HOLY TWIN

 In Czech, his first name meant "angel, or blessed messenger from God." So it was fitting that Dr. Andel Janak should one day become Director of the Department of Religious Studies at Charles University in Prague. As head of the Hussite Theological faculty there, the professor was now off on summer sabbatical to continue research on his latest book -- an attempt at detailing the virtually unknown life of the Virgin Mary's spouse, Joseph.

 In addition to his native language, Dr. Janak was fluent in English, Arabic, Latin, and German, as well as the ancient Biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac. Andel was married, with two daughters, and had just celebrated his forty-eighth birthday.

 The professor continued with his latest research first at the Coptic Museum in Cairo. By examining their Nag Hammadi Library of twelve codices -- discovered in 1945 in Egypt -- he had been drawn to its gnostic Gospel of Thomas and to its so-called Gospel of Truth. But he found nothing about Joseph after several days there. So off he went to his next stop: The Vatican in Rome -- specifically, the Vatican Secret Archives.

 As he walked briskly towards the looming dome of St. Peter's after arriving in the Eternal City and checking into his hotel, Janak heard a woman's voice excitedly cry out in German: "Gunther! Gunther Weiss! Is that you?" Moments later, Andel felt a tug on his arm from behind. He turned and was startled to see a strange though attractive middle-aged woman dressed in smart business attire addressing him.

 "Gunther?" Then she stopped. "Oh, my...I am so sorry, sir. It seems I have mistaken you for someone else...a colleague of mine that works with me at Bayer pharmaceuticals in Berlin. Other than that small scar on your chin, you look exactly like him! Wait...I have a picture of our sales team with him and me," She fumbled inside her portfolio. "Oh, excuse me...forgive my manners...my name is Karla Webber." She produced the photo from a slick sales brochure. Ten smiling standing sales reps. "There is Gunther," she pointed.

 When Dr. Janak looked at the picture, he was amazed. Gunther Weiss looked exactly like him! Face, height, build -- identical. It was like looking in mirror...

 In fact, this was the third time such an eerie coincidence had happened to him. Somewhat similar scenarios occurred three years ago in Zurich, and seven years ago in Glasgow.

 "Perhaps you have a doppelganger," Karla offered. "A double, a twin...in fact, some scientists believe that everyone on Earth has two or three exact look-alikes. But an old superstition says that if you ever see your doppelganger face-to-face, it soon presages your death." The woman apologized again and then rapidly departed, still visibly shaken and embarrassed.

 Andel continued via the Porta di Angelica, then through to the Porta di S.Anna until he showed his credentials to the Swiss Guards at the entrance to the Vatican Library. The Secret Archives was adjacent. [In October, 2019, Pope Francis had officially renamed the Secret Archives as the 'Vatican Apostolic Archives.' In its original meaning, the word 'secret' meant 'private,' rather than denoting anything mysterious. The Pope wanted to dispel the lingering misinterpretation -- hence the renaming.] Special entry to the Archives was restricted to sixty researchers each day.

 Permit cards were issued by Cardinal Emilio Toroni, whose gateway office led to the secured entrance of the Archives. The red-robed Cardinal rose from behind his ornate Renaissance desk, walked towards his visitor, and extended his hand. Toroni was a Milanese, short and rather portly, in his mid-50s, but energetic and good-natured. He wore a large gold crucifix hanging from a golden chain around his neck. He spoke in English with a slight Italian accent.

 "Ah, Professor Janak! Good to see you again, my friend. I trust you and your family are doing well. So, you are back to continue your research on Joseph? What are your latest discoveries, if I may be so bold?"

 Being a lapsed Catholic, Adnel skipped kissing the Cardinal's ring, but the two kindred historians warmly shook hands instead.

 "I and my family are doing quite well, Your Eminence, thank you for asking. I brought you a small box of Mozart Kugel chocolates, from my last trip to Vienna. I know how you always enjoy them." He presented the neat red and gold box. The Cardinal grinned and thanked him. "Even the colors match my clerical outfit!" Toroni quipped.

 "As for St. Joseph, nothing new to report since last year. In the New Testament, Joseph effectively vanishes after Jesus turns age twelve. I am here today looking for more evidence to either support or refute the late 6th century *Historia Josephi Fabri Lignari.* It claims that Joseph married Mary when he was eighty years old and a widower, and she was fifteen. They obviously never had carnal relations. This History of Joseph the Carpenter also claims that Joseph was previously married to a woman named Salome, and that they had four sons and two daughters together. The History also claims that Joseph lived to the age of 111, and that Jesus -- at age nineteen -- was with Joseph at his deathbed. Now, Your Eminence, you already know from the Gospels of Mark (6:3) and Matthew (13: 55-56) that James, Joses, Jude, and Simon are mentioned as the brothers of Jesus, and that his sisters were named Assia and Lydia. But these six were referred to as step-brothers and step-sisters only, to ensure the sole divinity of Christ and retain the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Through Joseph's lineage, however, Jesus is said to be descended from the House of David, as prophesized in the Bible."

