

19. Coming to Call

Jones was a driven man. It was strange, he thought, that anything could increase the urgency of a mission the purpose of which was to save the world from the threat of widespread exposure to a fatal virus unleashed by a terrorist attack. Strange, but true, nonetheless. The abduction of Suzanne had intensified his energy and his focus beyond anything he had known before. There was an alien clarity in his mind, alien because it seemed to come from some power beyond himself; and, on account of it, he seemed to know what he had to do next.

Accordingly, Jones caught the first shuttle he could get to Boston, leaving behind Archbishop Halderman, Brandon Schimidt, the German, and the other thugs that had jumped him on Fifth Avenue and spirited away Suzanne. None of them were any use to him now.

Boston was cold but bright and dry, and the late afternoon wind was blowing hard, as Jones stepped out of the taxi that he had taken from the airport to Beacon Hill, the city's best neighborhood. A telephone call to Ratwell, which he'd placed just before boarding the flight, had secured, from OSA researchers, the Beacon Hill address of Cardinal Donnelly's mansion and confirmed from news reports that Donnelly was currently in residence there.

Jones stood across the street from Donnelly's six storey house, his hands in the pockets of his quilted Wellington jacket, his thick black hair blown to one side, squinting to examine the ornate exterior of the opulent structure, and considering his options. He wondered if Donnelly was personally familiar with his case, or whether it had been left to underlings to resolve. Well, if Donnelly didn't know who he was, Jones thought, he would know shortly! The tale that Jones had to tell, about a red-capped Cardinal in Avignon, about Roger Bacon's stolen manuscripts, about messages and doves, about Archbishop Halderman and the New York thugs, about

retroviruses that caused rejuvenation and senescence, and about the trail that lead directly to Donnelly's door, should get Donnelly's attention quickly enough.

If Jones went to the front door and presented himself, he was afraid that Donnelly would refuse to see him, send word denying he was on the premises, or even leave by a back exit. Unfortunately, Jones thought, bracing his arms and stretching, as if unconsciously readying himself for activity. To make certain of an audience with Cardinal Donnelly, he would have to do some breaking and entering.

Jones waited in the Paul Revere, a coffee shop a couple blocks from the house, until nightfall. When it was dark, Jones returned to Donnelly's homestead, climbing the twelve foot iron fence that surrounded the property. Standing within the grounds, Jones moved quickly and silently around the back, looking for a ledge that would give him purchase to climb to the second level. He located an outcropping of concrete and hoisted himself upward, until he finally stood on the ledge, nearly six feet from the ground. Once on the ledge, Jones circled around, hugging the wall, until he encountered a twelve foot statue of St. John. Jones scaled the statue, and, standing on the statue's shoulders, he was able to leap to a stone balcony and pull himself up and over the railing that surrounded it.

The balcony was shut off by locked French doors that were covered inside with draperies. Jones could see no lights from the room beyond, and he assumed, therefore, that it was unoccupied. He took out his resin knife and used the hilt to smash the glass near the door handle, reached in, turned the handle, and let himself into the room.

Jones stood in the dark, letting his eyes grow accustomed to the lack of illumination. He noticed a line of light under a closed door, and, realizing that the door must lead to the hallway outside, he hurriedly walked toward it.

Jones opened the door a crack and looked in the hall and, seeing no one, slipped out the door and closed it behind him. He found himself standing in a richly decorated passage, with high, arching ceilings, lined with oriental carpets, set with antique tables along the paneled walls, and hung with old English oil paintings of hunting scenes. Walking quickly and silently down the hall, without encountering anyone, Jones came to a stairway and bounded up, in great, silent leaps, like a giant cat, looking ahead to make sure that no one waited on the level above. When he reached the floor, he heard muffled voices coming from down the hall, and he darted into the shadows along the wall, sank down, and waited. After a few minutes, Jones heard a door open and then close, and he saw a servant walking down the hall, using both hands to carry a silver tray that was laden with used crockery and cutlery, passing him by, and turning to take the same stairs down that Jones had taken up.

When the servant had disappeared below stairs, Jones sprang to his feet and walked to the door whence the servant had come and, without hesitation, grasped the doorknob, turned it, and flung the door open.

There, in a high maroon leather chair, behind a large desk, his head inclined over a book, sat a tall man whose black hair was shot with gray, and who looked up at Jones, mildly, as Jones stood facing him, in silence.

Jones walked toward the desk, stopping when he stood opposite the man who sat behind it.

“Cardinal Donnelly, I presume?” Jones said.

“You have the advantage, my son,” said Donnelly, closing his book and looking Jones up and down. “Tell me, are you here to confess your sins?”

“Not exactly,” answered Jones.

“Or do you, perhaps, have some grievance with me?” Donnelly continued.

Jones stepped up to Donnelly’s desk and leaned forward on it with both hands, bringing his face within a couple of feet of the seated man’s.

“You don’t seem overly distressed to be visited by an unannounced caller,” Jones said. “Are you accustomed to unknown people showing up in your study, uninvited?”

