

The Prophecy of the Seventh Elizabeth

The Battle Between Light and Dark

Book 1

By Jarrod L. Edge



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"Just breathe. Everything will be OK."

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This book is dedicated to my
loving family:

Lisa, Kari, Taevon, Edward, and
Isabella.

All glory, honor, and praise be to
God.

Thank you, Lord, for this gift.

I pray that it will be a soul-
altering experience for all who
read it.

CHAPTER 1

Location: Badlands National Park, SD

Time: May 9, 2014, One Year after the Battle between Light and Dark (Age 15)

"And she went forth to save the world in the name of Jesus Christ." The stone stood silently. It was cool to the touch and smooth like silk. The light from the evening sun was shining down from heaven as if God was smiling down on the now green valley. It was quiet here. There was only the sound of the wind blowing against the giant oak tree that provided shade for the large stone during the day...keeping it cool to the touch.

The stone was about five feet tall and four feet wide. It had one flat side, which had been polished to perfection. Its face was prepared by the world's foremost engraver of stone. He did not engrave it for a fee, as the stone was not for sale. He did not do it for fame or for recognition, for the stone would not be displayed in any gallery of art. The stone was a memorial, a thank-you, an expression of love from many nations hoping to express their gratitude as one world.

Standing in front of it and looking out into the vast, green valley, a person might not realize that just one year earlier, every leader from every country on the planet had stood right there. Right there in front of this stone. Lifelong enemies set aside their hatred for each other just to stand in front of this stone together on that day. Some were rich and some poor. Some were strong

and others weak, but on that day, status meant nothing. Many wept as they paid their respects to the one who gave her life for the sake of all mankind. The surrounding fields were littered with thousands of citizens of Earth, creating a sea of colors as far as the eye could see. As the president of the United States of America spoke on that day, he read the words engraved in stone as if they were his own, "And she went forth to save the world..." The president paused as the world stood silent and listened to his echoing voice. "In the name of Jesus Christ..." He paused again as the rolling hills came alive with a mighty roar of boundless cheers. And then, with a loud and steady voice, he proclaimed, "Our Lord and Savior!"

CHAPTER 2

Location: Ephesus

Time: Approximately AD 100

"Ziya! Ziya, hurry, he is asking for you," said the young woman. She had run from the other side of the village as fast as she could and lost one of her sandals in the process. She was out of breath and panting as she added, "Please hurry."

Ziya gathered himself as quickly as possible. "I am coming," he said to the young woman. "I must grab my things." Ziya was a very organized and well-mannered man, always making sure that everything was in its place. He spent most of his day dedicated to his studies. The rest of his time was fully dedicated to his mentor, the Apostle John, the beloved disciple, one of the sons of thunder. Ziya grabbed his bag and threw it over his shoulder.

"Hurry," the young woman repeated again, the sound of her voice becoming more distant each second as she ran ahead.

Ziya ran swiftly through the village toward the place of worship on the hill at the edge of the village. His beige tunic trailed behind him as he leaped over objects, animals, and even the occasional child. Ziya was worried. The health of his mentor, one of the original Disciples of Christ, was fading. He was very old. "Full of blessed days," as his mentor would say. But the apostle was growing weaker every day. As Ziya arrived, one of the priests

was tending to John's needs. When John saw that Ziya had arrived, his face seemed to light up. Ziya wiped the moisture from his brow. Even though Ziya was a fit man of good stature and able to hold his own, the run combined with his worry had worn on him. He needed to catch his breath.

"It...it is time..." said John. "Please leave us," he said to the nearby priest while motioning for him to leave. The priest obeyed, leaving the apostle and his student to their own company.

"It is time," John repeated. He tried to move and then moaned quietly. "Please, help an old man sit up, won't you?" he asked with the slightest of smiles on his face.

Ziya set his bag down on a small wooden table against the wall and quickly walked to the side of the small bed where the white-haired man lay. He put one hand behind John's head, and with the other hand, he locked arms with his mentor and gently helped him to an upright position. "Thank you," John said. "I am old, but the Lord is not finished with me yet." Ziya smiled, knowing that he could have completed John's words, as he had heard this saying time and time again. "That is why I have called you here, young Ziya." John paused and looked at the attentive Ziya. "I have one more task in front of me." Ziya listened carefully as he looked into his mentor's gracefully aged face. "I must tell you of a vision young Ziya, a vision revealed to me by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

CHAPTER 3

Location: Jacksonville, FL

Time: May 9, 1999 (4:00 a.m.)

"Honey, can't you drive any faster? This baby is coming now!" The passenger's seat was not agreeing with Samantha at all. She struggled to find a comfortable position, but nothing seemed to work. "If you don't hurry, I'm going to have this baby right here in the car!"

"Sweetie, this is a BMW not a hospital. Don't worry—we'll make it." Johnathan liked his BMW, but he knew he was pressing it with his wife.

"I hope that stands for 'Better Make Way for the baby.'" Sam grabbed her belly as she felt another painful contraction. "Ow!" She paused to catch her breath and then gathered her strength to say in a semicalm voice, "Hurry!"

"Just breathe, sweetheart. Everything will be OK." Sam wasn't having it. Johnathan could normally calm her down by stroking her long brown hair or gazing into her beautiful eyes and reasoning with her. But none of that was working right now.

"Don't talk to me. Drive! And where are the children? Why aren't the children with us?" demanded Sam. She kept one hand on her belly as she tried to remove the strands of hair from her face and tuck them behind her ear. Her hair never stayed behind

her ear, but something about the act seemed to calm her. It was one of the things that Johnathan loved most about his wife.

Johnathan didn't know whether her tone indicated that she was mad or she was in pain. "Nana is getting them ready right now. They'll be there shortly after us. Don't worry."

"Well I'm not having this baby until everyone is at the hospital!" Sam put her other hand back on her belly.

Johnathan bit his tongue and simply replied. "Yes, dear."

It was four o'clock in the morning as Johnathan and Samantha traveled from their house in Mandarin, in the southernmost part of one of the largest cities in the United States, Jacksonville, Florida. It had been raining since six the evening before, and there was no end in sight. The roads were thick with water. The windshield wipers were doing the best they could, but the rain seemed to be coming down in buckets. "What a night for the baby to come," he thought. It was typically a fifteen-minute drive to St. James Hospital at this time of the morning, but the rain wasn't making it easy. "We'll be there in a minute," he reassured Samantha.

"I love you," she replied. In the calmest voice he had ever heard, she added, "I want you to cut your hair before the baby sees you like that," which was followed by an ear-piercing yell. "Ow!"

"Are you OK?" Johnathan asked.

"Just pay attention to the road," she snapped back at him. After a few moments, she said, "Sorry, John."

"That's OK, Sam...I love you too," he said with a smile.

"Are you sure you're OK with the name?" Samantha asked as calmly as she could.

"Yes, honey, it's a great name," Johnathan replied as he looked ahead and saw the light change. "Great, a green light. Just hold on, and we'll be there in no time." He attempted to keep Samantha calm, but that was outside the realm of possibility on this wet, stormy morning. A flash of lightning lit up the rainy night sky, immediately accompanied by a loud burst of thunder.

"John, look out!" Samantha's tone was no longer the voice of pain and suffering. It was now the voice of fear. It took Johnathan by surprise. He turned his head toward her. His eyes were blinded by a light, and at that instant, the unthinkable happened.

"Dear God!" shouted Johnathan. His mind raced, flashing with thoughts of Samantha, the baby—and then the violent clap of metal on metal filled the air.

The impact of the crash threw the BMW across the intersection and through the empty lanes of oncoming traffic. The grill guard on the raised four-wheel-drive pickup truck caught the unsuspecting vehicle directly in the back portion of the passenger door. As it devoured the BMW, it lifted the tiny black car off the ground and threw it into the air. The car spun as it grasped for the pavement below. But when it finally made contact with the ground, it could not grab hold or slow down. The BMW slid across the wet blacktop. To Johnathan, it was like living in a world of slow motion as the fragile car's forward motion was countered by

its horizontal rotation. The car slid across the wet grass, and then it was over as violently as it had begun. This devastating ballet of motion was brought to an abrupt halt as the driver-side door slammed into a concrete pole.

There was an odd silence filled with unfamiliar noises. The engine ground as it came to a halt; the impact had twisted its parts. As the car's electrical system failed, Johnathan saw lightning without thunder, heard silence without peace, and felt stillness without calm. His eyes fell shut.

"John?"

"John..." Samantha was having trouble breathing. Blood covered the right side of her head; she was trapped and losing consciousness. Her own blood was choking her.

"John...I love you."

Johnathan opened his eyes to a blurry nightmare. He was barely conscious and trying to wake up. But he couldn't. His hearing was muffled as if he were under water. "Pull...pull...harder." As his eyes began to roll back into his head, a hand touched him. "Are you OK," a voice kept repeating. "Are you OK? Are you all right? Just hold on." But Johnathan could not reply as his eyes slowly closed.

CHAPTER 4

Location: Space

Time: May 9, 1999

Twenty-two years after its launch, *Voyager 1*, now on its extended mission and 8,877.14 million kilometers from Earth, continues to transmit data.

29 122 02:00:38 32 40 SET 10 DEGREE SET DSC-40 2V

30 122 04:12:45 31 10RISE 10 DEGREE RISE E7 E7 E7 E7 E7 E7 E7

31 122 05:15:00 31 15 AOS OPCH ACE AOS DSS-15 PASS-6466 (D/L ONLY) 1DP

Hidden in the data stream, an anomaly went unnoticed. It was a signal from an unknown source.

CHAPTER 5

Location: Jacksonville, FL

Time: May 9, 1999

Suddenly, the upside-down car's radio turned on, tuning itself to a channel of its choice. "We're here tonight with Dr. Henry Moore, whose latest book gives us details about the origins of the Bible. Dr. Moore, please tell us about your new book," the announcer said.

"You see, history reveals to us that the New Testament was written over time and that books were slowly and gradually accepted into canon. The gospels were written by the apostles and their close friends." Dr. Moore's distinguished Southern accent was charming. He continued, and the host occasionally commented.

"Then there were the epistles?" the host asked.

"Yes," Dr. Moore continued, "the epistles addressed the needs of the churches. Basically, they were letters from church founders to communicate with their congregation from wherever they were in the world at the time."

"Were there any false gospels?" The announcer read a question from a listener.

"Many false gospels and epistles are believed to have been written, as in the case of the Gospel of Judas. This gospel was

designed to challenge what is believed about Judas and his betrayal of Jesus," Dr. Moore replied.

The announcer followed up by asking, "How would you prove the authenticity of a book?"

"Well, there was careful, deliberate, and prayerful examination. The real books and letters were received by the church as inspired writings of the apostles and others. As in my book examines, this is how the New Testament canon came to exist," the doctor concluded.

"When we come back from break, we'll ask the doctor about 'homologoumena' books and the—" The radio went dead again as sparks appeared from under the hood of the car.

The sound of an engine, squeaking brakes, a car door opening, and a police radio filled the air. The early morning darkness was now illuminated by flashing blue-and-red lights.

CHAPTER 6

Location: Ephesus

Time: Approximately AD 100

"I...I do not understand." Ziya's voice all but trembled. "Why must you tell me? Would it not be more appropriate to speak to a priest about such a matter?"

"The time will come for priests to know, young Ziya. But that time is not now." The old man's voice was raspy and dry, but he made his intentions clear.

This wasn't the answer Ziya was expecting. "Why would the priest be excluded? Why the secrecy? But most of all, why me?" he thought.

"Do not worry, Ziya. I know you have questions, but all will soon be made clear. For now, you must listen carefully and write down what you hear." John paused and looked up at the ceiling. "No man knows the day or the hour that his time will come to an end, but I do know that I have this final task before me—just as you, Ziya, have a task before you. It is not by chance that you are here today, my friend, but by God's divine plan. You were chosen by God to protect what I must tell you until the time is right for the world to know of it." The old man paused again to steady himself.

Ziya did not know what to say. Instead he took a deep breath and began to listen as John began to speak.

