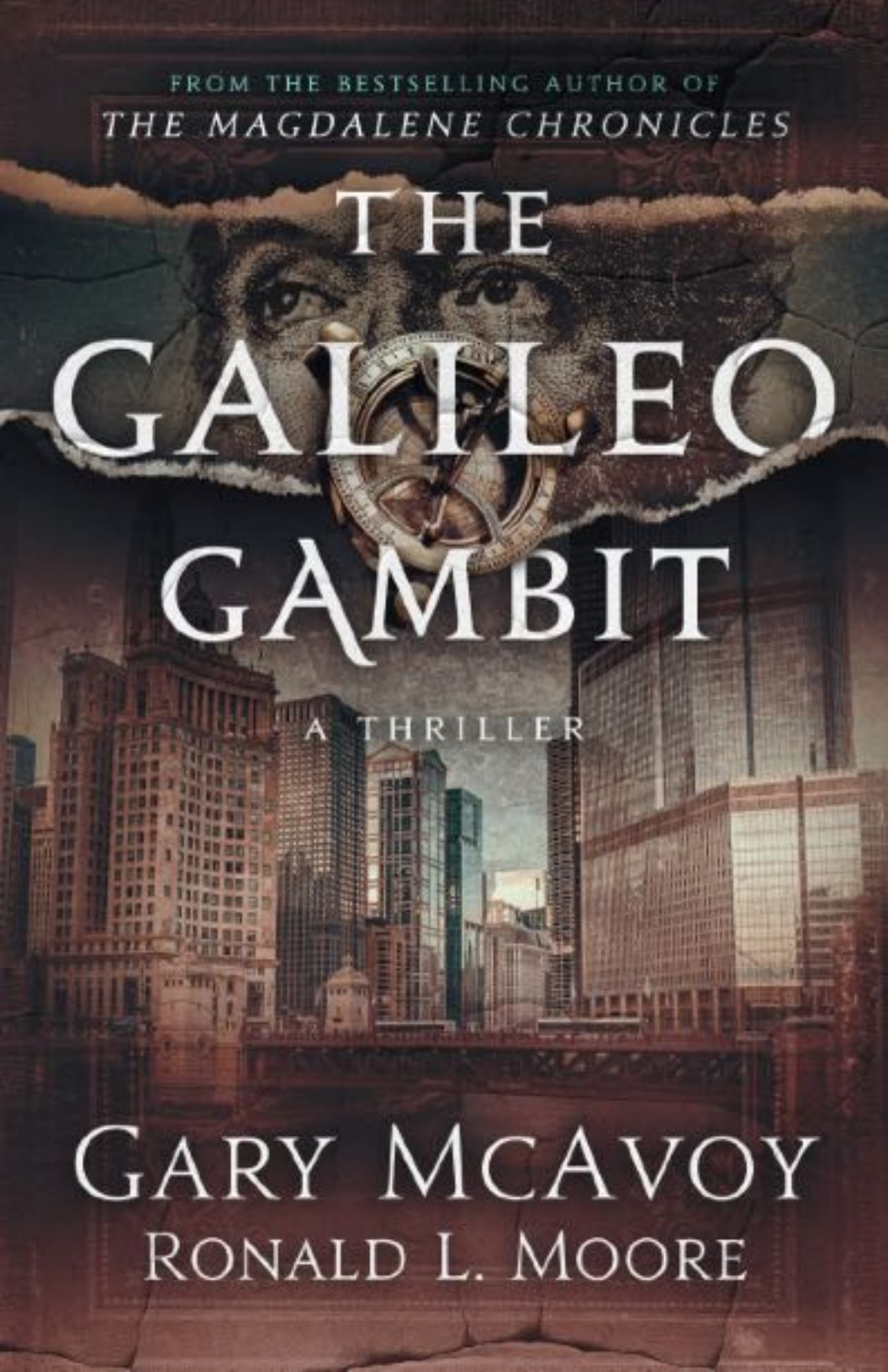


FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
THE MAGDALENE CHRONICLES



THE
GALILEO
GAMBIT

A THRILLER

GARY MCAVOY
RONALD L. MOORE

THE GALILEO GAMBIT

VATICAN SECRET ARCHIVE THRILLERS

BOOK SIX

GARY MCAVOY

RONALD L. MOORE



LITERATI
EDITIONS.

Copyright © 2023 by Gary McAvoy

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted under current copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher at the email or postal address below.

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-954123-32-8

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-954123-33-5

eBook ISBN: 978-1-954123-34-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023908070

Published by:

Literati Editions

PO Box 5987

Bremerton WA 98312-5987

Email: info@LiteratiEditions.com

Visit the author's website: www.GaryMcAvoy.com

R0623

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, long-standing institutions, agencies, public offices, events, locales and incidents are either the products of the authors' imagination or have been used in a fictitious manner. Apart from identified historical references, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

All trademarks are property of their respective owners. Neither Gary McAvoy, Ronald L. Moore nor Literati Editions is associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

This book contains original and copyrighted material that is not intended to be used for the purpose of training Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems. The authors and publisher of this book prohibit the use of any part of this book for AI training, machine learning, or any other similar purpose without prior written permission.

PROLOGUE

SIENA, ITALY, 1633

Just off the coach from Rome—where he had endured a trial for heresy against the Catholic Church for contradicting Holy Scripture—Galileo Galilei strode into the opulent parlor of the Episcopal Palace, home of the archbishop of Siena, the Most Reverend Ascanio Piccolomini.

Though Siena wasn't Galileo's beloved Arcetri—his home in the hills west of Florence—it was a lot closer to Rome, and he was grateful for the opportunity to stay here. And while he was here he was hopeful for a brief respite to visit his two daughters in the San Matteo Convent.

The room was a dizzying feast for the eyes, with riches draped everywhere: wondrous rugs and gilded furniture, walls adorned with heavenly treasures, including a haunting representation of Christ's martyrdom. As he sat there waiting, Galileo could hardly draw his gaze away nor ignore the painful parallels between his own suffering and that of Christ's.

Glancing around, however, it was difficult to consider this as suffering in any form. Galileo had taken up residence in the home of the Florentine Ambassador to Rome while the trial had taken place and for the ensuing ten days awaiting the verdict. Now, he braced himself while the court determined where he would serve his imprisonment.

The uneven pulse of approaching footsteps—two people, he surmised, both men by their long strides—snapped him out of his reverie. Just as he stood up, the archbishop's herald swept into the room and announced, "His Excellency, the Archbishop Piccolomini."

Piccolomini entered the room, clad in his purple cassock, a white rochet overlaying it, a hooded mozzetta covering his shoulders, and a purple zucchetto atop his balding head, with a gold pectoral cross on a chain around his neck and secured over his right breast.

"Forgive me, dear Galileo, for keeping you waiting. I was celebrating Mass this morning."

As the archbishop approached his guest he extended his right hand. Galileo instinctively knelt and kissed the archbishop's ring, a sign of loyalty and obedience to the Church.

"Your Excellency, thank you for seeing me and allowing me to reside here in your magnificent palace during my imprisonment. I promise not to bring you trouble," he said, rising from his kneeling position.

