

# THE GOSPEL OF MIRIAM

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a brown headscarf and a heavy, textured brown cloak, stands in a landscape. She is looking towards the camera. The background shows a valley with a body of water, hills, and a clear blue sky with some clouds. The lighting suggests a bright, sunny day.

A fiction short novel by

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Cover illustration by Elsinä Schepers

## **WARNING TO POTENTIAL READERS**

**THIS FICTION NOVEL CONTAINS CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECT MATTERS OF RELIGIOUS NATURE THAT MAY OFFEND SOME PERSONS. WHILE THIS NOVEL DEPICTS MANY HISTORICAL PERSONS AND EVENTS FROM THE PAST, THIS IS A WORK OF PURE FICTION AND WORDS OR DEEDS ATTRIBUTED IN IT TO PERSONS WHO EXISTED DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT HISTORICAL REALITY. ALSO, THE CONTENT OF THIS NOVEL DOES NOT REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF THE AUTHOR ABOUT RELIGION.**

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## **ABOUT THIS NOVEL**

This fiction novel is a complementary part to a collection of novels which depict the adventures through time of Nancy Laplante, a female Canadian war correspondent and reserve army officer from the year 2012, and of Ingrid Weiss, a German teenager orphaned by war in 1940 and adopted by Nancy Laplante. This particular novel centers on a historically famous person, Miriam of Magdala, better known to Christians as Saint Mary Magdalene. In the second novel of my collection, ADVENTURES THROUGH TIME, Miriam was transported through time by Nancy Laplante in order to ensure her safety and that of her unborn baby at the request of Yeshua, better known as Jesus Christ, just before his death, and thus disappeared from known history. Miriam then lived at the secret base of the Time Patrol, situated in the distant past, visiting from time to time the future of alternate timelines. The letter which follows the year dates in this novel denotes in which timeline the action takes place. Timeline 'A' is the original timeline where we all live, while Timeline 'B' is a modified history which split from the main timeline in 1940, following the involuntary travel back in time of Nancy Laplante 'A' from 2012 to 1940.

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## CHAPTER 1 – TWISTED WORDS

**10:28 (London Time)**

**Sunday, May 11, 1952 ‘B’**

**Saint-Paul’s Cathedral**

**London, England**



**Miriam of Magdala**, accompanied by her twelve-year-old son **David**, hesitated for a moment before starting to climb the wide steps leading to the West entrance of Saint-Paul’s Cathedral. As a Jewish woman she was not coming here to worship but rather to observe. During the eleven years she had been living at the secret base of the Time Patrol, hidden in the distant past, she had ample time to hear and read about the Christian religion, or rather religions, and its claims about Yeshua of Nazareth, better known in this time period as Jesus Christ. While not a devout or orthodox Jew, Miriam had been shocked more than once when seeing how the words of her former lover, husband and spiritual guide had been twisted. This visit, coming on the heels of Queen Margaret’s coronation yesterday, which Miriam had attended with David as guests, was however the first time she would enter a Christian place of worship. Acutely conscious of the controversy she and David were raising among Christians because of the redefinition of Yeshua’s nature presented by the Time Patrol, Miriam had dressed in a contemporary European dress and shoes instead of her customary antique Jewish robe. David was similarly dressed in contemporary fashion, wearing a boy’s suit.



Entering the huge cathedral along with a few people intent on attending Sunday mass, Miriam tried not to look too much around the magnificent interior, not wanting to attract attention on her. David however, as a bright and curious boy, could not help crane his neck and look around him, awed by the decoration and architecture. Urging him in a low voice to be more discreet, Miriam led her son to one of the rear rows of pews and took place there, sitting behind the other persons present in the nave. The worshippers were not very numerous for such a huge church, and for reasons Miriam knew too well. Ten years ago, after appearing in this century and putting a quick end to World War Two, the Time Patrol and its leader, Nancy Laplante, had put in question the

very foundations of Christianity. For one, Nancy Laplante had personally conducted a lengthy mission in the past in order to document the life and death of Yeshua and had found him to be a man, and not the Son of God, as claimed by the Church. As if that had not been enough, Nancy had also transported Miriam and her unborn son out of the First Century, on the request of Yeshua as he was dying on his cross, in order to insure her safety and that of her unborn son. The notion that Miriam was the lover of Yeshua and had a baby from him had infuriated churchmen and devout Christians alike, who believed firmly the Bible's notion that Miriam had been simply a prostitute exorcised many times by Yeshua before becoming one of his disciples. To make matters worst, Nancy Laplante, who held a number of fantastic powers given to her by the supreme spiritual being called 'The One', had become the ruler of Palestine, which was now known as 'The Holy Land of Palestine', after having given control of it by the grateful British government for having put a stop to World War 2 and having defeated both the Nazis and Imperial Japan. There, every day in Jerusalem, Nancy had been conducting public mass healings for the benefit of anyone who showed up in Jerusalem while sick, wounded or handicapped. Such a repetition of miracles, performed for free, had quickly made many past devout Christians doubt the words of their respective churches, which kept promising help from God to its members while collecting their donations, but could not deliver on those promises. That, and the doubts raised about the supposed divinity of Jesus Christ, had gradually emptied the Christian churches of much of their past believers. The resulting cuts to its revenues had hit the various churches hard, prompting in return vicious reactions against what the Pope in Rome called 'blasphemers' and 'heretics', while Nancy Laplante had been branded as a liar and a witch bent on destroying Christianity. As for Miriam of Magdala, the Church had quickly enough accused her of being a fraud, invented by the Time Patrol in order to help discredit Jesus Christ. That accusation had particularly hurt Miriam, who believed more than ever that the words and teachings of her past lover, husband and guide were still well worth listening to.

Miriam, thinking about all this, was returned to reality a few minutes later by the arrival of the bishop who was to perform the mass. The bishop, flanked by two choir boys, knelt and made the sign of the cross in front of the altar, then faced his congregation and started the mass by reciting a prayer. Acting as if she was praying in response, Miriam lowered her head and imitated the other persons in the cathedral while

paying attention to what the bishop actually said. Much of it was standard prayers and recitation of psalms from the Christian Bible, a book Miriam knew to be deeply flawed because of poor translation work over the ages and from outright rewrites and censorship made by the early Christian Church to the original texts. Even the original texts themselves had been flawed from the start in her mind. They had been written well after Yeshua's death by people who had not met him and who had relied on oral accounts passed through at least a couple of generations. Also, they had reflected what their authors had believed would attract most new converts, rather than recounting the true words and actions of Yeshua.

Things came to a head when the bishop went to his pulpit and started his day's sermon. Miriam nearly rose up in protest when the man launched on a vitriolic attack on Nancy Laplante, whom he called 'the Witch of Jerusalem', warning his parishioners that listening to her would send their souls straight to Hell. He even warned them that the public healings in Jerusalem were actually meant to bind their souls to the Devil, healing hopeful ones in exchange of a spiritual debt to be later paid at the calling of the Prince of Darkness. Miriam saw genuine fear and indignation go through the parishioners at those words. In contrast, her son David looked up at her, both confused and surprised. While he spoke in a low voice, he used Aramaic, the native language of Miriam and the one they used commonly between them.

"Why is the man telling those lies about Nancy, Mother?"

"To discourage others from following her, David." answered Miriam, whispering while bending down her head. "Now, keep silent or someone will grow suspicious of us." One of the nearest parishioners, a thin man in his fifties, actually turned his head briefly to look at Miriam and David, but soon returned his attention to the bishop, who was now blasting away at the books and documentaries produced by the Time Patrol, calling them 'atheist propaganda' and reminding his flock that they were still blacklisted by the Church and banned by the British government.

After a bit over one hour of mass, Miriam had heard and seen enough. Leaving her bench with David before the basket for donations was passed around, she walked out of the cathedral. Once out of the building, she couldn't refrain from spitting out her frustration in a few Aramaic words.



“God, what a pack of lies! And they are supposed to follow the words of Yeshua? Where is the tolerance and the compassion that Yeshua wanted his followers to show?”

Miriam actually knew the answer to that as soon as she asked herself that question. In truth, only a few of Yeshua’s first disciples had been truly tolerant, since they had been Jews of the First Century, who typically had a strong xenophobic streak. Miriam knew for a fact that the man who had taken control of Yeshua’s disciples after his master’s death on the cross, the disciple known to Miriam as Shimon but commonly known to Christians as Saint Peter, had been in truth an obdurate, misogynistic and rather slow-witted fisherman with no education. She had been ignored or demeaned many times by him while following Yeshua on his spiritual journey, with Shimon doing his best to try to convince Yeshua to stop listening to her. Miriam shook her head in disbelief at the thought that such a man could have been the founder of the Christian church. David, who had been looking up at her as they stood outside of the cathedral’s entrance, pulled gently on her left sleeve to attract her attention.

“Mother, could we go somewhere to eat? I am hungry.”

Forgetting her anger, Miriam smiled down tenderly to her son, a handsome boy with the same dark skin and dark brown hair of his father.

“Of course, David. Let’s walk back towards Buckingham Palace: we will certainly find a place to eat on the way.”

Going down the steps of the cathedral, they carefully crossed the busy street and started walking down Ludgate Hill Street, looking at the façades on both sides. It however became quickly evident to Miriam that all the restaurants and pubs wouldn’t open until noon, still fifteen minutes away. As for the other types of commerce, they were all closed on Sundays. She thus decided to slow down her pace and take the time to browse through the windows of the shops they were passing in front of, in order to kill time until noon. With David growing more impatient by the minute, noon finally came, by which time they were crossing the wide roundabout of Ludgate Circus. Once on the other side and walking along Fleet Street, they stumbled upon the façade of an old pub with a warm look to it called ‘The Punch Tavern’. Seeing that the pub advertised a good list of menus for lunch, Miriam led David inside and was at once pleased by the interior, with its exquisite tiles, etched mirrors and solid marble bar counter top. Despite having just opened, the pub was already filling with customers, thus proving its popularity. The

men present in the main bar room all looked at Miriam when she entered with David, with many openly admiring her. While in reality 36 years old, Miriam had benefited like all members of the Time Patrol community from the anti-aging genetic treatment common in the 34<sup>th</sup> Century society of the Global Council, which the Time Patrol was a government agency of. Miriam thus appeared to be still in her late twenties. She was also a true Semitic beauty, with long black hair, deeply tanned skin and smooth, oval face. Followed by the eyes of many men, Miriam proceeded to a free table with David and sat, their backs to a large wall mirror. A middle aged waiter with a large mustache quickly came to their table, a menu and notepad in hand, and gave a welcoming smile to Miriam and David.

“Welcome to the Punch Tavern, miss. What may we serve you?”

“We came to have lunch and will look at your menu, mister.” answered Miriam, smiling back. “Could I have a glass of milk for my son and a glass of red wine for myself while we make our choices?”

“Of course, miss! We have a good French Bordeaux as our house red wine that I would recommend to you, miss.”

“That will do fine, mister.”

The waiter bowed his head and gave her and David menus before hurrying back to the counter. While eyeing her menu, Miriam listened discreetly to the conversations between the other customers. A pair of men in suits conversing at a nearby table while reading newspapers and drinking beers quickly attracted her attention, as they were obviously commenting yesterday’s royal coronation.

“...and the way Laplante opened up the sky and chased away the rain clouds. Nobody before believed that she was this powerful.” said the young red-haired man facing a bearded man in his forties. Before the bearded man could reply to that, another man drinking alone at a neighboring table jumped in their conversation, speaking with contempt in his voice.

“Of course she is powerful, man: she’s a witch!”

“Would you mind keeping to your business, mister?” replied the red-haired man, obviously annoyed by the unsolicited comment, before looking back at the bearded man. “By the way, did anyone take pictures of that man who appeared out of nowhere and healed that old amputee?”

“Yes! In fact, there is a picture right here, in the Sunday Times.”

Both men examined the grainy, black and white picture for a moment, then read the text below it.

“Could he really be Jesus Christ, as Laplante claimed later?” wondered the bearded man.

“Who else could make an amputated leg grow back and make a chain-link fence disappear and then reappear again? Do they say why he then went to hug that woman and boy that stood besides Laplante?”

