

Prologue

Scene A

The Fall of Constantinople

May 29, 1453

Giustiniani was slain. Constantinople's heroic Genoan commander—struck down by the great Ottoman cannon while defending the northwest wall, the Mesoteichion. Like a dark wind, the rumor of his death swept from regiment to regiment and chilled the heart of every man who heard it. The Mesoteichion had not held. It was all but smoking rubble. And Giustiniani had been dragged from the battle, his boots leaving twin trails of blood. So it was said.

At the southwestern wall near the Golden Gate, Sultan Mehmet's janissaries began a fresh assault. Jakab gripped his spear, trembling. He was no warrior. He was a monk, conscripted in a desperate hour along with children and old men to defend the city's walls. He'd already seen what no man should. "Slain, slain! Giustiniani slain!" shouted a frantic youth racing past. Jakab only just glimpsed the boy's fearful eyes.

If it were true . . . their leader . . . lost . . .

To Jakab's left were several archers—Genoans like Giustiniani—who sought to defend their adopted home. Upon hearing of the commander's death, they dropped their bows and fled from the ramparts back into the city. Others followed their example. Commands to hold the wall went unheeded, and the trickle of retreating men soon

became a stream. As it swelled, the stream swept Jakab up with it. He had no choice. He dropped his spear and fled.

But where was he to flee? The city was surrounded. The Mese, the city's main street, was churning with people, all uncertain which direction to run. Many simply stood huddled together weeping, clinging to their last possessions. Some rushed south to the harbors to try to escape the city by boat. A scant hope, Jakab surmised. He had seen the masts of the Turkish fleet. The Sea of Marmara was no longer a sea but a floating forest.

In the tumult Jakab was pushed north. He kept his feet moving lest he be caught in an undertow and trampled. At the aqueduct that spanned the city's third and fourth hills—Constantinople was built on seven hills like Rome—the current of the crowd slowed, and Jakab broke free. A shadow fell over him. He looked up. It was the Church of the Holy Apostles towering above him from the fourth hill. There some of the nobility had taken refuge, and many priests had gathered to pray. Perhaps if God would not spare the city from the Turks, he would at least spare his churches. Jakab crossed himself and prayed it would be so. Then he turned east. There was only one place to go. Only one place he wanted to be when the Sultan's army took the city. There they would find him.

On he went, avoiding the main thoroughfares now. He did not wish to see people, their fearful countenances, and he wanted to hide his own for shame. The houses he passed were silent, the windows empty. Doors had been left open. Endless rows of darkened, gaping mouths.

At last his destination lay before him. He slowed as he neared it, taking in everything one last time: the amber brick walls, the central dome, the tympanum that crowned

the red, wooden doors, and the words carved into the lintel.

He pushed the door open. The shrine was empty save for an aged and bearded monk kneeling in prayer before the altar in the apse.

"It is finished," Jakob announced. "Giustiniani—" his knees buckled as he spoke, and he slumped to the floor.

The aged monk rose and went to him. "Then . . . they come?"

Jakob covered his face and wept.

The old man knelt and gently grasped Jakob's shoulders.

"I am sorry, Laomendon," Jakob sobbed, rocking back and forth. "Our Brother Thaddeus—I could not save him."

"Killed?" Laomendon asked, his voice full of grief.

Jakob nodded. "We were on the wall. The janissaries—"

"Say no more, my son. He is with the Lord."

Jakob put his head in his hands.

"Come," Laomendon said, "let us pray that the Lord will likewise receive us."

With determined strength, Laomendon gripped Jakob's arms and pulled him toward the altar. Blood on Jakob's waistcoat stained the old man's wrinkled hands. Silently, he looked at the blood. His hands shook, and he clenched them hard. "Come," he commanded and began to chant.