"Have you been so thoroughly humbled, my friend? That is not the Galileo I have come to know. Here, do sit down." Piccolomini gestured toward a pair of luxurious chairs set off to the side of the room near the fireplace, the wooden logs within crackling fiercely as orange and yellow sparks leapt from the flames.

"Come, tell me all that has transpired, for it has been some time since we spoke, and while I have heard frag-

THE GALILEO GAMBIT

mentary accounts, I would prefer to hear the whole tale from you yourself.”

“As you wish, Excellency. As to the beginning of it all, we have spoken of it before, so I will be brief. But for the sake of the memory, I will go back to where I think it all began.

“You might recall that in 1609, or perhaps the following year, I became aware that a Dutchman had created a device consisting of a tube with glass lenses at either end, which was capable of magnifying vision such that far away objects appeared closer. A ‘telescope,’ he called it. I was able to divine its operating principles such that I was able to build one myself and improve upon its capabilities.

“It was simply a matter of the shape of the lenses and the length of the tube. Those who were using the device in other places were using it merely to observe ships and troops at a distance, which has obvious tactical advantages and for which the device is eminently useful. I believe I was most probably the first to point a telescope at the heavens. Truly, the experience was illuminating. You have, of course, had this experience yourself, Your Excellency?”

“Yes, Galileo, I have. One of your disciples, if one may call him that, passed this way and made his device available to us. Some among my advisors cautioned against looking through it, claiming that it produced visions by way of witchcraft...that God had not meant for man to view the heavens in any other way than with the eyes God gave him, for fear of being confused and deceived by its false images. Yet, against such counsel I chose to look through the device. And indeed, I saw the moon and the satellites of Jupiter, just as you had described them! It was this experience that compelled me to begin our correspondence and now our close acquaintance.”

“Very good, Your Excellency. Very good, indeed. You can see, then, why I became so very excited and enthusi-

astic about using this device to observe the heavens—for I was making discoveries that nobody else in the world had seen and for which few men had the appreciation. It became clear to me, having read the work of Copernicus, that these discoveries supported his interpretation of the heavens: that the Sun, and not the Earth, stands at the center of the universe. And that the Earth and the movable stars—the planets such as Jupiter, Saturn, Mars and Venus—all revolve around the Sun, too, and that the Earth itself turns on its axis, fixed at the North and South, rotating toward the East, and that the moon revolves around the Earth.

“And furthermore, I observed that Venus, in a similar fashion to the Moon, exhibits phases, waxing and waning, showing that it indeed revolves around the Sun, and that the moons of Jupiter revolve around it, as our moon revolves around the Earth. I observed that Saturn is not one body, but three which move together, and that the outer two fade and return over time. I observed stars in the Milky Way galaxy that cannot be seen by eyes alone and craters and mountains on the Moon. And all this, taken also with the evidence from the tides—which are caused, I believe, by the movement of the water as the Earth revolves—convince me that Copernicus was right. I have spoken to many people, learned men and Churchmen and those among the nobility, and many have been convinced by this evidence. Many, but not all.”

“Yes,” the archbishop concurred, “and some of those who do not agree with you see themselves as ardent Defenders of the Faith whose mission is to resist heresy wherever they find it. You have made more than a few enemies, Galileo. Some very powerful.”

“Indeed, though I did not fully appreciate the extent of my peril. And it seems now, in retrospect, that was not so much due to my scientific observations as to how I

attempted to reconcile the apparent conflict between the Holy Scriptures and those observations. I wish now that I had never written that letter to Grand Duchess Christina."

"Then why did you, my friend?"

"Benedetto Castelli, a Benedictine, if you recall, was one of my students and I discussed my discovery with him. Very bright and more than a little ambitious."

"Ambitious, you say?" the archbishop chuckled. "Go on."

"Yes, well, it is said one notices his own faults most in others. In any case, Benedetto had occasion to break fast with Grand Duke Cosimo de Medici, Ferdinando's son and his wife, the Grand Duchess Christina, and Cosimo Boscaglia, who is teaching at the University of Pisa, like Benedetto, and who does not like me even a little bit.

"Boscaglia apparently took great exception to Benedetto's representation of my work and propounded a great many Scriptural oppositions to it. Benedetto did his best to refute them, but after the meal, Benedetto was called into audience with the Grand Duchess to make further answer on the theological points. When Benedetto informed me of this occurrence, I subsequently decided that it might be best if I addressed the Grand Duchess's concerns myself. I did not anticipate the extent to which copies of that letter would circulate. Certainly not all the way to Rome! I sent that letter to her in 1615, and by early the next year it had become clear to me that I was going to have to go to Rome and defend my opinions and reputation before I was summoned by the Inquisition."

"So you went to Rome voluntarily?" the archbishop inquired. "You were not summoned?"

"Yes, I went voluntarily. I did not know that I had already been referred to the Inquisition. But I did not meet with them formally, and there was no trial or even questioning."

"Hmm, I heard many rumors to the contrary. So, what did happen?"

"Well, earlier in 1616, Monsignor Ingoli instigated a discussion about the matter, and I defended my observations and their interpretation, including my opinions about reconciling Scripture with the clear implications of scientific observations. Once I got to Rome, I attempted to obtain an audience with His Holiness, hoping for a decision from the highest authority. But before I could do so, Cardinal Bellarmine requested my presence and informed me that the works of Copernicus and several others of the same bent were to be placed on the Index and that I could not hold the opinion of Copernicus nor teach or defend it. I understand now that after the Inquisition made their findings and presented them to the pope, he directed Bellarmine to give me that warning.

"A short while later, I had the opportunity to speak with His Holiness, who reinforced the Church's position, so I began preparations to return home. But already, rumors circulated that I had been summoned to appear before the Inquisition, had been tried, found guilty, and punished!

"None of these rumors being true, I asked Cardinal Bellarmine for a letter explaining what had transpired, which he graciously provided. Little did I know at the time how important that letter would become. I returned home and let the matter rest for the most part, as I had teaching responsibilities and my children to attend to. Vincenzo was only ten years old then, and the girls fifteen and sixteen."

"And had you left it there, you would have been safe," Piccolomini observed. "So what possessed you to write that book?"

"Ah, well, the root of that must be in my dispute with Jesuit Father Orazio Grassi over the comets. The man is a

blithering idiot. His arguments on the comets weren't even his, they were Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe's, and he presented them poorly. I responded with my *Discourse on Comets*, in which I dissected his stupidity. Of course, Grassi responded, not even man enough to put his name on the reply. He used the name of one of his students.

"Obviously, I could not let that lie, so I wrote *Il Saggiatore*, *The Assayer*, perhaps my greatest written work. Since he could not dispute the science any further without looking foolish, he resorted to theology in his last response. And from what I understand, a similarly worded complaint was filed a couple years later with the Inquisition.

"But I would not have written *The Assayer* at all if Cardinal Barberini had not been elected pope that same year, 1623. I went to Rome after his election and spoke with him some half-dozen times. When I left, I was sure I had permission from His Holiness to discuss heliocentrism, as long as I did it in a purely hypothetical manner, not defending or extolling the view but merely explaining how my scientific observations seemed to support the conclusion.

"His Holiness felt that since God had the power to make the universe as described in Scripture, and yet have it appear as the observations supported, we could never know the truth of the matter from observations alone.