“Uh, let me read...”

Miriam felt blood rush to her head when she realized that the men were talking about her and David, but kept quiet and motioned to David not to speak. The bearded man soon spoke again to his companion across their table.

“According to a diplomat who stood nearby, that woman was Saint Mary Magdalene and her son from Jesus, David.”

That sentence was enough to make the thin man sitting alone four feet away become agitated.

“BOLLOCKS! JESUS WAS NOT MARRIED AND WAS NOT A SIMPLE MAN!”

That outburst earned him a warning from the pub owner, who was rinsing glasses from behind the bar.

“Mister, if you can’t keep quiet and can’t let others converse in peace, then you will have to go drink elsewhere.”

The thin man gave a black look at the pub owner.

“How the hell am I supposed to keep quiet when such nonsense about Jesus Christ is repeated around?”

The pub owner, sensing how intense the man’s emotions were, took no chances of this getting out of hand and pointed at the door.

“Mister, this is a free country, with people entitled to their opinions. Finish your beer and then get out!”

Clearly pissed, the thin man took a last pull from his mug, then put it down and left after dropping money on his table. The red-haired man shook his head while watching him walk out.

“That was one closed mind for you, John.”

“Damn right! Too bad that there are so many of them around.”

“Returning to my last question, do they show a picture of this Saint Mary Magdalene?”

“Uh, there is one of Laplante and her group. I believe that she can be seen on it but it is a distant shot.”

Both men examined closely that picture for long seconds but saw only the outlines of the woman’s face. The red-haired man sighed with frustration.

“If the government had not banned the distribution and sale of the books and documentaries made by the Time Patrol, we would have been able to see a good picture of Saint Mary Magdalene by now.”

“Well, they are on open sale in France.” replied the bearded man. “Next time I go to Paris I will buy the whole collection.”

That made his companion smile to him.

“Hey, why didn’t I think of that before? Thanks for the idea.”

Miriam was deep in thoughts about that conversation when the waiter returned with a glass of milk and a glass of red wine, putting both on her table and smiling to her.

“Have you made your choice, miss?”

“Uh, yes! I will have the chicken breast. David, did you make your mind up?”

“Could I take the steak with fried potatoes, Mother?”

“Of course, David! My son will have the T-bone steak, medium done, mister.”

“One chicken breast and one T-bone steak, medium, coming up, miss!” said the waiter, writing on his notepad, before leaving towards the kitchen. Miriam took a sip of her wine, her mind still in turmoil. Because she had been living most of the time at the secret main base of the Time Patrol, situated in New Zealand and 5,000 years in the past, she had never realized until now how intense the emotions were in this time period concerning the true nature of Yeshua. Finding out that she was herself a subject of heated controversy was also coming as a shock to her. By the time her food arrived, she had resolved herself to study more carefully that whole question from now on.

## CHAPTER 2 – IN SEARCH OF A PURPOSE

**12:03 (New York Time)**

**Friday, May 19, 2006 'A'**

**AMC Empire 25 Cinema, 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Manhattan**

**New York City, United States**

“DO NOT GO LISTEN TO LIES. BELIEVE THE GOOD BOOK, WHICH CONTAINS THE ONLY TRUTH.”

That message, shouted repeatedly at the long line of prospective movie viewers by a small but vociferous group of Christian fundamentalists holding large signs and bibles, finally attracted a reply from a young, solidly built man sporting a brush haircut.

“HEY, BOZOS, THIS IS A DEMOCRACY. I WILL GO SEE WHAT I WANT AND, IF YOU DON'T LIKE THAT, THEN YOU CAN GO FUCK YOURSELVES. IN FACT, THAT WOULD DO SOME GOOD TO YOUR CONSTIPATED LOT.”

Many in the lineup laughed loudly at that fighting reply, while the dozen or so fundamentalists reddened with indignation before shouting again.

“YOU WILL ALL BURN IN HELL FOR DOUBTING THE WORD OF THE LORD.”

“THIS MOVIE IS PURE BLASPHEMY.”

“HOW COULD A PROSTITUTE BEAR A CHILD FROM JESUS?”

Forward in the lineup, just outside the main doors of the cinema complex in downtown New York City, Miriam of Magdala's eyes bulged with indignation on hearing that last sentence. She would have shouted something back if not for **Nancy Laplante 'A'**, who was using the physical form of Sarai of Ur for this visit to New York in order to go around more discretely. The power of changing shape at will between her original body and that of



one of her most famous past incarnations had been given to Nancy by The One, or rather by Sarai's old husband, Abraham, two years ago. It had happened in Hebron, at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, when Abraham, now an angel of The One, had appeared to Nancy for a moment and had borrowed her physical body, so that he could be with his beloved Sarai one last time by temporarily placing Sarai's soul in Nancy's body. The gift made to Nancy's by Abraham in return for that had been the old golden family ring Sarai

had worn all those years. That ring, bearing cuneiform markings, had conferred to Nancy the power of shape-shifting at will into Sarai's form and back. That had proved most useful to Nancy many times already, allowing her to go around in public without touching off some strong reactions to her presence. This present occasion was another one when looking like a young Semitic woman of great beauty was of use to her, as it had permitted her to escort Miriam and David to this premiere of the movie 'Da Vinci Code'. When she had been told that a movie had been made featuring herself, Miriam had insisted on being able to see it in its original release setting, so that she could gauge the popular reactions to it. Up to now, she certainly had seen and heard enough to convince her that her hypothetical fate after the crucifixion of Yeshua was a matter of great controversy indeed in this time period.

"Let these fanatics shout all they want, Miriam: they are not worth your time...or mine." said calmly Nancy, putting a hand on Miriam's shoulder.

Miriam, her hands still covering the ears of David in order to prevent him from listening to the obscenities being exchanged between the fundamentalists and waiting patrons, looked at Nancy, still fired up.

"But, you heard what they called me?" she said in Aramaic. That only brought a tolerant smile on Nancy's, or rather on Sarai's face.

"Some of Yeshua's male disciples were not much more polite or charitable with you, Miriam. Remember?"

Miriam sighed at those words.

"True! Shimon 'The Rock' was one that could be rather crude himself."

"Rather crude? How about downright insulting? If he could have chased you away he would have done it. Yeshua however would never have let him do that, and Shimon knew it. Shimon also knew that he would have eaten my walking staff for that." Picturing that in her mind made Miriam giggle: most of the male disciples of Yeshua had indeed treated her shabbily a number of times, so jealous were they of her influence on their spiritual master.

With the lineup advancing steadily and with a number of policemen preventing the protesting fundamentalists from entering the entrance lobby of the cinema, Miriam, David and Sarai were soon able to buy their tickets and to go take place in the inner lineup waiting at the entrance of one of the projection theaters reserved for the viewing

of 'Da Vinci Code'. Sarai made a quick trip to one of the snacks service counter and returned with a large bag of popcorn and a Coca-Cola for David.

"No cinema experience is complete without the overpriced junk food, right?" she said with a smirk to Miriam while giving the popcorn and Coca-Cola to the boy.

"If you say so, Sarai." replied Miriam, who was not overly strict about following Mosaic Laws concerning Jewish diet. They soon were entering the projection room with a few hundred eager patrons and took seats in the center. The three of them waited patiently, with David munching on his popcorn, until the pre-show commercials and trailers started being projected on the giant screen. Miriam was however a bit nervous as the movie finally started. She had read the book on which the movie was based and, while it was clearly a work of fiction with much of it made up in order to provide drama, the starting premise of it, basically that she had a baby from Yeshua, was certainly correct enough. That massacres and other horrible crimes had been committed in the past in order to enforce the views of the Catholic church concerning her role in history made Miriam most uncomfortable, if not distraught. The part of the movie about the past slaughter of tens of thousands of women accused by the Church of being witches hit her particularly hard, bringing tears of rage and frustration to her. Yeshua had meant women to be full members of his ministry, yet the Christian churches had branded women as born sinners, with the more conservative branches refusing them any meaningful role except as subservient nuns. Even now, such an exceptional woman as Nancy Laplante was being branded as a witch by the Christian churches of Timeline 'B', for her stated beliefs about the true nature of Jesus Christ and for her powers, even though she had always used those powers for the good of all.

Miriam was in tears as the final scene was shown, with the camera panning over the hidden sarcophagus supposedly containing her remains in a hidden basement room of the Louvre Museum. As the other spectators around them were getting up from their seats to leave, Miriam looked at Nancy/Sarai and spoke in Aramaic while keeping her voice low.

"Sarai, I know that I can't even try to influence this timeline, but I would like to do something to bring the true words and teachings of Yeshua to Timeline 'B', where the existence of the Time Patrol is public knowledge. I have lived hidden away in comfort for too long while the Christian churches have been distorting Yeshua's doctrine. Would you help me do that?"

Sarai was thoughtful for a moment, then nodded her head once.

“It would please me to do so, Miriam. Be prepared to face many frustrations, though: the Church is still most inflexible about its doctrine.”

“I realize that, Sarai. I however truly want to spread the truth about Yeshua. Thank you in advance for your help.”

“You’re welcome, my friend. How about leaving now and going to a nearby coffee shop, so that we can listen to some of the spectators who have just seen this movie. On this premiere day, it should be a common subject of conversation.”

“That sounds like a good idea, Sarai.” replied Miriam, smiling. The three of them then got up from their seats and left the cinema complex. Since the complex was right in Downtown Manhattan, they had no trouble finding a coffee shop less than fifty feet from it. Letting Sarai order for them, Miriam smelled with delight the cup of espresso coffee she brought to her: despite coffee having been unknown to the Israel of the First Century, Miriam had quickly developed a liking to it while living with the Time Patrol, where she was working as a hairdresser. David was also quick in starting to sip on the hot chocolate brought to him by Sarai. In many ways the various small comforts of modern life made it often much nicer than Miriam’s original life in Galilee. A news flash on the television set of the coffee shop, tuned to the CNN News channel, then reminded her of other aspects of modern life less to her liking. With the voice of a news correspondent commenting, pictures of pandemonium and destruction were shown from Tel Aviv.

“...The suicide bomber detonated his explosives in a popular market of a middle class district in Tel Aviv, killing at least three shoppers and wounding dozens more, some critically. The Palestinian faction ‘Islamic Jihad’ has claimed responsibility for the bombing. This terrorist attack, the first in Israel since December of 2003, is sending a shockwave through both Israel proper and the Palestinian Territories, where people are afraid that the fragile peace between the two people could be shattered by the return of terrorism.”

Sarai’s face hardened as she listened to the news report. She then looked gravely at Miriam and David.

“It seems that some will never learn. I am truly despairing to see a lasting peace ever come to that part of the World.”

Those words made Miriam take a decision she had been weighing for a while already.



“Sarai, I believe that it is time for me to do my part in bringing some peace and tolerance to this World, at least in Timeline ‘B’. I firmly intend to write down a book on the life of Yeshua and I hope that publishing it in Timeline ‘B’ will help spread the truth about him and his message of tolerance.”

In turn, Sarai looked soberly at her for a moment before speaking.

“Then, be careful how you proceed, Miriam. Many could become violent in order to shut you up.”

“Yeshua died while trying to bring some good to his time period. I will gladly risk myself in order to pass his message, Sarai.”

## **CHAPTER 3 – FALLING ON DEAF EARS**

**10:17 (Paris Time)**

**Monday, September 26, 1955 'B'**

**Transit Hall, Time Patrol outpost**

**Le Bourget Airport, Paris**

**France**

“Thank you for the lift, Michel!” said Miriam to the pilot of the time scooter who had brought her to Paris from the Time Patrol main base. The young field agent smiled back to her while taking out her travel suitcase.

“It was a pleasure, Miriam. Good luck in Rome.”

Miriam backed away with her suitcase in the transit hall of the outpost, letting space for the time scooter to lift off again and jump spacetime, disappearing in a flash of white light. Extending the pulling handle of her travel suitcase, Miriam then walked out of the transit hall, towing her suitcase on its two small wheels. She was dressed in a contemporary, conservative style dress and shoes, in order to blend in with the people of the time. Before Miriam could walk out of the small outpost complex, she was intercepted by Anna Hauser, the duty field agent of the Time Patrol in Paris at this time. The German woman actually ran to her and her concerned expression alarmed Miriam, so she stopped and faced her.

