

500 YEARS FROM YOU

Livio Rosenberg

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FOREWORD

"When did you first meet Kate?" Elizabeth asked, holding her notebook and pen on her lap.

"The first time we met was 500 years ago. We were both trying to board a ship to escape from Trani" answered David knowing that it would be hard for her to understand.

"Trani?" Asked Elizabeth without making reference to the 500 years David had mentioned.

"It's a port city on the eastern coast of Italy," David explained.

"What were you escaping from?" Elizabeth inquired.

"We were both escaping from the Inquisition," explained David. "We met while a crowd was boarding a ship that would take us away."

"And you recall all that transpired?" Elizabeth asked curious to find out how many details could he remember from a past life.

"Using hypnotherapy," explained David, "I was able to unlock memories that otherwise would have been forever just stored away. Our DNA stores memories. Every cell of our body does. Some memories are from past lives."

"What about the second time you both met?" Elizabeth asked eager to continue.

"Again, we were both trying to board the SS St. Louis," David told her, noticing she was actually interested in what he had to say.

“Is that a US Navy vessel?” Elizabeth asked innocently.

“No,” answered David letting out a soft giggle. “Not at all. It was a passenger ship in the 1930’s. It was docked in Hamburg, Germany in 1938. We were two of the more than 900 people who were escaping Nazi Germany.”

“And you’ve met yet again, here and now;” Elizabeth said affirming she was following his account.

“We have,” affirmed David.

“On another ship?” Elizabeth asked.

David giggled once more. “We met on a baseball field. Allow me to explain. My brother-in-law and I are not only best friends, we are both psychologists who practice hypnotherapy and past-life regressions with many of our patients. But it was my sister Diana, a wedding planner, who actually introduced me to Kate. When I diagnosed her with thalassophobia, I proposed hypnotherapy as a way to treat her.”

“Tha, la...” Elizabeth tried to pronounce the name of the phobia David had diagnosed.

“Thalassophobia,” explained David. “It means fear of the ocean or open water. Kate agreed to undergo regression to see if maybe her irrational fear was caused by some tragic event that she lived through in a past life.”

“And that’s when you found out that you both had shared two previous lives together. It does sound a bit unbelievable;” Elizabeth said trying to piece it all together.

“I had no idea at the time,” affirmed David. “My sister was planning Kate’s wedding, and coincidentally my brother-in-law was trying to convince me to undergo my own past-life regression.”

“So, what happened? How did you figure it all out?” Elizabeth asked, now anxious to find out every possible detail.

“It’s probably best if I start from the beginning,” affirmed David.

“From your first encounter in Trani?” asked Elizabeth remembering the order of events.

“Exactly,” said David. “It was 500 years ago...”



“It is said that the miracle of the parting of the sea pales in comparison to the miracle of matchmaking.”

CHAPTER 1

“Are you ready?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be.”

“All right then, take a deep breath. Release. One more time...”

SOMEWHERE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA - Daytime.
July, 1581

Below the waterline, in the galley toward the bow, young Danilo clung to a beam and struggled to monitor the oarsmen. The caravel that had picked them up just off the shores of Portugal rocked fiercely, back and forth, from port to starboard. Danilo’s dark skin and straight nose stood in contrast to his thick golden curls and his light, gentle eyes. Yet, there was nothing gentle about this day.

The crashes of the fierce battle came from the hull above. Loud and distinct were the sounds of canon fire blasting and crackling in the smoky skies, and then, they heard a final, deafening explosion. Wood cracked, and, Danilo made out the desperate cries of pain and agony from the men onboard the ship. The ship’s oarsmen, sweating and grunting, below deck, rowed as hard as they could; their very lives were depending on each stroke and wrench of the giant oars.

Padre Joaquin was still attempting to supply clean drinking water, from a bucket, to the struggling men. Tall, thin, and pale, Joaquin donned his black cassock and a silver cross that bounced from one side of his slim chest to the other.

The caravel continued to sway and bounce the sailors around. Joaquin was jostled about roughly as the water in his bucket swirled and sloshed and soaked his robes. He tried to commandeer his clumsy gait along the ship's bow. Joaquin would never admit it, but he was terrified.

Suddenly, someone yelled out orders from the upper deck. "Veer to starboard, veer to starboard." Sitting amongst the oarsmen, Danilo heard the instructions from above and directed the rowers with a loud yell, "Down on starboard. Row." Danilo bellowed above the raging sounds all around them and struggled to maintain his own balance. "Hard on port." Danilo managed to keep his heightened emotions at bay as he glanced around at the men. Somehow, he managed to keep them all from panicking.

The oarsmen listened to Danilo and instinctively reacted; they trusted the young captive, with an unearned faith. The ocean waves and the fierce battle above shook the ship violently, adding to the chaotic frenzy of battle action both on the upper deck and in the galley below. A loud clanging noise jostled the oarsmen for an instant, but they continued to row. Padre Joaquin, still carrying his now-empty bucket, made his way to the bow closer to Danilo.

"Padre," said Danilo, "Am I glad to see you. Stay here and keep the men as calm as you can. I want to see what is happening above."

"Danilo, I wouldn't go on deck if I were you," said Joaquin, expressing genuine worry. "Stay here, the men need you."

Danilo placed a firm hand on Padre Joaquin's shoulder, "Amigo, we'll make it out of this, I promise." Knowing that there was no way to stop Danilo, Joaquin silently blessed his impulsive friend. "*Ve con Dios, Danilo,*" whispered Joaquin.

Danilo climbed through the bulkhead doors and disappeared into the light that seeped through the floorboards of the upper deck. Meanwhile, the oarsmen continued to row. The bulkhead doors shut with a bang behind Danilo, temporarily smothering the constant cries of battle from above. A loud explosion whistled through the thick, smoky air as a distant cannon shot off another shell; this one, however, aimed right at the ship, exploding through the hull and creating a fiery blast. Two of the oarsmen were hit by flying debris and fell over onto the splitting deck.

The air all around the ship thickened with more black smoke and the pungent smell of sulfur. It was getting harder to breathe, and the crew all gasped for air. Padre Joaquin dropped his bucket and turned to the heavy bulkhead doors. The violent sea waves began to flood the hull through the shattered walls of the galleon.

The last row of oarsmen, comprised of enslaved men, all chained together on their wood benches, cried out desperately for help. Another loud bang spooked the crew, and the entire boat roared under the strain of the impending wreckage. Water was flooding the decks above and pouring down into the rowing chamber at an alarming rate. The sailors and crewmen were all tossed around like splintered pieces of driftwood on a sandy shore. The boat tipped sharply to one end and began sinking at the aft. A few slaves, chained to their benches, were unable to break free. The other sailors trampled over each other as they struggled to reach the bow of the ship.

"The keys! Somebody get us the keys before we all die." one of the chained slaves yelled as the galleon began to sink in the inky-dark and icy waters. Padre Joaquin held on to a low-hanging beam by the bulkhead doors. He prayed out loud in a sorrowful tone. To himself, he beseeched, *Danilo, where are you?*

A frantic slave grabbed hold of his cassock and tore it as he slipped helplessly into the water. Joaquin was now completely overtaken by desperation and fear; all his years of faithful service did not prepare him for this. Shaking with panic, he watched the men all around him sinking helplessly into the black Mediterranean waters. Completely overcome with terror and agony, Father Joaquin screamed out from the depths of his soul, "Danilo, anyone, *ayudenos*."

Oarsmen and crew alike, struggled to endure the devastation as the boat continued to slowly sink. Seconds seemed like hours, and time was running out on for any chance of rescue. Padre Joaquin clung desperately to the wooden plank at the bow, with one aching arm, and simultaneously attempted to open the hull doors. Ocean water began surging and surrounding him everywhere. Gradually, the unforgiving tides and the cast-about debris from the wreckage, were swallowing up all that had been peaceful just hours before.

Unable to open the door, Joaquin took one more deep breath and clung more tightly to the splintered wooden beam. Suddenly, a bright flash of light shone through from above and a steady, waterlogged hand gripped the young priest by the collar. Danilo, with his lower half dangling from above, managed to take a firm hold of Padre Joaquin.

The two friends, the only apparent survivors of the attack, wrestled against the force of the rushing seawater and their own weight. They managed to pull each other upwards and out of the flooding lower hull. Now, fully standing on the drier side of the upturned deck of the galleon, amidst all the smoke and destruction, Danilo and Padre Joaquin carefully made their way over broken planks, debris, ropes, and fallen sails.

Joaquin began coughing violently, and, Danilo grabbed hold of a large wooden barrel to steady himself on his bare feet. Bodies of the ship's sailors were scattered about the decks like discarded refuse. The enemy Spanish ship, a large Ballinger galleon, was now in clear view and was swaying, with an eerily calming rhythm, near the sinking Portuguese ship.

With the Spanish pirates now hovering so close to them in the murky vast sea, Danilo and Padre Joaquin both questioned how the celebrated Portuguese naval machinery with their trained sailors had ever managed a single day at sea, in competition with the invincible Spanish armadas and flotillas. From the enemy ship, the Spanish captain proudly spied the results of his brave sailors' victory over the Portuguese through his periscope.

In the midst of all the wreckage, he noticed two unarmed men, treading unsteadily onboard the captured caravel. He pointed at them with a crooked finger, signaling to his crew for a dinghy, and ordered the two men quickly onto a small ferry. A beautiful olive-skinned woman stood behind the captain, holding on to his elbow.

"Remember your promise," she whispered in the captain's ear. Her words were barely audible in the thick and turbulent air.

"Yes, *querida*. I will not harm any men of the cloth." The burly, weather-beaten captain wondered how his striking mistress always seemed to remind him of his moral compass.

A large, crowded tender set off into the waters toward the defeated caravel; it was full of hungry Spanish sailors ready to forage and loot their earned booty from what remained of the conquered ship.



CHAPTER 2

MIAMI, FL - Daytime. October, 2019

"On the count of three, you'll awaken and open your eyes. Breathe deep. One, two, three..."

A snap of the fingers.

David Stern's dreamy blue eyes opened slowly and adjusted to the light in the office. He laid, stretched out, on the familiar couch, but he was not comfortable. His throat felt sticky and dry. His head weighed like lead, and, blood pulsed at the temples. He felt as if a trapped bird were fluttering around inside his skull trying to free itself. His clammy skin was crawling and itchy with irritation. *How did I ever let Simon talk me into this?* David thought to himself.

Dr. Simon Canavaro, David's best friend and brother-in-law, sat by his side in a high-backed brown leather chair. He wore dark slacks and a neatly pressed white shirt with the collar opened at the neck. His hair was combed neatly to one side, as usual, and his complexion, the color of pale toffee, was flushed a healthy and excited ruby-red. His soft eyes, lined with small crinkles - more from serious concentration than age - sparkled with kindness, honesty, and patience. The doctor put down his pen and notepad on the coffee table in front of him and reached over to stop the recorder.

"This is some story," Simon noted with eagerness, as he stared down at his discarded writing pad. David rubbed his red-rimmed eyes briskly with the heel of his hand. Sitting up on his right elbow and slightly twisted at the waist, David asked the same question he had been asking Simon for days, "When will you let me listen to these tape recordings?"

"Again, you're hassling me with that? C'mon, David, I've already explained that I can't share the tapes with you yet. I don't want to tell you anything that will influence your thoughts or experience one way or another." Simon sighed.

David slowly stretched his legs and straightened to a sitting position on the couch. His attention was piqued. The muscles in his thighs contracted tightly and pulled taut through his dark blue jeans. "I know the drill. We both do this for a living and I know the 'rules'; but, Simon, this is me you're talking to."

"All I can tell you without altering your subconscious is that your past life took us on a journey to the fifteen hundreds," said Simon still amazed at what his colleague and best friend had revealed during his regression.

"I lived in the sixteenth century? That's amazing. Was I anyone famous?"

"Yes, actually. You were Cleopatra. Oh, stop it." answered Simon. "Just make sure you come regularly and finish the story. It may reveal something significant." he added.

David had been invited to speak at the University of Miami, his *alma matter*. Professor Tilden, a long-standing psychiatrist in the school's medical department, had asked David to speak on a wide range of scientific theory, most specifically, on the very controversial field of hypnotherapy and past life regression therapy. David had become intrigued by the topic of hypnotherapy since Simon introduced him to it in medical school. If David was going to present a discussion on this highly speculative topic with any sense of medical credibility, he had to look for sustenance from a historical context. Even though these new therapeutic methods were

considered to be very “person-centered,” fostering a close, personal relationship and unconditional acceptance between doctor and patient, David still chose a more structured, methodical approach to counseling in his own practice, one that left a clear distance between himself and his patients. David never really focused on history, however, he figured that connecting a historical, logical basis to psychological theory would help illuminate and enhance his discourse.

Personally, David felt that it was necessary to put space between himself and his patients. It’s not as if David was incapable of feeling empathy for his patients. He just believed that he could be a more effective counselor if he maintained an objective distance. David’s curiosity and research in hypnotherapy finally led him to a progressive slant toward history.



"So, how many more sessions do you think this will take?"

"Aw, I’m not sure. Two, three more, at the most," answered Simon, not totally convinced himself.

David got up and shook his friend’s hand, clearly indicating that he was quite finished with this regression therapy for the day. "Was it really that exciting?" he questioned, staring straight at Simon's earnest face. David’s own eyes twinkled with little boy charm and pretense. He believed in the healing potential of regression-type therapy although he wasn’t always convinced that what clients told was really about past lives. Simon believed in both its healing potential and the veracity of souls and past lives. The two had been so close for years, and David now humored Simon as much for his sister’s sake as for his own.

David always knew Simon to be a straightforward, analytical thinker – a great doctor, too - but sometimes he wished that Simon would just loosen up a bit and stop taking himself so seriously. At least, at the end of the day, David could walk away from it. On the other hand, Diana, David's sister had to deal with it all the time. *Well, it's definitely time for me to leave,* mumbled David with an inaudible grunt.

David held back his personal opinions, doubts maybe, of his own past-life regression therapy, at least, verbally, although, his face always betrayed his true feelings, and, who better than Simon to read him like an open book? It was only quite recently that David understood it had medical value, however, he still couldn't be completely sure about the veracity of past lives, not as a therapist. Things were changing now, and, patients of his were healing by tapping into past lives.

It was hard for a doctor to become the patient, but at this point, David was willing to try anything to alleviate his own lingering and ever-growing anxiety. As a therapist himself, David had refused any notions of taking any type of conventional medication. After his breakup with Chrissy, he had lost his appetite and his sleep; at times, even his desire to breathe. After losing too much weight, not getting enough sleep, feeling a constant heartache, he tried some sleeping aids and hated the after effects. When he came to Simon to unload his restless feelings and uncertainties, David was already at his wit's end and needed help in dealing with the anxiety he couldn't seem to conquer on his own. So, somehow, here he was, on Simon's couch undergoing regression therapy. Still doubtful, yet silently impressed with Simon's resolve, David hoped to find remedy for his current unease.

"You know, it's true that...well, there's always the chance that...all this could be a projection of your subconscious, and not necessarily the recollection of a past life," Simon offered his best medical answer. Could he impress David with enough expert verbosity to steer them clear from their usual argument?

David, impatient and ready to put this hour behind him, shook out the kinks from his stiffened legs again and walked pensively to the door. With his head hanging to his chest and his hand rubbing at his stubbly chin, he turned to his friend with a buoyant smile and replied with his usual sarcasm, "And, there's a chance that it really is a memory of the past. Isn't that so?"

"At least you are here and agreeing to participate," offered Simon with a smirk of his own. He knew his friend well and recognized the cynicism in his voice, but Simon controlled the condescension in his own tone. It took him months to convince David to simply try a session. He didn't want to lose him now. He followed David to the door and slapped him on the shoulder with a friendly thump.

"Yes, doctor, and hopefully you'll soon be able to tell me why I've been feeling so uneasy, so anxious, and so restless." David dropped his earlier mocking tone, and his words now reflected a profound sadness. David was normally a very easy-going, accepting, almost too relaxed, kind of guy. All of this agitation and inner unrest was beginning to irritate him - and, quite truthfully - everyone else who knew him better.

"Tell me something, Simon," asked David putting his friend on the spot. "What part of the world did I transport you to?"

"I believe it was somewhere in Europe during the 1500's" said Simon without wanting to give too much away. "Europe in the sixteenth century?" asked David with even more skepticism. "I don't know anything about the 1500's. I wonder how will any of that help me today?"

"I'm not sure how this will give you the answers you're looking for," said Simon.

"Hey, Dr. Canavaro, aren't you supposed to tell your patients that you can help them find answers?" replied David. His playful nature was returning to the surface again.

Simon looked at his watch and took a deep breath. "We'll talk more about it the next time we meet here."

"Well, I'll definitely see you tomorrow at the park, right?" David reminded Simon of their regular Wednesday night baseball game.

"Of course," answered Simon. "How could I forget? Aren't we playing against those stuck-up lawyers?"

David smiled and shuffled lightly out of his friend's office. Yes, he could always rely on his buddy to comfort him. David grinned, opened the office door and called back affectionately over his shoulder, "See you tomorrow, my friend."



CHAPTER 3

MIAMI, FL - Daytime. October, 2019

There was a large crowd assembled at the ballpark this Wednesday night, despite the sticky humidity and the threatening rainclouds that always seemed to saturate the Miami air with a heavy cloak of dampness. The park was striped with beams of light beneath the darkening sky, and the energy was intense. Spectators mingled and chatted on the bleachers, and the two ball teams gathered in clusters on the field. Tonight the “Shrinks” were playing the “Legals” and everyone was in a feverish mood. Even those less passionate baseball fans were there to witness the most competitive game in the city - Psychologists against lawyers; a solid academic assortment in an overly competitive city league.

David always wondered at the irony of intellect. It seemed to him that the more academic a person was, the more competitive that person became. As if they had something to prove, an inner balance to achieve. David just went with the flow of it all.

Simon was playing catcher for the “Shrinks,” and David was going to pitch, as usual. As the two teams began to take their positions on the field, David, of average height, great posture, walked over to the mound and began his warm-up by throwing a few fastballs over to Simon. *David still has a great arm*, Simon conceded, as he crouched in his catcher’s stance at home plate. He still could clearly recollect all the games they had played together during their college years at UM (University of Miami).

Not far from the playing field, way up in the home-team bleachers, David suddenly noticed his sister, Diana. She always seemed uncomfortable and out-of-place when she came to the games, but she had a strong sense of loyalty and obligation to support both her brother and her husband. From birth, Diana tended to be a bit intense and always worried about something.

Here at the park, she admitted, it was usually the uncomfortable weather that disturbed her most. That, and the fact that she hated wearing casual wear. No wonder she and Simon got along so well. It was a struggle for Simon as well, and, his uniform was always clean and pressed... *I guess there's someone for everyone out there*, thought David from the field as he looked at his sister and chuckled out loud.

Diana would always be her own unique system of contradictions. Her naturally blond hair was always bound up in a neat, tight chignon, and her deep blue eyes – like David's – were soft, welcoming, and friendly. Her nose, straight and narrow, was softened by her unblemished, rosy-colored cheeks and full, pouty lips. She was a natural looker, just like David.

"Hey, Simon. Look up. Your wife is here keeping an eye on you again," joked David from the mound.

"Yeah, I know. Diana can't stand the fact that the cougars can't keep their eyes off me," answered Simon. A large, beaming smile spread across his face, visible even under his catcher's mask.

When David looked up again, he noticed Diana standing and chatting with a young woman in a flowing floral dress. He did not recognize her as one of Diana's friends. The young woman's almond-shaped eyes twinkled and shone - even from that distance. A red scarf framed her soft, glowing face, and small brown ringlets escaped from the fringe of the scarf around her temples. A long braid hung down her back. She was talking with Diana as serious and concentrated expressions flashed passionately across her face, totally engrossed in whatever she and Diana were discussing, ignoring the crowd around them. David couldn't break his stare from this mysterious girl. *Who, the heck, could she be?* David pondered.

Now the game was beginning in earnest. The crowd hushed and collectively settled into seats in the bleachers; David's warm-up pitches to Simon came to a quick finish. The two friends were close enough to read each other's non-verbal cues, and David could sense that Simon was more anxious, the concentration on his pitches building. This game meant too much to serious Simon, who did not like losing at anything. *We better beat these buffoons tonight*, Simon gurgled, clicking his tongue.

Simon set into his crouched stance behind home plate, and the first batter for the "Legals" strolled up to the batter's box. It was Bruce Handel, the very aggressive accident attorney from a huge downtown Miami law firm. Bruce had developed a very notorious reputation in the city for his highly competitive nature and nearly perfect case record. Of course, his TV ads lent a small hand to this public image, as well.

He was calculating, greedy, and mean-spirited – all the qualities needed in a first-rate legal advisor. Bruce waited at the plate for the pitch. He gave a swift kick to the home plate – a clear-cut demonstration of his natural aggression and lack of tolerance. His uniform was completely stainless and perfectly pressed. David stood on the pitching mound and Simon behind home plate gawking Bruce down. David continued to be distracted by thoughts of his sister's mysterious companion in the stands.

"When you come back from La-la Land, Doc, you may want to start the game and pitch that ball," Bruce shouted, egging David on with clear disdain.

David completely ignored Bruce's incitement. Simon tried to get David's attention again, also, to no avail. David could not stop staring and he had completely lost track of time and space. Simon let out a loud, drawn-out whine, "D-a-v-i-d."

David turned to look at Simon, somewhat annoyed, "What?" David's question startled Simon.

"Well?" asked Simon.

"Well, what?"

Simon waved his catcher's mitt toward Bruce. "This ambulance chaser here would like for you to pitch him a ball – that is, if you're done daydreaming out there."

"Assholes." murmured Bruce, flaring his nostrils.

David instinctively pitched a fast ball hitting Simon's mitt dead center. Bruce had no chance.

"Strike!" yelled the umpire. "Crap!" said Bruce between his teeth. He then turned to the bleachers and looked at the young woman talking to Diana, maybe hoping she hadn't seen him freeze up.

Now distracted and confused, David pitched an easy slider, allowing Bruce to hit the ball into the center outfield. As Bruce threw down his bat and started running toward first base, David shrugged his shoulders apologetically at Simon. Simon burning with visible fury shot David a glare. *Geez, these guys need to chill out*, thought David to himself. *It's only the first inning.*



David just couldn't concentrate on the game at all. The distraction of Diana's friend proved to be the demise for the "Shrinks" that night. The game ended with a 14-3 win for the "Legals," yet, David appeared completely heedless of his teammates' wrath. As the park lights began to flicker and dim, and both teams drifted over to their respective dugouts, the "Legals" roared and cheered for their victory, and the "Shrinks" sulkily stumbled over each other in their loss. The air in the doctors' dugout weighed heavy with sweat and defeat.

Over their own grumbles, they couldn't drown out the cheers from the lawyers; a few of David's teammates sniggered. The doctors' first baseman, Steve, coughed and muttered loudly for all to hear, "if only our pitcher had shown up tonight, we might have had a chance at beating those bastards." Simon sat on the bench, silently fuming over the sting of the loss. He was so certain that this year the shrinks would finally defeat those cocky lawyers.

David, however, did not pay any attention to the tension hanging over his teammates, and he remained in the cloudy state of mind that had overcome him since the beginning of the game. He maneuvered his way through the strewn baseball equipment and the other players lolling around in the dugout. The only thing on David's mind now was getting to his sister and her companion in the stands before it was too late. Leaping with a sudden burst of energy from the dugout, David pushed his way desperately through the lingering crowd of fans and spectators. More park lights flickered off before David reached Diana. Finally, he was in the stands.

"Diana, my loving sister," said David, heaving breaths escaping his full lips. In trying to appear spontaneous and uncalculating, David was managing to achieve just the opposite effect. The girls felt his sudden presence in the stands like an approaching storm.

"David, hi. What was that all about out there? You were so off your game tonight. And, I thought you doctors finally had a winning chance this time against those bozo-lawyers." Diana turned to her friend, patted her arm, and offered her a friendly grin. Diana always supported her brother, but tonight he was clearly not himself. The young woman did not really seem that perturbed by Diana's slight about the team of lawyers.

"Never mind the game. The guys will get over it. I just wanted to come by and say hello," answered David. Although he was talking to Diana, he stared intently at her captivating companion. Something about this enigmatic stranger was so familiar and so warm.

David intrinsically flashed his charming, full smile at the girls. People always commented on his pearly-white teeth and killer-smile as his foremost and undeniable allure. David continued, "And, aren't you going to introduce me to your friend?" His blue eyes sparkled as he spoke. There was a flare of involuntary good humor - typical between strangers meeting for the first time. Diana could read her brother like a favorite book. She let out a long sigh and rolled her eyes. She said, breezily and a bit scornfully, "Of course, where are my manners. David, this is Katherine Brenner," Diana continued turning to her friend, "Kate, this is my usually charming brother, David, otherwise known as 'the pitcher to watch', except for this disastrous evening."

Ignoring the wistful banter of his little sister, David took over the conversation from there. "Katherine...well, what a beautiful name for a beautiful woman. It's wonderful to meet you." Diana's companion blushed crimson and stared down at her feet.

David did not mean to embarrass her; he was just stating the obvious. "Have we met before?" he added not taking his eyes from her. Somehow, he had honestly felt that he had seen this beautiful girl before. "I don't think so," Kate said with a soft frown. David changed the subject quickly noticing she had become slightly uncomfortable, and blurted, "I'm taking the boat out to the Keys tomorrow morning. Maybe you girls would like to join me for the day?"

"To the Keys?" questioned Diana. "In the middle of the week? What about work?" *How very typical of David to just pick up on a whim and take off on that boat of his. He'll never grow up.* She was a little bit jealous of David's carefree nature, inherited from their father. She always secretly wished she could be more like her older brother - relaxed, less serious, more 'go-with-the-flow.' Diana just rolled her eyes at David's mislaid attempt to hit on Kate. A new bride-to-be, Kate was not likely to fall for David's nonsense in any case.

"Yeah, sure. How about it, Katherine?" David remarked staring directly at this captivating and intriguing young woman.

"Please, everyone calls me Kate, and it's nice to meet you, David, but I'm afraid I'll have to decline your offer," said the mysterious almond-eyed girl. Kate tugged at her scarf, securing it tighter under her chin, and then extended her small, white, delicate hand toward David. Her caramel eyes sparkled with an intensity that made David unwillingly redden. Kate could feel a sudden shudder in the air so intense that she blushed a deep shade of red and suppressed a quivering sigh from her own full lips. David reached out and took her hand in his. In stunned muteness, David and Kate both lingered in the moment and stared into each other's eyes. It was the oddest single moment David could ever recall. Diana, also, wrinkled her brow, wiggled her nose, and puckered her red lips with a puzzling smirk. Kate was first to make the next move, and she quickly pulled her hand from David's grip.

"I... uh, I...", Kate was at a loss for words. Diana watched both her brother and Kate with surprising awe.

"I'm sorry, but I won't be able to join you," Kate tried again. The tension immediately lifted, and a deep melancholy replaced the stunned expression on David's face.

"Oh, what a shame. Some other day, maybe?" David's chest heaved and sunk under his jersey, flustered with Kate's response. He wasn't going to give up that easily.

"David," interrupted Diana, "I should have mentioned that Kate is my newest client. She's planning her wedding."

"Yes," Kate picked up on Diana's attempt to change the conversation. Her own heavy breathing was slowly returning to normal. "Diana is helping me plan my upcoming wedding," Kate repeated, a sense of forced pretense in her overtly distracted reaction. "I've been waiting for this day all my life." She didn't know why she added that.

David was shocked and could not hide the disappointment now clouding his eyes. *Why the heck didn't Diana mention that sooner?* "Yes, well then, I guess a 'congratulations' is definitely in order," said David, trying to recover some pride and poise. "For the wedding and your perseverance," he added with a wink.

"Thank you," Kate chuckled pleasantly. "And, thanks for the invitation, but, I'm not very fond of the sea, anyway," Kate informed them. She was not about to get into an explanation of her unnatural fear of the ocean, and she certainly was not getting on any boat, as long as her life depended on it.

David, showing his truer nature and not missing the opportunity for flirtatious banter, replied, "Maybe I can help you look at the ocean in a different way - show you how enjoyable it could be."

Diana pulled at Kate's bare elbow and explained, "David, believe it or not, is a clinical psychologist. He thinks he can resolve everyone's issues."

"*Moi?*" whined David sunnily. His charm was returning to the surface just as Simon suddenly appeared from the thinning crowd. He was oddly accompanied by the overbearing Bruce Handel.

"Do you also use past-life regression, like Diana's husband?" asked Kate unpretentiously. Her curiosity seemed genuine and sincere; she ignored the approaching Simon and Bruce. "Because that actually sounds interesting, and maybe there really is some odd rationale for my not being able to handle the ocean...Oh, hi, darling." Kate ran her sentences together in a mass of nervous chatter. She turned her head suddenly to focus her attention now on Bruce. Her red scarf rustled gently in the stirring breeze.

Bruce strode obtrusively alongside Simon as they approached the group. Still in their uniforms, Simon was dripping with humid perspiration, while Bruce looked like he just emerged from a clean shower. "We all thought you guys were going to kill us this year," Bruce snorted at David. "So, what happened to you out there, doctor-pitcher? Or should I just say 'thanks for the game.'?"

Bruce placed a rough hand on Kate's shoulder. She gently removed it with a quick, cautious shrug. "Bruce, honey," said Kate. "it's so hot tonight."

David, still feeling inwardly dazed and deflated, did not even respond to Bruce's comments. He was not in the mood for small talk with this wise guy. He slowly turned away from the group, then reconsidered and spun back toward them. "You guys played a good game," David said looking at Bruce. "Congratulations on the win." Then, David changed his track and turned once again to Kate. "It was nice meeting you, Kate. The offer still stands." David's words blurred together as he made his way from the group.

Kate flashed a soft smile and slightly raised her small hand to wave goodbye. Bruce tightened his thin lips in a snarl and followed David with a hostile glare until he was out of sight.



CHAPTER 4

“Are you ready?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be,” she said unafraid, and, with a gentle voice.

“All right then, take a deep breath. Release. One more time...”

TRANI, ITALY - Nighttime. August, 1581

The dominating presence of Christianity in this port city of Puglia was pervasive and absolute. The Romanesque medieval remains of the Cathedral San Nicola Pellegrino and Frederick II’s famous Castel Del Monte towered over the port in an intimidating fashion. The entire skyline was crowned with the hulking remnants of ancient Christian martyrs and rulers. Although many of these buildings had been plundered over the centuries, Trani still offered serenity and refuge to travelers and citizens alike; after all, it had been established by the Templar Knights of the 12th Century as a welcoming and safe harbor for all travelers, and, was commonly regarded as a link for those journeying on to the Holy Land.

One hundred years earlier, the Knights had even established a hospital in the courtyard of a Gothic mansion, the Palazzo Cacetta on Via Ognisanti; they maintained a church, the Church Chiesa di Ognisanti, which was still functioning fully for those in 16th Century Puglia.

It had been seasonably cool and drafty that season when Isabella and Camila Sabona found themselves unexpectedly homeless, penniless, and orphaned – drifting aimlessly on the cobbled streets of Trani. To think that the Sabonas had lived for generations in Spain, descendants of the renown Donna Gracia Nassi, and in spite of threats, and before the great Inquisition, the Sabonas mostly enjoyed a peaceful and safe existence.

Over six generations, Isabella's family had established a harmonious life in a very Hebraic neighborhood of Toledo and had flourished in comparison to even the wealthiest in town. Unfortunately, that relative peace and tranquility of Spain disappeared when the king relinquished power to the Catholic Church. After decades of prosperity and happiness for the Sabonas, Isabella's father had carelessly let down his guard. Fatefully, in one fell swoop, the family had fallen victim to the violence and random abuse from the Spanish authorities.

Isabella Sabona would always have nightmares of that night. The fierce and graphic memories haunted her night after night, and even in her waking hours. Tears would flow from her beautiful almond shaped eyes, but she would allow them to pour only when no one would be looking, especially Camila, who was counting on her sister to carry her through.

How could she forget that night though... when a group of Spanish sentinels had just been relieved of their daily duties and were rooting through the streets of Toledo, bored and looking for some fun. They entered the small Sabona home just as the family was sitting down to their evening meal. Two armed guards simply opened the unlocked front door of the house and stormed the little home without any warning or foreseeable reason. *Señor* Sabona, Isabella's father, did not react right away; it was not unusual for neighbors to come by at all hours to visit the Sabonas.

Instead, *Señor Sabona* sat unperturbed, hunched over his hot plate of steaming sea bass glazed with homemade mayonnaise. When Isabella's father finally turned his bowed head upward at the taller of the two uniformed men - a menacing and domineering young soldier, Isabella would never forget - a single shot rang out sending *Señor Sabona* forward into his plate of food. The bullet struck him in the back of his neck, and blood spurted wildly from the wound, soaking Isabella's face and dress. *Señor Sabona* was killed instantly, right at the family's dining table.

Isabella's father had been a successful cloth merchant, recognized in their quarter of Toledo and even far beyond that, as a prominent and fair businessman, exceeding all cloth sales across Spain. He was a close relative of Dona Gracia, the greatest of all merchants among crypto-Jews. He had built trade relations with Dona Gracia's former merchants traveling to and from North Africa. Merchants who purchased the best products from those coming from the largest Indian seaports like Goa, Surat, and Cambay.

Things were going very well for the tranquil and happy cloth merchant and his family. He felt certain that he had truly honored the struggles of the Sabona family tree. Yet, now, tragedy seemed to follow him, even six generations later.

Isabella and her younger sister were frozen, petrified with fear. They could only watch with wild, wet eyes as the Spanish guards continued with their rampage; the men, unrelentingly, like wild beasts let out of long captivity, turned to *Señora Sabona*. To quiet her screams they assaulted her, and beat her until she suddenly fell from their grasp with a loud thud to the stone floor. Isabella barely escaped attack herself.

She ran and pulled Camila close to her, until together they were concealed and crouched behind the kitchen pantry. It took Isabella all night before she could move a muscle from their dark hiding place. When the guards had finally left the house, there was a dead body, upturned furniture, and pools of blood splattered all over the little household.

Throughout that long, hot, drizzly summer night, Isabella and Camila remained shivering in the dark, putrid house. Isabella's nightmare did not end there. It took her months of additional abuse until fate caused her to run away. Remembering the stories their father used to tell, they knew that if Donna Gracia had fled to Italy, that is where they should go as well. And so they did. Now, the two sisters had made their way to the port city of Trani, a bit north of Bari on the east coast of Italy. Hungry and tired, they aimlessly walked the cobbled streets of the port city. They moved cautiously through the drizzly, humid streets.

Camila shuffled wordlessly and painfully behind Isabella, holding tightly to the dangling pointed end of the scarf that covered Isabella's slumped head. Isabella tried to steady her shaking limbs so as not to frighten Camila any further.

Isabella and Camila were on their own to forage for food and to find places to sleep at night. The girls knew there was no turning back. They would go wherever destiny would lead them.



After drifting through an unfamiliar neighborhood of Trani for almost eleven days, the sisters finally found themselves on the narrow cobblestone street of the Baron family. At the corner of the row of houses that led to the couple's home, the girls were unexpectedly confronted by a transient, homeless man. He was often seen roaming the narrow streets of Trani, babbling half-crazed gossip and opinions to himself in a language most neighbors did not understand.

The man was offensive; he had a gap in his mouth where he was missing a few teeth, his gray hair was greasy and matted, and he smelled of liquor and stale body sweat. His ragged clothes were stained and torn. Camila stiffened at the sight of the hobo and gripped Isabella's hand tighter. Wordlessly, she pushed her body up against her older sister. The man then turned the street and disappeared into the night.

