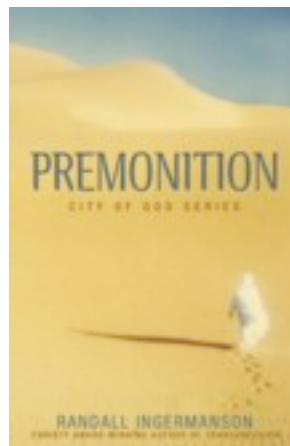


Premonition

Randall Ingermanson



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Part One: Shards

Winter, A.D. 57-58

*For now we see him as in a brass mirror,
but then we shall see face to face.*

*And now we know him in riddling shards,
but then we shall know him in whole.*

— Saul of Tarsus

1 Corinthians 13:12, author's paraphrase

Chapter One

Rivka

Rivka woke from a light sleep, her heart thudding. Had she heard a child scream? She listened, her whole body taut, absorbing the sounds of the sleeping city. Jerusalem, city of white stone. City of God. City of fear.

Nothing.

She must have imagined it. Rivka snuggled herself into the warm hollow of Ari's body, willing herself to relax. So much had changed since she'd left Berkeley last summer. Now with Hanukkah coming—

A thin, reedy voice screamed outside in the street. "*Imma!* Where are you, *Imma?*"

A rush of adrenaline shot through Rivka. Good grief, some little kid was out there in the cold, shrieking for Mama.

Rivka waited, listening. She and Ari were camped out in a small house with their hosts, Baruch and Hana. It was horribly unprivate. Back in America, her friends would just *freak* to hear she'd gone off and gotten married and was sleeping on the floor in the same room with another couple. But this was Jerusalem, another world. She couldn't go back. She had chosen to live here and—

"*Imma!* I'm cold, *Imma!*"

This was getting ridiculous. She would just have to go see what was wrong. Rivka reached for her heavy cloak and pulled it inside under the covers. The air in the unheated room chilled her arm.

“Rivka! Did you hear something?” Hana’s voice, a sleepy whisper.

“I’m going downstairs to see what’s wrong.” Rivka wriggled away from Ari, pushed her covers off, and yanked her cloak around her, shivering. It must be freezing outside, and if that little kid was lost—

“I will come also.” Hana rolled out of her bed and stood. A thin shaft of moonlight lit up her belly bulging inside her thin wool sleeping tunic. Hana was a regular Barbie doll—six months pregnant and she still looked fabulous.

“No, Hana, stay here. I’ll call if I need help.” Rivka slipped on her sandals and tiptoed to the door. From a shelf on the wall, she grabbed a ceramic oil lamp, spiced with cinnamon. They’d lit it earlier that evening, before *Shabbat* began. She sniffed deeply. It smelled delicious. She stepped onto the stairway. Behind her, she heard Baruch’s muffled voice. Great, she’d woken him too.

“*Imma!* Help me, please, *Imma!*” The child outside sounded desperate.

Rivka scurried down the stone stairs to the first floor. She opened the wooden shutters and peered out of the high, narrow window slits.

A ragged girl in thin clothing stood in the moonlight, her face awash in terror.

“*Imma!*”

Anger kicked Rivka hard in the gut. Some . . . *jerk* had gone and abandoned their kid in the middle of the night! It happened all the time and Rivka hated it.

She rushed to the barricaded door, lifted the heavy wooden bar, unlatched the crude iron lock, and pulled open the door.

Upstairs, Baruch shouted, “Sister Rivka, wait!”

She stepped into the street. “Come here, little girl. I’ll help you.”

Fear twisted the girl’s face. She backed away. “*Imma!*”

Rivka followed her. “I won’t hurt you! I’ll help you find your *Imma.*”

The child backed up further, stepping into the shadows of the narrow street.

Rivka hurried forward. “I won’t hurt—”

A shadow lunged toward her.

Rivka screamed, spun, stumbled. Her oil lamp flew against the wall, broke into a thousand shards.

The shadow fused into a grubby, bearded man with a very dirty face. Strong hands pinned her arms to her sides.

“Get away from me!” Rivka kicked furiously. “Ari! Help! Baruch!” She twisted her head, trying to butt the man. Several men emerged from the shadows and surrounded her.

Strong hands grabbed her hair and yanked back, stretching her neck painfully. A cold metal blade pressed against her throat.

“Sister Rivka!” Baruch staggered out of the house, rubbing his eyes, squinting into the dark.

Upstairs, Hana screamed.

“You will give us money, sir, or the woman will die,” said the man holding Rivka. Three other men stepped in front of her, brandishing crude handmade blades. They blocked the way between Rivka and Baruch.

Dagger-men!

Rivka felt like an idiot. She ought to have smelled a trap. Ought to have been suspicious of a child abandoned in the middle of the night. Ought to have—

Ari’s muffled shout filtered out through the window slits above them. Feet thumped down the stairs. Baruch spun to look. “No, Brother Ari!” He disappeared into the house. Then a shout and a terrific collision.

Ari and Baruch tumbled out into the street, sprawling in the dust. Ari rolled to his feet, his eyes black with rage. He stood to his full height, six foot three, glaring at the dagger-men. They were short men, but they had weapons and he had none. Ari pointed at them. “You will give me back my woman.”

Rivka saw from Ari’s probing eyes and tightening muscles that he was going to jump the men, fight them. *Please, God, no!*

Baruch put a hand on Ari’s shoulder. “They will kill Sister Rivka if you make a fight, Brother Ari.”

Ari’s face tightened and he peered past the men. “Rivkaleh! Are you hurt?”

“I’m f-fine.” Rivka had never felt so scared. “They’re bandits. They want money.” She switched to English. “Ari, it’s okay. Just . . . give them some money and

they'll let me go." *I think*. The dagger-men were both revolutionaries and bandits, killing the rich and robbing the poor.

Ari turned and whispered to Baruch. Baruch pointed upstairs and spoke in a low voice.

"Be quick, tall one," said the man holding Rivka. "Give us money and we will not hurt your woman."

Ari raced into the house. Baruch stood in the street, arms at his sides, a statue of calm.

"I do not trust the tall one," muttered the man holding Rivka. "He will make some trick on us." The dagger-men backed down the street away from the house. Baruch moved to follow.

"Stay!" shouted one of the men. "You will tell the tall man to remain in the house. When he brings the money, you will throw it to us and we will return the woman!"

