

CHAPTER 55

Seated on the divan beside Langdon, Sophie drank her tea and ate a scone, feeling the welcome effects of caffeine and food. Sir Leigh Teabing was beaming as he awkwardly paced before the open fire, his leg braces clicking on the stone hearth.

"The Holy Grail," Teabing said, his voice sermonic. "Most people ask me only *where* it is. I fear that is a question I may never answer." He turned and looked directly at Sophie. "However . . . the far more relevant question is this: *What* is the Holy Grail?"

Sophie sensed a rising air of academic anticipation now in both of her male companions.

"To fully understand the Grail," Teabing continued, "we must first understand the Bible. How well do you know the New Testament?"

Sophie shrugged. "Not at all, really. I was raised by a man who worshipped Leonardo da Vinci."

Teabing looked both startled and pleased. "An enlightened soul. Superb! Then you must be aware that Leonardo was one of the keepers of the secret of the Holy Grail. And he hid clues in his art."

"Robert told me as much, yes."

"And Da Vinci's views on the New Testament?"

"I have no idea."

Teabing's eyes turned mirthful as he motioned to the bookshelf across the room. "Robert, would you mind? On the bottom shelf. *La Storia di Leonardo*."

Langdon went across the room, found a large art book, and brought it back, setting it down on the table between them. Twisting the book to face Sophie, Teabing flipped open the heavy cover and pointed inside the rear cover to a series of quotations. "From Da Vinci's notebook on polemics and speculation," Teabing said, indicating one quote in particular. "I think you'll find this relevant to our discussion."

Sophie read the words.

*Many have made a trade of delusions
and false miracles, deceiving the stupid multitude.*

—LEONARDO DA VINCI

"Here's another," Teabing said, pointing to a different quote.

*Blinding ignorance does mislead us.
O! Wretched mortals, open your eyes!*

—LEONARDO DA VINCI

Sophie felt a little chill. "Da Vinci is talking about the Bible?"

Teabing nodded. "Leonardo's feelings about the Bible relate directly to the Holy Grail. In fact, Da Vinci painted the true Grail, which I will show you momentarily, but first we must speak of the Bible." Teabing smiled. "And everything you need to know about the Bible can be summed up by the great canon doctor Martyn Percy." Teabing cleared his throat and declared, "The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven."

"I beg your pardon?"

"The Bible is a product of *man*, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book."

"Okay."

"Jesus Christ was a historical figure of staggering influence, perhaps the most enigmatic and inspirational leader the world has ever seen. As the prophesied Messiah, Jesus toppled kings, inspired millions, and founded new philosophies. As a descendant of the lines of King Solomon and King David, Jesus possessed a rightful claim to the throne of the King of the Jews. Understandably, His life was recorded by thousands of followers across the land." Teabing paused to sip his tea and then placed the cup back on the mantel. "More than *eighty* gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John among them.

"Who chose which gospels to include?" Sophie asked.

"Aha!" Teabing burst in with enthusiasm. "The fundamental irony of Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great."

"I thought Constantine was a Christian," Sophie said.

"Hardly," Teabing scoffed. "He was a lifelong pagan who was baptized on his deathbed, too weak to protest. In Constantine's day, Rome's official religion was sun worship—the cult of *Sol Invictus*, or the Invincible Sun—and Constantine was its head priest. Unfortunately for him, a growing religious turmoil was gripping Rome. Three centuries after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Christ's followers had multiplied exponentially. Christians and pagans began warring, and the conflict grew to such proportions that it threatened to rend Rome in two. Constantine decided something had to be done. In 325 A.D., he decided to unify Rome under a single religion. Christianity."

Sophie was surprised. "Why would a pagan emperor choose *Christianity* as the official religion?"

Teabing chuckled. "Constantine was a very good businessman. He could see that Christianity was on the rise, and he simply backed the winning horse. Historians still marvel at the brilliance with which Constantine converted the sun-worshipping pagans to Christianity. By fusing pagan symbols, dates, and rituals into the growing Christian tradition, he created a kind of hybrid religion that was acceptable to both parties."

"Transmogrification," Langdon said. "The vestiges of pagan religion in Christian symbology are undeniable. Egyptian sun disks became the halos of Catholic saints. Pictograms of Isis nursing her miraculously conceived son Horus became the blueprint for our modern images of the Virgin Mary nursing Baby Jesus. And virtually all the elements of the Catholic ritual—the miter, the altar, the doxology, and communion, the act of "God-eating"—were taken directly from earlier pagan mystery religions."

Teabing groaned. "Don't get a symbologist started on Christian icons. Nothing in Christianity is original. The pre-Christian God Mithras—called *the Son of God* and *the Light of the World*—was born on December 25, died, was buried in a rock tomb, and then resurrected in three days. By the way, December 25 is also the birthday of Osiris, Adonis, and Dionysus. The newborn Krishna was presented with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Even Christianity's weekly holy day was stolen from the pagans."

"What do you mean?"

"Originally," Langdon said, "Christianity honored the Jewish Sabbath of Saturday, but Constantine shifted it to coincide with the

pagan's veneration day of the sun." He paused, grinning. "To this day, most churchgoers attend services on Sunday morning with no idea that they are there on account of the pagan sun god's weekly tribute—*Sunday*."

Sophie's head was spinning. "And all of this relates to the Grail?"

"Indeed," Teabing said. "Stay with me. During this fusion of religions, Constantine needed to strengthen the new Christian tradition, and held a famous ecumenical gathering known as the Council of Nicaea."

Sophie had heard of it only insofar as its being the birthplace of the Nicene Creed.

