

Lee entered the law library a little after eight in the morning with his brown briefcase in hand. Walking past the first two units of shelves into the first study area, he noticed his new friend seated at the same table where they had met the previous day. She was facing the opposite direction from where he stood, but the dark, shimmering, shoulder length hair and the dressy appearance was enough for him to positively know it was indeed Laura, the one who filled his thoughts for the last twenty hours.

He turned around and headed down the shelves directly to her left, stopping three times to view her from the side to see what the material was she was so engrossed in. At the end of the aisle, he peeked his head around the end of the bookshelf and watched her highlight phrase after phrase with a fluorescent green marker. He paused, taking a mental snapshot for his own remembrance sake, and wondered if he had ever seen someone who looked so wonderful. Quietly approaching the table, he set down his briefcase next to the chair, slid the chair out from the table, and sat across from her. She still did not notice him as she marked a few more lines on the papers in front of her.

Rather than speak, even though he had thought up a snappy one-liner greeting if he saw her today, he just sat and watched. He wondered if his intense staring would give her the eerie feeling that someone was watching her. He realized that this was a very rare occasion to be able to sit so closely to someone and contemplate every facial feature, because usually the person would bring embarrassment to another if they studied their countenance. Lee made up his mind that he really was fond of her dark hair, dark eyebrows, and deep blue eyes, high cheekbones, rose lips, and slim neck which caused the sharp curves on her jaws and chin. He wondered why no ring was on her left hand, what her boyfriend was like, and everything about her that he would probably never know. He reached down beside his chair, brought his briefcase up onto the table, and opened it. Finally, she looked up and noticed him sitting across from her.

A smile grew across her face, and a puzzled look came to her eyes. "How long have you been sitting there?"

He faked a serious face. "About two hours. I'm a very quiet, unnoticeable person."

"No, really, I've got to know."

A smile broke out. "About five minutes."

"You're kidding. Did I do anything stupid?"

"No... unless you call picking your nose three times stupid."

Her face reddened as she tried to read whether or not he was serious. "You are kidding," she hoped aloud.

"Of course I am. I haven't known you long enough to be serious."

Laura laughed. "You're crazy."

Opening wide his left eye, narrowing his right eye, and pressing his eyebrows down and together, Lee showed the face of a crazed, mental patient. "Me, crazy? You've found me out. I am crazy. That's the reason I'm late this morning. It took me an hour to escape from the institute. It took forty minutes just to get out of the straight-jacket. Did you know those walls are twelve feet high?"

She thought she might as well humor him and play along. “Twelve feet! How did you get out?”

“Through the gate, silly. You don’t think I’d try to climb a twelve foot wall. I’m deathly afraid of heights. I’d have to be crazy to scale that wall.”

“But you are crazy, remember?”

“How could I forget? You keep bringing it up.”

“And just when are you due back?”

“Never. I blew that joint,” he said as Humphrey Bogart. “I left a note which said if they want me, they’ll hafta come and get me.”

“They’ll nevah find you heah, dahling,” she replied as Lauren Bacall. “My lips are sealed.”

“No, schweetheart, I’m afraid you’re wrong there. The return address on the note is this library, so they can send me my royalty check from Casablanca.”

“You really are crazy. Lee, are you always this talkative?”

He was back in his own voice, wearing a slight half-smile. “You want honesty?”

“Yes.”

“In all actuality, I’m quite shy. I guess the joking around is an attempt to hide that. Plus, I feel comfortable talking to you. You know, there’s no pressure.”

“What do you mean?”

Just then, another figure was up against their study table and talking.

“Hello, Laura. I thought I would find you here. How is your research coming?”

They both looked up. Lee saw a handsome, well-dressed, sandy-haired fellow, with a brown suit and matching silk tie, looking like he had just stepped out of a GQ magazine. Laura saw Randy.

“Oh, hello Randy. I’m just finishing up. I’ll be done in a few minutes.”

“Great. Say, it’s about 8:35,” said the law student looking at his Rolex watch.

“It’s about 8:35,” whispered an obedient Lee only loud enough for Laura to hear.

“...and we’re supposed to meet my dad at 9:30 in his office. I was wondering if you wanted to leave your car here and ride over with me.”

“Sure, Randy. That would be fine. It would save us both having to find a parking spot.”

“Good. I’ll meet you in the lot about a quarter after nine.”

“Sounds great,” smiled Laura, finally realizing how Lee had mocked Randy without him knowing it. Randy smiled back, threw a puzzling look Lee’s direction, then turned and walked off.

“One of you many boyfriends?”

“Hardly. A lot would have to change in Randall P. Jones, Jr. before I could date him.”

