death of Monstri Rocknia was so brutal and that he swore that he would come back from the dead to kill the families of those who had betrayed him.

The death of Monstri Rocknia stopped all the fighting and the deaths of so many. Glavine summoned the leaders of all religious sects. They had a meeting and decided to bury Monstri Rocknia in the cave where David and Damien had been earlier in the day. The historian said that the two coffins next to him do not contain bodies, just information on how to control Monstri Rocknia if he were to escape.

“It appears from what you have told us, what had happened to you earlier,” said the head elder, “your son Damien, has allowed Monstri Rocknia to escape.”

Daniel looked at his father and said, “Damien has not argued with us about watching the sheep at night for the past five nights.”

“My son Damien did watch them for five nights straight,” his father commented. “I even had to argue with him about taking a night off. My God! What has my son done?” the poor man moaned.

“It is too late for us to go to the cave,” said the town elder, “at night, he will have the upper hand on us.”

The elder passed the word around town that there would be a curfew at sundown.

“Everyone will stay in their homes, and no one is allowed to go out, for their own safety. I would like all the elders to stay with me so we can plan on what to do, when the sun rises. The David and Daniel will also stay with us,” said the elder.”

Nasry Mahmoud stopped telling the story of David and his two sons, when he looked over the distance and could see the cave. All of us who were with him also looked and knew what we were looking at. We dismounted our horses and tied them all together. Nasry Mahmoud was the first to enter the cave as the rest of us followed. Some had torches and some had lanterns. As we reached the opening of the cave, we could all see that the three coffins and the room were exactly as Nasry had described, on our journey to the cave.

The seal on the center coffin was indeed visibly cracked open. Four of the ten men started reading the writing on the walls and continued to converse amongst themselves about what they had read. Ali, Father Torri and I stepped closer to the stone coffins. There was no doubt that the coffin of Monstri Rocknia had been opened. We all knew that we didn’t have much time. The four who were trying to understand the writing on the walls turned to the coffins as Father Torri and I were opening the coffin to the left of Monstri Rocknia’s coffin.

Inside the coffin we found four different bags made from wool. We opened one bag at a time and found different herbs and spices in one, and dried wildflowers in another. One bag had three sealed glass jars filled

with liquid and wrapped in string. The last bag had five pages, one from each of the five religious holy books.

Nasry explained to all nine of us what each bag stood for and how they could again seal Monstri Rocknia. First the herbs and spices were used to tenderize the entity, making it weak. The dried wildflowers were used to give the stench of death a more appreciative sent, although they were dried their sent was unmistakably strong. The three jars were used to contain and further weaken the beast. The letters were written in each of our native tongue, with what we needed to say for the final containment of Monstri Rocknia.

As we formed a circle around the center coffin, Nasry started to spread the herbs and spices on top of the coffin. He then proceeded to crumble the dried flowers. The jars were next, with the liquids having different smells, some good, and some bad. Each group started to say different verses from their holy books whose pages were left in the coffin. The more they spoke, the louder their voices became. I was so scared I thought I was going to faint.

The third time they recited their different prayers, the top half of Monstri Rocknia's coffin started rattling. As they continued, the lid started to raise a couple of inches off the bottom half. Screams and hideous sounds were coming out of the coffin, making everyone very nervous. Nasry screamed at the others not to look in the coffin. They obeyed, by looking down and away from the coffin. The room started shaking and dirt from the roof started coming down, with dust making it hard to breathe.

With one loud thump, after what to me had seemed like an eternity, the top of the coffin slammed into the bottom of the coffin with such incredible force that all who stood around the coffin fell on their rears.

Everyone started to help each other up as Nasry started to walk around the coffin, to make sure that it was sealed. After everyone stood up, they began circling the coffin, each one saying a prayer in their own language.

I asked Nasry what allowed this Monstri Rocknia to come out of the coffin.

“That’s what we have got to figure out now,” he said.

Everyone of the men were looking all around for any clues on what caused Monstri Rocknia to get out of its sealed coffin. We continued looking with no luck at all in the search for even the smallest clue. Nasry called the ten men together.

“I don’t know what caused this evil entity to be released amongst our people again, but we have got to start heading back to town before night fall,” said Nasry. As they took a last look at the coffins of Monstri Rocknia, each one said a prayer. I just looked at the coffins and prayed that I would never see them or the cave again.

Nasry picked five men, one from each town, to stay and guard the cave, until we could get the towns’ warriors to keep watch. The five that weren’t chosen, untied our horses and headed back to town.

Nasry spoke and said, “We will have to return with ropes and our strongest horses to cover the hole in the cave.”

As we rode back to town, I asked Nasry if he could finish the story of what finally happened to David and his two son’s Daniel and Damien.

“Well let’s see,” said Nasry, “the elders, David, and Daniel, all spent half the night talking and getting everything together that the historian had told them.

That night, in a town fifteen miles away, there had been four people killed. Word spread, all over town the next morning. The elders sent out a messenger to every town in the area, with the news of what had happened in their town.

They also sent a letter asking for help in stopping Monstri Rocknia from killing any more innocent people. They waited two hours before taking off toward the cave, giving the messengers plenty of time to arrive from all the surrounding towns.

Six men, David and Daniel headed out toward the cave. They talked all the way there about how and what they should do, the only thing that had them a bit stumped was what the bad son Daniel, would be capable of doing. As they got close enough to see the opening of the cave, they could see from the top of the last hill that all the men were coming in the distance, representatives of the other four towns.

“Perfect timing,” said one of the elders.

As the men representing the other towns came in one at a time, one of the elders would spend time filling the newcomer in on what had happened and how they planned on stopping Monstri Rocknia. After the last group was up to date with everything, the towns elder had two of the bravest warriors enter first and everyone else followed.

David and Daniel were just behind the elders as they got to the opening of the main cave. When David entered, he called for his son Damien, but there was no sign of him. They noticed that the middle coffin's seal was off and proceeded to open the coffin on the right side as the historian had told them to do.

Inside they found exactly what we found in the left coffin.

They proceeded to surround the coffin with one religious elder in every other spot. When they got to the spraying of the liquids on the coffin, a loud screech came from the opening of the cave. The elders told the group around the coffin to continue and not to look in the coffin or toward the entrance of the cave. As they continued, a rumbling noise came as if charging toward them from the entrance of the cave.

The top of the coffin lifted but, as they had been told, no one looked inside. Then the top fell with enormous force, slamming the coffin shut, and everyone noticed the seal return to the coffin. The rumbling noise from the entrance became louder and all who carried a weapon had them out and ready for whatever it was that was coming with such force. As they faced the entrance, the rumbling became so loud that the cave was shaking. Dust and sand from the top of the cave came down on top of the men.

What they saw coming at them were two sheep with red blood dripping eyes. They were three to four times the size of any sheep that anyone present had ever seen. When they opened their mouths they revealed large fangs, like no sheep on earth, and they made a sound that caused the ears of the men to pop. Their screeches scared some of the men so much that they moved backward.

One of the Monstri sheep went to the right of the cave and the other went to the left, as if to surround everyone.

One of the elders screamed, "Those without a weapon get in the middle, the rest get ready and surround them."

As the Monstri sheep passed each other they made a growling attempt to bite one each other, causing the men to look at one another and at that instant the Monstri sheep attacked the men. All hell had broken loose.

One of the Monstri sheep was able to grab one of the men by the arm and by swinging its neck back and forth, it was able to knock over three more men. The rest of the men, including David and Daniel, drew their weapons and attacked the two Monstri sheep. They started taking shots with their swords and spears, stabbing, and cutting the Monstri sheep. Every stab would cut a gash and the sheep would cry out with a horrible screech. Time was suspended as the men fought the sheep and finally, they could see that the Monstri Sheep were beginning to lose the battle.

One of the warriors and David attacked one of the Monstri sheep, and the rest of the men attacked the other. The sound in the room made everything rumble again, then, as if a switch had turned something off, there was complete silence.

The head elder broke the silence, asking who else had been bitten. Four men went forward. He called on two of the remaining men, to attend to their wounds.

David walked over to his son Daniel and put his arm on his shoulder, asking him if he was okay. Daniel answered that he was.

After the elders had ministered to the men's wounds, they gathered in the middle of the cave to discuss what to do. They decided to take the two Monstri sheep out of the cave and burn them.

The head elder sent two men to go searching for Damien as far in the cave as they could. They returned within minutes, saying that they were able to go about a hundred and fifty feet, and then they found a drop-off that appeared to be never-ending.

Everyone proceeded out of the cave, carrying the two dead Monstri sheep. With ropes and horses, they were able to put the boulders back in front of the cave, sealing off the entrance.

When they were done, one of the elders told two warriors to stay and guard the cave, and to burn the two Monstri sheep. The rest of the men were told to go with him to the home of David and his son Daniel to see if Damien had been there.

When they arrived at the house, there was no sign of Damien. Everyone was tired and hungry. David and Daniel gave food and water to all the men. Two of the men headed back to the cave to take food and water to the two warriors, who had stayed behind to guard the cave. They remained with the two warriors overnight.

The next morning there had been no sign of Damien. The elders decided to head back to their own towns and planned a meeting of all the elders to take place in three days. Each town would take turns sending four men to guard the cave. David and Daniel stayed at home to see if Damien would return.

The third day had come and still there was no sign of Damien. David and Daniel got up early and packed everything that they could put in their carriage, and four townspeople came to help them move into town. Two of the men drove the carriage back to town, while the rest went with David and Daniel to herd all their sheep closer to the town.

David did not want to look over his shoulder every day and thought it was not a good way for his son Daniel to live. Herding their sheep was much more difficult than usual. David noticed that the sheep kept getting spooked and he told the other men that they had never reacted that way, warning the men to be very careful. David knew after awhile that there would be no way possible for them to make it to the pasture near town as there was only two hours of sunlight left in the day. David noticed a lush green pasture that he considered a great place to leave the sheep until the next morning.

When the last sheep had made it to the pasture, all the men headed back into town. The next morning, they got up early and headed out to the pasture where they had left the sheep. This time, though, they brought more men. They didn't want to miss the meeting on what to do about Monstri Rocknia.

As they approached the pasture, they could see smoke in the distance, in the same general direction where they had left the sheep. The men all started out at a full gallop and within fifteen minutes they had reached the pasture, which now was engulfed with fire and smoke. They could hear the sheep crying. Quite a few had made it out of the fire, some with deadly burns. David, Daniel, and all the men were fighting the fire, trying to break a hole in what looked like a ring of fire that surrounded

the sheep. David jumped off his horse when he saw an opening in the ring of fire.

He grabbed a blanket that was rolled up and tied down in the back of his saddle. As quickly as possible, he started to pounce on the ground with his blanket, trying hard to smother the fire. Many of the sheep noticed the path that David had made and began running out of the ring of fire. Seeing the sheep coming out, Daniel and the other men ran to help.

Everyone was in the ring, trying to save as many sheep as they could. The fire and smoke in the ring of fire was closing in fast and all the men ran out as the ring closed. They collapsed to the ground, exhausted from the smoke and fire.

The cries of the sheep that didn't make it out filled the air, as they were burned alive. Daniel, whose eyes had been burning from the smoke, could finally see. Daniel looked for his father and called out to him, with no reply. All the men, and Daniel, stood up as quickly as their tired, smoked-out bodies could move. They were looking for David, when they heard a scream from the other side of the fire. The men all ran as fast as they could to the other side of the ring of fire, Daniel started running faster than the rest, leading the way.

“Father,” Daniel screamed as loud as he could.

David was rolling on the ground to put out the fire that had already burned three quarters of his body. Daniel slid to his father's side and yelled at the other men to get water from one of their saddlebags.

Daniel slowly lifted his father's head up on his left hand, which was cushioned by his shirt that he had quickly torn off. As the men came with water and horses, David tried to speak, but he couldn't. Daniel snatched the water from one of the men's hands and gently gave his father a sip. The burned man coughed as he choked on the water. Again, Daniel gave his father a sip, and this time the water wet his dried-out throat. He asked for one more sip.

“My son,” he said, “you have meant the world to me. Your brother has always had a demon burning within him. I don't know from what or from where, but I need you to promise to accept what I now ask of you.”

“Anything,” said Daniel, “you just ask,” as tears filled his eyes.

“Promise me that you will not go searching for your brother. When he is ready, he will come back to us,” his father said, and began to cough.

Daniel gave his father his word. David looked into Daniel’s eyes and smiled as he squeezed Daniel’s hand as David closed his eyes. Daniel looked at his father for a couple of seconds and then looked at the men. All the men bowed their heads as Daniel put his cheek next to his father’s and squeezed his hand as he cried out loud.

Within minutes, more than thirty of the townspeople had arrived in carriages and on horseback. Daniel and three men carried his father to one of the carriages. All those who came out, started herding up the sheep that were left. They killed those that were suffering and loaded them on one of the carriages. After everything had been taken care of, everyone headed back to town.

After they arrived in town, the elders were told of the happenings with the fire and started helping Daniel and the men who accompanied him.

The eldest of the elders said, “Your father was a good and brave man. We will give him an honorable funeral after the meeting of the towns.”

The undertaker took the carriage back to the mortuary to get David ready for his burial. One of the elders took Daniel to the house that his father had looked at for them both. It was a nice one story, two-bedroom house with a wood fence around a large three acre back yard for the sheep. By the time they arrived, the sheep were already being put into the fenced yard.

“From what I’ve seen,” said the elder, “in sheep meat and hide that we’ve been able to get from your herd, this house and the death of your father is more than paid. All your things have been put away. The meeting will start within the hour.”

Daniel said that he would attend the meeting. The hour came quickly and there were several hundred people from all the towns.

All the elders stood on a makeshift stage as the eldest of the group spoke. “All of you here know me and by now, everyone should know what has been going on over the last couple of days. I propose that we rotate around the clock, a watch over the cave of Monstri Rocknia,

rotating every week, with all five towns. Each town will oversee the cave for one week at a time.”

Someone in the crowd asked, “How long will this last?”

“For as long as it takes or until we find Damien,” said the elder.”

Nasry stopped telling the story, as his horse came to a stop. One of the men asked him what was wrong.

“The cave was watched over for thirteen years, until the elders stopped the rotation,” said Nasry. He looked at all the men around him. “Could it be that Damien came back and opened the cave?”

“How could that be?” One of the men asked. “He must be at least in his sixties. He has never been seen in these parts since that day. There would be no chance for a man that old to move those boulders.”

“What if he had someone helping him?” Nasry asked.

“We have got to hurry back to town, so that we can tell the elders and the rest of the towns people what we have discovered. We need to send some of our bravest warriors to protect the cave before whatever it is returns. It’s better to be safe than sorry,” said Nasry, and we headed back to town in a quick gallop.

When we arrived back in town, the whole town had been waiting for news of the cave. We arrived at the inn and Newton was the first to come out.

“Where are the other five men?” asked Newton.

Nasry jumped off his horse and said, “We left them behind to make sure that no one tries to reopen the coffin of Monstri Rocknia.”

“Did you figure out who, or what, opened the cave?” asked Newton.

“I told them the story of David and his two sons,” said Nasry, as the rest of us dismounted off our horses. “I suspect, perhaps, Damien may be responsible for allowing Monstri Rocknia to escape.”

“He must be close to my age,” said Newton. “Some one or something must be helping him. We need to get our finest warriors there just in case whoever it is comes back.”

Newton called one of the town’s protectors and told him what needed to be done as he proceeded to walk off quickly.

“That has been taken care of,” said Newton. “Now, everyone, please go home! We are going to keep the curfew, from sundown to sunset.”

Some in the crowd sounded a little upset, but when Newton raised his voice and asked, “All agree?” Everyone said, “Agree!”

“Jonathan,” asked Newton, “can we use your hall again?”

“Of course,” said Jonathan. All the town’s people were dispersing, and the elders walked toward Jonathan’s Hall.

A thunderous sound of horses came from the distance. Eight men in big, strong horses came thundering down toward the elders as they walked across the road, stopping right in front of them.

“A prayer,” said the warrior in front on the biggest horse.

Newton put his hands out as all who heard bowed their heads.

“May the Lord guide and protect you from all that you may face, and if for any reason, any harm falls upon you, may your souls be protected, Amen.”

Everyone responded, “Amen.”

The warriors were off without another word.

When the elders and I walked into Jonathan’s Hall, we could see that Jonathan had already set up drinks and food for all to eat. They continued to bring food in from the outside kitchen.

As we sat down, Newton stood up and said grace as everyone bowed their heads. When he finished, Newton looked as if he had seen a ghost.

“Oh, my Lord,” he said, “has anyone put any thought into the fact that both coffins are now empty? If Monstri Rocknia is freed again, we have got to find a way to contain him. Both coffins with the spices, flowers and the special potions have been used.”

After Newton’s comment, very little of what had been served was touched. All the religious groups were discussing between themselves what to do. After a little over an hour went by, Newton stood up and asked if anyone had come up with anything.

Monsignor Luigi stood up and said, “There is a man who lives on the outskirts of the Vatican, who is said to have contained an evil entity

in a statue, which the Catholic Church has hidden deep within the Vatican.”

“Do you think that he can contain our Monstri Rocknia?” asked Newton.

“Anything,” said Monsignor Luigi, “is worth a try. I will send a messenger to my town to go and get him...that is, if he is willing.”

“Rabbi Swartz,” said Newton, “what have you come up with?”

“Well,” said Rabbi Swartz, “between the rest of our religious brethren, we should be able to duplicate everything needed to reseal this monster.”

Rabbi Swartz gave the floor to Damini Dharti, from the Buddhist group.

“Newton,” said Damini, “the only thing that we are all worried about is whether the top of the coffin will be able to take one more seal with the force that is needed. I believe that at this time we must try to do both...that is if this statue maker that Monsignor Luigi will be calling for will be willing to help.”

“All agree?” asked Newton.

“Agree!” was the response.

Everyone stood up and headed out the door, with every group thanking Jonathan for the use of his hall. As they walked across the street toward the inn, it had begun to get dark.

Newton asked me where I was going.

“Home,” I answered.

“I think it would be a good idea if you stayed here at the inn tonight,” said Newton. “I’ve already had a room made up for you.”

“I have no complaints about that,” I said. “Thank you, Newton.”

Everyone involved had a rough night sleeping. Early the next morning just before sunrise, Monsignor Luigi gave specific instructions on what he wanted done. He sent one of his most trusted priests, Father Wilfred Henry. Everyone called him, Father Pop due to his white hair at a very young age which made him look much older than he was.

Newton asked Monsignor Luigi if I could go with Father Pop.

“That will not be a problem,” said Monsignor Luigi.

Newton asked me and I was not happy about it, but I thought that anywhere away from the cave must be better than in town. When I walked outside the inn, my horse was saddled and ready to go and Father Pop was already sitting on his horse. We rode off as the sun was starting to show up on the horizon.

We didn't speak a word as we rode as fast as we could. Father Pop had been given a very important task which could help him in becoming a stronger and a more reputable priest. We arrived at Monsignor Luigi's rectory within two hours and Father Pop had everyone in the rectory running around and taking care of everything he asked for. Four more men came along, two brothers and two priests.

The mission had begun as we rode off. We rode all day and by the time we reached our destination, it already had been dark for some time.

TWO

We finally arrived at the home of Augustus Fulginiti, and we could see that the house had one light on, but in the back, there was a big pole barn about fifty feet from the house. There were numerous lamps and torches making it extremely bright.

As we dismounted, two men with monk's robes came walking over and took our horses to water and feed them. We proceeded to walk toward the brightly lit pole barn.

Augustus Fulginiti called out Father Pop as he could see a big see-through sheet hanging on one of the beams in the pole barn.

I could see a big six-foot statue with wings and a man working on the statue. We walked closer as the man working on the statue came around the sheet and said, in a deep Italian accent, "Who wants to know where Augustus Fulginiti is?" He had very broad shoulders, the biggest hands I had ever seen, and a totally bald head.

"I do," said Father Pop as Augustus Fulginiti approached him as if he were about to go right through him, making everyone including myself move back two steps. Augustus stopped just short of knocking Father Pop down.

"Who has sent you?" asked Augustus.

"I am Father Wilfred Henry and Monsignor Luigi sent me to ask a favor of you," answered Father Pop.

Augustus laughed a very strong and sort of scary laugh. Augustus may have not been a very tall man, only about five-eight, but his chest, arms and hands made him look enormous.

"Why didn't he come and ask for me himself?" he asked.

“He had to stay behind to give spiritual help to others,” said Father Pop.

“Augustus,” Father Pop continued, “time is of the essence.”

“First of all, don’t call me Augustus,” said the big burly man, “just Gus.”

“Okay,” answered Father Pop. “Gus it will be.”

He then began telling Gus everything that had been happening in our small towns for the past month. When Father Pop finished, Gus walked over to a chair and sat down, covering his face with his big hands.

“Did Monsignor Luigi ask the Pope permission to try such a dangerous attempt?” asked Gus.

“I don’t think so,” said, Father Pop, “but, he may have. You see, we left this morning.”

“Maybe I’ll do it,” said Gus, “if the Pope doesn’t know, maybe I’ll do it.”

“What does it matter if the Pope knows?” asked Father Pop.

“I knew a Father Augustus,” said Gus, “a long while back who helped not just the church, but the Pope himself and was not given what he was promised when he was done.”

“You were a priest?” asked Father Pop.

“A long time ago,” said Gus. “If I help you, all of you have got to listen to everything I say with no, and I mean no hesitation. Is that understood?”

“Anything you ask we will do,” said Father Pop.

Gus yelled in Italian, very loud and fast. Not even Father Pop, who knew Italian, very well, could understand more than a couple of his words. Then Gus walked toward the statue behind the sheet. Father Pop and the rest of our group followed. Even I who was very scared of a man like Gus, followed closely behind him. Gus removed the sheet.

The first sight of the most beautiful statue that anyone of us had ever seen was stunning. The details on the face and hands made the

statue appear life-like. It appeared to have been made of marble, or porcelain, but the robe was of a rough glittery grey stone.

I finally spoke. “What is it made of?” I asked Gus.

“And you are?” asked Gus.

“My name is Roger Dearman, a member of the Christian town,” I said.

Gus walked up to me, looking mean-faced and said, “What, you don’t like my angel?”

“Oh, no,” I said. “On the contrary, I have never been in the presence of something which at first glanced looked so alive, but a statue none the less.”

“Monsignor Luigi finally sent a good man,” said Gus. “I like the way you think.”

