

CHAPTER 13 [ROMANS]

The funeral was held in the biggest chapel in the neighborhood and there still wasn't enough room for all. Reverend Love showed with his wife and children, which caused a small media stir. But the friends of Aunt Jenny made sure she was properly and respectfully laid to rest. Hundreds came to say goodbye, and visitation lasted for over twelve hours. The church was filled with flowers and those that could also donated to Aunt Jenny's favorite charity. She was laid to rest with the ceremony of a great member of state, which in her world she was.

James read the eulogy. Close friends carried the coffin the short block to the cemetery, where hundreds more lined the streets to say their last good-byes. Thomas, Judy, Russ, James and Cindy walked behind the casket, followed by James' friends. She was laid to rest under the sunshine and between magnolia trees she had loved to smell in blossom.

The food donated to the family to help with cooking during their time of grief was overwhelming. James attempted to try every dish, but had no luck. Finally, leftovers and untouched dishes were donated to the local food pantry. It was a sad time a time of loss. Everyone missed her presence, yet James and Cindy seemed at peace and smiled warmly at the mention of her name.

Judy received the linens and cedar chest in order to start a "hope chest." Cindy received all Aunt Jenny's pots, pans, and dishes, with strict instructions to pass them on to Judy when it was "time." Her pictures were divided between Cindy and Judy. Russ and Thomas had the pick of the rest of her possessions.

The surprise, however, belonged to James. Aunt Jenny, in little need of money, rich in friends and family, had invested her meager sums over many years and left a sizable sum to James. She had also bequest her home to him, with instructions to "begin your task with the seed I have left you."

James was unaware she had even known of his desire to help people, just coming to that conclusion himself. In his gratitude James began the Aunt Jenny Foundation right there in her house. Cindy was proud and thrilled to have James close to home. After a little renovation, James' friends moved in with him and they began the process of contributing to better the condition of men and women in the Lord's world.

The office was next to the church. Subtly ornate, the kind of office you would expect from a man in Cardinal Michael's position, rich, full curtains, wood panels, and ornate statuettes. The cardinal was not in a reflective mood though and the textures around him gave him no comfort. He was agitated and frustrated and he was pressing his aid for comfort.

"Why him? What does this dead woman mean to him?" Cardinal Michael asked. "There are

too many questions and not enough answers. Something is going to happen, and if we aren't ready it could damage the Church. I need information and I need it now."

"We just don't know." said Brother Francis. "We aren't a spy agency, sir. We don't have the resources to just bring people in and question them. Don't you think your over-reacting on this issue? After all, Mr. Love has never attacked the Church or tried to harm it in any way."

"I know, Brother Francis, I know. But the circumstances of his birth and the power and influence he has over the masses has swayed some of our flock from the true teachings of Christ and the Church. Remember, we are in a fight with the devil for the very souls of our members. Any teachings that contradict our theology would result in catastrophe for our parishioners. Indeed, certain offhand remarks made by Mr. Love have led our own priests to question our Pope's interpretation of Our Lord's teachings. I have vowed to defend those teachings and the true Bible, and I won't let a young, uneducated whippersnapper destroy 2000 years of theology for his own convenience."

"I understand your thoughts, Monsignor, but don't you feel that Mr. Love's actions do not warrant this interdiction?" asked Francis.

"I have studied and written works upon the true meaning of the Bible and its teachings. The Pope himself has used my counsel to hold back the tide of liberalism that wishes to change the very way we worship our God. In my studies, I have found that the devil is truly in the details. He does not consume by large events, but tries to take one soul at a time. I see this birth, this mockery of our Lord's birth, just one more detail in his effort to undermine our way of life. I feel this man currently is only a seed, but we must nip it in the bud now or we could face a garden of discontent later." The Cardinal's face was grim.

"Yes, Your Eminence. I see he could prove to be a larger problem later. I try to find out more about this black man that he has been seeing," said Francis.

"I understand that this.. uh .. James, has started some foundation to help the needy in his neighborhood. Is that true?"

