

“Do we have a problem, Felix? ‘Cause, y’know,”  
Pastor Donald Westbrook pulled his nickel-plated  
.45 from under his jacket, chocked the slide  
and laid the pistol on the coffee table,  
“Jesus is a problem solver.”

# zion

A LOVE STORY



## ZION: A LOVE STORY

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A LOVE STORY

**A**t 2:15 a.m. on Thursday, August 17th, the New Greater Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church exploded, vaporizing the church and badly damaging several nearby homes. This touches off a murder investigation which threatens to expose a complex conspiracy between high-ranking police officials, a violent drug cartel, and the group of black church leaders who launder their money. Michael Zoë Dallas, an FDNY arson investigator, is brought in to work the case. Only, Dallas has a serious conflict of interest: she's been having an illicit affair with Kai Tremaine, Mount Zion's pastor. Her assignment to the case leads Dallas to discover her relationship with Tremaine has been orchestrated—from the start—by high-ranking officials who are now threatening her career and, ultimately, her life.

Mount Zion is revealed to have been a clandestine money-laundering “bank” run by The Five Fathers—an alliance of local black ministers. These pastors had been laundering drug money for a Colombian cartel who were using a violent Ecuadorian street gang to provide retail services under the protection of high-ranking NYPD commanders. Zion's destruction unsettles the fragile alliance, turning cops and crooks against one another and all of them looking for Kai Tremaine, Mount Zion's pastor, who has vanished under a cloud of suspicion. Dallas, the arson investigator, is the last person to have seen Tremaine alive.

With time running out, Dallas finds herself struggling to find meaning in faith, spirituality, and love as she is pushed well beyond her fire marshal's role. Caught in the crossfire between the disintegrating cops-preachers-crooks alliance, she furtively attempts to unravel the deepening mystery of Zion's firebombing and its pastor's disappearance. One woman, caught between cops and crooks. Between pastors and pushers. Between right and wrong. Between heaven and hell.

One *soul*. Trapped in ZION.

ZION: A LOVE STORY is an urban crime drama set against an unflinching, candid perspective on the culture of the black church. Themes: faith, ethics, the quality of morality, police/firefighter drama. 197,000 words / 49 Chapters.



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**zion**  
A LOVE STORY

“These pastors are the *mob*, Marshal Dallas. They build their hopes on things eternal, but they settle their differences out in Edgemere at two in the morning with tire irons.

“And we think they saw us rounding third and made Kai Tremaine go away.”

## Chapters

- |  |                                    |
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| 1. The Charity of Lies                 | 26. Ponga Eso Alli                 |
| 2. The Doberman                        | 27. Earned                         |
| 3. Encounter At Farpoint               | 28. Parkside                       |
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| 5. Opera Ad Extra                      | 30. Guns And Butter                |
| 6. 10-45 Code 1                        | 31. The Two Percent Solution       |
| 7. Jesus And The Knicks                | 32. The Thursday Rule              |
| 8. The Harold Gilbert Phone            | 33. The PathMark Guy               |
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| 13. The Magic Kingdom                  | 38. Twelfth Floor                  |
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“100 arson investigators in the New York Fire Department, but they drag you—the woman involved with the arson victim—in to work the case. They *will* come knocking soon.”

“They’ who?” Dallas asked.

“Cops. Crooks. Preachers. Everybody.”

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## Preview

In the history of her life, no one had ever told Dallas that she was pretty. Oh, Oletta, of course, but that was a compliment of obligation: a parent has to tell their kid they're attractive, whether they actually are or not. It's part of the overall charity of lies, compassionate nonsense routinely hurled your way by people who genuinely love you and who, therefore, rarely tell you the truth.

Dallas was used to being lied to. Being lied to was her job. She'd spent four years in college learning how to be lied to. Every hour of every day somebody, somewhere, was lying to her—Oletta's protests of Dallas's beauty being perhaps the kindest. It's just not something a girl wants to hear from her mother who, after all, has a vested interest in her child's beauty. No mother wants to admit she'd spent nine months dragging that belly around just to push out a duck.

Adding insult to injury, Dallas was also black. Not Oprah Winfrey Black or Maya Angelou Black but Sidney Poitier Black. Wesley Snipes Black. Tar Baby Black. Lean Past Me To Ask My Girlfriend To Dance Black. Almost blue black. Dallas was so black you had to actually get right in her grill to realize how amazingly beautiful she was. Asian doe eyes and the button-nose of an innocent. Dallas had absolutely flawless skin; the kind of skin rich folks pay good money to achieve chemically. It just so happened that her skin was nearly dark as shoe leather, which repulsed blacks as well as whites.

Dallas was so dark, in fact, that there inside her car it was difficult to see where her hand ended and the pistol clutched in it began.

\* \* \*



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While gifted with the angled features and caramel complexion of a male model, Caius J. Tremaine struggled with an innate duality that made simply being in the room with him a real chore, like entertaining a neighbor's Doberman while she made tea. The rule was, a Doberman can stare at you but you can't ever stare back. You just sit there, like a schmuck, waiting for the kettle whistle to give you your dignity back. Being in a room with Kai Tremaine was exactly like that.

Only the most obliquely self-absorbed people could sit comfortably in a room with Kai Tremaine, who excreted the threat of violence with every move. The man could offer you lemonade, and you'd wet your pants. *Would you like some lemonade before I split your head open and kick your brains under a bus?*

\* \* \*

The car was violently bumped, another vehicle slamming against Harold Gilbert's Dodge on the passenger side, causing the car to slide across the slick turnpike lanes toward the concrete median. Pastor Kai Tremaine fought with the steering, the old car lacking traction control, anti-lock brakes or airbags. The Colt hit the median, the sheet metal sparking as the car rebounded off, now caroming back across the lanes.

Dallas was blinded by a confusing array of lights flooding the compartment and then going black again; glimpses of color. It took a few seconds for her mind to put it together that the odd array was actually a car spinning in front of them, Harold Gilbert's old Colt barely evading the car as the two vehicles spun out of control in the rain.

An '02 Honda Civic, running too fast in the rain, had hydroplaned across the lanes, impacting Gilbert's Colt before sliding back across the road. The car smashed into the median, finally coming to a halt, facing south in the northbound lanes of the New Jersey Turnpike.

Kai stopped the old Dodge, pulling onto the shoulder.

