

CHAPTER 20

The day was perfect, as James had said.

"A little gift from Grandmother Mary. Nice to have friends in high places, sometimes," mused James.

The wedding wasn't until 1:00 P.M., so James had plenty of time before the service. He went over to His mother's house for breakfast, but was met at the door by Judy.

"And just what do you think you're doing, big Bro?" she asked.

"Breakfast, girl. I'm starving." Said James.

"Then you best get over to the garage with the menfolk and find out what they're doing for food. You cain't come in here an see this girl before the weddin'. Shoo." Judy laughed.

James looked in mocked horror at his little sister and made his way to the garage. There he found Robert, Thomas and all the boys nursing a single pot of coffee as they tried to wake up.

"It looks like a fast food morning to me," said James. Everyone nodded in agreement and started heading for the cars.

Thomas slapped James on the back as they piled into the car.

"See, you saved another body today and you didn't have to use nuthin' but your noggin." Both men laughed and headed out the driveway.

"Your father is a grown man, John. Don't worry, he'll be all right. We can look for him after the wedding. Now hurry, I'm already late and I have to get there to help Katy dress." Said Maggie.

"As if. Last I counted there were ten women over there fixin' and dressin' that girl, includin' Sister Genny. I don't see how one more is going to make any diff...."

John stopped short as he looked at her flashing eyes.

"Let's go." John said heading for the door at a crisp walk.

"Are you sure? I mean does it look just right?" Asked Brother Francis.

"For the tenth time, yes," said Sister Genny. "Now let's go, Father. I'm late."

"Yes, yes. I mean, it is just so special. Can you imagine? He asked me to give a special blessing at the end of the service. Oh, I think I'm going to faint."

"Not now you don't. Here, let me drive." The Sister grabbed the keys from Brother Francis and pushed him into the passenger side of the car.

"They're here!" Yelled Judy from the front door.

Oh, thank God, thought Katy.

"Sorry I'm late, Katy. I just couldn't get John moving. He was trying to find his father and

just kept delaying things," said Maggie.

"Is everything all right? Dex is okay, isn't he?"

"Oh he's fine. Just his grumpy ol' self. He gets that way whenever he feels he's lost. I thought you were going with the other shoes?"

"Well, Ingrid and Mrs. Jamison thought these looked better. What do you think?" asked Katy.

"I think we need to shut the door and let you have just a few moments to yourself, girlfriend." Said Maggie, shutting the door and locking it from inside.

"Oh, that sounds wonderful." Katy collapsed half-dressed on the bed. "Am I doing the right thing?"

"Now's a bad time to ask that question." Said Maggie, removing Katy's shoes and getting a new pair.

"I know, but the Son of Jesus, I mean...."

Maggie grabbed both of Katy's hands and looked her straight in the eye. "Do you love the man, girl?"

"Yes."

"Then his occupation doesn't matter." They both fell down laughing.

There was a slight knock at the door.

"May we come in?" Said Cindy softly.

Maggie got up and opened the door, letting Millie and Cindy in, then closing it behind them. "Just giving Katy a chance to catch her breath." said Maggie.

"I can imagine." said Cindy. "Katy, I told you of Thomas' and my marriage by Jesus. And my love for Jesus and Thomas."

"Yes," said Katy.

"Well, mom couldn't be with me when those things happened. So, well I guess it was stupid, but I kept a blue locket with me during James' birth. That way I could have my whole family around me, even if they couldn't be there. Well we talked and we thought maybe you could keep it and wear it today. You know, something old."

"Something blue," chimed in Millie.

"And something borrowed," said Katy, crying. "I will give it back. I could never keep this from you."

"And something new." said Cindy, pointing at Katy's feet.

"Nice shoes, dear." Everyone started laughing.

The limos were parked outside. The church was covered with flowers, inside and outside. There was an air of slight perfume all around the church that emanated from some unknown source. No one seemed to mind, though; it was quite pleasing and soothing.

The church was crowded, with enough people so that the rector was forced to turn on the air conditioner. James stood at the altar and looked around and above him. The church was immaculate, as if scrubbed from top to bottom. James saw plenty of forms in the rafters and knew that Aunt Jenny was among them. Mother Mary and Jesus sat at the altar, visible to James and Katy only. John was resplendent in his robes and Brother Francis was near fainting standing beside John in his vestments. It was perfect.

Then the choir stood to sing and welcome in Katy. The music was glorious. They choir knew they had never sung so well but, James was aware it was probably the help from the angels behind them that gave them an edge. Then Katy came in. She was beautiful.

Mary and Luke, John's children, were the ring bearers, and some of Tommy's relatives scattered rose petals at Katy's feet. James just smiled and reveled in Katy's beauty. Not a hair was out of place. Every crease on her dress was just so, and her eyes were exceptionally wide when she saw Mary and Jesus standing at the altar to welcome her. James took Katy's hand from Robert, who had been given the honor of giving her away.

John began the service. He had never given such a marriage, but he had the voice and stature to go with such circumstances of great pomp. When he led James and Katy to the altar and had them kneel for a blessing, James felt the hand of God Himself comfort the pair. They rose and looked up after the blessing to see Mary and Jesus crying softly. Brother Francis came over after that and gave a final blessing upon the pair in the most perfect voice and calm manner he had ever done. When Francis had finished, John asked them to rise and asked the members of the congregation to rise also.

"I now give you James and Katy, man and wife. What God has joined, let no man tear asunder." The hall erupted in cheers. Rice was thrown over the pair as they walked down the aisle as man and wife.

The wedding party was lined up outside down the front steps. Greeting each and every well-wisher when Dex approached. He came from out of a group of cars lined up across the street. He was dirty, he was drunk and he was mad.

"You will not blaspheme my God! You will not take what belongs to me! You will not hurt my family! And you will not. be. my. God!" He fired. He kept firing until every bullet in his gun had discharged. The congregation was stunned. Katy screamed.

John yelled, "My dear lord!"

James fell on the steps, blood pouring out of every hole in his body. Katy reached for James and propped his head on her perfect white dress.

Tommy grabbed the gun from Dex's hand while Sister Genny ran in and called 911. Members of the church, not yet through the line, tried to pour out of the church to see what was happening. Pierre and Mobutu restrained Dex and held him for the police. Cindy ran to her child and cried on his chest, holding her body against his, trying with all her might to keep the blood in.

Judy howled at the sight and had to be held by her grandmother, who was equally shocked and saddened. Russ held his brother's hand and Thomas stood over Katy, Cindy, and James, tears running down his cheeks, as if he could protect them from any further harm.

The police came quickly and took Dex from the area as fast as they could. The ambulance came at about the time the heavens opened up and the beautiful day turned black. The clouds were dark and terrible, and the congregation recoiled in horror. James was laid down on the steps with needles placed into both arms that were extended from his body. His feet were crossed at the ankles and his eyes were open towards the sky. A restraint was placed around his forehead in order to stabilize his neck, and it was then that Sister Genny remarked "James' position sort of resembled His Father's when He died."

Then the rains started, softly almost as if they were tears. The medics worked feverously to stop the bleeding and the men and women were crying. Just then, Luke looked at his mother Maggie and said, "He's getting wet, Momma."

Maggie was startled. "What?"

And Mary, Luke's sister, said, "Momma, James is getting wet."

Then she and Luke took Luke's jacket and stood over James' face spreading the jacket the best their little fingers could to keep the rain off James' face. James breathed softly then, and his eyes moved slightly to each of the children's faces. Smiling slightly James took a last breath.