“Is something wrong, Anna?”

The German braked to a halt in front of her before answering Miriam with a question.

“Are you staying here in France or are you heading to another country, Miriam?”

“I was heading for Rome, as a matter of fact. What is it?”

Miriam’s answer seemed to make Anna more glum.

“A number of European countries have just broken diplomatic relations with the Holy Land of Palestine and with us, on the pretext of supposed defamation of their religions by the Overseer and by the Time Patrol. Those same countries are also reserving the right to refuse access to their territories to members of the Time Patrol. Italy is one of those countries. Do you have a visa already for Italy?”

“No!” said in a hollow voice Miriam, who was already seeing her all important trip being possibly over before she could even get to Rome. “I was planning to get a visa at the Italian embassy here in Paris. Is there any chance that I still could get one?”

“I doubt so, Miriam. This crisis looks quite serious, unfortunately.”

Miriam’s discouragement then made way to frustration and anger.

“How could this happen? The whole of Europe owes heavily to the Time Patrol and Nancy Laplante. Have they all forgotten already what we did for them? We saved them from Nazi occupation and put an end to World War 2, dammit!”

“It seems that their churches were able to convince their governments to take action against us, Miriam.” answered Anna, sounding understandably bitter. “Not surprisingly, the countries which have broken relations with Palestine and the Time Patrol are the ones with the most conservative Christian churches. We are talking here about Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Spain.”

“POLAND?” shouted Miriam, stunned. “But, we saved so many lives there during the last war.”

“Those were mostly Jewish lives, Miriam. Besides, the Catholic Church does pretty well what it wants in Poland.”

“But...such a political move had to be organized. Who initiated this?”

“The Pope of course! Who else?” replied at once Anna. “The Catholic Church is on the verge of bankruptcy because of the steady fall in the number of its followers and benefactors, thanks mostly to us and Nancy. The Orthodox and Protestant churches are also hurting bad and seemingly made an alliance pact with the Vatican against us.”

“The Protestant Church too? Does that mean that Great Britain is also turning against us?”

“Not yet, Miriam, at least officially.” responded Anna gloomily. “I suspect that only the opposition of Queen Margaret and the popularity of Nancy with the British people has stopped the British government from joining this diplomatic boycott.”

“Why? Why now?” asked Miriam, near tears with discouragement. “The World has now known peace for thirteen years, thanks to Nancy and the Time Patrol. Hundreds of thousands of people have been healed by Nancy in Jerusalem. And that’s how they repay us?”

Anna, also feeling down, stepped forward and hugged the Galilean woman.

“We did bring peace to the World, Miriam, but we also disturbed the spiritual monopoly of men who refuse to accept other views than their own.”

“Then, what are we going to do? Are we going to fight this or simply accept it?”

“We are not going to take this lying down, Miriam.” replied Anna in a resolute tone while stepping back, “and neither will Natai, I strongly suspect. Look, Farah is going to show up soon to try to bash sense back into some of those governments. Why don’t you stay here until the worst of this crisis is resolved? We have a few transient rooms available.”

“Thanks, Anna, but I will go to Paris and see if I can still find a way to go to Rome...legally. My mission is too important to be delayed or cancelled.”

“And what is your mission, precisely?” asked Anna, a bit apprehensive now.

“To convince the Christian churches to effect reforms in order to follow the true words of Yeshua.”

Her frank admission only unnerved Anna more.

“Miriam, the refusal to reform is the main reason why the Christian churches pushed those various European governments into cutting relations with us. You are in fact one of the persons specified by name as being persona non grata in those countries. They will never listen to you, especially now.”

Those words brought tears to Miriam’s face this time, and she had to sit down on her suitcase, totally dejected.

“But...I spent the last three years writing down what I could remember of the life and words of Yeshua. I was bringing copies of my accounts to the various Christian churches, so that they could study them and hopefully use them to rewrite their own sacred books. And you are telling me that this was all for nothing?”

Miriam then started sobbing, prompting Anna in kneeling besides her to console her.

“It won’t be for nothing, Miriam. We will find a way to make all these churchmen and politicians more reasonable, you’ll see.”

Anna was still comforting Miriam when a Global Council member of the Time Patrol, a bald giant measuring a bit over two meters in height and with six fingers per hand, came to Anna and handed her a message while speaking softly.

“Anna, we intercepted a communiqué from the United States government: they are also breaking diplomatic relations with us and Palestine.”

Anna sighed as she read the official American communiqué: the American government had a particular grudge against Nancy and Palestine since Nancy, in her shape as Sarah Ur, had turned all the racists in the World coal-black four years ago. That the

majority of the racists thus affected had been in the United States, with over half a million of them committing suicide after seeing their skin turn black, had created a great enmity since then between Palestine and the United States. Anna was thus less than surprised by this development. Farah Tolkonen, the Chief Administrator of the Time Patrol, was going to have her hands full dealing with this diplomatic crisis.

As if thinking of her had conjured her, **Farah Tolkonen** came out of the transit hall, accompanied by her secretary. The latter was pushing an antigravity cart loaded with suitcases. The slender bald giant didn't look exactly happy now, something Anna could understand easily. Farah stopped besides Anna and gave a concerned look at the still sobbing Miriam.



“What is wrong, Miriam? Can I do anything to help?”

“Yes! You can put some sense in the heads of all these churchmen.” replied Miriam, truly bitter. “Yeshua gave his life so that the people around him could practice a more tolerant and kind religion. And what do we have now? A bunch of ungrateful, power-hungry and intolerant men who claim themselves to be infallible. I was bringing to them the true words of Yeshua, only to be told that I won't even be permitted to meet them.”

The gentle giant patted Miriam's back, trying to console her.

“This won't go on for long, Miriam. Hell! It won't be allowed to go on for long if I have my way.”

“What are you going to do, Farah?” Asked Miriam, her voice still half choked.

“I will have to talk to Natai first, in order to coordinate with her our actions, but I intend to place a diplomatic protest at the United Nations about this. Maybe we will be able to shame those countries and their churches into backing down from their stupid stance.”

“Add the United States to these countries, Farah.” then said Anna, presenting her the message recently given to her. The giant's yellow eyes were nearly flashing lightning bolts by the time she finished reading the message.

“Decidedly, those Americans will have proved consistent in their ungratefulness. We were still helping them by fighting the Japanese in 1942 when their stupid racist policies forced us to relocate our ships from Pearl Harbor to Paris. How could one be so advanced technologically in comparison to the rest of the present World, yet be so

retarded socially? Well, they will get their diplomatic lumps like the rest. Can I and Virna get the use of two of your spare quarters, Anna?”

“Of course, Farah! Follow me.”

Left alone with her suitcase in the main hallway of the outpost, Miriam took the time to dry her tears, then grabbed the pulling handle of her suitcase and walked outside to get a taxi, still resolved to try her luck at obtaining a visa to Italy and then, hopefully, an audience with the Pope. She didn't have to pass through French customs before leaving Le Bourget, as France was possibly the best friend of the Time Patrol in this time period, save Palestine, and granted free and full access to its territory to the members of the Time Patrol and to the citizens of the Global Council.

She already knew from previous vacation trips to Paris, a city she loved, a small family hotel owned by a Jewish couple near the Eiffel Tower, in the center of the city. She thus asked the taxi driver to get her to that hotel and then sat back, thinking about how she would go about trying to gain access to the Pope. It was obvious however that she first had to obtain a visa to enter Italy, something that was not going to be easy, if she could believe Anna Hauser. After a thirty minutes drive through Paris, the taxi finally dropped her in front of the hotel, with the driver helping her taking out her travel suitcase and getting a good tip as a reward. Miriam was greeted with open arms inside the small lobby of the old building by the owner's wife, a woman in her forties with a heart of gold.

“MIRIAM, MY DEAR FRIEND! WELCOME TO PARIS!”

Miriam returned her hug, then smiled to her host.

“It is nice to see you, Madam Chomsky. I hope that you have a room available for me.”

“At this time of the year? Of course, Miriam! And please call me simply Hanna. Are you planning to stay long in Paris?”

“A few days at most, Hanna: I am merely transiting on my way to Rome...if I can obtain a visa to enter Italy.”

Those words immediately made Hanna Chomsky sigh with exasperation.

“Those idiots from the Catholic Church. We heard this morning about the cutting of relations with the Time Patrol and Palestine announced by Italy and other countries. Me and Shaul are still trying to figure out what went to their heads. Enough of this for the moment, though. Let's get you a room.”

Going behind the reception counter of the hotel, Hanna grabbed a key from the key press on the wall and gave it to Miriam, then made her sign the guest registry. Next, she led her up the old staircase to the first floor, unlocking the door of one of the four rooms on that level and pushing it open for Miriam.

“Here you go, Miriam. You have a view on the street and the bathroom is small but fully equipped. Will you have your breakfasts here at the hotel?”

“How could I skip on your morning collection of bagels and croissants, Hanna? Of course I will have breakfasts at your hotel. Is that Jewish restaurant three blocks from here still open?”

“It still is, Miriam.” replied softly Hanna. She and her husband had been saved from death in a Nazi concentration camp by the Time Patrol thirteen years ago. Despite the years which had passed, she still was grateful to her saviors. Besides, she held true admiration for Miriam, who had proven many times to be a woman with nearly infinite kindness but also great courage. After wishing her a good stay, Hanna left Miriam’s room and went back downstairs to the reception desk, in time to greet a couple of young travelers from Palestine.

Taking ten minutes to unpack her suitcase, Miriam then looked at her watch and decided to go to a nearby bistro for some wine before lunch. While not an alcoholic in any way, ancient Jews in the Antiquity had favored wine as a drink of choice when dining...if they could afford wine. Going down to the lobby and saluting Hanna in passing, she then walked out and followed the narrow sidewalk towards the nearby street corner bistro. While the owner and barman there knew her by name, they didn’t know who she was really, thus she was able to take a street-side table without creating a sensation. A few customers were already sitting at the bistro and having their customary drinks while chatting or reading newspapers. Miriam ordered a cup of chilled white wine and grabbed a newspaper from a pile on the bar counter, eyeing the front page at once. The diplomatic tiff concerning Palestine and the Time Patrol was the top article and she read it avidly. The newspaper being a left-leaning one, it ridiculed the position of the Catholic Church and compared what it called its empty promises and inflexible rhetoric with what Nancy Laplante and the Time Patrol had done for the people of France and Europe. Getting her glass of wine and starting to sip from it, Miriam went through the various articles and editorials on that subject with great interest. One article in particular, about the opinions of a group of so-called worker-priests opposed to the official doctrine

of the Catholic Church, attracted her attention. Those worker-priests had as a goal to spiritually support workers of the lower classes toiling in the big industries for minimal wages, notably by working alongside them in those same industries. They were also pushing for better treatment and conditions for those workers, something that had earned them the designations of 'communists' and 'social trouble makers' and had put them in trouble with their original church. From what she could read, Miriam felt that those worker-priests could be counted on to support the cause of Nancy Laplante and of the Time Patrol here. She noted down the name of the author of that article and promised herself to meet him one fine day.

After finishing her cup of wine and paying her bill, Miriam walked to the Jewish restaurant she knew nearby and had a frugal lunch there. From there she took a taxi and went to the Italian embassy, still hoping somehow to obtain against all odds a visa there. Stepping out of her taxi in front of the main entrance of the embassy, Miriam gathered her courage, then entered the building, walking past two French policemen standing guard at the gate. Two Italian Carabinieri and a young receptionist greeted her inside the reception lobby, with the young woman smiling to her from behind her desk and addressing her in good French.

"May I do something for you, miss?"

"Yes, miss. I am here to obtain a visa to Italy."

The receptionist nodded and pointed towards a wide double door to Miriam's left.

"The visa section is this way, miss. The lineup is short at this time, so you should not need to wait very long."