Baruch nodded and stepped into the doorway. Ari thumped down the stairs.

Rivka waited, fear clogging her throat. Would the dagger-men keep their word? Would Ari . . . go berserk?

Baruch backed outside, his eyes boring a hole into the house. "Brother Ari, please, you will obey me. You will stay inside. I will give the men the money, and they will release her." Baruch had a way of talking quietly that made people trust him. Ari stayed in the house.

Baruch turned to the dagger-men, holding a long piece of cloth bound in a knot. "This holds all our money." He studied them, his face untroubled. "Now you will release the woman."

"Throw us the money," said one of the dagger-men.

Baruch underhanded the bundle to the one in the middle.

The man peered inside and let out a low chuckle. "It is good." He stuffed the bundle under his arm. Together, he and his companions backed up past Rivka. "Release the woman."

A hand shoved Rivka hard in the center of her back.

She staggered forward, tripped, caught herself, and ran.

Ari raced out of the door and smothered her in his strong arms. "Rivkaleh."

Rivka hugged him, letting her fear drain out in a long sob. “Ari! You were so brave.” She pressed her face into his chest.

Ari rocked her gently, stroking her hair. “Rivkaleh.”

After many beats of her heart, Rivka heard Baruch’s voice. “Brother Ari, it is cold in the street and the night is yet dangerous.”

“Of course, Brother Baruch.” Ari guided Rivka into the house.

Baruch followed them in, shut the door, lowered the bar. “You are frightened, Sister Rivka. Come, we will pray to HaShem and the fear will leave you and then you will sleep. We have lost only money, and you are restored to us. Blessed be HaShem!”

* * *

After Baruch prayed for her, Rivka did indeed feel better. The deep quivering in her belly stilled to peacefulness.

In the darkness of their communal room, Rivka lay awake, listening. Soon Hana’s steady, even breathing and Baruch’s light snores told her they were asleep.

Ari held her in his arms, tickling her neck with his beard, his breath warming her ear. “Are you well, Rivkaleh?” he said in English, their private language.

Rivka tensed. “I . . . think so.” She waited for him to tell her how foolish she had been. And he would be right. She should not have gone out, child or no child. After dark, the streets were a jungle. She could have been killed.

“HaShem took care of you.” Ari squeezed her tightly. “And Baruch kept me from being a foolish hero. Sleep, Rivkaleh.”

Rivka gave a deep sigh. “Ari, I . . . I want to go home.”

“We are home.”

“I mean *home* home. I want America. Are you sure there’s no way to go back? They can’t rescue us somehow?”

“No.” Ari’s gentle voice cut through her like steel. “I am sorry, Rivkaleh.”

Rivka wanted so desperately for Ari to be wrong. He had made mistakes in the past. Like the one that brought them here last summer. Then, she had been sweet little Rivka Meyers from Berkeley, grad student, archaeologist, linguist, Messianic Jew on the run from God and Ari Kazan. He had been a physics professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, a hard-nosed Israeli, an agnostic with a crazy crush on her. They had met at

the dawn of the twenty-first century and somehow—thanks to a physics experiment gone awry—they had ended up on the wrong side of a busted wormhole.

In the year A.D. 57.

Married.

And stuck here permanently.

Rivka bit her lip, wishing it were all a movie, but it was just . . . too crazy, even for Hollyweird. Even the dumbest screenwriter knew better than to leave the good guys stranded, with no way back to the future.

Ari's muscles slowly relaxed. Rivka decided he must be asleep. Dear, sweet, opinionated, gentle, infuriating Ari. He was the one good thing that had happened to her in this whole awful adventure. At first, she'd thought him cold, distant, judgmental. And he was all that, but as she'd gotten to know him, she realized that he was like the desert cactus, prickly on the outside, sweet and tender on the inside.

And he had come so far. He believed in God now—she wouldn't have married him otherwise. Someday, he would get it that Yeshua really was the messiah. *Mashiach*. She wanted that. Wanted it even more than she wanted to go home. In the last six months, Rivka had given Ari as much truth as he could handle. Every time she did, it ended in a fight, and she had finally realized that she was making things worse. She had done her part. God would have to do the rest. Ari was stubborn but he was honest. He would come to Yeshua in his own time, not hers. Maybe that was why God had brought them here—so Ari could learn the truth.

Rivka shivered. Yes, God had brought her here. How could she deny it? Last summer, she had saved the life of a man who would change the world. The man they called Renegade Saul. Paul of Tarsus. Rivka had nearly gotten herself killed, and she had made the terrifying decision not to go back before the wormhole was destroyed, just to make double sure that she saved Paul.

According to Ari, she hadn't really changed anything. He said it was impossible to change the past. Instead, she had simply intervened in the past in just such a way as to create the future they had known all along must happen. It was all self-consistent. Something about single-valued trajectories through phase space.

Whatever. It sounded like fatalistic mumbo jumbo, and Rivka wasn't buying it. Without her, Paul would have been cosmic roadkill. She had fixed things once, and she would fix them again.

A slow tear burned down Rivka's cheek. She knew what was coming. Had read the history books. Memorized them, in fact. She had an eidetic memory, never forgot anything she read. The horrors to come made her heart ache.

In just a few years, the Jewish revolt would begin—with easy victories over the Roman legions. Nero's suicide would kindle hopes in Jewish hearts for a final triumph over the great dragon, Rome. But then the dragon's resolve would stiffen, while Rivka's people wasted their strength fighting each other. The city of God would fall, the Temple would burn, the Jews would be decimated, enslaved, deported. The last holdouts at Masada would commit suicide rather than submit. If she survived the years ahead, Rivka would see this whole terrible history.

And that had to be why God had brought her to this forsaken city. To make things right. According to Ari, there was a theory of quantum mechanics that there were infinitely many parallel universes. In some universes, things happened one way. In others, a different way. Ari didn't believe this theory.

But Rivka did.

God had given her free will and intelligence and a knowledge of what had happened in one particular universe. That was a warning—like a prophecy bundled up in a great big *if*.

If you do this, *then* that will happen.

But if you knew the future—one possible future—you could change it. Had a responsibility to change it. Must change it.

Rivka was not going to accept some stupid fate, just because a history book somewhere said so.

Phase space be hanged.

Chapter Two

Ari

The next morning, a *Shabbat*, Ari woke before dawn. Rivka lay sleeping, her mouth slightly open, her silky black hair hanging over her face. She was all that a man could want.

