



*Dr. William Hart find verses from an alternate version of the book of Revelation. If made public, the new version would shake the very foundation of the Christian faith.*

**The Hart of John**  
By Lawrence R. Deering

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LAWRENCE R. DEERING

A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a man's face, looking slightly to the right. The lighting is dramatic, with the right side of his face (viewer's left) in shadow. His left eye (viewer's right) is a striking, glowing green color, while his right eye is dark and mostly obscured by shadow. The overall mood is mysterious and intense.

THE  
HART  
OF JOHN  
THE NEW APOCALYPSE

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## C H A P T E R

# 1

**D**r. William J. Hart rubbed the callous on the crease of his thumb with his forefinger. He had given up trying to break the habit long ago. He was also prone to tug on his right earlobe and twist clumps of hair gathered from his eyebrows. An annoyance to others, the collection of nervous rituals was comforting to Will. He inherited none of the bravado or charisma from his famous parents, only their intellect and good looks. Carrying the weight of his father's fame was burden enough. His connection to Aaron Davis, his uncle, was more than he could sometimes bear.

He had been staring at the document for hours, reading the fifth chapter of Revelation, verses 2-3 and 6-8, over and over.

“And the strong angel proclaimed in a loud voice, no one is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals thereof. And no man in heaven nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, either to look thereon. He beheld in the midst of the elders a Lamb. And the Lamb attempted to take the book from his right hand but the angel handed it to another. He shouted, there is only one worthy to open the book and open the seals, he that hath dominion over the earth.”

The familiar tightening in his stomach reminded Will of the discomfort he experienced no matter how many times he read it. The text was from an alternative version of *The Apocalypse of John*, more commonly known as the book of Revelation. In this version, the angel entrusted with the Book of Life hands it to Satan instead of God. He found the verses among his late uncle's research papers for his doctoral dissertation at Harvard Divinity School.

It was the discovery of these papers in high school that eventually led Will to pursue a PhD in theology from Duke University. He saved Harvard Divinity School (and himself) the embarrassment of following in his uncle's footsteps. Now he was a professor in Duke's religious studies department. He specialized in ancient languages and was proficient in Hebrew, Aramaic, Latin, and Greek. As he gathered up a stack of papers and absently formed them into a neat pile, he tried to remember the last time he had eaten.

Making his way to the refrigerator, he removed a Tupperware container filled with the previous night's vegetable lasagna. Cutting a piece exactly four inches by four inches square, he set the microwave for three minutes. He watched for several seconds to make sure the plate was centered precisely in the middle of the revolving tray. Food in hand, Will melded into his aging recliner, turned on the television, muting the sound. He thought about calling Maggie but decided against it.

They had met in the library at Duke. She was an alumna, having graduated two years earlier with a master's degree in the sociology of religion and culture. Her freelance writing work had been featured in *Books and Culture*, *The National Catholic Register*, and several other prestigious publications. She spotted him sitting next to a stack of books writing furiously in his journal.

"Your companion for the evening looks bored stiff," she said pointing to the stack of books.

Will caught by surprise waited a second before responding. He noticed how the fluorescent lighting shimmered off her brown hair, flawless skin, and impish smile.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have taken up two chairs."

"No apology necessary. I've been known to keep the same company. I'm Margaret Sheffield. You can call me Maggie."

Will rose and shook her hand.

“William Hart.”

“I know who you are. You’re the brilliant but misunderstood professor of biblical history.”

Will blushed and looked down, but Maggie wouldn’t let him off the hook.

“In fact, you’re the school’s ultimate authority on ancient languages. I could really use your help with a story I’m writing ... I can pay you.”

“I’m kind of busy right now.”

Will cringed as soon as he said it. What was it about beautiful women that caused him to become so tongue tied?

“I’m a good cook. Would it help if I threw in a couple of home cooked meals?”

He didn’t want to appear too anxious. He tugged at his earlobe.

“Okay, you’ve got a deal.”