"There is an evil not born of this world and not of this time. It was created to stop the light, for the light is its enemy. It was created to devour this world, to cause chaos as it spreads its darkness across the sky. It intends to circumvent the second coming of our Savior. Its name is the Destroyer, and it is the son of Satan." John looked up to see Ziya looking back at him intently. "Ah, I see I have your attention, young Ziya. Do not fear, my friend. There is one who will be chosen."

"Chosen?" Ziya repeated.

John's eyes met Ziya's gaze. "Chosen to stand for all mankind."

CHAPTER 7

Location: Jacksonville, FL

Time: May 9, 1999

"Nice and quiet tonight, isn't it, Doc?" Jones had been the night maintenance supervisor for about seven years. He liked to stop by and say hi to the ER staff at least once a night. They were usually very busy but not tonight. Jones, whom everyone called Jonsie, was a slightly balding, gray-haired, middle-aged African American man. He always had cheer in his voice and a smile on his face. You could count on him to have something positive to say. His wife called him Smiley, but no one at the hospital knew this somewhat private fact. Along with his smile, he owned an unforgettable laugh. Sometimes his coworkers went out of their way to tell him a good joke so that they could see his belly jiggle like Santa's.

"Sure is, Jonsie," Dr. Conner replied. "Let's hope it stays that way. I need the break after the last few nights."

"I hear that," Lilly added. She had been working in the ER for the last six months. "I haven't had a chance to catch up on my magazines in days. It's like the world has been going crazy or something."

The doctor gave her a "You shouldn't be reading your magazines while you're on the clock" look. Dr. Conner was a stickler for his employees doing what they were paid to do. He

was in his late thirties and had learned over the years that it's just better to do it the right way. He was probably one of the more professional doctors on staff. He always wore a tie unless he was in scrubs. His wife liked that he wore ties because it made it easy for her to pick out a gift for him on special occasions.

"I meant medical journals," Lilly added with a cheerleader's smile. "OK," she gave in, "I'll get to work."

Dr. Conner returned the smile and went back to what he had been doing before Jonsie stopped by.

"I guess I need to listen to what my pastor said in church the other day anyway," Lilly said as she stood up.

"And what was that?" Jonsie turned and asked. He had heard that her pastor was a good preacher and Jonsie was always ready to talk about Church.

"He said that it's like stealing from your employer if you aren't doing your job or if you take things from work. You know, stuff like that." Lilly picked up her clipboard and pen.

"Yeah, I know what you mean. I bet he preached it too. Probably brought the house down." Jonsie smiled big and shook his head in joy. "Did you shout, girl?"

"Oh, you know I got my shout on!" Lilly said while giving a slight demonstration. "Hey!"

Dr. Conner smiled slightly and shook his head. He was always intrigued listening to Lilly talk about shouting in church. He was from a Catholic family and had attended a Catholic church while growing up. He worked most weekends now, and he and his

wife never really went to church other than on Easter and Christmas and to attend friends' weddings. He had always wondered what it would be like to go to a church where they danced and clapped and stomped their feet. "Maybe one day," he thought.

It had been a slow and uneventful night at St. James Hospital until now. But that was about to change. The lights on the call box lit up like a flare. Two ambulances were called to report to the site of a hit and run. Both victims had substantial injuries, and one appeared to be in labor.

"So much for the peaceful and relaxing night," Jonsie said.

"I guess I'll have to catch up on my...medical journals...some other night," Lilly said. Then she smiled, got up from her chair, and headed down the hallway to start prepping the ER. "And I was just getting into it," she said as she disappeared down the empty corridor.

As the paramedics rushed Samantha through the emergency doors of the hospital, another ambulance was only seconds behind. "We're losing her!" one of the paramedics yelled to the doctor who met them there. "We haven't been able to stabilize her, and the fetal heartbeat is faint."

"Get her in to OR one, stat!" Doctor Levi shouted orders to the ever-increasing number of hospital staff members that now surrounded Samantha's gurney. "We need to deliver this baby right now. Move, everyone. Move!"

Although no one had the time to think about it, they each felt an overwhelming sensation of confidence. As if they knew

exactly what to do, exactly where to be, and exactly how urgent the situation was. As if a presence had entered the room and organized all of their thoughts for them. Clarity of mind and a sense of purpose filled the room.

The hospital staff quickly moved Samantha into the operating room, connected the monitors, and started working to save her life and the life of the child she was carrying. They moved precisely and in sync. Dr. Levi took the lead. He issued orders to his staff, and the staff members responded as if they knew what he was going to say before he said it; everyone correctly anticipating his every instruction.

The light was shining into Samantha's eyes as she slipped in and out of consciousness. "John..." she mumbled from under the mask over her mouth. A tear fell from the corner of her eye as she faded out again. There was no pain even though her injuries were extensive. There was only a voice in her head telling her that all would be OK.

"Peace," the voice said, "Peace, be still." She heard the voice again, as if it were calming a raging river in a violent storm.

With a loud crash, the emergency room doors opened again. Two paramedics escorted a gurney. On it lay Johnathan Sette, unconscious but alive, even if barely so. The nurses, paramedics, and other ER personnel rolled him into operating room two and began working on his almost dormant body. Dr. Conner and his team went to work attempting to stabilize their patient.

Samantha took a turn for the worse. "Oh, God, she's flatlining," yelled a nurse monitoring the EKG.

"We can't defibrillate her. Start compressions now!" the doctor yelled back.

"We have to get the baby out now!" a second doctor replied. "If we start a C-section now, it could—"

Dr. Levi interrupted to say, "If we don't, we'll lose them both! Do it now! Get that baby out."

While Doctor Levi attempted to stabilize Samantha, his counterpart started a C-section.

"We're losing her," called a voice.

"Keep the compressions going," the doctor replied.

In an instant, the entire world seemed to pause in silence. The lightning did not share its stage with the sound of thunder, the wind fell silent, the oceans became calm, and the rain came to an end. "Peace..." Samantha heard the voice again. It was clearer now. The lights dimmed for a split second, and the ground seemed to tremble. But only Samantha noticed that at the instant the ground trembled, seven angels filled the room and the room filled with light.

Then it came, the loud and very distinct sound of a baby taking its first breath in and letting it out with the beauty of a newborn cry.

As the hearts of Dr. Hamed, who was holding the baby, and his team filled with joy at the sight of a beautiful baby child, healthy and strong, the hearts of Dr. Levi and the two others

fighting for Samantha's life filled with sadness as the last breath of air escaped from her lungs. But they had accomplished their mission of keeping her alive so the baby would have a fighting chance. God blessed Dr. Levi and his team immediately as Dr. Hamed shared the joy of life with his colleagues and held the baby up for everyone to see.

Dr. Levi smiled. "Thank God," he said, and then repeated it two more times.

History would record that on this night, as the baby took its first breath, its mother took her last. Exhaling for the last time, Samantha's mission on earth was over. Her eyes, which had opened to witness the birth of her child, now fell closed for the very last time. A steady tone now radiated from the machine keeping track of her heartbeat.

No one realized it for some time, but there was only one birth and one death on this day in the entire world.

CHAPTER 8

Location: Jacksonville, FL

Time: May 9, 1999

"Nana, will the baby be there already?" Rebecca asked before taking another sip from the straw in her cup.

"We will see," replied Nana, a thirty-year-old woman of Turkish descent, whose real name was Nursen. Because Nursen was a little hard for a five-year-old girl and two three-year-old boys to say, everyone just called her Nana. She had been the family's nanny since the twins were born. She was a true member of the family. Her room was right next to the children's, and she took care of all their needs.

"Why did Mommy and Daddy go to the hospital without me?" asked Rebecca, who was always full of curiosity. "Don't they know I want the baby to see me first, before it sees anyone else?" Rebecca was very proud of being the oldest child and wanted the baby to be fully informed about the order of things. "How will the baby know that I'm the oldest?"

Nana smiled. "I am sure the baby will figure it out, Rebecca, just like Jacob and Matthew did."

Rebecca seemed pleased with this answer.

"Oh my." Nana said quietly as she noticed several police cars and fire engines ahead with their lights flashing.

Simultaneously, the twins seemed to come alive. "Nana, look at the lights!" Matthew was very excited.

"Cool," Jacob added.

But Nana had a bad feeling about it. As she slowly approached the accident scene, her worst fears were confirmed. She recognized the features of the mutilated car as that of her employer, Johnathan Sette. Nana quickly pulled the minivan to the curb and stopped. She turned to the children and said, "Stay in your seats and keep your seat belts on. I have to talk to the police officer." The children nodded and Nana got out of the car.

"Officer, Officer, please!" Nana yelled.

"Lady, you can't park there!" the officer told her.

"That car...dear God..." She tried to gather her words.

"That car belongs to my employer. I have his children with me. Please tell me what is happening."

The first officer immediately called over the officer in charge, who explained to Nana that the passengers had been taken to the hospital a few miles away. He also explained that he did not have any information on their status. Nana turned and ran to the van.

"Wait, Lady!" The first officer she had spoken to hurried after her.

Nana turned to see what he wanted, and her face looked panicked.

"Follow me. I'll get you there as fast as possible," the officer said.

Nana hurried to the van and jumped in. She fumbled with her keys and almost dropped them on the floor of the van. "Breathe...just breathe," she said quietly. She managed to start the van and put it in gear. The officer pulled out in front of her and turned on his siren.

The twins found this very exciting. They were chasing a police car, an unheard of pleasure. "You can catch him, Nana," Matthew said.

Matthew and Jacob were mature for their age, as was Rebecca. Nana had taught them to read before they could walk. Even walking came early for each of them. The twins were about to turn four, and Rebecca, who seemed seven, would soon be turning six. Nana's thoughts were on the children as she pursued the police car.

The hospital was only two miles away. As they approached the hospital, Rebecca could hear Nana praying. "Nana, why were all the police there?"

Nana could barely answer. "There was an accident, sweetheart."

A bolt of lightning lit up the sky, but in her state of mind, Nana didn't notice that the thunder never followed.

Before Nana could say anything else, Rebecca put her hands together and started to pray for the people in the accident. "Dear God, it's me, Rebecca, again. Please help the people that were in the accident. Please make sure that they are OK. And if anyone dies, please let them be safe with you, in heaven. I love you. In Jesus's name I pray. Amen!"

"Amen!" Matthew joined in.

"Amen!" added Jacob.

Nana was speechless. It was all she could do to just drive. She followed the police escort into the hospital parking lot. She gathered the children and followed the officer into the emergency room. "Hurry, children," she said as she held the twins' hands.

"Hurry, guys, we don't want to miss the baby," Rebecca said, turning back to look at the boys. Rebecca could always be found in front, at least whenever it involved getting to do something first.

Once inside the emergency entrance, Nana ushered the children into the emergency area waiting room. No one else was there, so it was easy for Rebecca to choose a seat for herself and of course for the boys. "Matthew, you sit here. Jacob, you sit there," she said in an authoritative, yet polite, way. The boys followed her instructions to the letter.

"Stay right here and don't move. Do you understand me, children?" Nana said, digging through her purse.

"Yes, Nana," they replied.

The officer had gone to find a staff member who could give Nana some information. Nana was outside the waiting room, pacing back and forth quickly as she dialed her phone.

CHAPTER 9

Location: Jacksonville, FL

Time: May 9, 1999

"Hello," mumbled a groggy voice in the darkness. The voice on the other end of the phone was frantic. "Slow down, slow down," he said, but the woman was terrified. "Nana, is that you?" he asked as he sat up on the side of his bed.

"Yes, yes, please, you have to come now. There has been a car accident. It is bad. Mr. and Mrs. Sette—I think they were hurt..." There were tears in her voice as she pleaded. "Please hurry."

"My God, where are you?" the man asked as he jumped out of his bed and started to scurry around for his pants.

"St. James Hospital, in the emergency room."

"I'm on my way," he replied and hung up.

CHAPTER 10

Location: Jacksonville, FL

Time: May 9, 1999

After a while, the officer returned with a man wearing a doctor's coat. "Miss, this is Dr. Levi. He's the emergency room doctor, so I'm gonna leave you in his hands. You can get in touch with me later if you need to." The officer handed Nana his card and left. As he exited, he realized that the rain had stopped.

