

THE 6TH SEAL



J.M. EMANUEL

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BY J.M. EMANUEL



Eloquent Books

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Eloquent Books
An imprint of Strategic Book Group
P.O.Box 333
Durham, CT 06422

www.StrategicBookGroup.com

ISBN: 978-1-61897-133-3

Printed in the United States of America

For John, Niki and Matthew

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the following friends and colleagues for their advice, assistance, or support: Chris J. Kowalski, Kathleen Lang, Holly Maag, and Lisa Smith.

Prologue: The Experiment

Saturday, September 6, 1975—Kovno, Lithuania

In the dream it was always the same. A fly appeared across the room buzzing about haphazardly then spiraling towards Kozar and hovering above him for a moment before landing on the near wall. Its shadow suddenly grew, bleeding out from its core, spreading, evolving into the shape of a beast that stood on two legs. Arms spread out from its sides and became wings, like those of a dragon flapping against the wall, faster and faster, ready to take flight, and then—a man stepped out of the wall and into the laboratory, a man enshrouded by a shadow, unable to come into the light, always in darkness. He came with cold air around him and wearing dark sunglasses. His voice was deep and full of resonance.

“Are you ready for your next lesson?”

The dark man directed Kozar to accomplish what seemed fantastical when he awoke but what happened easily, logically, in the dream. The science was awe inspiring. The process was radical, never envisioned before, but practical nonetheless. It would make Kozar a rich man. It would take him out of Eastern Europe and open the door to his dream of living and working in America. The dark man promised him that. Kozar was terrified of the dark man

but not enough to scare him off the science. Besides, it was only a dream.

Kozar sat up in bed and smoked and revisited the dream. He was hunched over the microscope with the dark man hovering beside him and directing his actions. The dark man used a skin cell. He told Kozar precisely how to remove the nucleus, and as Kozar worked, he felt a rush of adrenaline but forced his hands to be steady and to perform. It was exhilarating work. When the dark man presented him with a petri dish containing a human ovum and told him precisely how to inject the nucleus into it, he felt his head spin. The process was intoxicating. Kozar realized that the ovum did not need to be fertilized because it now contained the correct amount of genetic material to develop in a host. A host. That's what the dark man said. A human host.

That was the point in the dream when Kozar always turned to him. He eased his body around to face the dark man and watched as he removed the dark sunglasses, and the wall of cold pressed against Kozar. He felt as though he was levitated. When the dark man looked at him with irises as dark as a chasm, Kozar felt himself falling into them, and he reached for the edge of the counter to steady himself. That's always when he awoke—one hand clutching the bed rail, sweating and cold at the same time. Kozar was glad the dark man was only a dream.

But he was not dreaming now. The dark man sat across from Kozar in his laboratory office. He sat with one leg casually draped over the other and worked a bright coin between his fingers. He appeared to be studying Kozar who rolled a pen between his fingers to keep his hands from shaking. He could do nothing about his legs. They twitched uncontrollably beneath the desk, and he was sure the dark man could hear them. He grinned at Kozar, a small, elfish grin. His head was tilted slightly, and the bright coin flashed between his fingers so that Kozar felt hypnotized, drawn into the thickness of a spell. He was mesmerized by the roll of the metal and

the glint of it in the fluorescent light. His insides turned to gelatin. His concentration weakened, and only the hum of the lights and the press of the cold that permeated the room kept him linked to the real world—or what passed for real.

“You know who I am?” the dark man asked.

“Yes,” was all Kozar could manage.

The dark man grinned harder and leaned back in his chair. The coin vanished, flicked completely out of view, and Kozar stared at the dark man’s hands that were now neatly folded over his knee. He was dressed expensively in an Armani suit with Ferragamo shoes—alligator.

“Good. Introductions are so vastly overrated. Better that you intuit. It shows off the scientist in you in a better light.”

Kozar sat spellbound. He wanted to respond but could not speak the words.

“So you know then that I’m here to elevate your lessons. You know that it is time for dream to become reality. Are you ready? Have you had sufficient instruction?”

“I’m ready,” Kozar said dreamily.

“Good. The others have gone. Their efforts have all been in vain—hundreds of failed attempts because they don’t understand the science and are unwilling to do that which must be done. It will take them decades to learn what you are about to do this night. Our work can proceed.”

