

Chapter 2 Let There be Light

Blake called the number on the card in the payment envelope, reaching a private line for Stanfield Turner a few minutes after Brother Henry and the ladies left his office. Gil Harwood, Mr. Turner's spokesperson, answered the call.

Blake introduced himself and expressed his preference to speak directly with Mr. Turner. Gil complied and put the call on speaker.

From somewhere in the room, the familiar voice of Stanfield Turner said, "If you have this number, it has been given to you by one of my closest confidants. That describes Gil as well, so please feel free to talk."

"Mr. Turner, my name is Blake Franklin with Franklin Investigative Services," Blake began.

"Yes, of course, Mr. Franklin. Brother Henry said he was meeting with you today. The fact that you are calling means you meet my requirements," Stanfield said.

"The purpose of my call Mr. Turner is to determine if there is anything I think I can do to help you. Is it acceptable to talk over the telephone with Gil there?" Blake inquired.

"I have no concerns regarding Gil. However, I believe it best to meet in person to discuss my situation and provide some background information. Would you be available this afternoon around five?"

"I can make that work. Where would you like to meet?" Blake asked.

"I'll let you and Gil work that out, Mr. Franklin. I'm heading into another meeting now. I look forward to our discussion, and your utmost discretion is both expected and appreciated," Turner said. Then Blake was on with Gil to make arrangements.

Gil said, "Bishop Turner will return to the mountain around four-thirty this afternoon. I will text you the address. When you arrive, follow the directions you get. I will meet you and take you to Bishop Turner's office."

Blake knew the Dallas-Fort Worth area well enough to know the only "mountains" around were former landfills. He didn't think Stanfield Turner would have a home or office in one of those locations.

"Am I driving to the hill country for this meeting? If so, getting to Austin will take three hours, so I may run a little late."

Gil responded as though he was talking to a child, "Mr. Franklin, if you are unaware of the bishop's ministry location, it is near Eagle Mountain Lake in Wise County. Ergo the mountain, and his home is here on the ministry grounds. As I said I will send you the address. Is this the number to text, or shall I wait for you to provide another?"

Blake was instantly irritated with Gil but letting him know would have been foolish and rude. So, he said, "Yes, that's my number. Thank you, Gil. You have been so—"

Gil hung up, and immediately after an address came through on Blake's phone.

The drive to Eagle Mountain Lake took thirty minutes. It took another ten to find, Go, Tell It on the Mountain Ministries, two miles off a four-lane highway. Blake noted that the six lanes to and from the ministry grounds were in better shape than those cared for by the county. As he drove the two-mile entry

drive, he read the electronic billboards placed every half mile. They had intermittent messages like *"Leave Your Burdens at His Feet,"* and then the screen filled with the image of Stanfield Turner.

The next billboard Blake passed read *"By His Stripes, We Are Healed,"* followed by the same photo of Turner. The electronic billboards lined both sides of the road, so there was no need to wonder if he was going the right way.

Blake came to a point where the three lanes in and the three lanes out veered to the west slightly. A single lane veered to the right, and the directions told him to follow the single lane. He had driven for about a half mile when the roadway was suddenly covered completely by a canopy of trees that lined both sides of the narrow road.

Blake remembered an old verse his mother used to recite when Blake had gotten into mischief with his friends as a young boy: *"Narrow is the Road, and Straight is the Gate that Leads to Life, and Few Will Find It."*

At ten years of age, he didn't understand her point. Then at seventeen, when he got drunk with fellow players on his high school team, his mother spoke more clearly, and he understood perfectly.

She had told him, "Don't follow the wrong influencers in your life, Blake. Instead, be a positive influence others should follow because the road to righteousness is very narrow, and too many people will never find it."

After emerging beyond the canopy covering, Blake saw a guard house about a quarter mile ahead and a narrow gate preventing further approach. He stopped, and two uniformed guards came to either side of his truck.

