

## Now You See It...

Carlene expected to hear from God. Hadn't she been praying for this, twice every day for months? Hadn't she faithfully spent eight hours every day since the first of the year cleaning house for that lazy heifer married to Pastor Harris? Not to mention picking up behind his equally lazy daughters--both of them hot-to-trot and not worth the food it took to keep flesh on their narrow behinds. And, just that morning, hadn't God led her questing fingers to the fifth chapter of James? Right there, in verse 16, was her confirmation: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

"Ain't nobody in this town much more righteous than me," she thought. In her mind, a wo-man could out-righteous any man any day. So today was the day. She knew it.

Carlene snorted as she wiped down the countertops and range in the spacious old kitchen. Where does all this grease come from, anyway? Dulcie Harris doesn't cook; she makes reservations. And the twins don't eat meat anyway, so ... oh well, no matter. She needed to finish up in this kitchen and put her effectual and fervent prayers to work.

The Harrises were at the Regional Convocation for three days--all of them out of the house and out of Carlene's way, so she had plenty of time to search every nook and cranny for the ...well, she didn't know just what it was, but Momma had told her it was hidden in this house.

"What are you talking about, Momma?" she had asked. "What did old Reverend Madison have that was worth hiding? He was poor as the mice that nest up in the rectory walls."

"Hush, Carlene. You don't know anything. Rev. Madison told me two things, on his death bed, just as clear as I'm telling you. First, that he saw God's hand hovering over the heart of this congregation, waiting for his people to focus their love on Him and live their lives in His kingdom. And two, in his very words: 'Sister Jessie,' he said, 'I've prayed for you and all the saints here, that they would get a real vision of their place in the heart of God, that they would be inspired to live lives of love and thanksgiving.' He shook his head and closed his eyes. 'I've hidden a little treasure with some precious things in my...' And then he had a coughing fit so bad that I called the doctor in, and ... he was gone."

"Lord, Momma!" Carlene said. "So you don't know what precious things he was talking about? Did Sister Madison leave him jewelry or something that she

inherited from her folks? 'Cause you know those Jenkinses were rich as sin...thanks  
\*to\* sin, no doubt."

"Carlene, watch your mouth! You don't speak that way about the Lord's  
anointed! Have you lost your mind?"

"Oh, Momma. The Lord ain't anointed Althea Jenkins Madison with nothing  
but a good husband she didn't deserve. Everybody knows that her daddy was as  
crooked as they come."

"I'm not telling you this so you can gossip about the dead. I think whatever the  
Reverend thought was precious is something that could be a real blessing to the  
congregation. I think we need to figure out what his "treasure" was and where he  
was keeping it."

"OK, Momma. OK. I'll keep an eye out." Carlene had promised.

One thing she knew was that Dulcie couldn't be counted on to spot anything  
unusual. The only things in this house she ever touched were the phone and the  
closet door.

So now that the kitchen was clean, this was the day to keep that promise to  
Momma and find Reverend Madison's treasure. Where to look?

Think, Carlene, think. Where did Reverend Madison spend most of his time after Sister Madison died? Why, in his study with his Bible or in the tiny spare bedroom, on his knees, praying for the church. When the Harrises moved in, the study had been cleared out, its contents replaced with Pastor Harris' humongous desk and fancy executive chair. So anything that was in there is long gone.

Oh, but the spare bedroom. The little one in the back part of the house that was way too small for either of the twins and even too isolated to be affected by the "absolutely essential" remodeling that had torn up the front part of the house for three months. The Reverend's "prayer closet" he used to call it; that room was still intact. That was the place to look.

The door was locked. What's up with that? The room was so far beneath Dulcie's decorating standards that she was embarrassed for anybody to see it? Or maybe, the notion of a place dedicated to prayer--a prayer closet--was so foreign to her and her husband that it made them uncomfortable, so they simply pretended that it didn't exist.

