





Prologue

Louisiana, August 1953 Lafayette State Penitentiary

The intense heat and humidity hung over the crumbling maximum-security prison like a soggy, bug infested wool blanket. The fetid air was permeated with the smell of rotting vegetation from the surrounding swamp, the odor of melted asphalt from the prison roof mixed with the stench of unwashed bodies and raw sewerage. The buzz of the flies and the drone of mosquitoes played counterpoint to the clank of steel doors shutting men away from the outside world and any hope of freedom. As if being in the middle of a swamp teeming with alligators and snakes wasn't enough to give potential escapees pause, the entire compound was surrounded with a triple layer of 20-foot high fences made of razor wire. The whole place was a seething miasma of misery and despair. Anger bubbled just beneath the sweaty surface and fights broke out at the slightest provocation. The guards turned their backs and walked away rather than break a sweat trying to save some unlucky convict from getting his ass kicked or being on the receiving end of a concealed weapon. It was the law of the jungle at its most elementary level. Serving ones sentence had become almost as difficult as surviving it. Most felt that the ones

who died got off easier than those left to face the brutal conditions.

The warden who had started his career thinking he could make a difference in the lives of his charges had long since given up on the idea of rehabilitation and had settled for the status quo. He wasn't a cruel man, he just knew his limitations. That's why he was shaking his head as he stood in his office window looking down on the exercise yard with his back to the visitor sitting in front of his desk.

"Look at them," he muttered, uncrossing his arms and gesturing toward the scene below. "Those men are the dregs of society. Most of them come from broken homes with little or no education. Some of them got here because they got in with the wrong crowd and others, I swear, were just born that way. And these are the best of the lot. The ones in C Block can only be let out of their cells an hour a day and then only one at a time. They'd kill each other if they were allowed to have direct contact with one another. They're worse than animals. I gave up trying to change things a long time ago."

"I'm sorry, but I must respectfully disagree," the warden's guest replied. "Those poor souls simply haven't been given the chance to see the error of their ways. Just because people make mistakes doesn't mean they are a lost cause."

"Mistakes? Are you trying to tell me that armed robbery, assault, rape and murder are mistakes? Really, Doctor. I know you mean well, but trust me, nothing can be done for them. We get the worst of the worst. People just want us to keep them off the streets so that they can't hurt anyone else and that is exactly what we do here."

"Without hope or the chance to make amends for their sins?"

"We had a prison chaplain who came in a couple times a month a few years back. The man meant well and may have even gotten through to an inmate or two, but the

state cut our budget, so we had to let him go. He really didn't make that much of a difference anyway."

"Might I remind you that funding for what I am proposing won't be an issue. As you know, I am offering to volunteer my services. I assure you that not only will your prisoners benefit from my treatments, but you will as well. If I am given free rein, you will be amazed at the results. Dangerous criminals will be made into God fearing men who have something worthwhile to contribute to society. Think of how that would reflect favorably on you and the job you are doing here. You have my personal guarantee."

"No disrespect intended, but I just don't think anyone can work that kind of magic, Doctor."

"None taken. But you do realize that if you refuse to allow me this opportunity, Mrs. Bennett, *Senator Bennett's* wife, will be extremely disappointed. She is, after all, the one who arranged for this interview and her husband is a member of the State Appropriations Committee. The same committee charged with determining the state's prison budget allocations, " he added with a wry smile.

"No, I haven't forgotten!" he muttered, his face blushing scarlet. "I'm just not convinced that it will work and if anyone gets hurt, it will be on my head. If one of those men should injure, or God forbid, kill you, it will be my responsibility. I am the person charged with your safety and these men are extremely dangerous, Doctor. Trust me, I know. There have been five guards killed and at least a dozen seriously injured during the ten years I've been here."

"I am well aware of the type of individuals you have here, which is exactly why you are so desperately in need of the service I have to offer. Since you feel that you can't provide for my safety within the general population, perhaps I could suggest an alternative plan that would both afford me the chance to demonstrate what I am

proposing while providing you with a way to limit your liability with regard to my safety.”

“And that would be...?”