Jakob tried to obey. Laomendon was his spiritual elder. Often in the dark days of the Sultan's siege, Jakob had taken comfort in Laomendon's uncommon serenity. But now as his voice united with the aged monk's chant, with the din of war echoing all around, Jakob despised his need for comfort. "What good is it?" he shouted. "God does not hear. He will not save us. Soon we will be nothing. Our city, our people—lost forever!" He pounded the floor with his fists.

"Not lost. Only . . . hidden, perhaps. When our Lord was crucified, the apostles also feared they had lost all. But they

endured. The truth of God will endure. We must believe.”

“Endure?” Jakab shouted. “Thaddeus is dead! I held him in my arms. And we will soon follow him. Do you not understand? So few have come to our aid. When many could. Especially the Latins. May God judge them for their betrayal. For betrayal upon betrayal!” Jakab shook his fists in the air. “Once they came to plunder us, to rule us, to steal our sacred treasures. Now, what does Pope Nicholas do? Merely stands by watching as these sons of Muhammad do the same. The janissaries will plunder our churches. Take our sacred relics for their hoard. Plucking fruit from every tree. Everything they see.”

“It is as our Lord wills. And he is just. We must place our faith in him.”

“Where is he now? I cannot see him.”

Laomendon turned his eyes upon Jakab. They were not serene eyes now, but stormy. “Enough! My son, you must cleanse your heart of doubt. It is only the pure in heart who shall see God.”

Laomendon’s rebuke made Jakab weep afresh. How could this have happened? How could it be that this was the end? Jakab stood, and as his elder’s chanting filled the shrine, he walked about it, taking in once more its sumptuous beauty. He wanted its images to remain before his eyes to the very last: the frescoes of the apostles in the north aisle, and of the Christ in the central dome, and finally, the four mosaics in the west aisle—as beautiful as any mosaic in Hagia Sophia, Emperor Justinian’s matchless church.

The four vivid figures stood proud and defiant, as Jakab himself wished to stand. Each of the four men held an identical treasure—a golden dish. Jakab stepped toward the nearest image. The saint’s fiery halo and cold, ebony eyes

could of themselves inspire many seekers to become penitent. Ministering in the shrine to pilgrims, Jakab had often witnessed it. He touched the golden dish in the saint's right hand, then pressed his lips to it, kissing it. "Until the wages of sin are paid," he murmured.

Shouts beyond the walls of the shrine made him gasp. Hastily, he returned to Laomendon at the altar. "Father! Have we done enough? Have we sufficiently protected the Legacy? Justice must prevail. It must!"

The old monk ceased his chant and lifted his eyes. "Tell me, Jakab, what do you see?" He pointed past the altar to the bare wall of the apse.

"Nothing," Jakab said. "Nothing at all."

"And thus it will be for the Turks. We made certain of that."

"But do you not think, in time, they will discover the chest?"

"No."

"But how can you be sure?" Jakab knelt beside Laomendon once more, his anger spent.

"Because as you have just said, they will take only what they see."

"But how will the Legacy of Andronicus be passed on? What if Alexander and Demetrius do not reach Athos? They carry our Order's secret texts. What if the shrine is destroyed? What if—"

"My son," Laomendon interrupted, shaking his head sadly, "these are questions we cannot answer. The fate of the Legacy, like our own fates, like the fate of our Order, we must leave in the hands of God. Perhaps, in the fullness of time . . ."

Jakab opened his mouth to speak.

Laomendon stopped him, placing one hand on his arm.

“No. No more questions for this poor, old monk. You, Thaddeus, myself—all of us have suffered long nights of labor, and we have done all we could with the time God gave us. Rest your mind in that knowledge. It is true we . . . will not live to see divine justice prevail. But we must believe—” Lamendon’s hand trembled. Beyond the walls could be heard a clashing roar. He gripped Jakab’s arm firmly. “Believe, my son, that the Lord will exact punishment upon those who have betrayed us.” His voice rose. “Believe that his justice will run like water, his righteousness like a mighty stream!”