"Yes, it is."

"Why don't you make an appointment to see him for the possibility of help from the Church? That might allow you to find out some more information," said Cardinal Michael.

"Would we truly be interested in helping this man's foundation?" asked Brother Francis.

"A good charitable foundation should always be given a hand when needed. If you find this to be a good foundation, then there is a good probability. I would not ask you to go under false pretenses, Brother Francis." replied the Cardinal.

"Of course not, Your Eminence. I was just wondering about the limits of our offer."

"Whatever we can do, within the realm of the Church and God, as always." Replied the Cardinal.

"As always." Brother Francis nodded.

It was a little much. I really thought I had taught that boy to recognize charlatans better, thought Dex. Imagine, 30 years old, been through every type of "healing" and "talking in tongues" there was. Hell, I even taught him some of the old things we did on the circuit and he still gets taken in by some nigger from Atlanta.

Dex poured himself another drink. And he flies all the way to Jerusalem to get him, he fumed. What was it with that funeral anyhow? He didn't even know that old lady. She sure as hell didn't give their church any money, I checked. Gave it all to that nigger he brought home with him. And he knows damn well he was the only child born that night, especially the only one born within that light. I checked all the hospital records, every record I could find. No one else was born that night, there is no record of this James being born that night, no record of a James even being born. Dex reached for the bottle again and brushed across the latest pledge figures lying on his desk. Well, maybe he does know something, he reconsidered. That little stunt with the old lady increased our take 5% in one week, with a residual increase of 2% over the next three weeks. Maybe a little freebie now and then with the masses wouldn't hurt. I'll have to keep an eye on him and his new "friend" to see what's happening. My boy ain't gonna cut me out of the take yet."

"What do you think?" asked Ahmed. He and Lu Chan were sitting at the kitchen table with James discussing the phone call they just got from the local Catholic organization.

"It seems pretty nice if they're going to do it. Aunt Jenny's money isn't going to last forever, and we're not adept at raising funds and keeping books. My Father's love will help, but hey, we still gotta help ourselves and pay the bills." James chuckled.

"I don't know." said Lu Chan smiling. "Either your Father is pulling some heavy strings to give you a hand, or they want something. In my country the Catholics only did you a favor if they could get something in return, now or in the future."

"Now you're getting cynical." James grinned. "The Catholic Church has always tried to help others. I've never seen them withhold charity because you believed, looked, or felt differently."

"Neither have I. But there has always been a price, permission to build a church, teach their ways to your children, or read passages in their Bible to your Emperor. Subtle, but effective. "

"Well, we don't have an offer yet, and it won't hurt to speak to this Brother Francis, if only to be polite. Be assured, though, we shall do this our way and the way of my Father or we won't do it at all."

"And just what way is that?" said Tommy, coming in from the living room a hammer in one hand, and a grin on his face. "Hate to say, old friend, but you have yet to tell us what's up. Not that

I'm complaining; I'd stay in a cave with you till we starved, but curiosity is getting the better of me."

"And me," said Pierre, coming through the back screen door. "It does seem that you are attempting to establish some roots, my friend. Begin some project. And not just the foundation, wonderful as that is. You would have to admit; it would be quite a change from our previous years together."

"Yes, James. What is up?" asked Katy, followed thru the door by Judy and Mobutu. Judy and Mobutu put down plates of steaming hot food while Katy went to the cupboard to lay out dishes and silverware.

"Looks like dinner to me." said James.

"Ah, you do not get out of the answer that easily," Pierre said. He grabbed James' plate and held it back above his head. "No answer, no dinner."

"Answer? What's the question?" said Cindy, entering the door with another basket of food. "The question is, Mom," said Katy, knowing calling her this pleased Cindy immensely, "what are James' plans now that he seems to be settling down?"

"You settlin' down James?" Cindy smiled. "You goin' to stay here next to your Momma?" "Nothin's been decided permanent or anything. See what you started, Katy? She is going to ride me to stay home now." James laughed.