"At this gathering," Teabing said, "many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon—the date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of sacraments, and, of course, the *divinity* of Jesus."

"I don't follow. His divinity?"

"My dear," Teabing declared, "until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet . . . a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless. A mortal."

"Not the Son of God?"

"Right," Teabing said. "Jesus' establishment as 'the Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea."

"Hold on. You're saying Jesus' divinity was the result of a *vote*?"

"A relatively close vote at that," Teabing added. "Nonetheless, establishing Christ's divinity was critical to the further unification of the Roman empire and to the new Vatican power base. By officially endorsing Jesus as the Son of God, Constantine turned Jesus into a deity who existed beyond the scope of the human world, an entity whose power was unchallengeable. This not only precluded further pagan challenges to Christianity, but now the followers of Christ were able to redeem themselves *only* via the established sacred channel—the Roman Catholic Church."

Sophie glanced at Langdon, and he gave her a soft nod of concurrence.

"It was all about power," Teabing continued. "Christ as Messiah was critical to the functioning of Church and state. Many scholars claim that the early Church literally *stole* Jesus from His original followers, hijacking His human message, shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity, and using it to expand their own power. I've written several books on the topic."

"And I assume devout Christians send you hate mail on a daily basis?"

"Why would they?" Teabing countered. "The vast majority of educated Christians know the history of their faith. Jesus was indeed a great and powerful man. Constantine's underhanded political maneuvers don't diminish the majesty of Christ's life. Nobody is saying Christ was a fraud, or denying that He walked the earth and inspired millions to better lives. All we are saying is that Constantine took advantage of Christ's substantial influence and importance. And in doing so, he shaped the face of Christianity as we know it today."

Sophie glanced at the art book before her, eager to move on and see the Da Vinci painting of the Holy Grail.

"The twist is this," Teabing said, talking faster now. "Because Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries *after* Jesus' death, thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a *mortal* man. To rewrite the history books, Constantine knew he would need a bold stroke. From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history." Teabing paused, eyeing Sophie. "Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's *human* traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned."

"An interesting note," Langdon added. "Anyone who chose the forbidden gospels over Constantine's version was deemed a heretic. The word *heretic* derives from that moment in history. The Latin word *haereticus* means 'choice.' Those who 'chose' the original history of Christ were the world's first *heretics*."

"Fortunately for historians," Teabing said, "some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert. And, of course, the Coptic Scrolls in 1945 at Nag Hammadi. In addition to telling the true Grail story, these documents speak of Christ's ministry in very human terms. Of course, the Vatican, in keeping with their tradition of misinformation, tried very hard to suppress the release of these scrolls. And why wouldn't they? The scrolls highlight glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming that the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda—to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and use His influence to solidify their own power base."

"And yet," Langdon countered, "it's important to remember that the modern Church's desire to suppress these documents comes from a

sincere belief in their established view of Christ. The Vatican is made up of deeply pious men who truly believe these contrary documents could only be false testimony."

Teabing chuckled as he eased himself into a chair opposite Sophie. "As you can see, our professor has a far softer heart for Rome than I do. Nonetheless, he is correct about the modern clergy believing these opposing documents are false testimony. That's understandable. Constantine's Bible has been their truth for ages. Nobody is more indoctrinated than the indoctrinator."

"What he means," Langdon said, "is that we worship the gods of our fathers."

"What I mean," Teabing countered, "is that almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is *false*. As are the stories about the Holy Grail."

Sophie looked again at the Da Vinci quote before her. *Blinding ignorance does mislead us. O! Wretched mortals, open your eyes!*

Teabing reached for the book and flipped toward the center. "And finally, before I show you Da Vinci's paintings of the Holy Grail, I'd like you to take a quick look at this." He opened the book to a colorful graphic that spanned both full pages. "I assume you recognize this fresco?"

He's kidding, right? Sophie was staring at the most famous fresco of all time—*The Last Supper*—Da Vinci's legendary painting from the wall of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. The decaying fresco portrayed Jesus and His disciples at the moment that Jesus announced one of them would betray Him. "I know the fresco, yes."

"Then perhaps you would indulge me this little game? Close your eyes if you would."

Uncertain, Sophie closed her eyes.

"Where is Jesus sitting?" Teabing asked.

"In the center."

"Good. And what food are He and His disciples breaking and eating?"

"Bread." *Obviously.*

"Superb. And what drink?"

"Wine. They drank wine."

"Great. And one final question. How many wineglasses are on the table?"

Sophie paused, realizing it was the trick question. *And after dinner.*

Jesus took the cup of wine, sharing it with His disciples. "One cup," she said. "The chalice." *The Cup of Christ. The Holy Grail.* "Jesus passed a single chalice of wine, just as modern Christians do at communion."

Teabing sighed. "Open your eyes."

She did. Teabing was grinning smugly. Sophie looked down at the painting, seeing to her astonishment that *everyone* at the table had a glass of wine, including Christ. Thirteen cups. Moreover, the cups were tiny, stemless, and made of glass. There was no chalice in the painting. No Holy Grail.

Teabing's eyes twinkled. "A bit strange, don't you think, considering that both the Bible and our standard Grail legend celebrate this moment as the definitive arrival of the Holy Grail. Oddly, Da Vinci appears to have forgotten to paint the Cup of Christ."

"Surely art scholars must have noted that."

"You will be shocked to learn what anomalies Da Vinci included here that most scholars either do not see or simply choose to ignore. This fresco, in fact, is the entire key to the Holy Grail mystery. Da Vinci lays it all out in the open in *The Last Supper*."