Maggie told him about her article that explored the importance of religion on social stability. Her thesis was that the breakdown of the family unit in America could be attributed directly to the abandonment of the practice of religion. She wanted a historical perspective on family mores from the Bible. That’s where Will came in.

They spent the first couple of weeks delving into the Old Testament. Will read from the original Hebrew text. One evening after another delicious homemade dinner and a bottle of wine, the conversation drifted to a more personal nature.

“Tell me if you don’t want to talk about it,” Maggie said, “but what’s it like being the nephew of the infamous Dr. Aaron Davis?”

If it wasn’t for the second glass of wine Will might have tried to change the subject.

“You mean the Messenger, the Prince of Peace, the man who persecuted thousands of innocent people and sent countless others to concentration camps?”

“I’m sorry I brought it up. Let’s talk about something else.”

“No, it’s all right. It’s part of who I am. I think about it every day—the Davis blood coursing through my veins. Is it a curse? What demons did

I inherit? My uncle was the most gifted man the world had ever seen—except maybe for Jesus Christ. He could heal the sick. His vision for everlasting peace combined the best of religion and politics. He created a worldwide government and religion.”

Maggie sensed Will’s discomfort but waited for him to continue.

“The fact that he became a maniacal dictator was bad enough. What I can’t get beyond is the perverse sexual relationship he had with my mother.”

Maggie shifted in her seat.

“From what I’ve read your mother was a victim. The abuse started when she was a young girl.”

“Yes, but when she left my father for a time, before they were married, she and my uncle resumed their...whatever you call it.”

Maggie opened another bottle of wine.

“How has that affected your relationship with your mother?”

“I’ve always been closer to my dad. I was captivated by the stories he told through his documentaries. When I was old enough, he allowed me to help with his research. Do you know he gave me a credit on his Emmy-winning documentary *Lemmings* when I was only fourteen?”

“It sounds like you’re very proud of him.”

Will nodded.

“He’s a brilliant, good man.”

“And your mother?” Maggie gave him a reassuring smile.

“My mother is brilliant in her own right. She was Aaron’s partner in the most influential organization in the world. Aaron wouldn’t have been able to achieve what he did without her.”

“So why is your relationship strained?”

“It’s not strained, it’s ... complicated. My mother is a Davis. She had an unnatural relationship with her own brother. She was part of an organization that brought us to the brink of world war. Although she abandoned her position and turned against my uncle, I can’t dismiss the fact she was part of it.”

“Maybe you’re afraid you’re more like your mother than you care to admit?”

Will was silent. They got up from the table and made their way to the sofa.

“What about you? What skeletons are in your closet?” Will asked, eager to change the subject.

“My closet is chock full just like everyone else’s. I was a socially awkward teen who found more comfort in books than people. I rushed through my undergraduate program in three years. I guess I was so anxious to start my career or running from the lack of a social life.”

Maggie looked off toward a corner and sipped her wine.

“I was average looking in college. Guys showed little interest, and I didn’t give them any reason to pursue me.”

“But you’re beautiful,” Will blurted out.

Maggie smiled in embarrassment.

“Thank you, but I was a late bloomer. When guys started to notice me, I was ill prepared. My first relationship was a disaster. I fell in love with a second year graduate student. He was brilliant, handsome, and devilishly clever. He cleaned me out of what little savings I had and left me for a cuter first year. I swore off men after that—of course, until I met Brodie. He was a social gadabout. No party was too big or raucous for him. At first I craved the attention. We drank too much and went from one party to the next. Eventually, I tired of the lifestyle and ended it. That was too much for Brodie’s ego, and I ended up in the hospital with a concussion.”

“I’m very sorry.”

“Me too. I lost my confidence and focused on my career instead, which brings you up to speed.”

The sessions continued for a few more weeks until Will summoned the courage to let Maggie know he had developed feelings for her. She confessed that she had as well. They started off slowly, but Will couldn’t contain himself. He was inexperienced and uncomfortable in dealing with matters of the heart. He declared he was hopelessly in love with her.

