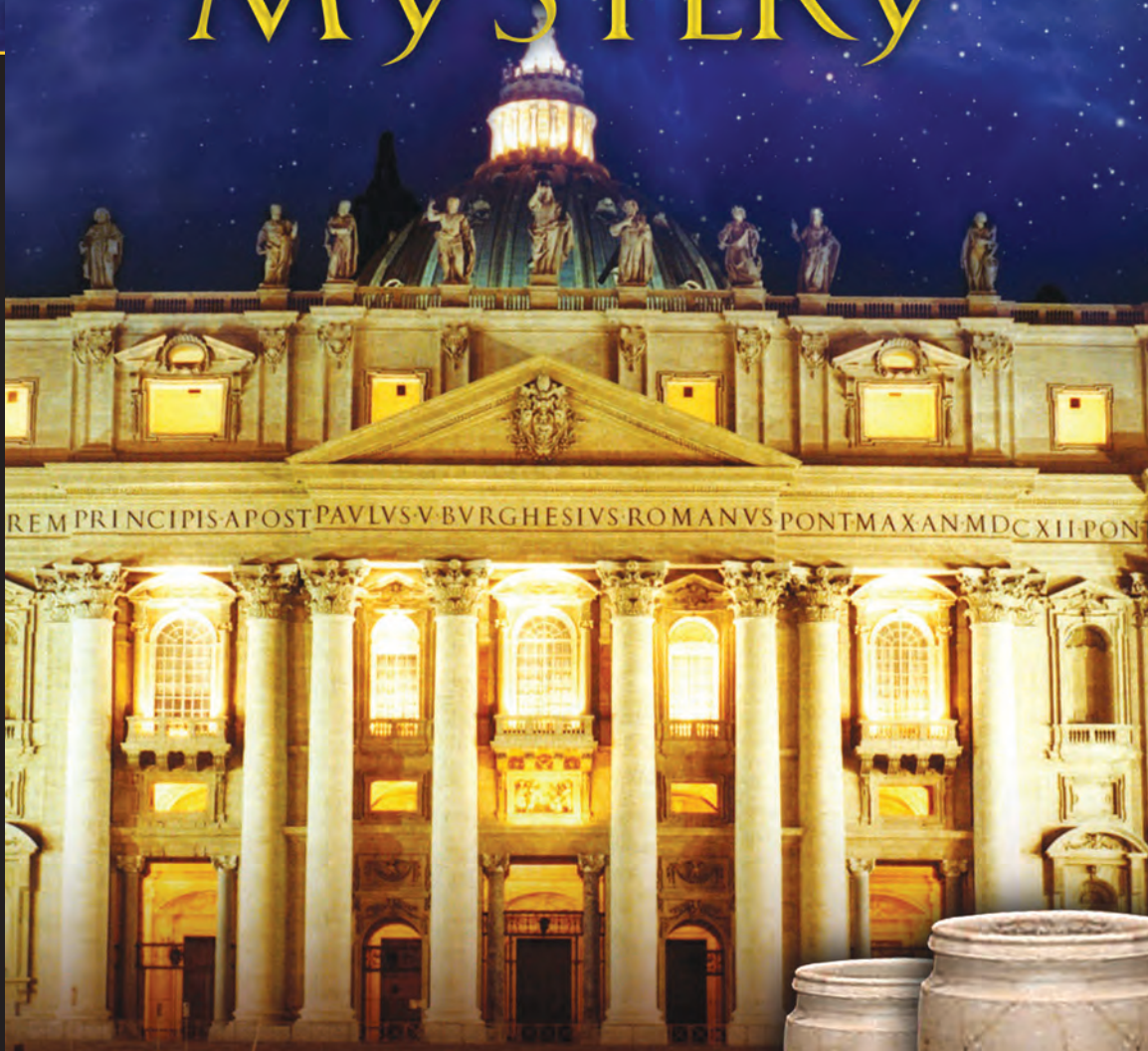


THE CANA MYSTERY



DAVID BECKETT

THE
CANA
MYSTERY

David Beckett



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For Catherine

THE
CANA
MYSTERY

In a time when error reigns—
bleak days the world doth mourn,
cries of anguish, great with pain,
children of the light forlorn.

