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Opening Extract from...

The Library of Gold

Written by Gayle Lynds

Published by Corvus

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*For Sophia Stone,
my granddaughter,
child of light and grace*

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As you read this novel, you might enjoy knowing that several of the characters have the real names of readers who entered a contest on my website. Much to my delight, they sent in e-mail waivers allowing me to use their names in the book—whether for criminal or corpse or hero. No description is accurate, and certainly I won't tell you which ones are theirs. That's called suspense.

Thank you one and all.

PART ONE

THE HUNT

As he walked to the Senate, a note was thrust into Julius Caesar's hand. His spies had done their job, giving him a list of conspirators and their plans to kill him. Unfortunately, Caesar was in a hurry and did not read it. An hour later, he was assassinated.

—translated from The Book of Spies

In the abstruse world of espionage, it's not always easy to know when you are in on a secret.

—Time magazine, January 9, 2006

1

A library could be a dangerous place. The librarian scanned the ten men in tailored tuxedos who lounged around the long oval table in the center of the room. Encircling them were magnificent illuminated manuscripts, more than a thousand of them, blanketing the walls from floor to ceiling. Their spectacular gold-covered bindings faced out to showcase the fortune in gems decorating them.

The men were members of the book club that owned and operated the secret Library of Gold, where the annual dinner was always held. The finale was the tournament, in which each member tested the librarian with a research question. As the books towered around them and the air vibrated with golden light, the men sipped their cognac. Their eyes watched the librarian.

"Trajan," challenged the international lawyer from Los Angeles. "A.D. 53 to A.D. 117. Trajan was one of the most ambitious warrior-emperors of old Rome, but few people realize he also revered books. His supreme monument to his successes at war is called Trajan's Column. He ordered it erected in the court between two galleries of Rome's library, which he also built."

The room seemed to hold its breath, waiting. The librarian's fingers plucked at his tuxedo jacket. Nearly seventy years old, he was a tidy man with wrinkled features. His hair was thin, his glasses large, and his mouth set in a perpetual small smile.

The tension heightened as he mulled. "Of course," he said at last. "Cassius Dio Cocceianus wrote about it." He went to the shelves containing the eighty volumes of Cassius Dio's history, *Romaika*, compiled in the second and third centuries and transcribed by a Byzantine calligrapher in the sixth century. "The story is here, in volume seventy-seven. Most of Cassius Dio's work has been lost. Our library has the only complete set."

As pleased laughter swept the exclusive group, the librarian laid the large volume into the arms of the challenger, who stroked the embedded opals and sapphires on its cover. Gazing appreciatively at the golden book, he stood it up beside his brandy glass. Eight other illuminated manuscripts stood beside eight other brandy glasses. Each was a testament to the librarian's intimate knowledge of ancient and medieval literature and the priceless value of the library itself.

Now only the tenth member—the director himself—remained. He would pose the final question in the tournament.

The men helped themselves to more cognac. By design their yearly dinner was dazzling theater. Hours before the first martini was poured, ten wild ducks, freshly shot, had arrived by private jet from Johannesburg. The chefs were flown in from Paris, blindfolded of course. The seven-course meal was exquisite, including truffled sweetbreads with chestnuts. The alcohol was the best—tonight's cognac was a Louis XIII de Rémy Martin, worth more than a thousand dollars a bottle in today's market. All of the book club's liquors had been laid down by those who had gone before, creating a cellar of indisputable quality.

The director cleared his throat, and everyone turned to look at him. He was American and had flown in from Paris earlier in the day. The room's tenor changed, becoming somehow menacing.

The librarian pulled himself up, vigilant.

The director peered at him. "Salah al-Din, also known as Saladin. A.D. 1137 or 1138 to A.D. 1193. General Saladin, a Kurdish Muslim, was famous for his espionage network. One night his enemy Richard the Lionheart went to sleep in his tent in Assyria, guarded on all sides by his English knights. They poured a track of white ash around the tent so wide no one could cross it undetected. But when Richard awoke, a melon with a dagger buried deep inside had appeared beside his bed. The blade could just as easily have been stabbed into Richard's heart. It was Saladin's warning, left by one of his spies. The spy escaped without leaving a clue and was never caught."

Again the eyes watched the librarian. With every word, he had tensed. The door behind him opened quietly. He glanced over his shoulder as Douglas Preston stepped into the room. Preston was head of library security, a tall, muscular man who was an expert in weapons and took his work seriously. He was not wearing a tuxedo, instead had on his usual black leather jacket and jeans. Strangely, he carried a bath towel.

With effort, the librarian kept his voice steady as he headed across the room to another bookshelf. "The story can be found in Baha al-Din's *Sirat Salah al-Din: The Life of Saladin*—"

"Of course, you're correct," the director interrupted. "But I want another manuscript. Bring me *The Book of Spies*."

The librarian stopped, his hands reaching for the volume. He turned. The men's faces were outraged, unforgiving.

"How did you find out?" he whispered.