“Give me access to the worst of the worst. Just one. One of those men you mentioned who are in solitary confinement. Keep as many guards near by as you wish who could rush to my aid if needed. If I get the results I’ve promised, turn the lion into a lamb so to speak, you could thus be assured that my treatment works and give me the go ahead to expand it to include the rest of the men.”

“And if it doesn’t work? What then?”

“I shall admit defeat, apologize profusely for wasting your time, and let the Senator’s wife know how wrong I was to interfere with the fine job you are doing here.”

“How will I know that you’ve been successful?”

“Believe me, Warden. You’ll know. I will have that poor lost soul praising God and eating out of my hand within a week. All I need is your permission. Do we have a deal?” he asked, extending his hand for the warden to shake.

“I guess we do, Doctor,” the warden replied, taking his hand and giving it a squeeze while looking skeptically into the other man’s eyes. “I have just the man for you. His name is Dwight Wardell, but I would suggest that you call him Ike.”

“Oh, and why is that?”

“Because he gutted and cut the head off the last man who dared call him Dwight.”

“Oh, my! He sounds like the perfect candidate for what I have in mind.”

“Are you sure about this, Doctor?”

“Absolutely! How soon can I begin?” he smiled, bending over and picking up the black leather medical bag that was sitting by his feet.

“I guess you can get started right away if you want to. Where would you like to do this thing you do?”

“What about the prison infirmary? Could you have him brought to me there?”

“I can have him there within the hour. You know, of course, he’ll have to be restrained with handcuffs, leg irons and a leather muzzle if you intend to be left alone with him.”

“Leather muzzle? Whatever for?” the doctor asked in surprise.

“You asked for the worst of the worst and believe me, he’s it. He bit the ear off one of the guards a few weeks back, so now we have to muzzle him whenever he’s out of his cell.”

“I assure you that will not be necessary once I get through to him. You’ll see a whole new God fearing man in Mr. Wardell. You have my word on that.”

“Whatever you say, Doctor,” the warden shrugged.

A guard the warden had summoned arrived shortly thereafter and escorted the doctor from the warden’s office, down a stairway and across the now empty prison yard toward a small gray cinder block building designated as the prison infirmary.

“Where did all the inmates go?” the doctor inquired, trying to make conversation with the grim faced security officer as they walked along. “I could have sworn this yard was full of men just a short while ago.”

“In lock down. We got orders to bring Ike the Spike to see you.”

“Ike the Spike? Why do you call him that?”

“You didn’t know? After he cut a guy’s head off, he supposedly threw it down on the ground just like a football player does in the end zone after he makes a touchdown. Course that could just be a load of bull, but trust me, Ike’s definitely not a guy you want to turn your back on. He’s a real hard case all right. When he’s out of

his cell, we have to give him our full attention. Trust me. You'll understand once you lay eyes on 'em. There's a rumor going around that you're some kind of crusader who's going to save old Ike's soul. That right?"

"Only Dwight can do that, my good man. I'm just going to show him the way," the doctor sniffed.

"*Dwight*, you say? You actually going to call Ike *Dwight*?"

"That is his name, is it not?"

"Mister, you're either damn crazy or you got some kind of death wish goin' on. The guards are laying odds that Ike'll rip your head off in about two shakes."

"I wouldn't take that bet if I were you," he scowled. "Just bring him to me and I'll take care of him."

They had reached the infirmary and the guard departed, leaving the doctor to prepare for his subject's arrival. The facilities were more primitive than he would have liked. It was obvious that the place had been used for little more than storage for a long, long time. The air had a stale musty smell and a thick layer of dust covered the floor and counter tops. The few small rusted cots that remained were stripped bare and scattered haphazardly around the room. He was pleased to see that there was a wheeled gurney with leather restraints in relatively good condition pushed into a corner. He pulled it to the center of the room and gave the leather straps a tug to assure himself that they had not rotted through. Once he had the room arranged to his satisfaction, he stepped back and began humming his favorite hymn. With his eyes aglow with religious fervor, he opened his bag, and pulled out vials of liquids in a rainbow of colors and syringes, lining them up on the counter on a couple of dented metal trays he had found in the nearly empty medical supply closet. A rapturous smile crossed his lips when the silence was broken by the sound of a scuffle outside. He rushed over and swung the door wide open.

