22. And Darkness Was upon the Face of the Deep

In his time, Jones had traveled by almost every means of conveyance imaginable. He had floated a helium balloon across the Alps, in the glory of a sun blanched, cloudless sky, sailed in a submarine through black waters, in the frigid depths of the Persian Gulf, ridden the hump of a surly camel in the deserts of Algeria, the shoulder of a regal elephant in the jungles of Kashmir, and the back of a compliant donkey in the rocky wastes of Iran. But never, he reflected, as Jones and the other travelers entered the private plane, had Jones seen anything like this.

Donnelly's wide-bodied jet was a sort of an urbane, flying palace. Fully customizing the interior, Donnelly had divided the passenger compartment of the plane into two spacious rooms, outfitted with traditional furniture, carpets, and paintings that reminded Jones of an English town house in the Mayfair section of London. The décor, however, Jones reflected, wasn't the only compelling aspect of the aerial environment.

What Jones found even more fascinating were the passengers that Donnelly had assembled to accompany him on his journey.

In addition to the pilot and copilot, who, obviously, kept largely to the cockpit and the anterior galley during the flight, Jones counted twelve people on the plane. Donnelly's senior staff member on board was Deacon John Corsair, an earnest, cultivated man in his early thirties, who, Jones was told, was of the laity. From Donnelly's cursory account of Corsair's position, Jones surmised that Corsair administered the Boston Diocese on Donnelly's behalf, and Jones understood that Corsair, in doing so, wielded considerable authority. Jones was favorably impressed by Corsair's seriousness, intelligence, and what he adjudged as his integrity. Jones could be wrong, of course—this was only a first encounter with the man, after all—but he had the feeling that Corsair was an honest man who followed Donnelly because he believed that

Donnelly was, quite literally, on the side of the angels. Another traveler to whom Jones was introduced was Elton Stanmore, Donnelly's private secretary, a slender, slight, handsome fellow in his twenties, with a large head, curly blond hair, big blue eyes, and long eyelashes. He seemed to Jones to be a model of efficient good humor, who, throughout the flight, always managed to appear, at the ready, when Donnelly required his service and to disappear into the background at other times.

Although they were not introduced or identified to him as such, Jones recognized four of the other travelers—tall, muscular, silent men, who separated into pairs and kept to themselves—as Donnelly's bodyguards. Jones automatically rated the potential threat represented by prospective combatants in his presence, and he judged these four to be unusually formidable.

Two remaining travelers were curious entries in the guests' registry. Donnelly informed Jones, enigmatically, that these girls were prospective members of the Order of St. Teresa of Avila, a group for young women, which, Donnelly explained, he was planning to institute shortly. Jones could only speculate if Donnelly was intimately involved with these girls. They were certainly beautiful enough, thought Jones, to be desirable! They were blonde, pert and slender, and had long legs, pretty faces, and fair, unblemished complexions. Jones guessed that they were around eighteen or nineteen years old.

One of the blondes even reminded him of the beautiful Juliette Dubonnette, the sixteen year old schoolgirl whom he had questioned at her house in Avignon. Jones felt sure, Donnelly would have loved to have impressed her into his little troupe.

Before they had left Donnelly's Boston house, Donnelly had made the terms of the trip abundantly clear. Jones was to be Donnelly's guest of honor and was to be treated to Donnelly's personal tour of Rome and Vatican City. Jones had been relieved of his weapons; but he had

known he should have no use for them, in any case. For Donnelly had also made it clear, without ever actually saying so, that, in the event Jones caused trouble, Jones would never see Suzanne again. Conversely, Donnelly had repeated his promise that, if Jones would but be cooperative for the duration of the trip, after a few days, when the trip was completed, he would be free to take back Suzanne. It was a hard bargain to contest. Jones had decided he had little to lose by joining Donnelly's strange excursus and a great deal, indeed, to gain, if it worked out as he hoped.

If he could free Suzanne, that would be a victory indeed. But, of course, as he scarcely needed to remind himself, Cardinal Donnelly, the least of whose shortcomings was that he was a psychotic murderer—assuming him to be, as he had now all but confessed, the author of the Oxford crimes—was not the most trustworthy man in the world. The grim fact was that Jones had no way of estimating the likelihood that he would keep his word regarding Suzanne when the Roman holiday was over. Nevertheless, Jones realized, there was more at stake than one woman's life, however precious that life might be to him. For Jones thought that traveling with Donnelly gave him a good chance of finding out something useful about the arch villain and his operations, something that would help defeat him and save the world from a catastrophe, the date of which was rapidly approaching and the opportunity of averting would very soon, he had no doubt, expire.