Isabella refused to give up. Noticing the desperation in Camila's face she began to search house to house, looking at every doorpost for a familiar marking. Many Jews had removed the scroll that dons their doorposts, but surely, she'd be able to spot a marking. They finally arrived at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Baron. Isabella knocked once, then twice, when Mr. Baron finally opened the door to see who was interrupting their dinner. With average height, a bit overweight and always donning his black hat, one that would contrast with his white shirt that he wore as if it were his daily uniform, Mr. Baron looked at the girls and immediately wanted to close the door completely uninterested in anything they wanted to say.

“Please spare us some food,” Isabella pleaded. “Go away,” Mr. Baron answered, possibly displeased with Isabella as she covered half her face with a scarf. “It’s the Sabbath for heaven’s sake.” Isabella insisted, knowing very well Camila hadn’t had a bite to eat in a long time. Seeing that he wanted to shut the door she continues to plead her case. “We haven’t eaten in days.” “Wait here,” he finally answered as the door shut close, but not before allowing Mrs. Baron to peak at the girls from within her home. Seconds later, Mr. Baron opened the door and handed Isabella some leftovers. “Thank you,” she answered. “Do you have a room for the night?” Isabella pushed her luck. “No. I’m sorry,” he answered closing the door before she had a chance to plead any further.

Isabella and Camila walked to the end of the street, a dark corner where they sat down to eat. Camila’s face lit up. She needed nourishment and the food was incredibly tasty. It was true they hadn’t eaten anything meaningful in days, and their bodies had begun to feel the effects, draining them of the energy they so needed to continue on their journey.

Minutes later, Isabella saw a shadow, someone approaching from a distance. Slowly it became apparent it was a woman; seconds later Isabella recognized Mrs. Baron from the house that had given them their nourishment for the day. “Are you really Jewish?” asked Mrs. Baron with a dry tone in her voice. “We are,” answered Isabella. “Where are you from girl?” she inquired. “We’re from Spain. From Toledo, a town not far from Madrid,” Isabella responded trying to enunciate her words, first, because her Italian wasn’t that good, and secondly, because of the scarf that she refused to take off.

“Is that your daughter?” asked Mrs. Baron. “She’s my sister.” “Take off your scarf, let me see your face,” insisted Mrs. Baron. Isabella tilted her head down. She did not comply. “Very well,” said Mrs. Baron. “You need a place to sleep and I may know the person that can help you out – the rabbi, of course.” Isabella’s face lit up like Camila’s when she finally had some food in front of her. “Follow me,” instructed Mrs. Baron as she began walking down the adjacent street. Isabella wrapped up the remaining food, and, helped Camila up, not wanting to fall behind.

As they turned the corner, none other than the drunk that had accosted them before came uncomfortably close. The filthy old man stared blankly into the dark space between them, gurgling gibberish through his foolish grin. “*Summis desiderantes affectibus,*” he slurred. The hobo sounded antagonistic and irrational to Camila, but to the older and more schooled Isabella, the man’s words were unmistakable. Isabella recognized the unadulterated.

Latin threat in the hobo’s outrageous chant. His words slithered through his remaining rotten teeth and rolled right past his raw, thin lips until they pierced Isabella right through her chest. An eerily cold shiver ran through Isabella’s entire body. She then felt Mrs. Baron’s hand take a hold of hers and pull her together with Camila to walk a bit faster, as she mumbled quite angrily, “they see a woman in the street and they immediately think she is either a gypsy, a Jew or a witch.” The humid heat in the night air froze tiny drops of sweat on Isabella’s forehead. There seemed to be no respite for the young, innocent girls.

Finally reaching Rabbi Menachem and Esther's doorstep, anxious and filled with dread, Isabella held her last breath as Mrs. Baron knocked on the chipped wooden door, softly, three times. Her foot tapped impatiently on the stone doorstep. When the door opened, the sisters cautiously waited a few feet from the house. "Mrs. Baron," said Rabbi Menahem twirling his lips trying to show pleasantness but clearly annoyed. "You know we are completely overcrowded," shared the Rabbi.

"I thought some of your guests left this morning. At least that's what we heard," said Mrs. Baron providing her best excuse for knocking on his door at these late hours of the evening. "And as soon as they left, others took their place," confirmed the Rabbi. "For God's sake, she has a child with her," insisted Mrs. Baron. "They look gypsy," said the Rabbi in an even harsher tone. "Where are you from?" he asked addressing Isabella who just stood her ground not letting go of Camila's hand. "We're from Toledo, Spain," she answered. "You're far from home," the Rabbi added. "There's no more home," answered Isabella. "Not for me or any other Jew for that matter.

The Inquisition has done away with our entire community," explained Isabella. "Take off your scarf, let me see your face," insisted the Rabbi. Once again, Isabella tilted her head down and refused to comply. "Oh fine," said the Rabbi. "I guess we can make room for two more." "Thank you, my dear Rabbi," said Mrs. Baron. "Give my regards to Jacob," said the Rabbi as he watched Mrs. Baron head back home. Isabella and Camila took a few steps closer to the door.

"Well... do you rather stay outside?" asked the Rabbi sarcastically. Isabella and Camila, still holding hands, stepped inside Rabbi Menahem's house; and little did they know, that would be the last home they'd know while in Trani.



CHAPTER 5

MIAMI, FL. Daytime. October, 2019

"On the count of three, you'll wake and open your eyes. Breathe deep. One, two, three..."
A snap of the fingers.

Kate's eyes opened slowly. She laid heavily on the comfortable, black leather couch. The light in the room was dim, and David sat by her side. He stared at her. The past hour came and went with a flash in David's mind. He realized that he was entranced and Kate was staring back at him. Kate wrinkled her brow, wondering what David was thinking. David reached over to the coffee table and stopped the recorder. Kate was fatigued, fidgety, and confused. Her heart was racing and her blood pumped violently in her legs and shoulders as if she had just ran a marathon. Feeling lightheaded and bewildered, Kate's face flushed with childish fascination.

Wow, David thought. What a story. David was utterly enthralled by Kate's tales of the past. How did she evoke all those details? pondered David. What detail. What vibrant images. David was curious if Kate had ever been to Italy, and he asked her out loud.

"No," answered Kate. "Although I've always wanted to go." She wondered why David had asked.

After the embarrassing baseball game, a week ago, David had not been able to think of much else other than seeing Kate again. David thought that inviting Kate to his office - strictly professionally, of course - would be a great excuse to see her again. Especially since he had failed with the ruse of the boating invitation.

The idea of regression therapy seemed to intrigue her enough, though, so he decided to immerse himself with focused dedication. Through his sister, David had invited Kate for a session in his office. Kate remained reluctant at first, but had finally decided to accept David's offer. Maybe it had to do with her not wanting to deny her husband-to-be from taking them on a cruise for their honeymoon, or, maybe it was an inner desire to rid herself from an irrational fear; though guarded and cautious about this meeting, Kate immediately proved to be, if nothing else, very entertained.

"How do you feel?" asked David.

"Fine, I guess," croaked a groggy and shaken Kate. "Was I asleep? My throat is so dry...like I've been talking for hours." David reached for a glass of water and handed it to her. For a brief second, their fingers touched and sparks of energy teemed through their veins. The beautiful woman with almond shape eyes and the captivated man with a delightful charisma sat spellbound in the office for what seemed like an eternity.

David didn't want to divulge many details of the session to Kate too quickly. He wanted to see her again. So, like Simon had been doing with him, David merely offered a general explanation. "You were not sleeping, but you did share a very fascinating story," David clarified.

"May I listen to the tape you made?"

"Yes. But, not yet." David repeated Simon's refrain, and flashed Kate his most charming smile. He sensed Kate's interest pique, and, that was exactly where David wanted her.

"There is a strong probability that we can discover the cause of your thalassophobia," David continued to explain.

"Fear of open water," interrupted Kate, "although it's not fear, exactly," she continued, a bit annoyed. "It's more of a dislike." She emphasized the last word with an irritated hiss.

"Well, in my professional experience, I think we can resolve your phobia and maybe a few more issues that might be brewing" interjected David.

There was a sudden knock at the door. Kate wanting to respond winced and looked at her watch. "That's probably Bruce."

"Your boyfriend," mumbled David disappointedly.

"Yes, my fiancé," corrected Kate. She was flattered by David's obvious boyish jealousy towards Bruce.

Just as Kate was about to stand up, David's secretary opened the office door. "I'm sorry to interrupt you, Dr. Stern, your next appointment just called to cancel."

What perfect timing, David thought deviously. "So, I have an extra hour now?" asked David. Kate began to scan the room for her purse. "Kate, sit for a minute. While we wait for your fiancé..." David stumbled awkwardly over his own words before continuing. "Why don't you stay and tell me a little more about you and Bruce?" *Would she take the bait?*

"Doctor, is this part of the therapy?" Kate asked. She peered thoughtfully at David through her thick, fluttering eyelashes. It was just their first meeting together, and there was an instant foundation of affection - Kate could feel it straightaway.

"Well, the more I know about you, the easier I can help piece things together," David responded. "You don't really have to, if it makes you uncomfortable," he reassured her further.

"It's alright," Kate answered. "If you're still willing to listen to me speak, I have nothing to hide." She was glowing from the inside with the opportunity to stay a bit longer. She clearly began to recall, "It was a Thursday, I remember, back in school..."



“YAAA-HOOO” Bruce screamed, forgetting where he was. He was not the type to be intimidated easily, but after failing Florida’s Bar exam twice before, Bruce had finally managed to pass the test and feel his way out of the cloud of unmet expectations that had been hovering over him for the past few years. He pursed his thin wiry lips in an eager expression of pleasure. His jaw clenched and pulsed with exhilaration, and his brow glistened with heavy beads of apprehensive sweat.

Bruce wiped his forehead with the tip of his thumb and glared devilishly through squinty black eyes at the students that were sitting around him. A small group of law students quietly stared in Bruce’s direction and shushed him. Bruce quickly regained his cool composure and contained his excitement as he moved to the corner of the library alcove.

In his large, trembling hand, Bruce still clutched the single sheet of paper. The short, typed letter was headed with the familiar bold lettering of the Florida Bar Association, followed with the news that Bruce had met the passing requirements of the last Bar exam with a score of 142. It did not faze him at all that his score was only considered average, or, that it had taken him three attempts over the past two years to pass the exam; after all, law students often joked throughout law school about the one who finishes in “last place” still graduating and becoming a lawyer.

He had graduated from the University of Miami Law School last summer, and had since spent countless hours - and dollars, - preparing with private Bar Review courses and tutors for the Florida exam. No doubt in his mind, Bruce would be staying in Miami, and he needed to pass the state’s required test, come rain or shine. Now, at age 29, Bruce had finally succeeded. Taking a huge gulp of air that inflated his thick chest and exhaling slowly like a sluggish old rusty train, Bruce figured, “I have to call Pop about this.”

Bruce breathed a satisfied purr and reckoned out loud, "Hey, if it took John-John Kennedy three attempts to pass the Bar, I guess I'm not so bad-off." The group of students that were sitting around him shook their heads again with disapproval and annoyance at Bruce's continued noisy outbursts. Bruce hastily gathered his papers in his brown leather briefcase and prepared to leave the library.



"Watch it." cried Kate. Her purse strap slipped roughly from her slender shoulder, and she stumbled a few steps backward. From her almond shaped caramel eyes, Kate glared at the man trying to whizz by her. Delicate and slight in stature, Kate was no match for the husky, broad man now blocking her passage at the library door. Both stood startled and caught off guard in the glass doorway, flustered by the sudden crash.

"I am really sorry, miss," stammered Bruce. Kate had a natural glow of innocence and self-assuredness that blinded Bruce from all else. Something about her petite, sophisticated girlish nature was so suggestive and arousing...Bruce was mesmerized. "Oh, I'm really sorry. You're bleeding..."

The tall stack of files that she carried in her arms had struck Kate against her soft face and grazed her jawline. "Ouch! Darn it," she swore. Kate snapped to attention and straightened her posture, but she was unable to shift the burden of her files to focus on her stinging cheek. Kate winced involuntarily, letting out a pathetic sigh. Bruce automatically turned on his calculated charm, softening his greedy black eyes.

“Here, let me help you with all that,” insisted Bruce. He reached for the stack of folders, still teetering in Kate’s arms. He gently placed his own briefcase between his legs and reached out toward Kate. His shiny black-cropped hair glimmered in Kate’s welling eyes. *How embarrassing*, thought Kate. *I must look like a complete idiot*. She slowly shifted the weight of the files and let Bruce grab the stack. There was something strangely familiar about this guy. Suddenly, the sting of the cut on her face brought Kate quickly out of her thoughts.

Kate touched her jaw with her delicate fingertips, and pulled them away, wet with tiny droplets of blood. She stared down at her hand and let out another low moan. Bruce noticed her hand shaking in front of her face and offered to escort her back inside the library. Holding the stack of files, Bruce stumbled over his briefcase and nearly toppled overhead first. Kate chuckled, amused at his bravado, and followed Bruce into the building. She picked up his briefcase as they entered the cool entrance of the library.

Kate had just graduated from University of Miami’s sociology department, and had been interning with an addiction center for a few years. She always wanted to help the poor and indigent community, and the center would be just the stepping-stone she needed to start what her teachers all agreed would be a very successful career. Kate was smart and serious, and she never let her teachers down with her sensitivity and humanitarian diligence. She was able to take any helpless cause and turn it into an entirely optimistic experience. Kate had a simultaneously childish and angelic nature mixed with a touch of craftiness to her aura. Courage and faith flowed naturally through her veins. Everyone in the sociology department at the university recognized Katherine Brenner’s total dedication to the people she served.

While Bruce scrambled to find some tissues, Kate stood alone at the library's information counter. She had so much work to do on her first individual assignment. Kate had been assigned to help a patient at the addiction center on a one-on-one basis. Kate had been waiting a long time for just such an opportunity. She was the youngest counselor at the large South Florida center for addiction, and, therefore, could not let this opportunity pass her by. Kate had lots of research to do today. Now, in the flurry of the moment, Kate's professional focus was shattered. *How have I never noticed this guy here before? He is ssssooooo cute.* Kate cooed and giggled out loud. A tremor of giddy enchantment ran throughout her body.

By the time Bruce returned to her at the information counter, Kate had forgotten all about the scratch on her cheek. "Here, put this on your face," huffed Bruce, approaching Kate with a wet paper towel in hand. "Again, I am really sorry for this." Bruce sounded sincere enough, and Kate felt comforted by his brisk, direct, commanding nature. Bruce tapped her cheek roughly with the tip of his forefinger. A shine from his gold pinky ring momentarily blinded Kate's vision.

"I don't even know your name," said Kate. She extended her own small hand to Bruce and continued, "I'm Katherine Brenner. Most everyone calls me Kate."

"What a pretty name, Kate. I'm Bruce. Bruce Handel," he replied. His black eyes bore intensely into Kate's. "It's a pleasure to meet you, although I wish it were under better circumstances." A slow, foreboding grin spread across Bruce's chiseled face.

"I'll be fine now," replied Kate. "Don't think twice about it." She twisted her thin, red lips in a silent grimace, lowered her eyes, and gave Bruce a shy wink through her thick eyelashes.

“Well, I’m sorry I have to run now,” Bruce replied quickly. He remembered that he still wanted to call his father about his news. “I would love to make this up to you somehow...how about dinner tomorrow night?”

“Dinner?” Kate replied, wishing he’d insist. “A chance for a do-over,” said Bruce.

“Dinner it is,” Kate returned, filled with dreams of innocent delight to see this intense, mysterious man again.



“What is it?” asked Kate, noticing that David was staring at her with a slight frown.

“What do you mean?” asked David unsure of Kate’s intention. “Why are you looking at me that way?” asked Kate a bit on the defensive.

“Well, it’s not the most romantic story I’ve heard, but if you two love each other, it’s all that really counts,” said David trying not to hurt her feelings.

Swiftly, Kate stood up from the couch. She began to gather her cell phone and purse from the armchair next to the bookshelf and walked a bit precipitously toward the door. David forced a friendly grin. The whole wretched story of how Kate had met Bruce did not impress David. Kate sensed the negativity and unexpectedly, and clearly, felt distressed. Kate opened the office door and saw Bruce suddenly shuffling from the hallway into the outer office. He was dressed immaculately in a dark blue suit that screamed ‘custom-tailored’ from head to toe. His cropped black hair was slicked back from his forehead with a slight part combed neatly from the left side. A Bluetooth phone device flickered quick blue beams of light from his ear.

David heard Bruce’s approach from outside the office door and froze as he felt the bile from his stomach climb up to his throat. He choked down a groan.

Kate turned back to David, "So, I'll see you next week?" Her tone was dry and there wasn't the faintest of smiles on her beautiful face.

"Yes, next week," replied David, tempering his mood with a forced flirtatious flash of teeth. "Just set up a time with my secretary before you leave the office."

Bruce stuck his head in the doorway and bellowed, "Hey, if it isn't Doc 'Daydreaming-pitcher,' how's it going?"

"Hello, Bruce," answered David, forcing himself to be cordial - or, at least, professional. Something unnerved David about this man. Although he couldn't really put a finger on it, David felt a constant uneasy, hostility about Bruce every time he was around. It didn't help David's demoralized frustration that Bruce was going to marry Kate in a few weeks. "It's always interesting to see you," David continued.

Bruce turned to Kate and said dryly, "We have reservations at *Brio*, and we don't want to be late, do we?"

What a condescending piece of garbage, growled David under his breath.

Bruce's phone beeped loudly, and the flickering blue light of the earpiece gave off another burst of blue glow. He glanced down at his phone in his hand and activated the earpiece. Bruce blurted loudly into the air, "Johnny, my man, talk to me." While he chatted with a false, cheeky grin - and without even glancing up at Kate or David again - Bruce waved his arm at Kate, motioning her toward the door.

While Bruce continued his phone conversation, Kate tripped lightly on the doorjamb. She tried to catch up with Bruce, who was now out of the office and halfway down the building corridor. As she waved a friendly hand at David's secretary and closed the door to the office behind her, Kate paused for a moment to notice the bold letters engraved on the brass plaque on the office door. She read, Dr. David Stern, Clinical Psychologist. She would be back.



CHAPTER 6

"Are you ready?"

"Absolutely. Go for it Doc..."

"All right then, take a deep breath. Release. One more time..."

HAMBURG, GERMANY - Daytime. May, 1939

A newspaper headline is dated May 13, 1939 and it reads "HITLER THREATENS TO INVADE POLAND". It is being read by Manfred, a middle-aged man, tall, thin and pale white, sits on a wooden chair at a small dining table. A few feet away, Daniel, a young man in his early twenties, with darker skin and a Greek shaped nose looks out the window from behind the curtains. Soldiers march outside. A military convoy of trucks and jeeps roll out. "If we wait much longer," said Manfred looking up through smudged spectacles, "we might not make it out at all."

Daniel turned away from the window. He casually rolled an old baseball around in his right hand. "But, *tatteh*, I promised Zelman, I would stay with him." Daniel fidgeted some more with the baseball and shifted his body weight from foot to foot. He was a heap of nervous energy, and he noticed that his father would not meet his eyes. Daniel continued, "I can't leave him here now, or, there won't be enough men left to fight."

Daniel could not disguise the fact that he wanted to stay in Hamburg and fight with his friends. He had only just gotten involved with the group of young underground resistance fighters in the city. Daniel was proud to be a part of the group that resisted the Nazi authorities and the cruel impositions placed upon his people.

Daniel and his other Jewish friends were continuously being forced to leave their places at the university and their jobs, but Daniel and Zelman kept busy with the resistance around the neighborhood and their clandestine ties to the underground group.

Daniel's friend, Isaac Zelman, somehow managed to secure a job at the local offices of the German *Der Stürmer* newspaper, and at night he would stay late, after everyone else left the building, to print anti-Nazi pamphlets for the resistance movement. Goldie, another friend, was the one that actually wrote the stories that were later furtively distributed around the city by the young opposition participants.

Daniel was determined to beat the Gestapo at their own game. As the Nazi party was reverting to barbarism, indiscriminately arresting or executing Jews, Daniel grew more spirited with each blow from the imposing authorities.

"Your young resistance fighters are also leaving Hamburg faster than you think, Daniel," argued Manfred, looking across the room at his hotheaded son. "We finally got our visas approved, and all we have to do is get on that boat tomorrow." The exasperation mounted in Manfred's voice, and the color washed from his face matching the color of his straggly white beard. It was fear that truly shrouded father and son, even if for different reasons. The dread blanketed their small apartment and oozed through every wooden splinter of the floorboards and every crack in the wall plaster.

Daniel's two closest friends, Zelman and Joshua, were planning to stay in Germany and continue their support in the young resistance forces. This, with disapproval from Hamburg's chief rabbi and other Jewish community leaders, just added to the rising community tensions. The elders of Hamburg's Jewish community preferred peaceful negotiations, rather than the rabble-rousing and trouble that the younger Jews sought, with the current establishment.

"Some say things are not looking good anywhere," maintained Daniel. He had additional access through the newspaper to the terrible stories about work camps and laws that were being implemented against the Jews all over Germany and other European nations. It made him sad, and more than that, it made Daniel angry. He knew his father was only thinking of leaving in fear of what he felt deep inside was an inevitable collapse of his community. Manfred had managed to secure two more travel visas and felt that his son undervalued what he had to go through to get them. Daniel sighed, and Manfred's gold-speckled green eyes swelled with tears of anguish.

"No, we are definitely leaving, Daniel; and, we will continue on to America," Manfred demanded. They were getting on that boat to Cuba the next morning. There was no more discussion about it.

"Some say things are not looking good in Cuba *papa*," argued Daniel. "We're continuing on to America," quickly responded his father. "-- I know that. And what are we going to do in America anyway? We don't know anyone; we have no money. How will we survive?" Daniel's tone became a bit more aggressive, as if trying to plead his case and buy his friends a bit more time. Maybe that was all that was needed to affect a change.

"For thousands of years we've been persecuted, and we always managed somehow. Call it Divine Providence," responded Manfred. "Suddenly my father believes in God?" Daniel snapped sarcastically.

"Every Jew believes in God, even the ones that lie about it," answered Manfred, turning his eyes back at the newspaper article. Daniel smiled weakly and tossed his baseball softly to his father. Manfred, already 67 years old, still had wonderful reflexes and caught the ball with ease, without as much as looking up. The tension in the airless apartment seemed to ease a bit, and father and son found themselves playing a game of light toss in the small living room.

"Hey, Daniel. Wouldn't you like to join a baseball team like the one we saw in the Olympic games in Berlin?" asked Manfred. "It's the great American pastime." He was good at changing a foul mood into a cheerful, light moment.

"The Olympics were three years ago," Daniel reminded his father, "and now, Jews aren't even allowed to play on those teams, anymore." *Was Daniel ever going to see an optimistic, happy life again?* Manfred wondered and worried about his 22-year-old son. He was still so young and yet already so disillusioned with life. Forced to leave his school and battle for survival...Manfred let out a slow, hissing sigh. Daniel caught the last toss of the baseball and placed it back in his pocket. "Damn those Nazis!" Daniel seethed. "They are such *shmoots* and *shtoonks*."

"Daniel!" barked Manfred, admonishing his son's foul language. "Let's finish packing and leave the future in God's hands. We will be traveling on the Sabbath, so maybe God will travel with us and be extra generous in keeping us safe." Faith and hope evaporate in life when all one has left is empty existence. Not for Manfred; they had no choice but to leave their home to the other side of the world.



Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. Manfred raised his thick eyebrows, wrinkled his long wide nose, and shot Daniel a worried look. Who could it be? They were not expecting anyone. Daniel moved slowly and opened the front door. "Mr. Wolf, what a surprise to see you at this hour."

Morris Wolf was an old family friend who was really just a few years younger than Manfred; yet these days, he appeared to be at least a decade older. He limped heavily into the apartment, leaning on a crooked wooden cane. He carried his age and anxiety unhidden in his worn expression. His suit, dark and stained with blotches of sweat and flaky food stains, sagged on his wasted, bent frame, and, his wide-brimmed hat was way too big for his disheveled head. His shoes were scuffed, and there was a hole in the sole of his right shoe just under his big toe. As Daniel let his father's friend into the apartment, he wondered if this was what the future looked like for all of them. He rushed the man into the apartment.

"Manfred, *vos machste yid?*" greeted Mr. Wolf in Yiddish.

"How nice to see you, too, my friend," replied Manfred.

Mr. Wolf took a seat by the dining table and helped himself to some tea from the antique porcelain tea set. His breathing was heavy and fast, and his hand trembled as he poured tea from the pot.

"Are you two going to leave this weekend?" asked Mr. Wolf.

"That's the plan," said Manfred. "We were just discussing it." He tried to remain positive and confident, especially in front of Daniel.

Daniel, however, was not paying much attention to his father's conversation with Morris, and sat staring out the window as Nazi troops noisily paraded by on the street below. The moisture from the nearby harbor hung in the air and blurred the road that led from their neighborhood past the old medieval fort in the Old Town. Nazis in the streets were becoming more common - it was an obvious threatening reminder to the remaining Jewish residents that they were being watched and guarded at all times.

"I hope we can get past all these German soldiers," commented Morris. "They're watching us like hawks here, and, in the end, I hear the Cubans are making it harder to travel there, too."

"I'm willing to take my chances," replied Manfred. "Besides, who is choosing to stay in Cuba?" Manfred's bushy eyebrows arched upward as he said this. He really wasn't so sure that his plan was completely foolproof. "We will be carrying on from there to the United States."

"Ah, yes, you will be moving on to America...the '*Goldeneh Medineh*,' they call it...and our ticket to prosperity," said Morris Wolf, taking a sip from his tea. He was trying to convince himself more than Manfred that he also supported a positive view of the future, even if it did sound a bit derisive now. "Well then, I will definitely meet you at the ship. Just do me a favor --"

"Anything, my friend."

"Don't wait any longer to leave. You have to trust me with this. We must all leave on that ship in the harbor, now that we have our travel papers." Mr. Wolf was referring to the *SS St. Louis*, a large and luxurious American cruise liner that was currently docked in the busy Hamburg port. His head turned downward, Mr. Wolf avoided eye contact with Manfred and Daniel, who was now paying curious attention to the older men's conversation.

"What is it, Morris?" asked Manfred, sensing more was on his friend's mind. "Do you know something more that we don't already know?"

Reluctantly, Mr. Wolf spoke again in a whisper. "A group of Jews were arrested last night, Manfred. They were accused of spreading false propaganda against the Fuhrer." His breathing became even more labored and his throat emitted a small croak. "Some say they were taken to be tortured, to give up more names, but I know these men won't talk."

"*Papa*," Daniel interrupted suddenly. "I think we need to finish packing now." They had been warned before about what happened to resistance fighters that were caught by the local Nazi authorities. It was true his friends were printing and spreading anti-government literature around Hamburg, and all this talk at home was beginning to make Daniel queasy with panic. It was the last thing Daniel wanted to think about as he and his father were about to turn their backs on his brave friends in the Resistance movement. Mr. Wolf noticed that Daniel wanted to change the conversation, so he stood up from the table and shuffled unevenly back toward the front door of the apartment.

"Thank you for your visit, Morris," barked Manfred. Anxiety was choking him, too. He watched his old friend leave. Swallowing his nervousness, Manfred added a familiar blessing after his old friend, "Zein Gezint." His stomach knotted with a pang of horror.

"Good luck to you, too, my friends," said Mr. Wolf, turning to glance at Manfred and Daniel. Daniel turned to Mr. Wolf and smiled wearily. Opening the door of the apartment, Manfred, Morris, and Daniel could hear the continuous commotion of the passing military. The three men jumped nervously at the same time, and Manfred mumbled gruffly, "Please, God. Help us all get out of here alive." He shuffled, deflated and broken, out the door.

Then, as if he had forgotten something inside, Mr. Wolf turned back around and stuck his head inside their home. "Manfred," he said with a trembling voice. "If something happens and we are not allowed to leave tomorrow, Rabbi Weiss has a way to get us to Palestine. Promise me, that no matter what, you'll leave Germany," he pleaded. "My friend, I don't know what's gotten into you," replied Manfred getting up from his chair and walking to the door towards his friend. "I promise you we will leave one way or another," assured Manfred.

"Very well," said Mr. Wolf turning back around to continue on his way. Daniel stared at his father. Manfred, looked at Daniel with an expression Daniel hadn't seen since his mother had passed away. Daniel knew at that moment that the very next day they would be leaving his Germany for good.



CHAPTER 7

MIAMI, FL - Daytime. October, 2019

"On the count of three, you'll wake and open your eyes. Breathe deep. One, two, three..."
A snap of the fingers.

David's eyes opened slowly and drowsily. He laid on Simon's familiar, cozy green couch. The light in the room was dim. Simon stopped the recorder and waited for David to fully recover consciousness.

"I was hoping you'd finish recalling the story from our last visit..." commented Simon, as he reached over David for the water pitcher. "You jumped 500 years forward - to another completely different story." Simon scratched at his clean-shaven chin. He was completely stunned.

"Another - different - life?" asked David, incredulously, rubbing his eyes. "Is that even possible?" Simon frowned and took a sip of water from his glass. He held out a second glass of water and offered it to David without words.

Simon could not deny that he, too, was very baffled. David seemed to be recalling two completely different stories, from two completely different eras in time. Jumping from one to the other with no regard to chronology. Simon crinkled his forehead in skepticism. *Maybe I did something wrong,* questioned Simon to himself. *Maybe David's right, and this is all a projection of the subconscious...*

"Right now, we can't know for sure," came Simon's uncertain yet enthusiastic answer.

David got up from the couch and stretched out his long legs. "Let's go out for a drink. It's late, and it's quitting time for today." David was becoming exasperated with Simon's obsession with this therapy. It's not that David did not understand the concept of his friend's efforts, he just didn't really know where it was all heading. David still felt that pain that comes with heartbreak. Therapy was a possible remedy, but now it was getting even more complicated with another simultaneous story. *What did all of this mean?* David questioned himself. *Maybe nothing at all*, he wondered.

Simon remained seated in his high-backed leather swivel chair. "I wish I could join you, David, but not tonight."

"Fine, party-pooper. Suit yourself," David said, standing to leave. *When is he just going to learn to relax a little bit?* thought David with a bit of impatience. He strolled slowly toward the door and hesitated for a moment in the open-door frame. It was almost as if something was pulling him back into the office. Reluctantly, David turned back to Simon. "Did you say something?" asked David.

"No, although I do have one last question, David," Simon called out to David. "By any chance, do you speak Yiddish?"

"Yiddish?" repeated David, bewildered. His eyes twinkled with mischief, and his eyebrows arched upward. "Ha, ha! Except for a few choice words my dad used to sling at me, that language is just forgotten nonsense - only the old timers from the 'Catskills' era can still understand it. Why would I speak Yiddish?"

Simon understood clearly what David was referring to. Mr. Stern would use certain un-translatable words and phrases in Yiddish every now and then. He had never heard Diana use any Yiddish at all, either. He chuckled out loud and kept his unanswered hesitations to himself. "No particular reason," answered Simon. He put his glasses on and turned his wary eyes back to his notebook.

David stood by the door in complete silence. Frozen. Old, familiar feelings flooded back over David now. Thoughts of Chrissy usually evoked melancholy and sadness, even anger and resentment. Remembering the day, he saw Chrissy for the last time built a tightening knot in his throat. The pain he felt that day had not eased an iota to this day. If anything, it had sent him to do the unthinkable, to subject himself to a regression; just as he sometimes did with his clients who came to him conflicted one way or another; it had made David feel a bit superior – when in fact, his own pain was just as harrowing for him as the fears, phobias, and, the smorgasbord of pain his patients brought into his office on a daily basis. Still, there was something else today, something else he was feeling right now, and Christine may have had nothing to do with what he felt today.

“Hello...David...are you here?” sang Simon. He had been watching David, who had wandered back into the office and sprawled sleepily on the couch.

“Wow, Sorry about that, Simon,” responded David. He rubbed his tired blue eyes with his fingers and let out a loud, open yawn. “I don’t know what got into me just now, but I just couldn’t snap out of it.” He could not figure out where the memories of Christine came from all of a sudden. David just chalked it up to the strange and complicated fluctuations in introspection from the regression.

Simon knew David all too well. He was sure now that David had been distracted, once again, by uncontrolled thoughts of Christine. “It seems you’ve got a lot on your mind, my friend. I think you really need to take some time to figure out what’s really haunting you these days.” Simon tried to remain compassionate toward his friend. It had been a while already since David and Christine had ended their relationship, and Simon’s empathy was beginning to wear thin.

“I think it was something about the regression that sparked an old feeling,” said David. He puckered his lips and scratched at his chin.

“Well, we’ll see what happens next time,” responded Simon. He really did not want to entertain another discussion about Christine now. “Let’s set up the next appointment with Ms. Dach.” He led David back to the open office door.



CHAPTER 8

MIAMI, FL - Evening. October, 2019

Kate tugged at the dark crimson scarf around her head. The warm, light breeze was helpful, but the muggy springtime air stifled the dense night and made Kate feel ruffled. She usually kept a spare scarf in the glove box of Bruce's Mercedes convertible for times just like this, and now she grinned with smugness at her foresight. Bruce kept his eyes riveted on the road in front of him and drove with the heel of his right hand resting on the gearshift between them.

"That was a lovely dinner," said Kate. She wanted to sound appreciative, but for some reason, tonight she felt indifferent, vacant. *How much eating out and fine dining - as Bruce liked to call it - can two people really appreciate?* wondered Kate. She tried to share Bruce's love for the constant social scene, but Kate simply preferred the quietude of her cozy, little apartment and a good book for the evening. The distance and apprehension Kate felt with Bruce these days was beginning to surface more and more; the uneasiness was beginning to startle her. Kate was becoming more and more tense and irritable with Bruce.

Bruce interrupted Kate's silent thoughts. "There are many more dinners like that to come, my dear," replied Bruce. "I promised you the 'good life' and that is exactly what you'll get." Kate got the profound feeling that Bruce was being more arrogant than generous with this reminder.

"I think we --" Kate tried to sound grateful, but suddenly Bruce's cell phone cut in with its all-too-repetitive and maddening ring. Bruce activated his Bluetooth device without hesitation, and, with a familiar dismissive wave of his hand - as if conducting traffic - signaled Kate to stop talking. Kate hushed.

"Johnny, tell me you sold those bonds," blurted Bruce into the hot air. Kate was completely repulsed. Where she once saw Bruce as confident and accomplished, Kate was now recognizing a mean-spirited, greedy, and calculating demeanor in him. She was getting a strong sense of a lofty conceit and a repugnant, domineering haughtiness. Kate wondered scornfully to herself, *Is this guy for real? Who really buys this shtick of his?* "Apparently, Johnny does," she grumbled out loud, and she let a slight chuckle escape from her puckered, downturned mouth.

After a few minutes of his endless chattering, Bruce finally disconnected the call and changed gears to put the car into a slow, purring roll. They drew up to the entry of his swanky apartment building. Bruce always felt a sense of pride when he came home to his luxurious condominium. Miami had always felt more like home to him than the dirty, rundown part of Hoboken where he grew up.

Now, as Bruce and Kate waited on the sidewalk in front of the electronic gateway of the apartment building, a man in worn rags wobbled down the street, coming disturbingly close to the car. The pungent odor that reeked from the old man was a sickening mixture of whiskey and vomit. Just as the shabby man came into full view under an overhead street lamp, a flash of instant perception passed through Kate's mind; in a misty rain, clearly recognizable, she saw a young woman on a dark street, dressed in rags and holding the hand of a young girl. In the haze of the vision, the woman's face was covered with a silver-threaded, tattered red scarf.