And yet he wanted more, something no woman could give him. Ari awkwardly dressed himself in bed, pulling off his sleeping tunic, wriggling into his four-cornered tunic. He touched the blue-and-white threaded *tzitzit*—ritual fringes exactly like the ones he had so despised growing up as a boy. His stepfather, a harsh and rigid man, a Hasid of the Lubavitcher sect, had made life miserable for Ari. The kosher laws, the rules for *Shabbat*, the endless prayers—all of it was *meshugah*. Crazy.

By the age of thirteen, when he took his *bar mitzvah*, Ari had already read Darwin. Einstein. Russell. The universe was not 5,700 years old; it was fourteen billion. Man had not been molded from the dust of the earth; he was the random endpoint of a long sequence of chemical reactions. And if there was a God, he was not a personal God; he was a First Cause, a Ground of Being, infinitely remote. Or so Ari had believed until he came here.

Ari heard Baruch pulling on his own clothes under his covers. “Brother Ari, it is time.”

Ari slipped out of bed and plunged his feet into his sandals, throwing his thick goat-hair cloak around him to ward off the chill. Baruch followed him out of the room. They tiptoed down the stairs to the doorway. Ari wrapped a long, very broad cloth belt

around his waist several times. Baruch did the same with an old and worn belt—he had given the bandits his usual belt last night. With many *dinars*.

Anxiety weighted Ari's spirits. Baruch, a scribe, had recently been paid for copying a Torah scroll. That was all the income they would receive until Baruch completed his next scroll.

Baruch snugged his cloak around his shoulders. "Courage, Brother Ari. HaShem has shown us mercy."

Ari felt relief. That was Baruch's way of saying that the bandits had not gotten all of their money. On the way out, both men kissed their fingers and touched the *mezuzah* on the doorpost. In the street, Baruch latched the door with a heavy iron key, put it in his belt, and they set out for the synagogue.

And therein lay the central paradox of Ari's life.

Not in a thousand years would Ari have imagined that he would ever be going to daily prayers, like the foolish *Haredim*, who had made his teenage years a torture. He was a man of logic. Reason. Physics. But that was before he came through the wormhole. Before he met Rivka. Before HaShem gave him one small shard of belief to clutch.

They walked in silence through the streets of white stone. The walls boxed them in tightly, so close that Ari could stretch out his arms and touch both sides at once. He loved this city. It was primitive. Alien. Superstitious.

Home.

This city of God was in his bones, in his blood. He had known it from the day he came through the wormhole, that this was home, that he had been made for this city, and it for him. The language had been a problem at first, but first-century Aramaic was not so very different from twentieth century Hebrew, and that was soon solved.

Jerusalem was a city of infinite wonder, and Ari loved it, despite its strangeness. But he must somehow learn to put together the shards of his life, and this seemed impossible. Yes, he believed in HaShem, a personal God, who had intervened in his life one fine day in a way that could not be explained. And yet neither could one explain ten thousand years of archaeological ruins, or four billion years of fossils, or fourteen billion of light pouring in from the universe, except to conclude that the Torah was not the history book that the *Haredim* said it was.

How to believe in the HaShem of Torah, if one did not believe that the Torah was given by HaShem? HaShem had made a puzzle for him, and Ari's life would be incomplete until he solved it. But he would not give up his reason, and neither would he release his tiny shard of faith.

Fifty paces from their synagogue, Baruch suddenly stopped and held up his hand. "Brother Ari, you will not speak of the matter of the bandits to anyone, please."

Ari narrowed his eyes. "As you say." He rubbed his hands together against the morning chill, remembering that Baruch would not be paid again for several weeks. "How many *dinars* do we have left?"

Baruch gave him a strange look. "None."

Ari stared at him, feeling a huge emptiness open in his stomach. "But . . . how will we live?"

Baruch smiled. "HaShem will watch over us. You will say nothing."

Which was typical foolishness. Baruch made a career of walking a fine line between faith and craziness, and some days Ari wished to strangle him.

"Brother Ari, I see what you think in your heart, but you are wrong. The evil men took only our money, but we have still our honor. Honor is all."

More craziness. This whole city believed such foolishness about honor.

Baruch put a strong hand on Ari's shoulder. "Think, my friend, if they had stolen Sister Rivka instead."

A cold knot formed in Ari's belly. If anything had happened to Rivka . . .

"You see?" Baruch smiled. "You have still your honor and it is worth more than many *dinars*. So be glad, and wait to see what HaShem will do for us. Only say nothing!" He turned and continued walking.

Ari hurried after him. They reached the synagogue and went in. They were almost late. Half a hundred men waited there already for the early morning prayers to begin. This was a heavy irony to Ari. He prayed every day with men who followed a man they called Rabban Yeshua. In plain language, Jesus—a name Ari had been taught all his life to despise. Because of Gentile followers of this Jesus, millions of his people had been murdered. Flogged, burned, decapitated. Forced to convert, then tortured to test that their

conversion was true. Their women were violated, their homes burned, their children stolen.

In the name of Jesus. That was a name Ari would never love.

But of course, that was yet future, and these men of The Way of Yeshua would never know of it. Would never believe if Ari told them. He had not even told Baruch. Some horrors were best left unsaid. No, these men could not imagine the evil to be committed in the name of Jesus. They followed Yeshua, the Righteous One—the *tsaddik*—of *Yisrael*. He had done no evil. Instead evil had been done to him, by the hand of Roman soldiers, at the command of a chief priest named Hanan. And his followers continued until now, praying to HaShem in the name of Yeshua, whom they believed to be *Mashiach*. Ari respected Yeshua as a good man, a wise man. Not *Mashiach*, but a *tsaddik*.

Though Ari did not believe in Yeshua, he prayed with these men. Why should he not? His best friend Baruch prayed here. The men of this synagogue accepted him, though they knew he came from a far country, knew that he was not fully a man of Jerusalem, not a follower of The Way of Yeshua. If they would have him, why should he not have them? A man needed a community, even if he could live only at its edges.

His life was shards anyway, and one paradox more or less would make no difference.

Silence fell over the congregation of men. Ari raised his *tallit*—his prayer shawl—over his head and let its softness enfold him. Such customs were foolishness, of course, but they were a harmless foolishness. And the ritual had a way of centering his mind on the prayers to come next.

