

RESURRECTION

Part 2 of the DOMAIN TRILOGY
by
Steve Alten

“And there was war in heaven:
Michael and his angels fought against the dragon;
and the dragon fought and his angels,
And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.
And the great dragon was cast out,
that old serpent called the Devil and Satan,
which deceiveth the whole world:
He was cast out into the earth,
and his angels were cast out with him.”

--Revelation 12:7

“None of those who were born in the light,
Begotten in the light
Will be yours. . .

**–The Hero Twins, to the Lords of the Underworld
Excerpt from the Mayan Popol Vuh**

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The Universe is not only stranger than we know,
it is stranger than we can even imagine.

-Albert Einstein

PROLOGUE

The Journal of Julius Gabriel

(Excerpt from opening address at Harvard symposium, August 24, 2001)

Earth: An ocean planet whipping around the Sun at 18.5 miles a second. For life to have sprung from this world is truly a miracle, for our planet was once a very hostile place, its atmosphere poisonous, its land mass a volcanic wasteland.

All life that has existed and will ever exist on Earth can be traced back to primordial bacteria. Encoded within man's DNA are the details of our three-and-a-half billion year journey from single-celled ocean dwellers to supreme rulers of the planet.

But are we so supreme? Is modern man truly the pinnacle of evolutionary success, or are we unwittingly traveling on a path of extinction? If history is any teacher, then our continued existence on this cosmic lifeboat, Earth, is more fragile than one might care to believe.

The End of Humanity? Who has time to contemplate such ridiculous a notion? Job security, the falling Dow, overdue bills, the threat of terrorism, a heated argument with our spouse—these are the daily burdens that occupy our minds, not our extinction.

And yet, disaster could strike at any moment. Of course, some threats we can't prevent.

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For instance, should a star go supernova within several light years of Earth, a lethal rain of nuclear particles would exterminate every living thing on the planet.

Some threats we can prevent, yet we chose to wait. Our planet lies within a cosmic shooting gallery of asteroids and comets. The impact of a 2-mile-in diameter asteroid could wipe out the population of an entire continent. . .or worse. It has been estimated that two thousand of these “civilization killers” actually cross Earth’s orbit, though to date, we’ve only been able to locate one in ten. Why? Because no government likes to commit funds to a “threat.” And so we wait for disaster to strike, knowing the cost of our shortsightedness will be measured in billions of dollars and billions of body bags. . .assuming someone is left around to bury the dead.

But asteroid strikes are not the only civilization killers littering our planet’s history. Ice Ages have come and gone, each wiping out nearly every life form living on Earth at the time. Shocking new evidence indicates the last glaciation came swiftly and suddenly in the form of a global super storm that sent temperatures plunging in a matter of minutes, literally freezing herds of woolly mammoth in place as they grazed in temperate grasslands.

Experts believe fossil fuels exacerbate global warming, and global warming leads to Ice Ages. Yet our politicians refuse to wean us off these polluting sources of energy, fearing reprisals from the Oil and Coal industry, from whom they receive vital election funds. Our ozone layer continues to shrink, still we shrug it off as yesterday’s news.

If a virus such as Ebola become airborne, it could ravage our species. Should the politics of nuclear deterrence falter, we could vaporize ourselves out of existence.

But the End needn’t be a roulette wheel of cataclysms. Blessed with intelligence, it is up to us to heed the warnings of our past and present and prepare for the futurenow, or there may be no future left to prepare for.

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And the warnings of our demise are everywhere, for almost every culture and religion speaks of an Apocalypse to come. In the Bible, God tells Isaiah, “I will make the heavens tremble, and the Earth will shake from its place.” In Revelations, passages tell of earthquakes so mighty that “every island fled away and the mountains were not found.” Perhaps the most frightening prophecy of all comes from the 2,000 year old Mayan Calendar, an instrument of time and space more accurate than its latter-day European counterpart. Believed to have been created by the mysterious Mayan wise man, Kukulcan, the Calendar abruptly ends with humanity’s demise on a date equating to December 21st in the year 2012. As if to remind us of the event, the shadow of a giant serpent appears on Kukulcan’s pyramid in Chichen Itza each Autumn and Spring Equinox, just as it has for over 1,000 years. Let me assure you, this baffling special effect was not intended as a tourist attraction.

