

Chapter XXIV

Grimaldi knew he had to let things go, flow, go with it, and perhaps later, he would be able to pull the pieces together.

When Prygocki had stood up to make his plea, that was when Grimaldi scribbled, "School. The common denominator," put down his pen and set aside his legal pad.

He sat back in his chair, swiveled around, and kicked up his heels, up on the window sill, back to the door.

He slipped into a revelry, but it wasn't long before he was writing down the names of Prygocki, Johnson, Lemay, Christ Brown, and Auntie Agnes. He completed the list with Bulls and Raiders.

That was it, it being something sensational, terrific, a veritable diamond.

This was one of the moments that he'd only learned about through experience. More than *deja vu*, a crippled attempt to capture eternity; these graced moments were a gift, mystery, Eucharist, a sacrament. That's the only way he could explain it as he remembered sitting in a business meeting and having the world open up for him.

Since God entered history and began a personal relationship with that small band of marauders, the Israelites, a relationship that took on an even more personal dimension with the entrance of God's son, Jesus Christ, the unimaginable could happen. But it could only happen in the context of the community that believed. So why would Grimaldi feel after so much agony that the murder in the factory, the death of a teenager in his own school yard, and the closing of a school were intertwined?

Could it be pinned down to the reality that God, that at any moment, God could, through revelation, cut through the murkiness surrounding us, and reveal some greater truth of his and ours?

The most important thing Grimaldi had learned, though, was not to try and think or draw conclusions while he was in the flow, going with the spirit. Simply to let go, go along with what was happening was enough. Things would become clearer as they went.

The only other thing he learned was that sometimes evil could present itself in a most alluring form and fool him with intriguing and inviting images.

Grimaldi picked up the file marked ``Letters to the Bishop on School Closing." He was in the middle of his fifth letter when he phone rang. He didn't really want to be pulled away – the letter, for the most part, was vicious – no different from the other four in that respect, and that was what stuck with him. There were lots of letters left and he wanted to get through them. But he felt a real urge to get away from them, too.

He picked up the phone.

A quiet, reserved voice said, ``Hello, Grimaldi. This is Agnes, Chris's aunt."

It took a minute for the name to take hold.

``Hi."

``I'm sorry," she said. ``I must have gotten you at a bad time."

``No. Not at all," he answered. ``Just going through some papers. The mind drifts, you know. How can I help you?"

``You seem like a reasonable guy. Already I've told you more about Chris than practically anyone else, even the people closest to me. It's either that I can trust you or I'm a little more distracted than I've ever been."

“Let's find out,” he said.

“You've met Johnson, what kind of man do you think he is?” she asked him.

“Is this a quiz?” he answered.

“Maybe.”

“If it is, and I pass, what is my reward?”

“I'm not quite sure, yet,” she said.

“Okay. Part of me says he's okay. This is a gut reaction, of course. I guess he's okay because he's a hurting guy. He's taking some chances getting his program going. Some people might think he's a little bit crazy.”

“I'm one,” she said.

“I don't think he's crazy,” Grimaldi said.

There was a long pause.

“Sometimes he sounds crazy, though doesn't he,” the voice said.

Grimaldi was trying to picture her during the silence.

Without quite conjuring up her face, he had to stop. He laughed when she finally spoke, more from relief than what she said.

“A little crazy, but no more crazy than this phone call.”

“Mr. Grimaldi,” she said, “I'm afraid for him. He's in a bad way. Seems to think the bullet that killed Chris was meant for him.”

She said she hadn't heard from him since the visit to the cathedral. Today he called and it seemed like he was calling to say goodbye.

“Mr. Grimaldi, you have to understand about these men. Johnson wasn't always like this. It began after Lemay died. Together, Lemay, Prygocki and Johnson had something. Then, it all fell apart.”

She had her suspicions, she said.

“In some ways, it's like *deja vu*. Only Lemay is missing. Prygocki's been calling around here looking for Johnson. That used to happen all the time. Long sessions where they would talk and plan, the three of them. They always knew what each other were doing. Back then it was good, or at least until the school talk started. Then it sounded as if they were checking up on one another, not simply checking in with each other, you know.”

“Lemay and Johnson started meeting separately, avoiding Prygocki. It was like that tonight when Prygocki called to ask if Johnson would be at the funeral. I told him didn't know. That man has his own life, and it's been like that since the beginning. He goes where he wants to go when he wants to go.”

