

CHAPTER 19

Millie was in heaven. She held her grandbabies tight and often. Judy was complaining of swollen cheeks to Katy because they had been pinched so much by her. After their ordeal at the foundation house, Thomas had invited them all over to his home for a meal. Although tension was still in the air, each one was making a best effort to capture some of the family love that they had missed. Robert was stunned. Stripped of many beliefs he had held for decades, he was as a child, easily led. Cindy was happy. A thorn in her life had been removed and she was once again with a father she loved, so she cooked.

"A meal in my home for my father." She giggled.

It was then that Robert regained some of his composure. "Aren't you getting married, James?"

They all laughed until they cried.

He fumbled and he stumbled, fidgeted and twitched. James grinned from the kitchen as he watched Brother Francis come through the door. Always a major production thought James. I wish he could get used to me. Yet he stood tall with my mother when called upon. I'll never forget him for that.

"Come in, Brother," cried James through the doorway.

Brother Francis stopped twitching for an instant and hurried into the kitchen proud and pleased to be in James' presence.

"I'm sorry James, but it seems my lot lately to always bring you troubling news."

"The least you could do is sit down and share some of my mother's cookies and milk before you unburden yourself." James offered him a glass and cookies.

"Are those the chocolate chip ones?" Francis asked, pointing to the plate.

"The very ones."

"Oh, joy. Promise you will stop me before I make too big a pig of myself."

"I dare not, for fear of retribution from my mother. She and I thank you for your input at the meeting," said James.

"My privilege and my duty, no more," replied Francis.

"In any event, I'm sure you will have as many chocolate chip cookies as you wish. What else can I do for you? I do not think you came all this way for dessert."

"No," Francis said, trying to swallow a cookie. "I'm sorry, James excuse me. I mean to say that I didn't. Although these treats would be excuse enough."

"What then, friend?"

Brother Francis beamed. "It is the Cardinal, James. He insists that your presence here on earth is a sign from your Father. He wishes to introduce you to the Pope and proclaim you

throughout the world. He is in a dither, quite frankly, and knows not what to do next. He constantly asks me and the Sister, if we know of anything that you have said that will give him a clue as to what and when is coming. He has just become a handful. I don't even want to tell you what he wished to give you for your wedding."

"What do you wish of me, then?", asked James.

"Would you talk to him again. Soon. Before the wedding and the gift?" asked Francis.

"Before the wedding?" asked James. "This cannot wait?"

"Believe me, James. Before the wedding would be good," replied Brother Francis grabbing another cookie.

"James, is that Brother Francis that came in?" asked Katy from the front porch.

"Yes, dear." James smiled.

"Oh, good. Cindy wanted him to have these and couldn't come over right now." Katy came into the kitchen and handed Francis a 'to-go' bag of fresh chocolate chip cookies.

"Oh, my. I will have to let out my sash a little more this month, won't I?" Francis said accepting the bag.

"Our friend wishes me to speak with the Cardinal again before our wedding," said James, speaking for Brother Francis.

"Well I don't see why not?" said Katy. "I'm sure we can find the time."

"Oh could you?" said Francis excitedly.

James looked, stunned, into Katy's face.

"I thought I was supposed to concentrate on the wedding and avoid business?"

"Well, a small exception for a family friend can be accommodated." Katy turned on her heel and left.

"I will never understand women," said James under his breath. Turning to Brother Francis, James said, "How about here tomorrow about two? Would that be all right? I would go to meet him at his office again, but that is just too difficult for me right now."

"Tomorrow at two. We'll be there. Thank you, James." Brother Francis rose to go, cradling his cookies.

It was chilly in Atlanta, this close to Christmas, but the Cardinal was still sweating. Why does he wish to see me? Will he strike me dead? The Cardinal thought, and then began praying again as he rode in the chauffeured car to his destination. The car pulled up to the Foundation house and Cardinal Michael looked out to see James and Francis waiting to greet him on the porch. The Cardinal almost died.

"He is coming to greet me at his door. There must be something wrong." The Cardinal got out of the car and hurried reluctantly to the porch.

"Thank you for coming, Cardinal Michael," said James. "I am so pleased you agreed to see

me on such short notice and at my offices."

"Not at all, James. I realized you were busy with your wedding and as I said, "Anything to help." They entered the front room.

"Please sit down, Michael. Brother Francis, could you retrieve some of those famous cookies and refreshments for the Cardinal?" Asked James.

