

QUATRAIN
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Prologue. BLOODLINE.

April 1429. Vaucouleurs, France.

Cate was afraid. This was her first birth and her mother Isabelle was gone. The pain in her swollen stomach was like a blacksmith's molten poker. Her fever had not broken in the last two days. The midwife had told her that this kind of pain was normal, but she didn't think so. She knew that girls her age often died in childbirth, but she wasn't worried about herself. Her Savior would take care of her if anything happened. Cate was worried about the baby. If the baby should die before being baptized.... No, she could not think of such things. She stretched out on the small wooden cot, trying to get comfortable. Each position was worse than the last. Her white cotton robe was saturated. The midwife tried to calm her by rubbing her wrinkled hands on her neck and pressing wet strips of cloth onto her forehead. Cate wished that her sister....

Her thought was interrupted by an agonizing convulsion of pain. Her scream caused villagers in the fields to turn their heads. Blood started pouring out between her legs. She grabbed the midwife's blue shirt in desperation. "If it is a boy, I want his name to be Jacquemin, after my brother...." Cate didn't get time to express her name preference if the child was a girl. Before she blacked out, all Cate could see was the grimaced look of concern on the face of the midwife.

Ann, the midwife, had seen cases like this before. The placenta had ripped from its moorings. She acted quickly, using a metal tool to pry the infant's head through the birth canal. Seconds counted. She expertly removed the umbilical cord from around the child's neck and the mucous from the child's mouth. The infant looked a little blue, but within a few seconds, the infant gasped and began wailing. Success. The infant was a girl! She had beautiful red hair, like Cate's sister. She placed the child and the umbilical cord in a pre-arranged bassinette. Her assistant Marie attended to the child while Ann attempted to save the mother, but there was not much she could do. Cate had lost a lot of blood. She kept placing water on the girl's face, but after a few minutes, she realized Cate was lost. Her soul was now with Jesus Christ. She sent for the local priest.

Jean Colin, Cate's new husband, was a young tax collector for the duchy of Bar. He was the son of the Mayor of the nearby town of Greux. He was not a horrible man, and he had his tender moments, but for the most part, he was someone who thought of himself first and everyone else last. He had not even wanted children, seeing them as a nuisance and an expense, but his beautiful wife Cate had insisted that God's plan was for them to have children. Colin had fallen for her as soon as he had seen her pale cheek, her long blonde tresses, and her beautiful blue eyes. Cate's father was a tax collector like him, and her dowry had been sufficient. She was by far the fairest young girl in Domremy. His hope was to move to Chinon or even Paris someday, where he might move up the ranks and improve his position.

Ann left the birthing room and went out to see Colin, who was nervously waiting in the hall.

"I am terribly sorry, Monsieur Colin, but your wife has passed."

"What?" demanded Colin. "What do you mean she has passed?"

"Sir, the Lord has taken her. There was nothing we could do. She had lost so much blood."

“No!” Colin pushed passed the hefty midwife, and rushed into the birthing chamber, where his wife lay on the cot, in a clump of sweaty and bloody sheets.

“No!” Colin lifted up his wife’s head, and looked for any signs of life. He could see she was gone. He didn’t cry. He was just numb. “My God! Cate, I love you so! Do not leave me!”

Ann watched from the hallway as Jean Colin cradled his wife’s body, willing her to return to him. Ann brought over his baby daughter in a blanket, hoping that the sight of the newborn would comfort him.

“Monsieur, you have a baby girl. She is just as beautiful as her mother.”

Colin took the infant in his arms gingerly, worried he would break the small thing. She was so tiny. Colin was happy to see his new child, but the loss of his wife was devastating. And he had to admit he was disappointed that the child was not a boy. All of his plans were dashed. He looked down at his daughter. A baby girl-- what could he do with a baby girl? He was certainly not going to raise a baby girl by himself. That was for sure. He resigned himself to thinking it might all work itself out somehow.