"So I returned home to write the book, careful not to defend the Copernican model, but only to show how the observations supported the model so as to explain the appearances. I felt myself very clever to have hit upon the idea of structuring the book as a dialogue, much like that of Plato's work.

"But that is where the seeds of my destruction were planted, watered by my ego and illuminated by my arrogance, only to reap a crop of woe. Well, you have read it. I

put the pope's argument in the mouth of the simpleton. He took it worse than I imagined. In my defense, I had obtained imprimatur from the censor in Rome where it was originally intended to be published. But then bubonic plague hit, and I could not return to Rome, so I obtained the second approval from Florence."

"So, when the Holy Father heard of the book, he had the Inquisition call you to Rome?" Piccolomini asked.

"I admit, as I did when I was questioned by the Inquisition, that my biggest fault was an over-exuberance in my own cleverness in trying to show how the scientific evidence might be so convincing if it were not for the contrary light of Scripture.

"The thing of it all, however, seemed to come down to whether I had received a formal injunction not to hold, teach or defend the Copernican model all those years ago, at the meeting with Cardinal Bellarmine. The Inquisition had minutes from the meeting that confirmed I had been so enjoined. I don't think they were aware that I had the later letter from Cardinal Bellarmine that stated the opposite, that I was only given an informal warning. The Inquisition was stymied when I revealed that, and the prosecutor came to me after the questioning and suggested that if I were to confess to my over-enthusiasm in emphasizing the support given by science to the Copernican model over the Scriptural truth, that I might be convicted only of Slight Suspicion of Heresy and released with a light punishment.

"But, having agreed to this, when I returned to give my confession, I was informed that the bargain had been revoked, I believe by His Holiness, and that on pain of torture I was to renounce to their formula and be convicted of Vehement Suspicion of Heresy and punished with a lifetime of imprisonment, as well as being forbidden to do any further work in this area. And thus,

THE GALILEO GAMBIT

now, I find myself at your mercy and in your debt for however you managed to have me remanded to your custody.”

“Well, for all your irascible ways, Galileo, you still have friends in this world, and I number myself among them. I think you are right—though I cannot say that publicly, of course. So I must limit my support to hosting you here and making sure your imprisonment is not too onerous to bear.

“But I must go now. I have duties to attend to. Wait here and enjoy the warmth of the fire. When your things have been placed in your apartment, someone will come and take you there. We will speak again soon. And as you contemplate the fire in the hearth, be grateful that you are not staked to a burning pile of rushes.”

“Indeed, Your Excellency. Indeed.”

CHAPTER ONE

PRESENT DAY

Dr. Alice Hastings, Dean of Loyola Law School, paused at the door to the conference room and checked herself. Law school administration, especially at Catholic institutions, was still largely a man's world, and she had to be perfect just to be considered adequate. The law school had only had one female dean before, and Hastings was not going to let them down.

The legal conference and trial exhibition coming up this weekend would be the first of what she intended to be a series of events to raise the public profile of the law school, part of her focus as the new dean. She had taken over from someone who had served in that role for over twenty-five years, and for the last several of those, at least, had become more of a caretaker and figurehead than an active leader. This had left the school pulled in many directions by some faculty asserting their own interests over those of the school. None of those directions appeared to have a chance at strengthening the overall program, only

pet projects, let alone increasing profitability to the university. The need to bolster the coffers from what was now her department now rested on her shoulders. Alice Hastings was going to right the ship and get everyone pulling in the same direction. This trial exhibition, the crowning event of the Historical Trials Conference, would begin to accomplish that. It was common for law schools to do this type of historical re-enactments periodically to revisit old cases to see if the same result would be reached using modern legal methods. But she needed more. She needed this conference to help put the school back on the map and on people's minds.

Satisfied that she at least looked the part of a competent academic administrator—outfitted in a dark gray pinstriped suit and a cream-colored silk blouse with a pleated jabot—she took a deep breath to settle her nerves and entered the room. The three men already there stopped talking and rose in unison.

"Gentlemen, please be seated. Thank you for taking the time from your busy schedules to join me both today and in this moot trial for the conference. Let me make the introductions."

The three men glanced at each other as she began. She gestured to the first man on her right.

"Professor Thomas Anderson has been helping me get acclimated as dean and has assisted me in outlining a schedule of events that will revitalize the law school and increase our public impact. He's been at Loyola for about twenty years now, holds a PhD in Renaissance studies from Sapienza University in Rome and an LLM from Oxford focusing on medieval legal systems including canon law. He writes primarily on the impact of historical trials on modern jurisprudence. Tom will be acting as the conference chair, as well as taking the position of advocate for the defense in the trial."

Professor Anderson lifted the Styrofoam cup of coffee in front of him and raised it in salute, then took a sip and set it back on the table.

“Working opposite him as prosecutor, I’d like to introduce Bishop Vijay Sharma, Deputy Prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, known more colloquially as the Holy Office, or historically as the Inquisition. Before coming to the Vatican, Bishop Sharma was director of the Canon Law Society of India. He holds a doctorate of theology from Christ University in Bangalore, and a masters in canon law from St. Peter’s Pontifical Seminary and Institute of Theology, also in Bangalore.”

The bishop stoically bowed his head in acknowledgment but gave something of a hard look at Tom. Dean Hastings wondered what that was about, but she went on.

“And on my left is Professor Emeritus Luigi Bucatini. Luigi recently retired from teaching philosophy at the University of Padua. He holds a PhD from Harvard University in the philosophy of science, and over his distinguished career has written extensively on bioethics, environmentalism, and the intersection of science and religion. It is in this last area that he will lend us the most support, as the Galileo affair has been a pet project of his for decades. He will be portraying Galileo himself, though in my discussions with him—attempting to convince him to be a part of this project—I can tell you that he is much more agreeable than Galileo was. He assures me that, when the time comes, he will manifest a most historically accurate and irascible persona.”

Professor Bucatini smiled, then shifted to a menacing scowl before breaking into affable laughter.

“Now, we have a couple of weeks before the conference to plan out the trial. Members of the law school faculty, some of our prominent alumni, and a few local clergy will serve as members of the jury. The trial will start on Friday,

the second day of the conference, with opening statements and the first witnesses for the prosecution. On Saturday the prosecution will finish and the defense will present their side, and on Sunday, after Mass, I expect closing statements. The jury will deliberate, and we will get their decision at the conclusion of the conference Sunday afternoon.

“Tom had the wonderful idea that it would be nice if we could get the original Galileo documents from the Vatican and have them available for display at the conference and trial, properly preserved from potential damage, of course. The Fielding Museum here in Chicago is going to have a Galileo exhibit at the same time as the conference and would love to display the documents for as long as possible before the trial starts and before they are moved here.”

Bishop Sharma raised his hand and addressed the group. “The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith has its own archives, and our records from the actual trial of Galileo are stored there. I have arranged to have as many of those documents as possible brought over with me when I return for the conference, so I can make arrangements to be here for a couple of days before the event to allow them to be displayed at the Fielding Museum. Some of these documents have never before been viewed outside the Vatican.