When she told him she thought they should slow things down a bit, Will took it as rejection. He was crushed and withdrew; developing an unnatural obsession with work. He went days without emerging from his apartment. In truth, he had fallen into a deep depression.



When he and Maggie spoke on the phone, he kept the conversation short and to the point. He wanted to tell Maggie he longed to be with her, but as time went on, the more hopeless the situation seemed.

★

Will took a yearlong sabbatical from his teaching duties to write a book. He was three months into his research with little to show for it. The stress manifested itself in the base of his neck and shoulders. He convinced the theology department at Duke to pay for his research on the earliest texts of the Bible. What they didn't know was that this was a ruse for him to conduct his own personal research.

He was running out of time, so he dialed Maggie's number. He was emboldened by knowing he would get her answering machine.

"It's Maggie. I'm not home right now. You know what to do after the beep."

"Maggie, it's Will. I'm sorry for avoiding you. It's the last thing I want. When you told me you wanted to take things slow, I was devastated. I didn't really understand what you were trying to tell me. I don't know how to handle things like this, so I'm just going to be honest. I—"

*Beep.*

"Damn it."

He redialed the number and waited impatiently for her message to end.

"Maggie, I'm sorry for leaving this on your answering machine. I'm going to Europe and Asia to research my book. I'll be gone a month or so. I want to talk about us when I get back. Please give me another chance. I—"

*Beep.*

Will took Lufthansa flight 451, leaving for Istanbul at 5:00 p.m. He stretched out as much as possible in his coach window seat. He dozed off and on, struggling to fight off his reoccurring nightmare, without success.

In his dream, he watched passively as his uncle fondled his mother. She arched her back as Aaron ravaged her. Fast forward to his mother in the hospital delivery room. The doctor removed his surgical mask and congratulated the new parents. They had a healthy baby boy, William J. Hart. The

new mother cuddled the baby in her arms. She pressed her nose to the baby's head and took in his smell. It was a tender moment, as if no one else existed.

A masked figure materialized next to the bed. His mother's expression morphed from contentment to resignation. She hesitated but then summoned the courage to fulfill her destiny. She lifted the baby from the sanctuary of her bosom and placed him in the father's outstretched hands. He smiled at his son. Will watched the events unfold like a voyeur peering through an open window. He saw the father lift the baby above his head.

"You, my child, will finish what I could not."

The father returned the boy to his mother and looked in Will's direction. Will was powerless to move. He knew what would happen next, because he had seen it many times before. The man removed his mask. The face was not his father's but his uncle's, Aaron Davis.

Will heaved forward in his seat gasping for air. His seatmate gave him a look, more disturbed than concerned. Will reciprocated with a weak smile. He knew intellectually the dream wasn't true, that he was conceived months after his uncle had been killed. At the same time, the details surrounding his uncle's death were murky. Supposedly, Barbara Holder, the First Lady, killed Aaron. She shot him in the chest after he attempted to shoot Will's mother. The rumor among conspiracy theorists was that Aaron had survived the initial incident, only to be brought to justice some time later.

The entire matter could have been cleared up with a simple DNA test, but his mother laughed when he suggested the test would put to rest any questions he had regarding his paternity. Maybe it was because Will had been twelve years old at the time. He never brought it up again.

Now on his way to Turkey, he questioned his decision. He knew he was better at running from relationships than making them work. Was he putting off the inevitable with Maggie? Was she out of his league? Too smart? Too pretty? What did he hope to gain by chasing after a book that may not exist? He decided it wasn't ego; it was destiny. The thought of someone else finding it before him was unthinkable. He was Aaron Davis's nephew. He had to be the one that stopped "another" Aaron from using the book to rise to power.

The pilot's voice came over the intercom indicating they were starting their descent into Istanbul. Will made sure his briefcase was stowed properly and his seatbelt fastened. Take-offs and landings were the worst. He looked out the window and saw the safety of the ground moving ever so slowly toward the plane.

