



CONFIDENTIAL

The Black Bird, I met with my friend Sam at the train station. Sam, he of Spade and Archer had been my friend for a while . So he asked me to take something off his hands - a fraud he had said - it was heavy and I had run into it before. So this is where it gets tricky. . .

1539 - Sol 3 - I was hanging around with some of Jack's associates in the Time Agency to find something very nice or so they said, "swag". The plan was that I would travel to the hold of the Knights Templar and pick up the falcon they were sending to Charles V of Spain. I would, of course, be dressed as a nun. A nun that would be overpowered and the jewel encrusted bird, would be stolen. Well, that's what the time agents thought was going to happen. I really like things that sparkle . . .

The Templars were the first obstacle, I was sure no one would remember me, I had done a little digging around this time period before so a perception filter in the wimple was a necessity . Sister Lucrezia de Medici was ready to visit some knights. I've always hated riding side-saddle but

I needed speed. Get in, convince the knights I was there to deliver the Falcon to Charles before anything else.

The goal tower was easily 100 stairs, and they weren't designed to ride but I did have my vortex manipulator, so quick and dirty time travel it was.

The halls in the tower were lit with torches casting an amber glow on the rough hewn stone. My sandals barely made a noise as I swiftly walked toward the main chamber. There, at a large banquet table sat a cadre of the knights and above them a spectacular jeweled falcon. Made of gold and with wings inset with rubies, the beak a large diamond and emeralds for eyes it was one of the most beautiful things I had ever seen. The room was awash in the scents of cinnamon and simmering meats, but I had no time to enjoy the moment, I needed to lower my eyes and approach the table as a messenger.

"My lords?" bowing slightly, I addressed the knights. "I've been sent to deliver the tribute to King Charles."

The largest of the knights with a heavy red beard looked me up and down and laughed, "A woman? What is he thinking?"

"My lord, he is thinking a woman is not who you would be expecting to carry an item of such worth. A holy sister - even less so."

He grumbled and reached for the Falcon.

"Take it, they will give you provisions when you reach the stable. Safe journey"

Clutching the bird, I hurried down the hallways, until I was out of sight. I suppose the knights would find use for the horse, as I programmed my VM and vanished. I suppose the Time Agency would be looking for me too. So I headed to Florence, 15th Century. . .

Florence . . .

Florence, the home of the Medici, and a beautiful city. The Medici aren't bad to look at either. Trying to forge an alliance with Milan and Venice, not an easy thing. A beautiful city in a very deadly time. Ah Italia .

I had jumped to 1489 AD - Not the best nor the worst time to be in Florence. Art and commerce were at an all time high but the infighting was only going to get worse . The Pazzi rebellion was brewing and so I didn't plan on staying long. I set out to find Lorenzo de Medici, Lorenzo the Magnificent.

Deciding to stick with the ruse of the holy sister, I adjusted the perception filter in my veil to alter my appearance and meekly entered the city gates as Sister Clarissa. I needed to lay eyes on the next pope, Lorenzo's son, Giovanni, who is turning 13 and is destined to become Pope Leo X. Oh, being a time traveller, archaeologist and detective is certainly the best way to meet people.

Lorenzo's home is magnificent. The statue of David with the head of Goliath in the courtyard, murals by Botticelli , the artwork and sculpture, are astounding. I am guided to a reception room where I wait for Madonna de Medici .

"Sister, have you travelled far ? I did not receive word from Rome of your arrival"

"Madonna," I looked down demurely. "There was no time and this was a mission that needed to be kept secret. " I pulled the bundle from beneath my robes and slowly unwrapped it.

Her eyes grew large, as the jeweled Falcon emerged, catching the light and casting rainbows around the room.

“What is this fantastic object? And why have you brought it here?”

“It is a gift for someone not yet born.” Well I was telling the truth, in a way. Many people wanted to possess it and very few of them were born yet. “ I need your brother Giovanni to take care of it. To keep it in Rome. Someone will pick it up in the future.”

“Surely, you mean within a few years” she was now very curious.

I could only smile, that little crooked one that said maybe and maybe not. I wanted to stay and meet Lorenzo, but time was not friendly and so I handed the object to Maddelena.

“You must include this in Giovanni’s luggage when you go to Rome. He must hide it in the crypts below. It’s owner will find it.”

“You know a great deal for a holy woman. . . “

“I follow directions from a higher power. All I ask is your trust.”

She nodded and showed me to the door. Lorenzo had just come in, hot from a hard ride from Naples, he was quite appealing but no time. I needed to be outside the city and on my way to Rome, 1913. . . Besides, I was a nun.

Rome

1913 at least in most calendars, and let me tell you setting a VM with the Gregorian Calendar can make you a bit crazy . I was in the right year, as the history books would record it , and I was in Rome. Aside from Benito

Mussolini I was skipping the politicians this trip. So I was headed where the Falcon should be - Vatican city.