The guard to Blake's right ran an undercarriage inspection mirror beneath his truck, scanning the vehicle's right side, rear,

and then left side. Meanwhile, the guard on the left approached Blake's open window.

He was dressed in a dark grey uniform adorned with a gold embroidered emblem, featuring three crosses on a mountain, with a gold eagle perched on top of the crosses. A sign with the same image was displayed on the front of the brick and stone guardhouse.

"May I have your name and see your driver's license, please," the guard requested.

Blake provided both, and the guard took his license into the guardhouse while the other guard continued inspecting the underside of Blake's truck.

Finally, he peered into the bed and said, "I need you to open your toolbox for me, sir."

Blake complied, unlocking the toolbox, and allowing the guard to inspect its contents, lifting the trays to ensure nothing suspicious was hidden.

The inspecting guard returned Blake's license and stated, "All good."

The first guard handed Blake a visitor's badge that now displayed Blake's license photo and instructed him, "Keep this badge on your coat pocket the whole time you are here. When you go through the gate, follow the road, and go left at the Y you'll come to. Someone will meet you out front. Have a good day, and God Bless You."

Blake fastened the visitor's badge to his coat and returned to the driver's seat as the gate descended into the ground. He drove through and entered another canopy of trees that obstructed his view, leaving only the road visible. Upon emerging on the other side into bright sunshine, he lowered his visor and beheld a magnificent mansion about half a mile ahead. Blake was so awestruck by the grandeur of the estate

that he missed the left turn at the Y intersection and continued straight ahead.

As he approached a downhill slope leading to a towering steel door over what seemed to be an underground tunnel, a voice from the visitor's badge interrupted, "Stop your vehicle, Mr. Franklin. You need to back up two thousand feet and take the left roadway at the Y."

Blake acknowledged the voice but also whispered, "Thank you God, for guiding me in the right direction."

There was no audible response, so he reversed as instructed, taking care not to leave any tire tracks on the meticulously maintained landscape. He made the left turn, and within a hundred feet the road transitioned from concrete to brick cobblestone, leading to a spacious circular reception area in front of a modern castle.

Nestled atop a pristine hill, bathed in the warm embrace of the afternoon sun, stood the opulent mansion of the world-famous televangelist, Stanfield Turner. The grandeur rivaled the majesty of castles in distant lands. This resplendent residence, an example of excess, rose like a celestial citadel against the azure canvas of the sky. Approaching it was akin to stepping into the hallowed pages of a sacred storybook.

As Blake passed through the imposing iron gates and ventured down the winding driveway, the first glimpse of this architectural marvel left him awestruck. The mansion, a symphony of intricate stone and marble, sprawled across the landscape with an air of regal authority. Its front elevation adorned with religious artwork and extravagant detailing, conveyed a message of devotion and divine opulence.

A towering figure stood at the base of a staircase waiting for him. The man appeared to be seven feet tall, incredibly muscular, and completely bald. He reminded Blake of some of

the WWE wrestlers he enjoyed watching on television. Blake parked his truck in a designated visitor spot and stepped out.

"Mr. Franklin, please follow me inside," the imposing figure said in a terse tone.

"You must be Gil Harwood," Blake remarked.

"Looks like you took note. Good for you," Gil replied.

They entered through a ten-foot-tall iron door adorned with intricate engravings. Artwork covered the entire surface, featuring depictions of Moses at the top left and Jesus at the top right, along with various biblical scenes. Although Blake recognized some of them, he didn't have the opportunity to appreciate the art further, as Gil's long strides left little room for art appreciation.

The entry hall radiated grandeur in every detail. The ceiling soared to thirty feet and was adorned with a colorful fresco depicting a scene from Genesis. The art showed Baby Moses floating toward Pharaoh's daughter in the Nile River. Interestingly, a castle in the background resembled the very castle Blake was currently visiting.