“It’s true,” answered Donnelly, pushing his chair back from his desk and standing up, while keeping his eyes on Jones, “that I don’t know your name. But that doesn’t mean you’re entirely a mystery to me. And it certainly doesn’t mean that you weren’t invited!”

Jones straightened, backing off from the desk. Donnelly’s words had caught him by surprise. What on Earth, Jones wondered, could he mean?

Donnelly walked around the desk and crossed the room, stopping at a rolling bar that stood before a mirrored wall.

“Care for drink?” Donnelly asked Jones, who stared at him but made no response. “No? Very well. As I said, I don’t know your real name or even who you work for. But I know something about you, my friend, nevertheless. I know you’ve been on my trail since Avignon, for example. And, forgive me, but I really did intend that you’d be coming here to confront me.”

Jones followed Donnelly across the room, until he stood face to face with the other man, staring at Donnelly with a mixture of fury and bafflement.

Donnelly looked back at Jones, and a crooked smile formed on his lips.

“You could be my son,” said Donnelly, his eyes level with Jones’. “Look—in the mirror!”

Donnelly stood aside and turned to face the mirrored wall, so that Jones could see them both, standing, the one next to the other, looking back from the glass.

It was true! They were of the same commanding height, of the same broad shouldered build, they had the same jet black hair, though Donnelly's was streaked with gray, the same luminous blue eyes, even the same square jaw and Roman nose. And their stance was similar, also; they each stood straight and proud.

Remaining by Jones' side, facing forward, Donnelly addressed Jones' figure in the mirror.

"You were born in the faith," said Donnelly, "Are you so strong, my friend, that you never felt the absence of Christ in your life? Tell me the truth, Major Jones, is the world going to Hell without God's guidance? Or, perhaps, you think I'm mistaken? And you, perhaps, have the answers for us? It's not me, you know, who let loose this new power of life and death on the world. No, God decided the time and place to make that power manifest! I only took steps to harness that power."

"Then, you're confessing!" Jones whirled on Donnelly, spreading his arms in astonishment.

"Confessing?" said Donnelly, turning to face Jones, and pretending to look around the room before looking back at him. "I don't see any witnesses here with us. I want you to understand the futility of interfering with my work at this stage. There is, in fact, nothing you can do."

"I could kill you where you stand," said Jones.

"It wouldn't change anything," declared Donnelly. "The Advent is larger than any one person, even me."

"I wonder," answered Jones. "And taking one life to save countless others would not be a bad bargain, to my way of thinking."

“Your soul is more in need of saving than I thought,” responded Donnelly. “And, yet, voices whisper to me that murder was not what brought you here today.”

“Cut out the mumbo jumbo, Donnelly,” said Jones. “Let’s talk business. Forget the voices.”

“The Saints, the Martyrs, the Apostles, and I,” answered Donnelly, “have all heard voices. But so have psychopaths in the backwards of Creedmoor Clinic. But I do hear them, you know. It’s your choice if your want to believe I’m insane.”

Donnelly walked over to a plush armchair and sat down.

“Come, sit,” Donnelly said, indicating a chair to Jones with a flourish of his hand. “We’ll talk about Suzanne Sebonne.”

“Well,” Jones said, walking over and sitting down, staring fixedly at the other man. “Talk!”

“Suzanne is a gifted and desirable young lady,” said Donnelly. “Naturally, she’s been completely uncooperative. However, we don’t regard that as very significant, because we don’t think she knows very much, now, does she?” When Jones didn’t answer, Donnelly continued, “No, I didn’t think so. In any case, her value is in whatever little hold she gives us over you.”

“Go on,” said Jones.

“I can see,” expounded Donnelly, “that you’re a sentimentalist. It’s showing, right now, in the desperate intensity with which you’re troubling to consider this slight affair. What? Do you think you’re in love with the girl? Or do you feel a courtly responsibility to save her from her misfortunes?”

“You’re not telling me anything,” said Jones. “You can skip your personal analysis of me.”

“Forgive me, son,” Donnelly answered. “I’m thinking aloud. I’m wondering what to do with you, what to do about you.” He paused, looked up at the ceiling, then back at Jones, and continued, “I could just let you go. You have no evidence against me. My respect as a Cardinal of the Church is—unassailable! So.... But I have another idea. I want you to take a trip with me. Yes, a trip!”

“You said you were going to talk about Suzanne!” exclaimed Jones, leaning forward in his seat.

“Yes, yes,” Donnelly said. “I mean to speak of her, give me a chance! You and I will take a trip. After the trip, you’ll be free to take back Suzanne.”

“In exchange for going on a trip with you,” Jones repeated back to him slowly, “you’re offering to let me have Suzanne?”

“I meant exactly what I said,” answered Donnelly. “You’ll be free to take her back. Well, what do you say? Are you up for a flight abroad?”

Jones peered at Donnelly, trying with all his power to imagine what could be behind this strange invitation, but without success.

“Where are we going?” asked Jones, finally deciding that he had no choice but to accept.

“Coming to call on the Vatican,” answered Donnelly, cheerfully. “We may even get an audience with the Holy Father, bless his soul, if he’ll see me!”