For the next several months, as was the custom, the child was raised and breastfed by the midwife. Colin went about his tax collecting business for the most part, and visited his daughter once or twice a week. He seemed to take some comfort in the fact that the child had her mother’s beautiful blue eyes and his sister-in-law’s red hair. He loved his daughter, but he realized that he would soon either have to re-marry or do something with the child. By early July, Colin had heard news of the battles at Fort St. Loup, Fort St. Jean le Blanc, and Les Tourelles. Fearing that the English might kill him or his child if they learned that his sister-in-law had a surviving heir, Colin arranged for a traveling group of Visitation nuns to secret the child to Bordeaux in the south of France. Before he surrendered his daughter, Colin gazed at the wicker basket and gave his daughter one last tender look. She should have something to remember him by. That was only proper. He took out a small cloth. On it was stitched the Colin family crest—a shield of blue stripes, a knight’s helmet, and swirls of blue and silver. He tucked the cloth around the child like a blanket and kissed her goodbye. The nuns, believing they were doing God’s work, agreed to the mission, and by October 1429, young Jeanette Colin, niece of Joan of Arc, was safe in the convent in Bordeaux.

CHAPTER 1. VISION.

March 1538. Agen, France.

God had given her a glorious day. After a long, bitter French winter, spring was finally here. The light breezes of Gascony carried the sweet scents of almonds and honeysuckle. Children watched their wooden toy boats bobbing on the River Garonne. The peacock-blue sky and towers of cumulus clouds beckoned anyone who was still indoors to come outdoors and breathe the fresh air. Young Henriette loved days like this. On these days, her father would relax in quiet meditation on the green banks of the Garonne, smoking his pipe, eating cheese, and reading stories written in Latin. But the twelve year-old French girl would rather be in the fields. Just a mile or two out of town, hillsides filled with cheery sunflowers danced next to vineyards brimming with purple grapes. Agen was, after all, only a short distance from the world- renowned vineyards of Bordeaux, the bosom of French wine making. Henriette loved to pick flowers and twist them into pretty arrangements for her mother, Andiette. Henriette took in a deep breath of spring air, smiled, and hurried down the dirt path with her little terrier Pierre. Today Henriette would visit the almond trees, sprouting their white and pink blossoms, swaying in the wind, blowing buds around her like a springtime shower of pink and white confetti. Henriette planned to lay down with Pierre in the grass between the trees, letting the blossoms fall on her face, smelling the almonds, and eating slices of her mother's nut bread. And if she got around to it, she might write a story. Henriette had an active imagination and cherished making up stories about far away lands and princesses and castles and stories of love. Her father had given her a white feather and bottle of India ink for her birthday. Papa was like that. He was always so considerate. She had borrowed some pieces of vellum from her father's study to start her next story. She had also brought her Bible. The Lord's Word was not only important for feeding the soul, but also a great source of inspiration when she got writer's block.

Henriette scaled a small hill, pushing her way through thigh-high grass. When she reached the top of the hill, she saw the rows of almond trees ahead and her heart leaped. Surely no one could deny the Savior after seeing such beautiful wonders! "Come on, Pierre!" she beckoned to the brown and gray pup. She carried a small basket which contained some of her mother's nut bread. She was trying to learn to cook these days but she had so much to learn. Mother had taught her last week how to make rabbit stew. How Michel had liked that! She thought of how savory the broth was when her Mother made it. She took in another breath of almond air as she skipped to a small clearing between the rows of trees. Henriette took the small blanket out of her basket and laid it on the ground, making sure there was no mud here which would ruin it. The grass here, though, was not wet and the spot was suitable. She pulled up her white cotton dress near the fringe and lay down on her back, staring up at God's beautiful sky. What a day!