The floors were pristine marble, and the walls boasted dark, highly polished wood panels with intricate millwork from floor to ceiling. These polished walls were occasionally interrupted by expensive art pieces, all elegantly framed in gold. Blake was directed to a room on the right. It was situated about fifteen feet from the base of a carpeted, slightly curved staircase that stretched twenty feet wide as it ascended to the second level.

Crafted from the finest mahogany, its banisters were etched with intricate carvings depicting scenes from biblical lore. The soft illumination from crystal sconces bathed the staircase in a warm, welcoming glow, like a guiding light on a sacred journey.

To the right of the entry hall, a pair of ornate double doors led to the beautifully appointed library. As the doors swung open, the rich scent of aged leather and polished wood filled the air. Cherry wood shelves lined the walls, showcasing an impressive collection of leather-bound books, each a repository of knowledge and faith.

The televangelist's private sanctuary, the library embodied a fusion of opulence and spirituality. It was a place where one could lose oneself in the pages of wisdom or simply bask in the presence of faith. The cherry wood shelves, with their treasure trove of knowledge, seemed to whisper the secrets of the ages to those who sought them.

Two sumptuous sofas and two wingback leather chairs took their positions in the center of the room, facing one another as if engaged in eternal conversation. Plush cushions invited contemplation, while the intricate patterns of the upholstery hinted at a tale untold. Between the seating arrangements rested a round oriental rug, a tapestry of deep blues and rich reds.

The walls of the library were filled with paintings of biblical scenes, each brushstroke a testament to the televangelist's unwavering belief. The artwork, bathed in the soft glow of strategically placed spotlights, came to life with a radiant aura. Scenes of miracles and parables unfolded in vivid color, transporting visitors to the sacred stories they depicted.

Outside, the fall afternoon sun began to slip below the horizon, casting a warm golden glow through the library's windows. The room exuded a sense of tranquility that transcended time and space. It was a haven of resplendent beauty, where faith and opulence converged in harmonious splendor.

Upon entering the room, the most beautiful library Blake had ever entered, Gil gestured to one of two burgundy leather sofas facing each other in the center of the room.

A long, low table between them caught Blake's eye. It appeared to be hand-carved from a substantial tree trunk, with a piece of granite in the middle and a thick, glossy layer of epoxy. It was the only piece in the room that could be described as "rustic," though it was still well beyond Blake's budget.

Two walls in the library were lined from the floor to the twenty-foot-high ceiling with mahogany bookshelves. These shelves featured library ladders on rollers, providing access to the leather-bound books that lay on every shelf.

Gil instructed, "Wait here for the bishop. Try not to get lost again."

Blake had reached the limit of his patience with Gil, and against his better judgment he retorted, "Do we have a problem, Harwood? Every time you speak to me, it comes across like you've got a bug in your ass."

Gil had been heading out of the room but halted and approached Blake. He leaned over him, stating, "You really don't want a problem with me, little man – trust me. Mind your manners when speaking with the bishop, and we won't have any issues."

Blake had dealt with bullies both on and off duty, during his time as a Fort Worth police officer, and he wasn't easily intimidated.

Stepping back, he replied, "Trust me? How about you mind..."

"Enough, both of you," interrupted the bishop as he entered the room.

Blake felt a surge of embarrassment at allowing himself to be provoked, especially considering the substantial retainer at stake. The bishop approached and extended a manicured hand, saying, "Thank you for meeting me on such short notice."

Blake shook the offered hand and concealed his surprise at how different the bishop appeared in person. Standing at just five feet five give or take an inch, and likely weighing around one forty, the bishop hardly matched the imposing image Blake had anticipated. His black hair, featuring a single silver streak, was reminiscent of a skunk, but didn't appear as exaggerated in person. He spoke softly, yet his presence seemed to fill the room.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Turner," Blake responded. He added, "I mean, I'm delighted to meet you, Bishop Turner," when he noted Gil tense at his informal words.