The Mayan Calendar was divided into five great cycles, the previous four ending in “fire, water, wind, earthquakes and volcanic rain.” Unfortunately, the Mayan codices, left to us by the wise man, Kukulcan regarding the End of Days, were burned by superstitious Spanish priests when Cortez invaded the Yucatan in 1519.

And so for answers we must turn to the Mayan Popol Vuh, the “bible” of the Mesoamerican culture, which speaks of humanity’s trials and tribulations through its Creation Story. The hero of this story is a brave warrior known as One (Hun) Hunahpu, later revered by the Maya as “First-Father.” Hun Hunahpu’s great passion in life was to play the ancient ball game known as Tlachtli. One day, the Lords of the Underworld, or Xibalba (pronounced She-balba), challenged One Hunahpu to a game. One Hunahpu accepted and entered the Dark Road to Xibalba, an evil realm, represented in Mayan mythology as both the mouth of a great serpent and a mysterious subterranean dwelling.

But the Lords of Xibalba had no intention of actually playing the game. Using trickery and deceit, they defeated One Hunahpu and decapitated him, hanging his head in the crook of a Calabash tree as a warning to others who might challenge them.

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After a great many years, a brave woman named Blood Moon ventured down the Dark Road to see if the legend was true. Approaching the tree to pick fruit, she was startled to find One Hunahpu's head. The eyes opened and the face spit into her palm, magically impregnating her. The woman fled, the Death God and his minions unable to destroy her before she could escape.

Blood Moon (who would later become known as First Mother) gave birth to twin sons. As the years passed, her boys grew into strong, capable warriors. Upon reaching adulthood, their genetic calling would push them to follow in their father's footsteps and make the journey to Xibalba to challenge the Death God and avenge One Hunahpu's death.

Once more, the Lords of the Underworld would use cunning and deceit. But the Hero Twins, having prepared for this treachery, triumphed, banishing evil while resurrecting their long-lost father.

It is said there is Truth in all Myth. The Mayan Calendar was written as a warning. Should we heed it, then perhaps we can save ourselves from whatever cataclysm is destined to come.

Or, as is the nature of our species, we could simply chose to ignore it. . .

**-Professor Julius Gabriel
August 24, 2001**

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A wisp of thought, in the consciousness of existence.

I am anger.

A black hole of rage.

Lost in eternity.

God's abandoned child.

Seething with the mortar of indignation, imprisoned within its invisible walls.

The confluence of bitterness ferments my soul.

I am the product of injustice, and self-servitude, and greed.

I am the void that tasted love and lost it forever.

Loathing existence.

Set adrift in my own ocean of hatred.

I am the end of humanity and its beginning.

I am One Hunahpu and the universe laughs at me.

I am . . . Michael Gabriel.

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PART 1

"TIME IS NOT AT ALL WHAT IT SEEMS.
IT DOES NOT FLOW IN ONLY ONE DIRECTION,
AND THE FUTURE EXISTS SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH THE PAST."

-ALBERT EINSTEIN

THE HOUSE IS SILENT.
THE DOOR IS CLOSED.
A PERSON ENTERS.
THE WINDOW IS OPENED WIDE.
YANG ENTERS THE YIN.
A BABY IS BORN.

-TAO TEH CHING

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1

*West Boca Hospital
Boca Raton, Florida*

**22 September 2013
12:53 A.M.**

Dominique Vazquez gazes through feverish eyes at her foster mother, Edith Axler, as another contraction begins. The wave of pain crests higher, causing her to groan through clenched teeth. “Get me . . . drugs!”

Edith turns to Rabbi Steinberg, the only other person in the birthing room. “Richard, find the doctor.”

The auburn haired, bearded Rabbi unbolts the door, hurrying past the two armed security guards and into the chaos of the main corridor.

A dozen policemen have formed human barricades in front of each of the three stairwells, shunting off the swelling mob of reporters. Two nurses and an orderly argue at their station with members of the Governor’s entourage, while Governor Grace Demers continues her

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verbal assault on Dominique's private nurse.

