

## THE SHADOWS FLEE

T. J. Mathews

Genesis 9: 20-24

*And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: and he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.*

Elder Manuel Alcalá Campos groggily opened his eyes as the morning sun, breaking over the tops of the mountains, shone directly through the east window of his bedroom and onto his face. He turned his head stiffly and looked at the clock on the nightstand between his twin bed and his companion's; it was just after 9:30. He'd slept in--should have been up three and a half hours ago. Obviously, he had overdone it again last night. His head ached. His mouth was dry. His body was stiff and he hurt everywhere. He felt an urgent need to take a dump and so rolled over while he simultaneously threw the blanket off of him. Only then did he realize that he was completely naked. The air was cold on his legs, his thighs and his privates, and his nakedness made him feel worse. When he stood up he felt a dull and throbbing cramp in his rear-end and almost doubled over. And then he saw the stains on his sheets. Blood, he supposed. But dark. Oh shit. What had he done? He looked over to Elder Hanson's bed and noticed that it was already made up. Near the center of the bed, folded neatly, were his pajamas and his garments--clean and stain free--and on top of them, an empty plastic prescription bottle. It had been Vicodin.

Elder Alcalá had a drug problem. He had never used drugs before his mission, at least not improperly. But things had snuck up on him. Now he was Zone Leader, called to the position after the death of Sister Larwood and the attendant disgrace of Elder Martin. There was a lot of pressure. On top of this, just after he was first made District Leader,

almost a year ago now, he'd had an abscessed wisdom tooth and the dentist chose to extract all four wisdom teeth, for good measure. The pain, he was told, would be temporary, and he was given a prescription for "palliative medication." Now he was hooked. He used every day. He needed the pills to keep his work at its best. Thus he was addicted and he knew it.

There are a number of ways in which Elder Alcalá got his drugs:

- When at the home of investigators, or even when visiting with members, he would ask to use the bathroom and would there search through the medicine cabinet and drawers for any prescription drugs.
- He would make appointments with doctors and feign a malady of some sort, begging for pain pills, until they would give in. At one point he had prescriptions from four physicians at once.
- Twice he had purposely injured himself: once he tripped as he exited a city bus and fell on his extended left arm, breaking his ulna near the elbow; later he cut deeply into his left baby finger while chopping lettuce for a salad. That incident took five stitches. Both got him months of Percocet.
- He found that if he called a pharmacy, particularly those inside supermarkets, and pretended to be one of his doctors, he could order a refill. Then he would drag Elder Hanson to the market and sneak away (usually again with the need to use the restroom) and pick up the prescription.
- His luckiest break was when he learned that one of the seventeen-year-olds in the Priest's Quorum in the ward they attended had been arrested for selling drugs at Ogden High. He got off, but Alcalá hooked up with him and became a good customer. They usually exchanged money for drugs during Sunday School.
- Once he merely begged the pharmacist at Walmart for a fix of Oxycontin. He was actually in tears, from the supposed pain. This would never have worked, of course, but for the white shirt, the tie, and the prominent name badge on his left pocket.

Elder Hanson feared that he was an enabler. Perhaps he was. But he did not respect Elder Alcalá Campos. He had developed the habit of calling his senior companion Elder Zone Leader. Most people thought this was cute, or humorous, including Alcalá, but Hanson always meant it with

derision and contempt. Hansen felt that Alcalá needed to be knocked down a peg or two. At the same time, he had not done anything to stop the behavior. He said nothing when Alcalá disappeared at church or during a discussion or at the market. He kept quiet when Alcalá was obviously under the influence; glazed eyes, inadequate responses to questions and inevitably falling asleep at the first opportunity. He had never reported his knowledge of Alcalá's problems to the President or one of his Assistants. So, perhaps he was complicit.

On a Thursday evening in September, Alcalá was in typical form. They had taught a discussion to a beautiful family that had been recommended by ward members and who were enthusiastic and inquisitive about the Gospel. This was the Zampolla family; mother and father, both probably in their mid forties, a teenage son and two younger daughters. It was their third visit; on the fourth they would probably broach the topic of baptism. Alcalá predictably excused himself to use the bathroom. The mother, Gema, told him where to go. Hanson made small talk while they waited for the senior companion to return. When he did, they continued with the third discussion. The parents were sincerely interested in church doctrine and in religious ideas. The son, Mark, was mostly interested in the Church because he had been playing basketball on the ward young men's team and had some good friends who were members, and the young girls were merely polite, there at their parents' insistence, and yet generally entertained by the elders' presentations.

Alcalá had been a good missionary. He had thoroughly memorized the discussions so his delivery was quite believable and most investigators were unaware that he was reciting a lesson written years before by a Church committee. This lesson with the Zapolla family was in Spanish, the language of Alcalá's parents, but he was equally as convincing in English. Bilingualism was often a necessity in the Ogden mission and this was a typical example. Raúl and Gema Zampolla were more comfortable in Spanish, but Mark and the girls seemed to prefer English. It was helpful that the Elders managed both, and Alcalá switched seamlessly from one language to the other.

