

# 1

The conference room at Effective Engineering Solutions emptied. Everyone left, leaving Gideon Crew alone with Eli Glinn and Manuel Garza in the austere room, high above the streets of Manhattan.

With his withered hand, Glinn motioned Gideon to a chair at the conference table. “Gideon, please, sit down.”

Gideon took a seat. He sensed already that this meeting—which had begun with a celebration of his successful completion of the latest project for EES—was morphing into something else.

“You’ve had quite an ordeal,” Glinn said. “Not just the physical manhunt, but the, ah, emotional toll as well. Are you sure you want to jump right into something new?”

“I’m sure,” Gideon replied.

Glinn looked at him carefully—a long, searching look. Then he nodded. “Excellent. Glad to hear you’ll be continuing with us as our...” He paused, searched for a word. “Our special deputy. We’ll engage you a suite at a hotel around the corner, so you’ll have a place to stay while we find you an apartment. I know how you hate to be away from your beloved Santa Fe, but it’s a very interesting time to be in New York. Right now, for example, there’s a special exhibition at

the Morgan Library—the Book of Kells, on loan from the Irish government. You’ve heard of the Book of Kells, of course?”

“Vaguely.”

“It’s the finest illuminated manuscript in existence, considered to be Ireland’s greatest national treasure.”

Gideon said nothing.

Glenn glanced at his watch. “Then you’ll come have a look at it with me? I’m a great fancier of illuminated manuscripts. They’ll be turning a new page of the book every day. Very exciting.”

Gideon hesitated. “Illuminated manuscripts are not exactly an interest of mine.”

“Ah, but I was so hoping you’d accompany me to the exhibition,” said Glenn. “You’ll love the Book of Kells. It’s only been out of Ireland once before, and it’s only here for a week. A shame to miss it. If we leave now, we’ll just catch the last hour of today’s showing.”

“Maybe we could go Monday.”

“And miss the page displayed today—forever? No, we must go now.”

Gideon started to laugh, amused at Glenn’s earnestness. The man’s interests were so arcane. “Honestly, I couldn’t care less about the damn Book of Kells.”

“Ah, but you will.”

Hearing the edge in Glenn’s voice, Gideon paused. “Why?”

“Because your new assignment will be to steal it.”

## 2

Gideon followed Eli Glinn into the East Room of the Morgan Library. Despite its being packed with visitors, entering the magnificent space was nevertheless an overwhelming experience.

Gideon hadn't been in the Morgan for years—he always found its treasures too tempting—and immediately became entranced all over again with the vaulted and painted ceilings, the two-story tiers of rich books, the massive marble fireplace, the opulent tapestries, furniture, and thick burgundy rug. Glinn, operating the joystick of his electric wheelchair with one claw-like hand, moved into the room aggressively, cutting the line and taking advantage of the fact that people tended to yield to the handicapped. Soon they had moved to the front of the line, where a large glass cube contained the Book of Kells.

“What a room,” murmured Gideon, looking around, his eyes instinctively picking out the many aggressively visible details of high security, starting with the hyper-alert guards, the single entrance, the camera lenses winking in the ceiling moldings, the motion-sensor detectors and infrared laser placements. Not only that, but—in entering the room—he had observed the side edge of a massive steel pocket door, ready to seal the space off at a moment's notice.

Glinn followed his eye toward the ceiling. “Magnificent, isn't it?” he said. “Those murals are by the artist H. Siddons Mowbray, and the spandrels feature the twelve signs of the zodiac. J. P. Morgan belonged to an exclusive dining club that admitted only twelve members, each of

whom was given a zodiac code name. They say the arrangements of the signs and other strange symbols painted in the ceiling relate to key events in Morgan's personal life."

Gideon's eye fell to the grand fireplace adorning one end of the hall. Even in its intricately carved recesses he could make out the faint presence of security devices, some of which he had never seen before and had no idea what they did.

"That tapestry over the fireplace," Glinn continued, "is sixteenth-century Netherlandish. It depicts one of the seven deadly sins: avarice." He issued a low chuckle. "Interesting choice for Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan, don't you think?"

Gideon turned his attention to the glass cube that contained the Book of Kells. It was clearly bulletproof, and not the standard blue kind, either, but white glass—he guessed a P6B standard—which rendered it not only bulletproof but blast-proof, hammer-proof, and ax-proof as well. He stared intently into the case, ignoring the fabulous and irreplaceable treasure it contained, his eyes instead picking out and categorizing the many layers of security within—motion sensors, atmospheric pressure sensors, infrared heat detectors, and even what looked like an atmospheric composition sensor.

Clearly any disturbance would trigger the instant shutting of that steel door—sealing the room and trapping the thief inside.

And that was just the security he could see.

"Breathtaking, isn't it?" murmured Glinn.

"It's scaring the shit out of me."

"What?" Glinn looked startled.

"Excuse me. You mean the book..." He looked at it for the first time. "Interesting."

“That’s one way of putting it. Its origins are shrouded in mystery. Some say it was created by Saint Columba himself around AD 590. Others believe it was created by unknown monks two hundred years later, to celebrate Columba’s bicentennial. It was begun at Iona and then carried to the Abbey of Kells, where the illumination was added. And there it was kept, deeply hidden, as the abbey was raided and looted again and again by pagan Viking marauders. But they never found that book.”

Gideon looked at the manuscript more closely. Despite himself, he was drawn in, enthralled by the fantastically complex abstract designs on the page, almost fractal in their depth.

“The page on display today is folio 34r,” Glinn told him. “The famous Chi Rho monogram.”

“Chi Rho? What’s that?”

“*Chi* and *Rho* are the first two letters of the word *Christ* in Greek. The actual narrative of Jesus’s life starts at Matthew 1:18, and that page was often decorated in early illuminated gospels. The first word of the narrative is *Christ*. In the Book of Kells, those first two letters, *Chi Rho*, consume the entire page.”

The crowds began to back up behind them, and Gideon felt someone’s elbow giving him a faint nudge.

Glinn’s whispery voice continued. “Look at the labyrinth of knotted decoration! You can see all kinds of strange things hidden in there—animals, insects, birds, angels, tiny heads, crosses, flowers. Not to mention Celtic knots of stupendous complexity, a mathematician’s dream...And then the colors! The golds and greens and yellows and purples! This is the greatest page from the greatest illuminated manuscript in existence. No wonder the book is considered Ireland’s greatest national treasure. Just *look* at it.”

This was the first time Gideon could remember hearing anything approaching enthusiasm in Glinn's voice. He leaned closer, so close his breath fogged the glass.

"Excuse me, but there are people waiting," came an impatient voice from behind him.

As a little test, Gideon reached out and put his hand on the glass.

Instantly a low beeping sounded and a guard called out: "Hands off the glass, please! You, sir—hands off!"

This stimulated the impatient crowd. "Come on, friend, give someone else a chance!" came another voice. Others murmured their agreement.

With a long sigh of regret, Glinn touched his withered finger to the joystick and the wheelchair moved aside with a hum, Gideon following. A few moments later they were back out on Madison Avenue, the traffic streaming past, cabs blaring. Gideon blinked in the bright light.

"Let me get this straight. You want me to *steal* that book?"

He felt Glinn's hand touch his arm reassuringly. "No, not the entire book. Just that one little folio page we were looking at, number 34r."

"Why?"