“. . .we had an arrangement, Mrs. Klefner.”

“Hey lady, I called you, just like I said I would. Not my fault the prego wants nobody but the old woman and Jew in the birthing room. You don't like it, you can take your money and shove it where the good Lord split you.”

“Now you listen to me—”

“Nurse Klefner?” Rabbi Steinberg grabs the nurse by the arm, dragging her away from the Governor. “Where's Dr. Wishnov?”

“Who're you?”

“I'm the Jew. Now where's the doctor?”

“Uh, he's trying to secure an operating room.”

Steinberg heads down the corridor.

The Governor catches up. “Rabbi—wait! Get me inside to witness the birth, and I'll make it worth your while.”

Steinberg spots Dr. Wishnov hurrying down the opposite corridor.

“I'll bet your Temple could use a new access road.” She lowers her voice. “Or would you prefer credits?”

Steinberg's blood pressure boils. “*Gay cácken afin yam.*”

“Excuse me?”

“It means, go shit in the ocean.”

The Rabbi jumps aside as a burly Hispanic cop drags two handcuffed reporters into a makeshift holding room. Jogging down the corridor, he intercepts Dominique's obstetrician, who is dressed head-to-slippers in surgical-green. “Where have you been? Dominique's in pain, she

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needs an epideural--”

“Dominique may need a Caesarian. The O-R’s ready, but the mob’s getting worse. I thought Chaney was sending the National Guard?”

“Yes.” Steinberg struggles to keep up. “That’s what we were told.”

The security guards step aside, allowing the doctor and Rabbi to re-enter the private birthing room.

Edith is at the window, peeking between wooden shutters at the scene three stories below. The night is torn by sirens and swirling lights that streak the surging crowd blue and red. Mesoamerican Indians, news reporters, and religious fanatics have jammed the parking lot and hospital entrance to jostle with local police. The deep thrumming from news choppers pounds the humid air, their white-hot search lights cutting through palm fronds, casting bizarre shadows across the glass-faced building.

“There must be ten thousand people out there. Where the hell’s the National Guard?”

“Owww!” Dominique moans as she rides another crest. Sweat mats her black bangs to her forehead, beads of perspiration rolling past her high cheekbones. “Get these babies out of me!”

Dr. Wishnov releases the brakes on her roller bed. “Hang in there, we’re moving you to an operating room.”

“No! No Caesarian! It’s time. Just get them out. . .owwww!”

The doctor kneels between Dominique’s legs and lifts her gown. “You’re right, you’re already dilated ten centimeters.”

“No shit!”

The sounds of the mob grow louder. “Okay, forget the Caesarian, we’ll do this the old

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fashioned way. Where's that nurse?"

"Selling us out to the media," the Rabbi says. "I don't want her in here."

Wishnov shoots the Rabbi a harsh look. "Then scrub up, I may need your help."

* * *

The black limousine continues north on Route 441, inching its way towards the hospital through bumper-to-bumper traffic. Designed by the United States Army, the "smart-limo" contains a variety of offensive and defensive systems. Tinted bullet-proof glass and lightweight Kevlar armor shield the body. High-voltage door handles and pepper-spray blasters keep hostile crowds at bay. Conformal arrays of super-bright LED lights in the front, sides, and rear can blind enemies looking directly at or pursuing the vehicle. A retractable antenna and bowling ball-sized weapons platform can deploy from inside the trunk, providing night-vision images and laser-designation capabilities.

Two men are seated up front. Riding shotgun, sporting a trimmed black beard and mustache, is Mitchell Kurtz. At five-feet eight and one-hundred-sixty pounds, the thirty-two year old Caucasian looks anything but dangerous, yet Kurtz has killed a dozen times in the line of duty and has sent more than fifty nosey civilians to the hospital in ten years of service.

What he lacks in physical stature Kurtz more than makes up in advanced gadgetry. His sleek wraparound "smart" sunglasses contain tiny lasers embedded in the frames that beam light into his eyes, offering crisp wide-angle images from the miniature cameras. The camera lenses are telescopic, enabling him to zoom in on objects over great distances, using either day or night vision.