Sophie scanned the work eagerly. "Does this fresco tell us *what* the Grail really is?"

"Not *what* it is," Teabing whispered. "But rather *who* it is. The Holy Grail is not a thing. It is, in fact . . . a *person*."

CHAPTER 56

Sophie stared at Teabing a long moment and then turned to Langdon. "The Holy Grail is a person?"

Langdon nodded. "A woman, in fact." From the blank look on Sophie's face, Langdon could tell they had already lost her. He recalled having a similar reaction the first time he heard the statement. It was not until he understood the *symbolology* behind the Grail that the feminine connection became clear.

Teabing apparently had a similar thought. "Robert, perhaps this is the moment for the symbologist to clarify?" He went to a nearby end table, found a piece of paper, and laid it in front of Langdon.

Langdon pulled a pen from his pocket. "Sophie, are you familiar with the modern icons for male and female?" He drew the common male symbol ♂ and female symbol ♀.

"Of course," she said.

"These," he said quietly, "are not the original symbols for male and female. Many people incorrectly assume the male symbol is derived from a shield and spear, while the female symbol represents a mirror reflecting beauty. In fact, the symbols originated as ancient astronomical symbols for the planet-god Mars and planet-goddess Venus. The original symbols are far simpler." Langdon drew another icon on the paper.



"This symbol is the original icon for *male*," he told her. "A rudimentary phallus."

"Quite to the point," Sophie said.

"As it were," Teabing added.

Langdon went on. "This icon is formally known as the *blade*, and it represents aggression and manhood. In fact, this exact phallus symbol is still used today on modern military uniforms to denote rank."

"Indeed." Teabing grinned. "The more penises you have, the higher your rank. Boys will be boys."

Langdon winced. "Moving on, the female symbol, as you might imagine, is the exact opposite." He drew another symbol on the page. "This is called the *chalice*."



Sophie glanced up, looking surprised.

Langdon could see she had made the connection. "The chalice," he said, "resembles a cup or vessel, and more important, it resembles the shape of a woman's womb. This symbol communicates femininity, womanhood, and fertility." Langdon looked directly at her now. "Sophie, legend tells us the Holy Grail is a chalice—a cup. But the Grail's description as a *chalice* is actually an allegory to protect the true nature of the Holy Grail. That is to say, the legend uses the chalice as a *metaphor* for something far more important."

"A woman," Sophie said.

"Exactly." Langdon smiled. "The Grail is literally the ancient symbol for womanhood, and the *Holy* Grail represents the sacred feminine and the goddess, which of course has now been lost, virtually eliminated by the Church. The power of the female and her ability to produce life was once very sacred, but it posed a threat to the rise of the predominantly male Church, and so the sacred feminine was demonized and called unclean. It was *man*, not God, who created the concept of 'original sin,' whereby Eve tasted of the apple and caused the downfall of the human race. Woman, once the sacred giver of life, was now the enemy."

"I should add," Teabing chimed, "that this concept of woman as life-bringer was the foundation of ancient religion. Childbirth was mystical and powerful. Sadly, Christian philosophy decided to embezzle the female's creative power by ignoring biological truth and making *man* the Creator. Genesis tells us that Eve was created from Adam's rib. Woman became an offshoot of man. And a sinful one at that. Genesis was the beginning of the end for the goddess."

"The Grail," Langdon said, "is symbolic of the lost goddess. When Christianity came along, the old pagan religions did not die easily. Legends of chivalric quests for the lost Grail were in fact stories of forbidden quests to find the lost sacred feminine. Knights who claimed

to be "searching for the chalice" were speaking in code as a way to protect themselves from a Church that had subjugated women, banished the Goddess, burned nonbelievers, and forbidden the pagan reverence for the sacred feminine."

Sophie shook her head. "I'm sorry, when you said the Holy Grail was a person, I thought you meant it was an actual person."

"It is," Langdon said.

"And not just *any* person," Teabing blurted, clambering excitedly to his feet. "A woman who carried with her a secret so powerful that, if revealed, it threatened to devastate the very foundation of Christianity!"

Sophie looked overwhelmed. "Is this woman well known in history?"

"Quite." Teabing collected his crutches and motioned down the hall. "And if we adjourn to the study, my friends, it would be my honor to show you Da Vinci's painting of her."

Two rooms away, in the kitchen, manservant Rémy Legaludec stood in silence before a television. The news station was broadcasting photos of a man and woman . . . the same two individuals to whom Rémy had just served tea.

CHAPTER 58

Teabing's "study" was like no study Sophie had ever seen. Six or seven times larger than even the most luxurious of office spaces, the knight's *cabinet de travail* resembled an ungainly hybrid of science laboratory, archival library, and indoor flea market. Lit by three overhead chandeliers, the boundless tile floor was dotted with clustered islands of worktables buried beneath books, artwork, artifacts, and a surprising amount of electronic gear—computers, projectors, microscopes, copy machines, and flatbed scanners.

"I converted the ballroom," Teabing said, looking sheepish as he shuffled into the room. "I have little occasion to dance."

Sophie felt as if the entire night had become some kind of twilight zone where nothing was as she expected. "This is all for your work?"

"Learning the truth has become my life's love," Teabing said. "And the Sangreal is my favorite mistress."

The Holy Grail is a woman, Sophie thought, her mind a collage of interrelated ideas that seemed to make no sense. "You said you have a picture of this woman who you claim is the Holy Grail."

"Yes, but it is not I who *claim* she is the Grail. Christ Himself made that claim."

"Which one is the painting?" Sophie asked, scanning the walls.