She thought of her mother and father and how much she loved them. She thought of her husband Michel. He seemed like a kind man so far, and he seemed so dedicated to his medical patients. Papa had assured her that Michel was not only a man of means but also a man of wit, and Papa never said that about anyone. Her father had become such close friends with Michel. The two talked often for hours, discussing the need for a book on grammar or the best cure for a plant rash. They had become inseparable. She did not

mind being married to Michel. He seemed very smart, and marrying Michel made Papa happy. She just didn't like the "consummation." She had only had her first blood come out six months ago, and she was just not that interested in having a naked man on top of her. She did not understand why people were supposed to enjoy intercourse at all. It hurt and Michel's underarms smelled and his beard was scratchy and it was just... well, not enjoyable. But Mother said girls must marry when they are twelve and can bear children, and sex was the only way to have children, so that was that. Henriette did look forward to having her own child, however. "How wonderful it will be to carry a child inside me," she thought, "And then to have a tiny face smiling back at me, just like one of Jesus' angels? What joy!" Her mother had told her that when God put a child inside her, the bleeding between her legs would stop. She wondered about that, because her blood had not come two weeks ago. Could she be pregnant?

She put such thoughts out of her mind and stared with wonder at the billowing clouds. She mentally drew a line between several of the clouds, picturing herself constructing a giant house of cotton fluff, where she would entertain pretty lady giants over for tea and make nice comments about the weather down below and serve almond cakes. She closed her eyes and faded off, almost asleep....

The vision fiercely gripped her, making her eyes pop out in fear. Even though her eyes remained open, it was as if she was asleep. If this was a dream, it was the most realistic dream she had ever experienced. She seemed to be seeing into another time—when, she did not know. There were two figures in the room. One paced back and forth on the floor, clearly agitated. The room was round, and the walls were cream-colored, with grand drapes the color of mustard. The floor was a deep blue color. In the middle of the floor was a crest of an eagle. The eagle was carrying a leaf in one claw and arrows in the other. Around the eagle were letters in a language which was not French, and which Henriette did not understand. As the scene unfolded over the next several hours, Henriette saw many things, very horrible things, and shook until her body turned cold.

When she woke up, she looked around her and noticed that it was night! How long had she been dreaming? The cool breeze felt good, because she was covered in sweat. Her arms and legs and face felt badly sunburned. She was exhausted. She felt like staying here under the stars and resting until morning, but she knew her mother, Papa and Michel would be worried about her. Henriette sat up and picked up her basket, but as she did so, she noticed her Bible was missing. She looked over to the blanket and saw her Bible was on the ground in the grass, opened. Next to the Bible in the grass was her white feather, blackened at the bottom, and an empty bottle of India ink. She looked at her hands and they were covered in ink, as was much of her white dress! That would be difficult to get out! Henriette looked at her Bible. There was handwriting—her handwriting!--all over many of the Bible's pages. The Bible appeared to contain verses of some kind of poetry. For the life of her, she could not remember writing any of this. Henriette looked around her, wondering for a moment if someone was playing a trick on her and writing the verses in her hand to trick her. However, that was plainly not the case. No one knew she was even here, and there was not a soul around anywhere. She read the verses, and they appeared in some places to reference what she had just dreamed. But how could she have written all this and have no memory of it at all? The young girl worried she might be going crazy. She remembered hearing stories her Mother told her about Joan of Arc, and how she at first believed she was crazy when she heard the Lord

speaking to her. Like Joan, if the Lord wanted her to write this vision down in her Bible, then she would do God's will. It was not for her to question God. Was some handwriting in a Bible more fantastic than speaking through a burning bush or parting an entire sea? No, of course not. Henriette vowed to ask her father and her husband what this all meant.

Henriette found herself momentarily distracted by her hunger and devoured a piece of nutbread. Her hunger satiated, she packed up her things. Badly shaken and confused, the young French girl set off with her dog for the trail that would take her back to the village of Agen to her husband Michel de Nostradame, the man the world would later know as Nostradamus.

January 15, 2013. Salon-de-Provence, France.

The burly workman hired by Father du Bois aimed his sledge hammer at the stone wall in the basement of l'Eglise de St. Michel. After his last swing, the last remnants of the stone wall came down. Father du Bois aimed his flashlight in the murky black space beyond the wall. There was something back there, all right. The priest entered the room behind the wall and shined his light around. There was a staircase, leading downward to an old wine cellar. Huge, centuries-old, wooden wine casks ran along the wall. The groundwater leaking into the basement of the church was coming from a hole somewhere up in the rafters of this wine cellar. The next call was to the plumber, who would need to caulk the hole where the water was entering.