"Thank you very much, miss." said Miriam warmly, encouraged by this, before going to the designated door and entering a large room lined with chairs and writing desks. Four service wickets were lined along a long service counter and there was maybe nine persons waiting at the time to be served. Miriam was about to grab a number from a wall dispenser when she saw the notice fixed besides it. It was in Italian, French, English, Spanish and German and proclaimed that citizens from Palestine and from the Global Council had to take a number from a special dispenser marked in red. With her apprehension returning, Miriam went to that dispenser and took the top red tag hooked to it. A Carabinieri on guard in the room came at once to her, his face neutral, and showed her a number of chairs separated from the others in a corner.



“If you will take a seat over there, miss, you should be called to a service wicket soon.”

“Uh, thank you!” replied Miriam, a bit intimidated by now. She nonetheless went to sit in the designated corner and steeled herself for whatever would come. She was quick to notice that the Carabinieri, instead of returning to his original spot, took position only a few feet from her. While impassive and not staring at her, Miriam was now acutely conscious that the Italian policeman was in fact paying special attention to her. Since he probably only followed instructions from the embassy staff, Miriam couldn’t hold it against the man, who had stayed polite up to now. Before she could spend much time worrying, Miriam was called to the last wicket by a man sitting behind the service counter. Hurrying nervously to the wicket, Miriam tried her best to appear calm and smiled to the man in his late thirties now facing her.

“Good day, mister! I would like to obtain a visa in order to visit Rome.”

“Your passport, please!” said the man in a cold voice, not smiling back. Miriam took her Global Council passport out of her purse and gave it through the small opening in the Plexiglas window of the wicket. The embassy employee grabbed it and frowned at once on seeing which kind of passport it was. His look back at Miriam was distinctly suspicious: the only Global Council citizens which were not bald giants with six fingers per hand were members of the Time Patrol or their families. Opening Miriam’s passport and looking at the first page, the man stiffened at once and gave her a hostile glare.

“Miss Miriam of Magdala, or whatever your real name is, you are not welcome in Italy. You may take back your passport and leave this embassy at once.”

“But...” replied Miriam in a choked voice, “Miriam of Magdala is my real name. I am no impostor, mister.”

The employee ignored her protests and, slipping her passport back through the wicket’s opening, waved at the Carabinieri to approach.

“Signor Busconi, please escort the lady out of the embassy.”

Before Miriam could do more than get hold of her passport, the policeman was on her and firmly took hold of her left arm.

“If you will follow me, miss...”

Realizing with bitterness that there was nothing she could do but obey without fuss, Miriam let the Carabinieri lead her towards the exit. She was however in tears and feeling humiliated to the core as the Italian policeman made her pass through the main door.

“But I wanted only to go ask for a private audience with the Pope.”

The young Carabinieri gave her an apologetic look and released his hold on her arm, but kept blocking the entrance to her.

“I am sorry, miss, but I have my orders. I am afraid that any attempt for you to return here would be futile. Goodbye, miss.”

Now totally discouraged, Miriam turned around and walked down the steps of the embassy, sobbing quietly. A French press photographer, who was standing vigil beside the embassy’s gate in case some demonstrators or protestors showed up because of the present diplomatic row, came to her as soon as she was on the sidewalk and took a picture of her before asking her a question loudly.

“Miss, why are you crying like this while coming out of the embassy?”

Unaccustomed in dealing with media people, a concept that had not even existed in her native First Century Israel, Miriam answered with the simple truth.

“I was refused a visa to enter Italy and was thrown out of the embassy.”

“Do you know why, miss?” asked the photographer, now scribbling on a notebook. Miriam nodded slowly her head.

“Yes! I live with the Time Patrol and Italy is now refusing access to all members of the Time Patrol.”

“May I have your name, miss?”

Miriam hesitated at first, hating the idea of making a public spat out of this. She was however proud of her name, which had just been smeared. Wiping away her tears, she faced the photographer and made a brave face.

“Yes, you can! I am Miriam of Magdala and I was born in Galilee in the year 6 C.E.. I simply wanted to go to Rome to ask for a private audience with the Pope. I wish to see the Pope in order to present to him my written account of the words and deeds of Yeshua of Nazareth, whom you would better know as Jesus Christ.”

The photographer opened his mouth wide, not believing his luck.

“You are Saint Mary Magdalene, miss?”

“I prefer to be called simply Miriam of Magdala, mister.”

“And...you said that you wrote a gospel about Jesus, miss?”

“Yes, that’s correct. After all, I lived seven years with Yeshua and knew him very well. The mistakes and distortions about him that are contained in the Bible used by the Church need to be corrected.”

“And...that gospel, are you planning to have it published, Miss Magdala?”

The question from the photographer struck Miriam at once: she had not thought about that possibility, hoping in her naiveté that giving a copy of her manuscript to the Church would have sufficed to ensure its circulation. She now realized how much hopeful thinking that had been.

“Uh, I may do that eventually, mister.”

“Please tell me how things went inside the embassy, miss.” asked gently the photographer, smelling a top story but not wanting to scare her away. Miriam obliged and spent a good two minutes telling her tale. At the end of it, the photographer thanked her and took a last picture of her, then hurried away, most probably to return to his newspaper’s offices and present his story to his editor.

Now alone on the sidewalk save for passersby who paid little attention to her, Miriam wondered for a moment about what to do next. Trying to go to Rome was now a moot point, at least until this diplomatic row was resolved. In fact, nearly half of the countries of Western Europe were probably closed to her, and not only Italy. The photographer’s suggestion about publishing her manuscript was definitely an appealing one and would probably ensure a wide circulation for it around the World. An idea then hit her, prompting her to search for a taxi: she had another place to visit, but would first need to go back to her hotel in order to grab one of the three copies of her gospel she had printed while at the Time Patrol’s main base.

A bit less than a hour later, Miriam got out of a taxi in front of the Apostolic Nunciature of Paris. The Nunciature was in effect the equivalent of an embassy and represented the Vatican and the Pope in France. If she couldn’t get to the Pope in Rome, maybe she could see his representative in Paris instead. With luck, she could maybe even convince the Papal Nuncio to secure a special permission for her to enter Italy in order to go see the Pope. As she walked towards the front entrance to the stone building, which was squeezed between two other buildings along the wide and affluent Avenue du President Wilson, two men came out while arguing rather loudly. One was wearing a gray civilian suit while the other wore the black robe of a Catholic priest. They were arguing in French, so Miriam was able to understand quickly that the civilian was probably a creditor or service provider who was clamoring for some late payment due to him by the Nunciature. The priest insisted however that the Nunciature didn’t have the means to pay right now, prompting the civilian into turning around and walking away

after threatening a judicial seizure. Miriam slowed down and hesitated, realizing that now was maybe not the best time for her visit. The priest however noticed her and looked at her, blowing air out discreetly to calm down before addressing her in a polite tone.

“May I do something for you, my child?”

“You may, Father. I was hoping to be able to speak with the Papal Nuncio, if that is possible.”

“His Excellency is rather busy right now, miss. May I ask what is the subject you wanted to speak about with him?”

“Well,” said timidly Miriam, holding her large purse with both hands in front of her, “my name is Miriam of Magdala and I wished to present to the Pope my written account of the words and deeds of Yeshua of Nazareth.”

The priest’s polite demeanor evaporated at once on hearing her name and he glared at her, furious.

“YOU? YOU AND YOUR LYING FRIENDS ARE NOT CONTENT IN RUINING OUR GREAT CHURCH? YOU HAVE TO COME LAUGH AT US ON TOP OF THAT? GO AWAY!”

With Miriam paralyzed by his violent reaction, the priest then walked back inside the Nunciature and slammed the door behind him. Miriam lowered her head, more saddened than angered by the priest’s reaction. His unwillingness to even try to consider her point of view ran in sharp contrast to the tolerance and open-mindedness Yeshua had preached in his time. That same open-mindedness was however exactly what she was striving to promote, but she now had to face the self-interest of the Christian churches, the same churches which had tortured and murdered tens of thousands of innocent women falsely accused of witchcraft during the past centuries. Resentment and bitterness then came to Miriam when she remembered that the Inquisition, the main architect and executioner of those atrocities, still existed under the innocuous-sounding name of ‘Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office’. What could she expect from a church that still harbored such an institution and still held to its doctrine of papal infallibility?

Wanting to change her mind a bit from such depressing thoughts, Miriam started walking slowly along the avenue and eventually came to the Boulevard des Champs Élysés, the main thoroughfare of downtown Paris. The sight of the colorful shops and

terraces, along with the dense and varied crowd of strollers and shoppers, helped lighten her mood and she ended browsing with curiosity at the content of the various storefronts. At one point, she encountered a growing crowd seemingly attracted to the storefront of an electronic appliances shop. Her curiosity made her slip politely to the front ranks, where she saw that the crowd was watching a large television set showing a live news report. Miriam's heart jumped in her chest on seeing that Farah Tokkonen was shown speaking from the podium of the United Nations General Assembly, which building was in Paris. While using restrained words and tone of voice, Farah was making clear her disapproval and objections to the diplomatic snub delivered to the Time Patrol and to Palestine by numerous member countries of the assembly. When Farah was finished, the Secretary General, a distinguished Norwegian gentleman, gave the podium next to the representative of the United States. The American diplomat was quick in delivering a 'no prisoners taken' kind of reply to Farah's address, reminding the assembly of the mass suicides caused four years ago in the United States following the anti-racist, skin-blackening energy burst released by a Palestinian Chosen in Alabama. Directly blaming Nancy Laplante for that deed, the American then delivered the most striking part of his speech.

"In view of the repeated acts of interference in the internal affairs of the United States by the Overseer of Palestine and of the slanderous smears spread against our Christian beliefs, smears that have caused serious social and moral upheaval, the government of the United States has decided that simply cutting diplomatic relations with Palestine would not be enough to signal our profound disapproval. Thus, in the name of the President of the United States, I am announcing to this assembly that the United States will impose a commercial embargo on all Palestinian imports to our country, effective immediately. Furthermore, all direct air links between the United States and Palestine will be stopped forthwith, and this until further notice. All Palestinian citizens presently in the United States will have until the day after tomorrow to leave our territory, after which they will be subject to arrest and forcible deportation. That last measure will also apply to all members of the Time Patrol. The United States truly regret having to retort to such measures, but the actions of the Overseer of Palestine and of the Time Patrol left it no other choices. Thank you for your attention, ladies and gentlemen."

As the American representative was about to leave the podium, the Secretary General, who was sitting one level higher and behind, bent forward and spoke to him in a low voice, visibly concerned by the turn of events. The conversation went on for a few

seconds before the Secretary General looked around at the delegates and spoke in his microphone as the American diplomat walked off the podium.

“In view of the declaration by the American delegation, does any other delegation wish to present a counterpoint or comment?”

Quite a few delegates stated their wish to address the assembly then and started lining up to go on the podium. There was however a slight disturbance when a tall woman dressed in a white hooded robe seemingly came out of nowhere and joined that group. Out of a common accord, the delegates let her go up to the podium first while excited whispers went around the assembly: the woman was no other than Nancy Laplante, Overseer of the Holy Land of Palestine and the center of the present controversy.

“The Overseer of the Holy Land of Palestine has the podium.” declared quickly the Secretary General. Miriam, like the French people around her, watched on intensely the television set as Nancy Laplante calmly took place behind the microphone of the podium. Nancy, her intense green eyes sparkling under the glare of the spotlights directed at her, looked around confidently at the United Nations delegates and spoke in her clear, agreeable voice.

“Ladies and gentlemen, thank you in advance for your attention. I will make this short and simple. I do not deny having tried to bring forward the truth about the story of Yeshua of Nazareth, nor do I deny having attempted to make the American and other governments conscious of their shortcomings in how they treated some of their own citizens, along with the citizens of other countries. In that I was merely fulfilling my mission as given to me by The One, namely to promote justice and to protect the innocents. If that is what I am accused of, then I am guilty as charged. However, if the American, Belgian, South African or any other government judge that combating racism, discrimination and blatant injustice is a crime, then I say that they are the criminals, not me. So does The One think!”

Many delegates squirmed at those last words: when Nancy Laplante invoked The One, drastic things normally followed. Nancy however didn't let the delegates much time to think about that.

