

# **See Jack Die**

## **(Part 5 of 5)**

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Other books in the See Jack Die Series: **See Jack Hunt**

## CHAPTER 58

### *MS. JOSEPHINE'S SHOP.*

#### *17 SECONDS LATER . . .*

Ms. Josephine already had three chairs set out around the small wooden table of smoking things. She always seems to know what we're up to. No matter how clever and devious we think we are, she's one step ahead of us.

"ello, boys," she says politely, bringing us small cups of something that might or might not be tea.

"Is this going to make me infertile?" Ricky jokes.

"opefully," Ms. Josephine answers as we head back to our rickety thatched seats.

We sit, and for a couple of seconds nobody says anything. I sip at the tea-like substance, wondering what she'll say. She looks across the table at both of us and laughs to herself.

"What kind of mess are we?" And then she smiles. A big, grand, full-on smile. And I realize that I've never actually seen this side of her. She looks so pleasant and nice that I have a hard time connecting this glowing face with the woman who communes with the dead and chops up live animals to make skin paint.

Ms. Josephine, I start, I want to know where you stand on all of this.

"But it ain't my decision, child. Whatever you decide to do, I'll be on your side."

I understand, I tell her. And that is a comfort. But I want to know how *you* feel about all of this. I mean, this is really your field of expertise.

She put her elbows up on the table, her chin sinking into her hands as she contemplated. "I'm worried about all of dis. I'm concerned dat we don't 'ave all of da facts."

This is not what I expected to hear her say. Definitely not what I wanted to hear from her.

"We have the book, we've read it cover-to-cover," Ricky said. "Well, he has."

She nodded, "I understand dat. But, to me, it feels like somethin' is missin'. I can't put my finger on it. I've been listenin' to the other side da last couple days . . . and da voices is quiet, right now. And dey ain't never been quiet before. Dat bothers me."

Yeah, me too. What would put a gag order on the Deadsiders?

" . . . but den," she says, her eyes lighting up, her face softening, " . . . I know you love dis girl, Kristen."

I feel like I have to save her . . . to save all of them. I think this is what I am supposed to do with my life. I try explaining this to them, but I'm sure I butchered it along the way.

"Well, den," Ms. Josephine says, "we just need to be sure we've done everythin' possible to ensure you make a safe trip." She ponders something and then asks me, "Are you absolutely sure dat you 'aven't missed nothin' in dat *Book of Sighs*? Cause, dat's really all we got to go on."

I've read every translated page. I guess we could go back and read it all again. Just to be safe.

"Do dat," she said, "cause tomorrow will be 'ere before you know it. And once you go, dere ain't no turnin' back."

"Do you think this is going to be dangerous?" Ricky asked.

" . . . boys," she said, "every time you step across da plane between da livin' and da dead, you take a chance on never returnin'. Each voyage you make could be for eternity. So dat is somethin' you got to take into consideration when makin' a decision like dis. Eternity."

I'm going to tell them I'll help. I'll do whatever I can. If this is my calling—and I think that it is—then I don't really have a choice in the matter.

" . . . no," Ms. Josephine said, " . . . I don't suppose you do. None of us do."

Then she stood up, and stretched her arms, yawning, "Go on 'ome, boys. Get your rest. Tomorrow is goin' be a big day."

## CHAPTER 59

*JACK'S APARTMENT.*

*WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON . . .*

Ricky says I should carb-load, so we're eating a mixture of frozen pizza, iced milk, and *Taco Bell*—which they may actually have in Deadside. The idea is that my body needs all kinds of things it can burn, while I'm in the process of freezing to death. And sugar—in the form of simple or complex carbohydrates—is the best source for this.

So, we're approaching my death from a nutritionally healthy angle. Ricky spooks me by saying that our hair still grows even after we're dead. Something to do with the hair follicles not knowing the rest of the body is dead while the moisture shrinks your skin.

They debunked that on *Myth-Busters*, Ricky.

"I've seen it happen, dude."

When I ask him how this helps me, he just shrugs and chomps off another bite of pizza.

Ricky and I took Ms. Josephine's advice and went back through the *Book of Sighs*, again. We've read every page in the book. But there was one itsy-bitsy little problem. In the back of the book, it seemed as if a couple of pages might have been removed. Torn or cut out, so close to the binding that you had to really squint to see.