The workman asked the priest in French if he needed any more help. No, the priest said, the workman could go. Father du Bois looked through the labyrinth of cobwebs running across the room. With a broom, he whisked the webs away and went down the stairs. When he got to the bottom of the steps, he inspected the wine casks. Behind each cask was a small, wooden fleur-de-lis nailed to the wall, which bore the name of the wine which had once rested within the cask. Father du Bois shined his light on the labels over each cask. That was strange. One of them looked different from the others. Father du Bois went back through the hole in the wall to get a ladder. What he would later discover would change the course of history.

CHAPTER 2. MASSACRE

September 28, 2012. Cincinnati, Ohio

They called him Mash'al, or "The Torch." He was an Islamic extremist and a paranoid schizophrenic, a dangerous cocktail. Since the time he was a teenager, Mash'al began finding his own personal secret messages from Mohammed in the Qur'an. When he was young, the Prophet only needed him to do minor tasks, like removing all the brown bottles from the local convenience store or catching mice and putting them in a duct-taped Slurpee cup. But that was small potatoes. The Prophet was calling him to do something important, that was sure. Mash'al's parents in Iran had given up on him long ago. The father had a fairly respectable job working for a petroleum company. His mother did a good job raising Mash'al and his three brothers. But Mash'al was too much for them to handle. One day, his father would find Mash'al high on opium lying around the house. The next day he would learn that his son had vandalized a fruit stand, throwing the fruit all over the bazaar, claiming that the Prophet was calling him to cast out all the evil fruit pits. Left to his own devices, he was easily recruited by Al Qaeda. This next mission for Islam was something only a certifiable lunatic would do.

The Planner had mailed the anti-psychotic medications to his small apartment in Cincinnati. The Planner insisted that Mash'al take the medicine. If he did not, he would not become a true Abisali, a Warrior of the Faith. Mash'al did not want to take the pills, but he knew if he did not, he would let down the Master. Incredibly, the pills gave him a focus he had never experienced. The inner voices, constantly screaming at him that he was not worthy, that he was a mangy wolf, that he had too much hair...they had all died down. The silence from the voices was most welcome and allowed him to focus. The only downside was the drugs made him a little lethargic, but Mash'al was in good shape. He would be fine.

Today was the day Mash'al would fulfill his destiny as the spear point of jihad. He could not wait. Mash'al opened the door to the lobby of his downtown Cincinnati apartment building and met the UPS man. He was terribly excited to receive the brown package. He bounded up the steps two at a time until he reached 2J, then opened his door with the key and dashed to the kitchen table. He ripped off the paper covering with a knife, and opened the cardboard package. Inside, wrapped in cellophane was a set of gray janitor's overalls, with a red and white emblem on the shoulder which read "Mills Janitorial". There was also a red baseball cap with the same emblem. Also included in the package were a black .45 Beretta and silencer, and an orange key to a storage locker.

Mash'al could barely breathe, he was so excited. This was really happening. The Prophet was practically demanding that he complete his tasks today. He quickly donned the baseball cap and put the overalls over his clothing, zipping himself up in front. The overalls were the correct size. He grabbed his keys and, checking the hallway to make sure no one saw him, ran down the stairs and out the door to the parking lot.

In a half hour, he had arrived at the Store-A-Lot storage facility in downtown Cincinnati. He parked his beat-up Mazda in front of locker 73. Taking out the orange key, Mash'al unlocked the powder blue door, and then, from the inside, swung up the corrugated metal garage door. There was only one thing in the locker, a white plastic trash barrel with the words "Mills Janitorial" stenciled on the side. Mash'al lifted off the

lid and peaked inside. Seeing what he expected, he quickly shut the lid, looked around and smiled. The barrel was heavy, but he managed to drag it over and roll it sideways into his hatchback. Today, the Prophet would be proud.

