

9. A Man in a Red Hat

Juliette Dubonnette, wearing a slate blue corduroy jumper over a white linen blouse, delicately frilled at the collar and cuffs, her red cloth coat thrown open to the temperate, late afternoon November air, walked up the lane toward her house, carrying her school books in a tan leather satchel by her side. The sixteen year old was, thought Suzanne, as fair and beautiful as Tourneur had represented her to be. Her round, lucid, blue eyes, tiny, turned up nose, and creamy complexion were framed by a straight, bright, golden hair that fell to her shoulders and rocked and rippled as she went; her expression was both lit by the vitality of childhood and charged with an unselfconscious, nascent sexual power. It was not difficult to understand, concluded Suzanne, watching Juliette's progress from across the street, half concealed behind some bushes, how Tourneur had been captivated by Juliette's charms.

Juliette's father had died when she was still an infant, and she had been brought up by her mother and her mother's brother, in a modest country house on a small plot of ground, situated on the quiet lane, several miles outside the Avignon city limits. This much Jones and Suzanne had learned from Father Rudolf's files on the girl and from the additional context Father Rudolf supplied about the neighborhood.

"How sweet and fair, she seems to be!" quoted Jones, from a sixteenth century love poem, as he watched Juliette stroll by.

"Your Grace!" said Suzanne, with mock severity. "I didn't know that a man of your station was permitted to notice such things! And, frankly," she added, placing her hands on her hips and slightly swiveling her svelte, buxom torso, surprising herself by the boldness that several days of working closely together had somehow made possible, "I was beginning to wonder if you ever did notice such things!"

Jones looked at her with calm amusement that was tinged with surprise.

“A Bishop of the Church is obliged to take the measure of all things within his ken,”

Jones replied, with a straight face. “The evil and the ugly, he must regard with unflinching attention, for the glory of God. Likewise, the good and beautiful, he must acknowledge as well and give its full due, also for the glory of God.

“So much for theology,” continued Jones, finally breaking into a smile. “And, yes, I like girls! As a matter of fact, and if you must know, you’re a fascinating and damned attractive woman. But I don’t mix business with pleasure, at least not in that way! I can’t take advantage of our propinquity on this assignment to, well, to, well—you know what I mean!”

Suzanne was stunned by Jones’ confession. Stunned and delighted!

“In case you haven’t noticed, Bishop,” Suzanne responded, “unlike Juliette, I’m over twenty-one. When you refer to ‘taking advantage’ of me, you sound as if you think of me as a child! Or maybe you’re just an old fuddy-duddy, speaking the way they talk in old books about women!”

“Don’t try to confuse the issue,” answered Jones, thrilling her with that deep, soulful look, with his wide blue eyes, that she had come to know so well. “We’re on the job. We’re coworkers. And that’s how it has to stay, at least until the job is completed.”

They were both silent for a moment.

“I still think you’re cute, though,” Jones added, taking her hand in his, and giving her a peck on the cheek. “And now that that’s settled, I know you’ll try to help me concentrate on our problem. Believe me, it’s more important, more serious, and more dangerous, than you would ordinarily imagine!”

“OK, Bishop Kempis,” said Suzanne, shaking herself slightly, as if to shatter the spell of the previous exchange and, most of all, of that little kiss—for the present, at least!—and straightening up, “you’ve put the fear of God into me! What’s our next move?”

“Obviously,” answered Jones, “we have to make contact with the Dubonnette family. This little reconnaissance was just to give us a feel of their circumstances, and we were lucky we succeeded in timing our arrival to coincide with Juliette’s return from school.”

“We didn’t have to wait long,” commented Suzanne. “She was right on time.”

“Yes,” said Jones. “And that’s probably how they lead their lives. That is, quietly, by the book. George Dubonnette, Juliette’s uncle, owns a small textile manufactory and consumer outlet in the city. Greta Dubonnette, Juliette’s mother, is reclusive, and occupies herself by taking care of her brother and her daughter. At least, that’s the profile of the family we have from Father Rudolf.”

“You sound as if you don’t quite believe it?” said Suzanne.

