

# The Tetrahedron

by Charles L. Harness

This story copyright 1994 by Charles L. Harness. Reprinted by permission of Linn Prentiss. This copy was created for Jean Hardy's personal use. All other rights are reserved. Thank you for honoring the copyright.

Published by Seattle Book Company, [www.seattlebook.com](http://www.seattlebook.com).

\* \* \*

## 1. Elizabeth

\* \* \*

Elizabeth sat tightly in her chair-- a chair ordinarily occupied only by very important people.

The man on the other side of the desk, the senior-most partner of the most prestigious law firm in Washington, DC, had called her in from her little cubbyhole. Why? What horror had she, a mere junior associate, committed that required the personal attention of Barrington Wright? She was going to be fired. She just knew it.

Cocooned in tight invisible armor, Wright peered over at her somberly: "Ms. Gerard, do you know what TM is?"

TM? She thought. What the hell was *that*? Was she *supposed* to know? She suspected not. So just tell him the truth. "No, sir. I don't think I've ever heard of it."

She watched his face covertly. Yes, the muscles around his mouth seemed to relax. She had passed some sort of test. She hadn't known what TM was, and for some reason that was good.

He said in a soft monotone, "There are only ten persons in the world with TM clearance. That number includes myself-- and now, you."

She blinked. They were not about to fire her. Quite the contrary.

"TM," said Wright, watching her, "means time machine."

She knew she heard him clearly, but it made no sense. She waited.

"A client," he said, "has invented a time machine. Theoretically, it works. Our Mr. Pellar prepared and filed a patent application on it." He paused and looked at his watch. "I had expected him to sit in with us, but he has been delayed coming in from the airport. So we'll go ahead with the preliminaries. To continue, the patent office has placed our patent application in interference with another application, earlier filed, and directed to the same invention." He paused and looked over at her.

She nodded. C. Cuthbert Pellar was evidently one of the charter members of this TM club. Pellar the Couth. Wright's clone, they called him-- but not to his face.

Wright was saying something to her. "Do you follow?"

"Yes, sir. We're junior party. To win the interference, we have to prove that our client is the first inventor."

"And what would that involve?"

"We'd need at least a prior conception, properly confirmed, with a good showing of diligence leading to actual reduction to practice."

"And what if the client can't do any of that?"

"Then somebody should tell him he can't win. At least save him the cost of useless litigation."

"That's good advice, ordinarily. But here it's a bit more complicated. Our client is the Department of Defense."

"And Defense won't let you give up?"

"Exactly. So what do we do now, Ms. Gerard?"

"Find some really close prior art, then move to dissolve the interference, as unpatentable to either party. That way, nobody gets a patent, but DOD will be free to use the invention."

She knew very well they didn't have any "really close prior art," and that somehow she would be involved in remedying the omission. It was beginning to come together.

The intercom buzzed. "Yes?" said Wright, without turning.

"Mr. Pellar, sir," said a disembodied female voice.

"Send him in."

C. Cuthbert Pellar smiled ingratiatingly at the man who could make him partner, frowned remotely at Elizabeth, and took the indicated chair.

"Nothing?" said Wright.

"Nothing, sir. We've searched the entire field of US and foreign patents, and all the scientific literature. We've spent three months and three million dollars looking for a reference to prove the TM is old in the art. We found nothing." He looked over at Elizabeth. His expression said plainly, "And she can't help."

"As I explained earlier," said the older man, "the DOD has examined the *curricula vitae* of every employee of the firm, including the associates, not only for security reasons, but also looking for special skills." He held up a printout, adjusted his spectacles, and studied the sheet. "Colonel Inman has called my attention to certain interesting facets in Ms. Gerard's background. She got her master's degree in assembling and translating ancient manuscripts. She has stack privileges in major international libraries. She is reasonably fluent in several foreign languages."

"Sir," said Pellar, "I don't understand."

Yeah, thought Elizabeth. Me either.

"Simple," said Wright. "We've exhausted the printed art; now we go farther back-- into the manuscripts."

"But--" began Pellar.

"The client has requested it, Mr. Pellar," said Wright firmly. "Please describe the machine to Ms. Gerard, so that she can go to work."

"Oh, yes, sir. Of course, sir. We can start with the interference count. I quote." he half-closed his eyes and began to rattle away in a rhythmic sing-song. "Apparatus for shifting the space-time axis consisting of (a) silver tubes containing heavy water and positioned to form a tetrahedral framework; (b) a source of EMF adapted to cause an electrical current to flow through said framework; (c) a cubical crystal of uraninite; and (d) a mammal in cerebral electrical contact with said EMF source and said uraninite."

Son-of-a-gun, thought Elizabeth. He's memorized it. And meanwhile, she was thinking... a *tetrahedron*? Had she seen something... somewhere?

Pellar leered at her. "Well? Did you get it?"

He's mad at me already, she thought. The first team spent three million and crapped out. So now the problem is handed over to one lone female junior associate. And the worst is yet to come, Cuthbert, because I do indeed remember something. "Just a minute, please." She let an image form in her mind. Four equilateral triangles made of silver tubes... Where had she seen this? Something in manuscript. She remembered the strange writing. She ran down a mental list of the major medieval mathematicians. Geber... Kashi... Copernicus. No, none of them. How about the minors? Biagio de Ravenna... Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli... two of the finest mathematicians of Renaissance Italy, and both had taught the boy Leonardo da Vinci.

*Of course.*

*That's* where she had seen the sketch. In a copy of a page from one of Leonardo's many notebooks. Which one? There were dozens, and they were scattered in libraries all over the world. Yes, she had it now. The *quaderno* so recently bought by the Library of Congress. "Gentlemen," she said, "your time machine may indeed have been described in the unprinted literature."

The two men stared at her in puzzled silence.

Pellar was the first to move. He looked over at Wright. It was an expressive look, and it said, "You see, Mr. Wright, this is what you get when you bring in a woman."

Elizabeth blushed, and fought the urge to clench her fists. *This is the twenty-first century. Why do we still have to put up with this?*

"Ms. Gerard," said Wright gently, "would you excuse us for a moment?"

"Of course." She rose from her chair. They had decided she was useless, and they were going to take her off the case before she was ever really on it.

*Like hell they were.*

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

## 2. The Fax

\* \* \*

She turned when she reached the door. "Before I go, I'd like to mention that Leonardo da Vinci described an apparatus very similar to that of the interference count in Notebook 23, Codex IV, pages forty and forty-one. It's in the data banks at the Library of Congress, and you can call up a fax in seconds, if you're interested." She started out into the reception room.

"Ms. Gerard," Wright called quickly. "Just a minute, please."

"Oh?"

Wright nodded toward his credenza. "Use my fax."

She walked back in, punched in the call, and the printer lasered the reply in less than three minutes. The two men hovered over the machine. No room for Elizabeth. No matter. She had caught a glimpse: a sketch of a tetrahedron, plus lines of tiny elegant letters.

"Interesting," admitted Wright. "Very. What does the writing say?" He handed it over to Pellar.

The associate shook his head. "It's all gobbledygook. Illegible. Worthless!"

"He wrote right to left," explained Elizabeth. "You read it with a mirror. I assume there's one in Mr. Wright's washroom?"

"Sir?"

"Go ahead."

"It's--" began Elizabeth.

Pellar pushed her aside, but after a moment he wailed from the little room: "I *still* can't read it."

"It's in Italian," said Elizabeth. She walked up behind him. "It says, 'A tetrahedron is required, of a size such that a man can stand within. The four triangles are formed of silver tubes filled with water distilled from forty tuns by the alchemist. The traveler stands in the center of the base triangle. He attaches the headband. He holds the black cube, and he attunes his mind to the... (hmm-- strange word here... ah...) *back-time*. He sees-- hmm... *scacchiera*... yes, chessboard. By means of this assembly I was able to finish the Cenacolo for the friars in Milan!'"

"Chay-nak-olo?" said Pellar. "What's *that*?"

"The Last Supper," explained Elizabeth. "He painted it on a monastery wall in Milan in the late 1400s."

"He used the apparatus to complete a painting?" asked Wright. "How? Why?"

"I don't know," said Elizabeth. "He doesn't say."

"But, sir," Pellar said, "Five hundred years ago how could anybody know anything about space-time and quantum physics? And especially this fellow Leonardo? He was just a painter."

"Leonardo had an ultra-genius IQ," Elizabeth answered stoutly. "Some psychologists place it at 250, some even at 300, beyond Einstein. He had brainpower adequate to create your TM. From the description that he left, it appears that he did just that."

"Appears?" sneered Pellar.

"I think we can nail it down, one way or the other," declared Elizabeth.

Wright swiveled his chair to face her. "How?"

"Go back. Ask him."

"Him?" said Pellar blankly. "Who?"

"Leonardo," explained Wright dryly. "Take his deposition."

Pellar was now totally bewildered. "I thought he was dead!"

"She means," Wright explained patiently, "use the TM. Go back to Leonardo's time. Find him. Take his deposition. Ask him to explain his sketch. Is that it, Ms. Gerard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Fascinating," mused Wright. "It might give us the exact art we need to dissolve the interference. When did Leonardo make this sketch, Ms. Gerard? Any way to tell?"

"The date can be fixed only roughly. It was almost certainly after he finished *The Last Supper*, in Milan, in 1498, but probably before he started the *Mona Lisa* in Florence, which we think was 1503."

"So, where would we find Leonardo in 1503?"

"From March to June, 1503, he was in Florence. He had a studio in the house of an affluent friend."

Wright regarded her with interest. "What would the locals think about the machine? And its crew, for that matter. Could you get in and out again safely?"

"There's some risk, but it could be minimized. Our Italian associates could provide a list of alberghi-- inns-- complete with piazzas, that have been in existence in Florence since 1500. We would come in on the piazza, just before dawn. It would be dark for a few more minutes. We dismantle the TM, pack it away, and present ourselves, properly dressed, to the innkeeper."

"So we check in," demanded Pellar. "Then what?"

"We locate Leonardo, find a local lawyer to swear him in, and proceed with the deposition."

Wright studied the ceiling. "It just might work." His eyes dropped back to her. "Ms. Gerard, just how did you become interested in medieval manuscripts?"

"Well, sir, to sort of sum it up and cut some corners, at American U. Two of my Professors were international authorities in the Renaissance and its incunabula. It seemed the natural thing to do."

Wright nodded. "Yes. Undoubtedly a wise decision. Still, quite a coincidence that it should offer such possibilities in a patent interference." He leaned forward, and now his tone and manner were all business. "I'd like you to prepare a memorandum stating the essentials we'll need to consider for this deposition. I'll go over it with Mr. Pellar and Colonel Inman, our contact at Defense. Further, would you please prepare the necessary deposition notices."

"Yes, sir." As she closed the door behind her, she heard:

"Mr. Pellar, if you could stay a moment..." The syllables were harsh, clipped.