Ari closed his eyes and waited. Thick silence fell, heavy with the presence of HaShem. Brother Shmuel the prophet began chanting, his deep and powerful voice a river that would carry them to the throne of the Blessed One. The others quickly joined in. Ari did also.

“*Baruch, Attah Adonai, Eloheinu, v'Elohei avoteinu . . .*” Blessed are you, Lord our God and God of our fathers . . .

Ari had suffered through this very prayer many times as a boy. Now, as a man, he loved it, though it made no sense that a man of reason should love a foolish ritual. Perhaps it was simply in his blood to love it.

It was the best part of any day, and Ari could easily see why his fathers for a hundred generations had endured torture and death for the sake of such prayers.

* * *

A pink dawn was breaking over the city of God when the prayers ended. Ari felt wonderful. Then he remembered the matter of the *dinars*, and coldness settled over his heart. They had food for today's *Shabbat* meals, but that was all. After today, they would go hungry—and Hana was six months pregnant. How could Baruch be so calm in the face of that?

Ari folded his *tallit* and was putting it into the folds of his belt when he heard a deep, pleasant voice.

“Brother Baruch, please, you will pray for me.”

Ari turned to see Shmuel the prophet standing before Baruch. Shmuel stood only a few centimeters shorter than Ari. In this city of poorly nourished men, that made him practically a giant. A young man in his early twenties, Shmuel was a *Nazir*, which meant he never drank alcohol and he had not cut his hair for a very long time. Thick black dreadlocks hung to his waist. Rivka considered him weird, hyper-religious, but the men of the synagogue held him in high honor and called him a prophet. Ari did not know what to think of Shmuel, but he did not believe he was a prophet. Shmuel held out his left hand to Baruch. The smallest finger was bent inward at a right angle at the second joint.

Ari sighed. Yet again. Shmuel had been born with his finger defective, and Baruch had prayed for him twice a week since Ari came to the city. To no effect. Another prayer would be *meshugah*.

Baruch beamed at Shmuel. “Of course, Brother Shmuel. Brother Ari, you will lay hands on him with me, please.”

Ari did his best to smile pleasantly. It was foolishness, but he would do it. He placed both hands on Brother Shmuel's shoulders. Baruch took Shmuel's hand in both of his. Other men gathered around, laying hands on Shmuel, waiting for Baruch.

Ari had seen this so often, he could have done it himself. First Baruch asked the Spirit to rest on them. Then he waited for some minutes. Ari felt nothing, other than a sense of quiet. Baruch wore a look of deep concentration, as though listening to a voice many miles away. The other men prayed this or that. They meant well, but Ari had never seen any of their prayers have any effect.

Whereas Baruch . . .

Baruch could really heal, sometimes. Often, Ari knew, there might be a psychological explanation. The placebo effect. And yet, occasionally, something real happened. Something beyond reason. Last summer, Baruch had saved Ari's life when he should have died of a hornet sting. Since then, Ari had been stung twice, with no reaction. Baruch had healed him permanently of a fatal allergy. That was why Ari believed in HaShem, why he consented to all this craziness. It was logic to believe, even if he did not understand.

Baruch finally stirred from his reverie. He touched Shmuel's finger and commanded it to be straight, in the name of Yeshua.

Nothing happened.

Ari was not surprised. He had seen Baruch pray for Shmuel many times. Nothing ever happened to Shmuel.

Baruch continued praying for some time. A feeling of warmth filled Ari. This too was common. He did not understand it, but he thought there was some natural explanation.

Finally, the prayer ended. Ari took his hands off Shmuel.

Baruch kissed Shmuel on both cheeks. "Go in peace, my friend, and trust in HaShem." He turned to Ari. "The Spirit was strong today. Did you feel it?"

"No." Ari had never felt the Spirit. But Baruch did, and perhaps that was why Baruch could heal and Ari could not.

"Perhaps tomorrow, Brother Shmuel." Baruch took Ari's arm and guided him toward the door.

When they were out in the street, Ari asked, "Why do you continue to pray for Brother Shmuel? You know nothing will happen."

Baruch gave him an enigmatic smile. “Rabban Yeshua commanded us to pray. Therefore, I pray. There is a secret room in Brother Shmuel’s heart, and this I cannot enter. Not yet.”

“A room?” Ari studied Baruch. “What is in this room?”

“On the day Brother Shmuel chooses to unlock it, then I will know, and then his finger will be a simple matter.” Baruch drew in a deep breath and gazed up at the clean, cloudless *Shabbat* sky. “Now you will explain to me about the electron again. You are much disturbed by this electron, and I do not understand why it should be a hard matter.”

Ari could not help smiling. It was their private tradition that they walked in silence to the morning prayers, but they returned home afterward discussing physics. Baruch loved to hear of the majesty of HaShem’s creation, and he never took offense when Ari told him something that contradicted the Torah. He seemed to think that contradictions were merely HaShem’s invitation to a deeper understanding.

“The problem is this,” Ari began, and they stepped into a universe of ideas far from the city of God.

Rivka

Rivka peered through the window slits into the early-morning light. The men would be home soon and then . . . she wasn’t sure what would happen next. Hana had just told her upstairs that Baruch had given the dagger-men all the money in the house—every single *dinar*. Rivka shivered in the December cold and snuggled her cloak around her shoulders.

Hana came downstairs, yawning fiercely, and looking like a million *dinars*. As usual.

Rivka still felt like a king-sized fool for being taken by the dagger-men. “Hana, what are we going to do?”

Hana shrugged, her eyes distant. “All is in the hands of HaShem.” She studied Rivka’s face. “You are well, Sister Rivka?”

“I . . . didn’t sleep well last night. Are you well?”

Hana slumped onto a wooden stool at the one-legged stone table. “The shade of the wicked man troubled my dreams again.”

Rivka sighed. There wasn't any such thing as a shade, but she couldn't tell Hana that. Hana was always talking about spirits. It was a little weird, but Rivka was used to it. "Have you asked Baruch to pray about these . . . nightmares?"

"They are not nightmares." Hana put on her obstinate look. "It was the shade of the wicked man."

Rivka didn't want to argue. The wicked man. Damien West. Ari's former colleague. A large, grinning blond man with a cherubic face, the man responsible for bringing her here. A man who would have killed the apostle Paul, along with Rivka, Ari, Hana, Baruch. Yes, he had been a wicked man, but . . . now he was a very dead man. And dead people didn't go around clanking chains. Or whatever.