“Of course, I will need to arrange for security to keep an eye on them. The dicastery has a special contingent of Swiss Guards assigned to us. Perhaps I can arrange for some of them to come along to keep watch over the documents. However, I suspect the Vatican Secret Archive may have additional documents related to the Galileo affair that are not in the possession of the dicastery. We operate within our own little spheres and are not involved with other departments in the Vatican.”

THE GALILEO GAMBIT

“Well, then we are in luck,” Professor Bucatini said with a knowing smile, “for I know just who to call at the Secret Archive.”

CHAPTER TWO

As he sat at the old, red oak desk in his office overlooking the Vatican gardens, Father Michael Dominic, Prefect of the Secret Archive, studied an inventory of digital documents from a small cathedral in Prague.

In response to the devastating Notre-Dame blaze of 2019, Pope Ignatius had initiated a preservation process that sent Vatican archivists all over Europe—and eventually, the world—to help digitize each cathedral’s records. Too much precious information had been lost in the Paris fire, and with the advances in digital imaging technology, it would be possible—indeed preferable—to prevent such further losses.

This project melded perfectly with the already daunting mission of digitizing the Vatican’s vast archives and Church records, a task that could never be finished. With millions of documents on more than eighty kilometers of steel shelves situated in the underground archive, it was already a challenge to keep track of what was there, let alone know what was yet undiscovered. Nevertheless, Michael and his crew had to do it, despite their

already thin ranks being stretched even further by this new task.

Fortunately, his team was only responsible for training each cathedral's people in such matters as the Vatican's archival requirements and the correct equipment to make digital images of the records and such. Local staff would take it from there, mostly interns recruited from nearby universities and seminaries. Pope Ignatius had decided that one of his legacies would be to safeguard the history of the Church. It had not gone unnoticed by some, however, that the project also expanded the purview of the Prefect of the Vatican Archive—who, as it happened, was also the pope's son.

Father Dominic's illegitimate parentage had been revealed in Malta on live television by the late Cardinal Fabrizio Dante during what was purported to be "The Last Mass." This was an apocalyptic fraud perpetrated by the now-defunct Knights of the Apocalypse. Since then both Michael and Pope Ignatius had been forced to deal with that unfortunate disclosure, which until then had been a closely guarded secret. Michael had been the product of a clandestine love affair between then-parish priest Enrico Petrini (now Pope Ignatius) and his housekeeper, Grace Dominic.

Once the child had been conceived, Enrico and Grace ended their intimacy, but Grace stayed on at the rectory where she was allowed to raise their son Michael, with Enrico assuming the role of a loving, supportive mentor. Michael had followed "Uncle Rico" into the priesthood, obtaining a degree from Fordham University, though also spending a couple of summers at Loyola University in Chicago, before taking his Jesuit formation at the Pontifical Institute at the University of Toronto. Topping off his training with a masters degree in medieval studies with an emphasis on paleography and codicology made him a

natural for work in the Vatican archives. His facility with languages and computers also helped a great deal. Michael himself had only recently learned the truth after Petrini had been elevated to cardinal and later Vatican secretary of state and had brought Michael to the Vatican as a *scrittore*, or archivist.

Over the past few months, Michael had known that the pressure on Pope Ignatius to resign had been growing, instigated by far-right conservatives in the Curia. Some hard-liners could not stomach the fact that the pope, being human, was imperfect. The Holy Father reminded them that Jesus himself had called on some of the worst sinners he could find to follow him and be his disciples and founding fathers of the Church. Surely, if the cardinals believed that the Holy Spirit guided the selection of popes, from whom nothing was hidden, then this pope's election had been determined and approved by God himself.

Still, there were those who felt very strongly that it was inappropriate, even shocking, for the Catholic Church to be led by a priest with a bastard son, especially in light of other crises the Church was facing. The pope's offspring was continually brought up in those discreet discussions among detractors of the Church's leadership. It made defending the institution that much more difficult.

But the pope was less concerned with defending the Church than he was about ferreting out bad priests and healing the damage caused by their abhorrent conduct in various scandals. His Holiness had, for the most part, shielded Michael from this criticism and the pressure being put on him. Working in the archives was a world unto itself, and while the pope was certain that Michael heard the gossip in the cafeteria and in the halls, still he did not face the brunt of what was directed at the Holy Father himself.

. . .

THE PHONE on Michael's desk rang. Looking up, he noticed the U.S. country code and the Chicago area code on the caller ID display. He wondered if this had anything to do with the death of Father Jonah Barlow, whose nearly completed manuscript on the Third Secret of Fatima had set the Knights of the Apocalypse off on their twisted path the year before. Tragically, one of the Chicago police detectives investigating Barlow's death had herself been killed at the end of that misadventure.

Curious, Michael answered the phone. "*Pronto*, Father Dominic speaking."

"Hello, Father Dominic. My name is Alice Hastings. I am dean of Loyola Law School in Chicago."

"Of course, Dean Hastings, hello. How can I help you?"

"Well, the law school is going to be conducting a conference on historical trials, and the featured presentation this year will be a three-day retrial of Galileo. Bishop Sharma of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith will be bringing a number of original documents from the actual trial to Chicago for the conference, and they will be on display for a couple of days at the Fielding Museum's Galileo exhibit.

"It was suggested that I contact you to see if the Apostolic Archive had any other documents that would be relevant to the retrial that might be brought to Chicago for display at the museum and the conference. Having some of the original documents would be quite a draw for the conference exhibition. We would be willing to fund your attendance at the conference and cover expenses for as many of your staff as you think necessary to care for the documents while they are here. We have secured funding from a few prominent alumni who would like to see this conference be as special as possible."

"An interesting proposal," Michael said. "I do know

we have a number of Galileo documents, although I don't know specifically which ones. To be frank, I didn't know that the DDF had its own historical archives, although it makes sense that they would. Also, I believe the Vatican Museum has the original telescope Galileo gave to Pope Urban the Eighth when he came to Rome in 1623, just after the pope's election. Perhaps I can also arrange to bring that along."

"Oh, my! That would be marvelous! Does that mean you'll accept my offer?"

"Well, I do need to make sure I'm not otherwise committed during that time, and that we have something of substance to offer, but yes, I agree in principle. When is the conference?"

"It starts in three weeks, on a Thursday and ending that Sunday. It would be wonderful if you could arrive on Monday or Tuesday that week so the documents and telescope could be on exhibit at the museum for a couple days beforehand. I know it's rather short notice, but we hadn't actually thought of having the original documents on hand until our organizational meeting of the principal participants yesterday."

As Dr. Hastings was speaking, Michael checked his calendar. "That should be fine. It looks like I am free that week. Let me see what documents we have available and I'll call you back tomorrow. Is this a good number to reach you?"

"Yes, this is my direct line. I'm very excited that you might be coming, Father Dominic. It will really boost the profile of the conference. Thank you so much."

"It's my pleasure. I'll give you a call tomorrow, then. Goodbye for now, Dean Hastings."

Michael wandered down the hall and peeked into his assistant's office, but Ian wasn't there. Walking out the

entrance doors of the Archive, he stopped to greet the Swiss Guard stationed there, Sergeant Dieter Koehl.

“Hey, Dieter. Have you seen Ian, by chance?”

