

The Rozabal Line

By

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Author's Note

This book is a work of fiction. Religion, history and factual narrative have been liberally interspersed with the fictional narrative in order to give context and colour to the plot.

Wherever possible, notes have been provided at the end of the book to explain, justify, attribute or acknowledge.

Chapter One

Srinagar, Kashmir, India, 2012

The onset of winter in idyllic Kashmir meant that the days were gradually getting shorter. Even though it was only three o'clock in the afternoon, it felt like nightfall. Icy winter winds, having wafted through the numerous apple and cherry orchards of the area, sent a spicy and refreshing aromatic chill to the man's nostrils. The leather jacket and lamb's wool pullover underneath it were his only comfort as he knelt to pray at the tomb.

Father Vincent Morgan rubbed his hands together to keep warm as he took in the sight of the four glass walls, within which lay the wooden sarcophagus. The occupant of the tomb, however, resided below in an inaccessible crypt. Standing in front of a Muslim cemetery, the tomb was located within an ordinary and unassuming structure with whitewashed walls and simple wooden fixtures.

Vincent's blonde hair, blue eyes, together with his athletic build and pale skin clearly marked him out as separate and distinct from the locals. The goatee and rimless spectacles completed the slightly academic look.

The sign outside informed visitors that the Rozabal tomb in the Kanyar district of old Srinagar contained the body of a person named Yuz Asaf. Local land records acknowledged the existence of the tomb from 112 A.D. onwards.

The word Rozabal, derived from the Kashmiri term *Rauza-Bal*, meant "Tomb of the Prophet". According to Muslim custom, the gravestone had been placed along the north-south axis, however, a small opening revealed the true burial chamber beneath. Here one could see the sarcophagus of Yuz Asaf, which lay along the east-west axis as per Jewish custom.

Nothing was out of the ordinary here - nothing that is except for a carved imprint of a pair of feet near the sarcophagus. The feet were normal human feet - normal, barring the fact that they bore marks on them; marks that coincided with puncture wounds from a crucifixion.

Crucifixion had never been practised in Asia, so it was quite obvious that the resident of the tomb had undergone this ordeal in some other, distant land.

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Mecca, Saudi Arabia, 2012

The thousands of male pilgrims to Mecca during the Islamic month of *Dhu-al-Hijjah* were dressed identically in *Ihram* – a simple white, unhemmed cloth. It was impossible to distinguish one pilgrim from another in the white sea of humanity.

After all, this was *Hajj*, and all of Allah's followers were meant to be equal before Him. Some, however, were more equal than others.

The simple face and ordinary features did not reveal the depth of this particular pilgrim as he performed the *Tawaf* - circling the holy *Kaaba* - swiftly four times, and then another three times at an unhurried pace.

This was Ghalib's second visit to the Kaaba. A week ago he had already been through the entire routine once. After completing the *Umrah*, Ghalib had stopped to drink water from the sacred well of *Zamzam*. He had then travelled to Medina to visit the mosque of the Prophet before performing the final three acts of Hajj - journeying over five days to the hill of Arafat, throwing stones at the devil in the city of Mina, and then returning to Mecca to perform a second Tawaf around the Kaaba.

Ghalib was praying: *Bismillah ar-rahman ar-rahim*. "Allah, the most kind and the most merciful, please do not show your legendary kindness or mercy to my enemies."

He felt refreshed. Blessed. Purified.

The *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, the Army of the Pure, had been fighting a bloody Jihad in Kashmir for the restoration of an Islamic caliphate over India. The outfit was on the radar of most intelligence agencies around the world. Ghalib, however, was not even a blip on the screen.

Unknown to most intelligence agencies, the Lashkar-e-Toiba had spun off an even more elite group within itself called the *Lashkar-e-Talatashar*, the Army of Thirteen, consisting of twelve elite holy warriors who would deem it an honour and privilege to die for the cause of Allah. They were not confined to Kashmir but scattered across the world.

Their leader, the thirteenth man, was their general. His name was Ghalib.

