

The Harvest of Christopher Cushing

A Love Story

by Judith Bronte

Rebecca Newton has endured the recent death of her beloved husband, only to be involved in the corruption of her boss, Christopher Cushing. When Jose Fernandez, a good-looking and fast thinking reporter, suddenly receives an anonymous phone call, it leads him to Rebecca's door. As Rebecca relates her story, Jose has suspicions that her late husband had not died by accident. Fearing for her life, Rebecca and Jose take the first bus out of town, which happens to be filled with honeymooners on their way to Niagara Falls. In this romantic atmosphere, they join forces to uncover the truth behind Christopher Cushing and make an unexpected discovery-- each other.

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Scene One

Monday, December 21, 1998 / Buffalo, New York / Late Morning

"It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter."
~ Proverbs 25:2 ~

"Wake up dear," Mrs. Newton coaxed, nudging her sleeping daughter's shoulder. Rebecca, 26, and former secretary of Christopher Cushing, pulled the covers over her head in silent protest. "There's a reporter from 'America Weekly' downstairs and he wants an interview. You aren't in any trouble, are you, Love?" asked Mrs. Newton.

Rebecca pushed back her long, brown hair away from her face and looked into her mother's troubled eyes. "Of course not!" smiled Rebecca. "Go back and keep Dad company. I'll be down in a minute," she reassured.

Mrs. Newton went back downstairs while Rebecca got dressed. She took a deep breath and descended the staircase. A casually dressed man stood up and approached Rebecca as she entered the living room.

"Mrs. Rebecca Newton?" he asked, holding out his hand, in a friendly manner. "I'm Jose Fernandez of 'America Weekly.'"

"Mr. Fernandez," replied Rebecca, shaking his hand.

"Call me Jose," he smiled, taking out a tape recorder. "May I record this interview?" he asked, looking up for her permission.

"Why not?" replied Rebecca dryly.

"Do I sense reluctance, Mrs. Newton?" asked Jose, taking out his note pad. "I thought all pretty secretaries loved publicity."

"Some more than others," replied Rebecca evenly, accepting the cup of tea her mother handed her. Jose smiled grimly. He could tell this wasn't going to be as easy of an interview as he had hoped.

"Mrs. Newton," he began, "are you currently employed by the office of Christopher Cushing?" Rebecca took a sip of tea, her hand slightly trembling. When Jose first mentioned the fact she was a secretary, she had an uneasy feeling of which direction the interview was going to take.

"No, I am not," replied Rebecca, rashly. Mr. Newton looked up from his newspaper. This was news to him! He had thought his daughter had merely come home to spend Christmas with her family and friends.

"When were you let go?" continued Jose.

"Excuse, me?" asked Rebecca.

"When were you fired?" asked Jose, rephrasing the question.

"I understood the question, Mr. Fernandez. What I don't understand is your misconception that I was fired."

"You were not fired from Christopher Cushing's office? Why, then, is the reason you no longer work there?"

"Mr. Fernandez, what are you leading up to?" asked Rebecca.

"I was hoping you could tell me," smiled Jose.

"There's no big mystery, really," stammered Rebecca, "I quit for personal reasons. I was hoping to save it as a surprise; my parents don't know about it yet." Mr. Newton dropped the newspaper to the floor.

"Mother!" he called, "Rebecca has news for us!" There was no need for him to call her, for Mrs. Newton had been listening to the interview from the kitchen and was already standing beside her husband.

"Go on, Love. What news?" coaxed Mrs. Newton.

"Mom and Dad," Rebecca nervously began, "I'm going to have a baby. I'm going to have Peter's baby." Mrs. Newton broke into tears and hugged her daughter. Mr. Newton walked over to the fireplace and picked up the framed picture that had a loving preeminence on the mantle. Jose disappointedly turned off the tape recorder. This was a dead end. Rebecca saw the picture in her father's hands and broke out into uncontrollable sobs. Mrs. Newton hugged Rebecca tightly.

"I don't understand," asked Jose, turning to Mr. Newton, "isn't she happy?" Mr. Newton wiped the tears from his eyes.

"It's a bittersweet moment. Peter died last month in a car accident," Mr. Newton said, pointing to the picture in his other hand.

"Peter? Who was Peter?" asked Jose, forgetting to extend sympathy or condolence.

"Why, Peter was our son and Rebecca's husband," answered Mr. Newton, indignantly. Jose patted the pockets of his jacket, searching for a notepad. "Peter was such a happy person," continued Mr. Newton, "he could light up a room with his smile." Jose scribbled something down on the note pad and tore off the page.