After a smart salute to the priest, Dieter assumed the more casual Guard’s position, his hands folded in front of him. “Well, Father Michael, you didn’t hear it from me, but I’d check the Restoration Lab.” He smiled knowingly, nodding his head down the main hallway toward the lab. “Ian has been sneaking off down there quite a bit lately. I think it has something to do with that cute young Roma girl you have working there.”

“Oh, has he now? Good to know. Thanks, Dieter.”

Just then, Ian emerged from the Restoration Lab and turned up the hallway toward the two men. He stopped when he saw Michael and Dieter looking at him, realizing he’d been caught. Head down, he resumed walking toward them, slowly now, trying to come up with a good reason to have been in the lab.

“Uh, hey, Boss,” Ian quipped, with a sheepish look on his face. “I was just—”

“Never mind, I don’t want to know. You’re allowed to have a life. Just make sure it doesn’t interfere with the work. And be discreet. You may not be of the clergy but still you know how rumors fly around here.”

“Thanks, Michael!” Ian beamed. “Was there something you needed?”

“Yes. Feel like a field trip to Chicago? I just got a call from the dean of Loyola Law School. They’re putting on a conference and a retrial of Galileo’s heresy tribunal. I need you to determine what our Galileo holdings are and where they might be located. I’ve got to go have a chat with the curator of the Vatican Museum and see if I can borrow a certain telescope.”



LATER THAT AFTERNOON, Michael had returned to his desk when his phone rang again. This number he recognized immediately: the Rome bureau for *Le Monde*, the French newspaper where his friend Hana Sinclair worked as a reporter.

"Hana!" he answered brightly. "What a lovely surprise. What are you up to?"

"I was about to ask you the same thing! I just saw a press release come into the newsroom from Loyola Law School stating the Vatican was sending some of the original Galileo documents for a conference and moot retrial in Chicago. My editor said it sounds like a good story for me, especially with some investigation into the Galileo affair itself. It's the 400th anniversary of one of his major publications, *The Assayer*. So, are you going to the Windy City for the event?"

"I am, indeed. The conference is paying for me and a few of my staff to attend the conference and safeguard the documents. Were you thinking of going as well?"

"Well, actually, I'd love for all of us to go together if you don't think I'd be a distraction. I'm sure we could get Grand-père's jet. Save the conference some money on airfare and increase the level of security for the trip. Sound like a deal?"

"That would be terrific! It's always great spending time with you, and we haven't yet been to the U.S. together."

"Okay, then, it's set. Send me your conference details and my assistant will make the arrangements. I'm so looking forward to getting away for a bit. The Rome office is nice, but since we're a French publication, the space is a lot smaller than working at the main office in Paris, and we are literally tripping over each other here. Besides, I've always wanted to spend some time in Chicago. Big American cities are so different from Europe's. Didn't you go to school there for some time?"

"I did, yes. A couple of summer programs at Loyola while I was getting my degree at Fordham. But that was a while ago now. From what I've read, the city has grown substantially since then and is not necessarily the safer for it. I'm bringing Karl and Lukas for security—both for the documents and for me." He laughed. The two Swiss Guards had become friends with the priest while serving as his protectors over the years. Though Michael never felt he needed protection, there had been certain threatening times when he was more than happy they'd been with him.

"Well, I'd love to see some of the sights, if there's time," Hana added. "I'll also check on available rooms at the conference hotel, or someplace nice nearby. This is an academic conference at a Catholic law school. I imagine they don't have a lot of extracurricular activities planned. You're not participating in the trial, are you?"

"No, I'm just an observer and custodian of the documents and perhaps another exhibit. I'm working on getting the telescope Galileo gave to Pope Urban. I've almost convinced the curator of the Vatican Museum to let me have it for the conference. He's reluctant to lend it out, but they do it all the time for reciprocal institutions, so it shouldn't be that big a deal. I'm sure the pope could put in a good word, too, if it came to that."

"Oh, you wicked boy... Well, it all sounds like fun anyway. I can't wait. I'll give you a call back when I've got all the arrangements made. I'd love some background on which documents you'll be taking, for the piece I'll be working on."

"We're still making that assessment, seeing what documents we have and which ones are amenable to travel. I'll know more in a few days, and we can talk again then."

CHAPTER THREE

VATICAN CITY, TWO WEEKS LATER

In an office somewhere in the Vatican' Apostolic Palace, the phone on a desk rang. The person sitting there noted caller ID and picked it up.

"Hello, Your Eminence, I'm very busy right now. What is it?" Bishop Sharma asked.

The caller's response was curt, nervous. "You leave for Chicago tomorrow. Is it done?"

"No," Sharma answered. "As I understand it, there are processes involved that cannot be sped up. It will be a few more days."

"What are you going to do? This is becoming a problem. I thought it would be done by now."

"No, it is not a problem. I had planned on that. I'll call Father Dominic. Ask him to transport our documents with his. I'll tell him we could not spare the personnel to provide adequate security. I'm sure he will be accommodating. In fact, he is perhaps too accommodating; it's in his nature. And actually, I'm counting on that."

“Good. But what about the girl? She is going to Chicago, too.”

“Yes, that is also part of the plan,” the bishop confirmed. “Had Father Dominic not thought of bringing her, I would have insisted that she be part of the team to make sure the exhibits were properly preserved on display.”

“So, you have left nothing to chance?”

“No, not so far as I am able. I’ll make the call to Dominic. Once he is committed to taking the documents to America, I will make sure to have what I need, when I need it. Fear not. I have taken steps to anticipate contingencies that might unfold. You just do your part. I will worry about the rest. You will have what you are looking for, and I intend to win this trial as well, one way or another. No sacrifice is too great.”

“And no detail too small,” the familiar voice replied. “*Veritas vos liberabit.*”

The truth will set you free.



IAN DUFFY POKED his head in Michael’s office as he was heading back to his own desk.

“Well, Boss, I’ve done as thorough a search as I can, and it turns out that we don’t have as many Galileo documents as you might think. I guess the Office of the Inquisition must have the bulk of them,” Ian surmised.

“Be careful calling them that,” Michael cautioned. “They can be a little sensitive about their image, and you really don’t want to make enemies over there. They hold a great deal of power within the Curia. Their capacity to investigate misdeeds and violations at will gives them influence over a lot of people they’ve caught in various indiscretions.

They have been known to withhold prosecutions in order to sway people to their positions on issues. It's practically blackmail, but it is within their purview to use discretion in enforcement. They just aren't supposed to use it for their own ends. It's supposed to be pastoral, not persuasive."

"Right, okay. So what *do* I call them?" Ian asked.

"Well, their new formal name is the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. We used to call them the Holy Office, but I think we should use their formal title when they are around. In here, we can just refer to them as the DDF."

"DDF it is, then. Anyway, we have some records from 1616 and 1623, from Galileo's trips to Rome, including a copy of the letter Cardinal Bellarmine wrote for Galileo describing the warning he was given at Bellarmine's palace. We also have a copy of the summons that brought him to Rome in 1633, and others related to his imprisonment after his conviction. There are also a few of Galileo's letters to various Church officials and the approvals for him to publish his 1632 treatise *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*. Plus, we have a copy of *Dialogue* itself."

"Well, that will have to be enough," Michael said. "I hope the DDF is bringing some good stuff for the exhibit. I'd like to see Loyola have a nice event, and for the Fielding Museum to have a compelling exhibit, since our name is going to be on it as supplying the records and the telescope—which, by the way, we just got approval for bringing with us."