Neither of us know how important, or not, those pages were. But one thing I know from reading Todd Steele novels is that the last couple of pages change everything. All the twists and turns, the peaks and valleys—they're all solved in those last two or three pages. And this leaves me more than a bit suspicious.

Ricky points out that I can just ask the people on the Deadside what was in the back of the book. He figures it's just a bunch of religious scripture and rhetoric anyway. I sure hope he's right.

Ms. Josephine will be over in a few minutes to help us get ready. I'm not really sure what's going to happen on this visit, and don't know if I need to be in *save-the-world* mode, or *compassionate-paying-attention* mode. I hope I don't have to wield a sword, or anything overly heroic like that. I don't know anything about fighting, and the thought of getting my ass kicked in another dimension does not please me. It seems, however, to amuse the crap out of Ricky.

“Just think, Jack,” Ricky says between laughter, “. . . some little monsters might beat you down, and then tie you up, rub pig shit in your hair, or whatever monsters do for a laugh. Oh, man, that would be funny.”

You're a bad wingman, I tell him. You're supposed to be giving me all sorts of advice that I can turn to when there are no other options. Wisdom. You're a genius, not me. I'm just unluckily half-dead.

“Okay, okay,” he says. “Look, the only thing my dad ever taught me about fighting is that all creatures, big and small, animal or otherwise, they have testicles. And if you smash them with sufficient force, they will drop like a sack of potatoes. That and the head butt.”

“So, Ricky's advice for the netherworld is to . . . kick 'em in the nuts?” I ask. “That's it?”

Ricky sat back with a look of pride and satisfaction on his face. Like he just explained quantum physics to me. Like he just worked out all of my life's problems in one fowl swoop.

I ask him if there are any 'medical' tips he can give me. What I should or shouldn't do that might affect my chances back here for staying alive.

He considers my question. “Not that this would ever come up, but,” he chose his words carefully, “. . . I would frown on you having sex while you're over there.”

Sex? What are you talking . . . *oh*.

He raised his eyebrows, almost accusingly, at me. “The girl. You. Nice quiet dark place. Nobody around. Some old feelings begin to—”

*Okay*, Ricky. I see where you're going with this. I'm not going to have sex with a dead girl, I tell him. And, up until that point I hadn't even considered it. I'm way to shy, anyway. I mean, technically I'm a virgin. And saviors aren't allowed to go around knocking-up the local populous. What kind of saint sleeps with a dead girl?

“Just for argument's sake,” I ask him, “. . . why not?”

“Oh my god, dude!” he says, seemingly disgusted by my question, “. . . you *were* thinking about it.”

*No, I wasn't!* I'm just . . . you made me curious, that's all. Why no sex?

His mouth is stuck in a big 'O' as he figures out his theories. “Well, for a couple of reasons. One is that there's a chance of contracting some kind of disease. I mean, she is dead, and all that. Sure, sure, she looks good, compared with other dead people, but . . .you know, she's not of the living. And there's all kinds of diseases and pathogens you might contract.”

Undead herpes and stuff?

He nods, “And two,” he says steeping his hands in front of him, “is that you might suddenly die. Or at least, your Earth body might die, leaving you stuck over there. See, during intimacy . . .”

I'm going to get the *birds and the bees* speech given to me by a 22-year-old stoner. I am the laughing stock of the cosmos.

“... you share part of yourself with a woman...”

This is the ugly side of sainthood.

“... and as you're, uh, becoming one with her, so-to-speak...”

This is my punishment. My torture.

“... at that moment of climax, a part of you is forever connected to her. It's like, at that exact second where you and she are coming, there's this bond between you. And it's forever.”

I'm astonished. “Ricky,” I say delicately, “I think that is the first time you've ever said anything beautiful. Really.” I ask him, “How is it that you know about this sexual bond?”

“Oh, that's easy,” he says as he takes a swig of milk, a white mustache sitting over his top lip. “There isn't a single chick that I've ever banged in the past, that I can't go back and bang right now. Like with my ex-girlfriend, doesn't matter if she's married, or pregnant, even. I could still get some of that.”

The beautiful thing that Ricky had been describing like a wonderful sensual flower, it's petals are now burning to ash. “That's romantic,” I say.

“I didn't say it was romantic, I just said that's the way things work. When a chick gets attached to you, even for that infinitesimally small moment during orgasm... that's it. You two are connected forever.”

Any more pearls of wisdom? I ask him.

“Try not to get eaten by those birds, they sound nasty. Oh,” he adds, “and don't eat anything. Better not to risk it. Those dead, they probably have a different palette than you and I.”