A silence. "Have you ever known me to answer a question like that?" Glinn asked pleasantly as their limousine came gliding up to take them back to Little West 12th Street.

### 3

Three days later, Gideon Crew, fresh from a swim in the rooftop pool of the ultra-hip Gansevoort Hotel, stood stark naked in his suite high above the Meatpacking District of New York, staring down at a king-size bed overspread with diagrams and schematics—which mapped out, in minute detail, the security system of the East Room of the Morgan Library.

The loan of the Book of Kells by the Irish government to the Morgan Library had taken eight years to arrange. It had been fraught with difficulty. The main reason was that in the year 2000, one of the book's folios had been sent to Canberra, Australia, for exhibition. Several pages were damaged by rubbing and a loss of pigment—the vibration of the plane's engines were blamed—and the Irish government was now loath to risk another loan.

James Waterman, the billionaire Irish American founder of the Waterman Group, had made it a personal mission to bring the book to the United States. A man known for his charisma and charm, he managed to persuade the Irish prime minister, and finally the government, to release it—under stringent conditions. One of those conditions was a total overhaul of the security system of the East Room of the Morgan Library, which Waterman paid for himself.

Waterman had initially tried to put the manuscript on display at the Smithsonian. Museum security, however, had proven unwilling to provide the necessary high-tech face-lift, and the effort had fallen through. Secretly, Gideon was pleased to hear this. Although he had

dreadful memories of Washington, DC, as a child—after all, that was where his father had been killed—in later years he had gone back occasionally to visit and found the town to be a somewhat boring, even sleepy, collection of handsome monuments and timeless documents. But just weeks before, he'd been summoned to Washington to receive a medal for his recent accomplishments at Fort Detrick. And to his dismay—perhaps because of 9/11, perhaps simply as a result of red tape and the inevitable bureaucratic accretion—what had once been a pleasant and relaxed capital was now more like an armed camp. The Metropolitan Police, Capitol Police, Park Police, State Department Police, US Mint Police, Secret Service Police, “Special” Police (*achtung!*)—in fact something like two dozen different police forces, he'd learned—now choked downtown with their presence: all armed, and all seemingly with the power to pull over and arrest any luckless driver or visitor. (This according to one of Gideon's cabdrivers, himself formerly on the Job.) Looking around at all the redundant cops, with their overlapping fiefdoms, Gideon could practically smell his tax dollars burning away.

The final straw came when he later received a robot traffic ticket in the mail: some pole-mounted camera-radar had observed him driving up New York Avenue at a few miles over the thirty-five-miles-an-hour speed limit, and—snagging an image of his license plate—had mailed him a ticket for \$125. Now there seemed no easy way to protest the ticket short of traveling back to Washington to defend himself. And, of course, the actual event was so vague in his memory there was no way to reconstruct it: had there been a 35 MPH sign posted anywhere nearby? Had he truly been speeding? Where the hell, exactly, was New York Avenue? Many days had passed—how was an honest citizen to recall? So Gideon had done two things: first, paid the fine; and second, vowed not to return to DC for a long, long time. What had once, in his opinion,

always been a beautiful and abiding symbol of the country's greatness was now obsessed with balancing its grossly swollen budget.

Or maybe, fresh from his trout stream, Gideon was just feeling the pain of reentry into urban existence. But either way, there wasn't a chance in hell he was going back to the Smithsonian.

Now—as his thoughts returned to the present and he circled the bed—Gideon began wondering how Glinn had managed to get hold of the complete engineering, wiring, and electrical diagrams of that security system. Here was every circuit, every sensor, every spec, spelled out in minute detail. Lot of good it was going to do him. He had never in his life seen a security system like this—he had never even *imagined* a security system like this. There were the usual multiple layers, redundant and hardened systems, backup power supplies, and everything a burglar might expect. But that was just the beginning.

The East Room itself was now, essentially, a vault. It had originally been constructed of double-laid walls of Vermont limestone block almost three feet thick. The single entry into the room came equipped with a divided steel pocket door that would drop down from the ceiling and rise up from the floor the instant an alarm was triggered, sealing the room. There were no windows anywhere, light being incompatible with the preservation of books. The vaulted ceiling was of poured reinforced concrete, incredibly thick. The floor was a massive slab of reinforced concrete, covered with marble. To all this original reinforcement had been retrofitted, at the Irish government's request, an outer layer of steel plating and sensors.

At night, the room was completely sealed up. Inside, it was secured by crisscrossing laser beams, motion detectors, and infrared sensors of several wavelengths, including one that would pick up even the smallest hint of body heat. Quite literally, not even a mouse (and probably not

even a cockroach) could move inside the room without being detected. There were cameras running day and night, the monitors staffed by highly trained, handpicked security guards of the highest caliber.

During the day, when the exhibition was open to the public, people had to leave behind all their bags and cameras and pass through a metal detector. There were guards inside and outside the hall, and more cameras than a Las Vegas casino. The cube in which the book sat contained an atmosphere of pure argon. Inside the cube were sensors that would immediately go off if they detected a whiff of any other atmospheric gas, even in levels as low as one part per million. If the book was disturbed, the steel doors would seal the room so quickly that not even an Olympic runner could carry it from the case to the exit before it shut.

For days, Gideon had looked for weaknesses in the system. All systems had vulnerabilities, and almost always those vulnerabilities were related either to human fallibility, to programming glitches, or to a system too complex to be completely understood. But the designers of this system had taken those limitations into account. While this system was indeed complex, it was modular, in the sense that each component was fairly simple and independent of the others. The programs were simple, and some layers of security were entirely mechanical, with no computerized controls at all. The redundancy was such that multiple systems could fail or be compromised without affecting the ultimate security of the book.

There was, of course, a way to turn the system on and off, because the pages of the book were turned on a daily basis. But even this had been exceedingly well planned. To shut down the system required three people, each with a simple, independent code that they had memorized. There were no physical keys or written codes or anything that could be stolen. And these three people were untouchable. They were John Waterman himself, the president of the Morgan

Library, and the deputy mayor of New York City. While one might be corruptible or susceptible to social engineering, two would be extremely difficult and three impossible.

And what would happen if one of them died? In that case there was a stand-in, a fourth person—who happened to be the prime minister of Ireland himself.

What about fire? Surely in the case of an emergency, Gideon reasoned, the book would have to be quickly moved. But the specs dealt with that possibility in an unusual way. The book would not be moved in case of a fire. It would be fully protected in situ. The glass cube was designed to be a first line of defense, able to withstand a serious fire on its own; the second line was a fireproof box that rose from inside the cube to enclose the book, protecting it from even the most prolonged fire. And the East Room had redundant, state-of-the-art firefighting components in place that would stifle any fire well before it got going. There were similar systems protecting the book against earthquake, flood, and terrorist attack. Just about the only thing it wasn't protected from was a direct nuclear strike.

With a long sigh, Gideon strolled over to his closet and flipped through his clothes. It was time to get dressed for dinner. He had taken, as a loose cover, the persona of a young, hip dot-com millionaire, a persona he had used before with success. He took out a black St. Croix mock turtleneck, a pair of worn Levi's, and some Bass Weejuns—he had to mix it up a *little*, after all—and pulled them all on.

He hadn't eaten anything all day. This was usual. Gideon preferred one elegant and extraordinary dining experience to three cheap squares. Eating for him was more ritual than sustenance.

