

12:15 A.M. *Fiumicino Airport. Rome*

Why have I been flown here?" Jonathan Marcus asked the chauffeur, raising his voice over the winter rain.

The downpour of a Roman *burrasca* pounded the hood of a black Maserati Quattroporte sedan. The chauffeur's shirt was soaked, his stomach blousing out like a sack of grain.

"The partner is expecting you, *Signore*," he said, taking Jonathan's carry-on and opening the back door.

Water streamed down Jonathan's suit pants and gathered on his Ferragamo shoes, but he seemed not to notice. He pointed at Fiumicino's runway lights.

"Underneath the runway where my plane just landed was once the largest sea harbor in imperial Rome. The *Portus*, it was called. Two-thousand-year-old Roman ships are still under there!"

The chauffeur nodded politely. He laid Jonathan's briefcase in the trunk and, when he closed it, was surprised to see the tall young man still beside the open door, elbows on the roof, the wet folds of his white dress shirt clinging to his athletic shoulders. He was staring at the runway.

Jonathan Marcus had returned to Rome, a young corporate lawyer in a navy chalk stripe suit and a loosened Hermès tie, but just ten minutes back on *terra antiqua* and memories from his doctoral work in classics beckoned to him from the stones.

"*Signore?*" The chauffeur gently pointed to the door.

Jonathan ducked into the car's immaculate leather backseat. In the finished-wood console, a freshly brewed cappuccino steamed in a bone

china coffee cup bearing the firm's dignified logo, DULLING AND PIERCE LLP. He was reminded of the firm's mania for formality, and although his jacket was still sopping, he slipped his arms through its sleeves and buttoned it.

"Still not exactly presentable," he said softly, raking back the soaked, brown hair from his brow. Stubble accented the strong angles of his attractive face, darkening his boyish looks.

A digital clock in the center of the console displayed the time in a cobalt blue glow: 00:17 a.m.

Long day, Jonathan thought.

Only twelve hours before, Jonathan was sitting at his desk on the forty-first floor of Dulling's headquarters in midtown Manhattan, another solitary night of document review before him, when the intra-office mail cart delivered a travel itinerary with the word URGENT stamped across it like a red sash.

The details were few, listing only the departure time of an Alitalia flight out of Kennedy Airport in three hours and his seat number in first class. This exceeded even Dulling and Pierce's legendary standards for client secrecy. A partner's recent toast at a firm dinner now sounded like an ominous oracle. "With your background in classics, Marcus, antiquities dealers all over the world will want you on their lawsuits, won't they?"

Last month, Jonathan's representation of Dulling client and Roman antiquities dealer Andre Cavetti catapulted him into the spotlight of the antiquities world. The Italian government had brought a lawsuit in a U.S. District Court in Manhattan, alleging that Mr. Cavetti's gallery on Madison Avenue displayed a twenty-inch-high nude bronze statue illegally excavated from the ancient town of Morgantina on the Sicilian coast. Jonathan's cross-examination of the Italian government's expert, Dr. Phillip von Bothmer, curator of Greek and Roman antiquities at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, left the Italians' case a smoldering ruin.

"And the ancient town of Morgantina, Dr. von Bothmer, the site of my client's alleged excavation, when was that town destroyed?"

“Beginning of the second century B.C.” Dr. von Bothmer spoke reprovingly, as though Jonathan had not been listening to his hours of testimony. “Morgantina foolishly backed Carthage against Rome in the Second Punic War. The strata of archaeological dirt is black soot, which indicates that everything in Morgantina was laid to waste at that time. Total destruction.”

“Total destruction,” Jonathan repeated. He paused, approaching the small sculpture sitting on display in front of the witness box.

“Tell me, Doctor, are you a breast man?” Jonathan said.

A juror laughed out loud, then unsuccessfully disguised it as a cough.

“I’m sorry?” Dr. von Bothmer said.

“Breasts, Doctor.” Jonathan cupped his own chest a few inches beyond his shirt. “Aren’t the statue’s breasts a little small for you?”