“It’s not that I don’t believe it,” answered Jones, “as far as it goes! But I’m wondering what connection the Dubonnette household has with the conspiracy we’re investigating. How did George and Greta Dubonnette come to play hosts for Tourneur? At least one of them knows something, I’m pretty sure. And I’m going to find out what that something is!”

Two days later, at dusk, Suzanne parked Jones’ Mercedes in the broad gravel driveway of the Dubonnette property. Relying on Jones’ persona as Bishop Kempis, Father Rudolf had easily maneuvered a dinner invitation to the Dubonnette house for the three of them. Father Rudolf had told George and Greta Dubonnette that Kempis had been appointed by the Vatican to administer a commission to reform and improve the quality of Catholic religious instruction. Kempis had come to Avignon ex officio, on a fact-finding tour for this commission. He was paying

unannounced calls on Catholic schools around the world and meeting with school administrators, teachers, and students and the parents of students. Juliette, in part because of her interest in local history, had been chosen as one of several students with whom he wished to speak while in the vicinity. The Dubonnettes could hardly refuse to welcome the visiting Bishop into their home.

Jones, Suzanne, and Father Rudolf got out of the car and stood together for a final conference.

“It’s OK if you do a lot of the talking,” Jones told Father Rudolf. “You’re the local school official. It would be natural for you to assist in my interview of the young lady. Obviously, we’re more interested in Juliette’s mother and her uncle than in the girl. But I’ll just have to bide my time and try to pry loose some information as the opportunity arises. Our critical questions, as you know, are about Tourneur. Any of us might contrive to bring him into the conversation.

Suzanne and Father Rudolf looked at each other and at Jones and nodded in agreement.

“Well,” Jones concluded, turning toward the house, “let’s go in! Café food is fine. But I, for one, am looking forward to a good, home cooked meal!”

Suzanne hadn’t thought of that aspect of the evening. Suddenly, she felt hungry, too!

The dining room was almost completely filled by the oblong heavy wooden table that would have seated ten, and easily afforded places for Jones, Suzanne, Father Rudolf, who sat on one side, and Greta and Juliette, who sat opposite them, and George, who sat at the head.

“Please permit me to say,” said Jones, in French, “that, although French is not my first language, I understand French well, and I ask your patience, because I would like to do my best to speak French tonight. If I have any difficulties, I’m sure I can rely on the help of my assistant and translator, Ms. Taylor.”

“As you please, of course, Your Grace,” answered Dubonnette, a little grandly. “Well, now, we’re all seated and ready. This is an occasion. I mean, of course, it isn’t every meal when we can begin with grace being said by a Bishop of the Church! Your Grace, I hope you won’t mind?”

Suzanne shot an alarmed look at Jones, who, she was relieved to see, sat erect and steadfast in his armchair, appearing calm and even gratified by Dubonnette’s request.

“I will pray in Latin, if no one objects,” said Jones, “and deliver the traditional grace before partaking of an evening meal.”

Dubonnette said nothing, but his face registered frank surprise.

[INSERT LATIN PRAYER]

“Thank you, Your Grace,” said Dubonnette, when Jones had finished. “That was indeed a rare privilege.”

“Yes, thank you, Your Grace,” echoed Mrs. Dubonnette, speaking for the first time since they had gathered at the table.

Heidi, a chubby, young serving girl in an apron, began carrying hot serving platters out from the kitchen. The food was abundant, Suzanne noted with approval, and offered an incredible variety of tastes and smells. Jones had been right again, she thought, reaching for her glass and another mouthful of a regional, fruity and cheerful red Bordeaux, ruefully eyeing him as he dug into his pheasant with mushrooms and gravy, a local specialty, they were informed. It was good to have a home cooked meal after an unremitting stint of restaurant provender!

“Your Grace,” Dubonnette ventured, finishing a bite of food and dabbing his mouth with his napkin, “it’s certainly not my place to question you or the practices of the Church. But, with

your permission, might I address a question to you about the prayer you just offered, before we began our meal?"

"I am at your service, Mr. Dubonnette," replied Jones.