"Well what are your plans? And you better tell me 'fore I get your Daddy and his belt in here to get you to tell me," said Cindy

All hooted at the image of James getting whupped by his daddy, and James had to shout them down just to get them to listen.

"Well, under threat of a sound whuppin' and imminent starvation, I will tell you. You all have spent years with me, showing me and teaching me the ways of men and women in the world.

Whether you knew it or not, your care and friendship through all the time, hard as well as easy, allowed me to see the world as my Father wished me to see it. I have seen the greatest miracles in the smallest acts, compassion out of the most unforgiving men. This is what I was sent to learn. Some call it the indomitable spirit of humans, some call it love. I see it as that which my Father saw it that unique quality, when left to make a free will decision, to make it at one's own expense and for the benefit of another.

Man has faith. For me who has needed no faith, this is incredible. To make a sacrifice to better the condition of others on the basis of what is "right", follows no logical pattern and in some circumstances is not even taught by religion. Before my Father was born, men and women had this quality. It is not a quality that can be ascribed to religion. It existed well before organized faiths. My goal is to try to add to this wonderful condition. To give where no reward is expected, but just because it is right. To stand by those who have given of their hearts and assure them their faith was

not wasted. I wish to contribute to the goodness of man."

"In this effort I hope to use some of the gift my Father has given me to heal and comfort throughout the world. I wish to send each of my friends into the world to establish a center where they can monitor activities and help me choose those that would qualify for a small hand from My Father or an encouraging word from me. It will be difficult. We could make a lifetime of help in this neighborhood alone, but I wish to spread my gifts and help throughout the world. Therefore, time, cost, and energy must be measured between my friends to maximize the benefits of my gifts. This I know you can do, because you love one another as I love you. That is what my plans are and I wish you will help me." With those words, James sat and looked at his friends in the room.

Cindy broke the silence. "An ambitious plan, James. How do you expect to carry it out?"

"That is what we are here for. To figure it out," James said.

"I have been your companion for many years, to leave your company now would be difficult for me," stated Pierre.

"As I," said Tommy.

"Wait," said James holding up a hand to still the protests. You all know who I am. You all know what I can do. Would you keep this gift for yourself or use it as My Father intended? I know your answers in my heart, for I know you each intimately. Besides, if our work is done well, I shall see each of you throughout the year and all of you together sharing my mother's food at my Father's birthday."

"Then it will be done," said Mobutu The rest agreed.

"Well, mom, is a year enough warning to give you for our next gathering?" teased James. "If that's all your gonna give," Cindy replied.

"Well then, Pierre, if you will give me my plate, let's dig in." James laughed. "Because we got a whole lot of work to do tomorrow"

The plans were going along smoothly. Ahmed was a genius at finance and had begun investing Aunt Jenny's money in places that would give a good return and keep the foundation's main house open for some time. Tommy took the reins of procuring donations and selecting sites for additional houses around the world. Lu Chan developed strategic plans for the implementation of James's work. Pierre took care of the local calls and secretarial duties. Momma and Katy kept track of food and clothing, while Mobutu did repairs on the buildings and kept an eye on Judy. Russ had agreed to anchor the foundation at Aunt Jenny's home, so all seemed to be going well.

"James, we gotta talk," said Mobutu one evening. "Sure, Mo, what about?" asked James.

Mobutu paused, then looked at James and said, "well, your sister."

"She givin' you problems, Mobutu? You want me to talk to her?" James asked. "No, oh no," said Mobutu hurriedly. "She has been a perfect lady in every way." "Then what's the problem?"

"Well, I like her. I like her a lot."

"So that's good." James started to smile.

"Well, I'd like to date her. If that's all right with you." Mobutu said.

"I don't think it's my place to pick my sister's dates. Do you? I mean, if she knew we were having this conversation I'm sure she would whup us both to within an inch of our lives. You know Mom. Judy's just like her." James laughed.

"You don't mind, then? It's sometime so hard to know the rules with you."