"Mr. Newton," I would like to ask your daughter-in-law a few more questions, when she feels up to it." Jose handed him the note. "That's my telephone number. Please see that she gets it?" Mr. Newton took the note and nodded. Jose showed himself to the door and got into his car. Something in his gut told him Rebecca was hiding something. But what? He opened the manilla envelope tucked under his seat. All the research he had done for the past three months had been stuffed into it, including a cassette tape. Jose listened to the tape again. The cassette contained a recording of the anonymous phone call that had kicked off his investigation, over three months before.

Scene Two

Wednesday, September 29, 1998 (three months earlier) / Santiago, Southern Baja, Mexico

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

~ James 4:17 ~

Jose Fernandez, 35, and a reporter with 'America Weekly' for over fifteen years, had just drifted to sleep on his beach towel, enjoying the hot Mexican sun, when a bellboy tapped him on the shoulder.

"Excuse me señor, but you are wanted on the telephone," said the young boy.

"I'm on vacation," protested Jose, intent that his office would not cut short this vacation also.

"Señor, it's your secretary. She's called five times. Por favor, señor," the boy pleaded.

"I'm coming," Jose replied, standing up. The hotel clerk handed the phone receiver to Jose.

Jose: I'm here. Make it quick.

Person on the other end of the telephone: Fine greeting! I've called you a dozen times!

Jose: The bellboy said 'five,' Diane.

Diane: How did you know it was me?

Jose: No one else would call me five times during my vacation and expect an answer.

Diane: As your secretary, I reserve the right to pester you any time I want. Especially, when someone is pestering me.

Jose: Who is it?

Diane: Mr. Collins wants to talk to you. His phone number is 555 326-9844.

Jose: Wait a second. Who's Mr. Collins?

Diane: He wouldn't say, only that it's extremely urgent.

Jose: Extremely urgent?

Diane: I believe the words 'life and death' were used. You better call him, Jose.

Jose: O.K., I will.

Diane: As soon as I hang up?

Jose: Sure. Bye!

Jose punched the number into the telephone. The phone only rang once before someone answered.

Jose: Hello, is this Mr. Collins?

Collins: Yes, it is.

Jose: I'm Jose Fernandez. My secretary said you were trying to reach me.

Collins: <no reply>

Jose: Hello?

Collins: Do you know of a company called 'ClearFieldz, Inc.?'

Jose: No.

Collins: ClearFieldz is a non-governmental, commercial company that is occasionally hired by private parties to clear away anti-personnel land mines and unexploded ordnance left over from previous wars. <pause>

Jose: I'm listening. Do you mind if I tape record this call?

Collins: Well, if it will help you, then I guess it's all right. The UN contracts organizations such as ClearFieldz to demine suspected land mine locations in other countries. However, ClearFieldz also subcontracts other commercial organizations.

Jose: If the UN doesn't mind, why should you?

Collins: Subcontracting doesn't bother me; it's HOW they subcontract that I don't like.

Jose: How are they subcontracting?

Collins: ClearFieldz is practicing something they call 'stretching the profit margin.' Someone is forging documents within ClearFieldz, accrediting subcontracted personnel with experience they don't have.

Jose: Why?

Collins: Money. Someone in a key position is making money and 'stretching' personnel so they can make more money by taking in more work than they should-- at the risk and expense of other people's lives.

Jose: How do you know it's just one person?

Collins: I don't- not personally, but it's the way the system works. Just one rotten apple can make the good apples look rotten also. Besides, I've seen the records. I know what I'm talking about!

Jose: What records are you referring to?

Collins: I can't say.

Jose: Do you know of other companies who's conduct is questionable?

Collins: No. ClearFieldz is the only one I'm aware of.

Jose: How do you know all this?

Collins: I can't tell you without endangering myself.

Jose: Why did you choose me to tell this to?

Collins: I've followed your stories in the newspapers. You seem to be honest. Mr. Fernandez, I can't face God, I can't- not when there's something I can do about it. Like the Bible says, 'to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' I think that's in James chapter four somewhere.

Jose: Verse seventeen. Tell me, Mr. Collins, what do you think I can do about this?

Collins: You're a reporter! Don't let him get away with murder! <click!>

Jose dialed the number again, but there was no answer. He quickly called his office. Diane answered the phone.

Jose: Diane, trace this number and see where it is. Call me back when you find out.

Jose only had to wait ten minutes before Diane called back.

Jose: What did you find out?

Diane: The number 555 326-9844 is a pay phone in New York.

Jose: Which part of New York?

Diane: What does it matter? Just look up his name in the phone book!

Jose: No. If the phone number isn't real, then his name isn't real. Which part of New York?

Diane: The western part-- Buffalo, New York.

Scene Three

Monday, December 21, 1998 (back to the present) / Buffalo, New York / Late Afternoon

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

~ 1 Corinthians 10:13 ~

It was approximately four in the afternoon when Mrs. Rebecca Newton appeared on the porch of her parents' home. Jose looked up. He had remained in the car the entire afternoon reviewing his manilla envelope.

