

An ornate, black and white decorative border surrounds the text. The border features a repeating pattern of stylized, interlocking geometric and floral motifs, creating a rich, textured frame. The central text is written in a classic, elegant cursive script.

*A Gift
More Precious
Than Gold*

Chapter Two:

The Symposium



As Scott reentered the Waldorf Astoria through the revolving glass door he noticed Hartwell pacing back and forth in the reception area. Obviously relieved when he saw Scott, Hartwell called out, “Professor! There you are. Your wife didn’t know where you were. We can’t be late for the start of the symposium, you know. Please follow me.”

Continuing to talk while rushing through the lobby, Hartwell rambled on, “Don’t worry about Mrs. Hamilton. She’s scheduled to join the other spouses for a cruise in the harbor around Ellis Island up to the Statue of Liberty. They will also attend a special show at Radio City Music Hall and get to meet former Mayor Rudy at a reception for the New York Firefighters Association.”

Excited by the prospect of discovering the reason for all the secrecy surrounding the invitation by the Kincaid Trust to this special event, Scott kept pace with the quick stepping Hartwell. Glancing at his watch when they stopped in front of the Presidential Boardroom, Scott thought they were early as it was only 8:45 a.m.

Hartwell knocked twice and a dour-faced looking butler opened the door and immediately announced in a booming voice, “Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome Professor Scott Hamilton from Lehigh University, Pennsylvania.”

As if on cue, everyone in the room stood in unison as Scott found himself escorted by the shiny bald headed butler to the

only empty seat in the conference room. No wonder Hartwell had been so nervous, Scott was the last to arrive. Embarrassed, Scott sheepishly looked around the huge conference table to see if he recognized any of the other participants.

At exactly 9:00 a.m. the inner doors of the boardroom opened and a procession of bodyguards preceded an impeccably dressed handsome young man looking very much like a GQ ad in his double breasted Pierre Cardin. He spoke in a soft but commanding voice, "Good Morning, my friends. Welcome to our symposium. I am glad to see that all of the guests we invited decided to join us. I know you all have many questions and I promise that before you leave New York, you will have your answers."

Everyone around the room sat mesmerized. He continued, "Let us begin with introductions. My name is Arthur Kincaid III, executor of the Kincaid Foundation established by my great grandfather over one hundred and fifty years ago and which continues a tradition handed down by my ancestors. The primary beneficiaries of our trust funds are non profit educational institutions such as Lehigh University and other charitable organizations. Today, however, we will talk of different matters."

Looking around the room, he motioned for his assistant to hand a wireless mike to the pretty Asian lady sitting directly in front of him, then added, "Before we proceed any further, please do us the courtesy of introducing yourselves. Scott listened carefully as each of the guests sitting around the massive boardroom table stood up and addressed the group.

"Zao Shang hao. Wo jiao Chao Lin Dang Hong Kong."

"Guten Morgen. Ich heie Gustave Kreiger auf Germany. Sehr erfreut."

"Buenos dias. Que tal mucho gusto. Me llamo Ceasar Ruiz

donde Spain.”

“Ohaiyo gozaimasu. Jiko shokai shitemo ii desuka? Watakushi no name wa Makiko Watanabe desu Japan.”

“Bon jour. Je m’appelle Franz Robelle, France.

“Good Day. William MacCary here from England.”

Scott took his turn introducing himself, handed the mike over to the striking woman with the beautiful bronze complexion on his left, then sat down scribbling the names of the attendees in his notes. He recognized one of the people seated at the head table in front of the room but none of the guests around the conference table. Many spoke in their native tongue though it was understood that everyone spoke English as well. In his own field of Classics, Scott had been required to have a reading knowledge of German and French as well as Hebrew, so he assumed that the assembled group would be multi lingual as well. The introductions continued.

“Hi Y’all, my name is Nancy, Nancy Demray from the Peachtree State of Georgia.”

“Zdrostvuytye minya zavut Irena Kasparov, Russia.”

“Martin Steinberg, Israel.”

“Talofa! I am Numi Tafasau from Tahiti.”

“Namashe mai, Sister Carol Ann from India, God Bless you all.”

“Omar Bodurin, I am from Egypt.”

“Magandang unaga Wilma Ortale. I represent the Phillippines.”

“Buon giorno. Mi chiamo Roberto Sellitto de Italia. We are so, how you say, ‘happy’, to be here in New York.”

Smiling warmly, Arthur Kincaid looked at each of the guests assembled and said, “Thank you. You will all get to know each other better during our luncheon in the Royal

Ballroom. I should also tell you that I have taken the liberty of including each of your resumes in the packet of information which will be distributed to you at the end of the session. Well now, let's get started with the business at hand."

He nodded to Hartwell who promptly set the activities in motion. Butlers carrying silver trays were ushered into the Boardroom to offer coffee or tea and a delicious Portuguese pastry, fresh baked malasadas. Two additional assistants, clones of the officious Hartwell, handed out leather bound folders with each participant's name engraved on the cover.

