

THE EXCHANGE
Something for Nothing

by
Barton Green

ACT ONE

~ ~ ~

*"It is appointed unto every mortal
once to die...
Still every law devised for mankind,
has its loopholes. "*

~

based on Barton Green's
MORTAL MEMOIRS
The Journal of Lazarus

345 Barton Road
Dayton, TN 37321

WGA Registered

EXT. CROSSROADS HOUSE - THE WELL - RAINY DAY

We see a rain-soaked woman frantically pulling on a rope retrieving a bucket of water from a well. She appears desperate, distraught; her hands, face and clothes are smeared with blood. She is at the point of tears as she hoists the bucket on her hip and turns for the house...

She takes three steps then turns and walks out into the middle of the muddy road in front of the house and gazes down the long winding path.

MARY

(whispering)

Hurry... please hurry.

As she scurries back to the house, we see the water in the bucket slosh against the sides violently, spilling out here and there...

CUT TO:

INT. CROSSROAD'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - RAINY DAY

CLOSE UP: of soup-filled wooden bowl STIRRED by the hands of older woman. She is sitting by the bed of an extremely ill man, trying to feed the him.

The man tries to take the bowl but his frail, shaking hand sloshes the liquid meal against the bowls side, spilling the broth over the sides here and there.

The older woman rushes to clean up the spill. But The man stops her and weakly takes her hand in his. Then, lovingly he caresses her hand, holding it as tightly as he can.

KEPLER'S VOICE (O.C)

(almost whispered)

It is appointed unto every mortal once to die... The words are ancient, haunting, They form an edict that can not be avoided or ignored. This other-worldly command describes humanities only predestined act.

Though we do NOT see the ILL MAN's face, camera pushes to CU of his sunken eyes, as they are offer the woman a weak, but heartfelt "...GOODBYE'

ILL MAN'S POV: The woman reluctantly clasps his hand in both of hers... and the bedroom starts to go DIM...

KEPLER'S VOICE (O.C) (CONT'D)

...To the majority of the living,
these nine simple words are a
sentence of execution without
appeal, a slave's chaffing shackle.
But here in the foothills of my
home these words are not feared,
they're welcome, even cherished.

The younger rain-soaked woman carrying the bucket of water enters the room, sees what his happening and screams "NO!" Approaching the foot of the bed she drops the bucket of water and grabs the man's feet with both hands. As if trying to keep him "here."

KEPLER'S VOICE (O.S) (CONT'D)

...In this land of famine, leprosy,
and foreign occupation, this
sentence of death is not reviled,
but relished. Its command is a kind
of emancipation. ...It is appointed
to every mortal to die, once.

Though the two women keep their attention on the bed, the dying man's perspective changes.

FROM HIS POV, As he RISES ABOVE THE BED, the sound of the crying women slowly fade... and is replaced by the rhythmic pelting of the rain on the roof.

He RISES THROUGH THE THATCH ROOF, ABOVE THE CROSSROAD'S HOUSE, ...ever higher until he is able to see both THE WELL IN THE YARD and the muddy CROSSROADS INTERSECTING NEAR THE HOUSE.

Dry despite the rain around him, he sees a DIVINE BRIGHT LIGHT appear just above him. He takes one last look down and WE SEE (FROM HIS PERSPECTIVE) a small GROUP OF MEN (below) ON THE ROAD... MOVING TOWARDS HIS HOUSE.

The LIGHT OVERTAKES HIM and...

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NATIONAL MUSEUM - WASHINGTON D.C. - PRESENT DAY

The FLASH of SMART PHONE CAMERA reflects off the clear ACRYLIC of a DISPLAY CASE. When the light fades we see group of COLLEGE STUDENTS DRESSED IN RAINY APPAREL peering into the case. As the group ogles the dual display of an ANCIENT JOURNAL and a pair of EGYPTIAN DICE, we see our first glimpse of PROFESSOR CHALICE KEPLER (40's)... It is HIS VOICE we have heard reading from THE iPad WE SEE in his hand.

KEPLER'S VOICE (O.C)

... For one soul this ultimate destination was reached nearly three days ago, And as his reluctant escort on that final furlong, I likewise encountered an experience which has but one rival. But like every law devised for mankind, this decree of death also has its loopholes. And it is the existence of such exceptions that compel me to chronicle what I have seen - firsthand.

Kepler looks up from the iPad and SHOWS his students a DIGITAL PHOTO of the JOURNAL's FOUR DISPLAYED PAGES.

KEPLER (cont'd)

Two weeks ago this was e-mailed to me with tips on how to decipher the writing. After some trial and error I managed to translate three of the four pages you see here. Its a brilliantly crafted combination of kabbalah letter-skipping techniques and multi-language quatrains, similar to those used by Nostradamus. Obviously the author did not intend his commentaries for everyone.

GREG

So why you, professor? Your just a teacher of Medieval myths, languages and stuff.