*

London, UK, 2012

The Department for the Study of Religions was part of the School of Oriental and African Studies, which in turn was part of the University of London. The school boasted a vast library located in the main school building just off Russell Square.

On this damp morning, faculty librarian, Barbara Poulson, was attempting to prepare the library for its first wave of students and faculty members at the opening time of 9 a.m.

Most students would start their search on the library catalogue, which indicated whether the library had the required

item. From the catalogue one could find the class mark - a reference number - of the item one wanted and this could be used to find the exact location of the book.

The previous day, Professor Terry Acton had been attempting to locate a copy of the Hindu treatise, *The Bhagavad Gita*, published in 1855 by Stephen Austin. The absentminded professor had been unable to locate it and had requested Barbara's assistance. She had promised to find it before his arrival that morning.

She mechanically typed the words "Bhagavad Gita" into the library's computer catalogue. There were only two books displayed, neither of which was the one that the professor wanted. She then recalled the professor mentioning that *The Bhagavad Gita* was actually part of a broader epic, *The Mahabharata*. She quickly typed "Mahabharata" into the computer and saw two hundred and twenty-nine entries. The twelfth entry was "The Bhagavad Gita, A Colloquy Between Krishna and Arjuna on the Divine". She clicked on this hyperlink and she had it - the book by Stephen Austin, published by Hertford in 1855. Noting the class mark - CWML 1220 - she looked it up on the location list.

Items starting with "CWML" were located on level F in the Special Collections Reading Room. The extremely efficient Barbara Poulson headed towards level F, where she started moving in reverse serial towards CWML 1220.

CWML 1224... CWML 1223... CWML 1222... CWML 1221... CWML 1219... Where was CWML 1220?

In place of the book was a perfect, square, crimson box about twelve inches in length, width and height. It had a small, white label pasted on the front that simply read “CWML 1220”.

Barbara was puzzled, but she had no time in her efficient and orderly world to ponder over things for too long. She lifted the box off the shelf, placed it on the nearest reading desk and lifted off the cardboard lid to reveal the perfectly preserved head of Professor Terry Acton, neatly severed at the neck. On his forehead was a yellow Post-It that simply read “Mark 16:16”.

The cool and extremely efficient Barbara Poulson grasped the edge of the desk for support before she fainted and fell to the floor.

The passage Mark 16:16 of the New Testament reads as follows:

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned!

*

Waziristan, Pakistan-Afghanistan Border, 2012

Waziristan was no-man’s land, a rocky and hilly area on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, and a law unto itself. Even though Waziristan was officially part of Pakistan, it was actually self-

administered by Waziri tribal chiefs, who were feared warriors, as well as being fiercely independent and conservative.

The presence of the lanky, olive-skinned man wearing a simple white turban, camouflage jacket and holding a walking cane in his left hand was a little out of place in this region. The man was extremely soft-spoken and gentle in his ways. His overall demeanour was that of an ascetic not a warrior. So what was he doing in this harsh land where swords and bullets did most of the talking?

He was sitting inside a cave on a beautiful Afghan rug. His few trusted followers sat around him drinking tea. He was talking to them. ‘As for the World Trade Center attack, the people who were attacked and who perished in it were those controlling some of the most important positions in business and government. It wasn’t a school! It wasn’t someone’s home. And the accepted view would be that most of the people inside were responsible for backing a terrible financial power that excels in spreading worldwide mischief!’

‘Praise be to Allah!’ said one of the followers excitedly.

‘We merely treat others like they treat us. Those who kill our women and our innocent, we kill their women and innocent until they desist.’

‘But Sheikh, we have already achieved a sensational victory. What else is left to achieve?’ asked one of his followers.

‘We started out by draining their wealth through costly wars in Afghanistan. We then destroyed their security through attacks

on their soil. We shall now defy the only thing that is left - their faith.'

'How?' wondered the followers.

'Ah! I have a secret weapon,' said the Sheikh in his usual hushed voice.