He checked his watch again. It was still too early to dine, but he felt restless after three days cooped up in this room, staring at diagrams. He had yet to find a hole, a chink, even the

slightest hairline crack in this security system. Since he'd started stealing from art museums and historical societies when he was a teenager, he had come to believe that there was no such thing as a perfect security system. Every system was vulnerable, either technologically or through social engineering.

That had always been his certitude. Until now.

Christ, he needed a break. He went into the bathroom, combed his wet hair, then slapped on some Truefitt & Hill aftershave balm to cover up the lingering smell of chlorine from the pool. He left his suite, hanging the DO NOT DISTURB sign on the doorknob on his way out.

It was a hot August evening in the Meatpacking District. The beautiful people were out in the Hamptons, and instead the cobbled streets were packed with young, hip-looking tourists—the District had become one of the chicest neighborhoods in Manhattan in recent years.

He walked around the block to the Spice Market, sat down at the bar, and ordered a martini. As he sipped the drink, he indulged in one of his favorite activities, observing the people around him and imagining every detail of their lives, from what they did for a living to what their dogs looked like. But try as he might, he couldn't get into the groove. For the first time in his life, he had run into a security system designed by truly intelligent people—people even smarter than him. The damn Book of Kells was going to be harder to steal than the *Mona Lisa*.

As he pondered this, his mood, already foul, deepened. The people around him—well-heeled and sophisticated, talking, laughing, drinking, and eating—began to irritate him. He began to imagine they weren't people, but chattering monkeys, engaged in complex grooming rituals, and that eased his annoyance.

His drink was empty. Long ago he had learned it was a bad idea for him to order a second one—not that he had a drinking problem, of course, but after two he seemed to pass a line that

led to a third, and even a fourth, and that would inevitably led him to seek out one of those sleek, blond, chattering monkeys...

He ordered a second drink.

While he sipped it, feeling marginally better about the state of the world as the alcohol kicked in, a little idea came to him. If it was truly impossible to steal the Book of Kells—and deep down he knew it was—he would simply have to get someone else to take it out of the room for him...with the full cooperation of those three people. This would require a level of social engineering far more sophisticated than any he had attempted before.

And a way to do just that began to materialize in his very crooked, half-soused mind.

His third drink arrived, and he cast his eye about the elegant bar. There was a woman at the far end, not necessarily the most beautiful woman in the room—she was plump and wore glasses. But—what he personally found most attractive in a woman—she possessed a mordant, intelligent gleam in her eye. She was looking around, and it seemed to Gideon that she found this scene as amusing as he did.

He picked up his almost finished drink and walked over. He glanced at the stool. “May I?”

She looked him up and down. “I think so. Are you in the computer business?”

He laughed and put on his most self-deprecating look. “No, but I am WYSIWYG. Why do you ask?”

“The Steve Jobs uniform—black mock turtleneck and jeans.”

“I don’t like thinking about what I’m going to wear in the morning.”

She turned to the bartender. “Two Beefeater martinis, straight up, two olives, dirty.”

“You’re buying me a drink?”

“Any objection?”

He leaned forward. “Not at all, but how did you know what I was drinking?”

“I’ve been watching you since you came in.”

“Really? Why me?”

“You look like a lost boy.”

Gideon found himself flushing. This woman was perhaps a little too keen in her observations, and he felt unmasked. “Aren’t we all a bit lost?”

She smiled and said, “I think we’re going to get along.”

The drinks arrived and they clinked glasses.

“To being lost,” said Gideon.

## 4

The shop of Griggs and Wellington, Rare Books and Manuscripts, was just around the corner from the Portobello Road. It was one of those antiques shops that had moved up from Portobello but had not quite achieved the success it was trying very, very hard to reach. As Gideon entered the shop, he noted a veneer of British snobbery not quite covering up a kind of trashy East End hustle. The shop's proprietor, a young Brit dressed in overdone Savile Row, confirmed Gideon's suspicions when he arrived, his plummy accent almost but not quite smothering a Cockney origin.

"May I help you, sir?"

Gideon, himself dressed in an expensive Ralph Lauren suit, gave the proprietor a dumb-ass American smile. "Well, I was wondering if I could look at that old manuscript page in the window." His Texas accent came out despite the effort to control it.

"Naturally," the proprietor said. "You mean the illuminated book of hours?"

"Yeah."

The man went to the case, unlocked it, and removed the small page. It was enclosed in stiff plastic. With obvious reverence he placed it on a black velvet tray that he whisked out from under the counter, then set the tray within a pool of light from a spot in the ceiling. It was a page out of the gospel, with an illusionistic border of flowers, its central scene showing the Virgin

Mary seated under an arch, with an angel descending from a blue sky. Mary was drawing back in fear. It was exquisite in every detail.

“Very lovely,” the shopkeeper murmured. “You have a good eye, sir.”

“Tell me about it,” Gideon asked.

“It’s from a Flemish book of hours dating to around 1440—a very fine one indeed. Very fine,” the man repeated, his voice hushed with veneration. “It is believed to be by the workshop of the Master of the Privileges of Ghent and Flanders.”

“I see,” said Gideon. “Nice.”

“It depicts the Annunciation, of course,” the dealer added.

“And how much is it?”

“We have a price of four thousand six hundred pounds on that very rare page.” The man’s voice became pinched, as if discussing sums of money were distasteful to him.

“What’s that, about eight grand?” said Gideon. He peered closely at it.

“Would you like to examine it with a loupe?”

“A what? Oh, thank you.”

As Gideon examined it, the dealer went on, hands clasped, his buttery accent filling the small shop. “As you probably know,” he said, his tone implying that Gideon certainly did not know, “the medieval book of hours came from the monastic cycle of prayer, simplified for private devotions. They represent some of the finest works of medieval art in existence. They were incredibly expensive—the cost of a book of hours in the fifteenth century was about the same as buying a good farm, buildings and all. Only royalty, nobility, and the very wealthy could afford one of these books. Just look at the detail! And the color. I especially direct your attention

to the blue in the sky—a pigment made with crushed lapis lazuli, which in the Middle Ages was more expensive than gold. The only source of lapis at the time was Afghanistan.”

“I see.”

“Are you a collector?” the dealer asked.

“Oh, no. I’m just looking for an anniversary present for my wife. She’s religious.”

Gideon gave an indulgent laugh, signaling that he himself was not.

“May I introduce myself?” the dealer said. “I am Sir Colin Griggs.”

Gideon glanced up at the fellow extending a small white hand, his chin thrust slightly forward, his back straight. He was about as much as “sir” as Gideon was a lord. He took the hand and shook it enthusiastically. “I’m Gideon Crew. From Texas. Sorry, you can’t put any ‘sir’ in front of my name, I’m hardly even a mister.” He gave a belly laugh.

“Ah, Texas, the Lone Star State. You have excellent taste, Mr. Crew. Can I answer any other questions about the item?”

“How do I know it’s real?”

“I can assure you it’s real beyond all doubt. We stand behind everything we sell. You would be welcome to have it examined by an expert after your purchase, and if there were any doubts we’d immediately refund your money.”

“That’s good. But...well, I have to say this four thousand six hundred pounds is a lot of money...how about making it four thousand, even-seven?”

Sir Colin gathered himself up into a ramrod of disapproval. “I’m sorry, Mr. Crew, but at Griggs and Wellington we don’t negotiate.”