And then I point down at the frozen pizza and the empty pieces of tissue paper with *Taco Bell* stamped about a thousand times on each one.

“Good point,” he concedes. “If we can eat this shit, there's probably nothing on the Deadside that could even give you a stomach ache.”

Ricky sat up, grabbed a napkin and wiped-off his mustache. He lifted his wrist and checked the time. His eyebrows raised.

It was getting to be that time. I glanced out across my living room, to my glass sliding door where I could see half of the sun retreating to the western side of the Earth. The light outside was becoming redder—which Ricky tells me is the *Doppler effect* of red-shifted light waves, elongated by the far angle of the sun in relation to us.

For science questions, Ricky is good. For affairs of the heart, not so much.

I sigh, it's about that time, isn't it?

Ricky nods, "We need to get you juiced-up." That's his cute little way of saying jab a 16-gauge catheter in my arm and forcibly hydrate my body with saline goo. I feel like a pin cushion. I have become the lab rat after all. Maybe I'm not slobbering, wearing pajamas, and being studied by a bunch of nameless doctors, but I'm the test dummy all the same.

I hear a knock at the door. That's Ms. Josephine.

Ricky crossed the dirty kitchen and opened the door, but it wasn't Ms. Josephine. It was a guy in a cheap suit, with a half crown of grey hair that circled his tanned head. He had one of those mustaches that people in the seventies had. And he should give it back.

He introduces himself, "Hi, I'm Detective Gonzalez, I'm with the Dallas Police Department."

Oh, shit! This is about Rupert. This is *not* good. They'll be on to us for sure, now. And I can't be tortured, not tonight. I have to cross over. I have to tell the dead souls that I'm going to save them all. A police line-up is going to ruin everything.

"I'm doing a report on James, ah," he looks down at a small note pad, "... James Mathis. He works for Dallas County Services."

That's not Rupert.

"Seems he got attacked by one of the, what do you call yourselves? *Patients?*"

Ricky smiled, "Oh, the dude who got bit by the retard on the third floor?"

The detective smiles, "That's the guy. Anyway, I'm just following up on it. Seems he's pressing assault charges, trying to sue the city. Normally, some weirdo bites a guy, the black-n-whites that patrol will do the report. But, since it involves an alleged *assault*, and the guy's asking for a bunch of cash, they stuck me with it. My luck, huh?"

"Well," Ricky says, "... we only heard the rumors floating around." Then Ricky kind of pushes his hip out and rests his palm on his side, the elbow cocked in that ambiguously gay way, and he says, "What about you *Sssssteven?* You hear anything *saucy?*" And Ricky, he's talking with a pronounced lisp. Liberace would call him effeminate. Elton John would call him a *fag*.

"Uh, no," I answer.

Ricky waves his limp wrist at me.

The detective laughs to himself as he scribbles some notes down. "Alright ... *fellas,*" he glances up briefly, "... if you hear anything, just give me a call." And he delicately hands Ricky one of his business cards as if he's handling plutonium. As if he might catch something if their fingers were to accidentally touch, even minutely.

Ricky grabs the card and smiles, like a big old drag queen, at the detective. And that cop, he takes no time in getting along to the next door.

Once he's gone I ask, "What ... in the hell are you doing?"

Ricky explains to me that police, especially any of those old school cops, they hate homosexuals. Most of them are uptight and religious. So, if you ever want them to leave, you just act like your a bit light in the loafers and they'll shag ass. He says you can get out of speeding tickets, airport security checks, all sorts of body searches. And I already don't want to hear any more.

Before Ricky gets the door closed, Ms. Josephine waddles-up and stands in the threshold. "ow are my two mislead children doin' dis evenin'?"

Ricky's hand falls away from his hip, as he straightens his posture.

She looks him up and down, a slight grin forming, "Ricky, is dere somethin' you want to tell us?"

But before he could answer, she walks past him. I consider telling her about the detective, but we're pressed for time. "I need to paint you up, again," she says as she lifts her heavy magical purse up to the bed.

Great. The blood of untold insects and animals, large needles in my arm, heating blankets, soothing words, experimental oxygen-starving drugs, and drowning. This is my unlikely sainthood.

"Alright," I say, "... let's kill me."