"Mr. Fernandez?" asked Rebecca, knocking on the window of his car. "May I talk to you?" Jose rolled down his window. "Is there somewhere we could go? I don't want my parents to hear this," said Rebecca, nervously. Jose leaned over and opened the passenger door. Rebecca climbed in.

"Anywhere in mind?" asked Jose.

"The mall. There's a lot of people there," replied Rebecca. After they were well inside the mall, Rebecca sat down on a bench outside a toy store. The loudspeakers played 'Jingle Bells,' and the sound of children's excited voices filled the air. Jose sat down beside her on the bench. "It didn't occur to me until you left my parents' home, but you're the reporter who tried to call me three months ago," asked Rebecca, "aren't you?"

"I am," replied Jose. "I asked some of the people who operated businesses beside ClearFieldz' office, and they said you left there last Friday, looking troubled. They guessed that you had been fired. I thought if you had been fired, you might be willing to answer some questions." Jose stopped talking and waited for Rebecca to speak her mind. If there was one thing Jose had learned by being a reporter, it was how to listen. She was about to talk and he knew it.

"I was told," began Rebecca, "that if I spoke to you, I would be fired. I guess it doesn't matter now." Rebecca watched the small children running in and out of the toy store. "What I told my parents wasn't true. I'm not pregnant. I just didn't want to frighten them."

"Won't they find out when you don't have a baby in nine months?" asked Jose. Rebecca shook her head.

"I won't be alive in nine months, Mr. Fernandez. They will see to that."

"They?" asked Jose.

"The company I worked for, ClearFieldz, is run by people, mostly men, with a background in the military. There are people in ClearFieldz that would be more than willing to kill me, if the order were given. It wouldn't make any difference to them."

"Why?" asked Jose, incredulously.

"I was the secretary to Christopher Cushing, president of ClearFieldz, Inc. I had access to sensitive files, that, if made public, could be incriminating to the personnel of ClearFieldz and its president." Jose glanced around them. He was beginning to feel uneasy.

"Do you have any of these files, Mrs. Newton?" he asked carefully. Jose saw Rebecca's hands tremble. He put his hand on top of hers. "Do you?" he repeated. Rebecca nodded. Her face was pale white. "Does Cushing know you have these files?" Rebecca's breathing grew rapid. "Mrs. Newton, you're hyperventilating," Jose warned. "Hang your head down, and breathe," he instructed. Rebecca did as she was told. When she felt better, Jose repeated his question. "Does Christopher Cushing know you have the files?"

"He does now," Rebecca replied, "at least, I think he does. I took them from the locked file cabinet before I left work, last Friday."

"Are you telling me you just left, not giving any explanation?" asked Jose, looking at her in surprise. Rebecca nodded. "When Cushing arrives at his office today, and finds both you and the files missing... Mrs. Newton! whatever were you thinking!" exclaimed Jose half angrily. Rebecca covered her face with her hands.

"With Peter gone, I didn't have much to lose. I thought I could do something he would be proud of!" she sobbed.

"So you took the files and went home? Mrs. Newton, why did you go home? They would be sure to search there first. Why?" asked Jose, only half hearing her explanation.

"Mr. Cushing doesn't look at the files until everyone else has gone home. He usually doesn't check them until five-thirty p.m.," explained Rebecca. "I wanted to say good-bye to my family first. I thought I would have time."

Jose checked his watch. It was ten minutes after five. "We don't have much time, Mrs. Newton," remarked Jose, helping Rebecca up from her seat.

"We don't have much time for what?" asked Rebecca, wiping the tears from her face.

"Time to become scarce," replied Jose. He rushed Rebecca through the mall, always choosing the way with the most people. A tourist bus pulled up in front of the mall. Its passengers lined up and climbed on board. "This way," said Jose, tugging on Rebecca's arm.

"But, your car," Rebecca protested.

"Forget the car," Jose replied, helping her onto the bus. Jose chose two seats near the back. He noticed the bewildered look on Rebecca's face.

"If, and I say IF," explained Jose, in an attempt to calm Rebecca's nerves, "if Cushing hasn't missed the files before five thirty, then the likelihood that you were being followed was not high. However," Jose sighed, "after what you've told me, and after all the noise I've made at ClearFieldz's office, I, most likely, was being followed. Either way, I wouldn't want to stake our lives on it." Jose patted his bus seat, comfortingly. "God doesn't give His own more than they can handle, Mrs. Newton. If one way is closed, you can be sure another way will open. Today, the way opened in the form of this bus." Rebecca leaned back against her headrest. She was so tired. Jose went to the front of the bus and paid their fare. He also inquired about their destination.

