

CHAPTER 15

"That's it. I've just about had it with this whole nonsense," Dex growled. "Lori, do you know what your boy has went and done now? Another \$50,000.00 sent to that nigger and his organization. It isn't enough I have to endure that friendship of his with that black boy, hell, he's even going to marry them, but I have to endure his giving out our hard earned money to support this twerp. Just when is that boy going to grow a brain? Why can't he see that that coon is just another con artist taking him for all he is worth?"

"Now Dex, that is a lot of money, but John can afford it. Besides, it isn't right you referring to his friend as a nigger. You've never even met the man. He might be very nice," replied Lori.

"Don't be takin' his side. I know a con man when I see one."

"I suppose you should." said Lori. "You been associating with them for years."

"Now don't get smart. My dealings have kept you pretty comfortable for years. I don't see you complaining on your monthly shopping sprees to New York."

"But what is wrong with John giving some of his money to friends?" Lori asked. "Con men or not, it makes him happy."

"Because I don't like people stealing from me or my family!" shouted Dex. "This gets out and every con artist in the country will make us a target. I'm not going to be taken for a sap. You know the old saying, 'You can't con a con man.' Well, I'm going to prove it. I'll nail that poor bastard publicly where even John will have to acknowledge his fraud."

They had decided to wait until the anniversary of James' baptism to have the wedding. It would allow Katy to make arrangements with her friends and invite her mother. Maggie was already complaining that it wasn't nearly enough time, and it was still six months away. John was delighted and more than eager to officiate at the ceremony. Cindy and Judy were on cloud nine, calling friends, neighbors and acquaintances. Russ and Dad were beaming. But James had one more to which he had to make the announcement, and the following evening James took Katy to his small hill out back and introduced her to his Father.

"What will He say? Do I look all right? Do I kneel? Are you sure He is OK with this?" Asked Katy, eyes wide, steps hesitant.

"I don't know what He will say. You look fine. He will accept you kneeling or standing. We'll both find out if He is OK with this."

"But what if He isn't OK? I mean, it's not like we can elope or anything. Oh, James, I'm scared."

"If He's not OK with it, we'll send in Mom." James grinned. "I mean He is Jesus, but He

also was a man."

"And what does that mean?" shot back Katy, eyes flashing.

"Too late... we're here." said James ducking the question.

"We're where?" said Katy, looking out over the slight hill into the star lit sky. "Oh, gosh. You mean we're here."

James dropped his arms to his side, closed his eyes, tilted his head towards the Heavens and spoke.

"Father, I am here. I wish to speak with you."

The light came, the same light Katy witnessed at the baptism, but somehow brighter and softer, warm but comforting. Then she saw them.

"Grandmother, Father!," James exclaimed with joy. "It is so good to see you again."

Turning to Jesus James said. "Father, I come to ask your blessing and yours too, grandmother. I have met someone I wish to marry. Her name is Katy."

James reached for Katy's hand and pulled her near.

Extending his arm as if it was any common introduction, he said, "Katy, this is my Father and my Grandmother Mary."

Katy nodded, barely remembering her manners. "I am so pleased to meet you."

James continued speaking to his Father while Mary moved over and placed Katy's hand in hers. "It would honor me greatly, Father, if you approve of this marriage," he said.

Gazing upon His Son, His Mother, and Katy, Jesus smiled and said, "Son, with all my heart, I bless this union and I think I speak for your grandmother too."

With that, Mary and Jesus slowly disappeared and the light became night again. Katy just stared, dumbfounded, then erupted.

"Pleased to meet you! I just said pleased to meet you to Jesus and Mary! Where was my tongue? And you were no help!" she said, turning to James. "Why didn't you tell me your grandmother would be there? And me in these rags."

Katy punched James in the ribs and headed off.

"But Katy," James yelled, "they liked you. They blessed our wedding."

I should have definitely spent more time studying women, thought James as he ran after his fiancé.

Thomas met James outside the door. Katy had entered a minute before and was in animated conversation with both Judy and Cindy.

"Son, I wouldn't go in there if I were you," he said.

"But Dad, I gotta find out what's wrong. Katy just punched me and headed straight for mom after Grandmother and Father both blessed our wedding."

"Son, there is no woman in there on your side right now, and there is no man in there that

wishes to keep his hide. It is very important in a relationship to know when to keep your mouth shut and just accept the fact you are wrong. Don't matter what about, you're just wrong." Thomas smiled.

"Come on, son. Let's go handle something we can whip, like global warming or worldwide pollution." He led James next door to the Foundation house.

