

CHAPTER 2

The inside of the tent was hot and humid. The recent rainfall had done little to relieve the heat and the lack of a breeze made the cramped space a hot house that caused the people to be drenched in their own sweat. Thirty people had crowded under the canopy, all listening intently to the speaker, hoping to be transported by his words to a higher place that could possibly allow them to be graced by God Himself.

Dexter Edward Love watched from aside of the stage. He had seen it all before and was still amazed at the ease with which Bobby could convince these people to give their hard-earned money to him. Bobby, or Brother Robert as he was called at the pulpit, could read a few phrases from the Bible, save a few souls, swear that all would be damned to hell, then pass the hat and collect a good bundle of cash.

"Truly amazin, however, the way that dress clings tightly to that blonde is also something to behold," he said to himself.

He looked closer and saw her glance his way. He thought he saw a possibility, and why not? He was only twenty, six foot, black hair, and the model of righteousness. He looked good in his white suit with sparkling black shoes and a smile that exposed a set of perfectly white teeth. Maybe after the service he could get closer and take her off somewhere. Those southern girls always seemed a lot more agreeable after being convinced, by Brother Robert, of the need to give unto their fellow man.

Dexter's attention was quickly jerked back to the business at hand when Brother Robert fell to the floor and started screaming for the Lord to have mercy on the souls of those present.

New twist, Dex thought. He must be needin' some cash bad if he was goin' this hard. Quickly he rushed to Brother Robert's aid and began pleading with him to calm himself.

"Surely the Lord had heard and would save the souls of those present. He would help Brother Robert to continue his good works by entering the hearts and souls of these sinners and bring them up into the spirit of Christ."

Words spilled out freely as Dex and Bobby struggled on the floor together. Bobby acted unconvinced that anything short of self-sacrifice would save these forgotten people, and Dex tried vainly to calm his troubled friend. Soon the crowd rose from their seats, slowly at first and then as a human wave, pleading and shouting for God to forgive them, promising to help Brother Roberts in words and deeds if only He would release him from this terrible pain.

Slowly Bobby seemed to calm down. An occasional relapse kept the people glued to the spectacle before them. Brother Robert acted as though he was entranced and looked glassy-eyed toward his audience. "Thank you," he said. "Thank you. Your prayers and faith have saved me from a tormenting hell." Then, on cue, he cried.

Dex saw his cue. "Thank you Lord, Thank You. Only with Your help can we overcome the evil that lurks within us. People, my brothers and sisters, please help us pass on the great miracle that has happened here today. Tell your neighbors, your friends, anyone you see about the true power of the Lord. Help us pass this message on by digging deep into you pockets for the offering that we will take in your behalf to instruct others in His way.

Dex jumped down and took the collection from each individual, blessing them as they gave their soiled and worn dollar bills to him. He looked directly in their eyes as they gave and with his pleading stare, made them give more than even they knew they could give.

Slowly the crowd filtered out, clasping Brother Robert's hand at the tent entrance. The blond wandered out slowly, lingering until she and Dex were the only ones left in the tent.

"Hello, waitin' for someone?" he asked.

"For you," she responded as she handed her cash to the pile Dex held in his hand.

Sweat dribbled down her chest and disappeared into the front of her dress as Dex watched.

"My name's Dexter Love. You got a name?"

She giggled. "Lori Jean, Lori Jean Baxter. Is that your real name?" "Yeah, that's it."

"Can you live up to it?"

"On occasion, if the partner's right. Want to go for a cold drink?"

"Sure. Poppa won't mind me bein' out with a preacher man, `specially one named Love."

"Good. Let's get the Chevy and drive to town. I'll drop you off after we're done."

Dex grabbed her by the hand, took a few bills for himself, gave the rest to Bobby and drove off. A few hours and a few cold drinks later found Dex and Lori discovering their own brand of salvation on a deserted back road.