"Where are we going?" asked Rebecca when Jose had resumed his seat.

"Niagara Falls, Mrs. Newton," replied Jose in his easy manner.

"Do you think we'll be safe there?" she asked.

"As safe there as anywhere," answered Jose with a smile.

"Are you sure?" she asked, her voice filling with uncertainty.

"Mrs. Newton, God chose our destination. You must have a little faith. I'm not going to spend the rest of the day worrying." Jose closed his eyes and yawned, hoping that the power of suggestion would cause Mrs. Newton to do likewise. Soon, Rebecca was asleep.

Scene Four

Monday, December 21, 1998 (later the same day) / Niagara Falls, New York / Evening

"Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee."

~ Proverbs 2:11 ~

It was six twenty-three p.m. when the tourist bus pulled up to the Marriott Fallsview hotel. The sun had already retired for the night, leaving the solitary moon to glow in the black sky like a large, fluorescent nite light. Jose shook Rebecca's arm.

"Mrs. Newton, it's time to get out of the bus," Jose announced, taking a good look around. Rebecca and Jose followed the crowd into the hotel. "Mrs. Newton, I suggest you sign the register as a Mr. and Mrs., using, of course, a different name, and tell the clerk that your husband will be joining you later as an explanation of why he is not with you. There's no sense in making it easy for Cushing to find you," Jose said in half whispers. "After you sign in, go to the dining room and order dinner. I'll get a room under the name 'Anthony Ramirez' and meet you there. You better tell me the name you intend to use, just in case," added Jose.

"How about Mr. and Mrs. Collins?" suggested Rebecca. A look of recognition briefly flashed across Jose's face.

"Why do you suggest the name 'Collins,' Mrs. Newton? Is there any particular reason?" he asked.

"Why, Collins was my maiden name," Rebecca replied. "Why? Don't you think it will do?" she asked.

"No, I don't think so," Jose replied abruptly. Rebecca quickly decided on 'Brewster' and signed the register as Jose had instructed her. Rebecca waited in the dining room for an hour before Jose entered and sat down at the table. His face was grave and somber. Dinner was served, and Rebecca remained silent. Newlyweds dotted the dining room, each table defining the dimensions of separate little worlds; their spouses being the only other citizen. The contented faces reminded Rebecca all too well of Peter.

"If you'll excuse me, Mr. Fernandez. I don't feel well. I think I'll go to my room now and rest," Rebecca explained, leaving the room as soon as she could form the words. This suited Jose well. He was in a considerable amount of distress, himself. Collins! The name had echoed through his brain incessantly for the last three months. He remembered how Mr. Newton had said Peter died in a car accident.

"Car accident, ha!" muttered Jose angrily. Why hadn't it never occurred to him before, that the anonymous phone caller, 'Mr. Collins,' was in fact, Peter Newton, husband of Rebecca Newton. "How was I supposed to know?" he argued. "If I had only known that Mr. Collins was Mrs. Newton's husband, I would never have stirred the hornet's nest by asking questions that would create suspicion and trouble!" A new thought came to him. "If Cushing and his men arranged Peter Newton's death, then they must have had reason to suspect Rebecca," he thought. "Why didn't they stop her before she had the chance to act?" Jose took another mouthful of dinner. "Maybe, two deaths, especially husband and wife, dying from separate causes within such a short span of time, would have drawn too much attention," Jose reasoned. Jose's newfound understanding of events did little to soften his guilt over Peter's death. His mind told him there was nothing that he could have done differently, even if given a second chance; his heart, however, was another matter. Jose decided not to finish his dinner, but instead, go to his room.

Jose's room was on the same floor as Rebecca's, a fact he thanked God for, for it was easier to protect her than if they had been on separate floors. Before going to bed, Jose softly knocked on Rebecca's door.

"Mrs. Newton?" he whispered.

"Yes?" came Rebecca's reply. "What is it?"

"Be sure to keep your door locked, Mrs. Newton. Good night," whispered Jose.

"Good night, Mr. Fernandez," Rebecca responded. He could tell by the sound of her voice, that she had been crying. With a guilty sigh, Jose returned to his room.

Scene Five

Tuesday, December 22, 1998 (the next day) / Niagara Falls, New York / Morning

"If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for He [God] that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they."

~ Ecclesiastes 5:8 ~

"Mr. Fernandez, are you in?" asked Rebecca, knocking on Jose's door.

"Come in," called Jose. Rebecca opened the door to find him on the telephone. He motioned for her to take a seat, and continued with his conversation.

Jose: Before I forget, you are calling me from a pay phone, right? Don't trust the office phones, just in case they're tapped.

Diane: I'm not a two year old, Jose!

Jose: Glad to hear it. So the car wasn't searched?