“What is it made of?” asked Father Pop.

“Three different stones, which interact to make one as I chip them into shape, to what I wish them to become,” answered Gus.

“How are we going to move it?” I asked. “It looks like it weighs a couple hundred, if not a thousand pounds.”

“Believe it or not, it is mostly hollow,” Gus said, and he grabbed the statue by the waist and lifted it straight up in the air, making everyone move back.

“Are you going to help me?” he yelled, and everyone walked toward him.

Gus let out such a loud laugh that it stopped all the men in our tracks.

“I don’t need a hand,” he said as he laughed. “Move as I walk with this thing of beauty.”

Everyone present had the same thought: that Gus was as strong as he looked, maybe even stronger, I thought. Gus walked with the statue toward the flatbed carriage that had been laid with one foot of straw. One of Gus’ helpers put a three-step ladder made of wood at the back of the flatbed carriage.

As Gus stepped up on the ladder and stood on the flatbed carriage with the statue, everyone watching could see the shadow of the statue on the back of the house. The wings looked like if they were moving in flight as Gus laid the statue down. Two monks jumped on the carriage and as Gus jumped down, they covered the statue with more hay and then put a sheet over the entire back of the flatbed carriage.

“I will be back in a minute,” said Gus as he walked toward the house, which now had many lights on inside.

The same, two men who had grabbed our horses when we first arrived at Gus’ house, came forward with all our horses, fed and hydrated with water. They also brought over one of the biggest horses that anyone of us had ever seen. We had no doubt that it must be Gus’ horse.

As we mounted our horses Gus came walking out of the house with a big bag, wearing a monk’s robe with a hood. Gus walked over to the carriage and threw the big bag in the back behind the seat and told the men who had watered and fed the horses to get on.

“Now we go,” he said as he jumped on his horse.

The carriage led the way as Gus told Father Pop and me that he would not allow his statue to be left alone behind him.

“My statue must lead the way,” he said.

As we were on our way, Gus told the men different stories about his amazing life. A long life we thought, but we were happy for the stories. If not for the stories, everyone would have fallen asleep.

Nearing Roger’s town about an hour away, Gus made a loud sound, causing the carriage and the horses to stop in their tracks. Gus jumped off his horse and ran to the carriage to get his big bag. Everyone around, even the two monks who were driving the flatbed carriage looked as if they had no idea what was going on. Gus reached in the bag and took out two torches, soaked them in fluid and lit them, then placed them on either side of the carriage.

Gus screamed in a loud voice to all the men on horseback.

“Stay close to the carriage, as close as you can!” he said, as he grabbed his horse and tied it to the side of the carriage.

He then ran back to the bag, pulled out one more torch, lit it with a can of liquid, only twenty feet from us, starting a fire which surrounded us making a ring of fire. He ran from the fire to his bag and pulled out a sack and started throwing a powder substance on the ring of fire as it started to sparkle, sealing the entire ring of fire.

When he finished running the ring of fire one last time, Gus dropped his bag and jumped on top of the flatbed carriage. He stood looking straight to the right of the road. Every one of us had no idea what was coming but we all sensed that whatever was coming, was coming fast. There wasn't one man who wasn't scared to death, outside of the monks and Gus.

One of the young brothers that Father Pop had brought with us from the rectory couldn't take it and made a mad dash over the fire, running his horse at a full gallop.

Just as the sound of the brother leaving ended, everyone turned to look in the direction that Gus had been looking. That's when we all noticed what and why Gus had done what he had. The most horrific looking black entity circled the fire, with its red blood dripping eyes.

"Monstri Rocknia!" I yelled, as Gus put his hand to his mouth signaling us not to say a word.

It circled two more times screeching and making sounds that only Hell itself could produce. It started circling even faster and, in an instant, headed directly in the direction that the brother had raced off toward. The silence outside of the crackling of the circle of fire was eerie, when suddenly there was a scream—not just a scream, but a scream out of Hell itself. Some who were present had to cover their ears, for it was the scream of death. Again, there was silence outside of the crackling of the ring of fire.

Gus stood on the carriage looking in the distance behind us where the terrified brother had fled...the dead brother, I should say.

We were all frightened as again, we got the feeling of something coming at us at a very high-speed approaching fast. Then we saw it again, the entity Monstri Rocknia circled the fire and made a screeching sound, a sound so loud that if you didn't cover your ears, they would end up blowing from the inside out. Even Gus had to cover his ears. Everyone started yelling at Gus for some leadership on what they should

do. Gus looked at us and pointed to the east where a twinkle of light was coming up just over the horizon.

Then, suddenly, Monstri Rocknia stopped circling and turned its head from side to side, as the red blood dripping eyes peered as if through everyone present. In the blink of an eye, he was gone.

Gus jumped off the flatbed carriage and picked up the small sack with the dust that he had sprayed on the fire. He put what was left back in the sack and began putting out the torches, and the fire around us started to reduce to a smoldering, smoky stage.

I looked at Gus and asked, "How did you know that the fire would last till daybreak?"

"I didn't," he said as he laughed making everyone, even the two monks a little uncomfortable.

"We must move quickly," said Gus. "God only knows what has happened in town since you left. We only have eleven hours of daylight to be able to capture this Monstri Rocknia."

Gus jumped on his horse and yelled at the monks as they proceeded into town at a faster rate than before.

As we arrived, there were many people walking around talking and whispering to each other. They made a path in the street allowing us to pass.

When we arrived at the inn, the elders came walking out to meet us.

Monsignor Luigi was the first to speak.

"My dear friend, I mean Father," he said, as Gus widened his eyes, "Excuse me, Augustus."

They kissed one another on each of their cheeks.

"It's been a while," said Monsignor Luigi, "and I thank you for coming. You haven't aged a bit."

"I try to keep myself young," Gus answered, as they both laughed.

Newton stepped in and said, "We have only daylight to end this horrific situation in which we find ourselves, and a lot has happened since some of you left us yesterday morning."

“All is being arranged. As you travel to the cave, one of our men will explain to all of you what has occurred in the past twenty-four hours. Please all of you, come into the inn and relax, eat, and drink, for some of you will be leaving within the hour.”

We walked into the inn and saw a table spread with food and drinks.

When we were done, Father Pop told the elders of what we had experienced and the death of the brother who had accompanied us. When he was finished telling the story, as if on cue, two men walked in and said, “Excuse us, but everything has been arranged and we’re ready to leave.”

Everyone proceeded outside where there were two flatbed carriages, one being Gus’ and the other containing everything needed to seal Monstri Rocknia in the coffin. There were nine saddled horses. Gus mounted his horse, noticing that his horse had been fed and hydrated.

Then he yelled in a deep voice, “How many men are going to be going on this mission to stop this Monstri Rocknia?”

Those that hadn’t spent any time with Augustus Fulginiti were all a little fearful of him.

I mounted my horse, and four of the eight warriors who had gone to the cave the day before mounted their large horses.

Gus’ two monks got on their carriage. Father Torri and Rabbi Swartz drove the other carriage, and the last three horses were mounted by Nasry and Damini and one apprentice.

Newton raised his arms out and said in a loud voice, “Bow your heads as we say a prayer.”

A dead silence came upon the town.

Newton spoke, “May all our beliefs and the power of our Gods help us to stop this evil Monstri Rocknia. God give these men and religious leaders the strength and power to once and for all end this evil that has cost so many lives. In God’s name we pray. Amen.”

Everyone responded in unison, “Amen.”

Nasry Mahmoud and Damini Dharti led the way with Gus’ flatbed carriage following behind. Then the rest came on horseback and the

carriages with Father Torri and Rabbi Swartz trailing. The crowd parted as we left town to the cheers and praises of the townspeople.

Once we were on the road headed toward the cave, I asked Father Torri what had happened in town while we were gone. Gus pretended not to listen, but his ears were wide open. Father Torri looked at the warriors and asked them if one of them would like to tell the story since they lived it.

One of the Warriors with a deep voice, a long beard and the face of a man who had seen many a battle spoke. The warrior began, “The other day, the first group had left five of our religious brethren guarding the cave, and as you know, I and seven other warriors went to relieve them. When we had arrived, there were blood stains all over the front of the cave and a trail as if someone or something had dragged what ever had bled into the cave.

There was no sign of the five men, only signs of blood left in many different areas outside the cave. We dismounted our horses and drew our weapons. Entering the cave, we proceeded with caution. When we got to the opening of the cave, we noticed the cave was very bright with a lot of light. When we got to the place where the cave opened, the blood stains on the ground began to get wider and wider. As soon as they were able to see around the corner of the main entrance, the two men in front quickly charged in at what they saw on the other side. The rest of us followed just as quickly.

What we saw when we entered was something that even the bravest of men would have a problem witnessing. The five holy men who had been left behind had been chopped up into pieces that were spread all over the inside of the cave. Parts of their bodies were everywhere. The first two warriors who entered went directly toward the coffins made of the grey stone. They were swinging their swords at what looked like a disfigured man with a couple of long strands of white hair and an old, sun-baked face. He had animal like fangs—a demonic creature would probably be the only way to describe this beast.

He carried a sword in each hand, his fingers and nails were so long that they wrapped around the sword up to his wrist. The creature was winning the battle against the first two warriors, both of whom were wounded. The next two warriors jumped in and continued the fight. They began slashing away at the demonic creature, as the rest of us

approached. When the fight finally ended, four of my brethren had suffered deadly blows. The demonic creature lay motionless by the right coffin next to Monstri Rocknia. As he exhaled his last breath, the sound that came out of his mouth caused everyone to shiver at the pitch and the stench was of sulfur. Most took a couple of steps backward, for fear of the creature returning to life.

The Warriors started to stare at the center coffin. “Everyone began noticing that the coffin in the middle, which half of the seal that contained Monstri Rocknia, had been removed. That explained why the first two warriors went running into the cave so fast—they must have noticed the demonic creature trying to set Monstri Rocknia free. We had nothing with us to reseal the coffin. Time was of the essence.

We proceeded to remove all four warriors who had died, placing each on his horses and tying their bodies down. We quickly picked up all the body parts that we could find of the five holy men and put them in sacks that we had brought along in our saddle bags. When we gathered up the last pieces, a sound came out of the middle coffin that had us moving quickly. We had never experienced anything like this Monstri Rocknia, and my men and myself would have preferred to be in battle with a hundred men two our four, instead of hearing that loud screech again.

We got on our horses and headed into town as quickly as our horses could run. Just before we had made it into town, no more than two hundred yards away you could hear something coming in the distance at a fast pace. We entered the town at full gallop, quickly all the horses were put in the barns as daylight broke through the darkness. As you were leaving town with Father Pop, we were just coming back from the cave,” the warrior took a deep breath.

“Our poor town’s undertaker had the task of putting all the body parts in their respective coffins, a job I don’t think anyone would want.” After the warrior finished talking no one said a word until we reached the cave.

As soon as we arrived at the cave, Gus took full control of the situation at hand. We were first going to try to seal Monstri Rocknia in the coffin, leaving the statue as a backup plan. Everyone was moving back and forth, bringing everything needed into the cave. The stench of

death and sulfur in the cave was nauseating. The cut-up corpse of the demonic creature in the corner gave the room even an eerier feeling.

Within a couple of minutes, the potions and everything needed to seal the coffin had been put in place. Gus called on two of the warriors to come outside and help him maneuver the statue into the tight front of the cave.

They walked out of the cave as everyone followed. Gus looked back and shook his head but said nothing. He could tell that no one in their right mind would want to be in the cave for more time than they needed to be.

Two of the warriors grabbed the statue on each side, by the wings and Gus grabbed the legs. The statue made it through the main hole of the cave as if it were cut out of the opening itself.

They entered the main entry with the statue; a rumbling noise was coming out of the crease in Monstri Rocknia's coffin. Everyone heard it and stopped in their tracks.

Father Torri spoke and said, "Let's get this over with as soon as possible. I don't know about the rest of you, but with my aging heart, I'm afraid I cannot take too much more of being in this cave."

Everyone looked at each other in agreement.

Even Gus, who had never had anything from this world or any evil entity's that he had sent back to hell, had ever given him the feeling of making him want to leave a place. This cave though, was like a dungeon of death, for even Gus wanted out as fast as possible. They finally had the statue in the cave and positioned it about five paces away from Monstri Rocknia's coffin. Gus looked over at the two monks who proceeded to leave the cave.

The four Warriors stood ten feet from the coffins, surrounding them, while the rest, including Gus and I, surrounded Monstri Rocknia's coffin.

The ceremony started as before but this time more noises were coming out of the coffin. A loud screeching sound made everyone even more nervous. When we were ready to use the potions, the cave started shaking and sand and dust particles filled the cave, making it hard to see and breath.

The noise from the coffin increased to a deafening point. Nasry Mahmoud yelled for us not to look inside of the coffin. The lid started rising in the air and as before, came down with an incredible force. The only sound in the cave, was the sound of the sand and dust particles hitting the ground.

When the dust settled, which seemed like an eternity, we were all wiping the dust off ourselves and some of us were coughing. I looked over at Gus and saw that he was looking directly at the coffin without blinking an eye.

Everyone finally noticed the way Gus had been staring at the coffin. Oblivious, Gus moved back and ran for his bag, yelling at everyone to move away from the coffin. Without any hesitation, we did as he said.

Gus took out a jar that looked like the same powder he had used earlier in his first encounter with Monstri Rocknia. He began sprinkling the dust around the coffin. He then handed a couple of pieces of paper with Latin writing, to the Catholic and Christian groups, including myself. Gus knew that only a few of us spoke Latin, since only a couple of religions used the Latin language and Gus's writings were only in Latin. He only needed three people to recite the words for it to work but was sure that the other religious men would recite what they heard along with him, since the sayings weren't long. He jumped back again grabbing one of the torches that was on the wall, he then picked up his bag and handed me a jar. "When I tell you, throw it," he said.

Gus looked at the four warriors and told them to stay back till he called on them. They moved back a couple of steps. Gus then reached in his bag and pulled out a sheet with Latin writing. Everyone looked at the sheet and could see that the writing had been written in blood.

Gus opened a jar and just then a crackling sound came out from Monstri Rocknia's coffin. The sound from the coffin got louder. Gus yelled at me, "Are you ready?" and in a split second the lid to Monstri Rocknia's coffin exploded into a billion pieces toward the ceiling of the cave.

Gus screamed at me to throw the jar at the coffin, and without the slightest hesitation I threw the jar, which exploded on impact and a bright light appeared.

Everyone stepped back. What followed was a monstrous screech. “Recite the words in Latin,” said Gus, as he too recited the words, but much louder than the rest. The more they said it the louder they got. They continued reciting “Control this beast, Oh Lord, for thy power is second to none.” Monstri Rocknia’s screeches and screams were almost enough to drive us to madness.

But we could tell that we were winning the battle and we continued chanting, “Control this beast, Oh Lord, for thy power is second to none.” Even the four warriors began chanting with the rest, as the sounds from the coffin began to get lower and lower. Everyone in the room started chanting louder and louder, until finally there was not a sound, coming out of the coffin.

The ring of light encircled the coffin. Gus looked around the room and saw that I was lifting off the ground, until I was suspended in mid air, four feet off the ground. Everyone moved further away as Gus grabbed a jar and soaked the blood-stained sheet with the liquid that was in the jar. Then he called over to Nasry Mahmoud to grab the other side of the sheet that was soaked in the liquid with the blood-stained Latin writing.

“When I tell you to throw the sheet at the beast, do it quickly,” said Gus. I was still floating in the air, now with my head bent back. “Now,” screamed Gus, and he and Nasry threw the sheet at Monstri Rocknia.

The sheet immediately engulfed the beast and tied itself into a ball. We could all see the beast struggling to get out. Gus grabbed a rope from his bag and lassoed the sheet, commanding the warriors to help him pull. All four warriors began pulling and within seconds, Gus grabbed the end of the rope and ran to the statue.

He stuck the end of the rope in a hole in the back of the neck of the statue between the wings. The rope instantly began pulling itself as Gus told the four warriors to stop pulling. Now the screeches and screams were so loud that everyone had to cover their ears with their hands. The closer the rope brought the sheet to the statue, the louder the noises of the beast became. As soon as the sheet touched the statue, Monstri Rocknia was sucked up instantly.

Gus pulled a piece of what looked like white clay from his monk's robe pocket and placed it on the hole, sealing it instantly.

Everyone looked back at me, still suspended in mid air. Gus walked over, taking something out of his bag and sprinkled it all over me, and I slowly descended. Gus caught me before my body could fall to the ground. Everyone came over, even the monks who had been waiting outside.

“Is he going to be ok,” asked one of the warriors, as Gus called to the monks to get water and a blanket out of the carriage. When they returned, Gus gave me water and wrapped the blanket around me. As I came to, I had no idea where I was, but I was so cold.

“What happened?” I asked.

“We will tell you on our way back to town. Let’s first get out of this deathly cave,” said Gus.

Gus called to the same two warriors to help him get the statue out of the cave. “It feels much heavier than before,” one of them said, as they brought the statue out and gently laid it on the back of the flatbed carriage. Gus walked back into the cave with another bag that he took from the carriage, telling everyone to stay outside of the cave.

Gus looked at everyone and shook his head. That was an order that was probably wasted, as no one would think twice of going back inside the cave unless, there was no other option.

“I will be right back,” said Gus. Within minutes Gus was walking out of the cave and as he walked out the ground started shaking. The cave within seconds closed itself from the inside out, with a thunderous boom.

Everyone present jumped back then looked at Gus and I thought to myself, ‘this man Gus was more then just an ex-priest, but a gifted man of God.’

Not a word was spoken on our way back to town. I was just about back to normal, not feeling as cold as earlier. There were hundreds of people, from all the surrounding towns as we arrived. Everyone clapped and many prayed for our safe return, parting to make way for us as we got closer to the inn.

When we reached the inn all the religious elders came out. Newton raised his arms in the air and within seconds there was silence. “By your

faces I can tell that it was not an easy journey that all of you have taken, for the sake of our towns. Did all go as planned?" asked Newton.

We shook our heads, and all the townspeople broke out in a loud cheer.

Newton again raised his arms, and the town's people became quiet. "Today is a day of celebration, but first the elders need to meet with these brave men. Before anything else," said Newton, "a prayer to thank our God for helping our men succeed in their journey."

Everyone bowed their heads. Newton raised his hands and said, "Oh Lord, thank you for your help in our time of need, bless these men for their work and for those that were lost, may they be at your side in the kingdom of heaven. In our Lord we believe and pray, Amen." Everyone together replied, "Amen."

There was a chorus of clapping and cheers as the celebration began. All the men continued to the barn where the caretakers, took our horses and carriages. Two men walked over to the carriage with the angel and Gus positioned his horse between them.

"Do not even think of going near this carriage" he said and gave orders to the two monks in Italian as he handed one of them his horse. All the men headed back to the inn where the elders awaited them. Newton told all the men to wash up and they would be waiting for us at Jonathan's. We all washed ourselves and we met up at the watering hole in the inn.

Gus grabbed a bottle of wine, passed a cup around to all the men and made a toast.

"To the Lord our God and to all of you who showed great bravery. To those who died, we will see you again in heaven. Salute," he yelled, and all replied, "salute."

As they began walking out of the inn, Gus asked me to stay for a quick chat.

"What, do you want?" I asked.

"How do you feel?" Gus asked.

"Different," I said, "as if I, don't think me crazy, but younger than I am, like I could climb a mountain."

“Good,” said Gus.

“Do you understand what happened?” asked Gus.

“No, not really,” I answered.

“You have been given a new life,” said Gus. “You are the new guardian of my statue, till God decides.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Your new job in life until your dying day is to take care of the statue. The Lord will provide you with the skills needed till that day.”

“I really don’t want that job,” I said.

“Well,” said Gus, “the Lord our God picked you from the group, so you really don’t have a choice.

“There’s one more thing,” he added, as I opened the door to leave.

“What?” I asked, as I turned around.

“From this day forward, you will never age, until the Lord wills it. Keep this between us,” said Gus. “Only a few in this world, know the truth, do you understand?”

“Yes,” I said, “I think I do, but I really think I’m about to faint.”

“You won’t faint,” said Gus, “or ever be sick, not as much as a simple cold. We will discuss this in more detail.”

“When?” I asked.

“Later. We have a lifetime plus some ahead of us.”

We started walking toward Jonathan’s and Gus let out a strong laugh, as I looked like maybe, I could get sick.

When we entered, everyone was eating and drinking wine. A festive time we had for hours, as Gus told everyone in detail what had happened in the cave. After all was said and everyone had their fill, goodbyes were said by all.

As everyone left, Gus, Newton, Monsignor Luigi, and I were the last to leave.

“My friends,” said Monsignor Luigi, “I have taught all that I know about the containment of evil entity’s to my dear Gus.

The same has happened to you?” asked Monsignor Luigi as he looked at me.

“Yes,” I said.

“Good,” said Monsignor Luigi, “Gus will teach you everything you need to become a great guardian of the Statue.” Then Monsignor Luigi gave a hug to Gus and a peck on each cheek. “You will no longer be alone my son, go with God.”

Monsignor Luigi walked right out the door without saying another word.

“What will you do with the statue?” asked Newton.

“We will take it back home to my town in Italy and protect it from harm for many years to come,” said Gus.

“I see,” said Newton, and was silent for a couple of minutes, then asked, “When will you be leaving?”

“Tomorrow morning,” answered Gus.

“Tomorrow it will be then,” said Newton, as we walked to the inn across the street. Newton walked behind Gus with me.

“My son,” said Newton, “you’ve been given a great gift. Use it well and always remember that you will always have a place in our town for as long as it exists.”

“Thank you,” I said. All three of us stayed in the inn that night and were all finally able to have a good long sleep, now that Monstri Rocknia was in the statue.

Next morning, about ten, Newton knocked on my door. I awoke, as I heard the knock and said that I would be down in a couple of minutes. When I went down the stairs, I could smell the morning meal and ate until I couldn’t eat a bite more.

When I finished eating, I walked outside to see were everyone had gone. Gus was on his enormous horse and ready to go.

“I need to stop at my home and gather up some of my things,” I said.

“No need,” said Gus, “it has already been taken care of by one of my monks.”

I then noticed that one monk was with the carriage which had the statue, and the other was loaded with all my possessions.

“We will miss you,” said Newton. “This town will hold you with the highest regard.”