"Hmmm . . ." Teabing made a show of seeming to have forgotten. "The Holy Grail. The Sangreal. The Chalice." He wheeled suddenly and pointed to the far wall. On it hung an eight-foot-long print of *The Last Supper*, the same exact image Sophie had just been looking at. "There she is!"

Sophie was certain she had missed something. "That's the same painting you just showed me."

He winked. "I know, but the enlargement is so much more exciting. Don't you think?"

Sophie turned to Langdon for help. "I'm lost."

Langdon smiled. "As it turns out, the Holy Grail *does* indeed make

an appearance in *The Last Supper*. Leonardo included her prominently."

"Hold on," Sophie said. "You told me the Holy Grail is a *woman*. *The Last Supper* is a painting of thirteen men."

"Is it?" Teabing arched his eyebrows. "Take a closer look."

Uncertain, Sophie made her way closer to the painting, scanning the thirteen figures—Jesus Christ in the middle, six disciples on His left, and six on His right. "They're all men," she confirmed.

"Oh?" Teabing said. "How about the one seated in the place of honor, at the right hand of the Lord?"

Sophie examined the figure to Jesus' immediate right, focusing in. As she studied the person's face and body, a wave of astonishment rose within her. The individual had flowing red hair, delicate folded hands, and the hint of a bosom. It was, without a doubt . . . female.

"That's a woman!" Sophie exclaimed.

Teabing was laughing. "Surprise, surprise. Believe me, it's no mistake. Leonardo was skilled at painting the difference between the sexes."

Sophie could not take her eyes from the woman beside Christ. *The Last Supper is supposed to be thirteen men. Who is this woman?* Although Sophie had seen this classic image many times, she had not once noticed this glaring discrepancy.

"Everyone misses it," Teabing said. "Our preconceived notions of this scene are so powerful that our mind blocks out the incongruity and overrides our eyes."

"It's known as *scotoma*," Langdon added. "The brain does it sometimes with powerful symbols."

"Another reason you might have missed the woman," Teabing said, "is that many of the photographs in art books were taken before 1954, when the details were still hidden beneath layers of grime and several restorative repaintings done by clumsy hands in the eighteenth century. Now, at last, the fresco has been cleaned down to Da Vinci's original layer of paint." He motioned to the photograph. "*Et voilà!*"

Sophie moved closer to the image. The woman to Jesus' right was young and pious-looking, with a demure face, beautiful red hair, and hands folded quietly. *This is the woman who singlehandedly could crumble the Church?*

"Who is she?" Sophie asked.

"That, my dear," Teabing replied, "is Mary Magdalene."

Sophie turned. "The prostitute?"

Teabing drew a short breath, as if the word had injured him personally. "Magdalene was no such thing. That unfortunate misconception is the legacy of a smear campaign launched by the early Church. The Church needed to defame Mary Magdalene in order to cover up her dangerous secret—her role as the Holy Grail."

"Her role?"

"As I mentioned," Teabing clarified, "the early Church needed to convince the world that the mortal prophet Jesus was a *divine* being. Therefore, any gospels that described *earthly* aspects of Jesus' life had to be omitted from the Bible. Unfortunately for the early editors, one particularly troubling earthly theme kept recurring in the gospels. Mary Magdalene." He paused. "More specifically, her marriage to Jesus Christ."

"I beg your pardon?" Sophie's eyes moved to Langdon and then back to Teabing.


"It's a matter of historical record," Teabing said, "and Da Vinci was certainly aware of that fact. *The Last Supper* practically shouts at the viewer that Jesus and Magdalene were a pair."

Sophie glanced back to the fresco.

"Notice that Jesus and Magdalene are clothed as mirror images of one another." Teabing pointed to the two individuals in the center of the fresco.

Sophie was mesmerized. Sure enough, their clothes were inverse colors. Jesus wore a red robe and blue cloak; Mary Magdalene wore a blue robe and red cloak. *Yin and yang*.

"Venturing into the more bizarre," Teabing said, "note that Jesus and His bride appear to be joined at the hip and are leaning away from one another as if to create this clearly delineated negative space between them."

Even before Teabing traced the contour for her, Sophie saw it—the indisputable  shape at the focal point of the painting. It was the same symbol Langdon had drawn earlier for the Grail, the chalice, and the female womb.

"Finally," Teabing said, "if you view Jesus and Magdalene as compositional elements rather than as people, you will see another obvious shape leap out at you." He paused. "A *letter* of the alphabet."

Sophie saw it at once. To say the letter leapt out at her was an un-

derstatement. The letter was suddenly all Sophie could see. Glaring in the center of the painting was the unquestionable outline of an enormous, flawlessly formed letter M.

"A bit too perfect for coincidence, wouldn't you say?" Teabing asked.

Sophie was amazed. "Why is it there?"

Teabing shrugged. "Conspiracy theorists will tell you it stands for *Matrimonio* or *Mary Magdalene*. To be honest, nobody is certain. The only certainty is that the hidden M is no mistake. Countless Grail-related works contain the hidden letter M—whether as watermarks, underpaintings, or compositional allusions. The most blatant M, of course, is emblazoned on the altar at Our Lady of Paris in London, which was designed by a former Grand Master of the Priory of Sion, Jean Cocteau."

Sophie weighed the information. "I'll admit, the hidden M's are intriguing, although I assume nobody is claiming they are proof of Jesus' marriage to Magdalene."

"No, no," Teabing said, going to a nearby table of books. "As I said earlier, the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is part of the historical record." He began pawing through his book collection. "Moreover, Jesus as a married man makes infinitely more sense than our standard biblical view of Jesus as a bachelor."

