

As soon as Sammy's father got the car rolling down the driveway, Gully's smile disappeared into a tight-lipped frown and his eyes bugged wide. His whole body went tense, his arms bulging with ropy muscles and his grayish knuckles turning white where his hands grabbed the edge of the car seat.

But he only stayed that way for the briefest of moments. With a snort like an angry bear, he released the seat belt, leaned forward, his hands curling into alarmingly large fists. Then he sneered at the back of Sammy's father's head, pulled his right fist back, and—

"No!" Sammy screamed, and flung himself across the backseat at the golem.

"What? Did you forget something for school?" Sammy's father glanced in the rearview mirror. "And why are you hanging off your friend's arm?"



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Before

*2008: In an underground research facility,
near Rehovot, Israel*

Chaim crouched in the men's room in the dark and prayed. He wasn't particularly religious—he was a scientist, after all, in his first year of real work.

But this night was different from other nights. It was Passover. And it was definitely a night for prayer.

He shuddered as the sound of automatic gunfire rattled down the long hallways, accented by the booming reports of a single .50 caliber Desert Eagle.

Guns won't stop the protectors, he thought. The soldiers don't know what they're fighting.

Chaim knew, though.

“It's *keshaphim*,” he whispered into the dark. “Magic.”

But it had all started with science.

Chaim had always been good at science. Had a gift

for it. Since grade school, he could see patterns in raw data that other people needed weeks to decipher. He had the ability to explain his results clearly to any audience.

When you have such a gift, Chaim felt, you should use it in service. Give back to those who had educated you. So when the secret service, known as the Mossad, came to him before he even started fielding offers from the private sector, he listened.

“There’s money in the big companies,” they told him, “but there is no *kavod*, no honor.”

Remembering the recruiters’ words now brought a cheerless smile to his face. *Where’s the honor in waiting in the dark to die?*

Back then, it had seemed not just an honor but a joy to come to work every day. He was in the technology department. The equipment was cutting edge, the staff dedicated, and his bosses wanted him to think and act “outside of the box.” No idea was too wild to mention, and most of the time he was encouraged to follow up on even the craziest of them. So when he began seeing patterns in historical data pointing to something outlandish, unbelievable, even . . . mythical . . . he was still allowed to perform some experiments.

His boss, a man named Lev Spiegel, laughed as he signed the paperwork.

“Should I call you Rabbi Loew?” he said.

Rabbi Loew. The sixteenth-century chief rabbi of Prague. The one who created a creature from clay to defend the Jews in the ghetto. A creature called a golem.

“Let’s see if it works first,” Chaim replied.

Lev was the first in Chaim’s department to die. Then Nissa, his research assistant. Then . . .

Then the rest of them, Chaim thought as the gunfire stopped. *There’s nobody left but me.*

And now heavy footsteps were heading for his hiding spot. But instead of fear, Chaim suddenly felt strangely calm.

Kavod, he thought. *If I am to die, I won’t die in the bathroom. I will do it with honor.*

He stood. Opened the stall door. Felt his way in the dark toward the exit. Toward the footsteps. When he stepped into the corridor, he could see again. Small fires were crackling where gunfire had set stacks of paper or garbage alit, illuminating the area.

Thwop . . . thwap . . . thwop . . . thwap. Slow stone footsteps on cement floors.

They were coming.

Chaim shuddered but moved with a purpose to the nearest pile of papers strewn on the ground. Gathering them up, he fed them into one of the fires, then bent and grabbed more. He added those as well, and within moments, the flames were tall enough to lick the ceiling. As he turned to build another fire, he saw long shadows starting to creep around the corner. He scurried wildly around now, tossing papers onto every flame he could see.

“I will burn this place to the ground!” he shouted at the shadows. “No one will know what happened here.”

He expected no response from the shadows or the creatures casting them. And he didn’t get one. Just the slow, relentless approach of their footsteps.

Thwop . . . thwap.

“No one will repeat this deed!”

Thwop . . . thwap.

They were around the corner now and in full view, but Chaim didn’t look up. He knew what they looked like. What they were.

“And if I survive,” he said softly, “I will leave this desert and move somewhere cold and wet.” He fed a last

piece of paper to the flames. “And I will study the Torah every day.”

Then he looked up into the lifeless eyes of the creatures he’d created and started toward them.

He was thinking of the name of God.