One curiosity continued to puzzle Jones, as the limousine, in which he occupied the back seat next to Donnelly, sitting erect, facing forward, majestical in his red robes, pulled away from the airport and onto the highway ramp that would take them into Rome: What was in this for Donnelly? Why would Donnelly go to such lengths? Was it to show Jones something about the nature or quality of life in Rome and at the Vatican? It was clear, in any case, that Donnelly

intended to give him information, rather than to get information from him. In fact, from the time Jones had appeared in Donnelly's Boston mansion, the Cardinal had made no effort to question him, evidently accepting the fact that Jones would refuse to cooperate, even unto death. Jones felt a grudging respect for his captor, recognizing that Donnelly's actions, in response to this fact, were guided by cold logic, without taint of anger, fear, or impatience. Thus, instead of badgering Jones, Donnelly seemed keen on showing Jones around.

Was it Donnelly's hope that Jones would come to understand something important that would help elicit compliance from the countries of the world to Donnelly's plans? Jones was reluctant to admit it, but Donnelly's conduct, in extending this invitation to him, as well as Donnelly's depressingly buoyant affect, seemed to signify considerable confidence in those plans, whatever they might be. And that was not a good sign, thought Jones. Not a good sign, at all.

It was a glorious morning in Rome. The sun shone over the great city of two and a half million people, and, as they made their approach, Jones could see from the car window, the unique skyline and crowding assemblage of modern, medieval, and ancient buildings in the only metropolis on earth that had been continuously occupied as a center of power since ancient times. Of course, Jones knew, there had been a number of great cities in the world that had been founded before Rome. Many of these, like Mohenjo-Daro and Harrapa, the uncannily sophisticated settlements of the Indus Valley, which, by 1,800 B.C., had boasted such amenities as a rectangular street plan and indoor plumbing, had been reduced to dust thousands of years ago. They had been entirely forgotten, until recent excavations brought evidence of their past existence to light. Other cities, like Athens, had known days of glory in ancient times and then had undergone nearly two thousand years of desuetude, until being returning to a modicum of

their former stature in the twentieth century. Rome alone had never lost its ascendancy, never ceased to hold its place as a hub of political, religious, cultural, artistic, and economic influence, across the upheavals of the millennia and the stormy seas of the centuries. Rome's unbroken reign as a center of authority and power—that was what was meant, Jones reflected, when Rome was called, with considerable justice, "the Eternal City."

It was true that, centuries earlier, certainly by the end of the Renaissance, Rome had lost direct political control over temporal empires. However, today, as Jones was aware, what was usually meant by the "power of Rome" was not the secular power of the capital city of Italy, an impoverished nation with a population of a little over fifty million. Instead, "Rome," in this context, was identified with the "See of Rome," the "Roman Church," or the Vatican, the miniature sovereign state nested within the city limits, and, together with the Catholic Church over which the Vatican presides, enlisting over a billion of faithful adherents around the world and laying claim to many trillions of dollars in assets, in the form of real estate, bank accounts, securities, and bulging treasuries of precious jewels and antique gold and silver relics, as well as, of course, the largest and most valuable collection of great oils, frescos, and sculptures the world had known.

As Jones turned from his survey of the Roman streets, to face the interior of the car, he was surprised to see a transformation in the man who sat next to him. Since the moment Jones had met Cardinal Donnelly, the Cardinal had evinced an insouciant air that expressed itself in an arch piquancy in his voice and a subdued, wry smile that never entirely left his lips. Now, Jones was struck by an almost grim seriousness in Donnelly's demeanor, as the Cardinal sat, erect, unmoving, a somber look in his eyes, which Jones had never seen him display before.

"A penny for your thoughts?" asked Jones, not knowing if it was possible to disturb Cardinal Donnelly's serious mood or to annoy the man with flippancy, but deciding to try.

"You think me a mad fool," answered Donnelly, evenly, without looking to the side. "You think you know it all. There's great comfort in fighting the just fight, in protecting the innocent and punishing the evil doers. Let me ask you something. If you succeed in returning the Baconian rejuvenation secrets to Oxford, what's your understanding of what will be done with them?"

Pretty frank conversational gambit, Jones thought. This guy doesn't beat around the bush.