The bishop chuckled lightly and asked Gil to leave them so they could speak in private. Gil complied, though reluctantly, and motioned for Blake to take a seat on one of the leather sofas. The bishop settled into a leather wingback chair positioned at the edge of the large oriental rug that covered the room's center.

Blake was chagrined by his momentary loss of composure, particularly with such a substantial case at hand. The bishop initiated the conversation, taking Blake on a journey through the last fifteen years of his life.

The bishop's ministry began in Oceanside, California, with a modest congregation of well-to-do individuals. Within two years his following had grown, and he received a divine directive from God to relocate to a larger place of worship. In a remarkable turn, he constructed a cathedral capable of accommodating eight thousand people. The construction process spanned nearly two years, and during this time, God apparently instructed him to begin faith healing.

When the subject of faith healing arose, the bishop fixed his gaze on Blake and remarked, "I understand you maintain a healthy skepticism about God bestowing the power to heal upon a mortal, Mr. Franklin."

Blake simply shrugged and replied, "Please, go on, Bishop Turner."

The bishop continued his narrative, "When I began my ministry, Mr. Franklin, I never anticipated receiving the anointing. Yet once it came to me, it felt blasphemous to withhold the gift God had entrusted me to share. Nevertheless, the healing of my fellow man became both a blessing and a burden. You see, my ministry exploded. When our new church opened eleven years ago, it was too small for my congregation. Consequently, I delivered three sermons every weekend to accommodate the throngs seeking the love of God."

The bishop sat back, crossed his legs, and continued, clearly comfortable with his own narrative.

"That's when my church purchased the arena, which had been home to the Dallas basketball team, who had also left it for a much larger home. It is now the home of Go, Tell It on the Mountain Ministries," the bishop explained.

Blake inquired, "I understand you need me to investigate a problem. Does it have anything to do with how quickly your ministry has grown or your claim to be a miracle worker? With all due respect, of course."

The bishop cautioned, "I usually find that when someone says, '*with all due respect*,' what follows isn't very respectful at all. I would appreciate it if you would not tarnish our brand-new relationship just yet. Allow me to finish the backdrop, and then I will share with you the reason for your presence here. You see, the root cause of the issue lies in the story I am about to relay."

Blake regretted his attempt to expedite matters and said, "Of course, please continue, Bishop."

The bishop continued his narrative, "So, the ministry was flourishing, and we garnered substantial interest from around the country and the world. Even before relocating to our cramped new sanctuary in Oceanside, the *Christian Hearts*

Television Network approached me about televising one of my weekend services. While the broader television audience undoubtedly helped expand my ministry, it was the anointed power to heal that caused our growth to surpass all expectations. It was fulfilling to spread the gospel and share His message with hungry people worldwide."

Unintentionally, Blake's gaze wandered around the opulent room and its surroundings within the castle. He wondered how much of the abundance was being shared with those seekers in need around the world.

The bishop, keenly observant, addressed Blake's unspoken thoughts, "When I began my ministry, Mr. Turner, the divine calling did not necessitate a vow of poverty. It only required that I fulfill the purpose for which He had anointed me."

"If you have ever seen or read anything about me, you know I am holding up my end of the bargain," the bishop remarked.

Blake inquired, "What bargain is that Bishop Turner, if you don't mind my asking? Did you promise God something in exchange for that power to heal?"

The bishop responded, "Now you sound less like a healthy skeptic and more like an insolent naysayer. Mr. Franklin, how can I trust that you will give me your best effort to solve my problem if you hold me in such low regard?"

Blake assured him, "Sir, if I take your case, I will give it my all because that's the kind of man my mother raised me to be. I don't have to sit in your church or believe you do what you say you do, to believe your case deserves my full attention. Whatever the case may be. Respectfully."

He continued, seeing that the bishop had received his words well, "Let's talk about why I'm here, so you and I can make a one hundred-thousand-dollar decision."