 "Indeed, Professor. Please inform me, then, if you unearth any new evidence on our beloved St. Joseph. Such a fascinating subject!" the prelate remarked. "Here is your signed entry card. I'll detain you no longer, as I am sure that you are anxious to get to work." Dr. Janak expressed his thanks, and then entered the impressive, carefully temperature and humidity-controlled Archives. The world-renowned collection consisted of an above-ground repository -- with some older wooden shelving, glass display cases, and decorative artworks -- and a vast, two-story underground storage area known as the Bunker.

 Inside the latter were eighty-five kilometers of industrial grey metal shelving behind locked metal cage-like fencing, holding some 35,000 precious volumes in the selective catalogue alone. Some of the holdings had been digitalized for scholars around the world for access from their computers, but the purists preferred to handle the actual primary sources with their own (white cotton-gloved) hands. Some of the archival treasures included: England King Henry VIII's request for a marriage annulment; hand-written notes from the heresy trial of Galileo; Michelangelo's letter of complaint to Pope Julius II on not being paid for his work on the Sistine Chapel; and the Papal Bull excommunicating Martin Luther in 1521.

 Andel worked for a week, from the entire opening to closing hours. When tired or hungry, he took needed breaks, and then typically ate lunch in the Vatican Museums (rather mediocre) cafeteria, which offered soups, salads, pasta, paninis, fresh fruit, gelato, pastries, and assorted beverages.

 But suddenly, while working at the beginning of week two, Dr. Janak made a surprising discovery.

 At the back of an ancient, leather-bound vellum volume, the professor found four faded 15 x 25 cm. vellum calfskin sheets written in Aramaic, which were unrelated to the book he was studying. The orphan pages had no bar code and -- when he quickly double-checked the computer catalogue under its title -- no listing either. An unusual archival error? Or what, exactly?

 The document was entitled The Testimony of Shraga. The Aramaic name 'Shraga' meant 'candle' or 'light.' It appeared to have been written in the 2nd Century, given certain vocabulary syntax clues. Because it was near closing time, Andel quietly took careful photos of the documents with his cell phone camera. Then, still wearing his white cotton archivist gloves, he returned the sheets to their original place and left the facility when its closing chimes rang.

 Back at his nearby lodgings -- the Paolo II -- after transferring the images from his phone to a wireless printer in the hotel's business center, Janak printed out four large, legal-sized enlargements of the mysterious pages. After a light dinner of minestrone soup, fish and salad, he slowly began to read his rare find back in his room. What he found was jaw-dropping!

 Here is a translated summary of the document findings:

 *Shraga lived in Damascus, and had befriended a good neighbor named Judah. Judah was married to Elisheva, and had a son, Lemuel, and a daughter, Miriam. Judah was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth. Judah was the twin brother of Jesus, later to be known as the Christ, son of Mary and Joseph, the carpenter. Mary was fourteen when she gave birth -- first to Jesus, then moments later to Judah. Her husband was eighteen years older. As prophesized, Jesus was said to be the foretold Son of God and the promised Messiah. When angels warned Joseph and Mary to flee with the infant Jesus to Egypt until King Herod was dead, Judah was then secretly sent to Nazareth to be cared for by relatives of Mary. After it was safe to return from Egypt to Judaea, Joseph and Mary made a home in Nazareth and the twins Jesus and Judah were reunited. Both boys learned the skilled carpenter's trade from their father. Mostly, they made wooden plows and yokes. Mary later gave birth to four other sons and two daughters. At twelve years of age, Jesus began his ministry by appearing at the Temple in Jerusalem. He later traveled and preached as he grew into young manhood. Such was his attraction after he performed several miracles that he asked his twin brother, Judah -- whom he identically resembled -- to also travel and preach in other nearby lands in his stead, having told his twin what Godly truths to speak upon to the growing crowds. Although Judah could perform no miracles, the people knew not that Judah was not Jesus.*

