

Chapter 16

Moriel woke. The hound's-tooth pattern on the ceiling of the Volvo played tricks on his tired eyes, momentarily seeming to acquire extra dimensions. He rubbed his eyes forcefully to eliminate the illusion. He had been asleep for the last few hours in the driver's seat of the car, and his back pain had awoken him just in time. Jim Purcell was early for work and was walking through the parking lot with determination as Moriel brought his seat upright. He opened the heavy leather-covered door and swung his legs out, his 52-year-old back reminding him where he'd slept last night. He had only begun to adjust to a world without Fin Canty, but the rest of Fin's close friends were still unaware of his absence.

“Dr. Purcell, sir, I need to talk with you,” Moriel called to him as he strode across the main lot toward the Applied Physics & Mathematics building. Father Moriel was not a man who enjoyed giving bad news, but when it needed to be done, he felt that, if possible, the only way to do it was face to face. “Sir, I'm sorry to bother you, but I have some news, some terrible news.”

Jim Purcell was generally an inwardly focused individual, and this morning was no exception. He continued to power his way toward the front door of the science building while barely acknowledging Moriel. “Certainly, Father, but I've not been to mass for quite some time, so any salvation issues should probably be directed toward my wife,” he retorted with some self-satisfaction.

“Fin Canty was murdered last night.” Father’s words stopped Purcell in his tracks.

“What did you say?” Purcell’s voice now held an unsteady degree of anger, and his demeanor toward this stranger changed with their new degree of intimacy. He turned to face him directly. “Father, please, what did you say?”

“Dr. Purcell, I am so sorry to be the one to bear the news, but Fin was a very close friend of mine as well, and I didn’t want the police to be the ones to tell you. Last night around ten o’clock, he was . . .” Father’s voice began to shake. Up until now, he’d not spoken these words to anyone who hadn’t already known, and hearing them come out of his own mouth seemed to cement the night’s events. Jutting his lower jaw forward, he exhaled forcefully through his quivering lips and began again. “He was shot and killed in what the police believe was a gang murder. Eva’s missing.”

Purcell stared at him in shock. “I just spoke with him yesterday afternoon. We had a meeting, one that was the beginning of something huge for him. He was supposed to be leaving this morning to fly with Eva to Geneva.” His unwillingness to believe what he’d just been told was growing with each word. “Father, are you sure we’re talking about the same man?”

“Jim, we met last December at Fin and Rachel’s Christmas party. You and I talked only briefly. We spoke about your beliefs on Darwinism versus creationism.” Father put his hand gently on Purcell’s forearm. “I wish to God there was some mix up regarding his identity, but I identified the body myself only a few hours ago. I’m certain it was . . . is Fin.”

“This is surreal.” Purcell looked as if he was going to be sick. The color had nearly drained from his face in the bright morning sunlight. “I think I need to sit down. Can we go to my office so we can talk?”

Purcell led the way into the building and up the flights of stairs to the third floor. No words were spoken. He was going through the same process Moriel had suffered less than ten hours ago. Unlocking the door, he made his way with Moriel across the department waiting area and entered his office. Purcell gestured across the well-appointed room toward a comfortable chair. “Please, Father, have a seat.” Never redirecting his gaze, he dropped his coat on the floor near the hat rack and made his way over to the small bar near the window overlooking the science courtyard. “Can I get you something to drink?”

“Yes. I’m not usually a drinker, this morning I think I’ll have bourbon if you’ve got any.” Father sat quietly for another five minutes or so while his Purcell prepared their drinks and took his seat behind the large leather embossed desk that sat between them. Accepting his drink, Father said, “Tell me how you met Fin.”

“We met in college, I knew both him and his wife for years. Hell, I knew them when they were dating. I was the one who helped Rachel put Fin back into his bed, drunk on his twenty-first birthday . . . after he threw up all over her new shoes.” He paused, “My God, I can’t believe this. Where do the police think Eva is? Do they think she’s . . .” He hesitated again, not sure if he could tolerate the word most appropriate for the question. “You know, alive?” He finished his drink in one swallow.

“There seems to be evidence that she was taken in my car into Mexico. The police are . . .”

“Your car? What were they doing in your car?” Purcell’s staccato delivery cut Father off cold.

Father could see Dr. Purcell was used to having someone to blame for the things that went wrong in his life. He accepted his tone as an expression of their shared feelings of powerlessness. “He brought Eva by my parish, St. Pius, last night to tell me of his good news and pending trip. His last few months have been hell, as you know. This turn of events seemed to be a true blessing for him—both of them, actually. It really seemed to change his outlook. He was leaving his car with me for safekeeping and instead took my old jalopy for their brief ride to the airport.”