As she walked away she visualized the probable tableau now going on behind her. Wright wouldn't even raise his voice, but Pellar would perspire and wonder if he could still make partner. Finally, Wright would suggest to Pellar that he prepare a suitable memo to Colonel Inman of the DOD, explaining why he, Pellar, had wasted three million dollars before getting around to the Leonardo proposal. It made absolutely no difference that Pellar was essentially blameless; it was simply the way things worked.

Anyhow, she was too exhilarated by her new assignment to feel very sorry for Pellar. All that effort in the Renaissance was finally paying off. She knew medieval Florence backwards and forwards. She knew how to dress, what to wear. She could walk across the *Piazza del Signoria* in 1500 and be taken for an average housewife on her way to the *panetteria*. And the way things were going, it seemed quite likely that something like that was going to happen.

She floated all the way back to her minuscule office. "Office" by courtesy, that is. It lay between the copier room and the men's washroom, but it had been remodeled for her, because there was nowhere else to put her. The male associates had to walk behind her desk to get to the washroom door.

There were two pictures on her desk. One was a good miniature of the *Mona Lisa*, the other a photo of the house where she had been born and raised, back in Naples, Texas. She required the first because in her estimation of the lady *Lisa* was the most beautiful woman in history. She kept the second as a substitute for the real thing. She dreamed of going home again, but she knew she probably never would. She couldn't face her mother's highly vocal accusation: "Twenty-eight and still not married!"

*Meanwhile, stop dreaming and get out the form book! Fix up a notice for Mr. Wright to sign and send to... who was opposing lead counsel? Larvey? Yes, Ralph Larvey, of Getterfield, White. Right down the street. Welcome to 1503, counselor!*

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

### 3. Like a Smothered Mate

\* \* \*

At the appointed time Elizabeth and Pellar drove out to the army complex near Manassas, Virginia, to meet Colonel Inman and receive instruction in operating the TM.

The colonel was a tall, thin, gray-haired man. Elizabeth knew very little about him, just that he was married, with children grown and gone away. He had several graduate degrees, including physics and law, and now he ran Special Assets.

She also knew that the colonel's consuming interest just at present was to resist buying the opposing Rosso patent application, which had been offered to the Army for one hundred million dollars.

The officer led them down a gravel path to a Quonset hut. He unlocked the door, flipped a light switch, and they walked in. A seven-foot plywood tetrahedron stood in the center of the chamber.

"I thought the TM was just a framework of tubing," Elizabeth said.

"The real thing is," explained Inman. "What you see here is just a trainer, to familiarize you with the controls. We want to minimize use of the real thing. You've heard of the 'space-break' theory?"

Elizabeth nodded. One of the top DOD physicists had a theory the TM could break the time-space barrier only a limited number of times. After that, the TM wouldn't work.

"Where is the real thing?" asked Pellar.

Elizabeth had already figured that out. Over against the far wall stood a nondescript leather valise. By her calculations, if the tubes of the framework were unscrewed into quarters and stored with battery pack and computer console, it all ought to fit into that valise.

"It's in a safe place," answered Inman noncommittally. He held open the door of the simulator and turned on a small fluorescent. They joined him inside.

"There's room for three travelers and these two cases," he said. "One case can hold the dismantled tetrahedron, including the console and battery pack. The other is intended for materials you'll need for your deposition. Take a look." He asked Elizabeth, "Is one case big enough for your needs?"

"Hmm. The IBM translator and printer will fit nicely, but there may be a space problem with our power pack. Do you think we could use the TM pack?"

"What power will you need?" asked Inman.

"One hundred watts, for probably two to three hours."

"The TM pack can easily provide that. Now then, let's go on. I'm sure you both know the theory of the invention. It's based on the University of Arizona process of cold fusion. In that process, heavy water fuses to helium-four and makes heat. Simple, eh? Actually, not so simple. More heavy water was disappearing than could be accounted for in recovered helium-four. Asa Green, our inventor, discovered the loss was going into positive He-4-- antimatter-- which was not detectable because it was being consumed by driving the synthesis apparatus into the past. In the interests of efficiency and control, Green developed the tetrahedral frame of silver pipes. The heavy water circulates in each fractional pipe section. For control of gross movement he uses a crystal of black uranium oxide, linked to the console and framework by an electrical conductor. For fine tuning he uses a headband"-- he indicated a circlet of thin gold braid-- "also linked to the console. This way the 'driver' maintains continuing contact with the synthesis process within the silver tubes."

"Just exactly what does this 'continuing contact' feel like?" asked Elizabeth.

"It's a visual thing," said Inman, "experienced by images created in the occipital lobe. Sort of like getting conked on the head and seeing stars, except there's no pain, and instead of stars you see shifting geometric patterns. Do you play chess?"

She had taken first prize in the DC Open last year. She said cautiously, "I know the moves."

"So do I!" Pellar chimed in.

"Very good. Look at it this way: time moves in quanta-- seen mentally as frames of a chessboard. Each moment differs from the next by changes in position of the 'chess pieces' on the frames. As you stand in the TM and approach your destination, it may seem that the pieces are clumping around a central point, rather like pawns and pieces sheltering a king at chess. It's up to you to select the final point in time. Quite like cross hairs in the center of a bull's-eye, or a knight making a smothered mate. If you're a fair chess player you'll have no trouble running the TM. So let's start."

"Me first," said Pellar.

Inman smiled faintly as he handed the lawyer the small black cube of uraninite, and then a gold circlet. Both were attached to the console by insulated wires. "Ready?"

"Ready."

There was a sharp metallic click as Inman closed the triangular door.

Pellar jerked. "Hey!" He dropped the black crystal. "You didn't say it was going to be like *this!*"

Inman grinned. "Try again, Mr. Pellar. This time, close your eyes and imagine you're a chess master, playing blindfold."

Pellar tried a few more times, achieved a debatable competence, then passed the headband and crystal over to Elizabeth.

She caught the hang of it in seconds. She asked Inman, "When we return, do we use the same technique?"

"No. Coming back is much simpler. You don't need the headband or the crystal. You just slam the tetrahedral 'door,' and you zoom right back. You'll come to a jarring halt at your exact starting time and place." He looked at them both and smiled. "I think we're ready for Florence."

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

#### 4. Florence

\* \* \*

Elizabeth, Pellar, and the colonel were drinking cappuccinos under the awning of an outdoor cafe on the Piazza del *Signoria*.

Pellar kept glancing at his wristwatch. "Larvey's late."

Inman shrugged. "Do you know him?"

"Only by reputation."

"Same here. Apparently he's a deposition wizard. I've studied all his past depositions that I can find. He's clever, sneaky, dangerous, slippery, treacherous."

"Yeah," said Pellar sincerely. "A credit to the bar."

Inman looked across the table at Elizabeth. His mouth twitched.

She smiled faintly back at him. She knew that Inman had insisted she take the TM training along with Pellar and that she be a member of the time travel group. Pellar had resisted bitterly, and finally they had compromised. Pellar could drive the machine. She would be the language link with Leonardo and the other Florentines.

"This may be our boy now, coming across the square," said Pellar. "Yes, it's Larvey." He stood up and

waved.

Elizabeth observed the approaching lawyer carefully. He was about forty, hair thinning but no gray. A wide smile. Too wide, she decided.

Pellar made the introductions. He explained and excused Elizabeth's presence: "She speaks medieval Italian. Sort of a tour guide."

Let it stand, she thought.

They got down to business. Next stop, the costumer's.

\* \* \*

"Attire must be simple, yet elegant," Elizabeth explained. "For you chaps, tunics and tights, with citizen's caps and soft leather boots. Tunics may be silk brocade, stitched with gold thread, with fur trim on cuffs and collars. Matching cloaks recommended. I shall wear gray silk, covering a plurality of petticoats, with a single strand of pearls. All these things are available locally."

"For the costume ball at the embassy?" the shop manager asked politely.

"Something like that," said Elizabeth. She watched the two men preen in the fitting room. Pellar had a good figure. His legs modeled beautifully in the close-fitting tights-- tights rather like a woman's panty hose, except of heavier material. The tunic design was truly exquisite: red roses woven into a light blue background, and embroidered with gold and silver threads and paste diamonds and pearls. The outfit was completed with Gucci shoes of soft black leather, and for the tunic, a big gold buckle. As they watched, the tailor draped a knee-length cloak over the lawyer and turned him into the mirror.

Impressive, thought Elizabeth.

Larvey was similarly dressed. He caught the spirit, and pirouetted like a ballet dancer.

\* \* \*

The once-piazza of the Cigno Nero, now a fifty-car parking lot, was duly cleared and closed for the night, and in the cover of darkness the TM crew set up the big canvas tent and brought in the two cases. Under Elizabeth's critical eye Pellar opened the case containing the knocked-down TM and began reassembly. Colonel Inman looked on silently. Twenty minutes and a few bumbles and curses later, it was ready. And now a last-minute flashlight inspection of her two companions. Clothing, hats, cloaks, all OK. Next, the travel case. She unbuckled the leather straps, raised the lid, and pushed aside shaving kits and extra underwear. The IBM translator/camcorder was in place. Everything ready? she asked herself. Not necessarily. She stood up and faced the men. "I think we should make sure the IBM is still in working order."

"I already tested it," Pellar said stiffly.

"Here?"

"No, back in DC"

"It's had several plane rides and taxi rides since then."

"If it bothers you," mumbled Pellar, "go ahead. Test it again."

Silently, she removed the unit from the case, then opened the TM storage locker, got out the power pack, plugged it into the side of the IBM, and flipped the switch. A green LED flashed in front of the translator box. "IBM," she said, "are you operational? *Per italiano?*"

A well-modulated baritone rose from the box. "Yes. I'm ready. *Posso chiederle chi è?*"

"I don't believe we've met. *Io sono la signorina Elizabeth Gerard.*"

"Ah, *Signorina Gerard, sono molto lieto di fare la sua conoscenza.*"

"*Grazie.* Do you feel competent to take a patent deposition in Italian?"

"*Si.*"

"Knock it off, Elizabeth," growled Pellar. "The machine is working. Let's go!"

"Yes," she said. "See you later, Mr. IBM."

"*Arrivederci, signorina.*"

She pulled the plug and repacked everything. "Gentlemen," she told the two lawyers, "you may get inside." She moved in with them, handed the flashlight out to Inman, picked up the unlit lantern from the TM console, and looked around for the tinder box with its flint and steel. She found it, flicked away for a moment, and got plenty of sparks, none of which ignited the exposed wick. She paused, frustrated.

"Hey, no problem," said Larvey. He pulled out a cigarette lighter, flicked it once, and touched the flame to the wick. She took the lighter from him and stuck it into her waist-purse. "By golly, Ralph," she said thoughtfully, "if you do that in 1500 Florence, they will probably lay a commemorative plaque for you."

"A plaque?" He smiled uncertainly.

"A plaque. It would read, 'Here we burned the English sorcerer, Raphael of Larvey.'"