“The United States just declared a commercial embargo against the Holy Land of Palestine, while it and other countries were pushed by the Vatican into breaking diplomatic relations with me and the Time Patrol. I will not even honor their accusations of slander with a response. I have explained myself and presented facts for years now

but was ignored and will not repeat myself anymore. Instead, I will now simply pass on a declaration from The One.”

Nancy then stopped speaking for a moment and closed her eyes, as if to meditate. Exclamations went around the assembly when she started to grow quickly in size while becoming luminescent. Within seconds, she had become a bright silhouette standing a full twenty feet high. When she spoke, it was in a voice that boomed around the huge room.

“DELEGATES OF THE WORLD, I HAVE BEEN INFINITELY PATIENT FOR MANY MILLENIUMS WHILE HOPING THAT THE SOULS I HAVE CREATED WOULD LEARN TO LIVE TOGETHER IN PEACE AND TOLERANCE. I AM HOWEVER RUNNING OUT OF PATIENCE. TO THE PEOPLE OF THIS WORLD, I SAY THIS: IF YOU SHOW TOLERANCE, KINDNESS AND COMPASSION, YOU WILL HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM ME. TO THE GOVERNMENTS WHICH DECLARED THEIR OPPOSITION TO THE HOLY LAND OF PALESTINE AND TO THE ONES WHO SACRIFICED MUCH IN ORDER TO STOP THE LATEST MAJOR WAR, I SAY THIS: YOU WILL BE CURSED UNTIL YOU MEND YOUR WAYS AND SHOW GENUINE TOLERANCE AND KINDNESS. TO THE POPE AND THE VATICAN, I SAY THAT THEY DO NOT REPRESENT ANYTHING BUT THEIR OWN SELFISH INTERESTS. STOP INVOKING MY NAME OR THAT OF MY CHOSEN WHILE TELLING LIES. UNTIL YOU DO SO, YOU WILL BE AS EQUALLY CURSED AS THE OTHER GOVERNMENTS I JUST WARNED. A PURE AND KIND WOMAN TRIED TODAY TO BRING THE TRUE WORDS OF MY CHOSEN, YESHUA OF NAZARETH, TO THE POPE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, HOPING SIMPLY TO DISCUSS WITH HIM HIS WORDS AND DEEDS. THAT WOMAN ENDED UP BEING THROWN OUT OF THE ITALIAN EMBASSY WHILE BEING CALLED AN IMPOSTOR AND A FRAUD. IN RETURN, I CALL THE PRESENT POPE AND ALL HIS PREDECESSORS FRAUDS, AS THEY NEVER REPRESENTED MY TRUE WORDS. FROM NOW ON, BE ALL ON NOTICE THAT I WILL NOT TOLERATE ANYMORE THE KIND OF HYPOCRISY AND INTOLERANCE THAT HAS TOO OFTEN PERMEATED THIS WORLD.”

Once those words had echoed around the room, Nancy’s giant silhouette faded into nothingness in a moment, leaving behind a stunned crowd of delegates. The people standing on the sidewalk with Miriam and watching the television set were equally stunned. Exclamations and excited comments then went around the crowd.

“Was that really God speaking to us?” Asked a mature woman while looking at her male companion, who hesitated before answering her.

“I don’t know, Francine, but can we afford to take a chance and ignore that warning? I don’t think so! Besides, is being tolerant and kind such a despicable thing to be? I have no problems with that, personally.”

“But, what about the teachings of the Bible?” replied an older woman, attracting an immediate retort from a young man dressed in dirty jeans and T-shirt.

“The hell with the Bible! It only takes a feeble mind to accept without question all the lies told by the Church.”

That sparked one mean and animated debate which Miriam was too happy to step back from. Once away from the crowd, she went to sit on a nearby bench and thought over what had just happened. Clearly, the warning from The One meant that some dramatic events would happen soon around the World, putting weight to his words. It would probably be wise for her to wait and see what happened in the next couple of days before continuing with her task. At least, being in Paris, there was still a lot she could do to fill her time here in the meantime, like enjoying the sights and the local life. Maybe she was going to be able to use this time as a true vacation, after all.

### **17:19 (Rome Time)**

#### **Offices of the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office**

#### **Vatican City, Rome**

#### **Italy**

“So, my good brothers, what should be our next move to counter the latest display of witchcraft from the Overseer of Palestine?”

The various bishops and Monsignors sitting around the conference table with Cardinal Giuseppe Pizzardo looked at each other, unsure about what to say. The pictures from the United Nations General Assembly had struck them hard, with a few around the Vatican starting to have doubts about the wisdom of denying everything said by Nancy Laplante. Cardinal Pizzardo, who would have been called the Grand Inquisitor in earlier centuries, sensed the doubts around him but kept his voice calm and measured.

“Come, now! You are all faithful servants of the Church: one more magical display should not disturb you this much.”



“What if it was not a magical display, Your Eminence?” replied quietly a German monsignor. “This is the first time that what Laplante calls ‘The One’ would supposedly have appeared in public. At the risk of offending my brothers here, shouldn’t we at least consider the possibility that we may have erred in our judgment of the Overseer? She has after all saved or healed hundreds of thousands of persons in the past years, while not committing once any act that could be called evil.”

“Not once, you say?” countered in a reprobate tone a hardnosed Spanish bishop. “Denying the divine nature of Our Savior the Christ is not an evil act in itself? That woman is an apostate and a blasphemer of the worst kind. What tells us the limits of the things this future technology from the Global Council can do? Creating an optical illusion and then disappearing by traveling through time should be child’s play for Laplante. We should...”

A drop of red liquid then splattered on the bishop’s pointed index, cutting him off and making him look up at the ceiling. His strangled exclamation of horror made the others look up as well, in time for all of them to receive red drops on their faces. A dark red liquid was now oozing through the ceiling at a growing rate, like rain bursting out of a cloud! The monsignor who had presented an objection hesitantly smelled, then tasted one of the red drops as the others were getting up on their feet in a hurry to try to get out of the red rain.

**“BLOOD! IT IS RAINING BLOOD!”**

Now truly panicked, the churchmen ran out of the Cardinal’s office to escape the bloody rain, only to find to their horror that the ceiling along the main hallway was also raining blood. From the way other churchmen were running out of their offices along the hallway, it was apparent that the whole building must have been similarly cursed. The Cardinal and his subordinates next ran towards the nearest exit, the red rain quickly soaking them and making the floors and steps slippery. Before they could get to the exit, though, a woman’s giant face appeared to them, blocking completely the hallway and glaring severely at the churchmen. Her voice boomed and echoed around them.

**“THIS IS THE BLOOD OF ALL THE INNOCENTS WHICH WERE TORTURED AND MURDERED DURING MANY CENTURIES IN THE NAME OF YOUR CHURCH. YOU KILLED PEOPLE ON MERE RUMORS OR SUSPICIONS AND YOU PRETENDED AFTERWARDS TO DO GOD’S WORK? EVEN IN THIS CENTURY, YOU ARE STILL READY TO PERSECUTE THOSE WHO DON’T AGREE WITH YOUR**

VIEWS. OTHERS WILL BE CURSED TODAY, BUT YOUR SO-CALLED CONGREGATION WILL BE CURSED FOREVER!"

The giant face then vanished, letting the blood-drenched inquisitors flee in panic outside. They were not out of trouble yet though, as the churchmen nearly gagged the moment they were in the open plaza in front of the Palace of the Holy Office: a horrible stench floated all around them. As far as they could see inside the Vatican grounds, people were made sick by that stench, covering their noses and mouths or vomiting where they stood. The inquisitors, including their cardinal, made the sign of the cross while fighting the urge to throw up.

"How could such a saintly place as the Vatican be cursed like this?" protested the Spanish bishop. Nobody in the group dared answer that.

### **17:46 (Washington time)**

#### **Residential apartment building**

#### **Arlington, Virginia**

#### **United States**

The welcoming smile Betty Gorman gave her husband when he came home turned nearly immediately into a disgusted frown: Bill stank like a sewer!

"Phew! Where did you go to catch such an awful smell, Bill?"

Her husband, as fit physically as one would expect from a Secret Service agent, gave her an apologetic shrug while staying well away from her.

"The White House. Didn't you listen to the news this afternoon?"

"Uh, no! I was too busy vacuuming, doing the laundry, ironing, washing the dishes and preparing supper. What happened at the White House? The sewers backed up?"

"I wish that it would have been as mundane as that, Betty." said Bill in a discouraged tone while shedding his vest, shirt and trousers where he stood near the entrance door. "To make a story short, Nancy Laplante, the Overseer of Palestine, cursed us and the other governments that have cut diplomatic relations with Palestine and the Time Patrol. The White House, the whole of Capitol Hill and the State Department now stink to high hell, to a point where they had to be evacuated. Nobody can work or visit there without puking his or her guts out."

Betty couldn't help laugh then as she mentally pictured that.

“Hell, the least you can give that Laplante is that she has a mean sense of humor.”

“Well, the President is definitely not amused, I can assure you of that.” replied Bill. “Uh, can you throw me an empty garbage bag?”

Betty searched for a second inside a closet and pulled out a large plastic bag, throwing it to her husband.

“And what is the President going to do now? Nuke Palestine?”

Betty’s joking remark brought an expression on her husband’s face that made her pause with worry.

“He is not going to do that, is he, Bill?”

“I’m sorry, Betty, but I can’t tell you what was discussed by the President and his cabinet.”

“Bill, that woman healed my grandparents, along with tens of thousands of other people. We can’t seriously be thinking about nuking Palestine.”

Bill gave her a cautious look while stuffing his smelly clothes inside the garbage bag.

“Betty, that anti-racist energy burst four years ago cost the lives of half a million Americans. Now, much of the federal government is paralyzed because of this...curse thrown on us by Laplante.”

“Those Americans were racist rednecks of the worse kind. Nobody forced them to commit suicide, Bill! As for that curse, maybe we deserved it after all.”

“How could you say that, Betty?” said Bill, shocked.

“How? By using my head, Bill. Laplante and her Time Patrol brought the war to a stop in 1942, saving us tens of thousands of dead soldiers. What did we do then? We snubbed her. She brings a near end to racism in our country and we get mad at her instead of thanking her. We cut diplomatic relations and put an embargo on Palestinian imports and then act scandalized and surprised when she replies to that. Did you think for a second that maybe God is on HER side, Bill, and not on our side?”

Her husband lowered her head slowly, not knowing what to reply to that.

**19:51 (Washington time)**

**Secure conference room**

**National Military Command Center**

**The Pentagon, Washington, D.C.**

President Eisenhower, his hand on the telephone sitting on the table in front of him, looked around the conference table, trying to gauge his cabinet members and top generals before making his call. Many obviously had doubts about the actions just decided by him. His military chiefs in particular were clearly hesitant, except for the fiery commander of the Strategic Air Command, General Curtiss Le May, always prompt in adopting aggressive solutions. However, his Secretaries for State, Interior and Defense all showed masks of resolve. Eisenhower, himself having some doubts about the wisdom of what he was about to do, sighed and picked up the receiver.

“This is the President. Patch me at once to the palace of the Overseer of Palestine, in Jerusalem.”

After maybe less than a minute, the telephone started ringing at the other end of the line, with someone picking up after the second ring.

“Overseer’s palace! May I help you?” said in both Hebrew, Arabic and English a melodious female voice. Somehow, the soft tone of that voice only made Eisenhower feel more guilty.

“Miss, this is the President of the United States. I wish to speak urgently to the Overseer, Miss Nancy Laplante.”

Since it was nearly two O’clock in the morning in Jerusalem, Eisenhower was expecting to be told that Laplante was sleeping. To his surprise, he was simply told to wait for a moment. After less than forty seconds, the receptionist came back on the line.

“Mister President, the Overseer will now speak to you.”

Eisenhower’s surprise when the line was then cut turned to anger, leaving him to glare at his telephone receiver.

“What the...”

“You may speak, Mister President.” then said a female voice in his back. Eisenhower swiveled his chair around abruptly, to find Nancy Laplante standing calmly a mere ten feet from him, wearing her customary white robe and with her golden crown of Palestine on her head. General Le May was on his feet at once, shouting towards the door of the room.