The clashing roar grew near, now punctuated with shrieks and curses. It hammered the walls all around. The shrine’s red doors burst open. One door, screeching, swung wildly, broken from its hinges. They had come, the soldiers of Sultan Mehmet, and with them, swords dripping with blood.

A Promising Strike

*University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
February 15, 20—*

“I must admit,” Professor Adam Burke said to the phone receiver cradled between his shoulder and his ear, “this dig sounds promising. Very promising.” He scribbled down names, phone numbers, and dates on a notepad.

Burke was an active listener. “That’s good, he’s highly able,” he interrupted as the woman he spoke to went on, and “yes, I’d thought of Stoltzfus too,” and “of course, without question, Dr. Foo.”

“Oh, other names?” The smile on Burke’s freckled face grew wide as he considered the question. He’d been waiting for a chance to mention a person’s name—a woman’s—in particular. But he didn’t want to appear too eager. He leaned back in his chair and ran his fingers through his thinning, brown hair. It was a routine, unconscious gesture, as if to confirm to himself that his hair was still there.

“Let’s see,” he began, pretending to be without a ready answer, “if you believe the structure might be a church or a shrine, then I’d recommend Dr. Calvino at University of Bologna. I worked with him in Croatia. Yes, on the grounds of the Euphrasian Basilica. Very knowledgeable man. And, uh, perhaps—I’ve never met her, you understand—but you might consider Dr. Elena Hromadova at Moscow State. She’s new to the field. I’ve reviewed some of her work here and there. In the latest *Journal of the History of Ideas* she

has a brilliant essay on eighteenth-century Dishing. I believe the article is called *The True Origins of the Cappadocia Theory*. I'm quoted in it extensively."

Burke paused, listening to an interjected question. He responded with a self-deprecating chuckle, a chuckle he'd perfected over his many years as Miller Family Chair of Byzantine Studies at the University of Pittsburgh and as the director of the Keslo Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology. It was a chuckle that not only inspired his graduate students to work harder to edit his manuscripts, but also persuaded wealthy patrons of the museum to empty their pockets.

"No, Hromadova isn't a former graduate student. As I said, I've never met her. Truly. It's just an instinct I have. Her work is exceptional. Those would be my top recommendations." He shifted from the subject quickly: "Say, I'm sorry you had trouble getting in touch with me. I've been on sabbatical. Didn't my assistant give you my cell?"

Another pause. Another chuckle. "Yes, that's right. Getting good help these days. Hey, did I ever tell you about Stoltzfus? No? Well, he once uncovered an ancient Egyptian tablet. Written in hieroglyphs, naturally. When he translated it, all it said was—Kids never listen, and it's hard to find a good servant. True story! Yes, some things never change. But anyway, I'm glad you found me. What have I been doing on sabbatical? Writing my speech for the conference at the National Archaeological Museum in Bulgaria, of course. You didn't know I'm the keynote speaker? Not that I have anything to talk about. Just the, oh, interesting trinket I found in the dig in Sofia a few years back. Ha-ha, yes—interesting trinket—that's what I said. The Saint Nil icon. The museum will have it on public display for the first time. A big event for sure."

As Burke spoke, he reached behind him and lifted an object from his bookcase. It was a wooden panel the size of a book and bore the likeness of a thin monk with a scraggly beard and golden halo. Only half the monk's face appeared, as the entire upper left corner of the icon was missing. Near his heart, the monk clutched a dish in both hands. Gently, Burke felt the cracks and pits in the panel. They weren't ancient cracks and pits. The icon was a facsimile. Burke had paid quite a bit to have it made, and it was excellent work. Small differences between it and the original would only be clear to an expert—such as himself. Saint Nil's irises, for instance, were just a touch too white. No replica could approximate the natural aging process that over the centuries inevitably turned white paint yellow.

"The anticipation for the Nil is at a fevered pitch," Burke said. "After all, it's still the only one in existence."