Gideon bestowed a genial, Texas smile on the snobby Brit. “Aw, don’t play that game. Everything’s negotiable.” He took out his credit card. “Four thousand or I’m outta here.”

Sir Colin allowed the disapproval on his face to ease somewhat. "I suppose—for someone who appreciates it as much as you do—we could make an exception and lower the price to four thousand four."

"Four thousand two."

The expression on Sir Colin's face indicated that this was a painful and unpleasant discussion. "Four thousand three."

"Sold."

## 5

After a quick trip back to his hotel room for a change of clothes, Gideon set off with the precious page for the London offices of Sotheby's, where the final test of his scheme would take place. It was a stiff three-mile walk that took Gideon through some fascinating byways, as well as Hyde Park. It was a splendid late-summer day, and in the park the ancient trees were in full leaf, cumulus clouds drifting overhead like sailing ships, the greensward alive with people. London was an extraordinary city, and he told himself he really should spend more time there—maybe even live there.

And then he remembered his terminal medical condition, and such thoughts were quickly forced from his head.

The Sotheby's building was an unpretentious, nineteenth-century edifice of four stories, newly whitewashed. The staff were most solicitous when they saw the little illuminated manuscript page he wanted to place with them at auction, and he was ushered into a neat little office on the third floor, where he was greeted by a charming, roly-poly man with gold-rimmed spectacles and a huge shock of Einsteinian hair, dressed in an old-fashioned tweed suit with a vest and gold watch chain, looking like a man out of a Dickens novel. He was considered to be—Gideon had done the research—one of the world's greatest experts on illuminated manuscripts.

“Well, well!” the man said, smelling of tobacco and perhaps even a hint of whiskey. “What have we here, eh?” He held out a fat hand. “Brian MacKilda, at your service!” He spoke as if always out of breath, punctuating his phrases with a *huff-huff* as if catching his wind.

“I’ve got an illuminated manuscript I’d like to place in auction.” Gideon held out the small leather portfolio.

“Excellent! Let’s take a look.” MacKilda came around the desk, opened a drawer, and pulled out a loupe, which he pressed into one voluminous, winking eye. Adjusting a special lamp—which threw a pool of white light onto a smooth black tray—he picked up the portfolio, took out the plastic-covered page Gideon had just purchased, slipped it out, and stared at it with a few nods, which set his fluffy hair a-wagging, accompanied by grunts of approval.

He then put it under the light. Several minutes went by while he examined it with the loupe, making more animal noises, all of which sounded positive. After that, MacKilda switched off the bright light, reached down into his desk, and removed a small, peculiar-looking flashlight with a square face. He held it close to the page and turned it on. It cast a deep ultraviolet light. MacKilda shone it here and there, lingering only briefly, and then switched off the light. The noises suddenly turned into negative snorts.

“Oh, dear,” the man said finally. “Dear, dear, dear.” This was followed by some huffing and puffing.

“Is there a problem?”

MacKilda shook his head sorrowfully. “Fake.”

“*What?* How can it be? I paid four thousand pounds for it!”

The man turned a pair of sad eyes on him. “Our business, sir, is sadly rife with fakes. Rife!” He rolled the *r* with particular emphasis.

“But how can shining a light on it for five seconds be definitive? Don’t you have other tests?”

A long sigh. “We have many tests, many, *many* tests. Raman spectroscopy, X-ray fluorescence, carbon 14. But in this case there’s no need to do other tests.”

“I don’t get it. One five-second test?”

“Allow me to explain.” MacKilda took a deep breath, followed by several *huff-huffs* and a general throat clearing. “The illuminators of yore used mostly mineral pigments in their inks. The blues are from ground lapis lazuli, the vermilion from cinnabar and sulfur. Green came from ground malachite or copper verdigris. And the whites were usually made from lead, often in combination with gypsum or calcite.”

He paused for more stentorian breathing.

“Now, the point is that some of these minerals fluoresce strongly under ultraviolet light, while others change color in certain ways.” He paused, breathing hard. “But look at this.”

He shined the blacklight once again on the manuscript page. The surface remained dark, dull, unchanged. “There, you see? Nothing!”

He snapped it off. “These pigments are therefore cheap aniline dyes, none of which react to UV light.”

“But it looks so real!” Gideon said, almost pleading. “Please take a look at it again, *please*. It’s got to be real!”

With another long-suffering sigh, MacKilda turned to it again and in fact did look at it for more than five seconds. “I admit the work is quite good. I was fooled at first. And the vellum looks original. Why a forger with such evident talent would go to the trouble to create an artistic fake like this—and then use aniline dyes—is beyond me. My guess is that it’s Chinese. It used to

be most of the fakes came out of Russia, but now we're starting to see some out of the Far East. The Chinese are a bit naive—hence the aniline dyes—but they'll catch on, unfortunately.”

He shook his head, the hair wagging, and held the page back out to Gideon. “It's most certainly, most definitely, without a doubt, a forgery.” And he punctuated this with a final jiggle of hair and a loud *huff-huff*.

## 6

Julia Thrum Murphy, thirty-two years old, had driven all the way from Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, where she was an assistant professor of romance languages, to see the Book of Kells on its last weekend in the States. It was a glorious Sunday afternoon, if a bit warm in the city, and what she had feared turned out to be true: the exhibition was jam-packed.

At the ticket desk, she was informed by a harried attendant that the wait just to get into the East Room was about forty-five minutes. And then there was a long, slow-moving line within the room itself, which might take another thirty minutes or more.

An hour and fifteen minutes. Hearing this, Julia almost decided to skip it and head up to the Cloisters to see the unicorn tapestries instead. But then she decided to wait. This, she knew, would be her only chance to see the Book of Kells outside of Ireland.

So she bought the twenty-five-dollar ticket, checked her handbag and camera, went through the metal detectors, and got in line. As people exited the East Room, more were let in, and the line moved slowly. Finally, after forty minutes, she reached the head of the initial line and was given the nod to enter the East Room.

Inside the room it was almost worse. The crowd moved snake-like between sets of stanchions and velvet ropes that would have done an airport security gate proud. Viewers were

given less than a minute to ogle the book before guards began polite murmurings for them to keep moving, keep moving.

An hour-and-fifteen-minute wait for one minute of pleasure. This was a bit like sex, she thought, feeling disgruntled as she moved along through the serpentine line.

Just then, a fellow about her age, a bit ahead of her, passed going the other way in the queue and gave her a smile, a little warmer than mere politeness would dictate. She was startled by his roguish good looks and the combination of jet-black hair and blue eyes: a type her mother would call “Black Irish.” As his smile lingered, Julia looked away. She was used to this; it was her good fortune to be born not only with brains but also with a certain willowy beauty, which she maintained with a regimen of Pilates, yoga, and jogging. Even though she was a professor, she was not at all attracted to the crop of flabby, self-important, and often pretentious men who were her peers at Bryn Mawr. Not that there was anything seriously wrong with them: the type, frankly, didn’t turn her on. At the same time, it was hard to find a man who was her intellectual equal outside of academia. She could imagine herself marrying a poor man, or even an ugly man—but never, ever, would she marry a man who was less intelligent than she was.

As she thought about this, the line shuffled forward, and the man who had smiled at her approached again. When they drew side by side, he leaned over and spoke to her, sotto voce: “We’ve got to stop meeting like this.”