September 28, 2012. Kirkwood Elementary School, Cincinnati, Ohio

Eleven year-old Justin Idris was excited about his Science Fair Project. His project was about bees. He had stayed up until midnight with his mom the night before making the hive out of paper maché. It looked so real! The pieces of honeycomb were expertly glued to the side. All the parts of the bee--head, thorax, and abdomen--were labeled. His notes of his interview with the beekeeper were pasted into his yellow and black Project Notebook. And, in colored yellow and black marker, he had drawn on the side of the project boards numerous "Fun Bee Facts", including:

- the average colony has 45,000 to 70,000 bees
- 90% of the food consumed by humans depends on the pollination of honeybees
- the honeybee eats seven pounds of honey to produce 1 pound of wax
- the flight speed of a honeybee is 9 miles per hour
- the bee makes as many as 24 trips a day when collecting nectar from flowers
- 50% to 80% of flying bees are collecting nectar.

Amy Idris, Justin's mother, was a single mom and a police officer for the Cincinnati Police Department. As usual, she was running late. She checked her makeup in the rearview mirror, and, as she did so, looked at her small son in the back seat. He had black glasses much too big for his head. She had pleaded with him to get less conspicuous eyewear, but Justin really liked the black glasses. He said the glasses made him feel smart. The Science Fair project was lying on the passenger seat of their tan Chevy minivan. She could see that Justin was looking at the seat in front of him nervously, obviously concerned that the bee project would suffer some mishap on the way to school.

"Don't worry about your project, sweetie. I am taking good care of it up here."

Kirkwood Elementary had two separate entrances. The first entrance was used by parents dropping off children in the morning. The second entrance was used by the bus drivers. Occasionally, parents racing to get to work on time would cheat and go in the bus driveway so as to avoid the traffic in the other lane. Today, the line in the first driveway was packed with minivans and SUVs, so Karen passed it and cheated her van into the bus driveway.

"Mom, you're not supposed to go that way," complained Justin.

"I know, but if we wait behind all those cars, we are not going to get your bee project in by the deadline. They said it has to be in the gym by 8 o'clock."

Justin's mother glided the minivan around one bus and in front of the other, and then put on her flashers.

"OK, quick, sweetie. Jump out and get your project. I am holding up traffic."

Justin quickly unbuckled, opened the sliding side door, and from the outside, opened the passenger door in front. He gingerly extricated the tall science fair project and closed the door with his foot.

"Bye, honey! I know your project will do great!"

"Thanks, Mom! Love you!"

Justin hurried through the front door of the school. Justin was a little guy, so the big three-paneled cardboard science fair project was a huge thing for him to carry. He was sweating a little bit, and his glasses slid down the bridge of his nose. He pushed back his glasses and forged on. He knew he had to get the project into the gym by 8 a.m. or it wouldn't be counted in the competition. It was five minutes to eight. He had better hurry. As he hustled down the hall to the gymnasium at Kirkwood Elementary School, he couldn't see where he was going because the boards of the science fair project were blocking his view. Running blindly, he plowed right into a plastic trash barrel placed against the white cinderblock wall of the hallway. His science fair project went flying and fell in a heap. The hive became disconnected from the branch and fell off. Some of the chicken wire and honeybee models he had glued to the board also fell off. "No!" pleaded Justin, visibly upset that his project was damaged. He started crying and whimpering, trying to re-attach the broken bee paraphernalia.

One of the science teachers, Mrs Willoby, was at the end of the hall and saw Justin collide with the trash barrel. Justin was so cute, in his green plaid shirt and those goofy black glasses. She would help him fix his project.

"Don't be upset, Justin, I will help you."

"But it won't be in the gym by 8 a.m.!"

"Don't worry, Justin. I will tell Mr Yost what happened and he will let you bring it in a little late. I have a glue gun back in my office. We can get that hive put back together in no time." She brushed her hand on Justin's messy brown hair, and felt good that she had cheered him up. As she bent to look at the broken science fair project, she glanced over at the trash barrel. The lid of the barrel had fallen off and the barrel lay on its side in the hallway. Something was blinking red in there. A toy maybe? She walked over to the barrel, righted it back up, and peeked inside. She saw a flashing red light, a series of wires, and beneath that bricks of some kind of gray clay. She was, after all, a science teacher. It took her brain three seconds to make the mental synapse.

"OH MY GOD! IT'S A BOMB!"

