

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER

A Novel

By

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PROLOGUE

*33 A.D.
Friday, April 5
Golgotha, Judea
Outside of Jerusalem*

The soldier snapped the short whip with the three metal-tipped leather tails, shredding the skin off the Nazarene's back. It was brutal—but necessary. His orders were to get the prisoners to the mount alive. With no mercy. The crowd expected a show and roared whenever the Nazarene and the two other prisoners fell from the vicious strikes.

A Roman centurion on horseback was on the side of the road observing the procession. Longinus was a battle seasoned veteran but because of an eye affliction he was assigned as the official Roman representative for the execution by the Governor and Pro-Consul of Roman-occupied Judea, Pontius Pilate.

For some reason, he cringed with every strike of the whip as the nearby crowds cheered the soldiers on.

Longinus reflected on the meeting yesterday with his Legion Command and Pontius Pilate.

“The Sanhedrin have insisted we must declare this Jesus of Nazareth an enemy of the state of Rome and it is requested he be executed.” Pilate said.

“The Governor should do what the Governor deems fit,” the Commander said.

“What egregious offense has this man committed? I gave them a choice. For their Passover I would release one prisoner. Either that murderer Barabbas, or this man, Jesus. They would let me free the murderer. Such madness.” Pilate shook his head.

Pilate’s servant brought a small bowl of water with a linen. Washing his hands he said, “The Nazarene’s blood will not be on me.” He half-nodded toward Longinus.

“Make sure you are there tomorrow. The Hebrew Council says this Jesus claims he is the Messiah—the King of the Jews. When I asked Him if He was in fact the King of the Jews—He simply replied, ‘So you say’. The Council claims the Nazarene’s response was treasonous and a direct challenge to our Roman authority.” He placed the linen across his servant’s arm.

Exasperated, he sighed, “Sometimes, even the innocent must face death for what will be seen as the common good.”

He waved the back of his hand to both men signaling their meeting was concluded.

By nine o'clock in the morning the procession had reached the Place of the Skulls and all three prisoners had spikes driven through their hands and feet—securing them to the heavy wooden crosses they were forced to drag up the hill. The soldiers planted them in the pre-dug holes—Jesus in the center. Here they would hang for hours—however long it took—until they were dead. The sky grew darker and thunder could be heard in the distance.

By mid-afternoon a messenger arrived for Longinus.

The message was from headquarters. The Sanhedrin, the Hebrew Council of High Priests would be sending the Temple Guard. They were to break the legs of the crucified men to hasten their death before nightfall. With their bodies broken, the prisoners would sag and suffocate quickly. Jewish Law decreed that no man can be executed on the Sabbath. Therefore, before sundown the bodies would need to be removed.

Longinus watched as the man they called Jesus was berated and laughed at by the crowd as he hung from the cross. Some of the same crowd that Longinus had seen at His sermons.

“Where is your God now?” someone yelled.

“If you are the Messiah, why don’t you save yourself?” He was mocked by one of the bandits crucified to his left.

Jesus looked skyward, “Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do.”

His response was met with shrieks of laughter and a pelting of rocks.

When asked if he had any requests from the crowd. Jesus said, “I am thirsty”.

A man from the crowd soaked a sponge in sour wine vinegar for Jesus to drink.

The crowd roared when Jesus turned away from the bitter drink.

Six hours had passed when Jesus finally cried, “My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?” The first raindrops began to fall.

The Roman soldiers turned their backs in disgust when the Temple Guard arrived and started smashing the skulls and limbs of the two men crucified with Jesus.

Longinus watched in horror as the guards started mutilating the two thieves. His jaw clenched and he closed his eyes for a moment. The anger would pass. He was sure the Pro-Consul wasn’t aware of this. It was barbaric. The Sanhedrin were intent on having not just the Nazarene’s legs broken but also to have his body mutilated beyond recognition. This was their way to prove to the masses that Jesus was not the Messiah. Salvation could only come through the Hebrew priests.

Soon it would be dark. Jesus’ lifeless head hung on his chest. His face bruised and swollen beyond recognition, his eyes narrow slits. Wet, blood-soaked hair matted under the crudely made Crown of Thorns. His flayed skin flapped in the air like a torn cloth. His jaw hung slack and the rivers of blood that had flowed freely during the scourging had dried up, coating His entire body in what looked like a crusty red dye.