## CHAPTER 60

*JACK'S APARTMENT, DEADSIDE.*

*WEDNESDAY EVENING, DUSK . . .*

I hit the floor wanting to cough up the water I just drowned myself with. The fact that I'm getting somewhat comfortable with drowning myself, is a bit unsettling. I may need to discuss that with Dr. Monica. But, whatever.

I look at my melted, twisted grey apartment, the sky outside the familiar color of dogs and wolves and sharks and horrible birds. And I'm searching for signs of Kristen and Rupert.

"Welcome back, John," her soft voice says to me. I want to smile, jump up and down, and race over to her. But that might not be appropriate, given the situation we're in.

Hello, Kristen.

She's sitting on my stretched wooden chair, the one the *Book of Sighs* was resting on that night when the spooks were staring at it. Her legs are together, her hands sitting over her knees, as if she's in school, waiting for the teacher to arrive. She looks calm and serene, much more relaxed than I've ever seen her.

I feel a bit awkward as I approach her, sitting on the edge of my bed. Just behind me, my body is lying dormant, mostly obscured by blankets. I glance back at my slowly cooling human form and then to her. And I remember how beautiful she was in the dream that she gave me, and how sad she was the last time I saw her. That moment when we kissed so briefly that it might not have even happened at all.

I take a deep breath and sigh, "I'm ready to help."

She doesn't smile or jump for joy or celebrate, other than to nod a couple of times. "It pleases me to hear that, John."

So, I say, where do we go from here? Do I need to slay a dragon, or solve some deeply philosophical mystery? I mean, how do we proceed?

She leans toward me, lowering her voice—as if the words she's about to speak are so fragile that they might disintegrate in the small space between us. "John, have you ever heard of the word, *Dimashka*?"

No.

" . . . it is a word of pre-semitic etymology."

I have no idea what that means, other than the fact that my otherworldly girlfriend is way smarter than I am. In the future I can see her wearing one of those shirts that says *'I'm with stupid'* and it has an arrow pointing to me.

She continues, "It suggests that the beginnings of a place, called Damascus, go back to a time before recorded history. And it is to this city of Damascus . . . that you must go."

Whoa, wait a minute. I don't know anything about Damascus. Where is that even located? Russia? I don't speak Spanish.

She smiled, "Damascus is the capital city of Syria. It is located in the southwestern part of the country. It has been called the *'Pearl of the East'*. It is the oldest continually inhabited city on earth."

The Middle East? I've read articles about that place. They don't care much for people like me down there. They wear bombs and stuff. Fourteen-year-olds have full beards and machine guns. They *eat* camels!

Ignoring my bigoted statements she continued, "In the old city, there is a wall referred to as the *Old City Wall*. At a point between Herod's Gate, and the Damascus Gate, there is a door. A portal, if you will. And you must unlock that door so that our souls will be freed. It is only you who can do this. Nobody else. Just you."

Supposing I get there, I pose to her, what then? Do I *will* it open? Do I need a spiritual fire ax, or would an earthly fire ax work just as well? What am I getting myself into, here?

She scoots closer, reaching out for me. Just the touch of her warm little hands in mine, it made my body feel so full of energy that my chest might suddenly burst—but in a good way.

"John, you must bring the *Book of Sighs*. That book is the key. You and that book, both of you are connected to this world, and to the Earth plane. The two of you, as prophesied, must open this door. Only you, and only with the book, can the door be opened and our souls freed to the golden light that awaits. That book and you were both destined to be together, and to make this voyage."

And right then I'm thinking that the cover on the *Book of Sighs* is probably something other than leather. Something I probably don't want an explanation for.

This all sounds too grand. Too incredible. Questions are sprouting in my mind. "Are you . . . are you certain that I am who you think I am?"

They looked at me like I was being blasphemous. Rupert nodded, "You are aware that there were originally three copies of the *Book of Sighs*?"

Of course, I told him. You were the one who told us about them. Two of them were destroyed in Italy or somewhere like that.

Rupert smiled, laughing quietly to himself. “My facts were not completely accurate. The other two copies of the book were made to look as though they had been burned. But this, you see, it was a carefully articulated plan. The books were actually separated so that when the reincarnate of St. John the Divine returned he would be able to find the book.”

I understood what he was saying, but not the logic behind it. So I asked him, “Why would you do that . . . hide the books if your only hope is to join them with your saint?”

“The theory,” Rupert explained, “was that the books were quite controversial, and in the wrong hands might have done much damage to the church, which,” he admitted, “. . . might have been the original intent of the books, for some. But the idea was that when St. John returned, over the course of his life, he would naturally come into contact with the book. If it was so destined; it would, after all, be the natural course of his true fate if he was the chosen one.”