Carlene went back to the kitchen and pulled out her "kit"--an oversized rucksack where she stored all her workday essentials. After a few moments' rummaging, she extracted an equally oversized set of keys: about 20 on a huge metal ring, ranging from preteen-private diary to ponderous iron-gate size. With a

satisfied grunt, she hefted the ring and hauled (it was a BIG ring) all of them back to Reverend Madison's "prayer closet."

The most-promising keys were together on a small ring attached to the big one, so Carlene isolated the smallest one, a dull wrought-iron piece that looked antique-y. No joy; it was too big to slide into the lock. She held up the second key and muttered, "Next up." The shiny brass key fit the lock perfectly. A quick twist of the wrist, the satisfying sound of tumblers falling into place, and Carlene pushed the door open.

She stared around the room and whispered, "Oh... my...Lord."

Books lined the shelves on the side wall. They were stacked on the desk and spilling off the easy chair in the reading corner. They were boxed in dollar-store bins that were themselves stacked two-high below the back-wall window. They were scattered across the floor like extra-large children's blocks at the end of a toy-room scuffle.

And they were dusty. Even from the doorway, Carlene could see thick layers of dust lying on every horizontal surface and thin, ragged sheets clinging to verticals. The sight horrified her fastidious soul.

"Oh no. Not having this. Not while I'm in charge around here." In 45 minutes, Carlene had vacuumed and dusted every accessible surface, vertical as well as

horizontal. Then she cleared the volumes from the book-strewn desk, chair, and floor, re-positioned them in the wall shelves, and neatly aligned the book bins beneath the wide back-wall window. Her final burst of energy left the window sparkling and the desktop gleaming.

Dropping her dust rag onto the vacuum cleaner and herself into the Reverend's old easy chair, she relaxed. To think. She couldn't think at all, let alone focus, in a dirty place. "Now. Let me figure out where Reverend Madison kept his treasure."

Not on top of bookshelves; they were all built to fit into the recessed wall. But...maybe behind the bookcases. No. Pulling out all those books to get to the back of that wall—no. The Reverend wouldn't have gone to all that trouble. Besides he was too frail for that after he got sick.

So...the treasure must be somewhere easy to get to. And 'easy to get to' means 'easy to find'.

Carlene leaned back in Reverend Madison's chair and looked around the small room. Maybe behind the back-wall shelves, under the window? No. Again, too hard to move.

Maybe in a wall safe, behind the room's only picture—a framed print of the Reverend's first congregation posed in front of a small storefront. But no such

luck. Taking the picture down revealed a deep-gray, pristine rectangle that contrasted sharply with the sun-bleached wall surrounding it. Swing and miss.

That left the desk and chair. Carlene flipped the chair over and examined its underside. No crevices, cracks, or hidden compartments. Strike two.

After righting the chair and dropping into it, Carlene examined the horizontal and vertical surfaces of the desk. Nothing. She leaned back, considered the remaining alternatives, and pulled out the center drawer. When spread on the table, the drawer's contents were disappointing: pencils, pens, loose change, receipts, scribbled notes, and not much else. Strike three. But Carlene wasn't out.

She eyed the ornate molding running along the front edge of the desk: about two and a half inches thick and real fancy, not Reverend Madison's style at all. She leaned over, reached into the drawer cavity and swept her fingers along its upper surface. Front corner, then back corners. And there it was, a round depression in the back left corner.

A slight push, and the front molding slid out and dropped down. Carlene closed her eyes and took a deep breath, and muttered, "Thank you Lord!" Then she looked into the now-open hiding place and sat back in disbelief and disgust.

"What foolishness is this? An old notebook and a...a...child's puzzle? Where is the treasure, Lord?"

But she received no answer.

The notebook was a diary of sorts; on its title page, the Reverend had written *Reflections: a Record (1998 to \_\_\_\_ )*. Carlene snorted again as she turned the pages.