Concealed beneath the former FBI agent's shirt, strapped to his right forearm and powered by a waist-worn battery pack is a "pain cannon." Used for riot control, the weapon fires

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pulses of millimeter-waves at its target, heating the victim's skin as if the subject had just touched a hot light bulb. The pain cannon is capable of scattering every living being within a three-hundred-yard radius or delivering a death-blow to a specific target up to half-a-mile away.

Driving the limo is Ryan Beck, an immense African-American, whose six-foot-six frame carries two-hundred-and eight-five pounds of sculpted muscle. The former Green Beret holds black belts in several martial art forms, is an expert with guns and knives, and once took a bullet for Senator Jesse Ventura. The scar is still present beneath the man's shirt collar.

This unlikely pair, known affectionately around the Oval Office as "Salt and Pepper," have spent the last ten months guarding one client.

President Ennis Chaney stares out the tinted rear windows of the limo, growling to himself. The former Pennsylvanian Senator-turned-Vice President-appointed Leader of the Free World feels anything but free. Security on the birth of Dominique Vazquez's twins has been breached, and the media has turned the event into Ringling Brothers meets the Second Coming. Terrorist threats, intercepted on-line by the FBI over NREN (National Research and Education Network) have forced Chaney to by-pass the scheduled helicopter ride from Fort Lauderdale airport to the hospital, while traffic jams have delayed the National Guard's arrival by two hours.

The seventy year old African-American rubs sleep from his deeply set owl-shaped eyes as the limo rolls to a stop in front of a police barricade.

Pepper, seated driver's side, lowers his window.

A cop reeking of garlic breath pokes his head inside. "Sorry, pal, this area's closed. Now turn this boat around and get outta here."

Pepper holds up his I.D.

"White House? Yeah, right."

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Chaney leans forward from the backseat and shoots the cop one of his infamous “one-eyed Jack” glares. “You need glasses, son, or you just stupid?”

The cop’s complexion pales as he recognizes the heavy rasp. “Mister President? Geez, I’m sorry, sir—”

“Shut up and let us through before we have to shoot you.”

Pepper grins, shutting the window in the cop’s face. The limo proceeds past the barricade and continues north on Route 441 for another three miles before turning onto a side street leading to the hospital.

The access road is wall-to-wall people.

Pepper shakes his head. “Look at all those freaks. This is worse than one of your damn Republican Conventions.”

Chaney leans forward, gazing out the windshield. “It’s a goddam mess, alright. Salt, clear ‘em out.”

“All of them? Cops too?”

“Just do it.”

With a mischievous grin, Kurtz activates the moon roof and stands, his upper torso protruding out the hatch. He scans the crowd, his computer optics calculating distance.

A sixteen year old Caucasian male with a blue goatee and a dozen facial piercings saunters over, two fourteen year old girls handcuffed to each tattooed wrist. The girls, high on Ecstasy, climb onto the hood of the limo. “Hey, Dr. Shades,” the male calls out, “you here to witness the birth of the Messiah Twins?”

Kurtz rolls up his shirt sleeve, revealing his weapon. “Yep. Me and the other two wise men in the limo brought the frankincense. Open wide, here comes the mirth.”

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Salt fires the cannon, its invisible beam of millimeter waves igniting screams from the crowd. Several dozen fanatics leap into the nearest canal, the rest dispersing in every direction, screaming as if their skin was on fire.

The tattooed teen yelps like a banshee as he and his girls tear at their scorching tongue rings and handcuffs.

“It’s a school night, junior. Go home and study.” Kurtz ducks back inside the vehicle as Pepper drives up the now-deserted hospital entrance.

* * *

“I can see the first one’s head. . . easy while I turn the shoulders. Okay, push!”

Dominique bears down, grunting as she squeezes the newborn from her birth canal.

Dr. Wishnov holds the blood-streaked, fair-haired child in both hands, momentarily dazzled by the infant’s bright azure-blue eyes.

“Hey, no breaks here!” Dominique yells.

“Sorry.” The obstetrician quickly runs a suction tube down the newborn’s mouth and throat, clearing the airway before passing him to Steinberg.

The Rabbi places the wide-eyed child onto the incubator as instructed. He mutters a prayer in Hebrew, watching as the warmth turns the infant’s skin a healthy pink.