★

Maggie spent the afternoon in the library. She wished Will had been there to interpret some of the Hebrew references. When exhaustion forced her to abandon her research, she returned home. She threw her jacket on the sofa and stepped out of the shoes that had tormented her all day. Clicking on the stereo, she went through the mail, throwing yet another offer for a credit card in the trash. She noticed the light blinking on the answering machine and hit play. It was Will.

Maggie played the message over several times. She couldn't believe he left the country without saying goodbye in person. She regretted their last encounter. It wasn't that she didn't love Will, she just wondered if she was capable of sustaining a healthy relationship. Her previous liaisons had not prepared her for true love.

She pictured his expression when she had told him they should take it slow. She knew he had taken it the wrong way. He really was a beautiful man, although he unknowingly tried his best to hide it. She had seen footage of Dr. Aaron Davis many times. She would never admit it to Will, but the resemblance was striking. She also noticed how other women looked at him. Will, on the other hand, was oblivious.

Maggie was hungry but didn't even bother going into the kitchen. She thumbed through a stack of takeout menus on the table and ordered Indian food: tandoori chicken, bharta, raita, and onion naan. She watched the news, but it depressed her, so she brought up Will's number on her cell phone. She hesitated and put the phone down, choosing instead to watch a segment on TV about the brutal kidnapping and rape of a local girl.

## C H A P T E R

# 2

Will was jetlagged and grumpy when he landed in Istanbul. He checked his phone for messages. Nothing from Maggie. He went to the car rental counter and picked up his key. Successfully navigating the drive to the Hotel Amira, he checked in and managed to make it to the bed, where he slept soundly for two hours.

Will didn't have a real plan. He figured Turkey was as good a place as any to get started. It was the cradle of civilization. Still, it was a bit ironic that his search for a book from the Christian Bible led him to Turkey, which was ninety-nine percent Islamic.

Turkey had biblical significance. Noah's ark supposedly landed on Mount Ararat, and he had lived with his family in Haran for a period of time. The tombs of Joseph and Mary were conventionally accepted to be in Ephesus. A Pharisee named Saul, who eventually became the Apostle Paul, was born in Tarsus. He wrote his first Epistle to the Christians scattered throughout Pontus and Cappadocia and authored the New Testament books of Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians, all in Turkey.

Will's first order of business was to meet with up with Hasad Kahalil. Will had met him at a seminar in Chicago. They had a deep respect for each other's scholarly work, which developed into a friendship. Hasad was a professor at the Halki Seminary, which was located on the second largest of the Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara. The seminary sat atop a hill on the

site of the original Byzantine-era Monastery of the Holy Trinity. It had been converted to a theological school in 1888.

Will woke to the call to morning prayer. He took the hour-long boat ride to the island, where he found Hasad waiting his arrival at the dock.

“You look older than I remember,” Hasad said with a slight accent, embracing his friend.

“And your manners haven’t improved,” Will replied.

“Come, let’s go to my home and have some tea.”

Hasad’s apartment was located on the top of a hill on the seminary grounds. Will was slightly winded from the steep climb from the parking area below.

“I’m glad you’re finally getting some exercise,” Will said.

Hasad chuckled. “Looks like you could use some yourself.”

Will settled into the guest room located in a small alcove off the living room. A twin size bed dominated the space. He threw his suitcase down and joined Hasad in the living room.

“You have come a very long way. I’m surprised your research brings you to Turkey. I would have thought you would have gone to Greece or Israel.”

“To be honest, I wasn’t sure where to begin,” Will said. He didn’t know how much to tell Hasad but he needed his help. “Let me show you something.”

He retrieved his briefcase. Sitting directly across from Hasad, he spread his papers on the table.

“As you know, my uncle attended Harvard Divinity School.”

Hasad nodded. “Yes, he was quite the prodigy and at such a young age.”