"I can't know, because I could never be you. But I'm sure sometimes you wonder if the wrath of my Grandfather would descend upon you if you angered me. Be assured Mobutu, my Father put me on this earth as a man. I am His son, but I am a man I bleed, I hurt, I laugh and jest. There is no plan for me to come back to earth when I die; that's already been done. I'm here to live, do some good works and die a man. That's all. But, you treat my sister wrong, I'll come hunt you like any good brother would." James laughed.

"Then, I shall most assuredly treat her well."

"Oh, and Mobutu, if it goes any farther, my dad's permission is the one you should ask for." MoButu laughed and walked out.

"If only all my problems were as easy to solve," whispered James to himself. It had always been like that, he thought. They must surely have questions about his Father, heaven, hell, religion, but they never asked. It seemed as if it was a taboo subject. He had never offered to start the discussions, and probably avoided them because he didn't want to offend anyone. So maybe they respected his silence and didn't ask for fear of offending him. His dad never asked, nor his mom, but they had already met Jesus and were satisfied with their own knowledge. But what about Judy and Russ? It wasn't like they ever held anything back from him. Why after twelve years did it bother him now? Maybe the baptism reminded him of who he truly was. "Whatever it is, it's time to confront it," he said. "I need them with me, not in awe of me. We'll have a discussion about it tomorrow after the meeting with Brother Francis."

James had stayed away from many religious orders during his travels. He knew that people recognized him for who he was quite frequently and their reactions often were hard to take. He did not need the public kneeling or prayers at his feet. Many times he had lifted a body off the ground and bought him or her a cool drink just to avoid further spotlight. He had become quite adept at defusing potentially difficult situations.

James remembered visiting his Father's birthplace and making arrangements to see it at night. It was quite remarkable that the church had been able to find and protect the exact place. His Father had been born for over 2000 years. Even though he went in at night and few people were there, the priest recognized him at once and wished to call the others of his order. It was quick thinking and a little help from Lu Chan that had allowed him to finish his visit and exit without

further problems. That brief encounter showed him what great potential for disruption he could have on many people and religions if he was recognized. Therefore, he avoids most churches and priests at all times.

But this was different. His fledgling foundation needed money to complete his task and the help of the Catholic Church would move them forward rapidly. John Love had offered his fortune in the endeavor, but James did not want a single sponsor. It would look like he was endorsing one sect over another. Besides John was doing good work and needed to continue in his way. James had to meet with Brother Francis and hope that he wouldn't be recognized.

Russ answered the door when Brother Francis came calling and showed him to a seat in the front room. It was apparent that Brother Francis had done his homework and knew that James was the leader of this new foundation. Russ avoided any attempts to have Brother Francis deal with him. After seating Brother Francis in a comfortable chair, Russ excused himself and went to get James.

"He knows I'm not in charge, James. I'm sorry, but you'll have to come down and meet him." Said Russ.

"I was afraid of that. Well, here's hoping."

James went downstairs and entered the front room. Brother Francis rose from his chair and fell on his knees before him, head bowed and eyes closed.

"Well, I think he recognized you," said Abdul.

It took a while to get Brother Francis to his feet again. It was obvious he was a learned man and no amount of easy assurances were going to convince him of his place before James. Finally, with James's hands upon his shoulders, Brother Francis allowed himself to be seated again. A cool glass of water, time and gentle conversation eventually gave Brother Francis back his voice and some composure.

"Hi," said James to Brother Francis.

Brother Francis began to tremble again and the remaining water started to splatter out of the glass he held in his hand. His look remained fixed on James and his face was contorted in wonder.

James, who had been sitting in a wooden kitchen chair opposite Brother Francis, rose and put a hand on the Brother's shoulder once more.

Brother Francis stuttered back, "Uh.., hi."

Then, as if to confirm his reality, he looked at Abdul and Russ and excitedly said, "It's him! I mean, my Lord. Oh dear God! No, I'm sorry. Your Father. My Father. Oh my gosh, it is you!"