Before him were four burly prison guards doing their utmost to restrain a bald, heavily muscled struggling prisoner. It was obvious that the man had not come willingly since one of the guards had blood dripping from his nose and another was well on the way to having a black eye. It was hard to discern the man's features other than his hawkish eyes because the lower half of this face was obscured by a thick piece of leather that buckled behind his head. He was basically being dragged along the walkway because his legs were chained closely together in leg irons. His wrists were attached to a chain around his waist, but that wasn't enough to keep him from striking out at his captors with his shoulders and elbows. His nostrils flared as he struggled to breathe in the intense heat and presumably after his exertion of fighting the prison guards. Rivulets of sweat poured from the top of his tattooed head down his forehead and soaked into his filthy sleeveless prison uniform shirt. His rippled arms were covered from shoulder to knuckles with black, blue and red skin art favored by those who have spent more time incarcerated than free. The odor that wafted from him was so pungently foul it nearly took the doctor's breath away.

"Gentlemen! Come in! Come in!" the doctor grinned, waving his arm in a welcoming sweeping motion. "Please bring my guest right on in here out of the hot sun. We have the Lord's work to do and must get to it."

The guards manhandled their prisoner through the door and at the doctor's direction, wrestled him up off his feet and on to the gurney. Using their superior numbers and strength, they held him down while the doctor buckled the leather restraints across his chest, arms and legs and pulled them tight. Once they were satisfied that the man was completely immobilized, they let go and stepped back.

"Well, there he is, boss, he's all yours," the guard with the bloody nose muttered. "It wouldn't bother us

none if you just killed the son of a bitch right here and now while you got the chance. Looks like you got more ‘en enough stuff to do the job,” he added, pointing his chin in the direction of the drugs laid out on the counter, “Save the state some money keeping his sorry ass alive.”

“I’m not in the business of killing people, sir,” the doctor huffed. “Mr. Wardell simply needs some assistance in finding his way back to God. My intention is to help him not harm him.”

“No shit?” the guard with the burgeoning black eye smirked as he gave his companions a crooked gap toothed grin, and poked the trussed but still defiant Wardell in the ribs, “Ya hear that, Ike? The man here is going to make you into a regular choirboy! Ain’t that some shit?!”

All four of the guards broke out in loud braying laughter that only agitated the prisoner even more as his eyes nearly bulged from his head in rage. He was unable to form any words due to the thick leather binding his mouth closed, but he started to make guttural growling sounds deep in his throat. There was no mistaking the menace implied by the inhuman sounds he was producing.

“You need us for anything?” the first guard asked, wiping his bloodied nose on a dirty rag he had pulled from his back pocket. “The warden said we’re supposed to stay close by in case you need any help if Ike gets out of line.”

“That really won’t be necessary. I think once he and I are alone, he’ll be able to relax and quit fighting so much. Why don’t you check back with me in say, oh, a half an hour? There really isn’t anything for you to do and he isn’t going to free himself anytime soon. You needn’t worry about me. I’ll be perfectly safe.”

“Whatever you say, boss. No offense, but personally, I think you’re nuts, but then again it ain’t my place to say so.”

“You are correct, sir, it isn’t your place,” the doctor snapped back, “now, if you gentlemen will kindly run along, Mr. Wardell and I can begin his treatment.”

The four guards filed out and the doctor closed the door behind them. He squared his shoulders, blew out a sigh, turned back toward the center of the room, strode purposefully to the side of the gurney and looked down at the man on it.

“Hello, *Dwight*,” he said, mere inches away from the man’s face and locking eyes with him. “You’ve been a very, very bad boy, haven’t you, *Dwight*?”

At the sound of the hated name, the veins on Wardell’s neck and forehead ballooned out and his face flushed crimson. He began yet again making snarling animal sounds and thrashing his head from side to side in fury. With almost superhuman strength, he renewed his efforts to get free of his bonds, but they held tight.

The doctor stepped back and watched him for a moment or two until his agitation subsided.

He then stepped in close yet again until he was in the man’s line of sight and began speaking in a soft, soothing tone of voice one would use when confronted by a dangerous wild animal.