KEPLER

If you'd ever cracked a book you'd know that this "stuff" originated in THE MIDDLE EAST... where this journal was found. But your point is taken; I thought it was some faculty stunt, too, until a few days ago when I saw an article in The Post about the diary and this: its first public showing in the West. Whoever the mystery e-mailer is, he - or she knows more about this fascinating relic than most. And also somehow knows about me and my fondness for languages, history - and of course, the deconstruction of a good myth. ...Hence, today's unscheduled, rainy day field trip.

ERIN

The e-mailer --he obviously wanted to get you...here.

KEPLER

I'm kinda hoping that "he"... is a "she".

ERIN

But what if SHE isn't- and wacko?

KEPLER

There's safety in numbers.

MERRILL

We all know you're back on the single scene. But there's no need for impatience, professor... you're not THAT old.

GREG pointing to PLAQUE Next to the DISPLAY CASE.

GREG

Professor, it says here that the journal was discovered in the rubble of a bombed home in Baghdad, during the second Gulf War.

KEPLER

What it doesn't say, and few will admit to, is that over the years the journal's earliest entrees have been repeatedly tested by members of the same team that studied the Shroud of Turin. And according to my mystery e-mailer; their conclusions have never been published, only whispered.

A stragglng student SAM joins the group, still DRIPPING FROM THE EXTERIOR SUMMER SHOWER. He hands the professor a small bag of CANDY BARS and the car keys.

SAM

Sorry Professor, its really comin' down out there... I had to go to three convenience stores to find your kind. And then I got caught in a police road block over on Route 60...Some idiots hijacked a US MAIL truck and killed the driver. The police are everywhere checking I.D's. Parked your car in the back lot.

KEPLER

Thanks Sam for going the extra
soggy mile. Field trips make me
(looking for word) ...hungry.

Kepler opens the bag and tares into one of the bars...
Looking up, he notes his students staring, curiously.

KEPLER (CONT'D)

(confessing) I have this ancient
curse, Diabetes. If I don't eat on
time things tend to get out of
hand, and I'd rather NOT have to
use plan B.

Pats his JACKET POCKET. They continue to stare, concerned.

KEPLER (CONT'D)

Guys, the OLD relic you're here to
study is -in the case. I'm good,
really.

In B/G we see a WELL-DRESSED, UMBRELLA TOTING, MIDDLE-AGED
MAN OF MID-EASTERN ORIGIN hovering near the group. Pretending
to peruse the museum, he is eavesdropping on the discussion.

Kepler continues, while chomping on his candy bar.

KEPLER (CONT'D)

As I was saying... both the
parchment and ink used in the
journal's early sections, date back
to the first century.

ERIN

What's so hush-hush about that? A
lot of documents from that period
have survived.

KEPLER

Though a number of pages have been
ripped from earliest portion of the
journal, the document details
events not only from the latter
half of the first century, but
through every period of history
from that time up through late
2004. And it is the secret
conclusion of those involved in the
study that every entree, from
beginning to end, despite the
various languages used - were all
written by the same hand.

GREG

That's obviously impossible.

The eavesdropper smiles to himself, checking his vest POCKET WATCH. Looking up, across the museum, his smile vanishes...

REVERSE ANGLE - MUSEUM ENTRANCE

Entering we see a suspicious TRIO of DARK-CLOTHED MEN. Also MID-EASTERN, they appear focused on the JOURNAL DISPLAY.

DARK MAN #1

(into concealed headset)

Yes, we have the artifact in sight.

MABUS (O.S.)

There will be no better opportunity.

DARK MAN #1

But we have an audience.

MABUS (O.S.)

Then make sure you put on a good show.

REVERSE ANGLE:

As DARK MAN #1 subtly signals his team, the EAVESDROPPER NOTICES, and moves to blend in with the students; thus making Kepler and company visibly uneasy.

KEPLER

Give us a few moments sir, and we'll be out of your way.

DR. BETHANY

No, that's not necessary. My name is Dr. Bethany. I couldn't help overhearing. You seem to know a great deal about the journal. Did I understand correctly; you can translate it?

Kepler and students glance at each other suspiciously.

KEPLER

I've managed a little something about the death of a man despite the efforts of two women, which were probably relatives.

With an eye on the approaching trio, Bethany is nonchalant.

DR. BETHANY

Ah! The events at the Crossroads house; it is an uncommon tale, no? And you're a rare find, as well, professor. There are not many able to recognize the patterns of the Kabbalah technique. The details surrounding the man's burial and return are indeed among the most illuminating. Don't you think?

KEPLER

Return? Obviously I'm not as familiar with the text as you, sir. I'm just to where a group of men have arrived to pay their last respects to the departed.

DR. BETHANY

So you've only reached to...here!?

Points to the glass enclosed journal page with his umbrella.

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)

(flustered)

I thought surely you would have completed all four pages by now!

KEPLER

You know my e-mail address, but I know nothing about you. What do you want, sir?

DR. BETHANY

To protect you.

KEPLER

Protect...me?

Bethany's eye catches the TRIO SPREADING OUT, inching closer.

DR. BETHANY

(urgent, authoritative)

You are Chalice Kepler, yes?

Kepler eyes grow large

KEPLER

You are familiar with the cultural myths of many countries. You translate and speak multiple languages including Latin and dialects of Aramaic?