Longinus heeled his steed and raced toward the high central Cross, thrusting his Spear into the right side of Jesus, piercing the skin between the fourth and fifth rib. This

was the manner in which he had been trained on the battlefield to prove that a wounded enemy was dead. For the blood no longer flows from a lifeless body. If Jesus was proven dead, the Temple Guard would no longer need to continue their butchery and they could remove all the bodies before sunset in time for the Passover Sabbath.

After striking Jesus, a burst of blood and water—life—the last of it—spurted onto Longinus’s face and then stopped. Jesus of Nazareth was dead.

Suddenly, an electrical charge flowed through Longinus’s body as if he had taken a mysterious drug. Miraculously, his cloudy eyesight instantly cleared and he could see perfectly—as if he were a young man again. He felt an energy he hadn’t felt in decades—as if forty years of aging had suddenly been wiped clean.

He looked at the man who now hung lifeless on the Cross and whispered to himself, “Behold, the Son of my God.”

He held the Spear close to his chest and wept.

Unwittingly, Longinus had fulfilled the scripture for the coming of the Messiah. According to John 19:36—

For these things were done—that the Scripture should be fulfilled—a bone of Him shall not be broken.

Shortly after the death of Jesus, Longinus left the army and sought out the Apostles to take instruction from them. He later became a monk and was soon arrested for his faith. His teeth were ripped out and his tongue cut off, yet he was still able to

speaking clearly. After his death he was deified as a Saint and buried in the Church of St. Augustine in Rome.

For that one moment, at the Place of the Skulls, Longinus held the destiny of all mankind in his hands. The Spear with which he had pierced the side of Jesus Christ became one of the great treasures of Christianity. And one of its most sought after relics. The Spear of Destiny.

For centuries, millions of lives would be lost in pursuit of this artifact. From Constantine the Great to Adolph Hitler—those who possessed this ancient Spear would believe they had garnered a power over all others throughout the world for as long as they held possession. This pursuit and possession of the Spear would forever change the course of history. And today would be no different.

Part I

The Incident

“Take back your Holy Spear, as I know not him that makes it Holy.”

-Attila the Hun to Pope Leo I

(The Hun would mysteriously die in his sleep a short time later)

CHAPTER 1

William “Irish” Flaherty and Samir el Hussein (The Ghost, aka Carlo Generosa)

2006, September 10

Babylon, Long Island, NY

8:30PM

The dog’s black, furry ears perked up and his eyes half opened. A twig snapped. Something was in the backyard.

William “Irish” Flaherty heard none of it. At eighty-four he still had the lean, athletic look as when he first jumped with the 82nd Airborne during the Second World War. But age had made him brittle. He had retired from the NYPD thirty years ago and his cop-sense skills, once as sharp as the dog’s, had faded.

In his lap was a copy of Newsday folded over to the Cryptogram section. The booming volume on the TV hadn’t fazed him as he strained his eyes over his reading glasses watching the New York Giants on the opening night of Sunday Night Football. Eli versus Peyton. The Manning Bowl.

“Yes! Touchdown!”

Tiki Barber's off-tackle dash for thirty-nine yards got Irish clapping his hands and whooping. The dog ignored him. Football. He thought back to a time when his youngest son, Shea, was the top player in the state. What could've been. But that was a long time ago.

Seamus jumped up and startled Irish with his snappy bark. A jolt of adrenaline shot through the old man's body and he shook.

"Oh for Chrissake, you almost gave me a heart attack," he said to the dog and swung his legs off the ottoman staring at the TV waiting for the replay of the Giants touchdown. Slowly, he sat up trying to regain his balance.

"Wait a second," he waved the dog off as if he could shoo him away like a fly, his eyes glued to the TV.

"Now you want to go out?" Irish said turning to the dog.

The dog stood in front of him, sat down and lifted his right paw and barked his answer and Irish laughed.

Seamus was a beautiful black, white and sable colored collie that the old man had purchased as an eight week old pup after Shea's wife passed away six years ago. The dog had been an easy train, was gentle and well-mannered but now a ridge of angry hair stood up along his spine. The pooch growled. Irish had to be careful as Seamus made a sport of chasing squirrels and chipmunks during the day, even sometimes breaking out of their fenced yard. At night, he wouldn't put it past the dog to scuffle with a raccoon.

Against his son's wishes, Irish had taken to grabbing the small, Smith and Wesson .38 Special—his retirement gun—when he was going out in the yard at night. He didn't want the dog, or himself, to get slashed by some rabid raccoon. He had never used the weapon but the raccoons had a habit of scaring the crap out of you by climbing out of one of the garbage cans when you were out there. If it wasn't a dog or a cat, it was classified as a wild animal according to the city born and bred Irish Flaherty.