"How'd it go?" said Russ to James as he walked in.

"Yeah how did it go?" said Mobutu. He and the rest of His friends were drinking soda pops in the front room. "Katy came running in the back door cryin'. Judy jumped up and ran into the kitchen, yelled something like 'Men' at the top of her voice. When your Dad headed for the door, so did I."

"Well I thought it went all right," said James. "Mary and Jesus blessed the union." "Great!" said Russ, and the room erupted with backslapping and congratulations.

"Don't worry, son," said Thomas "You'll find out what was wrong soon enough. Let your mother handle it now. Meanwhile, congratulations."

"Thanks, dad." Said James. "I'll do that."

"Hey, James," said Abdul. "We got a call from John Love. He wanted you to call him back tonight if you could."

"Sure, why not. Where's the phone?"

"James?" said John, answering the phone. "How'd it go?... Yeah? That's great. Well I was worried; Maggie is on the other phone talking to Katy now. I left the room as soon as I had the chance. Yeah, well, Cindy will handle it. Hey, do you think we can arrange a meeting between you and my dad soon? Yeah, he requested it. No, don't know why. Sure. Thanks, I appreciate it. Hey, be careful when you talk to him. He's an old time con man, could get you into trouble without knowing it. And friend, stay low, at least until Katy's storm blows over. See you later." John hung up.

"When it rains, it pours," said John, hearing but not listening to his wife comforting and commiserating with Katy over the phone.

What is dad up to? Thought John. He's been angry about this whole situation with James. I probably shouldn't have gone blathering on about him when I got home from the baptism.

Brother Francis was thrilled. After his initial conversation with James he had gone about his work with a renewed vigor. He told himself that he had always believed, but knowing and believing in your work, especially in these doubtful times, was a world of difference. Then Russ called to explain the news. Brother Francis had known he was working well with the Foundation and considered it an honor to be so close to James. But to be invited to His wedding? It was just too

much to expect in one lifetime.

Brother Francis rushed to call Sister Genevieve, or Jenny as she was often called. Francis was so pleased he had introduced her to him. It had made things so much easier to have someone to talk to about these things. She was also quite adept at taking those calls when he was not around. Of course she had recognized James right off. Francis new she would; a more saintly woman he had never known. She had wept for hours after meeting him, thanking Brother Francis profusely for his confidence. Together they had worked diligently for James.

She squealed a spontaneous blessing of delight, then they both knelt and prayed to the Lord, thanking them for their blessings. Brother Francis assured her they were invited guests and she squealed and prayed some more. "A crock pot is definitely out on this one." She smiled to Brother Francis as he nodded quickly.

James set the meeting for the following week with John's father. Wedding plans, the startup of the foundation worldwide, and finding Katy's missing mother were more than enough for one week.

"She never even told me her mother was alive," said James.

Now it was his turn to be nervous. He hadn't banked on a mother-in-law. Thomas was no help, saying how Cindy's mom not talking to her was one of his blessings. He had told Katy he was sorry that night. He still wasn't quite sure for what, but he was sure sorry. The apology worked, especially after he promised not to do whatever it was again.

A week had passed and James was waiting in Dex Love's offices for Mr. Love to show. John was very nervous about the meeting and had arranged it so, as few people as possible were around when he showed up. John didn't want to take too many chances on someone recognizing James for who he was and causing a scene. It would be difficult enough if his father recognized him, although somehow John didn't fear that happening.

The door opened and a slim man in a light blue suit looked out at James. "James? I'm sorry, I don't know your last name." The man extended a hand to him.

"James is just fine, sir. And would you be Mr. Love, John's father?" James asked.

"That I would, son. Thank you for coming to see me. I have heard precious little else from my son and daughter-in-law lately but your name, so I thought it might be nice to meet you and find out a little more." Dex motioned to a chair in front of the desk, while he took the seat behind it.

James was relieved. Mr. Love obviously did not recognize him as a Son of Jesus, and they could carry on the conversation as two men.

"There really isn't much to tell, Mr. Love. I was born here in Georgia, traveled the world a bit, and came home to start an organization to help people of the world."

"Call me Dex, son. After all, anyone that has over \$150,000.00 of this organization's money should be on a first-name basis with the president," said Dex coldly.

"Is that what you called me here for, to talk about John's donations? I believed it was his money to donate," said James.

"His money is the church's money," said Dex. "And any money you may have received from him is of concern to my church."

"Well then, sir," James said coldly, "I suggest you speak with John about these matters. It seems a family disagreement that I have no part in." He rose to leave.