Kai picked up his iPhone. "What are you doing?" Dallas asked.

"Calling 911."

"You can't do that."



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Kai stopped, not quite processing what Dallas was saying to him. “What?”

“You call 911, they’re going to place you at the scene.”

“They’ll place Harold Gilbert at the scene.”

“Yes, Sherlock, and they’ll figure out Harold Gilbert’s been dead for twenty years! And they’ll start wondering why Harold Gilbert has active credit cards and a condo in New Jersey!”

“Dallas—you’re being ridiculous.”

“Am I?”

Kai put his iPhone away. “Fine, you call it in.”

“So, why am I here? Why are *we* here?”

“Dallas, there’s a woman in that car—”

Dallas opened her door. “And, hopefully, she’s got a cell phone we can use.”

Dallas vanished into the rain, leaving Kai with his iPhone, struggling with a new moral dilemma, one he’d not before encountered.

The iPhone’s power-saving feature blanked the screen, presenting Kai with his own reflection. Kai stared at himself, observing his control slipping away, which truly annoyed him. He glanced over at Dallas, across three lanes of freeway traffic, opening the Civic’s door, the realization sinking in:

He was losing her.

He *needed* to lose her.

Things were getting to the point where Kai would usually invent some excuse to dump out of the relationship. The woman was becoming too clingy or too needy and, ultimately, too dangerous for a married pastor to keep company with.

Kai put the Colt in drive.

Leaving Dallas by the side of the road would certainly accomplish that goal. She’d hate him. She’d leave him alone. She might even try and go public, as others had done. Others Kai had bought off or frightened away. He sincerely doubted he’d be able to do either with Dallas, but he also doubted Dallas would cause much of a fuss. There was, in fact, only one flaw in Kai’s impulse:

He didn’t want to lose her.

Fear tightened around Kai’s throat, which made him angry. Kai was a man who simply refused to be afraid of anything or anyone. But this he feared: losing Dallas. Of all the women he’d talked into his sheets, of all the relationships he’d managed like railroad schedules, there was something distinctly and perhaps divinely different about this one. Kai found himself trapped in a gravity well of his own making,



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finding something he'd not quite expected. Something he'd not quite experienced before.

There, on the shoulder of the New Jersey Turnpike near exit eleven, Kai wondered if that vertigo might actually be love.

All of which immediately had Kai mentally ringing up the cost at the check-out counter: what would it take to transform this lie into a divine truth. Kai knew, when Dallas got back in that car, she'd end things between them. Better to just ditch her by the side of the road and be done with it.

Or face the reality of who and what he had become. Kai stared at his reflection in the blacked-out iPhone. He had many contemplative moments where he struggled to repress his conscience and justify his endemic selfishness. He usually allowed these moments to pass without incident. But here was a crisis of faith and hope, Kai forced either down the familiar road of vain narcissism or to risk everything he was by reaching for something more, something higher and more pure than his sullied façade of godliness.

Kai looked across the lanes at Dallas, seeing to the passengers in the Civic. There he saw something purer than anything he possessed, than anything he was. A woman he loved desperately, "love" being something no one could explain to you and no one could prepare you for. Many times before, Kai had thought he was in love, but it never felt like this. It never made him want to sacrifice, to change. It never made him ashamed of the lie his life had become.

The purer revelation, however, was that, for Kai to have that love in his life, he had to have it the right way. He had to have it God's way. Which made his choice very simple: either drive off and forget her, or get out of the car and risk everything for a last chance at getting things right.

Kai glared across the highway. Hating her. Loathing her. He liked his life the way it was.

Which made it all the more strange that he found himself rushing across those lanes.

"This idiot," Dallas said as she furiously worked to create a Jerry-rig tracheotomy on a nine-year old Pigtail Girl in the front passenger seat. A deflated passenger-side airbag covered the rail-thin child. "She puts her kid up front. The airbag busted three ribs and one of those clipped her lung. She's bleeding internally. Kai, she doesn't get to the hospital now, she's dead." Dallas turned to look Kai in the eye. "We call 911, we're dead."

Kai looked back at her grimly. The rain fell. The girl slipped toward eternity.



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“Kai...” Dallas said, looking into her lover’s eyes, suddenly vulnerable. “What are we doing?”

Kai looked into Dallas’s eyes.

He reached a hand across to the little girl’s forehead, anointing her with rain-water, and prayed. Dallas continued work on the tracheotomy, inserting a straw through a slit in the child’s neck. For reasons she couldn’t fathom, Dallas made note of the colorful barrettes in the child’s hair.

There were thirteen of them.

\* \* \*

Claudia Jo Tremaine stared at herself in the ladies room mirror. She'd left her cosmetics in her Cadillac, which she assumed was being stripped on Junius Street. She'd washed her face and fruitlessly picked at her short, layered hair with her fingers. But she looked a mess. There, reflected in the harsh, unflattering light, was Claudia Jo Tremaine. Just as she was. Without cover. Without enhancement. It was a face that horrified Claudia Jo. A face of acne and wrinkles and uneven skin tone. A face of imperfection. An overweight, aging church lady whose best days were well behind her.

Claudia Jo looked at herself, her true self, showing no expression. This was a face Claudia Jo never showed the world, never showed her own family. She never walked around her own house without at least foundation and eyeliner. But there, in a dingy Atlantic Avenue IHOP, she was marooned without her armor—her cosmetics. There was only the painful truth staring back at her, the person she loathed most in the world.

Her daddy used to tell her the bible said God made Man in His own image. But what that meant was that God made *Mankind*—human beings—in His own image.

“Wanna see what God looks like?” Pastor Milford Willis said as he kneeled next to his eight-year old daughter, Claudia Jo.

“Yes, Daddy!” Claudia Jo beamed, loving her father's attention.

Pastor Willis produced a small hand-mirror, holding it in front of his vain, spoiled eight-year old. “Like this!”



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Little Claudia Jo smiled a little girl's smile, admiring herself in her Minnie Mouse Dr. Denton's as Pastor Willis told her, "God is not black. God is not white. God is not male or female. God is a spirit. To know Him, to serve Him, you have to learn how to worship Him in both spirit and in truth.

"That's the truth, Claudia Jo. You are made in His image. You are wonderfully made in the image of Almighty God."

Standing in the stark public restroom some thirty years later, Claudia Jo tried to believe that. Tried to find that part of her again that trusted her father. That trusted God.