AVA OF GÖTTWEIG,
“Der Antichrist,” Vora Manuscript
(trans. author)

PROLOGUE

THE VATICAN, 1462

Daybreak. Pope Pius II watches a fiery orb crest the Tiber. His mind drifts. He recalls that Aristotle's student Callippus once computed the seasons' duration, measuring the sun's movement within its ethereal sphere. While the pontiff ruminates, his valet methodically extinguishes the candles that had illuminated a long, busy night. Pius smiles. An educated man, he'd known it would be difficult to glean the secret. Nevertheless, anticipation grows in him. On this blessed day they may unlock the great enigma, a message concealed for a millennium.

One artifact has remained hidden in the catacombs since the Vandals' attack in 455. He'd retrieved the second from Scotland twenty-five years ago. Now he prays the cryptic knowledge these objects contain would avail his church in its desperate campaign against the Turks, who are occupying Constantinople.

Pius turns away from the window and crosses through a cleverly masked portal. Emanating from his private library, wondrous voices speak incomprehensible words. Inside, a dexterous young acolyte transcribes the mysterious cipher. Pius watches the boy ink words onto a scroll. Gradually, words form into couplets; couplets become quatrains. "It must be the lost prophecy," the

pope thinks, “just as Bessarion and Regiomontanus described.” Pius understands not a syllable.

“What language is that, Jacopo?” he asks his most trusted cardinal.

“An ancient tongue, Holiness. Few in Christendom speak it. It’s beyond my ken, but my young scribe can translate.”

The pope is not surprised. Cardinal Jacopo Piccolomini-Ammannati is ever surrounded by an entourage of brilliant students. Over the years, he’d guided countless priests’ careers. The shrewd academician could be elected pope himself someday, supported by this army of admirers and protégés.

“Very well. What does it say?”

The Gallic child smiles. He is eager to win favor with the Holy Father—and he is secretly pleased he will be able to report the prophecy to his true master, the brilliant Spider King. Having transcribed several quatrains into Latin, he begins to read aloud.

1

NEAR SANTO STEFANO, ITALY
DECEMBER 24, 2007

The tiny archipelago had been inhabited since prehistoric times. Romans named it Ilva, then Fussa, and, later, Bucina. In medieval times it was called Bicinara. Pisa and Genoa disputed ownership throughout the twelfth century. Four hundred years later, Corsican shepherds rechristened it Santa Maria Magdalena. Now it concealed a secret U.S. submarine base.

Across the bay a dilapidated ferry's halogen floodlights pierced the gathering fog. On board, Roderigo leaned against the wet metal rail and smoked. He checked his watch: 11:20 P.M., plenty of time. Earlier that day, he had crossed the causeway from Caprera and piloted his van through Moneta's narrow streets. The Italian's movements betrayed no anxiety. His papers were legitimate, his registration was authentic, and his custom-tailored delivery uniform bore Francese-Trinita Catering's interlocked F-T logo. Don VeMeli had seen to every detail.

The lumbering boat docked. Roderigo started the van and drove to the base, where, just before midnight, a moderately intoxicated guard waved him through security. At the appointed spot, the Italian parked, killed the ignition, rolled down the window, and tapped his cigarettes.

Before long, he detected a diesel engine's tubercular mutter. He swung his long legs out of the vehicle, stood upon the rain-soaked asphalt, and stretched. A motorized forklift emerged from the gloom. Roderigo hailed its driver, who nodded in recognition.

Working in collusive silence, the men removed three heavy suitcases from the van and replaced them with a ponderous steel container. Business complete, Roderigo was preparing to depart when he felt a hand on his elbow. He turned.

"Your boss . . . he keeps his word, right? He'll use it only on Arabs?"

The Italian's eyes narrowed. He appraised this curious confederate: shaved head, pale skin, several fierce tattoos, but really just a frightened lad.

"Because if that," the speaker continued, gesturing to the van's cargo, "goes off in New York, D.C., anywhere else in the States . . ."

Roderigo's nostrils flared, emitting a curl of bemused smoke. "Relax, *paisan*. The Gruppo hates ragheads as much as you. My boss will do the right thing, like Truman did in forty-five."