“I found this among Aaron’s research papers.”

Will handed Hasad the handwritten notes. He spent several minutes reading and re-reading the passages before looking up at Will.

“This is very disturbing. What if Dr. Davis just made them up?”

“He was quoting from a book written somewhere between one-fifty to two hundred AD. What about the references to Satan? What about his ‘God Exists’ list? He says, ‘I am the spiritual leader of this world. God can

have the heavens. As the mutiny continues, there will be increasingly more defections. There is no such thing as evil, only opposition to God.' And what about, 'My Father's power grows as the creator's weakens. I am the Messenger'?"

"I'm sorry, Will, but it sounds to me like your uncle was *majnoon* (crazy)."

Will noticed his colleague's Americanized attire for the first time. Hasad wore neatly pressed cuffed slacks and penny loafers, like all good American professors. His white oxford cloth shirt was open at the neck. He might have been mistaken for an American tourist but for his dark skin and beard. (Hasad wore his beard as prescribed by the Sunnah or teachings of Muhammad.)

The son of a fisherman, Hasad had been raised by three generations of family living together on the banks of the Bosphorus. His father worked long hours chasing the elusive blue fin tuna making their way down the river en route to the Black Sea. His mother died from pneumonia when he was five. His *babaanne* or grandmother raised him. She often told him that he was gifted and would be a great man someday.

Hasad presumed he would follow in his father's footsteps and enter the fishing business, but when he turned ten, his father sent him to live with his uncle's family in Istanbul. There, he attended school with the other local boys. He was the first of his family to graduate from high school. When he was awarded a scholarship to college, his entire village celebrated. He went on to earn a doctorate in international studies and become a professor.

"Hasad, my uncle was an evil man, but he wasn't crazy. He wouldn't have quoted these verses unless they were from a reliable source."

"So, what do you hope to find in Turkey?" Hasad asked.

"I want to find the complete manuscript."

Hasad could tell Will was dead serious and determined. He leaned forward, stroking his beard.

"Will, a search such as this could lead to dark places. If the manuscripts exist, others will know of it. They will do anything to find it."

"I don't know what I'll find, but look what my uncle was able to achieve," Will replied. "Where did he get his power to heal? How did he

become such a powerful man? He had something that no one else had.”

“Evil exists in many forms, Will. One man, even as gifted as you, cannot make this journey alone.”

Will smiled. He knew where this was going.

“I have to return to my teaching by the middle of September,” Hasad said. “I have sixty days to give to you.”

“You are a good friend,” Will replied. “I would not ask you to do this unless ... unless I had no choice. I know this is what I must do. So, where shall we begin?”

“At the beginning. We should go to Patmos, where Saint John wrote the book of Revelation. We’ll fly to Kusadasi and take the ferry to the island. I have a friend there who is an Eastern Orthodox priest. He can get us into the Monastery of Saint John the Theologian. We’ll take the tour of the Grotto of Saint John and the Cave of the Apocalypse, where John received his vision.”

Will nodded.

“I’ve always wanted to go there, but how will this help us find the manuscripts?”

“If anyone has heard of these manuscripts, it will be the monks at the Monastery of Saint John.”

Will retired to his room and checked his phone for messages. Nothing.



The strong but inviting smell of freshly brewed Turkish coffee permeated the room. Will joined Hasad, who poured his special blend into special cups, allowing the grounds to settle at the bottom. Will sipped his coffee greedily, undeterred by the heat of the liquid. Hasad was still preparing for the trip and appeared an hour later in cargo pants, a dark green long-sleeved shirt with matching vest, and hiking boots.

Will laughed as Hasad entered the room.

“I thought we’re going to Patmos, not climbing Mount Ararat.”

Hasad looked slightly offended.

“We’re going on an adventure. I’m merely dressing the part.”