The bishop smiled and said, "You know Mr. Franklin, despite yourself, I may like you one day. Okay. When I began my ministry, I was married to my lovely wife, Darla. We had a daughter who was six years old at the time. When I was preaching to twenty families in a tiny chapel in California, Darla and my daughter were happy and supportive. When I started my healing ministry more than two years later, my wife suffered from the same kind of skepticism you do, Mr. Franklin. Then she soon suffered from pancreatic cancer that took her from me before I opened the doors of the Cathedral. My daughter Savannah was eight when her mother died, and she began to change. She spoke to me rarely and seemed to drift further and further from me. I got counseling for her, of course. I tried to care for her every need, but I could never regain what I had somehow lost with her."

Anticipating Blake's question, the bishop asked, "What is it you want to ask, Mr. Franklin?"

Blake inquired, "Was your daughter confused about why her mother died when her dad had the power to heal people?"

The bishop replied, "Well, you are one to get to the point aren't you, Mr. Franklin? Yes, that's what twenty thousand dollars' worth of professional counseling arrived at. But unfortunately, understanding the cause didn't help heal the relationship, and Savannah's drift continued. I did everything I knew to do, and nothing seemed to help. Every person God healed through me drove her further and further away. Finally, when she turned eighteen, I tried talking to her about colleges. She told me she not only wouldn't be attending college but also planned to move out of our home. That's exactly what she did, Mr. Franklin. She was eighteen and ill-prepared for the real world and left without a trace in the dead of night. Had I known of her plans, I may have been able to prevent her from running off. I haven't seen or heard from her in three years, Mr. Franklin. I just want you to find her, so I know she is well. I want you to find my daughter and return her to me, so I can try again to heal

our relationship. It is this one relationship God has told me I simply must repair, before he calls me home."

Blake recognized the term "being called home" to mean death, so he asked, "Do you have an urgency of time here? Is there a health concern you're dealing with, Bishop Turner?"

The bishop replied, "No. Not at all. A broken heart, to be sure. I want to spend as much time as possible with my baby girl, while I walk and breathe on this side of the grave. That's all. How can I effectively shepherd my flock if I cannot protect my own lost lamb, Mr. Franklin?"

Blake had a soft spot in his heart for family connections, having been without a true relationship with his own father for a long time. His father, who was the Chief of Police in Fort Worth, had not been supportive of Blake's career as a Fort Worth Policeman. He even went so far as to hinder his progress by rigging the detective exam.

"I have to ask. If your daughter left three years ago, I'm curious why you're only now consulting a private investigator. Why the urgency now, and why not over the last three years?"

"Oh, I have tried Mr. Franklin. Gil of course has been instrumental in my search as I have maintained my focus on doing God's work. But he has employed outside services during that time, and I feel as though I have been adequately, what's the term? Bilked? I have paid considerable sums of money only to receive false reports designed to string me along. Mr. Franklin, had you not been endorsed by my very good friend Henry Lake, I don't believe you and I would be talking right now. But I'm glad we are, and I pray you find Savannah."

"I'll take your case, Bishop. I will find your daughter so you can try to rebuild your family."

The bishop took a deep breath, released it quickly, and expressed his gratitude, "You have no idea how happy that makes me. Thank you." He then extended his hand.

As the bishop prepared to leave, Blake interjected, "I have some questions for you before I can start looking for her."

The bishop responded, "Yes, I'm sure you do, Mr. Franklin. Gil will answer all of your questions. As I said, Gil has been front and center in the search for Savannah, just as he was in her protection for years before she ran away."

Turning to face Blake as he opened the large library door, he continued, "Gil may seem to harbor some animosity toward you, but it's because he couldn't find her, and you remind him of this failure. Try not to let that interfere with your investigation. Gil Harwood is my head of personal security, and he will be your point of contact. He has done significant work on this matter and will give you the complete file he has assembled. I think you'll find the file enlightening." The bishop shook Blake's hand, thanked him, and walked out of the room, the heavy wooden door closing slowly behind him.