*

Vatican City, 2012

Popes had ruled most of the Italian peninsula, Rome included, for over a millennium until 1870. Disputes between the Pope and Italy had been settled by Mussolini in 1929 through three Lateran Treaties, which had established the *Stato della Citta del Vaticano*, more commonly known as The State of the Vatican City. It instantly became the world's smallest state, with an area of just 0.44 square kilometres.

His Eminence Alberto Cardinal Valerio was just one among 921 other national citizens of The Holy See but was extremely important among the 183 cardinals.

He now sat in his office wearing his black simar with scarlet piping and scarlet sash around his waist. The bright scarlet symbolized the cardinal's willingness to die for his faith. *To die or to kill*, thought His Eminence.

He picked up the sleek Bang & Olufsen BeoCom-4 telephone that contrasted dramatically with his Morano antique desk and asked his secretary to send in his visitor.

The young woman who entered his office had delicate features and flawless skin. It was evident that she possessed a beautiful blend of European and Oriental features. Her bright eyes shone with fervent devotion and she knelt before His Eminence.

‘Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been a year since my last confession.’

‘Go ahead, my child,’ whispered His Eminence. He motioned for her to talk by waving his podgy hand. On his ring finger sat a pigeon-blood-red Burmese ruby of 10.16 carats.

Swakilki began. ‘I severed the professor’s head and left it in the library as a lesson to those who mock the sanctity of Christ’s suffering. He deserved it for his blasphemy.’

‘And are you repentant for this terrible sin?’

‘Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more and avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen.’

His Eminence pondered over what she had said for a few seconds before he spoke. ‘May our Lord Jesus Christ absolve you; and by His authority I absolve you from every bond of excommunication... I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. *Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christi, merita Beatae Mariae Virginis et*

omnium sanctorum, quidquid boni feceris vel mal sustinueris sint tibi in remissionem peccatorum, augmentum gratiae et praemium vitae aeternae.'

Valerio made the sign of the cross and looked squarely at the young woman. Swakilki looked up at the cardinal. He was seated on a large leather sofa in the luxurious office.

'Do you reject sin so as to live in the freedom of God's children?' asked Valerio.

'I do,' replied Swakilki.

'Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness?'

'I do.'

'Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth?'

'I do.'

'Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?'

'I do.'

'Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?'

'I do.'

'Then it is time to eliminate all those who make people believe otherwise... now listen carefully...'

*

Zurich, Switzerland, 2012

In 1844 Johannes Baur opened his second hotel in Zurich, right beside the lake and with an open view of the mountains. The hotel would soon become one of the most luxurious hotels of Zurich, the Baur au Lac.

Nestled within one of the deluxe suites of the Baur au Lac, with a beautiful view of Lake Zurich, sat Brother Thomas Manning. He was quite obviously a very valued regular patron. Why else would the hotel specifically stock Brunello di Montalcino, his favourite Tuscany wine?

There was a discrete knock at the door. The brother commanded in fluent German, '*Kommen Sie herein!*' and the door opened.

The visitor was a thin, spectacled man.

Mr. Egloff was the investment advisor from Bank Leu, the oldest Swiss Bank in the world. Bank Leu had started out as Leu et Compagnie in 1755 under its first chairman, Johann Jacob Leu, Master of the Purse and later Mayor of Zurich. The bank's clients had soon included European royalty such as the Empress Maria Theresia of Austria.

'Herr Egloff. Under instructions from His Eminence Alberto Cardinal Valerio, I require a sum of ten million dollars to be transferred from the Oedipus trust to the Isabel Madonna trust,' said Brother Manning.

‘Very well, Brother Manning,’ replied the banker.

Unknown to the outside world, the strange sounding offshore trusts managed by Herr Egloff for his clients had anagrams as the beneficiaries. Brother Manning chuckled to himself.

After all, the beneficiary of the Oedipus trust was Opus Dei and the primary beneficiary of the Isabel Madonna trust was Osama-bin-Laden.