Incredibly, the newborn seems to be watching *him*.

The Rabbi shakes the ridiculous thought away, returning his attention to Dominique as her second son is birthed.

Belle Glade, Florida

22 September 2013

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1:32 A.M.

Forty-seven miles to the north, seventeen year old Madelina Aurelia thrashes naked beneath a sweat-soaked bed sheet as she cries out to her foster father, “Get this goddam baby outta me!”

Quenton Morehead, Baptist Minister, squeezes the girl’s hand, his eyes lingering on the girl’s exposed pelvis. “Don’t blasphemy, child, the midwife’s on her way.”

“Fuck you!” Madelina claws his arms, drawing streaks of blood. “Where’s Virgil?”

“I don’t know—”

“Find him!”

The minister turns as the girl’s high-pitch screeches penetrate his brain like a tuning fork. He hears the front door open and sighs a quick *Amen*.

“Virge?” Madelina stops thrashing. “Virgil, honey? That you—you cheatin’ sonuva bitch!”

A heavy-set Black women enters. “Calm down, baby, everthin’ gonna be just fine—”

Madelina tears at the mattress as another contraction grips her torso. “Vir. . . gil!”

The mid-wife turns to the Minister. “Go on and find him. I can handle things here.”

Quenton backs out of the bedroom, then hurries out the front door of the sweltering stucco home and into the night.

* * *

Madelina Lilith Aurelia, the only child of Miguel and Cecilia Aurelia, was born in the small Mexican town of Morelos. Cecilia’s maternal descendants were full-blooded Aztec Indians, their ancestors dating back to the reign of Montezuma. Her marriage to Miguel had been arranged by her uncle, Don Rafelo, feared by all as an *Ojo mak* (evil man).

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Bad luck seemed to follow the young couple since Madelina's birth. Cecilia had nearly died in labor, and Miguel suffered a debilitating stroke a month later. Relatives, believing Don Rafelo had cast his evil eye on the Aurelias in hopes of obtaining their daughter, advised the young couple to move as far away from Morelos as possible. They held out until Madelina turned four, then joined a group of crop pickers bound (illegally) for the United States.

Life in America seemed just as bewitching. Cecilia lost sight in her right eye due to a bee sting and Miguel suffered a stroke. When the Aurelias' shanty burnt to the ground, the superstitious couple departed Belle Glade—leaving their daughter on the doorstep of the town's Family Services office.

A month later, Madelina was placed in the foster home of Reverend Quenton Morehead and his wife, Rachel.

It soon became clear there was something seriously wrong with the young Mexican immigrant. Bizarre infantile behavior, including public masturbation and finger painting with her feces led the God-fearing Quenton to declare the girl possessed. His wife, being more grounded in reality, suspected a chemical imbalance and made an appointment with a child psychiatrist.

After two visits and a battery of tests, the doctor diagnosed Madelina's problem as a form of disorganized schizophrenia, probably inherited from one of the girl's biological parents. Drugs were prescribed, therapy recommended.

Two weeks later, Rachel Morehead found a lump on her left breast. She would not last the year.

Deeply depressed over his wife's death, Quenton was forced to endure the additional burden of Madelina's illness. Unable to accept the doctor's psychiatric "mumbo-jumbo," the God-fearing minister decided the best course of action was to simply exorcize the demons from

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the girl himself.

Prayer, empowered by Quenton's fire and brimstone delivery, would cleanse Madelina's soul. Daily bible readings and nightly services would fill her idle time after school, preventing her mind from wandering back toward Satan. Jesus would shine his guiding light into the girl's valley of darkness.

It was a long, exhausting "road to salvation," complicated by Quenton's own disease.

Alcoholism.

After staggering home drunk, the ordained minister would strip naked and crawl into bed with his frightened foster child. On most nights, Quenton nothing happened.

On a few terrible nights. . . things did.

By the time she turned sixteen, Madelina had been molested by her foster parent no less than a dozen times. The girl's schizophrenia grew worse, and the minister feared he might be stuck caring for his foster daughter the rest of his days.

What he needed was a son-in-law.