“Maybe you are making a little too much of this,” Grimaldi told her. “This phone call thing might just be what they need to bring them together as friends. If they had so much invested in each other at one time, maybe this is what they need now.”

He tried to visualize her face as they talked. He remembered her smooth skin, oval face, thin neck, full lips. She surprised and tantalized him by coming to him with her problems. This is friendship, he concluded, and he should be careful. He figured it was some weakness in him for women, in general. What would Katie think?

“I had a dream last night,” she said. “I don't know if you put much faith in dreams, but my granny says we ignore them at our peril.”

“I side with granny,” Grimaldi said.

“Chris asked for prayers, for himself and for Lemay. ‘Prayers,’ he said, ‘could make the whole thing okay.’ I asked him, ‘What thing?’ He smiled his sweetest smile, and I felt my heart breaking. I started to cry. He didn’t say a word. Lemay smiled his saddest smile. He was in his collar and blacks. The two of them, friends until the end. Did I tell you he wanted to become a priest? I mean, Chris wanted to become a priest. I really didn’t want him to do it. I even asked Prygocki to talk him out of it. He really couldn’t move Chris on this point. But after Lemay left, disappeared, Chris felt betrayed and dedicated himself more and more to basketball and school and getting ahead. If anything he become loyal to Prygocki, but he never liked the man.”

“I saw him for a while,” she confided. “I dated Prygocki. Chris told me I was a fool. This was after his marriage broke up, after Lemay left. I guess the death had a terrible effect on his marriage. I guess we all make mistakes, and I’ve made my share.”

She admitted she might have made the biggest mistake in leading Chris away from the church. He had so much potential, she sad. She didn’t understand how a man of the church like Prygocki could get so upset about Chris wanting to become a priest.

“He must have had his reasons,” Grimaldi said, reserving his own unbelief.

“You think so,” she said. He could hear the doubt in her voice.

“I can’t imagine any myself, but then I didn’t know Chris,” he said.

“Because I called to ask you what kind of man you think Prygocki it, too. He just called me about Johnson, I told you. Johnson might sound crazy, but Prygocki can be. I know him. Once a long time ago he told me it was a discipline to keep track of the troublemakers in your life. There was no telling when you could get them.”

Grimaldi laughed.

“I'd just as soon forget them,” he said.

He'd seen the man enough in the classroom and on the basketball court to know what she meant. There were times when Grimaldi wondered if the guy weren't crazy, too. But he always did what the man wanted him to, both as student and even now as a professional working for the diocese. Wasn't he fighting to keep the school open for at least one more year? Isn't that what Prygocki wanted?

“So, what do you think of him?” she asked again.

“I think, yea, he might be crazy from time to time, but he's got a point about motivation. Kids love to identify with some who challenges reality. It's part of the game. Win at all costs.”

“What happens if he transfers some of the rules of the game, like who lives and who dies?” she said.

“Then he would be genuinely crazy, and I'd be a little bit frightened. That frightens me,” she said, “is that when he called he said he thought Johnson's life was in danger. He said he'd been thinking about Chris and what had happened and decided the killed didn't want Chris, but had mistaken Chris for him?”

“How would he have known that?” Grimaldi asked.

“He said he had a hunch. Time to move the game to the streets,” she recounted him saying.

“You know he wasn't opposed to hurting opposing players. Chris used to tell me that. We'd go for walks sometimes, our special time, I'd make a point of taking him out to lunch and on shopping trips, and he'd tell me stories. He'd tell me how much he missed

Lemay. Lemay was really a man. Chris missed him a great deal and couldn't understand how come he'd never come by to say good-bye. Chris said he would have understood. Chris thought Lemay should understand that. Sometimes, he'd cry, get tears in his eyes, but that all started to fade. I think it's because he never really knew his father. He needed a father figure. I ended up picking Prygocki. I don't know if I did the right thing."

Grimaldi listened and swore he could hear her crying.

He tried saying something comforting, reassuring her that she did the right thing, but he had to get off of the phone. He could feel himself starting to well up.

"If you see Johnson," he said, "give me a call. I'll see you tomorrow?" He asked more than told her that, which surprised him.

"At the funeral," he said and felt stupid.

"Yes," she said. "At the funeral."

He tried phoning Prygocki before he left the office. he'd gotten the answering machine, so he left a short message that he could be reached at the rectory before the funeral. Afterwards, he'd be at his office.

Grimaldi had to meet with Paradis. He had a few questions he wanted answered before he could share his latest theory.

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