Rivka put her arm around Hana. "Ask Baruch to pray for you and this . . . shade thing will go away."

"Yes, of course," Hana said in a wooden tone.

Voices. Rivka turned to look at the door. It swung open.

". . . so they discovered that an electron can be both here and not here at the same time," Ari said. "It is a strange idea, yes?"

"Not so strange," Baruch said. "Brother Ari, this electron of yours is much like the Spirit. The Spirit is here, and yet not here, do you agree? And this is a mystery, but it is not a mystery. I do not see why you consider this electron so strange."

Hana harrumphed loudly. "I think certain men are both here and not here, would you agree, Sister Rivka?"

Ari and Baruch looked up, startled. As usual, they must have walked home on autopilot, their bodies navigating the cramped streets of Jerusalem while their minds wandered in a strange universe of ideas. Ari had nobody in all the city to talk physics with, except Baruch. But Baruch was enough.

Rivka felt grateful once again that Ari had such a friend. "And how were the morning prayers?"

"Most wonderful," Baruch said. "The Spirit came while we prayed the *Amidah*, and I knew that all will be well."

Which was just a little naive, but Rivka didn't want to say so. "What did the men say when you told them about the dagger-men?"

“We will not tell them of this matter,” Baruch said.

Rivka wanted to ask why not, but Ari gave a little shake of his head.

Baruch sat at the table. “We have food for *Shabbat* and we will take delight in *Shabbat*. Come! Let us give thanks and eat!”

Rivka opened the small pantry and brought out their morning meal. Barley bread. Goat’s cheese. Pickled cucumbers. Soured milk—like yogurt, only not quite. Water, mixed half and half with beer. Everybody here drank their water mixed with either wine or beer. The alcohol killed whatever bacteria infested the water. It was a good system, really, though it probably would have shocked the daylights out of Rivka’s best friend back home in Berkeley, a Baptist.

They all washed hands and sat down on stools around the tiny table. Baruch raised his eyes to heaven and gave thanks to HaShem. “Blessed are you, Lord, God of our fathers, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.” It was identical to the prayer Rivka had learned in her Messianic Jewish synagogue in San Diego, two thousand years in the future. Despite the culture shock coming here, some things hadn’t changed a bit.

While they ate, they talked of the future. Hana’s baby. Baruch’s Torah scrolls. Ari’s prospects for finding work. Rivka barely listened. Was she the only one of them worried about what they were going to eat tomorrow? It was fine to talk about how HaShem would take care of them, but realistically, what were they going to do?

But Baruch was not going to let dirty reality mess up his *Shabbat*. Neither would Hana. And Ari, as usual, just went along. He was easy to get along with, but . . . infuriatingly passive. This whole situation was just frustrating, and the sooner Ari found work so they could move into their own house, the better.

After some time, Rivka realized that the others were looking at her. Waiting. Of course. The blessing after meals. She had spaced out again. “I’m sorry.”

Baruch raised his eyes to heaven and prayed the blessing again.

After the meal, Hana and Rivka put the food away. Baruch and Ari went outside to look at the weather. Ari poked his head inside. “It will be a fine *Shabbat*.”

Rivka and Hana kissed fingers to the *mezuzah* on the way out and they locked the house. Baruch took Ari's arm and started toward the synagogue. "Now, Brother Ari, you still have not explained to me why this electron bothers you so much . . ."

The two women fell in step a few paces behind the men. Something inside Rivka squeezed into a hard, tight knot. Always behind the men. In Jerusalem, in this century, in this culture, a woman never walked beside her husband. You walked behind him. You covered every strand of your hair. If you were upper class, or a virgin, or very pious, you wore a veil over your face. Rivka felt thankful she was none of those, so she escaped the veil, but there was no way in the world to get out of covering her hair.

And a man did not talk to his wife—not in public, only in private. Nor would he talk to any other woman ever, not in public and not in private, unless he must. This world of Jerusalem was two separate worlds. There was a man's world—the house of prayer, the marketplace of ideas, the fellowship of Torah. And there was a woman's world—the house of chatter, the marketplace of fruits and vegetables, the fellowship of women and children. Parallel universes.

It was driving Rivka nuts. Thanks be to HaShem that Ari and Baruch bent the rules a little. The four of them lived in one house together—much too cramped for two pairs of newlyweds. Until Ari found work, they would be living like this, all sleeping on the floor in one room of a very small house, living on the wages of one poorly paid scribe. Within that house, Baruch did his utmost to treat "Sister Rivka" as a human being. Not merely a woman, but a real person. He understood that she and Ari came from a different land, a different time, with different customs. On the street, though, he followed the customs of Jerusalem. Ari did the same.

It hurt. A lot. Rivka knew the rules. Understood why they had to do it. And yet it made her angry. Furious. She was trying to get over it. Trying desperately hard.

Failing miserably.

Whereas Hana was happy as a kitten in her new life. When Rivka had met her, Hana was working the streets in what preachers called The World's Oldest Profession. Rivka hated stupid euphemisms. In blunt speech, Hana was a *zonah*—a whore. Had been a *zonah*, anyway. No longer, thanks to Rivka and Ari and Baruch.

Now, Hana was a respectable married woman. *Pregnant*, even, and thrilled to death over it. She was the wife of Baruch, a Torah scribe, a good and honorable man who followed The Way of Rabban Yeshua. She lived in the upper city now, far from her former haunts in the filthy Ophel district south of the Temple Mount. Few here knew Hana's past. Men in this part of the city didn't leer at her in the street. Women didn't spit at her feet. Children didn't shriek horrible names at her from the safety of their doorways. Here, barely half a mile from her former life, Hana had dignity. Blessed be HaShem.

They turned left onto the street of their synagogue. Ari led the way, pushing forward through the narrow street, crowded as always. Rivka felt claustrophobic. This street—an alley, really—was barely wide enough to drive a Volkswagen. A narrow stone gutter on each side stank with the detritus of the city. Rotting vegetables. Dead rats. Human waste.

There was no sidewalk. The doors opened directly onto the dirt street. To go into a house, you stepped over the open gutter, and heaven help you if you missed your step.

The whole city was like this. Unsanitary. Disgusting. Gross.

Home.

Rivka was getting used to it. So far, she hadn't died, or even caught any kind of weird disease. She didn't trust the drinking water, but oddly enough, that wasn't an issue, thanks to the beer.