"Doctor, Mrs. and Mr. Sette..." The doctor looked down at the floor. "Please, tell me: how are they?"

Dr. Levi had worked in this emergency room for three years, and he had seen unspeakable things in his time there. But no amount of time or training can really prepare a person for these situations. It was the part of his job that he liked the least. He glanced at the waiting room and saw three children sitting quietly. The young girl was looking at him. She smiled and then waved. It was apparent to him that she was not aware of the tragedy that had just unfolded.

"I'm sorry...Mrs. Sette's injuries were too extensive. She died a short time ago," the doctor said, looking Nana in the eye.

"No—" Nana's eyes were already tearing up, and now her fears were confirmed.

"Mr. Sette has been stabilized but is not out of danger yet," Dr. Levi added. He had wanted to say something, anything

more positive than that; but the truth was, the situation wasn't good.

"Dear God! What about..." She drew in a breath. "What about the baby?" Nana tried to hold it together.

"The baby is alive and well." The doctor put his hand on Nana's shoulder. "She's in excellent condition and being moved to the nursery as we speak."

Nana looked up at the doctor. "What will I tell the children?" she asked as tears streamed down her face.

The doctor looked back to the waiting room. "Oh no," he said, looking worried. As he stepped around Nana, he asked, "Where did the little girl go?"

Nana turned quickly. "Rebecca! Rebecca!" She ran back into the waiting room. "Boys, where did Rebecca go?"

"Are you crying, Nana?" Jacob asked.

"It's OK, Jacob. Tell me: where did Rebecca go?" she asked as she knelt beside him.

The doctor picked up his radio and called to the nurses' station. "Nurse Brown, there is a little girl wandering around the floor. Please send someone to find her. The girl's name is Rebecca." He turned to Nana and said, "Don't worry. We'll find her."

"You don't think she heard what you said, do you?" Nana asked.

"No, I'm sure she's just fine. Don't worry. We'll find her," he repeated as he turned and left the waiting room.

CHAPTER 11

Location: Jacksonville, FL

Time: May 9, 1999

"Can I help you, sir?" The nurse on the night shift was busy painting her nails. She eventually looked up to see who she was talking to. When she did, she was pleasantly surprised. A tall, handsome man stood before her, his hair damp and a little scruffy and it was obvious that he had not shaved. But it was still very early in the morning. "And at least he wasn't bleeding, coughing, or otherwise dying," she thought. He looked to be of mixed nationalities, but she couldn't quite place which.

She was right, of course. His mother was a fair-skinned African American woman who lived near Washington, DC, and his father was from Panama. They had met during a visit to Daytona Beach, Florida, on a college spring break. He had grown up in Clinton, Maryland, and as a result of this, he had no trace of his father's accent. Although, when he needed to, he could easily foster one.

"Yes, I'm looking for two emergency room patients, Mr. and Mrs. Sette," the man said.

The nurse was even more pleased. "A manly voice," she thought. "Are you family?" she asked. "Because I can only give information to immediate family." She smiled and waved her hand to dry her nails.

The man, trying not to appear frustrated, reached into his jacket pocket, grabbed his identification, and placed it on the desk. The nurse's eyes lit up, and her attitude changed to be more serious. "Sorry, Officer...Martinez. Let me check. Sette, was it?"

"Yes, and that's agent, not officer," he said.

The nurse checked her computer and said, "They're in trauma one and two. Just go through those doors and take a right, then go all the way down the long hallway to the other side of the hospital. See the nurses at the emergency room desk. They can give you more information."

Agent Martinez hurried through the doors.

The nurse watched as the agent disappeared. "Wow, FBI." She leaned forward for another look as the doors closed. "And he's cute too!"

CHAPTER 12

Location: St. James Hospital, Jacksonville, FL

Time: May 9, 1999

Rebecca walked slowly down the empty passageway, as if she were following someone. She turned right, then left, and then left again. Finally, she stopped. "OK, I will," she said. She stood at the entrance to the nursery, where a nurse placed a baby into a tiny bassinet.

The pale green-and-white striped blanket was beginning to unravel. The nurse took the blanket off and replaced it with a pretty pink one. Rebecca noticed a tiny birthmark on the baby's shoulder.

"Aren't you a little cutie pie," the nurse whispered to the child. She continued wrapping the baby and placed her back into the bassinet. As she turned around, she noticed a pair of eyes struggling to see into the window. It was Rebecca, standing on her tippy toes, trying to see her new baby sister. The nurse walked over to the window. "Hi there," she said to Rebecca. "I bet you're the little cutie that everyone's looking for." She walked to the door and opened it. "What's your name, little one?"

"Rebecca," she answered with a smile.

"I thought so," the nurse replied. "My name's Nurse Jenny. I'd better call someone and let them know where you are."

Rebecca smiled and asked, "Can I see my sister now, Nurse Jenny? Please?"

Nurse Jenny smiled and grabbed Rebecca's hand. "How about I lift you up so you can see her through the window?"

Rebecca nodded in agreement and held up her arms.

"I think she looks like Mommy," Rebecca said.

The statement caught Nurse Jenny off guard. She knew that Rebecca's mother had died in the operating room. "Come on, cutie. Let's let everyone know you're OK. You can come back later and visit your sister."

"Oh...OK," said Rebecca.

Nurse Jenny motioned to another nurse, who was filling out some papers and listening to her portable cassette player. The nurse reluctantly removed an earphone so that she could hear Nurse Jenny. "I'll be right back. I have to take Rebecca to the ER waiting room." The nurse smiled and went back to what she was doing.

As Nurse Jenny and Rebecca turned the corner, they almost ran into a tall man in a white lab coat. "Excuse me," he said, hiding his accent. But Nurse Jenny and Rebecca didn't notice. They were on their way to the ER, holding hands and smiling.

CHAPTER 13

Location: St. James Hospital, Jacksonville, FL

Time: May 9, 1999

"I'm looking for two accident victims, Mr. and Mrs. Sette." Agent Martinez took out his badge and showed it to the ER nurse.

"I'll get the doctor right away," the nurse replied with a sense of urgency. She picked up the phone and paged the doctor over the loudspeaker. "Dr. Levi to the desk, please. Dr. Levi to the emergency room desk."

"Can you tell me about their condition?" Martinez asked.

"The doctor will be here in just a second to help you," said the nurse.

A moment later, the doctor arrived at the desk. "Yes, Shanice?"

"This gentleman is with the FBI, and he's asking about the accident victims," Shanice answered.

Dr. Levi turned to Agent Martinez. "How can I help you?"

"I need to know the status of Mr. and Mrs. Sette." Martinez flashed his badge at the doctor.

"What does the FBI have to do with a hit-and-run?" Dr. Levi asked.

"Johnathan Sette is my partner," Martinez replied.

Just then, a call came over the intercom at the emergency desk. "Shanice, this is Jenny. You'll never guess who I found. She says her name is Rebecca. I'm bringing her to the ER."

There was a pause, and then Shanice answered, "Roger that. I'll let everyone know."

The doctor sighed in relief.

"Rebecca" Martinez thought. He was becoming impatient. "Doc..." he said.

The doctor hesitated and then said, "Mr. Sette is in a coma, but he is stable."

"That's good news," Martinez replied. He felt a weight lift off of his chest. "And what about Samantha, uh, Mrs. Sette?"

The doctor paused again. Martinez noticed the doctor's voice dropped a little. "She...died on the operating table. Her injuries were too extensive, and we couldn't save her."

"Oh God." Martinez felt his heart sink. He had been partners with Johnathan for five years now. Samantha was like family. Suddenly, he tensed up. "The baby?" he asked.

"The baby is fine. We were able to deliver her before Mrs. Sette died. The baby is in the nursery. I suppose you'll want to see the nanny?" Dr. Levi asked.

"Yes, I would." Rick tried to hide the sadness in his voice. This was his partner, his friend, his family they were talking about.

The doctor nodded and led Agent Martinez down the corridor to the emergency area waiting room, where Nana was still pacing back and forth.

The boys jumped out of their seats and ran yelling, "Uncle Rick! Uncle Rick!" Each boy ran as fast as he could and jumped onto Uncle Rick's legs, just as they had done a thousand times before. He hugged both of them more intensely than in the past. "These two beautiful children are too young to understand what is going on," he thought. And then he looked up at Nana.

Nana was beside herself, shaking. She stared at the doctor. "Have you found—?"

Dr. Levi interrupted her. "A nurse is bringing her down right now. She's just fine."

"Oh, thank God. Thank God!" Nana cried out as she broke into tears. The sight of Agent Martinez allowed her to breathe more easily, and that breath unlocked a flood of emotions that she had held in since she saw the distorted remains of what used to be her employer's car.

"It's OK, Nana." Agent Martinez placed his arms around Nana to calm her down. As he held back his own tears, he ushered Nana over to a chair. "Here, sit down."

Nana took a seat. Just as she did, Nurse Jenny and Rebecca entered the room. Nana jumped out of her chair, grabbed Rebecca in her arms, and held her tight. "Rebecca...where did you go? I was so worried about you."

"I went with the angel to see the baby," Rebecca said.

CHAPTER 14

Location: St. James Hospital, Jacksonville, FL

Time: May 9, 1999

"Peacefully sleeping in your bassinet," the man in the white coat thought. "Just where I was told you would be." Behind him, the sound of music came from the headphones that fell off when the assistant nurse collapsed. The man in the lab coat had rendered her unconscious. "No time to waste," he thought. He picked up the baby and made his way through the halls to a rear hospital exit. As unnoticed as he had entered the hospital, he was now gone.

Nurse Jenny arrived back at the nursery a few minutes later. "How's that little cutie doing?" she asked as she opened the door. But when she stepped into the room, she was startled by what she saw. "Are you OK, Jodie?" She hurried over and kneeled down to check the young lady. Jodie didn't move. Nurse Jenny checked her colleague's pulse; it was strong, but Jodie wasn't moving. She grabbed her walkie-talkie and started to call for help. "Medical emergency in the nursery. Repeat: I need assistance in the—" Nurse Jenny had just noticed that there was a baby missing. "Oh my God! The baby." Nurse Jenny's voice became frantic. "Someone, help! A baby is missing, and Jodie is unconscious. Someone, please help!"

In the emergency room, Agent Martinez was comforting Nana and waiting for the doctor to return with information on Johnathan's status.

Two security guards ran by, followed by another.

"Nana, I'll be right back," Rick said.

As Rick turned the corner, Dr. Levi was coming toward him.

"Doc, what's going on?" Rick asked.

"Agent Martinez, we may need your help. There's an unconscious employee in the nursery, and a baby is missing."

"A baby—" Agent Martinez stopped in mid-sentence. He grabbed the doctor's coat. "Which way to the nursery, Doc?"

"Follow me," replied Dr. Levi.

As Rick turned around, he saw Nana standing a few feet behind him. Her eyes were like glass. She had heard everything. "Nana, don't worry. Just stay here with Rebecca and the twins. I'll be back soon," he said before he turned and ran to follow the doctor.

When they reached the nursery, Rick's fears were confirmed. The missing baby was that of his longtime partner. "How could this get any worse?" he said. He stood silent taking it all in. "How could this get any worse?" he thought. "What are the chances of this being random?" He took out his phone and used his speed dial. Within seconds, someone answered. "This is Agent Rick Martinez. I need every available agent at the emergency room of St. James Hospital right now. We have an agent down

and a missing child. I have the scene." He paused as the party on the other end of the line spoke. Then he replied, "That's right—we have an agent down. Agent Johnathan Sette is down..."

Behind him, Dr. Levi, Nurse Jenny, and the security guards were silent as Rick's presence captivated the room.

Rick noticed a blinking red light coming from the corner of the ceiling. "Call the Jacksonville sheriff's office and have them set up roadblocks. Tell them to coordinate with Agent Hanson. I'll call you back with a description of who you're looking for. For right now, stop and detain anyone with an infant and everyone who looks suspicious. Send two agents to an accident scene at the corner of Belfort Road and JTB. Have the local PD secure that scene. Don't let them touch anything else. If they already have, find out what they touched and secure the vehicles. Call me back when you have something." Agent Martinez hung up the phone and turned his attention to the doctor. "Doc, have your security team report to the operating room where Agent Sette is located. No one goes in or gets out without checking with me first. And where does that get recorded?" he said as he pointed to the security camera.