No one answered. The room was so silent he could hear the tread of crepe-soled shoes. Before he could turn again, Preston's towel slapped around his skull, covering his eyes and mouth. There was a huge explosion of gunfire, and pain

erupted in his head. As he fell, he realized the security chief had given him fair warning by using a technique of the later Assassins—the towel was to cover the entrance and exit wounds to control spraying blood and bone. The book club knew that.

2

Los Angeles, California *April, One year later*

As she walked into the Getty Center's conservation laboratory, with its sinks and fume hoods, Eva Blake smiled. On the sea of worktables lay centuries-old illuminated manuscripts, charts, and scrolls. Tattered and sprinkled with wormholes, all would be brought back to useful life. For her, conservation work was more than a profession—by restoring the old books she was restoring herself.

Eva's gaze swept the room. Three other conservators were already bent over their tables, lone islands of movement in the vast high-tech lab. She said a cheery hello and grabbed a smock. A slender woman of thirty years, she had an understated face—the cheekbones were good, the chin soft and round, the lips full—that resisted the sharp cut of classical beauty. Her red hair tumbled to her shoulders, and her eyes were cobalt blue. Today she wore an open-necked white blouse, white pencil skirt, and low-heeled white sandals. There was a sense of elegance about her, and a softness, a vulnerability, she had learned to hide.

She stopped at Peggy Doty's workbench. "Hi, Peggy. How's your new project?"

Peggy lifted her head, took a jeweler's loupe from her eye, and quickly put on large, thick glasses. "Hey, there. Seneca's worrying me. I think I can definitely save Aristotle, but then

he's the one who said, 'Happiness is a sort of action,' so with that kind of Zen attitude he's bound to last longer."

Born and raised in England, Peggy was a gifted conservator and a longtime friend, such a good friend that she had stayed close even after Eva had been charged with vehicular manslaughter in her husband's death. As she thought about him, Eva's throat tightened. She automatically touched the gold chain around her neck.

Then she said, "I always liked Aristotle."

"Me, too. I'll see what I can do for Seneca. Poor guy. His toga's peeling like a banana." Peggy's brown hair was short and messy, her eyeglasses were already sliding down her nose, and EX LIBRIS inside a pink heart was tattooed on her forearm.

"He's in good hands." Eva started to leave.

"Don't go yet. I'd sure like your help—the provenance on this piece sucks." Peggy indicated the colorful medieval chart spread out on her worktable. "I'm waiting for the results of the date test, but I'd love to know at least the century."

"Sure. Let's see what we can figure out." Eva pulled up a chair.

The chart was about fourteen inches wide and twenty inches long. At the bottom stood two figures in rope sandals and luminous blue togas. On the left was Aristotle, representing natural philosophy, and on the right was Seneca, moral philosophy. To all appearances they were an unlikely pair—Aristotle was Greek, while Seneca was Roman and born nearly four hundred years later. Eva studied them a moment, then moved her gaze to medallions rising like clouds above their heads. Each medallion contained a pair of the men's opposing theories, a battle of ideas between two great classical thinkers. The chart's lettering was Cyrillic.

"The chart itself is written in Old Russian," Eva explained, "but it's not the revised alphabet of Peter the Great. So it

was probably made before 1700." She laid her finger along the right margin of the parchment, where small, faded words were printed. "This isn't Russian, old or new—it's Greek. It translates as 'Created under the hand of Maximos after cataloguing the Royal Library.'"

Peggy moved closer, staring down. "I'm pretty sure Maximos is a Greek name. But which Royal Library? Russia or Greece? What city?"

"Our chart-maker, Maximos, was born Michael Trivolis in Greece and was later known as Maximos. When he moved to Russia, he was called Maxim. Does that give you enough information to know who he was?"

Peggy's small face lit up. "Saint Maxim the Greek. He spent a long time in Moscow translating books, writing, and teaching. I remember studying him in an Eastern history course."

"And that gives you the answer to your question—Maxim arrived in Russia in 1518 and never left. He died about forty years later. So your chart was made sometime in the first half of the sixteenth century in Russia."

"Cool. Thanks."

Eva smiled. "How's everything with Zack?" Zack Turner was the head of security at the British Museum in London.

"Distant, as in he's still there, and I'm still here. Woe is me—and he."

"How about going back to the British Library?"

"I've been thinking about it. How are you doing?" There was concern in Peggy's gaze.

"Fine." It was mostly true now that the Getty had offered Eva the conservation job to tide her over until her trial. She was out of sight in the lab—the press coverage of the car crash had been exhaustive. But then Charles had been the renowned director of the elite Elaine Moreau Library, while she had been a top curator here at the celebrated Getty.

Charming, handsome, and in love, they were a star-studded couple in L.A.'s art and monied beau monde. His dramatic death—and her arrest and denials—had made for a particularly juicy scandal.

Being home all day every day after the accident had been hard. She watched for Charles in the shadows, listened for his voice calling from the garden, slept with his pillow tight against her cheek. The emptiness had closed around her like a cold fist, holding her tight in a kind of painful suspension.

"I'm so sorry, Eva," Peggy was saying. "Charles was a great scholar."

She nodded. Again her fingers went to the chain around her neck. At the end of it hung an ancient Roman coin with the profile of the goddess Diana—her first gift from Charles. She had not taken off the necklace since he died.

