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THE SEA WAS SPARKLING GREEN, shimmering in the midday tropical sun. The white prow of the big yacht, now slowed from full power, sliced easily through the transparent water, leaving a trail of foam and bubbles behind.

High on the flying bridge Simon Pedersen, his right hand on the twin throttles, eased back on the controls. The water here was shallow, less than two fathoms, and Pedersen did not want to chance scraping the bottom of his 58-foot yacht, *Marah*, on the rocks below.

Just ahead was Grand Bahama Island and the harbor at West End. The lean, tanned captain loved the feel of the salt spray on his face. His shirt was open, exposing the curly, silver hair matted across his bronzed chest -- glistening with the salt of sweat and sea. His firm face and muscular arms disguised the fact he was the head of one of America's largest financial empires.

It had been a rough ride across from Ft. Pierce, Florida -- the kind of ride Pedersen enjoyed. It took him back to his early teens, fighting the North Sea off the coast of Norway in his stepfather's fishing boats. This time the seas had been running eight feet in the Gulf Stream, causing the waves to break over the bow and splash against the Plexiglas windscreen on the high bridge. But now on the lee side of the big island the water was like glass. All the details of the bottom--the starfish, the brilliant conch shells and the occasional coral banks -- were visible as the big boat glided over the surface, moving slowly as the depth finder spotted the ever-shifting channel.

Pedersen turned and grinned at his single passenger, a stocky man who was standing beside him on the bridge.

"Feel better?" Pedersen chuckled.

Bert Jessup nodded his head slightly. His face was still a pale green from the intense vomiting he had experienced only an hour before. But now, as the big yacht glided through the smooth water near the harbor, his strength seemed to be returning.

Bert Jessup, one of the nation's best known evangelists, had something on his mind. He had made the trip from Florida to the Bahamas several times aboard the *Marah*. Always before it had been with invited guests -- men and women who wanted to know more about God. But this time Jessup wanted to talk only to his wealthy friend, Simon Pedersen.

Simon was Jessup's strongest supporter. The head of one of the nation's largest hotel conglomerates, owner of America's second largest newspaper syndicate, Vox Populi, he was in many respects Bert's closest friend. It was Pedersen who had let Bert Jessup use -- free of charge -- the 20 acres where his Jesus World Ministries headquarters were located. Pedersen owned 2500 acres close by Walt Disney World near Orlando, and the prime section was where Jessup's Jesus World was located. The men had been friends many years.

Jessup's intense phone call to Simon two days before had intrigued the businessman, however. The evangelist was not given to "visions," and when he used that word over the phone, Simon agreed to fly down from Chicago immediately. The next morning the two men were aboard the yacht heading for the Bahamas.

Ahead was the entrance to the marina. Pedersen pulled down on the twin controls to the left of the wheel. The engines reversed, bringing the big boat to a standstill in the transparent water. A clumsy sailboat was coming through the long, canal-like entrance to the marina. Pedersen waited until it cleared the jetties and turned toward the open sea. He

pushed the throttles forward. Deep in the hold the mighty twin turbo diesels rumbled back to life. The yacht slipped through the narrow channel and into the crowded marina.

Twenty times during the seven years he had known Bert Jessup, Pedersen had made the run to the Bahamas in the *Marah*. He loved it when he pushed the throttles forward and felt the big yacht leap forward “on the step,” slicking through the deep blue waters of the Gulf Stream.

Standing on the flying bridge, his radar screen gave him a picture of what he could not see with his naked eye. The bank of powerful electronics in the lockers under the wheel kept him in touch with land and other boats. Years before he had promised Jessup to use the yacht as a place of ministry. To Simon Pedersen, the “Silver Fisherman” as his men called him, the boat belonged to God.

He guided the three-story yacht into the marina at West End, spotting his slip. He maneuvered the big boat like a child pushing a toy car across the carpet. Standing with his back to the wheel, he faced the stern, his hands behind him on the controls. Shifting the engines expertly from port to starboard, reversing first one engine then the other, he gently slipped the boat between the barnacle-covered pilings.