(MORE)

KEPLER (CONT'D)

You hold to no religion, yet you wear your ex-wife's crucifix about your neck.... And you use injections to control your blood, yes?

Kepler nods and finger's the SMALL CRUCIFIX dangling around his neck. The students are dumb struck.

DR. BETHANY

Then decipher this passage, quickly.

He points to the displayed journal with umbrella. Kepler leans in.

KEPLER

(squinting, reading)

My...companion...a vessel.. by the one who saw planets move.

DR. BETHANY

No professor. Not 'BY'...OF...OF the one.

MERILL

(thinking out loud)

Of the one who saw planets...move? - Motion, ...planetary motion?

GREG

That would be Leonardo?

ERIN

No... Galileo!

SAM

Johannes (BEAT) Johannes -KEPLER! ...OF your family, professor?

MERRILL

VESSEL? Some kinda bowl, or cup?

DR. BETHANY

(Impatiently) A chalice.

ALL STUDENTS

...Chalice Kepler!

KEPLER

What's going on here?

DR. BETHANY
(under his breath to
Kepler)

A serious case of bad timing. I
thought you would have read more,
and THEY would have arrived later.

Bethany gestures with his eyes toward the TRIO subtly moving
through the museum patrons.

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)
Instruct your students to calmly,
as naturally as they can, break off
into groups and move as far away
from this display as possible...DO
IT...NOW!

DARK MAN #1 POV:

Moving through patrons, he sees the students pair off and
walk away from the DISPLAY.

DARK MAN #2
(whispering into
headset)
Target clearing. Watch the
perimeter. I'm going for it.

Bethany, acting as if nothing is amiss, pretends to eye the
journal while carefully moving to put the display case
between him and the TRIO.

KEPLER
Who are these guys?

DR. BETHANY
Collectors.

KEPLER
The journal's that valuable?

DR. BETHANY
If you had read more you would not
have to ask.

KEPLER
How're WE gonna stop them from
taking it?

DR. BETHANY
They're not here for the journal...

Kepler's questioning eyes dart to Bethany's.

We HEAR the sound of a PISTOL COCK.

Kepler's EYES DART to the SOUND.

DARK MAN #1, arm outstretched over the acrylic case, points the pistol at Bethany's head.

DARK MAN #1

Dr. Lazarus Bethany... We knew you couldn't resist the bait.

DR. BETHANY

Of course, it belongs to me after all.

DARK MAN #1

(triumphant)

And now, after all, YOU belong to me.

In the blur of one swift motion, Bethany SWINGS HIS UMBRELLA DOWNWARD, as if wielding a sledge hammer. He snags the DARK MAN's gunhand with the UMBRELLA HOOK, and then completes the hammer-like motion downward SMASHING THROUGH THE ACRYLIC CASE, creating a substantial JAGGED HOLE.

#1's SCREAMS of pain echo in discord with the sudden SHRILL of the MUSEUM ALARM. The umbrella smashes across his face and he slumps to the floor.

INT. NATIONAL MUSEUM - WIDE VIEW - PRESENT DAY

Patrons panic and run in every direction.

Kepler's students are torn between staying with their professor and running for their lives. Frozen, they watch as-

DR. BETHANY

(to Kepler)

The journal! The Dice! Get them!

Kepler plunges his arm into the jagged hole. He SCOOPS UP THE JOURNAL, but as he does the DISPLAYED DICE roll out onto the museum floor.

KEPLER

What is my name doing in this book?

Kepler waves to his students to GO! They scatter in every direction, blending in with the exiting crowd.

DR. BETHANY

We can discuss this later.

KEPLER

There is no later! This is the National Museum... Every government agency on the planet will be here in a matter of minutes. I want to know. Now!

DR. BETHANY

The answer to your question and all the questions you have yet to conceive is there, in your hand.

Kepler looks down at the bound collection of papyrus pages, then up into Bethany's ancient eyes.

KEPLER

Who are you!?

IN THAT INSTANT:

DARK MAN #2 GRABS Kepler from behind.

In the scuffle A SMALL LEATHER-BOUND CASE falls from Kepler's jacket. As it hits the floor, a SYRINGE and THREE vials of liquid spill out, between Kepler and Bethany's position -NEXT TO THE DICE.

BETHANY takes a step forward. DARK MAN #2 cautiously steps back, dragging his hostage with him.

DR. BETHANY

Let him go. You want me. He's worthless to you. Let's trade; something for nothing.

Bethany steps closer. #2 retreats.

DARK MAN #2

Nothing? I now have the journal, and a man who can read it.

Bethany takes another step, within reach of the leather-bound syringe case. He points down to the scattered vials.

DR. BETHANY

Your hostage is a diabetic.

KEPLER

(to DARK MAN)

Please, I need that!

FROM BETHANY'S POV:

...he can see that one of the vials CRACKED OPEN on impact, the clear liquid puddles on the marble floor. And a FOURTH VIAL is still snug in the safety of the case.

Bethany takes a step and deliberately STOMPS on the (already broken) vial. CRRRUNCH!

KEPLER

Whaaa-!? Are you insane?!