"Why?" Sophie asked.

"Because Jesus was a Jew," Langdon said, taking over while Teabing searched for his book, "and the social decorum during that time virtually forbid a Jewish man to be unmarried. According to Jewish custom, celibacy was condemned, and the obligation for a Jewish father was to find a suitable wife for his son. If Jesus were not married, at least one of the Bible's gospels would have mentioned it and offered some explanation for His unnatural state of bachelorhood."

Teabing located a huge book and pulled it toward him across the table. The leather-bound edition was poster-sized, like a huge atlas. The cover read: *The Gnostic Gospels*. Teabing heaved it open, and Langdon and Sophie joined him. Sophie could see it contained photographs of what appeared to be magnified passages of ancient documents—tattered papyrus with handwritten text. She did not recognize the ancient language, but the facing pages bore typed translations.

"These are photocopies of the Nag Hammadi and Dead Sea scrolls, which I mentioned earlier," Teabing said. "The earliest Christian records. Troublingly, they do not match up with the gospels in the

Bible." Flipping toward the middle of the book, Teabing pointed to a passage. "The Gospel of Philip is always a good place to start."

Sophie read the passage:

And the companion of the Saviour is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, "Why do you love her more than all of us?"

The words surprised Sophie, and yet they hardly seemed conclusive. "It says nothing of marriage."

"*Au contraire.*" Teabing smiled, pointing to the first line. "As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word *companion*, in those days, literally meant *spouse*."

Langdon concurred with a nod.

Sophie read the first line again. *And the companion of the Saviour is Mary Magdalene.*

Teabing flipped through the book and pointed out several other passages that, to Sophie's surprise, clearly suggested Magdalene and Jesus had a romantic relationship. As she read the passages, Sophie recalled an angry priest who had banged on her grandfather's door when she was a schoolgirl.

"Is this the home of Jacques Saunière?" the priest had demanded, glaring down at young Sophie when she pulled open the door. "I want to talk to him about this editorial he wrote." The priest held up a newspaper.

Sophie summoned her grandfather, and the two men disappeared into his study and closed the door. *My grandfather wrote something in the paper?* Sophie immediately ran to the kitchen and flipped through that morning's paper. She found her grandfather's name on an article on the second page. She read it. Sophie didn't understand all of what was said, but it sounded like the French government, under pressure from priests, had agreed to ban an American movie called *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which was about Jesus having sex with a lady called Mary Magdalene. Her grandfather's article said the Church was arrogant and wrong to ban it.

No wonder the priest is mad, Sophie thought.

"It's pornography! Sacrilege!" the priest yelled, emerging from the

study and storming to the front door. "How can you possibly endorse that! This American Martin Scorsese is a blasphemer, and the Church will permit him no pulpit in France!" The priest slammed the door on his way out.

When her grandfather came into the kitchen, he saw Sophie with the paper and frowned. "You're quick."

Sophie said, "You think Jesus Christ had a girlfriend?"

"No, dear, I said the Church should not be allowed to tell us what notions we can and can't entertain."

"Did Jesus have a girlfriend?"

Her grandfather was silent for several moments. "Would it be so bad if He did?"

Sophie considered it and then shrugged. "I wouldn't mind."

Sir Leigh Teabing was still talking. "I shan't bore you with the countless references to Jesus and Magdalene's union. That has been explored ad nauseam by modern historians. I would, however, like to point out the following." He motioned to another passage. "This is from the Gospel of Mary Magdalene."

Sophie had not known a gospel existed in Magdalene's words. She read the text:

And Peter said, "Did the Saviour really speak with a woman without our knowledge? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?"

And Levi answered, "Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you contending against the woman like an adversary. If the Saviour made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Saviour knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us."

"The woman they are speaking of," Teabing explained, "is Mary Magdalene. Peter is jealous of her."

"Because Jesus preferred Mary?"

"Not only that. The stakes were far greater than mere affection. At this point in the gospels, Jesus suspects He will soon be captured and crucified. So He gives Mary Magdalene instructions on how to carry on

His Church after He is gone. As a result, Peter expresses his discontent over playing second fiddle to a woman. I daresay Peter was something of a sexist."

Sophie was trying to keep up. "This is *Saint* Peter. The rock on which Jesus built His Church."

"The same, except for one catch. According to these unaltered gospels, it was not *Peter* to whom Christ gave directions with which to establish the Christian Church. It was *Mary Magdalene*."

Sophie looked at him. "You're saying the Christian Church was to be carried on by a *woman*?"

"That was the plan. Jesus was the original feminist. He intended for the future of His Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene."

"And Peter had a problem with that," Langdon said, pointing to *The Last Supper*. "That's Peter there. You can see that Da Vinci was well aware of how Peter felt about Mary Magdalene."

Again, Sophie was speechless. In the painting, Peter was leaning menacingly toward Mary Magdalene and slicing his blade-like hand across her neck. The same threatening gesture as in *Madonna of the Rocks*!

"And here too," Langdon said, pointing now to the crowd of disciples near Peter. "A bit ominous, no?"

Sophie squinted and saw a hand emerging from the crowd of disciples. "Is that hand wielding a *dagger*?"

"Yes. Stranger still, if you count the arms, you'll see that this hand belongs to . . . no one at all. It's disembodied. Anonymous."

Sophie was starting to feel overwhelmed. "I'm sorry, I still don't understand how all of this makes Mary Magdalene the Holy Grail."

