

A trip to Joey's shop, brings another interesting and unique perspective on the hidden meaning in God's creation

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TOPAZ

"Hey Tommy, can I ask a favor?"

"Depends on the favor."

"Well, Diane's birthday is right after Thanksgiving. I want to give her something special; something that says how I really feel."

Looking at his friend, Jack, Tommy chuckles. "Don't tell me the leopard's changing his spots?"

"Yea, I think it's time. Watching you and Al, and now Paul with Denise, I'm getting the feeling my current act ain't gonna go the distance if you know what I mean?"

"You're serious," Tommy says, a different look in his eye than usual when around Jack.

"I am."

"Okay, what do you need?"

"If you can, I'd like you go with me to Joey's shop. I know you got Al's engagement ring there, and, well, when it comes to jewelry, I'm clueless."

"Well, going to Joey's is a good start. So, yea, I have some time in the middle of the week. How about Wednesday morning?"

"Sounds good."

"About eleven?"

"I'll meet you there."

Hi, Tony here. Saturday afternoon finds us at stationhouse #5. The morning chores are done and a good college football game on tap; the home town university is playing their cross-state rivals.

The pot of Crazy Pat's famous chili is one the stove. The gang will show up in a bit with the drinks and all the fixin's, and an impromptu party is on tap as usual.

Jack, Aliana's close friend Diane's boyfriend, just arrived. As usual, Tommy's helping Pat set up and I think Jack knew he could catch him here.

Since Tommy got Al's engagement ring from Joey, and most of the neighborhood gang patronize Joey's shop, I figure Jack knew if he needed advice, this was the place to come.

This could be interesting Let's listen in ...

The bell over the door in Joey's shop announces the arrival of another customer. This time, it's just Tommy meeting Jack as promised.

"Hey Jack, see you got here a bit early," Tommy says.

"Yea, thought I'd come down and look around on my own."

Stepping out from the back room, Joey smiles. "How's Aliana, Tommy," he asks shaking Tommy's hand.

"Fine. She and her mom spend all their free time picking out colors, putting together the guest list ... you know, crossing all the t's and dotting all the i's. Sometimes I think her mom's more invested in this wedding than Al."

"Take it from me, Tommy, that's par for the course." Pausing and spotting Jack, Joey nods in Jack's direction.

"So, who's your friend,?" he asks.

"Oh, this is Jack, Diane's boyfriend."

"Let me guess, Diane, one of the crew Nick calls the fearsome foursome?"

Tommy laughs. "One and the same."

"Hi, Jack, nice to meet you," Joey says, turning to Tommy's buddy, shaking his hand. "Thanks for coming to my shop. What can I do for you?"

"Well, Diane's birthday's next week and I'm looking for something a little more significant than just candy and flowers."

"Question," Joey says. "Is this a long term relationship like our friend here."

"Never been asked that, huh, Jack?" Tommy says, chuckling at the look on Jack's face

"Well, maybe, Joey. But not right around the corner," Jack says.

"Then I suggest something other than a ring. Rings have a meaning you might not want to project right now."

"Yea," Jack says, "I was thinking about a pendant. She wears them all the time."

"So, are you familiar with November's birthstone; topaz? Or maybe something else?"

"Yea, I'm thinking a birthstone piece I was looking in a couple shops in the mall. Saw something called mystic topaz. But I don't see any here."

"Well, that's because I don't sell it, Jack."

"Why not?"

"Well, to me, it's virtually costume jewelry. 'It doesn't occur naturally and its beauty is an illusion."

"Why?"

"Because it's coated; it's beauty is painted on."

"Nobody at the mall told me that. They said it was a natural topaz that's hard and durable."

"Well, that's true; but not the whole story."

"No? So, what's the deal?"

"It's true, compared to a lot of other gemstones, topaz is hard and durable. The problem is the beauty of mystic topaz isn't. Like I said, it's coated, and with heavy wear or treated improperly, the coating can wear off. It can't be cleaned or worked on as other gemstones are, and if a repair is needed, the nature of mystic topaz can make any repair complicated; hence expensive in relation to the value of the gemstone itself."

Saying nothing, Jack listens intently.