The serviceman's posture eased, and if he suffered further pangs of conscience, Roderigo knew, the million-dollar bribe would dull them.

"Okay. I just needed to be sure."

"No problem."

As they shook hands, the lanky Italian smiled, knowing the young American soldier would be dead inside a week. Roderigo rammed the door shut and started the van. Just before leaving, he called out, "Merry Christmas!"



BOSTON, FEBRUARY 2013

Ava was roused by her phone vibrating. Who calls at three in the morning? Groggily, she traced a finger across the screen to answer.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Ava. What’s happening?”

The man’s voice was familiar, but she couldn’t quite place it. “Listen, I need help on something,” he said. “What’s your schedule next week?”

Emerging from a drowsy fugue, Ava struggled to identify the caller. Not Gabe, not Dad, not her thesis adviser. Maybe the pushy guy from the bachelorette party? Hadn’t she given him a fake number? Was he stalking her?

“Who is this?” She was fully awake now, and riled.

“This is Paul. Paul Grant. Can you come to Yemen? My boss will pay for everything. We found something important and we need your help to—”

“Paul?” It had been years, and, as she recalled, they’d parted under ambiguous circumstances. Now he was calling in the middle of the night expecting her to drop everything and fly to Yemen?

“Is this a joke? Who is your boss?”

“Oh, I thought you knew. I work for Simon DeMaj. You’ve heard of him?”

Of course she had. DeMaj was a global celebrity. Rising from the slums of Algiers, the half-French, half-Algerian polymath had flown helicopters for the French air force before attending Yale. Later, he made headlines when his high-tech start-up landed contracts to provide Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and Libya with state-of-the-art digital infrastructure. DeMaj had wired half of the Middle East, becoming one of the world’s four hundred richest men in the process. He was equally famous for romantic liaisons with models and actresses—juicy affairs providing fodder for gossip columns

and tabloid pictorials. DeMaj was as likely to be seen hosting an economic development forum at Davos as canoodling with best-supporting-actress nominees at the California Governor's Ball.

"I may have heard the name," Ava deadpanned. "What does he want?"

"We need an expert in ancient languages," Paul told her, "someone who can solve difficult puzzles. I can't explain by phone, but you'll be well compensated. How about two thousand dollars a day?"

Despite herself, Ava was intrigued. She couldn't resist an intellectual challenge and she could use the money, but that was insufficient justification to leave the country.

"Paul, I need more info."

He groaned. "You'll get me in trouble. I'm really not allowed to say. How about this: I'll give you a hint and you figure it out, just like the old days."

In college, Ava had been known for cracking riddles. Classmates tried to stump her at every cocktail party, but she'd amazed them all. It was a gift. Too bad it didn't pay well.

She accepted the challenge. "Lay it on me."

"I'll e-mail you."

He pecked keys. "Okay, it's sent. I'm going on Expedia now. I'll book you an open-ended ticket from Boston to Yemen. Simon's lawyers will set up your visa and handle the diplomatic details. If you decide not to come, text me back at this number. Otherwise, I'll meet you at the airport in Sana'a."

She scrolled down to a message that was sent from PGRANT@SDEMAJ.ORG: "Something sought in a historic hat bag has been found."

For half an hour Ava lay on her back and stared at the ceiling. She pondered the clue, working to discern a hidden subtext or

pattern, but she made no progress. A different puzzle preoccupied her mind: After all this time, why did Paul still have her number? Before she reached a firm conclusion, she fell into a dream.

When the alarm rang, Ava rolled out of bed. She dressed, grabbed her backpack, trotted downstairs, and, it being an exceptionally sunny morning, began riding her bicycle toward Harvard. Ava was earning her doctorate from MIT, but she'd enrolled in one cross-registered history course. She didn't need the credit; it was mainly an excuse to see her friends Gabe and Jess and to visit her beloved alma mater. After an invigorating ride, Ava skidded to a stop and secured her bike outside Lowell House. As she cut across the interior courtyard, her eyes lingered on a favorite tree, a majestic giant growing directly in front of the main entrance. Its tallest branches reached three stories; its lowest swept the ground. Each October it turned a brilliant gold, as if touched by Midas. Smiling, Ava crossed Mt. Auburn, made for Dunster Street, turned right onto Mass. Ave., and ducked into Au Bon Pain, ending up in line behind a striking young woman in a sheer tunic and skinny jeans.