Moving slightly at an angle, she saw, reflected in the mirror, Michael Dallas standing a few feet behind her, Dallas's arms folded and head bowed slightly as she leaned against the tiled wall.

"So Kai had this dog. 'Cody,'" Claudia Jo said stoically. "Big ol' police dog. Mean—that's how Kai liked 'em.

"Kai would train 'em to be even more vicious. Strange hobby for a church pastor.

"Told the boys— 'Let that dog alone, y'hear?' 'Don't be throwin' stones at him and grabbin' his ears and the like.' But, boys being boys, they didn't listen. Teased that dog whenever Kai wasn't lookin'."

Dallas kept her head bowed, praying for Claudia Jo. Asking God for the right words to say to her. Unburdening herself to Claudia Jo might make Dallas feel better, but she doubted it would help Claudia Jo. Dallas's newly discovered faith made Claudia Jo the priority. Dallas still didn't understand how all of this Christianity stuff worked, but she was sure the line was open and God was listening.

"Came the day when Elijah tugged on that dog's ear and the dog had had enough. Snapped at Elijah, scared him half to death. Elijah come runnin' inside to his daddy." Claudia Jo turned to face Dallas, Dallas's head still bowed, her arms crossed. "Kai hollered at that boy.

"Kai grabbed him by the back of his shirt and tore his backside up. 'Didn't I tell you let that dog be!'

"Kai wailed away at Elijah, Elijah hysterical, now. Then Kai sends him to his room, tells him he better listen next time.

"Now, tell me, Michael Dallas, what's wrong with that story?"

Dallas said nothing, certain Claudia Jo would answer her own question.



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“That boy was this man’s son,” Claudia Jo continued, her voice softening now. “He was a scared little boy who wanted his daddy.”

“Maybe before Kai started yelling at him, he shoulda thrown his arms around him first. I mean, isn’t that what God would do? Wouldn’t God comfort us first, and save the stupid-ass lecture for later?”

Dallas didn’t answer.

“Did you love him?” Claudia Jo asked.

Dallas kept her head bowed, arms crossed, thinking it over. “I wouldn’t call it that.”

Claudia Jo walked purposefully out of the ladies room. “Well, then, why don’t we save the stupid-ass lectures for later.”

They sat silently, snacking on short stacks and coffee, Claudia Jo resigned to the humiliation of being seen in a common dive like that late at night without her make-up.

“You know where he is?” Claudia Jo asked, glancing out of the window into the night drizzle.

Dallas looked down at her plate, digging her fork in. “No.”

“But you’re sure he’s alive?”

“Nobody has a motive to kill him,” Dallas answered. “The cops need him to testify against Amaru and the Colombians. Amaru and the Colombians need him alive, his knowing the connection between them and the crooked cops, in order to back the cops off.”

Claudia Jo riveted her eyes to Dallas, drilling her. “I have a motive for killing him.”

Dallas continued looking at her plate. “No you don’t.”

“He slept with you.”

“He slept with a lot of girls. You knew it. You didn’t kill him. You went shopping.”

“So, long as I can go shopping, I don’t care who Kai screws?”

“You don’t care enough to kill him.”

Claudia Jo sat back in the booth, absorbing the sting. “So much for the gloves, I guess.”

Dallas glared at her. “I’m not making any excuses, but I’m not eating what you’re serving up, either. You want to sit there and play the wounded wife, hail a cab.

“This Tremaine, he was what he was, he did what he did. You were right there



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with him. Coulda brained his ass with a fryer, but you went bought yourself a hat.

“Now I gotta sit here, tickets to your opera. Lady, the man was bad news. I was wrong, I own that. Now you gotta own your own wrong as well.”

Claudia glared at Dallas.

Then she smiled. She couldn't help it.

“I don't get it,” she said. “You're not Kai's type. Kai doesn't usually like 'em with a spine.”

Dallas sipped coffee.

\* \* \*

Woods Grammercy was a swanky Italian bistro off of Park Avenue South in Manhattan, a favorite haunt for Pastors Kai Tremaine and “Dean” Westbrook when they were out with their concubines, as their various mistresses were clandestinely referred. Dean Westbrook, Kai's mentor, maintained the bible does not prohibit polygamy. Westbrook privately reminded his young ministers that King Solomon had 700 hundred wives and 300 hundred concubines. By blessing Solomon, the wisest man in the bible, Westbrook argued that God acknowledged man's essential nature. Westbrook's legal wife would always come first—family must always be a minister's priority. Beyond that, by submitting these women to God—at least clandestinely—as concubines, and considering them in his heart as secondary to his legal spouse, Westbrook managed to rationalize his behavior within proper bounds of a Christian covenant.

Kai Tremaine adopted much of Westbrook's doctrinal teaching as he came into his own as pastor of Mount Zion. Kai was perfectly comfortable with his home life of Claudia Jo and the boys, and his private circle of the 60-ish Westbrook and the college girl Shaquia.

What Dallas knew about the bible, about King Solomon and the morality of 1,000 sex partners, was told to her by her pastor, Westbrook, and her lover, Kai. Dallas was simply not a bible reader, not one line of it read during the week. She would occasionally follow along as the subject text was being read from the pulpit Sunday morning, but the book was not a living document to Dallas. It was a cryptic, dense, incomprehensible mishmash that confused and bored her when she tried to



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make sense of it. The fatherly Westbrook's confidence in both his Savior and his women dispersed most of Dallas's doubt about what she was doing, not that she had much guilt about it to begin with.

"Excuse me," Kai said as he abruptly left the table. Kai was a man on his own timetable whose manners were always appropriate to his own timing.

Shaquia's immaturity fairly bled from her eyes, extorting in a faux blush, "Whups."

Dallas looked at this kid, nearly seven years younger than she. A child who wore her emotion on her sleeve. She wondered how many times Kai had hit that before passing her onto Westbrook.

Dallas left the table.

She found Kai in the men's room, glaring at himself in the mirrored wall behind the sinks.

"Dean pinch a nerve?"

Kai glared at himself, ignoring her. "Dean talks too much."

"Dean's among friends, Kai. *Christians.*"

Kai turned and glared at Dallas, then went back to his self-examination.

"The part Dean left out of the story," Dallas said, "is you banged the granddaughter after you put Mother McCargo to bed." Dallas let that hang a moment. "But that woulda ruined his punch line."

