

THE IMAGINATION STONE

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FREE CHAPTER

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PROLOGUE

Years Ago



Michelangelo strolled along the beach, feeling the sand between his toes and the humid air clinging to his skin. It was a gray day, and light rain started to fall. His long hair was stringy, guiding the gathering water onto his increasingly wet robe. The air was warm, and the water didn't bother him initially. He didn't shiver until he saw the water drip from his hair onto the shirt beneath his robe. Seeing the cold water disappear into the cloth made it feel more real and made his skin colder.

He was in his early thirties but already feeling much older, and after his long walk from Florence to just outside of Rome, he felt almost ancient. His feet hurt. His legs were tired. He slipped the sandals off his tired and aching feet and walked toward the water. Even though the sand was wet, he always enjoyed the feeling of sand on his feet. He likened it to a soft pillow along the coastline made only to comfort those travelers who needed a gentle foot massage. He could smell the salty sea air, and, closing his eyes, he inhaled deeply. He felt the salt air fill his lungs. He thought about his long journey and the work ahead of him. *Rome*, he thought to himself. *What am I doing there? Can I make the grand art they are asking me to do? My work, to this point, could have been better.*

As he stood, eyes closed and water lapping at his feet, a small, hard object brushed against his foot. He opened his eyes and looked down. A stone, the shape of a small egg, half floated, and half rolled in the ebb and flow of the water. He stooped to pick it up, looking at it with marvel and wonder. "Never have I seen a stone like you," he said to the stone. It was translucent and filled with

swirls of color that flowed slowly around the inside of the strange stone. Green at one end, purples and reds in the middle, and clear at the other end, the colors almost glowed with an intensity that caused him to stare in amazement as they pulled him inside. Even though this man had worked with colors to rival those in nature and those created by God's hand, he had never seen colors this vibrant and this alive in his lifetime.

"What are you, little stone that you float on the waves?" He spoke to the stone again, almost expecting an answer, but received none. "I have traveled many miles from Florence to be greeted by a strange little stone. I wonder how far you have traveled to meet me?" He chuckled and rolled the stone between his fingers. He held it up to the sky, peering through it. He saw patterns of cracks and separations on the inside but not reaching the outer skin. "You are so smooth and light, unlike any stone I have ever seen. Where do you come from, little stone, and why do you find me today?"

He put the stone in the palm of his hand and closed his hand around it. Doing so caused him to take a sharp, deep breath, and he couldn't help but smile. He looked up at the sky, down at the sand, and out to the water. He began to chuckle and giggle with delight. The sights that filled his eyes and the emotions that tugged at his consciousness were unlike any he had ever known. He suddenly felt like a child again. He felt giddy. He spread his arms and started to spin in circles. He was enjoying his life for the first time he could remember, and he didn't understand why. He stopped and opened his hand, staring and smiling at the stone. "I think that you'll come with me, little stone. You are the answer to my prayers. Have you ever seen Rome?" He laughed and kissed the stone. He tossed it up and caught it again as he turned. He picked up his sandals and began walking inland toward Rome, alternating a smile with a lively whistle and a laugh.

For the next seven years, Michelangelo worked on commissioned pieces in Rome, creating some of his best works. He always chiseled or painted with the stone from the beach. As time went by, he made a setting for the stone and bound it to his wrist so that he could work with both hands. When he left Rome, Michelangelo returned to the beach where he first found the stone. His hair and beard had streaks of gray, but a youthful sparkle was still in his eyes. He walked across the sand and stared out over the calm water. He slowly opened his hand, revealing the stone that he had carried as a companion these many years, and he looked at it with sadness in his eyes and heart. "Ah, my little stone," he spoke reverently and with compassion, "you and I have performed many great and wonderful things together. You have become my friend and companion. Time continues moving forward for me, but not for you, my small friend. You still look the same while I am growing older and look so much different."

A small tear rolled down his cheek as he closed his eyes and tried not to think about what he had to do. "I can feel that you need to return to the water. Why? I don't know. But my works shall live on as a testimony to your wonderment. Thank you for all that you've done and for all that you've taught me."

He lifted the stone to his lips and kissed it. He closed his eyes and threw the stone as far into the water as his aging arm would allow. "Go and give your gift to another!" he called out.

Michelangelo turned and started to walk away. The small stone, caught up in the ripples and waves, rolled back to the shore one last time as if to tell the aging man "goodbye." After that, it was caught up in the waves and washed out into the water. Michelangelo stopped and turned to watch the stone float away. He had grown to love the stone. This tiny object had touched his soul in ways no person ever had. His heart was heavy, and it reflected on his face. He saw the stone floating out to sea. The stone began to glow softly, sending rings, like ripples of light, across the water's surface and down to the depths. The rings of light and color made the old man laugh, and he waved to the stone. Michelangelo turned, and lines formed around his eyes and mouth. His hair, already streaked with gray, rapidly started to gray even more, and he stooped slightly as he shuffled away from the

water and back toward the inland area. From then on, his works would reflect darkness and would lose the light and life that those works had seen in Rome during those seven years.

Throughout history, small mentions of the stone have been found in the writings of the Wright Brothers, Vincent Van Gogh, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, and even as recently as Steve Jobs. Any records of the stone indicate that possession only lasted a few months at the most, except for Michelangelo. No one knows exactly why that is, but plenty of speculation exists.