Carefully, as if it were his child, Burke replaced the facsimile on its display stand. The conversation devolved into professional gossip of little interest to Burke, which allowed him to plan his exit in a way that would still convey collegiality and charisma. He decided to cap off the exchange with one of his favorite lines, one that guaranteed a laugh: "Well, Zainab, if giving my life to history enables me to make history, I guess I'll just have to suffer the fame and fortune." A nice way to wrap up a conversation with a fellow archaeologist, especially one lesser known in the field. Burke hung up and reclined in his chair for several minutes, contemplating the future. Then he dialed the Archaeology Department secretary: "Sandra, Burke here. Yes, I'm fine. Would you check my calendar for me? I need to clear out all my appointments for the next, oh, ten weeks. I'm going out of the country. Reschedule what you can. Nothing before May."

This task accomplished, Burke stepped around his desk

to make sure his office door was locked. Then, from the top drawer of his filing cabinet, he took out a small dartboard and three steel-tipped darts. He hung the dartboard from a hook nailed to the back of the door, a hook reserved just for this purpose. He stepped off five paces, readied his first dart, and faced his target.

“Ah, Winters,” he said a bit too cheerily. “Winters. Winters. Winters.” He flicked the first dart and struck a glossy photograph thumb-tacked to the board. The photograph—already full of holes—was of an old man in a gray suit standing at a podium accepting an award. The dart hit Winters, puncturing tufts of thick, white hair. Burke rarely missed.

“For so long you’ve eluded me,” Burke said, flinging his second dart. “Even though you haven’t published one thesis worth a damn in over a decade.” The dart hit the podium where Winters stood. “And without your sycophants at the *Journal of Near East Antiquity*, you’d have sunk into scholarly oblivion long ago.” With his fingertip Burke plucked at the tip of his third and last dart.

“It’s just so easy for you, eh, Winters? Pass off your unthinking, banal skepticism as real scholarship?” Squinting as he took aim, Burke readied the third dart for a finishing strike. “But I’ve got you now. Once I get to Istanbul, it’s over.” The dart stabbed the old professor’s heart with a satisfying thunk.

Lights, Camera, Action

Göreme, Turkey
February 15, 20—

The day was calm, without a trace of wind. It was as if the little town held its breath. Nestled among the rocky cliffs, the white stone houses were like tombs, the ruins of an ancient people long forgotten. The arid valley below lay in shadows, as thick motionless clouds absorbed the weak rays of the late afternoon sun.

But the little town wasn't forgotten. At its central market, vendors were closing after another busy day. Several late customers still haggled with a woman stacking woven rugs. Near them on the main street, a man carried a mountain bike with a flat tire back to the rental shop. Overhead, a blue and white striped hot-air balloon gently descended. ANATOLIAN TOURS—read the balloon on one side—THE BEST LIFT UP.

As dusk settled in, Jane Whitaker stood in a shop at the far end of a dead-end alley. She was on a secret mission and had dressed accordingly. Her face was hidden by the brim of her white Barmah hat and by the fox fur collar of her vintage Versace gray-silk bomber jacket. Her hands trembled with excitement as she received a brown-paper package from the proprietor.

“Only you would have been able to choose such a rare treasure,” he said to her. “It must be, as you say, destiny.” His eyes twinkled as he spoke, and he grinned broadly through his beard.

“Oh, I’m sure of it,” Jane said, tucking the package into her jacket. “I almost didn’t come in ‘cause I wasn’t sure this was a shop. Like, the sign isn’t in English and stuff, ha-ha. But then, I saw that tailless cat in the window, and I just had to see it, ‘cause, like, I’ve never seen a cat without a tail. Destiny works in mysterious ways, y’know what I mean?” Before the proprietor could reply, Jane added, “Cats give Baby Girl the shivers, don’t they Pookums?”