"Hello, darling!" said Jess. Several male customers turned, secretly hoping. With her alluring features and sexy British accent, sable-haired Jess stood out in any crowd. A gifted scholar, she might have been Ava's rival. Instead, Jess numbered among the kindest, most sincere people in their class. Unlike many Harvardians, who would bayonet their peers to obtain a better grade or job, Jess rose above the competitive, duplicitous environment. She'd become one of Ava's closest confidantes and most steadfast allies.

"Ready to be televised?" Jess asked.

"What?"

“Have you forgotten? We have the guest lecture today. Bagelton. It’ll be on Book TV.”

Ava groaned. “You’ve got to be kidding. I knew he’d speak today, but I didn’t realize it would be a media event.”

Dr. Ron Bagelton was a rising academic celebrity. His books sold well, but Ava considered him guilty of pandering. The type of scholar who appeared on the History Channel, MSNBC, or *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, his usual method was to posit spectacular hypotheses based on scant evidence. One of his best-sellers described a previously unpublished *Divine Comedy* that featured characters who were different from those in the well-known version. Bagelton alleged that, contrary to Dante’s wishes, a revisionist conspiracy had populated the inferno with victims chosen to reinforce orthodox Church values.

“It’ll be a nightmare,” Ava said, paying for their chai lattes.

“Why?”

She rolled her eyes. “Bagelton’s ego is titanic. He’ll use us as props to establish his brilliance. Our classmates haven’t read his latest book, so they’ll be unable to refute his outlandish theses. To the TV audience, polite passivity will be indistinguishable from submissive acceptance. Viewers will think Bagelton must be legit if he lectures an auditorium full of Ivy Leaguers, never mind that his treatise is just ahistorical speculation tarted up with academic gobbledygook.”

They entered Harvard Yard and walked by Wadsworth House, a clapboard structure in which Washington stayed during the Revolutionary War. They passed Widener Library and entered a redbrick building named Emerson Hall. Ava and Jess took two of the last available seats in room 105, an airy lecture hall with three hundred wooden chairs bolted to its floor. Five minutes later, Dr. Bagelton burst through the doors and strode

to the rostrum. With a sinking feeling, Ava whispered, “Here we go.”

It was worse than she’d imagined. Bagelton lectured for thirty-five minutes, then spent another fifteen reading passages from his latest work, *The Philosopher-Queens*, its cover displayed for the cameras at all times. Afterward, he opened the floor to questions. There were no microphones for students. All cameras remained focused on the author. Ava recognized this bit of media manipulation. No cogent question, correction, or critique would be broadcast. Viewers would see only the speaker’s smiling, confident replies. Despite the rigged game, Ava couldn’t help but play. She raised her hand. Predictably, given the speaker’s interest in pretty college girls, he called on her right away.

“Dr. Bagelton,” she began, “your conjecture seems terribly unlikely. You assert that because highly advanced Atlanteans didn’t conquer the ancient world, Atlantis must have been a peace-loving matriarchy. The notion certainly appeals, especially to women, but you offer no verification that a place called Atlantis ever existed. Even if we suspend our disbelief on that point, no archaeological evidence supports your second premise: that Atlantis achieved an advanced technology. Furthermore, you provide zero proof that the supposed inhabitants were peaceful. Maybe they tried to conquer the region but failed. Or if they did conquer—”

“My dear,” Bagelton interrupted, “your course work must have skipped over the fact that no historical records document an Atlantean conquest, attempted or otherwise. If brave female warriors from Atlantis attacked Greece and Egypt, wouldn’t some evidence remain? Because none exists, we must conclude that the Atlanteans were pacifists.”

“No! The only logical conclusion to draw from no evidence is no conclusion.”

Bagelton’s features settled into a patronizing smirk. “As you advance in your studies, young lady, you’ll discover that much true history has been repressed and hidden by the establishment. The fact that the world’s first and, arguably, greatest civilization was dominated by strong, independent women threatened the monopoly of political power held by the Catholic Church and the European monarchs. These fearful males eradicated all evidence of Atlantis and its philosopher-queens.”