“There is really no need for all this hostility, my boy,” he said, giving his captive a fatherly pat on the shoulder, “I know you don’t believe it, but I am here to help you. I mean you no harm. No, I truly don’t. You see, somewhere along the line, you simply took a wrong turn. No one is born evil, not even you. Everyone comes into this world with the same choice to make. They can be good God fearing members of society, or they can be hopeless sinners. It’s as simple as that. You see, God loves everyone, even lost souls like you. In His Wisdom, He has given me a very special gift so that I can help those who have lost their way on the path to Glory and I want to share it with you. Do you know what that gift is?”

Wardell had stopped struggling and was watching the doctor warily as he spoke. He made no sound, but he did appear to be listening although hatred and suspicion were clearly etched in his glare.

When the doctor got no response to his question, he continued, “ Well, of course you don’t know!” he chuckled, “so I’m just going to have to tell you all about it. Would you like that?”

Again there was no response, so he went on, “I’d really like to take that piece of leather off your mouth, but I’ve been told that you’ve been known to bite people. Is that true, *Dwight*?”

The mention of the man’s hated given name caused his face to flush and his eyes to narrow in anger, but he quickly regained his composure obviously deciding to play along with whatever game this strange man was playing. He shook his head no.

“No, you haven’t or no you won’t?” the doctor asked.

Again he shook his head no.

“My, my, this is getting confusing. All right, how about this? If I take that thing around your face off, do you promise not to bite me? Because if you can’t control yourself, I have some medication right over there that will cause your muscles to relax and you won’t be able to move.”

He let that sink in for a moment and repeated his question, “So, what do you say? Do you promise?”

This time his prisoner reluctantly nodded yes.

“Wonderful! You and I have so much to do and it will be so much more pleasant if you can speak.”

He went around to the head of the gurney, helped Wardell lift his head and removed the muzzle.

“There! Now isn’t that better?”

“Uh huh,” he rasped, running his tongue around his dry, parched lips. “Now why don’t you unbuckle these straps and let me up?”

“Oh, I don’t think that would be a good idea,” the doctor smiled, moving around to the side of the gurney making sure to keep an arm’s length away. “I think we’ll just keep you nice and secure for right now. If you show me that you can behave yourself, perhaps later we’ll let you get up.”

“Who the hell are you and what do you want from me anyway?” he demanded, his temper flaring up yet again.

“Now, now,” he scolded, “there’s no need for profanity. I don’t want anything from you. As I was saying, I want to share my gift with you.”

“Oh, yeah, right,” he grumbled, deciding to play along until an opportunity for escape presented itself. “You said God gave you some kind of gift.”

“Yes! That’s right! You were listening!”

“Okay. What is it?”

“I am a trained psychiatrist and physician. I spent many, many years learning how to treat people with mental disorders. I am also a very religious man. It occurred to me that I could use my scientific knowledge to bring sinners back into the grace of God. I believe this is my mission because I believe that everyone is a child of God and basically good inside. I have at my disposal various methods to wipe away all the evil that dwells in the hearts of men and replace it with goodness and love, the way we were all meant to be.”

“And this is your gift?” he chortled.

“God gave me the talent to devise a method to accomplish His will. I believe it is His gift to me,” he nodded.

“No, shit?”

“Please! I said no profanity! Yes, it is His gift to me and you are the first to reap the benefits of my research. Isn’t that great?”

Before Wardell could respond the doctor walked to the counter, picked up one of the empty syringes and selected a vial of greenish yellow liquid.

“Hey! What you doing over there?” Wardell cried, lifting his head and trying to twist around to see what the other man was doing behind him.

The doctor started humming his favorite hymn as he drew the fluid up into the barrel of the hypodermic needle. The doctor ignored the man’s protestations and filled several others and laid them out on the tray. He then carried the first over to the side of the gurney and wiped a spot on his captive’s forearm with an alcohol swap.

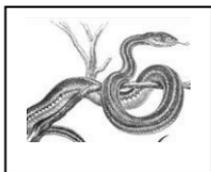
“Wait! Wait! What the hell are you doing?” he yelled, struggling mightily against his restraints.