“Thank you,” I said as he came and gave me a heartfelt hug.

I then jumped on my horse.

When we started heading down the road, many of the townspeople, if not all of them, came out to wish us well.

As we left town, Gus started telling me that I had a lot to learn, but time is something that we would both have a lot to spend.

“Remember the statue that was somewhere under the Vatican?” he asked. “That, you see, my friend is my statue. I am its guardian, but that statue is safe from anything ever happening to it.”

“How long ago was it that you had the experience with your statue?” I asked.

“Many years ago,” said Gus.

“How old are you?” I asked.

“Not a day over fifty-two,” said Gus, laughing out loud. “I am about ninety-six or ninety-eight, it’s been so long, I’ve basically lost track.”

I didn’t say a word after what Gus had just told me and Gus didn’t either, knowing that I needed to spend a little time with my thoughts. After a while I asked Gus, “If your statue is under the Vatican, how do you protect it?”

“Like I said earlier, I don’t need to, it stands were no one can get to it, outside of the Catholic Church,” said Gus.

“You see, Roger,” he continued, “I have been driving myself crazy for years wondering why I am still around and now I see the reason. The Lord kept me here to protect and show you everything you need to learn, to be the guardian of a statue. I will teach you many new things, as I have learned much, in my ninety plus years.

The Lord will always provide,” said Gus.

Those were the last words spoken, between us for many hours to come. Later, we were on a trail that went around a mountain side and that's when Gus broke the silence, with a big hearty laugh.

"There she is," said Gus, "my town, my home, your new town, your new home, Perulli, Italy."

The town was much smaller than I had expected.

When I had been there last time to ask Gus to help us, it had been dark.

How many people do you have in the area?" I asked.

"Eighty-something," said Gus. "It all depends on who died and who was born in the past couple of days." We both found the answer funny and had a good laugh.

"Where's your house?" I asked.

"Over to the right," pointed Gus. "It is the biggest house in town. I get bored," said Gus, "I build."

"By the way" he added, "it is our house now. I haven't married. I was a priest once and my vow of celibacy has never changed. I may not have a good relationship with the Vatican, but I will never sway from my God."

When we arrived at our house, two other monks came out to help with bringing everything in the house. Where are we going to keep the statue," I asked.

"For now," said Gus, "just until we can find a better place, in my basement, through the cellar doors, which are big enough to fit the statue perfectly."

As the monks carried everything in the house, Gus asked me to help him lift the statue, so that we could take it into the basement.

"I can't carry the statue," I said. "What if I drop it and it breaks? Monstri Rocknia would surely kill us both."

"Try and see if you can lift it. Get the legs," said Gus "and I will get it between the wings."

I was so nervous that I would drop it, but when I started to lift the statue, I was amazed at how much stronger I had gotten.

“A gift from God,” said Gus, “Your strength will only increase with your age.”

We began carrying the statue down the steps to the basement. I could see that Gus had already set up the basement as a containment area for the statue. There were four crosses in the room, one on each wall. There was a circle in the middle of the room made of different powders, herbs, spices, and crumbled up wildflowers.

As we walked the statue in, Gus told me not to step on the line. We proceeded to set the statue in place. Gus walked to the right of the room and picked up a bag, like the other bags that he had taken on our earlier mission. Gus pulled out a sheet like the one he had used in the cave.

The sheet had the Latin writing in blood as did the one from the cave. Gus told me to grab the other side and throw it when he told me to, but first a prayer.

We bowed our heads and Gus started praying to himself. When he finished, he looked at me and said, “Now!”

We threw the sheet on the statue.

The sheet stretched itself out, covering the whole statue and sealed every inch, exposing absolutely no part of the statue, even the base. When we were done, I followed Gus out through the cellar doors. Gus shut the doors taking out a big chain. He then took out the biggest lock that I had ever seen. There was writing on the big lock.

“What does the writing say?” I asked.

“In Latin,” said Gus, “it says, no entry without God’s blessing.”

THREE

Many years went by. Gus had taught me everything that I needed to know about being a guardian of the statue. I had my own bags of protective dust and liquids. I had learned how to make my own sheets with what I had learned was sheep's blood.

I learned how to speak Latin and Italian fluently, as Gus was a good teacher. He taught me how to fight with several weapons, which we practiced every other day. I told Gus my age, forty-two, although everyone always said that I was much younger looking. I had become a devote Catholic with the leadership of Gus. We had become more than just friends; we were like brothers, and sometimes, like father and son.

One thing that I had learned was that Gus was a true believer in the power of laughter. Gus would find the simplest of things funny and after many years together, I had developed a great sense of humor. We both agreed that laughter was a healing tonic for the soul.

Not aging was something that had taken a while for me to get used to, although Gus had already been accustomed to not aging. It had been over seventy years, since our friendship began and the statue had remained in the basement, because we had not found a safer place.

Since I had arrived in town, we had not left its surroundings. The town though had grown three times as big as when I first arrived.

Gus had taught me the art of sculpting, and I had become an accomplished apprentice, to Gus. That was our way of making money to survive. Gus would always say that the Lord gave us the gift of being able to create the statues so we could have no money problems.

We had sold many statues to different towns in Italy, especially to the Vatican. Many different Popes had come and gone since I, arrived in Italy.

Pope Leo XII, who had taken Gus' statue, had been dead for many years. The reigning Pope, Leo XIII was a Pope who both Gus and I admired from everything we had read or been told about him by the priests who were sent to us with the outlines of the types of statues needed for the Vatican.

There was great respect, even as far as the Americas, for the work that Gus and I had done on our statues. Our house, that had been built by Gus so long ago, needed many repairs. So, Gus started to draw up plans for a new house on the property that we owned. It would be built directly behind our existing house.

You can draw plans but, many times, those plans you draw may not materialize as you hoped they would.

One late afternoon, I was finishing off the last of a group of gargoyles which had been ordered by a French group for whom we had done many statues in the past.

One of the monks who had only been with us for two years came walking out to the pole barn and handed me a letter. Immediately, from the unmistakable seal, I could see that it was from the Vatican. Whenever we had received an order from the Vatican, a special representative would accompany the letter. The representative would always be a priest.

He would bring the designs that would show what was wanted, specific stones and dimensions. I put the letter down and proceeded to finish off the gargoyle. When I was finished and started cleaning around the work area, I heard Gus come in from buying supplies in town.

I called for Gus to come out to the pole barn.

"We have a letter here from the Vatican," I said. Gus picked up the letter and began opening it quickly, being careful not to damage it.

"It seems that the Vatican is calling on us to attend, as it says, a very important meeting with Archbishop Rosenhausen. It is of the utmost importance that we attend this meeting in three days," said Gus, as he laughed.

"What do you think it is about? I asked.

"I don't really know," said Gus "but their timing is right on time. We have just finished the last of the statues with any deadlines."

I could see the excitement in Gus' face and eyes as he could in mine, to be summoned by the Vatican.

"We will leave first thing tomorrow morning," said Gus.

"Gus," I asked, "what are we going to do with our statue of Monstri Rocknia?"

"It should be fine," said Gus.

"I agree," I said, although something deep inside of me was telling me something different.

The next morning Gus and I got up early and were giving orders to the four monks that took care of all our needs. Our four monks, were all from the same sect, which was from the temple of Dali. Our eldest monk was named Dani, two of our monks were cousins. One was named Jude, the other was Nitché and the only Italy born monk that was with us for only the past two years was named Lorenzo.

Although trains and a few motorized vehicles were being driven around the towns, Gus and I decided to go on horseback. When everything was set for us to leave, we mounted our horses, and we took one last look at our home.

Our ride to the Vatican was an amazing trip for both of us, but especially for me. The technology of trains, lights, new bridges, and the new modern homes, was an amazing sight to see.

Gus, who had been to the Vatican many, many years earlier, was also amazed at how much had changed. We passed by the Coliseum, and had to stop twice, because it was the most amazing sight that I had ever set eyes on. The trip through Rome was an amazing ride on horseback.

We turned down Corso Vittorio Emanuele and at the end, before The Bridge of Angels, we stopped at a stable that Gus was very happy to see that it was still around after so many years.

We both jumped off our horses and stretched out our bodies.

"A long ride," said Gus.

"Yes, but an incredible one," I said.

"How, may I help you?" said a tall, thin man, with a big nose.

"A couple of nights stay for our horses," said Gus.

“That will not be a problem,” said the man, who introduced himself as Francisco.

“I am Gus, and this is my apprentice, Roger,” Gus laughed out loud after saying my name.

“Do you have a place to stay?” asked Francisco.

“We have a meeting with Archbishop Rosenhausen tomorrow at the Vatican.”

“Very well, you will probably be walking there. It is a very short distance.”

“Thank you,” I said, “and should we pay you now?”

“Oh no,” said Francisco, “at the end of your stay will be fine. Don’t worry about your horses; they are in good hands.”

Gus and I grabbed our one bag apiece and started walking toward the Bridge of Angels. As we walked across, we stopped to look at the scenery all around. We made a left onto Via della Conciliazione, until we arrived at St. Peter’s Square. We were confronted by the Swiss Guard. Gus showed them the letter, with the seal of the Vatican. The guard signaled to two other guards, twenty paces away, who took us through a door that led to a long hallway. We walked to the end of the hall where another door led us back outside, directly across from the Borgia Apartments. There the Swiss Guard led us inside and introduced us to Father Blanco.

The Swiss Guard handed the letter to Father Blanco, who read it and thanked us both for coming. Then he took us to our room.

We were led down a hallway where marble was the choice of building material. The walls, floors, and the ceilings were made of marble. There was a very big wooden door at the end of the hall. Father Blanco could barely get it open, so Gus stepped in to help.

When we entered the room, there were two beds. The room was small, about eight feet by eight feet. There was a cross in the middle of the room on the wall. A light sat on a table between the beds with a single chair.

“Is there anything that we can get you?” asked Father Blanco.

“No thank you,” we answered at the same time.

“If you do find that there is anything you may need, there will be someone at the end of the hall, all night long.”

“Thank you, Father Blanco,” said Gus.

“I will be here in the morning to wake you, so that you can have your morning meal before your meeting with Archbishop Rosenhausen.”

“Thank you, again,” said Gus as he helped Father Blanco shut the door.

“What a wonderful day,” I said.

“Yes,” said Gus “but remember God only knows what we will face tomorrow.”

We threw our bags under the beds and began taking our boots off. As we lay in bed Gus said, “Good night, my friend.”

“Good night,” I said as we fell right to sleep.

The next morning when Father Blanco knocked on the door, Gus jumped out of bed and opened it slowly.

“Is it morning already?” asked Gus.

“Yes, it is,” said Father Blanco.

We will be out in a minute,” said Gus.

We put our boots on, grabbed our bags, and walked out the door.

“Wait,” said Father Blanco, “you must please leave your bags in the room. No one will touch them or enter your room while you’re here at the Vatican.”

I looked at Gus and Gus shook his head in agreement that we could leave our bags. Father Blanco led us down the hall and to another room close by where there were two wash basins with towels on either side.

We washed ourselves clean and Father Blanco took us down the hall where another door led us to the rear of where we had first entered. Then we walked three steps down to a garden, like no other garden that either of us had ever seen. We continued down a path, leading us to a gazebo right in the middle of the beautiful garden.

There was a table and three chairs in the middle of the gazebo. On the table they had different types of pastries and a jug of wine.

“Please sit and eat,” said Father Blanco. “Archbishop Rosenhausen will be here shortly.”

We were both very hungry and thirsty and we ate until our stomachs were full and drank until we quenched our thirst.

When we were done, Gus nudged me to look behind him as two Swiss guards were approaching. When they were within twenty paces, both Swiss guards stopped and separated as a small man approached. By the color of his robes, we could tell that he had to be Archbishop Rosenhausen. He had dark brown hair, and deep blue eyes, with a wind burned face, and the look in his eyes made him seem creepy.

Right behind Archbishop Rosenhausen was a priest who helped Archbishop Rosenhausen into his seat.

The archbishop just sat there looking back and forth at us. The way he stared made it seem to me like time had stood still. Archbishop Rosenhausen finally broke the silence and asked us both, with a very strong German accent, “What does it feel like to live for so many years?” After a couple of minutes, Gus finally replied, “Sometimes it is more of a curse, but it is the Lord’s will.”

After another long stare, Monsignor Rosenhausen said, “I see. You both know who I am, and let me guess, you’re Augustus Fulginiti and you’re Roger Dearman.”

“That’s very good,” said Gus. “Please call me Gus, and can we get to the reason that we have been asked to attend this meeting.”

“All in good time,” said the archbishop.

“You see,” he continued, “I am the head keeper of the chambers that hold many of our religious documents, statues, and many religious artifacts. For many years, I have been researching the writings by Monsignor Luigi, which was about his life, right around the time you knew him. He died a cardinal, many years ago. He was our source of information about both of your bouts with evil entities.

You both are also the men who are responsible for many of our beautiful statues, throughout the Vatican. For that we thank you, on behalf of the Pope himself.”

“Yes, we are,” said Gus, “but we thank the Lord for the great gift that he has bestowed upon us, to produce these statues. Archbishop

Rosenhausen, can you please get to the reason we have been called to the Vatican?"

"In time," said the archbishop, "have patience, dear man. I have been spending many years researching in the archives, trying to piece your lives together. His Holiness was advised on the gifts that you both posses. He himself, wanted to meet with you both, but an urgent problem outside the Vatican would not allow it. For that reason, I am here representing the Pope. His Holiness is hoping that you will stay, he will be returning to the Vatican in three days."

"What are we supposed to do for three days?" asked Gus. "We have other deadlines to honor in our statue making."

"Augustus," said the archbishop, "you know that the last deadline that you had was the gargoyles with the French."

'Again,' thought Gus, 'the Vatican has been interfering in my life, always needing to spy, to control.'

The archbishop stared at us for a while, without saying a word. He finally spoke and said, "Augustus Fulginiti, have you ever thought of returning to the Priesthood, in the hundred and thirty-seven years since you left the Church?"

"Not once," answered Gus. "A man of God doesn't have to belong to a group of men, to be a man of God."

"Well said," said the archbishop, as he stared at us again in a stranger way. "Your statue that we have been keeping for you, has been misplaced and the documents that I have been researching about your statue have also been misplaced."

Gus stood up immediately scaring me almost off my chair.

"How in the world could you misplace something so evil? God forbid, if it were to get out, it would be even stronger than before. Many people would die horrible deaths, maybe even the Pope!" Gus bellowed, moving back and forth causing the Swiss guardsmen to come a little closer to the gazebo. "Do you have any idea what you will be facing if it were to get out? Do you!" Gus demanded.

"Please," said, the archbishop as he waved his hand over to the Swiss Guard, not to come any closer. "Let me finish Augustus, the statue

is in one of our holding rooms in the underground vaults in the Vatican. Our problem is that we need you to tell us which statue is yours.”

Gus looked at the archbishop and shook his head.

“We had a fire that started several months ago. Many documents and statues had to be moved for fear of them being destroyed by the fire. We had to move out four of our holding rooms and since there wasn’t any space left, everything was transported from one underground area to another. Not a thing left our underground. Only the Swiss Guard and clergymen of the Vatican were allowed in to move all the items.

As you know, the Swiss guard and our own Vatican Guard would not do anything to harm the Vatican. They took an oath.”

“An oath you say,” said Gus. “They are still men and when men are involved, there is always many who seek to further themselves for supreme power, that’s where my trust in them dies. When can we go and look for the statue?”

“We will start today,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen.

“Good,” said Gus, “the sooner the better, but first we need to go back to our rooms and get our bags that we brought with us.”

“Why do you need your bags?” asked the archbishop. “No one will touch them.”

“Just in case we have a problem finding our statue and if the evil entity is released for any reason,” said Gus.

“I have personally been down in the safe rooms under the Vatican, and I can guarantee you that there isn’t anything near an evil entity in any of the safe rooms in the Vatican,” said the archbishop.

“Regardless,” said Gus, “I insist.”

“As do I,” I said.

“I will have someone go to the room and bring them to you,” said the archbishop.

Gus stood up as did I.

“Sit,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen. “I will send someone to get your bags.” He put his hand up in the air, telling the priest behind him to go and get the bags.

“Now that we have a little time, I would like to ask you both a couple of more questions,” said the archbishop.

“I would really like to answer all your questions,” said Gus, “but, I must spend a little time alone with Roger before we go in search of my statue. I promise you that later we will answer all the questions that you and the Vatican want answered.”

“From what I have read about you Augustus, your word is your bond,” said the archbishop and he signaled over to the two Swiss guards. The guards came over and one of them grabbed the back of the seat and the other guard helped Archbishop Rosenhausen stand.

“How much time do you need?” he asked.

“Just fifteen minutes, no longer,” answered Gus.

“Fifteen minutes, if not a little more, you will have,” said the archbishop.

As the archbishop and the two Swiss guards walked away, Gus stood up, as did I.

“It is amazing that one of the safest places in the whole world could have a fire and so much turmoil,” said Gus.

“I have a very bad feeling with this whole situation,” I said. “When we left our home, something really felt wrong, as if someone was plotting against us.”

“Why didn’t you tell me that you felt this way before we left?” Gus asked.

“Maybe the excitement of being asked to the Vatican made it difficult to worry,” I said.

“Now I also think that something is not right with this whole situation,” said Gus. “Keep your eyes and ears open and if you see or hear anything out of the norm, do not hesitate to react.”

We spent a couple of minutes with our own thoughts. The priest that went to get our bags was arriving with two men who were wearing brown robes. They must be monks, I thought and each of them was carrying one of our bags.

Archbishop Rosenhausen walked in from the other end, with the two Swiss guards.

“Have you had enough time?” he asked.

“Yes, we have,” replied Gus.

“Good, then we shall go down into the depths of the Vatican,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen.

Archbishop Rosenhausen led the way as Gus, and I followed. We went through the garden to the same door that we had entered earlier, which led us to the Borgia Apartments. Back outside, we walked through the Borgia Courtyard and around to an entrance which led us into the Sistine Chapel.

The Sistine Chapel was an amazing sight to see. Archbishop Rosenhausen stopped twice to allow us to take it all in. As we arrived at the end of the north side of the Sistine Chapel, we entered a back room, which led us to a door on the right side. One of the Swiss guards passed us by quickly to open the door for the archbishop. The rest of the group, which now totaled eight, followed behind.

The door opened and the scent of the underground was the old smell of antiques, and mildew. We proceeded down a staircase to the core of the Vatican. Several flights down, we could see what looked like an enormous cave, well built, with smaller containment rooms, some empty and some over-stuffed from front to back.

We finally arrived at the ground floor. I had goose bumps just taking it all in. We continued walking passing by glass rooms full of priceless artifacts, statues, and the most exclusive information of history ever collected. The truth of religion and the world lie in those rooms. We went past three rooms which were totally filled. The next three were empty, but the last room that we came upon appeared to be the room where the fire had started.

Archbishop Rosenhausen stopped and explained to us how the fire had started. “An older priest in charge of labeling everything in the room had suffered a stroke and the candle holder that he carried for light spilled on his robes setting him on fire.

We are very lucky that another priest had been looking his way, if not the damage would have been far worse,” said the archbishop.

“What happened to everything in the room?” asked Gus.

“We transported everything out of these rooms to another safe room down this hall,” Archbishop Rosenhausen said as he walked toward an opening.

What he called a hall, I thought was more like a tunnel leading to another cave, where there were eight more rooms which were clearly much newer and twice as big as the others.

“Please tell me this is not the place where you have my statue?” asked Gus.

“This is precisely the place,” replied the archbishop.

The rooms were cluttered with not a single thing in order. Many documents were stacked one on top of the other and many statues were leaning up against each other.

“How are we supposed to look through these rooms, when everything is piled up on top of each other? Gus asked.

“What we are going to do,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen “is to have eight men move the contents of each filled room into the other empty rooms, setting everything up as it should be with labels and in categorical placement.”

“Do you have any idea how long this is going to take?” asked Gus.

“His Holiness will be back in three days. You asked me what you can do for three days—well, here it is,” was the archbishops reply.

Gus was visibly upset but I felt like a boy in a candy store.

“Gus,” I said, “for the sake of the statue, I say we give it a try.”

Gus began walking and looking through the glass at the three rooms that were loaded with everything, hoping to get a glimpse of his statue.

“Nothing,” he said, as he put his bag down on the ground and walked over to Archbishop Rosenhausen. The Swiss Guards moved closer to the archbishop.

“You want this done then it will be done my way. What I say goes and if I have a problem with anyone, they go. Do you understand?” said Gus.

“That will not be a problem. Is there anything else that you will need? The archbishop asked.

“A couple more men,” said Gus.

“No problem,” said the archbishop as he spoke to one of the monks who then walked away. “I will leave you then. Will you be coming up to eat, or shall I have someone bring your meals down to you?” asked the archbishop.

“Have them bring it down,” said Gus. “The faster we get this done, the better it is for all of us.”

Archbishop Rosenhausen left with the two Swiss guardsmen.

Gus started surveying the area. He explained that he was looking for a way to contain the statue just in case of a breakout. I was also trying to figure out a way, but everywhere we looked there was always a way out through the back, where we couldn't reach. Stepping on such valuable artifacts and writings just wasn't an option. Especially if we were to break a statue, Gus' statue, in the process.

The rest of the monks started coming in and four priests walked in with heavy bags containing labels and classification documents. Two more monks walked in with a medium sized table and two chairs. They put them by the last glass room.

One of the priests introduced us to the rest of the group as each one said their name, although Gus had no interest in learning them.

“I will be telling you what to pick up and when to pick it up, do you understand?” Gus said. “Then you will take whatever it is to the last room, allow the priest to label it, or whatever it is they plan on doing. You will come back, and we will start all over again.”

After a couple of hours, Gus was able to tell, which one of the monks could lift more than others and which monks were faster in transporting the thousand plus artifacts that laid all over the floor.

Gus and I couldn't believe the way they had no concern in transporting all these valuable pieces.

Ten hours into it and less than half the room had been emptied, and there was still no sign of the statue we sought. The monks all worked extremely well without any complaints at all. Eighteen hours, and we

finally were able to complete the first room. Gus and I tried to look for the statue through the glass that showed a side view of the next room, but we couldn't see even a toe.

"That will be enough for today," said Gus, and all the men seemed relieved. We headed out the same way we had entered, this time going through the Sistine Chapel slowly admiring all that our eyes could take in. Gus laughed when I asked him if he was looking at or painting the chapel at the same time.