“I’m sorry, Father. I just can’t believe this is happening.” Purcell paused, looking down into his empty glass. He turned, walked to the bar and poured another drink. “Another?” he asked Father. Purcell returned to his desk and handed the fresh drink to Father. He glanced down at his watch; it was already 8:00 a.m. “Shit,” he muttered under his breath. “I’ll have to call Fin’s contact in Geneva.”

"You mean Dr. Krunowski?"

"Yes." Purcell regarded Moriel with a little surprise before continuing on. "It’s already 5:00 p.m. there.” Purcell suddenly looked exhausted to Father Moriel. “I should try to catch him before he leaves the institute for the day.” As Purcell sat down again the phone began to ring. Hoping there would be no one on the other end he’d need to share the news with, Purcell answered it. “Hello.”

A booming voice caused him to wince uncontrollably. "No, Edvard, Fin did not leave already. Edvard, Ed . . ."

Purcell had maintained eye contact with Moriel initially, but now he closed his eyes to answer Edvard. "Ed, I have some very difficult news."

Father took this opportunity to explore Purcell's vast office. There were numerous academic degrees and awards posted throughout, but what captivated his attention most were the photographs intermingled with them. Many were of Purcell and Fin, obviously dating back to their college days as physics majors. As he sipped his drink, Father couldn't help but wonder how profoundly Fin's death would affect not only his friends, but the ever more complex field of physics. He had only been half listening to Purcell's conversation, but had heard his own name referenced several times. Now there was an unusual pause in the conversation, which drew his attention back to the desk.

"Please Father, help yourself to another drink if you'd like. Edvard's got me on hold, some emergency call he's gotta take, I guess. Hello, yeah I'm here . . . no go on." Purcell's gesturing glance waved Moriel over toward the bottle.

As Father contemplated a third drink, the cell phone in his coat pocket began to vibrate excitedly. He excused himself, allowing Purcell some privacy to finish bringing his friend into the grieving fold. He stepped into the office waiting room to take the call. He didn't recognize the number listed on the phone's front screen.

"Hello, Father Moriel here."

“Father, this is Agent Rivera. I’m a local FBI field agent working on many of the gang-related violent crimes in the SoCal area. I was hoping to have a word with you.” Her voice was very soothing. “I’m sorry for your recent loss, and I understand that the local police have already questioned you, is that correct?”

He could hear other conversations going on in the background. “My dear, it sounds like you’re in a cave. I’m afraid that this is a bad time, can we talk at another time?” He had hardly slept last night, and what sleep he did get was certainly not curative.

“I understand, Father, but often rapid pursuit of the matter, even during these initial difficult hours after a crime, gives us the information we so desperately need. Is there a good time that we can meet?”

She seemed genuinely interested in getting the information—something Father knew was not common with “routine” cases. Out of loyalty to his friend, and his desire to find Eva alive, he agreed. “Of course, any time in the next day or so will be fine. I’ll have matters to attend to for the family of the deceased. I’m sure you understand.”

After Fin’s body was identified, the police notified Fin’s only living immediate relative, his brother, Liam, on the East Coast. Father was upset he was not available for the family in that moment. He called Liam back shortly afterwards, consoling him and offering to help in any way he could.

“I’m currently finishing up another case, one that may be related, and I was hoping to stop by your church tomorrow morning. Would that be alright?” Agent Rivera asked.

“That sounds fine, my dear. I’ll expect you sometime around 10 a.m. then. Our morning service is at 8:30, but I have another at 11:00.” Father added.

“I wouldn’t worry about that, Father. We’ll only need a bit of your time. Thank you, and we’ll see you tomorrow.” She hung up before he could add anything further.

Putting the phone back into his pocket, Father listened at the door but didn’t hear anything. He opened the door and saw Purcell holding the phone to his ear with one hand while holding his head with the other. Purcell looked up quickly and motioned for him to come in. “Ed, hold on a minute, there’s someone here I want to introduce you to.”

Purcell gestured for Father to resume his seat near the desk. Purcell pushed a button on the phone, and then replaced it in its cradle. “Ed, are you still there?”

“Yes, I’m here. Did you say you wanted to introduce me to someone?” The voice coming over the speakerphone was vaguely familiar to Moriel, though he couldn’t place it off the top of his head.

Purcell interjected. “Father, please say hello to Dr. Edvard Krunowski, Fin’s former advisor and . . .”