"We're an old fashioned bunch, here in Avignon," Dubonnette, began. "Very traditional. I hope you won't be offended if I say that many of us weren't pleased, nearly fifty years ago, when the Vatican decided to abandon the Latin Mass!"

"George!" said Mrs. Dubonnette, shooting a concerned look at Dubonnette, then turning to Jones. "Please forgive my brother, Your Grace. He has a passion for the old ways of the Church. He doesn't mean any harm. But perhaps he's forgetting he's not at the café with his pals tonight. George," she added, addressing Dubonnette again, "the Bishop has come to our house to speak to Juliette, not to be badgered about your complaints about the Church!"

"I'm not at all offended by these thoughts, Mrs. Dubonnette," said Jones. "I, too, regret the passing of the Latin Mass. You know, Latin has been used in the rites of the Western Church since at least the fourth century, if not earlier. Vernacular translations followed, rather than preceded, the Latin original. It is my belief that the use of the Church's traditional language of worship in the Mass had important advantages, advantages that have now, unfortunately been abandoned.

"Greta!" said Dubonnette. "Do you hear what the Bishop is saying?"

"I hear," answered Mrs. Dubonnette.

"Latin is a sacral language, associated with the single, exalted purpose of the worship of God," continued Jones. "Latin helps us overcome limitations of time and place, and helps us participate in the universal reality of the Catholic Church, linking us with the generations who have worshipped before us. And the use of Latin in all countries and across the centuries is a

powerful symbol of the Church's unity. You know, a sacerdotal tongue is a feature common to all the major world religions: Classical Arabic in Islam, Sanskrit in Hinduism, and, of course Hebrew, in Judaism—the language in which Our Lord would have said His prayers. It is only the Catholic Church that stands deprived of this great, unifying force. Mr. Dubonnette, how can we regard this deprivation with anything other than regret?”

“Your Grace,” said Juliette, joining in the conversation for the first time, “I’ve studied a little about Church history at school. We were taught that the conversion to the vernacular tongues was performed in the early 1960’s, so as to make the Mass more accessible to the common man. So people could understand the Mass! Do you think that was a bad thing?”

“Child!” Mrs. Dubonnette said sharply. “You mustn’t challenge His Grace. Apologize!” Then, turning to Jones, she added, “I’m sorry, Your Grace, Juliette is young and still needs instruction in manners.”

“Not at all, Mrs. Dubonnette,” answered Jones. “We are all friends here. I’m gratified by her interest in the Faith. Shall we, who come in the name of the Light of the World, shrink from the light of truth? Shall we be afraid to talk of matters relating to our Savior and our redemption?” He paused and looked at Juliette. “Your question is a good one, Juliette. And I can see you’ve studied your lessons well. Yes, the ostensible motive behind obliterating the Latin Mass was to make the Mass more accessible to the people. What I am saying is that the price that was paid for this apparent advantage was far too high.”

“The price?” asked Juliette.

“The price was the fragmentation of the Church,” explained Jones, looking around to the other guests at table, whose faces were rapt with attention, Suzanne’s no less than the others, “and no pretended benefit is worth that price! Christ gave the keys of heaven to St. Peter, with

instructions to pass them down in perpetuity to the Popes that would follow him. As you know, this is called the ‘Apostolic Succession.’ The integrity of the Church depends upon the unity presupposed by this transfer of authority, on its exclusivity and uniqueness. For well over a thousand years, whenever a person entered a house of God on Sunday to attend the Mass, he heard the identical liturgy performed, no matter if he found himself in Italy, in Germany, in Ireland, in the United States, in India,—or in Avignon, for that matter! That’s all changed now. Now, if you could, with God’s ear, listen in on the services being held in Churches everywhere, you would hear a cacophony of voices and languages, all different! Can you not see, my child, that such fragmentation is the first step toward dividing the Church itself, making many Churches, where, before, there was only one!”

“Bravo!” said Dubonnette. “I heartily agree! Bring back the Latin Mass, I always say!”

“Take care what you say,” cautioned Jones. “The Vatican has issued its decree, and, as servants of the Holy Father, it is our duty to accept his authority and obey.”