To her amazement, Ava noticed many audience members nodding. What a crock! Frustrated, she collapsed back into her chair. The bigger the lie, she thought, the more books you sell.

The speaker called on another student, who expressed his deep admiration for *The Philosopher-Queens* and asked Bagelton if he needed a research assistant. The audience groaned, offended by such blatant boot-licking.

“I’ll be happy to consider your résumé when I return from the G8 Summit in Italy,” the author replied smugly.

After the lecture, Ava and Jess walked to the Garage, a converted building that housed a variety of shops and restaurants. Ava’s favorite served authentic Vietnamese cuisine. Inside, boisterous students dined, joked, and debated. While Ava visited the rest room, Jess ordered a bowl of pho large enough to share. Minutes later, Jess spotted Ava threading her way through the maze of busy tables. Suddenly, Ava stopped. The restaurant’s TV had captured her attention. A CNN reporter spoke.

“Catholics around the world were shocked when Pope Benedict XVI announced that he will resign for the good of the Church . . .”

Ava commanded the room to hush as the report continued.

“Thousands gathered in St. Peter’s Basilica to attend the pope’s Ash Wednesday service. The crowd gave Benedict a standing ovation. Many in the throng had tears in their eyes. Some observers waved papal flags, others lifted a huge banner reading GRAZIE SANTITA. Speaking softly in Italian, Benedict asked that the faithful ‘continue to pray for me, the Church, and the future pope.’ A chorus of schoolchildren sang in German. Benedict, who is Bavarian, thanked them for singing a hymn ‘particularly dear to me.’ He is the first pope to resign since Gregory XII, in 1415 . . .”

Ava shook her head. She turned from the television, came to the table, slid into a chair, and whipped out her iPhone. Jess saw that her companion was annoyed.

“What is it?”

“It wasn’t . . .” Ava inhaled deeply, paused for a beat, continued. “CNN just compared Benedict’s resignation to that of Gregory XII. The comparison isn’t valid. The circumstances are different. Gregory refused to resign unless the antipopes—”

“Antipopes?”

“After the Great Western Schism, three men claimed to head the Church: Gregory XII in Rome, Benedict XIII in Avignon, and John XXIII in Pisa. Five years of chaos convinced Church leaders to hold the Council of Constance, which strongly suggested that all three popes resign. When Benedict refused, the council excommunicated him. John and Gregory both stepped down to become cardinals, but it wasn’t an entirely voluntary move.”

Jess nodded. Ava was Googling. She found a more historically precise article and read it aloud.

“Italian newspapers have lauded Benedict’s shocking, unprecedented decision. ‘We’ve entered uncharted territory,’ remarked *La*

Repubblica's editor in chief, Ezio Mauro. In March, cardinals will convene to elect a new pope. Regardless of who next wears the Piscatory Ring, Benedict will enjoy a life of quiet prayer in a monastery on the Vatican gardens' far northern edge. His final papal acts will be audiences with key world leaders. Benedict has already agreed to see prominent politicians from Romania, Guatemala, Slovakia, San Marino, Andorra, his native Bavaria, and Italy. Many more requests are expected. The influential G8 has invited His Holiness to address its annual conference.

“While most Catholics praised the pope’s decision, others fear the unexpected news validates an ancient prophecy that Benedict XVI will be the last good pope, that ‘the seven-hilled city will be destroyed,’ and that these events signal the end of the world. Such dire forecasts are found in the *Prophecy of the Popes*, a collection of cryptic Latin phrases attributed to Máel Máedóc Ua Morgair . . .”

Ava rolled her eyes and closed her phone.

Jess laughed. “Wow. That last bit is something Bagelton would enjoy.”

“I know. Can you believe that guy?”

“He really got under your skin, didn’t he?”

“No. As much as I disagree with Bagelton, I’m really furious with our classmates. They should have laughed him out of the building. Why do we tolerate pseudoscholarship? Success eludes responsible, legitimate writers who never plagiarize, monkey with facts, or exaggerate findings. Meanwhile, garbage like Bagelton’s book sells a million copies.”

“Are you surprised? People love myths. We invest in fantasies to make existence feel—what’s the right word? Richer? More rewarding? Humdrum lives of quiet desperation take on meaning when they’re populated by exciting supernatural beings and apocalyptic events.”