 *After Jesus was arrested at age thirty-three and crucified by the Romans under Pontius Pilate with the approval of the Jewish Sanhedrin. Joseph and Mary urged Judah to flee to Syria after Jesus was said to have resurrected himself from the dead. At this time, Roman soldiers were searching for Jesus' apostles and followers to do them harm. It was then in Damascus that Shraga met Judah and heard his story, which I, the scribe Mordecai, have written down truthfully in this testimony, for Shraga could neither read or write.*

Dr. Janak took a brief break, then continued with his translated summary:

 *One day, after Elisheva had died and left Judah a widower at the age of fifty-two, and when his children had grown and moved away, the apostle of Jesus named Thomas came to Judah. This was nineteen years after the resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Thomas asked Judah to leave Damascus and go with him to preach the new faith of Christianity to the people of India. The two men went to Ophir, on the Malabar coast of western India in Kerala, an area well known to the Hebrew King Solomon. There, the two Judeans preached together for twenty years, until Thomas was martyred by an angry mob, his body later buried. Judah returned secretly alone soon afterwards to Damascus, and told Shraga all that had transpired. Both friends were seventy-two years old at this time. Judah later requested, as he approached age eighty, to be buried back in India next to Thomas when his time came. I, the scribe Mordecai, cannot attest if this last event ever happened, however, because Shraga died shortly after telling me his story.*

 The professor knew that this newly discovered document was unprecedented in its potential impact on the Catholic faith. Of course, the vellum and ink would need to be carbon-dated to prove it was not a forgery, but Janak knew that such an important find needed to be shared with Cardinal Toroni back at the Vatican. So on the following Saturday, the two historians met for lunch. Toroni eagerly studied the photocopies of the original Aramaic documents, and then Janak's English translations, while they ate.

 "Andel, we must be very careful and very cautious here," the Cardinal advised. "These revelations could have potentially explosive ramifications to our sacred Church. If our Holy Mother Mary had seven more children other than Jesus, that would jeopardize the entire concept of the Immaculate Conception. It would mean that this Holy Twin, this Judah -- while being 100% human, and not half Divine and half-human like our Lord -- could share the genetic DNA of Jesus Christ Himself, as would Jesus' four other brothers and two sisters! And what's more, that bloodline could still be in existence down through the centuries up until now! We could prove this DNA link by analyzing, let's say, a bone fragment from the tomb of this Judah, who is supposedly buried near St. Thomas in India."

 "I agree, Emilio -- I mean, Your Eminence, please forgive me -- that we must unemotionally and scientifically investigate all aspects of this theory before presenting the final results to the Holy Father. There is also the possibility of confusion between St. Thomas and now this holy twin named Judah. As you know from the Scriptures, Thomas was also referred to as Judas Toma, with To'ma in Aramaic meaning the word 'twin.' And Thomas was also referred to as Thomas Didymos in the Greek version of the New Testament. Didymos likewise means 'twin' in Greek. Jesus Himself speaks in the Bible of Thomas being considered by some as His Twin."

 "Please, Andel, feel free to call me by my Christian name when we are in unofficial surroundings like in this restaurant. We are close friends, are we not?" On this hot and humid afternoon, Toroni was wearing civilian clothes -- a mint green, short-sleeved linen shirt with beige cotton trousers and dark leather loafers. "Now, I agree we must go slow. Dare we bring in other experts at this early stage, other than the carbon-dating specialists for the vellum and ink 'time period' authentication? Then I suppose the next step is a trip to India to try and find the lost tomb of Judah. Fortunately, we know that St. Thomas' remains are in the St. Thomas Cathedral Basilica in Chennai, in Myalpore, India," the Cardinal explained. "He is the patron saint of India, as you know."

 The men agreed to meet again the first thing on Monday morning back at the Archives. Toroni wanted to see the original found vellum sheets for himself.

 The next day, on Sunday, Andel was out briskly walking for his daily exercise around the streets near the cooler Tiber River. While stopping at a corner near a bus stop and waiting to cross the street, a bus pulled up to wait for the traffic signal to change. As Janak moved forward, he happened to look inside the nearest bus window. He was shocked to see himself -- or rather, an exact double of himself -- staring back! Moving a bit to the side so as to be sure he wasn't witnessing his own reflection in the window, Andel had a strange feeling when he realized he was not looking at just himself. For a few seconds, the two 'twins' gazed at each other in awe, then the bus pulled away as the traffic light changed. The professor stood stock still, quite amazed...

 Maybe I was seeing Gunther Weiss, the man that Karla Webber mistook me for two weeks ago, he thought. Perhaps that 'double' was really in Rome after all. Andel mulled the possibility around in his mind for the rest of the day. The experience was unsettling yet still oddly thrilling at the same time.