"Awesome! Okay, so I've pulled all the records for your review to see which ones you think we should take. They are all down in the Restoration Lab so they can be prepped for transport. Say, why didn't you tell me Kat was coming?"

"Oh, so it's 'Kat' now, is it?" the priest asked, grinning. "Well, I was saving that as a surprise, but I guess 'Kat' beat

me to it. I need someone with experience in archival preservation methods to assist with the display of the records. And you are going as a reward for your help on my last couple projects. I want you to know I appreciate it." Michael reached out to squeeze Ian's shoulder in a moment of solidarity. "Besides, I might need a gofer while we're there..." Ian rolled his eyes but grinned happily.

The phone on Michael's desk rang. He glanced at the number on the display.

"Well, speak of the devil. It's someone calling from the DDF." He picked up the phone and answered, "*Pronto*, Father Dominic."

"This is Bishop Sharma at the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. I understand from the conference organizers at Loyola that you are going to be taking some documents to the Galileo conference and the Fielding Museum beforehand. Is that right?"

"Yes, Excellency. We are taking a number of documents, and a telescope from the Vatican Museum, the one Galileo gave to Pope Urban the Eighth."

"Very good. I need you to transport our documents, Father. I have to leave for Chicago early to prepare for the trial exhibition, but our archivists have not been able to complete the preparation of our own documents for travel yet. I expect you will be able to take our documents with you when you go over later in the week," he said in his typically curt manner.

"Of course. I don't see a problem with that. Did you need us to come pick them up or will you have them delivered here?"

"We will have them delivered to you there, and naturally you will need to sign for them to establish chain of custody. There will be a complete inventory. I expect you to check it thoroughly to ensure everything is there and properly accounted for. Then they will be locked and

sealed in an archival transport case. You simply need to take them to the museum. I will come to the museum and oversee their unpacking and installation at the exhibition. I appreciate your assistance in this matter."

"I am happy to be of help, Bishop Sharma."

"Very good, then. I will have our archivist call you when the documents are ready. Goodbye, Father. I will see you in Chicago."

"Ciao, Excellency." Michael hung up, then turned to his assistant.

"Well, Ian. I guess the DDF is going to be sending their documents with us. We'll get to see what they're taking when we inspect the inventory before locking up the transport case. Can you make sure Ekaterina has a similar case available?"

"Yes, sir! I'd be happy to run down to the Restoration Lab for you."

"Yeah, I didn't think you'd have a problem with that."

CHAPTER FOUR

The morning of the day before he was due to leave for Chicago, Michael called up to the pope's office to arrange to say goodbye. Father Nick Bannon, the pope's longtime personal assistant and gatekeeper whom Michael had known for many years, answered the phone.

"Pronto, Office of the Holy Father."

"Hi, Nick, it's Michael."

"Hey, Michael! I hear you're heading across the pond soon. Did you want to meet with His Holiness today?"

"I do, yes. I'm leaving tomorrow for the Galileo conference and wanted to see him before I go. How is he doing?" Michael appreciated that Nick had always been honest with him about the pope's health, even if the pope himself had asked Nick not to tell anyone about his growing infirmities. Nick had known about the relationship between Michael and the Holy Father longer than almost anyone except the previous pope, so he felt that Michael, more than anyone, had a right to know.

"I was thinking of calling you later today, anyway. Your father has been pretty run down the last few days

and we are restricting his schedule to give him some time to rest. Would you like to have lunch with him?"

"Yes, lunch would be perfect. What time should I be there?"

"Come up at eleven forty-five. And don't be shocked at how he looks. He's lost a bit of weight because he hasn't been sticking to his normal diet. Hopefully having lunch with you will stimulate his appetite. I'll let him know you're coming."

"Nick, level with me. Should I be concerned? I don't have to make this trip. I could just send the staff. I was just looking forward to seeing Chicago again. My last trip there, for Detective Lancaster's funeral, was rather short."

"Well, his doctors don't think it's anything serious. He just keeps a busy calendar that would tire a man half his age. There is so much he wants to accomplish, and he knows his time is limited, no matter how long that is. And he's been under stress since the revelations in Malta. There are factions within the Church that would use that against him, and the vultures are always circling. He has been shielding you from most of that, you know. But you would do well to watch your back, even more than you normally might."

"I understand, Nick. It's shameful that power is so important to some people, but what can you do? Anyway, I'll see you just before noon. And thanks."

"You're welcome, Michael. See you then."

Michael had just hung up the phone when it rang. The screen displayed "Diamond Ark Cathedral, Dallas, Texas, USA."

Michael groaned. *Oh, great. This can't possibly be good.* He decided to answer in Italian.

"Pronto, Archivio Pontificio, parla Padre Dominico."

"Michael, Michael, Michael..." a voice greeted him chidingly. A man with a strong Texas twang continued.

“This is Pastor Gabriel Darwin of the Church of Supreme Divinity, calling from the Diamond Ark Cathedral in Dallas, Texas, in the good ol’ U. S. of A.”

Michael reluctantly switched to English. “Hello, Pastor Darwin. I’m curious, how did you get my direct line?”

“Well, Michael, I think you’ll find I’m a very resourceful person. And I take it as a sign of God’s favor that when I want something, God and I usually find a way to make it happen. Why, just look at the hundreds of Jewel Ark Chapels we’ve opened around the world to spread the good news of the prosperity guaranteed to us by the Lord in the Good Book. And I am a livin’ example of that prosperity. In fact, I think you might have had the opportunity to visit one of those chapels in the Holy Land recently. I know some of your people were there...” Darwin let that hang in the air a moment, but when Michael did not comment, he went on.

“Well, all that aside, I’m callin’ ‘cuz I’ve had a new vision from the Lord, and I’ve been directed to make an addition to the Biblical Hall Museum that’ll feature the original writings of some of Christianity’s greatest heroes of the faith. People like Martin Luther, Calvin, Tyndale, Wesley, Wycliffe—why, even Oral Roberts! Speaking of whom, maybe I should look into starting my own university and a seminary... Hmm, I’ll have to pray on that.

“Anyway, back to the addition. I hear you are going to be bringin’ some of the original Galileo documents to Chicago soon. And I intend to buy one of them. I want the original letter from Galileo to Grand Duchess Christina as the centerpiece of the openin’ of our museum’s new addition. I think it’s destined to be in my collection so that everyone who visits the Biblical Hall Museum can read it for themselves and rejoice in the presence of such history. I assume you’re familiar with the letter? It’s the one where Galileo explains why the Catholic Church is wrong to have

taken a strict literal interpretation of the Bible in conformity with its tradition rather than in accord with proven science.”

Michael was feeling testy with this tiresome man. “Pastor Darwin, I’m afraid the Vatican is not in the business of selling off its historical manuscripts. Plus, the text and digital image of Galileo’s Letter to Grand Duchess Christina is readily available in a number of books and websites for people to read, whether they visit your ‘museum’ or not.” The priest reflexively allowed an audible sneer color his pronunciation of “museum.”