“Does that make it rational to believe in the Roswell aliens? In Bigfoot?”

“Maybe not rational, but comforting. Lonely, frightened individuals form a community around their creed—any creed. Accepting and defending the existence of flying saucers, ghosts, angels, or Sasquatch helps certain people get along. Call it rational irrationality.”

“If people need an emotional crutch that’s fine, but it’s still a delusion. No logical person believes things without evidence. Jess, I’m not demanding irrefutable scientific proof. There’s not even a scintilla of evidence. Nil! Do these credulous saps believe a mad fairy zips from pillow to pillow collecting teeth?”

“Some probably do.”

Ava laughed. “Okay. Good point. What did Mencken say? ‘You’ll never go broke underestimating the public.’ People were convinced the world would end in 2012, and in 1844, and in the year 1000. I’d like to think humanity has advanced since the medieval era, but given the prevalence of superstition and magical thinking, I should probably be grateful no one wants to burn us as witches.”

Jess grinned. “So you don’t buy any of that stuff? Never check your horoscope?”

“No. No astrology. No conspiracy theories. No mysticism. I believe in scientific fact. Humans apprehend truth through rigorous experiment and analysis. Suggestions to the contrary are soft-minded nonsense or snake-oil scams.”

“That sounds like your father talking.”

It did. Richard Fischer was a paragon of scientific integrity. An atmospheric chemist at NASA, he’d been pressured by two administrations to revise data on how chlorofluorocarbons—CFCs—destroy ozone in the presence of high-frequency ultraviolet light.

Both times he'd refused, obliterating his prospects for advancement. Yet he'd become a hero in Ava's eyes. She smiled, thinking of her father, and wondered how her parents would react if she went to Yemen.

Sipping a spoonful of savory broth, Ava had a brainstorm. "Hey, I'm going to read you a message. Tell me if you know what it means: 'Something sought in a historic hat bag has been found.'"

Jess frowned. She mouthed each word, reflected a moment, then replied, "I've no earthly idea. What is it?"

"I don't know. It came this morning—supposed to be a riddle."

"A guy sent it, right?"

"Yeah. Why?"

"Only a person who never shops would say 'hat bag.' Hats come in boxes."

Ava's eyes widened, and for a second she looked dazed. She fell back in her seat.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm perfect," Ava replied, tossing her napkin onto the table. "Could you cover a few of my classes next week?"

Back at Lowell House, Ava climbed the stairs and let herself inside with the key that Gabe insisted she have. Dropping onto the ratty couch, she borrowed Gabe's iPad and wrote H-A-T-B-A-G on the touchscreen. Then, she rearranged those six letters into "T-A-B-G-H-A." A search under that spelling revealed dozens of websites. She picked one at random.

Historic Tabgha, a city lost for centuries, was the setting for Christ's calling of the disciples. Here Jesus walked the shore and hailed Simon, Peter, and Andrew, three fishermen casting nets into the lake.

Tabgha was rumored to be the hiding place of the legendary lost jars of Cana.

“What are the lost jars of Cana?” asked Gabe, biting into an Oreo.

“Just Google it,” Ava said. “There’s an entry on Wikipedia.”

“Yeah, but you probably wrote it.”

Ava sipped her chai and smiled. “No, although I suspect I know who did. It contains a few historical errors and is confused regarding—”

“Just tell me!”

“Tell you what? The legend?”

“No. Tell me how you can drink that foul brew. You added, what, six Splendas?”

She grinned. “I like it that way.”

“Gross,” muttered Gabe. “I don’t know how you stand it. Now please relate the legend of the lost jars.”

“I’ll tell you what I remember. In undergrad I was studying for Professor Cusanus’s final. Her lectures referenced several biblical legends, things like the Holy Grail, the Spear of Destiny—”

“The Nazi thing?”

“Yes and no.”

“What do you mean?”

“The Nazis thought the spear would make them invincible, but it predates them by centuries. Back in biblical times, a Roman centurion, Longinus, used the spear to stab Jesus. Hundreds of years later, Baldwin II sold it to Louis IX to be enshrined in Paris. It disappeared during the Revolution—supposedly taken by Napoleon—and it’s in the Vatican now. Anyway, you’ve diverted me.”

