

Pew 56

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

On a Sunday morning in early October, the Associate Minister of Divine Trinity Church concludes his sermon and steps down from the pulpit. Soon the gallery choir sings a final hymn with the organist setting their tempo and a formation of four elders heads down the centre and side aisles with a silver plate to collect the weekly tithes and offerings. After the collection, the plates are consolidated and two of the elders carry the offerings up the steps to the chancel, passing both ministers kneeling in faithful prayer. After a period of guided prayers, the benediction begins announcing the conclusion of the formal Sunday service. Ahead of the period of fellowship in the Central Hall, the ministers and elders quickly head to the boardroom for an emergency meeting scheduled only one day prior.

"I apologize for the inconvenience today... There is a serious matter needing to be attended to..." The Senior Minister says to open the meeting.

"This meeting is in regards to an alarming shortfall that was caught by our administrative assistant just two days ago..."

"Moderator... May I have permission to speak?" A female elder asks.

"Yes... Please do, Susan." The Senior Minister and Moderator replies.

"When did the so-called funds go missing?" She asks.

"We noticed that we had a shortfall not in our main general trust account but in our Breadbasket coffer just a few days ago." The Associate Minister answers.

"Moderator..." A second elder says.

"Yes Bill."

"How much are we talking about here?" He asks.

"Well... We had about fifty to seventy-five thousand stored for the upcoming winter season of Good Samaritan's Table. As of today, forty thousand seems to have left the coffer and the bank just reported to us that it is no longer in their possession either."

"Moderator... Surely the bank can track the funds... They must have caught some type of transfer online or a covert withdrawal in the branch itself..." The Associate Minister says to the stunned and bewildered church council.

"We will continue to get updates from our banker. However, we may have to launch an appeal about the shortfall and see what kind of spontaneous giving will come up at this stage with our meal cold weather meal season approaching fast."

"Moderator... I'd like to motion for adjournment after we set a fundraising goal." A third elder says solemnly.

“Thanks George. We discussed the amount of twenty-five thousand that will be announced as a fundraising goal in response to the current shortfall. Do I have a seconder?”

“Seconded by Lois. All in favour?” The Moderator asks as all of the hands around the table are raised.”

“Motion carried. Now... A final motion to adjourn.”

After the motion to conclude the emergency meeting in the boardroom, the council of elders along with the two ministers exit the room and return to their usual Sunday obligations or head to the Central Hall to chat and catch up with fellow worshippers.

The following day, the two ministers meet with a church custodian to go up on the roof of the old nineteenth century Romanesque revival parish nestled in the heart of the downtown core of _____. Carrying a new flag to put up for Trinity Tide, the Senior Minister starts to talk about some of the carvings and motifs on the upper parts of the church’s side façades.

“Notice the ancient guild symbols of the Freemasons who were believed to have been the original builders of Divine Trinity and a great many churches and cathedrals of the period...” The Senior Minister says to the Associate Minister while pointing to a particular stonemason marking attributed to the group of mysterious builders.

“Do you mean the square and compass in that upper corner?” The Associate Minister asks.

“Yes. And notice the ‘all-seeing eye’ just to the left there. They also call it the Eye of Providence. That is without a doubt not only a builder symbol but clearly of the Masonic Order.”

“What about the letter ‘G’ over there? I mean within the compass and square?”

“I believe ‘G’ has a layered meaning, representing the divine (God) as well as the geometry of creation referencing God as the great creator and architect.”

“I have the flag here, Reverend _____. Let’s unfurl it and tether it to the flagpole.” The custodian says, after listening in on the conversation between the two ministers.

“Good idea Rodrigo! Hard to believe Trinity Tide is already upon us.” The Senior Minister replies.

Soon, with the help of the two ministers, the custodian attaches the white and gold flag to the pole and uses the rope to raise it in the air. A few moments later, a north wind catches the flag and makes it flap southward with the slight metallic tugging sound chiming softly on the slightly overcast and blustery October day.

At roughly the same moment, Divine Trinity's Facilities Manager John Freeman arrives at a side door of United Masonic Lodge carrying a large briefcase. After reaching in his pocket for a special 'members only' fob, he uses the electronic key system to unlock the door and go in. Once inside, the Facilities Manager enters the gentlemen's locker room to change into his Freemason regalia. After putting on an apron and his collarette, he enters the Grand Ballroom Hall where a fellow Freemason acquaintance is awaiting his arrival.

"Did you bring the capital?" The other man asks adorned with both a collarette and a jeweled necklace.

"It wasn't easy like it usually is. But all forty is accounted for." Mr. Freeman replies.

"Is their banker aware of it?"

"Well... The ministers and elders just had a meeting about their lost funds. Pretty soon, we may be investigated by the bank."

"Did you know that a Master Mason called William Storm actually had that church built way back in 1840?"

"I knew the guild was ours... When I was Apprentice I learned all about the Stonemasons and their contributions to the foundations of our beloved city..."

"Makes perfect sense to take a cut from their tithes and offerings... They should be grateful to us!"

"If they spot our hidden reclamation account at the bank, we'll have to move fast... Our last strategy will then be that funds were transferred accidentally from the Breadbasket designation for reparations of the church structure."

"That will work... As a last resort, just say we need emergency repairs done for the main steeple and roof... Once the scaffolding goes up we'll fool everybody."

After the secret conversation with the other Mason, the Facilities Manager takes the briefcase into the Lodge Office.

The following Sunday, Nation's Bank, determined to investigate the unauthorized transfer of funds outside one of their main downtown branch, send two of their agents into the church service. After going through the motions of Sunday worship amid the congregants, they look down into the sanctuary from the upper balcony and converse in a low voice.

"I asked the Senior Minister for a map of the pews just yesterday... Do you see those two sitting in the centre aisles about nine rows back?" The male agent says to the female agent to his right.

"Yes. I have a copy of the map right here... That would be pew 56."

“I’ve been told that the Facilities Manager, seated there next to his wife with the red scarf around her neck, was in the branch about two weeks ago...”

“Did they catch the transaction?” The female agent asks.

“It appeared he was just involved in regular banking maneuvers but he took out funds from an unlisted account with no apparent connection to the church... When we looked into the mystery account, the funds within it were hard to trace. What we did find out is that the banker that day wasn’t one of ours.”

“So he brought in his own banker to follow up and complete the transaction? Did they track down the individual posing as a banker?”

“Yes... It wasn’t easy either. Apparently, the man working in the branch that day was known to be a regular worshipper at the United Masonic Lodge.”

After the final hymn, the two agents stand up from their balcony seats, noticing the Facilities Manager down below mingling with other worshippers. Unable to apprehend the powerful Blue Lodger among the large crowd of oblivious Trinitarian church-goers, they both eye him wearily as he walks up the centre aisle and toward the back parts of the church where fellowship groups would gather every Sunday over tea and coffee.

-The End-