DR. BETHANY

(calmly) He will be of use to no one in a matter of hours...Let him go.

DARK MAN #2

I can not go back to Mabus empty handed.

Bethany cautiously stoops. Ignoring the syringe, he picks up the case, and SCOOPS UP THE TWO VISIBLE INTACT VIALS. Standing, he clandestinely palms one of the vials and holds up the other.

DR. BETHANY

He'll never survive the trip.

Bethany throws the vial to the floor between them. It SHATTERS.

DARK MAN #2

Mabus is closer than you think.

KEPLER

You want to protect me by - killing me?!

DARK MAN #3

That is exactly what he wants to do...

A few feet away DARK MAN #3 aims pistol at Kepler.

DARK MAN #3 (CONT'D)

Death IS the perfect escape, isn't it Dr. Bethany? I pull the trigger and he is spared the tortures Mabus would most certainly inflict upon him.

DR. BETHANY

Death isn't the cure for life.

DARK MAN #3

But it can be the lesser of many evils... Here is what we are going to do; You and the journal come with us, and I put HIM out of his misery now.... Refuse, and both he and the journal will be our guest...and his miseries will be sustained til he translates the contents or dies in the process.

In B/G the sound of approaching police sirens multiply. And in the museum foyer we hear the commotion of ARMED AGENTS entering, and panicked patrons scurrying to get out of the way.

Dr. Bethany studies the scene. He scans the large spacious museum and spots an UNGUARDED SET OF DOUBLE DOORS.

DR. BETHANY

It is appointed to every man to die, once...

He turns his calm gaze to the trembling Professor Kepler, and locks eyes.

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)

So, Professor, what are we to do? Since you have the most to loose, I leave the decision in your hands... These gentlemen don't care about you. All that matters to them is that book you hold. To get to its contents, they are willing to toss you aside, like I did your vials...

KEPLER

You want m-me to d-decide?!

DR. BETHANY

Yes, I don't have the answer for this. It is - in ...your... hands.

Kepler finally understands... And looks down at the journal.

DARK MAN #3 realizes what Kepler is about to do and - FIRES!

Kepler tosses the journal in Bethany's direction. Doing so, he lunges forward, and the bullet meant for him strikes DARK MAN #2. Kepler breaks free.

The sound of gun fire brings the AGENTS storming into the large room. Though the odds are against him, #3 turns and attacks.

As the gun battle begins...

INT. NATIONAL MUSEUM - DISPLAY CASE

Bethany and Kepler dive to the floor behind the display case. Huddling together Bethany points to the DOUBLE DOORS.

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)
We have to make a run for it.

Bullets whiz over their heads.

KEPLER
WE!? -- aren't going anywhere. I'm
a diabetic, remember? - With no
plan B -thanks to you.

Bethany opens his hand revealing ONE FULL VIAL. Kepler's eyes widen. He's speechless.

DR. BETHANY
But this are no good, without THAT.

Points to SYRINGE on the floor NEXT TO THE DICE between them and their escape.

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)
You grab the journal. I'll get the
syringe and meet you at those
doors.

As he speaks Bethany spots the PAPER BAG of CANDY BARS, reaches around the display and retrieves it.

KEPLER
What if its locked? Or just a big
closet?

Bethany sprouts a grin, amused and hands the bag to Kepler.

The Professor reaches in and grabs a few and stuffs them in his pants pocket.

KEPLER (CONT'D)
And why are you smiling?!

DR. BETHANY
I'd forgotten how pessimistic you
could be.

Kepler does a double-take; convinced the old man's crazy.

KEPLER
We've met - before?

DR. BETHANY

Oh yes.

KEPLER

I think I would have REMEMBERED
that.

DR. BETHANY

In time.

Bethany gets in position to run.

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)

We've got to do this together. On
three?

As the AGENTS corner the pistol-waving DARK MAN, Kepler picks
up the journal and hesitantly nods.

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)

One... Two... GO!

The duo bolt for the doors.

#3 SEES them, resignation falls across his face.

DARK MAN #3

(into his headset)

The artifact and the teacher, they
are escaping... with the journal.

MABUS (O.S.)

You know what you must do.

DARK MAN #3

Yes Mabus, I will obey.

#3 steps out into the open, training his pistol on Bethany.
He is instantly hit from multiple angles by the Agents.

As bullets fly, Bethany makes a b-line for the syringe,
SNATCHES IT OFF THE FLOOR, AND SCOOPS UP THE DICE, as
well....

And Kepler sprints full-out for the double doors.

KEPLER

Please don't be locked! --or a
closet.

INT. CORRIDOR TO EXIT. RAINY DAY

Closing his eyes, he turns his shoulder to the doors and
BUSTS THROUGH - into a serene, chandelier-lined corridor.

Resting against a wall, grateful to be out of the fray, he watches Bethany rocket passed him, sprinting for the EXIT sign at the end of the hall.

DR. BETHANY
Come on!... Professor?

KEPLER
It's okay. We're safe.

DR. BETHANY
Not until we are out of D.C.

KEPLER
And you call ME pessimistic!?

Pausing at the EXIT, Bethany looks back, soberly.