We both laughed as we went through the Borgia Courtyard, but then Gus noticed someone following us. We entered the Borgia Apartments, and I kept walking toward our room as Gus hid behind a doorway. When I got to the room, I went to close the door and looked back and saw Gus carrying a small man. Gus had his hand covering the man's face and the man was suspended in air. I quickly opened the door to the room to let Gus in.

"Who are you?" asked Gus, "and don't try to make any noise. These hands can cover your face and crack your skull like a nut if I wished them to. Do you understand?"

The man nodded his head up and down, so Gus took his hand off his face.

"Who are you?" Gus asked again and I noticed that the man had a tattoo of a sword on the inside of his left wrist.

"I have been sent to follow you," the man said.

"By whom?" asked Gus.

"I am a priest, with full access to the Vatican. My name is Father Montoya. I've been sent to follow you and check on your progress here at the Vatican."

"Who sent you?" asked Gus again.

"I will get to that in a minute. You both have got to be very careful with the situation that you've been brought into. There are a lot of things that aren't the way they seem," said Father Montoya.

"Gus," I said, "he has a tattoo of a sword on his left wrist."

Gus grabbed Father Montoya's arm and turned it to see his wrist. "What is this tattoo about," asked Gus. "Through my many years, I've only seen one other, exactly like this one and that was many years ago.

"Who?" I asked

"Monsignor Luigi," said Gus.

"Cardinal Luigi," said Father Montoya. "He was one of the founding priests who started our group. So, the legend is true; you really don't age."

"What do you know of my aging? You better start giving us some more information or squeezing your head like a nut will not be the first thing that will cause you pain," said Gus.

"Please, understand," said Father Montoya. "I am on your side to protect those who live to fight against the evil entities that escape in our world.

"I was sent by my group—we're known as La Espada de Vida, the sword of life—to watch over you, so that no harm may come to you," said Father Montoya. "We have been watching over you since you contained Monstri Rocknia. When Cardinal Luigi died, one of his apprentice priests was working for the Vatican to spy on his writings about the containment of evil entities. He stole our cardinal's writings and brought them to the Vatican. That is how Archbishop Rosenhausen was able to know so much about both of you...not to mention the spying that has been going on for years.

We have been trying to figure out what kind of game Archbishop Rosenhausen is trying to play here. He belongs to a secret society known as The Ganadores de la Vida, the winners of life. Their entire function is to take over the Catholic Church. Many think that they will succeed this next time around. It is said that they have already picked their Pope's name, it is Pope Pius X.

They have placed different people in all kinds of levels here in the Vatican. You never know who it is that you can trust, so please be careful."

I sat on the bed, trying to take in all that had been said in the last couple of minutes.

Gus found it bit strange and said out loud, scaring Father Montoya, “How do we know that you aren’t the one, or that your secret society is not part of the evil group?”

“There are few of us in the quest to help you protect the statue, but there are many who are part of the Ganadores de la Vida. Do not trust anyone unless I tell you that they are safe. Trust me. You knew Cardinal Luigi, and he cared greatly for both of you,” said Father Montoya.

“How do we know that what you say is true?” asked Gus.

“The tattoo is real. Do you think I would have this sword on my wrist if I weren’t part of La Espada De Vida? You, yourself said that Monsignor Luigi was the only person you’ve seen with such a tattoo,” responded Father Montoya.

“Okay, so what do you think is going on? We have emptied one of the glass safe rooms and we have two more to empty out,” said Gus.

“Go ahead and see if you can find your statue or the file which has all the writings of our Cardinal Luigi. If you find Cardinal Luigi’s journals, try for the sake of what we have all believed in both of you to find a way of taking them from the hands of the Ganadores de la Vida.

Trust me my friends, we have a lot of enemies here. Don’t get me wrong; There is more good in the Vatican, but evil lurks around every other corner,” said Father Montoya. “I have got to leave before they station someone down the hall to keep an eye on your every move.”

“How will we get in touch with you?” asked Gus.

“Don’t worry. I will get in touch with you,” said Father Montoya as he left the room.

Both Gus and I lay in our beds deep in thought for a good while.

“What do you think?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” said Gus. “Now you know why I don’t have the Vatican on a pedestal as I did when I was a young priest. When politics and greed take over anything, it all turns to no good.” “What are we going to do?” I asked. “Nothing right now, we sleep, and in the morning, we will figure everything out as we go along. Remember what I told you a long time ago—the good Lord will provide for us and show us the way to the truth,” said Gus.

“I think we can trust Father Montoya,” I said. “He seemed to be an honest and caring man.”

“We will see,” said Gus. “We will see.”

That night sleep didn’t come easy for either one of us, especially for me.

Next morning when Father Blanco knocked on the door, Gus jumped out of bed and opened it.

“Good morning, Father Blanco,” he said.

“He is waiting for you in the gazebo by the gardens,” said Father Blanco.

“Who is waiting for us?” asked Gus.

“Archbishop Rosenhausen,” said Father Blanco. “Do you need me to take you?”

“We can make it there just fine, thank you,” answered Gus.

“Good day then,” said Father Blanco.

Gus and I got up and washed, then headed to the gazebo where Archbishop Rosenhausen, his apprentice priest and the same two Swiss guards waited, in the same spots as yesterday. Gus looked at me and asked if I thought that maybe the Swiss guards have a mark on the floor to indicate how far they need to be from the archbishop. I just looked at Gus and he started laughing, lowly to himself.

As we approached the gazebo, Archbishop Rosenhausen asked us what was so funny.

“Oh, nothing,” said Gus. “What is this meeting all about?”

“First, would you like something to eat?” asked Archbishop Rosenhausen.

“Not just yet,” said Gus, as we sat down.

“As you wish,” said the archbishop. “Did you come upon anything yesterday in the first safe room?”

“Nothing of interest,” said Gus.

“We will meet every morning. Tell one of the priests that are labeling everything to come and get me if anything of importance comes up,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen.

“As you wish,” said Gus, as he grabbed three pastries and walked off. I stood and grabbed two pastries. As I turned, Archbishop Rosenhausen grabbed my arm and said, “You don’t have to be like Gus.” I pulled away and said, “We are one and the same; don’t ever doubt that.”

I finally spotted Gus walking through the Borgia Courtyard. As I approached, Gus asked, “What did he say after I left?”

“He told me that I don’t have to be like you.”

“There they go again trying to find a weak link, to control. They will never change,” said Gus. “What did you respond with?”

I told him, “That we are one and the same and not to forget it.”

Gus laughed out loud, and I laughed along with him.

We entered the Sistine Chapel and headed for the door that led us to the underground of the Vatican. When we arrived at the door, there was a Swiss guard in front of it.

“Are you ready?” asked the guard. “Yes,” was the reply, and he opened the door and followed us all the way through the first holding room area, down the hall to the second holding room.

All the men from the previous day were there, ready for orders. Gus had everyone back to work within minutes, both of us looking at everything that was taken out of the room. We were really keeping our eyes out for the writings of Monsignor, Cardinal Luigi.

A full sixteen hours had passed, and the room was just about empty. Gus told me to keep an eye on everything as he spent time looking through the glass to the other safe room. There was still no sign of the statue. Gus stepped out of the two doors to the holding room and stood there looking over to the priests who were labeling and categorizing everything, when a sound behind him got his attention.

Gus looked and started walking toward another opening that led out toward another area. He looked back to see if anyone was following him, as he went through the opening, walking fast. Later he told me that when

he arrived at the other side, the opening was much smaller than the previous two. There was a glass holding room, but even bigger than any of the others, twice as big as the first one. The glass had sheets draped against them so he could barely see what was in the glass. He started getting closer when he heard the two doors to the big glass holding room open. He hid against the cave wall, bending down so that they could not see him, whoever they were.

He heard someone talking and instantly he recognized the voice. Archbishop Rosenhausen was walking out with four others, two cardinals and another archbishop, as Gus could tell by the color of their robes. The last was the same priest who had been with Archbishop Rosenhausen earlier at the gazebo.

They walked out the doors and the priest locked them with a key that he pulled from under his robe. As they walked away from Gus down a path, Gus heard some commotion coming from the opening from which he had just come, and he started heading back.

When he got to the opening, Gus looked and noticed that no one was looking his way, as all who had been working were facing the priest at the second to the end holding room. Gus walked over and asked what was going on.

“Where have you been?” asked one of the priests.

“That is a question that you have no authority to be asking me,” said Gus. “What is going on?” Gus asked, looking at me.

“We found a leather-bound sleeve with Cardinal Luigi’s name on it, but with nothing inside of it, but blank pages. I brought it out when I saw the name. We looked inside to see what was in it and, as you now know, just paper. There is nothing left in the second safe,” I said and continued. “The monks and the priest started arguing about who touched it, and that is when the argument started.

“I will keep this and bring it to the attention of Archbishop Rosenhausen,” said Gus.

“You can not take anything out of this room,” said one of the priests.

“Are you going to try and stop me?” asked Gus.

“No, but you can destroy the documents, depending on how long they have been down here,” said the priest.

“What documents,” said Gus. “It’s paper with no writing on it.”

“That is true,” said the priest. “I guess it can’t do any serious harm.”

We all headed out of the tunnels and through the first caves to the steps that led to the Sistine Chapel. This time Gus was in a hurry; there was no time to admire the beauty of the Sistine Chapel. I suspected as much and walked quickly beside him. When we got to the Borgia Courtyard, everyone split up, leaving us by ourselves.

Gus walked over to a small concrete wall, as I followed.

“What’s, going on?” I asked. “You are acting a bit strange.”

“When we were finishing up the second safe room, I heard something coming from another cave, the one that’s to the right when we enter the second area,” said Gus. “I followed it to the next big cave, not as big as the first two, but there is one big glass safe room, and I witnessed Archbishop Rosenhausen with four others walking out.”

“Could you see what was in it?” I asked.

“No,” said Gus. “The glass was covered with white sheets.”

“What do you think might be in the safe room?” I asked.

“I don’t know, but we have got to find out. When I told you to take over, I looked through the glass and I will bet my life that I saw enough to know that my statue is not in the third safe room. We have this leather binder now with only blank paper. Something is wrong here. I would really like to find Father Montoya. There are a lot of questions we need answered,” Gus said, with a stern look.

Gus and I started heading back to the Borgia Apartments, and Gus kept looking around for any sign of Father Montoya. When we finally got to our rooms, we put our bags under our beds and sat down. We didn’t speak a word for a long while.

Gus finally broke the silence.

“Tomorrow the Pope is supposed to arrive and I’m beginning to think that we have been brought here for another reason than just to look for the statue and Monsignor Luigi’s journal.”

“I agree,” I said. “I am also getting a bad feeling about the statue we left behind at home.”

“We will be done with all of this tomorrow,” said Gus. “I am going to tell Archbishop Rosenhausen that I need four more men to help us finish the last room. Let’s get some sleep, we have a long day ahead of us tomorrow.”

The next morning, like clockwork, Father Blanco knocked on the door. Gus and I got up, grabbed our bags, and set out to wash ourselves. We then headed for the gazebo.

This time there were at least eight people standing around in the gazebo and six Swiss guardsmen placed around the area, including the same two guards from the previous day. As we got closer, we could see the reason for all the Swiss guards. The Pope was sitting in the same chair that Archbishop Rosenhausen had sat in the last two days.

Gus walked in front of me as we took the three steps up to the gazebo. Gus kneeled in front of Pope Leo XIII. His Holiness extended his hand and Gus kissed his ring. I followed and did the same.

“Your Holiness,” said Gus, “it is an honor to be in your presence. I know my apprentice and dear friend Roger, feels the same as I do.”

“I thank you both for coming, and I apologize for not being able to be here when you first arrived a couple of days ago,” said His Holiness.

“No apology needed,” said Gus.

The Pope asked everyone around him, including the Swiss Guard, to leave the gazebo so he could speak to us in private. He then asked us both to get a little closer to him so that we could hear him, so no one else could.

“I am very sick,” he said, “and I think I will be going to meet our Lord shortly. I have been informed of everything that you both have been able to do in your long lives, a gift from the Almighty. There are many in the Vatican who would like to know more of your powers of life and your powers to contain the evil entities. I am one who believes you both have been blessed by God himself. There are many in the Vatican who would like to see me die. Their agenda is something I don’t agree with. Are you following me?”

“Yes, we are,” said Gus as I nodded. “What can we do to help? Anything you ask of us, we are your servants, as you have been a great servant of our God.”

“I’ve been Pope now for twenty-five years and I am very old. Many around me think that I can’t see what’s really going on. There is a plot to try and take over the leadership of the Catholic Church. I know this and if it happens, I pray that you both will be safe. Your friend Monsignor Luigi was a dear member of my family. Gus, I think you may know, but if you don’t, my name before I chose Pope Leo XIII was Gioacchino Vincenzo Raffaele Luigi Pecci.

He was a great man of God and I know that there were times you and Cardinal Luigi didn’t get along, but I also know that there was much respect between the two of you. He taught you everything you needed to know about being a guardian of the statue, as you have since taught Roger. I know this because I read everything he wrote. Now I see that others in the Vatican have been informed about your special and God given powers.

As in everything in this world, there is good and evil in the Vatican. In the Vatican, we have those whose greed for power sometimes carries them away from the Lord or God’s teachings. You have many friends here in the Vatican. Make sure you choose the right ones. I am glad to have finally had the chance to meet you both. I am old and wish to be younger, to be able to stop some of the wrong in our Church. That I must leave for our next Pope. I pray for both of you to be able to continue your work.”

His Holiness looked at us and lift a little of his left sleeve, exposing his wrist. He also had a tattoo of a sword just like Monsignor Luigi’s and Father Montoya’s.

“Thank you, your Holiness,” said Gus and I in unison.

A commotion started at the far side of the garden as Archbishop Rosenhausen came walking over with everyone else who had moved away at the Pope’s earlier request.

“Your Holiness, why didn’t you wait for me. I sent a messenger that I would be here an hour later than planned,” said the archbishop.

“No need,” said His Holiness. “Our meeting is done.” He called for two priests to help him up. Before leaving, Pope Leo XIII made the sign

of the cross-facing Gus and me and said, “May the Lord always be with both of you.” He then turned and walked away, leaving only Gus, me, Archbishop Rosenhausen, his apprentice priest and two Swiss guardsmen.

“I am sorry for being late,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen. “May I ask, what I missed in the meeting with His Holiness?”

“It had nothing to do with you,” said Gus, as I nodded. The Pope was just talking about an old friend of both of ours whom we mutually knew, a very long time ago.” Archbishop Rosenhausen just stared at us for a couple of minutes without saying a word.

“How is the moving of the holding rooms going,” asked Archbishop Rosenhausen. “I heard you found something and were asked not to take it out of the area.”

“About that,” said Gus, “No one, including you, said anything to me about not being allowed to bring anything out of the safe rooms. My job here is to find the journal of Monsignor Luigi and my statue.

This is what we found in the safe room,” he continued, as he reached in his bag and pulled out Monsignor Luigi’s journal with nothing but worthless blank paper.

Archbishop Rosenhausen opened the journal and gently put the paper on the table and looked through them. Seeing no writing, he responded, “There has to be another binder with his name on it.”

“I would hope so,” said Gus, “as you, yourself has told us that you read everything that Monsignor Luigi had written. Was this part of your research, or is this new?”

“I have never seen this binder, and someone must have put these blank papers in here,” said The Archbishop.

“I don’t really care about the binder and the writings, so to speak. My main concern is the statue, and from what I was able to see from the side of the holding room, it is almost impossible for it to be in there,” said Gus and continued.

“I request another four men to help with the transfer of the last safe room. I will not spend another sixteen to eighteen hours transferring things that have nothing to do with my being here.”

Gus and I stood up. “Too much time has been wasted already please see that I get the four men needed to finish the last safe room.”

“Can you take this back to the safe room?” asked Archbishop Rosenhausen with his arms stretched out, with the journal in his hands.

Gus reached over, getting a little closer than the archbishop would have expected and whispered, “I don’t know what kind of game is going on in the Vatican, but I want you to be aware that Roger and I have been blessed by the Lord our God. You do not want to see what we can start. A nightmare would be a light description.”

Gus turned and walked away headed for the Sistine Chapel. I looked over at Gus as he was talking to himself. I asked him what he told the archbishop. He told me as we both started walking faster through the Borgia courtyard. As we continued, not a word was spoken as we realized that we really didn’t want to get to the point of having an all-out war in the Vatican.

We entered the Sistine Chapel and were in the second cave within minutes. All the men were there from the previous day, with four more men.

With the help of the other men, we were able to finish emptying the last room in seven and a half hours. Gus was very upset at the outcome and mad couldn’t begin to describe his demeanor. I had never seen him in that state. His statue was not there or in any of the other three holding rooms. The journals of Monsignor Luigi were also missing. Gus looked over at me and said, “They’ve been playing a game here with us. Archbishop Rosenhausen knew that the statue and the journals of Cardinal Luigi were never in these safe rooms.”

As the last piece was recorded, the priests stood up with their logbook of all that was in the three holding rooms and headed toward the opening, and the others followed. Gus and I stood there as they walked away out of sight.

“Come on,” said Gus, as he led me to the third cave where he had seen Archbishop Rosenhausen the day before.

We headed through the man-made hall that led to the opening. This time, though, there wasn’t a sound. As we approached the opening, Gus peeked to see if anyone was present.

There was not a soul insight, but the glass safe room had lights inside, exposing a silhouette of what Gus new immediately was his statue. The sheets covering the glass had the Latin writing in blood, something Gus had not noticed the day before, due to the poor lighting.

Gus pointed at the statue and told me that it was his statue. We walked down three flights of concrete stairs without rails and arrived in front of the two big doors that were locked. Gus took out a set of locksmith's tools and picked the lock within seconds.

We entered the room. The walls were covered from the back to halfway to the front with the white sheets. We walked through a gap in the sheets that were in front of us, finally looking directly at Gus' statue—an amazing creation of a man with a long robe and a sword in his right hand. The tip of the sword touched the ground. It appeared so life like, that even I became nervous.

I looked at Gus and said, “What do you think they are doing here? Why do you think Archbishop Rosenhausen made us go through the three safe rooms if he knew that the statue was already here?”

“I haven't figured it out yet,” said Gus, “but we will soon find out.”

He started walking toward a table were he instantly realized that Monsignor Luigi's journals were all three stacked one on top of the other, the dates were from his earliest writing to his death.

Gus sat in the chair that had been there next to the table. I came over and we started to go through the journals. Gus found many dates that by reading the information he could tell that Monsignor Luigi wrote everything in detail. After what seemed like a couple of hours of looking over the journals, we heard a sound coming through the two doors. Gus and I put the journals exactly how we had found them.

We ran for the doors, closed them behind us, and headed as fast as we could up the three flights of stairs with no rails and hid in the tunnel. Gus got down low and peeked over as he saw Archbishop Rosenhausen and three other priests walk to the double doors. Again, Archbishop Rosenhausen's apprentice reached under his robe and stuck the key in the lock and turned to open it. The expression on his face, even from a distance, was one of confusion, although he proceeded to open the doors. They walked in the safe room as Gus and I were both peeking around the wall. The priest and the archbishop walked in, then walked out within

minutes. They locked the door and walked off in the same direction that they had come.

Gus and I headed for the Sistine Chapel. As we walked up the three flights of stairs, the door opened from the Sistine Chapel causing Gus and I to stop in our tracks. “Father Montoya,” said Gus as we saw him walking toward us.

“I am so glad I have found you both. There is much I need to tell you, but this is not a safe place. Go to your rooms and wash up. After your supper I will meet you at the Borgia Courtyard. If Archbishop Rosenhausen calls for you, try to delay your meeting with him until I speak with both of you first,” said Father Montoya who then walked around us and continued down the stairs. Within seconds he was gone.

Gus and I walked quickly through the Sistine Chapel, then the Borgia Courtyard and as we entered the Borgia Apartments, Father Blanco came walking over to us.

“We have been waiting for you,” said Father Blanco.

“Why?” asked Gus.

“Archbishop Rosenhausen and a group of several clergymen are going to be having a meeting within the hour. Archbishop Rosenhausen wanted to meet with both of you before the meeting,” said Father Blanco.

“Where is the archbishop?” asked Gus.

“He’s at the gazebo in the garden area,” said Father Blanco.

“We will wash up and you can tell Archbishop Rosenhausen that we will be there shortly,” Gus told him.

We headed to the washroom with our bags in hand.

“What are we going to do?” I asked.

“Well,” said Gus “I think we really don’t have much of a choice but to meet Archbishop Rosenhausen at the gazebo.”

“So, what are we going to do about Father Montoya?” I asked.

“We will have to catch up to him later,” said Gus. “We will be able to handle anything thrown at us Roger; don’t worry.”

When we finished cleaning up, we walked toward the garden, where Archbishop Rosenhausen had been waiting at the gazebo.

“Sit,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen as we walked the three steps up, unto the gazebo.

“Where have you both been?” asked the archbishop. “The men had all been finished with the safe rooms for over a couple of hours.”

“Don’t take this wrong, but do we have to tell you all that we do?” asked Gus. “I thought we were guests at the Vatican not prisoners.”

Archbishop Rosenhausen had a strange look on his face then said, “Of course, you are guests here.”

“Archbishop Rosenhausen, can we stop this game that you are playing?” said Gus. “For once tell us the truth, of why we are here and how can a man of the cloth lie so easily.”

“I have not lied,” said the archbishop. “Your job was to search the three safe rooms. To make sure that there was nothing missing that would have anything to do with Cardinal Luigi’s factual information in his journal.”

“You are trying to tell me that we were sent here just to look through those safe rooms?” Gus said as he stood up and grabbed his bag. Then he looked over at me, standing there with my bag in hand.

“No, no,” said the archbishop, “your reason for being here is much more important than that. You said you had nothing to do till the Pope arrived, so I thought it would keep you busy going through the holding rooms and I thank you for doing such an efficient job. Not a thing was damaged.

Something you don’t know,” he continued as he pointed to the chairs for us to sit down, “is that our Pope Leo XIII is very sick, and the doctors have left it in God’s hands. You’re meeting with him was the last time he has spoken to anyone. He went directly to his room and was helped to bed, where he has been in a deep sleep ever since.