“GUARDS!”

Two Secret Service agents, along with two military policemen, rushed in at once with commendable diligence, pistols drawn. Laplante simply made a slight wave of her right hand and the four men froze where they were, completely motionless. She next gave a benign smile to Eisenhower.

“Don’t worry about these men, Mister President: they are only frozen in time until I am gone.”

“How...how did you know where to find me, miss?” Asked hesitantly Eisenhower. “My location is supposed to be secret.”

Nancy Laplante gave him the look an adult would give to a young, inexperienced child.

“The One knows everything, and I am one with The One, Mister President. You were calling me to give me an ultimatum, I believe. You may deliver it now, for all the good it will do to you.”

Eisenhower suddenly felt dizzy, overwhelmed by her presence. He was in theory the most powerful man on the planet now, yet felt like a mere dwarf in terms of real power compared to that young, beautiful woman. He however managed to speak in a reasonably firm voice after a few seconds.

“Miss Laplante, your acts against the United States and against allied states amount to acts of war. You either cease and desist or we will be forced to declare war on you.”

“A war against The One.” said Nancy, smiling. “That should be amusing to watch.”

Before Eisenhower, incensed by those words, could reply, a high-pitched, ear-splitting noise suddenly filled the room, forcing all the men present save for the frozen guards in covering their ears while grimacing with pain. Eisenhower, like the others, ended up on his knees, his hands clasped over his ears. After maybe ten seconds of that acoustic torture, the piercing noise stopped as abruptly as it had started, allowing Eisenhower to look back at Laplante, who was not smiling anymore.

“Mister President, everybody inside the Pentagon had to endure that noise. I could have made all of the United States ear it as well but I and The One are not sadists. Here are the conditions of The One to your nation and your allies, Mister President: you will tell your nuclear bombers to stand down, will cancel that embargo against the Holy Land of Palestine and will reverse that stupid braking of diplomatic relations tonight. You will also stop following the lead of the various misguided and intolerant religious groups which claim each to hold the universal truth. You will as well allow the people of your country to listen to whatever opinions they wish to listen to, so that they can make their minds on their own rather than being dictated to. No more censure and bans on religious ideas that don’t fit with the views of the official churches. If you refuse to abide by those conditions, then all adults in the United States will be made to endure the

sound you just heard, and that until you submit. Please believe me when I say that I only wish for Palestine to live peacefully with your nation and all other nations, Mister President. We will however not let ourselves be intimidated into not promoting truth, justice and tolerance. You have until midnight, local time, to comply to all of my demands. After that, all American adults will be unable to do anything but wish that you become reasonable. Don't force me to return, Mister President."

Nancy Laplante then vanished into thin air. The two Secret Service agents and two MPs at the door then came back to life, scanning the room with their pointed handguns.

"WHERE IS SHE, SIR?" asked anxiously one agent. Totally mortified by now, Eisenhower spoke in a low, shaky voice.

"Stand down, all of you: Laplante is gone already. You may resume your guard duties outside the door."

"Uh, yes, Mister President."

Once the door of the conference room was closed again, Eisenhower looked at the other conference participants, who now appeared at least as shaken as him.

"I hate to say this, gentlemen, but it seems that we lost this war before we could even start it. In view of what Laplante can do, I believe that we have no other reasonable choice but to accept her demands. Does anybody here disagree with that?" The men around him, who all held more power than most other people on Earth, nodded their heads in quiet agreement, clearly beaten into submission by Laplante's demonstration. The only exception in the group was General Le May, who slammed his fist on the conference table.

"WE CAN'T SIMPLY GIVE UP LIKE THIS, MISTER PRESIDENT! IF WE DO, WHAT WILL STOP LAPLANTE FROM THROWING SOME CURSE ON US AGAIN EVERY TIME SHE DISAGREES WITH OUR POLICIES?"

"And how do you propose to counter her powers, General?" asked pointedly Eisenhower. "She can appear anywhere, anytime and do damn near anything she wants."

"We have nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles, Mister President. Let's use them and erase Palestine from the map before that Laplante can do more damage to us. We may well have this one occasion only to act, Mister President."

Eisenhower disliked that idea at once. While Laplante was often enough a pain in the neck, destroying Jerusalem would be still an extreme measure. There was also another factor that was being forgotten here.

“What about the Time Patrol, General Le May? Even if we succeed in killing Laplante by nuking Jerusalem, I doubt that the Time Patrol will not react fiercely to that. You better remember that the Time Patrol was able by itself to stop World War Two in two weeks, General. We are simply no match to people who can travel through time at will.”

“Dammit, Mister President, we can’t surrender like this!”

“Yes, we can, and we will, General.” replied Eisenhower in a definitive tone. “I am not going to risk our country further just because some churchmen are screaming foul. Stand down your bombers, General, now! The rest of us will try to decide in the meantime how to best accommodate our needs with Laplante’s views.”

What Eisenhower didn’t say was how humiliated he felt at having to capitulate like this against such a tiny opponent as Palestine. He had to rethink that notion nearly at once, though: you couldn’t call God a tiny opponent. That distinction failed however to make him feel much better.

**08:06 (Paris time)**

**Tuesday, September 27, 1955 ‘B’**

**Hotel Jacob, Paris**

**France**

The Sun shining through the drawn curtains of her hotel room, along with the muffled noise of the street traffic, woke up Miriam from her peaceful slumber. Feeling like staying in bed a bit more, she turned on her side, her back to the window and her head snuggling her pillow, and went back to sleep. Maybe half a hour later, Miriam finally decided to get up, having had plenty of sleep by now. Lazily going to the small bathroom of her room, she relieved herself, then brushed her teeth before going to the closet and choosing a red and gold Arabic robe and a pair of laced sandals. Dressing and then combing quickly her hair, she finally went down to the lobby of the hotel, her purse slung from one shoulder. Hanna Chomsky, coming out of the small kitchen of her hotel while carrying a basket of fresh croissants and bagels, smiled warmly to Miriam.

“Ah, finally awake, I see. Will you have breakfast now, Miriam?”

One sniff of the smell from the still warm pastries was enough to decide Miriam.

“I sure will, Hanna.”

“Then, come sit in the lounge and let me serve you.”

Taking place at one of the small tables of the hotel's lounge, Miriam nodded politely to a young British couple sitting at the next table and munching on croissants and bread with jam and butter.

"Good morning!" she said softly to them in her good English. In truth, Miriam could speak a good nine languages, five of them thanks to the mnemotronic teaching techniques used by the Time Patrol and the Global Council. With mnemotronics, one could learn a new language in barely twenty minutes. The young couple returned her greeting, then continued their quiet conversation. A minute later, Miriam was also munching on pastries and sipping on a cup of hot coffee. Hanna brought her a newspaper after a couple more minutes.

"I thought that you may be interested in the front page titles of this morning's paper, Miriam."

"Oh? What is it?"

"Just read, friend!" replied Hanna with a grin before leaving the newspaper on Miriam's table. Now frankly curious, Miriam grabbed the paper with one hand and read the top title while still holding her cup of coffee. She was soon smiling with glee while reading about the various curses which had hit the governments that had broken diplomatic relations with Palestine and with the Time Patrol. The misadventures of the Vatican in particular made her chuckle.

"The offices of the Inquisition drenched by a rain of blood from the ceilings. How appropriate a curse." she said to herself, unconsciously speaking in Aramaic. Turning the front page to read more about the series of curses, Miriam nearly spilled her coffee when she saw her own face on page three: there was an article about her being thrown out of the Italian embassy. Reasoning that it must have been made by the press photographer she had met outside the embassy, she read that article with intense interest. Apart from being written to make it as sensational as one could, the article was basically accurate and didn't twist what Miriam had said to the photographer. What really got her attention was a note from the newspaper's editor at the bottom of the article, inviting her to come to the newspaper's head offices for a detailed interview. That note also contained the address and telephone number of the newspaper's offices. Miriam suddenly knew what she was going to do today.



**10:36 (Paris Time)**

**Head offices, newspaper 'Le Figaro'**

**37 Rue du Louvre, Paris**

Miriam, stepping out of her taxi after paying for her ride, looked upwards and examined briefly the narrow, seven story-high beige masonry building housing the offices of the newspaper 'Le Figaro'. Two large signs, one vertical and the other one horizontal, left no doubt that she was at the right building, situated in downtown Paris near the Palace of The Louvre. With her large purse slung over her left shoulder and containing a copy of her manuscript about Yeshua, Miriam entered the building and found herself in a relatively small lobby. A reception counter sat near a wide staircase wrapped around an old elevator shaft. There were quite a few people present, going in and out of ground level offices or climbing up or down the stairs. Miriam went after a short hesitation to the reception counter and smiled to the young female receptionist, who wore large spectacles.

"Excuse me, miss. My name is Miriam of Magdala and I have an appointment with a Mister Raymond Aron."

The young receptionist opened her eyes wide at those words and became visibly excited.

"You are Saint Mary Magdalene? Let me advise Mister Aron at once."

The receptionist then picked up a telephone receiver and composed a number.

"Mister Aron? This is the reception desk: Saint Mary Magdalene is here to see you... Yes, right away, Mister Aron."

Putting down the receiver, the young brunette looked back at Miriam, smiling warmly.

"Mister Aron's office is on the third floor, Miss Magdalene. Turn left once out of the elevator, then go to the second door."

"Thank you, miss."

Miriam was about to walk towards the elevator when the receptionist quickly presented her a pen and a small card.

"Uh, could I ask you for an autograph, Miss Magdalene? I saw the Time Patrol documentary about Yeshua of Nazareth and found it so moving."

"Why not?" replied Miriam, having grown somewhat accustomed to being a celebrity of sorts. She autographed the card in Aramaic and gave it back with the pen to the receptionist, who thanked her profusely. As she got in the elevator cage, Miriam

couldn't help think about what she represented to the average people of this time. Some treated her like an evil woman bent on destroying the Christian Church, while others adulated her for having been a close disciple of Yeshua. Yet, she felt herself to be no more than a simple Galilean woman who worked as a most mundane hairdresser while raising a teenage son. She didn't feel to be extraordinary in the least way and held no special powers, contrary to what Nancy Laplante 'A' had been. More importantly, she didn't have any wishes to become famous or important. The only thing she cared about was to spread the true words of Yeshua and correct all the falsehoods that had been said about him and his teachings.

She was soon knocking on a wood and glass door bearing a brass plaque with 'Raymond Aron, Editor in Chief' engraved on it.

"Come in!" said a male voice. Opening the door and entering a large office, Miriam closed the door behind her and walked to meet a thin, rather frail man in his fifties who had gotten up from behind a desk and was walking quickly to her. The man shook her hand gently while looking at her with gleaming eyes.

"Miss Miriam of Magdala, it is a true honor to be able to meet you. I am Raymond Aron, editor in chief at Le Figaro."

"Pleased to meet you, Mister Aron. Are you Jewish, by chance?"  
The editorialist nodded once his head at that.

"Yes! My family is from Alsace and is from old Jewish stock, but I am afraid that I practice religion very little."

"That is not a negative point in my mind, Mister Aron: I myself practice religion much less now than thirteen years ago."

"Oh? How so?" said Aron, clearly surprised. "You were a close disciple of Jesus for years."

"I effectively was, but living close to Nancy Laplante, a Chosen of The One, showed me that good deeds and kindness are a lot more meaningful than periodic prayers and fasts. To a lesser degree, this was also the philosophy of Yeshua, who was trying to make the Jewish religion more open and tolerant, as well as more appealing to all."

"I see already that our conversation will be a very interesting one, Miss Magdala. Please sit down and make yourself comfortable. Would you like coffee or tea, or anything else?"

Miriam gently shook her head while sitting down on the sofa designated by Aron.

“No, thank you. I had a late breakfast.”

Aron sat opposite her in a padded armchair positioned across from a low coffee table. He then took out of a vest pocket a pack of cigarette and was extracting a cigarette when he noticed how Miriam’s expression suddenly became guarded.