"Oh. Sorry."

She closed the triangular door with a satisfying click. "OK, Cuthbert, take it away."

The lawyer pulled the circlet over his forehead, then plugged it into the console. He began adjusting dials.

In the semi-dark she stole covert glances at Pellar and Larvey. Were they as scared as she? Quite likely, she thought. She took a long deep breath. Out beyond the silver tubes she thought she could make out the vague form of the colonel. He kept fading in and out.

At that instant Inman, the tent, everything outside the tetrahedron-- shimmered and vanished.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

## 5. Where Is 1503?

\* \* \*

She watched Pellar as he studied the dials with apparent competence. The days were whizzing by like strobe lights. The retinal lag soon merged everything into a gray twilight.

She leaned forward and watched the three chronometer dials: year... day... hour. 1575... 1570... 1565... 1560. So far so good, she thought. But-- is he *slowing*? No, Cuthbert, don't slow *here*. He's almost stopping! Water's seeping in! She spoke loudly in his ear. "Cuthbert, keep moving! *Move!*"

There was a jar. "Cuthbert," she wailed, "you've hit the Great Flood of 1558. *Keep moving!* If you stop here, we'll drown!" She scurried to the rear of the tetrahedron and plucked the battery pack out of the water.

It took a moment for the message to sink in; then the senior associate accelerated so fast that it made Elizabeth's head snap.

"Too fast, Cuthbert," she cried. "You'll overshoot!"

"Shut up!" he shouted. "*I'm driving!*" But finally he eased to a stop.

They looked out through the silver rods. It was early morning. The piazza was empty. Save for one... man?... lying face down a few yards away.

"Ssh..." She held her finger to her lips in a call for silence. She listened. No sounds anywhere. She sniffed the air. It was sour, sickening.

She looked out toward the body again and her throat tightened. She forced a squeaky question. "Cuthbert, are you sure we're in the right time frame?"

He muttered, "Yeah, I *guess* so."

"What year? Check your chronometer."

"Check it yourself if you're so interested."

Idiot, she thought. She replaced the power pack in its frame and was about to start forward to the chronometer panel when she noted motion out in the piazza.



It was a rat, and it was headed for them.

Meanwhile Pellar, perhaps influenced by a tremolo in her voice, had returned to the instruments.

"Thirteen forty-eight," he called back. "Are you happy now?"

Her calm astonished her. "Cuthbert, get us out of here."

The lawyer responded blithely. "Maybe we should get out and look around."

"Dammit, Cuthbert, will you listen? Thirteen forty-eight is the year of the Black Death. Half the city died. That's one of the dead ones over there. The plague is spread by fleas on rats. Like the one coming now. *There!*" She pointed.

"Cuthbert," urged Larvey, "let's get the hell out!"

Pellar stared open-mouthed at the oncoming rodent.

"Cuthbert?" said Larvey weakly.

Elizabeth glided quietly over to Pellar, eased the control band from his skull, and pulled it down over her head. He didn't protest. She doubted that he realized she had taken over. She adjusted the indicators quickly. The chessboard patterns began to come in. Slowly at first. A day. Another day. Then faster and faster. Flash flash flicker flicker. A week, a month. Faster. A year.

She visualized the cross-hairs lining up in her occipital lobe. The right year. 1503. She checked the chronometer panel. The right month. April. And then the right day and the right hour-- minutes before daybreak.

They were there. She unplugged the cable but left the gold circlet on her head.

Pellar flashed a look of utter hatred at her.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

## 6. Il Cigno Nero

\* \* \*

She held the lantern high and looked through the silver framework out into darkened piazza.

No movement anywhere. No sounds. That would change very soon. Dawn would be her in a very few minutes. The watch would open the city gates. The streets would begin to fill with people and carts. She looked at the men. "All clear, boys. Let's move!" She held the light while the two men unscrewed the tubing and loaded it into the TM case. "OK, now let's rouse *il locandiere*." She rattled the handle of the great iron-studded portal.

"Hey, it's locked!" complained Pellar. "Now what?"

"We knock." She picked up the bronze hammer, dangling from its chain, found the approximate center of the knocker plate, and gave it a hefty bang. The door rattled and sang with the stroke, and the piazza reverberated. She banged again. And again.

In the middle of the last assault the peep door beside the plate opened, and two bleary eyes peered out. A hidden mouth rasped: "*Non c'e stanza... non c'e stanza... va... va... va!*" No room... go away!

She reached into her pocket bourse and picked out a freshly minted gold florin. With her other hand she held up the lantern. The coin flashed.

"We shall require the entire first floor," she declared in firm Italian. In the local custom, she knew, that meant the second floor.

"All taken..." gurgled the innkeeper. But his eyes never left the coin.

"*Quanti clienti?*" she asked. How many guests?

"*Otto*." Eight.

"How much for each, the night?"

"Forty soldi."

"You mistake yourself, innkeeper. I know it to be ten soldi, rules of the Innkeepers Guild. No matter. Return their money. Double it. Nay, triple it. Roust them out. For your trouble take the florin."

She heard the creak of sliding bars and chains being unlatched. The door opened a crack. "*Signorina*, come around here, *per favore*."

She took a step to the right and held the coin up by thumb and forefinger.

A fat bare arm flashed out. The coin vanished. The door clanged shut. After a moment the door grated fully open. The innkeeper, still in the process of trying to fasten his tunic belt, looked out into the courtyard. "*Dov'è la vostra carrozza?*" Where is your carriage?

"On its way back to Pisa. Now, will we come in, or not?"

"Oh, *sì sì*. Come in, *signorina*, *signori*. Wife, get their bags."

Elizabeth asked, "How do you call yourself?"

"Antonio-- Tony-- *signorina*, at your service. And this is my wife, Anna." They both bowed laboriously.

"And who, *signorina*," asked the innkeeper, "honors my humble *albergo*?"

"A commission from His Majesty, Henry, King of England," she said calmly. "I shall explain certain things to you at the proper time."

"Of course, *signorina*, of course." Host and hostess ran greedy eyes over the newcomers, noting the rich clothing and especially the string of pearls around the woman's throat.

Wife pulled husband aside and held a hurried discussion with him. He turned back to Elizabeth with a face radiant with woe. "I had forgotten various extra expenses."

"How much?" she said dryly.

"Two additional florins. Three altogether."

She handed over the coins. "Now, Tony, let this be the end of it. It would grieve me to have to report you to the *Signoria*."

He listened uneasily. "No, *signorina*, no need for that. Here--" He handed back one coin. "You see, because of my love for your King Henry, I am willing to lose money."

Like hell, she thought.

She looked around. They had entered the main room, a combined kitchen with fireplace, dining room, and recreation room. There were several tables with benches. Cuts of meat and fowl, together with garlands of garlics, leeks, and onions, hung from hooks on the walls. Overhead, chickens roosted in the eaves. She took a deep breath. These were the sights and smells of barnyard and kitchen on Grandfather Gherardini's farm back in Texas. She was home.

She noted that her two companions were absorbing all this in growing horror. She suppressed a grin.

On the far side of the room a black-bearded man sat at a table, staring at them. Correction. Staring at *her*. Oh well, have to expect it. Strangers in town. Very strange strangers. But he was a bit odd, himself. For there was no plate or knife in front of him. Instead, a chess board.

She turned back to Tony. "We would like the rooms as soon as possible."

"Of course! Of course!" He wiped his hands on his apron and smiled effusively. "My wife will prepare your chambers. There may be a slight delay. She will have to, ah, *negotiate* with each of our patrons. While we wait, would the *signorina* and her noble companions care for wine?"

"We decline for the moment. We will talk later of wine and other matters."

"The gentlemen do not speak our language?" asked the innkeeper.

"No, they speak only English. I interpret and translate. I am called Elisabetta, and I am daughter of the English ambassador in Napoli. This gentleman is Lord Cut'berto, of Georgetown; the other gentleman is Lord Raphael, of Arlington."

"Ah... I see." He looked them over shrewdly, then back to her. "You are here to see-- *him*."

"*Him*?" She knew exactly what he meant.

"Leonardo, *signorina*. Great men, rich men, they come to him. *Maestro*, they beg, paint me, paint my wife, my daughter, my favorite greyhound. But no. He paints only as he pleases. Meaning no disrespect, milady, but I think if you even try to find him, he will vanish."

"But *you* could find him?"

He shrugged. "Perhaps."

They were interrupted by an outburst of howls, shrieks, and imprecations from the rooms overhead.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

## 7. A View of the River

\* \* \*

The innkeeper smiled apologetically but did not look up. "My good wife is negotiating the refunds. Your rooms will be ready very soon."

"What's all that racket?" demanded Pellar. "What's going on?"

Elizabeth pointed. A loud, disconsolate procession was stumbling down the broad oaken stairs: six men, two women, their nakedness covered in varied degrees. Their complaints died away when they beheld the three regal visitors.

"Former occupants," explained Elizabeth quietly. "Checking out."

Eyes downcast, the ex-guests filed respectfully past the newcomers. Two or three turned off toward the kitchen; the rest shuffled out the front door and disappeared.

Elizabeth faced Tony. "You have done well. Here's your florin back. For this I want you to send up various things to eat and drink. We would like warm red wine, and various meats and fruits, together with butter, cheese, and fresh-baked bread. You can manage that?"

"Of course, noble lady."

Half an hour later, when they were properly installed upstairs, they reassembled in Elizabeth's room. She handed the waiting innkeeper a little package. "Five ducats for you, Tony, if you place this in the hands of Leonardo within the hour."

"Count it done, noble *signorina*." He turned to go.

"Wait-- a second matter."

"Oh?"

"Involving litigation. We require a notary, a member in good standing of the Guild of Judges and Notaries."

"A notary... Hm. There are several good ones, milady. What will be expected of him?"

"It is a matter of legal deposition. I will be putting questions to a witness, and Lord Raphael will cross-examine. Everything must be done in accordance with certain rules."

"I see," said Antonio. "Let me think a moment. Yes, the best for this sort of thing is probably *Signor Rucellai*."

"Rucellai? How long has he been a notary?"

"Over twenty years, milady."

"He comes in here to dine occasionally?"

"Often, milady."

"He appreciates a good table?"

"He does, he does."

Very good. A profile was beginning to emerge. She sensed a complaisant functionary who would render the necessary services without asking unnecessary questions and who could be relied upon to spend most of his time at the side table. "His Christian name?"

"Biagio, if you please."

"He's our man, Tony. Please send for his excellency, *Messer Biagio Rucellai*. You may tell him that our great King Henry appreciates prompt service."

After he left, she noted that the two men were nibbling at things on the side table.