“Like what,” asked Lee, seriously.

“Well, to start with, I made up my mind a long time ago that I couldn’t date anyone who doesn’t have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”

Lee’s insides did a somersault as his soul cried out, *YES!*

“What church do you go to, Laura?”

“Inglewood Baptist Church, on the east side.”

“I’m the Associate Pastor of Emmaus Bible Church in Crawfordsville.”

“I sensed something extra peculiar about you, Lee.”

“Bingo. That’s it.”

“You reminded me about some of the crazy youth directors I used to have at church camp in the summer.”

“I spoke at a camp this summer.”

“I’ll bet the kids loved you.”

“Well...”

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Judge Jones made his way up the five flights on the Authorized People Only stairway and came down the back hallway, entering his office through the private entrance. Rarely did he take this path, usually using the front elevators that everyone used. This day was different, though. He wanted to be alone for a while before he met his family and was briefed by his new researcher on the study he had given her. Not even switching on the light, he sat down at the desk and stared out his window, watching the City-County workers enter the building through the front entrance. He looked across Market Street, the preserved brick street which gave an old look to this part of the inner-city, to the old Farmer’s Market building, now transformed into shops and restaurants. The old building and street had not changed a bit in his tenure as a judge, and he reflected on the truth that they would outlive even his lifetime. He was no longer a young man. Middle age had passed him by. He wondered how the remainder of his life would go, being a Supreme Court Justice. Would he grow old gracefully? Would he make an impact on Indiana law and his society? Would he make an impact on Indiana law and his society? Would the decisions he would make on the court keep his children, and someday his grandchildren, free from government encroachment upon their homes and families. He really believed he could make a difference. He would be one of the only five people hearing the highest cases in the state. He would be writing one-fifth of all the opinions handed down by the court. Glancing down at Nancy, who was smiling up at him from her picture on his desk, he marveled at the wonderful life he had lived. A beautiful wife and family, a respected position in his community, many friends, and even a few enemies he had gained over the years. He had everything any man would call success. Still, he wondered why the empty feeling deep inside him always came back when he was alone and meditating. Surely, it was just loneliness; a craving everyone has for company. The real reason, however, the reason he could not explain away, had haunted him since his college days at Villanova University. That was when the confrontation had first taken place. He heard the handle on his office door turn, and, as he looked in that direction he saw his secretary open the door and switch on the light.

“Oh, Judge,” exclaimed the embarrassed woman. “I didn’t know you were in your office.”

“I know, Fran. I came up the back way. It’s all right.”

“I’m so sorry,” she apologized again.

“It’s all right, Fran.” He emphasized.

“Judge, there’s an older man in the outer office who asked to see you. I told him that today was not a good day for you, but he insisted it was vital. He’s been waiting for over an hour. He seems very nice, and very intelligent, even though he is dressed somewhat like a farmer.”

“Did he give you a name?”

“He said his name was Bernie. That’s all I could get out of him. He said that you would want to see him.”

“Well, I’d rather talk to an old farmer than the people I’ve been talking to already today. Send Bernie in.”

The secretary ushered in the old man, dressed in overalls, a red flannel shirt, and a blue baseball cap with JESUS SAVES in two inch letters across the front of it. The white hair under the cap and the wrinkled face revealed the many years that had come and gone, with only a few years left.

“Hello, Bernie, I’m Judge Jones. Please have a seat.”

The old man either disregarded the invitation given him, or perhaps he was simply hard of hearing. He walked over in front of the desk, with his intelligent hazel eyes staring into the face of the judge. A slight recognition came to the judge’s mind, although Jones could not remember from where.

“Randall,” started the old man. “I see you do not remember me. We have met.” The thin voice was articulate and well educated. “We met a few years ago at a banquet the Governor was having. I’m Bernie Sallenger.”

It had been at least five years since that banquet. The judge now fully recognized the man standing in front of him. This was Bernard Raymond Sallenger, the Justice he was nominated to replace on the Indiana Supreme Court.

“Randall, we need to talk.”

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“Mr. Boyd,” said his secretary over the intercom. “There’s someone on line three who wishes to speak with you. He wouldn’t give his name, but he says he is affiliated with the Emmaus Bible Church.”

“Get rid of him, Susan.” Boyd thought again. “No, wait. Does it sound like the pastor?”

“No, sir.”

“I’ll take the call.” He waited a few moments, collected his thoughts, and then pressed three. “Hello, this is Superintendent Boyd. How may I help you?”