“I’m sorry: I should have asked first. Does smoke disturbs you?”

“In truth,” replied Miriam cautiously, “I never got accustomed to tobacco smoke, Mister Aron. Tobacco was unknown in my original century and smoking is banned for health reasons in the society of the Global Council.”

“And, in the Time Patrol?” asked Aron while putting back the pack of cigarettes in his pocket with secret regret. “Is it also banned there?”

“It is.” answered Miriam, cautious about what she was saying now: the location and time period of the main base of the Time Patrol was a highly sensitive secret, for many reasons. “The members of the Time Patrol avoid smoking for mostly professional reasons, though: the smell of tobacco on their clothes or on their breath would attract attention on their field agents on missions in most periods of the past.”

“That is something I never realized before now, miss. It certainly makes a lot of sense. But let’s talk about you. I understand that you tried, without success, to go see the Pope in Rome in order to discuss with him the doctrine taught to you by Jesus Christ.”

“That is correct, Mister Aron. I have spent the last years writing down everything I could remember about the life and teachings of Yeshua. The Time Patrol historical archives also helped me fill in some gaps in my knowledge about Yeshua’s early life. I was anxious to show my manuscript to the Pope and discuss with him the discrepancies that exist in the official Church version of Yeshua’s teachings. Unfortunately, I couldn’t even obtain a visa to enter Italy and, when I went to the Paris Nunciature, they slammed the door in my face.”

“An impolite but not unexpected reaction on their part, miss.” said philosophically the French editorialist. “The Catholic Church always had a hard time adapting to others’ opinions. By the way, do you mind if I record this conversation, miss? It would save me from having to write constantly and would help us keep the conversation flowing.”

“Go right ahead, Mister Aron.”

The editorialist nodded, then pressed a button on the bulky tape recorder sitting on the coffee table. He next looked back at Miriam and smiled to her.

“You went to the Nunciature yesterday, I suppose, miss?”

“Yes, I did!”

“And now... what do you intend to do?”

“I’m not sure. It will depend on how the Catholic Church reacts to the curse thrown on it and on the governments which broke diplomatic relations with Palestine and the Time Patrol. To be frank, I am wondering if the Church will ever listen in good faith to what I have to say. There are a lot of things in my gospel which contradict the official Bible. The Church may never accept to change significantly its doctrine.”

“Have you thought about the possibility of having your gospel published, thus bypassing the Catholic Church entirely, miss?”

“Until recently, no, but being spurned the way I was yesterday certainly makes that idea attractive to me now.”

“Then, if and when you do decide to try to publish your gospel, I would be most happy to make you meet with a well known publisher who is a good friend of mine. But, let’s talk now about your gospel. You said that there were a lot of things in it that contradicted the Bible. Could you tell me about the major points of contention in it?”

“Certainly!” replied Miriam, relaxing and laying back a bit in her sofa before continuing. “The main things that are misleading in the Bible and the Church doctrine in my mind are about women and tolerance towards other beliefs. First, the women. Yeshua was, for his time, very tolerant of women and was more than happy to have female disciples around him. He in fact had at least as many female disciples than he had male ones. Unfortunately, the male disciples, starting with Shimon of Bethsaida, the one you would know as Saint Peter, were not as tolerant of women being active in the faith and did everything to erase our role and influence in Yeshua’s ministry. In fact, Shimon resented me deeply and was jealous of my influence on Yeshua. He was also resentful of Nava but was too afraid of her to dare be rude with her.”

“Nava? Who is that?”

“Nava was the name used by Nancy Laplante while she was following under a disguise Yeshua in order to document his life.”

“Oh, I see!” said Aron, smiling. “No wonder that your Shimon was intimidated by her. Did Yeshua know the true identity of Nava?”

“Not until close to the very end, and even then only part of it. He however always knew that she was a person with a very powerful psyche, as he was able to see the

auras of the persons around him and saw that Nancy's aura was so much brighter than anyone else's aura."

Aron nodded at that, digesting those words: Nancy Laplante was widely acknowledged today around the World as being the most powerful person alive, by far.

"Let's go back to your role, miss. Very little is said about you in the Bible. In fact, you are all but absent from it except for a few quotes."

"You can thank the early Christian Church for that, Mister Aron. It rewrote the scriptures and purged them in order to write a Bible that would reflect the ideas and prejudices of the Pope and of his clergy. That was also when women were demonized by the Church and basically made to be sinners and temptresses, mostly to affirm the powers of men over them. I was myself passed of as a sinner redeemed by Yeshua, all because in the year 591, Pope Gregory the First couldn't make the difference between three women who bore the same name. In truth, Yeshua would be angry if he could see how a church that was founded in his name vilified the women he respected so much. Other points he would disagree strongly with are about the ministry of women, or rather the lack of it today, and about the celibacy of priests."

"Could you explain in detail those two points, Miss Magdala?"

"With pleasure. What is not reflected at all in the present Christian Bible is the true extent that the female disciples of Yeshua played in his ministry. Many of those women, including me, did a lot more than follow behind him and cook and wash for the male disciples. We also helped spread the preaching of Yeshua, talking with the women of the villages where we went through. Some, like me, also supported Yeshua financially. My family was wealthy and provided well for me, and I was in turn able to provide for Yeshua. In contrast, most of Yeshua's male disciples were poor, mostly uneducated men who barely could support their own families. Being the best educated of the disciples and being able to write in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin, I also served as Yeshua's scribe, who was himself only barely literate."

"Please don't take this bad, miss, but some today would say that you are painting yourself in the best possible light compared to Yeshua." said cautiously Aron. He saw Miriam's face become somber and she sat up straight while staring into his eyes. Her voice was calm but firm when she replied to him.

"Mister Aron, I was first the companion, then the legal wife of Yeshua and bore a child from him. He loved me and had total confidence in me. He also told me everything, something he didn't do with any of his male disciples, and was quite happy to

accept my help or advice when needed. I am not painting myself to look good: I am simply putting the record straight, a record that was grossly distorted by Yeshua's male disciples after his death, a record that was then further distorted by the purges and rewrites made to the gospels by the early Christian Church."

"Your point is well taken, miss. Now, what about the present celibacy of priests?" Miriam scoffed at those words.

"Complete nonsense, that's what it is. In Yeshua's time, and even today still, a Jewish rabbi was expected to marry and found a family. The Christian Church used its demonizing of women to justify its doctrine of priest celibacy, pretending that priests, apart from having to be male, had to stay pure by being celibate and devote themselves strictly to God. Well, I certainly don't look at myself as being a demonizing influence and Yeshua sure didn't look at me in that way. Also, celibacy simply goes against normal human nature and too often brings on deviant behavior. The Church is doing everything to hide the sexual scandals involving its clergy but you certainly know that there are plenty of cases today of priests abusing young boys or girls while the Church looks the other way."

Aron nodded at that: the Overseer of Palestine had made sure during the past twelve years that such sexual abuses didn't stay secret, lambasting the various churches for their hypocrisy and their disregard for the children being abused. Both the Catholic and various Protestant churches had been badly tainted publicly in recent years by horror stories of priests sexually abusing young boys or girls. The governments, police and medias, which at first had tended to close an eye and cover up such abuses in order to save the Church from scandal, had been gradually forced by public opinion to deal honestly with the problem. As a result, a number of priests and clergymen had been arrested in the past years, something previously unthinkable. That had also been one of the factors in the steady decline in the public popularity of the Christian churches during the past decade, which had been badly hurt financially as a result of the fall in Christian worship. In contrast, the informal religious philosophy preached by Nancy Laplante from Jerusalem, with its emphasis on practice of kindness and tolerance instead of formal praying and religious protocol, had gained tremendously in popularity around the World, and not only among Christians.

"I effectively know about such cases and, in fact, have written a number of editorials in the past about them. Are you thus advocating that priests should be allowed to marry, miss?"

“Not only that, Mister Aron. I also say that women should be allowed to be priests as well, and so would Yeshua. The present doctrine of the Catholic Church on those subjects is in complete contradiction to the teachings of Yeshua.”

“That doctrine is one of the fundamental basis of the present church, Miss Magdala. The Vatican will probably resist changing it to the bitter end.”

“Then, the Catholic Church will meet a bitter end indeed.” pronounced firmly Miriam, well fired up by now. “The One has shown that it is running out of patience with the various Christian churches and the governments supporting those churches. If the Vatican has an ounce of common sense left, it will finally listen and adapt, or it will shrivel away as a financially and morally bankrupt institution. The word of God will prevail over the word of men pretending to speak for God.”

Aron nearly sucked in air at the hard conviction evident in Miriam’s voice and words: she was sounding pretty much like Nancy Laplante in Jerusalem, a woman who now had the ear of many people around the World, be they Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists.

“The Church could say that Nancy Laplante is one person pretending to speak for God, miss.” replied Aron, playing the Devil’s advocate. In return, Miriam stared calmly at him, stating calmly what was obviously for her a fact beyond doubt.

“Mister Aron, when Nancy Laplante performed mass healings, or when she produced a burst of anti-racist energy in Alabama, she was effectively one with The One. In those instants, Nancy became an integral part of The One or, like when she addressed the United Nations General Assembly yesterday, even became The One temporarily. How else could anyone explain how powerful she can be, Mister Aron?”

Aron had to nod quietly at that, unable to counter that point.

The interview went on further for a good extra half hour, with many crucial points of religious faith debated between them. At the end of it, and with now enough materiel to produce one very powerful and controversial editorial, Aron thanked Miriam and arranged with her a meeting with an editor friend of his, so that Miriam could get her gospel published. Aron then escorted Miriam all the way down to the reception lobby, shaking her hand one last time as she was about to leave.

“Again, thank you for coming, Miss Magdala. It was a fascinating conversation. I wish you the best of luck in publishing your gospel. Don’t hesitate to call me if you further wish to discuss the subject of Yeshua in the future.”

“And I thank you for listening to me, Mister Aron. Unfortunately, that is something too few people are ready to do these days. Shelama, Mister Aron.”

“Shalom, Miriam.”

Miriam then walked out of the building, followed thoughtfully by Aron’s eyes. While apparently a simple young woman, the last hour had shown to Aron that Miriam of Magdala was a woman of strong character with a bright mind. He had no doubt that her gospel was going to shake the Catholic Church to its very foundations.

In the days that followed, Raymond Aron and his newspaper were kept very busy indeed, covering and commenting the many Earth-shattering news breaking out around the World. First, in the afternoon of the same day Aron interviewed Miriam, the United States announced that it was resuming diplomatic relations with both Palestine and the Time Patrol and also canceling its embargo against Palestine. Most of the countries which had broken relations with Palestine did the same the next day, with Spain and Italy holding out for one more day before giving up under the pressure from the curses bedeviling them. Only the Vatican and the seat of the Greek Orthodox Church held on stubbornly to their stance. That however cost them more disillusioned worshipers who were not ready anymore to believe without question their old churches. After a week of resisting despite all odds, the Catholic and Orthodox churches were left with only a core of hard-line followers and with finances even more precarious than before. Pope Pius XII then aggravated his situation even further by launching a vitriolic verbal attack against Nancy Laplante and those who followed her, going to the point of publicly excommunicating all the Catholics who now supported the Overseer of Palestine. That only resulted in convincing the few hesitant, moderate Catholics left in fleeing their church. In the United States the Baptist Church, which had a huge African-American following, one very conscious of the past efforts by Nancy Laplante to eradicate racism and segregation, openly sided with her and Miriam in the theological dispute. With passionate sermons by such reverends as Martin Luther King in support of Miriam’s calls for church reform, many Americans left the formal teachings of their old churches and embraced what was starting to be called the ‘Reform Christian Movement’. All the while, the Muslim world watched on with muted fascination but didn’t interfere in the Christian theological clashes. Nancy Laplante’s views were already well known to Muslims, as many of them went periodically to visit Jerusalem and as Nancy had been invited to The Mecca a number of times in the past by top Muslim leaders. Also, the new teachings



about Yeshua didn't clash with the broad beliefs of Islam, except maybe on the subject of the treatment and position of women. Most Muslims were however much more ready than the average Christian to obey what appeared clearly to them to be direct commands from God, given through a Chosen and the wife of a prophet.