Pope Pius X was on the papal throne but what I was after had been hidden a few centuries earlier if the Medici Pope did as requested. I could only hope. I needed to get into the crypts. Security was lax by 21st century standards, and I had come the long way around, a pop over to see Nero, well, see isn't really the right word, pop over and watch him while he destroys Rome, then catch up with the Medici pope and make sure he goes to Old St. Peters.

The Circus of Nero was a racing track, but because St. Peter was martyred there Constantine decided to build the Old (well of course it wasn't *then*) St. Peters on the site. I knew that the Basilica was moved in the 1500's and lucky me, I had an inside man. Giovanni de'Medici, who would one day be Pope Leo . Assuming he had followed directions I would find my bird near Saint Peter's crypt itself. There is an alfresco of the Virgin that a drunken soldier, in a bout of anger for the florins he lost in a game, in a sacrilegious gesture hurled a stone or ball at the Virgin's face. The lesion is still visible on her left cheek. Drops of blood appeared on the image and fell down onto the stone paving. There was also graffiti carved in the stone . It read "what you seek is with the Knights in the Library ". In 1521 Leo moved my package to the "secret" library in the Vatican. There, he secreted the package inside a 197-foot-long scroll containing the minutes of the trials of the Knights Templar.

I hurried through the crowd outside St. Peter turned into the Leonine Town Square, a far cry from what it would be in the 21st century , let alone the 21st, and moved to the St. Ann's street - It was dirty and empty - A few umbrellas and sidewalk coffee houses - the people were poor but happy. I mean it was still Roma - the city of life. One more turn and I was on the street leading to the library. One little problem - most of the roads were blocked. The Vatican is a kingdom to itself but still one that could be broken into. I checked my VM and looked at the sky. A new moon would be my friend and with a little help from my

sonic, I scooted past the guards. As I said, security in 1913 was a bit lax.

I knew what I was looking for so I headed deep into the dusty archives, eventually they would digitize this, but what I had stored needed to vanish. I looked quickly, The Excommunication of Martin Luther, A letter from Mary Queen of Scots, The Grimoire of Solomon, and then there it was, the trial transcript and wrapped inside a small package, heavy with a note to “the kind sister”.

I stashed it into my knapsack and headed to India - I had spotted a fort there in 2025 and I wanted to check my history. My final destination Kalavantin, India 3021

INDIA

AH, India, and back in the 15th Century. There were things to do before the 31st Century. Remember the calendar problem, it gets worse - seems Europe wanted to adjust a lot of things. It does seem that India was a great deal more advanced in the 15th century than you would have thought. Then again there is that missing queen ... and that could, well Spoilers - do read on.

It's monsoon season, and India is lush and green as I approach the Kalavantin Durg. The air is hot and moist, birds are singing and the elephant moves steadily onward. You could not miss the Durg or Fort rising out of the jungle floor, stairs that are almost vertical cut into the side of the cliff, a small outpost on the top and the larger fort, Prabalgad on the peak behind. I was fascinated with India, so much that was still unknown and all those diamonds ! There was the Hope

and The Kooonor, the diamond of death, so no one was even going to notice my sparkly little bird. I just needed to find a place for him to hide.

Teleporting to the outpost saved me time - and saved me from running into locals, well almost .

“My queen, we were concerned” a handsome dark eyed man bowed to me as I came into the main room. “They are threatening to attack the fort.”

Well now I really wasn't expecting that, I thought I had maneuvered around the various turf wars. I really hadn't planned on leading anyone into battle.

“Oh , well we can defeat them. “ I was just a bit overconfident . Hardly sounding royal, I asked, “Is there any food?” I was also a bit hungry and I could smell the spices of a rich curry .

The man looked at me, stunned and slack jawed, “My queen, they will attack by dawn, this is no time to eat !”

I looked at his terrified face and smiled, perhaps he was right. I should take a look at what we were facing . So I spun on my heel and headed to the ladder and climbed to the roof. It wasn't raining heavily but the mist was like a warm shower, but never mind , I had advantages that this century's natives simply did not, one of them being night vision goggles. My friend had not lied, there was a small complement of perhaps 50 men and we were an outpost of 10. Still they had those 1500 steps to come up and I could save us all if I tried.

My friend, Ravi and his wife Devi were huddled inside.

“My queen, what are we to do?”

Well, I supposed they believed me to be Queen Kalavantin, who disappeared after defending the fort. History didn't tell me much more and the opportunity was presenting itself, so queen I would be.

“ We are going to take them all to see the demons, “ I laughed, sounding a bit like a movie superheroine. “ We need to plant traps. Help me . . .”

I took the cooking oil and put it into pots then soaking rags in each of them. Now an adventuress is never without her lighter, so tucked inside my proper Indian garb was a small leather pouch and in that pouch a very tiny amount of a very explosive substance I borrowed from a lovely man named Ascanio Sobrero, a little thing called nitroglycerin.