While the line was hardly original, she laughed. He didn’t look stupid, at least.

He moved on as the parallel lines inched forward. She found herself anticipating his next pass, her heartbeat even accelerating a little. She glanced around the dense but orderly crowd in the East Room, looking for him. Where was he? This was crazy, her getting all a-flutter about some random stranger. She had been celibate way too long.

And then, quite suddenly, it happened. A flash of light, followed by a terrific *bang*, so loud it made her heart leap in terror, and she threw herself to the floor amid a chorus of shrieking and screaming. Immediately, she thought *terrorist attack*, and even as this went through her mind the alarms went off and the room abruptly filled with a thick smoke, totally opaque, that transformed her world into a hellish brown twilight in which she could see nothing, only hear the useless hysterical screams and cries of her fellow museum-goers.

Then came the hollow boom of what sounded like steel meeting steel, immediately followed by the *crump* of another, muffled explosion.

She lay on the ground, cheek by jowl with a dozen others, maintaining a defensive fetal position, protecting her head, as the hysterical screaming continued. She remained silent and, somewhat to her surprise, collected. After a few moments she could hear some shouted orders—security, trying to calm people down—along with sirens and the sudden roar of forced air.

Rapidly the fog thinned out and the light came back up. Almost by magic, the smoke was gone, sucked into forced-air grates now exposed in the ceiling by the withdrawal of painted panels.

The screaming began to subside, and she sat up, looking around to see what was happening. The first thing she noticed was that the glass cube holding the Book of Kells had been cleaved, a corner of the cube dirtied by what must have been a detonation of some kind. The book was not in the cube—it had been stolen. But no, not stolen, because there it was, on the floor next to the cube, open and in disarray.

And then she realized they were locked in: the only door into the East Room was now a slab of stainless steel.

The next thought that came to her mind, with some relief, was that this whole thing was nothing more than a botched robbery.

## 7

Now the stanchions and ropes served another purpose: they allowed the guards to control the seething crowd, which remained sealed in the East Room while security reviewed the situation.

Julia Thrum Murphy found herself herded, along with everyone else, to one side of the room while the half dozen guards secured and examined the Book of Kells and talked animatedly to their counterparts outside the East Room via radio. It became even more obvious to Julia that this was a botched robbery: the flash-bang and smoke used as a cover, the muffled explosion that split the case, the book removed—but the thief had evidently not been able to get the book out of the room before the steel security doors descended. So he'd dropped it and melted back into the crowd.

Which meant the thief was still locked in the East Room with the rest of them—a fact that was clearly evident to the guards as well. It seemed she was in for a long ordeal. While the crowd had grown more orderly, there was still a degree of chaos, with the inevitable hysterics making scenes, along with some enterprising people who appeared to be claiming non-existent injuries, no doubt hoping to make some money. Several doctors in the crowd had already come forward and were examining them.

A part of Julia was actually beginning to enjoy this.

Now a sweating guard moved her and some of the others to another place in the room, and she found herself once again next to the man with the roguish face and dark hair.

He smiled at her again. “Having fun?”

“As a matter of fact, yes.”

“Me too. You realize,” he went on, “the ersatz thief is still in the room.”

*Ersatz*. She liked a man with a big vocabulary.

“So...” The roguish-looking man smiled. “Take a look around. Let’s see if we can pick him out.”

This was fun. Julia glanced around, scouring the faces of the people. “I don’t see any obvious crooks.”

“It’s always the person you’d least suspect.”

“That would be you,” she said.

He laughed, leaned toward her, and put out his hand. “Gideon Crew.”

“Julia Murphy.”

“Murphy. Irish, by any chance?” He raised an eyebrow comically.

“What about Crew? What kind of a name is that?”

“A distinguished name of Old Welsh origin. Distinguished, that is, until a Crew nicked the bailiff’s moneybox and stowed away to America.”

“Your ancestry is as elevated as mine.”

The guards were already lining people up, organizing them for questioning. A commander—at least he had a couple of stripes on his shoulders—stepped forward and raised his hands.

“May I have your attention, please!”

The general hubbub died down.

“I’m afraid that we can’t let anyone leave this room until everyone has been interviewed,” he announced. “It would greatly speed things up if all of you would please cooperate.”

Murmurings, objections. “I want to get out of here!” one of the hysterics cried, to a scattered chorus of agreement.

The commander raised his hand. “I promise you, we’re going to get you out of here as soon as possible. But to do that, we need your help. We’ve just had an attempted robbery of the Book of Kells, and there are certain protocols that must be followed. So I ask for your patience.”

More murmuring, complaining, expostulation.

“So what do you do?” Gideon asked.

“I teach at Bryn Mawr. Romance languages—French, Italian, Spanish, and some Latin.”

“Bryn Mawr,” he said. “A professor. Nice.”

“And you?”

The man hesitated. “Until recently, I worked at Los Alamos National Lab. I’m now on leave.”

Julia was startled, taken aback even. “Los Alamos. You mean, where they build nuclear weapons?”

“Not build. Design.”

“Is that what you do? Design bombs?”

“Among other things.”

Was he joking? No, he wasn’t. She didn’t know whether to be impressed or horrified. At least he wasn’t just another dumb, good-looking male.

“I know,” he went on, defensively. “Maybe my profession sounds a little sketchy. But really, I’m an American doing my duty to keep my country safe and all that.”

Julia shook her head. “I can just see you talking like that at a faculty sherry at Bryn Mawr. Oh, God, they’d label you a killer.”

“And what do *you* think?”

She gave him a level gaze. “Do you care what I think?”

He returned the gaze, and she was a little taken back by its intensity. “Yes.”

He gave this a peculiar emphasis that caused her to blush, and as she became aware she was blushing, she only turned redder. “I’m not sure what I think,” was all she could say.

They were silent for a few minutes. She glanced over to where the book had been placed back within its cradle. Several guards were hunched over it, examining it with enormous care—turning the pages with white-gloved hands. They seemed to be getting more and more agitated. Moments later they called out to the commander, who bustled over. A short, intense confab took place, and then the commander spoke furiously into his radio. The crowd, noticing the change, fell into a hush.

The commander raised his arm again. “I need your attention. It appears a page has been cut from the Book of Kells and is missing.”

A gasp from the audience.

“The page must still be in this room. So I am afraid to say that no one can be allowed out without being questioned *and* searched. We’re obtaining the necessary warrants as I speak. The security door must remain closed until we recover the missing page. I apologize for the inconvenience, but there’s nothing else we can do. We cannot let anyone out of this room without a thorough search.”

“Wow,” said Julia. “The plot thickens.”

Gideon Crew was peering around the room, lips pursed, his blue eyes sparkling.

“Identified the thief yet?”

“I still think it’s you. You come from a line of thieves and you do look a bit of a rogue. And...you look nervous.”

He laughed. “And I’m sure *you’re* the thief. A professor of romance languages from Bryn Mawr—talk about the perfect cover.”

People were now being fed through the stanchions to where the guards had set up a makeshift screening area, behind a bookcase draped with a heavy curtain. Those who had been searched were being led into another holding area, the two groups kept separate. The room remained sealed in steel.

Several people were continuing to protest, and the temperature in the room was climbing. “We’re going to be here all afternoon,” Julia said. The novelty was starting to wear off. She had a long drive back to Bryn Mawr. Maybe she should stay in the city and drive back on Monday. She would miss morning classes, but at least she had a good excuse. She glanced over at Gideon and wondered, idly, if he had an apartment in the city.