"Dinner tonight?" Peggy said brightly. "My treat for letting me tap into that big brain of yours."

"Love to. I've got karate class, so I'll meet you afterward."

They decided on a restaurant, and Eva went to her workstation. She sat and pulled the arm of her stereo-binocular microscope toward her. She liked the familiarity of the motion and the comfort of her desk with its slide kits, gooseneck lamp, and ultraviolet light stand. Her project was an adventure manuscript about the knights of King Arthur completed in 1422 in London.

She stared through the microscope's eyepiece and used a scalpel to lift a flaking piece of green pigment from the gown of a princess. The quiet of the work and the meticulous focus it required soothed her. She carefully applied adhesive beneath the paint flake.

"Hello, Eva."

So deep was her concentration, the voice sent a dull shock through her. She looked up. It was her attorney, Brian Collum.

Of medium height, he was in his late forties, with

eyebrows and hair the gray color of a magnet and the strong-jawed face of a man who knew what he wanted from life. Impeccably turned out in a charcoal suit with thin pinstripes, he was the name partner in the international law firm of Collum & Associates. Because of their friendship, he was representing her in the trial for Charles's death.

"How nice to see you, Brian."

He lowered his voice. "We need to talk." Usually his long face radiated optimism. But not now. His expression was grim.

"Not good news?" She glanced at her colleagues, noting they were studiously attending to their projects.

"It's good—or bad, depending on what you think."

Eva led him outdoors to a courtyard of lawns and flowers. A water fountain flowed serenely over perfectly arranged boulders. This was all part of the Getty Center, a complex of striking architecture sheathed in glass and Italian travertine stone crowning a hill in the Santa Monica Mountains.

Silently they passed museum visitors and sat together on a bench where no one could overhear.

"What's happened?" she asked.

He was blunt. "I have an offer from the D.A.'s office. If you plead guilty, they'll give you a reduced sentence. Four years. But with good behavior you'll be out in three. They're willing to make a deal because you have a clean driving record and you're a respected member of the community."

"Absolutely not." She forced herself to stay calm. "I wasn't driving."

"Then who was?"

The question hung like a scythe in the sparkling California air.

"You really don't recall Charles getting behind the wheel?" she asked. "You were standing in your doorway when we drove away. I saw you. You had to have seen us." They had

been at a dinner party at Brian's house that night, the last guests to leave.

"We've been over this before. I went inside as soon as I said good night—before either of you got close to your car. Alcohol plays tricks with the mind."

"Which is why I'd never drive. Never." Working to keep the horror from her voice, she related the story again: "It was after one A.M., and Charles was driving us home. We were laughing. There wasn't any traffic on Mulholland, so Charles wove the car back and forth. That threw us against our seat belts and just made us laugh harder. He drove with one hand, then with the other . . ." She frowned to herself. There was something else, but it escaped her. "Suddenly a car shot out from a driveway ahead of us. Charles slammed the brakes. Our car spun out of control. I must've lost consciousness. The next thing I knew, I was strapped down to a gurney." She swallowed. "And Charles was dead."

She smoothed the fabric of her skirt and stared off as grief raged through her.

Brian's silence was so long that the distant roar of traffic on the San Diego Freeway seemed to grow louder.

At last he said kindly, "I'm sure that's what you remember, but we have no evidence to support it. And I've spent enough of your money hiring investigators to look for witnesses that I have to believe we're not going to find any." His voice toughened. "How's a jury going to react when they learn you were found lying unconscious just ten feet from the driver's door—and it was hanging open, showing you were behind the wheel? And Charles was in the front passenger seat, with the seat belt melted into what was left of him. There's no way he was driving. And you had a 1.6 blood alcohol level—*twice* the legal limit."

"But I wasn't driving—" She stopped. With effort, she

controlled herself. "You think I should take the D.A.'s deal, don't you?"

"I think the jury is going to believe you were so drunk you blacked out and don't remember what you did. They'll go for the maximum sentence. If I had a scintilla of hope I could convince them otherwise, I'd recommend against the offer."

Shaken, Eva stood and walked around the tranquil pool of water encircling the fountain. Her chest was tight. She stared into the water and tried to make herself breathe. First she had lost Charles and all their dreams and hopes for the future. He had been brilliant, fun, endlessly fascinating. She closed her eyes and could almost feel him stroking her cheek, comforting her. Her heart ached with longing for him.

And now she faced prison. The thought terrified her, but for the first time she admitted it was possible—she had never in her life blacked out, but she might have this time. If she had blacked out, she might have climbed behind the wheel. And if she did—that meant she really had killed Charles. She bent her head and clasped the gold wedding band on her finger. Tears slid down her cheeks.

Behind her, Brian touched her shoulder. "You remember Trajan, the great ruler who expanded the Roman empire?"

She quickly wiped her face with her fingers and turned around to him. "Of course. What about him?"

"Trajan was ruthless and cunning and won every great battle he led his troops into. He had a rule: If you can't win, don't fight. If you don't fight, it's no defeat. You will survive. Take the deal, Eva. Survive."