Cutting the throttles, he shouted to his passenger.

“Tie off the bow, Bert. I’ll get the stem lines.”

The stocky man ran forward, slipping on the wet deck, grabbing for the coiled lines. After several unsuccessful attempts, he finally threw the heavy loop around one of the big pilings. Sweating from the slight exertion in the hot sun, he bent over and tied the other end to the bow hitch. Then he ran to the other side of the bow and repeated the maneuver.

In the meantime, Simon Pedersen had already finished with his stem lines and was busy folding his charts in the cockpit.

A tall Bahamian approached down the dock, his starched white uniform contrasting with the black of his face and arms.

“How was the trip over, Cap’n?” the immigration officer grinned.

“High seas, clear skies, and the presence of the Almighty.”

“A man cannot ask for more,” the black man smiled broadly.

“Only one passenger this time,” Pedersen said as he finished folding the charts and stuffed them in his briefcase. “I’ll fill out the cards and bring them to your office.”

The officer hesitated

“Oh yes,” Pedersen chuckled, running his hands through his thick, silver hair. “I have those things you asked me to bring.”

The officer beamed in appreciation as Pedersen opened an ice chest at the back of the boat and handed the man several packages of frozen meat and American canned goods -- things the officer had requested for his family the last time the *Marah* left West End for the States. The two men shook hands like old friends.

Simon finished hooking up the fresh water and power from the fixtures on the dock. Then he turned and surveyed the marina. It was almost full of boats -- some small, some large -- but the *Marah* remained the queen of the Caribbean.

Fully air-conditioned with cabins fore and aft, two full bathrooms (heads) and a half bath with a lavatory and toilet, complete with galley and the sleeping space for twelve, she was as fancy as any hotel in the Pedersen chain.

It was Jessup, several years before, who had suggested a new use for the yacht “Both of us have influential friends -- hungry for spiritual things -- who would enjoy an excursion in the Bahamas,” he said “You have business connections. I have people who are attracted because of my TV program. We can feed them fresh lobster, conch fritters, fresh red snapper and grouper -- then talk to them about faith.”

Although Simon did not consider himself a church man, he had become a believer through

the influence of his Norwegian stepfather, a giant of a fisherman who had once told him that Jesus' choice of a pulpit was a fishing boat.

Jessup's suggestion that he invite small groups aboard the *Marah* reminded him of his father's words. Under Bert's guidance Simon had learned to communicate the gospel in relaxed settings.

Simon had been surprised by the results. His guests had been receptive to Scripture, engrossed by the Man who walked sandy beaches, proclaiming Himself a fisher of men. Several lives had been turned around, including a U.S. senator, the current Secretary of Labor, a president of one of the nation's largest corporations, several movie actors, and three tough newspaper editors and publishers connected with Vox Populi. Pedersen soon dubbed the excursions the "fishers of men" cruises.

Bert Jessup lost interest in the cruises after attending the first few. He admitted his primary interest was in reaching the masses. His weekly TV program, originating from the beautiful grounds of Jesus World Ministries headquarters, brought thousands of responses each week. In his city wide crusades and his overseas campaigns, he had reached millions. Aside from Billy Graham, few men in this century had been as successful with mass evangelism as Bert Jessup.

On this trip Jessup, despite his seasickness, was more intense than Simon had ever seen him. Halfway over from Florida, when the seas were crashing against the windscreen and the boat was rolling wildly, Simon had glanced over at his passenger to see how he was doing.

"Do you want to turn back," he had shouted above the roar of the engines and the crashing of the sea.

"The fire in my bones is greater than the nausea in my stomach," Jessup had shouted back gamely.

Simon left the immigration cards at the office at the end of the dock. Then the two men ate dinner in the dining room of the Grand Bahama Hotel, which was within walking distance of the marina.

Simon sat across the table looking at the evangelist, whose sunburned face was now showing the effects of four hours in the blistering sun. Jessup was seven years younger than the wealthy businessman. Short, stocky, his brown hair was now streaked with gray. Many religious prognosticators, especially those with Vox Populi, had indicated that Jessup was the heir apparent to Billy Graham.