DR. BETHANY
In there, that unfortunate said
Mabus is "...closer than you
think."

Bethany's mind races.

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)
Is your car in the lot?

KEPLER
Yeah - No! I've got students!

DR. BETHANY
They are not children, and in no
danger.

KEPLER
And I AM?

DR. BETHANY
Three armed men... short-range
headsets. They KNEW I would be
here... Mabus IS close. And if you
were not on his radar before, you
are now.

KEPLER
WHO is this... Mabus!?

DR. BETHANY
A hell I pray you never visit.
Cover the journal. Its raining.

KEPLER
(amazed) -- Raining, still!? Are
you sure THIS isn't hell?

Bethany pushes the EXIT DOOR open, letting in the downpour.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. WASHINGTON HOTEL - PENTHOUSE SUITE - RAINY DAY

Through the rain-splattered windows of his lofty perch, a 36 year old MID-EASTERN MAN looks down, across the street, to the confusion at the National Museum. Wearing an Italian business suit and a short-range headset, we see his anger and frustration, bubbling... building.

MABUS
See anything?

He turns to FOLLOWER #1 standing at a nearby window peering through binoculars.

FOLLOWER #1
Nothing, sir.

MABUS
The man is like sand. No matter how
tight the grip, he slips
through...And NOW he has the
journal!?!... Six years of this!

FOLLOWER #2
(mournful)
...And three more martyrs.

Yanking off his headset Mabus turns and angrily throws it at FOLLOWER #2.

A DOZEN other followers in the room step back, as if recognizing the on-set of another furniture-breaking tantrum.

MABUS
Why am I being punished?

Looking up, as if praying to - arguing with some unseen force.

MABUS (CONT'D)
He is the key to unlocking the
prison of my people... and I WILL
have him! When that day comes, I
will THRUST him into that rusty
lock of justice - TURN, TWIST and
JOSTLE him until the tumblers of
(MORE)

MABUS (CONT'D)
independence fall into place-- and
my people are finally --free!

FOLLOWER #2 leans into window, refocuses his binoculars and points.

FOLLOWER #1
Sir...

MABUS
(angry, impatient)--WHAT!?

FOLLOWER #1
In the back. The parking lot.

Mabus moves to the window and yanks the binoculars from #1.

BINOCULARS POV: Through the grey sheets of rain we see Dr. Bethany and Kepler running through a parking lot. Kepler points to a particular vehicle, gets in and unlocks passenger door for Bethany.

Mabus looks at Follower #3 nearby, and nods.

MABUS
Has the van been loaded with the
explosives yet?

FOLLOWER #3
No, not yet.

MABUS
That can wait... Take the van. You
know what we're after.

Mabus turns to the SCRIBE, an OLDER MAN wearing traditional mid-eastern robes, sitting at a table. The SCRIBE's attention is on a LAPTOP SCREEN.

MABUS (CONT'D)
Scribe... his companion's name is
Kepler, Chalice Kepler.

Scribe types the name into laptop and the screen illuminates with a digitized version of an ancient Hebrew manuscript. The Hebrew symbols form into a 3-D version of a rolled-up scroll, like the rings of a tree, each layer of the rolled up "scroll" represents a different PERIOD OF HISTORY.

We see that the symbols representing KEPLER appears ONCE CROSSING VERTICALLY over the symbols representing Lazarus Bethany - which appear frequently, through every layer of the rolled scroll.

SCRIBE

The name appears once, but it intersects with our objective.

MABUS

Only once?.... He is insignificant. Your target remains Dr. Bethany or whatever he calls himself now.

SCRIBE

Just get me close enough and I will erase his name ...it will be as if he never existed.

FOLLOWER #3

That's all?

SCRIBE

the Black Arts have been passed down to me from antiquity ...

MABUS

(to Follower #3) Faith has many applications.

(to Scribe)...but ONLY if it is the last resort. His capture is preferred.

SCRIBE

Only if there is no other way...yes sir.

Scribe stands, picks up the laptop and bows respectfully.

#3 motions to a couple of the others, they join the Scribe and move, with purpose, for the door.

MABUS

(to himself, pleased)
Sand may slip through my grip, but it always leaves a trail.

Turns his gaze back into the binoculars. The lenses BECOME-

INT. KEPLER'S CAR - WASHINGTON D.C. STREET - RAINY DAY

..the fogged-up windshield of Kepler's car. Rain is splattering the glass exterior. The windshield wipers sweep through the frame, and the CAMERA PULLS, REVEALING Kepler and his passenger, Dr. Bethany, sitting in the front seat.

As car moves down the street...

KEPLER

So ...which way?

DR. BETHANY

(Thinking) ...the foothills.

KEPLER

Your kidding...right?

DR. BETHANY

What?

KEPLER

The foothills...through the rain.
What are we now, a few men trying
to reach a house on the outskirts
of the city before a certain man
dies?

DR. BETHANY

(solemnly) What if I said...yes?

KEPLER

THAT'S IT!