“Now, Michael. Let’s not be too hasty. I could make a sizable donation to the Church. Think of all the good works that could be done with it. There could even be somethin’ in it for you. I’m sure the Archive could use the additional resources, right? So don’t say no just yet. Think it over. I’ve made arrangements to preach at the Jewel Ark Chapel in Chicago while you’re there for the conference. Maybe we can talk again. My people will be in touch. Just make sure you bring the original Letter to Grand Duchess Christina with you. Adios, Michael.” The connection broke off.

“Great. Just great...” Michael muttered to himself in the otherwise empty office. He logged into the Archive’s inventory and searched for the Letter to Grand Duchess Christina. Michael knew that the original manuscript had been copied several times in its day and circulated around the Florentine court as well as among the powerful clergy in Tuscany and Rome, including those of the Inquisition. Michael found that the Vatican had an early manuscript copy, as well as the Italian and Latin side-by-side versions published in Strasbourg in 1636, since Galileo had been prohibited from publishing after the trial in 1633. A brief search of the internet failed to reveal where the original was. Perhaps in the private

holdings of the remaining Medici family, or even lost to the ravages of time.

But he didn't have any further time to deal with that. The interruption and subsequent research had eaten up his morning and it was nearly time for his lunch meeting.

When he arrived at the Apostolic Palace, Father Bannon buzzed him in through the main doors.

"He's in a meeting with a few members of the Curia, but they are just leaving," Father Bannon warned him.

As Michael went in, he was received by one of the Gentlemen of His Holiness, personal lay assistants and stewards who see to the organization of the papal household, the conduct of guests to and from the papal apartments, and other duties under the pope's direction. One Gentleman brought Michael to the door of the pope's office and knocked briefly, while another Gentleman opened it from the inside.

"Your Holiness, I present Father Michael Dominic, Prefect of your Apostolic Archive," the Gentleman called out.

A cluster of bishops and cardinals in their various attire was still gathered around the pope's desk. The pope was dressed in a simple white cassock and zucchetto. In his declining health, such allowances for informality were made for his comfort, and none of them dared say anything about it. They began to file out as Michael was announced.

Michael recognized the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Giovanni Greco, as well as the heads of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Dicastery for Bishops, the Dicastery for the Clergy, the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies for Apostolic Life, and the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, as well as a number of their immediate assistants and the heads of subordinate institutions within the dicasteries.

As they left, many of them turned to regard Michael as he entered. Some of the looks Michael received were friendly, or at least neutral, but a few ranged somewhere between hostility and disgust. Cardinal Caputo, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith—formerly the Holy Office of the Inquisition—gave Michael an especially antagonistic glare. Caputo was one of the most conservative members of the Curia, and had a particular dislike of the current, more liberal pope and his son. He considered Michael's existence so severe an affront to the sanctity of the pope's office that he felt the pope should have abdicated in disgrace after the news of his paternity hit. The previous pope had absolved then-Cardinal Petrini before Petrini became Pope Ignatius, but Caputo still headed a faction within the Curia that looked forward to a more conservative replacement, and the sooner the better. The Holy Father tried to remain above the criticism. What was done was done, and he tried to serve the Church as best he could, just as his son Michael did.

As the last of the group left the spacious room, Michael could finally see the pope seated at his desk—not in his normal chair, but in a wheelchair. Michael rushed to his side.

“Papa, are you okay?”

“Yes, Michael, I am. Just feeling a little run down, and the wheelchair allows me to conserve my energy for the important work. You young men do not appreciate how big the Vatican is and how much effort is required to get around in it. Come, take me over to the table and they will bring our lunch.”

As if on cue, one of the pope's Gentlemen appeared through a side door with a wheeled cart holding two domed platters. The glinting silver cloches were pulled away with a flourish to reveal china plates with the gold and silver papal insignia on the china positioned at the

top. The pope received a steaming bowl of pasta *fagioli*, a hearty soup containing sausage, beans, pasta and vegetables. This was accompanied by a small loaf of crusty bread, a small antipasti salad, and a glass of red wine. Michael received a steaming bowl of mushroom risotto with bits of crimini and portobello mushrooms peeking out from around the creamy arborio rice. This was topped with slices of morels, white truffle, and a dusting of Pecorino Romano cheese.

"This smells heavenly," Michael remarked as he leaned over his bowl to inhale the heady aromas.

"Yes, well, it's not like your mother used to make. She was such a good cook, our Grace. We always ate so well in the old days. Not that I'm complaining, mind you. But when your mother cooked, it must have been her love imbued in the food that made everything taste that much better."

Michael looked at his father questioningly. "You miss her, too, don't you?"

"Every day. After you were conceived, we were remorseful of our sin, and we repented, never again engaging in intimate relations. But you had to be raised, and you deserved as close to a father figure as could be provided under the circumstances. Your mother sacrificed much in those days, Michael. She bore the shame of having a baby out of wedlock and the sorrow of never being able to claim a father for him, or a husband for herself. I think in a way it was her idea of penance. But she took such good care of us both. I miss her terribly. Maybe more now than when she died. I find myself thinking often of what might have been, had things been different."

"How do you mean?"

"What would life have been like for all of us if I had left the priesthood, married your mother, and raised you

in a respectable family? Or better yet, if the Church had allowed clergy to marry?"

Michael shrugged. "I didn't know any different. I think it worked out all right, though. But I know what you mean. Have you ever given thought to starting an initiative for the Church to allow priests to marry?"

The pope chuckled softly. "Oh, Michael. If there were even a remote possibility of it, I would issue a proclamation today. But the practices of priestly celibacy and self-denial are so deeply rooted in the ascetic impulses of Catholic culture, combined with the human quest for a closer relationship with Christ, that it would likely never gain traction with the conservative wing of the Church. But, I do have a possible plan—so for now, hold that thought.

"Speaking of self-denial...how are things with Hana?" he asked warmly.

Smiling, Michael looked at his father with great love. He was such an understanding and compassionate man.

"We are still very good friends, Papa, and we've agreed that must be enough for both of us unless something changes. Right now, I think I mentioned that my friend from Loyola, Aaron Pearce, is now here teaching classical studies at the John Felice Center across town. He and Hana have been spending a fair bit of time together recently. But she is coming to Chicago with us for the Galileo conference."

"Ah, the Galileo conference. I'm sure you will enjoy being back in the States for something less serious. Your last trip wasn't all that enjoyable. That whole mess with Father Barlow." He shook his head, sorrowful about the loss of a good priest. Plus, Michael had been in peril during that event, and the pope had worried for his safe return.

THE GALILEO GAMBIT

"I could stay, Papa. It worries me that you are slowing down so much."

"No, Michael. I'm fine. Go. I'll be working on my latest encyclical. It involves redefining the different roles in the life and structure of the Church. That is why certain members of the Curia were here when you came in, to give their input. So go. But keep an eye over your shoulder. You are not the only one to have noticed that I am getting older. They are like birds of prey now. Factions are forming. I would not be surprised if someone tried to use you to get to me. Make sure you take security with you to the U.S."

"Yes, Papa. Karl and Lukas are going, too. I will be careful. I would never let anyone use me to get to you."

As they finished their lunch, Father Bannon entered the office.

"I'm sorry, Michael, but the Holy Father's afternoon calendar beckons. I'm afraid we'll have to cut this visit short."