“. . . The current director of CERN. Hello, sir, I’m Father Moriel. I was good friends with Fin Canty . . . and his family. I’m sorry for your loss. Your voice sounds familiar, I wonder if we might have met at some point.”

“Perhaps, Father. Fin told me of how you often spoke since Rachel’s passing. He was a dynamic man and will be missed very much by his brethren on this side of the pond. I am truly at a loss for words to express the shock and sadness I’m feeling over his death.

This facility owes its ability to operate to the legal work Dr. Canty was involved in. As you're both aware, Fin was instrumental in the collection of supporting evidence for CERN's cause. His work as the spokesperson for our scientists and CERN at the hearings showed that the reactions we're now causing were occurring tens of thousands if not millions of times daily within the earth's upper atmosphere, and thus far there has been no ill effect on this planet. Thanks to Fin, the request for an injunction was rejected by the U.S. District Court of Hawaii, and actions to bring further federal bearing on the case have been denied based on the overwhelming evidence he provided. Fin simultaneously became a hero to his peers and public enemy number one to those who found our quest for scientific truth the modern-day equivalent of sacrilege."

"We all appreciate what Fin did for the field, Ed," Purcell added, as he rubbed his eyes.

"We were to have the holidays together, here with Eva. I understand there are few leads as to her whereabouts. Is that true?"

"Yes, I believe so. As a matter of fact," Father added, making eye contact with Purcell while he spoke. "I was just contacted by the FBI regarding all of this. I'm going to meet with one of their field agents tomorrow morning."

"Thank God," Edvard added remotely. "We can only pray that they find her well. I was just asking Jim when this occurred. Do you know what time this all took place, Father? I ask because we've had some strange developments in the last 24 hours here, too."

“I believe it was around 10 p.m. last evening.” It was becoming easier to talk about, a point that saddened Father even more. “What developments have you had?”

“I don’t know how much Fin told you, Father, but the research we’re doing out here is providing some very interesting findings for the field of physics. Our collider was initially just yielding particles of increased mass, simple muons and neutrinos coupled with photons. It became evident, however, that we were ending up with more matter than we started with—extra stuff, as we discussed before, Jim. Now, with the machine running for as long as it has been, we’re starting to see more complex compounds.”

“How long has the machine been running?” asked Purcell.

“Total? For about three days now.” Edvard paused, waiting for a rebuttal that never came. “We realize that by our design the machine was never intended to run for that long this early on, but the data was changing. At first the matter just showed up as an overload for the detectors. We’ve had to reprogram the Tier 1 and 2 computers to accept and analyze larger debris. Then, last night around 0400 hours, oddly enough around 10 p.m. your time, the reconfigured software began identifying these new compounds. Amidst the helium nuclei that were roaming Atlas and CMS, we found something else.”

“Atlas?” Father was doing his best to follow the conversation.

“Sorry, Atlas is one of the main particle detectors at the Large Hadron Collider here at CERN. It’s our main tool in our search for new particles derived from the high energy proton collisions.” Ed paused before continuing on. “This something else we’ve detected, though there’s very little of it, is carbon!”

Ed's voice was climbing in octaves, his excitement oddly contrasting the news of Fin's death.

"I don't understand. What's the importance of all of this?" Between his lack of sleep and the emotional stress of the last twelve hours, Moriel was beginning to have a hard time concentrating.

"Well Father, in a star, hydrogen atoms are flung at one another in a very hot and dense arena. During this main sequence, their nuclei fuse to form helium. This process gives off the light and heat we feel here on Earth. As the star or sun ages, it runs out of this fuel to burn. What's left is a celestial body that now contains only helium atoms, and the star becomes ever smaller and denser beneath the weight of its own gravitational collapse. The increased density causes this star to begin burning the only fuel it has left . . . helium. In doing so, while the star re-expands, these helium atoms begin fusing and thus give off more light and heat, but this time they result in the production of carbon atoms. It's a simple process of addition, really."

"So you're saying you've created a sustained locus of cold fusion?" Purcell asked with incredulity.

"That was our first assumption as well. But you see, we're detecting no heat; nor has there been any additional change in the energy of the system. We're not sure how or why this is happening, but it is definitely happening. However, that's not the strangest thing about all of this." He stopped, leaving his audience momentarily unsure whether they'd lost their connection. The line crackled and Ed continued, "I'm sorry. I just wish Fin were here for this."

Father interjected, “I have some understanding regarding scientific things like this, and I have to ask, has anyone attempted to date this carbon?” Father was beginning to understand the implications that his physicist friend was postulating.