If anything was going to kill her, it was the culture shock. She had been raised in a Messianic Jewish home. She had known before she came here that the Jerusalem church was an ultraconservative Jewish community. Even so, she was astonished. Half the followers of Yeshua here were *Pharisees*. Nice people, but just . . . awfully Orthodox. And some of them seemed incredibly ignorant about what Yeshua had actually taught. Of course the New Testament wasn't written yet, and all the apostles were long gone to foreign lands, but still. Rivka wished The Way was just a little more . . . Christian.

“Brother Baruch! Brother Ari!” A familiar voice from up the street shouted a greeting to the men. Ari and Baruch waved both hands overhead. Hana shrieked with delight and hurried forward, throwing her arms around . . .

A man. Not just any man. The kindest, strangest, holiest man in the city—Yaakov the *tsaddik*.

Yaakov wrapped his arms around Hana and gave her a full body hug, the kind an American daddy might give his young daughter. Definitely not the kind a sixty-something Jewish man here in ancient Jerusalem would give a young married woman on the street.

Yaakov kissed Hana on both cheeks. Then he stepped back and admired her bulging belly, his eyes shining with pride. He put both hands on Hana's unborn child and raised his eyes to heaven. "Blessed are you, King of the Universe, Maker of Heaven and Earth, who brings forth life and hope out of death and despair." He leaned forward and whispered something in Hana's ear. Hana hugged him.

And then Yaakov turned to Rivka. Opened his arms to her. She jumped forward and hugged him tight. It was so *good* to hug a man in public, to be touched, to be loved, to be treated like a . . . person. Rivka felt the anger melting out of her heart.

Yaakov's strong hands patted Rivka gently on the back. He leaned down and whispered into her ear. "I have a word for you from Brother Shmuel the prophet. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor the arrow that flies in the daylight. If a thousand fall at your side, or ten thousand at your right hand, the evil one will not touch you."

Tears welled up in Rivka's eyes. "Thank you, *Abba*."

Yaakov kissed both her cheeks. "Fear no evil, my daughter, though you are a stranger in a strange land. You were brought here for a purpose, and you must obey your calling."

"What calling?" Rivka asked.

Yaakov gave her an enigmatic smile. "That is for you to find. But do not turn from your task, be it ever so small, if the Spirit leads you." He released her and stepped back.

Rivka's mind began racing. What could Yaakov possibly mean by that?

Yaakov turned to Ari. "Come, my son, Aryeh, you young lion. Let me kiss you. And I have a word also for you from Brother Shmuel."

Rivka felt a glow of warmth encircling her. Yaakov was a special man. A holy man. A *tsaddik*. The history books had got him wrong. Completely. Even his name, they got wrong. "James the Just," they called him. Or "James the Righteous."

Which was like calling a certain famous physicist “Einstein the Patent Examiner.”

According to a fragment recorded by Hegesippus, James was some kind of an ascetic, a self-flagellating martyr, the kind who spent all his time in a hair shirt, praying on bleeding knees.

Dead wrong. James—Yaakov in Hebrew—was a *tsaddik*, which was about as far away from a fourth-century desert ascetic as you could possibly get. It was worth the humiliation and the stench of this wretched city to see a real, live, breathing, honest-to-God *tsaddik*. A *tsaddik* who didn’t care if you were peasant or king, bond or free, man or woman, because when he looked at you, all he saw was a child of HaShem. When Rivka looked at Yaakov, she saw Yeshua. If the rest of the men in Jerusalem could have been like Yaakov, the city would have been bearable.

“*Shalom* to you, Baruch, my son.” Yaakov kissed Baruch on both cheeks. “You will rejoice in *Shabbat* in peace and the fullness of joy, be glad and celebrate.” He stepped back and raised his hands in blessing over the four of them. “Now may HaShem bless you children and watch over you, may his face shine upon you and be merciful to you, in the name of Yeshua the *Mashiach*. Amen!”

Yaakov waved to someone coming up the street. “Brother Yehudah! I have a word for you from Brother Shmuel the prophet!” He hurried away, beaming.

Rivka noticed a tall young man standing quietly near the synagogue. Long black hair hung to his waist. Brother Shmuel the prophet. When he saw Rivka looking at him, his face reddened and he turned away.

Rivka smiled. Yaakov the *tsaddik* and Shmuel the slightly wacky prophet. Extreme extrovert and extreme introvert. She loved them both.

“Blessed be HaShem,” Baruch said. “The Spirit is here. Do you feel it, Brother Ari?”

Ari looked dazed.

Hana’s face beamed. “The *tsaddik* told us we will celebrate today.”

Rivka shifted on her feet, wishing it were that simple.

The four of them went into the synagogue. Baruch reached inside his tattered old belt and pulled out his *tallit*. A coin clattered onto the stone floor. All four of them stared

at it. A silver *dinar*! It was a day's wage for a working man, enough to buy food for all of them for three days. Baruch shook his head and laughed. "Yaakov!"

"Blessed be HaShem!" Hana said.

Rivka felt a pulse of joy in her heart. That was just like Yaakov, to slip someone a little money in secret. And just like Shmuel to know where it was needed.

Baruch turned to Ari. "The *dinar* is like the electron, yes? First it is not here. Then it is here."

Ari mumbled something. His eyes glittered, vague and unfocused. Distant.

Infinitely sad.

Chapter Three

Ari

The next afternoon, obeying the “word” Yaakov had given him, Ari slipped off quietly and attended the afternoon sacrifices in the Temple alone. Not exactly alone. Ten thousand other worshipers packed into the open-air Court of Women. But . . . yes, alone. Ari had been alone all his life.

After the service, Ari let himself be carried along with the crowd leaving the inner Temple. Yaakov the *tsaddik* was a strange man, and the message he had whispered into Ari’s ear yesterday still tingled in Ari’s mind. *After the sacrifices, hurry to the Royal Portico. Do not turn to the right or the left. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.*

That was all. If Ari did not know Yaakov, he would dismiss the whole thing as craziness.

Everything Yaakov said was both crazy and brilliant. Like quantum mechanics. That was foolishness too. Nobody would believe it if you explained it to them. The average man on the street in America thought physicists had some logical explanation for the universe. But they did not. They had quantum mechanics. And if the average man understood quantum mechanics, he would lose all faith in science. It took a physicist, a crazy person, to believe in physics and keep his faith in the universe.