Kate shuddered with an icy chill that ran up and down her spine. The ragged man on the street continued shuffling toward them, now glaring directly, menacingly, at Kate. He held her full attention with his malicious stare for what seemed like forever.

Kate grabbed instinctively for Bruce's forearm, scared. Bruce followed Kate's frightened gaze out to the filthy man on the sidewalk. Kate's blood went cold, and her chest heaved deeply as she tried to regain her lost and shaken composure.

"Get out of here, old man," Bruce yelled. His Bluetooth device was still activated and blinking neon blue in his ear.

The stinky hobo changed directions with a jolt, yet twisted awkwardly at the waist as he kept his glare focused on Kate in the open convertible. He slowly turned all the way in the opposite direction, and waddled away from the car, muttering over and over a strange unintelligible string of words. "*Summis desiderantes affectibus*," he gurgled, and then suddenly and completely disappeared into the dark night.

Kate glared wide-eyed at Bruce. "Did you hear what he said?" she asked nervously. Another bolt of shivers ran up her spine and froze in a knot at the base of her neck. The horrible image of the woman in a different place flashed wildly in her mind, along with the throbbing echo of the ancient Latin phrase from the mysterious old man. A sharp ache cut across her wet cheek.

"Are you alright?" asked Bruce looking straight at Kate. He stressed the last syllable with a high-pitch shrill in his tone, condescending and unconcerned with what could possibly be bothering his fiancé so much. Without taking a breath, he added, "How disgusting...how did that character get into this neighborhood? When we get inside, I'm going to have a word or two with the security guard." he growled threateningly through his thin, clenched lips.

Without even trying to disguise his displeasure with her over-dramatic reaction to the vagrant, Bruce glanced quickly over at Kate and berated her. "What's gotten into you, Kate? That guy is just some hobo who probably got lost wandering around. I'll be sure to report him to the building security and tell them to keep an eye out for him, and that will be the end of it." Kate was still pale and shaky. Bruce slammed his foot on the gas pedal as the electronic security gate finally inched its way open.

"I --" Kate tried to offer an explanation. She quickly changed her mind. "Never mind, Bruce. Let's just go in, please." She shut her eyes tightly and clutched at the dark red scarf tied under her chin. She could not erase the image from her mind of the shadowy, old man and his frightening words. Kate's head pulsed with fear and pain like never before.



CHAPTER 9

MIAMI, FL - Evening. October, 2019

David loved the stillness and comfort of being alone on his boat, even when it remained stationed in the marina. Docked at one of the many intercostal harbors around Miami, the tranquility of being on the boat had a transforming effect on David; it always seemed to bring him to a familiar place, far away from the present.

Tonight, the weather was a bit too warm and humid for his liking, but the gentle breeze from the salt water blew comfortably across the deck and managed to offer up some reprieve and relief from the stuffy night air. David would not take the boat out of the dock tonight, still, he wanted to enjoy the serenity that the ocean and the waves and the whispers of the breeze brought him.

David had officially inherited the 27-foot custom-built craft, *Take A Leap*, when he graduated from medical school. David treasured his boat. The *Take A Leap* had seen him through some good times and some hard ones, too, and David loved to relish in those memories every chance he got.

Tonight, as for most nights during the past several months, David sat on the deck of the boat, shrouded in a dimness that only seemed to sparkle intermittently with the distant flashing lights from Miami's skyline on the other side of the intercostal; David, himself, was plagued by feelings of unease, and he came to the *Take A Leap* tonight in order to relax his mind in these memories.

On the main deck, he made himself comfortable, sitting casually on a padded lounge chair with a bottle of cold beer. From his chair on the deck, David stared out at the Miami skyline. The view was magnificent tonight. The sky was clear, and the city lights bounced off the water like millions of tiny reflective lily pads across the surface. It was easy here for David to lose himself in thought.

With slow exerting movements, David finished the last of his beer and gently placed the empty bottle on the floor of the deck next to his chair. He reached over towards the bench by the boat's steering wheel and grabbed his favorite baseball and his favorite baseball cap. Faded from years of sun exposure at the helm, the cap fit David like an old worn glove. He tugged it carelessly over his head, and he balanced and fiddled with the ball in his pitching hand.

The lights and distant sounds from the city, together with the gentle rocking of the boat in the light wake, lulled David into a peaceful rest. David closed his eyes, and suddenly he was transported into a remote and distant state of mind. He flipped the visor of his cap around to the side, placed his baseball on his chest and let his head fall heavily back onto the lounge chair cushion.

Just as every muscle in his body started to ease into a numbing slumber, David's nerves jerked involuntarily. He was not alone. He kept his eyes shut tightly as his entire body shuddered with the shock.

"Drink much?" Diana was still dressed in her stuffy, tailored work clothes as she approached David from behind, her squeaky cackle echoing in David's ears over the rhythmic clicking of her stiletto pumps on the boat's fiberglass deck.

"That's either gotta' be the city's greatest party planner," replied David without turning around or opening his eyes, "or my annoying little sister."

"Right on both counts, brother. So, are we drinking to Chrissy again?" Diana dragged over another lounge chair and setting it down close to her brother.

"No, actually I was hoping for some peace and quiet, but that's all shot to hell now." answered David. He loved spending time with his kid sister, but tonight he was truly irritated by her interruption. He opened his eyes and glared right at Diana.

"You know, David, you don't have to keep doing this to yourself," Diana reassured him. An impatient sigh escaped her painted red lips.

"Why? Do you have a better plan in mind?" David played along.

"Ha, ha. Very funny, David. It just so happens I do know someone who can take your blues away," answered Diana. "Her name is Tammy, and she's my new receptionist. Gorgeous body, young, energetic, spiritual," she said while making herself comfortable on the lounge chair. "Spiritual?" asked David with curiosity. "In a shanty kinda' way," answered Diana.

"I know she can get you out of this ridiculous mood of yours in no time. And, it's better than you hitting on my soon-to-be-married clients," she added. Diana always seemed to have a fix for everything. David appreciated his little sister's care and attentions, but now he was just finding her condescending and annoying.

Diana had struck a nerve with David, and he sat upright in his lounge chair. The empty bottle of beer under his lounge chair fell over on the deck with a clink and rolled away with the gentle rocking of the boat.

"You know something?" David began to say, spontaneously and seriously. "When I first saw that girl - Kate - at the park with you, I thought I knew her from somewhere before." David recalled clearly that first evening at the baseball field when Diana had shown up with Kate.

"Funny you should say that," said Diana, "I got the same feeling from her the minute she walked into my office, too. I have to say, I really don't care for her fiancé much." Diana's face crunched up in disgust, like she just bit into a sour pickle.

"I also came across as a real jerk to her that night. And, that fiancé of hers had a few choice words to say about me, too. But things are different now" David considered.

"I think you're right. As a matter of fact, dear brother, if I didn't know any better, I would say that she took a liking to you. After all, who could resist the charms of Miami's most handsome doctor-bachelor?"

"Ha, ha, a lot of good that does anyone now," said David leaning over to scoop up the empty beer bottle on the floor. "I know you'll make sure she has a beautiful wedding...let's change the subject now."

"Well, if you think about it, consider Tammy. She's really a lovely person." Diana said, returning to her original attempt at luring David out of his gloomy slump. She stood and started back toward the stern of the boat.

"Tell me something," asked David before his sister turned to leave. "Does she know you're trying to pimp her out?" Diana just looked at him with a death stare.

"Seriously now," said David knowing that maybe he had crossed the line with his stupid comment. "Did your annoying husband send you here to talk to me?"

"He did mention that he saw you in his office, and that you seemed a bit down" answered Diana, "but I really did come here now on my own whim. I was just on my way home from a late night at the office."

"And you just figured that setting me up with your receptionist would be the key to my happiness?"

"You don't have to be a jerk all the time, you know?" Diana was the one who was getting annoyed now with her brother's attitude. One stupid comment she could put up with, two was already more than she was willing to handle. "The next time you call me, I hope it's to ask me for Tammy's number."

David stayed seated in the lounge chair, he puffed out his wide chest and straightened his spine. He smiled impishly and gazed at his sister lovingly. "Can you pass me another beer before you leave?" David rolled his shoulders trying to release the tension that was gathering at the base of his neck.

Exasperated, Diana shot David an irritated glance back as she left the boat. David was left alone again, rocking softly on the deck and floating through time.

Christine? David asked himself. *Could it really be a Chrissy-Crisis again?* There was no denying that his sister Diana, and his best friend Simon, knew him better than anyone.



CHAPTER 10

MIAMI, FL - Evening. October, 2019

David got up and fetched one more beer. He sat again on his favorite lounge chair and reminisced about the events that led him to Chrissy...

Diana had graduated from the Fort Lauderdale School of the Arts and immediately soared into the perfect job. She was a wedding planner, and Diana joyfully spent most of her time surrounded by music, celebrations, and cheerfulness. Proper and orderly by nature, Diana took careful steps in pursuing a mature and serious place in the professional world, and Diana relished in the dichotomy of her routine life and the fun she was creating in her work. Simon had added more surprised delight to her life when he fell madly and wholly head-over-heals in love with his best friend's little sister - who was not so little any more.

Although they had known each other for at least a decade by then, Diana and Simon found themselves completely spellbound with each other and their new grown-up lives. What started out as a flirtatious and giddy romance between them, soon blossomed into a gentle, loving relationship. Shortly after Dr. Simon Canavaro made his permanent move to South Florida, Diana found herself invested in a true and fervent romance.

David was quite pleased watching Simon inch more intimately into the Stern family and becoming closer to them all. David had to admit that he could think of no two people that were ever more destined to be together than Simon, his best friend, and Diana, his adoring sister. Both Mr. and Mrs. Stern had given their full blessings to the couple, and David remembered his father calling it *bashert*. Some things are simply 'meant to be.'

After three years of working hard and building a lucrative business as a party planner, and after securing a fulfilling relationship with Simon, Diana was finally planning the party of her dreams – her own wedding.

She stood with her parents, one on each elbow, and thought her knees would give out. She was shaking all over, but not out of fear or concern. Diana was about to embark on the most important, most exciting journey of her life. At the age of 24, Diana was as content as she believed anyone had the right to be. Mr. Stern leaned over and kissed his daughter's hand. Mrs. Stern, not wanting to smudge her lipstick, patted Diana's other hand. The music began in the main hall.

As they marched slowly down the aisle with the music filling the air, all the wedding guests stared at the glowing young bride. Simon's parents were there, too, and his brothers had surprised the whole family by flying in together from California to stand with Simon as groomsmen. Diana could not focus on anything around her; everything around the hall – all the decorations and flowers that had taken months to plan – were a mere blur to her now.

All Diana could distinguish through the cloud of happiness that enveloped her was Simon waiting under the wedding *chuppah* at the end of the white aisle runner. Next to him stood David – tall, proud, handsome, and grinning. There was nothing David would not do for his younger sister, and, it was completely obvious to him, at that moment, as he watched Diana approach, that the radiance that spread wide and beaming across Diana’s face was all the evidence David needed to agree with his father - this union was nothing short of ‘meant to be.’

Meanwhile, as Diana radiated down the aisle, Simon’s stomach did flips and his palms grew wet with nervous perspiration. He spent hours that afternoon with David, making sure every hair on his head was slicked into place, the wedding band was safely tucked into his tuxedo pocket, and his tie was impeccably knotted. Simon’s chest inflated with love and adoration as he watched his stunning bride approach him. He could not believe his luck at having such a magnificent woman take his hand in marriage. Simon felt truly blessed.

It was precisely on Simon and Diana’s wedding day that David met Chrissy, and, always wondered if they were really compatible or was it more a sexual attraction thing? His answer came much later and in the worst of ways.



They say that the most opportune place to find romance is at someone else’s wedding. At least that is what Simon and Diana kept reminding David throughout the week before their approaching wedding day.

David understood that they both only wanted him to be as happy and in love as they were, so David tried to tolerate the teasing and pestering of the couple's persistent mentions of David's past non-committal romantic involvements. But, at the wedding, the last thing on David's mind was his own erratic and unpredictable love life. He could only really focus on the destiny and timeliness of Diana and Simon.

Yet, there she was, just as plain as day. David felt the press of passion fill him almost immediately. The air filled with the heavy scent of honey, berries, and sweet vanilla. The woman's long blonde hair, so effortlessly tied in a ponytail hanging down her back, shimmered under the neon lights of the hotel bar. The natural beauty had eyes that sparkled blue and were framed with black, thick lashes. While her face shone with flecks of golden sun, there was a soft sadness that surrounded her.

Not long before that day, David thought he had his future all figured out. Things always came fairly easy for him; his laid-back temperament, his charm, his athletic prowess – he always captured attention and support from all whom he met. Getting what he wanted was never too difficult for David. So, when Christine entered into his life that day, he knew in an instant that the beautiful blonde would fall prey to his charm and be the one who played into his future.

Christine was not a guest at the wedding; rather, she was a new hire for the caterers at Diana's wedding. Carrying a tray of tall champagne glasses, she clearly stood out from the other employees. She wore her long, golden hair carelessly tied back in a ponytail that hung down to her petite waist. Her face radiated with flecks of golden sun (no makeup needed), and her large blue eyes were magnets to David.

David was immediately taken in by Christine's agile, quick motions and her focus on her work. She didn't miss a beat. A guest would not have to wait long with an empty glass before Christine noticed and ran to refill the drink. She knew exactly who was drinking what, and, she attended to everyone's needs without hesitation. David noticed that she was especially vigilant with the older guests - later, Christine had admitted to David that she assumed that they would make for a better tip at the end of the night.

Christine was on her way to the restroom when she noticed David, standing at the bar, while waiting for his drink. He had wanted a few minutes to himself, to get away from all the noise and commotion of reveling family members and swirling *hora* dances. David was just finding a seat at the bar when Christine walked by.

David could not resist the temptation and allure that surrounded Christine. He often met women rapidly and easily; he knew what he liked, and, he had no problem attracting attention from the opposite sex. The same held true for Christine. The moment she turned away from staring at David, he immediately lurched at her like an eagle on his prey. When he reached for her and touched the back of her arm, it startled Christine, forcing David to stop in his tracks and spill half of his drink all over himself.

"Can I help you?" she asked, trying to control her laughter upon seeing David's shirt soaked in alcohol. "Yes," said David. "Can you point me toward the bathroom?"

"As a matter of fact, I was heading that way myself," she said, flashing a smile that melted him away. Oh, she had sex-appeal, maybe too much of it.

David presumed that Christine was just too pretty and too smart for this kind of work. He spent the rest of the evening trying to catch her attention, and, by the time the last guest had left the wedding hall, David and Christine had a date for the following night. Then it became two, then three and soon they had lost count. Everyone thought that Chrissy was “the one” for David, and that David had finally met the woman that would break him of his wild and boyish nature.

A few months went by and David had fallen hard for Chrissy. He felt he was in love. And although he knew they weren’t perfect for each other, she was the best mate he had ever been with, that is, until he walked in on Chrissy, in bed, with another man. Well, if that wasn’t a good enough reason to tempt alcoholism nothing was. *Drinking cannot solve your problems*, a more than common phrase thrown around in his office like hot apple pie at a trucker’s stop.

Yet there he was, regularly collapsed on his favorite lounge chair, going through a six-pack with the easiness of a veteran sailor.

Diana had gone home, the beer was done for, and the cooler that David kept up on the deck of his beloved cruiser “*Take a Leap*” was as empty as he felt his life was. His boat, his career, and baseball kept him living his life day by day. Still, there was an emptiness, a void, something so big missing from his life. Why couldn’t he have met Kate before Bruce did? Would he ever be able to meet someone as captivating as her? Kate, the one he could not and probably would never have in his life, was the only woman that could erase Chrissy’s memories for good. Chrissy had nothing on Kate.

They were in different leagues, revolving on different orbits altogether.



CHAPTER 11

"Are you ready?"

"Yes I am. Go ahead, do your thing."

"All right then, take a deep breath. Release. One more time..."

HAMBURG, GERMANY - Afternoon. May, 1939

Ten months had gone by since Emma last sat by the frosty window in her living room; the last of the cold drafty airs of a winter left behind seeped through the rattling pane, and the dreary cloudy sky outside painted everything with a brown-gray pallor. Spring was hiding out and the somberness that engulfed the streets below was just more evidence of the dismal confines of their empty lives. Staring out at the depressing city, Emma wondered, *how can we continue to live like this? God surely could not intend for us to suffer so many indignities.* She had made up her mind.

Hot-headed, full of youthful zeal, and ready to fight, Emma set out. She grabbed her threadbare coat and drew her headscarf from its pocket. Although there was a yellow patch sewn onto the front of her coat, the bright blue *tichel* that her mother knitted for her last Hanukkah was Emma's defiant way of saying 'I will not blend into the scenery and become non-existent.' She brazenly wore it everywhere; it highlighted her beautiful almond shaped eyes, and, Emma had to always be aware of her appearance in the street.

As emboldened as she might have felt in her youthful opposition, Emma knew she was in constant risk and danger from the Gestapo. The yellow star on her coat made sure she remembered that.

Now, Emma hastily left her apartment to venture into the cold and blustery day. Winter was almost upon them, and the air outside stung her skin with frozen droplets of water that sprayed ceaselessly from the surrounding Hamburg rivers. Days were getting shorter, and, curfews ensured that Emma's time on the streets was limited. She needed to see her friend at the newspaper.

Emma's dearest friend, Peter, currently working as a maintenance worker at the newspaper building in Hamburg, had invited Emma to an underground meeting of the secretive youth resistance group. The sheer adventure of the group's clandestine operations and newsworthy labors had piqued Emma's interest, but she would also be proud of working with the group. She accompanied Peter to the meeting late last night, and, Emma was immediately convinced that she needed to be a part of the effort. Last night, she did not talk about it with Peter. She put off making any assertions before she was able to come to a committed decision. Peter had walked her home in cautious silence.

Now, Emma fought against the weather and her fear, to make her way to the newspaper offices. All the way there, she kept her head down against the cold, and, the possibility of being sighted by any passersby. She still could not contend with the loss of having to abandon her studies at the university. She had been so eager to become an important journalist. Now, the Nazi party had stolen all her hopes and dreams for the future; but she would not give up without a fight.

Emma appeared at the newspaper office building and found Peter standing watch from just inside the front doors. He wore heavy black boots and an old, worn overcoat with a yellow Jewish star sewn on the lapel. Peter held his thick hands in front of his ruddy face, blowing loud gusts of breath on them and rubbing them together. Even inside the building, the icy air was consuming.

When Peter noticed Emma approaching from the street, he quickly rushed to open the doors and let her in from the freezing weather.

"Hey, Emma. What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be home now?" Peter questioned.

"Yeah, hallo, Peter. Good to see you, too," Emma answered sharply. She was in an unusually foul mood. "I came because I need to speak with you. Is there somewhere we can talk in private?"

Peter knew Emma well enough to know that she would not leave her house and venture out across town in this weather - and with the danger of the Gestapo - for nothing. "Sure," Peter said. "Wait here." Peter pointed across the lobby to a wooden bench in front of a short concrete barricade. He disappeared for a moment and reappeared at Emma's side, just as she was taking a seat on the bench. Peter sat next to her, his knee softly brushing against the hem of her coat.

"Is everything okay?" asked Peter with friendly concern. He continued rubbing his hands together, making loud scraping noises with his rough palms.

"Yes, all is well. I am here about the meeting we attended last night," Emma guarded her words carefully. She knew that, at any time, someone could be listening to them. Peter simply nodded his head.

"Well, I want to help. I know I can do it. I can help write essays and articles for print, and, I still have contacts around the city from my days at the university who would offer me information, if they thought I was writing for *Der Stürmer* ..."

"What are you talking about, Emma?" Peter interrupted. "I knew it would be a mistake to bring you to a meeting."

“Why was it a mistake, Peter?” Emma raised her eyebrows, scrunching her forehead, and stared determinedly at her friend. “You know I can be a valuable help to the group. Isn’t that why you even invited me to go along with you? Let me prove I can do it.” Emma’s voice was filled with purpose and energy.

“NO, Emma,” Peter interrupted again, raising his voice just a bit too loud. He quickly looked around the building lobby and lowered his voice to a whisper before he continued. “I only invited you to come with me because I thought you should see what’s going on. That’s all. I just wanted to share the secret with someone, and, you are my most trustworthy friend.” Peter stood his ground. The resistance group was way too dangerous for a young and innocent girl like Emma.

“Listen, Peter. My mind is already made up, and I am determined to help. We can’t keep living like this.” Emma’s hand grazed absently over her yellow star.

For ten months Emma’s life revolved around helping the resistance and her friend Peter. Autumn turned to winter and winter turned to spring. And Emma’s family had different plans than to hang around Hamburg or join the resistance. The Nazis seemed unstoppable, and, Emma’s parents had had enough.



HAMBURG, GERMANY – Daytime. May, 1939

“Hitler Divulges Plans to Invade Poland” –*Der Stürmer*

Vladimir Baum was a middle-aged man, condemned to sitting in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. He had served proudly and bravely in World War I for the German air force and had been shot in combat. His spine had been fractured. But it was the long-term emotional effects of the injury that proved to be more painful for Vladimir. It was over a decade after the war, and, Vladimir now immersed himself daily in Torah study. It wasn't long before he became a learned and respected teacher in his town.

Vladimir's hair was already turning white and his long straggly beard, stained with pipe smoke around his thick lips, definitely added age to his 44 years. His eyes sparkled with love and concern for the world and the people around him. His clothes were sloppy and outdated – his trousers were always creased and too short, and his old, scuffed-up shoes, were always the first thing people noticed about him. His aged gray sweater, which had become part of his daily uniform, was always sprinkled with his favorite *mandelbroit* cookie crumbs.

To Vladimir, his appearance was comfortable and familiar. The war had left him old and tired, and, the physical confines of the wheelchair were more than he could bear. At first, when he returned from the war, he could barely manage to get around, still, he would not allow himself to be condemned to the imprisonment of his small apartment.

Vladimir worked relentlessly on rebuilding and maintaining a positive spirit. It was the least he could do for his devoted family and for God.

He did his utmost to hide his physical pains from his wife and daughters, and, he made valiant efforts to maintain an agile mind. *Baruch Hashem, Blessed be God! It could be so much worse; Vladimir would often pray and remind himself. God knows what He's doing, and he must have a plan for me.*

Today, Vladimir sat in his wheelchair next to the fireplace in the living room. He lifted his head and stared at his wife, Irene. She was standing nearby in the doorway. She was a few years older than her husband, but she maintained her youthful, smooth, and rosy-cheeked complexion. Irene marched through life with a proud, straight posture and a sophistication that made her look larger than her 5-foot 2-inches and younger than her 46 years.

Suddenly, the couple was startled by a loud knock at the front door. Irene hurried to the front hallway to see who it was.

"What happened to you, Emma-le?" piped in Vladimir, as Emma entered the living room. Emma would always be his little *maidel*, and he worried about her constantly. If he was shocked by the sight of Emma now, he did not show it. Vladimir had a sense of urgency about the timing for their long-awaited plans.

He was well aware that she had become deeply involved with the young Jewish youth that were engaged in political activities in town. It worried him to realize that she might be in danger, but Vladimir was inwardly proud of his daughter's decisions and show of strength. She would do what he could not. He just wished he did not have to see her suffer.

Since her friend, Peter, had inadvertently introduced her to the underground resistance group, Emma was responsible for distributing anti-Nazi propaganda around town. Peter, together with another young acquaintance named Isaac Zelman, were lucky enough to secure menial jobs at the local office of the German newspaper, *Der Stürmer*. There, the boys were secretly able to use the printing machine after hours to make flyers and pamphlets for the group. Emma had done her part in the resistance with pride and success – until now.

When Irene opened the door, she gasped hard. Her oldest daughter stood there in her shredded, wet clothing. There was a thin cut on her left cheek with tiny droplets of dark blood dotting the graze. "Emma, my *ketzele*, are you okay? What happened to you? You are bleeding, *oy, mein Gott*."

"I'm fine, Mammeh. Really, I'll be fine." Emma stood in the doorway, panting and out of breath. Her plaid blue-and-white blouse, torn at the shoulder just above her yellow star, bellowed like a sail in the wind with each breath she took. The faded cobalt *tichel* on her head was pushed back far enough to see dark, wet, curly ringlets escaping from under the scarf and framing her face. Dirt smudged across the bridge of her straight, thin nose, but that did not diminish the blush of color in her smooth, supple cheeks. The cut on her face was beginning to clot, despite the wet flush on her face.

"I'll get out of these clothes, and we can start getting ready to leave," said Emma, ignoring her parents' concerned questions. It was already five months since Emma had begun working with the Resistance fighters in Hamburg.

Emma, youthful and attractive in a classic way, bore a double-edge sword. Her rosy cheeks, curly dark hair, and light honey-colored eyes drew unwanted attention to herself at times, but it also gave her a charismatic and quick-witted edge over her male challengers. Emma was charming and knew how to use her feminine allure to her advantage.

Emma had just left the newspaper building with an envelope stuffed with newly printed leaflets from the resistance group. She had the envelope rolled up and secured under the elastic waistband of her skirt. A Nazi officer appeared out of nowhere and stopped Emma dead in her tracks. He began questioning her in the open, almost empty street.

Emma was nearly home at that point, so the officer had caught her with her guard down. When Emma tried to fight off his initial verbal assaults, the officer became more physically threatening. The officer swung his huge, meaty hand and bitterly struck Emma in the face, slicing into her soft cheek with his large, gold-encrusted pinky ring. It bore the insignia of the Nazi Party on it, and, the symbol seared in Emma's mind. She took off running without looking back, until she reached her apartment building.

She pressed her hand tightly to the envelope of leaflets inside her waist. Thankfully, when she arrived at her door, she found herself alone on the sidewalk with the stack of leaflets still in her guarded possession.

Emma's younger sister, Dora, emerged animated with excitement from the bedroom she shared with Emma. She heard the commotion at the front door as her older sister came in. "Are we really leaving this time?" asked Dora with wide-eyed anticipation. The Baum family had paid and obtained their travel permits a year ago, but until now, the government kept denying their exit visas for random "unexpected complications." They had almost lost confidence and hope in the family plan to migrate. Finally, the time had come for their move.

"Yes, we are," Emma reassured her. "We leave on a ship in just two days." She winked gingerly at her father and tugged at her *tichel*. She wanted to rip it from her aching head and face, instead, she cautiously readjusted it and kept it in place to conceal the dirt and blood encrusting her hair and cheek. She scampered off quickly to her bedroom and hid the envelope filled with resistance literature under her mattress.

"Thank you, *mein Gott*. Thank you," repeated Vladimir in whispered prayer. With his eyes lifted upward, he silently hoped that this would finally be the last of their dreadful existence in Germany. He trusted Emma's connections with the underground resistance group to guide his judgments. Even if it meant, this one time, making a hasty journey on the Sabbath, Vladimir was determined to leave.

Vladimir carefully maneuvered his chair passed the sofa and made his way over to his wife. He took hold of Irene's trembling hand, as the pallor drained from his face. "I know this will be hard for us, my dear," said Vladimir, "it is the best for all of us." He gave her a reassuring grin, and his messy beard shook from his trembling chin.

"I know," answered Irene. Although she didn't wholeheartedly believe it.



HAMBURG, GERMANY – Afternoon. May 13, 1939

Those two days had gone by, not a moment too soon, for the Baum family. They found their way onto the crowded pier where the *SS St. Louis* was docked. Holding on desperately to their belongings, the Baum women pushed their way up the gangway, making sure to keep Vladimir's wheelchair steady and rolling forward without incident. Panting and sweating from the weight of suitcases and satchels, Irene and little Dora walked in front of Vladimir, while Emma pushed the wheelchair from behind and carried a heavy duffle bag as well. They had managed to pack most of their valuables, and the hauling was challenging.

Emma suddenly noticed a group of German soldiers arrive at the pier; it was a Nazi convoy. Sailors and port personnel began scrambling while soldiers got off their trucks and began taking diverse positions at the pier. A handful reached the gangway and began climbing as if wanting to board the ready to leave ship.



CHAPTER 12

MIAMI, FL - Daytime. October, 2019

"On the count of three, you'll wake and open your eyes. Breathe deep. One, two, three..."

A snap of the fingers.

Kate's eyes opened slowly. She was stretched out on the lumpy couch in David's office, but she was not comfortable. Her entire body felt crushed and lifeless. The light around her was still dim, as David sat by her side. He reached over the coffee table and pushed the stop button on the tape recorder.

"This is pretty amazing," exclaimed David.

"What is?" asked Kate, still groggy and vexed from her hypnotic state.

David poured a couple of glasses of water from a pitcher for both of them.

"Kate, would you mind terribly if we didn't discuss the details right now?" asked David.

"You mean, you're going to leave me hanging?" Kate was puzzled.

David smiled playfully at her. "I would never leave you hanging," he teased - and, he meant it. There was just something about this striking young woman that kept him captivated. In fact, he was completely and constantly distracted with thoughts of Kate. Everything about her was compelling, and, David found it difficult to concentrate on anything else; *and those almond shaped eyes...*

"Fine," Kate said, snapping David out of his thoughts and back to the present. "But, promise me you'll tell me soon. I don't think I can do this much longer with the way it makes me feel - I am so exhausted all the time now, and, quite truthfully, I am getting more and more tense." Kate's thoughts came gushing out of her mouth like an out-of-control locomotive. She took a long gulp of her water, gathered her handbag and sweater, and swung her legs warily off the couch. "I thought this therapy was supposed to help me, not make me feel worse," she added.

Kate's sudden burst of liveliness put a huge smile on David's face. He could feel his cheeks flush crimson with heat. "Soon enough" replied David, "I promise I'll share everything with you soon. And you will find the answers you've been searching for."

Suddenly, the intercom buzzed from the reception area. Kate shook her head and broke her trance. A strand of her honey-colored hair swung softly over one eye.

"I'll see you next week," she whispered. There was a sensual desire in her words that softly rattled David's heart.

"For sure," replied David. "So, until next week."

Kate turned to look at David one more time. She lowered her eyes, flashed an intense smile, then turned away and headed to the door. David sulked back across the room and sat down at his desk with a heavy thump, Kate's sweet voice echoing in his head as she left the room.

Bruce was there, chatting away on his cellphone. When Kate walked out of the office and saw Bruce sitting there, one leg crossed high at the knee and his cell phone to his ear, Kate could not contain herself. She furrowed her eyebrows and pouted. "Hi, Bruce." *He is so big and klutzy*, Kate noticed.

"Don't tell me I didn't place the order," Bruce yelled into his cellphone. "I know darn well I did. Wait, hold on...Hi, dear. Are you ready to go now?" Bruce stood quickly, almost knocking his chair over, and huffed into the empty space between them.



Kate and Bruce went straight to their favorite South Beach restaurant for a late lunch. They sat wordlessly, face to face, with nothing to say. The space between them was empty and unnatural. Kate's stomach grumbled with hunger, even though she had no craving for food. Miami's intercostal surrounded them on three sides – the water was blue and smooth as glass, and exclusive private boats lined the marina. The couple had become regular patrons at *Monty's* since they began dating nearly six years earlier.

Usually, the serenity of the waterway and the cool breeze that lifted off the pier soothed Kate, but today she was especially irritable and edgy. *What on earth could be bothering me so much? Could it be the regression sessions? What could I have told David in that session today?* Nagging, unexplainable questions continued to jingle around in Kate's head these days, and her sudden ill-temper with Bruce was becoming more difficult to mask.

The uneasy sensation covered her like a slow syrupy drip and made it difficult for her to shift her moods. Kate could not focus on anything, and a poking unrest gnawed continuously at her stomach. Bruce and Kate just sat in the restaurant's outdoor patio, with nothing really to talk about. Not even the wedding plans...

Bruce's cell phone rang, and he grabbed it impatiently, speaking into the receiver so loudly that everyone in the crowded restaurant turned around to give the couple sour looks. With her anxiety mounting and her annoyance becoming more evident all over her face, Kate leaned over and slapped at Bruce's free hand, carelessly hitting his gold pinky ring. "Ouch!" she whined. The ring had hit a nerve in Kate's thin, delicate finger.

She rubbed it forcefully, scolding Bruce. "Please just take that call outside, if you must, Bruce," Kate squealed, trying to lower her voice and maintain her civility. Her tone was raspy and snappy, and Bruce flinched with the touch of her fingers on his hand. He put a finger to his lip, gesturing for silence, and he shut his eyes as if to shut Kate out.

Abruptly, Bruce stood up from the table and gave an awkward bang with his foot against the table leg that shook the water glasses resting in front of each of them. Without looking back at Kate, Bruce made his way through the tables and marched to the edge of the patio, carrying on with his call.

Now sitting alone, Kate wondered some more about what was really irritating her so much. Nothing really had changed. Everything with the wedding plans was progressing along smoothly, and even Miami's approaching hurricane season seemed to be holding off as if to say, 'all's clear for a sunny celebration.' The gentle splash of the lapping surf against the pier's pillars were not much help in soothing Kate today, but instead, she found the noise and the movement grating on her nerves. *Why can't I shake this feeling?* questioned Kate. *What the heck is wrong with me?* TV screens, suspended on the walls around the patio, exhibited random baseball games live from around the country. Kate pretended to watch the game broadcasting closest to her.

Almost twenty minutes later, Bruce finally sauntered back to the table with his cellphone held in one hand and a half-empty cocktail glass clasped in the other. Kate's cheeks were burning red with rage – Bruce was not sure if she was flush from the midday heat or from the anger sizzling in her stare. Bruce ignored Kate and grinned largely, his big teeth gleaming oddly in the bright sunshine. Kate checked herself, determined to avoid an argument with Bruce in the restaurant. She picked up her floral printed scarf that had fallen haphazardly on the ground behind her chair and slung it over the back of her chair.

“I hope you were able to make a deal,” Kate remarked wryly. “That was an awfully long phone call in the middle of our meal.” She looked up at Bruce who was still standing over her. *Why is Bruce smiling at me that way?* Kate wondered to herself.

“In fact, I was, Kate. I mean, I did. And, this one's for you.”

Bruce could not contain his smugness. He plopped into his chair with another clumsy crash against the table leg, again disrupting the water glasses. Bruce's demeanor remained unruffled, and his pride (or was it arrogance?) burst from every pore in his large, lumbering body as he began to explain. His eyes bore into Kate's face. “I am now looking at the new owner of *A Handel on Fashion, Inc.*” Bruce shot Kate a smirk of self-satisfaction and waited for her response.

“What the heck are you talking about, Bruce?” was all Kate could say. Her every nerve surged with impatience.

“Is that how you show your appreciation, Kate? I just bought you your very own boutique on South Beach. Say ‘thank you.’” Bruce was simmering and he continued with his grumbling tantrum, “You know, Kate, you're a very strange person. I try to do right by you, and all you can do is complain and argue?” Bruce's lungs deflated as he blew loud gusts of air out of his flared nostrils and thin lips. He crossed his arms over his chest and puckered his mouth into a pout.

"I'm not complaining or arguing with you, Bruce." Kate tried to soothe Bruce's mood. "I don't even know what you're talking about. You know I want to stay on at the addiction center." Kate offered Bruce a playful wink as a compassionate gesture of warmth and intimacy. She and Bruce had recently discussed her hopes of carrying on with her work after the wedding. In fact, she was almost certain that the regional director of the facility might even offer her a full-time position in their 'battered women' department.

Kate had wanted this position, and she had already invested so much of her time and energy in helping these women. Bruce had been opposed to his bride working and keeping a full-time work schedule. After all, Bruce reasoned with her, wasn't *he* supposed to be the breadwinner of their new family? Who needed another full-time salary, anyway? Bruce would take care of them.