The morning was warming up. She walked over to the little window and looked out. Il Cigno Nero was on a slight rise, and she had a nearly panoramic view of the city. There was the great cathedral, with Brunelleschi's famous dome. Beyond that, Giotto's campanile tower. And then the Arno and its beautiful bridges. Downriver somewhere was the estate of Francesco Giocondo, whose wife Lisa would soon enter immortality at the hands of the great Leonardo. Leonardo had sworn to paint no more women, but he had seen La Gioconda, and he had changed his mind.

Pellar walked up behind her. "You really ought to keep us better informed, Elizabeth. What was in the package? Where's it going?"

"Oh, sorry, Cuthbert. Our landlord claims Leonardo sees no one. I figured we needed something special to attract his attention. So I took Ralph's lighter and wrapped it in a photocopy of page forty-one of the TM fascicle, and held it all together with a rubber band. A gift to Leonardo."

"I don't get it," said Larvey.

"It's easy, Ralph. Your lighter tells him we're from his future, and page forty-one tells him how we got here. Even the rubber band says something. He'll add it up, and he'll come. Also, Ralph, I should mention I've sent for a local officer of the court. Meanwhile, we'd better get the IBM set up. Cuthbert, would you please put it under this little table. You can drape a cloth over the table to hide it, but make sure the lens has a good view. Ralph, would you close the door."

Larvey had hardly shut the door when there was a knock on the other side. He opened it a crack. It was the innkeeper.

Elizabeth came over to the door and held a brief discussion with Antonio.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

## 8. A Member of the Guild

\* \* \*

"What'd he say?" demanded Larvey.

"The notary's downstairs. Are we ready?" She examined the center table critically. The cloth seemed to hide the IBM translator adequately. She turned back to Antonio. "Will you please bring him up?"

A moment later the innkeeper returned with a short, fat, well-dressed gentleman. "*Signorina, signore,*" said Tony with great composure, "my privilege to introduce a leading notary of our fair city, the most learned, brilliant, and wise *Messer Biagio Rucellai.*"

"We thank you for your kind assistance, Antonio," said Elizabeth. She added with calm hauteur: "You may leave us now."

The innkeeper bowed once more and closed the door behind him.

Elizabeth turned to the newcomer and inspected the distinguished *Messer Rucellai* in silence. It had evidently been a considerable labor for him to mount the stairs, and he was still puffing. He wore the characteristic four-cornered hat of a working Renaissance lawyer, a deliberately ambiguous forked beard, and finally, and most importantly, the notary's robe, grave and somber with its broad black stripes on dark red background. A leather pouch hung from a strap over one shoulder.

She smiled graciously. "We are honored, *Messer Rucellai.* I am Lady Elisabetta of Napoli, daughter of the English ambassador there. I am interpreter for these two gentlemen, who speak only English. This gentleman is Lord Cut'berto of Georgetown, and the other gentleman is Lord Raphael of Arlington."

The notary bowed deeply. "Milady... milords."

Elizabeth continued. "We are here on a commission to see a certain citizen of Florence."

"Oh, Of course. You wish to commission a painting? A statue?"

Elizabeth interrupted. "No, nothing like that."

"No? Ah, I see. You wish to *sue* a Florentine. Yes?"

"Dammit, Elizabeth," complained Larvey. "What's going on? I'm entitled to know."

She turned back to him. "Of course you are, Ralph. Just turn on the IBM. The remote is there on the table. You can sit over there by the window and get a good readout on the CRT. You too, Cuthbert."

And back to the notary. "Excuse the interruption, *Messer* Rucellai. The gentlemen are fatigued and wish to rest."

"Of course," he said dubiously.

"But you and I will continue. Sue, you ask? No, not that, either. We merely require a deposition-- a sworn statement from one of your citizens. The statement must be made in the presence of a member of the Guild of Judges and Notaries, which is to say, yourself. The final document will require your seal."

"I am never without my seal." He patted the leather pouch.

"Excellent, *messer*. These are bothersome little details, but I'm sure that an official of your standing is familiar with all of them."

He bowed. "Naturally." He looked about the room. "But where is your deponent?"

"A messenger has been sent for him. We expect him at any moment." She paused. "And now, *Messer* Rucellai, we come to the matter of your fee."

"Fee? Fee? Oh, milady, you cut me to the quick. Members of the Guild serve all, rich or poor, without charge or fee." He drew closer and whirled his cloak so that the side pocket gaped at her. "Yet, noble *signorina*, we acknowledge that sometimes, completely unsolicited and totally unbeknownst to us, a grateful client may press a modest retainer upon us... such as may be within his means... or hers. A ducat for the day, as it were." He watched her, at first with mild anticipation, and then with growing fascination as with slow hypnotic gestures she loosed the drawstring of her waist-bourse. He sensed the thud of a heavy coin in his cloak pocked. He stifled a gasp. That was no mere ducat! That was-- *gold!* A florin! Was it possible?

He gathered all his courage and continued hoarsely: "Two, if the matter be complex."

Clink!

*Madre di Dio!*

He closed his eyes. "And for the guarantee of satisfaction in all details, major and minor, for assurance of complete harmony in all matters, expected or unexpected-- "

Clink!

*Messer* Rucellai began to perspire; he decided to quit while he was ahead. He sighed and closed up his fee pocket. "If milady will excuse the question, we come now to the crux of the matter. Who is your deponent?"

"Leonardo da Vinci."

He thought about that. "I must warn you, milady, Leonardo is a very independent man. If he refuses to come, I will refund-- "

"No need for that, *Messer* Rucellai," said Elizabeth. "In any case, I am certain that he will come."

There was a heavy knock at the door.

"*Entri!*" called Elizabeth.

The door opened. A tall bearded man in a rose-colored cloak stood in the doorway. Gray hair fell loosely to his shoulders. He took off his cap and looked about the room with cool blue eyes. His shoulders were broad; his hands surprisingly large. Elizabeth was ready to believe the stories that he could straighten horseshoes with his bare hands. Yet his features were fine, patrician, almost feminine.

His eyes came back to her.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

For a full moment, with shameless candor, the trained anatomist examined her. He seemed to take mental measurements of throat, breasts, waist. Then back to the face, estimating proportions of cheek, brow, nose, lips.

He spoke in a low resonant voice. "You are very beautiful. I will paint you." He held up Larvey's lighter. "In time, how far away?"

*Messer Rucellai* watched all this with open mouth.

Elizabeth found a small squeaky voice. "*Messer* Leonardo, I am not beautiful, and I cannot imagine why you would want to paint me. Aside from that, and before I answer your second question, please indulge me a moment. I am called Elisabetta. And here is Raphael, and there Cut'berto." They all traded bows. "And you may know our honorable notary, *Messer* Biagio Rucellai?"

Artist and lawyer exchanged nods.

She continued. "*Messer* Rucellai has not yet had breakfast. Our host has provided certain nutriments, all on the side table, with fine Tuscan breakfast wine. We will excuse you, *Messer* Rucellai, while you attend to your breakfast."

The notary got the message. Actually, he had had bread and sausage within the hour, but he didn't like to oppose this golden client. He hurried to the table and fell to.

Elizabeth returned her attention to the artist. "*Messer* Leonardo, we are from the year 2003. We live in the New World, discovered by Cristoforo Colon in 1492. In our day the New World has grown very populous, and inventors have made great discoveries in the sciences. In my country we have a system of laws that grants an inventor a seventeen-year monopoly on his invention. Our government issues a document-- a patent-- to the inventor certifying to his monopoly. Sometimes two inventors seek patents on the same invention. The government must then consider all facts, and issue the patent only to the first inventor."

"But suppose neither is the first inventor?"

"In that case nobody gets a patent." He catches on fast, she thought.

"And that's why you are here?" He held up the photocopy of page forty-one. "You think *I* invented the machine?"

"Did you?"

"Yes."

She took a deep breath. "Maestro, will you testify to that? We have a device here that will record everything you say, translate it into English, and will finally make a printout."

"Printout?"

"Like the pages in the books of your *Signor* Manutius."

"I see." He was thoughtful. "Your civilization seems quite advanced. All right. I will do it."

"Thank you. First, the notary will have to swear you." She called over to the banquet bench. "*Messer* Rucellai?"

The lawyer turned and acknowledged her signal with a sonorous belch.

Pellar shuddered.

"*Messer* Rucellai," she said, "will you please administer the oath to *Messer* Leonardo?"

The notary wiped his mouth on his sleeve, then, aided with a mouthful of mutton, he mumbled a polysyllabic litany.

"Thank you, *Messer* Rucellai," said Elizabeth. "In a little while we will need you again, to swear our recorder."

Leonardo looked puzzled. "You will swear a machine to tell the truth?"

"Something like that. The device is not only a recorder, it also serves as an interpreter. It translates my questions and your answers into English, so that Cut'berto and Raphael may follow the course of the deposition. Under our Code an interpreter has to be sworn just as any other witness."

The artist shook his head in wonder.

She called over to the notary. "*Per favore, Messer Rucellai.*"

"*Monna?*"

"Please swear our interpreter."

The notary looked about the room, then back to Elizabeth.

"He's under the table," explained Elizabeth. "You can't see him for the cloth."

"Oh. That's the way it's done in England? How does he call himself?"

"*Signor Ibi Emme.*"

The notary called out: "*Signor Ibi Emme!*"

From under the table: "*Presente!*"

"*Signor Ibi Emme, do you solemnly swear to translate accurately and completely, in full idiom, from one tongue to another, as required, adding nothing and omitting nothing, so help you God?*"

"I do."

"*Grazie.*"

"*Prego,*" said *Signor IBM.*

*Messer Rucellai* exchanged nods with Elizabeth, then returned to his table.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

## 10. The Deposition

\* \* \*

"I will speak in English for the benefit of attending counsel," Elizabeth told Leonardo, "and the IBM machine will immediately translate into vocal and printed Italian. *Messer Larvey* will follow the same procedure. Your responses will be in Italian, and they will be similarly translated into English. Is that satisfactory?"

The artist nodded. "Of course."

She began. "Please state your full name and your residence."

"Leonardo da Vinci. I live in the house of Andrea Martelli, in the Street of Brickmakers, Florence."

"What is your occupation?"

"Painter, sculptor, civil and military engineer, architect, inventor."

"*Messer Leonardo*, I hand you a sheet of paper purporting to show a geometric figure. Can you identify this?"

"Yes. It's a copy of a page from one of my notebooks."

"Showing-- what?"

"A sketch of a tetrahedral machine for going back in time."

"Did you actually make such a machine?"

"As you see from the sketch, it was shaped as a tetrahedron, forming a framework of silver tubes. These tubes were four ells on a side."

"Empty tubes?"

"No. They were filled with special water."

"Water from where?"

"From Dr. Marcos, a local alchemist. He had started with one hundred thousand jars of well water, and over a period of ten years, he boiled it and boiled it, until only five jars were left."

"Objection," intoned *Larvey*. "Hearsay."

Elizabeth said: "Let the record show that the specification of the party Rosso described such residues as a source of heavy water. Let us continue. *Messer Leonardo*, what, if anything, was associated with the framework?"

