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One

TENSION ON CAMPUS

TENSION ON CAMPUS was thick. The administrators of Opal University could not remember a more volatile season. Factions among the student body were growing militant, and violence seemed a real possibility.

Politics and social issues were always volatile topics among students, but strained relations had boiled over when one of the Opal instructors presented a strong case for the historical Christ during a debate with two visiting scholars—an atheist and an agnostic. The ensuing weeks had seen nonstop confrontations, sometimes ugly, between religious and atheist groups on campus.



Jamal Washington, the instructor who presented the historical Christ at the debate, was a doctoral student who taught several undergraduate courses in the school of religion. He was also thought to be responsible for the faith conversions of *emeritus* religion professor, Dr. William Peterson, and several students from the atheist club.

One month after the debate, Dr. Peterson delivered a stirring lecture on the deity of Christ, and even more students came to believe that Jesus was the Son of God. It was after Dr. Peterson's lecture that Jamal received his first piece of hate mail.

The unsigned letter was on his office floor one morning, evidently slipped under the door. Jamal didn't seem too worried about it. He viewed the controversy as harmless "hot air" stirred up by a few opinionated student leaders. While the atheist club members certainly didn't agree with Washington and Peterson, they weren't hostile.

Brett, an agnostic and former leader in the atheist club, was beginning to question his own skepticism. His family, well educated and academic, had a history of investigating new ideas before embracing them, and Brett was taking his time with this Jesus thing. No one would ever accuse Brett of an emotional conversion to anything—especially religious faith.

Earlier in the week, at Nick's invitation, Brett had attended a class taught by Dr. Peterson. Though *emeritus*,

Dr. Peterson frequently filled in for his former colleagues in the religion department. The topic of Jesus' resurrection had come up in class, and Brett decided to stop by the religion hall to ask Dr. Peterson a few questions. The resurrection was a key issue in his pursuit of truth.

Brett was within a block of the religion hall when he noticed students running from the building. *Must be a fire drill*, he thought. But something wasn't right. *Nobody runs during fire drills*. Then he heard screaming. Brett was a premed major and wired for action, and the screaming kicked him into response mode. "Gotta go!" he shouted as he flipped his phone closed, shoved it in his pocket, and took off at a run *toward* whatever was happening.

Students were pouring from the religion hall, screaming and running in every direction. As Brett approached, one girl stumbled and collapsed on the lawn not twenty feet in front of him. It actually looked like there was blood all over her T-shirt. Brett crouched beside her. She was breathing in short gasps and seemed frantic to get back up.

"Where are you hurt?" Brett shouted amidst the chaos. "What happened?"

"I'm shot!" she screamed. "He's shooting everyone!"

Brett immediately grabbed his cell phone, dialed 9-1-1, and with a shaky voice yelled for help. The call took under a minute, and then he lifted the girl in his arms and, as fast

as he could, moved her to a safe place across the street. She was crying hysterically.

“Where are you hurt?”

“My shoulder!” She seemed to be slipping into shock.

Now there were sirens everywhere and police cars were arriving from all directions. Police officers poured out and ran toward the building. It was all happening so fast it seemed like a dream . . . a bad dream that didn’t make any sense.

The girl in Brett’s lap passed out.