Now, Kate felt like she was drowning. There was no escaping Bruce's scheming, domineering nature or his one-sided plans for her future. She had been working hard to prove herself as a serious employee for the past six years at the Miami Department of Social Services. Now, Bruce was trying to simply obliterate all of her efforts and dedication and take everything she had worked for away from her - simply because of his overbearing and archaic views.

Kate remembered now that she had once mentioned casually to Bruce that she loved to sew. In reality, Kate was quite talented with fabrics, patterns, and needlework. She had inherited her grandmother's aged *Singer* sewing machine after her beloved *Baba* had passed away. Kate supposed that most people would regard it as an old-fashioned and dull pastime in the 21st century, so she normally kept hushed about her secret passion and talent, especially with Bruce.

Now, Bruce was going to use this against her. Was he doing this on purpose? Did he really think Kate could not handle anything more than being a wife and a storekeeper? Kate was positively stricken by the idea of sitting in a clothing shop every day. Even if she was the owner. Even if it was on the glamorous and stylish South Beach.

Kate gulped in a shallow breadth of air. Her neck and face reddened, and her heart rate accelerated with a thrashing in her chest. She sat on her small, pale hands to hide their uncontrollable shaking. Resentment sat in her throat and blocked her breathing. What was really causing her to be so prickly?





CHAPTER 13

“Are you ready?”

“Let’s do this.”

“All right then, take a deep breath. Two, three; release. One more time...”

SOMEWHERE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA - Daytime.
August, 1581

Joaquin and Danilo had boarded the Portuguese enemy ship just over two months ago, and, now, they remained on board as prisoners, slave labor for the Spanish privateers. Crushed in a sea battle, they watched the Portuguese galleon hopelessly sink to the depths of the Mediterranean Sea. Just months ago they had been plucked off the Iberian seacoast while fleeing the Spanish, their new masters. *How very ironic*, the two friends had observed, still feeling lucky to just be alive and out of Portugal.

Joaquin still donned his cloak and cross, while Danilo had shed his borrowed getup long ago. The clerical robes that Joaquin was more familiar and comfortable with were, for Danilo, overly cumbersome and restraining.

Now, he only wore tattered, long pants and a chemise which, on better days, would befit a royal advisor. Both men were bare-footed. They were kept below decks with the crew. The rough seas rocked the ship mercilessly, still, the sea-wary sailors seemed unnerved by it all. *How do they get used to this, spending all their time at sea?* wondered Danilo with his youthful familiar contempt towards the Spanish army.

Sailors clambered about easily on the upper deck, while Danilo and Padre Joaquin continued to suffer from constant nausea and faintness throughout their seafaring voyage. All the men, however, seemed focused on making landfall, regrouping, and getting on with their next launch - loot intact and secured.

"Soon we'll be on dry land again, eating and drinking in the best pubs of Trani," one sailor slurred. He was talking to anyone close enough to listen. Danilo caught only one word of the man's garbled conversation - Trani. They would not be returning to Spain after all; they were heading to Italy. It seems the two friends were actually luckier than they had even imagined.

"I hope the Capitan can avoid further calamity now," replied another nearby crewmember. "One more fight like the last one and this ship is *finito*."

The waves crashed against the sides of the ship. Sounds of wood creaking and canvas sails flapping in the salty winds echoed loudly throughout the ship's hallways.

"Well, right now I am only thinking of wine, food and women," commented the first sailor. "And, not necessarily in that order. You on the other hand, are a strange one - worrying only about this stinkin' ship."

"*Exactamente*," replied the second sailor raising his voice. "If it were not for her - and the might of Spain, I should add - we could all be in a shark's belly right now. This ship and Captain Huerta have kept us all alive, so keep your head straight for a bit longer. Oh, forget it - just help me fold this sail." *Que idiota*, thought the sailor in his head.

He couldn't wait to return to dry land either, but at least he recognized his good fortune on this voyage as he lifted the sail and skillfully folded it in quarters. After all, not only were they still alive, but they had seized a huge amount of valuable booty from that last battle.

An armed guard ignored the banter of the sailors and strode past them, leading Padre Joaquin and Danilo behind him across the deck. As the sailors wrestled with the sails in the wind, the guard stopped in front of the bulkhead door. Danilo and Joaquin stopped short, just before slamming right into the hulking guard's back. The guard, stiff and dirty with the smell of stale sweat, opened the door with a hard push from his shoulder. On the other side of the door, a narrow ladder led down to the galley. The guard guided the men down the dark, rickety stairs until they reached a lower deck where a number of oarsmen were waiting at their rowing positions.

A Spanish row master - a muscular, bare-chested and unshaven grump - gave the trio a bothered smirk and stared down at the armed guard who had just brought the two captives down. "And what are you three doing down here?" inquired the row master. His voice was scratchy and deep, like he had just woken up and was uttering his first words of the day.

"The captain said to put them to work," answered the guard, with a cocky and somewhat coy lilt. The guard pushed Danilo and Joaquin briskly in the direction of the sitting oarsmen, then hastily turned and disappeared back up the ladder to the main deck.

The row master, known only as Manolo, was irritated by their disruption, and he did nothing to hide it on his weather-worn face. His complexion was dark and thick and lined – the skin of a veteran seaman. He understood that he had to be cooperative if he wanted to collect his payment upon arriving in Italy, and these new prisoners were an intrusion into his domain. He made a quick decision for the two men. "You'll be in charge of cleaning up after the oarsmen," he said, pointing to the priest. "This bucket here is for the waste, and you will give them food and water only when told. Is that clear?" Joaquin nodded his head frantically in affirmation.

Manolo tossed two buckets at Joaquin and continued shouting his orders. "This bucket is for water and this other one is for their '*basura*'." "More buckets," said Joaquin with a nervous chuckle. His lips thinned as he offered a modest smile to the row master, yet the priest did not realize he was speaking out loud. Joaquin's easy and gentle disposition grated on Manolo's ragged nerves. The cantankerous seaman let out a long, hard sigh that sounded more like a grunt. The smell of alcohol reeked from his breath, as he bore his jagged and yellowed teeth through his own cracked lips.

Manolo turned his attention away from Joaquin and now stared directly at Danilo. "You'll be working in the kitchen. You'll clean, peel, and do whatever the cook orders you to do, right. I'm sure even a stupid runaway like you can handle that," Manolo snorted. *Stupid sacristan...these two imbeciles think they're so smart, thought Manolo, they don't realize how stupid and lucky they are that we are the ones that found them and rescued them from those sucios Portuguese...*

The row master stood to full height – nearly six feet in bare feet – and tugged once on a frayed rope attached to a bell that hung by the bulkhead door. Seconds later, the door opened with a slow, eerie creak. A young, blonde sailor timidly peeked his head in toward the row master.

"Good, there you are. Quickly, take this one for kitchen duty," ordered Manolo, gesturing at Danilo. "At break-time, you can bring him back down here," he ordered, pointing a crooked finger menacingly at Danilo. Manolo then shoved Danilo in the shoulder toward the ladder. "This means now...get moving," he yelled. Danilo complied meekly, looking first at Padre Joaquin and then down at his bare, blistered, shuffling feet. Joaquin scooped up the buckets and began walking toward the chained oarsmen.



Later, inside the captain's private berth, a confined yet smartly furnished room, Captain Mauricio Huerta sat at a small table in the middle of the room. He was a burly man, short in height (about 5 foot 6 inches when standing in boots), but he was tough and sinewy - most likely from his years spent at sea. Mia, a beautiful, young Italian woman with alabaster skin, high cheekbones, and eyes that looked like pools of liquid pitch, set out his late afternoon meal. She wore a tightly corseted, lime-green velvet gown that thrust her ample bosoms over the top of the threadbare neckline.

"My dear," uttered the captain from inside the cabin. "You know my stomach cannot handle a lot of food when the sea is this rough." He looked at the food laid out on his table, shifting his gaze uneasily across the plates and back to Mia.

"You hardly ate a thing today," replied Mia with feigned concern. Her voice remained tender, though, as she spoke in whispers to her Spanish lover. "You must eat to maintain your strength."

"We'll be back in Trani soon," replied the captain. "Do not worry for me, *mi flor bella*."

"Of course I worry about your well-being, *mi querido*," Mia answered with a smirk.

Mauricio chortled with manly pride and pulled Mia into his arms once again, kissing her hard on her lips. His unshaven chin scratched and burned her mouth and then her exposed decoupage, as he continued planting wet, sloppy kisses all the way down to her soft bosom. Mia shuddered but contained her surreptitious disgust.

"One more thing," stammered Mia through the assault of kisses, "The priest and the sacristan, the ones you took in --"

"*Si*, what about them?" questioned the captain.

"Promise me, again, you will not hurt them," Mia begged. She contained her secreted apprehension and religious foreboding on the inside of her bare, unprotected, pounding chest.

Mauricio held Mia tightly and continued to cover her neck with kisses. "*Si, Esta bien,*" he agreed absently. Not sure of him, Mia lifted his head gently with her hand, and, once they made eye contact, he blurted the "I promise," she needed to hear. The kisses continued, and, for the moment, he was lost in the rapture.



Down in the ship's galley, Padre Joaquin repositioned a stiff and moldy tarp over the soaking stacks of wooden oars. The wind roared and the waves crashed, but an odd tranquility filled the night air. Everyone on the ship seemed spellbound by the exhausted break in activity, despite the turbulent seas. The mid-summer humidity and the misty sea spray lulled them all into a lazy mid-day sleep as they approached the Adriatic coast.

Danilo appeared back on the deck and spotted his friend in a far corner. "What do you suppose they'll do with us now when we reach land?" he whispered to Joaquin. They sat huddled together, their skin burnt-red from the sun and dulled from the spraying salt waves.

After a long minute, Joaquin began conversing, "I don't know, friend. We are still alive and well aboard this ship. Also, we are not kept in shackles, so I assume we are not considered *enemigos*...for some reason." Joaquin suddenly realized that more than two whole months had passed since he and his friend were caught by the Spanish. Joaquin fingered the dangling silver cross about his neck and chuckled, for the hundredth time, at the irony in which the Spaniards had actually helped them get away, just as they had run into a dead end in their escape from them.

"I think we are safe, my friend." Padre Joaquin continued with comfort and good humor. "God is surely with us, and the Italians are quite well-known for their more compassionate nature."

"Do you think they'll set us free?" questioned Danilo with his usual youthful optimism. He squinted his eyes and crinkled his bronzed forehead against the glaring sun. He, too, was feeling the irony of their circumstance. And now wondered, *would Abba call this 'destino' or 'buena suerte'?*

"It's very possible they don't want anything from us, except for some physical labor on board and then getting the ship into port. Let's get some rest now. We'll probably be forced to work hard again tomorrow. I hear we're coming to port in Trani."

"Yes, I overheard one of the sailors earlier. We'll be heading into Italy tomorrow," Danilo affirmed.

"Trani is the port village north of Bari on the east coast of Italy, isn't it?" asked Joaquin. He attempted to turn Danilo's attention away from troubles and more toward the future. Joaquin seriously wondered just how true the rumors were about the tranquility in Italy, but he was grateful for, at least, the opportunity of passage – even if he and his friend had to make it as unintended working slaves.

The ship suddenly tilted and rocked crudely to one side. The entire galley growled under the weight of the shift, and, the sound of the service bell pealed. Danilo and Joaquin rolled softly into each other.

"This will be over soon," said Danilo. "Maybe Trani will offer some rest for our weary bodies." He stood swiftly and steadied himself quickly against the groan of the tired, rocking ship.

"Everything will turn out alright, Danilo. God is always watching over us," said Padre Joaquin, as Danilo made his way back down to the kitchen. Danilo let his friend's sentence vanish into the misty, salty sea air, reminiscing on the day they had escaped.



FARO, PORTUGUAL – Daytime. May, 1581

Clear blue skies stretched as far as the eye could see. White curls of cloud speckled the horizon, and Danilo flickered his eyelids a few times adjusting to the sudden flash of bright light all around them. His gentle blue eyes crinkled in the new and buoyant atmosphere of the open seas. Danilo quickly brought his breathing to a steadier rhythm, but he could clearly hear the loud puffs of air escaping from Padre Joaquin's throat, as he lay prone in the dinghy. The duplicitous calmness of the sea air and the hard heaving of Joaquin's slim chest contributed to Danilo's sudden and urgent sense of vulnerability. They had made it safely out of Portugal. For now.

Just a moment earlier, the two friends had emerged from a dark and humid woodland that bordered the southern shoreline of the Iberian Peninsula. They had spent the last month traveling by foot all the way to Faro on Portugal's west coast by way of the southwestern border from Spain, but Danilo and Padre Joaquin recognized right away that they would not be welcome in this part of Europe either. Just as they had experienced on their route through Andalusia's settlements of Bobadilla, Gibraltar, and Cadiz, the two friends found Portugal's countryside to be similarly hostile to strangers.

Danilo and Padre Joaquin were not faring well with the locals in their attempts to settle and fit in. After all, they were two seemingly aimless Catholic priests, wandering with no apparent direction in shabby black robes and well-worn sandals. Their strategy was that, if they could just get out of Spain first, in the guise of a Catholic priest and his sacristan, they would then arrange for their settlement somewhere in the new country.

Danilo huddled low in the rickety dinghy and blew air through his chapped, red lips. Hunger for his father and the rest of his family left behind in Spain was consuming him deeper than any physical hunger ever could. Danilo wiggled his parched tongue inside his thirsty mouth.

Joaquin and Danilo had grown up together in Granada, Spain. They spent years studying in the same school and living in the same neighborhood. Their lives were quite normal and happy - full of amusement and pleasure. One day in the summer of 1576, soon after finishing their *bachilleratos*, Joaquin left for religious training in a Spanish monastery in the north of Spain. Joaquin's family was Catholic, and they had resided in the Andalusian region of Spain for generations. They had high hopes for Joaquin joining the Catholic order of priests.

Danilo's family practiced Catholicism, too. But, in reality, they were Jews - Secret Jews; called "Conversos" by their Spanish neighbors, "new Christians" by the local church authorities, although no one ever actually would dare to openly discuss this status. In spite of the papal decrees of Pope Innocent VIII, that had spread across Europe almost 100 years earlier, and, the added civil edicts of 1541 by King Charles V, that vowed to eliminate all customs and rites of non-Catholics, Danilo's family had somehow managed to survive - and even thrive - throughout the decades, living comfortably among the people of Granada.

Those Jewish families who had enough money to pay the highest taxes to the king's government, were able to find relative peace, remaining mostly undisturbed amongst the Catholic peoples of Spain. The Jews of Granada, like those all over the Iberian Peninsula and Europe, maintained outward allegiance to the Church, while they clandestinely observed and maintained their Jewish rites and customs in the concealment and silence of their homes. Danilo's family had high hopes for him to endure another generation of hostility and upheaval.

Danilo was not the first in his family to want to break free from the secret and hidden lifestyle of the Spanish Conversos. Many an uncle, grandfather, cousin, and even a distant in-law had tried to escape from the duplicitous and hypocritical life they were forced to accept. Yet none was ever successful in fully carrying out a plan that took them, and their families, further than the border of Andalusia. After all, Spain was all they knew, and, the bookkeeping business that Danilo's family had built over the decades, was far too valuable and comfortable from which to walk away.

However, Danilo was different. He was not willing to hide and pretend to be something he was not, to deny what was so deeply imbedded in the core of his being. Even as a young, capricious boy, Danilo knew there was no denying his Jewish identity. Danilo's father, although proud of his son's religious and familial convictions, considered Danilo willful and childish, and, he wished that his only son would eventually outgrow his capricious immaturity. Danilo, however, viewed his natural obstinacy as righteousness and loyalty. He couldn't explain this tendency; he only knew that it was wrong to live a false and imprisoned life.

And, while Danilo accepted his neighborhood friends and acquaintances as fellow compatriots, he silently wished to take a stand against this deceptive fate and to live freely without disguise. Danilo knew that this day would come somehow, and his childhood friend, Joaquin, finally provided the answer. If only his father could see it, too.



It was late in the afternoon and Danilo was returning from his father's office, where he had been apprenticing under his father's tutelage. Danilo was naturally astute with numbers, and his father was proud to have him eventually take over the family's business. Today Danilo was overly sullen and contemplative. The weather was unusually balmy and muggy for the early weeks of May. Danilo, lost in muddled thoughts about the future, walked slowly and mechanically through the familiar streets of his neighborhood.

“Well, if it isn’t my dear old friend.” Danilo heard the high-pitched voice whisper from the shadows. It was so recognizable, it startled Danilo just the same. Suddenly, Danilo was whisked out of his trance as he noticed his childhood friend shuffling on the street’s flagstones to catch up beside him. “What a fantastic surprise, Joaquin. When did you get back?” questioned Danilo. They stopped to embrace.

The two friends found that not much had changed in the years since secondary school, but, their boyish faces were changing to reflect the passing of seasons. Each with his own unique experience to tell, the two young men still shared a steadfast and compassionate familiarity.

Springtime remained moderate and pleasant, as the two friends began to make their furtive plans. They grew increasingly disturbed by the tense unfairness and hostility of the social and political atmosphere in Spain, and the two old friends grew impatient for action. Danilo and Joaquin would meet regularly at a local inn and quickly discovered that they were both troubled about their futures in Spain. Joaquin had spent years in a Catholic seminary;

Danilo was still absorbed with the notion of being free and unrestrained to practice his own religion and lifestyle. It did not take long for these two confidants to formulate a scheme to rescue their futures. The plan they devised was not really complete, or even rational, but it was definitely inevitable. If only their families shared their concerns. They seemed always to respond with the same “it will be alright, just give it time;” Although time does not always guarantee a good outcome.

They started meeting several nights a week spending time playing chess, discussing the guarded writings of Renaissance philosophers and astrologers, and planning their stealthy flight from the confines of their impeding homeland. It would be risky, but the two young men were bound by their principles.

Now, in Faro, almost a year later, the two young friends found themselves faced with another hasty decision to make, partly due to the sudden and unexpected outreach from a local Faro priest. At the last minute, with only a few *maravedis* left in their pockets, and, with the Portuguese authorities wildly on their heels, Padre Joaquin managed to secure the necessary equipment and material from the local parish church to help the two men escape the dangers of the Iberian establishment.

The loosely fabricated idea required the two friends to stay hidden in Faro for a few days (which they did in the church's cramped and smelly tool shed behind the walls of the great church hall), and, finally, use the only viable escape route - the sea - to leave Portugal for good; with the authorities on their trail, and, the last of their money spent on some raw vegetables, the two men made haste with the little boat and a few meager provisions from the church. Now, they were adrift at sea. *This idea is nothing short of insane*, sighed Danilo. The wind and salt in the air began chipping away at their hopes and replacing them with doubts. Those fears increased tenfold when they were picked up by the Portuguese galleon that met its fate the day, they faced off with the very Spanish from whom Danilo and Joaquin had been so eager to escape.



SOMEWHERE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN - Nighttime. July, 1581

In his private chamber, alone, Captain Huerta no longer entertained the idea of eating his evening meal. The food smelled good; it was still covered and laid out on the small wooden table. He heard an abrupt knock at his door and yelled, "Who the devil is that now?"

The door opened slowly with a squeaky groan. The young, blonde sailor stood outside the door and addressed the captain.

"Sir, we can see the port city of Trani from here," reported the sailor. "It won't be easy getting into the harbor in this weather. We wanted to know what you want us to do."

"Very well," answered the captain with a brisk, dismissive tone. "Do not anchor her down. We are not going to wait here for the storm. We are coming into the harbor tonight. If we wait for the weather to ease up, it could be days before we touch land, and this ship and my crew can surely use a rest."

"Aye, sir. We will approach the port at your command."

"What dreary weather Italy has this time of year," complained Mauricio.

The whistles sounded and sailors scrambled in all directions. "Well," said Joaquin, "Italy here we come." Danilo placed his arm over Joaquin's shoulder. Both, lost in their own thoughts, knew that no matter what happened, their destiny would be what it was meant to be.



CHAPTER 14

MIAMI, FL - Daytime. October, 2019

"On the count of three, you'll wake and open your eyes. Breathe deep. One, two, three..."

A snap of the fingers.

David's eyes slowly opened. He lay awkwardly on Simon's green couch and the lights were dim. David was anything but relaxed. Simon stopped the recorder and waited for David to fully come back to his conscious senses.

"I was hoping you'd finish recalling the story from our last session," said Simon as he reached for the recorder. He shook his head slowly as if to shake out the confusion that smothered his mind. "Today, you actually jumped 500 years further back again."

To the previous story I began telling you a few weeks ago?" asked David. "The same one," answered Simon looking a bit startled, maybe even somewhat disappointed. "Are you sure?" insisted David. "That's strange, isn't it? I mean, two lives? And why the jump?" interjected David. This process was becoming harder to follow with each visit, and, David was becoming more and more confused and irritable than ever before.

"You are reliving two past lives. So much is clear," continued Simon. "It's really amazing and revealing."

"Do you think it sounds like all this could be my imagination?" David asked as he sat up. Simon handed him a glass of water. Maybe David's subconscious was playing bizarre games on both of them. After all, David was quite creative and imaginative.

"No, I don't think so," answered Simon confidently and quickly. "It's definitely two different lives." He knew David better than anyone else - except for maybe Diana - and he recognized that David was quite a charismatic storyteller. Simon felt completely certain now that David was not making any of this up in his imagination.

"I ask because my patient is also retelling a story that happened about the same time period. And, although, you haven't told me exactly what kind of story I'm telling you, it could be I'm simply relating to you what I hear from her," David said, hoping for his friend's honest opinion. "The stories are yours. Very much yours. What does it all mean, though?" Simon pondered further. "I'm afraid that, my friend, is still the famous enigma that we are bound to discover." Simon rubbed his clean-shaved chin, removed his wire-rimmed eyeglasses, and squinted his tired eyes.

"You're a smart doctor, you'll figure it all out," answered David. His blue eyes were dull in the dim lighting of the office, his tone was playful. David was not convinced that his friend would really figure anything out. There didn't seem to be any resolution or connection to anything significant.

David could not see any rhyme or reason, and, sitting here in Simon's office, made him realize that weeks were passing by, and he still felt a tense uneasiness. He couldn't seem to shake the eerie feeling that was following him like a low-lying rain cloud above his head. And, it all seems to have intensified since meeting Kate.

David and Simon sat facing one another for some time. Here they were, two grown and educated men of science, yet the silence between them was full of mystery, thick and weighty with ambiguity. They struggled to come up with something halfway intelligent to say to each other. This kind of quietness did not exist often between David and Simon; usually nothing could find these two friends at a loss for words.

Finally, it was Simon who piped up and broke the silence. "Even if you jump back and forth, you are still treading along a synchronized continuum with similar characters." *Doesn't that sound like I know what I am talking about?* Simon thought hopefully.

"Sure, Simon," replied David. "A synchronized continuum it is. Hopefully we'll be synchronized as well on Wednesday against the 'Cougars.'" Simon was sarcastically patronized by his best friend and brother-in-law. He would not be fooled. *I just hope David gets over his depression soon,* he thought as he watched him get up to leave.





CHAPTER 15

"Are you ready?"

"Sure am."

"All right then, take a deep breath. Two, three; release. One more time..."

TRANI, ITALY - Nighttime. August, 1581 A.D.

A loud knock on the door awakened the sleeping rabbi. He had fallen asleep on the couch while reading from his beloved *Talmud*, the source of his knowledge and inner-strength. Rabbi Menachem scurried from the couch to the front door with as much energy as his fatigued body could muster. His wife, Esther, heard the old man scuffling and panting heavily with effort all the way from the bedroom down the hallway.

Esther put her faded robe over her nightgown and walked into the kitchen. From there, she could hear what was going on in the living room without disturbing her husband. Lately, refugees from all over Europe were flooding into Italy seeking help in all the Jewish quarters, and Rabbi Menachem had had his hands full trying to secure shelter for these plagued Jews of Europe, including his own new houseguests, the orphaned Sabona girls. He worried now if the deluge of disparaging and wandering Jews would ever come to an end.

Isabella heard the knock at the front door, too, and she joined Esther in the kitchen. She did not sleep much these days, and, any sudden noise or interruption was enough to send the young girl into a frenzied panic. In the few days that she and Camila had been staying with the older couple, Isabella had managed to develop a strong fondness for Rabbi Menachem. His kindness and fatherly concern for her and Camila provoked the last shred of inner ease that she was able to muster. Isabella and her sister were lucky to find the rabbi, even though Isabella remained mostly ill at ease. The girls might have still been out wandering the streets alone if he had not been so generous in offering them a place of shelter and protection.

The serious young Isabella was still finding it difficult to ingratiate herself to Esther. Camila was still unable to speak; their experience had left her emotionally mute. Esther showed patience with Camila, but she remained a bit cold and distant with Isabella. Isabella decided she would follow the old woman closely and figure out how to win her favor.

Now, the incessant knock on the rabbi's door continued with a loud fury. "Rabbi, it is me, Moishy," a muffled voice announced from outside the house.

The rabbi hastily, but ever-so cautiously, opened the door. Isabella and Esther peaked around the wall from the kitchen and watched Moishy rush inside the house. Moishy was middle-aged, short, naturally and prematurely bald, but his body was as buff as any younger man.

"Come in, come in," urged the rabbi as soon as he saw his old friend on the doorstep. He half-twisted his body toward the kitchen doorway; Rabbi Menachem knew Esther was always close by. "Esther, please bring Moishy something to drink." He could tell that his friend was in an agitated state, and he quickly shut the front door behind them.

"You heard the rabbi, dear," Esther ordered in a low mumble, turning abruptly to Isabella. Something about Isabella continued to bother Esther. *She is some kind of trouble*, thought Esther over and over again. *I just know it. I suppose Menachem knows what he's doing*. She continued to stare into Isabella's almond shaped eyes. "Get the man a glass of water," she repeated. Isabella jumped to attention and did as she was told.

Moishy accepted the glass from Isabella with a shaky, outstretched hand. He nearly tumbled the serving tray. He was clearly frazzled, but he attempted to swallow his nervousness with each gulp of water. Beads of sweat formed under his skullcap and ran down his bald temples. A big lump in his throat bobbed up and down as he drank the entire glass of water.

"Rabbi, it's terrible," Moishy finally began to explain with a billowing exhale of air. "Over a dozen Jews were killed in Venice two days ago." Moishy spoke with great sadness. "The horror! They were burned alive inside the synagogue. I just heard this from my neighbor."

"They will come for us, too. Soon, there will not be a single safe place in all of Italy - in all of Europe, - for any of us," gasped the rabbi. Rabbi Menachem stared at his friend, silently, preoccupied with this latest news. After a pensive moment, Rabbi Menachem seemed to have reached a decision. He declared definitively, "Well, then." He stomped his foot as if taking a firmer stand. "The time has come. We have been expecting something like this for some time now." The rabbi had been warning the Jewish community for months; they would have to be ready to leave quickly, and, possibly, with little notice; he knew it would only be a matter of time before they would have to move.

He had warned everyone that the day would come and that they needed to be ready, each with his most important items, ready to move quickly without the burden of weight. Truthfully, the rabbi had prayed that the situation would not become so dismal in Trani. *It is now or never*, he thought. "Alas, the time has come for us all. Moishy, make the rounds. Make sure everyone knows that we are heading out tonight. We cannot wait any longer."

Did the rabbi just say we were to leave tonight? Moishy was stunned. He nodded his head in disbelief and straightened his back. He would be strong. He never imagined they would be in peril like this; still, he would never argue with Rabbi Menachem's proven and wise judgment. He silently agreed with a tight shrug of his shoulders and a wave of his hand over his heart.

"Esther," yelled the rabbi over his shoulder, "Help Moishy. Make sure everyone knows it's time to leave. And, keep it in the *quartiere*, please." Then, he turned back to Moishy and continued, "Remind everyone to take only what is necessary. We need to move fast and light." The rabbi turned to Esther, "Isabella and Camila will come with us; we will leave no one behind."

"Very well," answered Esther, and her attitude was slowly more accepting of the two girls. Esther took Isabella by the arm and walked back to the kitchen. "Come girl, it's time to pack," said Esther leading the girls to the bedroom.



That very same night, a crowd of several dozen Jewish families - men, women, and children - all gathered on the pier, huddling closely and silently behind the stacks of cargo crates. They knew the time would come. It did not come as a surprise, nor, was - anyone shocked by the rush of events that evening. The new month was upon them and it was turning out to be a particularly dark night. The sky was filled with clouds so that the stars were unable to project their usual light on the pier -. The warm, moist wind was wafting around the port, and, the humidity drifted in from the water, settling stiffly over the pier.

The anxious crowd waited impatiently, shifting their feet and struggling to stay together, as they watched a new ship pull into the docks. The ship's disheveled-looking row master, Manolo, was the first to disembark, leading a group of worn slaves down the ramp and onto dry land. Sailors and other crewmembers followed close behind. Among them were Danilo and Padre Joaquin trying to blend in with the other crewmen. The two detained men helped the crew unload gear and trunks full of well-earned booty.

The captain of the newly docked ship appeared on the ramp, making an even more grandiose spectacle of their arrival. Captain Huerta swaggered confidently and proudly while Mia sauntered tall and confident a few steps behind him. They were escorted through the crowd on the pier and onto solid land by an assembly of personal sentinels. Mia, especially, was thrilled to finally be home; the wear of time spent on the open seas showed on her rumpled dress, and, her sea-legs were a bit wobbly. heron the other hand, the captain, standing beside her, seemed as energetic and put-together as a young bachelor ready to venture about town. Padre Joaquin, Danilo, and the other crewmen were all ordered back up to the ship to continue unloading its cargo.

Eager to settle down on land, the captain arranged for his final directive. He signaled for the row master with a high-pitched whistle. When Manolo approached him, Captain Huerta explained, "Tonight, I want you and some of the crew to remain on board the ship. Tomorrow morning, I will issue new work orders. I will give you some time on-shore before we sail out again."

"Most sailors will spend the night at the pub. I need only a handful of men to keep unloading the ship. But what should I do with the "extra" crew?" asked Manolo, referring to Joaquin and his sacristan. His antipathy towards them was so blatant; his eyes did not meet the captain's but instead roamed unfocused and hungrily over the crowds gathered on the pier.

"It's getting late already. Have them stay with you and the other men for tonight. They can help wherever the men need them; tomorrow, we'll let them go." The captain remembered his hasty promise to his beloved Mia, and, due to the success of this last voyage, was feeling especially generous. After all, the Spanish were not really looking to bring home extra sailors; they were mostly concerned with gathering worldly riches and Catholic converts.

Manolo let out a wet, palpable whistle through his chipped front teeth. "Si, Capitan," replied the row master and headed over to his post next to the ramp. Mia, leaning right up against Captain Huerta now, smiled and relaxed. The corners of her mouth curled upward, offering a faint hint of satisfaction. Mauricio filled his burly chest with a huge gulp of air and grinned proudly back at Mia.

The Jews, impatient and nervous in the temperate late summer evening, remained crouched behind the crates on the pier, watching and waiting silently for further direction from Rabbi Menachem. The tension continued to thicken on the pier amongst them, and it mixed with the heaviness of the blackening sky and salty wind – it was almost hard for the exasperated Jews to breathe. At least the rain had stopped and the misty weather was bearable.

Isabella was sitting cross-legged on the pier, lost and confused, with her little sister in tow. They were just two amongst the dozens of other fearful Jews who were looking to make their hasty journey on that ship and somehow manage to find a new start in life.

Sorrow filled Isabella's dark eyes, but she was equally filled with a steely glint of new determination. She wrapped her mother's familiar scarlet shawl tighter around her shoulders and face. Her lips quivered as she mumbled a prayer to herself. How she wished her father and mother were here with them now.

Moishy, proud and brave, stayed close by the side of Rabbi Menachem. He glanced woefully around at the mass of Jewish neighbors and leaned in closer to the rabbi. "We must find a way onto that boat," murmured Moishy. "I think I have an idea. Inform everyone now to remain silent and follow my lead."

The crowd of fearful Jews heard the rabbi repeat Moishy's quiet request. They had been waiting for this moment and now they all nodded their heads in accord with their rabbi. Isabella stood tall among the complacent. They had no other choice; they would simply have to move again.



CHAPTER 16

MIAMI, FL - Daytime. October, 2019

"On the count of three, you'll wake and open your eyes. Breathe deep. One, two, three..."

A snap of the fingers.

Kate was out of breath, and, her cheeks were flushed apple-red. Her eyes revealed fear and foreboding; they were bloodshot and red-rimmed. She remained stretched out on the couch in David's office and tried to regain some composure. David sat by her side in the dim light. He reached over to the coffee table and stopped the recorder.

"It's so hot in here," Kate whispered with a raspy irritation in her tone. Her cheeks puffed out with exasperation, and her upper lip glittered with beads of sweat.

David handed her a glass of water. "You didn't really finish your story," said David, "but, you were about to..." David did not finish his sentence.

"Was it water?" Kate hissed. She trembled with a jolt of recognition that made the hair on her arms prickle and raise. Her eyes opened wide and mad.

"I'm fairly sure we will be able to discover the answer to your water phobia," answered David. He didn't want to appear overly assertive about the therapy just yet. He was satisfied that he might have finally found some significance to Kate's recollections. He wanted more time; he was just beginning to learn more about Kate, as well. David's voice sailed through the air with a sing-song lilt.

Kate's long eyelashes fluttered, and, detecting a warm understanding from David, she stretched her arms and legs as she sluggishly sat up on the couch. Just hearing David's voice filled Kate with a strong sense of security. At the same time, David's entire body was stirring with sensual awareness. David got up quickly and stumbled clumsily over to his desk, still eyeing Kate as he moved across the office.

"That's great news," said Kate. "It would make me - and Bruce - so happy to understand all this." The mention of Bruce made David shudder with anxiety. *Why did she have to bring up that idiot?* thought David. Kate gathered her purse and scarf from the coffee table. "The wedding is three weeks from now, and, I'd hate to disappoint him about the plans he's made for our honeymoon."

"You, 'disappoint'?" David jumped with jittery irritation. "How could you disappoint anyone?" David crooned. He picked up a pen from his desk and twirled it in his fidgety fingers.

"Yes, well, he wants to take me on a cruise for our honeymoon, but --"

"So, you're afraid of the water," David completed her sentence. "But, that's no reason for him to be disappointed." He rejoined Kate at the couch and slowly, mechanically, escorted her by the elbow toward the bookshelf. There displayed amongst the hundreds of medical books, David had several photos of himself and his dad on the *Take A Leap*. David and Kate stood staring at the photos like frozen statues, absorbed in deep attention.

Suddenly, the intercom buzzed from the reception area. Kate shook her head and broke her trance. A strand of her honey-colored hair swung softly over one eye.

"David, I won't be able to come next week but I'll see you in two weeks," she whispered. There was a sensual desire in her words that softly rattled David's heart.

"For sure," replied David. "So, I'll see you in two weeks," he said without questioning her. He was curious as to why the break; he understood that sometimes it's better not to be nosy. After all, she didn't owe him an explanation.





CHAPTER 17

MIAMI, FL - Daytime. October, 2019

Tammy sat at her desk in the small yet relatively uncluttered front office, filing her long black lacquered fingernails and chomping on the chewing gum in her mouth. She looked more like a rock band groupie than a professional's secretary, but, at least, she handled Diana's clients capably. With her sultry eyes and her full, pouty lips, Tammy had a special way of connecting with men and women alike, so that everyone, immediately responded to her youthful charm and quick-wit. Her desk was messy but somehow, she knew where everything was. She had an incense burner, a small Buddha, some kind of spiritual necklace and other shanti paraphernalia. She considered herself a spiritual person, although she looked more the part of a lost soul from the hippy era.