I'm guessing, I say to him, that since we're having this conversation, that this plan didn't pan out so well. Otherwise this whole mess would have been resolved some time in the last seventeen-hundred or so years. Am I off base, here?

“On the fourteenth day of November,” Kristen said reverently, “in the year six-hundred and one—the seventh century—a man by the name of Johannes Damascene was born. He was the first of three saints to come to this planet for the purpose of opening the door. He was Saint John Damascene.”

Damascus, I said under my breath.

“Very good,” Rupert said. “He authored a very famous work of literature called the '*Source of Knowledge*.' He was to obtain the copy of the *Book of Sighs* that had been hidden in Damascus. But he met an untimely death at the end of a thief's sword before he could complete this quest. Bad fortune and fate often struggle against each other.”

“On the fourteenth day of November,” Kristen began again, “. . . in the year of sixteen-hundred and one, a *thousand years* later, *John Eudes* came into this world. He was the second reincarnation of St. John the Divine. He, unfortunately, was slowly poisoned by religious fanatics in sixteen-eighty after having come into possession of the book that had originally been hidden in Athens, Greece. Sadly, he never returned from his first crossing to the Land of Sorrows, and was lost. His body was in France at the time of his death.”

“He was our second chance, our second hope,” Rupert said as his eyes looked down, almost paying silent homage to these men.

“You are the third,” Kristen said as her bright eyes studied me. “The only one, in fact, to successfully cross back and forth between both lands. You are St. John the Divine's third reincarnate. And you will be the one to succeed.”

And, I asked them, what happens if I fail . . . like they did?

"You won't," Rupert said confidently.

"You can't," Kristen affirmed.

And the both of them, they were so sure that I could do it, and that I was their saint, that I believed it, too. It all made sense, in a kind of outrageous, sensational way. My accident, and then the book, and now this . . . it all adds up.

"How do I get there?" I ask. "What does the door look like? I still have a lot of questions."

She brought my hands to her chest, just above her breasts. And I'm having a really hard time concentrating on saving the universe.

" . . . you will figure all of this out. It is your destiny to do so. And your reward, it will be your memories. Your past life will be given back to you. And once again you will be complete."

My heart is racing a million miles-an-hour. I then ask her, blood flowing away from my brain at an alarming rate as my hands touch her soft skin, What will happen when I accomplish this?

What happens to us, then?

To you and I?

She smiles that same perfect smile that I glimpsed in my dream. Her eyes, blinking slowly, thoughtfully, she tells me, " . . . that is a bridge that you and I must cross . . . together. When the time comes for us to consider *us*, we will make that decision. But right now, this isn't about you and I. This is about setting our captive souls free so that we are no longer hunted by the monsters in the sky. So that we may feel the grace of God. The warmth of his glorious embrace."

She did make it sound noble.

*I'll do it*, I tell her. *I'll do whatever it takes*.

"You must look at the back cover of the book. There is a rough picture of the area you must search to find the door. It will guide you. And remember, the book is the key. The book, nor you—alone—can open it."

Where will you be during all of this? How will I find you?

Out of the darkness Rupert steps forward, "We will leave for that place, now. When you get there, we will be waiting. This will be our last chance to speak with you until you arrive in Syria. And make haste, John. Time is of the essence. The window of our opportunity is closing quickly."

"How much time do I have? I mean, this isn't just something I can up and do. I need plane tickets, a passport, all kinds of shots. I might even need permission. I've never even been on a plane before. This isn't easy. What's my time frame?"

They looked at each other, and then Kristen turned to me, "Days, John. Not weeks. Days."

Or what?

“Or we all rest here until the End of Days, being attacked, hunted, and eaten. And nobody ever goes to Heaven.”

She sure knows how to lay a guilt trip on a guy. Man, I like her.

Rupert came forward, kneeling between us, his right hand on my shoulder, and it felt a bit creepy—my hands still technically on Kristen's breasts, with Rupert touching me. “Can we count on you to be the saint you are fated to be? It is your destiny. Your whole life was for this very aim. This is your quest. Will you do this, John?”

And you know, gullible old me, I said, “Yes. I'll go as far as it takes. But there's one thing I need to know.”

“Anything,” Kristen said.

There's no other way to put this. “Are you and I in love? I mean, *were* we in love? I need to know. I'll do this, either way. But I have to know.”