James was grinning by this time, but also concerned for Brother Francis's health. Putting a hand on his shoulder once more, James replied, "Why don't you give yourself sometime and slow down or we'll never finish this conversation."

Brother Francis caught James's eyes with his own and started to regain himself again. "My Lord," Francis began.

"James."

"James?" Francis asked. "But I know you to be of our God, how could I address you as James. Surely Jehovah or Jesus would be better."

"It would if it were my name. But Jesus is the name given to my Father and Jehovah is the name frequently given to His Father. I think to usurp their names would be presumptuous on our part, don't you?" Grinned James.

"Oh, well yes, my Lord, it would." replied Brother Francis.

"Just James, Brother Francis."

"Yes, sir. I mean James."

"Well, now that we got that out of the way, what did you need to know about our foundation? The telephone call placed to Russ here mentioned something about some financing to help us with our work," said James.

"Financing? Yes. Well, Oh yes. We heard about your organ..... Well, I don't believe that will be a problem. How much do you want? Do you really need money? I mean won't He...?"

"No, He won't. Doesn't have a checking account." James shook his head. "And I don't believe your superiors will allow you to write checks for just any ol' amount."

"Well, ordinarily they wouldn't, but it does seem that you are their superior and if you want the money, well it is the churches', raised in Jesus' name. Therefore, I guess it's your money and you can do with it what you will. I mean when we go back and show them who you are, how can they refuse?"

"Go back?" asked James. "What do you mean go back?"

"Well I have to tell Cardinal Michael and he's going to tell the Pope. Oh, goodness. Maybe, I should call him now. I mean he should probably come to you not you to him." Brother Francis looked worried.

"Whoa, slow down, Brother. I don't really want to make any formal announcements. We just met you to see if your organization could help us out by financing some part of our organization. This is not a pretext for a coming out party." James laughed nervously.

"But you must!" protested Brother Francis.

"No, I mustn't." Responded James. "And I will ask you to keep your knowledge of my existence to yourself. I also ask that if you do help support our organization that you be the only one we deal with. Do you understand?" said James sternly.

"No, I do not understand, but if it is your wish then I will do it, so help me God." said Francis. "Oops. I'm sorry"

"Quite all right." Said James. "Now, do you think we might be able to work out a little donation now and then from your Church?"

Brother Francis was still happily confused at the recent meeting with James. They had agreed

on a monthly stipend to be forwarded to the Aunt Jenny Foundation, and James had invited him back to dinner and conversation whenever he wanted. But what now to tell Cardinal Michael? Francis thought. It is obvious why John Love went to Jerusalem. But even though I know the reason, I have sworn not to tell anyone of James' existence here on earth. It is quite a dilemma.

Francis emerged from the car he had taken to visit the Aunt Jenny Foundation and looked at the building that housed Cardinal Michael.

"I shall have to tell him enough to distract him from James and have him concentrate on John Love. I shall tell him that Mr. Love flew to the Middle East to meet with someone who could help in his missionary work. That this man requested that he fly James and his group back home as a favor in return for his contribution. Yes, That ought to do it."

"More money, eh? Well that sounds typical of the Love clan. He would fly halfway around the world for a dollar, praise God," said Cardinal Michael.

"Yes, well you've said that raising money is what their best at." Replied Brother Francis. "Yes, I should have known. But this trip did seem darn peculiar, one would have to admit.

And all the people he brought back were just friends of his new benefactor?"

"Yes, as far as I could tell. They seemed quite harmless and just beginning to put together what could be a worthwhile organization. I thought it would be wise to contribute something to their cause. This would allow us to keep a better eye on them and maybe find out a thing or two about Mr. Love's operation also," said Brother Francis.

"A good idea, Brother. It would be nice to be able to know a little more about our dear Mr. Love. Well, keep me informed if you need anything else."

"Most certainly, Sir," said Brother Francis as the Cardinal dismissed him. Brother Francis turned and walked out of the room. With the door closed behind him, he let out a low slow sigh.