“Superintendent Boyd? As I told your secretary, I’m affiliated with the Emmaus Bible Church here in town. Our pastor, Reverend Hancock, told us that he talked to you. He said that you were personally going to handle the matter yourself.”

“Go on,” stated Boyd.

“Well, I spoke to an attorney friend of mine this morning, and he said that our church should not have started a Day Care in our facilities without checking with you all at the Welfare office first. He said our church could be in big trouble, and that we could be liable for a big law suit, and maybe even lose the buildings unless we get this all straightened out. Is that true?”

“That is quite possible.”

“I thought so. You see, the pastor, well, he’s a good man, but he thinks he knows all this legal stuff. I’m afraid he is going to lead us into a situation where we will lose

everything it has taken some of us thirty to build up, and all because of twenty-six kids. To me, that's just not good for the church."

Boyd wrote "twenty-six" on a piece of paper. "I see your point. It does seem foolish to risk losing it all, when all the State welfare department wants to do is look at the facilities and approve them. And that is all we would do. Why, we even make recommendations as to how the facilities can be upgraded to provide better safety for the children."

"I told the pastor he needs to be reasonable. I mean, you people are the trained experts. We're just a church."

"You know, that is exactly how all the other churches in the county who have Day Cares feel. All the rest cooperate with my department. We have not tried to close any of those churches. I am delighted to be talking to someone over there who has a level head."

"Well, I just try to look at the situation from everybody's view. I mean, you are just trying to do your job, the thing we taxpayers pay you to do. I don't see where the conflict comes from."

"It's not coming from this end. I can assure you of that," smiled Boyd.

"Well, I'm a deacon at the church, and if I can help things out to save my church, then I figure I'm just doing my job, too."

"It would really help everyone concerned if you could get your pastor to comply and let us look the place over, uh, Mr., uh..."

"Brown... Simon Brown. Mr. Boyd, I am having lunch with Pastor Hancock at noon today, to tell him what my attorney friend told me. I just wanted to hear your side of the story first."

"You are a very wise man, Simon." Boyd wrote down "noon" on his pad. "You may just be the one who can be the biggest help to us all. The Bible speaks well of those who are peacemakers. I trust that you can convince him to be a reasonable man."

"I'll do my best, Mr. Boyd."

"Good. Of course, please do not mention that we talked. He seems like a man who doesn't trust government officials."

"I understand. I really appreciate your time, Superintendent Boyd. I already feel better about the situation. Thank you, sir."

"Thank you, Simon. I feel better, myself. Good-bye."

Boyd pushed seven buttons on his phone.

"Camille, you have two hours. I'll call Judge Hoffman, the Sheriff, and the State Police. You get all you need. Tell Gayle she writes her complaint out today. You need to be at the church at twelve-fifteen sharp. Got it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Happy hunting, Camille."

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Twenty-five years on the high court had not dulled the seventy-two year old mind of ex-Justice Sallenger. Judge Jones had wondered why the man had stepped down to begin with.

“Do not apologize for not recognizing me, Randall. That is one of the benefits of being an Associate Justice. I could go anywhere in total obscurity. It is not a high profile job.”

“Probably, if you were in a suit...”

“I planned a special outing with my grandson this morning. That is a benefit of no longer being a Justice. It has been years since I have been fishing.”

“I can appreciate that, sir.”

“Randall, I came here to see you because you need to know what you are up against. Things are not always as they appear to be. Have you ever tried a case where all the evidence leans toward the defendant’s guilt, and at the last possible moment, someone else confesses to the crime?”

“I think we all have experienced that. Those cases keep us humble,” smiled the younger judge.

“All the evidence points toward you becoming the next Supreme Court Justice, but at the last moment...” The older man paused for the full effect of what he was trying to get across.

“What do you mean, Justice Sallenger?”

“You are not the Governor’s choice, Randall. You are mine. I have followed your career for several years, ever since my Martha died and I wanted to step down from the court. I have sat in, incognito, on some of your tougher cases, and in a black robe, you are probably the fairest judge I have known. Your judicial philosophy matches mine perfectly. I decided that you would be the best person to fill my seat on the court. So, I approached our Governor with a deal. I would retire, if he would nominate you to replace me.”

Judge Jones let these words sink heavily into his heart as the former Justice continued.

“I have been a pain in the side of our Governor for four years, always being the swing vote on the court, which is a very powerful position to be in. That is the position you would be in, if you are confirmed. You see, the Governor figured that he would rather take the chance of seeing if he could control you, corrupt you, or even defeat you, than see my vote knock down all his unconstitutional legislation during the next four years.” The older man smiled while removing his ball cap. “He said OK to my deal, and, being a man of his word when backed into a political corner, nominated you for my seat. Of course, just nominating you by no means guarantees you a seat on the court.”