Diana was in the adjacent smaller office, buried in paperwork and photographs stacked high on her desk. Reflections from the big, open glass window accentuated the hectic sense of the office space. The only view she had beyond the window was that of the towering warehouses that surrounded her building in Miami's art district.

Her office space was small, but it was kept elegant, tidy, and well-lit with the natural light that streamed in from the large window. There were photographs on all three walls of the office, showing happy party celebrations and wedding memories of past clients. In the corner of the office, along the wall with the door that led in from the outer office, there was a round table.

It was set with a white linen tablecloth that hung down to the floor. On top of the table sat an array of displays - floral bouquets, samples of wedding and party invitations, and three full table settings including china, flatware, and champagne flutes to complete each set. Next to the table was a long, narrow sideboard that neatly held a Nespresso machine and an electric teakettle with all the desired accouterments for a welcoming drink for visitors to her office.

Kate sluggishly pushed open the heavy glass door to of the outer office while Bruce waited in the car in the parking lot stuck to his Bluetooth device making his annoying business calls. He could not see why he had to tag along behind Kate, just so that they can drop something off for Diana. Bruce did not even know what Kate was dropping off, and, Kate realized that he did not even ask her.

When Kate made her way through the office door, Tammy glanced up from her fingernails, not really showing much concern for who had walked in on her, and, took in the sight of Kate. It did not take much for Tammy to realize Kate's discontent. Kate was wearing her emotions all over her face these days; she was walking around with a permanent scowl on her face - her lips pursed and her brows furrowed above her eyes - as if some slow, continuous ache was consuming her every move. With a casual nod of acknowledgment, Tammy wrinkled her button-nose, as if she suddenly smelled something foul, and forced a kindly wink. Tammy shouted through the open door to Diana's office. "Mrs. Canavaro, Miss Katherine is here to see you."

"She'll be right with you," Tammy said, before Diana even answered. She anticipated Diana's promptness with her clients, and, with a smile that stretched across her powdered face, she nodded to an empty chair next to her desk. *I'm glad it's not me getting married*, thought Tammy, again registering the sad pall that shrouded Kate. She could not imagine ever tying herself down to one man. *For what? To be this unhappy?* contemplated Tammy as she stared at Kate. Tammy's youthful, naïve eyes sparkled with a bit of smugness that she could not hide, as she nonchalantly nodded again in Kate's direction and returned to her manicure.

Kate noticed Tammy's attitude. She took in a deep breath through her nose and rang her small white fingers together in order to hide her discomfort. "Yes, thank you," answered Kate; "it's Tammy, isn't it?" she asked as if doubting her memory. Tammy looked up from her nails once more and simply glanced at Kate without even a hint of a smile or courtesy. Kate averted her look and tightened her lips. It wasn't really Tammy that was bothering her. It was that ceaseless uneasiness that was eating away in her belly all week, especially since Bruce's announcement of the South Beach clothing store he had bought to distract Kate from her more meaningful work.

As if a young and up-and-coming social worker like Kate could ever be distracted and swayed by trends and fashion. No, not even a boutique on the swanky Lincoln Road of South Beach could sidetrack Kate from her worthwhile and creditable career. Kate remained standing by Diana's door, waiting to be asked into Diana's office.

A minute went by. Kate noticed a motivational poster above Tammy's desk. It had a beautiful picture with the header 'Destiny'. "Do you believe in destiny?" asked Kate not really knowing why she was making conversation with this strange character. They had nothing in common. Not how they dress, behave and certainly not in their approach to life. Or so Kate thought.

"The choices we make and the chances we take, determine our destiny," answered Tammy. "That's quite profound," added Kate. Before they could continue their conversation Diana emerged from behind her desk and strode over to the front door where Kate was conversing with Tammy, shifting her small frame from one foot to the other.

"Hello dear, what a nice surprise," beamed Diana with a big smile. She was very busy these days; "I'm so glad you stopped by," Diana continued with a girlish ramble.

Diana stopped short with her chatter. There was something different about Kate; Diana couldn't quite put her finger on it, but something was very troubling about the usually friendly and plucky young bride-to-be. The two women embraced each other lightly in affectionate greeting. "Is something wrong, Kate?" Diana asked with concern.

"No, no. I just wanted to bring you the seating chart," said Kate. "I knew you needed it."

"Oh great," Diana answered, as she took Kate by the elbow. "And, I want to share with you a new idea I have for the place cards." Diana led Kate to the heavy armchair in front of her desk. Diana could not let go of the nagging sense that something was just not right.

Leaving the door open between her office and the outer office where Tammy sat unperturbed at her desk, Diana walked past the display table in the corner of the office and picked up a file folder from her desk. She passed the file to Kate, who casually skimmed over the contents. Her stomach lurched, as if it would leap right out from her throat if she opened her mouth. She had spent hours with Diana scrutinizing every sample and detail for the wedding.

Now, Kate felt offbeat and completely uninspired by any of their plans. *Shouldn't I feel excited for my wedding day?* She wondered secretly. *What's wrong with me?* Kate tried to reason with herself. Maybe, if the wedding was perfect and all went according to plans, then she could wait until the honeymoon and try to negotiate with Bruce about working at the women's shelter... but, what would she say about the clothing boutique?

"Are you feeling alright?" Diana insisted again. Kate looked wane and unfocused.

Kate whistled softly and rang her small white hands together again. "I guess I'm just a bit tired," Kate answered back.

"You're not getting cold feet, now, are you?" asked Diana, concerned but light-hearted. She was used to this type of reaction from wedding-couples-to-be.

"No, of course not," retorted Kate. Was it that obvious that she might be having second thoughts? "You know, it's just that Bruce bought a clothing shop on Lincoln Road for me, and, I have so many things on my mind right now."

Diana knew better than to push Kate any further. Why put thoughts in her head now? Sometimes it is better to just leave things alone. "I can certainly understand why you would feel overwhelmed. It happens to all of us. And in the end, everything works out," Diana said trying to comfort her client. "You are in good hands," Diana added.

“I know I am,” replied Kate. “It’s not because of the wedding plans that I’m feeling a bit jittery,” Kate tried to explain. “It’s...” and she went silent for a second. “It’s okay,” assured her Diana. “If it’s your destiny, everything will work out as it’s supposed to.”



CHAPTER 18

MIAMI, FL - Daytime. October, 2019

David and Simon had planned to meet at the *Starbucks* on the corner, but the day was proving to be too hot and steamy for afternoon coffee. They changed their plans and headed straight to the ballpark instead. When they arrived, the two friends changed into their uniforms and went out to the dugout to check on their equipment. They barely had time alone to discuss the last session together. Typical South Florida humidity and mugginess weighed heavily in the air. It was difficult to breathe, and, the early evening sun still hung bright on the horizon and baked everything into a thick, soupy haze.

David and Simon sat in the dugout, leaning against the concrete wall and the water canteen in order to escape the relentless heat. Today they were playing the "Cougars" - a huge team of South Americans that formed a sales conglomerate in Miami for high-tech auto components. Regardless of the heat and uncomfortable humidity, there was still a large crowd gathering at the park, and, thrifty teenagers from the local high school roamed the bleachers, taking advantage of the weather to sell everything from soft drinks and water to bandanas and sun visors to the crowd of devoted supporters.

Simon was again slated to play catcher for the "Shrinks," and, David knew he should spend some time on the pitcher's mound warming up his throwing arm; and neither one wanted to leave the relative respite of the dugout. They stayed put.

Simon leaned over and whispered to David, "I just can't stop thinking about your last session, David. You're in the middle of two past lives, about 500 years apart, but relaying them at the same time. And, what's really amazing is that you seem to recall every little detail with perfect accuracy. Even your language and accent change in each of the sessions."

David was surprised by Simon's sudden reference to his therapy as they rummaged through the team's gear in the hot dugout. As anxious as David was to finally understand what his 'therapy' would eventually prove, he lifted his eyebrow over his left eye in a peaked arch, as if to question Simon's timing of the conversation.

"Please stand for the 'Star Spangled Banner,'" they heard from the overhead park speakers. The baseball game was starting, and, like it or not, now they had to get out on the field.

Simon and David hesitated a moment before getting up and approaching the lit field. They would have to postpone this conversation once again. David hastily jogged out to the pitcher's mound that shimmered in the blistering sunlight, and Simon took his position, crouched behind the home plate. Their movements were slow and their energy was sluggish. Winning this game would not be easy.

David was not willing to lose another game this season, especially after the humiliating loss to Bruce and the "Legals" last month. He had vowed to concentrate on baseball tonight, although now it was evident that both David and Simon were still distracted by the lingering questions that remained about the regression sessions. Simon could hardly curb his excitement with David's story, and, David could not hide the anticipation of Kate coming back, at least one more time, to continue her own story.

David wound up for the first pitch, concentrating all his efforts on the batter at the plate, and, pitched a fastball. The ball burned in Simon's mitt as he caught it. He was well accustomed to the ferocity of David's throws. The umpire behind Simon called the play -- "Strike!" he yelled.

"No way, *idiota*," cursed the Dominican batter quietly through clenched teeth. "*La pelota era demasiado bajo.*" The ball was pitched too low, the batter whined.

David now pitched a curve ball, which the intense batter managed to hit into the left outfield. After one bounce of the ball in the grass, the outfielder threw the ball back at David on the mound, who caught it and spun around to throw it hard and fast towards first base. David's throw reached the first baseman just in time. The batter was out. "*Hijo-le...!*" screeched the runner. The Cougars' first batter shook his head in disbelief and stormed back to his team's dugout.

The crowd cheered for the doctors. The next batter approached the plate slowly and cautiously. Things were getting pretty serious now. Simon and David got into the groove of the game and began playing with a real passion – just like the times they played together in college. Thoughts of therapy sessions would have to wait for now.

David pitched the next ball; a fast curve ball that alit and swiftly struck the dead center of Simon's mitt. "Strike!" yelled the umpire. The new batter at the plate was feeling the pressure and the energy that was radiating between pitcher and catcher. This game was going to take its toll on everyone.

David rolled the ball in his hand and prepared his next pitch. His cheeks were crimson from the heat and excitement of the game, and sweat dripped from his brows under his cap into his blue eyes. Focusing with all his might, David rolled the ball over and over in his palm.



CHAPTER 19

"Are you ready?"

"Ready as I'll ever be."

"All right then, take a deep breath. Release. One more time..."

HAMBURG, GERMANY - Afternoon. May 13, 1939 A.D.

Young Daniel paced on the dock flipping his baseball absentmindedly in the air. Actually, he was quite nervous, but the natural swish of the baseball in and out of his palm calmed his frayed nerves. His father stood silently next to him, yet he was visibly shaken by the surrounding chaos. Between the two of them, they carried only one suitcase and a threadbare sack filled with various family heirlooms that they couldn't bear to leave behind.

There was a lot of movement on the gangway, and, people were haphazardly gabbing, gesturing wildly with their arms, and running in all directions. In the commotion, Daniel felt invisible from the throng of people; he couldn't help feeling out of place. So many Jews fleeing instead of joining the fight as he had done. And now, here he was together with the deserters, acquiescing to his father's desires.

Crewmen began trying to direct people up the ramp. The *SS St. Louis* was due to sail out soon after sundown. The din of the noise around the pier was busy and loud and ringing in Daniel's ears. A cacophony of ship horns, the dull rumbling of military and cargo trucks from the pier, the pungent stench of the river mixed with gasoline and sulfur, all added to the melee that was taking place on the pier. Military personnel, sailors, workers, and travelers all scrambled aboard the ship.

Slowly, the crowd moved along. Men, women and children dragged suitcases and bags up the long and steep ramp. Daniel and his father were propelled to the top of the ramp with the crowd, all the while trying to stay inconspicuously behind a large family with several small children. One of the children stared at Daniel as he rolled his baseball in his hand. David smiled and winked at him, trying to put the boy at ease. He was nervous as the rest of them and was looking for a thought to distract him.

Continuously, groups of people kept arriving at the pier. *How are all of these people going to fit on this ship?* Daniel thought naïvely to himself. As if reading his mind, Daniel's father sighed heavily and murmured, "Ach, everyone is trying to get out of Germany today." As they were still climbing, a Nazi convoy arrived at the dock. Soldiers accompanied Herr Klum, a high-ranking SS officer who began yelling orders in German to the officials at the pier. Herr Klum wore the Nazi uniform with pride. Slightly overweight and not particularly tall, he made up for his physical shortcomings with a load of arrogance. His cropped black hair was slicked back from his forehead with a slight part combed neatly from the left side.

Holding his officers visor cap in his hand, ace filled with disgust and hate, he hid behind the joy of being able to order people around and feel superior as he made others suffer and plead. His uniform was spotless but not his shoes. He was above the menial task of cleaning what came in contact with the floor.

Mr. Wolf, among the passengers still waiting to climb on board the ramp, walked in front of a large family and turned to the crowd of expectant passengers to repeat the Nazis' demands in Yiddish. "They want to recheck everyone's exit permits. I suggest we climb aboard quickly because chances are, we can take off before they even begin the recheck." He added this last part in a lowered voice.

Towards the end of the line, two families ahead of Mr. Wolf, young Emma was pushing her father, Vladimir, up the ramp in his wheelchair, while carrying a huge duffle bag strapped to her back. Even though the sun was beginning to set, sweat formed a shiny coat on her forehead. The humidity blinded her vision as the moisture from her forehead dribbled into her eyes. Irene and Dora were each burdened with their own cumbersome suitcases. They walked just a step ahead of the wheelchair. They were one of the last families to arrive at the pier. Suddenly, three more German military trucks rolled up to the ship's gangplank.



After successfully reaching the top of the plank and boarding the ship with no disturbance from the crew, Daniel stuffed his baseball in his pocket, and, assisted others up the gangway. Daniel immediately noticed Emma pushing the wheelchair and struggling with the weight of the duffle bag, and, without hesitation he quickly began making his way down toward them.

"Daniel, where are you going?" screeched Manfred, trembling and nervous. He did not want to be separated from his son.

"I'll be right back, *tatteh*. Don't worry, everything will be all right."

"Daniel, please come back," Manfred yelled to no avail.

Meanwhile, the German officers, led by Herr Klum, were getting much louder and much aggressive down at the pier. "This boat will not leave until we check everyone's documents," demanded the German *oberst*. A disturbance was forming further down the plank, but the officer only smirked and let out a low grumble.

"We are all ready and cleared to sail," insisted one of the young sailors. He was impatient to get out to sea already. However, something was causing unexpected delay on the plank. *We just have to get out of here already –the sooner, the better,* thought Vladimir. He was just as anxious to leave as the impatient sailor standing next to him. He felt impotent and guilty of the burden he had become to his Emma.

Daniel pushed his way through the horde of panicky people and reached the Baum family. Only for a second, Emma's and Daniel's eyes locked in a solemn stare. Someone shoved Daniel in the back with a hard suitcase, which pushed him forward in a jerky motion almost knocking Dora right off her feet. Righting himself quickly, he took hold of the wheelchair again and pushed it closer up the ramp. His hand momentarily brushed Emma's small dainty fingers. "Here, let me help you," cried Daniel to Emma's mother, Irene. "Put that suitcase on your husband's lap, quick." Vladimir's wife surprisingly and quickly complied with a hasty nod of her head and a fitful effort to lift the suitcase.

"Thank you," whispered Emma to Daniel as she took on one of the suitcases her little sister had been carrying.

Daniel nodded with a slight smile and pushed the wheelchair up the ramp as hard as he could. Emma's voice rang in David's ear like a soft melodic burst; they seemed to give him a renewed sense of hope. Irene took a hold of little Dora and struggled to keep up with David who was making headway up the ramp. Suddenly, another sailor appeared from nowhere and bumped roughly into Emma. She grabbed the handrail to regain her balance. Emma struggled momentarily with her heavy sack and fell further behind in the crowd of pushing passengers. David was pushing the wheelchair with all the strength he could muster and did not notice Emma losing ground; he was certain she was right behind him as he made every possible effort to clear the way up to the boat.

From the pier just below the ship's outer deck, the German *oberst* yelled again. "Stop! Everyone stop boarding immediately."

Soldiers heeded Herr Klum's commands and began scrambling to take control of the ship. Daniel, with immense effort, managed to push the wheelchair clear onto the deck of the ship and swiftly grabbed Irene's arm to secure her a place next to her husband. Then, he turned quickly and found himself dizzy with the scuttle of families pushing their way onto the deck of the ship. He reached out for little Dora and got her safely on board. "Where's your sister?" Daniel asked Dora surprised not see her there. "Where's your sister?" he shrieked once again. Emma's parents turned white. Fear overwhelmed them. Dora did not answer. She looked as lost and surprised as everyone else. Daniel looked down the ramp, "I've lost her. Where is she?"

"Where's Emma darling?" Irene asked Dora nervously. "I don't know momma. She was right behind me," answered Dora with genuine fear in her voice.

In that moment, the ramp began to sway and separate from the ship. A frightened sailor had given the other sailors orders on behalf of the captain to depart even while people were still climbing aboard and the ramp was still attached. Daniel's father emerged from the hoard of people on the deck and took a place next to Irene, Dora, and Vladimir. Manfred's straggly white beard shook convulsively against his chest, and, he gulped in deep breaths of air. He heard a sharp, painful cry from the moving plank that sent more shivers up his back. "Oy, vey, Emma, where are you?" squealed Irene.

A whoosh of air caused the ship to rustle loudly, and the engine revved into motion. Suddenly, the ship was rocking and drifting farther from the port and the plank; the Elbe River dark and wide before them. Daniel was still standing incredulously on the swaying ramp, mouth agape and eyes wide with panic. *I guess there's no more holdup*, supposed Daniel.

He had to move fast. With a swift thrust of his tense body, he instinctively made a last-minute jump toward the ship, and just barely caught hold of the metal railing. His chest and forehead bumped with a loud clank against the sharp metal edge of the ship. With the last bit of strength he could muster, Daniel swung his heavy legs up and managed to land with a thud on the deck of the ship. With a bump immediately protruding from his right temple, he filled with terror and despair. He glanced nervously over the railing and couldn't believe what was happening. In a blink of his red-rimmed eyes, Emma was out of sight.



Two Nazi soldiers had gotten hold of Emma, one at each elbow, roughly escorting her through the crowd and back onto the pier. Hundreds of Jews had made it to the pier that midday with the hopes of leaving their tragic lives behind. Suitcases, boxes tied with rope, and bundles of personal items still littered the heavily crowded ramp to the ship. It was hard for these people to leave everything, so they brought as much as they could carry.

The engine of the *SS St. Louis* now revved a little louder as the ship readied itself to edge away from the dock and into the churning, shadowy tributary. Some 930 Jewish refugees were finally on their way, traveling north on the Norderelbe branch of the Elbe River. From the railings along the lower deck of the ship, the travelers watched for the last time the five churches of the Old Town Altstadt settlement pierce through the river's misty haze and up through the German skyline.

Suddenly, the gangway - weighty with straggling passengers lugging all their possessions and trying to board the ship- inexplicably snapped and lost its support. It began plunging below the river's surface, crackling and scraping the pier's pilings as it descended deeper into the murky waters. Pandemonium erupted all around the ship's deck, where the quicker, helpless passengers watched the demise of the trailing, abandoned passengers on the pier. Baggage and cargo tumbled recklessly into the river, children screamed with fright, and men and women everywhere scrambled to hold on to their loved ones plummeting over the railings of the sinking ramp.

Not a single soldier was found in the vicinity of the mass chaos.

The ship's captain, Gustav Schroder, swiftly appeared on the top deck and ran to the railing, fuming with anger. "What in the world is happening?" screamed the captain. "Who is responsible for this?" His face burned with fury; like everyone else these days, the captain had a profound feeling that this mess was instigated by the German authorities. Panic, grief, and horror continued to mount as sailors began to emerge hastily on deck and tried to regain control of the situation.

"Help them," implored the powerless passengers already on board the ship. "They're all going to drown!"

The sailors were defenseless, immobilized and completely disabled with fear and shock. They looked around at each other and at the ensuing pandemonium with the unspoken understanding that no one would be saved.

Daniel, Manfred, and their friend, Mr. Wolf, stood among the others who were either frozen still in fear or scurrying about frantically on the ship's deck. All of a sudden, Daniel heard a dog barking from the far end of the dock and spotted Emma on the shore. He watched her as she was being pushed and shoved by two Nazi port guards. *Thank God she is still on solid land.* thought Daniel. Emma wrestled wildly with the soldiers, frantic to break free from their unyielding grips and re-board the ship. *Why don't I ever learn?* whimpered Emma.

The *SS St. Louis* was leaving Germany and Emma was being left behind.



CHAPTER 20

MIAMI, FL - Daytime. November, 2019

"On the count of three, you'll wake and open your eyes. Breathe deep. One, two, three..."

A snap of the fingers.

David's eyes slowly opened, out of focus, he tried to regain consciousness. Once again, he was on Simon's couch, and the lights were dim. Simon stopped the recorder and waited for David to fully come to his senses.

"I think we're getting really close," said Simon.

"Close to what?" asked David. These sessions with his friend were becoming more of an irritation for him, and, David momentarily felt it was not worth his time - but was instead a source of aggravation, especially on a Friday afternoon, after a full week of treatment with his own patients. Maybe his feelings were nothing but frustration. Frustration regarding not only his own treatment, which he knew little about since Simon was not sharing, but, also, regarding his own progress with Kate. His mind was cluttered with continuous thoughts of her upcoming marriage.

Simon's excitement, however, was unyielding. "Closer to a major incident, at least in one of your past lives."

"I'm glad you're being entertained at my expense," said David with a cynical note. He took a sip of water. "Can I now listen to the recordings?" The truth was David was really losing all patience and consideration with Simon and his "sessions;" he wanted to hear the tapes. He wanted to know if the past life he was relating was in the same time period as Kate's story. And if so, he wanted to find out why. *Was there a connection? Could it even be possible?* He thought to himself.

"When you finish with at least one of your past life experiences," answered Simon, "then, you can hear all the details of what you've been sharing with me. And by the way," he added, while putting his notepad away, "how are things going with your own regression-patient?" Simon should have held back in referring to a patient that was obviously evoking a myriad of feelings in *poor* David.

A couple of seconds of uncomfortable silence went by when David took another drink of water and considered his answer before he spoke. "She's..." he hesitated, "Yes, she is..." asked Simon wanting David to finish the sentence. David hesitated some more. Finally, he blurted out one single word, "unique." It was all David was willing to say to Simon - if Simon would not share information with him, he was not going to share his drama, either.

"*Unique?* Did you say unique?" Simon probed with a crooked grin. "I don't understand."

"Well, I just can't explain it," said David. "Yes, she is simply unique. Can we drop this now?" David really had a difficult time finding the correct words to describe what he was thinking of and feeling for Kate.

"You like her," Simon teased in a sing-song lilt. "I know you do, David. I can't believe you are falling for your patient."

"I'm not 'falling for my patient'," answered David defensively, "She's getting married in a few weeks. We play baseball with her fiancé, and she's your wife's client. Pull yourself together, shithead."

"Of course you're not falling for her, David," Simon said more as a lecture than an opinion. "Not only is she a woman 'spoken for' already, but you falling for a patient would be completely unethical too." Simon could sense from David's sudden fidgety movements on the couch that he hit a nerve, and, Simon knew that it was better to just let this conversation go. He was prone to reminding his impulsive friend of the consequences of hasty reactions. He concluded, "So let's say you're not falling for her."

"I am not falling for her," David argued nervously. "Thanks for your concern, but can I please have my tapes now?" David roared. He could feel the heat of anger and exasperation rise to his cheeks. His blue eyes grew large and dark. If he were truly honest, he would tell Simon that he has been up every night for a month thinking about Kate. When David did not think of her, a very unexplainable pall enveloped and smothered him. He had trouble focusing and even breathing. David has met her somewhere before – he was sure of this. But, this unaccountable, irrational – crazy? - reaction to Kate kept David from talking about it with his closest friend. He needed to figure this out on his own.

"Okay, so let's change the subject," Simon offered, noticing David's exasperation. "I thought about your hypothesis of projecting someone else's story," said Simon quickly. "And, at first I thought you might be right. But --"

David got up from the couch and stretched his sinewy legs and arms in all directions. He was still twitching all over with nervous energy, and, could not wait to get back to his own office so he could close up and head out to his boat.

"But what? Simon, it is ridiculous to think that two separate people – strangers, at that – could retell same or similar stories at the same time? I never met Kate before now, and I have not told you anything she has shared with me. At least, not consciously." David started to wonder. Had he actually revealed anything to Simon about his experiences with his patient? His heart began to beat restlessly in his chest. What could he actually be telling Simon in these sessions? He wanted to hear those tapes.

"Are you willing to break your patient's confidentiality?" warned Simon. He knew that David would not.

"What's your problem, Simon? I am *your* patient here, and you are not sharing anything with *me*."

Simon touched his chin and rubbed it with the tips of his long fingers. He removed his eyeglasses and stared down for a brief moment. "Okay, fine. We'll do it."

David didn't hear Simon. David was already so agitated that he briskly walked to the door and left the office with a huff. He couldn't remember ever being this infuriated with Simon. It was true that David had a very short attention span and could be overly sensitive. He could even be very melodramatic at times. As he whooshed by Mrs. Dach's desk in the outer office, he looked at her in the eyes. "Your boss wants to set us up, what do you say Mrs. Dach? Ready to leave your old husband for a younger man?" Mrs. Dach gave David a sharp look in return, not quite appreciating the humor. "How you got your license is a mystery to me, Dr. Stern" she said as she got up from her seat to attend to her boss. "You know I won't wait for you forever," said David jokingly as he left the office.



David prepared to get in his car. Suddenly Simon appeared out of nowhere. "Is everything alright?" asked David surprised. It was out of character for Simon to act so impulsively. "David," began to explain Simon. "I want us to compare notes. I really do."

"That's surprising," said David not fully understanding where this conversation was heading. "But I want you to do one more regression tomorrow," suggested Simon. "Tomorrow, Saturday?" asked David surprised. "I feel you are tense and having some resolution will help you out." "Then tomorrow it is," offered David. "Great," said Simon, "I'll see you tomorrow then."

"And one more thing," added David. "Don't share any of this with your sister. Nothing about Kate," he said with all seriousness. "Not a word," replied Simon. "You need not worry."

David drove out of the parking lot, unsure of what had just happened. Nevertheless, he drove straight down Highway I-395 towards Miami Beach trying not to make too much of it. Out the window he spotted the cruise ships that were lined up at the ports. Miami's skyline twinkled with the reflection of the receding sun on the water's surface.

David suddenly lost focus of the highway in front of him and was drawn to the silhouette of an older ship, a cargo boat, docked inconspicuously between the several passenger cruise ships.

He pulled over to the shoulder of the highway and came to a bumpy halt. With the car engine still running, he sat there mesmerized, staring at the cargo craft. A new wave of anxiety washed over him for a moment. It was a strong, uneasy feeling that crept through his body, carried on through his veins, and came to rest with panicky throbs in his heart. The dread lasted, what seemed to David, forever. And only seconds later, David was brought back to the moment; a flock of seagulls squawked loudly in the distance through the salty breeze, and traffic chugged past him on the highway. *It must be all the stress lately,* David mumbled out loud to himself.

He shook his head from side to side, up and down. He continued staring at the cargo boat, though, lulled into an almost hypnotic state by its bobbing up and down in the water between the cruise ships. *What is it about that boat?* he thought. Darkness began to descend from the sky, and the sun began to set in earnest. David put the car in gear and eased his way slowly back into the traffic.

A car in front of him had a disabled sticker on the back window, the type that shows a wheelchair colored in blue. Its license plate was from St. Louis. David felt uneasy, as he kept driving. Minutes later he passed in front of the Fontainebleau Hotel. An older couple was getting out of a taxicab and they were hauling suitcases; those old square brown suitcases that are hardly popular anymore. Again, David felt strange. *What is going on?* He wondered. All he wanted was to reach the marina, climb aboard Take a Leap, squat on his favorite lounge chair and guzzle down a cold beer.



MIAMI, FL - Nighttime. November, 2019

Simon laid on his bed. The nightlight was on and additional light came in from the well-lit bathroom. Simon donned his reading glasses and held a psychology journal in front of him. A voice from the bathroom interrupted his reading.

"My brother is going through another Christie crisis, except it might not be Christie," offered Diana making her voice heard from the bathroom adjacent to their bedroom. "I know. Actually, you don't know the half of it," replied Simon without lifting his head. Diana swiftly stepped out of the bathroom, a toothbrush still in her mouth, and wearing a chiffon baby-doll. "Well?" she asked mumbling and without removing the toothbrush.

"Doctor patient confidentiality, dear." Said Simon jokingly.

"Wait a minute," said Diana again mumbling but this time with a defiant tone in her voice. Diana disappeared again into the bathroom while Simon continued to read. Seconds later Diana rushed out of the bathroom and jumped on Simon. His magazine flied out of his hands. She removed his reading glasses as she laid flat on top of him. "Start talking mister, or you'll be sleeping in the living room tonight," she warned him. "At least I'll have some peace and quiet there," Simon replied jokingly. "Maybe I'll be able to read one journal article without interruption."

Diana's face turned sad, she makes a puppy face at Simon, who melts a second later.

"Alright, alright," he said. "But I warn you, you ain't gonna believe none of it." Diana rolled over and lied beside her husband, looking intensely and barely blinking her attentive eyes.



CHAPTER 21

"Are you ready?"

"I am."

"All right then, take a deep breath. Release. One more time..."

SOMEWHERE ON THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA - Nighttime.
August 1580

An Italian sentinel dressed in military uniform watched nonchalantly from the passenger access ramp as the ship's crew secured the Spanish galleon in the port. Unexpectedly, two men appeared on the pier and teetered sloppily towards the sentinel. Their speech was hurried and slurred, and, they threw vulgar insults at each other as they ambled and stumbled into one another.

The men reeked of stale sweat and fish. They wore ill-fitting, tattered dark suits and large hats that seemed inappropriate for the mild summertime weather of southern Italy. They continued spitting affronts at one other and flailing their arms above their heads, completely disturbing the muted hush of the dark evening air settling around them. The sentinel let out a heavy sigh. He was not in the mood for troublemakers tonight.

"You did it on purpose," slurred one man to the other.

"No, I didn't, you fool," yelled back the second man.

"Who are you calling a fool, you old fool?" cried out the first man. The sentinel on duty braced himself for the trouble he foresaw. He grew more irritated as the two men drew nearer, and, he purposefully slung his rifle sharply and menacingly over his shoulder.

In the next instant, one of the disheveled men jumped at the second and held him in a chokehold. The sentinel reacted quickly and rushed at the two men, his weapon smacking rhythmically against his hip. As he ran forward, the guard felt a sudden sharp pain in his groin. Shots of electricity coursed through his body, and, the sentinel could feel his legs crumble under his own weight. He fell with a thump on the wooden floorboards of the dock, moaning in pain and clutching the throbbing bulge between his thighs. Barely audible above the groaning of the downed guard, the two men huddled and called out carefully into the night air, "Hurry! All's clear."

From out of nowhere, a mass of individuals crowded the darkening dock. They watched the fabricated scheme between the two performing *shikers* unfold before their eyes, shocked that the plan actually worked. They scrambled about, apprehensive that the ruse would not hold up and that impending danger would be near. Dozens of men, women, and children, all heavily weighted with parcels and old suitcases, hastily made their way from behind the stacked crates and barrels up to the ship's boarding ramp.

The two men who had been pretending to fight on the pier, stopped to help bind the downed sentinel by his hands and feet and carry him out of the way; he was still moaning in pain but was conscious when he was brought onto the deck of the ship. Women prudently hushed their crying babies, and, the elderly kept a silent vigil as they all made their ways warily up the swarming gangway to the ship. Isabella, dripping with nervous sweat, her now stained and shabby bright scarf wrapped tightly about her head, pushed her way through the crowds and chaos on the pier and safely boarded the ship with her young sister Camila just two steps behind Moishy, Rabbi Menachem, and his wife Esther.



The newly boarded mob made their way onto the Spanish ship's deck. Amidst the commotion, they watched the crowd settle their bags and stand away from the younger men. The men in the stowaway group were all wearing dark heavy coats and fur-lined hats, much too much for the balmy Italian weather in August. Some of the men sported long and tangled beards down to their chests, while others donned small tufts of coils that swung past their quivering jawlines.

All of them seemed to be talking to themselves, their lips moving rapidly as they hustled around the crowds on the deck. The women and children looked like stuffed rag dolls, wearing drab layers of clothing over their sweaty and foul-smelling bodies. They moved sluggishly, panting in the breezy sea air, but they kept moving diligently.

The ship began moving. Men scrambled across the galleon looking for soldiers and passengers that might have been left behind. Two men began raising the sails to speed up their escape while a small crowd of men armed with knives, clubs and the sentinel's stolen rifle made their way down the hull. They sensed there were a few men sleeping. They snuck up and took hold of them with relative ease. Some struggled when they were hastily awoken, but, were quickly overpowered; among them were Father Joaquin, Danilo and Manolo, the row master.

The men in control seemed relieved to have been able to take over the ship without much of a fight. All the found passengers were led to the bulkhead doors and brought to the upper deck. Their hands were tied up and, all were placed kneeling on the floor wondering what their fate would be.

"Make sure we got everyone," growled Emile to no one in particular. Emile was one of the wealthy aristocrats of the community. Thick-boned, pale and with his hair greased back, he seemed unusually agitated. Emile stood out by being particularly arrogant and bossy. Looking around with his chin up, as if in charge of the operation, his lips curled in a snarled expression, and, his fists clenched at his sides. Emile slipped aggressively through the gathered crowds, pushing people, hissing through his thin, white lips, and barking orders in all directions. The more he barked, the more people shied away from him.

Emile tried unsuccessfully to move the commotion of people onto the ship so that they would not raise any further suspicion or attention on the pier. *Thank God it's dark tonight and the moon is hardly visible,* Emile yapped. *These people are hopeless on their own.*

"What are we supposed to do with them?" said one of the men that was watching over the captured sailors. "Let's wait until we are further out and throw them to the sharks," answered Emile. The man, taken aback, replied, "the Rabbi will decide what to do with them," he said, still not able to digest Emile's words.

"The Rabbi will decide...," repeated Emile mimicking the man in a ridiculous voice. "What else do you suggest we do with them?" Emile replied trying to make fun of the one who dared ask about the fate of the captured. The man, sensing that he was losing control of the situation, immediately left Emile and rushed over looking for either Moishy or the rabbi who were helping the women and children get settled down.

"Moishy, Rabbi, you better hurry," said the man with a sense of urgency in his voice. "What is the matter?" asked Moishy sensing the man had some troubling news. "Speak already," said Moishy loud enough to shake the man up.

"Emile is crazy. He says he wants to throw the prisoners overboard."

"We'll be right there," said Moishy calmly. "Tell him only the rabbi can decide their fate." Moishy reassured the man, placing his hands on the man's shoulders. "And don't let him do anything stupid," he instructed.

The captured men still kneeling in a row on the deck were getting particularly nervous. Two sailors seemed extremely anxious and trembled as their captors held their knives dangerously close to the prisoners' throats. "It's not looking good, Father Joaquin," said Danilo softly to his friend Joaquin. "After all we've gone through, now you're going to lose faith?" asked Joaquin, trying to remain positive but not believing it much himself.

Their murmuring was interrupted by the dreaded Emile. "That's all we need now," Emile grumbled into the briny night air. "A holy man to interfere with our escape." Emile's sarcasm was biting, and, his face turned red with heat and fury as he glared at the small silver cross that dangled over Joaquin's emaciated chest. "Quiet both of you!" he yelled as he turned to Father Joaquin. "In this Inquisition it is not you who has the right to speak."