“We have your statue and all the journals that Cardinal Luigi wrote. They are in a holding room safer than any other in our underground. There was a meeting that we were going to be having in less than an hour. Now since the Pope has gone downhill so quickly, the Board of Cardinals are having a meeting of their own to see if we are going to

continue with our previous plans or wait to see how His Holiness will make out.”

“What previous plans are those?” asked Gus.

“We will discuss them as soon as the Board of Cardinals give me the right to do so,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen.

“We have our horses at the stables on the other side of the Bridge of Angels. We will need to go there and tell the keeper that we will be staying a couple of more days,” said Gus.

“That has already been taken care of,” said the archbishop. “Your horses have already been taken to the Vatican stable master.

I have got to go. Please be patient with our situation. I will get back to you as soon as I know anything further,” said the archbishop.

Archbishop Rosenhausen was helped up by his apprentice and the Swiss guardsmen walked one in front and one behind.

When they were out of sight, I looked at Gus and asked, “What in the world was that all about?”

“That is what the Vatican is all about; nothing is done quickly; everything has its time,” said Gus.

“So, what are we going to do now?” I asked.

“Well, we’re going to be getting our supper and then we are going to meet up with Father Montoya at the Borgia Courtyard.”

FOUR

When Gus and I were done eating we walked outside and the commotion going on was chaotic. As I looked up at the smoke coming out of St. Peter's Basilica, I new what was happening. Gus looked up and saw the smoke, he too new, that His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII was no longer amongst the living. We kneeled and each said a private prayer.

We continued walking through the Borgia Courtyard and could see Father Montoya walking quickly toward us.

"Do you know what has happened?" asked Father Montoya.

"Yes," said Gus.

"We have to move quickly; follow me," said Father Montoya. He took us through the courtyard and quickly through the Sistine Chapel, but instead of going to the door on the right in the back, we headed to the left where he lifted a rug, exposing a wooden floor, about four feet by six feet wide.

"Help me, please?" said Father Montoya as they proceeded to lift one side, exposing a different stairway, much steeper than the other. Father Montoya started down the stairs as we followed. I shut the door as I was the last to go down. We proceeded down the steps, and I asked, "Won't someone see the wooden door?"

"No," said Father Montoya, "the rug is clipped on one side covering the hole."

We descended to what seemed like two to three stories into the underground, when we came to an opening that was set up like an old meeting room. Father Montoya lit a lantern as he entered. There were eight chairs, a table that had to be as old, if not older then Gus. The smell

of old furnisher and the custom cabinets on the walls appeared as if they were built in the wall itself.

Father Montoya headed to one of the cabinets and opened it, exposing all kinds of bound leather bags and religious relics. Gus and I were looking around as Father Montoya laid down a leather-bound bag, like the one Monsignor Luigi had used.

He carefully laid down animal skin paper with writing in Latin. We could see that these documents were much older than those that Monsignor Luigi had written. There were tabs on different pages. Father Montoya started to open the first tab. Then he sat down as Gus, and I looked over his shoulders.

“This is the reason you both were brought here to the Vatican. These are the writings of a nameless person that were found during the search for the Holy Grail. They were the teachings that, Cardinal Luigi was able to study to learn how to contain the evil entities.

Archbishop Rosenhausen was able to find other teachings from the same person in the archives. That is why we think the fire in the safe rooms was intentional to make sure that there were no other writings about the containment of evil entities. From what our inside person has told us, they want to allow the entity in your statue to be set free. You see the other writings have the formula and details on how to send the entity’s straight to hell,” said Father Montoya.

When he finished speaking, Father Montoya stood up and slid the papers gently to the chair next to him. He went back to the cabinet and pulled out two more binders made of leather like the rest. He opened them and set them down next to the papers on the table.

“Please sit, go through the papers gently not to tear them and see if you can find anything referring to the containment or destroying of evil entities,” he said.

We spent many hours looking through them and every time we thought we had found something detailing the destruction of the entity’s turned out to be a dead end.

I started looking at Gus as Father Montoya walked over and started putting the leather binders away. Gus looked at me and asked, “What’s wrong?”

“I just realized something old friend, if they destroy the statue, then your life would end,” I said.

Father Montoya turned and said, “It won’t just end, but you will begin to age, two years to everyone, if I’m not mistaken.”

“Yes,” said Gus, “two, to one is the formula, from what Monsignor Luigi taught me.”

“What are we going to do?” I asked. “We can’t allow them to destroy the statue.”

“How long did you want to live?” asked Gus as I looked down, not really knowing how to answer what Gus had just asked to me.

“I really never thought about us dying anymore; we have been around for so long now,” I said.

“True my friend, remember two to every one year is still quite a long time,” said Gus.

There was silence in the room until Father Montoya spoke, “I know that they have the information on sending the entity’s back into Hell. I’ve got to find a way of getting it from the archbishop. You see he wants this to be watched and learned by different priests. We believe that only God can give the power of containment and to destroy an evil entity. They apparently believe that it can also be a God given power, if not they would have had no use in having both of you present.”

We must get back upstairs. The cardinals should be done with their meeting; that would mean that Archbishop Rosenhausen will soon be looking for both of you.”

“That’s right,” said Gus, as we started up the stairs with Father Montoya leading the way. When we got to the top of the stairs, Father Montoya stopped and opened a box on the wall to the left of the stairs that neither I nor Gus had noticed.

He opened it and attached what was inside to a pipe on the side of the wall, putting his eye to it, turning it with his hands. I couldn’t see what he was doing so I asked Gus what was going on. Father Montoya heard and explained, “This is how we know that no one is on the other side of our hidden door. You see, this is an eye piece reflected to three other pieces of glass mirrors positioned in the tubing, allowing us to see the outside and if you turn the eye piece you get a full view of the room.”

When we finally went out, we closed the hidden door, and suddenly heard noises of people talking. Father Montoya said that he would meet up with us later and he went out the door on the right and headed for the safe rooms.

Gus and I walked through the Sistine Chapel and noticed the talking was from a couple of priests discussing the death of Pope Leo XIII as we walked by, the priests were quiet. Coming out of the Sistine Chapel, Father Blanco was walking at a quick pace toward us.

“We have again been looking for you. Archbishop Rosenhausen has been waiting for both of you in the gazebo, for almost an hour.”

“We will go and meet him now,” said Gus.

Father Blanco led the way as Gus, and I followed him to the Gazebo.

This time, though, the gazebo was set up as a meeting area, with six chairs on one side and two on the other. Three cardinals and one other Archbishop were sitting next to Archbishop Rosenhausen, as the archbishop’s apprentice sat at the end. There were at least eight Swiss guards and six Vatican guardsmen.

Gus and I sat down as Archbishop Rosenhausen made the introductions. “We have a major situation with the death of Pope Leo XIII; we have decided to postpone our mission pertaining to the statue until His Holiness is laid to rest and we elect a new Pope. I think you can understand why we would like to take care of this situation first.”

“I do understand,” said Gus, “but when are you going to tell us exactly what your plans are for my statue, and don’t doubt at any point that it is my statue.”

“We don’t doubt that for a second,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen. “We do know that we are only holding it for protection. You may stay in the Vatican if you wish, or we will send for you when we are ready, then you will learn everything in detail. The process to vote for another Pope could take some time. The decision is yours?”

Gus looked at me and said, “We will head home, and as the Lord is my witness, if for any reason something is to go wrong, everyone, and I do mean everyone, involved will answer to the wrath of God. Don’t think for a second that I am kidding.”

Gus looked sternly at everyone under the gazebo, grabbed his bag, looked my way, and we both slowly walked away.

As we left, we heard the cardinal in the middle, behind Archbishop Rosenhausen, who was the cardinal whom the archbishop was hoping would become the next Pope asked, "Is this man, Gus, is he going to be a problem?"

"No," said Archbishop Rosenhausen, "I will be able to control him and his apprentice; you leave that to me. Now let's get back to taking back the Papacy."

Gus and I were on our way to the Vatican stable house, to retrieve our horses and start the journey back home. When we arrived, the stable master greeted us and was making comments about our horses, more so about a possible breeding of our male horses with his prized female horse.

Both Gus and I laughed, and Gus said, "If there was time maybe, but for now, we are in a hurry."

"Please think about it," said the stable master. "You must see my mare on your next visit."

"Thank you," said Gus, "and what do we owe you?"

"Not a thing," said the stable master. "You were both guests of the Vatican."

"Thank you again," I said as we started to walk our horses, for riding a horse through the Vatican was not permitted.

Just before we were about to cross the Bridge of Angels, a man in monk's robes came quickly toward us. We stopped.

"Can we help you?" asked Gus. As he lowered his hood, we could see that it was Father Montoya.

"I am so glad that I was able to see you before you left," he said. "I heard that they are going to wait until after a new Pope is voted in by the conclave of cardinals. I will be sending you a messenger with any updates on the proceedings dealing with the Papal election. This is going to be a very trying time for the church. Did Archbishop Rosenhausen tell you anything about the destruction of the entities?"

“No,” said Gus, “he just told us that he would call on us when everything is stable, and a new Pope is chosen.”

“I see. Ride safe and we will be in touch. For the love of our church, let’s hope that Pope Leo XIII's Secretary of State, Cardinal Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro becomes our next Pope. Again, I say ride with God,” said Father Montoya, as he walked away.

Gus and I continued walking our horses until we got to the other side of The Bridge of Angels. As we mounted, I looked at Gus and said, “It feels good to be heading back home.”

“Yes, my friend, it does,” answered Gus.

We rode for many hours in the dark. As daylight was coming out of the east, we stopped at an inn to rest, taking care of our horses first. We rested till early the next morning and headed out, arriving home late in the evening, both very tired from our trip. The four monks that took care of our house came out and took care of the horses, as Gus and I headed toward the basement.

When we arrived, we could see that the lock and chains were still in place. Gus took his key out of his bag and opened it and I followed. We walked down the steps then lit a lantern. We noticed that everything had been left as before our trip to the Vatican. Gus looked over at me and said, “Are you a little more relieved now?”

“Yes, my friend, I am.”

We walked out of the basement locking it up and headed to our rooms to sleep. A long sleep we both needed, and we woke late the next morning. We went downstairs for our morning meal, and our eldest monk Dani approached us at the dinning table and told us that there had been four priests and fourteen guards camped out on the hill, to the right of the property. They had arrived hours after Gus, and I had left eight days before.

Gus called a meeting with all four monks. “Have any of you had any contact with the priests or the guards that were on the hill on the right of our property?” he asked.

Our monk Lorenzo said, “Yes. I had gone there to ask the purpose for them being there and I was told that it was Vatican business, so I left them alone.”

“When did they leave?” asked Gus.

“Yesterday,” said Lorenzo.

“And which way did they head?” asked Gus.

“Towards the southeast,” said Lorenzo.

“Just like I thought,” said Gus.

” What do you mean?” I asked.

“Please leave us for now and thank you for your help,” said Gus looking at all four monks. Gus gestured for me to follow him outside, and we walked past the pole barn near the hill where the Vatican priest and guards had been camped.

“What is going on?” I asked.

“The men went southeast, and the Vatican is north of here; does that tell you something?”

I stood there thinking to myself then I turned and looked at Gus who asked, “What are you thinking?”

“They went southeast waiting for orders to come back and watch over the statue when we get called back to the Vatican.”

“The Vatican has had their eyes on us for a very long time. We need to get our lives back in order; we still must make the statues of the children playing for that company in America.”

“Yes,” I said, “it has been a little hectic lately. A little normality would be good for both of us.”

“Yes,” said Gus, “but keep your eyes wide open.”

Three days went by, and everything was back to normal. Gus and I were working on the statues for our American customer, when one of the monks walked over with a priest from the Vatican.

“My name is Father Demetri,” he said. “Father Montoya sent me to give you an update. There is a lot of politicizing in the Vatican right now and your statue is fine. He will be sending someone every three to five days, with what’s going on in the Vatican. I must also warn you that there are many watching your every move, so keep your eyes open.”

“We have realized the situation,” said Gus, “and please tell Father Montoya that a group of four priests and many guards were on the hill from the day that we left for the Vatican until the day we returned.

We thank you for your time and would you like to stay the night?” I offered. “We have plenty of room.”

“Thank you, but I must get back to the Vatican. I think you can understand.”

“Forgive us,” said Gus “we understand.”

As he walked away, I looked over at Gus and said, “That was a lot sooner than I expected they would be here.”

“Remember my friend, he came with two others on a train, which only takes hours, not days as we did with our horses,” said Gus.

Eight days passed and Gus and I were both starting to get a little nervous with no priest coming for an update from the Vatican. We thanked God for our work on the statues that kept us busy through the long days.

On the eighth day, one of the monks that worked for us came walking over toward the pole barn and both Gus and I stopped what we were doing. Right behind him came Father Demetri with another priest behind him. By the robes the priest was wearing we could tell that it was an archbishop.

Father Lorenzo introduced him as Archbishop Alberto Cuartas, one of the highest-ranking archbishops in the Vatican. Gus and I were covered with dust from the statues of the children that we were sculpting.

“Please give us a couple of minutes to clean up and we will talk on our porch on the back of the house,” said Gus.

“That will be fine,” said the archbishop, as Gus and I led them to the porch and Gus barked out orders to the monks, who all were present.

Gus and I went inside the house and cleaned up and with in minutes we were both out on the porch with the group of priests. Some were drinking coffee and eating pastries, some drinking wine.

“We have been very worried with the situation in the Vatican,” said Gus as he looked at Archbishop Alberto Cuartas. “I hope everything is fine.”

“There is a lot to tell. That’s why I chose myself, to come and tell you personally,” said the archbishop.

“You see the conclave convened to elect a new Pope on the first of August. The favorite, if I’m not mistaken Father Montoya told you, was the Secretary of State, Cardinal Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro. You see on the first ballot, Cardinal Rampolla received twenty-four votes, Cardinal Gotti had seventeen votes, and Cardinal Sarto five votes. On the second ballot, Rampolla had gained five votes, as did Cardinal Sarto.

“Now the next day, it seemed that Rampolla would be elected. However, the veto against Rampolla’s nomination, by Polish Cardinal Jan Puzyna from Cracow, in the name of Emperor Frances Joseph of Austria-Hungary, was announced. Many among the conclave, including Rampolla, protested the veto, and many believed that he should be elected Pope despite the veto.

Now the third vote had already begun, and thus the conclave had to continue with the voting, which again resulted in no clear winner, but it did indicate that many of the conclave had been turning their support to Sarto, who at that time had twenty-one votes. Is everyone following along?” asked Archbishop Alberto Cuartas, as everyone nodded their heads in agreement.

“The fourth vote showed Cardinal Rampolla with thirty votes and Cardinal Sarto with twenty-four. At this time, it seemed very clear that the movement had been pushed toward Cardinal Sarto.

Now what you both don’t know,” continued Archbishop Alberto Cuartas, “is that one of the cardinals at your meeting with Archbishop Rosenhausen in the gazebo, the cardinal in the middle seat, was none other than Cardinal Sarto.

We are waiting now for the fifth vote, which will be taking place tomorrow morning. We will have news of the result within hours after the vote. I ask though, do you have room for the group of six that we brought with us. If not, we will stay in town.”

Gus laughed a hearty laugh that made everyone settle down in those trying times. Even the archbishop joined in the laughter as did everyone else.

“We have more than enough room,” said Gus, who suddenly stood, talking to his eldest monk Dani, and giving him exact orders of what he

wanted done. The monks brought out all kinds of food within hours and Archbishop Cuartas asked Gus and me if we would mind going for a walk.

“It would be an honor,” I said, and Gus agreed. As we started walking, two Swiss guardsmen followed twenty paces behind us.

“Where is the hill where the priests and the Swiss guardsmen stayed during your trip to the Vatican?” asked the archbishop.

“This way,” said Gus.

As we walked to the top of the hill, Archbishop Cuartas said, “Very close as always. A perfect view of the surroundings, now in my younger days, I took part in changing many ways of keeping things under control.”

“Control,” said Gus, “or spying on others?”

“Both are the same, I guess,” said Archbishop Cuartas. “The Vatican must keep tabs on everything around them. If not, how can we survive as the leader in religion? There are many religious groups out there in the world that would love to see us fail, but our God is strong. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” said Gus as did I, “but where did the group that watched over our house go, when we got back?” asked Gus.

“They went ten miles southeast, but I made sure that they went even further, so that my coming here was not noticed by their watchmen,” said the archbishop.

“Many in the Vatican,” said Archbishop Cuartas, “would love to spend time with both of you, asking you questions about your gift from God, to being alive as one of the guardians of the statues. I believe that only the Lord our God should know what you know.

Now my reason for our walk is so that you both can understand that there are many in the Vatican who would love to possess your powers; that is why they are going to try to kill off your statue Gus and find a way to control, Roger’s.

My fear is that there are those who have infiltrated our Catholic Church for their own religious interpretations and try to take over anything that would better themselves as a religious group. Now the

worst part in our Church is that there are those that are more interested in power than in getting closer to the Lord our God.

Which group is worse? We can flip a coin and whatever side it lands on would not make a difference on what group is worse for the Catholic Church.

I know that both of you are men of God, and I personally came here to meet you. Just from the little time that I've been here, I can feel in my heart that the Lord has blessed you both. I think anyone who comes near you, can sense the power of the Lord radiating around you.

Make sure that you know whom to believe, because there are many who will try and act as a friend for their own self interest. I hope you both can understand what I am saying.”

We assured him that we understood, and we headed back to the house.

FIVE

Next morning, everyone was up bright and early awaiting word from the Vatican about the fifth vote. It was near noon time when the messenger from the Vatican arrived.

“It is with a bruised heart that I tell you that the fifth vote of the conclave was taken, and the count had Rampolla with ten votes, Gotti with two votes and Sarto with fifty votes.

“Thus, on this day, August 4, 1903, Cardinal Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto was elected to the 257th Pontificate. His coronation will be on Sunday, August 9. He has chosen the name Pope Pius X. We would like that Gus and Roger accompany you back to the Vatican for the Coronation, signed, Father Montoya.”

“Will we be going?” I asked, looking directly at Gus.

“You have until tomorrow,” said Archbishop Cuartas, “we will be catching the early train into Rome.

I know that one of the first things on their agenda after the coronation will be to let out your statue and try to send it back to the depths of hell. I was also sent here to plead with you to come on behalf of our group,” said Archbishop Cuartas showing us his left wrist where he wore a sword tattoo, “to protect the dignity of the Church.”

Gus said he needed time to think about whether we would go with Archbishop Cuartas or go alone on horse back.

“The election of Pope Pius X does not make me very happy with our Vatican. He will be a fundamentally anti-modernist Pope, and he will be against democratic reforms and democratic institutions based on the idea that they threaten to give too many rights to others, weakening the powers of the Papacy,” said Gus.

“Well put,” said Archbishop Cuartas, “but now we need all the help we can to wield as much power as we can and prevent the Ganadores de la Vida from getting total rule over our Catholic Church. We pray that Pope Pius X is not a member of that group.”

Gus excused himself as did I. We started to walk toward the hill in the back of our property.

“What do you think?” I asked, “You know if they succeed in sending the entity back to hell, your aging process will start immediately.”

“Yes, my friend, but again, as I’ve told you many times before, I did not expect to live forever, and I have you to take care of me, as I get older.”

“That you can count on, my dear friend,” I said, and we both sat in silence for a couple of hours, deep in thought.

As the day went on, the Vatican group spent time watching Gus and I working on our statues, asking as few questions as possible about our lives. After supper, which was quite late due to our finishing off the last statue for the American company, which was to be shipped out the following day. Gus announced that we would be going to the Vatican with the group.

I had a very rough night sleeping, with so much on my mind, especially the possibility of losing my best friend, even though it would still be a long while, barring any serious illness.

The next morning everyone was ready and headed for the train station, a two-hour ride away. Two of our monks Jude and Niche accompanied us to return our carriage. The train was on time and Gus, and I had two bags each. The ride into Rome was just as fascinating as the horse back, ride just much faster.

Upon our arrival in Rome, there were more Swiss guards waiting not just for us but others who were coming in for the coronation of Pope Pius X. It made everyone a little uncomfortable.

Three carriages were called over by one of the Swiss guards, and we sat in the different carriages. As in one motion the carriages proceeded toward the Vatican. Everyone was admiring the beauty of Rome, and not a word was spoken until we arrived at the Vatican.

When we arrived, everyone went their separate ways and Father Blanco again walked Gus and me to our same room in the Borgia Apartments. After settling down in the room for awhile, we headed for the front of the Borgia apartments, hoping to be able to see Father Montoya.

When we arrived at the front of the hall where two doors were all that separated us from the outside, Father Blanco appeared out of nowhere and said that Archbishop Rosenhausen had asked for our presence at the Vatican Palace for supper.

When will that take place?" asked Gus.

"Within the next fifteen minutes," said Father Blanco.

"That's giving us very little notice," said Gus.

"Archbishop Rosenhausen also asked me to tell you that he apologizes for not giving more notice, but he was just told that you had arrived at the Vatican," said Father Blanco.

"We will go," said Gus, looking over at me.

"The Vatican Palace; there's a place I never thought we would visit," I said as Gus laughed at the expression on my face.

"Good," said Father Blanco, "please follow me."

We walked behind him through the two doors and into the outside air. When we had gone ten feet, there were two Swiss guards walking behind us, all three of us stopped.

"Can I help you," said Gus, to the two guards, with no response from either guard.

Father Blanco walked over to Gus and said, "They will go everywhere with you in the Vatican until the Pope's coronation. Every visitor will be escorted throughout the Vatican."

We continued walking across the Borgia Courtyard toward the Vatican Palace. Gus was visibly upset at having two guards following us around.

Entering the Vatican Palace stunned me. It was such a thing of beauty—the paintings, the marble walls, the detail in color schemes. It was an incredible sight to see. We were taken toward the back, where

there were two eight-foot wooden doors with the symbol of the Vatican on each door.

As we got closer to the doors, Father Blanco stopped, and the two Swiss guards opened the doors. The room had an enormously long table where all but two seats were taken.

There were many archbishops and monsignors, with Archbishop Rosenhausen's apprentice being the only priest. No cardinals were present because they're having been convened many days in the process of electing the new Pope.

Everyone went quiet as they entered the room. Archbishop Rosenhausen raised his hands as Father Blanco led us to the two chairs on the left of the archbishop, who sat at the end of the table.

Archbishop Rosenhausen waved his hand as all those who were not being seated at the table began to leave the room. When the doors were shut, the archbishop began to speak.