"Um—they're tied to the security station on the first floor; I assume that's where they record," the doctor replied, and one of the security guards confirmed this with a nod.

"How's your nurse, Doc?" Martinez said realizing that the doctor was looking a little stressed.

"She'll be fine, I think. We found a rag with chloroform on it," he said.

"Who would do something like this?" Nurse Jenny asked.

Martinez didn't answer her. He simply said, "I'll want to talk to her soon. Let me know when she wakes up Doc." Martinez paused and shook his head. "I have to go tell Nana the news."

As he turned to leave the room, an officer from the Jacksonville sheriff's office arrived. Martinez identified himself as the agent in charge and asked him to secure the scene. "No one touches anything until the FBI crime scene unit arrives. I'll be in the ER waiting room. Contact me when they arrive."

He made his way to the emergency room, but he wasn't looking forward to the task before him. "Nana won't be able to handle this," he thought. "Why is this happening? The Settes are good people," he said to himself. But Rick was sure it was not coincidence; he was upset with himself for not seeing it earlier. He knew that Johnathan had made only one enemy in his career. This had to be the work of the Syndicate.

The walk to the waiting room seemed never ending. "Lord, take this task from me," he said, sighing. But in his heart he knew that he was the only one for the task and that God had placed this task on him for just that reason. Nana would never trust anyone outside the family. She had proven that many times before. Thankfully, to her, he was family.

As Rick entered the waiting room, his eyes met Nana's. He wanted to smile, but he couldn't. His eyes gave the story away. She sank into the waiting room chair, placed her hands over her face, and began to cry again.

"Agent Martinez," said a voice from behind him. He held his hand up, motioning to the arriving FBI agents to hold on for just a minute.

"Nana, I'm sorry. I'll do everything in my power to get her back. Right now, I need you to go with one of my agents. You and the children need to be in a safe place." Martinez put his hand on her shoulder and knelt down in front of her. "I need you to be strong and watch out for Rebecca and the twins. Right now, I have to organize this search. OK?"

Nana nodded in agreement. The twins sat respectfully, with tears in their eyes, and Rebecca held on to Nana's arm. Nana had mustered everything she had and sat the children down, explaining to them that their father was hurt and was asleep and would wake up soon. She also explained that their mother, the light of their eyes, had gone to be with God and that He would now take care of her. When she said it, Rebecca added that she would have wings and be dressed in a beautiful white gown. Nana had done her best for the children. She had convinced herself to be strong and she prayed that God would see her through it. But the situation had just gotten worse. She lifted her head and, while looking into Rick's eyes, found strength. His expression reminded her that God was with her, always.

Martinez turned to the agents behind him. "Agent Jameson, this is Agent Sette's nanny and his children. I want you to take them to this address. Have the sheriff's office put two cars on the place at all times. And you stay in the house at all times. I don't want them out of your sight. Am I clear?"

"Yes, sir." Jameson replied.

Martinez wrote the address of his partner's house on a piece of paper and handed it to the agent. "Never out of your sight, OK?" he repeated, looking Jameson in the eyes.

Agent Jameson nodded. "Yes, sir."

Rick hugged the twins and then Rebecca. As he hugged Rebecca, she whispered, "The angel said it would be OK. She said that Elizabeth would go away for a while but that when it was time, we would see her again. She said that God will watch over her. So don't worry, Uncle Rick. Everything will be OK." Then she let go and went back to holding Nana's arm.

Rick stood up. He didn't really know how to reply, so he just smiled at her. "Watch out for your brothers, OK?"

She smiled and replied, "Yes, sir."

Then Agent Martinez turned to the remaining agents, who were steadily arriving as he spoke with Nana. He went to work investigating the crime scene, never turning back.

CHAPTER 15

Location: Ephesus

Time: Approximately AD 100

John coughed so hard that it caused him to double over.

"Are you OK?" Ziya asked as he set his writing tools down. Ziya knew his mentor was in great discomfort but was not at all surprised that his mentor was in good spirits.

"I am fine. This too will pass," the apostle said as he laid his head back again.

"Maybe you should rest?" Ziya asked.

"No, there is still much to be said," replied John. "Do not worry, Ziya. All is well. All is well."

Ziya nodded and prepared himself to listen. He was happy that his mentor did not want to stop because he was eager to hear more of the prophecy.

"Where was I?" John asked.

"The child," Ziya said. "The Destroyer will send his demons to destroy the child." He didn't mean to sound anxious, but he was.

"Ah, yes. You see, it is the only way that the Destroyer can have a chance at success. He will attempt to destroy the chosen one before the chosen one can stand in battle against him," John said.

"But to attack a child—what kind of evil is this Destroyer?" Ziya said in disgust.

"Evil is evil, young Ziya. It respects nothing. Have I not taught you this?" John scolded his student.

"I only meant to say that it was cowardly," Ziya responded.

"Satan will try everything he can to manipulate you. Do not be deceived, do not compromise, do not be blinded by his tricks, and do not become tied up by unrepentance. Stay in the Spirit. Pray without ceasing. And hide God's word in your heart." John had repeated these words to Ziya many times. He was trying to tell him that by reacting to the prophecy that he was writing down, he might open up doors that would allow the enemy into his mind.

"Thank you," was all that Ziya said in reply. John had caused Ziya to focus. He was now ready to write down more of the story that the apostle was revealing.

CHAPTER 16

Location: Jacksonville, FL

Time: May 29, 1999

"So, what's with the hair?" Samantha asked jokingly. She always had a way of getting her serious questions across in a joking kind of way. The fact was she had wanted Johnathan's hair to be cut weeks earlier. "When are you going to cut it? You know I think you're cute when your hair is short."

"So I'm not cute when my hair is long?" Johnathan cunningly replied. He was proud of himself for coming up with such a Sam-like reply.

"I didn't say that. You know I'll take you any way I can get you." She smiled in the most innocent way possible and then sat down on the bed. "Now, when did you say you were getting your hair cut?" If anything, Sam was persistent.

"The day after the baby's born," Johnathan replied, and then he waited for her to say more. He knew Sam wouldn't like that answer.

"What? I don't think so, Mister." Johnathan was right. She didn't like that answer. "I want my handsome, clean-cut FBI agent back. I'll call and make you an appointment for Wednesday." Sam was also efficient.

"I can't, Sam," he replied.

"Well then, Thursday."

"You don't understand," Johnathan said, interrupting her planning. "I can't cut my hair."

Sam looked confused. When she got upset, her dimples started to show. "Why?"

"Because, Sam..." Johnathan turned and looked around for something in the room. There was a beeping noise coming from somewhere, but he couldn't see it.

"Why, John?" she persisted.

"Because I made a promise to God."

The statement caught her off guard. Sam looked at Johnathan, waiting for an explanation. In the rare times that she was speechless, Johnathan thought his wife looked the most beautiful. It was like there was a ray of light from heaven acting as a personal spotlight, making her radiant, soft, and beautiful.

"When you told me that you were pregnant, I promised God that I wouldn't cut the top of my hair until the baby was born," Johnathan reluctantly told her.

Samantha tried not to look shocked, surprised, or suspicious. She was also trying not to laugh. So she simply said the only intelligent thing she could think of. "What?"

There it was again, a beeping sound. Johnathan looked around but couldn't pinpoint where it was coming from. "Did you hear that?"

"Oh no, Mister," she said. "Explain yourself!" she demanded gently.

"Well...you have to carry the baby for nine months. I won't always be here because of my job. I wanted something to remind me every day that you were carrying extra weight for our family. So, I promised God that I would wait to cut my hair until the baby was born. By feeling the extra weight on my head, I would always remember to be extra nice, extra patient, and extra loving to you." He realized that his statement was a long one and hoped that he had said something comprehensible.

"Aw, you are so sweet." Sam got off of the bed and gave Johnathan a big hug. "You're gonna make me cry."

Before Johnathan replied, he noticed that the spot on the bed where Sam had been sitting was stained red. "Honey, are you OK?" He looked at his hand, and there was blood on him too. The beeping was getting louder, and his chest, head, and arms hurt. "Oh my God, Sam, are you—" As he stepped back to look at her, the side of her face was covered with blood.

"John..." She was having trouble breathing, and there was blood on her hand. She reached out for her husband. "John, I love you."

"No!" Johnathan screamed at the top of his lungs and sat up in his hospital bed for the first time since he had been brought to the ER weeks before. When he sat up the wires that connected him to the machine next to him tore away. An alarm sounded with a loud, steady tone. Johnathan was disoriented. "What's happening?" he wondered as he struggled to stay upright.

"Code blue, room two oh nine. Code blue, room two oh nine!" announced a voice over the intercom.

Johnathan's head was pounding. He tried to lift his hand to his head, only to discover that his left arm was in a cast. "Where am I?" he called out.

Only a few seconds passed before a flurry of people in white coats and blue scrubs entered the room in a panic. They were surprised to see Johnathan sitting up, when only hours before, he had showed no hope of regaining consciousness.

"Where am I?" he asked again. "Who are you people?"

"Everything is OK, Mr. Sette," one of the nurses told him. "You're OK. You are at St. James Hospital."

"What, why am I...?" Johnathan's mind was grasping for pieces. "Where is my wife, Samantha? She's having a baby. Where is she?" he demanded.

"We need you to lay down, Mr. Sette," the nurse said as the medical team stood in amazement. Everyone on the hospital's staff knew the entire story of the events surrounding Johnathan, his wife, and his missing baby. But no one wanted to be the one to tell him. "Just lay back, sir. The doctor will be here in a minute."

"No! What happened? Where is my wife?" Johnathan demanded. "Tell me where she is!"

"Mr. Sette," said the doctor as he walked into the room. "I'm Dr. Conner, and I will tell you everything you want to know. But please, try to lay back. Your injuries were quite extensive. We

don't want you to tear any of your stitches. It took us a long time to patch you up, and I don't want to have to do it again."

Johnathan did as the doctor said. The pain in his side was too much for him to sit up for much longer anyway. "Where is my wife?" he asked again.

"There was an accident," the doctor explained. "You and your wife were hit by a truck on your way here."

Johnathan looked confused. He didn't remember an accident.

The doctor's voice lowered. "I'm sorry, but your wife did not survive the accident."

Johnathan's mind was racing. "How could this be?" he thought. But the only words that came out of his mouth were, "Dear God." He closed his eyes. The tears were too hard to hold back. His hand over his face, he repeated, "Dear God."

"I'm sorry for your loss, Mr. Sette," the doctor said softly. "There's more. We were able to save the baby."

Johnathan opened his eyes, and though he could not speak because of the pain in his heart, the overwhelming joy of hearing that the baby had survived, somehow allowed him to say one thing. "Thank you, Jesus." He exhaled and turned his head toward the window and away from the doctor.

Not knowing if it was the right thing to do, Doctor Conner hesitated to tell Johnathan the entire story. But he decided that if it were him, he would want to know the whole story. "Mr. Sette, there's a little more I have to tell you."

"What?" Johnathan mumbled, "What more could there be?"

As the doctor opened his mouth to answer, he was interrupted by a voice from behind him.

"I'll handle this one, Doc," Agent Martinez said. "Thanks for your help. You can go now."

The doctor nodded, acknowledging Agent Martinez, and then he and the nurses quickly left the room. Rick closed the door.

"You had me worried there, Partner. I thought I was going to have to break in someone new." Johnathan didn't reply. He just stared at the window. "I'm glad you're awake," Rick continued. "I know some children that would love to see you."

"Do they know?" Johnathan asked quietly. "Do they know about—" He didn't want to speak the words. "Samantha?"

"Yes," answered Rick.

"Are they...?" Johnathan didn't know how to finish the question. He couldn't imagine how the children would feel. Were they sad? Were they mad at him for failing them? He decided to set his mind on positive things and not give in to despair. But it was truly hard.

Rick said, "They're fine. They are strong, good kids. Nana's doing a wonderful job with them. And you know Rebecca. She's taking care of her brothers."