“Seriously, I don’t see any obvious crooks in here,” he told her. “Just a lot of boring old white people with names like Murphy and O’Toole.”

Suddenly there was a shout. One of the guards, who had been searching the room, was calling out and gesturing frantically. He was kneeling at a bookcase, the glass door of which was open. The commander and other guards went over, and they all bent down to examine something. It looked to Julia like a piece of paper shoved between two volumes. More activity, discussion, and finally—with gloves—the thing was removed. It was a sheet of vellum, and it

looked very much like a page from the Book of Kells. It was brought over to the volume, now back on its stand, and a long examination and a second whispered confabulation ensued.

Once again, the commander gestured to the crowd for quiet. “It appears,” he said, “that we’ve recovered the page cut from the Book of Kells.”

A large murmur of relief.

“I’m afraid, however, that we’re still going to have to question and search each and every one of you before we can open that security door.”

A smattering of angry expostulations.

“The sooner you all get with the program,” the commander said wearily, “the sooner all of us will be out of here.”

A collective groan. “Oh, God,” said Julie, “At this rate, I won’t get back to Bryn Mawr until midnight. How I hate driving at night.”

“You could always stay with me. I’ve got a suite at the Gansevoort Hotel, with a view of the High Line.”

She looked at him and, to her mortification, found her heart rate accelerating considerably at the thought. “Is that some sort of indecent proposal?”

“As a matter of fact, yes. We’ll have a wonderful dinner in the hotel restaurant with a good bottle of wine, talk about nuclear physics and French literature, and then we’ll go up to my room and make passionate and indecent love.”

“You’re awfully direct.”

“*Vita brevis*,” he said, simply. And the Latin, more than anything else, was why she said yes.

## 8

It was a fresh summer morning as Gideon walked the block from his hotel to the offices of Effective Engineering Solutions on Little West 12th Street. Dr. Julia Thrum Murphy. He felt more than a twinge of regret. As much as he'd enjoyed her company, he couldn't allow himself to get entangled in any sort of relationship with anyone, not with a death sentence hanging over his head. It wouldn't be fair to her. For her part, she seemed quite happy with a one-night stand and had said good-bye to him with no tone of regret. He would have loved to have seen her again—but it was not to be.

He angrily swiped his card and the unprepossessing doors of EES whispered open; he traversed the cavernous lab spaces, with their shrouded models and setups, the white-coated technicians whispering among themselves or making notations on clipboards; and he made his way to the conference room on the top floor of the building. There he found only the dour, nameless man who served coffee, waiting in his uniform. Gideon took a seat, threw his arms behind his head, and leaned back. “Double espresso, no sugar, thanks.”

The man vanished. A moment later, Glinn came in, bringing with him an arctic chill. Silently, he directed his electric wheelchair to the head of the conference table, the humming noise of the motor all the greeting Gideon got. A moment later Manuel Garza, Glinn's bullish aide-de-camp, entered, followed by half a dozen other EES employees. Nobody said a word.

The steward went around and collected everyone's murmured orders for coffee or tea. Once he had left, Glinn pressed a button on the small console beside the table—evidently starting a recorder—and then began speaking in a neutral tone of voice, giving the date and time, the names of those present. After that, he fell silent, his eye scanning the room and ending on Gideon.

“It seems the third time is not the charm, is it, Dr. Crew?” he said.

When Gideon said nothing, Glinn addressed the group sitting around the table. “Dr. Crew managed two successful operations for us, for which we are very grateful. I am sorry the Book of Kells has proved to be his undoing. After the utter disaster yesterday, it will be going back to Ireland this afternoon, by chartered jet, surrounded by unbreakable security.”

Gideon Crew listened to this statement with his arms crossed.

“This botched and amateurish operation of Dr. Crew's, I'm afraid to say, has created enormous difficulties for our client. It has caused an international furor in Ireland and the US. We've lost our chance to acquire the Chi Rho page.”

Glinn looked around. “In other words, *we have failed.*”

A grave murmur rippled through the room. Glinn's gray eye turned back toward Gideon. “Do you have anything to say?”

Gideon uncrossed his arms. “Not really. Except that the book hasn't left the country yet. Something still might happen.”

“*Something still might happen,*” repeated Garza in a voice laden with sarcasm. There was a frosty silence.

“You never know,” Gideon went on. “Remember Yogi Berra. ‘It ain't over till it's over.’”

Glinn's unflappable composure began to crack. "Spare us the hoary quotations. We must act now to contain the damage from this disaster."

"It's not a disaster yet. The flight to Dublin leaves at six o'clock. That's ten hours from now."

Glinn frowned. "Are you telling us you have a new plan to steal the page that you so conspicuously failed to acquire yesterday?"

"I'm sorry you don't have more faith in me, Eli."

"Because if you do have some sort of plan B, I'm sure we'd like to hear it."

"No, I don't have a plan B. Because plan A is still in progress."

"You call this a *plan*?" Garza broke in. "You attempt to steal the page, fail in the worst way possible, and in the process you get ID'ed, and we can only thank God you weren't actually caught. The whole business is now front-page news across the US and Europe. Some plan!"

"Do you know where the book is now?" Glinn asked quietly.

"No."

More incredulous looks around the room.

"I've had our people do a little digging," Glinn said, "and I *do* know where the Book of Kells is right now: in an impregnable vault underneath the Citicorp building. The prime minister of Ireland himself is on his way here to escort it back to his country. It will be in his personal possession from the Citicorp vault all the way to a vault at the Bank of Ireland, guarded by the heaviest security the US Secret Service and Interpol can provide, roads cleared of traffic, chartered jet, all the trimmings. And you think you still have a chance of stealing it?"

"Of stealing the Chi Rho page, yes." Gideon checked his watch.

"And just how can you be so sure?"

“Because before the afternoon is out, you will learn—from the news resource of your choice—that the page cut from the Book of Kells in an attempted robbery is a fake, and that the real page is missing and presumed stolen.”

There were shocked looks around the table.

“Is this true?” Glinn asked.

“Of course.”

“Well,” Glinn said after a moment, returning Gideon’s look with a faint, cold smile.

“Extraordinary. Although you might have spared us the drama.”

“Just think of all the drama you’ve put me through. Besides, I couldn’t help having a little fun.”

“So, where’s the original? Do you have it?”

“No, I don’t have it. As I said, I don’t know where it is right now. But I know where it *will* be, probably by the middle of the week.”

“And then?”

“And then I *will* steal it—for real, this time.”

## 9

Sergeant Adellepoise Johnson was in charge of the Third Tier Evidence Vaults in the vast basement complex of One Police Plaza, in Lower Manhattan, almost in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge. Sergeant Johnson had been a chain of custody supervisor for ten years, and during that time, in each of those years, she was the supervisor who'd experienced the lowest rate of CoC infractions. For that extraordinary record, she had been awarded an "Integrity" commendation with a dark blue star and a Meritorious Policy Duty citation, both of which she wore proudly on the ample front of her uniform. She had fifteen clerks handling evidence curation for her, as well as another dozen assistants and technicians, and she managed them with military precision and correctness. She knew as well as anyone that evidence management was critical to the outcome of criminal prosecutions. While she might not be the most beloved supervisor in the Evidence Vaults, she was the most respected. People were proud to work for her.