Kai ignored her.

Another patron entered the room but Dallas waived him off, "All full up, pal." Then back to Kai. "You hate people laughing at you."

Kai considered opening up to Dallas. Opening up made him vulnerable. He wrestled between his obsession with personal security and his emotional need to vent, meeting himself halfway.

"It's about respect," he said, now glaring down at the elegant sinks. "The bible says laughter is good for the soul. I know it is. But there's a way to talk to people."

Dallas smirked. "You mean, there's a way to talk to you."

"I'm no better than anybody else, Zoë. No worse, either."

"Oh," Dallas said, "you're worse."

Kai turned his head, looking over his shoulder at Dallas, who was standing a few feet away, her arms crossed. "How's that?"



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“You're trying to have it both ways,” Dallas said. “But it's tough to get women to treat you like the Pope after you've had your nose pressed up against their cervix. Seems like you've gotta choose.”

Kai glared at her, puzzled. “What... what did I do to *you*, now?”

Dallas rolled her eyes, she was being childish. “Nothing. Forget it.”

Kai turned to face her, perplexed, “No, what?”

“Oh, you're the wounded party now, right? That's how you ramp up to your bullshit—you find some way to become the one who was wronged?”

Kai was confused, “Zoë, I have no idea what you're talking about.”

Dallas snapped, pointing to the door, “That little twerp out there, Kai. How stupid do you think I am? How stupid do I *need* to be to make this work between us?”

“What?”

“You sit me down in front of that. Rub my nose in it. That's how you'll get off tonight, right? Your little secret. Your little giggle with Dean. Honestly, Kai, I can't imagine why you want to be bothered with me. You obviously like your girls stupid and afraid of you.”

Kai moved toward her, getting angry now, “I resent your accusations.”

Dallas held her ground, “I resent you treating me like a moron. It's not respect you want, Kai—it's fear. You want people to fear you. That discomfort, that paralysis that hits people when you walk in the room—it's like heroin to you. You feed off it.

“So much so, that when it's not there, it actually pisses you off.”

“Dallas—”

“You actually get pissed off that there are people in the world who could give a shit about you being Kai Tremaine.”

“Dallas—”

“It's like you're still walking that tier at Riker's. You still live your life like you're in the joint. Kai, you don't need those tricks anymore. You don't need that armor—” Dallas caressed Kai's cheek, looking into his eyes, “—you're *home now*.”

Kai stared into her eyes, almost losing himself in her as she reached for him, trying to lure his humanity to the surface.

Then he slapped her.

Then he slapped her again, Dallas's head snapping around as she reeled backward into the elegant tile.

Kai locked an iron grip around Dallas's throat. “You're missing the point,” he



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said. "I'm talking about respect."

Dallas struggled to breathe as Kai continued, "See, Church Folk are like children. They only respect what they fear. Respect comes from fear." He leaned in, kissing Dallas on the cheek while still choking her. "You need to watch how you talk to me..."

Within the space of an eye blink, Dallas snapped Kai's hold on her neck. She then thrust both hands forward, lacing her fingers together as she grabbed the back of Kai's head, yanking it down into Dallas's upraised knee.

Kai's nose exploded in blood as Dallas pivoted left, driving her right elbow into the side of Kai's head before sweeping his legs with one of her own, dropping Kai to the tiled floor.

Dallas planted a spiked heel on Kai's throat as she drew her Sig, cocking it as she aimed at Kai's face.

"Put your hands on me again and I'll blow your brains out."

\* \* \*

At 2:15 a.m. on Thursday, August 17th, the New Greater Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church exploded, vaporizing the church and badly damaging several nearby homes.

\* \* \*

Your phone is about to ring," Mr. Dillard said as he swept Dallas's bedroom for electronic bugs. "It will be your partner calling to inform you that Caius Tremaine's dental records match those of the corpse you found amid Zion's wreckage—" Mr. Dillard paused, glaring at Dallas, "—which we both know is not true But, you can't tell them that, can you?"

Mr. Dillard was a gangster. Not a *gangsta*, not those baggy-pants, doo-rag, hot-headed cussing idiots running the streets in Mercedes sedans with little tiny wheels on them. No, Mr. Dillard was a gangster in the truest sense of the word. Having spent twenty years on the New York City police force, Dillard had an extremely long reach, with lots of friends in law enforcement and criminal justice.



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He had absolutely no facial expression, showed no emotion whatsoever. Just a calloused gravedigger's sadness; his ancient eyes giving up just the slightest emote of humanity. At 62, Mr. Dillard was still a lethal hand-to-hand combatant who had not much in the way of a moral struggle about making problems go away.

Which was why he was in Dallas's condo.

"100 arson investigators in the New York Fire Department, but they drag you—the woman involved with the arson victim—in on your day off. Special Investigations Division's Arson/Explosion Squad's supposed to catch, but they give the case to Gates—a half-wit nightwatch oiler with two feet out of the door. Who has the power to do that? Westbrook? Kai? Mara Quebrada?"

Mr. Dillard stopped sweeping, turning to Dallas with his dead man's glare. "There are rats on the deck, Dallas. Which, I presume, is why you sent for me."

"You know where Kai is?" Dallas asked.

"No." Dead Man's Glare.

"You worried about him?"

"No," Mr. Dillard said, packing up his bug sweeper, "and neither are you."

"I don't think you're being surveilled right now," Mr. Dillard said as he walked towards her front door. "But that's a window. Dallas, you were the last person to see Caius Tremaine alive. They will come knocking soon."

"They' who?" Dallas asked.

Mr. Dillard looked back over his shoulder as he opened her door to leave. "Cops. Crooks. Preachers. Mara Quebrada. Everybody." He craned his neck a little, nodding toward the collection of Hefty bags. "Burn it."

\* \* \*

Pastor Donald Westbrook turned to Kilo, the hulking drug kingpin, looking him dead in the eye while pointing to twelve-year old Kai Tremaine, "This boy is my son and I love him. Touch him again and I'll beat you 'til I get tired. Then I'll put three rounds in your ear and dump you in the bay." Westbrook's smile faded to a stony mask. "Look at my face, son."

An hour later, the street gang descended on Howard's where they gorged themselves on the best ribs in town, exchanging war stories and hanging out with The



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Dean. Pastor Westbrook was everybody's dad, beloved in the community. A man to be feared and respected. He stayed, the entire time, at Kilo's side, fathering the young man, pastoring him, trying to win him over.