"Wait a minute, young man. I'm not through yet. I'm here to tell you to let my son out of this scam of yours or I'll expose you for what you are."

"And what might that be?" said James turning to face his accuser.

"A two bit-nigger con man." said Dex, standing and glaring at James.

"Jesus, forgive him," James said, and walked out of the room, closing the door behind him.

"I will kill him!" said John, inflamed.

"No you won't," said James, quietly.

John had never been so furious with his father. James had refused to discuss his conversation with John's father, and only discreetly placed inquiries had revealed the truth to John.

"He has no right, no authority to question my gifts to you. I'll not stand for it." John said angrily. "To call you a fraud, a con, a nigger... I'll never speak to the man again. I'll never work with him again."

"He was only trying to protect you, John. What would you expect? Consider his position and where he is coming from. In his background, men were constantly pulling scams and cons to receive a few more donations from the crowd. Speaking in tongues, healing, small miracles and promises, they were all garnered to milk a few more dollars. Then you walk in with a black man from Jerusalem. He knows nothing about him except that he has received \$150,000.00 in cash from his son and is starting what appears to be a church. What would you think?"

"I would hope to give him the courtesy of a good name," said John cooling down somewhat.

"It would seem you could show your father that the money is not going for some scam. Give him an accounting. Our books are open. Let him know others are involved; it may not be too late to turn him around."

"You, sir, are much more tolerant than I." John sighed.

"I don't need to audit his books." Dex said. "I've audited the man. Hell any fool could fake a good set of books. You know better than this, John. Why are you so taken in by him? Why don't

you see that he's heard of your quest and just supplied a response? The man will be swimming in Cadillacs inside a year and you will have lost all your money and self-respect."

"You stubborn old fool. It is true that a person can believe anything about another that they know they themselves are capable. Good Lord, you've been scamming people for so long you can't see the real thing when it happens in front of your eyes." yelled John. The outer offices had cleared as soon as the shouting began.

"Don't you speak to me that way. I made you and you will respect me. If it weren't for my guidance you would have never reached the position you are in now. You will do as I say, damn it. You will stop seeing and sending this person any more of our money."

"Father, GO..TO.. HELL!" Shouted John. "If you so much as raise one hand against him, once voice, one word, one finger, I will leave this congregation and take my believers with me. You cannot keep this church without me and I am not your puppet to be ordered around. You may think you have made me, but I sure as hell can live without you. Could you say the same about me?"

Dex was livid. He started to raise his hand, then realized what he was doing and controlled it.

Between clenched teeth he said, "Don't you ever threaten me, son. Do what you will and God damns you for doing it. I've had enough. Leave."

John, stood took his papers and walked out the door, slamming it behind him.

"Then the old bastard tried to cut off my weekly salary, can you believe that?" Sighed John to James. "Well, I went to the church board and told them no money, no preaching. My dad was furious when his friends voted unanimously to reinstate my salary and give me a raise. I thought about asking for his removal from the board and operations of the church, but he is doing well there except for the disagreement with me."

"I'm sorry all this has happened. Would it help if I distanced myself and this foundation from you?" asked James.

"It would help, but I don't want it to happen and I know Katy and Maggie would be mad at the both of us. I wouldn't want to face them. You think my father is bad." John grinned.

James patted John on the shoulder. "Never again do I want to face that." They both laughed.

There was no record of James' birth, just as John had said. The only explanations Dex could figure out was he was born at home, had his records destroyed, or wasn't really from Atlanta at all. He called Thomas' place of work.

"Trouble in paradise, eh?" said Cardinal Michael. "Well, maybe our boy is finally slipping. I knew no false church could last. What is the latest, Brother Francis?"

"Well it seems there was a very big fight over some of John's contributions to charities. His

father apparently did not approve. His father then tried to control John's finances by revoking his salary. A meeting of the church board of governors restored John's salary under threat of John. Then gave him a raise. John's father is very upset over all of this."

"Do you know what charity they were arguing about?" asked the Cardinal. "Aunt Jenny Foundation," answered Brother Francis.

"Isn't that the one we agreed to finance?" asked the Cardinal.

"Yes, sir. We have been sending them a small stipend each month. They have responded with detailed information on their expenses and seem to actually be doing some good."

"That's good. It will keep the church from any hidden scandal. Still, it does give us the tie-in we may need to explore this rift further. Keep an eye on them, Brother Francis. Let me know if anything further develops and be prepared to pull out if there is any problem with that charity. Dex Love may be a con, but he's smart. He usually knows when to leave a bad situation."