Kozar was suddenly at his lab table. He’d only seemed to blink his eyes, and he was transported out of his office and into the middle of the lab. The dark man hovered as in the dream. Kozar stared up at him and could see the clock in the background and smell the coffee turning to thick sludge in the maker that someone had forgotten to turn off. This was not a dream. The dark man reached into his coat and handed Kozar a vial containing a tissue sample suspended in liquid. The skin.

“Who is the donor?” Kozar asked.

“I am.”

Kozar crooked his neck and stared up at the dark man, aghast at the implications. He bent to the eyepiece again and made the preparations. With the dark man’s voice in his head, he continued to work through the process. His hands moved by rote as he placed the tissue in a petri dish and extracted a single cell. The dark man laid a hand on Kozar’s shoulder, and it felt like bone—frigid, meatless bone. He shivered. After isolating the nucleus from the cytoplasm, he raised his head and leaned back in the chair. He was bathed in the hushed light of the lab and had no clue how much time had passed. The dark man grinned and raised a hand and twirled a coin through his fingers. Kozar stared at it. Gold. Gleaming. The dark man flicked it with his thumb, and Kozar watched it loop through the air and caught it neatly in his palm. The dark man flipped another, and when Kozar caught it again, the dark man laughed, and Kozar heard a low rumble like distant thunder. He slid the two gold coins into his pocket, and when he looked up again, the dark man was not alone.

There was a woman. She was young and had Italian features—classical yet unadorned. Her long hair framed her face perfectly as she stood at the dark man’s side with her eyes cast down. Kozar saw a single tear fall from her cheek and plop onto the tiled floor. He wanted to reach for her. The dark man raised the woman’s chin with the knuckle of one hand, and she looked at Kozar. She looked incredibly sad, weary, and heartbroken, and Kozar felt his own heart tear. Suddenly, the woman was supine on the polished metal table with her knees apart.

“Age quod agis,” the dark man said.

“Attend to your business,” Kozar mumbled.

“Yes. You learned your Latin well. Now, attend to it.”

Kozar raised his head and stared at the dark man. “I can’t.”

The dark man removed his sunglasses and aimed the black chasm of his eyes at Kozar, and he felt his insides turn to ice.

“You will,” the dark man said.

“But I’ve only done this before in the dream, never with an actual patient.”

“Then this will be your first. Remember your lessons.”

Kozar tried to pull away. He felt disgust. There was bile in his throat, and he wanted to run, but the dark man held him with the black pool of his eyes. Kozar tried to steal his mind against the hypnotic pull, but the cold wrapped around him like a python, tightening its deadly grip, queezing the breath from his lungs, and forcing him into submission.

“You have my gold,” the dark man said. “You have been paid for the privilege of being the first to succeed.”

Kozar felt himself lifted by invisible hands and eased next to the examining table. Sterile instruments were neatly arranged on a white cloth draped over a metal tray. He found himself moving slowly through a fog, watching himself perform and unable to break out of the spell that held him. He removed an egg cell from the woman’s uterus and placed it in a separate petri dish then began preparations to extract its nucleus. Time disappeared. He worked expertly. The precision of the dream guided his hands, and he was amazed at his ability to perform with such skill and dexterity. After he transferred the nucleus from the skin cell into the egg cell, the dark man handed him another vial.

“What does it contain?”

“An alchemic preparation of my own design. A magic potion, if you will. An elixir of life. Simply add a few drops into the dish and observe the miracle.”

Kozar added three drops, and moments later he witnessed for the first time cellular mitosis. Procreation—in a glass dish. After implanting the embryo back inside the womb, he backed away from the table and slumped against the wall. He inhaled deeply and tried to fight the dizziness that descended upon him. He slid down the wall and onto the floor with his legs splayed in front of him. His

chin dropped to his chest with his mouth agape. The dark man crouched in front of him and grinned. He reached out and raised Kozar's chin, and Kozar felt the weight of a gold coin on his tongue, and his jaw was pressed closed. The dark man removed his glasses again, and Kozar felt himself swim in the black sea of his eyes.

"You are a great scientist, Kozar," the dark man said.

Kozar slid further down the wall and lay on his back on the floor.

"You've gotten what you asked, and I have no need of you now."

Kozar heard the words even though the dark man's lips did not move, and he began to cry. The dark man removed the two gold coins from Kozar's pocket and reached out and closed his eyes with two fingers. Kozar felt the cold weight of the coins against his eyelids and the taste of the metal on his tongue. Then he felt the dark man's hands fold his own across his chest and the sweep of icy air. Then came the long, slow drop into darkness.

They found him that way in the morning.

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