"I killed their mother," Johnathan said as the tears in his eyes increased.

"Hey," interrupted Rick, "Listen, this accident wasn't your fault. Don't let the devil try to twist your mind. There's more that you need to know. Most of all you need to know that this wasn't your fault. You were set up!"

"What?" Johnathan turned to look at Agent Martinez. "What do you mean set up? By whom? Who did this, Rick?" he demanded.

"Slow down, John. Let me explain," Rick said.

Johnathan backed off and listened.

Rick explained, "You and Sam were on your way to the hospital to have the baby. You were hit by a large pickup truck. We have evidence that leads us to believe that the driver of the truck that hit you and Sam was waiting for you. When police arrived at the scene, you were found outside of the car. But you couldn't have gotten there by yourself, not with the extensive injuries you had sustained. The officer who found you says that there was no one else at the scene. In fact, the officer who found you was on his way home, and it's a blessing he decided to take an alternate route to his house. Anyway, you were both brought to the hospital." Rick paused before continuing. "They operated on Sam, but her injuries were too extensive. They saved the baby. Nana called me as soon as she got here. Shortly after I arrived, a nurse in the nursery was found unconscious and...a baby was abducted from the nursery."

"A baby...?"

"Your baby, John." Rick replied. "Your baby was taken from the nursery, and we haven't found her yet."

Johnathan melted into a mass of tears. "Why is this happening?" he thought, and then he lashed out in vocalized anger. "Why aren't you out looking for her? You're wasting time here with me."

"I'm sorry, John, but Elizabeth was taken over two weeks ago."

Johnathan's eyes opened wide in disbelief. "Two weeks, what are you talking about?"

Rick answered, "John, you've been in a coma for over two weeks."

There was a long silence before Johnathan spoke. "Dear God...dear God," was all Johnathan could say. He was an experienced FBI agent, one of the best. He knew that only 10 percent of missing newborns were recovered. And the percentage after two weeks had passed was even less.

"Daddy!" The voice of a beautiful young girl sounded from a distance. "Daddy, Daddy!" Rebecca entered the room with a huge smile on her face, and she was followed by her two younger brothers and their devoted nanny.

"Hey!" Johnathan's face immediately glowed with happiness. "I am so glad to see you." Johnathan opened his arms as much as he could despite the pain from his injuries. "Come over here and let me touch you."

Rick backed out of the way and stood next to Nana. Her hair was in a bun, and she stood tall, with a smile on her face. Rick smiled. He was glad to see that Nana was finally getting back to her old self. This had truly been a hard time for all of them.

The children gathered around their father. Johnathan needed this moment. It was the perfect thing to reconnect him to his life after waking up to a horrible nightmare.

"Maybe now you can start sleeping at your house instead of at the hospital," Nana quietly said to Rick.

"How did you know?"

"The nurses here tell me everything." Nana smiled. "You are a good friend, Rick Martinez, a good friend indeed."

Nana was right, Rick and Johnathan had been through many life-or-death situations in their time as partners. Rick had saved Johnathan's life a few times, and Johnathan had saved Rick's life a few more. It seemed they were always in the thick of it. Neither man ever had to second guess the other. Rick looked up to Johnathan. It grieved him to see his partner in pain, but he knew better than to show it. There was still a job to be done—a child to be found no matter how bad the odds.

CHAPTER 17

Location: Unknown

Time: May 30, 1999

"It is done." Three men stood in the glow of a dimly lit room. Two of them wore white robes, and the third had just arrived from a long international journey. The traveler brought with him a small child and placed her upon an altar made of polished stone. The sound of seven miniature waterfalls quietly filled the room. The source of the waterfalls was a spring located in a distant corner of the room. The falls provided a steady, harmonious background noise that produced an air of calm throughout the farthest reaches of the surrounding rooms and corridors. A light radiated from above the altar where the child quietly slept, as if heaven had sent the light to protect her. Her smooth, cream-colored skin seemed to reflect the light, making her appear to glow.

The three men silently stared for several minutes until one of them broke the tranquil silence. "Look at her," one said quietly. His accent was thick, possibly Middle Eastern. "The prophecy is true; the time is drawing near."

As the second robed man assisted the traveler with his robe, the traveler spoke. "We have much to do. This is only the beginning." The traveler's accent was not nearly as thick as the other man's. It was pleasant and inviting, commanding yet reassuring. His was the voice of a charismatic leader. It was clear

that the two men were from different cultural backgrounds. "Father, will you please see to the arrangements?" he added.

The third man stepped closer to the traveler, placed his hand on the man's shoulder, and nodded. "Of course. I have already arranged a schedule for the child's care. I have chosen the caregivers and assigned twenty-four-hour guard over her. The child will be cared for every minute of every day. She is our charge, and we will not fail her." He removed his hand from the traveler's shoulder and took his hand. He pulled the traveler closer and gave him a hug. "It is good to have you back. You did an excellent job."

CHAPTER 18

Location: NASA Headquarters

Time: May 30, 1999

Jim McMillan had been at NASA since before the launch of the *Voyager 1* spacecraft in 1977. He was a jolly man who always had a smile on his face. Anyone could see that he loved his job. If you asked him, he would mumble something about the "long hours" and the "torturous clicking of switches" right before he ended with his favorite joke: "It's not like it's rocket science or something." This was followed by his signature shoulder synchronized smile. Everyone knew to expect it. They also knew to laugh.

Jim was in early every morning and left late every day. But so was everyone there, most of the time. Monitoring the telemetry and data streams from *Voyager* would be a boring job for many people. But to Jim, it was his life. He had viewed, deciphered, and catalogued every piece of data the spacecraft had sent since its launch. "If we're going to find something, I'm going to be the first to see it," he often said. That idea alone was enough to fuel him the entire workday. Besides, to Jim, it was an easy day's work. "After all it's not rocket science."

"How's it going, Jim?" His boss, Hal Ralston, walked by Jim's cubicle for a moment to check on him. "How's that data stream flowing?" Instead of his normal witty reply, Jim answered with a moan. "Jim, you OK?" Another moan came from behind

Jim's cubical. Hal rushed over and found Jim doubled over on the floor. He knelt and put his hand on Jim's shoulder. "Jim, Jim, what happened?" Hal said, but Jim did not answer. Hal tried to roll Jim over, but suddenly Hal let go and moved back.

As Hal picked up the phone to call for a medical team, he noticed the telemetry report on the desk. There was an odd discoloration. Hal assumed that this was because Jim had dropped something on the paper when he fell to the floor. "Hello, this is Hal Ralston. Get a med team down to sector echo seven right now. I've got an injured man." Hal paused. "Yes, it's Jim. I'm not sure what's wrong with him. He can't talk, and his eyes...you're not going to believe this, but his eyes are completely white. Just hurry!" Hal hung up the phone and knelt again. "Hang in there, buddy. Help is on the way." Jim was curled up on the floor, moaning something that Hal couldn't make out.

Several minutes earlier, as Jim sipped on a cup of coffee, he read through the daily *Voyager* logs, which were uneventful. The telemetry seemed the same as usual. Most people would not have bothered to read over the daily logs at all. At *Voyager's* current distance, the data was usually quite repetitive. It held no new noteworthy events for anyone other than Jim. Today, however, had not yielded the same repetitive data.

Jim, being as thorough as normal, had read over every detail of the telemetry printouts from *Voyager*. At first, the data had seemed to be a little glitchy, but then he saw the pattern and by that time it was too late. Something evil was present in the pattern. Something vile and disgusting that grabbed hold of his mind and violently lashed out at him. He could not close his eyes

or look away from it. It would not allow him to run or even scream, even though he tried with all his might to do so. The words became a black flame, and the data, the data that Jim lived for, that he came to work for every day, came to life and burned his eyes white.

Voyager had rebroadcast a data stream from a dark source. It was a source so evil that any person not already under the power of the Destroyer could not touch, speak, or read its words without suffering horrific consequences. What Jim had read loosely translated to "E-Seven must be found and destroyed." By the time Jim figured out that the line of code was extraterrestrial in origin, it was too late. The words on the page burst into black flames and removed themselves from the page. Jim was left as Hal found him. Unfortunately, Jim's sight was not all he would lose that day.

As Hal picked up the phone again, the medical team arrived. They had arrived quickly, as they had done a hundred times before in emergency drills, but Hal was so beside himself as he looked at his friend that his sense of time was off.

Daniel Hanson—Deek, as the rest of the emergency team called him—saw Jim's eyes and immediately reached for the cross around his neck. He was a deacon at his church, a true believer in Christ. He had never seen anything like this in his career as an EMT. Deek and his team of medical personnel quickly triaged Jim, loaded him up, and took him to the hospital. While loading Jim into the ambulance, Deacon Hanson prayed silently.

After the medical team was gone, Hal called Jim's wife and broke the news to her. He told her that he would meet her at the hospital as soon as he could.

As Hal arrived at the hospital, he wondered aloud, "What in the world is going on?" He and Jim went back quite a while, and their wives played bridge together on Thursdays. The NASA wives were, for the most part, a close-knit group of women. "How could something like this happen to Jim?" Hal thought. "It's not like he's an astronaut or a heavy machine operator. He's a data analyst. It's not like it's..." Hal smiled, thinking of Jim's joke.

When the elevator doors opened, he saw Sally McMillan pacing back and forth. Her long brown hair was mussed from continually grabbing her head as she considered what was happening to her husband. Her skin looked pale under the waiting room's lights. She held her brown, large-rimmed glasses as she walked from one end of the room to the other. She had been waiting at the hospital for a few hours now. As she spotted Hal walking toward her, a gleam of hope came over her face. "Hal," she said and gave a sigh of relief.

Hal could tell that Sally had recently been in tears. "I'm sorry it took me so long to get here. Have they told you anything about Jim?"

"Not yet. They don't know what's wrong with him," Sally replied.

Just then, Jim's doctor walked into the waiting room. He had a surgical mask hanging around his neck along with his stethoscope. "Mrs. McMillan, we've stabilized your husband. He's

under sedation right now and will probably need to stay that way for some time."

"What does that mean, Doctor?" Hal responded.

"The fact is, we have never seen anything like this. We've run every test we can think of, and we can't explain his symptoms or why he appears to be in such pain. We do know that his brain activity is off the charts." Sally tensed. "We've called a few specialists to see if they can determine what's going on. Do you know if anyone was with him at the time of the accident?"

"I was the one who found him, Doctor..."

"Reynolds, Robert Reynolds, and you are?"

"Hal Ralston. I'm the director of operations at NASA, and like I said, I found Jim." Mentioning his title gave Hal a little more pull. He continued, "There was nothing out of the ordinary around his work area, and no one else in the building was affected. His job is not dangerous. He was reviewing telemetry at his workstation, like he does every day." Hal looked deflated. He kept playing the day over and over in his mind, wondering if he had missed something. Before he left for the hospital, he ordered a detailed investigation into the matter and gave instructions that he was to be contacted immediately if anything was found. After explaining all of this to the doctor, he added, "We don't take this type of thing lightly at NASA. We never know what may compromise one of our operations."

"I understand. We've moved him to a room in the intensive care unit for now. The nurse will let you know when you can see him." The doctor turned and left the waiting room.

About thirty minutes went by, and the nurse came to bring Sally and Hal to Jim's room. Jim was heavily sedated but not asleep. He was fidgety and unsettled. He kept mumbling something that didn't make any sense.

"Must...E-Seven...die...seven must...no," he said as if he were being tortured.

Sally and Hal stared in disbelief. "How could this be?" they each thought.

CHAPTER 19

Location: FBI Headquarters, Jacksonville, FL

Time: June 1, 1999

The small banner above Agent Sette's office door read, "Welcome Back." It seemed like a very long time since he had been here last. His arm was still in a cast, and his scars were still in the process of healing. He had a temporary wooden cane to help him walk. His leg would heal in time, but the constant pain in his heart would need more than physical therapy. It would need time, lots of time.