"That's okay, Nick, I was just about to leave." Michael leaned over his father's wheelchair and gave him a hug and a kiss on the forehead. "Goodbye, Papa. I'll send word from Chicago."

CHAPTER FIVE

Early the next morning Michael woke up, threw on a pair of dark navy sweat pants, laced up his Saucony trainers, and headed out St. Anne's Gate for his usual run through the Suburra neighborhood of Rome.

He hadn't gotten far—just north of the Vatican walls—when his pace slowed as he approached *Edicola Sacra*, the news kiosk on the Piazza del Risorgimento. He noticed a young woman sitting behind the cramped counter, framed by colorful magazine covers and blaring headlines across the world's newspapers displayed in racks surrounding her. She appeared to be around twenty, dressed in woolen trousers with suspenders, a flannel shirt, and a newsboy cap tilted on her head.

"*Buongiorno, signorina,*" he greeted her, speaking in her native Italian. "I'm Father Michael Dominic, a friend of Signor Bucatini, the owner of this stand. I usually see him here every day; is he all right?"

"Oh, *sì, padre,* my uncle—well, great-uncle—he is fine," she answered with a generous smile. "And yes, he has told me about you. He just had to take a trip for a few days so

he asked me to work the stand. I thought I should look the part." She gestured at her attire, touching the brim of her cap as she nodded her head. "My name is Carla, Carla Bucatini. Can I get you anything?"

Michael stood there, a thin sheen of sweat from his run just forming on his arms and face. "No, *grazie*. I'm in no position to read a paper just now," he grinned. "But you know, that is how I met your uncle, dripping sweat on his newspapers one day. Anyway, if you do speak with Luigi, please tell him hello for me."

"I will, *sì*...unless you see him first," she replied with a look of mystery on her smiling face. Michael glanced at her, his head cocked to one side as if there were some joke he wasn't in on. With a slight wave, he turned and ran off.



HAVING RETURNED to his apartment after an hour-long run, Michael showered and dressed, then packed a suitcase for the trip and took it with him to his office.

He headed down to the Restoration Lab to check on preparations for their flight to Chicago and found Ian and Ekaterina working at the lab's main table.

"Hey, you two...how's it coming?" Michael asked, gesturing to the materials on the table. Each page of the historical documents they were taking had been placed between two sheets of acid-free archival paper, and then sandwiched between two sheets of thin, clear, UV-resistant Mylar and fastened with clear plastic clips. Kat was just finishing placing the pages of the last documents between the plates and clipping them closed.

"Just about done, Father Michael," she murmured, her voice not as robust as usual. Finished with the latest pages, she placed them into a wheeled, metal travel case on the floor next to her. "I've color-coded the edge of the plates

for each of the documents we are taking for easy reference. As you directed, we are taking Galileo's Summons to appear before the Inquisition, the letter Cardinal Bellarmine wrote to Galileo in 1616, the two Imprimaturs—the permissions to publish in Rome and Florence—and the pope's copy of Galileo's *Dialogue*."

"Excellent, good work," Michael said. Kat didn't look up, apparently focused on the task at hand.

"I've also prepared an inventory and shipping manifest as if we were sending these to the Fielding Museum by courier—but of course, *we* will be the couriers in this case. Father Michael, I just need you to check the page counts and validate we have all the documents. Then we can seal up the case."

Michael came over and peered into the metal case. He counted the pages of each color, then verified that each of the described documents was present and accounted for. Satisfied, he took the clipboard Kat had handed him, flipped the inventory over to the signature page at the back and signed it.

"Father, could you bring me that little pot of sealing wax on top of the burner over there? Be careful to hold it by the wooden handle; it's hot. Ian, please get a silicone pad from the drawer over there to set it on. I'll lock the case and then we can seal it. Did you bring your embossing seal, Father?"

"Yes, it's here in my pocket."

As Michael turned away and walked over to the side of the lab where the ceramic wax pot was warming on a Bunsen burner, Kat made sure neither was looking, then surreptitiously slipped another single-page document in similar packaging into the case, quickly closing it and twisting the keys in the two locks. Michael turned back and took the wax pot over to her, at which point she

poured a quarter-sized disc of hot red wax onto the sealing port of the case, then set the pot on the pad.

“Okay, now press your seal into the wax. Quickly, before it hardens.”

Michael sighed to himself; he’d used his seal enough times to know how it worked. He withdrew the brass seal engraved with the official insignia of the Apostolic Archive, then pressed it into the wax. He lifted it away to reveal the impression, which was rapidly hardening as the wax cooled.

“Thank you, Father,” she said coolly, still avoiding meeting Michael’s eyes.

There was a knock at the lab door.

“Enter,” Kat said loudly. A young Jesuit novice pushed the door open, pulling a similar wheeled travel case through the door behind him.

“Ah, Viggo,” she said. “Right on time. This is Father Dominic, Prefect of the Apostolic Archive, and of course you know Ian. Father Dominic, this is Viggo Pisano, a *scrittore* from the DDF.”

Michael extended his hand. “Good to meet you, Viggo.”

“Wow. Sir, it is such an honor to meet you. Ekaterina, I mean, Signorina Lakatos, has told me so much about you.”

“Well, it’s an honor to meet you as well, young brother, and good to see you’re on our Jesuit team. I only recently learned that the DDF has its own archives. So, let’s see what have you brought us.”

Viggo took two keys from his pocket, used one in each of the two locks, then lifted the hinged lid of the case and removed the inventory packets and passed them to the priest.

“Let’s see here... There are copies of the trial transcripts, one for each session. There is a copy of the notes from the

meeting with Cardinal Bellarmine, a copy of Galileo's confession which he signed, a copy of the verdict signed by members of the tribunal, and lastly, a copy of the Sentence of Imprisonment. This is an excellent addition to what we're taking and will make for a marvelous exhibition."

Viggo looked like he wanted to say something but hesitated, then responded absently, "Uh...yes, Father."

Michael verified that all inventoried documents were in the case. Satisfied, he had Viggo lock the case, then took the keys. Kat poured another disc of red sealing wax into the inset area on the base, and Michael pressed his insignia into the wax. Now any tampering with the cases—and potential access to the precious documents inside—would be immediately detectable.

Another knock at the door interrupted them.

"Enter," Kat again shouted.

Karl and Lukas came into the room, both smiling and wearing dark suits instead of their usual Swiss Guard uniforms.

"Good morning, everyone. Are we on time?" Karl asked.

"Yes, perfect timing," Michael said. "We've just locked and sealed the two transport cases." He took one of the two keys to each case and gave them to Karl. "You take one key to each case, and I'll take the other set. Now, if you guys can take the cases out to your car, I'll grab my suitcase from the office and meet everyone in the parking lot. Viggo, again, nice meeting you."

Viggo glanced at the cases, then said, "It was a pleasure meeting you as well."

With that, he ducked out the door to return to the DDF. As Michael watched him go, it seemed to him the younger man was bothered by something.

As Viggo left the Archive building, he took a deep nervous breath and let it out. There was something wrong

THE GALILEO GAMBIT

with the document count. He knew exactly which documents were intended to be sent to America, for Bishop Sharma had been very specific on that point.

But it was the documents that were *not* in the case that concerned him.

So, where were they?