“What could this be worth? Maybe I could print up some of these pages in a booklet and sell copies to people like Momma as devotional books. Probably have to give some of the money to the church, though. That may be worth doing, but it sure ain’t no treasure.”

She laid the notebook on top of the desk and picked up the puzzle-- a wooden cube about three inches square and an inch deep. It had who knows how many interlocking pieces that slid in and out, then backwards and forwards. The wood was well-worn and discolored, apparently from years of use. Carlene turned it over and over in her hands, trying with no success to see how the puzzle worked. She finally gave up and tossed the toy onto the desktop next to its sister “treasure”.

Then she pushed the molding back into its compartment until it clicked shut, flush with the desktop surface. Tucking both treasures into her voluminous pockets, Carlene dragged her kit and vacuum cleaner out of the room and re-locked the door.



So much for much-availing prayer. But Momma would know what to do next; she always did.

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“Carlene, are you sure you didn’t overlook something? These things don’t look much like treasures to me.”

“All I know is you said the treasure had to be in the house, and the Reverend’s prayer closet is the only place the Harrises haven’t already torn up. And these things were *hidden*, Momma! In a *secret* compartment! If this isn’t Reverend Madison’s treasure, then he just hallucinated the whole thing.”

“Carlene, you run your mouth too much for your own good. Hush now and let me try to figure this out.” Momma flipped through the notebook thoughtfully.

“Look, Carlene. These pages are dated, but not in any particular order. See, this one is May 5, then June 1, then not another one until September 17. Could he have been journaling about random events? I wonder if there’s any connection between the journal and this wooden puzzle?”

Momma closed the journal and focused on the cube. She rotated it with her fingers, as Carlene had done. Then she placed it in the open palm of her left hand, held it under a table lamp, and bent in for a very close look.

“There!” she said finally. See that itty-bitty round spot right there, on the top. See? It’s lower than the rest of the wood around it. Maybe a button of some kind, you think?”

“Ooh, I see it! Go ahead and push it, Momma. Go ahead!”

“Hold on a minute, Carlene. I’m still investigating. Ain’t no hurry.” Momma scrutinized all six wooden surfaces and leaned back with a satisfied grunt. “Uh-huh. The button on the top is the key. “

Carlene snatched the box, pushed down on the top button with her thumb, and held her breath. Nothing. Pushed harder. Still nothing.

Momma retrieved the puzzle from Carlene and cradled it in her own hands. Then she said, “Use a light touch. Like this.” When she touched the top depression, the mechanism shifted and a cloudy glass square appeared on its front face.

Carlene watched, open-mouthed, as Momma cocked her head, and shifted the glass, moving it in and out to focus on its contents.

“What is it, Momma? Is there a diamond ring in there? Or some gold coins? What is it?”

Momma was still silent, staring into the puzzle’s front face with her lips slightly parted, her eyes wide and spilling tears.

“Momma!” Worried, Carlene wrapped an arm around her mother’s shoulder and eased her into the closest chair. ”Momma! Are you all right?”

Momma’s face was intent, tears flowing freely now, falling unheeded onto the front of her dress.

Carlene was starting to panic. “Momma! Momma! Dear Jesus, Momma, what’s wrong?” She clasped her mother’s shoulders and shook gently.

Momma finally tore her gaze away and looked up at Carlene. “My,” she said. “Oh my Lord...” She took Carlene’s hand and put the cube gently into her open palm. She closed her eyes. “Thank you,” she said softly, as if to herself. “Thank you, thank you, thank you.”

Relieved, but still confused, Carlene twisted the cube one way, then another without seeing anything remarkable. “What, Momma? What happened?”

Momma shook her head, still in worship mode. Then she said, “*Look* at it, Carlene. Look *into* it.”

Carlene held the puzzle close to her eyes and turned over again and again. Then she shook it and examined it even more closely. “Momma, all I see is a dark film right in the middle of this one side. After all the trouble I went to, this thing ain’t nothing but a messed-up old puzzle? What’s up with that?”

