

The Unwanted Lecture

“I hate it when you talk about end of the world stuff,” Cynthia said. If her words weren’t obvious to her father, she hoped the look on her face made it clear. She walked with him into the classroom and stood silently while he unpacked his books, papers, chalk and eraser.

The professor’s daughter, Cynthia Volynsky turned toward the window. She wanted to be anywhere but here in her father’s graduate history classroom. Manny taught Egyptology on the Princeton campus. Cynthia spent a lot of her time in the seismology lab, where she helped other students understand the complex instruments that came easy to her.

“Shush,” Manny said. “The rest of the students will be here any minute. I know you have a hard time with my theories but please let me finish my teaching career with some dignity. A little respect during class would be nice.”

Manny was in the last year of teaching ancient history at Princeton. He specialized in Egyptology, and even taught a class on ancient cosmology. He only got that class approved because up until last year he served as dean of the department. Not many students took the class.

Ever since Cynthia’s mother died, he had become more and more eccentric. He didn’t seem to care how he dressed, forgot to comb his hair, and kept losing his glasses, which he appeared to be looking for now, even though they were right there on the top of his head.

Cynthia tried not to giggle when he finally located his glasses and slipped them on. He turned to write something on the chalkboard. “Dad, you know I’m only taking this class because you had the last open session. I need it the graduate credits.” She walked two rows back and sat.

“You have to know what they say about you. Ever since you published your *Alternative Chronology*, the other history teachers laugh behind your back.” Cynthia opened the textbook that bore her father’s name. “Just tone it down with the end of the world stuff today. I know you’re how excited you are but it comes up in every lecture now.”

Cynthia popped her chewing gum, a habit she knew annoyed her father, but didn’t care. “If the dean bothered to show up to check up on all these complaints you’d be out of here...”

Her father stopped writing on the chalkboard, turned around and stared at her over his glasses. She’d seen that look before. She’d said too much but it was too late.

“I’m sorry dad. You know your stuff. Everyone knows that. You make it interesting. You’re excited about the material, but you’ve got to stop bringing all that old religious junk into the lectures.” She fidgeted with her pencil, not wanting to hurt his feelings.

“I’m just worried your desire to prove the *Alternative Chronology* is going to get you in trouble,” Cynthia said. “You’re trying to force old traditions into real history. They don’t mix. Round cookies will never come from a square cookie cutter mold.”

“And that’s where you’re wrong, young lady,” her father said walking around his desk to stand in front of her. “Who made you the expert on history all of a sudden? Junk! Is that what you call religion these days? And what’s all this talk about cookies? They have nothing to do with history. But religion does. It’s the stuff history is made of.”

Cynthia had to laugh at the way her father wagged his finger when he got excited.

“Forty years I’ve been at this,” Manny said. “This may be my last year teaching but I’ll never forget the day I discovered conventional Egyptian chronology was wrong. My research explained so much. Haven’t I taught you anything this whole year?”

Cynthia's best friend Jody strolled into the classroom and plopped down into her seat, front and center. Jody believed the more a teacher saw you, the better your chances were of getting an A. She was right. "You've taught us a lot this year, professor. What were you and Cindy talking about, the homework assignment?"

"Don't encourage him, Jody," Cynthia said. "He might spend the whole lecture period on the subject. We've already read it in his book, isn't that embarrassing enough?"

"You are talking about the reading assignment. I have a question, professor." She smiled up at Cynthia's father. "It has to do with the timing of the fall of the middle kingdom."

Cynthia rolled her eyes. Jody didn't have to work hard to get an A in this class – just agree with the professor. It didn't seem to matter to Jody that the rest of the scientific world disagreed with him. It bothered Cynthia that her dad's textbook used the Revised Chronology.

A few more students sauntered in and took their seats. They tuned in to what Jody was saying. The rest straggled in eventually until the lecture hall was full.

"Go ahead Jody," her father encouraged her. "You've obviously read last week's homework assignment, unlike some people in this class," his glare at Cynthia unmistakable. "What part of the middle kingdom did you want to discuss?"