He wobbled and was slow to straighten his six foot frame. Slightly bent at the shoulders, he felt every bone align itself, cracking and popping, and with it came the pain.

Keep moving, he told himself. He glanced at the cane by the door as he regained his balance, ignored it and smirked.

In the kitchen, the mail from the last week was piling up in the same spot. On the table—unopened. So was his daily pill reminder box. FRI, SAT and SUN were still full.

Shea and his two grandsons were still not home yet from their Massachusetts college scouting trip.

He picked up the mail and looked at the return addresses. Rapid Recovery, Asset Associates, American Express, and US Bank, These weren't bank balance statements. Not being paid for four months, he wondered how his son would ever catch up. Being a cop wasn't easy. But being a suspended cop was worse.

Seamus stood firm staring out through the glass slider and growled. The dog was jumpy and started howling. Loud.

He yelled at the dog, “Oh for the love of Jumpin Jimmy Gavin. Stop it.”

He finally opened the door and watched the dog dart towards the back of the garage and disappear. His faint bark continued for about a minute and then faded until Irish heard it no more.

“Goddammit,” Irish said as he looked through the kitchen cabinets for a flashlight and grabbed the windbreaker that hung by the door. He took the pistol from the lockbox and put it in his jacket pocket and yelled out the door for the dog.

“Seamus, here boy.” There was no sound or rustling in the bushes.

Irish walked out onto the deck calling the dog again with no results.

“Sonuvabitch”.

He had the flashlight in his left hand and started to fear that the dog escaped out of the yard, or worse, something had happened to him.

“Seamus...Seamus...Here boy...” No sign of the dog.

The six-foot stockade fence that separated the Flaherty yard from the house behind them was solid, but he knew Seamus loved digging holes under it. He stepped off the deck and made his way to the rear of the garage and called for the dog one more time. Nothing.

The dog liked to lay under the copse of forsythia bushes that lined the fence behind the garage. As he bent down on his hands and knees to look under the bushes, he saw the tunnel under the fence.

“Goddamn dog.” He started to push himself up when he thought he heard the dog barking in the distance. What if he’s headed toward the highway? Oh Christ, he had to go find him.

His reflexes were too slow to see the dark figure moving towards him from the garage door. Suddenly, he felt a great weight on his back as he flattened onto the ground. For a second, he thought the garage had collapsed on him and he was being buried alive. His mind raced. It was 9/11 and he saw his oldest son, William, with his white Fire Chief helmet on, lying on the 92nd floor of Tower One as the World Trade Center collapsed. Concrete and steel pinning him down. And then the fire.

But in the split second that reality set in—Irish realized the building hadn’t collapsed on him. He had been attacked by someone in his own backyard. The adrenaline rush pumped his blood pressure into the danger zone. It was as if he was in a slow motion movie. He knew how to react but nothing was happening. He was eighty-four years old, for God’s sake.

“Goddamn sonuva...”

The assailant had wrapped a terry cloth towel around his neck and pulled tight arching his head up and back preventing him from screaming out. The man then buried his knee into Irish’s upper back. Irish knew he would lose consciousness within a minute.

Suddenly, he felt a sharp pain in the middle of his chest and for a second he thought he had been punctured, but he knew better. He felt the tingling and numbness in his left shoulder and he knew exactly what was happening. His damn ticker was finally giving out. Oh for Chrissake, he scolded himself for not taking his meds.

“It didn’t take me a long time to find you,” the man whispered in a firm, calm voice.

“Stop—please, I can’t breathe,” Irish wheezed. It was all he could do. The pressure on his chest was as if a truck had fallen on him. He was paralyzed and fought to use every ounce of strength to try to push himself up to his knees.

Leaning close to the older man’s ear, he spoke in a clear controlled voice.

“Sixty years ago, you came across a relic that you took during the war. It needs to be returned and I am willing to pay for it,” he slowed down his voice. Irish got the message. He was not your garden variety burglar.

“You are mistaken. Please leave me alone. I am an old man. I am not well.”

The attacker let the towel slack. Irish tried to suck in air. The burn was spreading throughout his abdomen and he heaved—vomiting onto the ground. The bile burned his throat and he could barely breathe but he was getting enough oxygen that his head started to clear. He hoped the dog was alright. Dammit Seamus. He needed time to think but his chest felt like it would explode and he didn’t want to drop dead before he came up with a plan.