Trying to save him.

Three days later, Kilo washed up on Brighton Beach with three bullets in his ear.

\* \* \*

I'm not going to ask you again," Dallas said sternly. She mentally kicked herself for trying to act tough while standing in a Macy's changing room in her panties.

The middle-aged white woman smiled, waving a hand dismissively. "Let me give you my card—then you'll understand!"

As the woman rifled through her dumpy, vinyl, dime-store purse, Dallas suddenly remembered where she'd seen this woman before—at the fire scene. This was the same woman who'd approached Hosun outside of Zion.

"So much junk in here..." the woman muttered as she rummaged. She grabbed a handful of personal items—lipstick, breath mints, keys, coupons—handing them to Dallas, "You mind, dear...?"

Dallas held her crap, realizing she should probably be on guard. But Dallas had had her back to the woman for at least ten minutes. If the woman intended to do Dallas harm, she could have done that and been gone.

"...I know it's in here somewhere... keys... penlight..." she kept handing her crap to Dallas, whose hands were getting full of the woman's personal items. "...compact... Kleenex... gun..." she handed Dallas a Colt .38 snub-nose revolver, "...badge..." she kept rummaging while handing Dallas a New York City Police Lieutenant's shield.

Dallas said nothing, just watched this strange person whom she'd never before met but who now held Dallas's future in her hands.

"Ah, here we go!" the woman said with motherly satisfaction. She handed Dallas her business card while using her free hand to scoop all of her crap back into her purse. "Thanks, Missy." Dallas read the card.



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MARY WALKER PRICE  
LIEUTENANT  
ORGANIZED CRIME CONTROL BUREAU  
POLICE DEPARTMENT  
CITY OF NEW YORK

“Hi, I’m Mary,” the woman said, beaming as she held out her hand for a handshake. “I’ll need your gun and your shield.”

\* \* \*

Inside the conference room, NYPD Lieutenant Mary Walker Price leaned in, becoming more intimate with Dallas, now, “On any given Sunday—three services, 2,500 occupancy, Zion might take in, what, little under half a million a Sunday? A lot of it in cash, in small denominations—just like drug money? You have any idea how much money these huge ministries rake in week after week, and nobody, I mean nobody, not us, not the IRS, nobody—is paying these folks much attention?

“Politicians give these ministries cover because, were they to start poking around they’d find so much corruption, so much mis-management and mis-appropriation of funds, so many pastors living in mansions and driving Bentleys, so many pastors’ wives wearing diamonds—so much *shit*—” Mary turned to Deputy Commissioner Graham, “—excuse me,” and back to Dallas, “—that a great many of these ministries would have to be reclassified as what they really are—rackets.” Mary tapped her index finger loudly on the desk, “Which is where we come in. Our motto at OCCB: *Rackets Are What We Do*.”

“This Appian Ministerial Alliance? These guys are the Mafia. Oh, they call themselves whatever they call themselves, and they tell themselves whatever they need to sleep at night, but these are wrong guys, Marshal. They reportedly take in around ten million in donations every year, but the figure is much more like thirty-five million as they take in copious amounts of mystery coin that just magically shows up in the count room, where their hand-picked guys skim their laundry fee off the top before cutting the checks to these various charities, who in turn deliver the



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money to guys like Jimmy Cats for the bosses in Colombia.

“They preach Jesus on Sunday morning but they're bangin' the secretary come Sunday night. These old farts—kindly father figures preaching the love of Christ—will push a button just as fast as Tony No Nose and the Ginny ball-breakers in Bensonhurst. They build their hopes on things eternal, but they settle their differences out in Edgemere at two in the morning with tire irons.

“Zion was a plant by the Colombian mob, designed, from the ground up, as a Mara Quebrada cash Laundromat, a deal Kai Tremaine made with Jimmy Cats in a Lagos whorehouse. These pastors—the ‘Five Fathers’— were all involved in laundering drug cash for some very scary people in Colombia, using a violent Ecuadorian street gang in Hempstead under the protection of crooked cops.

“These guys are the *mob*, Marshal Dallas. And we think they saw us rounding third and made Kai Tremaine go away.

“This is the Come To Jesus meeting, Marshal.” Mary slid Dallas's FDNY shield and gun toward her. “Pick those up, you're a cop. You're working for the Task Force. You're bringing down the bad guys.

“Can't be a Christian and screw the dope-dealing pastor. Can't carry that badge and turn your head.

“You gotta choose. Gotta do it now.”

\* \* \*

Martillo came to a stop in the blackness of Edgemere's beach. His partner used the butt of his assault rifle to scoop aside some of the light, sandy soil as Martillo handed Pastor Westbrook a flashlight. Westbrook snapped the light on, aiming it at the desolate soil at their feet.

The Reverend Michael Alexander, pastor of Macedonia Temple Missionary Baptist Church—and Dean Westbrook's partner in the Five Fathers—lay in the soil. Most of his face had been caved in by a tire iron. Rigor mortis had locked what was left of his face into a permanent scream.

“You guys be the *Three Fathers* now,” Martillo said.



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Now what?!" Claudia Jo demanded as she approached her Gold Mist Cadillac DTS, one of several luxury vehicles New Greater Mount Zion leased for Pastor Kai Tremaine. Mount Zion's First Lady left her DTS in a handicap access parking space, Kai having pulled in a favor with a deputy police commissioner to get Claudia Jo a handicapped license plate even though there was nothing physically wrong with Claudia Jo that Jenny Craig couldn't cure. A CLERGY placard, complete with cross and bible imagery, was prominently displayed on her dashboard, even though Kai never drove the thing and Claudia Jo was hardly clergy.

Approaching her car as the sun set, Claudia Jo became disgusted—a couple of vagrants were sitting on it. "Get the eff off my damned car!!" she screamed at the two vagrants.

Which was when she noticed one of the vagrants was a Chinese gangster wearing British Racing Green Armani and a \$6,000 IWC Portofino watch. The other vagrant appeared to be a priest.

"Sister—we could use your help," Chip said.

"I don't have any cash on me!" Claudia Jo snarled, waving them off, "Now get out of my way!" Claudia Jo had a wad of 50's in her purse.

"Not tonight," Hosun said, displaying his FDNY Fire Marshal's shield.