"Well, not discuss, really," Jody said. "It's like you said, Professor. I read the homework assignment. I think I've got the main cast of characters down, at least most of them in the eleventh and twelfth dynasties..."

"Yes, go on," her father said. He seemed excited at least one of his students took the reading assignment seriously enough to want to discuss it with the class.

“Like I said,” Jody continued, flashing a bright smile. “I think I understand the basics of those two dynasties. What I don’t get is why the text puts has them happening about five hundred years earlier than the standard chronology.”

Jody looked around the room, as if seeking support for what she was about to say. “I mean none of us were there, but I’m sure you realize you’re the only Egyptologist who has published this revised chronology, don’t you?”

Cynthia slunk down into her seat. She lowered her face, covered it with her hand.

“Ah, that’s the beauty of it,” the professor said. “Don’t you see? It opens up a world of possibilities in correlating profane and sacred histories.” Jody’s puzzled look only seemed to excite Cynthia’s father all the more. He came alive with animated hand and arm movements.

“In other words, we can now, with precision, date the time of the exodus of the Jews with the actual events of Egyptian history.” He paced the front of the classroom. “We no longer have to guess. We know exactly when the Israelis left Egypt. Isn’t that marvelous?”

Cynthia snuck a peak at the other students in the classroom. Yep, just as she thought – nobody looked the least bit interested or excited. Even Jody’s puzzled face didn’t abate Dr. Volynsky’s enthusiasm. But at least she stuck with it. Jodie was no dummy.

“I’m sorry doctor, and if this is something you didn’t want to talk about today, we can skip it, but I still don’t get it.” Jody hesitated. “Why is this important to Egyptology? This is a graduate class.” She looked around the room, then right at Cynthia, who shrugged. “Shouldn’t we be studying what your peers in the field have published? I’m just a little concerned that when we publish our graduate papers, nobody will accept the Volynsky chronology as valid.”

Cynthia could almost hear the thoughts clicking in the brains of other students in the classroom. Gutsy move, Jodie. Somebody had finally called him out. He was a loner and

everybody knew it: strange, eccentric, alone. Her poor deluded father. Papers were already being published by other graduate students from Yale and Harvard that mocked Immanuel Volensky as a crackpot whose theories were wholly flawed.

“That’s OK, Jody. This fits right in with today’s lecture. One of man’s eternal quests is to find and present evidence for the existence of a God and of God’s chosen people. By moving the history of the Exodus back five hundred years, we eliminate the enigmatic “dark ages” in Greece and elsewhere.

Her father leaned on the edge of his desk. “This shift of dynasties from the Old Kingdom to Ptolemaic times solves the age-old problem of where to place the Exodus.” He straightened up, obviously excited about his subject. “This vindicates the biblical accounts of history.”

“But professor,” Jody said, “this is not a religion class. We don’t really care about the Exodus or the flood or where the Garden of Eden was supposed to be. We’re supposed to be learning about the history of Egypt with verifiable facts from recent archaeological digs. If I wanted to learn the history of Israel, I would have taken a Bible class. No other Egyptologist I’ve read about agrees with your Alternative Chronology. Now I’m worried about having your name show up on my list of graduate advisors for my thesis.”

Cynthia felt her face redden. She may have felt the same way, but Jody was talking about her father and his theories, after all. Cynthia stood and turned to look at the class, perhaps to be heard better, perhaps to make her point emphatic.

“I think what *Dr. Volynsky* is getting at,” Cynthia heard herself saying, “is that he has proposed a solution to an age-old historical problem.” She could hardly fathom why she was defending his dubious notions. “He may be the only one to propose the Alternative Chronology,

but I think it deserves our consideration when we write papers dealing with ancient world history as we all will need to do.”

She looked right at Jody. “You’re right, this is not a religion class, but if Dr. Volynsky’s hypothesis solves a historical problem, then it should be taken seriously, don’t you think?” She stared at Jody for a moment then looked back toward the rest of the class.