“Listen carefully. I have no intentions of hurting you or your family. But you need to tell me where this relic is? Tell me now and you will live to see your grandchildren again.”

Irish knew why the man was here. He had feared this day for more than half a century. Since 1944, he had kept a secret. He had kept the secret from his family and friends. Except Riley.

He had taken the relic during the war and it saved his life in the process. How it had happened was a helluva story.

His breathing was labored but the pain had subsided a bit.

“You’re making a terrible mistake,” he gasped. “I’m not involved with anything. I’ve not hidden anything. I don’t know what you are talking about. I won’t say anything,” his body shook and he sucked in air by gulps.

Irish knew this man would not believe him, but he was buying time. A number of blood vessels in his eyes had burst and whatever vision he had blurred. Snot ran from his nose and his throat was on fire from the acidic puke still coating his mouth. His head pounded like he’d been hit with a sledge.

Irish moaned.

“Are you alright?” the man asked.

He barely squeaked out—“My son will be home soon. He’s a cop.” He was breathing hard.

“I know about Lion’s Den,” the man said.

What did he just say? Flaherty was stunned. Fear on top of pain. He wasn't going to last the hour. Goddammit, a military mission from sixty two years ago. How could he know?

“Yes, I thought you’d remember,” he said, adding pressure and pushing Flaherty down on the ground.

“Listen to me carefully. Nothing stays a secret forever. If you know where to look. And now I have found you. Where is it?”

“I ... the dog?” Irish mumbled, exhaled slowly and could not speak.

“Do not worry. The dog will be fine. It is pre-occupied with your neighbor’s cat on the next lane. But, you leave me no choice if you do not tell me.”

He side mounted the elderly man’s body putting himself between Irish and the garage and sprawled across him preventing Irish from moving, his lips just an inch from Irish’s ear.

“There is no mistake. Rest assured I will find it. I am not here for some History Channel treasure hunt. I am here for the item that you stole.”

Irish had been warned years ago that there would be people that would continue to look for the ancient relic. The Nazi's weren't done after the war. They had buried treasures throughout Europe, Russia and even in the Americas. But many in the occultist Nazi party believed that the Spear of Destiny held a special power for its holder. It is said, Hitler himself believed the legend that "Whosoever possesses this Holy Spear and understands the powers it serves, holds in his hands the destiny of the world."

It sounded like a childish cartoon. A comic book story.

Irish Flaherty knew it was real enough and that there was probably more to it than some urban legend. He was there. In Germany. He overheard the Nazi officers speaking about it. With reverence. He didn't understand all of it. They spoke German and frankly, he was more preoccupied with figuring out how to escape at the time. But when Irish came home he had been subject to enough misfortune in his life that once he hid the item he would forget about it. Forever.

And for sixty-two years he never thought about it, heard about it, or spoke about it—until this very moment.

He had been instructed by General Patton to go home just before the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes forest. He had been a battle hardened soldier, part of the notorious 82nd Airborne and none of the others had left. Within months Hitler and Himmler were dead and the Nazi's defeated. A few months later, the USA entered the Atomic Age destroying two Japanese cities—forever changing the face of the planet. The Axis was done. Patton himself was mysteriously killed in a fluke car crash after returning the

Crown Jewels to Austria. Did the fact that the Spear of Destiny residing safely on American soil have anything to do with these events and the United States becoming the most dominant world super power? Irish couldn't help but think that somehow he might have had some influential hand in all of this. He was so wound up that he had forgotten about the scrawled set of numbers on the band of the Spear.

Who had hired this man? Everyone was dead except for himself. Or were they?

As the man lay on top of him, Irish kicked his hip out, twisted and slipped his leg out to the right, the pain in his knee and hip seared up his side but it made him happy. He had stopped feeling the pain in his chest and it meant he was not dead yet. As he started to twist and turn his body around to the right, he used the leverage to his advantage. He grabbed the assailant's arm. But his strength was no match.

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Samir el Husseini was no amateur. He thought it amusing that circumstances brought him to this idyllic, reserved community that had been named after the legendary hedonistic city of ancient Babylon. The passport in his jacket said his name was Carlo Generosa and that he was an Italian national. Of course, he was not.

As he lay on top of the old man he struggled with what brought him back to this world. The world of darkness. A world he had left more than a dozen years ago.

He had a woman in Italy, a fine home and legitimate business that Aliya guarded like a mother hen. They had enough money to live unassumingly but more wouldn't hurt.