"A collection of alternating plates of copper and zinc. The plates were half an ell square and were separated by thick felt paper soaked in vinegar. The collection was about two ells high. I attached a silver wire to the topmost plate, which was copper, and another silver wire to the bottommost plate, which was zinc."

"What, if anything, did you do with this collection of metal plates?"

"I attached one of the silver wires to the upper apex of the tetrahedron and the other to another apex."

"Go on."

"I clasped the black cube in one hand."

"Describe the cube, please."

"Half a finger on a side. Heavy for its size. Strange texture, somewhat reminiscent of pitch. It was mined at Jachymov, in Bohemia, and was presented to Duke Ludovico as a mineral rarity."

"Let the record show that the witness has described uraninite, or pitchblende. Now then, *Messer Leonardo*, how did you come to invent your time machine? What was your purpose?"

The artist thought for a long time. "It goes back to the cenacolo."

"Meaning The Last Supper?"

"The Cenacolo, yes. The Duke Ludovico asked me to paint a cenacolo for the Dominicans at their monastery in Milan, and I began the preliminaries in 1495."

"When did you finish?"

"In ninety-eight."

"There were delays?"

"Actually, except for two faces, the work was completed within the first year."

"Which two faces?"

"Our Lord... and Judas. I could not visualize the divinity of the one, nor the evil of the other. So I delayed."

"But eventually you visualized the two?"

"I saw them. All of them: Jesus and the twelve."

She frowned. What was he saying?

He continued. "That's why I made the time-tetrahedron. So I could go back."

"To when? And where?"

"To the Upper Room of the Last Supper. Nearly 1,500 years ago. I saw them all. Then I returned to Milan, and I finished the faces."

"So you found..." But the words faded in midsentence. Hold on here! she thought. Other than the final trip to France, where he died, there was no record that he had ever left Italy. And yet... and yet... she knew he was telling the truth. In that year of the Crucifixion, he had been in Jerusalem. *How?* she thought. How had he done this impossible thing? There was only one way. He had set up his machine in Milan, and from there he moved practically instantaneously in both time and space!

The man understood things about the TM beyond their wildest imaginings.

Her companions were watching her in silence. Pellar's expression showed that he was merely curious as to why she had stopped. Larvey's mouth was curled in a sardonic grin. *He knows*, she thought. He saw it almost as soon as I did. You're good, Ralph.

She began quietly. "Is it your testimony, Maestro, that you saw Jesus and the twelve disciples at the, shall we say, *original* Last Supper, in Jerusalem, in the year 33 AD?"

"Yes. Except the year was 29 AD. The early Christian fathers miscalculated the year of His birth."

"You were actually *there*?"

"Yes."

And now Pellar was waking up. He shot a warning glance at her. It said, he's lying! Back off!

Interesting. Larvey's face held the exact opposite message: Right on, Gerard! Go on! You're already in over your head. Screw it up!

Maybe Cuthbert's right, she thought. Maybe I should quit while I'm ahead. But then she caught Larvey's wordless sneer. Wordless? No, it was full of words: You're a weak, timid, incompetent *female*.

*OK, Ralphie, that did it!*



Back to the artist. "*Messer* Leonardo, how far is Jerusalem from Milan?"  
He gave her a congratulatory smile. "As the crow flies, about 650 leagues."  
Larvey folded his arms over his chest and watched with narrowing eyes.  
She said with calm fatalism, "How did you get your machine to Jerusalem?"

"Willpower, *Monna*."

*Willpower?* With that answer, had her witness thrown away his hard-earned claim to credibility?  
Can't quit now, she thought. "Willpower, *messer?*"

"It is no great thing, milady. With a little practice, any left-handed person of fair intelligence can do it."  
"Clarify, please."

"Yes. My studies of the human brain indicate that each of the two hemispheres has its own set of special functions. The right hemisphere controls the left side of the body. It also controls our sense of pattern, geometries, visual arrangements, spatial positions. I'm sure all this is well known to your physicians and savants who work with the mind. is it not so?"

"Much recent work has been done," agreed Elizabeth. "Go on."

"Well, first, I set up the machine."

"Where?"

"In my studio in the Sforza palace, in Milan."

"What next?"

"I connected the wires, held the black crystal tightly, and then I concentrated on moving in both time and space. I had already decided that the journey toward Jerusalem of 29 AD should be made with movement of two years and three months per league. Do you want the itinerary?"

"If you please."

"Well, past Florence, down the ridge of the Appenines, past Ravenna, over the Adriatic, through the Straits of Otranto. Then over Macedonia and the land of the Ottomans. Next, the Sea of Crete. The year is now about 765, and I'm halfway there. Athens-- now a part of the Byzantine Empire-- is next. Then into the eastern Mediterranean, or Mare Internum, as the Romans called it. By the time I passed Rhodes, I was in the era of the Caesars. Suddenly it's the first century and I'm over Jerusalem. I find the Garden of Gethsemane. I leave the tetrahedron there. It was the time of Passover, and everything is a busy mess. The cooks and servants ignore me. I take an apron. I walk up those stairs." He paused, as though thinking back on what he had seen next, then he took a deep breath. "The whole thing was over within the hour."

Elizabeth said: "So you found what you needed? Jesus? And Judas?"

"Yes, I found them, but I did not understand what I had found. Judas? I looked at that face, and I looked for evil. I do not know. It was the face of horror, of despair."

"And Jesus?" Elizabeth asked carefully.

The artist looked up at the ceiling. "It is not easy to speak of this. After Judas left the table, I saw the face of Jesus that I needed for the cenacolo: a sublime sadness. It was that face that I tried to paint. I failed. That face defied painting."

"*Messer*, when you returned from Jerusalem to Milan, what did you do with the machine?"

"I destroyed it. My intrusion was a terrible thing. Never again."

"Thank you, Maestro. That completes my direct. Cross, Mr. Larvey?"

"Yes, thank you, Ms. Gerard." He faced the artist.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

## 11. Larvey on Cross

\* \* \*

"Just a couple of short questions, *Messer*." He folded his arms as he waited for the translation. "Is it your testimony that you journeyed some 1,500 years through time and some 650 leagues over land and sea, all within a fragile metal framework?"

The artist pondered that. "Rather incredible, isn't it? And yet, surely it is more probable than your claim to have journeyed from a time that does not exist."

"I... well then, this Last Supper. Did they see you?"

"They paid no attention to me. I wore an apron. I carried in a plate of bread."

"And a slice of lemon?"

"Lemon?"

"In copies of the painting that I have seen, there's a lemon slice on the table. Do you realize that lemons weren't introduced into the Mediterranean area until the twelfth or thirteenth century?"

"No. I didn't know that."

"And you put everyone on one side of the table. It wasn't really that way, was it? They were spaced all around the table?"

"In the Upper Room, they were spaced around on both sides of the table. But in the painting I put them all on the far side so the monks could see the faces."

"And in that alleged Upper Room, did they actually sit on a long bench?"

"No. They sat on straw mats, on the floor."

"Your painting lied?"

"No. In the painting it was easier to see them, sitting on benches."

"Did Judas actually put his bag of silver on the table?"

"No. That was symbolic."

"So there were many differences in what you saw, or thought you saw, and what you painted?"

"Yes."

Larvey sneered. "You're a real bastard, aren't you?"

"Objection," said Elizabeth indignantly. "Counsel is insulting the witness."

Leonardo shrugged. "Oh, I am not offended, *Monna*. True, I was born out of wedlock, but I honor both my parents. I am especially proud of my mother, Caterina. She was a servant girl in an albergo where my father stopped one night. *That* developed into an ardent love affair, but my grandfather da Vinci forbade marriage. Thus, in 1452, I was born illegitimate."

"*Messer*," said Larvey, "you have admitted your illegitimacy, and you have admitted falsehoods in your paintings. I put it to you that you are not merely a bastard-- you are a *deceptive* bastard."

"Objection," declared Elizabeth. "Counsel is again insulting the witness. If you keep this up, Mr. Larvey, we shall terminate this deposition on the grounds of grossly improper conduct by the party Rosso."

"I can *prove* deception, Ms. Gerard."

"Then do it."

"I will. *Messer*, you have filled a number of notebooks with sketches and written comments?"

"Yes."

"But your writing not is easily read?"

"I can read it."

"But the ordinary layman needs a mirror? Because you write deceptively-- from right to left?"

"I go right to left because I am left-handed. That's the easy way for me."

"Let it pass," Larvey said huffily. "You draw from life, *Messer*?"

"Preferably."

"But you like to draw demons and dragons?"

"On occasion."

"Have you ever seen a demon or a dragon?"

"No."

"They're simply images in your head-- illusions?"

"Yes."

"Like your illusions of building a time-space machine and visiting Jerusalem?"

"Objection."

"Withdraw the question, and that completes my cross."

"I have no redirect," said Elizabeth. "It appears that we are finished, *Messer*."

The Florentine stood up. "So now you will be going back with your friends?"

"Yes, tomorrow."

"I take weeks... to paint a woman's face."

"I know."

He sighed. "Well, it must be. You say we are finished here? I can leave?"

"Let me check." She looked over at Larvey. "I think the printout is finished. Do you want him to read and sign?"

"No. I want him out of here."

"*Messer*," she said, "you have the right to read and sign the record. Do you want to do that?"

"No, I'd just as soon not, but I'd like to see what it looks like."

"Of course. Please come over here. Just let me get one more entry into the record." She spoke quietly.

"The parties and the witness waive reading and signature." She waited a moment, then pulled the fan-fold pack from the printer basket. "This is the record. See, two columns, Italian and English. All our questions, all your answers."

"My congratulations," he said softly.

They watched in silence as he closed the door quietly behind him.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

## 12. A Motion to Suppress

\* \* \*

Elizabeth called over to the credenza. "*Messer* Rucellai, can you join us here for a moment?"

He walked over, holding a mutton chop in one hand and a half-capon in the other.

"We now need a certificate from you," she explained, "to the effect that you duly administered the oath to *Messer* before the commencement of testimony."

"Easily provided, *Monna*."

"You mean you actually have with you such a form?"

"Yes, indeed." He placed chop and drumstick on the table top, wiped his fingers on the cloth, and pulled a sheaf of papers from the folds of his cloak. "let's see. Eviction, divorce, complaint for money owed, deed for the sale of land, ah, here we are, certificate for a deposition."

She read it carefully. "Very good, *messer*. It conforms nicely. Will you please fill in *Messer* Leonardo's name, then sign and date it, and affix your seal? Should I send down for pen and ink?"

"No need, *Monna*." From another cavity in his clothing he pulled a little ivory box, and from this a small quill and stoppered vial of black liquid. He filled in the blanks with a flourish, waved the paper in the air to dry the ink, then pulled his seal from its leather pouch and pressed it into the corner of the form.

"Anything further, *Monna*?"

"No, that's all, I think."

He looked down at the half-eaten fowl and chop.