"Agent Johnathan Sette, I thought I told you to stay away from this office and take some time off to be with your children." Special Agent Charles Ralston, Johnathan's boss, wore a stern look. "In fact, I'm sure I told you to stay away from this office and allow yourself to recover. Now, what part of that order, emphasis on order, did you not understand?" Ralston was larger than average, and he had a deep, booming voice. Most people would probably classify him as always grumpy, but those who had worked with him for a while realized that he just sounded grumpy.

Johnathan just looked at him for a second. "Sir, I—"

"Well, since I can't talk any sense into you, don't be late for the briefing."

Johnathan was confused. "What briefing, sir?"

"You're being briefed in forty-five minutes about the status of your daughter's disappearance." Ralston turned to walk away. "And don't be late!" Ralston added before he disappeared around a corner.

"It's about time you showed up, Agent Sette," Agent Martinez said jokingly, imitating Ralston.

Johnathan turned around and saw that all of his fellow agents were gathering around to welcome him back. Each of them stepped up to shake his hand or pat him on the shoulder. Thankfully, his shoulders had not been injured. Most were very reassuring about the situation. Others were just glad to see him alive after the accident. A few wanted to sign his cast. Although he thought it was a little juvenile, he agreed. After all, they were part of his family too. Suddenly, everyone wanted to sign, and although he wished it would end, he endured it with a smile. Johnathan thanked everyone, shook hands with a few more people, and kept a smile on his face. However, his leg was killing him and he felt a little overwhelmed. He was anxious to get started on the case; time was slipping away. He needed to know who had turned his life upside down and, more importantly, why. As he entered his office and turned on the light, he was taken by surprise. "What is this?" Johnathan asked Martinez.

"I decided to use your office as the intel room for this case," Rick answered. "This is everything we have."

Johnathan slowly made his way around the room in silence. On the wall, many pictures told a story. There were pictures of the accident scene and the mangled car that Johnathan had been driving that awful night. The photographs of

the accident were accompanied by sketches of the intersection that showed the point of impact and the distance that Johnathan's car flew. On the side of the drawings were estimates of how fast each vehicle was traveling. Besides that, there were pictures of the deputy who was first on the scene. These had a sequence of letters and numbers written at the bottom of each picture; some had two. Johnathan recognized these as police report identification numbers, which normally wouldn't be written on the picture. In fact, enlarged pictures of the police officers were not normally posted on the wall; they were just added to the report. Johnathan realized that Rick was showing all of his research, including each interview with every person that Johnathan himself would have typically done. Johnathan didn't recognize any of the officers as ones he had worked with.

As Johnathan continued around the room, he noted the pictures of hospital staff members. He recognized most of them: Dr. Levi, Nurse Jenny, Dr. Hamed, Dr. Conner, Nurse Lilly, and Jonsie. They had each stopped by at some point to offer their condolences or an encouraging word and, in Jonsie's case, a story or two.

Finally, he came to the pictures from the hospital security cameras. He studied them closely for a few moments and then suddenly stopped. His eyes widened, and he reached out to remove one of the pictures. It was the first image he had seen of his baby girl. With all that had happened, all that he had been through and lost, it hadn't even occurred to him that there would be photographs of her. He just held the picture in his hand and

stared. Martinez didn't want to interrupt. He just stood by patiently.

"I didn't even get a chance to see her," Johnathan said.

"You will," replied Rick. "You will."

Johnathan put the picture in his coat pocket. "I'm gonna keep this one," he said as his voice cracked.

Rick walked over to Johnathan's desk and opened a folder. He pulled out a duplicate picture, walked over to the wall and pinned it up in the empty space. "I thought you might want that one," he said.

"Why didn't you bring me one before?" Johnathan asked.

"I figured you'd get it when you were ready," Rick replied.

"Thanks, Rick. You're a good friend."

Johnathan continued around the room and came upon a list. It listed possible groups that may have been responsible for the kidnapping and attack. He recognized all of the names on the list. Each name was followed by a percentage showing the likelihood that the individual or organization could have pulled off such a task. There was a place for a check mark for any that had claimed responsibility, but none were checked.

The list was sorted by percentage of likelihood. At the top of the list was an organization named the Syndicate. Johnathan had dealt with this group several times. They were international, and they were ruthless. In addition to stealing infants, they often kidnapped children who were usually under the age of ten. Most of these were children from orphanages, bad homes, and so on.

But there were several registered cases of children being taken from a high-profile individual or family like a senator, a CEO of some large company, or a leader of a country. It was commonly thought that those kidnappings financed the organization. All of the kidnapped children were sold into slavery, prostitution, or something worse. Johnathan didn't like thinking about the latter. Last year, he had helped save an infant from being sold as a meal. The ones who were lucky enough not to be sold into slavery or prostitution often became members of the Syndicate itself after they reached a "useful" age. They were taught to steal, to fight, and even to kill—whatever the Syndicate desired.

Johnathan had dedicated his career to fighting this group and had saved several children from being victims of who knows what. Once, in Japan, he had helped save a child from being taken by a Syndicate operative. It was the closest that he had ever come to taking a member of the group alive.

"If only I could have taken that Syndicate operative alive," Johnathan said in a low voice, barely realizing that he had said it out loud.

"They have a nasty habit of terminating themselves when captured, don't they?" Rick quickly added. He didn't want Johnathan to blame himself for anything. "There was nothing more you could have done. If he hadn't taken his own life, the Dragon Master would have."

The Dragon Master was the head of the Seven Dragons family, a proud family that traced its history back to the monks who traveled to Japan from China, bringing new medicines and

fighting styles to the Japanese. There were even tales that the ancestors of the Seven Dragons created the first ninjas.

Johnathan nodded but didn't turn around. "I just wish we had found his body," Johnathan thought.

Rick had always wanted to know the full story of what happened on the day his partner saved the Dragon Master's grandchild. He was sure it was an awesome story. But now was definitely not the time to ask for more details.

Suddenly, Johnathan stopped again. "What's this?" he asked. He was looking at several pictures of the kidnapper; some photos were blown up to reveal as much detail as possible. But the images weren't very good. The camera had only caught a part of the kidnapper from the back right side.

"That's the only lead we have on the kidnapper. It's like he knew where the cameras were. The only reason he's in this picture is because the unit that captured it was moved just two days previously," Rick explained.

"Two days?" Johnathan repeated.

This meant the kidnapper had either planned the abduction more than two days prior or that there was help from inside the hospital.

Johnathan continued looking at the pictures of the kidnapper and then looked closer at one of them. "What's this, right here?" he asked. "Do you have an enhanced version of this image?"

"Sure," Rick answered, walking over to a pile of folders on the desk. His blue tie got in the way as he bent over the desk.

Normally, Johnathan would have said something like, "Don't you have any other color tie?" or "I'm definitely buying you a new tie for your birthday," but today he didn't. Rick had purposely worn the tie to see if his partner was back to normal.

After shuffling through the folders, Rick found what he was looking for. "Here we go." He arranged the pictures on the desk and asked, "What do you see?"

"Right here, there's something on his forearm." Johnathan pointed it out. "I need this enlarged and cleaned up."

"Back for thirty minutes and already seeing the things we missed," Martinez commented. "That's why you're the go-to guy!" He picked up the phone. "Hey, I need you to drop what you're doing and enhance a section of one of the images we pulled from the videotape on the Sette case," Martinez said and then paused to listen. "Number one-one-five-thirteen-C," he said. "Yeah, that's right. Enlarge and clean up the forearm for me. We're on our way down." Martinez hung up the phone. "Ready to go?" he asked his partner.

Johnathan's leg was really bothering him today. It was the most he had walked around since the accident. "You go. I wanna take a look at the rest of these pictures," Johnathan said.

"You OK?"

"Sure. I just want to look," Johnathan replied and gave a nod to his partner.

"OK, I'll be right back," Martinez said, stepping through the door. He stopped and turned around. "Take your medicine, or I'm calling Nana," he added before leaving.

Johnathan took a seat. "Finally," he thought as he stretched his leg out under his desk. He propped his cane against the wall and took a deep breath. He closed his eyes and prayed silently. "Dear Lord, please guide me through this. Protect my child and lead me to her. I know you will keep her safe, watch over her, and provide for her. I love you, Lord. I don't understand why you are allowing this to happen, but I know you have a plan. Help me to be patient as your plan unfolds. Help me, Lord. In Jesus's name I pray, amen." Then he started sifting through the small mountain of evidence.

When he looked up, Nancy, the department's administrative assistant, stood at his door. "I didn't want to interrupt," she said. She was holding a cup in her hand.

Johnathan smiled. "Not at all, Nancy. Come in. What can I do for you?"

"Rick said to bring you this water and watch you take your medicine." She set the cup down on his desk.

Johnathan smiled again. "OK, OK." He did as he was told, thanked Nancy, and she left the way she had come.

About ten minutes later, the phone rang. "Agent Sette," answered Johnathan.

It was Rick calling on his cell phone. "I'm on the way up. It's some kind of tattoo or drawing. We cleaned it up pretty well."

Johnathan was curious. "What does it look like?"

"It's kind of a triangle-ish shape with a line going into the triangle from one side."

Johnathan could hear Rick getting off the elevator and getting closer. "A triangle...are you sure?"

"Well, it's kind of a triangle, but one of the sides is kind of bent in," Rick said as he walked into the office, still talking on the phone.

Also still on the phone, Johnathan replied, "Give it here. I need to see it."

Martinez hung up and looked around to make sure no one had seen what had just happened. Johnathan didn't really notice. He was preoccupied with the picture.

"I've seen this before," Johnathan said slowly as his eyes stayed on the image in front of him.

"What?" Martinez said.

"I had a dream while I was in the hospital. This tattoo was in it."

"A dream?" Martinez asked.

"Maybe it wasn't a dream." Johnathan got up and limped over to the pictures of the car. "No, not a dream, not a dream at all," he paused. "I was upside down in the car. It's the last thing I remember. A hand reached in and grabbed my hand." Johnathan stared at the images of the car for a minute. "Where was I found?"

Martinez replied, "Beside the car." He pointed to the drawing and said, "Right here."

"How did I get there? I was trapped in the car, trying to get to Sam." Johnathan paused, backed away from the wall of pictures, and sat down in one of the chairs in front of his desk. "Sam," he said softly as a rush of emotions came over him. "Where was Sam found?"

"Right beside you..." Martinez pointed to the picture. "Here," he said. "So you think you saw the person with this tattoo, and maybe he helped you out of the car?"

"I don't know, Rick," Johnathan said, "but I saw that tattoo. I saw it before I lost consciousness."

"OK. I told Sandy to start looking for a match. We'll find it, and we'll find Elizabeth. I promise." Rick took a copy of the picture and pinned it to the wall. "It doesn't make sense though. Why would a person help you out of a death trap, exposing himself to you, and then take your child?" he asked.

"I don't know," answered Johnathan. "But I saw that tattoo. I'm sure of it."

"Maybe you'll remember more after you see the videos in the briefing," Rick said.

"Videos?"

"Yes, in addition to the hospital video, we have a video of the accident. A gas station camera caught most of it." Rick added, "You should finish up in here so we can go, my friend. We don't

want to be late." He delivered the last part in his booming imitation of Special Agent Ralston.

Rick waited for Johnathan to get to his feet. He wanted to ask him if he needed help, but he knew his partner. The two men made their way to the conference room, where they watched the video footage from the hospital and the gas station, and then they filled in the rest of the team about their new discovery. The team was very impressed, as they usually were, with Johnathan's new discovery. "Why didn't we catch this?" many of them asked themselves. Johnathan often found something that they did not. He was gifted in that way.

Everyone gave his or her report, bringing Johnathan up to speed on every aspect of the case and what was currently in progress. They also told him about all of the leads that didn't pan out. Maybe he would see something that they had not in this situation as well.

Johnathan didn't have to tell anyone to go back and recheck everything or to follow up on the new leads. He knew that each of them would do their best and none of them would give up until the situation was resolved, one way or the other.

After the meeting, Rick dropped Johnathan off at home. Even though it was hard to be there without his wife and his newborn child, he knew that he had three children who needed their father, and they were waiting for him inside.