Grudgingly shifting to share space with the package was Baby Girl, Jane’s long-haired teacup Chihuahua. The little dog had one blue eye and one brown. It was dressed in a baby-blue monogrammed sweater. Jane lifted the dog and kissed its ear. “You’re so brave,” she cooed encouragingly.

The proprietor chuckled. “Kübra, that old stray, cannot even kill a mouse. He is so fat and lazy.”

“Ha-ha. Kübra, huh? What’s your name?”

The proprietor paused as if searching his memory. “Er, you may call me Babu.”

Jane giggled. “I’ll always remember you. Like, I can’t believe the secret to the Dish was here all along,” she blurted. She touched the brim of her Barmah hat in a parting salute.

Babu meekly inclined his head. “I am richly blessed by our meeting. May you find the reward you seek. Farewell!”

Exiting the shop, Jane surveyed for spies. Seeing none, she ducked into an alcove and unzipped her jacket. “Wait here for Mama,” she instructed Baby Girl, setting the little dog down. She secured the brown-paper package in one hand and reached into her jacket pocket for her phone.

It took her a minute to pose herself. She shook her head twice to get into character, pushing her long blonde hair back behind one ear, lowering her chin and parting her lips in a half kiss. She snapped several pictures with this facial

arrangement, making sure both the package and the shop were visible in the frame. It was a frustrating procedure, because she wanted Baby Girl in the picture too, but it was hard to manage everything at once, and the package was the most important thing, besides herself.

Eight tries later, she finally got The One, and it was super cute. But choosing the best filter before posting her picture to *Dishpix.com* would make it even cuter. The choice came down to Electra or Xanadu. She chose Xanadu.

Where was Baby Girl?

Peeing in a lonely patch of grass.

Jane swept Baby Girl up with kisses and re-tucked the little dog and the package into her jacket. Then she turned onto the street without looking and collided with an old man riding a donkey. He shouted at her in Turkish. Giggling mightily, Jane scurried up a steep incline and pushed her way through the gated arbor to her hotel just as the last brushstrokes of day faded away.

Guests had gathered for happy hour in the hotel café. Entering the lobby, Jane lowered the brim of her hat and hastened to the stairs, hoping Baby Girl wouldn't betray their presence with a yip. She just had to get to her room. Once there with the door locked, she'd be safe. She could allow herself to believe it was hers. Wouldn't Pope Boniface be furious! But what could he do? Truth was on her side. Just like in all her favorite stories. She was one step closer to fulfilling her dream. Soon, the world would know.

As Jane climbed the stairs to the second floor, she imagined walking on red carpet through a sea of cameras, their flashbulbs shimmering in wave upon wave.

8 Ball Productions

*CBS Broadcast Center
Hell's Kitchen, Manhattan
February 15, 20—*

Natalie habitually bit her lower lip when she was nervous. But standing off-stage next to Ray, she tried hard not to for fear of smudging her lipstick. Usually, she didn't wear lipstick, but this was television. And as the makeup artist had explained, bold lips and eyes would help her hold her own next to Kitty Lightly.

Kitty was the show host. Tall, blonde, luscious—she stood awaiting her cue opposite the stage to Natalie and Ray. Upon meeting Kitty backstage, Natalie had immediately disliked her. Kitty reminded her of someone.

Ray usually didn't wear suits. As he fidgeted, a production assistant fluffed the handkerchief in his breast pocket. The last time Natalie had seen Ray in a suit, the two of them had also been about to walk across a stage. Natalie couldn't help but remember because hearing their names called out had been a dream come true. They'd arrived at the peak of professional achievement. But after the awards show, neither of them had lingered long at their own party. Ray had left first. She'd watched him go, not knowing if she'd see him again. Not knowing if she cared to.

All at once, the countdown began. They were about to go live. Theme music blared; the studio audience cheered. As well as she could in pink stilettos, Kitty rushed to center stage. The spotlight quickly found her. She blew kisses at

the front row. “Hello, hello, hello! Welcome to Entertainment Now,” she squealed. “I’m Kitty Lightly, and have I got the scoop for you.”