“Not in this case Father,” Purcell added. “I’m not sure if the age of the carbon would even be relevant. It’s a long story, but the newly formed nature of this carbon precludes the use of that test anyway.”

Edvard laughed forcefully. “Very good, the idea occurred to us as well . . . and normally I’d agree with you, Jim. You see, the real riddle here has to do with just that point. It hinges not on the fact that we’re getting carbon, though that’s odd in its own right. Rather, the mystery here is the fact that the carbon we’re finding *can* be dated.”

Chapter 17

“Where is the girl?” Job was pissed. The hiss of his voice could be heard around the room through the small cell phone speaker. “I gave you very specific instructions on where the target would be and what to accomplish . . . to say that I’m disappointed would be an understatement. This was not supposed to happen.” Maria stood over the bed where Azazel lay, still recovering from the accident two nights ago. She was not accustomed to dealing with their latest financier. “Your uncharacteristic pause leads me to believe you are surprised I know of your failure already.”

“I’m sorry, sir, we did the best that we could under the circumstances.” Her reply was weak, uncharacteristically so for her. She was aware of the large sums of money at stake, as well as the fact that Job’s agenda—whatever it was—had been compromised. Azazel had told her of the importance of getting this right. “It means the difference between us stayin’ just another Salvatrucha faction or risin’ to the top as the center of our universe. We got a chance to run it all,” he had told her. The payoff for this job was enough to secure their longevity, not to mention the potential for additional business from Job. After a long pause she continued. “We have a lead, and have already arranged our next step.”

“Sweet whore, perhaps you do not understand the reach of those I represent. Their wealth is immense, and the depth of their influence stretches the breadth of centuries. For you to fail at this task is to become obsolete.

I certainly hope for your sake that does not happen.” His words portended a fate worse than Maria had previously understood.

Inside certain circles, distrust of the scientific community had grown over the years, and the work being done at CERN had only added to it. Small groups of recreational astrologists, as well as fringe religious fanatics, had fueled public concern over the catastrophic, world-ending, yet fictitious possibilities that they claimed could emerge from CERN’s work. Terms such as “God Particle” and the “Mind of God” had been thrown about in the press with purposeful abandon to foster doubt and alarm in the public psyche. Bit by bit, this grassroots affair had gained both form and momentum. The news groups that had initially heralded the project as human domination over the mysteries of the universe changed their tune once the wealthy right-wing Christian groups began threatening to withdraw their funding. News agencies that had once touted the scientific prowess of those responsible for CERN’s achievements were now airing stories asserting that the scientific community wanted to create black holes and rips in the time-space continuum. They had begun to portray CERN’s endeavors as a means to discover the inner workings of the universe with a total lack of concern for physical and religious consequences. With a longing for fame, these allied communities had sown the seeds of distrust that had grown into a full-on assault, questioning the motives of any scientist involved in such projects. Unfounded fear regarding the unraveling of God’s architecture had gained the attention of some very powerful groups . . . which is where Job found relevance.

“My dear, my displeasure is shared by all those involved, I assure you . . .” Job hesitated, like an irate father choosing his words carefully. “Azazel was not to make this move without my authority. I strongly suggest you find her and complete the deal before I do so by other means. Please pass my concerns to your counterpart, I want her found.” He spoke with a deliberation that came from wealth and education. “If your cohorts cannot convince me of their competence in this matter, you will be removed from our plan . . . we cannot afford any more mistakes. I will call you again soon.” The line went dead.

Maria closed her phone and placed it quietly on the nightstand next to where Azazel still slept. His condition was slowly improving, though breathing deeply still came with some difficulty. MS-13 was a lot of things, not the least of which was an organization of professional drug traffickers. Their movement of prescription pain killers had become second only to that of the FDA in volume country-wide. The corporate network that the factions had created gave them access to a virtual pharmacy. Over the last few days, the use of Percocet, as well as Valium, had alleviated a great deal of Azazel’s pain and allowed him to sleep more comfortably. In his narcotic stupor, his state of awareness flowed without borders into and out of consciousness. His dreams had grown more vivid, as when he used drugs before, his prophet had visited him many times.

“This can yet be salvaged. Find the little one and send her to me. Then you will join me, and together we will yoke her innocence to our cause and devour the one who searches for her.” In the red and golden light that shone through the swirling dust, the image of his oracle rose beyond his ability to focus.

Staggering beneath the ever broadening figure that faded into the dust above,
Azazel awoke in a cold sweat with a renewed hunger to complete his mission. Maria was
still sitting at his bedside. Wincing, Azazel took a slow and deliberate breath.
“Remind me again of our plan tomorrow with the priest.”