Brother Francis hurried into the next room as Cardinal Michael protested, "No need, James. I'm quite all right."

"Oh, but you must, Cardinal. These are such exceptionally fine cookies." Said Brother Francis, returning.

"Well, maybe one." Said Michael, reaching for the plate in front of him. "What did you wish to speak to me about James?"

"It has come to my knowledge that you are well aware of who I am and who my Father is," said James, smiling.

The Cardinal stopped in mid bite, looked menacingly at Francis and then back at James.

"There is no use in denying it. It is apparent that you take way too much interest in this little foundation. I doubt that even the best church-supported function has both a priest and a nun assigned full time as assistants."

"It is true, my Lord." The Cardinal said, lowering his head before James.

"The name is James, Michael. And there is no need to bow or honor me anymore than there is another man." Said James.

"Oh, but there is, sir. You are the Son of our Lord. A true Prince of Earth. Saying you are not does not deny the truth." replied the Cardinal.

"And who gives that title, Michael?" asked James.

"Why, it is God given."

"Do you propose that God or Jesus have need of titles?" asked James.

Michael sat, confused. He did not expect this line of questioning. James couldn't be ignorant of His Fathers teachings and of the word of God written in the Bible.

"No, I suppose not," said Michael.

"Then if God did not give me this title, who did?" asked James.

"I could only presume it must be man, then," replied Michael quietly. "But that still does not deny your existence as the descendent of the Creator."

"No, it does not. I am the descendent of the Creator. That is what I am, but I claim no Lordship or title. I was born of humble origins, a man in the world of men. Your bowing and submissiveness is not mine to have because I have not earned it."

"What then, in God's name are you doing on Earth?" asked Cardinal Michael.

"Living as a man. Loving as a man. Learning as a man. And helping, whenever possible, mankind," replied James.

"But with all your powers," Michael blurted out.

"What powers?"

"You speak with the Lord, His Angels. You can heal. There must be more." Replied the Cardinal.

"You speak with the Lord. His angels. And you heal," replied James.

"But He doesn't speak back." said Michael.

"He doesn't? Or you just don't hear Him?" Said James.

"This is a game I'm bound to lose, arguing with our God's Son." said Michael resignedly.

James smiled. "What do you want of me, Michael? Power, position, wealth? These I cannot give. I am no genie to grant wishes."

Michael looked at James and thought slowly to properly phrase his answer.

"I wish understanding, James. I have been a servant of God on this earth for many years. I have read the Bible and wrote many treaties on it. I have defended what I thought were his teachings for many years. I wish to understand that I was right. That I knew, that I did what was expected and asked of me."

"You wish for me to judge your life for you?" asked James solemnly.

"Is that not your right?" asked Michael.

James took Michael's hand. "No, Michael it is not. A greater force than I must judge your life. You must judge it yourself."

Michael looked confused.

"God created man and gave him free will. Whether you lived up to the expectations of God you must decide for yourself. It is a requirement of having free will," continued James.

"Then if I choose that I have lived up to the tenants of God, I have done so?" Asked Michael.

"Believe me, Michael, man is much more unforgiving of his sins than my Father. If you feel you have done the best you can then you have."

"Then what of the Bible? What need do we have of its rituals and stories? This seems all too simple, James," said the Cardinal.

"It always has been simple. It is man that makes it complicated, looking for markers by which to judge his progress. Hoping to put chits in the bank against future indiscretions. My father summed it up pretty good by saying, 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'" Said James.

"Then are you saying the Bible is worthless? Churches are meaningless? That my chosen profession is a waste?" asked Michael.

"Once again, you ask me to judge and it is not my place." said James.

"Then how do I judge?" Asked Michael.

"That is the tricky part. Has the church sought to do good? Have you lifted up your

parishioners? Have you used the Bible as it was meant to be, or have you sought to control, manipulate and condemn? These are not so easy questions to answer. For what if you controlled, manipulated, or condemned for the betterment of those around you? Would that not be good also? And how do you judge what is good for those around you as opposed to what you think is good for them? These are only some of the questions to be asked on a daily basis, before you can make final judgement of yourself.

Do not rely too heavily on the Bible for answers, Cardinal, for it is only a tool. It is an early history of man's association with God and My Father. It give's guidelines, but they are written in a way to reach the common masses over two millennia ago. Much has happened religiously in the intervening two thousand years that is not being taught. I, God and man have evolved intellectually much further. To teach the literal past could cause one to remain in the past. Use the Bible as the aid it should be and rely on yourself for the beliefs that you must have." James paused.