I explained to Ravi that they must be very careful and once I had left the fort , they must rain fire on the forces below. The package would not be safe here but I had one more place I could hide it for a few hundred years .

Bidding adieu to my colleagues I returned outside into the monsoon and in the time it took to punch in coordinates I went to my last, best hope for concealment - **Padmanabhaswamy Temple**. It was still closed, at least parts of it in 2020. Legends say it was sealed shut in ancient times via sound waves from a secret chant that has been lost in time. Two massive protective cobras adorn the door. I laugh about the sound waves, I even think HE might have been involved in sealing the temple.

I was inside now, and had no need to open the doors, as I settled my little treasure, safely hidden amongst a cache of sparking gems, I pocketed some small gems, white sapphires , and I grabbed a piece

of onyx. Maybe I'd make a ring out of them someday. Then I quickly entered the coordinates and I headed off planet to meet with the time agents I had left about a week ago.

Back and forth in Time. .

Spiridon 3031 - A lounge on Spiridon, pre-Dalek enslavement, I had finally met up with the boys, former time agents and they were expecting loot. I had picked up some lovely gems in India, but I wasn't sharing the Falcon. One of the time agents, Forrest Clark, wanted to know about The Bird. So I relayed much of what you know except for the temple in India.

“So what happened to the Bird ?” Forrest asked as he poured me a drink.

“Lost in the Vatican, “ I calmly replied, swirling the glass but not drinking. There was something odd going on and one of the other agents seemed laser focused on the conversation.

“I don't think so, it seems it vanished from the Vatican, I've been tracing you, Malone, or should I say Song ? “

“You could call me any number of names, I use what pleases me. I am so pleased to know how much I was trusted.”

“You promised us the Maltese Falcon, you said you'd get it from Spade. . . .”

I smiled slowly. Indeed I had gotten it from Spade and if that was the one they wanted I was more than happy to oblige. But it would take a bit of finesse. I couldn't have Forrest doubting me until it was too late and I was long gone. That's the problem with Time Agents - you never know when they will show up and they are always in it for the shiny gold rocks.

"The one from Spade ? " I was all wide eyed innocence. "That's what you want ?"

Forrest looked at me and then smiled, "yeah that's what we want, and no side trips."

Well this was going to be tricky. But maybe I had an advantage, so I agreed. I had a locker ticket for Union Station in 1939. That's where Spades should be. All I had to do was give that to Forrest and when he pinged he had the object I could get a message to Sam. Sam would kill Forrest if he showed up. I rather thought that would be deserved.

"So if I give you a ticket to where Spade has put it, all you have to do is grab it and we part company, right ?"

"No you should come with me" he snapped. It wasn't as if I didn't expect this reaction.

"Well then, sweetie, you should grab a trench coat because that red and blue spandex you're wearing is a huge tip off you aren't from around there. "

He glared at me, and I smiled. I certainly did appreciate that he had a great physique but he would have looked like he stepped out of the comics in 1939. He stomped back to his ship. It would give me the few seconds I needed. One quick back and forth and I left a postcard for Spade and his pal Effie, that I was coming back but not alone.

“Hey , you ready Blondie?” Forrest now looked like a tall version of Alan Ladd.

I nodded, “Of course just setting up a portal for us, you look pretty good for a Time Agent.”

In mere moments we were at Union Station in 1939. It was late at night and in the distance police sirens wailed . The sound of my heels echoed in the empty hallways and in the distance I could hear the sound of another pair of footsteps. Thing was, there was a pattern to the way this person walked and I knew that pattern. As we approached the lockers the footsteps did too, from the other direction and in no time at all we were face to face with Sam Spade.

“Evening Melody, who’s your friend, and why are you here?”

Spade was good, he knew I was coming, so I played my part.

“Hello Spade, just was going to deliver that bundle you gave me the ticket for to my friend here. He travelled a long way. “

“So you planned on double crossing me, all the talk of no one ever getting the ticket was a lot of malarkey, right Doll.”

“Well Sam, a girl’s got to make a living” I stepped slightly away as Sam fired, dropping Forrest where he stood.

“I still don’t know if trusting you was a good idea”, Spade chuckled.

“Give me a minute and you might change your mind”

He gave me a puzzled look as I stepped behind a column and disappeared. In milli-seconds I was in India in the vault and putting

the real Falcon under my coat and then I was back in Union Station. Standing over the body of the time agent.

Spade had opened the locker , and was holding his Falcon wrapped in paper.

“Trade you ? “ I offered my paper wrapped package.

“For this ? We both know it’s a fake. The real thing never made it.”

I smiled, “Well that’s what people believe, “ I peeled a corner of the paper back and a glint of gems caught the light. “Find someone you truly trust and paint it black, then lock it up. “

His mouth opened to speak , but handed me the wrapped package from the locker.

“Take care of yourself, Doll. And thanks for the dingus. It is the stuff that dreams are made of. “

And as he walked away, I thought it might be time to visit the parents . . .we’ll see.

THE END

