

Harvest of Gold

by

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Chapter 1

The door to Molly McGuire's car was opened by the elegantly dressed doorman at the Turtle Creek Hotel in Dallas. She slipped out of the aged Suburban, straightened her skirt and walked through the canopied entrance to the famous hotel in the exclusive area of close in Dallas some sixty miles from Athens. It was early evening and pleasant. April in north Texas is normally a blissful period of warm days and comfortable nights before onset of the ovens of summer.

Molly was striking. She wore a knee length jade green dress with pearls around the neck. Her graceful figure glided smoothly across the marble floored lobby heels clicking on the shiny surface. Heads of businessmen in the lobby, awaiting their appointments, moved in unison as she flowed by. The radiance of the woman attracted attention. Church friends and neighbors would not recognize her, even up close. The clever make up, expensive dress, and jewels gave the impression of a middle aged movie star.

Room 621, as always, she thought checking her watch. A little late but he would understand. He always had. Molly was eager with anticipation.

"How long will you be here this time, Uncle Juergen?" Molly asked the man seated in his suite at the Turtle Creek Hotel. He had not been to Dallas since John Horton McGuire's accident.

"I cannot know, my dear. Perhaps a few days," he answered. "I will advise as usual." Arrangements for their meetings were always handled by the manager of

Doninger's U.S. company based in Dallas. Werner Ottenheimer had been a part of Molly's life as long as she could remember, long before Juergen.

The man she called Uncle Juergen poured glasses of champagne. He had always been present at turbulent times in her life. He was a friend of her grandparents, introduced long ago as a minister of the Jehovah's Witness Church in Germany who had befriended her grandfather, Papa Rutherford, between the European wars.

"How is the youth ministry? There are sufficient funds?"

"Oh, there is never enough. But we are blessed. Our *Even Start Program* grows like the faith of a saint," she answered smiling. "We have about a hundred young people in the program today. You know well that we offer our love and support in the hope of their enjoying opportunities in their lives that are as equal as possible with kids from the most advantaged circumstances," Molly explained. Her program was renowned for its success with the ample supply of poor children in the area.

"We are so fortunate to have had support through all the years," she added, her head shaking with thoughts of the struggles she had endured to establish and maintain the program. There had never been support from the church. Her husband, John Horton McGuire, senior minister of the First Methodist Church in Athens, had insisted on using church funds for the real work of the church. "Not your Godless babysitting," as he had described it. She had found other sources.

"We get along, Uncle Juergen, supplemented now with support from our children who've taken their places in the world. We are blessed, indeed," Molly answered.

Doninger loved to listen to Molly's description of her program. He had been a part of it from the beginning. "What would you do if you had an unlimited supply of money?" he asked.

"I could not tell you," she answered modestly, having never thought of the question. "All the money?" Molly wondered in a bemused and playful voice. "Are you serious?"

"Sure," the silver haired man in his eighth decade answered.

"Are you offering?"

"Perhaps."

"Well then," Molly smiled rarely at a loss for words, "we'd give every child in the world an even start in life. Encourage them with nourishment for their bodies, minds, and souls. Equal opportunity would be the fuel of honor in our world, which could be a far better place with such attention, that's for sure. Just imagine what could be accomplished," she responded, thinking of the gifts her former students had already provided to expand the program.

"Maybe in time we could prevent disharmony in our Lord's world, like the horrible event last week in the subway," Molly said referring to the suicide bombing a few days earlier on a New York subway. The coverage was carried around the world. Terrorists had killed hundreds of innocent people with their nail bombs and cyanide, tearing flesh, and ending lives. *Achieving nothing*, Molly had thought.

Juergen Doninger admired the woman he had come to know so well. He took every opportunity to come to Texas. The U.S. headquarters of his company was the excuse as Molly was the reason.

So many years, Molly thought, touching his sleek silver hair illuminated with his proud eyes.

“Anyway,” Molly paused enjoying the champagne, “there is something I need to ask you, Uncle Juergen.”

He nodded, knowing that the time had finally arrived, as so long anticipated. *I must tell her*, he knew aware that the pattern of deaths could only mean that the beasts were finally on a trail that would lead to Molly.

“Won’t it wait, fraulien?”

Molly shook her head.

Juergen was preoccupied that night. Going over and over in his mind the things to be done. *Its begun*, he knew sitting back down. The process had been planned long ago. Everything was ready.

Molly took a deep breath.

He rubbed her forearm in a familiar way. No passion, just affection and concern. “Yes?” he asked looking into eyes that were serious and focused.

“A weird thing happened on Monday of this week,” she began.