“I saw **myself**, Carlene. I saw the time when I was...” She shook her head again. “A bad time, an unlovely time...but then I saw myself become...lovely. Jesus has made me lovely, made me beautiful. He used this mirror to help me see how much He loves me, to give me a glimpse of how He sees me. I...am...loved. Oh my. What a wonderful assurance.”

“Momma, stop talkin’ crazy. This is just an old wood puzzle with a hidden mirror. And not a very good mirror at that. Like I said, it’s all dark and cloudy in the middle .”

“No, Carlene. No! Remember the scripture where the woman at the well met Jesus and how he told her everything she ever did, and then offered her living water? That mirror was kind of like that for me. It showed me stuff I had let pile up in my heart and mind, and then it showed me how Jesus cleaned all that stuff away, how He vacuumed up all the loose debris, scrubbed away the ground-in dirt, and polished up the floorboards. It’s an answer to prayer, Carlene. A little miracle mirror with a message from God.”

Momma stood and wrapped her daughter in a right-armed hug. “Take a closer look, Carlene. Look with your heart as well as your eyes.” With her free hand, Momma positioned the puzzle’s mirrored side toward Carlene’s face.

Carlene frowned into the cloudy mirror. Foolishness. She already knew who she was—a good woman, a Proverbs 31 woman, the kind that is hard to find. And nobody in town could argue with that. But as she looked into the mirror, the haze cleared and an almost-forgotten face slowly came into view.

“No,” she whispered. She shook her head slowly...again ... and again. “No! Nobody knows about that. It wasn’t my fault-” Her voice caught in a sob. She reached up and back-handed the cube, sent it flying from Momma’s hand to bounce off the opposite wall onto the carpeted floor. “No!” Sobbing, she scurried over to smash it with the heel of her work shoe, but Momma pulled her back.

Momma held her shoulders and shook her. “Carlene! What’s got into you? What did you see?”

The cube had fallen mirrored side up. Carlene pointed at it with a shaking finger. “Momma,” she said between ragged breaths, “we need to get rid of that thing. It must be possessed or somethin’. Look at it! First it gives me hallucinations. Now it’s turning black again. If it’s not possessed, then it’s growing some kind of mold from being in the dark so long. Let me stomp it to pieces, ‘cause I don’t want it!”

As Carlene’s breathing slowly returned to normal, she shook off her mother’s hands and squared her shoulders. “Doesn’t matter. This is all foolishness.

Reverend Madison must have been confused, probably had a touch of Alzheimer's or somethin'. He sent us on a wild-goose chase after some worthless, maybe dangerous, 'treasure.'"

Momma retrieved the cube from the floor and sat back down. "Carlene, Reverend Madison was as sane as I am today. He thought this message mirror was so important that he kept a record of what he saw when he looked into it. Don't disrespect him just because you don't understand what he did. He was a man of God, and you would do well to appreciate that. Tell me, what did you see?"

"Really, Momma? You want to discuss some foolish smudges on a children's toy? Well, I don't. If Reverend Madison left us a mirror that gave you revelations about yourself, then we need to have Dulcie Harris look into it. If she can see herself, it'll knock her off her high horse. She needs to come down a peg or two anyway. This 'treasure' ain't nothing but a little old mirror with a big black spot. And maybe you just see what you want to see."

"No, Carlene. Maybe you look at truth and choose not to recognize it. Maybe you refuse to see what you don't want to remember. Might do you some good to peek into the dark corners of your soul and see what **God** wants you to see."

Carlene rolled her eyes. "Momma, it may do **you** some good to look inside your **own** soul. Me, I think some memories need to stay in whatever dark corner they

can find. And that toy in your hand? You can keep it. Ain't no treasure there for me.”

Momma sighed and dropped the cube into one of her big pockets. “No, not if you refuse to see it, Carlene. Sometimes treasure is in the eye and heart of the beholder.”