“Yes, yes,” acknowledged Dubonnette, hastily. “I’m not suggesting that we run our own Masses in Latin! The bishops and the priests decide, and they say the Mass in French. So that’s that, isn’t it? Of course, we do as we are told. But, as you said earlier, shall we shrink from the light of truth? May we not, at least, speak freely of what our souls tell us about this matter?”

“If we might, however, change the topic of conversation,” Jones essayed, glancing at Suzanne, “Mrs. Dubonnette, I wanted to pay my compliments to your house and your table. The pheasant with mushrooms is remarkable. And your fruity Bordeaux puts a smile on the lips!”

“We’ll give you a bottle of the Bordeaux to remember us by,” answered Mrs. Dubonnette.

“Thank you, indeed,” said Jones. “I accept with pleasure. But I need no tokens to fix this visit in my memory. Your daughter, if you will permit me—and I hope I do not embarrass you, Juliette—is such a rare beauty that she would be hard to forget.”

Juliette blushed crimson in both white cheeks and cast her eyes down.

“Thank you, Your Grace,” she said, barely looking up at him.

“She is blessed in that way,” answered Dubonnette expansively, his bulbous nose starting to redden, as he plied his fourth glass of wine. “But, as you know, looks can be a snare. She’s a good girl, bless her soul. But we must always be on our guard!”

“And you are right to be so!” answered Jones. “But tell me, Father Rudolf, would you not say that Avignon and its environs represent a wholesome environment in which to rear children?”

“Yes,” responded Father Rudolf, “I certainly would say so. This is a quiet, safe region, with little trouble, little drug abuse, and little crime.”

“And few strangers, I should imagine,” said Jones, “apart from the influx of tourists, who, I’m sure, don’t find their way out to this area of the county!”

“Yes,” acknowledged Dubonnette, lifting his refilled glass to his lips again, “hardly anyone ever comes here. But, you know, you’re right! It’s the outsiders you have to watch out for. After all, you know who your neighbors are. But when somebody new shows up—well, who can say what’s on his mind? Why, not six months ago we had a visitor to this very house, a stranger, from abroad. And, as a matter of fact, I didn’t like the way he looked at Juliette at all! Not at all!”

Mrs. Dubonnette froze as she heard these last words and straightened in her chair.

“George, I’m sure the Bishop isn’t interested in our old house guests,” Mrs. Dubonnette said. “But Father Rudolf was saying how safe it is to live in Avignon, and I agree. Your Grace, may I ask what impressions you’ve formed so far of our schools? Do you find us up to date? Or do we seem a little old fashioned?”

“A short answer,” replied Jones, “is that the Avignon school system is in good shape. Which isn’t to say that certain things can’t be improved.” He paused, turning to Dubonnette. “But, Mr. Dubonnette, if you don’t mind my asking, what was the occasion of the visit of this stranger from abroad? Now you’ve made me curious, you see! Of course, it’s none of my business. But I was just wondering how it is that you took a stranger into your house, and, as it turned out, one whose behavior didn’t quite measure up to standards?”

Suzanne held her breath. Jones had done it! He had broached the subject of Tourneur’s visit. Now they would see what kind of answer he would receive.

Dubonnette settled back into his chair to answer, his eyes bloodshot, his face flushed, looking sated with food and drink, and more than a little soused.

“It was all Greta’s fault!” Dubonnette began. Then, casting a glance at Mrs. Dubonnette, he added, “Sorry, Greta, I don’t mean it!” He turned back to Jones and continued.

“But, anyway, a young cousin of Greta’s from America telephoned her,” Dubonnette continued. “Yes, actually telephoned! A letter wasn’t good enough! She wanted a big favor, she said. Her fiancé was, if you can believe this, Your Grace, a bird trainer! To make a long story short, he had landed a job training messenger pigeons for a movie production company, and they wanted him to train some pigeons to fly to the Palace at Avignon. The problem was that he needed a place to stay while he was doing the work. Anyway, softhearted Greta agreed he could stay with us.

“Do I have to tell you what it was like? He arrived with three enormous bird cages and four white pigeons, as well as his other suitcases, of course,” Dubonnette went on. “Fortunately, there’s a large shed in the backyard. Otherwise, we would have probably had pigeons in our living room for three months!”