"We thank you both for being able to attend our dinner and meeting about our statue. As you can see, there aren't any cardinals present at the table, but all the archbishops in this room represent the highest group of cardinals, including Cardinal Sarto, who as you no will be our next Pope.

We will go ahead and eat first before our food gets cold and then we will continue with our meeting."

There was a lot of conversation in the room, most of it in Latin and Italian. I talked to a few of the archbishops while Gus didn't say a word, only shook his head every now and then.

It took a while for the priests who oversaw cleaning off the tables to finish, and then three more entered with wine and pastries for dessert. When the last one had left the room archbishop Rosenhausen started the meeting.

"Everyone in the room has been briefed about both of you, but I would like to introduce you," he said. "This is Roger Dearman, and to his left is Augustus Fulginiti. For those who weren't aware of it, he was once Father Fulginiti."

Gus just shook his head.

“The second day after the coronation of Cardinal Sarto, we will all be present with six other cardinals, not including His Holiness. As a protective measure, he will be leaving the Vatican that morning.

We don’t foresee anything happening that we can’t control,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen, glancing over at Gus.

“What we are going to be doing, as most of you know, is sending this contained entity back to the depths of hell. Barring any unforeseen problems, we will then soon be able to do the same with the other statue which you both have in your possession.”

I looked over at Gus as Gus stood up and pushed his seat in, under the table. “Have you ever considered discussing this situation first with the two whom the Lord our God has made the guardians of the statue?” he asked. “How do you know that this is the Lord’s will?”

“We, meaning the Vatican, have had major talks about the entities, which must be destroyed for the sake of everyone in general. Since we were able to find the other writings that were the source of the knowledge Cardinal Luigi had taught you, containment is no longer something that we intend to practice. Sending an entity back to Hell is why we believe the Lord has given us the new information.

The same person, who wrote the way to contain these entities, has also written how to send them back to the depth of Hell and that is where we believe they belong. We would like, if you don’t mind,” said the archbishop looking back and forth at Gus and I, “if you can spend the next two days studying the writings, so that we can all understand each other when our day comes to destroy the entities.”

“Where are these writings?” asked Gus, as he slowly looked at everyone around the room, knowing that he was making everyone very uncomfortable with his stare.

“At this very moment, they are being placed in a holding room and a small group of us will be taking a walk to the room as soon as this meeting is over,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen.

“Do we have to look through a whole room of artifacts to find these writings?” asked Gus, sarcastically.

“I am very sorry about the situation before, Gus, but we did explain to you in detail that we needed to make sure that there were no other writings.

“Now does anyone have any questions for our guest, either from your cardinals or from yourselves?”

There was silence in the room until a very large archbishop at the far end stood and said that he had a question. “What will you both do once we have sent both of the entity’s back to Hell,” he asked.

Gus looked around the room then said, “We will continue to build our statues until our age catches up to us and it becomes impossible for us to continue. Then we will be counting the days to be in the kingdom of heaven.”

The archbishop shook his head as he was satisfied with Gus’ answer, and Archbishop Rosenhausen asked if anyone else had another question. No one else said a word.

“Good,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen “this meeting is concluded and those of you who will not be accompanying us to the holding room may now leave.”

The room emptied quickly, and when those that were leaving had closed the doors behind them, all that was left was Archbishop Rosenhausen, his apprentice, the large archbishop who had asked the question earlier, two other archbishops who were very quiet during dinner, Gus, and me. Archbishop Rosenhausen’s apprentice helped the archbishop out of his chair and asked everyone to follow them to a door on the right back side of the dining area.

We all filed through the door and into a small room and as the door closed, Gus and I noticed that there was a rail protruding from the wall, all the way around the room. Archbishop Rosenhausen asked everyone to hold onto the rail and almost immediately, the room started descending into the underground.

“What is this?” I asked.

“It is an elevator that is setup for any emergencies, for the Pope or higher clergy to be able to go underground quickly.”

“How does it work,” asked Gus.

“Through a weight system on pulleys,” was the answer.

Just then, we stopped, and Archbishop Rosenhausen assistant opened the door on the opposite side of the room.

Everyone walked out looking up at the lines that were connected to the top of the room. Gus looked around, noticing that they weren't the only ones who had just taken their first elevator ride.

We started out through one of the man-made caves which led us out to the third cave. Then Gus and I realized that this was the route that Archbishop Rosenhausen must have taken when we saw him leave the holding room that held Gus' statue.

I looked at Archbishop Rosenhausen as his apprentice took out the key from under his robes to open the door, then, I asked, “Is there an underground throughout the entire Vatican?”

“There are ways to get around just about anywhere from any building in the Vatican to the underground, but there are very few open areas as big as the couple that you have been in,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen, as his apprentice opened the two doors leading to the holding room.

This is the safest room of all the holding rooms in the Vatican, said Archbishop Rosenhausen as we all followed, looking at all the sheets with the Latin writing in sheep's blood. As we parted the front sheet exposing the large room with the statue in the middle, two of the archbishops were frightened by its life like appearance.

Gus and I noticed that someone had drawn a circle very similar to the circle that Gus had made for Monstri Rocknia in the basement. There was another small table, next to the one that had been their last time we entered the room, and there were three extra chairs.

Archbishop Rosenhausen showed Gus and me the tables and their contents, but all we were interested in was the newly discovered documents about the procedure needed to destroy the evil entities. We sat down and began reading, as Archbishop Rosenhausen walked over to the archbishops that were there and started explaining the whole situation with the statue, including the purpose for the white circle on the ground. After he had said everything that he wanted to say to the other archbishops, Archbishop Rosenhausen looked over at Gus and me. He

could see that we were entranced with our research, as he was hoping that we would be.

Archbishop Rosenhausen called out to both of us, with no answer and his apprentice walked over to us and touched Gus on the back startling us both. Gus asked, "What is it?"

"I'm sorry," said the apprentice, "but Archbishop Rosenhausen would like to speak to you both."

"I see you are very interested in the writings, as I hoped that you would be. I will leave my apprentice here with you so that when you're done, he can lock the doors to keep the statue safe," said the archbishop.

"That won't be necessary," said Gus, "but what I would like is that we may go back to our rooms and get our bags, then return here and spend the next couple of days making sure that there is no mistake. This is not a simple exorcism, as I believe that most of you in the Vatican may believe."

Archbishop Rosenhausen stood there thinking for a very long time. He finally walked up to Gus and said in a low voice, "Is there something you have discovered so quickly?"

"No," said Gus, "I am a perfectionist, and this is something that we want to be perfectly, positively, right on target. There will not be a second chance without serious loss of at least some life present in the room if not everyone present."

"I see what you are saying," said Archbishop Rosenhausen and two of the other archbishops seemed a little shaken by what they overheard Gus saying. "I will agree with what you are asking but you will promise me that if you discover anything, and I do mean anything at all that we may not have, you will contact me immediately. May I have your word?"

"You may," said Gus as we shut the binders, and everyone headed out of the room as the archbishop's apprentice locked the door.

When we finally made it back up the elevator room and started to walk out of the Vatican Palace, the two guards that were sent to escort us around the Vatican again started following us. We started walking through the Borgia courtyard and across the way about thirty feet to the left a priest with a hood who resembled Father Montoya walked into the Borgia apartments ahead of us as Gus nudged me, noticing the priest.

When we had passed through the Borgia apartments doors, the two guards stayed outside of the front doors as Gus, and I headed toward our room. Walking in we were startled by the figure of Father Montoya sitting in the chair next to the desk.

“I’m sorry,” said Father Montoya noticing that we were startled by his presence in the room. “Please sit,” he continued, and we sat on our beds. “I see you have been taken to the holding room which holds your statue, and that you will be allowed to study the writings on how to destroy your evil entities.”

“Yes,” said Gus, “we have very little time. We are here just to grab our bags. I would like to read everything possible to make sure that everything goes as planned.”

“Here is a bag with paper and a dip pen, and a jar of ink, so that you may keep notes on what needs to be done. Is there anything else that I can help you with?” said Father Montoya, “I was also told that your statue at home is going to be brought to the Vatican by way of the train, in the next couple of days.”

On hearing this, I stood up and yelled, “Are they crazy? Monstri Rocknia would kill them all if he were to get out!”

“Trust me,” said Father Montoya, “they have the best and most knowledgeable group of priests available. They have also taken with them amongst the best of the Swiss guardsmen.”

“They are going to need the good Lord himself if they allow Monstri Rocknia free,” Gus said. He looked at Father Montoya, and asked him how long, had he known that they were planning to take the statue from our house.

“That was agreed upon in the meeting before you both entered the Vatican Palace. You see, Archbishop Rosenhausen got the word that you were both in the Vatican, so he gave word to proceed in his plan to acquire Monstri Rocknia. Anything that my eyes, ears, and those of us who are here to help you, will make sure that you will know as soon as we find out any information. Please don’t doubt that ever, we are here to help you both,” said Father Montoya. With that, Father Montoya stood up and said, “I will be around every corner. If you need me, I will not be far.” With that last word, Father Montoya walked out of the room, and

Gus and I collected our bags and headed toward the front doors of the Borgia Apartments.

We walked out of the Borgia Apartments and the two Swiss guards followed right behind us, through the Borgia Courtyard, and then to the back of the Sistine Chapel. Gus went through the door as I followed, leaving it open. The two Swiss guardsmen stood still.

“Well, are you coming?” I asked.

“No but we were told to tell you that you must come back the same way, because we will be here waiting,” one of them answered.

After the walk down the stairs and through the different holding rooms, Gus and I finally arrived at what would hopefully be the final resting place of Gus’ statue.

“We forgot to get a key,” I said, looking up at Gus as we heard someone coming from the opposite direction.

When the figure was closer, we could see that it was Archbishop Rosenhausen’s apprentice.

“I’m sorry that I am late,” he said, as he opened the two big doors.

“Will you be staying with us?” I asked.

“Oh, yes,” said the Apprentice, “these doors may never be left unlocked.”

“That is not a problem,” said Gus, “we are going to be looking at the newfound writings on this table. You may go ahead and read Monsignor Luigi’s journal. I promise you that you will be amazed at what a great life he lived, serving our God.”

“I am not allowed to read the journal without permission of Archbishop Rosenhausen,” said the apprentice.

Gus started to get upset, shaking his head and said, “I give you permission to read it. I am hopeful you will learn a little of what it takes to be a great religious leader.”

“I don’t know if I should,” said the apprentice and Gus asked him his name.

“My name is Father Maximus Castaneda, but everyone calls me Father Max,” said the priest.

“Good,” said Gus, “now you’re no longer—pardon me for saying this—a slave to the archbishop, but as God called you to be, a preacher of the word of the Lord.”

Father Max stood there thinking to himself for what seemed like minutes, when he finally said, “Thank you, I will look through the journals.”

For hours, Gus and I read through the writings, taking notes on anything that we felt needed to be covered again. Every so often we looked over and looked at Father Max, enjoying his reading of Monsignor Luigi’s journal.

After what seemed like an eternity, we were finally done with the writings and had everything that would be needed for what now looked more like an exorcism. This would be much faster, and more dangerous. This was something like what Gus had been taught briefly by Monsignor Luigi and it was a very dangerous procedure, especially with a lot of people around, as Archbishop Rosenhausen wished to have it done.

“So, what do you think?” asked Gus, looking toward Father Max, as he was in the process of turning the page. Father Max responded with, “Can I just finish this last paragraph?”

Gus and I both looked at each other with approval.

It took a minute or so before Father Max closed the journal and said one word, “Amazing.”

“Yes,” said Gus, “it is. He was a great man of God.”

“Yes,” said Father Max, “but you both have also been blessed with amazing gifts. I was never told, outside of the few things that I have overheard, but now I see why you are both so highly respected by everyone at the Vatican.”

Gus let out a loud laugh as did I, scaring Father Max a bit.

“Laugh,” said Gus, “it is good for the spirit.”

We headed out of the safe room and Father Max locked the door.

“Will you be going my way?” asked Father Max.

“No,” said Gus, “we have two Swiss guardsmen waiting for us in the back door, at the Sistine Chapel.”

“We will see you again shortly,” I said, as Father Max thanked us both for being so kind.

“Sometimes you forget what it feels like,” said Father Max.

Father Max headed in the opposite direction as Gus, and I watched him walk off. When he was out of sight, Gus looked over at me and said, “We cannot allow this situation to go on the way Archbishop Rosenhausen wants it to be. This should be kept to the minimal amount of people present. There shouldn’t be more than three men of God, and that includes both of us as part of the three.

The writings we have read noted that a stare in the eyes of the beast can change a man, even his appearance.

Remember the story of David and his two sons Daniel and Damien? We both, many years ago concluded that the creature in the cave that killed the four warriors was more than likely the bad son, Damien,” said Gus.

“Yes, I do remember,” I said.

Both of us stood there thinking and I spoke first, “Do you think that maybe Archbishop Rosenhausen knows the risk of what can happen and maybe, he plans to use it to his advantage, like maybe getting a high cardinal possessed? They are very old, and we could maybe still help them come back, but their bodies I fear will not be able to take it.”

“I like how you think,” said Gus. “I think I’m finally rubbing off on you. Let’s get out of here, we have a lot that needs to be figured out.”

When we finally got to the door of the Sistine Chapel, the two guards were still there, standing straight up. They followed us through the Sistine Chapel, through the Borgia Courtyard, then allowed us to go inside the Borgia Apartments alone.

When we were inside our room, we put our bags under our beds and Gus asked me to pass him the list of what we needed to send the entity’s back to Hell. After Gus spent a couple of minutes looking over the list of items that needed to be gathered for what now would be a lot closer to an exorcism. He knew as I also knew that we would have to do it ourselves without anyone else watching.

I saw the expression on Gus' face. After so many years together, there were times when I could tell what Gus was thinking, just by his expressions.

“So were going to have a go at it alone,” I said.

“Yes, we are,” said Gus, “with the help of Father Max—and we need to talk again with Father Montoya.

There are only a couple of days left. We need to get this done as soon as possible, but for now let's get some sleep. Tomorrow, I feel, will be a big day in the Vatican.”

Little did we know, while we were sleeping, back at our home, one of the four monks Lorenzo was talking to the priest over the hill, with the Swiss guards, preparing themselves to snatch up Monstri Rocknia. There was one problem with their plan. The other three monks Dani, Jude and Nitche had already realized that Lorenzo had been working for the Vatican, and all three were dedicated to help and serve Gus and me.

They had decided to make their own plans and since the American company had a mover coming to pick up their statues. The monks decided that the statue would be well taken care of if they sent it to the American company as a gift from Gus and me. They feared what the Vatican could do with the statue, and more important, they did not want to lose their men of God. For the couple of days that Gus and I were back at the Vatican, our three trusted monks had a good idea what the Vatican was up to, with my statue of Monstri Rocknia.

The minute our monk Lorenzo went to the other side of the hill, our loyal monks had gone to work on getting Monstri Rocknia out of the basement and boxed up for the move. Gus had shown Dani where the spare key to the lock was hidden, what to say in Latin when they crossed the protective circle, and how to release the sheet that helped reinforce the statue, just incase they had a situation, as the one they found themselves in.

When they had finished, they had gone to the pole barn and grabbed the biggest crate that they could find, which they were hoping would fit the statue.

“A perfect fit,” the oldest monk Dani had said, as he had covered the statue in new white sheets, with hay for protection, thinking in his own mind that Gus had to have made this crate for this statue. The two

other monks Jude and Nitche had already put the rest of the statues on the back of a flatbed carriage, with room enough to put the statue of Monstri Rocknia standing up, and everything was strapped down.

They had run to the pole barn, expecting that at any moment the priest, the monk Lorenzo and the Swiss guards would be coming over the hill. They had grabbed a statue of a man that was hollow and never finished due to the stone cracking in one of my earlier attempts at sculpting. Then they lightly hammered a piece of wood on each side, attaching them one just above the waist, and the other just under the shoulders. They then attaching them both at the other end, giving the impression of an angel with wings. They carried the statue to the basement and two of the monks held the blood-stained sheets with the Latin writing on them, said the words in Latin and threw them on the statue, totally sealing the statue.

“A perfect fit,” the oldest monk Dani had said, and the other two monks Jude and Nitche agreed. Only Gus and Roger could tell the difference, the oldest monk Dani had thought, as they hurried out through the cellar, locking it behind them.

They had heard a noise coming from the front of the house, and Dani had looked up to the sky and said, “Please my Lord, don’t let it be.”

As the three monks had walked through the house and opened the front door, relief had come upon the three monks. All three monks thanked God, for at the door there stood the two men from the moving company a little wary at the relief they saw in the monk’s faces.

The oldest monk Dani had told the other two monks to bring the carriage around to the front of the house. When they had come around the two movers were pleased to see that the carriage was loaded and strapped down. They had taken a count of the crates and after a second count, had said that there was one too many.

“Yes, we know,” Dani had said. “The extra crate is a gift from Gus and Roger who are at the Vatican to the American company’s chairman. Since Gus and Roger are at the Vatican, they asked that you please take care of it for them, and they will pay you double of what you normally charge. The gift is in this crate,” he continued, pointing at the biggest crate on the flatbed carriage.

“What is in it?” both movers had asked.

“A beautiful statue of an angel,” Dani had answered. “Please be careful.”

With that the two movers jumped on the front of the flatbed carriage and headed off on their one-day ride to the western port of Italy, for the transportation of the statues to America.

Dani had told the other two monks Jude and Nitche to bring the movers’ flatbed carriage around to the back of the house. Dani had walked through the house and when he opened the back door, he had seen the sun coming up over the horizon. Looking a little to the left, he could see Lorenzo the monk, leading the priest and the Swiss guardsmen right behind, heading directly toward the house.

Gus and I woke up and after washing up, headed to the front doors of the Borgia Apartments, again meeting up with Father Blanco, who was there to inform us of a meeting with Archbishop Rosenhausen in an hour at the Vatican Palace for our morning meal.

Gus and I both said that we would be there but first we would like to go for a walk. We walked out the front doors, walked ten paces and turned around expecting to see the two Swiss guardsmen, but to our surprise there wasn’t a soul to be seen, except Father Blanco walking toward them.

“I’m sorry,” said Father Blanco, “I forgot to tell you that Archbishop Rosenhausen doesn’t feel that it is necessary for both of you to have an escort through the Vatican.”

“Thank you,” said Gus looking over at me and smiling, as we walked down the Borgia Courtyards.

“This is working out perfectly,” said Gus. “I just hope that we can find Father Montoya before we meet with Archbishop Rosenhausen so that he can get everything we need for our entity’s exorcism. I think we should have it done today.”

“Today is a good day,” I said.

We started walking toward the Sistine Chapel and to the south side of the building we could see Father Montoya walking toward the front of the Sistine Chapel. We saw him wave slowly as we picked up our pace and opened the front doors, noticing that Father Montoya was headed

toward the back of the Sistine Chapel. We then followed, finally reaching him in the back as Father Montoya turned.

“There is much that we need to discuss,” Father Montoya said as he lifted the secret trap door with the rug which covered the secret door. Gus and I followed Father Montoya down the couple floors heading into the secret room. Father Montoya stood at the head of the table and took out a small package that was hidden under his robe and laid the contents on the table. He asked Gus and me to sit on either side.

“My friends, we have very little time and I have much to tell you about what has happened in the past day. I don’t know where to start, but as you can see, I have laid out everything you will need for the entity’s exorcism.”

“How did you know that we were going to attempt the entity’s exorcism without Archbishop Rosenhausen present? I asked.

“We weren’t sure, but we were hoping that you would,” said Father Montoya. “Here is everything that you will need to successfully complete the entity’s exorcism—your holy water, three crosses blessed by the Pope, and finally the words in Latin which will send any evil entity back to Hell.

Your statue will be here in the early afternoon,” said Father Montoya looking at me, as Gus stood up and said, “Are you talking about Monstri Rocknia?”

“Yes,” answered Father Montoya.

“How?” I asked.

“The priest and the Swiss guards that were watching your place were ordered to go and gather the statue. The order was given yesterday so it should arrive by train early this afternoon.”

Gus looked to his right, deep in thought, and nothing was said until Father Montoya spoke, “Is there something bothering you?”

“I don’t know,” said Gus. “Hopefully, they have gotten the wrong statue.”

“What do you mean?” asked Father Montoya.

“Nothing,” said Gus, “just a thought.”

“When are you planning on proceeding with the entity’s exorcism?” asked Father Montoya.

“We will have to do it right after the morning meal meeting with Archbishop Rosenhausen. We will tell him that we would like to see the writings again and hopefully he will only send his apprentice, Father Max, to open the doors for us. He will be easy to control,” said Gus.

“Good,” said Father Montoya. “As soon as I hear anything more about the arrival of your statue, I will send someone, or I will meet up with you myself.”

“We should go,” said Gus as we all stood up.

“May the Lord guide you both, as he has for many years,” said Father Montoya.

We started up the staircase, looking through the glass scope and proceeded out through the Sistine Chapel, and Father Montoya went a separate way as before.

Gus looked down, staring at his watch, and I could tell that we were running late. We hurried toward the Vatican Palace, and when we arrived, two Swiss guards walked us over to the two big doors leading to the grand dining area. We entered and the two Swiss guardsmen shut the doors. Everyone was seated the same as the day before. Again, there were no Cardinals, only Archbishops and Father Max, with Archbishop Rosenhausen at the head of the table as before.

After Gus and I sat, Archbishop Rosenhausen said grace and we proceeded with our morning meal. Once everyone was finished, and the servers had left the room, the meeting began.

“I’ve been told that you have read all of the writings on the entity’s exorcism and have a list of what is needed,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen.

“Yes,” said Gus. “The list is very simple, but we would like to spend a little more time with the writings. We do not want to make any mistakes. I think you can understand.” As he spoke, Gus looked around the table, seeing that everyone agreed.

“How long are we talking here?” asked Archbishop Rosenhausen.

“A couple of hours,” answered Gus.

“I think we can manage that. You know tomorrow we have the coronation of Cardinal Sarto, and everyone has much to do, and I will need my apprentice as soon as you are done,” said the archbishop.

“That will not be a problem,” said Gus.

The archbishop continued, “I would like to meet with you both on a matter that we will discuss in private later this afternoon, around three.”

Then Archbishop Rosenhausen stretched his arms out and asked if anyone had anything to add. Not a word was said, and within minutes, Gus, Father Max, and I were headed toward the Sistine Chapel.