“Beginning your transformation, of course. Don’t worry. You won’t remember a thing. And, when you wake up, you will be a new man. A God fearing man. A good man.”

“No, no! Wait!” he screamed, his eyes riveted on the needle poised to plunge into his arm. “At least tell me your name. If you’re going to kill me, you owe me that!”

“I am certainly not going to kill you, but if you must know, my name is Dr. Samuel Jaffe, but you may call me Brother Sam. Now, enough of this. Are you ready to turn your life over to God?”

The convict’s mouth formed the word no, but the needle hit its mark. His screams reverberated off the concrete block walls for only a moment and then all was quiet, except for the soft strains of an old hymn being hummed by Brother Sam.



1

Many years later...

“You can wake up now, Andy.” The man’s eyes slowly opened to small slits. He felt as if his head was filled with soft clumps of cotton and that if he shut them again, he could go back to sleep and continue the most pleasant dream he had ever had in his life. He couldn’t exactly remember the details of the dream, the people or what he was doing in it, only that it gave him an incredible sense of freedom. The peaceful sense of well being was so incredibly tantalizing, he resisted losing hold of it. He squeezed his eyes tightly and let the waves of serenity wash over him. But the soft, insistent voice kept intruding and no matter how hard he tried to ignore it, he awoke and the beautiful dream burst like a soap bubble.

Instead of lying in bed as he expected, he found himself sitting in a high backed leather chair in front of a large mahogany desk. He was in an office. The walls were filled with bookshelves from floor to ceiling and dust motes danced in the light from the window. The angle of the light told him that it was late afternoon, close to sunset. He felt disoriented, the dreamy peaceful state leaving him, his heart fluttering in his chest.

The man, who roused him, sat behind the desk, looking at him, his hands folded under his chin. He had a long dour face, deeply lined, with thick-lensed glasses in front of eyes that seemed to peer into the very back of Andy’s head. He was a stranger and yet, not a stranger. A name, unbidden, entered Andy’s mind, Samuel Jaffe. He knew that this was the man’s name, but how he knew this was a mystery. He also knew that he and everyone else called this man, Brother Sam. He wasn’t sure how he knew this, but was sure he was right. He didn’t know

why, but he felt sure that this was someone he could trust and his heart rate returned to normal.

“How are you feeling, Andy? Any discomfort, headache, dizziness or the like?”

“No, I feel all right, just a little sleepy,” Andy replied.

“Feeling a little out of it, no doubt. Nothing to be concerned about. Perfectly normal. You’ll be right as rain in a few days, thanks to God. With this new treatment you can go back to living a happy fulfilled life. So much easier than what some must endure to reach your stage of recovery.”

“I feel like I know you. Aren’t you a doctor?”

“Experiencing some amnesia, I see. Interesting. Bears some further study.” He flipped open the clinical chart in front of him and jotted a brief note. Heaving a deep sigh, he stood up and came around the desk to the corner closest to Andy and leaned a hip on it.

“I think it best to go slowly for right now. In answer to your first question, yes, you and I are very well acquainted, and to answer your second question, as a matter of fact, I am a doctor, or should I say, *was* a doctor,” he said, “but I haven’t practiced conventional medicine in many years. I am much more than a simple peddler of pills. You see, Andy,” he continued, “I am foremost a servant of our Lord. In the old days, when my patients recovered from their illnesses, I could see the Hand of God working His miracles. I realized that I was merely His vessel. Science is His tool. Technology should be used to His glory, so I decided to use my years of medical training and knowledge to help people, like you. The medical establishment wasn’t quite ready to accept some of my more, uh; unconventional therapies for people suffering from your particular problem, so I came to Whitestone seeking spiritual enlightenment. I established this clinic two years ago. We’re small and we only take

very special cases. Like yours. Plus, the isolation of a small town is much more conducive to my work.”

“What do you mean, special cases. What exactly is wrong with me?” he asked, a slight sense of panic creeping into his chest.

Leaning forward and placing his hand on Andy’s shoulder, he went on, “Let’s just say you were having some difficulty dealing with God’s plan for you, Andy. Your mind had become cluttered with unhealthy thoughts, dangerous thoughts and now your mind is clean and fresh, like newly turned soil in which the seeds of godliness can take root and grow. Call it a higher level of spiritual growth. Think of it as our Lord giving you a wonderful new beginning.”