"I assume," Jones responded, "that their rightful owners will put them to such uses as they see fit."

"But you see, Thomas," Donnelly said, addressing Jones by the cover name Jones had used in Avignon and that was still the only name Donnelly knew him by, "that's not a good enough answer. Not in this case."

Donnelly paused and, finally, looked over at Jones before continuing to speak.

"One of my gifts is the ability to see into the hearts of men," Donnelly told him. "I can see that you're a man of vision and penetrating intelligence who believes he can do the right thing and, yet, who doesn't believe in God. And you're also a man who realizes that this doesn't make any sense at all!"

Jones started. Despite his resolve to treat with Donnelly as an enemy, Jones felt a reflexive sympathy for a man who, somehow, could see so clearly into his soul.

Somewhere, along the way, Jones had lost his belief in God. It had been a casualty of his undercover work as an operative. He had witnessed too much pointless suffering and injustice to keep the faith of his youth that mankind was being watched from above by a benevolent Creator.

And Donnelly was right! Without believing in God, Jones continued to believe in the difference between right and wrong. Yet, Jones knew, and knew damn well, that he had never found any way to give right and wrong any real meaning without God!

"I suppose that half the people in the world," Jones answered, dismissively, trying to make light of Donnelly's words, "would accept that description as accurate."

"You're wrong, you know," Donnelly said. "You've been hanging around with intellectual snobs for too long. Most people believe in God. Over a third of the people in the world are Christian, that's over two billion people! And over half of them are Catholic. That's by far the biggest single identifiable religious group on Earth. Only about ten percent of people call themselves agnostics or atheists or non-religious."

Donnelly was right again! Jones knew, of course, if only from his travels, how widespread and unremitting the worship of God remained, in virtually every quarter of the world.

"But to return to the point," Jones said, "I can't agree with you that it's morally insufficient to return Roger Bacon's manuscript and the stem cell research based on it to their rightful owners. They were moving ahead with work that promised to be of the greatest importance to the whole world."

"Its importance can't be disputed," answered Donnelly. "But what would have been the disposition of their work? What do you think they would have done with their results?"

Obviously, Jones didn't know precisely what Professor Lawrence Putterman Kinmore, the Oxford genetics researcher who had pioneered the development of Bacon's crude ideas into a

modern stem cell treatment that would effect rejuvenation, intended to do next with his discovery. Of course, now that Jones considered the matter, he realized that Kinmore—Jones looked at Donnelly, coldly, remembering that Donnelly had had Kinmore murdered—hadn't owned the rights to his work. Research conducted at the New Biological Sciences Laboratory at Oxford University belonged to Oxford University. Considering the way that Oxford was funded, this meant, in effect, that, if Her Majesty's government were interested, the research results belonged to the Crown. But the Crown was just a figurehead. In fact, the entire British parliamentary government was scarcely more than a shell. Jones had come to know that there were other powers, lurking in the wings, that controlled the government of the United Kingdom, and that would, of necessity, also control any discovery as important as the secret of the extension of human life. These powers included the British military establishment, private British financial empires, and even the United States government itself. Now that Donnelly had raised the question, though, one thing seemed obvious. Bacon's secrets wouldn't simply be published for all the world to see. No, they would be jealously guarded by <u>whoever</u> controlled them. If it wasn't Donnelly, thought Jones, then it would be someone else doing the brokering of life and death.

Jones remembered Roger Bacon's warning, as Ratwell had explained it to him during his briefing at OSA headquarters in Virginia, and the reason Bacon had buried his secret of life extension in the most difficult cipher he was capable of devising: If given the opportunity, despots would use the rejuvenation treatment to keep themselves in power forever, and there should never again be any hope for human freedom.

"There's a new world coming," Donnelly continued, oblivious of Jones reflections. "Remember the first sentence in Genesis, 'In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth'? He's still creating, my friend. I suggest you get ready."

But Jones was pondering the shadowy upheavals and bloody conflicts that might, in fact, almost certainly would, attend the struggle for control over the secret of life and death, a struggle that, he abruptly realized, sitting abreast of the instigator of the first stage of that conflict, had already begun. Jones remembered a phrase from the second sentence in Genesis, "and darkness was upon the face of the deep," and began to wonder, suddenly feeling small in the face of the terrible new world of which Donnelly spoke, if there were any way to avoid passing through that transformational darkness, after all.