Cardinal Michael sat quietly, taking it all in.

"Then you are not a sign, the world is not coming to an end and we are not to be ready to be judged," the Cardinal said finally with a sly smile.

"No, not by God, nor me. If this world is to end or be judged, it must be by man alone."

"Then why are you here, James?" Asked the Cardinal.

"Because, God does so love the world and so does Jesus," interrupted Brother Francis. James waved deferment to the words of Brother Francis.

"That is your answer, Cardinal."

"May we speak further at a better time for you, James? I understand your busy getting married." The Cardinal grinned.

"Yes, oh yes," said James, rising to meet the Cardinal as Michael set himself to leave. "And please you are welcome to come. I know Francis and Genny will be there."

"Without a doubt, James." Interrupted Francis.

"I should be honored." Replied Michael. "And may I take a few of those cookies with me? They are delicious."

"Just return the plate clean." Said James, handing the cookies to the Cardinal as Michael headed out the door.

"I will. I do just have one more question. Why did you contact John Love when you started your foundation? Why not the Church? It does not seem to me that his evangelistic organization is quite dignified for your Father."

"There you go again, presuming a conflict where there is none. Although I cannot condone taking money from those that need it in order to further one's own pocket, or a churches, John is just following in an ancestor's footsteps. You see, we didn't go to John to start our organization, we went to him for a baptism. Mine. My Father chose him because he is a direct descendant of John the Baptist."

"Then that explains a lot. Thanks for your time, James." said Michael.

"Your welcome, Michael."

"But it is his money, Dad. We raised it in his name. He is not stealing it, we are." Said John.

"How can you say those things, damn it? You can't believe that poor bastard is the Son of Jesus," said Dex.

"How can you not believe it? After all you've seen, all you've been," retorted John.

"It is because of who I am that keeps me from being conned by this nigger." shouted Dex.

"Stop calling him that! He is Jesus' Son and deserves respect, not crude derision." John shot back.

"Jesus' Son. Hah. Hell, the boy isn't even white. And don't go givin' me that crap that Jesus is colorblind. If he was we would all be gray." said Dex.

"And what makes you think Jesus is white?" replied John.

"Don't you look at pictures, boy? Everyone I seen in black and white churches has Jesus painted white. Never have seen a black Jesus yet." Dex was angry.

"I can't believe that you think those pictures are accurate portrayals of an Arabian Jewish man who spent years in the dessert," said John.

"Then where'd they git them pictures?" shot back Dex.

"Geez, dad, even I thought you knew they were European artist's representations of what they hoped the Christ looked like. Do you think people in the Middle Ages would follow an Arab? Hell, they were fighting them for control of Palestine."

"Sez you, boy. You don't know if these aren't accurate portraits of Jesus or not. You never seen him. Besides ain't no way our followers are going to worship no nigger. We got good white folk supportin' us and they don't take kindly to any black boy takin' on airs. 'Specially one who claims divinity."

"Don't you understand at all? This is not a choice. Public opinion has no voice, there is no vote. God and Jesus have made a Son and he is black." said John.

"Well, you won't catch me worshipin' no nigger. Nor any of our followers. If this is what God wants, then He can keep it. We'll turn our backs on this Creator. Go ahead and worship him, but don't be lookin' for me in the pew." Said Dex heatedly.

"Sure, it is fine to worship the Lord, so long as He meets your needs," said John. "Turn His religion inside out. Prey upon the weak in His name to feather your pocket. But have him define himself and you figure you can get another creator. There is no choice, Dad. It is James or Hell."

"Then let it be Hell." John slammed the door on his way out.

"It is hard for me to believe he can be so stubborn, so racist, so damned money hungry," said John to Maggie.

"Do you expect him to change overnight, John? He grew up in the Deep South, a time of the Klu Klux Klan and Jim Crow laws. He was poor and poorly educated. He did well. He used the tools he was given and made a great life. A good life for you, so that you never experienced the misfortunes he had."

"The tools he was given, huh? Deceit, con and larceny? Hardly honorable trades or tools." replied John. "Hell, he even used me and my birth to con those poor suckers into giving more money."

"But they were the tools he was given, good or bad. He made use of them," said Maggie.

"I can't believe you are defending him," said John, shocked.