"I have nothing to do with the Inquisition," defended Joaquin against Emile's accusation. He barely finished his sentence when the angry Emile slapped him across the face. "You pig!" yelled Danilo, looking furiously at Emile, whose arrogance was intolerable.

Danilo made an effort to reach for Emile, but being tied up, he stumbled in vain. "Another anti-Semite to the rescue?" Sarcastically and in a burlesque tone asked Emile.

"I am a Jew, you stupid hog," assured Danilo. Emile turned red in the face and tightened the grip on his knife. Emile did not want to use it, but he came prepared to be on the offensive, if it came down to it. He slowly tiptoed his way closer to Joaquin and Danilo.



Standing with her younger sister by the railing on the other side of the deck, Isabella watched Emile, fully aware of his rash and imprudent disposition. Isabella barely knew Emile, but she often encountered him on the streets when she would pass the *yeshiva*. He would always gawk at her with intense, hungry glares whenever she had to make her way through the community's Jewish quarter and pass the school. Isabella had already seen and heard enough of Emile's provocations tonight, and, she was not inclined to end this wretched day with more misfortune.

Taking control of her own anxiety and wrapping her sweaty scarf more tightly around her matted hair and flushed face, she took a deep breath, straightened her spine, and turned to Camila. "Turn around," instructed Isabella. "Stay here and do not look," she told her young sister before walking over to Emile.

Isabella cautiously approached Emile and the captured men kneeling on the floor of the deck. "What do you think you're doing, Emile? We were all told to wait for the rabbi," Isabella challenged. "You will bring problems for all of us with your nasty and rash behavior."

Danilo looked on at the scene between Emile and Isabella. This young, mysterious girl with her faced covered was feisty and strong-willed, and she had a mesmerizing, stunning gaze.

Danilo watched her, and, he felt his breath evaporate from his lungs. Danilo could not take his eyes off of her. She conveyed a strong passion burning from her almond shaped eyes, and, a duplicitous softness came from the little one could see of her face, the scarf hiding most of her expressions. Danilo's heart beat wildly in his chest; he felt as if the world had just stopped. His attention was so diverted, that he didn't notice Emile draw nearer to Isabella and harshly grumble, "What is it to you? Get away from me before I do something you may regret."

"Everyone calm down, the Rabbi is here," called out loudly the man who had searching out the only person that could bring order to this situation. Moishy and the rabbi approached the crowd which had gotten a bit larger due to the ongoing scuffle.

"You heard the man, everyone calm down," Moishy's voice suddenly rumbled toward the crowd on deck. "The rabbi is right here." Moishy waved his arm through the air and Rabbi Menachem approached the uneasy group.

Rabbi Menachem approached the group and explained, "I just heard there are only eight men rowing down below. As it is, the ship is still barely moving. If we are to avoid being caught and executed, we need to get this ship moving faster and out onto its sea route as soon as possible. We need more volunteers to go down and help the ship's oarsmen." The rabbi implored the crowd, but, his tone suggested a command rather than a request. "And that includes these men."

Emile did not hide his displeasure with Moishy's and the rabbi's interference. He was the oldest of the rabbi's young protégées, and, he was determined to take control here. After all, he deserved respect as the group's leader. He knew the rabbi's word was the final judgment, yet Emile still assumed that his age, physical strength, and leadership skills should automatically brand him the leader of this scheme. "Not the priest," challenged Emile. "He's going overboard. This priest will not go with us." protested Emile. He dared to confront the rabbi in front of the others. The whole deck tensed and the bow of the ship creaked as it shifted slightly in the swaying surf. His heated irritation was overcoming any sensibilities at that moment.

"We are not murderers," explained the rabbi. "Nobody is going overboard. Stop wasting valuable time and go take inventory of the food supplies," he commanded. The rabbi turned to the man that had gone looking for him. "Take these men down and chain them to the benches so they can help us row the ship," instructed the rabbi.

"You heard the rabbi, c'mon..." interceded Moishy, attempting to dissipate the heat of that moment.

The men complied. Emile and his comrades pushed the men back toward the bulkhead doors. Isabella remained standing nearby, trembling with dread. She swiftly noticed the knuckles of Emile's hands turning white as he opened and closed his hands into clenched fists. Isabella noticed Emile slipping his right hand into his pocket and tightening his grip on what was obviously a knife. Danilo, walking but still lost in trance by Isabella, was suddenly shoved downward into the galley with some of the other men; Padre Joaquin a step behind him, and, Manolo not far from them. Isabella gestured as if warning Danilo of Emile's intentions. Danilo nodded, assuring her he was well aware.

When they reached the dark hull and before anyone could react, Emile reached out and thrust his hand directly at the men where Padre Joaquin was standing. Someone let out an animal-like screech that sent tremors through the air. Danilo saw the knife in Emile's hand, and, at the very last possible second, with his hands tied behind his back, he launched himself to shield Joaquin from Emile's brutal attack. A slow trickle of blood began staining Danilo's tattered shirt and plopping heavy, dark beads onto the wood deck floor. Joaquin leaned against his friend, just as Danilo doubled over and fell to his knees. Joaquin's silver cross shimmered in the glint of Emile's blood-stained knife.

Emile jumped over Danilo and charged against Father Joaquin once more. He swung the knife once more but his hand was stopped by Manolo, who swung his rope around Emile's neck and spun him around causing him to choke. Manolo was immediately overpowered by two other men but Emile's neck had gotten tangled in the rope. He turned blue and dropped to the ground dragging Manolo with him. "Dear God, somebody get Emile out of here," someone yelled out. Then, Rabbi Menachem and Moishy suddenly appeared at Isabella's side and stood stunned by the sight of Danilo on the ground. Isabella instinctively crouched down and removed her scarf from around her head. She used it to apply pressure to the wound in Danilo's stomach.

Danilo laid on the floor next to the staircase that led to the bulkhead doors. He bled profusely. Danilo closed his eyes.

The rabbi, worry-lines wrinkling his clammy forehead, kept calm and tried to regain order amongst the crowd. Three of the men grabbed Emile, managed to untangle the rope from around his neck, and, dragged him away from the fray. Emile's purple face had turned white, and, his listless body marked an unwanted casualty of their escape.

Able to regain control of the impending chaos, Rabbi Menachem boomed out to the men. "Moishy," he commanded sternly. "Go take inventory of the supplies that the women have brought. And bring anything this young woman may need in order to attend to this young fellow." The rabbi slumped over from fatigue and impatience moved away from the crowd. He turned back to the other men gathering around from the ruckus. "Alright my friends, let's keep to our plan. As soon as you can get your family members in groups up here, we need your help below to row the ship." Everyone moved in slow motion as the shock of Emile's attack settled in. Joaquin and Isabella tried helping Danilo to his feet, but he fell back to his knees again. Danilo lost consciousness as the blood drained gradually from his wound.

"Come on, everyone. You heard the rabbi," Moishy immediately jumped to attention. "Let's keep it moving."

Several of the younger boys obeyed with little argument. Isabella, still kneeling on the floor of the deck next to Danilo, continued to attend to the now-unconscious Danilo. Isabella applied continued pressure to the bloodstain on Danilo's shirt and leaned in close to his face to whisper encouraging words in his ear. Without distracting from Isabella's efforts and soothing gestures, two men tried to lift Danilo to his feet and shuffled him delicately to their quarters below deck. Some of the younger boys standing around helped steady Danilo in Isabella's feeble arms.

Through the hazy, moist air that enveloped them since they had left the harbor, Trani was no longer visible. The sails danced with the wind and the galleon sped away into the open sea.



CHAPTER 22

MIAMI, FL - Daytime. November, 2019

"On the count of three, you'll wake and open your eyes. Breathe deep. One, two, three..."

A snap of the fingers.

Kate's eyes slowly opened and scanned the room for David. He was right there, staring at her intensely; the attraction between them was palpable. "I'm glad you decided to go through with therapy," said David, knowing that the words coming out of his mouth revealed his feelings more than his professional assessment. "I'm glad I came too," replied Kate, not wanting David to feel more awkward than he already did.

"David...." Kate's voice escaped her throat with a tremble.

She had been overly anxious throughout her past session. Beads of sweat dotted her upper lip and around her collar as she slowly rose to a sitting position on the couch. Her usually impeccable attire was now wrinkled at the armpits and around her waist where her tailored shirt was sloppily untucked from her belted black slacks. Despite Kate's disheveled state, David could not help but only notice the delicate cut of her figure and the softness of her glistening skin around her throat.

"What's wrong, Kate?" asked David. "What are you feeling right now?" Through his own experience with Simon, he empathized with Kate and could guess that she, too, might be losing patience with the secrecy of these therapy sessions.

As she sat up and tried to reorganize herself, Kate avoided any direct eye contact with David. David quickly reached over to stop the recorder and handed Kate a glass of water from the coffee table in front of them.

"I have to tell you, David, that I won't be coming back here after today."

"Kate, what do you mean? We are so close - "

"So close to what, David? I just don't have any more time for this," blurted Kate, her sudden exasperation stirred by unease and guilt. "I have to deal with a new clothing store, with the wedding plans, with my current job... I'm sorry David." She could not afford to be this flustered and unfocused right before her big day. She still could not figure out how these sessions were helping her, and, seeing

David each week - this intimate and secretive routine, laying on the couch in his office, sharing her most private subconscious thoughts - just added to her own confusion and doubts about the future. Kate had to put a stop to these sessions with David. They were only making matters more complicated for her. *Thank goodness Bruce is such a workaholic and doesn't notice a thing*, thought Kate, not daring to say such a thing out loud, not even to her therapist. Otherwise...well, she didn't want to think about that.

"Kate, please don't be sorry. But, reconsider. Come to one more session, please. That's all I'm asking." David pleaded with her, regardless of her obvious discomfort. David couldn't stand to hear himself beg that way, but he was not ready to call it quits with Kate. It was all he could do to hide his disappointment. David stood up hastily, trying to break through the awkwardness that was beginning to fill the office, thinking of how he could hopefully make Kate change her mind.

Kate followed David's unintended lead and stood up from the couch. She grabbed her purse from the leather chair by the desk and walked determinedly toward the door. Before leaving the office, she turned one more time toward David. With a gnawing sense of insecurity, words and thoughts began to tumble recklessly out of her mouth, and, she longingly gave in. "I'll see if I can squeeze in one more session before my wedding, but I can't make any promises. Maybe the day after tomorrow, around noon," Kate contemplated. Then, she added, "I have a rehearsal for my wedding in the afternoon, but I might be able to stop by around noon."

Kate found that she was actually inventing justifications in her head to see David, and, David was quick to accept her spirited suggestion. "Of course, I can see you then. It's a date." Was he crossing the line with this off-the-cuff nonchalance? Kate blushed and opened the door. Calmly now, she continued, "Are you sure you can't tell me about the regression right now?" There was a sudden softness in her tone that David found hard to resist.

"Come the day after tomorrow," answered David, staring right at her almond shaped eyes, "Finish your next session, and it will all come together, I promise."

"And I'll get over my thala... phobia?" she asked with a slight grin.

“You are a strong and smart young woman. Everything will click, and you’ll overcome your fear. You can accomplish anything you set your mind to,” David could not help but sound corny. He felt relieved in the expectation of at least one more encounter between them. Even then, deep in the pit of his stomach, he knew he was just full of wishful thinking and unlikely fantasies. Kate is leaving his office now to go to attend to her wedding preparations. What on earth was he hoping would happen? David’s jumbled feelings raced through his head.

In the next blink of David’s weary eyes, Kate disappeared through the office door and was gone. David, still standing in the middle of the office, closed his eyes tightly and sucked in a large breath of air. A sweet, musky scent lingered in the room and draped over David’s still figure. The unforgettable fragrance cloaked him and left him feeling secure and bursting with the dream of her golden smile and her returning radiant presence.

David’s secretary came into his office as soon as Kate was gone. “Dr. Stern, your four o’clock rescheduled for tomorrow, will you stay in the office?” she asked insinuating that maybe they could call it a day. “Claire, you can go home,” David said also wanting to enjoy some privacy. Then, an idea occurred to him, he’d finish his own regression with Simon tomorrow and he’d take some time to settle his thoughts. “Claire,” David called out trying to reach her before she took off. “Yes, Dr. Stern,” she answered making her way back into his office. “Can you clear my appointments for tomorrow?” “All of them?” “All of them. And you take time off as well.” “No problem Dr. Stern. I’ll get right on it.”



CHAPTER 23

“Are you ready?”

“Absolutely.”

“All right then, take a deep breath. Release. One more time...”

HAMBURG, GERMANY - Afternoon. May, 1939

Vladimir could not see over the railing but watched Irene, frantic like others that stood there, feeling helpless as the *SS St. Louis* departed leaving passengers behind. Daniel ran, agitatedly, on the ship's deck towards the aft. He could see Emma on the shore. He watched her as she was being pushed and shoved by two Nazi port guards. The desperate pleading of those on the pier managed to get one of the Nazi soldiers to go over to the water's edge and help some of the fallen passengers that flung from the gangway... leaving Emma with only one guard holding on to her arm. Daniel got as close as he could...

Impulsively, Daniel remembered his baseball still bulging in his coat pocket and pulled it out. He rolled the ball in his hand for the perfect grip, took a deep breath, aimed with all of his energy toward the pier, and quickly pitched the ball as hard as he could. The ball sailed through the air and over all the melee; miraculously, it hit the soldier that was still struggling with Emma on his forehead with a powerful thwack. The soldier tumbled backwards, lost his grip on Emma and crumbled onto the cement rendering him completely motionless. The grunting soldier could barely manage to grab on to his thwarting head.

Emma did not hesitate. In spite of her fatigue and horror – or maybe because of it, she took a deep breath and ran straight up the pier. Her arms flailed wildly in front of her as she propelled herself up the pier, through scattered waste and shrieking people. Emma grabbed at anything and managed to topple her way through the mess.

Emma scrambled around parcels and bundles that were scattered all over the place. She began climbing the cargo crates stashed along the pier. She was following the already moving *SS St. Louis* as it left a powerful wake behind. She was determined not to stop - not now. And then, when there were no more crates to climb and nowhere else to go, in the blink of an eye, Emma spotted the loading crane. A rope hung from it with a large hook at the end. She had no choice. She flung herself as hard as she could and took hold of the rope. It swung once getting really close to the ship's side railing. She swung back and once more toward the ship.

Daniel, still watching from the railing of the ship's deck, tried to maintain his own balance. He was growing weak, wobbly, and knock-kneed, as he watched Emma's wild getaway. What the drifting passengers witnessed next left them all in complete shock.

Emma vigorously hurled herself toward the slowly drifting ship. Her body flew over the water. Emma squeezed her eyes shut and then opened them again in her one and only attempt to grab a hold of the side railing of the ship.

A swoosh of warm air suddenly gathered in the growing gap between the Hamburg pier and the *SS St. Louis*. Emma's sore and tired body flew through the breezy air and slammed listlessly with a loud thud against the side of the ship. Somehow, Emma collected her last bit of strength and determination and stretched her arms as high as she could towards the ship's railing. But her hands could not reach.

Daniel's heart was beating so wildly, he could almost feel it thumping right out of his clothes. His legs buckled under. Without taking his eyes off Emma, Daniel staggered over to the railing where she tried so hard to reach, her arms swayed and slammed against the side of the ship. Daniel linked his body at the waist to the lowest edge of the railing and flung his upper body over, just enough to reach down and grab Emma's arm.

"I got you, I got you!" reassured Daniel. His voice was surprisingly calm and reassuring. Emma looked up with pure panic in her deep-set eyes.

"I won't let go of you," Daniel repeated, looking into her frightened eyes. "I'll never let go of you."





CHAPTER 24

MIAMI, FL - Daytime. November, 2019

"On the count of three, you'll wake and open your eyes. Breathe deep. One, two, three..."

A snap of the fingers.

"You're sweating like a pig, my friend. Are you okay?" Simon could hardly contain his concern and excitement.

David sluggishly sat up. This last session was clearly intense. David seemed agitated and was soaked through his fine tailored dress shirt. His heart pounded in his chest as if he had just run a marathon. David reached over, and, with a trembling hand, grabbed a glass of water from the table; he finished the entire glass before he could take a single breath of air. Simon turned off the recorder and waited for David to say something.

"Must have been a hell of a story," was all David could say, catching his breath.

"Incredible. How are you feeling?" checked Simon again.

"I'm fine, but I can't recall a thing," replied David. He shook his head, trying to clear the fog that clouded his mind.

"So, what are you thinking right now?" asked Simon.

"About another glass of water," answered David. He reached back over Simon and poured himself another glass.

"Are you sure you're feeling okay, David? Seriously."

"Truthfully? I just can't stop wondering about my own client," answered David. This time, his tone had lost all levity and cynicism.

"Wondering about what?" questioned Simon. *Now, we're really getting somewhere*, he thought to himself. He hoped he could keep David talking.

"It's just that she's getting married next week," answered David, "and I can totally understand why her sessions are upsetting her so much." He took another large gulp of water. "So close..."

"Yes, David. We're so close." *But, what did she have to do with David's story?* wondered Simon. "Let's get back to you for a moment, I'm convinced that you are definitely not repeating someone else's narrative. Not now. Your descriptions are too detailed and accurate." Simon was still in shock with the story his friend was recounting. He continued, "You even spoke Yiddish, David."

David stretched his neck, twisting it first to the right and then to the left. He heard it snap as he pleaded with his friend, "Simon, please tell me what's going on already." He just could not understand why Simon remained so reserved about everything.

"Okay, it's time to compare notes," Simon agreed with a sympathetic look. "If there is any connection between your story and Kate's own recollections, it is time we figure it out." Simon removed his eyeglasses, winked at David, and heaved a heavy sigh.

David's body prickled with a sudden surge of electricity. Instantly, an idea had popped into his head. "Simon, why don't you come by the boat tomorrow night; we can talk there and have all the privacy and discretion we need." He could not say why, he just felt an urgent impulse to be on the water, on the boat.

"Sounds good. I'll see you tomorrow night, then," said Simon. "Even though last time you ditched me."

"I know. I apologize," said David in a soft voice. "No need for an apology, David," Simon reassured him. "I know you've been going through a lot."

Simon and David were interrupted by a knock on the door.

"It's your next appointment," muttered David. He stood up, re-tucked his sweat-stained shirt into his pants, and, readjusted his belt buckle.

"Wait," Simon beckoned to David. "Come to think of it, why should we wait until tomorrow? Why can't we meet tonight?"

"Well," replied David with a calculating grin, "Kate might be coming by tomorrow at noon for one final session." David felt a warm swell pour over him from the inside of his skin. "That's exactly what happened last time," protested Simon. "And I thought her therapy was concluded."

"Not just yet. She too kept on skipping between two past lives. One of them is reaching its finale."

"Two past lives?" Simon repeated wondering what was really going on.

David reached for the doorknob as Mrs. Dach opened it from the other side. "Hey there, it's the beautiful Mrs. Dach," greeted David, and he flashed the older woman his typical flirtatious grin. Then, he added, "I was just leaving, my dear. Have a great day." David's words rang out with a sing-song pulse. Mrs. Dach hmphed, but shyly. *He's back to normal*, reckoned Mrs. Dach. *Thank goodness*. Mrs. Dach's lips curled up at the corners almost in a coquettish grin. She watched David swagger out of the office.

Then, David stopped and turned energetically back towards Simon. He added, "And if she does show up tomorrow, I think I might finally understand her whole sordid story." Suddenly, David was feeling reinvigorated.

"Tomorrow night then," called Simon. David turned to the door.

“Tomorrow night,” replied David over his shoulder half-way to the outer office.



CHAPTER 25

MIAMI, FL - Daytime. November, 2019 A.D.

Despite the encroaching twilight, the sun was still beating down with its sharp rays as David walked through the door of his sister's warehouse. He was coming from Simon's office and a very unnerving session. Tammy, as usual, was sitting at her desk, tending to her fingernails and chewing a wad of pink bubble gum. Her eyes opened wide with pleasure as she watched David walk in.

"Hi," crooned Tammy, deliberately baiting David with her sultry tone and the coquettish downward cast of her eyes. "How can I - uh, we - help you?"

"I'm just here to surprise my sister, don't tell her I'm here."

"So, you are the famous David," Tammy said smiling coquettishly. "No problem, go right ahead," answered Tammy. She delicately flipped wisps of hair away from her face.

David leisurely cut right past Tammy and stepped into Diana's office. He had barely even looked up at Tammy as she deliberately tried to capture David's attention by adjusting the exposed, lacy straps of her bra on her shoulders and playfully thrusting her chest out in front of her. David brushed his hand on the edge of Tammy's desk as he stomped past into Diana's office. Diana caught David's reflection in the gigantic glass office window and bolted around her desk to greet him.

"What a surprise," beamed Diana. She stood on her tiptoes and kissed David on the cheek. "How have you been, David? To what do I owe this sudden visit?"

“Sis, I came to ask you a favor,” David said. He wasted no time on small talk.

Tammy appeared at the door holding a small brown package. She was determined to get David’s attention, but, Diana and David both ignored her.

Tammy left a small *Amazon* package on Diana’s desk, annoyed that she had failed again to win any attention from either of them. Tammy heaved a big sigh and sulked her way back to the outer office. She left the door cracked open so she could listen to the siblings’ conversation from her desk.

“Something very strange is happening,” David began explaining to his sister. “It’s about the regression sessions.”

“What about the sessions?” inquired Diana. Her interest was straightaway piqued.

“It seems that I’m recalling two past lives, according to Simon, who won’t really tell me much more at this point. And, to make matters even crazier, he says I’m even speaking in Yiddish,” David’s voice raised up an octave as he animatedly recalled the last session with Simon. “Did we ever learn Yiddish, Diana?” Now, a cynical tone rang clear.

“No, that is strange,” Diana replied in agreement. She had made a promise to herself - and to Simon - never to question Simon’s job or get involved in his cases. But this is different, Diana rationalized now. David is her brother, her own flesh and blood, and she was all too aware that he was going through a rough time lately. With sincere sisterly love and concern, Diana was more than just a little curious about this situation.

“Listen,” David tried again, “a patient of mine is doing the same thing. Two distinct tales, 500 years apart, and oddly similar to my own recalls, from what I gather. It’s so weird that they seem to be recollections that are duplicating each other.”

David and Diana both slowly sat down in the chairs facing Diana's desk.

"And about that," explained David. "Why do I feel like I've known her all my life? Like we actually know each other...it's so weird...like she can read my mind and knows things before I even say anything." David knew he really should not be discussing his patients like this, but he just had to unload and speak to somebody. Diana was the only person he could really trust. These unusual feelings about Kate were so deep in the pit of his stomach that the mere words stuck in his throat before he could even express them out loud. *Diana is the only one who can understand me, even if she must really think I'm losing it*, thought David. "Truthfully," David admitted now, "I can't seem to get her out of my mind."

"You're falling for your patient, aren't you, David? Oh, David. No, you can't do this." Diana had a strong, nagging intuition about this for weeks now. This was just crazy. David was setting himself up for more pain. Now, she took both of his hands in hers and held them tightly. He was shaking. Diana could sense that she might be a bit late with her warning.

"I'm not falling for her," David whined. "Am I?" He gently pulled his hands away from Diana. Suddenly, David felt vulnerable, alone. "Hey, but I don't need pity right now, sis. I know this whole thing is completely ridiculous. Just forget I even mentioned it."

"David, don't shut me out and walk away. You always do that, and it is so infuriating." Diana retorted while David was already making his way toward the door. "Tell me who she is" Diana insisted. David did not turn back. "And, you never told me what you wanted to ask me," added Diana, loud, for him to hear.

She watched David storm past Tammy and leave the office in a huff. She followed him up to the door. David was wrapped up in thought. Maybe he still had one more chance to talk with Kate about this if, he had, in fact, been able to convince her to just come to one more session. He shouldn't have tried to involve Diana in this, anyway. David really just needed to figure this whole thing out with someone, and, Diana had been his first clear choice.

Diana stuck her head out of her warehouse. "I love you, David. Don't leave yet...let's talk about this," Diana yelled. *He is so stubborn*, Diana mumbled to herself. *Should I worry about this?* she contemplated. Diana could not bear seeing her cherished brother get his heart broken again. And, from where Diana now stood, it looked sadly inevitable.

Tammy had just finished a phone call. She lowered the phone receiver back on its cradle and sauntered slowly over to Diana. "Is he always this intense?" she asked.

Diana answered right away. "Not really. He's definitely acting strange."



CHAPTER 26

MIAMI, FL - Daytime. November, 2019 A.D.

Diana followed David to his office. She wasn't about to see him walk away with such a heavy heart. She felt she had been somewhat insensitive, and, that David definitely needed a shoulder to lean on. Diana sat on David's couch while he prepared for his next patient. Sunlight streamed in through the window. The view of Miami's skyline was breathtaking. "It could all just be my subconscious playing with my feelings," he suggested to his weary sister. Diana looked at him intensely. "You don't believe that for a second," she replied. "So maybe it's what you've been saying all along," David suggested.

"And what's that?" She asked without even making an attempt to guess.

"It's another Christie crisis," he said, sounding anything but convinced. He took a deep breath. "I might never find out," he resigned.

"What makes you say that?" She asks softly, knowing very well that David was exposing his feelings more so than ever before. Before he could respond, there was a knock on the door. Jumping from his seat, David whispered to Diana, "quick, use the backdoor," he urged his sister. Diana sprung off the couch and exited through the backdoor. She left the door a tad open.

David opened the main door and his face lit up when he saw Kate standing there. "Thank you, Kate." He said with a trembling voice, almost whispering. "Thank you for coming."

Diana could not believe her eyes. Until this very moment she hadn't realized that Kate was the patient David was head over heels for. *Of course, it had to be,* thought Diana to herself.

"Tonight, is my wedding rehearsal," Kate explained as she walked into David's office. "In two days, I'll be married, and, then I'll be on my way to a cruise, the thought of which is making me very nervous."

"Are you sure it's the cruise that is making you nervous?" And as soon as those words came out of his mouth, he wanted so much to take them back. Kate just stared for a moment. "Is there something you want to tell me?" She responded, not too happy with his last comment. David froze. He waited a second and then reacted, while avoiding her question, "You are in a hurry," was his tangent. "Well then, let's not waste any time."

They entered the room. David had given ample time to Diana to exit his office through the back door. David took a seat, and Kate laid on the couch. Diana peaked through the backdoor still not believing what her eyes were witnessing. She could not stop staring at Kate in complete disbelief. When Kate finally laid on the couch, Diana closed the door quietly. She knew that doctor-patient privacy was in order. David reached over to the table next to the couch and started the recorder.



CHAPTER 27

"Are you ready?"

"Let's do this. One last regression."

"All right then, take a deep breath. Release. One more time..."

SS ST. LOUIS - THE SHORES OF CUBA - June 2, 1939

Captain Schroder had sent a young corporal on shore to speak with representatives of the island government. The captain was growing more agitated with each hour that he had to maintain his ship anchored in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Crew and passengers, alike, were already sea weary, and, signs of restlessness and illness were still mounting amongst the agitated travelers. Their numbers were diminishing every day, and, waves of nausea were affecting everyone on board.

Finally, looking out from the ship's main deck, the captain saw the small ferry bounce its way back from the port in Havana. The corporal climbed ceremoniously back on board the ship. Passengers began to gather around on the deck to receive the news. Anticipation filled their heads; dread filled the air.

Daniel, Emma, and, Dora were among the first to gather around Captain Schroder. It had been a terribly long journey with limited food rations and cramped sleeping quarters. All of the passengers were eager to disembark. They inched their way closer to the pacing captain, moving forward with the others, anxious to hear of the plans for their arrival on solid ground.

Daniel had a sense, however, that the news they were waiting for would not be good. The apprehension fixed on the young corporal's face said enough, and, the captain fidgeted with a map and binoculars that he clenched in his hands. The corporal finally announced, "After much hesitation, Cuban President Bru has reneged his offer and has ordered our ship to leave Cuban waters immediately."

The words pierced through the crowd, and, Captain Schroder's cheeks blushed a deep purple. His hands, sweaty and shaky, wrung the map he held until it almost shredded right in his hands. Passengers looked around at one another demanding further explanation. There had to be some kind of justification for this change in position. Hadn't they all already paid every pfennig they had for their visas and travel documents? Had they traveled all this way to find their futures swept away like this?

"What reason did the Cubans give?" asked Daniel's father from the crowd. "We have entry permits signed directly by Mr. Gonzalez."

Manuel Benitez Gonzalez was the Director-General of the Cuban immigration office, but, what the passengers did not know then was that *señor* Gonzalez, at this time, was being publicly scrutinized in Cuba for selling illegal landing certifications and bringing thousands of immigrants and job insecurity to the people of the small island.

Meanwhile, Captain Schroder became engrossed in animated conversation with the corporal. Finally, the captain raised his hands over his head in defeat, imploring attention from the fuming passengers. He sighed heavily and tried to explain, "It seems that President Bru believes you all might decide to stay here, and he can't take that chance. They are struggling with an economic depression here in Cuba, and they don't have enough jobs for all the Cuban citizens. The government has refused to accept any more immigrants at this time." The response from the crowd was a loud outburst of angry groans and deflated hisses.

The equally frustrated captain continued to address the passengers, raising his voice over their deafening chatter. He squinted his eyes tightly, bent his head, and looked down at his boots. "We have no choice but to leave," he exhaled.

"Where are we going to go now?" asked a young man. "Are we going back to Germany?" A unified audible gasp of fear encircled the throng of people.

There was no way the captain was going to waste his time or reputation going all the way back to Germany. As it was, they were low on supplies, food, and tolerance. They would have to choose another port, closer to America. We'll be close to the coast of Florida by tomorrow morning, the captain thought to himself. Maybe the Americans will let us dock.

Four days passed with no change in course direction. The boat remained anchored in the middle of the sea, and the passengers grew more anxious and sicker. They were angry, seasick, hungry, smelly, and completely at their wits' ends. Finally, the Jewish passengers traveling on the ship sent Manfred, Vladimir, and Daniel to speak directly with the captain. The small delegation of men entered Captain Schroder's office, the door shutting forcefully behind them.

After what seemed like hours, the trio emerged from the captain's office and gave the travelers the update. "It seems that President Roosevelt has also refused to grant our petition to enter the U.S.," they explained. "All we are getting is a statement that the U.S. immigration office has reached its quota, and, that we must return to Europe and resubmit visa requests."

"That's outrageous," a man yelled from the crowd. "Didn't you remind them that we already paid for our visas?"

"We have nothing to return to. We sold our homes, businesses..." protested another. Everything seemed lost to these refugees, and, once again, the atmosphere onboard the ship that had momentarily grown hopeful, filled heavy with despair.

"What will happen to us?" shrieked a young mother.

"There were rumors back home that Jews were being relocated to work camps," remembered one of the older men. "Maybe we can go back and get lucky with work?"

A teenage boy standing nearby retorted, "Are you crazy, Joseph? The Jews are being transported to ghettos. We are being *killed* with work. All work gets us these days is starvation and disease...what 'work' do you think they will give us?" The boy could not believe how naïve these people were.

Vladimir raised his arms and waved a crooked finger at the crowd for silence. From his wheelchair, he continued to explain to the crowd. "Listen up, the good captain believes that our best solution right now is to return to Europe, and, from there, find another port of entry." Daniel heard the words that tumbled from the old man's mouth, but he couldn't believe what he was hearing. There was no way to turn back, especially now that they had all risked so much and had given up everything.

Daniel made his way through the irate crowd, back to Emma and Mr. Wolf. The other passengers began to scatter. Daniel leaned into Emma and whispered gently in her ear, "I think we might have to try Canada...the captain seems to think..." Daniel saw a glint of fear and apprehension in Emma's eyes. He finished his broken thoughts, "We'll be okay, Emma. I'm sure we'll find a way through this." He tried to find words that would reassure himself as much as Emma.

The News Frederick, Maryland, June 3, 1939

"The German liner, *SS St. Louis* sailed out of Hamburg into the Atlantic Ocean in May 1939 carrying one non-Jewish and 936 (mainly German) Jewish refugees seeking asylum from Nazi persecution just before World War II....

However, on the ship's arrival in Cuba, the passengers were refused asylum by the Cuban government under Federico Laredo Brú. This prompted a near mutiny. Two people attempted suicide and dozens more threatened to do the same. However, 29 of the refugees were able to disembark at Havana....

"On 4 June 1939, the *SS St. Louis* was also refused permission to unload on orders of President Roosevelt as the ship waited in the Caribbean Sea between Florida and Cuba. Initially, Roosevelt showed limited willingness to take in some of those on board despite the Immigration Act of 1924, but vehement opposition came from Roosevelt's Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, and from Southern Democrats – some of whom went so far as to threaten to withhold their support of Roosevelt in the 1940 Presidential election if this occurred.....

"The *SS St. Louis* then tried to enter Canada but was denied as well."



CHAPTER 28

MIAMI, FL Daytime. November, 2019 A.D.

Kate's body twitched violently, and, she almost fell off the plush couch. She was sweating profusely, but she was still in a trance-like state. "Take a deep breath," insisted David in a soft whisper. He was a bit concerned for Kate's clear anxiety, still, he was extremely curious to hear this tale to its end.

Kate's eyes were still closed as her chest rose and fell erratically. He did not want to lose this last opportunity to conclude her past life story. David knew that he was close to getting the answers they both needed to hear.

"OK, Emma. You're back in Europe at the port..." encouraged David carefully. Kate suddenly slowed her breathing, lowered her voice, and in a matter of seconds she was back in 1939. Kate began babbling again. "We finally disembarked..."





CHAPTER 29

BELGIUM - Daytime. June 17th, 1939

Nazi soldiers were everywhere. The returning refugees were finally directed off the *SS St. Louis*. Emma heard a brusque shout. One soldier stared right at her and approached menacingly, keeping his pistol aimed and pointed at her head. It was too late for Emma to make a move; the old, yellowing bruise on the left side of her face was beginning to pound with pain again, like a hammer steadily hitting her skull. Emma stood frozen, but, sensing the impending danger, Daniel stepped in front of her.

"You, over there," the Nazi yelled, still pointing his pistol and walking toward Emma. "Show me your papers." He ignored David. The wary travelers had barely stepped off the ship's ramp, and the Baum family dropped their few possessions at their feet with a heavy thud. They all handed their documents to the German soldier at once. "You're staying here in Belgium," mumbled the Nazi.

Daniel could not believe their luck. Or was it God granting them a break. Belgium. They were back in Europe, but it was not Germany. *Maybe we can find a safe home here in Belgium*, thought Daniel. He had seen enough of the sea, sailors, and sick people all cramped together in unfit quarters. And, frankly, Daniel was ready and eager to see an end to this senseless journey. Emma reached out and held Daniel's grimy hand in hers. She gave him a quick, nervous squeeze, and muttered, "We'll be okay. I'm sure we'll find a way through this."

Swiftly, the Nazi soldiers at the Belgian port continued to fastidiously guide the dazed and tired refugees toward an old waiting train. Almost 300 people – the remaining Jewish men, women, and children aboard the *SS St. Louis* – were all cramped into a few windowless, smelly wooden train cars. Once inside, Emma and Daniel craned their necks out of the small opening of the rail cart to see what the Nazi guards were screaming about outside. They were stirring up such a racket, but an eerie silence enveloped the train passengers inside the car. Daniel rubbed his red-rimmed eyes with the heel of his left hand, while Emma held tightly to his right hand.

The train chugged along through the dark night, the hours passing slowly. The Jews could barely breathe in the cramped train car. They were dizzy, hungry, filthy, and exhausted. It took more energy to fight than to just wait for whatever would be their final destination. Finally, the train's brakes squealed and brought the passengers to a jolting stop. Relieved to be out of the stuffed car, they began to disembark slowly and hesitantly. Daniel helped Emma, her parents, his father, and little Dora off the train. Mr. Wolf followed just behind them. Vladimir was forced to give up his wheelchair at the port station, so Daniel and Mr. Wolf both took turns carrying and dragging the man, holding him upright by his waist and shoulders.