"What— you're a cop?!" Claudia Jo said, blurting out her unexpressed thought. Her surprise was not that the guy was Chinese, and tall Chinese at that, but that a cop could afford Armani. She concluded the suit must be a knockoff, but a good one.

"New York City Fire Marshal, ma'am," Hosun said, using the dreaded "ma'am" word.

"—?! Where's the fire?"

"There's no fire, ma'am."

"We'll, then, move," Claudia Jo said, moving to her driver door.

"No, ma'am, I don't think I will," Hosun said, putting his shield back in his pocket. He turned to Chip, "I hate this part: the part where I have to explain a Fire Marshal is not a Firefighter. Well, he is, but he's more than a Firefighter, he's a Firefighter who can lock people up."

Turning back to Claudia Jo, Hosun explained, "Problem is, most people don't know that. So every time I identify myself as a New York City Fire Marshal, I gotta go through this long explanation of how I have the power to lock people up. Cops don't have that problem. Everybody watches TV, everybody see the cops arrest



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people, so most people see a cop badge and just give it up.

“People rarely give it up to a Fire Marshal, forcing the Fire Marshal to have to break bad on the street whereas a cop wouldn’t need to. It’s the major flaw in the FDNY’s little mini police force: no TV shows. I wish they had at least one TV show about very tall Oriental Fire Marshals so I wouldn’t have to go through this shit every time.”

Claudia Jo Tremaine looked at Hosun like he was crazy. With deep-set, hostile eyes darting back and forth like Richard Nixon.

“But... there’s no fire.” Claudia Jo reiterated.

“Ma’am, I’m an arson investigator,” Hosun said, losing his patience. “Means—and, follow me, now—I’m *investigating* a case of *arson*. One you may have heard about—the church your vehicle is registered to?”

Hosun stooped a little to look her in the eye. “Lady, your husband is dead. Your church blew up last night, in case you didn’t hear about it. Or, is this the first stage of grief—shopping...?”

Never having been about the back-down, Claudia Jo sauntered toward Hosun, bullying. “First of all, I don’t believe Kai’s dead. If you’re an even half-assed investigator, chances are you don’t believe it, either. Second, I don’t know anything. That much I know—that I don’t know anything!”

\* \* \*

Dallas tried the car key she'd found on the would-be assassin in every Ford within a one-block radius before finding the undercover officer's getaway vehicle. Dallas squatted in the rain with her forensics kit, flashing her Grace Arson Scanner around the car interior while Westbrook held an umbrella over her, curious about her work.

“More iodine...?” Westbrook asked, inhaling a freshly-lit Lucky Stripe.

Dallas didn't entirely trust Westbrook. Didn't trust which phone calls Westbrook might make after she left. But she found an almost perverse comfort in his presence and could use the sounding board, helping her think through things.

“Faint gas traces,” she said, “but that could just be gasoline fumes.”

As Westbrook watched, Dallas used forensics tape to pull lifts off of the steer-



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ing wheel and the column-mounted gear shift of the old Fairmont. She wasn't looking for prints so much as looking for trace evidence—residue of what the cop might have touched.

Dallas exhaled, getting annoyed. “Felix Amaru says Sanchez was just a guy having breakfast.”

“And you believe Amaru?” Westbrook asked.

Dallas chewed her lip pensively, “I believe God.”

“What?”

“I believe God healed his little girl and Felix Amaru is a man who hates to be in anyone's debt.”

Westbrook smiled at her, admiring her intellect. “Which means Amaru's a saint.”

Dallas went back to work. “See, this is what helps me through this,” she said, focusing again on the car. “This is the only thing keeping me sane right now. This—” she picked through the messy discards in the car, “—little bits of junk. Distracts me from what a mess my life is right now.”

Dallas paused, staring at the jigsaw puzzle in front of her. Westbrook, Graham, Sanchez, somebody wanted her to see something. Westbrook sniffing that guy inside, why not hang a banner: DALLAS! SMELL THIS GUY! Which gave Dallas the guy's car, where there was something somebody wanted her to see. “There's a message, here—somewhere—for me.”

“You're sure?” Westbrook asked.

“Graham leaves this undercover cop outside in the rain to stake out your church, knowing I'd come looking for you sooner or later. I don't know where Sanchez fits, but I doubt his hands are as clean as Amaru wants me to believe. The guy driving this car either works for Sanchez or is working against him.”

Dallas continued processing the Ford. “New Greater Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church was the bank, the clearing house for millions of dollars in dope cash.”

Inside the Fairmont was the usual cop crap, mostly empty coffee cups and magazines, bottles of urine from staking out Westbrook for extended periods. By switching among the dozen or so colored LED's in her scanner, Dallas saw intermittent and very brief fluorescing which indicated trace amounts of explosive residue. Ten out of ten times it was nothing—gasoline fumes, Freon leaks in the air conditioner—but Dallas swabbed the driver's seat and took samples from the urine bottles.



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"If the church was making so much money for everybody—cops and crooks," Westbrook speculated, "—why would anybody want to blow it up?"

"Pastor, if I knew that, I wouldn't be out here on my knees trying to read Graham's tea leaves." Dallas held a plastic capsule at eye level. "He's sent me a message. For the life of me, I can't figure out why you couldn't just tell me what this guy wants. Instead, I gotta be Batman—the Riddler plants a clue inside a potted palm."

Dallas scrutinized the vial. "My friend is dead. Graham killed her for nothing and for no reason. And won't even let me grieve."

Dallas bent the plastic capsule in half, breaking an interior seal between her urine sample and a chemical testing agent. She shook the capsule vigorously, holding it at eye level again.

"Let me guess," Westbrook smiled, "he's pregnant...?"

"Pentaerythritol Dinitrate," Dallas said, studying the capsule.

"You mean, it's not urine?"

"It's a dinner invitation—Graham asking me out on a date."

Westbrook seemed genuinely puzzled. Dallas considered the remote possibility Westbrook didn't already know the answers to his own questions.

"Pentaerythritol Dinitrate is what Pentaerythritol Tetranitrate degrades to in urine." She turned to look back at Westbrook. "Somebody who's been around demolition explosives for any period time—Flex-X or sheet explosive—breathes PETN in, pisses out Pentaerythritol Dinitrate."

Dallas cracked a second vial, shaking it. "Of course, I'm in a hurry—testing for specific things, following a hunch. Could be all manner of things in this guy's piss."