“That would explain my meeting earlier this morning,” said Jones, taking the list out of his suit pocket and handing it to Sallenger. “Those on the left are for me, those on the right, against me, and Winiger is undecided.”

Sallenger studied the names. “Did you give them any incriminating evidence, Randall?”

“No,” he replied, thinking back on the conversation.

“That was wise.”

“But they were hunting for some,” said the judge sourly. His voice broke, not knowing whether to be hurt, discouraged or just plain angry.

“Here is how I read the committee vote, Randall. The Chairman, who is a lap dog to the Governor, would let Allen and Snodgrass tear you apart with whatever they could get against you. The Governor would have second thoughts about your nomination, but

not enough to withdraw your name. He would not break his word to me, because he still needs my political clout, but he would send word to the committee of his doubts. Then Parrish and Milton, through party loyalty, and for party unity, would vote against you with Allen, Snodgrass, and Winiger, and whoever else they can get to play along. At best, you are defeated by a vote of five to four.”

Judge Jones’ face went blank as he thought through the entire scenario. Each piece in the complex game was moved into place. He was a knight, being thrust into the battle in this political game of chess, where gambit meant sacrificing a major piece in order to gain a positional advantage. He was the sacrifice, and he could do nothing about it, as someone else moved all the pieces, including himself. There was one flaw. His friends would not betray him.

“Fran, get me Frank Haley on the phone. NOW!”

The secretary jumped in her chair. She was not used to the urgency in the voice that came over the intercom. She reached for the Rolodex on her desk.

“Calling Haley is probably not a good idea, Randall. It will make them suspect that you...”

“I’ve known Frank a long time.” Jones cut Sallenger’s statement short. “If I can get him on the phone, then you’re dead wrong. If I can’t...,” his voice trailed off, “then you’re right.”

The intercom light flashed. “Judge, Senator Haley’s secretary said he couldn’t be reached. I asked if we could reach him later at the hearing. She said he was going out of town for a few days with his wife. He didn’t leave a number where he could be reached. Sorry.”

Judge Jones sat back in his chair, motionless. The silence said everything.

He whispered, “What do I do, Bernie?”

“Do what you do best, Randall. Meet them head on with the truth. Use all of the resources you have been given. I really feel that God wants you on the court during these distressing times.”

“Sit with me at the hearing, Bernie.”

“No, they would know we talked. My deal with the Governor would be off. I want to help you, but my presence would be more harmful to you than my absence. That is precisely why I scheduled this outing with my grandson. Priority tells me to not break a promise to a young boy who has fish on his mind.” They both managed a smile.

“Can I come along?” The smiles broadened.

“Randall, the best solution I can give to you is to have a dear friend of mine accompany you to the hearing.”

“He’d better have some answers.”

“He has all of the answers, Randall.”

“Who is it?”

“My Friend, Jesus Christ. Randall, I know that you are a good man. I know you have a belief in God. But the only answer to the problems that lie ahead in your life is a personal relationship to the Son of God. You need the Judge of all men’s hearts, including your own, to be seated with you today.”

Jones’ mind reflected back on his best friend in college who had confronted him with this same offer. He saw his friend in tears when he rejected this Savior who died for his sins. That was when the loneliness, the longing in his heart, had started. Why had he

not accepted Jesus Christ back then? He knew that it was his pride that had kept him from having his need met.

“I don’t know, Bernie.” His pride again came to the forefront.

“Randall, my pastor, Reverent Hodge of the Independent Nazarene Tabernacle of the west side of the city, has contacted every Christian school in the state. He and his people personally contacted over five hundred Bible-believing pastors from all over the state to either come to the hearing, or to pray that God’s purpose will be done at the hearing. Randall, all this...for you.”

Tears glistened in the judge’s eyes. His friends had forsaken him. His party was going to ruin him and discard him as political fodder. The highest official in the state had used him and lied to him. Was there a God who could see him through these kind of challenges in his life, he wondered. Bernard Sallenger thought so. His old college friend thought so. Would Nancy agree? An hour ago, he would have disregarded any talk of a Savior to stand by him. Now he, Judge Randall Patrick Jones was on trial before the Judge of the universe. All the evidence he would ever need now sat facing him in the chair across his desk.

“What do I need to do, Bernie?”

Sallenger took his small New Testament from a back pocket in his overalls. The tattered book was worn from constant use. After a few verses which revealed to the judge his sinfulness and his need for a perfect Savior, the two men knelt behind the desk as Jones pled guilty before the greatest Judge, asking for mercy and salvation.