The tone and cadence of Brother Sam’s words had a surprisingly calming, comforting effect. More questions arose, but he found that before he could voice them, they faded away, lost in the recesses of his clouded memory. His head began to feel too heavy to hold up and Brother Sam’s bespectacled eyes seemed to look all the way into his soul. He wanted to look away, but was drifting deeper into the doctor’s gaze. He felt himself drifting back into that netherland between being totally awake and asleep.

With difficulty he tore his eyes away, pushed the doctor’s hand away, rose from his chair and looked out of the window on the darkening street below. In the distance the mountains on the horizon were limned with the last crimson rays of the setting sun. The vista before him delicately nudged that part of his mind that refused to give up its secrets. The sight eased his disorientation, but the impression was growing that some dreadful mistake had been made and he was a stranger here. There was so much he couldn’t remember about the situation in which he found himself. He felt alien within his own skin.

As if reading his thoughts, Brother Sam murmured, “Andy, you have lived in this same town all your life. Why if it weren’t for you, half the town would

never have come here now. You are a very important part of our little community.'

'I know you are feeling a little disoriented right now, but it is only temporary. These treatments are still experimental, so there may be some minor side affects. You had some heavy-duty problems, okay, but they are behind you now. Go home to your wife, and get some rest. Your illness is *in the past*. Don't concern yourself with it. God has wiped the slate clean. To talk of those things would only delay your recovery. You were led away from the path of righteousness, but your feet are firmly on the path to glory now. Your life is now headed in the right direction. He will bring you peace. Trust me, you'll see.'

If what Brother Sam was true, he reasoned, he should be filled with religious rapture right now, down on his knees, praising God for his deliverance. He should feel something, anything, but found he was emotionally dead. Empty. His head began to ache. He turned away from the window to find that Brother Sam had slipped out of the office. He walked to the door, opened it and looked up and down the corridor. The hallway was empty and silent. He started to call out, but something in his head changed his mind and told him to walk to the elevator. As if on autopilot, he exited the building and went directly to a car that looked vaguely familiar. He reached in his pocket and discovered a set of keys that opened the door. It started immediately and he was led in the right direction. This was all done mechanically, almost as if he was programmed to do it.

There were several other cars in the parking lot, and although it was early evening, no one was around. When he reached the highway, the only sign of life he passed was one lone policeman by the side of the road. He stood with his arm stretched across the roof of the car, looking back, almost as if he had been waiting for Andy to pass by. He turned as Andy passed, his head following the car's path like a radar dish. Andy could feel the man's

eyes on him long after he had passed him out of sight. The man's intense stare made Andy feel vaguely guilty and afraid, but he automatically checked his speed and saw that he was driving way under the posted speed limit. He knew he hadn't broken any traffic laws. Just thinking about the expression on the cop's face made the hair stand up on Andy's arms.

"What is going on here?" he muttered to himself.

He noticed that the lights were on in virtually all the houses he passed; and yet no one was walking on the sidewalks. No pets, no cars, no people. It was as if there was some kind of curfew in place and he was the only one breaking it. He checked the rearview mirror and sure enough, the police car was following him. No lights or siren, just keeping pace behind him. He had a momentary vision of the police car speeding up, forcing him off the road and the evil-eyed cop yanking him from his car, beating him senseless and dragging him off to jail.

With some relief he sensed he was getting close to familiar territory. Relying again on his instincts, he turned down a residential street lined on either side with hardwoods. To his immense relief the cop didn't follow, but continued on through the intersection. Why should he be afraid of the police, he wondered.

After traveling two blocks, he turned into the driveway of a house he knew was his destination. He hoped that here would be something he could remember. Putting the car in park, he walked up the sidewalk and he tried to convince himself that he had probably done this a thousand times. As he stood outside the door, he turned and surveyed the neighborhood. This house very much like all the other houses on the block. Older homes probably built in the 50's. Several were in need of paint and repair. He wondered if he should ring the bell, but decided to try the other key on the key ring. He was mildly surprised that the key fit.

"So far, so good." he thought.