It was a Friday, nine o'clock in the morning, and Sergeant Johnson had been in since seven getting an early start on the computer paperwork of the week, reviewing all the evidence that had been checked out or returned, every movement of every shell casing and hair and DNA swab, whether for trial, lab work, or on-site examination. Maintaining the chain of custody of evidence was of paramount importance, and in the past few years the entire procedure had been

computerized, with digital video recording of absolutely everything that was done to a piece of evidence, by whom, when, and why.

Sergeant Johnson was never happy when someone arrived to examine evidence by surprise, and she was particularly irritated that it would occur on a Friday morning. But occur it did. One of her evidence clerks arrived with a tall, thin gentleman in an expensive dark suit, sporting a wiffle cut that practically screamed *FBI*. And sure enough, he was a special agent of the most annoying kind, one of those who thought they were God's gift to law enforcement and that beat cops were a lower form of life.

"I've spent over an hour now getting credentialed," the man said in a sarcastic drawl. "I tip my hat to the efficiency of the NYPD."

With this, he held out his badge and a folder containing his credentials.

Sergeant Johnson never got into it with anybody for any reason. She rose from her desk—her sheer size was often all that it took to quell a sparky personality—gave the man a smile, and took the badge and folder.

"Special Agent Morrison?" she asked.

"That's what it says on the badge," he said.

A real hard-ass. She looked at the ID, which was brand new, and the badge, also new, and then looked at him. He looked new, too. Fresh out of the academy. They were the worst.

"So you're working on the Kells case, Agent Morrison?"

"It's all spelled out in the file."

"And you want to examine the forged page, I see."

"I repeat, it's all spelled out in the request, Sergeant."

“You understand, Special Agent Morrison, that in CoC situations the less evidence handling that goes on, the better. It’s my responsibility—” She emphasized the *my*—“to make sure any evidence handling is necessary and justified. I’m telling you this to make sure you understand the procedures.”

“I’m sure you will find that my examination of the evidence is not on a whim, and I can assure you the FBI would not be happy if my request were denied.”

Sergeant Johnson had dealt with Morrison’s type countless times before, and it was almost laughable how predictable he was. Spoiling for a fight even before there was reason for a fight. She opened the folder and carefully examined his credentials and documents. Everything did indeed look to be in order. The FBI had gone through all the proper channels, the only issue being that Agent Morrison was three hours early for his scheduled appointment. But again, that was typical FBI. The reason for the examination was standard and pro forma, evidentiarily justified and legal.

She approved the documentation, signed it, stamped it, and handed it back. “I will accompany you,” she said, rising.

“Fine,” said Morrison.

He didn’t seem interested in knowing why, so she added, truthfully, “I do this with many high-profile cases. My testimony can be helpful if the defense raises CoC issues.”

“It’s your call,” he said.

Johnson, the evidence clerk, and the FBI agent proceeded to the elevators and descended to the basement, which had been completely renovated in 2011 as part of a major expansion project. Much of the new space had been devoted to state-of-the-art evidence curation, and entering it was like entering the spotless corridors of a first-class hospital. It was a long walk to

the Tier Three Vaults, which housed all the evidence in active, open criminal investigations. It was the most important of the three tiers of evidence storage.

After passing many numbered doors, they came to the appropriate storage room. The clerk deactivated the alarm, and the door opened to reveal a beautiful, clean white room with locked cabinets and a plastic table and chairs. There were cameras in all four corners of the ceiling, which Sergeant Johnson knew were recording their every move.

The clerk put on sterile, powder-free latex surgical gloves, scanned the numbered cabinets, and approached one. She punched a code into a nearby keypad, and the cabinet sprang open. Peering inside, she removed a shallow tray and brought it to the table.

“Do you need to handle it?” Johnson asked Morrison.

“Yes.”

“Then you’ll need a face mask and gloves, as well.” She almost added a hair net to the list, just to be difficult, except for the fact that Agent Morrison had almost no hair.

Frowning, Agent Morrison donned the gloves and a face mask, and then sat down to the table. He pulled the tray toward him and looked down at the forged page of the Book of Kells. Johnson, curious, edged closer to take a look. *What an amazing-looking thing*, she thought, *so intricate*. It would have been nice to see the original—before it was stolen.

Morrison reached into his suit and removed a notebook, which he laid down on the table beside him, and began taking notes in pencil (pens weren’t allowed). He placed a loupe to his eye, examining the page silently. The time began to drag on, and on, and on. Five minutes went by, and then ten. What on earth was he looking at? She glanced at her watch but decided to say nothing. She was fairly sure Morrison was no expert, and the ridiculous examination was nothing more than the man feeding his own swollen ego.

She and the evidence clerk exchanged a glance.

And now, finally, Agent Morrison picked the page up and examined it while holding it closer to the light, squinting at it and turning it this way and that. Again, the examination went on interminably. Again Johnson exchanged another glance with the clerk, more exasperated this time. Her legs began to ache from standing, and finally she eased herself down into a seat; the clerk, with evident relief, did the same. Would this never end?

Yet still he examined it. Now he was taking more notes, writing rapidly in his notebook in an illegible hand, acting like the expert she was sure he wasn't.

Suddenly there was a clatter and she rose from the chair to see that the agent had clumsily knocked his notebook off the table, which was now lying spread out beneath it, with loose papers scattered all about. He had jumped up, the page in hand, and was bending down to pick up the notebook, his back to her. She was about to call out to him to put the damn page down while he collected his things but then he turned, still holding the page in one gloved hand, while with the other he fixed the rifled pages of his notebook, putting them back in order.

With a disapproving stare Johnson sat back down, while the agent went back to his examination, taking still more notes.

“Done,” he said at last, placing the page back in its tray.

Without a word, Johnson creaked once again to her feet. The clerk put the tray back into the cabinet, made sure it was locked; they signed out and proceeded out of the room and back down the long white corridors. All routine.

Sergeant Johnson didn't realize they had a problem until three hours later, when the real Special Agent Morrison arrived for his appointment—right on time.

# 10

Gideon went straight from One Police Plaza to the EES offices on Little West 12th Street. Glinn and Garza met him in the cavernous engineering space, and Gideon followed them past elaborate dioramas, mainframe computers, and heavily scribbled whiteboards to a room in the back. It contained a state-of-the-art chemistry laboratory. A stooped technician with a lugubrious face was awaiting them.

Glinn's wheelchair whispered along the polished concrete floor, and the door to the lab slid shut behind them.

"Do you have it?" Garza asked.

Gideon removed a notebook from his suit and opened it, displaying the small, jewel-like page. Glinn reached out and took it, staring at it with great intensity. The man's normally expressionless face was almost comically excited, the good eye glittering, his every movement sharp and precise. After staring at it for several minutes, he signaled the technician, who came over, latex-gloved hands bearing a tray onto which Glinn placed the page.

He turned back to Gideon. "Tell us how you did it," he said, unable to disguise the eagerness in his voice.

“Well,” Gideon began, “after looking over the specs, I realized the security in the East Room of the Morgan was pretty much perfect. There was no way I was going to get the page out myself. So I had to figure out a way for someone else to take it out for me.”

“How?”

“First I had to stage a spectacular, and apparently botched, robbery.”

Glinn nodded.