When we finally arrived at the two big doors to the holding room, Father Max took out his key and opened the doors.

I walked through first as Father Max followed, with Gus shutting the doors as he entered. Father Max turned and asked why he was shutting the doors.

“Because our plans have changed a little,” said Gus.

“What do you mean they have changed?” asked Father Max.

“Do you trust us?” asked Gus and Father Max started to show signs of nervousness.

“Yes,” Father Max finally said, “but what are we doing?”

“We are going to proceed with the entity’s exorcism, without Archbishop Rosenhausen and the rest of the Vatican that want to watch. This is not a show and should be done with as few people as possible.”

Out of nervousness, Father Max made a slight move to his right and Gus stepped forward, making Father Max move back quickly. Father Max looked as if he was ready to throw up.

“You have two choices,” said Gus, pulling a rope out of his bag. “The first is to find yourself bound with a rope, and the other is to assist us in the entity’s exorcism. The choice is yours.”

After what seemed like a couple of minutes, Father Max said he would assist but if he had to go in front of Archbishop Rosenhausen, he would say that he was forced to assist.

“That will not be a problem,” said Gus as he smiled, looking at me since I also had a big grin on my face.

“What we are about to do,” said Gus, “is very simple, but at no time can you have your mind wander off. We must keep our minds on sending this entity back to the depths of Hell. You cannot look at the beast, because if it latches on to your stare it can control you. Do you understand?” said Gus.

“Yes,” said Father Max. I indicated that I did, too.

Gus handed each of us a cross. I had the bottle with the holy water, and Gus was ready with the writings which we needed to exorcize the beast.

Gus made one more walk around the room, making sure that everything was in place. He then reached down in his bag and took out his monks robe. Noticing that I already had my robe on, Father Max became so nervous that he started shaking. Gus noticed his appearance and told him to sit in the corner near the table, to allow us to deal with the entity, and no matter what happened, to stay in that spot unless Gus or I commanded him to do something helpful.

Gus again reached into his bag, pulled out a sheepskin sack with sparkling dust and walked around the statue sprinkling the dust on the statue while saying a prayer, without skipping a beat. The white sheet with the Latin blood-stained writing fell off the statue to the ground as if it were made of bricks. Father Max jumped a little but maintained himself in the chair.

I walked to the side of the statue which held the sword and pulled a small sword from my bag. With two quick swipes of my sword, the sword came off the statue without breaking the hollow containment. Gus then walked over to me and took hold of the sword. I moved back and Gus jumped in the air, striking the statue on the neck, and separating the head from the body. The sound was unbearable, and the stench of death was overwhelming. Father Max lifted his priest’s robes to cover his nose.

As the evil entity came out of the neck of the statue, I took out the powder that we had brought in our bags and threw it as I had done with Monstri Rocknia many years earlier, containing the evil entity in a circle of light. The horrible sounds from the entity had Gus and me to the point where we almost needed to cover our ears as Father Max had already been doing for awhile.

Now that we had the entity out of the statue and under control, we began the exorcism.

Gus started reading “In the Name of Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, strengthened by the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God, of Blessed Michael the Archangel, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul and all the Saints, we confidently undertake to repulse the attacks and deceits of the devil. Depart then, transgressor, depart, seducer, full of lies and cunning, foe of virtue, persecutor of the innocent. Give place, abominable creature, give way, you monster, give way to Christ, in whom you found none of your works. For he has already stripped you of your powers and laid waste your kingdom, bound you prisoner and plundered your weapons. He has cast you forth into the outer darkness, where everlasting ruin awaits you and your abettors. God arises; His enemies are scattered and those who hate Him flee before Him. As smoke is driven away, so are they driven; as wax melts before the fire, so the wicked perish at the presence of God.”

Gus looked over at me as we both placed forth our crosses and Father Max followed suit. Gus yelled “Behold the cross of the Lord; flee bands of enemies; we beseech thee to hear us.”

I sprinkled the holy water which caused the entity to thrash back and forth against the light that contained it. Every sprinkle of holy water made the evil entity scream louder, but by the third time, the sound began to get softer and softer, and the ground and the entire safe room started shaking and a bright light came from the roof. We looked away for fear of catching the entity’s eyes. Then after one last scream, there was silence.

The silence didn’t last long, however. The light reappeared; the entity was back, still held by the light. Father Max looked up, just missing the eyes of the evil being, and his body was thrown against the glass wall. He began to rise quickly, tossed from one side of the wall to the other. Gus immediately grabbed the holy water, splashing at the entity and again the evil entity thrashed the wall of light harder than before. Gus again hit the entity with the holy water, and a third time. It thrashed back and forth as Gus grabbed his cross jumping up and placing his cross against the light. Gus was thrown back as the room started shaking out of control and in a blink of an eye. Silence followed, but no

one moved until Father Max came falling right on top of the table breaking it in half, almost startling the life out of me.

Gus got up and reached for a jar of powder in his bag. He started moving toward Father Max then stopped, seeing that he was not possessed. I started to pick up the journals, as Gus helped Father Max, who was still shaking.

I looked over at Gus and could see that he was exhausted, something I had never witnessed in this great man that I respected and admired. Gus laid down and I went to his side as did Father Max.

“Are you okay, my friend? I asked.

“Tired is all,” said Gus as he closed his eyes.

I yelled at Father Max to get a sheet out of Gus’ bag that was on the right of the room. He ran and got it immediately.

I grabbed the sheet and put it under Gus’ head. I checked his wrist and could tell that his pulse was fine. Father Max was looking around the room which looked like a bomb had gone off at the far end where he had been sitting in the chair. The religious writings, however, were all untouched.

“Will he be alright?” asked Father Max.

“Yes, at least I hope so,” I said.

Just then, the two big doors that led to the holding room opened with a sound of ten plus men walking through them. Father Max and I looked up to see Archbishop Rosenhausen walking ahead of the rest of the Swiss guard that followed him, filling the front of the holding room.

“What in the name of God has gone on in this room?” demanded the archbishop, as he surveyed the area, happy to see that the writings were still in excellent condition. He looked down at Gus who was unconscious then he looked over at me and asked if he was okay. I replied that I really didn’t know, but I hoped so and that he had saved us all.

“What do you mean?” asked Archbishop Rosenhausen.

“We came here to look over the writings and as we were reading there was a noise coming from the statue. Thanks to Gus, whose reactions were swift and effective, the evil entity was contained, then we

where able to perform the entity's exorcism. Otherwise, it would probably still be on the loose, killing anyone and everyone around it.

Gus was able to reach his bag and using the powders before the entity was able to get total power out of the statue. Maybe when you moved the statue it could have gotten a small hair line fracture, remember these statues are mostly hollow, to contain the entities. Since it was trying to get out, we had no choice other than to go ahead and start the entity's exorcism, which as you can see worked.

I would also give great thanks to Father Max. He may not admit it, but we would not have been able to send this beast back without his help."

Archbishop Rosenhausen stood there for a minute looking around. He then looked at Father Max and said, "Father Max is this true?"

Father Max stood up and looked around the room. Looking at Archbishop Rosenhausen, he said "Yes, but I only did what I was told."

I looked at Father Max and could tell that he was probably more afraid of the wrath of Gus than the wrath of Archbishop Rosenhausen.

"Now that you know what has happened here," I said, "can I get someone to help me with Gus?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Archbishop Rosenhausen, still dumbfounded with the situation at hand, as he started giving orders to the Swiss guardsmen. Two of the men went running out of what was left of the holding room.

SIX

When Gus finally woke up, I was almost falling asleep in a chair next to the bed.

“My friend,” I said, “how do you feel?”

“Human,” was his answer, as he attempted to get himself out of bed.

“Stop Gus,” I said. “You’re still too weak to get out of bed.”

“What happened?” he asked, and I began to tell him everything from the start of the entity’s exorcism to the end when he was taken to the hospital.

When I was done Gus closed his eyes, and when he opened them again, he said, “We better hope Father Max sticks to the story.”

I smiled and said, “I really don’t think that he will be a problem.”

At that very moment, Father Max knocked on the door and entered. “Our dear friend, Father Max,” I said. “Is everything ok?”

“Yes, and thank you for making me seem like more than I am, but how would the Lord view this situation?” Father Max asked.

“My dear Father Max,” said Gus, “you have saved my life and probably the lives of many. The Lord will look kindly upon you when your time comes. Now how can we help you?”

“Archbishop Rosenhausen has sent me here to ask both of you to come back down to the holding room. There is something he wants you to see.”

I looked at Gus and said, “I will go while you can stay here and get some rest.” Gus responded with, “Over my dead body,” and he asked us to help him up, then he got dressed.

“Do you have any idea what this is about?” asked Father Max.

Gus and I looked at Father Max and Gus said, “You work for the man, and you have no idea?”

“I am always the last to know,” said Father Max.

“We also have no idea,” I said, and we walked the rest of the way to the Sistine Chapel, then down to the depths of the Vatican without saying another word.

When we arrived at the safe room, Gus, Father Max, and I could not believe how, within a couple of hours, they could have fixed the safe room. It looked almost new. What really caught our attention was a statue standing straight up in the same spot as the last one. Although this statue was one that both Gus and I could not put together with its appearance. Archbishop Rosenhausen was sitting on one of the chairs near the new tables with the journals, with a cardinal and another archbishop on either side of him. Gus walked up to the statue and asked, “What is this?”

“This,” said Archbishop Rosenhausen, as he stood, “is your statue, from your home.”

Gus looked at me and I stared back at him

“Are you kidding?” said Gus.

“No, not at all, it was brought here from your home an hour ago.”

Gus looked at me and nodded his head toward the statue which was wrapped in the blood-stained sheets. He put his hand on the sheet, said a couple of words that no one was able to hear, and the sheets hit the floor.

Gus looked over at Archbishop Rosenhausen and said, “Can you please tell me where our real statue is being kept?”

Archbishop Rosenhausen walked closer, looking at this farce of a statue with wings made of wood, and he turned around looking directly at one of the Swiss Guard who had many stripes on his arm—a leader, I thought.

“What is going on here?” Demanded the Archbishop in an angry voice as the Cardinal, and the others representing different parts of the Vatican, stood up, shook their heads and walked out of the room. They

looked as if they had been betrayed. "I want some answers," Archbishop Rosenhausen continued, "and I want them now!"

Gus and I walked out of the room and headed back to the Borgia Apartments. We felt sorry for Father Max, who might lose all that he had dreamed of becoming within the Vatican, all because of the archbishop's attempt to make himself a big shot.

When we arrived at the Borgia Apartments, Father Blanco met us and asked if there was anything that he could get us. We hadn't eaten in quite awhile, so we asked him if they could get some food brought to our room, since Gus still wasn't feeling well. Father Blanco told us that he would be glad to do that for us. We went on to our room.

When we opened the door, there was an envelope from Father Montoya on the chair in the middle of the room. It asked us to stay in the room as he would be coming to speak with us. We sat down as a knock came to the door within minutes. I went to the door letting Father Montoya in as Gus laid down.

"First of all," said Father Montoya, looking at Gus, "how are you feeling?"

"Don't worry about me," said Gus, "I may have lost some power, but I still have enough to finish our work."

"I'm glad to see that you're in good spirits," the priest continued. "Now, about your statue: I believe that it is in everyone's best interest that you both catch the next train out of Rome, which will be at five p.m., and I have already arranged everything for you. Have you eaten?"

"No," I answered, "but we have asked Father Blanco to bring something to our room."

"Good," said Father Montoya. "Tomorrow, we have the coronation of our new Pope, and a lot still needs to be done. With your permission, I would like to send a priest with the two of you so we can be kept informed. The disappearance of your statue had occasioned an emergency meeting, which is taking place presently. I will send the priest back to escort you to the carriage that will take you to your train. I hope that maybe one day we can spend a little more time together, talking about life and God." Having spoken, Father Montoya stood up and walked right out the door.

I closed the door and helped Gus lay further up on his bed, as I could see that he was uncomfortable the way he was laying.

“The church will always keep tabs on everything we do,” said Gus, “no matter who is in charge.”

I looked at Gus, and Gus looked back at me. I knew that he could see that something had been bothering me.

“What is it?” asked Gus.

“You know where the statue is, don’t you?” I asked.

“I hope I can find out,” said Gus, “but don’t worry, I guarantee you that we will find it.”

Father Blanco arrived minutes later with an assistant who brought in a cart carrying two plates of food. We ate with gusto and laid down for a much-needed rest.

In what seemed like no time at all, there was a knock on the door, and I went to open it. To my surprise, it was Father Max.

“Come in,” I said as Gus sat up.

“What can we do for you, Father Max?” asked Gus.

“Did your Archbishop Rosenhausen make out okay at the meeting?”

“Archbishop Rosenhausen has been placed on prayer duty till after the coronation. Then they will decide what, if any, discipline is necessary for him.”

“And you” asked Gus, “what duty have they placed upon you?”

“They have chosen me to represent the Vatican, to report on your statue.”

“So, you have been promoted and Archbishop Rosenhausen has been demoted, so to speak. You see,” said Gus looking over at me, “God works in mysterious ways.”

“We will be more than happy to have you come along with us,” said Gus and I nodded in agreement.

“Let me get your bags,” said Father Max.

“Hold it,” said Gus, “you are no longer an apprentice to an Archbishop, you are your own man. Because I am weak right now, you may carry my bag, but Roger will carry his own bag.”

“Thank you,” said Father Max, and we headed for the front of the Borgia Apartments, through the Borgia Courtyard and to St. Peter’s Square, where there was a carriage waiting for us.

The ride through Rome as the night began to descend upon us was something that both Gus and I would always remember as our last visit to such a beautiful place, as we both sensed that this would be our last visit to the Vatican.

When we arrived at the train station, everything went as planned. Gus was able to sleep the entire trip back to our hometown. When we arrived, Niche our eldest monk was waiting for us with our carriage. I looked around as did Gus, to see if anything or anyone was out of the ordinary, and we both noticed two men getting out of the back of the train. One of the faces looked familiar, a Swiss guard, I thought, and the other a priest.

I nodded my head to Gus, motioning to him to look at the back of the train and he confirmed what I was thinking with the two men. Father Max asked what was going on.

“We have company” said Gus as he stepped into the carriage.

Arriving home had a warm feeling for both Gus and me, beyond our desire to find out what had happened to the statue. As soon as we pulled up in the back of the house, Gus and I headed toward the cellar doors, noticing from a distance that the lock had been removed. Father Max followed close behind.

As we entered the cellar, we could see no signs of complications with the movement of the statue, and that gave us a bit of relief. We walked back up the stairs and into the house, Father Max following.

The eldest monk Dani was waiting for us in the dining room with food and wine on the table. We sat down and Gus asked Dani to sit down with us. As we started eating Gus asked Dani to tell us what had happened to the statue. We listened intently as he told his story. When he was done there was nothing but silence, as we took in the information we had just heard. Gus asked what had happened to Lorenzo. Dani explained that he had left with the priest and the Swiss Guards.

“We have to get some rest,” said Gus, “and tomorrow we will make arrangements for our trip to America.” Then looking over to Dani, he said, “Thank you.”

It was late and everyone went to sleep except for Father Max, who I could hear writing what his memoirs would one day be.

The next morning, everyone slept until at least ten o’clock. Only one day had passed, but everything we had been through made it seem a lot longer. Gus was feeling a lot better than the day before. While he didn’t yet feel up to normal, he told me that he knew he would recover fully. After our morning meal, Gus called two of his monks and made a list of what we would need for our trip to America.

By early afternoon everything that we needed for the trip had either been rounded up or purchased in town. Gus gave specific orders that we would travel light—one bag apiece and one extra sealed trunk with a lock for the containment materials.

Gus made sure that everything was ready. As Nitche and Jude were putting the bags into the carriage, he called for me and Father Max. When we met him, I had my monk’s robes on, and Gus gave robes to Father Max who went back inside to change. We both laughed as Father Max walked out with the hood over his head and as he removed it, the smile on his face had everyone present laughing.

We boarded the carriage and Gus spoke to Dani, making sure what needed to be done, since we did not know how long we would be away in America. As we rode through town, we put our hoods on and just when we were about thirty yards from town, Gus looked back and could see that the two men from the train station were watching us ride away.

Our ride to the western port of Italy was a one-day trip. We stopped once to sleep at an inn for a well-deserved rest, more for the horses than for us. Having always lived in Rome and the surrounding area, Father Max enjoyed the simplicity of our small town and the countryside that we passed through.

When we arrived at the western port of Italy, the level of activity was amazing to us. There were three steam ships docked at the port. Some were being loaded, while others were being unloaded, from barrels to sacks, to carriages. One boat had a couple of those new steam engine cars.

Gus stopped to ask an older gentleman if he knew with whom we could buy our tickets for America and the older gentlemen pointed at a line with about fifteen people in front of what looked like an old fishing storage house.

Gus and I got out of the carriage, leaving Father Max to watch over our things. Within an hour we had our tickets, and our timing was perfect since the ship was to leave in less than three hours. We searched for a place to leave our carriage and horses, which we found less than two hundred yards from the port.

As we walked back toward the port, we kept our eyes open for the two men from the Vatican. We found a small pub right at the center of the port that served many different wines.

Gus noticed that I was looking a little uneasy as one of the ships blew its horn and proceeded to leave port.

“Are you ok?” he asked, and I looked back at him and said, “I have a feeling that the ship which sailed away may be our ship with my statue.”

“That could be possible,” said Gus, as he looked to the right of the port and could see the two men from the Vatican getting out of a carriage and walking over to the ticket purchasing line.

“Look,” said Gus. So, Father Max and I could get a better view of what the two men look like. We watched them walk to the ticket line, but they didn’t notice us in the pub. We drank and ate until we were full, and a horn went off which, we were told, meant that it was boarding time for our ship. Each of us had a bag strapped over our shoulders and Father Max and I carried the locked chest between us.

Boarding took only thirty minutes, and we were shown to our cabin, which had one bunk bed on each wall. The walkway between the beds was too small for Gus to walk in without turning a little sideways and he got a little upset, as he felt uncomfortable.

We were all still tired from the week before, so we decided to get some rest. When we were almost asleep, the horn for our voyage blew, briefly waking us. We slept through what was left of the sunlight, through the night and until the following morning.

Gus was the first to wake. He woke Father Max and me and we headed up a staircase leading to the deck of the boat. There were many people moving around the ship, and we asked someone for a place to eat. One of the crewmen pointed to the center of the ship. We walked in that direction, noticing that the seas were very calm, since our movements were very steady. We got a bite to eat and overheard a gentleman who was talking about how many times he had made the trip to America.

Gus walked over and started to inquire about the procedure once we would land in America. The gentleman told him that we would be ferried over to a place called Ellis Island, where we would go through an eight-point check stop and if everything would go well, we would be allowed into the country.

The next few days we spent talking to some of the crew and some of the passengers. There were individuals from all walks of life on the ship. We kept our eyes open for the men from the Vatican whenever we were on deck. We only spotted them once during our days at sea, but they were on our ship. Gus began to show signs of gaining back much of his strength, and I was happy to see the old Gus back. We spent many hours laughing.

The day before we were to land in America, a severe storm hit, making that part of our voyage very unpleasant. Father Max threw up at least six times and the boat was rocking horribly, making Gus and me a bit wary about the trip the statue must have had if the ship carrying it encountered this type of storm.

At last, our final day had come. We learned through a couple of the crew members that we would be arriving in New York before nightfall.

When the steam horn blew twice everyone could see the torch of the Statue of Liberty, which was as beautiful as we had heard it was. As we got closer, we could see the tops of some of the buildings and the city of New York itself.

Gus leaned over to me as he looked at the Statue of Liberty and said, “My friend—that is a thing of beauty, and something that I would like to make.”

My eyes widened, and Gus added, with a laugh, “Not that big...a smaller version.”

“Thank God,” I said. “That would have taken us a couple of lifetimes,” and all three of us laughed.

When the ship landed at the entrance to the Lower Bay of the New York Harbor the crew went to work. Big ropes were thrown off the boat and tied to the dock. Before they even started unloading passengers, the two big containment doors were opened, and things were lowered onto land with different pulley systems.

We each carried our single bags and were told that our locked chest would be given to us when we debarked. The dock was full of ships, dropping off and putting on hundreds of people who were moving toward the ferries that took them to Ellis Island.

We finally got on one of the ferries and off we went for Ellis Island. When we arrived, we estimated that there were at least a thousand people. Our first stop was at the baggage room where we left our chest and our three bags. Then we headed up a big staircase, it led to the Great Hall. Little did we know, as we climbed the stairs, that doctors stood at the top watching for signs of anyone having difficulty coming up the stairs.

The doctors would use chalk to mark the people with one of seventeen different marks—for instance, k for hernia, L for lameness and SC for scalp disease. Then there was a medical exam, where they would be looking for contagious diseases and conditions that would make someone unable to work. They administered an eye exam by using a hook to lift the eyelid, which Gus did not find at all amusing. We laughed several times as it took three tries for the hook to work on Gus’ eye.

Then we had a long wait in the Great Hall, after which we were sent for legal inspection. A person had to prove their country’s origin, where they expected to live and work once they entered the country, and any immigrant with a criminal record was rejected summarily. We where hear on business which was another way of entering the country.

Having passed all these inspections, we were walked over to the money exchange, where we would change our money for dollars and were able to purchase train tickets to anywhere in North America. Finally, we were able to get our baggage. As we were changing our money, we overheard someone saying, on their way out, that the exit was

called the kissing post, because of all the emotional reunions. Looking over at the kissing post as we walked out, we could see why it was called by that name.

The trip on the ferry toward New Jersey where we would catch a train was a happy one, after our time at Ellis Island. Gus, Father Max, and I had many a laugh on that ferry ride. When we reached New Jersey, we headed for the train station. Our train was scheduled to pull out in two hours, so we found a place to sit and waited for our train to come into the station.

Boarding the train was confounding for all three of us. We could hardly believe how many people could travel on a single train with only five carts. Gus even went as far as looking out the other side to see if some of the people were just passing through which made Father Max and me laugh.

Our trip to North Carolina would take a day and a half, and our cabin on the train was half the size as the cabin we had occupied on the ship. Gus had to inhale and hold his breath to get to his bunk. There was one cart that served food and drinks and it took over an hour before we were able to be served. We ate and then drank for quite awhile, until we all felt a little tipsy; Gus was even in sadder shape than Father Max and me.