CHAPTER 20

Location: Blount Island Marine Terminal, Jacksonville, FL

Time: Seven Months after Abduction

"I guess these guys never take off for the holidays," Rick said, taking a large sip from his cup of coffee. He was trying to lighten the mood in the surveillance room, which was actually a surveillance container. He felt a little claustrophobic, not to mention the fact that it was cold and damp in the container. The rain had been pouring down for hours on the metal roof of the cargo container that he, Johnathan, and three other agents had been hiding in for the last few hours.

The other agents chimed in, making comments about the closeness of the holidays, how many overtime days until Christmas, and how cold it was in the container. But Johnathan's mind was focused on the evening's objective: stopping the shipment of fifteen young females to Europe. If possible, they would capture the Syndicate operative in charge, find out the true destination of the human cargo, and replace the children with task force agents. Even though Johnathan wanted the operation to be successful, he knew that it was hard to get a Syndicate operative to talk, if you could even keep the agent alive long enough to talk. But his mind was set on changing that fact tonight.

"Look alive, gentlemen. We have visitors," said a voice over the radio.

Johnathan gave the standard reply, "Roger that."

A moving van had arrived at the Blount Island Marine Terminal and was headed toward the dock where Johnathan and his team of agents were waiting. A week ago, a reliable informant provided Johnathan with a tip about the shipment. Although the informant didn't know the time of the shipment, he did know the date. But that wasn't all. The informant also stated that one of the fifteen children was an infant not much more than six months in age.

"They are headed your way." The voice came over the radio again.

"After they're out of sight, lock the island down," Johnathan said. He had arranged for a surveillance detail to be in the area for the last six days in case the Syndicate decided to move early. Opportunities like this didn't come along every day.

"Understood," was the reply.

Most of Blount Island's work force had already left for the day. Johnathan thought this was a blessing. That meant there was less chance of any innocent bystanders getting hurt or killed. He was sure there would be casualties. However, Johnathan wanted to make sure that none of the twenty-seven agents and officers hidden nearby would be on the casualty list. Most of all, he needed to make sure that none of the abducted girls were harmed in any way.

A few minutes later, Johnathan and his team heard the moving van drive past. After a brief pause, Johnathan gave the go-ahead. "Everyone get to your primary position. Wait for my signal

and remember the plan," he said into his radio. Johnathan looked at Rick, who nodded confidently. "Hanson, Lee, and Jameson, you go low. Rick and I will take the high ground."

With a nod, the three men slowly opened the container doors. Each agent picked up a rope and immediately rappelled three stories down to the ground. Johnathan and Rick made their way up the ladder. As Johnathan opened the top of the container, rain poured down on his face. As his head cleared the top of the container, he could see members of SWAT team and other FBI agents making their way to the tops of the vast array of shipping containers. As he stood up, he saw the sniper teams getting into position. Johnathan and Rick quickly ran the length of the container they were on and then jumped to the next set of containers, clearing the four-foot gap with ease. They quickly made their way to the adjacent stack of containers, running in a diagonal course in order to catch up to the moving truck that had passed by their original position only moments before.

As the truck approached the dock in front of the French-registered cargo ship, it turned left and stopped. Almost immediately, it backed up toward the ship's gangway. It stopped about ten feet from the ramp, and the driver opened his door and stepped down from the yellow moving van. He walked around to the rear of the truck and opened the door. Four men stepped down out of the back of the truck. They were heavily armed.

In his ear, Johnathan could hear the snipers reporting in. Each had acquired a target and used a descriptive name to be sure that all the targets were covered.

"Hold your positions," Johnathan ordered. He knew that this was just the beginning and he didn't want anyone getting over zealous. He hadn't seen anyone who looked like a Syndicate operative yet. The five men at the truck looked too thuggish to be in charge of anything. They were unorganized.

"Someone's coming down the gangway," Rick reported via his radio.

"Finally," Johnathan thought. "That's the one we've been waiting for." Johnathan gave Rick a thumbs-up.

"This is Agent Martinez. Let them offload the cargo first, and then we move in. Do not fire until we are sure that the truck is empty." Rick looked back at Johnathan and gave a nod.

A man wearing a brimmed hat and a tailored trench coat made his way down the ship's gangway. As he reached the dock, he motioned to the men standing at the truck, and they immediately started to unload their cargo. The first girl nearly fell off of the truck. Her head was covered with what looked like a pillowcase, and her hands were bound. Two of the larger men set their weapons down to assist the young ladies as they exited the truck.

As the third captive was helped down from the truck, the unexpected happened. She kicked one man in the shin and pushed the other as hard as she could, knocking him on his backside. She yanked her hood off and started to run.

"No," Rick thought.

Johnathan watched as the scene unfolded. The Syndicate operative didn't move. He just grinned and said two words: "Kill her."

As the three remaining men lifted their weapons, Johnathan issued his own orders. "Take them out," he said. A split second later, before either of the thugs could get a shot off, Johnathan's snipers opened fire on the gunmen. Although there were five, it only sounded like one shot, but the result was undisputable. The five Syndicate gunmen fell to the ground. Three were dead, each with a shot to the head. The other two were down and not moving. "Go! Go! Go!" Johnathan ordered. Jameson, Hanson, and the other FBI and SWAT team agents came out of the shadows and moved quickly to secure the scene.

A member of the SWAT team grabbed the running girl and pulled her to safety. Hanson was the first to reach the girls near the truck, but as he stepped behind the truck, two shots rang out, and he tumbled to the ground. There was another gunman in the truck, and in the midst of the confusion, the Syndicate agent turned and started to run back up the gangway.

"Man down!" Johnathan said into his radio. "There's a gunman still in the truck. Do not fire into the truck! I repeat, do not fire into the truck! There are still hostages."

"Don't worry. I've got it!" Rick said over the intercom.

Johnathan looked to where Rick had been only a minute before. He was nowhere to be seen. Then Johnathan heard a large diesel engine starting and he knew that Rick had the situation under control. Johnathan needed to catch the Syndicate

operative. The only problem was that he was still about thirty feet off the ground. Less than ten feet away, there was another grouping of shipping containers. "No time to lose," he thought as he set himself in motion. When he reached the end of the container, he jumped.

"Agent Sette!" One of the nearby snipers saw Johnathan fall from sight.

"Come on, this can't be any harder than driving a forklift," Rick was having a one sided conversation with the enormous crane he was attempting to operate. "Not that I can drive a forklift," he thought as he pushed one of the levers forward. The crane turned to the right. "Oops," he said as the giant magnet slammed into a shipping container. "Wrong way Betsy." He thought giving the crane a name would allow it to participate in the conversation. "Let's try that again." This time, Rick pulled the lever, and the giant magnet went in the direction he intended. When it was lined up with the truck, he lowered the giant magnet down until it was right above the vehicle. "Now, how do I turn this thing on?" he wondered. He flipped a switch on the console, and the truck lurched. "Aha," he said. "Come to Papa!" he yelled. He couldn't hear the screams of the girls inside of the truck. As he lowered the giant magnet closer to the truck, the operative's gun flew out of his hand and attached itself to the ceiling. The entire truck came off the ground, and then the roof tore away. The truck immediately slammed to the ground, leaving all of its passengers helpless and off their feet.

Johnathan didn't intend to jump to the top of the next set of containers; he just needed to hit the side of one. As he

descended closer to it, he flipped so that his feet would hit first. He used his downward momentum to spring back to the set of containers from which he had just leaped. He flipped again as he approached the containers, repeating the maneuver one last time and safely reaching the ground on his feet.

"Agent Sette just fell off the containers," Officer Mills yelled into the radio.

"The lightning must be playing tricks on you, Teddy," another voice said over the radio. "I have eyes on Agent Sette crossing the engagement zone right now. And fast."

"What the...?" Mills whispered. "Roger that," he said into his radio.

Jameson, who had barely managed to dive out of the way of the falling truck, was back on his feet. He quickly kicked the weapons of the downed thugs to the side and climbed into what was left of the truck to apprehend the final gunman. After restraining the gunman, he quickly made his way back to his partner, Agent Hanson. Agent Lee had already reached Hanson, who was groaning in pain but alive. As Jameson reached him, he saw that Hanson's bulletproof vest had performed its duty. It had stopped the two bullets that would have taken Hanson's life.

The three men glanced up as Agent Sette flew past them. A team of SWAT officers trailed behind him. They hit the gangway in pursuit of the Syndicate operative making his way to the ship's stern. "Two of you make your way to the starboard side. We'll try to cut him off," Johnathan said. "We need to take him alive," he

reminded everyone. The officers were amazed at Johnathan's speed relative to their own.

When Johnathan reached the containers at the rear of the ship, he stopped. The operative had turned the corner and was out of Johnathan's line of sight. He motioned to the two officers behind him to proceed with caution and search the surrounding containers.

Johnathan cautiously glanced around the corner. He lowered his center of mass and moved around the corner, behind a large crate. As he moved around the row of crates, the Syndicate operative jumped Johnathan from above, knocking him to the ground and causing him to drop his gun. Johnathan quickly made it to his feet, as did the operative. Johnathan went straight for the operative, who grabbed Johnathan's arm and flipped him. Johnathan anticipated this and landed on his feet, using his own momentum to flip the operative and throw him into a crate. The crate, full of broom handles, collapsed onto Johnathan's attacker but didn't slow him down. He was back on his feet, attacking Johnathan with a flurry of kicks. But Johnathan blocked the kicks with ease. He ducked the last one and swept the operative's other leg, causing the attacker to spin twice in the air before hitting the deck hard.

The operative lost his footing again when he stepped on a broom handle. The long rod rolled just to the left of Agent Sette. Next, the operative grabbed one of the broom handles and stood to his feet. The operative ran at Johnathan, twirling the stick. Johnathan kicked the broom handle near him into the air, catching it in time to block the attack. He planted his foot firmly in

the center of the operative's chest, sending him backward and to the ground.

"Don't get up," Johnathan said to the operative. "Stay down," he reiterated. Now that Johnathan had a moment to study the man, he realized that the man in front of him wasn't wearing a suit, trench coat, or hat. This wasn't the Syndicate operative at all. It was a distraction. Just then, Johnathan heard an engine start. Before Johnathan could turn to look, the attacker was up again.

"Freeze!" Two SWAT officers had turned the corner, and their rifles were aimed at the attacker. They were just in time to see Agent Sette strike the attacker five times with his fists, although he moved so fast they could barely see the strikes. They watched as Johnathan leaped into the air, turned completely around, and kicked the attacker, causing him to leave the ground, spin, and slam to the deck. The officers were speechless.

Nearly out of breath, Rick arrived from the other side of the ship just in time to see the final blow.

Johnathan picked up his gun and looked over the side of the ship. "He's on that boat," Johnathan said to Rick. "Have the Coast Guard pick him up."

Rick managed to say, "OK." After taking a few more breaths, he called the dispatcher and had them notify the Coast Guard. He turned to watch with Johnathan as the boat sailed away. But before either of them could say a word, the boat exploded into a bright ball of fire.

"No," Johnathan said softly. "No." As he put his head down, he slammed his hand on the rail in front of him.

The others just watched in disbelief.

"We found a baby in the cab of the truck," Rick said softly.

"Was it—?" Johnathan started to ask.

"Princess Zamier," Rick interrupted. He didn't want to pull on Johnathan's heartstrings. Deep down, Johnathan wanted it to be Elizabeth. "We'll find Elizabeth, my friend. We will."

CHAPTER 21

Location: FBI Headquarters, Jacksonville, FL

Time: Seven Months after Abduction

In the several months after the abduction of Johnathan Sette's baby and the assumed murder of his wife, Agent Sette worked tirelessly to piece together what little evidence there was into something meaningful. Why was he targeted, and if it was him that they were after, why had they not been back to finish the job?

His office was still wallpapered with dark and blurred pictures of the man that had kidnapped his newborn daughter. The tattoo on the mystery man's forearm was engraved on Johnathan's mind. It was small and black, with a white or skin-colored middle. There were two straight sides and a third much smaller side that connected the other two. Johnathan and Rick had run the image through every known criminal database in the world with no luck at all.

The bureau had all but closed his case because of the lack of evidence and leads, so Johnathan was forced to work on it on his own time. It was now considered a cold case. Even so, his faithful partner helped him in any way he could.

