

BLACK OPAL

“Eleven thousand dollars! Tell me I’m seeing things, Joey.”

Looking up from a showcase, “Uncle” Joey chuckles at the look on Walt Robinson’s face. “No, ‘Hammer,’ you’re not.”

“Then, what is it?” “Bullets” asks.

“It’s a black opal, Vince.”

“I’ve never seen it, before. Where’d it come from?”

“Australia ... a place called, Lightning Ridge. It’s the only place in the world that produces this kind of opal ... no two are exactly alike ... and quality like this is really rare.”

“But why carry it?” Walt asks. “Seriously, you can’t have many takers at that price.”

“Why? Because I appreciate things that are rare and beautiful, as do a few of my customers.”

“I guess it only takes one,” Bagels chuckles.

“But who’d pay that much?” Walt asks. “Sure, it’s pretty ... but eleven grand? Do you expect to sell it?”

“... already did.”

“You’re kidding ... ?” Walt says, amazement in his voice. “Then why’s it still here?”

“Well, the buyer said it’s a Christmas gift. So, we agreed I’d keep it in the safe under the store’s insurance, and I get a showpiece for a while.”

“Where’d you get it?” Reverend Daniels asks.

“I bought it as part of an estate. The opal was a bit beaten up, the polish was badly abraded, and the colors muted, so I did a slight re-cut, then polished it and brought the life back. In a way, it was kind of like resurrecting the dead.”

“Uh, oh, Ace ... think I hear a sermon coming on,” Walt chuckles.

“Yea, Walt, and I think I’ll stick around to hear it.”

Hi, I’m Tony Baggz ... It’s seven in the evening here in Joey’s jewelry store. Joey stays open on Thursdays till eight for the after-work customer and tonight several of the guys stopped by. Rabbi Green, Sammy “Bagels” Reverend Mike Daniels, Pastor Williams, Darryl Martinson and Walt Robinson met at Mike’s Club for dinner and came by to browse a little. Seems both Darryl and Walt’s wives have October birthdays and the guys were thinking maybe jewelry for a gift. Joey has the new holiday offerings out and one is an incredible black opal pendant, October’s birthstone. Joey’s known for carrying beautiful and unique pieces, and this one has got the guys talking ... and thinking.

What do you say we listen in?

Looking at the pendant, Rabbi Green nods his head. “Rachel has family in the jewelry business,” he says, “and she carries some antique jewelry in her shop. I can tell you, Walt, that opal’s worth every penny. In fact, eleven grand for an opal that size is actually a bargain.”

“And a beautiful one at that,” Ace says, looking over the Rabbi’s shoulder. Winking at Josh, an impish grin lights up Ace’s face. “Buy it Walt, go ahead ... you know Cynthia would love it.”

“Joey’s says it’s already sold ... thank heaven,” Walt chuckles.

“I might be able to find another, Walt,” Joey laughs, a devilish look in his eyes.

“You know, Cynthia would love it ... till she found out what it cost. Then she’d probably shoot me. The woman’s too practical.”

“Well, there are some really nice opal earrings in that case. Not black, mind you, but pretty and they wouldn’t cost you your life,” Joey says, winking at Walt.

“Tell me Joey, who bought it?” Father Bob asks.

“A guy who appreciates it the same way I do.”

“And his reaction when he saw it? Walt asks”

“He couldn’t buy it fast enough. When he saw the beauty and the intensity of the colors and found a hidden meaning in the stone that resonated with him, he didn’t even think of the money. It was insignificant when he considered how her eyes would sparkle and what it meant when he explained it to her.”

“Well, he sure picked an expensive way to show it.”

“Not to him ... not according to his words.”

“And you’re saying this guy took it at first look?”