Diane: Nope. I found your manilla envelope under the seat, just where you always leave it. Really, Jose, this is the twentieth century! When are you going to start using your computer? I'm the only secretary in the building who has to collate files from her boss' manilla envelope!

Jose: You'll endure the shame somehow, Diane. Hold on, for a moment...

"Mrs. Newton, where did you hide Cushing's files?" Jose asked Rebecca.

"I'd rather not say," she stammered, "but I'll go get them, if you want."

"You have the files here?" exclaimed Jose. "I don't remember you carrying anything yesterday." Rebecca looked embarrassed and blushed. "Oh. I see," replied Jose.

"What do you see?" asked Diane, her voice carrying loudly over the telephone receiver.

"I'll bring you Mr. Cushing's files," Rebecca said, quickly excusing herself.

Jose: Never mind, Diane. Rebecca has the files on her. You won't have to go get them, after all. I would like my envelope, though.

Diane: How soon do you need it?

Jose: FedEx it as soon as possible. Send it in care of the Marriott Fallsview hotel, Niagara Falls, room 219, and address it to Anthony Ramirez.

Diane: What are sisters for?

Jose: I'm not sure, but I'll let you know when I find out.

Diane: Ha, ha. <click!>

Ten minutes later, Rebecca knocked on Jose's door. Jose opened the door and took the files she handed him.

"There's only four or five files," she pointed out as Jose quickly scanned the pages, as if searching for something in particular.

"What are you looking for?" asked Rebecca.

"Direct phone calls to or from the UN," commented Jose. "I heard that companies such as ClearFieldz are sometimes contracted by the UN. It's at least a place to start."

"You won't find any direct calls from the UN," warned Rebecca. Jose looked up.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Mr. Cushing never spoke with anyone from the UN, directly," said Rebecca, taking a seat on the couch.

"Tell me, Mrs. Newton," began Jose, "if I understand this correctly. ClearFieldz has, on occasion, been contracted by the UN to demine portions of land-- is this correct?"

"Well, yes and no. You see, Mr. Cushing was responsible for gathering groups of subcontractors or individuals with similar field experience and lease them out, under ClearFieldz name, to other contractors who were hired directly by the UN or private parties to perform certain jobs requiring specialized capabilities," explained Rebecca.

"Let me run this by you and see if I have it straight," said Jose. "The UN contracts a person or corporation to do a specific job; they, in turn, hire Christopher Cushing (for instance), and he

gathers the necessary personnel from smaller corporations. This reminds me of the fish who swallowed a smaller fish, who swallowed an even smaller fish, and so on," commented Jose wearily.

"The process is necessary, I assure you, Mr. Fernandez," said Rebecca. "No one corporation owns all the technology or individualized skills required for complex operations. It takes years of technological advances from multiple universities and commercial developmental corporations to pioneer the needed technology. Someone has to bring it all together into an operational team. This layering, however, does have a downside. There's a lot of money to be made in the demining of land, especially when governments pay for it. It only takes one person in the non-governmental side, such as Mr. Cushing, to forge documents when they assemble their teams. Maybe the personnel might not have all the experience their credentials claim, so Mr. Cushing falsifies them. This way, he can create more teams and make more money." Rebecca stood up from her seat on the couch and walked over to the window. The view of the Niagara Falls was breathtaking. However, Rebecca did not notice it, for her mind was elsewhere. "I'm not saying all the demining companies do this, only ClearFieldz."

"How can the UN not know all this?" asked Jose. Rebecca turned around.

"The UN is not omniscient. They are not God, no matter how many safeguards they have. Only God has the right to claim that He never makes mistakes, Mr. Fernandez," reminded Rebecca stoutly.

"Very true," Jose replied, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "Tell me, Mrs. Newton are you aware of a phone call your husband made to me, before he died in the car accident?" Rebecca's mouth opened wide in astonishment.

"Peter called you? about this?" she asked, pointing to the files Jose was holding. "Mr. Fernandez, that's impossible. Peter never knew anything about these files. I didn't want to worry him," said Rebecca. Jose nervously ran his fingers through his thick, black hair.

"Then," Jose said thoughtfully, "Peter was not my anonymous caller."

"What made you think it was my husband?" asked Rebecca.

"Because he used the name 'Collins,'" Jose explained, his voice betraying more emotion than he had intended.

"I never told anyone what I told you this morning," affirmed Rebecca. "But, who could have made the call?" she asked, nervously.

"Whoever did make the call, I'm glad it wasn't your husband, Mrs. Newton," said Jose.

"Why is that, Mr. Fernandez?" asked Rebecca, curiously.

"Well, I felt I might have been responsible, in some way, for Peter's death. I'm relieved to find I was mistaken," sighed Jose.