They grabbed their gear and took the boat back to the mainland. A small plane took them from Ataturk Airport in Istanbul to Izmir. From there, they drove the eighty kilometers in a mini-bus to Kusadasi, where they caught the hydrofoil. As the boat made its way across the crystal blue Aegean Sea, they dreamed about what lay ahead.

By the time they arrived on Patmos, there were weary but energized. They were met by their driver, who took them to the Petra Hotel and Suites, located in the quaint fishing village of Grikos. The renowned hotel was family-owned and known for its excellent service. One of the Petras checked them in at the desk. The bellman showed them to their well-appointed suites, where they unpacked and showered, agreeing to meet in the bar for a drink before dinner.

An hour later, Will skimmed through a brochure of the Holy Cave of the Apocalypse that he had spread out on the weathered wooden bar. Hasad and Krikor, the bartender, were engaged in a heated conversation over who was going to win the World Cup. They enjoyed their drinks so much they decided to eat their dinner at the bar. Krikor set out placemats and silverware.

“So, you come to Patmos to see cave?” Krikor asked with a heavy accent.

“That and your other historic sites,” Will replied. “We’re also going to the Monastery of Saint John to speak to the monks.”

Krikor shook his head.

“I don’t like see monks. They make feel ... uh ... not good.”

After they wolfed down their lobster dinners they were barely able to get up from the bar. It may have had something to do with the multiple bottles of Crazy Donkey beer they consumed. Will left Krikor a big tip and thanked him for the memorable meal. He managed to make his way back to his room in spite of his inebriated state.

He was brushing his teeth, looking in the mirror, when he caught sight of one of his dresser drawers slightly ajar. He examined his belongings and discovered that his undergarments had been pushed to one side. His heart raced. He went to the closet where he had stowed his briefcase. The lock



had been pried open. He threw its contents onto the bed. His uncle's papers were gone.

★

Maggie had difficulty concentrating. She knew she had a deadline to meet, but she couldn't focus on the article. Sitting at the small antique desk her mother had given her in college, she stared at the image on the computer screen: Dr. Aaron Davis. The longer she looked at the picture, the more she saw Will. She hadn't planned on researching Davis and the Brotherhood of Man, but it was a connection to Will. She couldn't imagine the guilt he must feel over his mother's incestuous relationship with his uncle.

She pulled herself away from the screen to grab a soda and happened to catch her reflection in the hallway mirror. She pushed her hair off her face and noticed the dark bags forming under her eyes from chronic insomnia. Returning to the familiarity of her office chair, she flipped through several articles on Aaron Davis. One article mentioned a man named the Grand Ayatollah Mohamed Hakimi.

Maggie Googled his name but there was very little information available. He was described as a wealthy businessman from Lebanon with diplomatic status in the US. If he were still alive, he would be in his seventies. She wasn't able to pull up any current information on him since the death of Aaron Davis. Will had mentioned the man a couple of times in conversation. He believed Hakimi had been partly responsible for the atrocities his uncle committed.

Maggie forced herself back to the work that paid the bills. She finished her article and submitted it for publication. It felt like giving birth. She allowed herself a moment to enjoy the accomplishment before returning to her research on Hakimi. After countless hours online, she stumbled upon a piece in the *New York Times*. It had run a series of articles over thirty years ago on the Brotherhood of Man's coalescing power in North Africa.

“Dr. Aaron Davis and his Brotherhood of Man have achieved what no other organization has been able to. They have unified

the countries of Northern Africa into a powerful economic and military coalition. He made the case that his organization, with ties throughout the Middle East, could play a similar role in peace negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. He was granted a seat at the table.

“Reliable sources confirm that the Grand Ayatollah Hakimi, a successful oil executive from Libya, was largely responsible for bringing the parties together. Although little is known about the elusive billionaire, he maintains diplomatic status in the United States and is a frequent visitor to Capitol Hill.”

Maggie glanced at the clock on her desk: 4:00 a.m. If Hakimi had been a regular in DC, there would be records of his meetings. She would try the State Department in the morning. Switching off her desk lamp, she went to bed. She lay awake on top of the covers for a long time, repositioning herself every few minutes.