"Aha!" Teabing exclaimed again. "Therein lies the rub!" He turned once more to the table and pulled out a large chart, spreading it out for her. It was an elaborate genealogy. "Few people realize that Mary Magdalene, in addition to being Christ's right hand, was a powerful woman already."

Sophie could now see the title of the family tree.

THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN

"Mary Magdalene is here," Teabing said, pointing near the top of the genealogy.

Sophie was surprised. "She was of the House of Benjamin?"

"Indeed," Teabing said. "Mary Magdalene was of royal descent."

"But I was under the impression Magdalene was poor."

Teabing shook his head. "Magdalene was recast as a whore in order to erase evidence of her powerful family ties."

Sophie found herself again glancing at Langdon, who again nodded. She turned back to Teabing. "But why would the early Church *care* if Magdalene had royal blood?"

The Briton smiled. "My dear child, it was not Mary Magdalene's royal blood that concerned the Church so much as it was her consorting with Christ, who *also* had royal blood. As you know, the Book of Matthew tells us that Jesus was of the House of David. A descendant of King Solomon—King of the Jews. By marrying into the powerful House of Benjamin, Jesus fused two royal bloodlines, creating a potent political union with the potential of making a legitimate claim to the throne and restoring the line of kings as it was under Solomon."

Sophie sensed he was at last coming to his point.

Teabing looked excited now. "The legend of the Holy Grail is a legend about royal blood. When Grail legend speaks of 'the chalice that held the blood of Christ' . . . it speaks, in fact, of Mary Magdalene—the female womb that carried Jesus' royal bloodline."

The words seemed to echo across the ballroom and back before they fully registered in Sophie's mind. *Mary Magdalene carried the royal bloodline of Jesus Christ?* "But how could Christ have a bloodline unless . . . ?" She paused and looked at Langdon.

Langdon smiled softly. "Unless they had a child."

Sophie stood transfixed.

"Behold," Teabing proclaimed, "the greatest cover-up in human history. Not only was Jesus Christ married, but He was a father. My dear, Mary Magdalene was the Holy Vessel. She was the chalice that bore the royal bloodline of Jesus Christ. She was the womb that bore the lineage, and the vine from which the sacred fruit sprang forth!"

Sophie felt the hairs stand up on her arms. "But how could a secret *that* big be kept quiet all of these years?"

"Heavens!" Teabing said. "It has been anything but *quiet*! The royal bloodline of Jesus Christ is the source of the most enduring legend of all time—the Holy Grail. Magdalene's story has been shouted from the rooftops for centuries in all kinds of metaphors and languages. Her story is everywhere once you open your eyes."

"And the Sangreal documents?" Sophie said. "They allegedly contain proof that Jesus had a royal bloodline?"

"They do."

"So the entire Holy Grail legend is all about royal blood?"

"Quite literally," Teabing said. "The word *Sangreal* derives from *San Gréal*—or Holy Grail. But in its most ancient form, the word *Sangreal* was divided in a different spot." Teabing wrote on a piece of scrap paper and handed it to her.

She read what he had written.

Sang Real

Instantly, Sophie recognized the translation.

Sang Real literally meant *Royal Blood*.

CHAPTER 59

The male receptionist in the lobby of the Opus Dei headquarters on Lexington Avenue in New York City was surprised to hear Bishop Aringarosa's voice on the line. "Good evening, sir."

"Have I had any messages?" the bishop demanded, sounding unusually anxious.

"Yes, sir. I'm very glad you called in. I couldn't reach you in your apartment. You had an urgent phone message about half an hour ago."

"Yes?" He sounded relieved by the news. "Did the caller leave a name?"

"No, sir, just a number." The operator relayed the number.

"Prefix thirty-three? That's France, am I right?"

"Yes, sir. Paris. The caller said it was critical you contact him immediately."

"Thank you. I have been waiting for that call." Aringarosa quickly severed the connection.

As the receptionist hung up the receiver, he wondered why Aringarosa's phone connection sounded so crackly. The bishop's daily schedule showed him in New York this weekend, and yet he sounded a world away. The receptionist shrugged it off. Bishop Aringarosa had been acting very strangely the last few months.

My cellular phone must not have been receiving, Aringarosa thought as the Fiat approached the exit for Rome's Ciampino Charter Airport. *The Teacher was trying to reach me.* Despite Aringarosa's concern at having missed the call, he felt encouraged that the Teacher felt confident enough to call Opus Dei headquarters directly.

Things must have gone well in Paris tonight.

As Aringarosa began dialing the number, he felt excited to know he would soon be in Paris. *I'll be on the ground before dawn.* Aringarosa had a chartered turbo prop awaiting him here for the short flight to France.

Commercial carriers were not an option at this hour, especially considering the contents of his briefcase.

The line began to ring.

A female voice answered. "*Direction Centrale Police Judiciaire.*"

Aringarosa felt himself hesitate. This was unexpected. "Ah, yes . . . I was asked to call this number?"

"*Qui êtes-vous?*" the woman said. "Your name?"

Aringarosa was uncertain if he should reveal it. *The French Judicial Police?*

"Your name, monsieur?" the woman pressed.

"Bishop Manuel Aringarosa."

"*Un moment.*" There was a click on the line.

After a long wait, another man came on, his tone gruff and concerned. "Bishop, I am glad I finally reached you. You and I have much to discuss."

CHAPTER 60

Sangreal . . . Sang Real . . . San Greal . . . Royal Blood . . . Holy Grail.

It was all intertwined.

The Holy Grail is Mary Magdalene . . . the mother of the royal bloodline of Jesus Christ. Sophie felt a new wave of disorientation as she stood in the silence of the ballroom and stared at Robert Langdon. The more pieces Langdon and Teabing laid on the table tonight, the more unpredictable this puzzle became.