 Monday morning found Dr. Janak back inside the Vatican Apostolic Archives. Using a wheeled metal library ladder, he led Cardinal Toroni to the stacks and then the high upper shelf where he had found the lost Shraga documents. Together, the two men examined the insides of nearby volumes, and also the general shelf area, to see if any more such treasures were secreted. But they found nothing else. Taking the original four vellum sheets with them, they returned to Toroni's gateway office.

 Once there, the Cardinal used his desk telephone and informed his secretary that they were absolutely not to be disturbed. Then Toroni went to his office door and closed and locked it.

 Using a magnifying glass taken from a desk drawer, the keenly focused prelate -- wearing the required white cotton gloves to protect against the natural oils of human fingertips -- eagerly examined the documents under a high-intensity desk lamp.

 "Remarkable, truly remarkable..." he murmured. "I have absolutely no idea how it came to be where you found it, my friend, or even when it was left there, for that matter," the Cardinal confessed.

 Looking up, Dr. Janak was surprised when Toroni suddenly asked, "Andel, we have known each other a long time, going on eleven years now. Tell me, if you had to strictly choose between faith and science, which would you choose?"

 "Well, Your Eminence, as you have discovered over the years, I am a lapsed Catholic. I have not attended Mass or taken Communion for a long time. Yet I still believe in the basic mission of the Church, and in the salvation offered through baptism and the grace of God through his Son, Jesus Christ. Still, as a scholar searching for actual evidence and truth, I must lean towards believing more in the reality of hard science rather than blindly in such a thing as intangible faith."

 "I see...would I be safe in assuming then that if the evidence you have discovered would harm the faith of the Church and her members in any way, that you would still proceed in making public the 'new truth,' as you saw it?" the Cardinal asked, smiling.

 "Yes, Your Eminence. I'm afraid that would be my position."

 "Very well, I just wanted to see what your honest reaction was to such a direct challenge. Just think of Galileo...like you, another man of science. The Church was wrong and he was right. The world is hurtling more and more towards belief only in science. Church attendance is seriously plummeting. What will happen to our faith in the future, I wonder? An unknown darkness seems to be steadily creeping towards humanity. Are we drifting away from our beloved Creator?...Anyway, we should directly proceed with your research, my friend. I can recommend both a carbon-dating specialist and a DNA expert, too, providing we can later find some remains of this supposed 'holy twin,' called Judah. Are you sure nobody knows about your discovery but the two of us, not even your wife?" Andel assured him that they alone knew. "That's fine. Will you join me in a toast then to our exciting new research adventure? I have some fine French cognac that was recently gifted me." The Cardinal went to a side table and returned with two small crystal goblets and the bottle. He poured the dark amber liquid and graciously offered one glass to his guest. They clinked a toast.

 But moments after Dr. Janak finished his drink --before Toroni pretended to casually sip his own -- the professor began coughing, then clutched his chest. He next dropped his glass before collapsing on the purple carpeted floor.

 "There, there...it will all be over soon, Andel. A classic Italian poison used by the Borgias. Quite popular in Vatican history. No more pain, just eternal sleep. Forgive me, my old friend, but we can't risk rewriting over two-thousand years of Church history, now can we? And for what it's worth, the Holy Father agrees with me. Make your confession of your life's sins in your mind, Professor. Farewell, and may God have mercy on your soul..." The red-robed prelate made the Sign of the Cross over the soon inert corpse, and granted him absolution.

 Once Professor Janak was dead, the Cardinal used his desk telephone and dialed a special number. He spoke quickly in crisp, business-like Italian."Yes, it's all over. Send the Disposal Squad. Make sure you scrub and then destroy his cell phone. I have the original vellums, the photocopies, and his English translations. I'll take care of disposing those items." He hung up.

 Later, in an obscure Vatican basement room, Emilio used an acid bath to destroy the ink on the vellum skins, then the skins themselves. The paper evidence was put into a paper shredder. Then all the remains of both actions were burned in an incinerator.

 As a final act, Cardinal Emilio Toroni went to his living quarters that evening after dinner. Before going to bed, he knelt on his private *prie dieu* in front of a large hanging crucifix and humbly prayed for God's understanding and forgiveness.

 "I did this for you, my Lord Jesus. I did it all for you. The world would be lost without faith in your sacrifice on the cross for us sinners, and belief in your Resurrection, which promises us eternal life. I had to do everything this day to protect our Holy Mother Church."

 Then tears unexpectedly filled the prelate's eyes, as the beginnings of fear and doubt over what he had just done slowly crept into his mind...

 THE END

 by Jack Karolewski

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