“A man?” he asked, hoping. Juergen had never liked John Horton McGuire. The man was stiff and cold, even mean, Juergen had believed though he had never met the man. Doninger never attended the church on Sundays when he was in Texas, or went to

Athens. Nonetheless, Juergen knew the minister from detailed reports over these many years. The wizened German left nothing to chance. John Horton McGuire was not like the minister who Juergen and Werner had arranged so many years earlier to raise Molly's mother, long before Molly's birth.

Juergen had hoped that Molly would fall in love, even before the death of her husband. *She needs to love and be loved*, he knew. *We all do!* The cold husband never filled that essential need in Molly.

"Oh, no, Uncle Juergen," Molly laughed, her seriousness interrupted by his tease. "Much different. I had a very strange call."

"From whom?"

"I have no idea. It was some lawyer in Switzerland saying my mother had an inheritance. He wanted to know my birthdate and the date of mother's death," Molly began explaining the conversation. "And the date of her birth. Then he hung up." The good cheer in Juergen drained like water in a tub when the stopper is pulled.

"Those dates? You are sure?"

Anger flashed in Molly's mind. *Does he think I'm stupid? That's what I said.* "Yes, I'm certain. He wanted to know about those dates. I asked who he was. He would not answer. Told me about some inheritance. 'Billions,' he said. I got interested then and answered his questions."

"And who was he?"

"I don't know. He hung up as soon as I confirmed the dates," she explained still disappointed and feeling used.

Juergen poured the end of the bottle of champagne. The older man studied the lovely, familiar face in front of him. *No guile in those eyes*, he knew. *She has been sheltered well. Will she stand the storm that is coming?* he wondered.

“He knew your mother’s date of death?”

“Yes.”

Juergen’s heart beat faster. “Did he ask about her birthdate?”

“No.

“Oh, good!” he exclaimed.

Molly’s ancient anxiety about her mother rose in her chest. “He already knew.”

“What? But how could anyone, unless . . .,” his voice trailed off as his mind wondered how anyone could know that information. *They’ve been here*, he knew instantly, closing in even faster than he had suspected. *But where could that date be recorded?*

“Juergen, my dear Uncle Juergen,” Molly began again reaching to touch his cheeks with her long fingers. As always when she was with him, Molly was dressed impeccably. Hair and makeup ready for the cover of a fashion magazine. It was the way he had insisted in their time together. “Part of your training,” he’d advised. Molly never really objected to the elegance lessons. This secret life had meant so much to her, especially after that earlier period of her life.

While Juergen’s heart beat faster, his eyes softened feeling the emotions in Molly.

“Tell me again who my mother was?” she asked for the umpteenth time. She knew the lines before he said them. “Just an Athens girl, born and bred. Child of a minister and his helpmate wife. Unfortunately, she died in childbirth.”

Juergen answered with those very words. They had repeated the discussion many times.

“Why did my mother have to die that way?” Molly had asked so often. “How can it be that I do not even know who my father is. Was she a whore? Is that part of my heritage? Is that why I ...” They both let the conversation trail away from that place.

The wealthy German businessman waited patiently to ask her the question that had found its way to the front of his consciousness. Molly soon tired of the ruminations of her past that never revealed meaningful answers.

“This lawyer asked you for the date of death of your mother and then told you that it was at your birth?” Juergen asked wanting to understand.

“No. He seemed to know that date. He wanted me to confirm it.”

“And he asked about *her* date of birth?”

“Yes.”

Juergen assumed that Molly did not know this date, which he had carefully instructed be kept out of any records.

“He knew that too,” she added, stoking his anxiety.

Juergen proceeded carefully. *How could anyone know that date?* he wondered again. “Tell me exactly what he said Molly,” Juergen pleaded. “Do you remember?”

“I’ll never forget” she answered quickly. Then repeated the conversation that ended with an abrupt hangup.

Juergen thought some more. “Oh,” he answered shortly, obviously surprised. *There’s only one place that so indicates*, he thought. “Did you know that date?”

“Yes, I found out a few of weeks ago, before John Horton McGuire died.”

“How, might I ask?” he queried, surprised at this unexpected turn of events. *This can only mean that they have found the trail*, he thought. *It has taken them so long. Longer than anticipated. We are so lucky. We were beginning to worry that the old trust really had been lost.*

Molly began crying, emotions of a lifetime coming to the surface, leaning against the sturdy shoulder of her Uncle Juergen.

The words came slowly. “You know that I’ve always felt odd, out of place. As if I lived the life of someone else who I don’t even know.”

“Yes,” he answered gently rubbing the back of her head, mussing the carefully brushed hair.