"As you can see, my dear," Teabing said, hobbling toward a bookshelf, "Leonardo is not the only one who has been trying to tell the world the truth about the Holy Grail. The royal bloodline of Jesus Christ has been chronicled in exhaustive detail by scores of historians." He ran a finger down a row of several dozen books.

Sophie tilted her head and scanned the list of titles:

THE TEMPLAR REVELATION:

Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ

THE WOMAN WITH THE ALABASTER JAR:

Mary Magdalene and the Holy Grail

THE GODDESS IN THE GOSPELS

Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine

"Here is perhaps the best-known tome," Teabing said, pulling a tattered hardcover from the stack and handing it to her.

The cover read:

HOLY BLOOD, HOLY GRAIL

The Acclaimed International Bestseller

Sophie glanced up. "An international bestseller? I've never heard of it."

"You were young. This caused quite a stir back in the nineteen eighties. To my taste, the authors made some dubious leaps of faith in their analysis, but their fundamental premise is sound, and to their credit, they finally brought the idea of Christ's bloodline into the mainstream."

"What was the Church's reaction to the book?"

"Outrage, of course. But that was to be expected. After all, this was a secret the Vatican had tried to bury in the fourth century. That's part of what the Crusades were about. Gathering and destroying information. The threat Mary Magdalene posed to the men of the early Church was potentially ruinous. Not only was she the woman to whom Jesus had assigned the task of founding the Church, but she also had physical proof that the Church's newly proclaimed *deity* had spawned a mortal bloodline. The Church, in order to defend itself against the Magdalene's power, perpetuated her image as a whore and buried evidence of Christ's marriage to her, thereby defusing any potential claims that Christ had a surviving bloodline and was a mortal prophet."

Sophie glanced at Langdon, who nodded. "Sophie, the historical evidence supporting this is substantial."

"I admit," Teabing said, "the assertions are dire, but you must understand the Church's powerful motivations to conduct such a cover-up. They could never have survived public knowledge of a bloodline. A child of Jesus would undermine the critical notion of Christ's divinity and therefore the Christian Church, which declared itself the sole vessel through which humanity could access the divine and gain entrance to the kingdom of heaven."

"The five-petal rose," Sophie said, pointing suddenly to the spine of one of Teabing's books. *The same exact design inlaid on the rosewood box.*

Teabing glanced at Langdon and grinned. "She has a good eye." He turned back to Sophie. "That is the Priory symbol for the Grail. Mary Magdalene. Because her name was forbidden by the Church, Mary Magdalene became secretly known by many pseudonyms—the Chalice, the Holy Grail, and the Rose." He paused. "The Rose has ties to the five-pointed pentacle of Venus and the guiding Compass Rose. By the way, the word *rose* is identical in English, French, German, and many other languages."

"Rose," Langdon added, "is also an anagram of Eros, the Greek god of sexual love."

Sophie gave him a surprised look as Teabing plowed on.

"The Rose has always been the premiere symbol of female sexuality. In primitive goddess cults, the five petals represented the five stations of female life—birth, menstruation, motherhood, menopause, and death. And in modern times, the flowering rose's ties to womanhood are considered more visual." He glanced at Robert. "Perhaps the symbologist could explain?"

Robert hesitated. A moment too long.

"Oh, heavens!" Teabing huffed. "You Americans are such prudes." He looked back at Sophie. "What Robert is fumbling with is the fact that the blossoming flower resembles the female genitalia, the sublime blossom from which all mankind enters the world. And if you've ever seen any paintings by Georgia O'Keeffe, you'll know exactly what I mean."

"The point here," Langdon said, motioning back to the bookshelf, "is that all of these books substantiate the same historical claim."

"That Jesus was a father." Sophie was still uncertain.

"Yes," Teabing said. "And that Mary Magdalene was the womb that carried His royal lineage. The Priory of Sion, to this day, still worships Mary Magdalene as the Goddess, the Holy Grail, the Rose, and the Divine Mother."

Sophie again flashed on the ritual in the basement.

"According to the Priory," Teabing continued, "Mary Magdalene was pregnant at the time of the crucifixion. For the safety of Christ's unborn child, she had no choice but to flee the Holy Land. With the help of Jesus' trusted uncle, Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene secretly traveled to France, then known as Gaul. There she found safe refuge in the Jewish community. It was here in France that she gave birth to a daughter. Her name was Sarah."

Sophie glanced up. "They actually know the child's *name*?"

"Far more than that. Magdalene's and Sarah's lives were scrutinously chronicled by their Jewish protectors. Remember that Magdalene's child belonged to the lineage of Jewish kings—David and Solomon. For this reason, the Jews in France considered Magdalene sacred royalty and revered her as the progenitor of the royal line of kings. Countless scholars of that era chronicled Mary Magdalene's days in France, including the birth of Sarah and the subsequent family tree."

Sophie was startled. "There exists a *family tree* of Jesus Christ?"

"Indeed. And it is purportedly one of the cornerstones of the

Sangreal documents. A complete genealogy of the early descendants of Christ."

"But what good is a documented genealogy of Christ's bloodline?" Sophie asked. "It's not proof. Historians could not possibly confirm its authenticity."

Teabing chuckled. "No more so than they can confirm the authenticity of the Bible."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that history is always written by the winners. When two cultures clash, the loser is obliterated, and the winner writes the history books—books which glorify their own cause and disparage the conquered foe. As Napoleon once said, 'What is history, but a fable agreed upon?' " He smiled. "By its very nature, history is always a one-sided account."