"It's pretty, but again, its beauty is an illusion. Do you want to say that in a gift on a significant occasion?"

"No, not really,"

"And to be fair to it, in an inexpensive piece not subject to heavy wear, it can be nice. Maybe a silver pendant. Buy it for Valentine's Day with a box of chocolates and some flowers. Make it a fun gift; just not a statement gift."

"Okay, so what do you suggest?"

"Well, topaz is one of my favorites because of its diversity," Joey says.

Tommy chuckles. "Come on, Joey, they're all your favorites."

Nodding, Joey laughs. "You caught me. That's true Jack, I love em' all."

"So, diversity; how do you mean?"

Moving to the showcase featuring pieces with topaz gemstones, Joey focuses on the jewelry within, pointing to the various varieties.

"Well, there's mystic topaz we talked about ... which you don't see here," he chuckles.

... "Next, natural heat and radiation causes colorless topaz to become a light blue. Here, man both duplicates and accelerates the natural processes to produce these beautiful blue gemstones. The color is safe, stable, beautiful, and affordable ...

... "Then there's the precious variety, generally untreated; ranging from a pale yellow to deeper golden shades. "

"Anything else?"

"Here's pink, both natural and in some cases, the result of a man-made treatment that intensifies the natural hue. A vivid natural untreated pink topaz can be quite expensive."

"And lastly, imperial topaz; a combination of pink, red, yellow, and orange. It's natural, untreated, and very rare."

"And very expensive I assume?"

"Oh yea, imperial can cost thousands per carat."

"Tommy says he enjoys coming here because you find deeper meanings in the things you sell ... you know, beyond just the bling."

"That I do."

"With topaz, too?"

"Definitely."

"How so?"

"Because topaz is like people."

"Interesting ... again, how so?"

"Well, there are those like mystic whose values are 'painted on.'"

"Next are those who like the blue; their beauty, while inherent, is the result of outside influences."

"Then there's the precious variety, rarer and with colors of varying intensity, not the result of the sanctions of others."

"Next is a beautiful pink topaz. A precious variety both naturally occurring and treated to become a vibrant pink. Much like those who have never compromised their values and their character."

"And finally, there is imperial; a pinkish orange apricot hue, natural, untreated, very rare and very valuable."

"A smile lights up Jack's eyes. Thanks Joey. I feel better about getting this. Now I know something I can share with her."

Looking over the showcase before him, Jack points to a pendant with a vibrant blue teardrop shape topaz accented by several small diamonds.

"Can I see that one."

"Certainly. It's set in 14k gold."

Taking the pendant from Joey, Jack nods his head.

"How much?"

"Let's see, with the gold chain, nine hundred fifty plus tax."

"I'll take it."

Joey chuckles. "Wait, you didn't let me finish. Beginning Black Friday, I'm putting some select pieces on sale ... kind of an incentive to shop early. This is one I've selected for that purpose. See the red star on the tag. So, I can make it eight fifty."

"Sold," Jack says, smiling; obviously happy with his choice.

Tommy chuckles. "Good choice, Jack. Diane has blue eyes and knowing her, she'll love it."

"Diane has blue eyes?" Jack asks. "I didn't know that."

The sound of Tommy and Joey's laughter rebounds through the shop. Shaking his head, Tommy looks Jack in the eye.

"Oh, have you got a lot to learn, my friend ...

... a whole lot to learn."

Again, Joey shows us how God speaks to us through his creation.

Isn't topaz, November's birthstone, a lot like the faith of people who identify as "Christian", or 'religious'

There are those whose faith is "painted on." An illusion that fades quickly in the pressures and challenges of life.

Then there are those whose faith is the product of uncritically accepting the beliefs and views of others. Or who observe rites and rules and rituals without any deeper understanding of their meaning or significance.

Next come those whose spiritual strength and beauty is second nature. Who go beyond the superficial and to varying degrees, live it recognizing the goodness of God and the inherent dignity and beauty God has instilled in all of creation.

Then there are those living lives of heroic virtue. Natural and very rare.

And, all are royalty in the eyes of their Heavenly Father..

Which one are you ...

Thinkaboutit, I'm Tony Baggz.

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