The lawyer from the Italian embassy exploded from his chair. “This is badgering, Your Honor!” The gallery came alive with laughter. At the Dulling table, the supervising partner collapsed his bald head into his hands.

“The depiction of breasts of Roman women, Your Honor, is a helpful metric to determine the date of a relic’s origin: Whether the breasts are una manus or duae manus, Latin terms for one handful or two.” He spoke as though explaining the dullest of courtroom technicalities. “The expert’s theory that this statue is pre-first century would require a more voluptuous representation, exhibiting a pagan influence. These slender breasts betray a Christian influence more fitting of a later artifact from, say, Byzantium.”

The District Court judge flipped up her reading glasses, turning to the witness.

“Is that true, Dr. von Bothmer?”

For the first time, the witness appeared uneasy.

“Pagan imagery of a voluptuous Venus was replaced by a tamer Christian portrayal after the first century. So”—he cleared his throat—“perhaps . . .”

“Perhaps,” Jonathan repeated, walking toward the jury. “Then how is it that a statue with a Christianized bust could come from Morgantina?”

According to your own testimony, Morgantina had been nothing but ashes for two hundred years before Christianity's rise."

Dr. von Bothmer shifted, a nervous glance at the Italian counsel's table.

"Let me withdraw that question, Your Honor," Jonathan said after a moment, allowing the professor off the ropes to get him squarely in the jaw.

Jonathan used the same respectful tone but now without the smile. "Doctor, didn't your own museum just return the Euphronios Krater to the Italian Cultural Ministry, having learned it was illegally excavated from Morgantina in 1984? Isn't it possible that by offering your testimony here today—a testimony even you know to be academically tenuous—the Met hopes to avoid a renewed interest by the Italian embassy in other items in the museum's collection?"

Dr. von Bothmer opened his mouth to speak, but no sound came out.

Jonathan walked back to the defense table. "Cognoscere mentem, cognoscere hominem," he said, just loud enough for Dr. von Bothmer to hear. "Know the motive, know the man."

Signore," the chauffeur said.

The Maserati had stopped in Piazza Navona in downtown Rome. The chauffeur let the engine idle.

Jonathan leaned forward. "I haven't received any information where to go."

The chauffeur said nothing, only pointed to the floodlit Baroque façade of a sixteenth-century palazzo at the far end of the piazza.

A line from Jonathan's graduate work in Latin literature came back to him. "*Ducunt volentem Fata, nolentem trahunt,*" he murmured.

His eyes met the chauffeur's in the rearview mirror when, to Jonathan's amazement, the chauffeur translated the phrase from Seneca.

* The Euphronios Krater was in the Metropolitan's collection for thirty years before the museum returned it to Italy in January 2008.

“Follow the fates,” the chauffeur said, “for they will drag you anyway.”

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After midnight in an abandoned warehouse along the Roman shipping docks of Civitavecchia, Comandante Jacopo Profeta removed a snub-nosed Tanfaglio combat pistol from its holster, drawing its trigger back to allow a cylinder rotation check. As commander of the Italian Cultural Heritage Protection, or Tutela del Patrimonio Culturale, the world’s most sophisticated antiquities crimes investigation unit, Profeta knew artifact raids had grown increasingly dangerous. He had more than 250 officers in eleven regions to assist investigations, ranging from staking out a deadly excavation site in Pompeii to conducting tonight’s raid of a portside warehouse in search of illicit antiquities.

“The Taliban used the opium trade to finance their activities,” Comandante Profeta often reminded his officers, “but terrorists have discovered a new source of revenue: antiquities. These men are not archaeologists. They are murderers.”

Profeta’s flashlight cut the warehouse’s blackness. The rank scent of fermented olive oil mingled with the stench of sewage and rust. Weeds had reclaimed the warehouse’s overgrown floor. He caught a glimpse of himself in a shattered windowpane. With receding silvery hair cropped close to his skull, gold spectacles framing his lumbering brown eyes, and a gray beard in need of a trim, Profeta resembled a strong but aging sailor too long at sea.

“Watch yourself, Profeta,” he said. “Not as young as you used to be.”

Lieutenant Rufio, a recent transfer from Palermo’s antiquities division