"You could never intentionally hurt anyone, Mr. Fernandez," reassured Rebecca. "It's just not in you," she added, walking to the door.

"Have you eaten breakfast, Mrs. Newton?" asked Jose, before she had the chance to leave.

"No, I haven't," replied Rebecca.

"Would you care to have breakfast with me?" Jose asked. Rebecca hesitated, her fingers feeling the wedding band on her left hand. "I don't recommend eating in the dining room," continued Jose, "even though we got away with it last night." Jose walked over to the telephone and picked up the receiver. "It's better to maintain a low profile and not be too easy to find," he explained. Rebecca nodded in agreement.

"Who are you calling?" she asked.

"Room service," replied Jose with a smile. "If we can't go to the breakfast, the breakfast will have to come to us!" Rebecca smiled.

Scene Six

Tuesday, December 22, 1998 (the same day) / Syracuse, New York / Late Morning

"There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid."

~ Proverbs 30:18-19 ~

Diane, 22, the secretary and stepsister of Jose Fernandez, sealed her boss's manilla envelope in a FedEx box, and sent the bulky parcel on it's way to Niagara Falls. Just as the package left, a handsome man dressed in a suit appeared in the office doorway. He double-checked the name printed on the door and stepped inside. Diane looked up from her computer.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"Yes, my name is Detective Foster. I'm with homicide," he said, flashing his badge. "I'd like to speak to Jose Fernandez."

"Why?" asked Diane.

"I want to ask him some questions," replied Detective Foster.

"Well, you can't," Diane stoutly declared.

"Why not?" asked Detective Foster.

"Jose is not in," replied Diane, "he is on vacation."

"Where is he staying?" inquired Detective Foster, taking out his notepad.

"Why do you want to know?" asked Diane, eyeing him suspiciously.

"This just isn't my day," Detective Foster groaned under his breath.

"What did you say?" asked Diane.

"I want to ask him some questions," repeated Detective Foster.

"You said that already," reminded Diane.

"Well, it's still true!" exclaimed Detective Foster. "Where is Jose Fernandez, Mrs...," Detective Foster bent over to read the name plaque sitting on her desk, "Mrs. Fernandez," he finished.

"That's 'Miss' Fernandez," corrected Diane, finishing with a charming smile.

"Where is Jose Fernandez, 'Miss' Fernandez?" repeated Detective Foster, patiently.

"May I see your ID?" asked Diane.

"I showed you my badge when I came in here," said Detective Foster, pointing to the door. "Why do you need to see it, again?"

"If you want to know where my brother, I mean, my boss is, then I will need to see your badge," insisted Diane. Detective Foster sighed.

"Here," he replied, handing her his badge, "satisfied?" Diane picked up her telephone receiver. "Who are you calling? You haven't answered me yet!" he protested. Diane nodded in acknowledgment. "I kept my end of the bargain," reminded Detective Foster.

"Are you married, detective?" asked Diane, over the receiver.

"What does that have to do with anything?" he objected. Diane smiled.

"No, I'm not married, and this is a glowing example of the reason why," groaned Detective Foster, flopping down into the chair in front of Diane's desk. He had realized after a few sentences into the discussion, that if he wanted information from her, he would also have to give information. He waited, patiently, for Diane to finish her phone call.

"Hello? Do you have a someone in your homicide department masquerading as 'Detective Foster'?" asked Diane. "You do? Thank you," she answered, "Have a nice day!" Diane hung up the telephone. "Now, what was your question?" she asked sweetly.

Scene Seven

Tuesday, December 22, 1998 (the same day) / Niagara Falls, New York

"Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: And He changeth the times and the seasons... He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding."

~ Daniel 2:20-21 ~

Jose and Rebecca had breakfast near the window, in view of Niagara Falls.

"Did you know," asked Jose, helping himself to more eggs, "that the Marriott Fallsview is the closest hotel to the falls?" Rebecca shook her head. Jose noted her plate was still untouched. "The Horseshoe Falls has over 600,000 gallons of water pass over it, every second," remarked Jose, in a cheerful voice. Rebecca smiled weakly. "If you don't believe me, you can ask room service," Jose grinned. Rebecca stared at her plate blandly. "Aren't you hungry?" he asked.

"I was earlier, but I don't think I could keep it down," replied Rebecca. "I just don't feel very good."

"Why don't you take a nap on the couch," suggested Jose, getting up from the table, "while I take a closer look at these files." Rebecca stood up. She unsteadily walked over to the couch. "You really don't look very well," observed Jose, in a concerned voice.

"I feel dizzy," said Rebecca, reeling back and forth. Jose helped Rebecca sit down.