The confused group of Jews found themselves standing amongst a crowd of hundreds of men, women and children, all groggy and wandering aimlessly about the station platform. They waited to see if they would receive further instructions from the ever-present guards. Armed Nazis with dogs made their presence known as they weaved their way loudly and threateningly through the throngs of people. The huge guard dogs growled through curled lips and flashing pointed teeth, antagonizing the mass of people. Armed guards also manned tall watch towers, with large blinding lights that flashed evenly at long intervals. No immediate orders were being given.

Suddenly, without warning, the guards began pushing and shoving the train passengers into a small fenced area just beyond the train tracks and the towers; there, the Nazi guards took charge, and the newly arrived refugees were forced to stand silently in straight queues.

Males and females were separated; families were being divided. Daniel was pushed to the right with Menachem, Mr. Wolf, and Vladimir. He did not speak but kept his sights on Emma, Dora, and Irene, forced across the muddy turf. Emma found Daniel's solid gaze and locked eyes with him for a short, terrifying moment. One soldier sauntered haphazardly amongst the people and randomly distributed a stack of pink slips of paper to arbitrary individuals.

"Auschwitz passengers must re-board the train immediately!" shouted another Nazi guard. Daniel held up his pink slip of paper and mouthed the word 'Auschwitz' to Emma. She held up her paper and nodded back to Daniel. The Jewish travelers were momentarily occupied with a false relief; they were all going to continue on this journey together. The efficient Nazi guards began boarding people and suitcases back on the train.

With no breaks in the travel except for a few two-minute stops every now and then for a piece of stale bread and warm water, it was several days later that a very groggy and weak Daniel was suddenly alerted by a thump from the slowing train; he tried to regain his bearings in the pitch-dark, smelly, and cramped train car. The air inside the car was thick with the mixed odors of sweaty bodies, vomit, and human waste. It was impossible to breathe.

Vladimir was slumped and motionless on the floor by the outer wall. Through a small sliver of space between two wooden slats near him, Daniel could look out and barely detect a grey pall of smoke, soot, and grime covering the landscape outside. It seemed to Daniel as if it were snowing; elusive white flakes flittered in the murky air. *How ridiculous*, Daniel mused, *it can't be snowing in June*, Daniel chuckled to himself.

He suddenly became aware that this was the first time he had laughed in a long while. Finally, the car was completely still. Blinking and adjusting his eyes slowly to the soft lights seeping through the boards, Daniel could scarcely make out the words of a sign that hung ominously above them, '*Arbeit Macht Frei*.'



CHAPTER 30

MIAMI, FL – Daytime. November, 2019

"On the count of three, you'll wake and open your eyes. Breathe deeply. One, two, three..."

A snap of the fingers.

Kate laid on the couch but was clearly agitated. Likewise, David was hardly able to disguise his restlessness that morning. He had arrived after a failed attempt to speak to Diana about this whole situation which clearly was taking a toll. Unable to remain calm in anticipation of perhaps seeing Kate again, Diana had followed him to his office and helped him settle his thoughts. He wanted Kate to come so badly to wrap up her therapy; he knew her time would be very limited.

David just wanted to be with her again, and, he was more than willing to accommodate her in any way. After all, like Kate had said to him previously, she had started the sessions with him to understand her anxiety about her honeymoon cruise and all the trepidation about the ocean. How well the universe had orchestrated the events of the day; his sister Diana showing up to give him some encouragement and support, and, then, Kate knocking on his door.

Kate could have continued to live with the mystery and uncertainty, but the past few weeks had left her – and David – more than just curious about where all the new sentiments were really coming from. It was a bond so strong that it physically kept them tethered to one other. They needed to lean on each other, and, their mutual dependency on another other was growing with every visit.

And, as much as David was beginning to put the pieces of Kate's story together, he was more eager to simply see her again. *Not a very professional attitude*, David chided himself. *But, if I could just find a way to steer her away from that big, stupid shmuck she wants to marry...*

Kate was finally beginning to regain her composure on the couch, and her breathing steadied to a moderate rate, David attempted to break through the heavy silence that engulfed the office. With a sweeping wave of his arms, David reached over to stop the tape recorder and gestured randomly around the room. He did not know what he was going to do or say next.

Kate sat up and straightened her rumpled shirt around her tiny waist. Her chest still heaved up and down with short, violent bursts of air. Kate listened to the sound of her own respiration. It felt like every breath she drew would be her last – she could not seem to get enough. Panic was filling Kate's caramel eyes and spreading like a smoky cloud over her smooth, crimson complexion.

"Come on, Kate. Count and breathe. Everything is all right," assured David. Kate was not so confident. While she couldn't remember any of the details of her subconscious tales, she felt a palpable fear, an unexplainable anxiety. The anguish filled her whole body with a measured, flooding force. And, she could sense something was off in David's expression, too.

"Is there something you're not telling me?" shot Kate through her uneven breathes. "You're Jewish, right?" asked David out of the blue.

"Yes, I am Jewish," explained Kate. *What an odd question,* she thought. "But, well," Kate stammered on, "Bruce and I - well, Bruce really - we just don't believe that much in religion." Kate flustered and reddened as she tried to justify her thoughts to David. The more she spoke, though, the more apparent it became to her that she had been ensnared by Bruce's controlling nature...one thought, one feeling, at a time. She was entangled by obedience and fear, not love and trust. Now, Kate's cheeks felt like they would burst into flames. *Why has it taken me so long to see this?* She wondered shamelessly.

Kate smirked at David with undefended embarrassment. The truth was, Kate's religious beliefs had been deep-rooted in her childhood. She still held fond family and childhood memories of holidays, stories retold by her father and grandfather, as well as the kosher cooking lessons and Shabbat preparations learned from her more observant aunt. Her namesake, Great-Aunt Emma Katherine, was a victim of the Holocaust.

Now, Kate had allowed herself to be swayed by Bruce, believing that religion simply didn't serve any purpose in their lives, and that religious ties usually showed vulnerability and ignorance. Kate had convinced herself all this time, so enamored by what she considered Bruce's confidence and strength, that he was actually wise enough to know what was best for her. Bruce had decided that he and Kate would be better off without any religious links at all. *How did I let it all come to this?* Kate fretted. Slowly, reluctantly, and still shaking with confusion, Kate started to gather her things to go. She was feeling so uncertain about everything that she just wanted to pick herself up and escape.

David didn't want Kate to leave. Not like this. David stood up and unintentionally brushed against Kate's shoulder with his own. The sudden rush of electricity between them was profound and made them both jump. David quickly took a step backward. He rubbed his fingers over his clean-shaven cheeks as if to wipe away the quiver in his expression. Kate maintained her gaze locked on David.

Breaking their silence, Kate tried to change the subject and whispered, "Can you share something you've learned with me?"

"You revealed two past lives," with his words, David attempted to re-establish the formality of a doctor-patient relationship. "Each unique and distinct but both had one thing in common," David offered before Kate would open the door to leave. "In both regressions you board ships escaping one calamity or another. Your fear of open water was a reminder that your soul had gone through very tough times escaping the horrors of one epoch and then another." Kate stared at David attentively. "Will I be able to listen to the tapes?" she asked. "Of course," replied David.

"I will prepare a whole report and assessment for you. Would you like to pick it up next week?" David knew she was getting married but he was either not connecting all the dots or he was in denial. Either way it prompted Kate to give him a disconcerting look. "I'm getting married next week," she said, almost surprised at David's willingness to ignore such an important event in her life.

"Well then," he offered. "When you return from your honeymoon, from the cruise Bruce wants to take you on, you can stop by and pick it up."
"I can't believe I'm going on a cruise," she offered.

“You’ll be just fine,” he reassured her. “You were a warrior in the past, in both past lives, and I’m sure that same warrior spirit is within you today.”

Kate smiled. She was truly happy she had made the decision to come to therapy. She still wasn’t sure if that cruise was not going to throw her into a panicked frenzy, still, she was amazed at the possibility of finding out details about her very own past lives. She did not want these sessions to be over. She knew that starting next week, she’d become Mrs. Bruce Handel, and, that she’d probably see David seldomly. at the ballpark. If even that.

Why was she thinking these things? What did they have to do with anything anyway? Bruce was a successful lawyer, they had been going out for quite a while already, and nothing would make her happier than being married to him... or was this not so true? Maybe she had told herself these things so many times that she had begun believing her own affirmations. And what was she supposed to do anyhow? *A warrior*, she thought. *I was a warrior...* “Wait!” she blurted out. David looked at her with surprise. “Was I a warrior in both past lives?” she asked not even knowing exactly why she was inquiring specifically about this.

“You were indeed,” assured her David. “You escaped the inquisitors in the sixteenth century and fled the Nazis in World War II.”

“It sounds more like I was a coward, constantly fleeing,” she said frowning.

“Not at all,” replied David. “You helped others, you fought bravely, and you were absolutely fearless,” David reassured her.

Kate smiled. “Very well then, a cruise it is,” she said lifting her head up with pride.

Kate stretched her arms straight out in front of her, continued to collect her belongings, and adjusted her purse strap over her shoulder. "Well, it certainly was great meeting you, David. And, spending time with you. I hope we'll see each other again." Kate stressed her last sentence with a clear sincerity and intimacy.

"If not in this lifetime, maybe in the next," David mumbled amusingly, and shot Kate a warm smile that spread across his face from ear to ear. It was so easy with her. He gleamed longingly into her eyes.

There was something very reassuring and uplifting in David's last peculiar remark. Kate responded effortlessly, "Maybe. Maybe so."

David who had stood up to see her leave, sat back down. He wanted to remain standing. He wanted to hug her and beg her not to leave, but his legs gave way on him. He froze and remained sitting, watching this beautiful woman leave his office and his life.



CHAPTER 31

MIAMI, FL - Afternoon. November, 2019 A. D.

There was a knock on the door while Simon was on the phone. "Diana, I think David is at the door. I'll call you later," said Simon into the receiver. He immediately hung up the phone. "Come on in," he offered. The door opened and David came in holding a small bag with taped recordings in his hand. "Good, you're alone," David said as he plopped on Simon's couch.

"What is it? Why are you so agitated?" Simon inquired. "She's not the one," said David laying down and staring at the ceiling. "I'm almost certain she isn't," he said, again, but this time revealing some hesitation, some doubt. Simon moved his chair closer to him. "So, what do you want to do?" David did not know how to respond. "Here are the tapes," David said gesturing to a bag he placed on Simon's table. "You may listen to them as soon as I finish retelling my past life."

"Well alright, let's get on with it," Simon said a bit surprised. He definitely did not want David to regret coming to therapy. As long as he was on the couch, it was a clear opportunity to get on with his regression.



CHAPTER 32

"Are you ready?"

"Ready as I'll ever be," answered David with no hesitation.

"All right then, take a deep breath. Release. One more time..."

SOMEWHERE IN THE ADRIATIC SEA - Nighttime.

September, 1580

Isabella and Danilo sat together on a rough straw mat on the floor of the ship. Danilo's bandage was stained but the blood was old; the gash that Danilo sustained in his stomach was finally beginning to heal; Isabella saw to regular rinses with the salty seawater, and she did not leave Danilo's side for more than a few moments each day. Slowly, with Isabella's care and attention, Danilo regained his former strength. Young Camila had found a dry spot to lay her mat in the corner closest to the door.

For the past three weeks on board the large Spanish galleon, Camila had been sick from the ship's frequent pitching and swaying. But when she wasn't asleep, Camila played with the other children, although there weren't many of them aboard. Padre Joaquin organized games for them and kept them entertained. Most passengers had gotten involved in conversation with Joaquin and many had come to like him despite his representing the religion that had been persecuting them for the past 200 years. Right now, Joaquin slept profoundly, snoring on a pallet across the large, stuffy room; a much-deserved rest. The stench of sweat and vomit from the crowd of miserable passengers was sickening.

Even in the daylight hours, perpetual darkness enveloped the windowless space below decks where the passengers were kept. The Spanish and Italian crewmembers on this voyage were quite unconcerned or bothered with the stowaway Jews. They allowed them continued passage, albeit in the cramped, horrid billets at the very lowest part of the ship.

The passengers were still nervous. They knew that other ships would be on the lookout for the vessel they so craftily had stolen. The rabbi had come to an understanding with crew members aboard, that not only would they get paid upon their arrival to the port city of Izmir (Smyrna), but that they would get to bring back the ship to Captain Huerta who was surely going to reward them. The tension on board had nearly subsided and the anticipation for a brighter and safer future kept everyone going.

Isabella shuddered suddenly and held Danilo tighter, their arms entangled, her head resting against his strong, solid chest. She began recollecting her long journey from Spain. How Camila would listen to her voice and would turn it into magic in her head, how she'd make up songs, happy tunes, oblivious to the dangers along the way that led them to Trani; even the spattering of outmoded Ladino words that she would intermingle in her tales would take flight in her head like familiar birdsongs in a hazy summer sky.

Danilo gently lifted Isabella's glowing face toward his and stared deeply, tenderly, at her radiating beauty. His attention moved to the scar on Isabella's cheek. Isabella looked at him, and did not say a word. She felt safe and comforted in his arms, and she did not mind his deep stare. She never wanted that moment to end.

"Who did this to you?" Danilo whispered in her ear, gently fingering Isabella's scar.

Isabella hesitated – she didn't want to abandon that moment of reminiscence and security in Danilo's arms. Danilo deserved her honesty, and, she wanted to share everything with him. Isabella would not hide in the past. "When Church Inquisitors came to our town one day, they arrested all the male adults," Isabella started to explain. "The men that refused to kneel before their cross were tortured. Most of the men who lived on our street were killed because of this, and then they came looking for trouble with us."

"Malditos!" Danilo sputtered in his native Spanish tongue.

Isabella continued. "When the Spanish guards were in our house, they shot my father and then came after my mother. Right in our house, in front of all of us, they raped her." Isabella paused and clicked her dry tongue against her teeth. "And somehow, I don't know how, my little sister and I were able to hide from them. To this moment, Danilo, I don't know how we were able to escape their rage. They left Camila and me alone in the house, but not until my father was dead and my mother gone. Our house, what had been home until then, was completely destroyed."

"I am so sorry..." drawled Danilo in a low whisper. He dragged out his words as if he could cloak and ease Isabella's pain with his sorrowful drawl. Danilo could feel Isabella's muscles in her back tensing as she continued her story. Both of them drew closer to one another and lowered their eyes, staring blindly at their single sleeping mat.

Isabella continued. "With the help of some neighbors, we were able to bury my papa. "Weeks went by. I was told not to leave my house. The head inquisitor would visit regularly and bring us food," Isabella said, her voice shaking to the rhythm of her heart. Isabella heaved a deep sigh, and her chest rose and caved with a rhythmic motion. Danilo lifted her chin with the soft tips of his fingers. His gentle stare comforted Isabella and made her feel safe; she had been longing to unleash her history and share the burden of her memories. She had told no one about the guards and her family, not even Rabbi Menachem knew all the details, and she was relieved to finally release these barred memories from her. A sourness bubbled deep in the pit of her stomach, and the images of those days flooded Isabella now. She could taste bitterness rising in her dry throat, but, wrapped in Danilo's comforting embrace, Isabella continued talking.

"Then I saw that he began noticing my sister Camila. I wouldn't let that disgusting maschile take her." Isabella continued relating her story with a soft almost trembling voice. She took a deep breath and continued. "So one day, I fought back. He beat me and then cut my face. He turned toward Camila who was screaming in horror," Isabella looked down and her words were barely audible anymore. "Oh, God," sighed Danilo, horrified. He traced her scarred cheek again, following the raised, red track that ran from her left temple to the bottom of her left jawbone with the tip of his forefinger. "What happened then?" Asked Danilo wanting her to unload this burden she was carrying on her shoulders.

"He threw me across the floor by the kitchen. I got up, grabbed a cooking-pan, and I launched at him; I hit him over the head." Isabella swallowed hard. "Many, many times," she confessed.

"You were defending your life and that of your sister. You did what you had to do," reassured her Danilo.

"I knew they'd come looking for me, so I ran away. And I've been on the run ever since. Camila is my guardian angel, and I'm hers."

Danilo smiled. "She is definitely an angel," he said with a grin as his eyes began to tear up. "And now you are my guardian angel too," he said, looking into her beautiful almond shaped eyes.

Danilo continued to gaze at Isabella with a strengthened passion and admiration. Isabella's eyes shined with a fiery passion; her small, red lips parted in a helpless pout. Danilo swept his hand over her face, as if trying to erase the red scar from her cheek and the pain from her heart. "Nobody will ever hurt you again, Isabella. You are my angel," Danilo vowed.



A sudden shout startled Isabella and Danilo out of their tender lull. "Land straight ahead!" yelled a sailor.

All the passengers, including Danilo, Isabella, Joaquin, and a groggy Camilla, all stood up and began gathering their few ragged belongings. All the weary passengers stood up, one and then another. Isabella patted the hem of her tattered skirt to make sure her hidden treasures were still intact. Her mother's diamond earrings, her parents' gold wedding bands, and her grandmother's tiny prayer book were all tucked carefully into the hem of her old skirt.

The passengers were all scraggly, smelly, limp with weakness, and yellow with sickness; everyone began making their way to the upper deck. Izmir was straight ahead. The ship came in slow to the port. Another shout "Welcome to the Ottoman Empire," yelled a sailor, hauling a heavy box outside the billet.

The Jewish passengers pushed past the bustling crewmen in the narrow hallways and up onto the outer deck of the ship. Danilo held tightly to Isabella's free arm as she held tightly to her younger sister's grubby little hand. Rabbi Menachem appeared from another hallway with his wife, Esther. The rabbi's beard had grown more disheveled and tangled, but he proudly donned his yarmulke upon his head.

Esther waddled with a limp since twisting her frail ankle a week earlier while trying to walk on the swaying upper deck. The rabbi and his wife found Isabella, Camila, and Danilo and worked their way over to them. The ship slowly moved close to the port. The Ottoman soldiers gathered at the pier; behind them a small crowd of merchants. Everyone shuffled slowly, cautiously, suspiciously.

Once the ship anchored close to the port, Rabbi Menachem and Moishy boarded a dinghy that took them to the pier. All the passengers, including Danilo and Isabella, waited on the deck for the rabbi's return. It wasn't long before Moishy sailed back to the ship. "We can stay," yelled Moishy with a big smile on his face.

Rabbi Menachem, feeling transformed with a burst of sudden animation, turned toward the straggling group of exhausted Jews. He boldly announced, "I have been informed that we have been granted permission to stay here. We can start out and look in Patrosso, Corfu, and Edirne - these Jewish communities will help us. We have found peace, *Baruch Hashem*. This will be our home, and we are certain to do well," said the rabbi. With his hands waving above his covered head, the rabbi shared a jubilant public prayer with the group. They all sang on the upper deck and gasped in the fresh air, as if breathing for the first time.

After a few minutes of swaying and singing their praises to God, the crowd let out a merry cheer, heavy with exhaustion but with a revived energy. They were all desperately eager to get off the ship. Now, full of new hope, they tumbled with anticipation down the dock toward a new life. The ship's row master, Manolo, had already disembarked and was waiting on the Turkish dock.

A few at a time, they made it to the pier. Danilo and Isabella, together with Joaquin and Camila were pushed past the working crewmen and onto the pier. Danilo spotted Rabbi Menachem and Esther, each wobbling weakly over to them. The passengers shuffled slowly, hesitantly, and wearily toward the open market up ahead.

Danilo turned to Isabella and took her small, calloused hand in his. He stared intensely into her eyes. There was a vibration in the air and a familiar, salty mist from the sea swept across their sallow skin. The Ottoman Empire had welcomed them with open arms. "I owe you my life, you know," Danilo's whispered words blew warmly across Isabella's flushed cheeks. She wordlessly lowered her scarf and kissed Danilo fully on his trembling lips.





CHAPTER 33

MIAMI, FL -Afternoon. November, 2019

"On the count of three, you'll wake and open your eyes. Breathe deeply. One, two, three..."

A snap of the fingers.

David woke up and slowly regained consciousness. Once again, he was on Simon's couch, and the lights were dim. Simon stopped the recorder.

"I believe that is the last of one of your past lives," Simon said, although David couldn't tell if he was being completely honest.

"So, I died?" David asked trying to ascertain his friend's claim of an uncontested end. "No, you didn't die," said Simon. "At least not in the story. What I meant is, the drama seems to have come to an end. There was a resolution. A happy ending if you may."

"And how can you be sure if you don't let the story play to the end?" asked David trying to push his friend a bit further. "Fine," replied Simon. "You want to continue? I have no problem with that. I'll put you under again, and we'll see where you take us."

David sat up straight, took a sip of water and looked at his friend again. "I know we have to continue," David snapped. "You said I had concluded one of the two past life regressions. I get it."

"I'm glad you understand we must continue," offered Simon. "I want to talk to you about your patient, and not while you're under."

David wrinkled his lips. He was not thrilled with his friend's unyielding drilling. Thinking about Kate was painful enough; there was certainly no need to also talk about it. That was like adding salt to an open wound.

"Do you want to come by tonight? I'll be at the marina. Maybe we can take the boat out for a while," offered David. "That actually sounds really nice," replied Simon. "I'll call Diana and ask her not to expect me for dinner."

"Ah, married life, the need for permission to do just about anything," laughed David. "Funny," snapped Simon not welcoming David's humor at all.

"Oh chill, Simon," said David losing the cool in his tone. "You know I'm kidding. And the last thing I'd want is to deal with my angry sister. I think it's great that you ask her for permission first."

"I'm not so sure if you're being honest or cynical," said Simon as if he was offering the idea as a cause for treatment.

"Simon," said David, "I've been contemplating leaving South Florida."

"Leaving?" yelled Simon. "Care to explain?"

"Tonight, I'll open up and share whatever you want; under the stars, squatting on the lounge chair and with a beer in hand. Right now, I need to get going."

"Tonight, it is," agreed Simon. "Take care of yourself," he said as he watched David make his way to the door.



CHAPTER 34

MIAMI, FL - Afternoon. November, 2019

David loaded the *Take a Leap* and prepared for his voyage. His phone rang. "Diana," he said over the speaker. "To what do I owe your call?" David remained on the line for only a few minutes. He explained to his sister that he needed to take a breather. He'd be going to the Keys. It was time to clear his mind. He did not mention however, that he had taken all the tapes from Kate's sessions to Simon's office. He wanted him to make sense of the stories Kate had been relating. He wanted Simon to do some research about the eras she had mentioned, not realizing that he was also recalling two lives that connected him to his patient. He knew something was not right, or too right, depending how he looked at it. Could he make sense of it all?

"Tell Simon I won't meet up with him tonight. I'll call him when I get back," said David, hanging up the phone so as not to hear Diana complain about his impulsiveness.

David sailed for a couple of hours reaching Key Largo. In the late afternoon he docked at a popular pier and walked into a small bar. He sat on a stool to the right of the bartender. The blues was the music of choice and the crowd was not the typical young college kids; most were working stiffs, older folks. There was no pool table but they did have a dartboard that had seen better days. It was the perfect place to soak his troubles. The perfect depressing music and an endless supply of beer. Would he be able to rid himself from the obsession with Kate? He wanted to find the answer.

“How does one forget a woman?” he asked the bartender, not knowing why he was sharing such a personal thought. “Move away,” he said without blinking an eye. “I got my heart broken once,” he continued, “back in LA. So after obsessing non-stop for a few weeks, I packed my shit and took off. Now, here I am.”

“So, it worked?” asked David naively. “Sure did,” the bartender answered. “A few months later, I found a beautiful woman. We are married now. I couldn’t be happier.”

“And you just packed up and left?” David asked again incredulously. “It was a Jewish man who once told me, that according to their tradition, one either changes his name or changes the place his lives; and that changes his luck. I wasn’t about to change my wonderful name, so I chose to change where I lived.”

“And what is that wonderful name you refused to forgo?” asked David. “The name is Chuck. A pleasure meeting you,” the bartender said with a smile in his face. “The pleasure is mine, Chuck,” answered David. “I’m afraid I won’t be seeing you again any time soon.”

“How so?” asked the bartender as he poured David his fourth beer of the evening.

“It seems I might be moving to LA” David said flashing a gigantic smile. “If I can figure how to get my boat to the Pacific.”

“Maybe the west coast is not the place for you. Maybe somewhere exotic... like Panama,” he said jokingly. “You’ll figure it out,” added Chuck. “I wish you the same luck I had,” the bartender blessed David, not really sure if his suggestion would end up helping or destroying this poor man’s life. *Panama*, thought David. *Yeah, I speak some Spanish. It’s far. It’s perfect*, he thought as he hurried back to his boat. He wanted to reach home just in case Simon should show up, and he’d have an opportunity to announce the new plans for his life.



David reached the pier earlier than expected. The fresh air had helped him dissipate the effects of Chuck’s beers and the current helped him cruise along with extraordinary ease. On the upper deck of his cruiser, David sat on his usual lounge chair. He held the picture, the one of himself and Christie -the expression on his face was that of his undying sense of loneliness.

He popped open another bottle of beer while an empty bottle rolled away from under his chair. David stared at the city lights and a tear flowed down his cheek. He got up and leaned on the railing. He slung the photo out and over the rail into the pitch-black water below. The photo danced and fluttered in the air for a while, and then it made a soft landing on the surface of the dark, gloomy water. David watched the photo curl up and finally disappear in the shadows. David remained standing over the rail.

“David,” Diana said announcing herself as she climbed aboard. “David,” she repeated much louder. David turned slowly and looked at his sister who obviously had something to share. “You and Kate,” she said. “You two are connected souls.” David looked at her but was not surprised. He did not smile.

"Kate died in Auschwitz," he responded. "So did you," answered his sister taking a spot on the railing next to her brother. "So much for connections," said David sarcastically.

Diana came closer and flashed a soft smile. "500 years ago, you both made it out alive. You bound your souls together." Diana said compassionately. "And 70 years ago, destiny conspired against you and sent you both... well you know what happened." She hooked his arm as they both stared at the water. "Either way," Diana continued, "you were together 500 years ago, again 70 years ago, and you found each other yet again."

"How do you know all of this?" She asked with a trembling voice.

"Simon listened to the tapes. The stories are identical." "It doesn't mean anything," said David letting his sister know that he had already given up. David took a sip of his beer and averted her gaze.

"It's not a coincidence," insisted Diana. "It's destiny." David turned to Diana, "Kate is getting married in two days," he replied, agitated. "And I'm not the groom. It's over." "Really?" She questioned her brother clearly upset. "Is that how this ends?"

"What do you want from me?" he asked on the brink of losing his temper.

"I don't know," she said looking down in shame. Then, they both leaned on the rail staring at the sparkling city lights. "Kate being my customer, you think it was coincidence?" asked Diana in a loving and soft voice. "Everything is a coincidence?" Diana's tone began getting a bit louder. "This is... fate. You're meant to be. Kate is your soul mate," she insisted.

"I'm not going to ruin Kate's wedding AND her life based on this nonsense," David replied, heading to the cooler to pick up a couple of bottles of beer. "I appreciate what you're trying to do --" Then Diana interrupted him. "-- I'm not trying to do anything. If you don't see this through, you will regret it much more than your flop with Christie."

"What flop with Christie?" David griped clearly upset. "Are you saying I drove her into someone else's arms?" David continued without as much as a breath. "It was my fault Christie cheated on me?"

Diana became frustrated and began walking away. Before she reached the ramp, she turned once more to her brother. "Everything happens for a reason. Kate might have been that reason. Don't you want to find out?" she asked with desperation.

David turned and looked at her in the eyes. But remained silent. "Well?" She insisted. "I thought you were setting me up with Tammy," said David, jokingly trying to diffuse the situation, but, instead, making things much worse.

"Very funny...." she answered sarcastically as she began walking back to him. "If she's the one, you have to fight for her," Diana said looking into his eyes. "There are no freebies in this world, only limited opportunities. Don't let her slip away." "Opportunities, uh?" David reflected on the wise advice his sister was giving him.

"Limited," she reiterated. "See this through." "Very well, I'll go talk to her," David promised. "If she refuses to acknowledge all of this, I want you to promise me you will let this go."

Diana smiled. "You know I love you, don't you?" and, as she finished saying that, David reached to give his sister a hug.

"I know you do," he said softly.
"I'm on my way to their wedding rehearsal now," Diana said as she began making her way off the boat. "You know where the club is. And you better show up." Diana reached the ramp and climbed down. And before she walked completely out to the pier, she uttered a "Love you," that gave David a warm sensation.

David stayed on his boat still holding on to his beer, though, too wrapped up in thought to even drink from it.



CHAPTER 35

MIAMI, FL - Evening, November, 2019 A.D.

"Stop! Stop right there," screamed the rehearsal director, glaring at Bruce. "You're supposed to be under the canopy already."

It was going to be a very tiring night. Bruce rolled his eyes at the irritating assistant. He found it insufferable to be ordered around, especially by a lousy underling like Diego Valero - Diana's leading emcee. Bruce forced himself to go along with all of Diego's commands and instructions. Bruce wavered in place for a moment, and then followed the wedding assistant's directions. Diego's arms flailed wildly about, and his quick, impatient hand gestures implored everyone back to their starting positions for the rehearsed procession. "Kate, darling," hissed the impatient Diego, "please go back to the top of the isle." He pointed to the still undressed isle that soon would mark the beginning of a new life for her.

Kate and her mother marched together, arms locked at the elbows, to the top of the isle. "People, people," called Diego. "We need to finish the rehearsal...please, can we take our positions?" Diana always felt that Diego got a bit too overexcited about things, and was sometimes even difficult to work with, but in the end, Diego always managed to produce a flawless event. But Diego was losing his mind. The moment he instructed Kate, he lost sight of the groom. He rushed again to chase the impatient men.

When Kate and her mother reached the top of the processional aisle, Kate turned back toward the wedding hall and took in the whole scene. As she steadied herself next to her mother again, Kate looked up at the canopy at the other end of the aisle. The canopy was made of delicate white lace and trimmed with a hand-sewn eyelet trim. Laced through the fabric, tiny diamond-like stones studded the incandescent fabric. It created the impression of stars shining down from the heavens. It was the only thing in the hall that made Kate feel happy and serene.

Suddenly, a corner of the lace canopy ruffled, and Kate squinted at the sight. *Is that David over there?* Kate carefully rubbed the corner of her almond eyes with her delicate pinky and squinted again at the canopy. She tripped over the hem of her pant leg and swore softly to herself. *I think I'm going crazy.*

Kate's mother yanked on her shirtsleeve and grunted loudly. She took one long breath in, and Kate let one deep, passionate sigh out. The air surrounding the canopy rustled, and the hanging lace brushed upward toward the high ceiling. Kate's vision continued to grow hazy, her mind out of focus. Her mother squeezed her elbow tightly and steadied herself against her daughter. "What is it darling? Are you alright?"

"Give me one sec, mom," answered Kate. She rushed down the aisle. "David," she muttered. But David was not there. *Yes, I must be nuts,* Kate stuttered. *I'm losing my mind,* Kate remained paralyzed under the canopy.

Kate turned and then saw David walking away towards the exit of the wedding hall. She took a small step as if wanting to chase after David but stopped when she heard her mom call out. "Darling, who is that man?"

Kate knew she wasn't going crazy. She hadn't hallucinated. "Give me one sec, mom," she said and rushed over to David. Before he could leave, she called out to him. David stopped and turned back to Kate who was approaching. "David, is everything alright?" she asked catching her breath. David hesitates and Kate insists. "Well...?"

"Kate..." he wanted to unload once and for all. At that moment, Kate's mom caught up to them.

"Kate darling, who is this man?" asked Mrs. Brenner giving David a not receptive look. "He's my therapist, mom," said Kate. "This is Dr. Stern."

"David" he said turning politely toward Kate's mom. "What are you doing here, David?" Mrs. Brenner inquired obviously annoyed at the interruption.

"Diana, the wedding director," explained David. "Is my sister, I just came to tell her something. I'm sorry for interrupting." David turned. "Nice to see you Kate," he said and immediately began walking away.

"Does he not have a phone?" asked Mrs. Brenner of her daughter that was surprised by David's visit. "And why does he let you call him by his first name?" Kate's mom insisted. She did not answer her mom. She hesitantly turned back to the canopy and rushed to please the annoyed director who, at any moment seemed like he might have a coronary. *Well that was strange...* thought Mrs. Brenner as she caught up to her daughter.

"Kate, darling," Bruce called out loud as he saw Kate coming back to the processional aisle. "Please stop playing around so we can get this over with already. I'm starving," Kate gave a forced smile to her fiancé.

Diana came out to the garden and saw David exiting the club. She then turned and saw Kate with Bruce rehearsing their entrance in the garden. Diana made a phone call.



CHAPTER 36

MIAMI, FL - Nighttime. November, 2019

David reached the pier and saw Simon standing next to his yacht. Simon spotted David getting closer and took a step to greet him. "Are you alright?" "I just made a fool of myself," offered David. Simon flashed a look of disappointment.

"I just want to crawl back on my yacht and down a six pack," David said with a tone of exhaustion. Simon placed his arm around his brother-in-law's shoulder and they climbed aboard. On deck of the *Take A Leap*, David sat impatiently on the edge of his lounge chair. The balmy intercostal air swept a warm breeze across the surface of the boat, yet, David sat on a layer of clammy dampness that was puddling between his thighs and the faded upholstered chair cushion. His sinewy leg muscles were stiff. Miami's distant skyline winked at him, and, the dancing lights danced on the water's surface. Simon handed David a beer and sat silently next to him. He allowed David to settle his thoughts and silently stare at Miami's skyline.

On and off, light and dark, memories blurred past David's closed eyelids. He leaned back into the lounge chair and tried to relax. David felt a solid sense of aloneness. *Was I lonelier with Chrissy or since Chrissy?* He wondered to himself for the millionth time since the breakup. Maybe he was simply meant to be alone, independent. That's the word Christine had used the last night they had spent together.

Yes, that last night. David recalled it with a reserved chill. It was the following night that David confronted Chrissy. That night, he was not able to bring himself to simply walk away from Christine without at least receiving some kind of explanation. After all was said and done, the couple had dated steadily for a while. And, David, who bared the brunt of all of Chrissy's capriciousness and frivolity, did really deserve something more from Chrissy than her simply dropping everything with no reason. To David, at the time though, it wasn't so much about being alone or independent - whatever Christine inferred with that- but, that he...what word would explain it, exactly, was not 'complete.'

Just months ago, the couple had been standing right there on the deck of David's boat. David would either have to end it all, or he would have to move their relationship to the next proverbial level of intimacy. On that night, David gazed deeply into Christine's deep blue eyes and searched for the right words to offer her as an excuse for having let their relationship fade away. It was Christine who spoke out first. It was quite a shock to David when she, finally exhausted and fed up with his boyish nature and lack of commitment, announced that she was letting him go. Not because she had found someone else, but because she had not been feeling enough love for him, if ever she did.

David swung a half-empty bottle of beer in his hand. His eyes blurred from the bright city lights beyond the black water horizon. A heavy tear rolled down his cheek.

That's it. He was done. It came to him then and there. He stood up from the lounge chair, catching himself off-balanced against the railing, still clutching the half-finished bottle of beer in his two hands. He remained standing over the rail. Eyes shut against the humid breeze and dancing city lights, David raised his bottle and took a long, final thirsty gulp from the bottle.