Using the property donated by Pedersen, Jessup had developed the 20-acre tract not far from the entrance to Walt Disney World outside Orlando, Florida, into a beautiful garden spot attraction called Jesus World.

Here families could come and bathe in the Old World atmosphere of Jesus and His disciples. Wax figures decorated the beautiful "Garden of Gethsemane," which was designed in quiet, reverent taste. Sitting on stone benches under the spreading trees, or kneeling on the soft grass, hundreds of travelers each day found this to be a place of serenity and prayer amidst all the commercialism that surrounded central Florida. The garden also provided the beautiful set for Jessup's TV productions, Jesus World Ministries, videotaped several times each year.

Recently Bert had expanded Jesus World to include two scenes from the Old Testament. One was a pastoral setting with a wax figure of the shepherd boy, David, sitting on a rock, with a harp as though singing psalms. The other required a bit more landscaping, but it, too, was a simple, serene place. Jessup had designed a small garden around twelve springs (actually water directed from a deep artesian well which flowed over coquina rocks) where he had planted 70 palm trees. He called this place Elim after the oasis in the wilderness where the children of Israel found refreshment. Free of charge, weary tourists, tired of their sojourns through Walt Disney World, Sea World, Universal Studios and the other nearby attractions, could come to Jesus World to pray, meditate, and leave refreshed.

On the back side of Pedersen's property, accessible only by a dirt road, Simon had leased

another 200 acres -- also free of charge -- to a cowboy preacher named Joe Panther who ran what he called a "discipleship training ranch." He named it Koinonia. Simon had met Panther only once, but the meeting had convinced him he should let the rancher, who was part Indian, use his property for his training school.

Actually, the introduction had come through Simon's old friend, the late Walt Disney. Disney had been in the process of building his Walt Disney World when he met Joe Panther. He was fascinated by Panther's work with the central Florida cowboys and urged Pedersen to let the cowboy preacher use the back 200 acres of his land -- which was mostly pasture anyway -- to build his ranch. Simon had never visited the ranch, although it had been in operation 18 years. But the reports he received from men like Jessup, who knew Joe Panther, were always good.

"It takes a special breed of man to work with cowboys," Bert had once told Simon, "especially drunk cowboys. Panther speaks their language. He preaches some at the cattle auctions, but his big thing is to put the men to work and teach them the Bible. He has a good ministry, but thank God I'm not called to do the same thing."

Thus, on the word of men like Jessup, Simon had been willing to let Koinonia Ranch use his property.

After dinner, Bert and Simon strolled across the beautiful grounds of the hotel down to the beach. The moon was at half crescent, almost directly overhead. The beach was quiet. The men walked silently on the sand, listening to the water lapping against the beach. Far behind them a long pier extended out into the sea. At the end there was a huge stern-wheeler strung with gaudy light bulbs. Ahead of them in the darkness was the long stone jetty which bordered the entrance to the marina where they had entered that afternoon.

Among the coconut palms at the edge of the beach, a white girl, a guest of the hotel, sat talking to one of the black Bahamian porters. Pedersen broke the silence, nodding in the direction of the couple.

"These girls come to West End to gamble at the casino at Freeport and to pick up a Bahamian as an escort for the weekend. They're airline stewardesses, cocktail waitresses, real estate salesgirls, or recent divorcees. They look on this as a lark, a fling. The porters at the hotel give them a line -- the same line they gave to the girl last week, the same line they'll give to another girl next week. The girls know it's a lie, but it's better to hear someone say he loves you, even if you know it's a lie, than never to hear it at all."

Pedersen paused, his mind running back to his wife, Cynthia. He loved her deeply, but over the last several years they had drifted apart. Cynthia drank too much. When he had left the day before to fly to Florida, there had been a nasty argument over his constant traveling and inattention to her and their grown son, Mark.

Simon longed for the days when they had walked hand in hand on the beach. Now they could barely communicate.

