

Book of Light

Prologue

~ *Egypt 365 A.D.* ~

Though he feared the night, Mikos the scribe was grateful for the darkness, felt almost safe in it. There was no question that his actions would have so outraged the priest – this priest especially – that he would be zealously hunted.

How was it possible – his life had been completely cast over in a matter of days? A promising young scholar at the Alexandria library, the greatest library in the world, now he was little more than a desperate thief. What he'd stolen was priceless. Yet the church would go to any lengths to destroy it. There was no time to consider alternatives; if the sanctity of the great library could not protect such treasures, then he must.

Taking the rare texts from the library was the least of his crimes. He'd gone against the edict of a Christian Emperor who'd decreed all heretical texts be burned. Worse, he'd defied the priest dispatched by the Archbishop of Alexandria, one of the most powerful prelates in all Christendom.

Dressed in the shabby garments of a desert traveler, he'd sought to appear a simple peasant hauling his goods to market. Encamped at an oasis near the village of Nag Hammadi, sharing a campfire with other travelers coming down from Luxor, he learned of agents on the road to Thebes who were looking for a young man with stolen goods. After everyone had fallen asleep and the embers of the fire grew low, he'd soundlessly reloaded his contraband on his small donkey and disappeared into the desert night.

After hours of walking, exhausted and consumed by dread, he hobbled the animal, lay down forlorn and curled up against the cold. Cradled in his arms, separate from the other texts hidden in the clay casks, was one special manuscript he'd not been able to part with. Sleep took him quickly. And in sleep he dreamed. A dream like no other. In the dream a stranger suddenly appeared before him with eyes that radiated a dazzling inner light.

Who are you, he asked?

I am that I am. I have come to tell you – lay down your burden. Surrender it to the desert like a breath released. Do not fear – the desert holds many secrets and shall keep it safe. Though hidden, it shall not be lost.

And just as suddenly as the stranger had appeared, the dream dissolved completely.

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Near dawn the donkey brayed, awakening Mikos. He rose, consumed anew with dark thoughts. He saw he stood before a high sandstone bluff. There were openings, what looked like small caves, dotting its face. And then he remembered the dream. *Lay down your burden . . . the desert holds many secrets and shall keep it safe.*

He unloaded the casks from the donkey and struggled them up the steep incline, securing them in a deep hole. He took his stout staff and began working loose the coarse sandstone above the opening. It was hard work. It raised blisters quickly. Daylight brightened, enflaming his dread. At last a column of sandstone crumbled away, filling the hole.

The moment seemed worthy of prayer. “To the desert I surrender the last of the gospels of the Gnostics. May the great desert and the Divine protect them. . . and me also.”

He started off eastward toward the light. And then he stiffened, halted abruptly, his hands running frantically over his clothing, searching. He turned in panic back toward where he’d lain in the night. He ran to gather up the gospel that had so entranced him. He chided himself for being careless, not secreting it with the others. Should he take it? Leave it? Keeping it put him at grave risk. Had he not done enough already? Who would fault him for casting it to the wind? Who would ever know?

In his heart there was no question what he must do. Far too much had been lost already. And the words of this gospel still called to him. It was like no other. He knew it just holding it in his hands. *Book of Light*, as it was known, was written by Mary Magdalene and told of a Jesus and his teachings radically different from the accepted canon of the church. Mikos had seen how those with power – religious and imperial – used fear as a bludgeon to beat others submissive. But this gospel unshackled the bondage of fear.

He slipped the lone text into his garment and turned and started off again. Despite the great risk, he knew, too, that here was something worth dying for.