I took one of Gus' arms as Father Max helped with the other and we walked side-by-side until we were able to make it to the cabin, all three of us laughing disgracefully. When we made it in our beds, though, there was nothing but silence.

The next morning, we were awakened by the sound of the locomotive whistle, signaling a stop. We got up and took turns at the washroom. When we were done, the train was coming to a stop and we headed to the door to stretch our legs a little, and many other passengers did the same.

As we were stretching, Gus noticed the two men from the Vatican at the other end of the train. "Look," he said, as both men from the Vatican turned. "I think we should give these two a little visit."

"I don't know," I said, looking at Father Max. "What do you think?"

Father Max looked dumbfounded and said, "Maybe they are going in the same direction."

Gus and I looked at each other, and Gus said, "I guess we'll give them a little more time. We should arrive at Chapel Hill in the next couple of hours. If we see them then, we will ask what their business in North Carolina is."

Just as we all agreed, a ball came bouncing over and hit Gus on his knee. Two young boys ran over as Gus reached down and picked up the ball. The boys looked at Gus and said that they were sorry.

Gus looked down at the boys and threw the ball up in the air, catching it behind his back with his other hand. He then looked down and said, "What ball are you looking for?" as both boys moved to the right to see the ball and Gus moved in the same direction. With a flick of his wrist the ball came back up to his hand in front. With a big grin, Gus handed the boys their ball and a group of people that had been watching clapped.

I looked over to Father Max and said, "That is the first time in the many years that I've known Gus that I have seen him play around with kids."

Gus bowed to the crowd as everyone laughed.

After re-boarding the train, the next two hours went by fast. When the whistle went off again, we looked out the window to see a sign that said, "Welcome to Chapel Hill," as the train came to a stop.

We grabbed our bags. Father Max and I grabbed the locked chest, and we walked over to a glass window that had writing on it that read, "Rooms and Transportation." Gus asked for a map and then asked the gentleman behind the window if he knew where the Johnson Company was located. The thin man with a very long mustache laughed and said, "Everybody knows the Johnson's, without the Johnson's there wouldn't be know train station."

"Is that so," said Gus. The man then asked us if we would need some transportation. He gave us a sheet with a list of possibilities and the rates for each. Gus held the paper as Father Max, and I got closer to see it.

"Do you have any flatbed carriages?" asked Gus, and the thin man grabbed his long mustache as if he didn't know what to say.

“I don’t recall having any carriages, but I know we have a flat-bed wagon,” said the thin man, as Gus and I turned to Father Max. We shook our heads and chuckled.

“We will take that wagon,” said Gus, “and two horses, for about a week.”

“Did you say a week?” asked the thin man, “or about a week? Because, you see, I can’t give you a price for ‘about a week.’”

Gus turned to Father Max and me again. “This is too funny,” he said, as he turned back around and looked at the thin man, trying not to laugh. “A week will be fine,” said Gus. “How far is it to the Johnson’s Company?”

The thin man took out a piece of paper and wrote down the directions, as he handed us a ticket and told us to go around to the back of the building, where a man named Bubba would get our horse’s and wagon together.

“Thank you for your help,” said Gus, as we headed toward the back of the building.

Bubba was a tall fat black man, about six feet six and four hundred plus pounds, with a bald shiny head. Even Gus was intimidated by his size and deep voice.

“Can I help you?” asked Bubba in a deep growl of a voice with an unfamiliar accent.

“I hope so,” said Gus as he handed him the ticket.

Bubba stood there looking at us and moving his head from side to side.

“Is there something wrong?” asked Gus.

“No,” said Bubba, “but are you three monks? See I read a book once and them clothes that them monks wear, in my mind, looked like them robes you three have on yourselves.”

“I’m sorry,” said Gus, “but we are priests, and we have been traveling all the way from Italy.”

“Italian monks!” he yelled, “see I knew you fellas were monks,” said the big burly man, as he turned around and walked through the double doors. He turned and headed out toward the barn.

Gus looked at me and Father Max, and all three of us started laughing.

“Should we follow him?” I asked, and we laughed again. After a hearty laugh, we headed through the double doors, and we noticed Bubba coming out through the right side with the flat-bed wagon and the two horses.

As Bubba approached, he asked, “Do you monks know how to handle these here horses and wagon?”

“Do not, worry about that,” said Gus. “It is the only way we travel at home.”

“Good,” said Bubba, “cause the last folk that I tried teaching how to drive when you go down the hill, you’ll see what happened to them if you look to the left.

“Thank you,” said Gus, as we jumped on the wagon, with Gus driving, I was next to him and Father Max was on the bench behind us, sitting sideways so that he could see forward.

“How far to the Johnson’s Company?” asked Father Max as I had the map out and was trying to make sense of the directions that we had received from the thin man with the mustache. “I think I have it now,” I said, turning the paper on an angle so that north was at the top.

It took us almost an hour to get to the Johnson’s Company. It probably would have taken less time if we had not stopped at the site where the last person Bubba taught how to drive a horse and wagon had ended up at the bottom of the hill. We laughed out loud with each of us giving our own rendition of how it happened. Each story was funnier than the next, as we each started to imitate Bubba teaching the people how to drive. Just before we left the site, we had to say two prayers, one to the poor souls who had probably died at that site and the other for their forgiveness for making fun out of their tragedy.

The town where the Johnson’s Company made its home was a little bigger than our own town in Italy. We could see that just about everything in the town had the name of Johnson written somewhere on

the posted signs. We stopped at an inn which had a sign outside the door reading ‘Rooms Available.’ The innkeeper gave us information on where we could board our horses and the wagon for our time in Johnsonville. We unloaded our bags and the locked chest and took them into our two rooms which had a door joining them together, with two beds in each room. Then we headed out toward the stables.

“These Johnson people even have the town named after them,” I said, as we dropped off the horses and the wagon. The man at the stables told us where the Johnson’s Company was located. “At the end of town, a quarter mile just past,” he said.

Gus noticed as we were walking out of the stables, that the two men from the Vatican were passing by on the street ahead of us, headed in the direction of where we were told that the Johnson’s Company was located. Gus pointed as Father Max, and I also noticed.

“Let’s get back to the inn and change these robes. Too many people are looking at us a bit strange,” said Gus.

“That sounds like a good idea,” I said as we passed by a store that had a clothing sale, which caught our attention.

Gus looked at me and said, “Maybe we should buy something that blends in with the rest of the townspeople. What do you both think?”

I didn’t answer I just headed into the store with Father Max and Gus right behind me. We changed into our newly purchased jeans and plaid shirts. We even bought cowboy boots, a belt buckle each, and three hats. Since we had spent so much in the store, the owners—an older lady and her son—allowed us to wash up in their sink at the back of the store. She even took our robes and told us that she would have them taken to the Chinese couple who are the town’s laundry service, who would deliver them right to the inn when they were clean.

As we walked out the front door, a couple with their baby walked by us and said, “Howdy.”

We tipped our hats as we had seen many men do, since we had arrived in America.

“We fit in now, don’t you think,” said Gus, as both Father Max and I nodded our heads, laughing. Gus joined in our laughter as we were pleased with ourselves.

It was getting late, so we walked swiftly toward the Johnson's Company. As we approached, we saw the two men from the Vatican being escorted around the back of what we later found was the main building. Gus proceeded to lead us off the road and into the woods, walking quickly to get around and see where the two men from the Vatican were actually being taken.

The Johnson's Company sat on eight acres of land with five warehouses, the main warehouse being the biggest and every other building being half the size, but all the same design. There was a fence that circled the entire property, and there were two men at the front, where two big gates were swung open. That entrance was the only way in or out of the warehouse.

Gus picked up his pace, and we kept up as the men from the Vatican were walking around the building within sight. Finally we were able to get to a spot where the back of the warehouse was totally visible, just as they walked in through the first two bay doors that were already wide open.

Gus crouched down, by several bushes, as did Father Max and I, so that the rest of the men walking around the warehouse could not see us hiding in the woods. We could see that there were many crates in the warehouse, and that they were looking around and shaking their heads. Within minutes they were on their way back up toward the front of the warehouse. Gus started heading toward the same way we came, with me and Father Max following behind.

"We have to get back into town," said Gus, "before these men head out of the Johnson's warehouse."

We started on a quick jog, getting far enough from the Johnson's Company to being able to walk on the road without being watched by anyone in the area. When we popped out onto the road, we continued walking quickly until we arrived at the tip of town, shaking off all the leaves and twigs that attached to our boots and jeans.

We headed directly toward the inn for a bite to eat and some time to talk over what we were going to do next. After a good meal and some wine, we concluded that the statue had not arrived from Italy, and that we would go in the morning to the Johnson's warehouse.

That night I woke up looking around the room sensing that my statue was closer now than it had been since the day we left our town in Italy. It gave me a calm, easy feeling.

When we woke in the morning, I told Gus what I had felt that night and he replied with, "That is a good sign. Our statue has probably arrived."

After getting dressed and having a quick morning meal, we headed to the stables to get our carriage and then out to the Johnson's warehouse.

When we arrived at the main gate Gus showed his papers from Italy, allowing the two men to see that we were there on business.

One of the men pointed to the main warehouse and told us to park the wagon around the left side of the warehouse and continue to walk to the building directly across from the main warehouse.

Once we were at the door, Gus knocked but no one answered, so he tried again. Then one of the workers noticed us standing at the door and yelled to us, "Walk in, or you'll be there all day if you don't."

Gus, Father Max, and I walked in the door to a nice sized room with pictures on the walls of the same man at different major attractions all over the world. They had little plaques at the bottom of each picture identifying where the picture was taken, the date, and the name James Johnson. There were also six big chairs, spread out around the room.

A young lady with a long thin material summer dress down two her ankles, came walking through the door ahead of us. She walked over and asked, "How may I help you?" Again, Gus took out his papers to show who we were, and her eyes began to widen, showing excitement.

"I can't believe you have come so far. My father has been such an admirer of your statues. We were discussing placing a much bigger order from you in the next couple of weeks and Papa said that he wanted to stop and visit your place of work next time he was in Italy."

We didn't know what to say. This was more than we could have wished for as a welcome to the Johnson's warehouse.

"Oh, my manners!" said the young lady. "Can I get you something to drink? I will tell Mr. Johnson." Putting her hand to her chest, "my father, that you are here."

As she walked back through the door shutting it behind her, Gus looked at me and at Father Max with a big grin on his face.

“Can you believe our luck. The owner is a big fan of our work” he said, tapping me on the shoulder jovially.

Just then the door swung open startling us a bit, considering all we’d been through lately. A big, light-brown-haired man with wide opened blue eyes came directly at us with his hand stretched out. He looked at all three of us, then straight to Gus.

“You must be the head man,” he said with confidence in his voice. “My name is James Johnson, but all my friends call me Jimmy. Now, since I bought those first statues from you a couple of years ago, I have considered you a friend, so you can call me Jimmy.”

“Thank you, Jimmy,” said Gus slowly. “This is my apprentice and dearest friend Roger Dearman, and this is Father Max, who is representing the Vatican.”

“Holy Lord,” exclaimed Mr. Johnson, “two different people from the Vatican in as many days! Is there something going on that I need to know more about?”

The young lady with the sun dress to her ankles came walking in with a tray laden with four glasses and a bottle of wine. Mr. Johnson turned and as she handed out glasses and Mr. Johnson poured the wine, then said, “Gentlemen this is my daughter Carol Anne Johnson.”

“A toast,” continued Mr. Johnson, “to two of the most talented men that I have ever been able to lay my eyes on, and to the Lord for bringing you here to my town. Cheers.”

We put our glasses in the air and drank them glass clean, as Mr. Johnson told us to follow him to his office, handing the glasses to his daughter, Carol Anne.

We walked to his office which was down a long hall. Along the hallway there were four smaller offices with at least three people in each office. At the end of the hall there was a door that led to the biggest and most radiant office or room that any of us had ever seen, outside the Vatican of course. Mr. Johnson walked around a big desk to a chair that looked as if it had been made to fit his body. He asked us to sit down at

any of the four chairs in front of the desk. Gus sat down and Father Max and I took a seat on either side of him.

“Please excuse me for getting so excited earlier,” said Mr. Johnson, “but, I’ve been dying to meet you both ever since I received my first order of your work. I believe the Good Lord puts us here to learn and get to know those who are gifted and allows us to connect as a group. But enough of my talking are you here on business or pleasure?”

“I wish that it were pleasure,” said Gus, “but it is just the opposite. We have sent your order of statues, which I know you will enjoy the group of statues with the children playing and the two with the boys and their baseball bats. We have also sent you an extra statue which was supposed to be a gift from both of us, but the monks who work for us made a mistake. They sent you the wrong statue. We came here personally to recover the statue and will be pleased to send your gift when we return to Italy.”

“I see,” said Mr. Johnson and sat for a moment not saying a word. When he finally spoke, he said, “It must be a very important statue for both of you to come so far to retrieve it. Personally, I can’t wait to see it myself, to tell you the truth.” As he spoke, he stood up and walked to the door of his office and called for his daughter, Carol Anne.

Within seconds Carol Anne was at the door walking toward the desk. “How can I help you Mr. Johnson?” she said.

Mr. Johnson said, “I’m your father; these people are friends. There is no need to be so formal,” and he laughed out loud. Gus, Father Max, and I all laughed with him. “There’s nothing as soothing for the soul then a good hard laugh,” said Mr. Johnson.

“We have a lot more in common than I realized,” said Gus.

“Carol Anne honey, please check and see if the statues from Italy have arrived and where they are, so my friends can get their statue back. I hope you will not grab your statue and run off,” he added, “because I would like you three to be my guests of honor at dinner tonight.

Once a month, we have a dinner at our house with the most influential people from the three surrounding towns,” he went on, adding quickly, “which only means about twenty people,” as he could see in Gus’ expression that he wasn’t too fond of the idea of a large dinner

party. "Have you found a place to stay since you came into town?" he continued in his effusive style.

"Yes," said Gus, "we actually arrived late yesterday, and stayed at the inn at the far end of town."

"Well, tonight you will stay in my guest home. It has four bedrooms with the latest plumbing money could buy. Trust me you'll love the place. Let me get one of my men to fetch your things from the inn. I'll make sure that he takes everything over to the house."

"You really don't have to do that," said Gus.

"I insist," replied Mr. Johnson, and without missing a beat the friendly man walked to his door and called out a man's name, then met him in the hall.

"It's all been taken care of," said Mr. Johnson as Carol Anne walked in with information about the statue.

"Papa..." said Carol Anne.

"That's much better," said Mr. Johnson.

"The statues arrived last night and went directly to the house and the installation crew has already been there since sunrise."

"What time is it now?" asked Mr. Johnson, as he looked at his pocket watch. "Ten-thirty hopefully they haven't opened your crate by the time we get there, which will take at least half an hour."

"Mr. Johnson," asked Gus, "may I ask you what the other people from the Vatican wanted yesterday?"

"Well," said Mr. Johnson, "I was not here, but what I was told is that they were looking for a missing statue. Is that your statue that they are looking for?" he asked as he sat down in his chair. "Is there something else that you should be telling me?"

"I really don't want to waste more time," said Gus. "Can I tell you about the rest on our way to your house? It is very simple, but it is critical that the crate with our statue stays sealed."

"That sounds like a deal to me," said Mr. Johnson as he got up, and we headed out the door and out of the warehouse, to where we had parked the wagon.

“An old flatbed wagon,” said Mr. Johnson. “Would you mind if I take a hold of the reins. It would be easier that way since I do know where I am going.”

“Certainly,” said Gus, as we jumped up on the carriage. Gus sat next to Mr. Johnson while Father Max and I sat in the back, each on an angle to see better forward.

On our way out the gate, Mr. Johnson stopped the wagon and told us to take hold. Then he yelled, “Yee-haw! Hold on!” and the wagon took off like a Fury. When we were close to town, Mr. Johnson slowed the horses down to a trot. Not a word was said as we went through town, but we could see that everyone who noticed Mr. Johnson on the wagon waved or tipped their hats.

Once we made it through the town, Gus started to tell Mr. Johnson that the Vatican had just voted in a new Pope. Mr. Johnson couldn't believe when Gus told him of the different groups of Catholics who wanted to control the Papacy. Gus told him that this statue was originally made for Pope Leo XIII, but since his death a month ago, he could not see giving the statue to Pope Pius X. His ways of running the church according to what we had been told were so different from those of Pope Leo XIII.

Mr. Johnson looked back at me and Father Max who quickly agreed. We were really enjoying Gus' creativity.

“You see,” continued Gus, “the Vatican believes that they can control anything they wish, and my statues are mine until they are delivered to the rightful owners.”

“Well put,” said Mr. Johnson, “but why is Father Max here representing the Vatican as you said earlier?”

“He is here,” said Gus, “to make sure that any unauthorized representative of the Vatican cannot take hold of the statue.”

“I see,” said Mr. Johnson, as we headed up a steep hill. “You know, my father always said, ‘A man can learn something new everyday,’ and this day I learned a lot.”

As we got to the top of the hill, we could see an enormous house with two separate houses connected to the main house on either side of

the mansion, and a garden surrounding them that only the Vatican could rival.

“Is that your home?” asked Gus.

“Sure is,” said Mr. Johnson. “Isn’t it beautiful?”

“Breathtaking,” said Father Max, as Mr. Johnson looked back and said, “Oh they do talk.” We all started to laugh as we neared the front of the mansion.

Three men came walking out immediately to take the wagon and led it to the stables. Gus, Father Max, and I were stunned by the size of the mansion, and Mr. Johnson noticed that we were amazed as everyone must be the first time, they see it up close.

“Come,” said Mr. Johnson, “and see the inside. You will meet the rest of my family.”

At the front door a butler held the door for us as we entered.

“Pauline,” yelled out Mr. Johnson and an echo rang out that must have been heard throughout the entire house.

“James.” we heard, from a room to the far-right side of the mansion, in a soft lady’s voice.

“Follow me, gentleman,” said Mr. Johnson as he led us to the biggest indoor kitchen that anyone of us had ever seen. There were four colored women moving around the kitchen cooking up a storm with the most beautiful red-headed woman that God could have put on this earth leading the group. She turned toward us, and I noticed that her blue eyes were like the sky itself. Mr. Johnson turned and started to introduce us.

“This, my dear, is Augustus Fulginiti, Roger Dearman, our esteemed sculptors, and this gentleman is Father Max from the Vatican. They have come here from Italy to retrieve a mistaken gift and I hope, to visit our home.”

“What mistaken gift would that be,” asked his wife, Pauline, the astonishing redhead. The men brought the new statues of the kids that you wanted and there was a crate with a statue of an; what was the statue of again?” asked Mr. Johnson, looking at Gus.

“It is a statue of an angel with wings. It must have been the biggest crate that you received,” answered Gus.

Pauline walked over to a large sink and started washing her hands, excusing herself and Mr. Johnson as she grabbed his hand and headed to another room in the mansion.

Gus, Father Max, and I walked over to a big window looking over the back yard, with its magnificent gardens. Toward the far end, a big statue was set on a concrete base that I estimated to be four foot high by four foot wide.

Gus looked to his left and saw a door, and before I or Father Max noticed him, he was halfway to the statue. Father Max and I tried to catch up with him.

Mr. Johnson and Pauline walked into the kitchen and asked the ladies what happened to the men, and one answered that we went running out the back door, toward the gardens. Mr. Johnson and Pauline looked out the window, seeing the men way in the back, by the statue of the Angel.

Gus arrived at the statue and just as Father Max and I got there, he was telling the men working to stop what they were doing. The men who had just finished setting in the statue and locking it into its base, didn't know what to say. Obviously, Gus was basically bigger than all of them put together.

Mr. Johnson and Pauline arrived a minute later, and one of his employees asked him what in the world was going on.

"Please," said Mr. Johnson, "give us a moment," and we began to walk a couple of paces toward the mansion.

"I'm sorry," began Mr. Johnson "but Pauline saw the paper that said it was a gift. We were going to have a statue made for the center of the back side of the garden and when they opened the crate, well, she fell in love with this one. That is why the men went ahead and sealed it in this spot for an eternity." He paused and looked up at the statue. "My Lord," he said, "I've never seen a statue so incredibly lifelike."

Everyone stood there and admired the beauty of the statue. I must say, it was a sight to see. The way the sun sparkled on some parts of it made it seem like the statue had a glow around it. Nobody would probably believe that something so beautiful could contain so much evil inside of it. Gus and I had lived long enough to know, however, that it

was somewhat like people—some of the most externally perfect could be rotten inside.

Gus started walking around the statue, looking at the base to see if the men had attempted to make a hole in the statue to lock it in the base.

“It has not been tampered with,” said Gus as Mr. Johnson and Pauline followed him.

“Gus, my friend, I know that you have your reasons for not giving the statue to the Vatican, but I will pay you whatever you ask. What you don’t seem to realize is that the men have already locked the statue to the base.”

“They did what?” I asked as Father Max, and I walked around closer to where Gus was standing. “What do you mean you locked the statue to the base?” asked Gus.

“You see,” said Mr. Johnson, “one of our men came up with a two-part lock-in system that basically seals the statue to the base. That is why we have only ordered statues from you. Your statues can last for centuries. That’s why we had the lock-in method perfected, for all the statues you see are permanent fixtures. The only way of taking them out is to take the entire base with the statue out of the ground or tear down the statue.

Now, that is another problem, because the base is four by four feet out of the ground, solid concrete with metal rebar going into a six by eight feet poured concrete slab on the bottom, for perfect stability.”

Gus, Father Max, and I all looked like we were about to pass out, as Mr. Johnson looked at us and said, “Gentlemen are you alright?”

“Yes,” said Gus, shaking his head from side to side. “We are going to have to spend some time figuring out what in the world we are going to do about this situation. Do you mind if we have a little time alone with the statue?”

“Oh, no, not at all,” said the very agreeable Mr. Johnson. “I can totally understand.” He grabbed his wife’s hand and started walking toward the mansion, ordering the men who were working on the statue to follow.

“Do either one of you have any idea, of what in the world, are we going do now?” asked Gus.

“We know that the statue is safe,” I said, “so why don’t we take the day to think of a solution. I don’t know about the two of you, but I would really enjoy a little time to rest.”

“Wisely spoken, my apprentice, I have trained you well,” said Gus, and all of us started laughing.

Gus looked at me and Father Max and after a minute of silence he said, “Well, it has been a rough month. Let’s get some rest.”

SEVEN



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