And Yaakov was just the same. A crazy man, to hug women in the street, to kiss their cheeks, to speak to them as if they were men. But nobody accused Yaakov of impure thoughts, because that would be twice crazy. Any fool could see Yaakov was a holy man. Such men lived by their own rules.

Therefore, Ari trusted Yaakov. They were both crazy men. They understood each other.

Ari saw a cluster of men gathering under Solomon's Portico. In the middle, a short man with a thin wisp of a beard and piercing eyes sat down to teach. Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai.

Actually, not yet. Someday he would be known by the title "Rabban." *Our Teacher. Our Master.* Someday, when he was dead, all *Yisrael* would value this great man who had walked among them. But for now he was simply Rabbi Yohanan, one of many sages teaching Torah to a few students. This man would save the Jews from desolation—after the destruction that was coming.

As a schoolboy, growing up in Haifa, Ari had learned about this man, Rabban Yohanan. The Talmud called him Mighty Hammer. Tall Pillar. Physically, the words did not match the reality of the tiny rabbi. But in the world of the heart, the mind, the spirit—yes.

Around Rabbi Yohanan, half a dozen young men knelt to listen. Pious men, they all wore *tefillin* strapped to their foreheads and left arms, small leather boxes containing certain Torah passages inscribed on parchment. Signs of HaShem's presence. *Tefillin* were more craziness. Ari wore them during the morning prayers, but they were a foolish custom. Baruch wore them all day, every day, except *Shabbat* and holy days, which were already signs. For Baruch and men like him, *tefillin* were precious, but for Ari, they were more shards of his fragmented life, signifying nothing. And yet he loved them also. Like the electron, Ari could be both one thing and another. It no longer bothered him that he was both believer and skeptic.

Ari stopped to watch the school of Rabbi Yohanan, as he often did. Here was wisdom, esoteric and profound. He did not understand their discussions on Torah. Did not even wish to understand. It was all complex yet elegant, specialized yet general, abstract yet concrete. Far too much for a physicist who only wished—

Ari shook his head. How long had he been standing here? A minute? Two? Five? He tore himself away from the circle and continued walking south along the eastern edge of the outer courts of the great Temple Mount.

He only wished for work. Not alms from a holy man. Work. To take alms was dishonor. What was so hard about finding work? He was a physicist. In the United States, he could have found a hundred jobs. In the State of Israel, also many jobs. But he had left all to come to this city of God—for a girl. For Rivka. He got the girl, but he also got . . . unemployment. In this city and this century, nobody needed a physicist.

Ari was not needed, and that hurt. He understood the deep structure of the universe and the atom, knew the workings of solid and liquid and gas and plasma, could conjure the magic of electricity and magnetism and light. If nobody needed *that*, he could understand. People here could not be expected to make use of his mind.

But why not his body? Ari was strong. Taller than anyone in this city, where the average man stood only a few centimeters taller than Rivka. He could dig, or carry stone, or do any of a thousand other menial tasks. Theoretically, he could even work in the Temple—he was a *cohen*, a man of priestly family. That was obvious from his family name, Kazan.

He had gone once to ask for work at the Temple. Any work.

“Your name is Ari?” A shake of the head. “A strange name. And you are a priest?”

“Yes.”

“Very well, Ari the Priest. Where are the records of your family?”

“They are lost. I come from a far country.”

“Not so well, Ari the Foreigner. Without records, you are not a priest.”

“I can work hard. I can dig or carry or whatever is required.”

Another shake of the head. “We have many born in Jerusalem who need such work, and not enough for them. Perhaps you should return to your far country?”

He was a foreigner in a land of high unemployment. And he was *issah*—a priest of uncertain lineage, one without records.

Unemployable.

He could not work as a scribe, like Baruch. His handwriting was too poor. He could not set up in trade. He had no money, no credit. He was a refugee in his own city, with no job, no hope, no dignity, living on the charity of his friend Brother Baruch. And now taking alms from a man who had nothing, Yaakov the *tsaddik*.

He would have done anything to find work, but there was nothing he could do. And the hopelessness of it all was crushing him. Rivka would not understand. And Brother Baruch could not help—

A scream slit open the lazy afternoon. The sound came from under the Royal Portico. For no reason and every reason, Ari began running. *Do not turn to the right or left.* Something deep in his heart told him that he had made a terrible mistake.

Under the portico, a cluster of men stood in a circle. Ari rushed to see. A man lay on the ground, his leg crushed under a large flat block of stone—many hundreds of kilograms. Several men strained to lift one end of it. The man on the ground lay silent—already in shock.

Ari pushed forward and grabbed a corner of the stone.

“Try again!” shouted an older man in priest’s garb.

Together, they all heaved on the stone. Slowly, slowly, the end lifted a few centimeters. Another man wedged a large rock under it and they all released their load.

Ari straightened up slowly, his back aching with the effort.

The man next to him pounded his shoulders. “Good work, Tall One!”

Others pulled out the injured man. Blood pulsed from the stump of his right leg. Ari whipped off his cloth belt and pushed forward. He knelt beside the man and made a tourniquet around his upper leg. “Get me a stick!”

Somebody handed him a short length of wood. Ari looped the belt around it and turned the stick until the blood flow slackened. He hoped this was the right thing to do, but nobody else seemed to know anything. If it was wrong, it was wrong.

The priest in charge stepped in. “Very good. Are you a physician?”

Ari shook his head. “It was only common sense.”

“Uncommon sense, it seems to me.”

“The physicians are coming!” someone shouted.

Three white-garbed men in priestly linen raced up. One of them spread out a thick sheet of some kind of sturdy material. They expertly lifted the man onto the sheet. Ari wondered how often they did this kind of thing.

A minute later, the three physician-priests had co-opted half a dozen men to carry off the hurt man. Ari stayed behind. “What happened?” he asked, to nobody in particular.

“An accident,” said the priest in charge, a gray-bearded man, thickly built, with authority in his eyes. He wore no *tefillin*, though most of the workmen did. “We were replacing one of the paving stones and the crane tipped sideways.”

Ari studied the fallen crane. It was an A-frame-type device, very simple. Stay-ropes were attached to the top, allowing it to lean forward at a slight angle without toppling. A block and tackle hung from the peak of the A. The legs of the A pivoted in notches at the base, allowing for limited tilt forward and backward. But something had failed. It should be an exercise of ten minutes to figure out why.