“Sorry.”

“Cusanus also mentioned the lost jars, so I looked them up. The gospel of John says Jesus attended a wedding feast at Cana.

When the party ran out of wine, Jesus ordered the servants to fill empty stone jars with water. The host tasted the contents, and shazam! Water had become wine. John considered it Jesus's first miracle. Anyway, the jars were taken . . .”

“Hey, I remember that story. These are those jars?”

“Exactly. The various Bible translations call them jars, water vessels, waterpots, or jugs. You can see them in Giotto's *Marriage at Cana*, although that artwork might not be the most accurate depiction. The relics are the subject of several wild stories. Apparently, the Crusaders searched for the jars. St. Peter may have taken them to Rome. A few historians claim the jars are hidden under Jerusalem, others suspect that the Knights Templar stashed them at Rosslyn Chapel.”

“Or maybe they came from Atlantis and were created by Martians.”

Ava giggled. “My thoughts exactly.”

“Are they supposed to be magic or something?”

“Yeah. I mean, no, not magic, but almost anything Jesus touched was considered a sacred relic that could protect you from evil or cure diseases. Some medieval Christians thought the Holy Grail bestowed eternal youth.”

“I saw that in a movie. What do the jars do?”

“I'm not sure. They might predict the future. According to legend, Jesus related a secret prophecy to his disciples. They hid the message in the jars and concealed them at Tabgha or Nag Hammadi or someplace. No one really knows. One account says they were taken to Rome and hidden in the catacombs. Eventually, the pope found the jars and tried to read the message.”

“That's why the Church is so rich! Because the pope knows all the right lottery numbers and who'll win the World Series!”

Ava laughed. “No. This was centuries ago. I'm blanking on

who was pope, and it's unclear if even he understood the message. One legend warns that no human can read it with mortal eyes. In another story, the pope decided the prophecy was demonic and ordered the jars destroyed. The version I like says the pope couldn't comprehend the message because some jars were still hidden in the desert and the prophecy is too complex to be understood piecemeal."

Gabe nodded. "Was the message encoded?" he asked.

She could see that the notion appealed to him. Gabe saw the universe in terms of code. There was probably a fascinating information-theory problem nestled somewhere in her story. She suspected his subconscious was processing brilliant, nonlinear solutions as they spoke. It occurred to Ava that she might need his help.

"Maybe so," she said, encouragingly. "You wouldn't want just anyone reading it. If they took the trouble to hide the jars, why not encrypt the text?"

"And that's why no one can understand it!" Gabe said. "The apostles intended it that way. They knew the message might fall into the hands of wicked Emperor Nero or whoever was in charge. They didn't want evil people to know the future. If Nero foresaw that Christianity would spread throughout Europe, he'd have thrown all Christians to the lions. So the apostles separated the code into mutually interdependent sequences . . ."

Gabe was a rabid cryptography fan. As he rattled off ideas about the relative value of compression algorithms, Ava's mind wandered back to the mysterious phone call. What had they discovered, and why had Paul called her?

Gabe stood at the window, gazing out. After a minute, he turned. "Yemen?" he asked. "Don't you need a special visa? Do we even

have an embassy there? What if something freaky happens?”

Stiffening, Ava said, “I’m a strong, independent woman. I speak three dialects of Arabic, and I’ve had all the necessary inoculations. I’m not a helpless little girl in need of male protection.”

He wilted. “I know. I know all that. That’s not what I meant, but you hear crazy stories about women traveling alone. Remember what happened to that CBS reporter in Cairo?”

She looked into his worried eyes. “You want me to be safe. I appreciate that, but I’m going. It’s important. Will you help me?”

Gabe sighed. “Yes. Of course I will. You know I always will, but if you end up a prisoner in some nasty Sultan’s harem . . .”

“Then you’ll hack into the DOD mainframe and send Delta Force commandos to rescue me.”

Gabe laughed. “Mainframe?” He shook his head. “No, I wouldn’t—”

“Anyway,” Ava interjected, cutting off his digression into technobabble, “I’ll call each day until I’m safely home.” At this remark, Gabe’s eyes flashed with an idea.