Miriam's gospel was then published in mid-October, just as the Vatican was on the verge of financial collapse. Launched in Paris in the midst of a media frenzy, Miriam's book was an immediate literary success, selling by the tens of thousands in its first week of publication in France alone. An English translation followed in a mere week and took at once the United States and England by storm. Miriam's simple, factual and unassuming style of writing did a lot to win over potential readers and the faithful. One French socialist-leaning bishop in the South of France then declared himself a new convert of the Reform Christian Movement and officially adopted Miriam's gospel as the basis for his theology, also succeeding in assembling reform-minded priests around him. His cathedral at once filled back with worshipers, who had been deserting it for years in a steady drain. The bishop's next move was to ordain on his own authority a number of nuns as priests and to declare his priests and priestesses free to marry, something that earned him an immediate sentence of excommunication from the Pope. The bishop simply ignored that sentence and invited Miriam to come preach the next Sunday in his cathedral, which she did with enthusiasm in front of crowded pews. That Sunday was a true watershed, with a number of European bishops and even one archbishop converting to the new reformed church and adopting Miriam's gospel in the following week. The first reformed church to operate under Miriam's gospel in the United States was the one led by Reverend Martin Luther King and it opened to a full house in Montgomery, Alabama. From there, reformed churches spread out like wildfire, first through the Deep South and the New England states, then through the rest of the country, attracting Catholics and Protestants alike. While few male clergy members acknowledged it at first, the more open-minded political analysts around quickly pointed out that much of the success of the reformed religion was due to the renewed fervor of female faithfuls, who were at last treated as full equals of men in the eyes of the new faith. The much simplified theology, emphasized around the practice of compassion, kindness and tolerance, also did a lot to appeal to many, especially in poor countries with largely uneducated populations. By contrast, the clergy of the traditional churches in those same countries was often the most resistant to change. However, it only

succeeded in falling harder when the floor gave way under the popular demands for reform. Many hardline Catholic priests and bishops around South America and Africa suddenly found themselves run out of their churches by crowds of ex-worshippers tired of being lectured to like retarded children by priests who were often European or American Caucasian missionaries. From there, young native priests took over, adopting Miriam's gospel and following the counsels of the Overseer of Palestine.

By the end of November, the Vatican was reduced to a hollow shell with very little real authority left, while the Pope's words now meant next to nothing. The various Christian Orthodox churches survived a bit longer, through intimidation of its followers and censorship against Miriam's book. Natai, acting officially as Nancy Laplante, however gave the coup de grace to the Orthodox Church by paying a few judicious visits directly to local worshippers in Eastern Europe and Greece and spreading herself the new theology. Some not too bright Orthodox leaders tried to keep their flocks in line by enlisting the strong arm help of the local mafia, which often in the past had a profitable relationship with the Orthodox Church. The mafia men stupid enough to come to the help of the Orthodox Church however ended up in ashes, incinerated very publicly by Nancy Laplante as an object lesson to their masters. After that, even the dumbest criminals refused to approach the Orthodox Church, even with a ten-foot pole. Now totally discredited, the leaders of the Orthodox Church who had enough money stashed away after their years in power took an early retirement and were soon forgotten. Then, the true problem became that of finding replacements for the discredited clergymen. Because of the rigid mentality of most of the Orthodox priests and, too often as well, their notoriously corrupt ways, very few Orthodox clergymen were willing or worthy of spreading the Reform Christian Movement in Eastern Europe. That was when the head nun of a convent in Leningrad took a bold leap and led the local conversion movement despite all the threats she received from hardline clergymen and believers. Within a month, and practically by default, most positions of leadership in the churches of Eastern Europe were taken over by nuns, who now became officially priestesses. By the time that the Christmas season of 1955 came, the religious face of the World was nearly unrecognizable.

## **CHAPTER 4 – MATRIARCH OF THE FAITH**

**13:44 (Jerusalem Time)**

**Friday, December 23, 1955 'B'**

**Office of the Overseer, government palace**

**Jerusalem, Holy Land of Palestine**

Natai was already up from behind her work desk when Miriam of Magdala walked in her office. Walking quickly around her desk and meeting Miriam in the middle of the office, Natai kissed her on both cheeks and invited her to sit in a sofa set in front of a low coffee table.

“It is a pleasure to see you, Miriam. Please, have a seat. How are you and David doing?”

“Fine, Nancy.” timidly said Miriam, still intimidated by the true nature of Natai. “I came to seek your counsel.”

“And I will be happy to help you as much as I can, friend. What is it about?” Even though Miriam suspected strongly that Natai, and The One, already knew what she had in mind, she answered after sitting down.

“Well, as you know, my gospel is now the official basic document of the Reform Christian Movement and I am constantly invited to churches around the World in order to give sermons and discuss Yeshua’s preaching. In that, I am too happy to help. However, I never thought that I would become so central a figure to the new faith and being designated as a leader of the church somewhat scares me. After all, I am just a simple woman and was never interested in holding a position of power. Yet, the bishops of our faith have approached me and asked me to become in essence their pope. What shall I do?”

Natai gave her a thoughtful look and replied with a question of her own.

“Do you feel that what you already do is enough to support adequately the new faith, Miriam?”

“Uh, I believe so. The basic tenets of the new faith are simple enough and we did away with most of the convoluted rites and rules of the Catholic Church.”

“And what would you do if you found out one day that a particular priest or bishop of the new faith is imposing on his followers new rites of his own making?”

“I would probably go see him and try to convince him to keep to the basic faith.”

“And why do you think that he will listen to you or obey your words, Miriam?”

Natai’s question somewhat put Miriam off.

“Uh, maybe because I knew Yeshua and his teachings better than anyone else and was close to him. The Reform Christian Movement emulates Yeshua’s teachings after all.”

Natai then grinned and pointed an index at Miriam.

“Exactly! Yet, you have no official title inside the new faith, apart from that of companion and disciple of Yeshua. You do not need any new title in order to be respected by your followers. In that, have no doubt: all those who converted to the Reform Christian Movement did it thanks to your words about Yeshua, as told in your gospel. The new faith is more like a philosophy than a religion and can function without a heavy central administration like the one the Vatican had. If anything, the simpler the faith stays, the better. The only thing it needs is a person who can mediate any dispute within the faith, the way Yeshua mediated between his disciples. As the matriarch of the movement, you do not need any formal title or position in order to help guide it.”

“Matriarch of the faith...” said softly Miriam while thinking about the accuracy of Natai’s analysis. “I could live with that title.”

“So, what will you tell those bishops, Miriam?”

“That we do not need a pope, but that I will be available to help in case of any dispute within the movement.”

“Good! Do you intend to move permanently to this century, then?”

“I suppose that I will have to, if I want to be available to my followers. My mind is on moving to Paris and live there. I love that city very much.”

“And your son David?”

Miriam hesitated before answering that one.

“I am not sure about that. He is still studying back at the Time Patrol main base and has many good friends there. I would hate to move him out and place him in a position where he could be hounded like a celebrity.”

“You could live a dual life, like many members of the Time Patrol do. You did benefit from the genetic longevity treatment given by the Global Council, didn’t you?”

“I did. Those weeks in Paris without David will feel long to me, though.”

“Which is only normal for a caring mother like you. You however now have a new and very large family to take care of. They need you as much as David does.”

Miriam shrank into her sofa at those words.

“God, I don’t know if I will be worthy of them.”

Natai bent forward and patted gently her shoulder.

“You will be, Miriam. Of that I am certain.”

Miriam, still a bit overwhelmed, then got up on her feet and smiled to Natai.

“Thank you for your counsel, Natai. I don’t know what I would do without you.”

“You would manage just fine by yourself, Miriam. Don’t sell yourself short.”

The angel then kissed Miriam on her cheeks again and hugged her warmly.

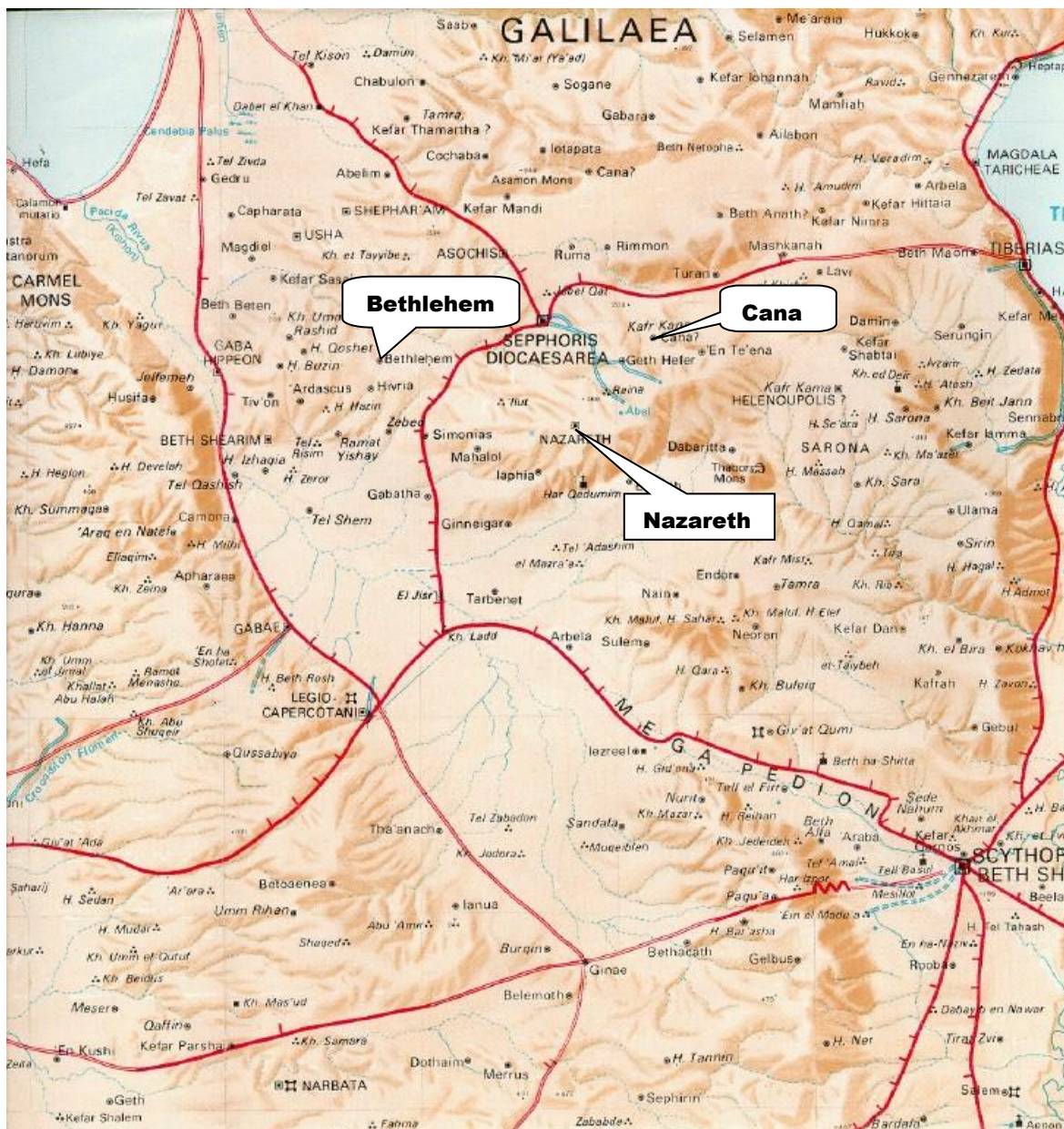
“I wish the best to you and David, Miriam. Have a good trip back to Paris.”

Miriam returned her kiss and bowed her head to Natai, then turned around and walked out of the large office. Her mind was still in turmoil when she started climbing down the main staircase of the Overseer’s palace.

“Matriarch of the faith...” whispered Miriam to herself. “If Yeshua could see me now.”

## ANCIENT ROMAN MAP OF NORTHERN ISRAEL

(Locations and landmarks known to Romans superimposed onto a modern physical map)



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