“I went on the final Sunday, when I knew the East Room would be packed. I set off a weak flash-bang with smoke, to scare and temporarily blind the room. Then I went to the case and attached a device that detonated a small shaped charge, which in turn split the bulletproof cube containing the book—not unlike cleaving a diamond.”

“A shaped charge designed by you, no doubt, given your work at Los Alamos with implosion bombs.” Glinn waved a withered hand. “Go on.”

“After splitting the case, I took out the Book of Kells, cut out the Chi Rho page, and gave it a very brief chemical treatment. Then I left the book on the floor and hid the page elsewhere in the room. It all took less than sixty seconds. The room cleared of smoke, and then things proceeded like clockwork. They discovered the book was missing a page; they searched for the page; they found it. At this point, the job had all the hallmarks of a botched robbery. They questioned and searched everyone who had been in the room—one of them had to be the thief—but found nothing, not on me or anyone else. They didn’t look as hard as they might have if the page had remained missing. They thought they had the entire book.”

Gideon smiled. He was coming to the good part. “But I knew that, at some point, they would have an expert conservator examine the cut page. Just to make sure it wasn’t damaged or in need of special attention. They might have even decided to test it to see if it was real or not. At

any rate, the Chi Rho page I'd cut out immediately failed a UV examination, indicating it was a forgery."

"How did you know they would do this?" Garza asked.

"Because I bought a real illuminated manuscript page in London, gave it my special chemical treatment, and brought it into Sotheby's. There it was pronounced a fake by one of the world's greatest experts on illuminated manuscripts."

"Very good."

"So—as soon as they found the page was a fake—they realized they weren't dealing with a botched robbery, but a *successful* one. Clearly, they concluded, the thief had brought a fake page into the room to substitute for the real one and hid it in the room, to make everyone *think* it was a botched robbery and that nothing had been stolen. You see, I had to make them think the real page was actually a fake. It had to fail the standard UV test."

"Clever," said Glinn. "So what was this 'special chemical treatment' of yours?"

Gideon reached into his pocket and removed a small spray can. "La Spiaggia Scent-Free Ultra Sunblock, SPF 70."

Everyone in the room stared at the small canister.

"The ingredients are titanium oxide, zinc oxide, and octyl methoxycinnamate—all broad-spectrum UV blockers. All it took was a quick spritz on both sides of the page and the deed was done. And when I was searched and the guards found the canister of sunblock—which of course they did—they thought nothing of it."

Glinn nodded his approval.

"So when the page—covered in sunblock—was subjected to the standard UV tests, nothing happened. None of these glorious medieval mineral pigments fluoresced as they should

have if the page was real. The page was therefore assumed to be a fake, made with aniline dyes! And now the powers that be realized—or so they thought—the thief had gotten away with the real page, leaving behind this substitute.”

“Brilliant,” murmured Glinn.

“Thus, the ‘fake’ page became evidence in a criminal investigation. As such, it was sent to the evidence vaults underneath One Police Plaza. And this morning, Eli, thanks to your phony credentials and your scheduling data from the FBI database, I was able to get into the vault and switch the fake *real* page with a *real* fake page. It was just a matter of prestidigitation, at which I excel, done under the table, out of sight of the video cameras. Now they have the fake that they always thought they had, and we’ve got the real page. And no one is the wiser—save for the fact that two Agent Morrisons visited the evidence labs today.”

Glenn clasped his withered hands together, almost as if he were praying. “This is amazing. *Amazing.*”

“Thank you. And now, I’d like to know why this page is so important.”

“And so you shall.” Glinn turned. “Dr. Stanislavsky?”

“Vee are ready, Dr. Glinn,” said the Munster-like technician, picking up the tray with the page and bringing it over to a series of other, shallow trays filled with liquids, akin to developing trays, each with its own thermometer. He took the manuscript page, laid it on a screen with a handle, and immersed it in the first liquid.

“What, exactly, are you doing to it?” Gideon asked, alarmed.

“You shall see,” Glinn replied.

After timing the bath, Dr. Stanislavsky raised the screen and placed it in a second bath, again timing it.

The bath became cloudy.

“Hey, what’s going on?” Gideon asked, staring at the clouding water. It looked to him like the ink on the page was dissolving.

The technician raised the screen. The colors of the intricate Chi Rho image were now running all over the place, along with a heavy white underpainting.

“What the *hell?*” Gideon yelled, taking a step forward.

Garza laid a firm, restraining hand on his arm.

The page went into the third tray, a laminar flow bath. Gideon could see, through the shimmering surface of the moving liquid, that the Chi Rho image was vanishing, dissolving...and then it was gone. With a deft motion the technician plucked the page from the bath with rubber-nose tweezers and held it up, dripping fluid.

It was blank.

# 11

“You son of a bitch!” Gideon cried as Garza tightened his grip. “I can’t believe you just destroyed—you frigging *destroyed*—that priceless work of art!” He jerked his arm away from Garza, took another step toward Glinn.

Unperturbed, Glinn held up a hand. “Wait. Please reserve judgment until the end.”

Breathing hard, Gideon fought to get himself under control. He couldn’t believe it. He had been conned into participating in a horrible act of destruction. This was unbelievable, despicable. He would go to the cops, tell them all about Glinn and the theft. What did he have to lose? He was going to be dead in ten months anyway.

Still using the tweezers, the technician laid the now blank sheet under blotters to absorb the excess moisture, and then put it on a glass stage, part of a large machine.

“That,” said Glinn calmly, nodding at the machine, “is an XRF analyzer. X-ray fluorescence.”

As the technician busied himself with the machine, Glinn continued. “Are you familiar with the term *palimpsest*?”

“No.”

“In the Middle Ages, manuscript vellum was a very costly material. Only the finest skins could be used—sheep, calf, or goat. The best came from fetal animals. The skin had to be

prepared by skilled experts—split, soaked, limed, scudded, and stretched. Because it was so expensive, monks often reused vellum from old books. They'd scrape off the old text, resoak and wash the vellum, and use it again."

"Get to the point."

"A *palimpsest* is the ghostly shadow of that earlier, original text. Some of the most important and famous Greek and Latin texts are today known only known as palimpsests, having later been scraped off and written or painted over for other purposes. That's what we're looking for here."

"There's an older text underneath the Chi Rho painting?"

"There's something under there, but it's not a text."

"For God's sake, did you have to *destroy* it to see it?"

"Unfortunately, yes. The Chi Rho page had an ultra-heavy underpainting of white flake, a medieval paint made with lead. We had to remove that to see what was underneath."

"What could possibly be more important than what was there?" Gideon asked angrily.

"You yourself said the Book of Kells is finest illuminated manuscript in existence!"

"We have reason to believe what's underneath *is* more important." Glinn turned back to the technician. "Ready?"

Stanislavsky nodded.

"Run it."

The technician raised the stage on the analyzer, adjusted some dials, and punched a command into a digital keyboard. A faint, blurry drawing sprang to life on the embedded screen. Slowly, like a master, Stanislavsky adjusted various dials and controls, fine-tuning the image. At

first it looked like a random series of dots, lines, and squiggles, but slowly it came into sharper view.

“What the hell is that?” Gideon asked, peering more closely.

“A map.”

“A map? To a treasure?”

“A map to something better than a treasure. Something absolutely, utterly, and completely extraordinary. Something that will change the world.” Glinn’s gray eye fixed itself on Gideon. “And your next assignment is to go get it.”