Prior to the introduction of Lake Okeechobee's legalized "river boat gambling" in 2009, Belle Glade had predominantly been a seasonal farming town, most of its worker force minorities, primarily African American and Hispanic. The big sugar companies recruited strong backs, having little use for brains, a fact that reflected poorly upon the school district, which boasted the worst standardized test scores in the county. For most high school males growing up in the area, college was not an option. In Belle Glade, you either labored in the fields, sold drugs, or played sports.

Seventeen year old Virgil Robinson could play sports, especially football. After three years of high school ball, he had earned the coveted, "Nastiest linebacker in the state" title

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While Glades Central High may have had a bad reputation for standardized test scores, they were tops in the nation when it came to sports, producing more professional athletes than any school in the country. Virgil was the cream of the football Class of 1993, a 257-pound man-child standing an imposing six-foot-five, who could cover forty yards in just under 4.4 seconds and had a 52-inch vertical leap. What's more, the speedy junior middle linebacker loved delivering bone jarring hits, the more savage, the better. "Don't wanna just hit the dude, I wanna bleed him from the inside out."

Young Virgil's parents had died when he was six, and he'd been toiling in his uncle's fields ever since. He could barely read and write, and admittedly didn't know "much about nothing." What he did know was that football was his ticket out of Belle Glade, and now, in his senior year, he was finally enjoying the first whiffs of success. The recruiting ritual had begun, the Division I college assistants luring him with promises of wealth, fancy cars, and beautiful undergrads. Virgil Robinson was the type of athlete who could turn around a losing program and bring home a national championship. Every coach knew about his inflated 2.13 grade point average and his third-grade reading level, but none seemed to care. Tutors were easier to find than All-Americans, and grades could be spoon-fed. At the very worst, the kid from Belle Glade would red-shirt his freshman year.

Of course, Virgil had no more interest in earning a degree than he did cracking opening a book, let alone actually studying. A year or two of exposure in a top-ranked football program and he'd turn pro. A year or two and the money would be there. Millionaires didn't need an education. Virgil's success on the gridiron was all he needed.

Unfortunately, Virgil also had an appetite for women and drugs, the latter amplifying his propensity for violence. On the eve of signing a letter of intent with the University of Florida, the

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high school star decided to spend the night on the town binging with a few friends and teammates. After getting high, the boys headed to nearby Clewiston, intent on crashing their rival's Homecoming Dance. One of the Clewiston cheerleaders had caught Virgil's eye during their last game, and the star linebacker's loins ached at the thought of seeing her again.

The girl was there, dancing with her boyfriend, the team's starting tailback. Virgil approached the couple, grinning his gold-capped smile. "Yo, hoochie, why don'tch ya'll shake dat thing over here--I'll show you how a real man handles it."

The tailback threw first, his punch striking Virgil's nose, drawing blood. Virgil never flinched, only his expression changed, morphing into an insane leer his defensive coordinator had dubbed "the Robinson Rage." In one motion Virgil grabbed the smaller teen by his neck and head-butted him twice, the latter blow knocking him senseless. A swift knee to the mouth finished the job.

As the crowd backed away, Virgil turned his attention to the girl. Grabbing her by the wrist, he tossed her over his shoulder, carrying her out to the parking lot like the proverbial Neanderthal choosing a mate.

Back in his truck, Virgil had to slap her twice across the face before she would allow him to tear off her panties. By this time a small crowd had gathered around the vehicle, including Wes Hobart, the school's wrestling coach. Hobart yanked open the door, only to have Virgil leap out and grab him by the hair, smashing him head-first through another car's windshield. Then he spun around to face his next assailant, the girl's father, an English teacher--

--who was carrying a shotgun.

The load of buckshot struck Virgil in his left knee, shattering the patella, blowing out most of the supporting cruciate ligaments and muscle. Six hours of surgery later, Virgil Robinson

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awoke in a hospital bed, his dream of playing football gone forever, the nightmare of adulthood about to begin.

The former football star left the hospital a week later and was sent to jail to await trial. The judge sentenced him to three years.

When Reverend Morehead read about Virgil's demise, he approached the judge and offered to take the youth in as part of the Church's work-release program. In the former high school star Quenton saw yet another downtrodden youth whose soul needed to be saved. . . and a potential son-in-law in the making.