"What's that one?" Westbrook asked.

"Lifts off the steering wheel—stuff on his hands. Looks like grease."

"Another hunch?"

Dallas stared at the vial. "Yeah."

"What are you testing for?"

"Monosaccharides," Dallas said, staring at the vial. "Powdered sugar."

Dallas reached behind her, snapping her Sony Halo out of its caddy on her belt. She called up Google Earth, zooming in on Long Island, New York. "Say Graham is planning to blow somebody up. Who's left?"

"Me," Westbrook said.

"He went cheap on you, sent Colonel Mustard with the candlestick holder.



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Which meant he probably blew his wad on something else—something bigger.”

Westbrook gave it some thought. “Lotta folks in the pipeline, Zoë.”

“Yeah, but who can hurt him? Who's left?”

Dallas turned her MicroPC toward Westbrook, displaying a satellite photo of the roof of Hempstead Village's Maxwell Arts building.

On the roof was a mattress-sized object covered in tinfoil.

\* \* \*

Dallas flattened herself against the wall on the landing as another rifle shot tore through the wall just above her head, Dallas locking her Sig into a two-handed grip on Bobby Jackson, who was aiming a stainless finish 6.8mm Ruger Mini-14 Ranch rifle at her from the second floor, several steps above.

Bobby was dressed in worn jeans and a grimy “One Way” tee-shirt, with a One Way traffic sign pointing upward and the Christian sign of the fish near the bottom. He was thin, unshaven, and in desperate need of a haircut. Small drops of blood dripped from his nose.

“Bobby, put the gun down!” Dallas ordered. “Nobody's here to hurt you!”

“Yeah?” Bobby yelled, wiping his nose with one hand, “How about those two downstairs?!”

“Well, other than those guys,” Dallas said.

“You're lying! You're a liar! A liar will not tarry in the House of God!!!”

Dallas actually recognized that scripture, though she couldn't say where it was found in the bible. “Listen, Bobby, I'm a Christian, too!”

“Liar!”

“No--I haven't always been a very good Christian--I'm still learning about it, really--but, yes, I am. I know that Jesus is alive, that He saved me, that He lives in me.”

“John 3:16!” Bobby shouted.

“What?”

“John 3:16! Tell me what that says!”

Dallas had no idea. She was sure she'd read passages in the book of John at some point, but had no idea what they might be.



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"Most famous passage in the bible!" Bobby sneered, again wiping his nose. "What's it say?"

In the basement, Mary pressed her back against the basement wall as she moved cautiously forward, shining a penlight flashlight through the darkness. Bobby's tiny rat hole of an apartment was empty. It was also the messiest, stinkiest guy's place Mary had ever seen; dirty clothes discarded everywhere, books, magazines strewn all over.

Mary flicked on the light, hoping this nut didn't have it rigged to explode. The walls of Bobby's basement apartment were fairly covered in crude, hand-written bible verses:

A GOOD TREE CANNOT BRING FORTH EVIL FRUIT,  
NEITHER CAN A CORRUPT TREE BRING FORTH GOOD FRUIT.  
THEY THAT PLOW INIQUITY, AND SOW WICKEDNESS, REAP THE SAME.  
BUT WHOREMONGERS AND ADULTERERS GOD WILL JUDGE.  
THEY THAT SOW IN TEARS SHALL REAP IN JOY.

"Wonderful..." Mary softly exhaled, genuinely chilled by the psychotic scrawl. The bible genuinely frightened Mary, who wasn't particularly religious mainly because of phonies like Kai Tremaine and lunatics like Bobby Jackson. Between the two extremes was the mystery, the puzzle of God's existence and God's purpose, something Mary thought about only when Harry got sick or when the dog got hit by a car.

All the rest was for somebody else.

Hearing gunshots upstairs, and having cleared the basement, Mary turned to pursue Dallas, pausing at the staircase for a brief second as her mind finally processed something she'd seen upon entering: among the debris in the basement, several industrial-sized 40-pound sacks of sugar.

Upstairs, Bobby was becoming impatient as he pressed Dallas for evidence of her Christian commitment. "What's the verse say?!"

Dallas kept her stern glare. "I don't know."

"23rd Psalm!"

"Bobby—"

"C'mon—*The Lord is my shepherd*— then what?!"

"I don't know."

Bobby tightened his grip, snarling. "You're no Christian."



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"Since when is there a test for being a Christian?"

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves," Bobby said, snarling. "Ye shall know them by their fruits."

"Bobby—"

"Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" Bobby asked, his voice getting louder. "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit!" Bobby wiped his nose.

"Bobby, you've got to listen—"

"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them!"

\* \* \*

Hosun awoke to intermingled sounds of a crying baby and cartoon sound effects on dueling TV sets. Panic set in briefly as he became momentarily disoriented, wondering, perhaps, if he'd fallen asleep in some kind of Ghetto Welfare Mommies Bar. The ungodly stench of a cheeseburger frying in a skillet first thing in the morning assaulted him, making his eyes water as he tried to decipher the blurred image before him: a big butt.

A big, fat, wide-ride heinie in graying, 3-day old big drawers with little ducks on them. Annette, the calorie-challenged teenage mom, had her back to Hosun, leaning forward, resting her elbows on the kitchen bar six feet from the sofa bed Hosun was sleeping on. Hosun had no idea who Annette was, which was fine considering Annette had no idea who Hosun was, either. At sixteen, Annette was still quite child-like. The cartoons blaring on the TV in her room were for her, not her infant daughter. And, much like her baby, Annette had absolutely no sense of modesty. She knew nobody in the house was lusting after her, least of all the giant Chinese guy sleeping on the couch.

*You've got to be kidding me...* Hosun muttered, shutting his eyes. He tried to screen out the crying, the TV's, the cheeseburger at nine in the morning and, above



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all, the giant Orca Butt. He tried convincing himself he'd been abducted by aliens and taken to Planet Orca. That, if he'd just click his heels over and over, he'd eventually wake up in the sanity of his own bed.

Which was when he heard the gunshot.

Annette, playing with Hosun's tiny .9mm Springfield XD Sub-Compact, had squeezed the trigger, putting a hole in Chip's stove. Annette shrieked at the noise and shrieked again when the ejecting shell casing burned her skin. Annette dropped the XD to the counter, where it bounced, firing again, the bullet ricocheting twice around the kitchen before it zipped past Hosun's head, embedding itself into a picture frame..