"Please," she said.

He picked them up, then studied the table and its draping cloth. "Could I say goodbye to *Messer* Ibi Emme?"

"Of course."

The notary called out to the invisible translator. "*Arrivederci, messer Ibi Emme.*"

The reply floated up from under the table. "*Arrivederci, Messer Commendatore Notario. Sono molto lieto di fare la sua conoscenza. Tante cose alla famiglia!*"

"*Piacere! Ciao!*" The Florentine walked toward the door.

"What the hell was that all about?" asked Pellar.

"They were just saying goodbye," said Elizabeth.

The door closed behind Rucellai, and the three were alone.

"We're still on the record?" asked Larvey.

She looked down at the green light on the IBM. "Yes."

He said calmly, "I move to suppress the entire deposition."

Elizabeth and Pellar exchanged glances. The partner-aspirant shrugged. That nonchalant lift of the shoulders translated into, "Elizabeth, you got us into this. You get us out."

She said, "Mr. Larvey, will you please state the basis of your motion?"

"I certainly shall. You are familiar with 17 CFR 1.674(b)(3)?"

"I'm familiar with the sense of the section. A person who is an employee or agent of a party is disqualified as an officer for conducting the deposition. So?"

"An interpreter is considered an officer of the court. The IBM interpreter is your property and under your control. Hence it is your employee and agent. Hence disqualified." He smiled at her.

"Ownership does not make the machine either our employee or our agent. In any case, the IBM is not a 'person' as called for under the relevant CFR section."

"He has third level AI," countered Larvey. "That's enough to give him a personality, and a biased personality, at that."

She considered her opponent thoughtfully. Here, she told herself, is a bitter, vengeful man. He knows his only recourse now is to try to discredit the record. "Mr. Larvey, when did you discover this disqualification in the IBM interpreter?"

"In the beginning."

She said, "Mr. IBM, will you please quote 37 CFR 1.685(c) in pertinent part for Mr. Larvey?"

"Of course. 'An error or irregularity in the manner in which testimony is handled by the officer is waived unless a motion to suppress the deposition is filed as soon as the error or irregularity is discovered.'"

Elizabeth smiled agreeably. "Mr. Larvey, if you ever had any right to suppress, you waived it by not making your motion at the beginning of the deposition." She paused. There was a silence.

"Surrebuttal, Mr. Larvey?"

He gave her a long strange look. For once she was glad for Pellar's presence in the room. She sensed that Ralph Larvey very much wanted to beat her brains out. Larvey turned his face to the window and did not reply.

She faced the IBM and spoke in a low monotone. "The Party Rosso offers no surrebuttal. These proceedings are terminated." She added, "And I think we might as well disconnect the machine. We'll need all that's left in the power pack for the return trip." She leaned down and pressed the switch. The little green LED went off.

What now?

She walked over to the credenza. The table was nearly stripped. *Messer* Rucellai had been thorough. Where had he put it all? She wasn't hungry, but in discharge of her maternal duties she would reorder for the two men. Not that they deserved anything.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

### 13. The Bridge

\* \* \*

She joined Pellar for supper in the adjacent sitting room. It was a chilly evening, and she added a couple of split oak logs to the fire before she sat down at the table.

Pellar was expansive. "Well, Elizabeth, I did it. I pulled it off. I won. I'll make partner."

She took a deep breath. *Get control, Elizabeth!* "Where's Ralph?"

"Sulking in his room, probably plotting something wicked." He looked around the table. "Where are the forks?"

"Forks won't be invented for another fifty years. Use your fingers."

"Damn primitives," he muttered. He tore a leg off his roasts capon and started nibbling at it. "Good stuff, Elizabeth."

"Cuthbert," she said evenly, "if we are able to prevent Rosso from getting his patent, it will be largely because of *my* efforts. *I* found the relevant notebook pages. *I* located Leonardo. *I* persuaded him to testify, and *I* conducted the deposition."

Pellar replaced the half-eaten bird on his plate, wiped his fingers on the table cloth, took a sip of wine, and studied his recalcitrant companion with judicious male eyes. "Of *course*, Elizabeth, of *course*. You were a big help to me. So relax, and eat your supper."

Like a good girl, she thought. "Cuthbert," she said, "Because of my work, you'll soon be a partner, with a big corner office where you can see the river, and with a staff of juniors and secretaries. If anybody deserves to make partner, it should be me."

He stared at her, astonished. "But, Elizabeth," he sputtered, "you're a *woman!*"

She got to her feet unsteadily. "I think I'll go for a walk."

\* \* \*

Brooding, she wandered the deserted twilight vias, letting her thoughts and feet go where they would. The narrow streets, most of them barely alleys, arched overhead with timbered walkways that made a fretwork pattern against the darkening skies.

She passed the old stone bottega where the youthful Leonardo had been apprenticed to the great Verrocchio. Art historians claimed the High Renaissance-- the *terza maniera*-- had been born in that shed. She sighed and went on.

You might as well accept it, she told herself. You will hang your tail between your legs, and you will trail Pellar back to your office next to the men's washroom, and there you will finally fade away.

She stopped and looked around. It was getting dark. Was she lost? No, wait, there's the approach to a bridge. Must be the Ponte Vecchio, "Old Bridge." Very old, in fact. The foundation arches had been laid by the Romans.

Downstream (she knew), bordering both sides of the Arno, began the considerable estates of Francesco del Giocondo, the husband of Mona Lisa. Oh, *Signora*, how I wanted to meet you!

She squinted down river, but it was too dark to see anything, except maybe a half dozen lanterns just off shore. Fishermen, at night? A bit strange. But she didn't really care anymore.

She returned to the arches, pulled off her slippers, and tossed them over the stone rail. Then she clambered over the railing, screamed once, and dropped.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

### 14. Francesco

\* \* \*

She flailed and thrashed, now under, now breaking the tumultuous surface. Her struggles were irrelevant. Even if she now changed her mind, and wanted to live, she knew it was not possible.

She awoke in fits and starts.

Her throat burned. Her gut ached.

She felt a flicker of heat on her cheeks. She tried to sit up. She groaned and sank back into the cushions of the great chair.

She was wrapped in blankets, and she was facing an oversized fireplace, afroth with flame.

Behind her, someone spoke. It was a male voice, authoritative, yet gentle. She caught the words: "See if she is waking."

The face of a child-- a girl of some ten or twelve years-- peered into hers, and broke into a happy smile. "Yes, Father, she wakes!"

Elizabeth winced as her diaphragm muscles cramped. Under the blankets, she put her hand on her bare belly. *I'm nude*. She tried to turn around to face the man.

"No, *Monna*," he said quickly. "Don't move. We will adjust the chair."

Human forms materialized from nowhere and lifted and angled the chair so that she faced away from the fireplace. A man stepped forward and bowed. "*Monna*, I am called Francesco."

She beheld a tall man in his early forties, with dark hair and bushy black eyebrows. She imagined great strength in the arms and shoulders. Warm intelligent eyes studied her face.

He nodded toward a short skinny man with bushy white hair and a black cloak that seemed to swallow him. "This is Doctor Marcos, who brought you back to life."

The doctor bowed modestly. (Marcos? Leonardo's alchemist? Oh, doc, she thought, how could you?) But she pulled herself together and inclined her head in silence. And now she understood why her abdomen hurt. Marcos had used the current system of artificial respiration: they had draped her over a horse, and they had trotted the poor animal in a circle until all the water in her lungs had been jolted out.

"My daughter Dianara," continued the master.

The child curtsied. Elizabeth nodded gravely.

"And my overseer, Lucas, and his wife Lucrezia. Becco, who helps in the stables, and Maria, the finest cook in Tuscany."

She nodded as appropriate, all the while thinking, Francesco... Dianara...? Could it be? She whispered hoarsely, "Francesco del Giocondo?"

"The same, *Monna*."

"Your lady," she blurted, "*Monna* Lisa? She is perhaps away?"

He frowned, puzzled. "*Monna*, I am a widower. There is no *Monna* Lisa in my house."

Elizabeth blushed under her pallor. God, what a *faux pas*! He hasn't meet her yet. "Oh, I'm sorry..."

Her confusion embarrassed him. "You are not from these parts?"

"No. I am called Elisabetta. I am from Napoli."

"Wha-- ? Oh, *Napoli*!" said Giocondo. "Of course! You're the interpreter with the Englishmen, at the Cigno Nero."

It was an invitation to talk but she didn't feel like talking. "I must be getting back," she said.

"*Monna* Elisabetta," said Giocondo doubtfully, "it is long after curfew. You must stay here tonight."

He was right. "Can a message be sent to the inn?"

"That we can do. A mounted courier with sword and lighted pistol will escort the good doctor to his home and then go on to the inn. What message shall we take?"

"Just say I'm safe and will return in the morning."

"It will be done. And while I make the arrangements, the doctor would like you to take a little wine. It's the red wine of Cyprus, thick, and mulled with pistachios and cloves. After that we will take you upstairs to your room." He handed her a silver cup, half-full. It was warm to the touch. She took a sip. It was delicious.

She was only vaguely aware when someone took the cup from her hand, lifted her up, tucked the blanket decently about her throat, and started upstairs with her. *Messer* Francesco, she thought dreamily, you have a wonderful male smell.

She was lowered gently into something soft. Somebody-- the cook-- was pulling a nightdress over her, and tucking coverlets around her chin. She heard a little girl's awed whisper, "Oh, Maria, she is so beautiful. Do you think she will stay?"

The responding voice sounded dubious. "All will be as God wills. Come, child."

She slept.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

## 15. Monna Lisa

\* \* \*

A noise-- *noises*, rather-- awakened her.

She listened to the sounds. They were coming from downstairs. These were *kitchen* noises. Pots and pans. Cutlery.

She remembered now that she had eaten nothing at all yesterday. With or without an invitation, she was going down into that kitchen.

Where had they put her clothes? She looked over at the draped alcove. She surmised that it was actually a dressing room, hopefully with commode and wash basin. She walked barefoot over to the little cubicle and pulled the drapes aside. In the dim light she could see that her clothes had been washed, dried, touched here and there with a warm iron, and hung with great care on wooden rods.

No shoes, but there was a pair of brand new slippers, evidently measured exactly to size.

She opened the commode lid. The bowl contained a scented liquid. Violets? And there, on the table, was a roll of fluffy linen paper.

She sighed. *Ah, that Francesco! Is he why Monna Lisa smiled?*

And it's really very curious. Where *is* Lisa? He hasn't met her yet. But all the chronologies put her in this house-- *now*.

She pulled her nightgown off and dressed quickly. She brought a measure of order to her hair with the comb and brush she found on the washstand. She examined herself in the dressing-room mirror. Plain but tidy. She stepped out into the room and looked around. Her headband lay on a night stand by the bed. She picked it up and pulled it on over her forehead.

That's when it hit her. She gasped once, then grabbed her abdomen in a struggle to breathe.