SLAMS ON brakes and PULLS TO THE CURB

KEPLER (CONT'D)

You appear out of no where and
within five minutes I'm surrounded
by a bunch of Ben Laden wannabees,
I'm stealing some international
treasure, my students are scattered
to God-knows-where, and I am
sentenced to death -TWICE- once by
YOU! I'm not going anywhere until
you fill in the blanks.

Bethany glances out the back window nervously.

DR. BETHANY

We can't just sit here...If you
drive, I'll talk.

KEPLER

(stubborn) You first.

DR. BETHANY

Most know me as Dr. Lazarus
Bethany.

KEPLER

Doctor of... what?

DR. BETHANY

For longer than I care to remember I've kept a medical bag under my bed... But I have had many vocations. My last post was Dean of the Antiquities Department at Beirut University.

KEPLER

You're a teacher, like me.

Bethany again glances out the back window.

DR. BETHANY

Yes... Now its your turn. I'll keep talking, but we must go.

Kepler puts the car in gear and pulls out into the CITY TRAFFIC.

Bethany stares at Kepler a moment, as if making a decision. Then hesitantly, he continues his confession...

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)

Dr. Bethany is not in fact my true name, but rather one which I have used, for a time, that I might fit in.

KEPLER

Because those wackos are after you? You know something?

DR. BETHANY

Yes...and I know much.

KEPLER

So how long have you gone by the name, Lazarus Bethany?

DR. BETHANY

Off and on since... 92.

KEPLER

That long? What did people call you eh, ...twenty years ago?

DR. BETHANY

Lazarus Bethany.

KEPLER

No, you said you changed your name in 92.

DR. BETHANY

Correct.

KEPLER

That was 20--

DR. BETHANY

No professor, you misunderstand.
I changed my name nineteen hundred
and 20 years ago.

INT. U.S. MAIL VAN - CITY STREET - RAINY DAY

MABUS's MEN see nothing until Kepler's car VIOLENTLY PULLS
OUT of traffic, onto a SIDE STREET. #3 SIGNALS to follow.

INT. KEPLER'S CAR - WASHINGTON D.C. STREET - RAINY DAY

As the car comes to ANOTHER abrupt stop, Kepler points to the
passenger door.

KEPLER

OUT! I debunk Mythology - I find
its roots, its reasons! I examine
it - expose it! I don't entertain
it... OUT! Apollo, Zeus,
Methuselah, whoever you think you
are-- Just GET OUT!

DR. BETHANY

(calmly) No... This is NOT the way
you said it happened. I can
understand you leaving this part
out. You are acting rather
unbalanced.

KEPLER

Me?!

Kepler tries to calm himself. Takes note of the journal in
his inside jacket pocket. Hits upon an idea.

KEPLER (cont'd) (CONT'D)

Here, I'll trade you. Give me my
syringe -carefully! I'll give you
the journal and we'll call this a
really 'memorable' day.

DR. BETHANY

This is a new experience for me,
too. And I haven't been able to say
that in a long time. I'll make you
a counter offer. I'll go along with
the trade, But first -

Kepler is exasperated.

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)
Open the journal to the section
where the missing pages belong.

Kepler impatiently humors Bethany. He opens the journal a third of the way in, to the spot where pages have been violently removed.

BETHANY reaches inside is jacket and reveals the MISSING PAGES: placing them into the journal- the torn pages match exactly.

Turning over one of the pages BETHANY reveals TWO faded, but detailed sketches 1. a rendering of the bespectacled Professor, wearing the same cloths and 2. The sketched image a PIECE OF CLOTH; resting on it is a SHARP KNIFE, A LENGTH OF ROPE, ONE VILES ...and a SYRINGE.

Looking at the sketched syringe closely, Kepler sees HIS PHYSICIAN'S Washington D.C. ADDRESS clearly drawn.

KEPLER
H-How? this journal is at least
1000 years old...the syringe wasn't
even invented till the mid
1800's...

Bethany retrieves Kepler's syringe from his jacket's side pocket. Kepler compares it with the sketches

KEPLER (CONT'D)
And even if the chronology is off-
....that's - -

DR. BETHANY
You... When we first met I didn't
believe you... I thought you were
as crazy as you now perceive me to
be... Even with all that has
happened to me since, the
explanation is... beyond words.

KEPLER
Are you gonna tell me, or just sit
there and grin?

DR. BETHANY
In time...you'll understand everyth-
-

Suddenly Bethany's eye catches sight of a MAIL VAN pulling up along the driver's side window.

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)

--Mabus!

Kepler looks out his window at a smiling bearded face.

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)

Go... Step on it!

Kepler doesn't think -just reacts. Tossing the journal into Bethany's lap, he throws the car in gear and peels out.

The U.S. MAIL VAN pursues.

EXT. D.C. STREETS - NEAR INTERSTATE ON-RAMP - RAINY DAY

As Kepler's car weaves and bobs through a maze of vehicles on a main drag, he spots the exit for the interstate up ahead.

MAIL VAN inching closer.

INT. KEPLER'S CAR

KEPLER

Watch behind me. If I can get into that lane up ahead, we'll loose 'em on the beltway.

DR. BETHANY

No! Not the interstate! That's not what you said - You crossed into Virginia and...