“... At first look, Hammer. I know him vaguely; I can’t tell you his name, but he’s a prominent businessman in the area. He held it for a moment and then said when you add up all the times she stuck by him when no one else did ... gave him her love and her unwavering belief in his goals and his passion for his work - even when his own was running out - this gemstone made sense. He said no other token of his love and appreciation he had considered, spoke to him as much as this did.”

“Lucky lady.”

“No, Walt, I think everyone who appreciates the deeper meanings of God’s creation would say, lucky guy ... that he’d understand.”

Ace takes the pendant from Walt’s hand and holds it up to the fading sunlight. “Always thought jewelry was just fluff. Something silly women wanted for a vain purpose. But this ...” he says, a tone of wonder in his voice as it fades off.

“Vanity ... strange thought, Ace,” Reverend Daniels says, shaking his head. “Why would the Creator make something only to satisfy human vanity? Like Joey says, I like to think things like these gemstones make a statement.”

“... about what?”

To show us beauty in a unique form. Maybe the Creator made this gem - rare like Joey says - to show us true beauty often appears brightest in the blacker moments of life. The different colors of the opal indicate different

moods, different personality traits. Reds show passion, green, life and serenity, violets and blues, tranquility and royalty, and yellows and golds, light, brilliance, and value.”

Chuckling, Walt looks at the Episcopal Rector. “I think I see where you are going, padre” he says.

“I knew where Mike was going the minute you asked the question,” Josh says. “Even though Rachel sells some jewelry in her shop, I never had much appreciation for it either until Joey started explaining how he saw that, in creating the wonders of nature, God speaks to us in a unique way. I think that’s where the good “professor” is going.”

“You caught me,” Mike laughs. “All too often, it’s the blackness in life that brings out the beauty in mankind. Ask yourself; to a poor dying man in India some years ago, who was more beautiful, a Hollywood actress, Miss America, or a small old woman who gave him a place of warmth, cared for him, and treated him with dignity?”

“Mother Theresa,” Walt chuckles softly. “The Good Samaritan story.”

A momentary silence falls over the shop.

“Josh and I were talking about just such a thing one night,” Bagels says. “Mike’s words remind me of that conversation.”

“How so, Sammy?” the priest asks.

“Well, take World War II ... so much blackness ... so much evil. Yet against that backdrop the best of mankind shone forth. Those unknown heroes of countless battles who gave of themselves, even to the ultimate sacrifice, and saved the world from a pair of madmen. And especially those we Jews know, the righteous Gentiles, many buried in sacred ground in Jerusalem, who aided our people during those dark nights. Like your Kolbe, Schindler, Bonhoeffer, Pius the eleventh, and so many others. In times of darkness, God raises up the righteous; saints, as our Christian friends call them ... people of strength, faith, hope, and love, who shine as a light in the world.

“Seems someone’s been catnapping in the synagogue on Saturday mornings ...” laughs the Rabbi ...

“... good to know everyone isn’t sleeping.”

A wise man* once said something to the effect, “Sometimes the only way God can reach a human heart, is to break it.”

What was the longest day in history? For eleven men it was a Saturday; a day between Despair and Delight. On Friday, on a hill outside of town, the promise was crushed. On Sunday, it rose ... glorious and triumphant. How much more did those eleven rejoice when they experienced the reality and the ecstasy of living water, boundless hope, and the sheer joy of knowing eternal life existed beyond the toil and misery of this world. It is a fact of life; sometimes dark and desperate circumstances are the canvas on which God paints a masterpiece.

Sorrow, pain, and suffering are facts of life. Does the Creator permit them to exist to provide a unique frame of reference for those seeking to understand true beauty in life?

And maybe, if we hold fast to the understanding we are all made in the image and likeness of God; creative, productive, loving, compassionate, merciful, and just, magnificent attributes of God, we can see and appreciate the beauty of life in the bright light of peace ... and hope ... and love. Not only in a life to come ...

... but right now?

Thinkaboutit ... I'm Tony Baggz

* Fulton J. Sheen – Catholic Archbishop 1898 – 1979