The young couple, seeing the two men approach, got up from their place on the bench and, hand in hand, headed back toward the hotel.

"I wish there were some way I could tell kids like that how much more there is to life," Simon said quietly.

"That's what I want to talk to you about," Bert Jessup said. The two men turned and walked toward the bench which the couple had just vacated.

Pedersen waited. He knew Bert had something important on his mind. He also knew better than to push it. When the time came, Jessup would open up.

"I turned 40 this week," Bert began. "I've been preaching for 23 years. But the world is going to hell -- by the billions. I feel I've got to do something to turn the tide. Something big."

"Well, you're doing a lot more than most people," Pedersen replied. "You've got a nationwide TV show. Your newspaper column is read all over the country."

"Yes, thanks to Vox Populi," Jessup conceded. "You've helped me more than any man on

earth. But time is running out. Communism is taking over the world. Islam is the fastest growing religion on earth -- with twice as many Muslim conversions each year as Christian. It's terrifying what's happening in Africa, the Orient, behind the Iron Curtain, and in nations like India and Ethiopia. So many of these nations used to be Christian -- now they're either Muslim or Communist.

"And here at home secular humanism is running rampant. We can't pray in the schools; the only way Jesus Christ ever gets into a courtroom is when someone mutters 'so help me God'; our university system is saturated with humanism and most of the large denominations are so liberal you can't even call them Christian anymore. Simon, this world is going to hell faster than we can blink our eyes. I've got to do something gigantic to swing the world to Jesus Christ."

He paused, then said movingly, "So that girls like the one who just left to spend the night with that hotel porter can know Jesus Christ."

"You mentioned some kind of vision over the phone?"

"Last Monday, on my 40th birthday, I gave my entire staff a vacation. We closed the office and closed our Jesus World attractions. The place was deserted. I spent all day alone on the grounds -- fasting, praying, seeking God's plan for my life. Just at dusk, as the sun was setting, I went over to the Garden of Gethsemane. I sat on one of the stone benches and began to cry. I thought of all the people who had come into that little garden, had sat on those benches, had seen those wax figures of Jesus and His disciples, and had left as empty as when they came in. I looked over at the wax figure of Jesus kneeling there beside the rock and literally screamed: 'Why can't you talk? Why do you have to be made out of wax?'"

"Just then the fireworks went off at Disney World, on the other side of the Interstate. The entire sky lit up with the skyrockets. Simon, it was as clear an answer to prayer as I've ever experienced. Only one time before in my life have I felt the power of God as strongly -- and that was when I was called into the ministry on my 17th birthday."

"I don't understand," Simon said sincerely.

"You would have had to be there to catch the full impact. Here I am with my wax Jesus. Over there is Walt Disney World, drawing a million people a month. Jesus told His followers that 'the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.' As I was sitting here, looking at all those fireworks and weeping for the lost souls of the world, I heard words, as plainly spoken as your words to me. The words were: *Make to yourself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness.*

"Why should Walt Disney be more attractive than Jesus Christ? Why is it you can pick up a phone book and find any item you want in the yellow pages -- except salvation? It's not right for the children of this world to be wiser than the children of light. It's time for a man to arise who will shake this world to its core for Jesus. I believe God has called me to be that man."

Simon was leaning forward on the bench, listening intently. He knew very little about visions, prophecies, and calls from God. But he knew enough to realize the words Bert Jessup had spoken were from Scripture -- "Make to yourself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness." In fact, that was the same verse, from Luke 16, his Sunday school teacher in Chicago had used the week before. The teacher said it meant that Christians should use all the methods of the world to build the Kingdom of God. Simon had questioned it at the time, for he thought there was more to the verse than the teacher had quoted. But now, hearing it again just a few days later from his trusted friend, Bert Jessup, he was convinced God had spoken.

"I stayed in the Garden most of the night," Jessup said. "I had cried out for Jesus to speak -- and He did. The plans began to form in my mind so rapidly I had to race back to the office to get paper and pen and write them down before I forgot them. It was as if God was outlining the very blueprints for the evangelization of the world."