This assignment was different. It had come at the right time. And then there was the payout.

In June, a man in New York had insisted on contracting through a broker the services of the famed assassin, The Ghost. Normally, these contacts ended up in dead ends.

Carlo had Aliya listen to the man's pitch and requested an outrageous number. One and a half million dollars. The client agreed. By the time he got to this assignment he raised his demand to three million dollars. Surprisingly, the man agreed again. This was not a high profile assassination, which he thought odd. His assignment was to find the man who stole the Lance of St. Maurice in 1944— or what it is commonly known as the Spear of Destiny, the legendary Spear that struck the side of Jesus Christ on the Cross to prove his death—and retrieve it. There were multiple relics throughout the world claiming to be real. But none had a provenance. His employer wanted the real thing. And it was here. In the United States. At least that's what was thought.

He was given the time and place when the relic was taken. He was to find who was responsible and get it back.

A half million dollars up front had been wired to his account in Europe and the balance would be paid upon delivery. He would not be paid for killing the man so he would not do it—unless absolutely necessary. So at forty-six years old, it would be the retirement bonus he had been waiting for. It took six weeks of careful research and preparation to locate William “Irish” Flaherty. He had to thank the Freedom of

Information Act and the United States Central Intelligence Agency and their massive World War II document dump for that info. From that information it did not seem particularly hard to find Irish Flaherty. He just hoped he still had the edge.

For the last few weeks he sat and watched the Flaherty family. The old man was never alone. This had been the first and best opportunity. But he had underestimated Irish Flaherty. The old man was ill and arthritic, alone with a quiet farm dog. It was to be quick. In and out. No one would die. Routine. He had picked up a neighbor's cat as he approached and figured the dog would follow it through the hole he dug under the rear fence. He had underestimated the old man and didn't expect him to come outside and to resist. That was a mistake. He hated mistakes. Mistakes got you dead.

Carlo was now rolling around in the dirt in the backyard. He had wasted too much time. Soon, the son would be home and that was a variable he did not want to confront.

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Irish froze for an instant, dropped his hand from Carlo and slipped it into his pocket. The pain was back, worse than ever. Numbness spread into his hands and he was having trouble breathing. His hand and fingers were locking up. It would be close. It felt like a giant vise had clamped on his neck and chest. Tears welled in his eyes, not because of the pain he was enduring, but because he no longer had it in him. He hoped he had the

strength to do what he needed to do. He was thankful Shea and the boys were not here. He was dying but was still thinking like a cop.

“Flaherty, I know you are not well, but my patience is gone. Tell me where you have hidden it and I will pay your family. I am not unreasonable and I give you my word I am not here to kill you or anyone. Tell me now.” Carlo said.

Irish Flaherty realized he couldn't just die here of a heart attack. No. He'd be just another statistic with a bad ticker. His son was a sharp detective but he wasn't Sherlock Holmes. There was only one way to send a message to his son and protect his family. And dammit it was time anyway. He was tired. He had beat the Angel of Death on more occasions than any man had a right to.

He grabbed for the pistol in his pocket. Carlo snagged Irish's wrist and twisted his arm out turning his hand back away from his body to prevent Irish from shooting him. Exactly what Irish thought he would do.

With no resistance Irish slipped the gun back into his pocket and rolled his wrist out. With his face inches from Carlo's he smiled. One big toothy grin. BANG!

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One thing about that snub-nosed Smith & Wesson, it was loud—in spite of being muffled inside Flaherty's windbreaker pocket. The gun report was like a thunderclap in the cool night air. For the next few seconds, the silence was unnerving. Carlo looked

down and saw a river of dark fluid run out of Flaherty's belly. The bullet had passed through the portal vein and he would bleed out in minutes. Carlo considered running into the garage and finding something to use so that he could stop the bleeding. But Irish grabbed his wrist, grimaced through clenched teeth and growled—

“Don't you dare. It's my fucking time.”

And then he started to mumble a prayer.

“I'm sorry old man. It wasn't supposed to happen like this.” Carlo said. There was no helping Flaherty. The old man knew exactly what he was doing. This was a mercy kill. His own. And no one was taking that away from him.

Flaherty was dying. And that was that.

Carlo was not happy—He so wished he could save Flaherty's life but he couldn't. No one could. He gently put his hand on Flaherty's head—a signal that he understood.

He had been in worse situations. Now it was time to find out if anyone else was in Germany with Irish Flaherty in October 1944. Things just became complicated.