Justin looked at her in panic. Her first thought was that she should evacuate all the children. No, that would take up too much time. How much time was left? She gently lifted up the housing with the red light and peered underneath. A red digital timer underneath the housing read TWELVE SECONDS!!!! ELEVEN, TEN....

"Oh God, Oh God, Oh God...." She grabbed the edge of the trashcan and yanked it as hard as she could, dashing down the long hallway. NINE, EIGHT, SEVEN, SIX.... The trash barrel was heavy, and she was not that strong. My God! All these children!

She could see the doorway at the end of the hallway. Oh, God, she was going to die today! What about her husband? Her children? She did not want to die!

FIVE, FOUR...

Only thirty feet left. She hauled the trashcan as fast as she could. She was ten feet from the exit.

THREE, TWO, ONE..... She threw the barrel towards the exit and then tried vainly to leap in the opposite direction.

The explosion which followed leveled half of the red-bricked school instantly. A huge ball of black smoke hurdled to the sky, as bricks went flying in all directions. Raging walls of fire consumed much of what was left of the school. The eighty or so students and teachers who were at the far western end of the building when the blast went

off were the only ones not killed in the initial blast. The teachers and students, deafened by the sound and impact of the explosion, tried desperately to orient themselves in the darkness, as their ears began ringing and everything went deathly silent. The few teachers who could make sense of what had happened tried to find children in the flame, smoke and rubble and carry them to windows or stairwells. Many of them collapsed from smoke inhalation or falling debris with children in their arms. Miss Kiki Johnson's math class was trapped underneath piles of stone and brick, their classroom door walled shut by falling debris. Within minutes, the class of helpless crying children suffocated in the smoke. A resourceful gym teacher named Joe Wallace, a big six-foot 275-pound former high school football lineman, managed to carry, pull and lead about thirty children to a western art room on the second floor. He pulled a child's black North Face jacket from a hook and placed it underneath the door to prevent smoke from coming in the classroom. Then, in the dark, he ushered all of the children to the windows. He opened one of the windows and heard a lot of screaming below. He waved down one of the bus drivers in the school's front driveway, who came beneath the second-story window to try and help.

"Stay there. I have thirty kids up here! I am going to try and pass them down to you one at a time." Gus, the bus driver, looked around at what was left of Kirkwood Elementary. There was fire everywhere. The teacher had better hurry.

Most of the kids were crying, their faces blackened by the soot and smoke. Some had significant lacerations.

"I can't jump that far! I am too scared!" said one.

"It will hurt when I fall!"

Joe Wallace thought for a moment. He looked out the window at Gus. It was too high up. They would get hurt pretty bad if he threw them out the window.

"The coats!" he said. "OK, kids, this is important, I want all of you to stay next to the windows and try and breathe the air from the windows. Do not go anywhere but the windows or I won't be able to find you in the darkness. OK?"

The children nodded and crowded to the windows. Wallace crawled in the dark over to the far wall where the children had all hung up their coats. He grabbed fifteen coats. Then he returned to the children by the windows.

"Shoelaces! I need everyone wearing tennis shoes with shoelaces to take out their shoelaces and hand them to me." The children obeyed.

"I don't have shoelaces. I have Croc's," said a young girl.

"That's OK. I just need you to give me your shoelaces if your shoes have shoelaces." Just then another explosion rocked the school from the far side of the building. The children all screamed and huddled to Coach Wallace, petrified with fear. "Come on guys! Focus! Give me your shoelaces!"

Coach Wallace used the shoelaces to tie the arms of the light fall jackets together, in a daisy chain, making a long rope. When he had about ten coats tied together, he started to throw one end out the window. Wallace got the entire rope out the window.

"OK, now this is just like gym class. Remember when we all climbed the rope in gym class. This is no different. I want you to climb down the rope and when you get near the bottom, jump off. Jimmy Seigel, you go first." The Coach picked the strongest and most athletic of the children, hoping he could easily scale the coats to the bottom and give the others confidence that they, too, could do it. Jimmy took the rope of coats and climbed out the window. He was down the rope in no time and jumped into the arms of

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