★

Will got up with the sun and sent Maggie a brief email.

“Maggie, I’m in Patmos, Greece with Hasad. My uncle’s papers were stolen from my briefcase last night. Why would anyone want them? I miss you. Please don’t give up on me. Love, Will.”

Will and Hasad had breakfast in the hotel restaurant before heading off to the cave. He told Hasad about the break-in. Will had copies of his uncle’s notes, but the theft of the papers written in Aaron’s own hand broke the physical connection he had with his family’s history.

They waited in the lobby with the other tourists waiting for the bus. Will eyed the group suspiciously. He wondered if one of them could be the thief. They were herded onto the aging mini-bus, where Will made Hasad take the window seat to minimize his claustrophobia and carsickness.

They meandered their way up the mountain, past the village of Skala, on the way to the Monastery of Saint John the Theologian. The view beyond the narrow roadside was spectacular. The tour guide, Alexandro, kept pointing out areas of interest, but Will’s gaze remained fixed on the

next bend ahead. When the monastery came into view, the excited group of travelers met it with a collective “ah.” Alexandro exited the bus and held up one of those annoying paddle signs. The group gathered obediently for the first of many lectures.

“The large building in front of you is the Chapel of Saint Anne, constructed by Holy Christodoulos in 1088. It was built to honor Saint Anna, mother of the Virgin Mary. The Bishop of Caesaria Grigorios founded the monastery in the seventeenth century. The Patmian School came later in eighteen hundred.”

Alexandro led his faithful followers to a set of stairs, where they would begin their descent into the cave. They passed the chapel of Ayios Artemios and went down several steps until they reached a platform. A few more steps, and they were at the entrance to the church of Ayia Anna and the holy cave. Alexandro pointed out the mosaic above the entrance. The Greek inscription read “Saint John the Theologian and his disciple Prochoros, who transfers John’s vision into writing.”

The cave was tiny; the ceiling low enough to touch. Alexandro led a few tourists into the cave at a time to observe the shrine and take a few minutes for reflection. Regardless of one’s religious orientation, the experience was very moving. Outside the cave, Alexandro regained control of the group and read from the book of Revelation.

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”

The words were met with complete silence. Alexandro bowed his head for a moment and then looked up at the group.

“Okay, back on the bus.”

Will and Hasad informed Alexandro they would be staying at the monastery and had arranged for a ride back to the hotel. Will slipped him ten Euros. As they made their way to the main chapel, Will marveled at the fifteen-meter surrounding walls. It was truly an impenetrable fortress. He read the monks had sounded the bells to warn the citizenry of Patmos of impending danger. They defended themselves by pouring burning oil or lead onto the heads of intruders through small openings in the wall.

They were captivated by the three-dimensional carved wooden icons adorning the walls of the entrance to the main chapel. They approached a monk standing on the other side of the chapel.

“Excuse me, I’m Dr. William Hart, and this is Dr. Hasad Kahalil. We’re looking for Father Stephen.”

The monk grunted. “Follow me.”

They found Father Stephen seated at a table in the library surrounded by stacks of books. He looked up from his work and acknowledged his guests with a nod. When he completed writing in his notebook, he stood up and extended his hand.

“Dr. Hart, Dr. Kahalil, welcome to the Monastery of Saint John.”

The local vendors could have used Father Stephen’s image for any one of the postcards in their gift shops. His white beard extended down his chest, and he wore the traditional black habit and mantle. He had learned English as part of his religious education, but it was clearly not his mother tongue.

“Thank you, Father Stephen. Father Galen sends his regards,” Hasad said.

“Father Galen is good man. Tell him I expect him come see me.”

“I will most assuredly do so.”

“You have seen the cave, no? It is great treasure of the Aegean.”

“Yes, it was quite spectacular,” Will replied, anxious to move on to a more sensitive subject.

Father Stephen gestured toward the door.