Sophie had never thought of it that way.

"The Sangreal documents simply tell the *other* side of the Christ story. In the end, which side of the story you believe becomes a matter of faith and personal exploration, but at least the information has survived. The Sangreal documents include tens of thousands of pages of information. Eyewitness accounts of the Sangreal treasure describe it as being carried in four enormous trunks. In those trunks are reputed to be the *Purist Documents*—thousands of pages of unaltered, pre-Constantine documents, written by the early followers of Jesus, revering Him as a wholly human teacher and prophet. Also rumored to be part of the treasure is the legendary "*Q*" *Document*—a manuscript that even the Vatican admits they believe exists. Allegedly, it is a book of Jesus' teachings, possibly written in His own hand."

"Writings by Christ Himself?"

"Of course," Teabing said. "Why wouldn't Jesus have kept a chronicle of His ministry? Most people did in those days. Another explosive document believed to be in the treasure is a manuscript called *The Magdalene Diaries*—Mary Magdalene's personal account of her relationship with Christ, His crucifixion, and her time in France."

Sophie was silent for a long moment. "And these four chests of documents were the treasure that the Knights Templar found under Solomon's Temple?"

"Exactly. The documents that made the Knights so powerful. The documents that have been the object of countless Grail quests throughout history."

"But you said the Holy Grail was *Mary Magdalene*. If people are searching for documents, why would you call it a search for the Holy Grail?"

Teabing eyed her, his expression softening. "Because the hiding place of the Holy Grail includes a sarcophagus."

Outside, the wind howled in the trees.

Teabing spoke more quietly now. "The quest for the Holy Grail is literally the quest to kneel before the bones of Mary Magdalene. A journey to pray at the feet of the outcast one, the lost sacred feminine."

Sophie felt an unexpected wonder. "The hiding place of the Holy Grail is actually . . . a *tomb*?"

Teabing's hazel eyes got misty. "It is. A tomb containing the body of Mary Magdalene and the documents that tell the true story of her life. At its heart, the quest for the Holy Grail has always been a quest for the Magdalene—the wronged Queen, entombed with proof of her family's rightful claim to power."

Sophie waited a moment as Teabing gathered himself. So much about her grandfather was still not making sense. "Members of the Priory," she finally said, "all these years have answered the charge of protecting the Sangreal documents and the tomb of Mary Magdalene?"

"Yes, but the brotherhood had another, more important duty as well—to protect the *bloodline* itself. Christ's lineage was in perpetual danger. The early Church feared that if the lineage were permitted to grow, the secret of Jesus and Magdalene would eventually surface and challenge the fundamental Catholic doctrine—that of a divine Messiah who did not consort with women or engage in sexual union." He paused. "Nonetheless, Christ's line grew quietly under cover in France until making a bold move in the fifth century, when it intermarried with French royal blood and created a lineage known as the Merovingian bloodline."

This news surprised Sophie. Merovingian was a term learned by every student in France. "The Merovingians founded Paris."

"Yes. That's one of the reasons the Grail legend is so rich in France. Many of the Vatican's Grail quests here were in fact stealth missions to erase members of the royal bloodline. Have you heard of King Dagobert?"

Sophie vaguely recalled the name from a grisly tale in history class. "Dagobert was a Merovingian king, wasn't he? Stabbed in the eye while sleeping?"

"Exactly. Assassinated by the Vatican in collusion with Pepin d'Heristal. Late seventh century. With Dagobert's murder, the Merovingian bloodline was almost exterminated. Fortunately, Dagobert's son, Sigisbert, secretly escaped the attack and carried on the lineage, which later included Godefroi de Bouillon—founder of the Priory of Sion."

"The same man," Langdon said, "who ordered the Knights Templar to recover the Sangreal documents from beneath Solomon's Temple and thus provide the Merovingians proof of their hereditary ties to Jesus Christ."

Teabing nodded, heaving a ponderous sigh. "The modern Priory of Sion has a momentous duty. Theirs is a threefold charge. The brotherhood must protect the Sangreal documents. They must protect the tomb of Mary Magdalene. And, of course, they must nurture and protect the bloodline of Christ—those few members of the royal Merovingian bloodline who have survived into modern times."

The words hung in the huge space, and Sophie felt an odd vibration, as if her bones were reverberating with some new kind of truth. *Descendants of Jesus who survived into modern times.* Her grandfather's voice again was whispering in her ear. *Princess, I must tell you the truth about your family.*

A chill raked her flesh.

Royal blood.

She could not imagine.

Princess Sophie.

"Sir Leigh?" The manservant's words crackled through the intercom on the wall and Sophie jumped. "If you could join me in the kitchen a moment?"

Teabing scowled at the ill-timed intrusion. He went over to the intercom and pressed the button. "Rémy, as you know, I am busy with my guests. If we need anything else from the kitchen tonight, we will help ourselves. Thank you and good night."

"A word with you before I retire, sir. If you would."

Teabing grunted and pressed the button. "Make it quick, Rémy."

"It is a household matter, sir, hardly fare for guests to endure."

Teabing looked incredulous. "And it cannot wait until morning?"

"No, sir. My question won't take a minute."

Teabing rolled his eyes and looked at Langdon and Sophie. "Some-

times I wonder who is serving whom?" He pressed the button again. "I'll be right there, Rémy. Can I bring you anything when I come?"

"Only freedom from oppression, sir."

"Rémy, you realize your *steak au poivre* is the only reason you still work for me."

"So you tell me, sir. So you tell me."