“I’d rather be behind the camera,” Ray said to Natalie.

“Me too.”

“We have to do it.”

“Remember what Reggie said.”

“I know what to say.”

Natalie clenched and unclenched her hands; her fingers were so cold. She sought reassurance that they could pull off the interview and glanced up at Ray. His lips were pinched in a hard line, his gray eyes fixed on Kitty. It was his game face. Kitty was nearly through her opening bit:

“. . . and did you know soap star Amber Lane’s on-screen romance has continued off-screen? Well, now you do! And tempers flare on the set of Another Superhero Movie. Did you know producer Jude Muckenfuss told Pepper Richards that if he wanted such bad acting, he would’ve cast his cat? Well, now you do! So, hold on, people—I’ve got all these stories for you and more. Let’s get entertained.”

Kitty hopped up the three steps to the host’s chair. Next to it were two empty ones. The audience clapped on cue, and Kitty smiled with glossy, full lips as she perched herself on the chair’s edge and crossed her legs. Her platinum bob needed no adjustment, but she brushed her fingertips along her bangs. Her bracelets twinkled in the spotlight. “But first, we begin with our surprise celebrity interview,” she announced. “We welcome two guests who’ve never, ever appeared on Entertainment Now.”

The audience murmured.

“I know, how could anyone not love me?” Kitty ad-libbed. “I mean, look at me!”

A few in the audience whistled and hooted.

Natalie rolled her eyes in disdain—and envy.

“I think you look great,” Ray said to her suddenly.

Natalie didn’t hear him right. “Kitty? Yeah, nice body work, but her brain needs a fill-up.”

Ray turned his head sharply. “What did you say?”

Natalie frowned, puzzled.

Kitty read from the teleprompter: “Tonight’s guests first met at New York University Tisch School of the Arts, where they studied documentary filmmaking at The Maurice Kanbar Institute of Film & Television. Their first joint project, *The Full Chester*, a documentary about the fast-food industry, won top honors at the inaugural Tribeca Film Festival. Their second documentary, *Monica’s Dress*, won the Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival. And most recently, their much-acclaimed *The Tent at Ground Zero* got them their first Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. So, you might say these two are super good at what they do. Just like me!”

“Marry me, Kitty,” a man in the audience shouted.

Kitty pretended to swoon. The audience roared. Fanning herself with her hands, Kitty told a production assistant to get the man’s name. Then she read again from the teleprompter: “After pursuing solo projects the last three years, our two guests have reunited. So, cheer up film fans. Here to tell us about their latest project are—from 8 Ball Productions—it’s Ray Cozart and Natalie Ashbrook! Let’s give them a warm Entertainment Now welcome.”

Listening to Kitty’s introduction, Natalie suddenly realized what she’d just said to Ray. *Solo projects*. She hadn’t meant to imply anything. It was a joke, and one not totally meant for him—or Kitty. Natalie had meant it for another woman, the one who resembled Kitty, the one she hated.

That woman was Staci.

As Natalie stepped with Ray into the spotlight, she felt him take hold of her hand. She knew it was just for show, just part of the game. But still. Her emotions flitted between hope and sadness. Her body seemed to melt away; she was all mind, formless and floating, inhabiting the past and present at once. She felt an uncanny merger of time and place. Back in the past, six months before she'd walked across the stage with Ray to receive their Academy Award, there had also been a marriage proposal. Geoffrey had proposed. And she'd accepted. Those days should've been days of exhilaration and triumph, but they weren't.

Feeling her hand in Ray's, Natalie remembered the first time their hands had touched. That was so long ago. They'd still been in film school then. She felt fresh regret about what had happened between them three years before. She wanted to communicate her grief by squeezing Ray's fingers, but they reached the chairs next to Kitty, and he let go.