She saw it all, complete: an integrated panorama. She will marry this good man. She will bed him. His hands, his mouth, will be all over her, touching, caressing, stroking, kissing.... She will glow, radiant as the full Moon. Truly, she will be beautiful. Truly, Leonardo will paint her. Truly there will be a marvelous portrait, and it will eventually hang in the Louvre. For who is *Monna Lisa*? *I am*.

*Not so fast, Elizabeth!*

There was just one little problem: According to well-authenticated history, *Monna Lisa* would accompany her husband on a trip to southern Italy some forty months from now, and there she would die of a fever.

Well, so be it. At least those forty months would be spent with people who loved her. And that's not all. Tradition even gave her a seasonable pregnancy and a little son.

So, *Monna Lisa-to-be*-- or *Mona*, as the English say-- let's get the show on the road. Still breathing hard, she pinched both cheeks delicately, just enough to give a spot of pink. Then she opened the door and walked out into the hall.

She smelled it instantly. Coffee! In Italy so soon? She started slowly down the stairs.

There was a scurry down below. Evidently someone had been set to watch for her.

And there, very suddenly, was Francesco Giocondo at the bottom of the stairs, holding out his arms in wide and cheerful greeting. "*Monna Elisabetta! Buon giorno!* How did you sleep?"

She smiled at him. "I slept wonderfully well, *Messer* Francesco."

"Then let us sit down a moment and have something to drink, with bread and honey... or whatever would please you."

She took a seat on the bench across the table from him. Maria sidled up beside her with plate, knife, and spoon. "What to drink, madonna?" she asked softly. "Milk? Wine? Water?"

Elizabeth looked over at the dark liquid in Francesco's cup. What did they call it? Not coffee. That came from the french word *café*, a century later. "What drinks milord?" she asked.

"It is called mocha. The Venetians bring it in as beans from Mocha, the Arabian port. Maria roasts and grinds the beans, and makes an infusion with boiling water. It is a new thing. It helps one to wake up in the morning."

"Really? May I have a taste?"

"Of course." He passed the cup over. "Careful. It's hot, and you may find it somewhat bitter."

She took a sip. "Ah!" She passed the cup back to Francesco, then looked up at the hovering. "I liked that. Now, could you pour me some, perhaps in a smaller cup, with this much milk?"

"Right away, madonna!" She was soon back.

Elizabeth found the honey jar and stirred in a spoonful.

Francesco watched all this with great interest. "A taste, milady?"

She handed it over. He sipped noisily. "Oh... good, *good!* Milk and honey much improve the taste!"

Elizabeth slapped butter and grape jelly on her bread and began the best breakfast she had had since Texas. And while she had him here, she might as well clear up a few points. "*Messer* Francesco, about last night. Would you mind if I asked some questions?"

"Go ahead!" he leaned forward, almost eagerly.

Well, I'll be darned, she thought. *He's* the one who should be asking the questions, like, *signorina*, how did you come to be in the river? But he's not going to pry. She took a long pull at the mocha, then exhaled slowly. "*Messer* Francesco, you were on the river rather late yesterday."

"Yes, madonna, fishing after sunset is unusual. It is hard to see anything, even with good lanterns. But last night was special."

"Special?"

He pulled a piece of folded paper from his pocket and handed it over to her.

She read:

*Fisherman! Tonight the House of Venus stands in the sign of Pisces.*

"Your horoscope?"

He nodded. "Doctor Marcos."

She handed it back. Things were clearing up just a little. "Please continue. Pisces? Something about fish?"

"*Perhaps* fish. And there was still the question of Venus. She rose from the waters, you'll recall. But the only water around here is the Arno. So, *Monna Elisabetta*, mostly because of my very great curiosity, I was there on the river bank, watching our *pescatori*. Sure enough, they hauled you out."

She smiled. "I'm very glad you went fishing, *Messer* Francesco."

"So am I." He paused. "We must do something about names. I am simply Francesco."

"And my friends call me Lisa." *From now on, that is!*

"Lisa," he murmured. He rolled the word in his mouth, as though he were sampling a new wine. "Yes, Lisa. I like that very much. *Monna Lisa*."

It was official.

He said slowly, "I suppose you must return to your friends this morning. I will order a carriage soon. Meanwhile, do we have time to show you my house?"

"Plenty of time. And certainly, I would like to see Dianara again."



\* \* \*

\* \* \*

## 16. The Flowers

\* \* \*

This is the central bedchamber," he explained. He pointed to the gigantic four-poster in the center of the room. "Dianara was born in that bed. It is not used at present. The nursery was through that door."

He opened one of the double doors in the east wall, and they stepped out into an expansive loggia that ran half the length of the house. He pointed to a brilliant patch of sunlight on a nearby hill. She gasped; it was gorgeous.

He looked at her and smiled. "Dawn comes first through that gap in the hills, and covers the slope, there, where you see the flowers. Dianara loves to walk there. She brings home dozens of bouquets, but for every flower she cuts, ten more spring up."

They heard throat-clearing sounds in the chamber behind them. They turned to see Dianara with a basket full of irises. The girl curtsied deeply. "They are for you, milady."

"Ah!" Elizabeth radiated pleasure. As she held out her hands for the basket, she noted that the child's feet were wet. Obviously she had gone into the fields barefoot so as not to risk her shoes and stockings. "They are beautiful!" On sudden impulse she bent over and kissed the girl on the mouth.

Dianara grabbed her around the neck, noisily returned the kiss, then turned and ran out of the room, singing, "*Rimarrà, rimarrà!*" She will stay, she will stay!

Elizabeth looked down at the imprint of small bare feet in the deep pile of the rug, then quizzically up at Francesco. His face seemed a blend of awe and pleasure.

She did not know what to say. He wants me, she thought. His daughter wants me. I want them. Why isn't something happening?

The man led her down the hall. They stopped by a glass-fronted bookcase. She pointed to one of the books. "May I?"

He pulled it out for her. "It's a book about the game of chess, by the Spaniard, Luis de Lucena. Very instructive, if you like chess that is."

She opened the flyleaf. On the left a copper plate engraving of a somber bearded man stared up at her truculently. That face, she thought... looks familiar. Where have I seen him? Ah, yes. The man at the chess table at the Cigno Nero! The staring man. The great Lucena, champion of Spain, France, and Italy, playing the locals for a few ducats? Singing for his supper, as it were?

She looked further. On the right, the author and title: Luis Ramirez de Lucena/Repetición des Amores e Arte de Axedres/Lambert Palmart, *Impresiar/Valencia/1497*. Discourse on Love, and Art of Chess. It was actually two books in one binding. The first, the Discourse, would eventually attain fame as the most virulent anti-feminist document of all Spanish literature. Already she detested Luis Lucena.

She replaced the volume, then stood and faced her host squarely. "Francesco, you have a great need for a woman in your home, a wife for you, a mother for your daughter, someone to manage the house and the servants. But you hold back, because it would be your third marriage, and you think you might be condemning the woman to death. You, a mortal, cannot be blamed for what is ordained. You should make the most of what remains." She almost glared at him. *Dammit*, she thought, *propose to me!*

He took an immense breath, then grasped her hands firmly. "Listen to me, Monna Lisa. You know I have buried two wives... two very good women, whom I loved dearly. And you must know I am bad luck. Yet I ask you, despite all this, will you marry me?"

She knew what her answer was going to be; yet she too had to be honest-- up to a point. "Before I answer, let me explain something. On occasion, my ways may seem a bit strange to you. I am from

another country, you know."

"Understood."

"Secondly, there can be no dowry."

He shook his head. "It is not required."

Fine, she thought. Forget the dowry. But with her next statement she knew she was dealing from strength. "Leonardo wants to paint me."

He looked at her in amazement. "Lisa *cara*, you are a very beautiful woman. But I am a merchant, and Leonardo paints only noblewomen."

"I am not beautiful, Francesco. I must correct you there. Still, he wants to paint me. He asked yesterday morning, but I had to decline, because our commission was scheduled to return today. But now I shall stay, and Leonardo will paint my portrait."

"God is bountiful," he muttered. "The wife of Giocondo, painted by the great Leonardo! I must begin now, assembling the fee."

"No fee, my friend."

"How can you say that? He does not paint for nothing."

"He will paint me for nothing, but he will keep the portrait."

"Ah. I see. Well, most remarkable." He laughed a short half-believing chuckle. "Leonardo resumes painting, and he paints La Gioconda! So now, Monna Lisa, will you marry me?"

Still holding hands with him, she bowed slightly. "Milord, you do me great honor to ask me to be your wife. I accept with pleasure."

He embraced her warmly, then held her by the shoulders. "We must send word to your legation to delay departure, so that they can attend the wedding."

She thought, Cuthbert Pellar attend the wedding of a third-chair associate? Fat chance! "They cannot stay, dear Francesco. Their high liege lords require their immediate return."

"Oh? Too bad. Well, then, we must at least tell them the good news. I'll send now for the carriage."

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

## 17. Lucena

\* \* \*

The *carrozza* pulled into the piazza of the Cigno Nero and stopped near the big iron doors.

"Please wait here," she told him. "I have to explain things and say goodbye."

"Of course. Take all the time you need."

Pellar was waiting for her inside. "Dammit, Elizabeth, we've been worried sick about you!"

She was immediately suspicious. "Cuthbert, what the hell is going on?"

He managed a feeble grin. "First of all, Elizabeth, I'd like you to meet *Señor* Lucena."

Lucena? She looked around. A gloomy bearded man was shouldering his way through the front circle of idlers. yes, it was he-- the great chess master and anti-feminist. A few meters behind him she noted the two TM cases and the bag of florins.

She further noted that Ralph Larvey was standing off to one side, arms folded across his chest. His face was wreathed in a smile of cold triumph.

A heavy gray lump of concrete began to solidify in her stomach.

The Spaniard bowed deeply and gracefully. "*Señorita, sono lieto di conoscerla.*"

She ignored him. She whirled on Pellar. "He suckered you into a game of chess, didn't he?"

The lawyer said weakly. "He was just a local *potser*, Elizabeth, but he got lucky."

"*Lucky?* Godalmighty, Cuthbert! Do you know who he is?"

"What do you mean?"

"This is Luis de Lucena, currently chess champion of Europe!"

"Jesus, Elizabeth, how was I to know? But actually, there's no need to get in an uproar. We can get everything back. All we have to do is, you spend an hour with him upstairs."

She stared at his averted face for a full minute. "Start at the beginning."

"Well, as I said, he suggested we play."

She said, "First, though, Ralph and Lucena had a little discussion, probably using an interpreter. Right?"

"Well, yeah. How did you know?"

So this is Ralph's revenge, she thought. "Then Ralph came over and said here was a local *potser*, and you could beat him easy. Right?"

Pellar nodded dumbly.

"And you beat him, that first game."

"I did. And it was easy."

"Then he suggested a little wager."

"Yeah. I won again."