After a few silent moments leaning against the railing with his eyes closed, David realized he was not alone. Sitting next to him on the deck, Simon suddenly whistled, "You-hoo, am I invisible?" teased Simon. He waited for his friend to turn and acknowledge him.

The balmy breeze was barely stirring now. David remained lost in thought. Simon tried again, "Nice night..." He wiped some sweat from his upper lip and took a long swig from his own bottle of water.

It was easy to see that David's mood was exceptionally foul that night, and Simon really a could not make sense of his current temper. David had always been spontaneous and impulsive, but lately he was just impossibly unpredictable, moody, and, exhausting. Simon did not know what to think anymore.

David tilted his head down and stared at his shoes and the empty bottles of beer, now collecting on the deck of the boat. He slowly lifted his eyes, and gazed vacantly at his friend; his expression was hollow and sad.

"I'm leaving, Simon. I'll pack the boat up and, in a few days, I'm taking my yacht to Panama" David announced. "I don't really care anymore." He sounded wild with desperation.

"Really, David. Where, pray tell, do you think this will lead you? You can't keep running away from things." Simon did not know if David was serious or not, but he feared that maybe his friend had reached a new low point. Neither David nor Simon reacted immediately. They both just stood there in silence, staring out at the dazzling city lights sparkling on the water that surrounded them, contemplating the consequences of David's latest idea.

Simon was first to break the deafening silence. He started, "Are you for real, Dave? Have you lost your mind?" Even for David, at his most stubborn moments, this was completely absurd. Simon shook his head in disbelief. No, there was no rationalizing when David got like this.

"I just need to do this, Simon. Try to understand. I just need a break for a while. From Chrissy, from Kate, from all of this. You don't get it, do you?" David's exasperation was raising like a tide from deep within him and was now forming lines across his wrinkled brow. The corners of David's mouth were turned downward.

"So, you think that running away to Panama will help? How typical. To hell with it all, right?" This was more a statement than a question. Simon continued with a frenzy, "What's the matter with you, David? You sound nuts, man. And, what about your practice? Your patients? Have you thought about them?" Simon continued. "No, of course not. It's all about you, like always..." The more Simon spoke, the angrier and more exasperated he grew. The *Take A Leap* was a sound vessel, Simon knew, but no one would venture a long trip to Panama without a solid, well-thought-out plan.

Almost reading his friend's mind, David turned to Simon and blurted, "I'm leaving in two days. I'll have my secretary help with calling all my patients, and I can leave you a list also, if you really want to help. I intend to set out as soon as I can."

Simon's eyes bulged with incredulous shock. "What's your problem, David? You know this sounds absurd?" *Was there really any use trying to reason with David at this point?* Simon worried.

"I'm done thinking and worrying about all this," David boomed, knocking his beer bottle deliberately against the boat's rail. The beer sloshed, and foam spilled over David's sweaty fingers. "I've made up my mind, and I'm going."

David teetered over to the cooler for another beer. He was visibly shaken, but he didn't really blame Simon. The solace had been haunting him for weeks now, and he could not come up with a better solution than to just get away from it all. Change the scenery. Let go of things and look forward to a new future. All David could really say for certain now was that his sudden upset and anguish seemed intensified in the past weeks since meeting the captivating, mesmerizing stranger named Kate.

Reaching down into the cooler, David noticed his old, faded baseball cap and his grass-stained baseball sitting together on a deckchair, the ball wobbling gently back and forth with the soft sway of the boat. David flung the cap on his head, leaving small wisps of his golden curls loosely covering his forehead. He scooped up the ball in his free hand. Something about the worn, smooth texture of the ball in his palm comforted David. And, just like that, a wave of calm suddenly engulfed him and smoldered his irritation. He softly tossed the ball to Simon, who let it fall to the floor of the boat. It rolled slowly with the gentle sway of the boat until it anchored itself in the corner of the deck. Simon gave up, and David frowned despondently prompting Simon to get up and reach for the ball. David tilted his head downward. He slowly looked back at his friend's eyes as Simon made his way back to his lounge chair and placed the ball on top of the cooler.

"I'm leaving to Panama." David said with all seriousness. Simon looked surprised. "I need a break. From Christie, from Kate, from all of this." There was a true sadness in David's voice. He slowly turned to the ocean. "I want to set sail before the winter winds begin to blow."

“Why don't you think about this for a while?” suggested Simon. “There's no rush.”

“I've been thinking about this for a while. Enough thinking,” David said as he slammed his beer on the table. “I'm going to Panama. And stop worrying, we'll be in touch more often than you'll want to.” They chuckled. There was acceptance in the air. “But,” said Simon. “What about Kate?”

“What about her?” David inquired. “She's marrying a rich a-hole lawyer in a couple of days. Who cares?”

“Alright,” Simon answered giving up the fight.

The breeze was not cool enough that evening and the moisture was beginning to take a toll. Simon knew that maybe now wasn't the time to argue about this any longer. “If that's how you feel, then maybe it's all for the best.”

David reached into the cooler for some more beer bottles. His trophy baseball laid on top. He took a hold of the ball and softly launched it at Simon. “Head's up!” Simon caught the ball and looked at David with a surprised look in his face.

“Keep it,” David said softly. “We won our first tournament with that one.”

“Are you sure you don't want to take it with you?”

“Nah. I'm starting a new life.”

They laughed and began guzzling down their beer. Simon laid the ball back down on the cooler. As they drank, the ball fell unnoticed and rolled back into the crevice on the deck.



CHAPTER 37

MIAMI, FL - Nighttime. November, 2019 A.D.

Later that night Simon and Diana laid on their bed. Diana's head was on her favorite place in the world, snuggled on his chest. Simon still wore his reading glasses but his journal rested unread on his night table. Diana's head rested comfortably on Simon and her leg laid listless on his lap.

"They did share a past life together," said Diana lacking a bit of assertiveness in her voice, and instead projecting more of a mixed feeling of sadness and hopelessness.

"Twice," Simon replied. Sharing the same sense of sadness.

"It's unbelievable," she added lifting her head to look into the eyes of her beloved. "Do you believe it to be true?" she asked. "I do," he said without exposing a shred of doubt. His therapy sessions had revealed a truth that, as unbelievable as it might sound, was not a fabricated story. Nothing had conspired to create the drama they were living through. Nothing except destiny and the power that those souls emitted and their undying desire to reunite once more.

"There's no chance he was just telling you what Kate was relating to him during her sessions?" asked Diana, hoping that maybe they were wrong. Maybe somehow, their beloved David was only projecting the pain he had kept inside ever since his episode with Chrissy.

"I heard the tapes," answered Simon. "There is no other possible explanation."

"I feel bad for David," Diana offered. "So, you're sure...he's definitely going to leave?" Diana repeated nervously into Simon's chest. She was concerned for her brother. It wasn't just the recent regression therapy anecdotes that piqued Diana's attention now – she was becoming more and more troubled for her brother's state of mind.

"Yup," Simon confirmed again. "And, even crazier is that I am pretty sure that all this has to do with Kate and the whole regression therapy thing. I know this is getting kind of out-of-control...I never heard or read anything like this in all my medical research." Simon removed his glasses and chewed on the end of the earpiece.

"What?" Diana lifted her head to look into Simon's eyes. They were cloudy and deep. Diana recognized the serious scowl there. "And, the worst part of this whole thing is that I don't really think David is aware of any of it, I wouldn't be surprised if we were *all* tangled together, one way or another," Simon mumbled this last thought more to himself than to Diana.

Diana suddenly sat straight up in bed. Concerned, she offered, "David was so crushed by Chrissy, and he really hasn't gotten over it yet. And, now he falls for Kate, and she is marrying some jerk," Diana said as she reached for Simon's hand. "I know he is feeling vulnerable, so maybe taking some time off is actually a good idea for him. Maybe he can regain some control in his life. What do you think, really?" She was clearly looking for validation.

"He's always wanted to go abroad," Simon added. "It's probably the best thing he can do for himself right now."

Diana was noticeably upset. "So, something doesn't work out and the best thing is to run away?" she blurted with a bit of anger in her voice.

"David is not running away," Simon explained. "He got hurt by Chrissy, and his patient is marrying some jerk." Simon looked at Diana surprised at her lack of empathy. "Taking some time off is a sound idea," he said firmly. "He didn't even talk to her," complained Diana. "He came to the rehearsal and simply walked away."

Simon took Diana in his arms. "Sometimes things just don't work out. Maybe they're not meant to be." He placed his glasses on his night table and reached over to turn off the light. "So much for destiny," said Diana with a sigh of resignation. Simon pulled Diana more tightly into his arms. "I understand that sometimes, things just don't work out the way we want," said Diana as she leaned against his body.

"I don't really think David will find his answers in some Central American country." Simon, troubled by his friend's decision, shook his head and hugged Diana again, thankful for the security and happiness she brought him.

"So much for destiny," Diana sighed.

"And to think," repeated Simon in the dark; "It all started nearly 500 years ago."



CHAPTER 38

MIAMI, FL - Daytime. November, 2019 - WEDDING DAY

"I'll be at the country club," Diana reminded Tammy. "You know how to reach me."

Tammy looked up from her worn-out paperback and sensing Diana's mood, asked, "Is everything alright, Mrs. Canavaro?" Tammy could easily read Diana's disposition, and it was clear now that her boss was distracted and distant. Tammy stood up from her desk and dashed toward Diana.

Diana stopped abruptly. "Tell me something Tammy, do you believe in destiny?" She didn't have the faintest idea why she asked Tammy this. As soon as the words were out of her mouth, she regretted bringing up the subject. *Certainly, Tammy didn't think of destiny*, thought Diana. *She could barely remember her next nail appointment*, Diana let out a nervous giggle.

"Why are you laughing... you mean, like Karma 'n stuff?" Tammy felt the slight of Diana's snicker and tried to validate her intellect and depth beyond her daily routines at the office. Tammy tugged down on her blouse and straightened her back, making sure to pose her most professional, prime stance.

With a soft, sad sigh, Diana blurted out, "I think my brother is in love with Kate."

"And you think him and Ms. Katherine were meant to be together?" asked Tammy trying to pinpoint where Diana stood in all of this. "Yes. I think they shared a past life and maybe they are meant to be together again. Does it make any sense?" asked Diana. "So, you think their destiny is to be together?" Tammy inquired again. "Today, Kate's marrying Bruce. And, there's nothing David can do about it. And, to top it all off, he's going off to who-knows-where on that boat of his."

"You're kidding, right? I mean, what's David thinking?" Tammy was a bit shocked, but she kept her tone composed and even. "Well, you know what they say... if it's meant to be..." Tammy let the rest of her sentence fall away. *I guess that's the end of that*, slurred Tammy inaudibly as she snapped her chewing gum and shrugged of her shoulders. "It's about having faith," she said as she combed her long black-lacquered fingernails through her hair and sauntered back to her desk. "Faith?" asked Diana. "Sure," answered Tammy. "Just because you don't see something doesn't mean it isn't there. If they have faith, they'll fulfill their destiny," Tammy shrugged again and closed her eyes, her eyelashes fluttering from her heavy, painted eyelids.

"I'm not quite sure what to think about faith or destiny," responded Diana, continuing the conversation, but really speaking to no one in particular. "I think I am beginning to believe that our lives are already decided for us, and that is why there isn't much we can do to change things. In fact, I think Kate was written into David's life a long time ago." Diana realized that Tammy had already stopped listening to her and had made up her mind. Tammy eyed her battered paperback novel. The corners of Diana's mouth drooped; she shook her head. Quickly, Diana ran her fingers through her neatly cropped hair and gathered her purse to leave the office.



"What a beautiful day this turned out to be, Kate. Not a cloud in the sky," announced Mrs. Brenner with a distinct shrill. Kate stared out the window of the car, paying little attention to her mother's chatter. "I must admit, there's still something a bit unpleasant about Bruce's father that I can't quite put my finger on," Kate's mother continued; she crinkled her nose as if she suddenly got a whiff of something rotting and nauseating.

Trees and cars and houses blurred past the windows of the cruising limousine as Kate stared listlessly out. Bruce had sent the car to pick them up and take them to the country club. It was not necessary, but to Bruce, it was always about appearances. Now, all dressed in her white wedding dress, with the corset squeezing and digging sharply into her ribs, Kate's delicate white hands were trembling and sweaty. Kate's mother sat next to her in the back seat and continued to exasperate Kate with endless, nervous chitchat.

"Well, don't you have anything to say?" asked Mrs. Brenner. "How do you mean, mom?" hissed Kate through clenched teeth, still staring out the car window. She strained to play into the conversation and keep her spirits uplifted. A growing wave of unrest was about to bubble up from her belly and explode inside her; Kate felt like she was going to suffocate and drown.

"There's just something about that man I don't like," repeated Kate's mother. "I don't know exactly what it is... I can't seem to put a finger on it," she continued her annoying chatter. Kate remained partially "absent" as she let her thoughts run uncontrolled while she stared at Miami's landscape. She fidgeted with her shoes, readjusted her corset for a hundredth time, and, shook her feet; all signs that she was anything but happy to be heading to the club. *Is it cold feet?* She wondered. *Was there something else?*



Diana paced up and down what was to be the processional aisle in the garden. A roaring burst of sunshine and warm air blew around her. Because the weather had turned out to be flawless that afternoon, the maintenance crew at the country club was busily moving chairs and the wedding canopy to the outside garden; everything was proceeding as they had hoped. White and pink lilies decorated everything, from the poles holding up the four corners of the *chuppah*, to the large vases that adorned the aisle where the new bride would soon march. A trio of musicians playing a flute, a violin, and a harp grouped together in the back of the garden where they prepared their repertoire for the event. The gleaming sunshine and bright blue skies gave way to a pleasant breeze that would surely keep the guests comfortable and composed in the summer heat.

I couldn't have arranged for a more perfect day, thought Diana. *Although something still feels wrong about the whole thing...* Diana paced nervously. Distracted by her thoughts, she pulled out her cell phone, and dialed a number. It finally hit her what she really had to do. Diana was suddenly moved by a passionate stir in her gut, an intense stir, a sense of deep urgency. "C'mon, c'mon," she whined into the phone.

"Simon, we have to tell Kate," she said into the phone. "What do you mean butt out?" she replied to an obvious rejection by Simon. "Alright, it may not be any of my business but the least we could do is tell her." Diana remained silent listening to her husband's rebuke. "Alright then; Let your bother-in-law run away. I'll talk to you later." And she hung up immediately. She thought for a second and made another call.

There was no answer. Frustrated, Diana ended the call and started to dial yet another number; her last recourse. A voice from behind startled her, and Diana quickly jumped to attention and shoved the phone in her back pocket.

"Aren't you the person in charge of all this, little lady?" Albert Handel asked with a stab of arrogance. Bruce's father had stayed distant and detached from all the wedding plans, staying at his home in New Jersey until the last minute, but he was, after all, paying all the bills. "What on earth are you doing here making phone calls?" he demanded of Diana in his typical high-pitched bully-tone.

They had met only once, but Diana recognized Albert Handel immediately. "Yes, we've met before, sir. I am Diana, the party organizer. Can I help you with something, sir?"

"Help me?" he responded; his reply peppered with ferocity. For a man of his towering height and thick girth, his voice was unexpectedly shrill. "How about you go about doing your job instead of sitting here on the phone. What the hell am I paying you for?"

Diana looked at Bruce's father with a serious glare. "Yes, sir," she hissed lowly. She lowered her troubled eyes and stared at her shoes.

Suddenly, a waiter ran toward them, excited and out of breath. "Mrs. Canavaro, the Justice-of-the-Peace is here and he needs you right away." The waiter ran his words together as if he were rambling off a rehearsed monologue.

Is that what they call Rabbi Dodd these days? thought Diana. *A Justice-of-the-Peace?* Rabbi Dodd used the official title of 'rabbi,' but when he met Diana at her office last week, driving up on a Harley Davidson and wearing a Louis Vuitton leather belt around his svelte waist, Diana wondered where Bruce and Kate had found this man. Certainly, he was not your typical rabbi. Rabbi Dodd was, however, the only 'rabbi' that Bruce would agree to have officiating at the wedding. And, after all, the Handels were paying for most of the wedding costs, Diana had to keep reminding herself.

"OK, tell him I'll be right there." Diana was grateful for the interruption. Diana nodded her head toward Mr. Handel and bolted toward the country club's offices. "Thank you for the rescue, God," she whispered out loud with her fluttering eyelashes turned upward.

As soon as she was out of view from Mr. Handel, Diana diverted her course toward the musicians and reached into her back pocket for her cellphone again. She dialed, and this time, someone answered on the first ring. "Oh, thank God, I need your help. It's urgent."



CHAPTER 39

MIAMI, FL – Daytime. November, 2019 - THE WEDDING DAY

A small, two-door old red sedan screeched to a halt. Tammy got out from the driver's seat and ran up to a house. She rang the doorbell, and fidgeted as she waited impatiently. The door opened. A Hispanic housekeeper answered the door. "Can I *ehlp* you?" asked the housekeeper in a heavy Spanish accent.

"I'm looking for Miss Kate," explained Tammy. "La *señorita* Kate left already," answered the housekeeper. "How long ago?" inquired Tammy but got no immediate answer. "When - they go? *Vamonos*?" Tammy tried rushing a response from the housekeeper who was searching for the right words. "Now, one *mineet*. in a big *lee-mo-sin*," finally answered the housekeeper. Tammy rushed back to her car as she yelled out, "Thank you..." The housekeeper was left standing by the door with a worried look in her face. "*Ay madre santa*, I hope all is okay," said the housekeeper as she saw Tammy speed away.

The limo was on its way to the Country Club. There was considerable traffic on the roads of Miami Beach. Tammy zigzagged through traffic, running through a stop sign and finally catching up with the limo on a busy street. She tailgated the limo and honked her horn, but they continued to drive along ignoring her altogether. Tammy continued to honk until Kate finally turned to see who was the raving lunatic making all that ruckus. She saw a familiar face at the wheel of the car behind them. It was Tammy and she was signaling for her to stop. Kate could hardly believe her eyes.

"I think that's Tammy," pointed out Kate unsure of herself. "And who's Tammy?" asked Kate's mother. Kate did not answer. There was a park ahead. Joggers, guys playing baseball, teens on skateboards, people playing with their pets. "Stop!" demanded Kate from the driver. "Please stop the car right here."

"Yes ma'am." The driver complied. He spotted an opening on the side of the road and slid the limousine to a halt. Kate rolled down the window and looked back at Tammy's car that stopped right behind them. Tammy put her hands together as if imploring her to give her a moment's time. Kate saw Tammy's lips moving. "*Please....*" Tammy kept repeating hoping Kate somehow would understand. Kate finally got out of the limo wearing her wedding gown. "Kate, darling," yelled out Mrs. Brenner. "Where are you going?"

"Just one moment, mom," Kate said without even turning to face her. Tammy got out onto the sidewalk and met up with Kate who was stunned by her absurd behavior. "I'm getting married in an hour," said Kate. "What are you doing here? Did something happen at the Club?" Tammy turned her head and spotted a bench by the park. "Can we sit?" begged Tammy. "Just for a moment?"

"No, we can't. I'm sorry. Just tell me what happened."
"Kate, give me one minute, that's all," insisted Tammy giving her a look of supplication. "Please?" Kate did not seem to want to comply with Tammy's request. "It's about David," said Tammy. Kate's eyes opened wide. She took a deep breath. "One minute, Tammy. You have one minute," said Kate with a frown. Tammy smiled in gratitude.

They walked together, Kate holding her dress high. When they arrived at the bench Tammy realized Kate couldn't sit while wearing the white wedding gown. Tammy gazed at the bench. "Tammy, I can't sit," said Kate. "Just tell me already." "Simon believes you and David have shared past lives," Tammy declared out loud. The sounds of the park barely deafened the thumping of Tammy's heart. She realized that what she was doing might hurt Kate but she had to help Diana. Tammy had to set things right - before the wedding, and before David left on the boat.

Kate's corset was still jabbing relentlessly into her ribs, and her veil shifted slightly to the left as she stood, unbalanced and incredulous, in front of Tammy.

"OK, now, what did you say?" Kate wanted to hear it again. "He told you we share a past life?" Kate's voice was harsh and raspy. Her words caught in her throat. She stared at Tammy in disbelief. "This crazy regression therapy...are you falling for it, too?" she choked.

"I'm not completely convinced of it all," commented Tammy. She really was not sure what to believe anymore. She quickly checked herself and added, "But, I'm not completely *un*-convinced, either." She gazed down at the floor. "Look Ms. Katherine, I don't know what to think about regression therapy - I am not a doctor. But I do believe in the heart, in what we feel. Don't you?" Kate did not answer, so Tammy continued, "I know I shouldn't be getting involved in this, but David says he feels like he's known you all his life - why is that? He barely knows you. Don't you think it's all a bit odd?" Tammy gave Kate a chance to answer but sensing silence she continued. "And, now he wants to take off and leave on that boat of his." Tammy still could not believe it, even as she repeated the news out loud to Kate.

"None of this makes any sense to me, either," Kate agreed. "I don't know what to think about all this, it all seems pointless, anyway." She twisted her hands nervously and picked at the corners of her newly polished French-manicure.

"Well, let me ask you something else, Ms. Katherine. Do you feel like Bruce is your soul mate?" Tammy's thoughts flowed out of her mouth, unguarded and unrestrained. She shocked herself as she heard the unfiltered words spill from her lips, but she did not stop. She had to make this last attempt to support Diana. She waited a moment for Kate to react, and then quickly continued. "Isn't there something pulling you towards David?" She emphasized David's name.

"I'm not going to ruin my wedding day and all my plans just because 500 years ago... maybe...David and I had a thing together in Italy or wherever. Really Tammy, is that what you're suggesting here?"

"I never said anything about *Italy*, Kate." Tammy pursed her lips and wrinkled her brow. "Can't you see, Kate? You can't just ignore this." Lowering her voice and taking a deep breath, Tammy concluded, "Look, Kate. I don't want to upset you or cause a problem, today of all days. I do think you and David are definitely connected in some way. And, you owe it to each other to figure out this whole mess, before it really is too late." It was Tammy's last pitch, and her quivering voice echoed with passion and candor.

Kate raised an eyebrow as she recollected her own confusing feelings over the last few months. *Could I be making a mistake?* Her face flushed hot and red. Miami's humidity was aggravating an already stressful situation. She felt sweat building up on her forehead, and the dress weighed on her. What to do? Kate felt the pressure.

"Listen, David's at the marina now. He's getting ready to leave. He said, --"

"I can't --" yelled Kate, feeling a knot tighten in her stomach. "I can't do this," she lurched forward as if she were going to throw up. She was going to marry Bruce in less than an hour. *Of course, Bruce was her soul mate. She had planned this day for so long. What was she thinking? And, what would her parents think? And, what the hell was Tammy trying to do here?*



The sounds of the baseball game merged with the sounds of traffic. People went about their routine. A few steps away, a middle aged, white, tall homeless man, a preacher of sorts, dressed in rags, held a sign while accosting passersby with warnings about the inevitable end of the world. Suddenly, this loud street preacher, that was only feet away, now, interrupted them. "You can cheat your destiny," he said starring them down. "And happiness will not be attained in this world." He then turned to Kate. She stared right back at him. The preacher looked like the German officer who held her back from the ship in Hamburg. The same soldier that flashed a sinister smile back then, was flashing his smile at her today. He then began to walk away. Tammy ignored the interruption but Kate seemed captivated.

"I do think you and David are connected souls," insisted Tammy. "If so, then where is David?" asked Kate reverting back to Tammy, and now somewhat upset. "Why is he not telling me all of this?" She asked in an abrasive tone. Tammy wanted to answer and had to raise her voice. The sounds of the park, and, that annoying preacher still mumbling about the end of the world, seemed somehow louder.

"He's at the Marina. He's leaving for some island or Panama or somewhere like that."

-- I can't --" said Kate feeling a knot in her stomach. "It wasn't meant to be," Kate tried justifying what she was witnessing. "Sometimes when things are falling apart," said Tammy "they may actually be falling into place."

All of a sudden, a baseball flew in from the park and hit the preacher on his head sounding off a loud thump. Kate and Tammy looked dumbfounded as he fell to the ground. He grunted as he held his head in pain. A couple of players rushed in from the park. Kate's eyes wondered off. Kate saw the image of the Nazi soldier being hit on the head by a baseball. She saw Daniel aboard a ship looking at her with love and despair. And she saw Daniel -or was it David? - holding onto her for dear life over the ship's railing. Kate then pictured herself resting her head on Danilo's shoulder. Danilo's stomach wrapped in bandage; his hand softly caressing her head. She pictured Danilo saying "I owe you my life." Danilo looking into her eyes. Kate remembered lowering her face scarf and kissing Danilo, no, David, passionately.

Without letting another second go by, Kate sprinted back to the limo yelling at Tammy while opening the door, "Sorry, I got'ta go," yelled Kate as she grabbed as much of her dress in her hands as she could and raised the hem to get into the limousine without tripping.

She startled her mom. "Kate darling, are you alright?" asked her mother shocked at her behavior. Kate ignored her mom. "Take me to the marina, now," she commanded the driver. Kate gasped frantically for air, and sweat swathed over her moist cheeks, leaving black kohl rings around her blood-shot eyes.

Wet streaks caressed her hot cheeks. Her heart was pounding madly through her chest. The corset around her body tightened and squeezed until she thought she could not take another breath. She had no choice, she decided. It was now or never. She had to see David. Filled with a sudden sense of desperate, pressing melancholy, Kate urged the driver yet again.

Crouched down low in the backseat of the limousine, Kate removed the veil from her head and her white satin pumps from her feet. She was drowning in dread and gloom. Memories flickered in Kate's head, off and on, like tiny flecks of floating light: a rambling old vagrant; a heap of fluttering documents; a glint of gold metal; a tattered red rag. A slow burn seethed across Kate's face, and her clammy hand flew up to stroke her wet cheek. Kate wiggled and stretched her pinched toes and counted to ten, trying to calm her breathing. "Please, hurry," she implored the driver.

"Honey, did you say marina?" asked her mother, not understanding anything that was going on. "And why did you remove your headpiece and your shoes?" she asked not getting a response. "Have you gone mad?" asked her mother. "Please, hurry," Kate implored the driver once again.

Tammy was left behind, but ran back to her car and gave chase to Kate's limo once more. Tammy made a phone call while trying not to lose control of the car. "Diana," said Tammy on the phone. "Come to the Marina right away! Hurry."



CHAPTER 40

MIAMI, FL – Daytime. November, 2019 - THE WEDDING DAY

When the limo finally pulled into the marina, Kate instantly spotted David far at the end of the pier. He was moving sluggishly, almost hesitantly, as he untied the *Take A Leap* from its dock. Kate watched him climb aboard and turn on the motor. The limousine slowed down about 50 feet from the dock, and Kate jumped out of the car before it had even come to a full stop. The bulkiness of her dress made her movements awkward; she darted in her stocking feet as fast as she could toward David's boat. Kate's mom, still in the limo made a phone call as well. "Victor," said her mother on the phone, "you need to come down to the pier immediately."

David did not notice Kate's arrival or the commotion she was causing on the dock. His faded baseball cap, resting unevenly on his thick golden curls, shaded the unrelenting sun from his eyes and blocked his view of the impending commotion on the dock; his vision was further blurred with puddling tears. In the meantime, strolling passers-by watched the harried scene and the strange bride bustling around in her now-disheveled wedding gown. They waited with wide eyes and gaping mouths to see what would happen next.

David mechanically continued to prepare for his departure. He had been preparing for the voyage, stocking the boat with bundles of food, extra fuel, and other navigating gear. From inside the boat, David untied the ropes that anchored it to the pier, pushed carelessly against one of the pilings with all the strength he could muster, and began to drift out to sea against the soft wake, pushing farther from the dock toward the open sea.

Kate ran up the wooden dock. Just as she reached the edge, she watched David and the *Take a Leap* slip further away into open water. Another flash of white metal light blinded Kate's vision, and for a sheer moment, her head whirled with a sharp, cutting pain.

"David, wait," Kate yelled at the top of her lungs. But to no avail. The sounds from all around the pier and the droning boat engine drowned out her frantic screams. Kate bent over, the corset still strangling her ribs against her stomach, and she began to heave bile onto the wood floorboards. Tammy reached Kate and placed her arm around her. A low, collective groan emanated from the wide-eyed onlookers along the dock as they waited with baited breath to find out what would occur next. A heavy cloud of anticipation and suspense hung over the growing crowd of people.

David continued out to sea without looking back. He cringed and shivered in frozen silence; his eyes stung with the salty sea spray, and a tremor of cold air blew through his bones. The boat trudged its way through the growing froth of the ocean wake. David's baseball rolled spontaneously across the floor of the deck with a gentle rumble. His mind drifted away. David saw the image of Emma -or rather Kate- being held by a Nazi soldier as he hit him on the head with his baseball. He saw Kate running and climbing over the crates with despair.

David saw Kate jumping for dear life towards the boat, and he saw himself holding onto her over the ship's railing. David tried to shake off these images from a different era. David then pictured Isabella resting her head on his shoulder. But it was Kate. And his stomach wrapped in bandages, his hand softly caressing her head. David saw Kate and himself standing together at the pier. Kate holding him tight. "I owe you my life," said David to Kate starring into her eyes. She lowered her face scarf and kissed David passionately.

Then, David stiffened and slapped the side of his head with the flat of his trembling hand. *What an idiot I am. This is all wrong. I can't just leave and give up on her like this,* David reprimanded himself out loud, thankful that no one was around to hear him. How could he have gone to her wedding rehearsal and not speak to her? *I'm not a coward,* he angrily admonished himself. He swiftly began to turn the boat around and immediately caught notice of the crowd on the dock and a woman in a white wedding gown. *Kate? No, it couldn't be.* A strong, piercing ache suddenly jabbed him in the belly. David doubled over clutching at his gut and momentarily lost his footing.

As David drifted closer toward the dock, he regained his balance and cut the engine of the boat. He watched Kate standing on the dock in the white dress take two clumsy steps backwards. Then, just like that, she vaulted across the wooden planks of the dock and plummeted into the water with a great splash. David let out a loud gasp and the crowd groaned out in unison. David could barely make out the weak cry...

"D - A - V - I...!" Kate gurgled mindlessly, as she swallowed mouthfuls of sea water and thrashed desperately in the waves. Her hands flailed wildly above the water's surface, and her kicking and splashing created enough of a wake to slap lightly on the sides of the *Take A Leap*. Kate's dress fanned out, creating a halo of sparkling radiance over the water's surface.

David was still standing and trembling with alarm on the deck of the boat. He reflexively reached for a ring buoy hanging by the boat's steering wheel. With the ring hanging firmly from his elbow, David dove head-first into the water. Kate was bobbing up and down, desperately trying to stay above the surface of the water. She gasped for a breath of air.

The crowd of on-lookers on the dock all stood and stared out at the water in silenced shock. Two more cars, both black and shiny, screeched to a halt on the marina behind the still-idling limousine. Mr. and Mrs. Handel, together with Bruce and Kate's father, Victor, tumbled out of the first car. Diana and Simon emerged together from the second car, and they all ran out toward the dock's edge. Mr. Handel was the first to reach the water, followed by Diana, sweating and panting with fear and shock. Still in her wedding attire, but now wearing a crimson scarf around her head, Mrs. Brenner was wrenched with a sudden fit of sobs. She shouted hysterically, "Help her...somebody...oh, my God...my daughter's afraid of the water. She can't swim!"

Eyes firmly fixed on the floating mass in the harbor, watching Kate fearlessly swimming towards David, Diana sprung up beside Mrs. Brenner. She glanced at Kate's mother sideways, taking in her electric head scarf, her firm jaw, and her piercing brown eyes. Diana grinned at her and sputtered, "I don't think she's afraid anymore." Catching her breath, Diana beamed with a secret consciousness that Kate and David had finally discovered the truth. She let out a hearty laugh and hugged her arms around her shoulders.

Kate managed to sputter weakly in the stirring waters. Her arms reached out and gripped David tightly by the shoulders. "Without you," Kate tried explaining but David interrupted her. "Sssh," gurgled David. "Not now, my love."

"Yes, now," wrestled Kate. She pointed her chin upward to keep her open mouth above the water. "I've been silent for too long. I have to tell you this. Without you, David, my soul will never stop searching. My heart and my whole being is incomplete without you."

David stared at Kate, unbelievably. He gently brushed strands of hair from Kate's cheek and said, "Our souls found each other." Kate smiled. "You really think so, doctor?" David smiled. "We were never able to remain together, were we?" asked Kate. "I think we managed once before," said David. Then he added, slowly recuperating his strength and nodding his head vigorously up and down, "It may be that, sometimes, it takes 500 years to figure things out. Let me love you, now, if not for the rest of your life, then for the rest of mine." They both giggled with passion and longing.

"It may be that it took us 500 years to realize we belong together," Kate said with a tenderness that melted David's soul. Clinging to each other tightly, bathed in complete desire and certainty, their tender lips met, and the crowd on deck exploded with cheers. Kate and David kissed with a passion that only 500 years of love can bring about.

Those that stood motionless at the edge of the pier knew at that moment, that destiny had spoken.

-- *Diana is seen as Camila in 1580 and Dora in 1939.*

-- *Simon is seen as Father Joaquin in 1580 and Manfred in 1939.*

-- *Bruce is seen as Emile in 1580 and Her Klum in 1939.*

-- *Tammy is seen as Mia in 1580 and Peter in 1939.*

-- *Kate's mom is seen as Esther, the Rabbi's wife, in 1580 and Irene in 1939.*

-- *Victor is seen as Manolo the row master in 1580 and Vladimir in 1939.*

-- *Albert is seen as Captain Huerta in 1580 and Mr. Wolf in 1939.*



A voice is heard.

"On the count of three, you'll wake and open your eyes.

Breathe deep. One, two, three..."

A snap of the fingers.

THE END



*“The couples that are meant to be,
are the ones who go through everything that is meant to tear them
apart, and come out even stronger”*

For Henry

Authors' Notes and Acknowledgments

Though *500 Years from You* is a work of fiction, all historical references and settings are real as I could gather. I have attempted to portray all scenes and characters as they might have appeared in context and in history.

I would like to mention my deepest gratitude to my dear friends, Mandi Eizenbaum and Jeanne Nassi, for their invaluable time in editing, embellishing and reviewing this story. Their imagination and creativity continue to be a source of inspiration for me. In Mandy's own words: "I first discovered the writings and medical accounts of Dr. Brian Weiss decades ago, and couldn't help falling captive to the possibility that our world might be a bit smaller than we think and that we are all connected to each other somehow."

I too wondered how is it possible for some of us to feel sudden, instinctual judgments and emotions about certain people. The theory proposed by past life regressionists gives a perspective that allows us to make sense of it all. Intrigued by this concept, and using it as a starting point, I have attempted to tell a story that would reflect the delicate history of the Jews and their survival through the ages - the thread of custom, tradition, and familiarity that has outlived all others - and construct a common denominator for strangers to come together again and re-connect those loose ends that might have otherwise been altered by time and consequence.

I would like to thank Dr. Leventhal for her insight and wisdom in the field of psychiatry and for inspiring me to learn and discover more about our roles while in this universe.

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About the Author

Livio Rosenberg holds a Doctorate in Business Management, a Master's Degree in Special Education, and works as a professor teaching social studies, business courses, and academic English. He is a dedicated and dynamic teacher, writer, and music composer. A son of Holocaust survivors, Dr. Rosenberg grew up in Colombia, and, lived in the United States, and in Israel, which has provided Dr. Rosenberg with experiences to become an amazing story teller; a skill he has refined by combining it with historical events. He currently lives in Panama, teaching, writing, and composing music.

*"We are spiritual beings, living physical experiences,
constantly yearning to align with our dreams"*



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