He paused, got up from the bench and suddenly whirled to face Pedersen. "You are part

of that plan, Simon. God told me to speak to you. He has not only chosen me, He has chosen you. He needs you and those four square miles of land across from Disney World.”

Simon sat, speechless, looking at the intense man now pacing back and forth on the sand in front of the bench.

“It will be Jesus World in capital letters. A hundred times bigger and more spectacular than Walt Disney ever dreamed. We will recreate the scenes of the Bible, we’ll build a scale model of Herod’s temple, we’ll have holograms of Jesus walking on the water. And when they come -- by the millions -- they’ll hear the Word of God. It will be Christianity’s answer to communism, Islam, humanism. We’ll make Jesus so attractive that children and grandparents alike will come from all over the world to see Him in *His world*. It will be so big, so electrifying, so exciting that nobody on earth will miss it.”

“Bert, you know I’m not a theologian. I’m just a layman. I’ve supported your ministry because I believe there is a place for the evangelist. But the only work I’ve done for Jesus is to bring these small groups over here to the Bahamas on the *Marah*. At times I can almost picture Him aboard my boat, sitting on the fantail fishing, helping with the cooking when we’re making conch fritters, sitting cross-legged on the beach under a moon like this, talking to a small group of men. My question is this, Bert: Has anyone ever improved on the methods of Jesus as He walked the shore of Galilee with a group of disciples?”

“You have only a small part of the big picture, Simon,” Jessup said excitedly.

“You forget Jesus also spoke to crowds -- huge mobs. His miracles attracted thousands. And what about Pentecost? Look what happened there when all Jerusalem turned out to see what was going on. What Pentecost was to the early church, so Jesus World will be to the church today. This could even be the ‘latter rain’ the Bible speaks about before the final return of Jesus.”

“That’s pretty ambitious, Bert.”

“I learned it from you, old friend,” Jessup laughed. “Weren’t you the one who said, ‘Think big; God doesn’t bless small plans.’”

Simon allowed a slow grin to spread over his bronzed face. He rose to his feet and stood for a long moment looking up at the moon, listening to the wind rustling the palm branches and the waves lapping the smooth beach.

“Bert, more than anything in the world I want to be in the will of God. But I’m a spiritual novice. I have to take my directions from men like you.”

“Others may remain in the safety of the boat, Simon. But as for me, I believe Jesus has called me to do this thing -- this big thing. I’m ready to walk on water.”

Simon’s voice was pensive. “There are a lot of areas in my life where things aren’t going well. Cynthia and I have drifted apart. She’s jealous of the time I give to these cruises. She resents my business success. She resents me” Simon’s voice trailed off.

Jessup sat down on the bench beside his friend, his hand resting gently on the larger man’s knee. His voice was gentle. “Simon, I believe with all my heart Cynthia will respond to a big commitment on your part. She thinks you’re just playing little boy games on your boat. But when she sees you are committed to this vision for worldwide evangelism, when she sees you’re not just coming down to Florida every once in a while on a holy junket, when she sees you have committed all you have to the cause of Christ, she’ll catch the vision too. When she does, your marriage will be healed.”

Simon sat silently, looking out past the end of the reef to the little island where the palm trees were silhouetted against the moonlit sky. Cynthia and Mark both resented him. Maybe Bert was right. If they saw how seriously he felt about God -- serious enough to consider giving away a piece of land worth many millions of dollars, serious enough to commit himself to the most extravagant evangelistic plan in history -- maybe things would be different.

Simon reached over and put his hand on top of Jessup’s hand, which was still resting on his knee. “It’s a huge gamble,” he said quietly. “But if you say God drew up the plans and put me in

them, I'd better give it serious consideration."

"I'll need more than the property, Simon," Bert said, his voice quivering with excitement "I'll need your business advice. I'll need your close association so I won't make mistakes. We're talking about the biggest ministry project in all history. It isn't just land and money I'll need, Simon. Give me yourself as well."

Simon had always thought big. Now Bert Jessup was pushing him to think bigger than he had ever done in his whole life.