“Let’s go to private room.”

The men followed the priest down a narrow corridor that led into the refectory, where the forty monks shared their meals. The large, stone-walled rectangular room was empty; its furnishings consisting of two long marble tables with wooden chairs. Father Stephen took a seat at the end of one of the tables and invited his guests to join him.

“How can I help?”

Hasad knew Will was uneasy, so he gave him a supportive nod of approval.

“Father Stephen, my uncle was Dr. Aaron Davis of the Brotherhood of Man,” Will began. “He obtained his doctorate in theology from Harvard

Divinity School. My father, Thomas Hart, came across some of his personal notes and papers. They were stolen last night from my briefcase.”

Father Stephen’s face registered shock as Will continued.

“In those papers were two verses from the book of Revelation.”

Will handed him a copy of the verses.

Father Stephen studied the words. He looked at Will and seemed to take measure of the man sitting before him.

“I see before.”

Will and Hasad looked at each other in amazement.

Father Stephen closed his eyes and recited the verses from memory.

“And he that sat upon the throne looked upon those he ruled; the abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters and liars. He was filled with pride. And he saw the angels ascend toward the heavens from whence they came. And they returned no more.”

Will gasped.

“An alternate version of the book of Revelation exists?”

Father Stephen shrugged.

“I know only these verses.”

Will glanced at Hasad.

“How did you come by this information?”

“We have piece of paper from early manuscript. Two other sections in Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens. That where is Archbishop of Athens.”

Will tried to slow the pace of his racing heart.

“May we see the piece of paper?”

“What you want with manuscript?”

Will leaned forward, choosing his words carefully.

“Father, I believe my uncle felt he was fulfilling prophecy. Not the Judeo-Christian version of the Apocalypse but an alternate version. If these manuscripts exist, there may be those who believe it will enable them to accomplish what my uncle failed to do.”

“And what is that?”

“Use religion to create a single world-wide government.”

Father Stephen grabbed the crucifix he wore on a long gold chain around his neck and mumbled, “*O Theos na mas prostatevei apo to kako.*”<sup>1</sup> The monk rose slowly from the table and motioned for Will and Hasad to follow.

The men went down into the bowels of the monastery until they reached a locked door. Father Stephen retrieved a skeleton key on a silver chain from beneath his habit. He bent down to place the key in the ancient lock, pausing as if reciting a silent prayer. The lock popped open, and the priest led the men inside a pitch-black room.

Father Stephen felt his way along the wall finding a shelf with a candle and a box of matches. He lit the candle and carried it over to a rustic wooden table, where he lit two more candles. The dark room’s interior glowed faintly as it was made known to them. Will and Hasad noticed the heavily carved wooden panels and beautiful icons that adorned the walls.

“This room from eleven hundred Anno Domini. It sacred place for monks.”

Father Stephen produced a large, heavily carved wooden box. He opened the lid and gently removed its contents. Held between two pieces of glass was the remnant of a page written in an ancient language. He placed it on the table in front of the men.

Will squinted in the dim light, not daring to touch the glass.

“Father, who else knows this is here?”

“Church in Athens. Other monks no allowed here.”

“Would it be possible for us to see the other pieces of the manuscript in Athens?”

“I ask permission of Archbishop. You go hotel. I send message if he say yes.”

Will tore his eyes away from the manuscript and looked at the monk.

“Father Stephen, I cannot begin to thank you enough for showing this to us.”

“You welcome. *Eithe o Theos na enai mazi sas.*”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> God protect us from evil.

<sup>2</sup> May God be with you.

Father Stephen returned the manuscript to the box and blew out the three candles, casting the room in total darkness. They felt their way along the stone walls until they reached the hallway door. Once he heard the click of the lock, Father Demetrius uncoiled himself from his cramped position in the corner of the sacred room.



*Dr. William Hart find verses from an alternate version of the book of Revelation. If made public, the new version would shake the very foundation of the Christian faith.*

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