"Hang your head down, and stay calm," directed Jose. "You know, you did the same thing in the mall, yesterday," observed Jose. "I thought it was just because of all the excitement, but now, I'm not so sure." Jose crossed the room and called the hotel's main desk. When Jose returned, Rebecca was curled up on the couch, busily fighting back fear. "I just called the desk," he explained, sitting down beside her, "the hotel physician will be here soon."

"I don't understand what's happening," Rebecca moaned.

"Have a little faith, Mrs. Newton," reassured Jose, patting her hand, "remember what you told me, 'God never makes mistakes.'"

"What do we do now?" asked Rebecca, weakly.

"About what?" Jose asked.

"About Mr. Cushing. What do we do next?" repeated Rebecca, not so ill that she hadn't forgotten her prior problem.

"Well," replied Jose, "all we can do at the moment, is to wait. My car, you know, the one we left at the mall, was not searched. I'm guessing, of course, but I don't think we are being pursued, at the moment. I can't understand why, but it's a feeling I have."

"It must be your reporter's instinct," observed Rebecca, seriously.

"Quite frankly, I have no instinct. I must rely completely on God's Spirit," replied Jose. "Why, the leading of the Holy Spirit has done more for my career, than all the anonymous phone calls and tips combined!" Rebecca smiled. "Speaking of anonymous phone calls," continued Jose, "I'm waiting for a FedEx package to come sometime tomorrow. I had Diane send it to this hotel. It's all my research," explained Jose. "Just one more reason to sit tight and wait."

"Who's Diane?" asked Rebecca, curiously. Just then, someone knocked on the door.

"That must be the doctor," said Jose, getting up and walking to the door. The hotel physician was a short man with a round, red face. It grew even redder when he smiled.

"Where is the patient?" smiled the doctor, stepping inside. Jose showed him over to the couch.

"I'll just go get a magazine from the lobby, downstairs," said Jose, excusing himself. When Jose returned, Rebecca was sitting up on the couch, reading a small pamphlet. "What's that?" asked Jose, pointing to the pamphlet. Rebecca showed him the cover. "So, you're going to have a baby, after all!" he exclaimed.

"My husband and I had only been married for a year, when he died. It was almost like he never existed. Now, a part of Peter can go on living," said Rebecca, glowing from inner happiness.

"I'm very happy for you, Mrs. Newton," said Jose, warmly.

"Thank you, Mr. Fernandez. I know you are," replied Rebecca.

"Please, call me Jose," he said, smiling.

"Only if you call me Rebecca," Rebecca laughed. While Jose spent the rest of the day reading and analyzing the files, Rebecca returned to her room and rested.

Scene Eight

Wednesday, December 23, 1998 (the next day) / Niagara Falls, New York

"I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same."
~ Job 4:8 ~

"Here it is, room 219," said Diane, knocking on the door. When Jose opened the door, he saw Diane standing beside a man he had never seen before. "Surprised?" asked Diane.

"Who is this?" asked Jose, motioning to the stranger.

"Detective Foster, this is Jose. Jose this is Detective Foster," she said, introducing them. "Are you going to invite us in, or do we have to stand in the hall?" asked Diane. Jose showed them in and closed the door. "What a great view of the falls!" exclaimed Diane, going to the window.

"Mr. Fernandez, my name is Detective Foster. I'm with homicide," he stated, flashing his badge. Diane rolled her eyes. Not regarding her, Detective Foster continued. "I would like to ask you a few questions concerning the death of Christopher Cushing."

"The death?" repeated Jose, raising his eyebrows. "Is Christopher Cushing dead?"

"I see you haven't heard yet," replied Detective Foster.

"How did he die?" Jose asked, pulling out a notepad.

"Before I answer your questions, Mr. Fernandez, you will please do me the courtesy of answering mine," Detective Foster said, glancing in Diane's direction.

"What do you want to know?" asked Jose, sitting down at the table. Detective Foster sat down and pulled out his notepad.

"Were you in Buffalo late Monday night?" asked Detective Foster, his pencil poised to take notes.

"No, I left Buffalo a little before five thirty in the evening, on a bus," replied Jose.

"Do you have a witness?" asked Detective Foster. Diane was about to protest to his line of questioning, when Jose held up his hand to stop her.

"Yes, I have a witness," answered Jose, "the bus driver saw me and can confirm the time." Detective Foster nodded.

"You understand, this is all a matter of formality. It's an open and shut case of suicide, but I still must confirm the facts," said Detective Foster, jotting down more notes.

"Detective Foster, maybe now, you could answer some of my questions. You just mentioned suicide. Did Christopher Cushing commit suicide?" asked Jose, his pen ready to take notes.