Scott was enjoying the malasadas which tasted like his Mom's special sugar dumplings and had just started a conversation with Makiko from Japan when Hartwell reappeared. Following him was a large contingent of security guards carrying an antique treasure chest with padlocks on both hasps and further secured by thick leather straps. The chest was placed on a table in the back of the room where Hartwell made a visible display of producing two separate skeleton keys which opened the heavy brass padlocks. Two of the guards wearing white gloves carefully removed a rectangular, transparent box made of glass which contained a manuscript bound on both sides by 1/2 inch thick koa wood panels. The wood was finely polished and hinged by wide gold clasps inlaid with rubies. The front of the cover was embossed with an intricate gold leaf design. The box was placed in the center of the oak conference table directly in front of Scott's seat. Arthur Kincaid stepped forward saying, "It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Dr. Gregory Rosenquist from the Institute of Scientific National Research in Utah. Dr. Rosenquist earned his Ph.D at the University of Cambridge and taught at the University

of Bristol before assuming his current position at Utah. Dr. Rosenquist.”

Scott, clapping politely along with the rest of the group, wondered if he could keep his curiosity in check for much longer. He had met Rosenquist at an archeological conference just last year and knew his background as an expert in the carbon-14 dating process. Rosenquist had studied under Professor Williard Libby, the American inventor of the carbo-14 clock, the geiger counter instrument for which he won the 1960 Nobel prize in chemistry.

“Mr. Kincaid has asked me here today,” Rosenquist began, speaking in his clipped German accent, “to authenticate the age of the bound parchment you see before you. I am pleased to confirm that using the most up to date radiocarbon dating instruments available, the tests place the date of the manuscript anywhere between the period 30 A.D. to 60 A.D.”

For just a minute, a hushed silence fell over the room as each of the guests digested the significance of Rosenquist’s statement and mulled over the more important questions. What was the content of the manuscript? Who wrote it? All at once the questions poured out.

Roberto DiMartino was the first to call out, “Is it a Biblical text?”

Irena chimed in, “Tell us, is it about Augustus Caesar, the Emperor?”

Nancy drawled, “This is important, isn’t it?”

Holding his hands up to quiet the group Arthur Kincaid nodded his head approvingly while escorting his next resident expert up to the podium.

“I appreciate your enthusiasm. I assure you that all your

questions will soon be answered. For now, let me introduce you to Professor Nina Carbonelle, an expert linguist who specializes in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic and is highly praised for her part in the translation of the Dead Sea Scrolls. She currently holds the Principal Chair of Kingston College in London. Professor, you have the floor.”

Quickly stepping up to the mike, the attractive young woman with hypnotic almond eyes held everyone’s attention.

“Thank you, Mr. Kincaid,” she began, “for giving me the opportunity to work on this project with my new found colleagues. I never dreamed that while on sabbatical I would be able to do research on such a fascinating topic. I, too, can confirm after scrupulously examining the text contained in this unique manuscript, that it is authentic.”

Dr. Howard Stassen was the next expert introduced. With a doctorate from Oxford, England, his research and publication list was highly impressive. Surprisingly, the short, powerfully built Doctor did not fit the image of the dry scientist. He punctuated his brief comments with hand gestures, clearly unable to conceal in his pale blue eyes his fresh enthusiasm for this project.

“I have carefully examined the ink used in writing the manuscript contained in this booklet. I put it through every test, using every modern technology available. I had my staff conduct extensive research using our computer banks and have come to the same conclusion as my colleagues. This booklet dates to the early first century of our Lord, 30 A.D. to 60 A.D.”

Arthur Kincaid stood confidently next to Stassen, asking the group to acknowledge him with their applause. “Our deepest appreciation to you, Dr. Stassen, and also to

your esteemed colleagues, Dr. Rosenquist and Professor Carbonelle, for sharing your convictions with our guests this morning.

Suddenly all eyes turned to Hartwell who was accompanied by one of his cloned assistants carefully holding an intricately carved staff approximately six feet in length. Hartwell motioned to him to place it in the middle of the antique oak conference table.

“Please feel free to look more closely at this staff, ladies and gentlemen,” exclaimed Arthur Kincaid. “However, since it has been in my family for almost two thousand years, I would appreciate your not picking it up without first putting on the white gloves which are available from Mr. Hartwell.

Scott was the first to don his protective gloves, anxiously ready and waiting to inspect the staff which Hartwell gingerly handed to him. Slowly reading the names from the bottom and turning the staff in a counter clockwise direction, Scott could clearly make out the names hand carved in the staff... Arthur Kincaid III 1967...Arthur Kincaid II 1932...Arthur Kincaid I 1897...Theodore Kakalouros 1862...Alexander Kakalouros II 1827...Alexander Kakalouros I 1792...

It was obvious to Scott that this was indeed a genealogy staff. The names were carved in sequence for each generation. He continued scanning the names which were now written in Greek easily making out the names until the year 742 A.D....

The names from the year 707 changed to Aramaic until Anno Domini 322, then back to Greek. The carvings became more difficult to decipher but Scott pressed on urgently, determined to solve the mystery of the generations.

Nearing the top of the staff, Scott identified the names

for the years 147 and 112 as Hebrew. Finally he reached the last inscription but he could not make out the last name carved in letters. Looking up to Kincaid for help, Scott exclaimed, "This is unbelievable," not realizing he was speaking out loud.

Arthur Kincaid III proclaimed, "Yes, it's true, Professor Hamilton, my lineage which you have been tracing on our family staff goes back to the year 77 A.D. Our family tree begins with our oldest known ancestor. His name was 'Melchior', one of the Three Wise Men, the Magi mentioned in the Bible."