"Then you started doubling, and redoubling, and you began losing."

"Yeah."

"And you lost everything."

He shrugged.

What was left to say? When Larvey came over, she murmured, "My compliments, Ralph. That was very neatly done."

He smiled. "It's nice to be appreciated."

Pellar looked at both of them, puzzled. "Honestly, Elizabeth, I tried everything. I think Tony even sent for Leonardo, but-- "

"Elisabetta."

She whirled. "*Leonardo!*" So he *had* come; but how could he help?

The artist took her by the elbow and moved her out of earshot of Lucena. He spoke quickly. "First, a question. How were you able to guide your machine to the day and hour?"

"I received special training in pattern shifting; it's much like chess play."

"Are you fairly good at chess?"

"I'm very good, Leonardo."

"Then you must challenge him. His stake will be your cases and money. Can you raise a stake?"

She thought a moment. "Yes. And, Maestro, would you be so kind as to be my second?"

"Yes, milady," he stepped over to the Spaniard, and they entered into a heated discussion, with much waving of arms. Finally Leonardo returned. "He will play one game, for all that he has taken from Lord Cut'berto, provided your stake is acceptable."

"Thank you, *Messer* Leonardo." Now it was time to confront the chess lord of Europe. "*Señor* Lucena."

He bowed. "*Señorita*. What stake, please?"

She placed both hands behind her neck and unclasped the string of pearls. "They are valued at ten thousand florins. Examine, if you like."

Pellar gasped. "No! No! Elizabeth, they're *rented!*"

The Spaniard scowled. "What does he say?"

"He says that he is certain I shall grind the bottom of the Spanish pig into little sausages."

"Ha! Does he now?" There was an ugly scrape of metal as the Spaniard pulled his rapier several inches out of its scabbard. Elizabeth Gulped. "Listen, why don't we start?" She handed the strand of pearls to Leonardo. "There. Leonardo will hold the stake."

"Then let us draw for color," growled the chess master.

Color was important. She was thinking ahead. She needed a sure-fire opening, something truly murderous. If she had the white pieces, she could lead the game into the deadly Evans Gambit, invented

by Captain William Evans of the Royal Marines in 1824. But-- to play the Evans she had to have the white pieces. There was only one sure way to get white: as odds-giver.

She said, "There's the question of odds."

His face hardened. "I do not give odds."

"You? No, of course not *you*. As the stronger player, *I* give odds."

"*You!*" he laughed in cold disbelief.

"Myself."

"You are *loca*. All right, what odds do you give?"

"I shall play *bendato*."

He looked puzzled. "Blindfold?"

"Yes. Without sight of board or pieces."

It gave her great pleasure to listen to the gasps. Evidently none of them had ever heard of blindfold chess. She pulled a white silk handkerchief from her bodice, tied it about her eyes, and took a chair facing away from the chess table. "Set up the pieces. As odds-giver, I take white."

"But how will you know my moves?"

"You will call them over to me, and I shall do the same for you."

She listened to the rattling of the chessmen as they were set up behind her.

"Ready," called Lucena. "Your move."

"*Pedone al quarto scacco del re*," she called. Pawn to king four.

He replied instantly. "And pawn to my king's fourth square."

And the game was on.

On her fourth move she called out, "*Pedone al regina cavaliere quattro*." Pawn to queen knight's fourth. That was the critical move in the Evans opening: the pawn offer.

There was a dead silence. Ha, she thought, he's never seen the Evans before! The question now is, will he take the bait?

Finally Lucena called out, "Bishop takes pawn."

She had him.

The game proceeded. The Spaniard's replies began to slow. He was in trouble, but he was fighting. He clustered his pieces in a protective shield about his king.

Elizabeth paused a moment and considered. The position cried out for a smothered mate. Yes, there it was. She called out in a firm clear voice, "I announce checkmate in two moves."

Silence. What was going on? Could she have been mistaken? No! She got up and removed her blindfold and walked over to the table. The position was exactly right. The smother was there.

Lucena looked up grimly. "There is no mate in two, *señorita*. There is not mate at all. You forfeit."

"*Señor*, there *is* a mate in two." She captured a defending bishop with her queen. "You must recapture, yes?"

He grunted, "So I recapture, and you are a queen down, and there is still no mate."

"Your bishop no longer protects this square, *señor*. My knight moves in, and mates-- so." She moved the piece. "*Scacco matto!*" Checkmate.

The bearded man stared at the board, then at her. His cheeks turned red. He scowled. "All right, it's checkmate. But one game decides nothing. We shall play two out of three."

"No!"

There was a commotion at the doorway.

It was Francesco, with Leonardo right behind him. The artist had evidently gone out for reinforcements. She groaned. She hadn't wanted to involve her fiancé.

Giocondo took in the situation at a glance. He faced the chess master. The room grew still as he spoke slowly, quietly, and with great presence. "*Signor*, in matters involving my betrothed, you may address *me*." His right hand rested lightly on the pommel of his sword.

The Spaniard looked dubiously at the newcomer, then at Elizabeth, then back at the glowering merchant. He took one fast longing glance toward the goldbag, then bowed deeply to them all, and he left.

Elizabeth let out a deep breath.

Francesco bent over her. "Are you all right?"

"I am fine." He had asked no questions, and he asked none now. He had simply waded in and protected her. She said, "Soon, I will explain everything. Just now I must say farewell to my friends upstairs."

"Of course, Lisa. Oh-- *Messer* Leonardo asked that I return these to you." He handed her the strand of pearls. "I will wait here."

Pellar had already recovered his aplomb. Larvey favored her with a thinly-veiled scowl. But each of the two picked up a valise and followed her silently up the stairs.

Down below, Francesco was calling for the innkeeper. "Tony! Wine for everyone! Set 'em up!"

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

## 18. Decision

\* \* \*

United States Army

Memorandum

TO: A. G. Perry, General, Pentagon, Division of Special Assets

FROM: K. R. Inman, Colonel

RE: Project TM; Patent Interference, Green v. Rosso

The Patent Office has formally dissolved this interference, as unpatentable to either party. The decision is perhaps moot, since we are advised by our technical people that the TM cannot be used again for an indefinite period, owing to strains in the space-time fabric created by our last use. Certain other aspects of the Project are best reviewed off the record.

(K. R. Inman)

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

## 19. A Smile

\* \* \*

She sat again in the comfortable straight-back chair in Leonardo's *bottega*. It was early afternoon. The light was soft, clear, luminous, relaxing-- just right for painting.

On the carpet off to the left, Dianara played with the beautiful long-haired cat. Outside in the garden a small fountain splashed. From behind the screen off to the right two unseen musicians were playing quietly, one on pipes, the other with a lyre of the artist's own invention.

Leonardo stood aside from his *cavaletto*-- the three-legged easel-- and considered her. "And now," he said, "we need a smile." Already he was sketching in the outlines of her face with light strokes of the charcoal pencil. As he worked, he murmured to her, almost as though talking to himself. "Dwell thou on the happiest moment of thy life. Thy nuptial day, perhaps? Or rescue from the river?"

He watched the subtle change in her face with wonder and delight.

Her happiest moment? Ah, she remembered. Pellar and Larvey had stood inside the TM, ready to

leave, in their upper room back at the Black Swan, and waiting impatiently for her to join them. Pellar had motioned to her with an imperious jerk of his chin. She had put her left hand on the handle of the door and she had swung the panel back and looked at both of them.

"That's *it!*" marveled Leonardo. "Hold that expression." Oh, yes! This woman was saying something wonderful about life. And death, love, suffering, endurance, all woven together, and emergent in fantastic unity in that smile. What memory, what thought-- *thoughts*-- had brought this transfiguration?

She was standing just outside the TM, and Pellar had shouted, "Dammit, Gerard, *get in here!*"

And she had calmly replied, "No, Cuthbert, I will not get in there. If you have further business with me, look for me in the Louvre."

Pellar's mouth had dropped. "The Louvre? Wha-- ?"

(Her happiest moment? Oh yes, she remembered!)

Next, she had finished what she had come to say, and they had both looked at her, first in blank disbelief, and finally in pink-cheeked horror.

"And now may I suggest," she had said sweetly, "that the two of you, jointly and severally, go fuck yourselves." Then she had slammed the frame door. The TM had shimmered... and vanished.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

## 20. Déjà Vu

\* \* \*

C. Cuthbert Pellar and his new bride spent their honeymoon in Paris, and on this particular day in June, mostly because Mrs. Pellar insisted on it, they found themselves in the Louvre.

They proceeded with the standard treasures, the Venus de Milo, the Nike of Samothrace, the Hera of Samos.

"Yes, dear?" he said.

"Are we supposed to meet someone here? You keep looking around?"

(*Look for me in the Louvre, she had said.*)

"No, we're not meeting anyone. I'm just trying to see what there is to see." God, what a mess *that* had been, when they got back, and no Elizabeth. It had taken the entire upper echelons of the Pentagon, working with Barrington Wright and the FBI and the CIA, to hush the thing up. Fortunately, Colonel Inman was on their side. It was almost as though he had expected Elizabeth to stay behind. He had provided the basic story, with supporting documents: Elizabeth Gerard was on the passenger list of Italia 816, the ill-fated Concorde blown up over Lisbon by a terrorist bomb. Wright had appointed Pellar to notify Elizabeth's next of kin. After which the associate had made partner.

Mrs. Pellar said, "They've got some famous paintings in here," she said. "What's that thing by Leonardo da Vinci?"

"There were several."

"The most famous one of all. You know..."

"The Mona Lisa?"

"That's it. Let's find the Mona Lisa. We'll have to ask someone."

Together they walked up to the *Renseignements* desk, occupied by a bored youth reading a paperback.

"*S'il vous plaît, monsieur,*" said Pellar politely, "*où se trouve La Mona Lisa?*"

The boy didn't look up. He pointed off to his left with a thumb. "Down that hall, turn right at the second corridor. No flash."

A moment later they stood before the masterpiece. "The greatest painting in the world," he said softly.

"I met him, you know, Leonardo."

"I thought he was dead."

Pellar was silent. He didn't want to go into that. Besides, he was studying the portrait. That face.. had he met her during the time of the deposition? La Gioconda? The wife of a rich Florentine named Giocondo? He was pretty sure he hadn't met any such woman. And yet, it nagged at him. He *had* seen this face-- this transcendent beauty-- before. Where? When?

Think back. Back. The women there...

There had been a servant girl, practically a child. And the wife of Tony the innkeeper. And the cook, an old woman. The only other female on the scene had been... *she?* Look hard. *On her forehead.* Is that the TM head-band?

Oh, great God! Don't let it be *she!* Oh no no no *no.* He closed his eyes and moaned.

Mrs. Pellar looked up in alarm. "Cutie-- ?"

He turned his back to the portrait. "Let's get out of here."

"But... oh, all right." She looked back. Wasn't there something about a smile? Was the lady smiling? Hard to say.