"I'm just pointing out his position. I do not defend him. But you must know the man before you can hope to correct the problem. He is your father. You must make some peace with him. We must deal with him daily and constantly fighting over James does no one any good. It will not allow him to accept James either. He just defends his position even more, no matter how ridiculous it becomes. It becomes a battle of pride. Withdraw for now, John. Let it go. We'll deal with it later. Besides, we have a wedding to attend." Maggie suddenly smiled and giggled.

"Right," beamed John, "a wedding. A once-in-a-universe wedding and I am the preacher and you are the maid of honor."

Maggie laughed as she pulled John to the bed and smothered him with kisses.

That boy is going to get himself killed. He is going to ruin everything over some nigger, some God wannabe," thought Dex. He poured himself another drink and brooded some more. He had been at his bar almost constantly since the incident at the foundation house. Now he had just had another argument with his son over increasing their donation to the foundation even more.

"James, a Son of Jesus, my ass!" Shouted Dex, throwing the bottle across the room. Picking another bottle from the bar, Dex stumbled into a chair.

"I have to think of some way to end this. I have to stop this fiasco. What could have happened at that meeting? Everything was going so well. Then, all of a sudden Robert is in the arms of James crying his eyes out, asking for forgiveness. How did I lose?"

"Well, that just go to show you that you don't trust any nigger. They are so ignorant." Dex sat back and drunkenly fell asleep.

With apologies to the local pastor, James had to move his wedding to the bigger church in the next neighborhood. There were more people coming than he would have ever guessed. Ingrid had asked if she could bring some of Katy's family. The boys wanted their families to come, and

suddenly Atlanta was host to hundreds. It's a good thing angels can fly or there wouldn't be any room for my Father's guests, James thought.

There was no traditional bachelor party for James. It didn't seem right and James, although quite a partier in his earlier time, had outgrown the ritual. The men did gather for a football game and a few beers at the stadium.

Katy, however, had no problems participating in every event that could be had, bridal showers, shopping, the bachelorette party, complete with dancing and laughter. James laughed at the antics and joined in when he could. He wanted to marry Katy because she could live life, and wanted no one, including himself, to deny her the privilege.

By now, Cindy knew all of the boys' mothers as if they were each her only best friend. And Ingrid and Millie could not find enough time to talk about all the things they wished to say. The women had quickly run the boys out of the foundation house and made room for themselves, talking and cooking until the wee hours of the morning. Cindy could not have been happier if there were two of her.

Robert and Thomas had grown to like each other in the many hours they spent running errands to the various grocery stores. With so many women and so many faces to feed, they were beginning to be known on a first name basis at the local markets. They did get to split time with the spouses of the women, and made frequent use of Thomas's garage, telling stories, drinking, eating, and yes, singing, particularly with Pierre's father, who quite enjoyed singing and had a good voice to prove it.

James and the boys were sharing rooms at the various neighbors' houses. Having grown up with James, they were quite pleased to be a part of the party and his wedding. Little if any foundation work was getting done, but no one seemed to mind, and Sister Genny had stayed at the foundation house taking messages, assuring James she would catalog all important calls and contact him in case of any emergency.

The presents started to arrive two days before the wedding, and James had to set two rooms aside in a neighbors' house to hold them all until the wedding. They were big and wrapped beautifully. Katy was thrilled and excited to see them. All James could think of was, "These are definitely not crock pots."

It was magic, it was fun. The wedding gown was beautiful and had a four-foot-long train. Katy had decided on four attendants and ushers besides the best man and maid of honor. James had asked his Dad to be best man, an honor for Thomas and a thrill for his mother. All agreed it was appropriate. Jesus had informed Him that His Grandmother Mary would be in attendance as well as He, and as always, God would join them. All seemed set, and the night before the wedding James even got to see Katy for a few minutes alone.

"Are you ready?" James asked. "Is everything as you want it?"

"Even if it wasn't, I wouldn't complain. I would marry you with a magistrate." Katy smiled

softly.

"Justice of the Peace, you mean."

"Whatever. This has been a wonderful time and I know we are going to have a wonderful marriage." Katy sighed.

"Everything just seems to happen just as we need it to. The weather is even going to be sunny and warm for tomorrow." said James.

"How do you know, James? Have you seen the forecast?" asked Katy.

"No just an early present from some friends." James grinned.

"Then it will be perfect." Smiled Katy. Just then, Cindy called from the door.

"When you get time, chile, I have one more stitch to make on the dress." Said Cindy.

"Gotta go, lover." Katy left him with a kiss in the moonlight.