“It was the will of HaShem,” said a short man with a scarred nose.

“No, it was a bad design.” Ari knew at once that this was exactly the wrong thing to say, but he had said it without thinking.

The old priest in charge scowled at Ari, his face darkening to purple. “It tipped to the side without warning. Nobody could have prevented it.”

Anger boiled inside Ari at such stupidity. Did these people think things happened for no reason? Then they would use the same design tomorrow and next week and next year. Nine times out of ten, it would probably work. But the tenth, it would fail and they would not know why, because they had not the least idea of physics.

Physics.

Ari swallowed. *You are meddling, Ari Kazan. Nobody will listen to you, a foreigner from a far country with no record of your family.* “I could have prevented it.”

His quiet words fell like bricks on the hard pavement.

“Nobody can prevent the will of HaShem,” said the man with the scarred nose.

“It is not the will of HaShem to crush a man’s legs. It is stupidity.” Ari knew this was craziness. He had no hope of winning such an argument. But he had nothing to lose either. Blind fury clawed at his heart. *Foolishness* had caused a man to be crippled for life. That man would never work again. Never walk. He would be forced to beg. Forced to live on charity, as Ari now did. Because another man was stupid. That was wrong. That was evil.

The gray-bearded priest in charge stepped forward and jabbed a finger at Ari’s face. “I suppose you know how to do better? What is your name called?”

“My name is called Ari Kazan, and yes, I know how to do better. What is your name?”

The priest looked surprised that anybody should not know his name.

Somebody said, “He is called Hanan ben Hanan, and he is *sagan*.”

The name meant nothing to Ari, but he knew that the *sagan* was the second in command of the Temple. This man Hanan ben Hanan was in line for the high priesthood. Ari looked around the circle of men. Hostility hardened in their eyes.

Hanan ben Hanan glowered at him. “And how does a man with the name of a beast know better than a priest of the living God?”

Hanan’s arrogance aroused rage in Ari’s heart. He stood up to his full height and stared down at Hanan. “Because I too am a priest of the living God. I come from a far country, and I have studied the secrets which are not permitted for an ordinary man to know. I know the secrets of the creation of the universe, and of the sun and the moon and the stars in the heavens. And if you permit me, I will reveal the secrets of the crane to you, so that no such accident will happen again.”

Around the circle, a murmur of excitement ran. “A man who knows the secrets of HaShem!” “Perhaps he is a magician from Babylon, or out of Egypt.” “What sort of name is that for a man—Ari?”

Hanan ben Hanan studied him with narrowed eyes. “Very well, Ari called Kazan, magician from a far country. Show us these . . . *secrets*.” He said the final word with a sneer that said plainly he did not believe Ari knew any secrets.

A shiver ran through Ari. He required time to redesign the crane. It was wrong—that was obvious. But finding the solution would take some thought. Ari shook his head. “I require one day to prepare the secret.”

Something like triumph flickered in Hanan’s eyes. Clearly, he thought Ari was lying, trying to save face. “Tomorrow at this hour, Ari called Kazan will show us the *secrets* of the crane. If this man Kazan is telling the truth, then it will be well. If he is lying, then it will not be so well.”

Ari held Hanan’s eyes without flinching. “Tomorrow.” He turned his back and began examining the crane. His heart hammered inside his chest.

Because the truth was . . . he knew not the first thing about engineering a crane.

Excellent thinking, Ari Kazan. You have twenty-four hours to become an expert.

Hanan ben Hanan

Hanan ben Hanan watched in disbelief as the tall arrogant man turned his back on him. He had not dismissed Kazan, and yet he turned his back. It was an intentional challenge to Hanan's honor. A statement that he, Kazan, was of higher rank than Hanan, the *sagan*.

What sort of name was that for a man—Ari? And Kazan—what did that mean? It sounded Babylonish.

No matter. Kazan was a fraud, a liar, a wandering magician of some sort. Such men could not be trusted. It was men such as this who led the people astray, promising miracles from the heavens, a sign from the Great King of the Universe, victory over the Romans, a *mashiach* to end all troubles. Lies! Rage slicked Hanan's hands with sweat. He would not permit such men to poison the hearts of the people.

Such men did not love the Temple. Because of such men, the Romans might come and destroy the Temple of the living God. Such men were evil.

Hanan loved the Temple of the living God. The Temple was in his blood. His father had served as High Priest, and his four older brothers also, and his sister's husband. They were the caretakers, the true sons of the Temple. The others—the Pharisees, the false prophets, the messianics—they were wolves. They did not love the Temple, and therefore the Temple must be protected from them.

And that was Hanan's job. That was why he had been appointed *sagan*, the captain of the Temple guards. His guards loved the Temple. They would die for the Temple—as Hanan would, because the Temple meant more to him than life.

Tomorrow, Kazan would attempt his foolish magic spells. He would perform his incantations and they would fail and then Hanan would have grounds to arrest him. One could not permit magicians to stir up the people before a feast. Such men were evil, dangerous. It was best to deal with them quickly.

The matter of the failed crane was more difficult. Problems like this fascinated Hanan. The Temple required the solution to all sorts of building problems. Lifting paving stones. Maintaining a flow of water through the aqueducts. Constructing gates of

sufficient size for the festival foot traffic. Of such things, the Torah had little to say. And the solutions of the fathers were no longer adequate. Hanan was now old, already more than fifty years, and in his long life Jerusalem had nearly doubled in population. The Temple, expanded by King Herod a hundred years ago, was again too small.

So Hanan had taken it on himself to innovate. The others of chief priestly family were too cautious. They were conservatives for whom the old was good enough. It was not good enough for Hanan ben Hanan, head of the great and powerful House of Hanan. He would solve the many problems that threatened the peace of the Temple of the Great King.

But this mystery of the crane had so far proven too hard. The paving stones in this part of the court were broader than normal. For some reason, this caused the ropes to break sometimes, even though they were easily strong enough to support the weight. Hanan knew instinctively that the solution was to make the crane taller. This new crane was the tallest he had yet constructed, and now it had failed. A man's leg was crushed and that was tragic, but it was not the fault of Hanan. Such things happened from time to time. It was necessary in order to do the holy work of perfecting the Temple of the living God.

Tomorrow or next week or next month, Hanan would solve the mystery of the crane. And he would do it without the magic incantations of wicked men such as Kazan.

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