“After the attack of my husband when he received the letter from the *Holocaust Survivor’s Fund*, I looked at the Rutherford family Bible. I remembered something strange from long ago. The entry for my mother was written by Mama Rutherford, like those for other family members, including me and Matthew. The entry for my mother was: Morgan Rutherford (b. April 14, 1934 Crackow; d. November 11, 1954 Athens),” Molly explained. “There was a six-sided star by the entry.

“Then I searched in the jewelry box of Mother’s that Mama Rutherford saved for me. I remembered the purple velvet bag of coins. There were five of them. They all bore the date of 1934 and a mint mark that I confirmed to be in Crackow, Poland,” she continued timing her words to coincide with the wrenches in her chest, hoping to control her emotions.

So, Juergen thought, Morah disobeyed our strict instruction.

Molly turned on the sofa, looking into the sky blue eyes of her Uncle Juergen. The muscles around her eyes squinted, highlighting the topaz bronze flecks in the retinas. She squeezed him tightly as her emotions flowed without restraint.

Long moments passed as composure returned. “Is that true Uncle Juergen? Was mother born in Crackow? Was she a Jew? Who was my father? What about all the money this lawyer referred to?”

He wiped tears from her eyes with his fingers and tried to absorb the emotions on her cheeks.

“Well,” he began an explanation he had planned for a lifetime, “everything you said about your mother is true. She was born in Crackow in 1934. Her name at birth was Morah Schmelmer, the niece of the man who formed a trust, Albert Schmelmer,” he began.

“So what the lawyer was asking about . . .”

“Is true, yes,” Doninger answered wanting to take the conversation in a different direction, trying to control his own emotions. “I need to explain a lot more to you. It is time.”

Molly's eyes cleared instantly as her mind focused. *This is not like him*, she thought, *he's always so calm, so reassuring. He's anxious, almost afraid.*

"Is it what that Swiss lawyer asked about my mother?" Molly asked.

"Not exactly," he answered knowing the matters to be connected.

"What's so serious, Herr Professor Dr. Doninger?"

He reached into the pocket of his suit coat. Her eyes followed his patient movement. His shaking fingers emerged with an envelope.

"Molly, I need your help," he said handing it to her.

"Of course, what is it?" she answered quizzically, turning the linen envelope from the hotel over in her fingers. It bore only the name "Molly" written in Juergen's hand with the broad strokes of the ancient fountain pen he had always carried. The encasement was fat, stuffed like a college admission letter.

"My lifetime blood oath," he began.

"Lifetime blood oath?" she repeated.

"Yes," he nodded, hesitating as if he were about to make a confession. "Molly, I'm almost 78 years old you know. I don't have much longer to live."

"You? You're strong as a horse."

"For you I am. But 78 nonetheless. Molly, when I was a boy in Germany during the war, I met a man under difficult circumstances in a camp. He had a secret that he entrusted to me. I made a promise. I've spent my life trying to carry out that promise. I've succeeded in many ways, but complete success is still in the future. I will not be here to see it. I fear that our work will fail ultimately, fail to get across the chasm of time," he

explained haltingly tears welling in his eyes explaining the mission of his life to the sole person who must now stand strong, with so little preparation.

“Now is not the time for the details. There should be time enough or others can fill it in. It is time to give you the keys to the secret just in case. The time is coming.” He stopped to wipe his eyes.

Molly reached for him. “Uncle Juergen you’re crying. My God what is it? Gretchen or Gretta?” she asked about his wife who had died many years ago and his daughter who died at age 23 in an accident, just after completing college at the University of Munich.

“No, it’s something else, before then. In this envelope are some pieces of paper. A chart, some bank account numbers in Switzerland and passwords. I am the protector. I must appoint someone in case I cannot continue.”

“Wait, wait. What do you mean ‘in a camp’?” *What kind of camp could it be?* she wondered, her clever mind racing to find connection to the strong man’s tears and spilling emotions.

“Uncle Juergen . . . what kind of camp could it have been?”

He looked into her eyes, holding her arm and getting as close to her as he could. The ancient horrors began flooding over him. They had been kept at bay for so long. “A Nazi death camp,” he whispered.

Molly could not react, as if she had been frozen in place. The school teacher began crying as well, sensing at close range the unknown darkness of her own history that had always seemed off in some mysterious distance. Elements of her life were like

scattered pieces of a puzzle. A piece found now, then another in this other place, and then another over there written in an obscure Bible. They paraded in front of her in that brief moment like a movie on a screen.

Mother's death . . . added to the Bible . . . 1934 . . . Crakow, a place in Poland . . . Uncle Juergen and Werner Ottenheimer, Germans . . . never feeling that I fit in my life, as if I were someone else . . . a stranger in my own life. The call.

“Uncle Juergen?”

They clutched each other as ancient feelings overwhelming them both.