And so Virgil Robinson moved in with Reverend Morehead and his foster-daughter, Madelina. Encouraged by their "matchmaker," the two adolescents began dating. After three weeks, the Reverend promised Virgil he would use his influence to commute the rest of his prison sentence--if he agreed to marry Madelina.

Faced with another two years of incarceration, Virgil wholeheartedly accepted.

A quick Sunday ceremony and the deed was done. As a wedding gift, Quenton gave the young couple use of a dilapidated stucco home the Church owned, but could find no one to rent. Before anyone could say "early parole" the newlyweds headed off to begin their lives together, blessed with all the hardships poverty and a lack of formal education could offer.

For a short while things seemed fine. With Quenton's help, Virgil landed an assistant manager's position with one of the big sugar companies. By day, he supervised sugar cane workers, by night, he would return home from the fields to find comfort in his young bride's loin. As for Madelina, with Quenton out of her life, the girl finally felt safe. Medication kept the "voices" at bay, and she began saving money to purchase a nicer home. There was even talk of starting a family.

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And then Virgil's drugging resurfaced.

It started innocently enough--a few missed NA meetings here, a few hits of coke there. But drug addiction is a disease only abstinence can contain, and before Madelina knew it, her husband was spending what little money they had on his all-night binges.

Madelina was forced to dip into her medication money to afford groceries. Depression set in, and with it, all of the girl's old fears.

"Remember girl, the Devil will take your soul if you're not strong. . ."

To make matters worse, the college football season was upon them, the time of year that stoked Virgil's anger to its fullest. He would watch the University of Florida's games on T.V., his internal rage building until he had to lash out at something. . . or somebody.

Madelina told Quenton she had broken her arm while mending the roof. The punctured lung--that had come from a nasty fall on her bike. She told the intern at the clinic that she broke her nose slipping in the bathtub.

The beatings subsided briefly in December of 2012 when Virgil learned his wife was pregnant. The news seemed to calm the former football star. A son could be put to work in the fields. A son could be taught how to play football. Virgil Jr. would live the life denied his father--he would return glory to his old man by making it in the NFL. Twenty years from now, old Virgil Robinson would be able to retire in wealth, living off the fortunes of his prodigal son.

Life in the Robinson home stabilized. . .for the moment

* * *

Reverend Morehead enters the strip club, his senses immediately seized by the smell of alcohol and smoke and sex. It takes him several minutes to find his son-in-law, who is in a back room, receiving a lap dance.

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“Virgil! Get your heathen butt home, your son’s on the way!”

“Aww shit, Quenton, just give me two more minutes--”

“Now!”

“Sum’bitch!” Virgil climbs out from beneath the stripper, squeezes an exposed breast, “call you later, baby,” then follows Quenton into the parking lot.

*West Boca Hospital
Boca Raton, Florida*

**22 September 2013
2:13 A.M.**

The parking lot is quiet.

Having arrived an hour earlier, the National Guard has taken over the hospital and its grounds. Only authorized personnel are allowed entry, no one permitted on the third floor maternity ward without President Chaney’s personal approval.

Dominique sits up in bed, gazing through heavy lids at her new family. Edith beams like a proud grandmother as she cuddles the dark-haired twin. Ennis Chaney sits back in an easy chair holding the fair-haired infant, the gruffness gone from the old man’s weathered face.

Rabbi Steinberg sits on the edge of Dominique’s bed, taking everything in. “So? Have you decided on names? You know, it’s Jewish custom to use the first initial of a deceased loved one to honor the dead.”

“I’m going to name the dark-haired twin Immanuel, after Isadore.”

Edie looks up, the mention of her late husband causing her eyes to moisten. “Your father would be honored.”

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“We’ll call him Manny for short. He has Hispanic blood running through him, you can see it in his eyes.”

“And what about this blue-eyed fellow,” Chaney asks. “How about an ‘M’ name, after the father?”

“The father’s not dead!” Dominique blurts out the words, the unexpected burst of anger exploding from her mouth.

“Doll, take it easy—” Edie hands Immanuel to the Rabbi, then takes Dominique’s hand.