Today, Johnathan and Rick had made a major breakthrough in a very large case by stopping a shipment of children to the Syndicate. Johnathan hated the Syndicate. He

knew that they were responsible for the kidnapping of his daughter. But he could never make the connection he needed; he couldn't find a breakthrough, and it ate at him every day.

It was past midnight, and they were just getting back to the office. "Rick, I've wanted to ask you something for a while," Johnathan seemed a little reluctant to ask. His memory of the accident and even some of the events prior to the accident were still vague.

"What's that?" Rick asked.

"When I woke up in the hospital, you said that Elizabeth was kidnapped..."

"Yeah, and?" Even though Rick had not fired his weapon earlier that evening at the docks, he was following his habit of checking it as he returned to the office.

"Well...how did you know her name was Elizabeth?" Johnathan asked, setting his gun down on his desk.

Rick paused and set his weapon down on the desk as well. "Rebecca, of course. That's where I get all of my information. Why, what's up?"

"Rebecca?" Johnathan said in as soft voice. "How could Rebecca have known?" Johnathan wondered silently. Even though she gets into everything, he didn't remember ever talking about the baby's name near the children.

"Dude, what's up?" Rick repeated.

"I guess it's nothing. I just don't remember ever telling the kids," said Johnathan. "No big."

"You look beat, my friend. Let's call it a night," Rick said.

"Yeah, my children barely see me as it is. I really need to be more involved in their lives. Let's get out of here."

CHAPTER 22

Location: Temple of Light

Time: Three Years after Abduction

The room was filled with brilliant light that seemed to radiate in infinite directions. It was a round room with seven pillars that stood twenty-one feet tall. Diamond-like glass made light from the ceiling refract onto every inch of the grand hall. Not a shadow could be found. The marble floors reflected the light up toward its origin, and the rays of light danced in the center of the room, where a small child knelt, meditating. Her white silk tunic was trimmed in gold. Her long, dark hair was pulled tight into a ponytail. The color of her hair stood in sharp contrast to the golden ribbon that held her braided tail in place. Her eyes were closed, her breath was steady, and her hands were steeped in front of her.

Soon, a man joined her in the Hall of Light, one of the many rooms in the Temple of Light. He stood and motioned for her to rise to her feet. With a single fluid motion, she jumped to her feet as if she were as light as a feather, her eyes still closed. She bowed her head gracefully as a gesture of respect, and as she opened her eyes, she spoke. "Good morning," she said in Chinese. Her voice was soft, but it carried throughout the great hall as if it swept through every inch and circled each of the seven pillars.

The man replied with a smile and a nod of his head. "Good morning, Elizabeth," he answered in English. "Your pronunciation

this morning is much better. I am very pleased." After allowing for a slight smile from the young girl, he added, "Shall we begin?"

Elizabeth and the man turned and faced the same direction. They both assumed a defensive position. The routine had been the same for a week now. Elizabeth matched the moves of her instructor. They each moved their left arm forward and then back, followed by their right arm forward and back, defending themselves against unseen warriors. They were in perfect sync. She learned fast, as if she had been born to move this way. Every now and then, her instructor corrected one of her moves. After a few days, she had the lesson mastered and was ready for the next lesson.

Her days were long and full. Each morning, she woke up early and meditated in the Hall of Light. Later, she was joined by her instructor; he was always on time. Precisely on time, as he would put it. They would practice for hours, working on various techniques and complex disciplines. After her morning lesson, she ate with her mentor. Her mentor would often test her knowledge during their meals together. This included knowledge of things such as languages, mathematics, and other skills. They often spoke the entire meal in a language that Elizabeth was learning. To an outsider, this may have seemed quite advanced for a three-year-old, but Elizabeth had been doing this for as long as she could remember. It was second nature to her.

After this meal, Elizabeth went to do combat and weapons training with special trainers from around the world: Chinese, Japanese, Thai, American, and more. There were seven of these specialized trainers in all, and each was the best in the world at

his or her art. When Elizabeth had mastered a subject or technique, the assigned trainer would be replaced with another.

Later in her day, Elizabeth worked on her academic skills with at least two teachers per day. Reading and writing in different languages were the main focus, but she was also being groomed for advanced topics like physics and applied mathematics. When a new teacher was assigned, they were often astonished to be teaching such a young person but were then quickly humbled by her learning ability. Most of Elizabeth's reading was now concentrated in the Bible or books that were in some way related to scripture.

In the evenings, she studied scriptures with her mentor and then meditated before bed. Her mentor always checked on her at bedtime and watched as she said her prayers. She was well cared for and watched over twenty-four hours a day.

CHAPTER 23

Location: Jacksonville, FL

Time: Three Years after Abduction

"Nana, why don't we play soccer like normal kids?" asked Rebecca.

"Normal kids don't play soccer. They play football or basketball," Matthew interjected before Nana could answer. "See, we're so not normal that we don't even know what normal is."

"You just want to be near Jimmy Stansfield," Jacob added. "And for the record, we like martial arts!"

"I wasn't talking to you two, I was talking to Nana," Rebecca said, getting angry. She knew the boys were right but didn't want them to know that they were right. "And I don't want to be near Jimmy what's his name!"

Nana finally found a break in the argument and stepped in. "Rebecca, it is your father's wish that you study martial arts. He has arranged for the best instructors for you and your brothers, and that is all you need to know." Nana tried to close the argument decisively, but that wouldn't work with Rebecca.

"You'd think we were preparing for a battle or something," Rebecca replied, fulfilling her need to have the last word.

"Maybe you should talk to your father about it when we arrive at the dojo, Rebecca. Perhaps he can explain it better than I can," Nana replied.

"Suddenly, kicking and punching doesn't sound so bad," Rebecca conceded.

"I just wish Dad would let us use what we learn. What good is it to know all of these cool ways to beat someone up if we can't let anyone know that we could beat them up?"

"Yeah," Matthew chimed in. "Like that bully Erich Smellman." His name was really Spellman, but the boys always referred to him this way, for obvious reasons.

"Boys," Nana said, "God did not put us here to beat up one another; we are to live together in peace. I won't have any more of this kind of talk—are we clear?" The boys were silent "Are we?" Nana added forcefully while looking in the rearview mirror.

"Yes, ma'am," both of the boys answered.

"Sorry, Nana," Jacob added.

A short time later, they arrived at the Seven Dragons of Light dojo. The dojo master, Master Haru, and his sons had migrated here from Asia over thirty years before. He and his seven brothers were known as the greatest fighters in all of Asia. Now, Master Haru's seven sons led most of the instruction. Johnathan had met one of Master Haru's brothers in a small village outside of Tokyo several years ago while tracking down a lead related to the Syndicate. Haru's brother had a granddaughter who had been abducted by the Syndicate. Johnathan saved her life but almost lost his own to a highly trained Syndicate

operative. Since that time, Johnathan had been very close with the family of the Seven Dragons. They had pledged to teach Johnathan their art so that he would be better prepared for fighting with the Syndicate. The Seven Dragon family also vowed that if ever needed, they would be there for Johnathan and his family.

Johnathan had been training with the Seven Dragons for some time now. As soon as the children were old enough, he had started their training as well. The Seven Dragons were the Dragon of Light, the Dragon of Earth, the Dragon of Water, the Dragon of Air, the Dragon of Flight, the Dragon of Invisibility, and the Dragon of Peace. The legend states that each of the original Seven Dragons, who had long since passed, had seven sons, and they were taught the skills of each of the dragons. Each son would become a master of one of the seven skills. It also states that the Seven Dragon family was protected by Shangdi. Using the Christian interpretation of the word, this meant "the God above all emperors" or "the Lord most high," who possessed extraordinarily long life. Their skills, which they referred to as powers, were passed to the seven sons of each of the seven masters. Now these skills were being taught to Johnathan and his children so that they would be prepared. He was sure the Syndicate was after him, and he was not going to end his search for his daughter or back down from his fight with the organization. His family would always be at risk, so he needed his children to be able to take care of themselves.

"Wow!" the children whispered quietly. As they entered the dojo, they stopped in awe of what they were witnessing. Their

father had jumped into the air and was gracefully flying toward his opponent, Daniel Tan, otherwise known as the Dragon of Air.

Daniel had seen the attack coming and flown away from Johnathan's attack. His flowing yellow-and-gold silk robe fluttered in the wind as he flew backward through the air. He grasped his long queue with his left hand so that it would not become a tempting target. As the two landed gracefully, Daniel removed his blindfold and spoke. "That was good, John. My brother has taught you the art of flight well, but you are still fighting the air. It is not your opponent. I am. You must agree with the air and allow it to assist you on your journey through it. How do you think I anticipated your attack?"

"Uh...I'm gonna say the air told you," Johnathan replied. He didn't mean to seem sarcastic, but it had been a long practice and he was quite winded.

"That is correct, John. The air is always around you. If you allow it, it will speak to you. It will warn you and assist you." Daniel noticed the children watching from the door and then turned his attention back to Johnathan. "You must open your mind to what I am telling you. If you do, you will learn to work with the air, and it will agree to work with you."

"I'll work on it, Master Tan," the very tired student replied.

"Hello, children," Daniel turned his attention to Johnathan's children. "Are you ready for your lessons?"

"Yes, we are, Daniel." The children ran over to greet Daniel and give their dad a group hug. Daniel cleared his throat. "Sorry," they said in unison, adding, "Master Tan." As the children bowed

in respect, Daniel's smile reflected the children's. The American Seven Dragons were not as strict about protocol as their Asian counterparts, but Daniel thought it wise to remind the children every once in a while that the protocol existed. Besides, he knew that Johnathan preferred they respect the ways of the Seven Dragons.

Daniel noticed Nana and smiled. "And how are you today, Nana? Are you sure you won't join us tonight in a few lessons?"

Nana smiled and gave her usual answer. "No, thank you. I will just watch from over here."

"As you wish, Nursen," Daniel politely replied, using Nana's real name as a sign of respect. He bowed slightly.

Johnathan hugged the children. His outfit resembled that of a white ninja, although Johnathan chose not to wear the mask. The children wore similar outfits for their training. "Daddy, you were awesome," Rebecca said as Johnathan released her from his arms.

"Thanks, sweetie. Master Tan is a good instructor." Johnathan nodded to Daniel and then looked back at the children. "I'm sure all of you will be just as good as he is someday." The children were excited to hear such a thing and their eyes could not hold their excitement back. Johnathan patted each of them on the head as they turned to get ready for their lessons.

To learn the art of the Seven Dragons, someone must complete the training in order. First, you learn the Dragon of Light, which is designed to enlighten you and open your mind to things that you would normally think are not possible. It was the

first step to conditioning your mind to accept that you are more than you have been taught that you are.

The Dragon of Earth and the Dragon of Water were next. These arts teach you to respect the earth and its power. They teach that your surroundings and your surefootedness are part of your relationship with the earth and its bodies of water.

The Dragon of Flight was next. This was a very physical stage. You must learn that you are capable of more than you'd ever imagined. You must also learn that your mind and body can move beyond the restrictions of the laws of physics. It is more about freeing your mind than about actual flight.

The Dragon of Air, Johnathan's current stage, taught a student how to use the same air that fills his or her lungs as a tool or as a weapon. It could even be used as a defense system, as Johnathan had found out today. It was a very difficult stage.

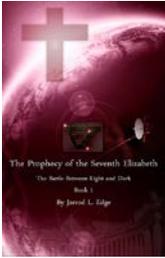
The Dragon of Invisibility applied the ninja arts and taught you how to blend into the environment by teaching you how to avoid your opponent's sight. This was also very difficult. There were many times in Johnathan's career that he wished he had been at this level.

And finally, there is the Dragon of Peace. Only those who reach this level are permitted to know what can be learned in it.

The children were very eager to learn. They practiced very hard and put everything they had into the lessons. The personalized instruction made them progress faster than normal students. The twins had progressed to the level of the Dragon of Water, and Rebecca was learning the Dragon of Earth. Although

they had a long way to go, the Seven Dragons were impressed by the children's many talents. They believed that the children were blessed by God and that angels were guiding them along a path.

The seven sons of Master Haru were also Christians.



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