“You were a Jew in those camps? A concentration camp, is that what you mean?”

Molly asked barely comprehending. She tried to subtract years from his age. He had never said anything about such things.

“Its a long story, Molly. Yes, I did undercover work for my church, the Pentecostal Watch Society. We tried to tell the world . . . it was so unbelievable. I met this man, his name was Albert Schmelmer,” he blabbered emotions of a lifetime overcoming his calm, professional demeanor.

“Tell me Uncle Juergen,” she pleaded wiping her own eyes with sodden fingers, then his.

He clutched her hand feeling intensely the loss of his wife and their daughter. So much loss in his life. *And so much hope in this one here*, he thought summoning the strength to do what he must.

Molly's mind reeled at this avalanche of information. *The Watch Society? Like Papa*, Molly thought remembering her beloved grandfather.

“You are a Pentecostal, Uncle Juergen? You never said anything about that,” she said thinking of his smelly cigars and sailor’s language. *How could he be?*

“Not now. There’s no time. Ok? . . . later.”

Okay, okay, Molly thought trying to grasp what she was being told. “What is a ‘protector’ Uncle Juergen?”

“Someone with a duty. Will you take my place?”

“Of course if you want me to. What must I do?” she asked frightened at seeing the pillar of her life dissembling in front of her with so many unanswered questions hanging in the stifling air of elegant rooms. *Never have I seen him cry,* she thought rubbing his head as she cradled it.

He rose from her lap, as a giraffe from the grass. Pride overcoming fear of what was to come. It was part of a plan long conceived that was painful in execution. “Read the papers in this envelope,” he said patting the sheath he had assembled from old documents safely stored in the bunker at the lake. “Then put the envelope in a safe deposit box. Protect it at all costs. If anything happens to me, there are instructions.”

“Is it your company or money?”

“No it’s his, it is all his. My friend Albert Schmelmer. I just watched over it,” Juergen explained with a voice that was steady again. “With the others.”

Molly moved in front of him sitting on a chair in the quiet suite as she pulled it to his knees. Nose to nose, she held his face in her hands.

“I love you, Uncle Juergen, like the father I never had. I will do anything. You’ve done so much. I do not . . .”

“No, no, you mustn’t worry about this. It is your destiny. There are others who will help you. I will not be here, but you may depend on them. Werner is . . .,” he began before catching himself. The words almost came forward in emotion overcoming reason. “If I am not here, you will be the protector. I trust you with my life and my oath.”

“Is it dangerous?” she asked trying to find some light in the fog, instinctively dismissing the dire words of a seemingly healthy man.

He looked at her. *So smart, so protective*, he thought. *She is ready*. “I don’t know, Molly,” he tried to answer a question that had never occurred to him. This had been his life work, together with all of the people who had similarly dedicated their lives. “It has not been for me. But 2000 is coming soon.”

“What happens then?”

“Your destiny begins,” he answered calmly.

“Your other questions, Molly. Do you want the answers now?”

“Yes, please. I want it all. Then I can cope with whatever is coming. It is the absence of information that has always been so disturbing to me,” she answered.

“Your mother was a Jew. You are half Jewish. You and your son Matt are the only living descendants of Albert Schmelmer, your great-grandfather. All the others are dead.

“And Matt?”

“He is also, just you two. You will be protected,” Juergen tried to reassure her.

“From what?” she asked sensing danger from unnamed sources.

“From the Nazi’s of today who want to prevent this trust from maturing in 2000.”

“They will kill us?”

“If they can.”

“How will I protect myself if you are not here?”

“Werner is here, and others. They are watching.”

“And Matt, what about him?”

“The same.”

“Should I tell him?”

“Yes, of course, when you have read the papers in the envelope.”

“And my father, who is he?”

Juergen hesitated. “You will know soon enough. Please trust me. Now is not the time for that. It is honorable, I assure you.”

Molly nodded, trusting and overwhelmed.

In the anxiousness of these moments, Molly had forgotten to mention the call she had received from an old high school friend in the county clerk’s office. The friend had made contact just days after her husband’s death, advising that a large and powerful black man with curly dark hair and a funny looking blondish dog, who seemed to be on guard all the time, had been combing through old records of about the time of their births. She was the same age as Molly. The records were public documents so she did not ask for identification.

“Were you scared?” Molly had asked.

“No, no, that’s not my point. He could not have been more pleasant. I just couldn’t figure out who he could be. Sorta had a British accent with proper words,” the friend explained.

“Did he ask about me or my mother?” Molly asked.

“No, he asked about nobody. Just curious, that’s all.

“I’m afraid I don’t’ know any such man,” Molly answered wondering if there was some connection she could not understand.

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