"That's right, Mr. Cushing was found face down in his office with a .45 automatic in his right hand. He did it, all right. Powder burns and everything," stated Detective Foster. "From what his doctor says, Mr. Cushing had been diagnosed with terminal cancer three months ago. However, there was a curious fact that caught my attention: his personal filing cabinet was open, and the contents strewn about the office, as if he were looking for something in particular. The blood from the gunshot was splattered over the top of the files, proving Mr. Cushing had first opened the cabinet and then shot himself. Otherwise, blood would have been found between the pages, and that was not the case. His prints were all over the papers, that and his secretary's, Mrs. Rebecca Newton," commented Detective Foster. "We are searching for her right now. As a matter of fact, I thought she was here with you. Her in-laws said she had an interview Monday morning with Jose Fernandez, and then went on a drive with him. I contacted your secretary, and she brought me here," finished Detective Foster. Jose stood up and nodded his head.

"Diane," Jose called, "go to room 215 and tell Mrs. Newton to come here," he directed. Diane quickly did as she was told.

"So, Mrs. Rebecca Newton was with you," said Detective Foster.

"You don't think Rebecca had anything to do with Christopher Cushing's death, do you, detective?" asked Jose, defensively.

"If the desk clerk can prove Mrs. Newton was in this hotel from the time the bus arrived (which he tells me was six twenty-three p.m.) till today, then she could not have killed Christopher Cushing. I have witnesses establishing the fact that Christopher Cushing was still alive at eight o'clock Monday night," stated Detective Foster. "And if Mrs. Newton was with you, then your innocence is also established."

"Good," replied Jose. Rebecca walked into the room with Diane. "Mrs. Newton," said Jose, "this is Detective Foster. Don't get excited, everything is all right," reassured Jose, offering her a seat on the couch. "Diane, you sit down too. I think I can piece together what happened Monday," stated Jose, confidently.

"On September the twenty-ninth of this year, I received a phone call from an anonymous caller. Since I received my research this morning, thanks to Diane, I'll play the tape for you now," said Jose, holding up his tape recorder so everyone could hear.

"That's Mr. Cushing's voice!" said Rebecca, half shouting with surprise.

"I thought so," remarked Jose. "Detective Foster told me that Christopher Cushing's doctor diagnosed him with terminal cancer about three months ago-- about the same time I received this phone call. Notice the caller said, 'I can't face God, I can't,' and, 'Don't let him get away with murder!' I think Christopher Cushing was afraid of dying and was trying to clear his conscience. Evidentially, however, his repentance was not sincere nor was it permanent, unless he would have given his real name instead of hiding behind his secretary's maiden name. When no boom was lowered, and Cushing saw that no one came to arrest him, he relaxed and thought the worst was over. However, when he arrived to work on Monday, and opened the filing cabinet around five thirty in the evening, and discovered that some sensitive files had absconded with his secretary, he must have gone into a panic. Detective Foster says he has witnesses that can establish the fact that Christopher Cushing was still alive at eight that night. After making sure the files had not gotten lost somewhere else in the office, he committed suicide rather than face the consequences of his own actions."

"Exactly, what actions are you speaking of, Mr. Fernandez?" asked Detective Foster. Jose then went into the files Rebecca had taken, and proved the extent of Mr. Cushing's guilt. He had sowed wickedness and reaped death. Such was the harvest of Christopher Cushing.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."
~ Galatians 6:7 ~

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."
~ 2 Corinthians 7:10 ~

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days."
~ James 4:17-5:1-3 ~

"Don't think you can get away, yet, Jose. You never answered one question," reminded Rebecca, as she and Jose took a stroll through Niagara Falls that evening.

"What's that, Rebecca?" he asked in a voice filled with surprised.

"Who is 'Diane'?" she asked. Jose smiled.

"Diane is my secretary," replied Jose.

"Is that all?" pressed Rebecca.

"Why, Rebecca," teased Jose, "anyone would think you were jealous of my stepsister!"

"Your stepsister?" repeated Rebecca, swatting his arm, "Why didn't you just come out and tell me, instead of letting me guess!" Jose laughed.

"Where is my sister, anyway?" asked Jose looking around.

"I believe Detective Foster asked her to dinner," hinted Rebecca.

"Oh really?" asked Jose. "I can think of better ways to spend time," Jose remarked.

"Like what?" asked Rebecca.

"Like spending our honeymoon here this Christmas," suggested Jose. "That is, if you say, 'yes.'"

"Are you asking me to marry you, Jose?" asked Rebecca.

"I believe the evidence points to that, yes," observed Jose, watching her out of the corner of his eye. Rebecca carefully took off Peter's wedding band and slipped it into her pocket.

"Who am I to contradict evidence?" replied Rebecca, taking Jose's arm.

"The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."

~ Psalms 126:3, 5 ~

End of Book.

***Disclaimer:** The characters and events depicted in this story are fictitious. Any similarity to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.*

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