Jones glanced at Greta and saw that she had turned pale.

“You say the young man was from the United States?” asked Suzanne.

“Yes,” answered Dubonnette, “from Los Angeles. One thing I’ll say about him, he was a devout fellow. He attended every Mass with us. And that’s something I have a feeling for. I can tell when a man takes his faith seriously. I just didn’t like the way he looked at Juliette, and him living under the same roof as her, for so long.”

“Oddly enough, I read a magazine article about a bird trainer from California,” said Suzanne. “What was this man’s name?”

“Jack O’Malley,” answered Dubonnette. “Does that ring a bell?”

“No, no,” said Suzanne, “I’m afraid not.”

They spent the balance of the evening talking about Juliette’s school work, including her special projects in Church history. As ten o’clock approached, Jones thanked his hosts and said he should be on his way. But first, he wondered if he might speak to Juliette, for a few minutes, alone.

The others left the dining room and waited in the living room.

Juliette sat at the dining room table, her hands folded.

“I want to talk to you about something important, Juliette,” said Jones, sitting down in the chair next to the girl.

“Me?” Juliette said, turning toward him. “You want to talk to me about something important?”

“Yes,” Jones assured her. “I want to talk to you. Not to your mother. Not to your uncle. To you. And whatever you tell me will remain between us, as under the seal of the confessional, as God is my witness! And I would like you to keep what we talk about just between us. Tell your mother that I asked you what you thought of Father Rudolf. You understand?”

“Yes,” answered Juliette uncertainly. “I understand.”

“Good,” said Jones. “I’m here on a mission for the Vatican. That’s all I can tell you. Now, I know you remember Jack O’Malley?”

“Yes, of course, I remember him,” said Juliette. “He lived with us for three months.”

“He’s a handsome young man,” Jones continued, “and a serious young man. He’s religious, and he loves animals. That’s true, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” agreed Juliette warmly. “Jack has ideals! He’s not like the boys I’ve met at school. He—” she broke off suddenly.

“So you cared for him?” asked Jones. “I’m not suggesting that you did anything wrong. But you spent time together. You managed to get away on your own sometimes, is that right?”

“Yes,” said Juliette, “that’s right. But how did you know—?”

“Never mind, my child,” said Jones, “it’s OK. All I want to know is this: When you were alone, did he ever tell you anything about where he lived or where he came from? Or did he ever take you to any special meeting spot? Did you, perhaps, meet anyone else when you were with him? Please think about your answers. This is very important.”

Juliette sat in silence for a few moments, remembering her furtive hours with Jack.

“We talked mostly about animals,” Juliette said, finally. “and about the state of the world, you know, how all their good environments are shrinking. And he’s not really engaged to that girl. They just told Mother that, so he could get to stay here with us. One thing, though—he’s not really from Los Angeles. He’s from New York, he told me that, for sure.

“That’s about it,” Juliette said, looking Jones in the eyes. “Except for one other thing. One time, close to the day he left, in the late afternoon, when mother was away, we went down the road and around the hill, where there’s a small clearing surrounded by a bunch of trees. He told me that this big deal, a really important man, had decided to come see his pigeons in action. They were going to pick him up in a car, stop at our house, and he would go and bring out his precious pigeon. You see, even though he had four, there was really one he was supposed to train if he could. They were going to drive to the Papal Palace, Jack said, so he could make a demonstration. He asked me to walk with him around the clump of trees and stay out of sight and told me I could get a look at the car. Then, he said, he would take off on his own.

“We rounded the trees, and I stayed hidden,” concluded Juliette, “and about fifty feet away I saw a black limousine. It was the longest car I ever saw! Standing next to it, was a man—he was tall and good-looking, like you, in a long black coat,” she shot him a shy glance. “But there was one difference.”

“One difference?” asked Jones. “What was that?”

“He was wearing a red hat,” replied Juliette and began idly twirling her serviette in her hands. “A Cardinal’s hat.”

A Cardinal’s hat—and a Cardinal was, Jones knew, the only man eligible to become a Pope!