They were talking now about the restoration of the priesthood, about fifteen minutes after Alcalá had returned from his exploration in the bathroom. Hanson noticed that his companion was slowing down, while at the same time his voice was getting louder and his pupils were growing wide. Hanson compensated by taking over more of the discussion and becoming more engaging. Usually this worked. Not tonight. Alcalá was going on about the blessings of the priesthood being available to all

worthy men. He had gone completely off script and was repeating himself in a lengthy soliloquy.

Mark, the son, interrupted, "Elder, are you stoned?"

Hanson turned to Mark amazed. The symptoms were not yet that noticeable. There was no slurred speech, no droopy eye-lids; Alcalá hadn't forgotten where he was or what he was doing. Mark must have some experience here.

But Alcalá was unphased and just kept talking, perhaps a little louder. Raúl and Gema Zampolla also seemed not to have heard their son but continued to listen to Alcalá.

"Fui ordenado por mi padre, por supuesto. Vivíamos en San Antonio y había muchos élderes en el quórum, pero la mayoría mucho mayores que yo. Los líderes me habían enseñado, como debían, que ahora yo tenía que vivir por cada palabra que precede de la boca de Dios, y que no hacerlo sería renunciar el poder del sacerdocio. Y es el poder del sacerdocio, tanto el aarónico como el de Melquisedec, que da todo el poder a la restauración en estos días. Sin la restauración del sacerdocio mediante José Smith, la iglesia no tendría más poder para actuar en el nombre de Dios que cualquier otra reli. . ."

"Jesus," Mark interrupted again. "You gotta be kidding." He looked at Hanson who merely shook his head slowly.

But this had gotten Alcalá's attention and now he was completely silent.

"¿Qué te pasa, hijo?" asked Gema Zampolla.

"This guys on drugs, Mamá."

She looked stunned and just stared at her son. Raúl Zoampolla didn't say anything either.

Hanson broke the silence, "Maybe we should go."

Alcalá jumped in almost immediately, still too loud, "Sí, but let's have a closing prayer!"

They did leave very shortly thereafter, and as soon as they were out the door, Alcalá took out the small translucent orange prescription bottle he had taken from the Zampolla's, dexterously pulled off the child-proofed white cap, and swallowed a few more pills.

"You drive," he said as he handed the car keys to Hanson.

"Yes sir, Elder Zone Leader."

Hanson felt compelled to act.

Alcalá stared at his pajamas and garments folded on Hanson's bed. He grabbed them and, without putting them on, used them to cover his privates as he moved quickly, though hunched over and hurting, to the

bathroom. The headache he understood. The stiff joints also. Had he finished off that Vicodin on the bed? Probably. He'd done that before and he'd passed out before. But this cramping pain in his ass was new. Like the worst case of diarrhea he'd ever had. He sat on the toilet, expecting relief, but the pain was still there. Something was broken. Something had ripped. He shat quickly and wiped tenderly. He started the shower and waited for the water to get hot. Meanwhile he searched in the medicine cabinet and found a couple of pills. This would help.

He turned and looked into the mirror, twisting uncomfortably to try get a look at his rear-end. No good though. The mirror was above the sink and he couldn't see anything below his waist. Then he noticed scratch marks on his back—two sets of parallel lines, rudely red and gently raised—one set angled from his right shoulder toward the middle of his back, the other from his left shoulder but straight down rather than at an angle. He felt a sick knot in his stomach, a growing, sickening pain unrelated to his binge or his withdrawal. He pulled the colorful plastic curtain aside and stepped over the side of the tub and into the stream of the shower. It was uncommonly not relaxing. As soon as the water wetted him down he saw that what was flowing at his feet was tinted crimson. He turned away from the shower head, away from the sight of blood. He put his left foot on the side of the bathtub, displacing the plastic curtain. He bent forward and probed the damaged area with his fingers, much like what he did when he washed there every day. This was altogether different. The cause of his pain was now clear. The tissues were torn. He was damaged. As it now quickly dawned on him what had been done to him, he felt the menace of the bathtub faucet, cold and hard and jutting out behind him. He turned again, stepped forward toward the tiled wall and let the water cascade down his back. He forced himself to feel his wounds again. Calmly this time. It was not so bad, perhaps. No stitches needed. The blood, he now believed, was mostly what had dried there through the night. This would heal.

As Alcalá left the bathroom, carrying his garments and with a white bath towel around his waist, he was in a daze. The air was heavy. He moved slowly. He saw Elder Hanson sitting on the sofa reading in his Quad. Hanson gave him an unfriendly and disdainful stare. And then he smiled. He spoke and his voice was muffled as it reached Alcalá's ears. "So, lover boy, you finally up?"

Alcalá felt only confusion. "*What?*" He realized a second later that he hadn't asked the question out loud. Hanson just watched him and

smiled. After a long and thoughtful pause, all Alcalá could say was "Did you. . . ?"

Hanson never lost his smile. "Yep."

Alcalá felt a sodden fullness in his head. He could not think clearly. What would make Elder Hanson do this. Hatred? He'd never seen any signs. Love? Slowly, and disgusted, he asked, "Are you gay?"

The smile was gone immediately, replaced with harsh judgment, the disdain Alcalá had seen as he entered the room. "God, no, Elder Zone Leader" said Hanson. "You're the one who got fucked last night."

Alcalá turned and moved still slowly into the bedroom. He pulled the blanket up over the stain on his bed, sat down with only the bath towel over his loins, and cursed softly, "Damn you."