

WHAT GOES 'ROUND...

As she pulled the burlap sack from the rental car, Madalyn shivered in the wind, then hoisted the bag and hurried toward the church annex, trying to ignore the muffled words pushing their way through the burlap.

“Shut up, Don,” she hissed to the bag. “You’re wastin’ Jeremiah’s battery power. Save it for Maralyn; maybe she gives a damn. Me, I’m sick of your whining.”

“Look bitch, this problem is your fault. My wife didn’t screw up the shipping schedule for these robot electronics. She does her job, and you need to do yours. Make sure that at least Jonah and Jeremiah are connected to the network by 6:00 before the banks—.”

“Listen, parasite—try to wrap your brain around three syllables, not just one. The name is **Madalyn**, thank you very much. I know what I’m doing. And if you want me to get it done, you need to shut up. Now.”

A pause. Then, “Excuse me. Bitch **Madalyn**.” And blessed silence.

Riverside Christian Charity Church sat about 50 yards from the river, on a hilly bank. Madalyn had just stepped off the parking lot and set the burlap sack on the lawn when the side doors flew open to release a wave of children. She protectively hefted the burlap sack and watched the stream of bodies separate and flow around her.

“Just like the Red Sea parting before Moses,” she thought. “Damned if those old stories don’t hide out in your mind and pop up wherever they please.”

After the wave broke, Madalyn approached the doors and the women who were watching the children board a bus. She looked down at the nearest neatly printed name tag, put on what she hoped was a sweet smile, and said, “Sister Sharon?”

“Why, yes,” the woman replied. “How can I help you?”

“Thank you, ma’am. I’m Madalyn Anderson, with Digital Prophecy. You know, the “Bring the Old Testament to Life through Technology” people. I’m here to set up for—
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"Oh, we're so glad to have you!" exclaimed Sister Sharon. "We've heard about the Prophets' amazin' performances—so wonderful and uplifting! Praise God, do you actually have one of the blessed Digital Prophets right here in this bag?"

"Yes, ma'am," Madalyn said. "Two, actually. I'm here a little early to set up the programming that lets the Lord use our small talents to bring honor to Him through the robots. I was surprised to see so many children at church already."

Sister Sharon smiled. "Sister, they're part of our local outreach—a home-grown version of the Orphans' Camps you all sponsor around the world. But don't you worry. We all know about your great work for God's children everywhere. All of us—even the little ones who just got on the bus here —have given up lunches and snacks all week to free up money for real generous donations to your poor children in Botswana."

"Thank you again, ma'am." Madalyn said. She suppressed an unexpected twinge of guilt with the thought, "You freakin' fanatics could all afford to miss a few meals. Like takin' candy from some fat babies."

Sister Sharon gently eased Madalyn and the bagged Digital Prophets inside. "Come on in and tell me how I can help you get ready for the services. At Riverside Christian Charity, our motto is 'Love always finds a way.' You all will do some real good here."

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Late that evening, Don sat at the Embassy Suites desk sorting bills, counting the night's cash receipts and entering expenses on the laptop. Madalyn leaned back on the couch and stretched out her legs. She sipped a mocha cappuccino and smiled at Maralyn sitting on the edge of the bed. "Hey Sis, do we still know how to work the good Christians, or what?"

Maralyn smiled back, but she shook her head. "I don't know, Madalyn. Everything seemed to be OK, but it just felt weird. I guess because so many things went wrong before the service."

Don made his last entry and snarled. "If your freaking sister had spent a little more time checking the details and less time congratulating herself, we wouldn't have had to wing this."

Madalyn sat up and put her coffee on the end table. "OK. The shipping delay was my fault. Fine. My fault, my fix. I drove the Jonah and Jeremiah clones down early—in a *burlap sack, for God's sake*—and re-programmed them to handle transactions. The good folks at Riverside Church of Good Works—"

"Riverside Christian Charity," Maralyn corrected.

"Whatever. Anyway, they didn't seem to mind making electronic donations through the two J's. And the cash donations weren't affected at all. So what's the beef? "

"She's right, Don," Maralyn said. "The other Prophets reached the church before the service. They performed perfectly well in the Inspirational and Scriptural Re-enactments. Everybody—even the pastor—loved them! And cash gifts for the "Botswana Orphans Camp" were as generous as ever."

Don wasn't mollified. "Yeah, the cash was about the same, but I'm still worried about the network connections. I don't trust our profit to *her* setup. In fact, I'm going to check the account right now."

"Listen, parasite." Madalyn said. "You may be married to my sister, you may make your living sponging off OUR operation, and you may know a *little* more about robotics than I do, but we were running this scam before Maralyn even knew you existed. So back off."

"Yeah, well, let's just see." Scrolling through the account history, he scanned the night's deposits. "Well. Looks like you lucked out, Miss Chips-for-Brains. Everything seems fine...Hey! Look at this!"

Behind Don's chair, staring at the screen, the sisters watched as Don scrolled back up to the beginning of the evening's financial activity. They saw a steady stream of transactions—deposits in amounts ranging from \$50 to \$200.

"Look at what?" Madalyn demanded. "At more than \$5000 in deposits to our own personal "Botswana Orphans' Camp" account? Me, I think it looks pretty damn good."

"Not the deposits," Don said. "Look at the last entry—a \$25,000 withdrawal. What the hell?"

Reverting to childhood twin behavior, Madalyn and Maralyn reacted simultaneously: "Can't be!" Then Maralyn laid her hand on Don's shoulder. "Check the transaction detail, honey; they must be makin' bookkeepin' adjustments or somethin'."

The Detail screen was three lines:

Transfer Confirmed
\$25,000 from Digital Prophecy
\$25,000 to Botswana Red Cross Children's Fund

A single line was scrolling slowly across the bottom of the screen, in an endless loop:

LOVE ALWAYS FINDS A WAY LOVE ALWAYS FINDS A WAY LOVE AL