

Prelude

“WHAT’S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH It?” That was the song wandering throughout Samuel Wade’s thoughts as he stood stern and muttered a silent prayer under his breath. It should be rather embarrassing to think of a secular song while in the middle of a spiritual ceremony, but now none of the old hymnals or new contemporary gospel songs he was raised on came to mind that mirrored his emotions. Samuel stood among his fellow brethren and sisters assembled in a circle. They were all waiting to be inducted as ministers into the bishops circle. It was an honor Samuel did not want, but he had no say in the matter. As he surveyed the layout of the building, he couldn’t help but notice the scores of black and gold suits. *Why so much security to deliver God’s word. So much for the comforter and angels*, he thought to himself as he smirked.

The building they occupied was arranged like a small auditorium inside. The décor was breath taking. A marble fountain sat in the middle of the foyer entrance way. An angel holding a scroll was perched on top, looking up towards the ceiling. Water spurted from its other hand, which lay tenderly out in front of it, as if waiting for someone to hold it in return. A line of golden arc angels stood down the center of the hallway leading to the entrance of the auditorium. Inside was an enormous beautiful chandelier hanging from the middle of the ceiling with colorful crystal pendants dangling giving off light of radiance and the podium on stage was solid gold. A solid white dove was attached to each outside seat of every row. One would think that they had stepped in to heaven. Outside, the building looked like an abandoned warehouse. A tactic used to distract the outside public. Only those whose names were written in the bishops circle ledger could enter and experience the glory and beauty.

On the lower level, in a space the staff referred to as “the pit,” liaison officers from several branches of the federal police and security services sat at three tables crowded with computers and radios. The agents and knights, territorial bounty hunters, sat in the second level, with the uppermost deck reserved for the other sir bishops, elders, evangelists, prophets, and ministers.

Samuel felt sweat stream down his back. Before he knew it, sweat trickled down the right side of his cheek. He hurriedly pulled a handkerchief out of the right back pocket of his new dark-charcoal clergy suit and wiped his face. He always sweated whenever he was doing something that looked right but just didn’t set right in his spirit. He wanted to leave, but he knew, by appearance at least, he needed to stay in control and full of confidence, even if he had neither of those things. After all, he was the son of Sir Bishop James Wade III, the presiding Sir Bishop of United Mega International Fellowship Ministries.

Counselor Eva, the national overseer and the first female to hold the position, asked the eager inductees to repeat after her. She stood in the middle of the circle and began reading from the bishops circle bylaws. Samuel could hear the words coming from her mouth, so he knew she must’ve been talking, but the beauty of the ceremony and the magnitude of the words were completely lost on him.

At some point in time, the lights were dimmed. Each of the ministers held a Bible and a candle, and as the flame passed from minister to minister, the dark sanctuary filled with warm light. It was the most meaningful part of the service to many, but Samuel merely went through the motions.

The word “I” could be heard in unison from every corner of the room. It was a sound that shook Samuel back to reality, along with the touch of his father’s hand on his shoulder. Sir Bishop Wade was standing behind him, as did all the fathers of the other brethren.

Many smiles from happy and anxious sons of the ministry flashed around the room simultaneously as they each looked at their fathers with great honor and admiration. However, a few frowns beamed noticeably through the crowd. It was plain to see that Samuel was not the only unhappy inductee there.

Samuel wanted to be happy for his mother’s sake. Mainly, because he knew that his absence would surely be the prelude to a Mr. and Mrs. Sir Bishop Wade late night argument; his father crucifying him, his mother sacrificing for him. Although they both needed no help in that department, he didn’t want to be the source of any burden on his mother. It took significant effort, but he managed to be civil, at least he thought. But as his mother often quoted, “The reality of you can’t hide from reality.” Truth be told; he detested being there.

