



XXIX. CONSTANTINE'S MANDALA



XXX. THE DONATION OF CONSTANTINE



CARMEN AND VESTA MET ONLY ONCE. WHEN THEY DID THEY SEEMED LIKE A PAIR OF CHILDHOOD friends re-uniting. They had never set eyes on each other, yet they seemed to have a lot of catching up to do.

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Petra ranked top of the MOI sites they wanted to visit. Neither owned up to it until they consulted with each other.

Vesta justified it on professional grounds. She kept saying she wanted to acquaint herself with the humus out of which my story grew. And she insisted that host had to get out of ghost.

Carmen justified it on the grounds that Petra had, by now, found its way onto my MOI, as the Old City – how could it not, after what had happened on the road to Vico, in the old Theogony!

They tried to involve Eleonora, my wife, in this little expedition to Petra, but they didn't get so much as a flicker out of her. So they kept going at me and, one evening after dinner, I capitulated.

Here we were, Carmen, Vesta and I, on our way to that awful place which had spawned so much of the story, but about which I had been so reticent.

'Go on, admit it – yours is just plain, morbid curiosity,' I teased them. 'Nobody can resist the attraction of evil!'

I had stuck a big 'K18' on the map, at the entrance into the valley of Petra. Originally – before the MOI – I had intended *k* to mean *kilometre*. But, now, after discovering the legend of the hidden king, up at AA3A, I couldn't deny that *Kronos* has crept into the address.

The Flaminia consular road runs from Capitol Hill, in the heart of Rome, all the way to north-east Italy – formerly, lower Gaul. I always loved all four hundred kilometres of it. Except for two of them: from K17 to just before K19. Along that two-kilometre stretch, with