The noise jolted Hosun out of his complacency, Hosun jumping out of the sofa bed wearing boxer shorts and his tee shirt. "What the hell are you doing?!?"

"Don't yell at me!" Annette screamed.

"You start firing my gun, I tend to yell, you dopey kid! And who eats *cheeseburgers for breakfast?!?"*

"I thought it was a toy! It's looks like a toy!"

"Annette—what'd you do—!?" Chip demanded as he arrived, wearing a bathrobe and toweling off his hair.

"That's it! That's right! Take his side! It's, like, every time!" Annette stormed out.

Hosun pursued her, yelling, "But, it's my first time here! Let me go out and come in again so you can shoot me twice and be sure it's 'Like, every time!'" Hosun stopped at the edge of the living room, "Hey, don't you want your breakfast?!" Turning back to Chip. "Nice bim y'got there, Chips."

Chip turned off the burner under the frying pan. "My sister's kid. It's a long story."

Hosun checked his XD. "Scratched it. She scratched it. Seen too many of them TV shows, 'Drop the gun, pal!' You don't drop a \$800 Springfield XD Sub-Compact in stainless steel finish! Kids these days!"

\* \* \*



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The badly-weakened living room floor gave way entirely under the weight of the water, forcing Dallas deeper into the mire. Dallas crashed to the cellar amid a rain of debris from the living room, some of it aflame now, adding fuel to the fire already burning in the cellar. The hot water scalded Dallas and she was bleeding, the chemically-tainted black water now a severe biohazard which threatened to send Dallas into septic shock.

Dizzy's company had cut the gas lines long before, but the house collapse brought burning debris into the cellar, which was now engulfed in flame and clogged with thick, black smoke. With only minutes of air remaining, and her attack line some eight feet over her head, Dallas had absolutely no idea which way was out.

Cellar fires were a firefighter's worst nightmare. They were veritable pressure cookers of combustible objects with few areas of egress. Several small windows, barely big enough for Dallas to squeeze through, lined the top of the cellar, but Dizzy's company were now firing water through them, raking across the house's foundation, attacking the fire in the basement. That made those windows an iffy exit strategy because, if Dizzy's company didn't realize Dallas was down there, the blast of water would shove her right into the flames.

Dallas remembered seeing a window well at the far end of the property, likely indicating a larger cellar window situated below ground. That window would likely be grated or barred, but it was out of Dizzy's attack line and would therefore be the lesser of the evils.

Dallas squeezed through burning debris, shoving her shoulder into what might once have been a sofa or a dresser, pushing the debris aside to find a pocket of air in the black. Dallas tumbled into the tiny scrawl space. So far as places to die went, it was good a place as any.

Dallas felt herself going into shock, so she had to keep moving. She had no idea who her attacker was and, for the moment, didn't care who he was. That was business for another day. Dallas pulled her hood over her head, feeling the hot, sticky matted Nomex weave on her scalp. She pulled on her Dregers SCBA mask, narrowing her eyes with conviction as she pulled herself together.

Dallas placed her firefighter's helmet over the hood. If this would be the moment of her death, she'd face it on her own terms.

Dallas looked through the black. She was only half-conscious at best. The thick blackness told her absolutely nothing. And she had only moments of air left in her Dregers pack. *Lord, which way out?*



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So, either NYPD Commissioner Leo Graham is the True Believer cop or the scumbag cop,” Hosun said, raising his hand. “How many vote 'scumbag'? How many vote 'True Believer'?”

“If it quacks like a scumbag...” Silva muttered.

“What if he's both?” Dallas said, staring at Oletta's carpet.

The room fell silent again.

“What if Graham really was caught up in all of this, but had a change of heart?”

“Found Jesus?” Martillo sneered.

“Stranger things have happened, Sergeant. What if, in the process of repenting, of cleaning up his act, Graham knowingly allowed these pastors to get whacked?”

“I mean, nobody's absolutely one thing or another,” she continued. “We all live somewhere between those extremes. What if Graham is a good boss pretending to be a bad boss in order to bring down a Colombian cartel?”

“Lady, if Graham is both,” Martillo sneered, “that makes him even more dangerous. Look, you can't be just a little crooked. You got any sin, you're a sinner.”

“We all got sin,” Dallas said, her head still bowed. “We're all sinners.”

“Yeah,” Martillo glared, “but some of us are working on it.”

\* \* \*

Pastor Donald T. Westbrook extinguished his Lucky Stripe in an ashtray and recovered his pistol. “I'll be 68 in November, Felix. Ain't got many days left. So, any time you're ready for that other thing, you just holler.”

\* \* \*

ZION: A LOVE STORY is an urban crime drama set against a candid perspective on the culture of the black church. Themes: faith, ethics, the quality of morality, police/firefighter drama. 197,000 words / 49 Chapters. For a complete outline and sample chapters, please send your request to:

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**zion**  
A LOVE STORY

Hosun muttered, teetering his head while mocking Amaru, “Bite my twelve-dollar blueberry muffin, you freakishly tall Korean moron...”

He assumed there was a rolled-up carpet in his immediate future.

## The Author

Christopher **James Priest**, 47, is a critically acclaimed comic book writer and novelist. Priest is the first African-American writer and editor to work in the comic book industry. His groundbreaking *Black Panther* series was lauded by *Entertainment Weekly* and *The Village Voice*. *Static Shock*, which Priest co-created with Milestone Media, Inc., has become the first nationally syndicated African American super-hero animated series, and the first act of 2005's *Batman Begins* was largely based upon Priest's *Batman* comic book work.

Priest has also written and recorded numerous songs and served as producer and sideman for various bands and choirs, and has developed numerous properties for Hollywood including projects with BET President Reginald Hudlin, Hamm & Kitchens, Inc., Edward R. Pressman Productions Inc. and Eddie Murphy Productions. He currently serves as a Baptist minister in Colorado Springs, where he founded PraiseNet Electronic Media ([www.praisenet.org](http://www.praisenet.org)) in 2002.



Priest is a 4-time American Advertising Federation Addy® award winner for graphic and web design. His most current work includes *Gunplay*, a novella for Platinum Studios, *Sleepers*, a trilogy of novels from iBooks/Simon & Schuster, and the hit series *Captain America & The Falcon* for Marvel Entertainment. Please do not call him “Chris.”