She considers my question as Rupert backs away. She stares into my eyes with her intoxicating gaze. And then she leans forward and kisses me, again. And this time, it was a real kiss. Like in those movies where two people really care about each other.

And me, I'm so dizzy I'm about to pass out. Everything is just about as great as I can imagine.

I don't know how long we kissed, but it was epic. And when she pulled away she reached her little fingers up and touched my lips, patting them a few times and said, “Go now, John. Go to Damascus and save us all.”

I stood, nodding. There's nothing I wouldn't do for her. Nothing.

“Hurry, John. Save us.”

I turned and dove back into my body. I had places to go, doors to open, all our souls to save.

## CHAPTER 61

*JACK'S APARTMENT,*

*EARTH PLANE . . .*

I wake-up, back in my bed, shivering and aching and cold . . . but happier than I can ever remember being. I sat up, pushing the heating blanket off of my pale chest and try to steady my vision. My throat, as is typical in my on-again off-again life as a mortal human, is burning something fierce and I know that if I try to talk I'm going to cough my lungs up.

I have to take small breaths, and it is driving me crazy because I have so much to tell Ricky and Ms. Josephine. But I'm a saint now, and I must behave like one. And *this* saint is hungry.

The blurriness starts to fade as the room becomes more clear. Ricky is standing, using the underside of his arm to squish the healing bag of normal saline. I'm feeling these little lines of heat travel through my veins, working their way around my body. He's looking over at Ms. Josephine, who is kneeling down fiddling with something on the kitchen floor.

Finally, I gather enough strength and saliva in my throat to speak, "We have to take the book to Damascus!"

Neither Ricky nor Ms. Josephine responds to me, and I kind of feel robbed of the moment. I just crossed the plane between life and death, conversing with troubled spirits about fulfilling my destiny and saving every soul that has ever lived, and I finally possess the answers that we have been searching for this entire time. You'd think they'd be just a tad bit more enthusiastic.

*Damascus!* I repeat.

*Hidden door!*

Ricky turns his face towards me, his eyes still focused on whatever Ms. Josephine is fooling around with on the floor. I so hope that she didn't drop a jar full of hairy poisonous spiders or snakes, or whatever. Because, even if she assures me that she's recaptured every last one of them, I'll never get a single second of sleep in this apartment, ever again.

Ricky, he speaks out of the side of his mouth, "Yeah, that's awesome, Jack." But he's clearly preoccupied.

So I squint over to where Ms. Josephine is kneeling and I have to blink several times because it sure looks like there is a pair of legs lying across the floor of my kitchen. And since this apartment only came with spooks and ghosts, I know that is one pair of legs too many.

Those aren't spiders, are they? I say slowly as my mind tries to make sense out of what I'm seeing.

"No, dude," he explains. "That detective that came by asking about that toothy retard on the third floor? Turns out he wasn't a detective at all. He was looking for the book, and after you crossed-over he came back with a pistol and an attitude, and he said he wasn't leaving without the book."

That's one of the guys who killed Rupert? One of the goons?

"Maybe," he said speculatively. "Not sure," he shrugs noncommittally, "... could be, I guess."

So, what? I ask. Did Ms. Josephine hit him with some voodoo? A jar full of icky bugs? Some spell to freeze his heart?

Ricky proceeded to explain that with me being on the *other side*, he had to tell the guy some song and dance about us selling the book to a private collector in Houston. Then, when the guy looked thoroughly perplexed, and there was a small window of opportunity,

"... I head-butted him and kicked him in the nuts with my boot! Like a *Chuck Norris* kick. Hit him so hard his kids will feel it. Dropped his thug-ass to the kitchen floor. While he was trying to breathe, I did the *Riverdance* on his face and then hit his ass with a thick rig of a barbiturate cocktail that I like to call, '*sleepy-time*'. He's out for a while."

Ricky laughed, "Funny thing is, I was saving that syringe for you, you know, in case you started freaking-out. But the goon asked for it first."

You killed him? Oh, we're in deep shit, now! They've got institutions for people like us. Not prisons... *institutions* for the mentally deranged!

"e's not dead," Ms. Josephine said from across the apartment. "And da both of you... watch your mouths."

### ***FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER...***

I'm still shaking, nearly uncontrollably, staring at this guy who is narced-out on my floor. Turns out Ricky didn't use the *IK-1009* on him. So that's good. Ms. Josephine did a number on him with a roll of olive-green duct tape.