What he detested even more was the fact that he was going to fly out to New Orleans first thing Monday morning. He was going to assist Elder Williams, who was ill, in running the ministry at Hope Fellowship. At least, that was what his father had told him, but Samuel knew it was only his father's way of getting him out of Atlanta until the heat his father was receiving from his fellow brethren cooled down. There was a lot of jealousy and hatred for Sir Bishop Wade by the other sir bishops, especially since the sacred bylaws forbade the sir bishops to induct their own flesh and blood into their territory. It was a law written so that no sir bishop would ever have too much voting power. The law also deterred sir bishops from any ideas of starting their own kingdom. But Sir Bishop Wade had the friendship and ear of the national overseer and could induct whomever he wished. Although there was a lot of murmuring from his peers, not a single territorial bishop chose to confront him.

Bishop Wade was all too aware of the hunger for power that certain other territorial bishops possessed. They would like nothing more than to destroy him and take his position—a position he had held for the last twenty years and did not intend to give up any time soon. If they got ahold of his son, they would use him to weaken Bishop's power. And he knew it, which is why he made sure he was always one step ahead of his fellow brothers. Samuel was his pawn, and Samuel knew it.

"Could you at least act like you're excited to be here?" asked Sir Bishop Wade as he walked toward Samuel with a grin on his face and a glass of wine in each hand.

Samuel frowned slightly. "Acting is your profession, not mine, Father," he said as he took a glass.

"It is a part of the game, Son," Bishop Wade said before sipping his drink.

"A game that I didn't want to play," Samuel murmured.

"Well, you have no choice in the matter," Bishop Wade said, blowing out his breath as discretely as he could.

"There's always a choice," Samuel replied.

Bishop Wade took another sip of his wine and looked directly at Samuel, as if his eye contact would reinforce the caliber of his words. "Listen, Son, I know we haven't always seen eye-to-eye on things..."

"A lot of things, Father," Samuel added.

"Okay, a lot of things," Bishop Wade agreed. "But you're a minister now, so we need to put all of those differences behind us. This night is the mark of new beginnings. Old things are passed away." Bishop Wade then turned his attention back to the crowd.

"Does that include using one's past to hold him captive in the present?"

Bishop Wade quickly turned his attention back to Samuel with fire in his eyes. He always gave that look whenever someone challenged him. Samuel knew all too well that his father's gaze was loaded with some type of lashing to follow.

"It includes doing whatever is necessary to hold your position," grumbled his father between gritted teeth. "Understand?"

Frowning, Samuel nodded slowly.

Trying to compose himself before anyone could catch a glimpse his disappointed gaze, Bishop Wade straightened his suit and his posture, then stared straight ahead before falling into a heavy silence.

Incredible, Samuel thought as his eyes targeted his father's stoic demeanor.

Samuel came from a long line of sir bishops. His father, grandfather, and great grandfather had all held the position of territorial bishop, and Bishop Wade was determined to lead Samuel to the same hall of fame.

Momentarily, Samuel's mind traveled back to his childhood. He smirked as he remembered spending Sunday mornings watching his father from the front pew in church. *How can I be like him?* Samuel would wonder as he sat recording his father's every word and mimicking his every move for an hour or more.

A lot had changed since then. Now Samuel would sit for hours with a pen and pad writing his own words, which somehow seemed to arrange themselves. God, *the taste of your word, the smell of your purity consumes me like fire...* Together they formed an essence of pure passion when released. The spirit of a poet, a spoken-word poet, had manifested within the core of Samuel's being. It brought him peace and happiness. However, it was a profession his father disapproved of and deemed outside the traditional church perimeters.

After a moment of silence, Bishop spoke again. "Do I need to remind you of who I am?"

"Of course not, Father," Samuel responded as candidly as he could under the circumstances.

“Good. Remember, Son, image is everything. Now come, let us mingle with the brothers,” Bishop uttered before stepping off toward a group of six bishops across the room.

Samuel followed with hesitation, all the while thinking to himself about what was in his future.