“Sorry. . . I’m just tired. It’s been a long night, a long pregnancy.”

“It’s okay.”

Dominique looks at the infant sleeping in the crook of Chaney’s arm. “Mick’s father, his name was Julius. I thought I’d name the baby Jacob.”

The Rabbi smiles his approval. “A wonderful choice. Jacob is Hebrew for, ‘he will prevent.’”

“I also want Mick’s last name. Rabbi, can you marry us in absentia?”

Steinberg nods. “I think we can do that. Dominique Gabriel it is.”

“And Ennis, I’d like you to be the boys’ godfather.”

“An old fart like me?” He smiles. “Be my honor. Now you listen,” he rasps, “I’ve made arrangements to move your family to a private compound on the Gulf Coast, someplace you can live without being under the constant watch of the media. Gated grounds, your own personal chef, housekeepers, and a twenty-four-hour-a-day security team. The twins will have private tutors when they get older, and starting today, I’m assigning my own personal bodyguards to your family. You and yours will never want for anything. That was my promise to Mick.”

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“Thank you.” She smiles through tears of joy. “There’s just one other thing I need from you. Julius Gabriel had a journal. It was confiscated after Mick. . . disappeared. I want the twins to have it. I want them to be. . . prepared.”

Belle Glade, Florida

22 September 2013
2:13 A.M.

Reverend Morehead hears the sounds of a baby crying as he reenters the sweltering stucco home. “Madelina?”

The heavy-set mid-wife is in the kitchen, an infant in her arms. “Look. There’s your grandpa. Say hi, grandpa!”

“My Lord, will you look at his eyes, I’ve never seen eyes so blue.”

“Silly, it’s not a he, she’s a little girl.”

“A girl?” Quenton feels the hairs raise along the back of his neck.

“Where’s the father?”

“Puking his guts up outside. Quickly, I want you to take the child and--”

The screen door slams open and Virgil approaches, a line of spittle running from his lower lip to his stained tee-shirt, a ring of white powder visible in his left nostril. “Okay, le’ me see my boy.”

Quenton and the mid-wife exchange frightened looks. “Now Virgil--”

The minister steps in front of the wailing infant.

“Outta my way, Quenton, I said I wanna see my son.”

“Virgil, the Lord. . . the Lord has blessed you with a child. A daughter.”

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Virgil stops. Facial muscles contort into a mask of rage. “A girl?”

“Easy, son—”

“A girl ain’t shit! A girl’s nuthin’ but another goddam mouth to feed and clothe and listen to her whining?” He points at the screaming infant. “Give her to me!”

“No.” Quenton holds his ground. The nurse stands, preparing to flee with the child.

“I want you to sober up, Virgil. I want you to go to my home and—”

Virgil punches the minister in the gut, dropping him to his knees.

The mid-wife tucks the infant under one arm, brandishing a kitchen knife in the other. “Ya’ll git outta here, Virgil. Go on!”

Virgil stares at the blade quivering in the fat woman’s fist. In one motion he grabs her wrist, wrenching the knife free.

The mid-wife screams, backing away.

Virgil stares at the infant, then hears Madelina moaning from inside the bedroom.

“Damn no-good bitch. . .” He leaves the kitchen, then ducks inside the bedroom, slamming the door shut.

“Oh, Lord, oh, God—Quenton get up! Get up, Quenton--”

The minister struggles to his feet as sounds of slapping flesh and Madelina’s screams fill the home. Quenton turns to the mid-wife. “Go! Take the child to the neighbors and call the police!”

The woman hurries out the backdoor.

Quenton bangs on the locked bedroom door. “Virgil? Virgil Robinson, you leave her be! You hear me?”

The screaming stops, the sudden silence deafening.

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The minister backs away from the door and the approaching footsteps.

Virgil emerges, his white tee-shirt splattered scarlet. He casts a hollow look at the minister, then stumbles into the night.

Quenton Morehead peaks inside the bedroom. Gags. Crosses himself.

Belle Glade police will arrest Virgil Robinson hours later in the apartment of Luanda Jones, a thirty-nine year old “dancer.”

The mutilated body of Madelina Lilith Aurelia will be buried two days later.