“I read the homework like the rest of you. I know dad’s chronology is unique, but then so is he. I know how many years he spent researching his theories. I for one, am willing to listen to the possibilities of what problems his chronological schemes solve.”

Cynthia stopped, realizing she had been way too personal, turned around and plopped into her seat. She felt her cheeks heat, then smiled, realized how proud she was of her dad.

She glanced at him. He had both a surprised and a delighted look on his face. Gazing out over the class he said, “Both Jody and Cynthia have raised valid points. This is not a religion class, but I can promise you, the more education you seek, the more you’ll realize our graduate coursework will touch on some element of our relationship to God, a Higher Power or whatever you want to call him.” Her father always appeared comfortable when lecturing about religion and history combined. It was his passion. To him, they were one and the same thing.

“Cynthia’s right. I’ve spent many years looking for a way to fit in the events of the Exodus with the historical record.” Her father pulled himself up to his full six foot three frame. “Yes, I readily admit my Revised Chronology is unique to me and so far, nobody else had endorsed it. But for me, it answers questions that have strengthened my belief in God.

“You don’t have to believe in God to be a good historian, but you do have to know how to ask questions and then follow through until you find the answers. If I leave nothing else to the world, the Revised Chronology will be my legacy. I spent years researching the sources. I’m

proud of my work even if nobody else respects it. No matter. I have a few other ideas I intend to publish when I retire in a few weeks.”

Cynthia thought of the several manuscripts in her father’s office. He got most excited about his concepts for the close intersection of two celestial bodies. What would happen if two worlds nearly collided? Sounded like a good name for a science fiction movie. Who knew, maybe it could be a bestseller. A newfound sense of pride at being Manny Volynsky’s daughter swept over her.

“I realized,” her father went on, “what caused the events of the Exodus while I was digging through old books and manuscripts to prove my point about the Revised Chronology. A good historian will go where his research leads him. I still remember the day.”

Uh oh. Here he goes again. Doesn’t he realize the class had heard this half a dozen times this semester alone? Looking around the room, Cynthia saw something different in the eyes of her fellow students for the first time: respect. And maybe a little curiosity.

Sure, he was a little bit of a nutcase. Maybe he did come across a little eccentric, but he was excited about what he did and it showed. Enthusiasm rubs off. People like to hear a good story, even if they’ve heard it before, even if it’s a fantasy. Cynthia listened with a different feeling this time.

Her father continued his lecture. “Can’t you just picture it in your mind’s eye? Scientists will tell you it’s impossible. There’s no way one planet can come that close to another planet without breaking up due to the Roche limit.”

His eyes widened with wonder. “But I’m telling you there is a stronger force in the Universe connecting and holding things together. Electromagnetic Plasma is many thousands

times stronger than gravity. If we had time tonight, I could tell you step-by-step what happens when two planets collide or at least come close together. It's all in the history books."

The bell rang. Several students groaned.

Surprised, Cynthia, who had heard the story so many times, realized again what a good storyteller her father could be. They had not gone over anything on the scheduled lecture of the middle kingdom of Egypt today. But it didn't seem to matter to the class.

"Read your homework assignment," her father shouted as the students began shuffling out the door. "We'll get to it. I'll tell you all about the events of the Exodus as they happened at the fall of the middle kingdom. Be ready to discuss chapter twelve."

Cynthia stayed behind after everyone had left.

Her father stacked up some papers, glanced her way. "Hadn't you better get going to your next class?"

"I just wanted to tell you I loved you," Cynthia said. She leaned up on her tiptoes and gave her dad a peck on the cheek. He looked surprised, but smiled.

He took Cynthia by the hand, looked her over and said, "You're all grown up, but you'll always be my little girl. I love you too. Now get off to class."

She turned as he swatted her lightly on the butt.

"What was that for?" Cynthia said.

"For misunderstanding what really interests people. You don't know everything yet."

"But I will. I'm going to be a seismologist. You'll see."

"I know you are," her father said with pride in his voice. "You can do anything."

Cynthia smiled again as she walked out the door, happiness and love in her heart.