“Here, take this.” He tossed her a chunky black mobile phone that looked years out of date. Ava regarded him quizzically.

“It’s a satphone, LEO. Should be fully charged.”

“LEO?”

“Low Earth Orbit,” Gabe explained. “I hacked it. Free unlimited minutes.”

She smiled, impressed. “It wasn’t my hack,” he said quickly. “I got the code from a guy online, but it works. You can download data into my system, send me video of you in the shower—”

“Ha, ha, ha.”

“I installed some cool encryption, making it untraceable. It should keep our conversations confidential, except from ECHELON and the NSA,” Gabe joked.

Ava wrapped him in a bear hug. Gabe was wonderful. She knew he'd help. In her mind, Gabe was the kind, protective big brother she'd always wanted. Of course, she kept this to herself. Gabe didn't think of her as a sister, and Ava couldn't stand to hurt his feelings. Better to leave the matter unspoken, postpone the conversation, indefinitely if possible.

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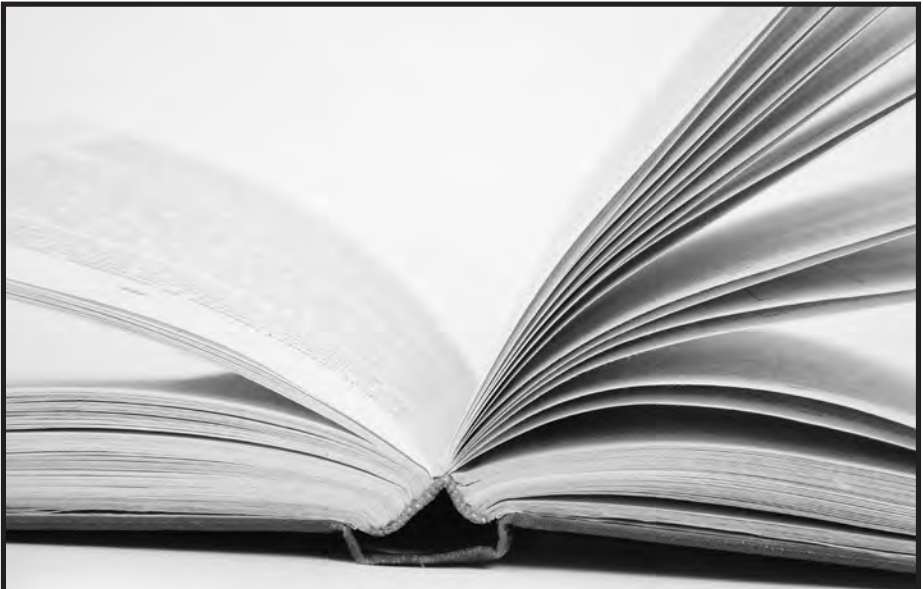
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THE CANA MYSTERY

In this gripping mystery adventure, Ava, an MIT graduate student and expert in ancient languages, is awakened in the middle of the night by a phone call from an old friend, Paul, with a baffling request: Could she fly to Yemen immediately? He's found something important and needs her help.

Paul's subsequent coded e-mail alludes to what he and his boss, Simon Demaj, have found: the lost jars of Cana—the very jars that Jesus used at the wedding at Cana—and a puzzle to be solved. Are the jars authentic, and is there a prophecy somehow hidden in them?

At the same time a shocking global announcement is made: “. . . Pope Benedict XVI announced that he will resign for the good of the church . . .”

Is there a connection? Ava and Paul set off on a deadly global adventure to Yemen, Egypt, Malta, and Rome searching for answers. Every step of the way they're chased by Paul's unscrupulous billionaire boss, a drug lord, and corrupt officials.

A thrilling mix of historical and contemporary intrigue, *The Cana Mystery* keeps the reader wanting to know more.



DAVID BECKETT studied English, German, and philosophy at the University of Texas in Austin and at the Julius-Maximilians-Universität in Würzburg before attaining his doctorate in jurisprudence. He received the Willie Morris Award for Editorial Excellence in 1997. A committed husband and proud father, David resides in Terrell Hills, Texas, with his beautiful wife, their adorable son, three rambunctious guard dogs, and one brave cat.



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