After the excitement of finding a semi-dead body wore off, I explained to them exactly what I had learned from Rupert and Kristen. How I was the third reincarnation of St. John the Divine, and how the book—like me—is somehow stuck a little bit in both worlds.

"So that book cover might *not* be leather, after all?" Ricky says, rubbing his chin. His eyes were studying the *Book of Sighs*.

“That's the first thing I thought,” I told him. Me and Ricky, we're starting to think alike, and that kind of scares me.

I recounted for them how, in Damascus there is a gateway, or a door, or something, and that only the book—in my saintly hands—can be used to open the passageway and free all the trapped souls.

“And then you'll be, what . . .” Ricky says, “. . . a *savior*?” He says it with wide excited eyes, and I know he's trying to figure out how he can use this whole thing to pick-up on women.

“Den,” Ms. Josephine said, “. . . 'e will learn who 'e really was before 'e got 'it on the 'ead. And 'e'll get to be wit 'is girlfriend.”

She makes it sound kind of trite and pathetic when she says it like that. But, yeah, that's basically the size of it. I save all those souls so that I can learn my past, fulfill my destiny, and get the girl. That sounds like some cheesy movie.

So now, I tell them, I don't know how, but we have to get to Damascus . . . and soon. The window for being a savior is closing quickly.

“Well,” Ms. Josephine said, “. . . we certainly 'ave to leave dis apartment. Whoever sent dis guy, dey'll send more. And dey're not going to be 'appy about what we done.”

I look at the motionless body of the supposed detective, wondering if the two spooks that are looking at him are doing routine work, or just answering some subconscious request of mine. This is something I may need to address.

It's time to go, I say. Now!

“Grab some clothes, and the book,” Ricky barks. “I'll call my dad and ask him for some help with the travel arrangements.”

As I'm packing I hear Ricky talking to his dad while he is circling my kitchen, stepping over the unconscious body. I grab my duffel bag.

“. . . we need to go to Syria, dad . . .”

I pack all of my folded white t-shirts—four of them—sniffing them to make sure they're sanitary.

“. . . well, I guess we need to go tonight . . .”

I grab all of my socks. They're thick tube socks and I like the way they make my toes feel warm and safe.

“. . . no, dad. This has nothing to do with a girl. I mean, there is a girl involved, but it's not like that . . . No, that was a one-time thing . . .”

There are only two pairs of pants in my wardrobe, and they are stone-washed blue jeans. I got them at *Old Navy*, but I was assured that they were new.



“ . . . one good reason? Okay . . . how about saving the fate of all our souls in the afterlife from the overwhelming forces of evil? How about *that*, dad?”

Of the two pairs of shoes I have, I am conflicted. I guess I'll bring both the *Adidas* cross-trainers, and my *Doc Martin's* boots—that Ricky bought me so that I wouldn't look like a *pussy* when I was out on the town.

Ricky's voice, it got considerably more serious, “ . . . yes, dad . . . it's important to me. *For real*, important . . . ”

Looking at my choices, I zip-up the duffel bag. I'm going to look like an escaped mental patient. But then, that's not far from the truth, so . . . whatever.

“ . . . thanks, dad. I owe you one . . . well, okay, I owe you several. Can you call the captain and file the flight plan, we're on our way over, right now.” Ricky's doing a lot of nodding at this point in the conversation with his father. “ . . . alright. Thanks. Later . . . yes, tell mom hugs-n-kisses.”

I walk back into the living room with my bag. “Hugs-n-kisses, Ricky?”

He shrugs, shoving his cell phone into his pocket, “Let's roll, team!”

I ask, where are we going? He says, *Damascus*.

I say, how are we getting there? He replies, *private airplane*.

I ask, how we can do that? He answers, *charter flight*.

Then he smiles, like I'm a little slow, and I need it all filled in for me. “My dad's hooking it all up. We're taking a private flight.”

I tell him that I don't have a passport, and he just smiles like it's no problem. So then I ask him how rich he really is. And you know what he does? He just looks at me with this smug grin on his Cheshire cat face, and he says that he's *rich*.

When you say rich . . .

“*Ugly* rich,” he replies. “We're ugly gross rich?”

Which, I assume, is a lot.

“Now quit jacking around,” he orders, “ . . . we need to burn-off . . . now!”

I couldn't agree more. I grab the book, give my apartment one last look. Time to fulfill the prophecy. My destiny.

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