Bethany opens the journal to a particular page, and scans it hurriedly with his finger...

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)

...took Route 60.

KEPLER

Why would I--(remembering) The police! The road block on Route 60! (whispered) ...Incredible.

Kepler makes a sharp U TURN... the van follows.

Keeping one eye on the rearview mirror, Kepler tries to put some distance between the car and the MAIL VAN. As they weave through traffic....

KEPLER (CONT'D)

So, that journal can predict the future?

DR. BETHANY

Of course not. This is just a record of the things I have seen, heard and experienced firsthand. It is a collection of my memories. My memoirs.

KEPLER

Your memories? I don't get it. When did we first meet?

DR. BETHANY

Our FIRST meeting?...From your perspective, it was an hour ago.

KEPLER

And from yours?...

A pleasant, distant expression comes over Bethany's face, and with a hint of a smile, he almost whispers...

DR. BETHANY

Far away and long ago, I recall you and I standing on a hillside. There was lightening in the sky and it reflected the tears in your eyes, as you told me how much you missed your wife...

Kepler looks at Bethany amazed.

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)

Often, I've thought about the mistakes you confessed to me that day... and over the years I've entertained the notion of contacting you - before our appointed time - and warn you, so you might have avoided the divorce. But if I had, you would never have had a reason to examine yourself, nor the opportunity to face your fear, and change.

KEPLER

Change?... Change what?

DR. BETHANY

Your direction...

Out of the corner of Kepler's eye he sees the BORDER SIGN: Welcome to VIRGINIA and the arrow to ROUTE 60.

EXT. D.C. OUTSKIRTS - ROUTE 60 - RAINY DAY

The car slows just enough to turn onto the narrow pot-holed, roller-coaster road. Moments later, the MAIL VAN follows.

INT. U.S. MAIL VAN

#3 crouches between the driver and the SCRIBE, seated in the passenger's position, with his laptop open and ON.

As the van bounces over the bumpy road, #3 points to the screen to a CROSSWORD PUZZLE-like grid of HEBREW SYMBOLS. Inside this grid TWO SETS OF SYMBOLS are HIGHLIGHTED.

#3 points to the first set,

FOLLOWER #3
(to SCRIBE) Lazarus?

SCRIBE nods yes.

#3 points to the second highlighted set of symbols.

FOLLOWER #3 (CONT'D)
The driver, Kepler...

SCRIBE nods yes.

FOLLOWER #3 (CONT'D)
(to van's driver)
Get closer!

INT. KEPLER'S CAR

Kepler glances in rearview mirror. The VAN is on their tail.

KEPLER
I don't know if this was such a
bright idea. There's nothing out
this way but hills and trees...
Does that diary of yours say
anything about when we might expect
to run into that police blockade?

Just as he finishes the question the car crests another rise and --- 200 yards dead ahead appears A WALL OF POLICE.

EXT. POLICE CHECK POINT - ROUTE 60 - RAINY DAY

To avoid slamming into the line of cop cars, Kepler instinctively stomps on the breaks - which gets the police's attention. He hydroplanes--- the momentum carries the car over a roadside ditch, through a wooden fence and into a ...

HILLSIDE COW PASTURE

DR. BETHANY

Professor I suggest you buckle up.

KEPLER

What's the matter Lazarus, afraid of dyin?

DR. BETHANY

No, I've done that already. My concern is for you.

INT. U.S. MAIL VAN

As Mabus's men crest the hill, they see the wall of cop cars. The driver slams on the breaks, but not fast enough and the van careens into a police cruiser.

EXT. POLICE CHECK POINT - RAINY DAY

POLICE amazed that the van "came to them," quickly gather their wits and surround the smoking van, guns drawn.

Two of the cop cruisers jump the ditch and chase Kepler's car, through the pasture.

INT. KEPLER'S CAR - HILLSIDE PASTURE - RAINY DAY

Kepler's eyes want to look at Bethany, but they remain fixed straight ahead, trying to keep the car steady through the bumpy field.

KEPLER

What do you mean you've died already?

DR. BETHANY

Surely a man of your education has read the story.

KEPLER

Are you saying that you're THE Lazarus? And the two women in the journal.. your sisters!

DR. BETHANY

I fulfilled the one command predestined for every mortal.

(remembering)

Everything went dark, painless, peaceful. After a moment I was surrounded by light...then a distant voice called my name.

(MORE)

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)

The next thing I heard were screams of fear...and joy. I was back.

KEPLER

Here? Seems a bit cruel.

DR. BETHANY

But necessary... By the laws of man, nothing can be established without a witness. Mankind is on the verge of transformation, and I was chosen to be the martyr.

KEPLER

Martyr?

DR. BETHANY

A witness... the original meaning of martyr - one who sees. Over the centuries the mortals who saw the transformation firsthand were often tortured or murdered. In time the words martyr and murder clashed so often, they came to mean the same thing. (sadly) Many of my old friends were witnesses...martyrs, and died, horribly. I simply died, then returned to be a martyr, the official observer, a witness to all that has happened since.

KEPLER

You're here to watch the world transform into the monsters that follow us?

DR. BETHANY

The stubborn, immature...? distractions. I am here to recognize the exceptional; mortals who are ready...those teetering on the brink.

KEPLER

The brink -- of ...what?

Bethany leans across and buckles Kepler's seat belt. Then tugs on it to make sure the driver is secure.

DR. BETHANY

(foreboding)

Change... This world will not survive if you are ignorant of your power to change things...

(MORE)

DR. BETHANY (CONT'D)

Do what you do best. Separate the myth from the moment... Our next meeting will be our first.

KEPLER

Next? First? Now I'm confused.

DR. BETHANY

No professor, you're extraordinary. Remember...Something for nothing.

Bethany smiles and points Kepler's attention back out the front window... As he does this, he SLIPS THE JOURNAL into his pocket, the VILE and CAPPED SYRINGE into the small case and DROPS THE CASE AND THE DICE into the PROFESSOR'S JACKET POCKET.

INT. U.S. MAIL VAN - CONTINUOUS

In that instant, as the armed POLICE are opening the doors of the crashed van, INJURED #3 manages to grab the SCRIBE'S arm.

FOLLOWER #3

There is no other way. It must be done.

The dazed SCRIBE nods.

ON LAPTOP SCREEN we see the scribe's weak, trembling hand manipulate the mouse to "GRAB" a strange ancient symbol and "DRAG" it INTO the crossword grid, and position the symbol ON TOP of the highlighted word representing LAZARUS.

But just as the SCRIBE is about to hit ENTER...

SLO-MO - The VAN DOOR OPENS and a cop GRABS for the laptop, causing THE MOUSE to SLIDE and the ancient symbol to MOVE from LAZARUS to the Hebrew word representing KEPLER...

In the scuffle the Scribe hits "ENTER", THEN sees that the curser has MOVED.

SCRIBE

NO-O-O!

Instantly...

INT. KEPLER'S CAR - HILLSIDE PASTURE - RAINY DAY

A flash of LIGHTENING strikes the car, momentarily blinding Kepler. The car slides across the rain-soaked pasture, then starts to flip end over end.

Sounds of GROANING STEEL and SHATTERING GLASS mix with the rumble of the storm....

Then SILENCE -

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE PASTURE - PAST - JUST BEFORE SUNRISE

Kepler is on his back. in the grass. Slowly he gathers the courage to open his eyes.

KEPLER'S POV: Everything is DARK except for a distant pin of flickering light. He turns his head to face it.

KEPLER
(to himself)
Surrounded by darkness... then a flicker light... Am I..? Please, no 'distant voice'... no distant --

A far away VOICE calls out. It is muffled, indistinguishable. Kepler closes his eyes reluctantly resigned to his fate, pulls his coat over his head.

UNDER THE COAT

KEPLER
(pissed)
The brink of DEATH? Thanks, Laz.

He hears the bleating of a few stray sheep...and the approach of two figures. He leaves the coat over his head and doesn't move. As the footsteps come closer,

MAN #1 (O.S.)
(in Hebrew) Dead?

KEPLER
(to himself)
Dead? That's Hebrew...old Hebrew!
Where am I?... It's too hot to be heaven.... So?....

The coat is removed and lit torch pushed close. A pair of dirty fingers takes hold of Kepler's nose, like a handle, to examine his face.

MAN #2
(In Hebrew)
Strange clothes.

Man #1 WITH TORCH kneels, studies Kepler's face. #2 starts to pull off Kepler's shoes, but then spots KEPLER'S GLASSES lying in the grass nearby.

MAN #1
(Hebrew) He's still warm.

Unable to hold his breath any longer, Kepler SLAPS THE TORCH AWAY, SNATCHES HIS GLASSES back from #2 and puts them on.

KEPLER
(English)Of course I'm warm, I've got a bloody torch in my face!

MAN #2 falls back on the ground, startled.

MAN #1
(Hebrew) Heathen?

KEPLER
Yes! Heathen! So what am I doing in NON-heathen quarter of hell?

KEPLER struggles to stand.

MAN #2
(Hebrew) He walks!

KEPLER
(English) You should see me drive.
...where's my car?

As he struggles to regain his sense of balance, Kepler's wife's crucifix (dangling from the chain around his neck) falls through his open shirt and shimmers in the torchlight. Seeing the crucifix.

KEPLER (CONT'D)
(Hebrew) Lazarus.. Where? Have you seen him?

Man #1 scurries backward suddenly afraid, points to jewelry.

MAN #1
(panicked whisper)
Lazarus!

The two men look at each other, then simultaneously point in opposite directions. They turn and together run over the grassy hill, leaving their stray sheep and Kepler behind.

Kepler looks off in the two directions indicated, then sets off over the hill following the fast moving torch.

EXT. APPROACHING THE HILL'S CREST- PAST - SUN RISING

Kepler rubs his eyes, as the early morning light reveals a
SPRAWLING VALLEY dotted with square, ROOF-THATCHED HOUSES and
in the distance A LARGE WALLED CITY.

KEPLER
(wide-eyed amazement)
NO...This can't... possibly be.

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DISSOLVE TO: 39