

# SHADOW DAILY

**Serial Updates for the Week of:**

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## Episode 10: Ray's Barbershop, Part II

EAST HARLEM, 1983

At the Father Divine Orphanage, the orphan boys stand giddily around Joven, looking upon him with adulation, watching Ronaldo in awe and benevolent envy. He's withstood Sister Modesta's dipstick, without crying. He's defied the rules and chilled at the barbershop with the biggest numbers man, craftiest pool shark and slickest hustler in Harlem Sharkie. He's lived to tell about it. They look at him as members of a family would survey a decorated war hero coming home for Thanksgiving, his medals shiny, his jaw tightened, his face ruggedly hallowed by a world few in the room new. Brown anxiously reaches for Joven's bag. "Let's see what you got here," Brown says, looking as if he was going to take the smaller boys money. But the boy stands firm, giving Brown a dastardly glare.

"Aw man, If I wanted that shit, I'd take it." Ronaldo likes his style but would never trust Black Brown from that point on.

Three days later at about that same time Ronaldo finds himself in the office with a social worker, Sister Modesta and Father Tony De La Rosa, a Dominican like himself who ran the Orphanage.

"You're a smart boy so I guess you know by now that this behavior will not be tolerated," the priest said, his scruffy voice focusing on the word tolerated. "Tu Sabes? Dije, comprendes?" He said signifying do you know and understand in Spanish making sure his young countryman knew what he meant. Ronaldo nods. "We just want to know why you leave every morning and where you go that keeps you until the afternoon," said Sister Modesta in a motherly tone. She acted so sweet when Father Tony was around, Ronaldo observes.

Father Tony coughed ferociously and sat down as if he would lose strength by remaining standing. He's never without a small tattered black fedora hat and has a couple of teeth missing. He's always talking about "the nature of man." Brown says Father Tony is deep and when Brown was caught smoking a cigarette he gets off light. The sisters are astonished. It turns out the Father has an affinity for cigars and he merely tells the sisters that "one man's pleasure is another's vice."

Sensing the tension in the room, the prissy social worker, a bleeding heart liberal child of the now defunct hippy sixties and disco seventies, tentatively smiles at Ronaldo.

"Yeah it's like you're going to a job or something. That's what it sounds like," the social worker adds.

"That what it is," the boy says as if he's watched gangster movies way too much. Which he does. The adults are all proud for some reason.

“Doing what son,” the father asks. Ronaldo smiles and says “shine boy,” with a majestic look on his face. The Father wheezes, laughs and coughed again, this time worse than before. He;s sick. The prevailing rumor at Father Divine was that he had cancer.

“And where are you a shine boy?” Sister Modesta asks skeptically, doubting that a boy of that age could be doing anything else in the streets of Harlem but getting in trouble.

Ronaldo mumbles, “Ray’s.”

The father grins, “Ray’s eh.”

“Ah, ha, a dive. A place of moral decadence,” insists Sister Modesta.

“Isn’t that a barber shop about three blocks from here?” the social worker asks more innocently than she should have. Feeling out of place, the social worker then takes leave, stuffing a folder into a large baggy wicker purse, most likely to check the story out.

“I believe it is a Barber shop,” says the Father, who knows damn well it’ s a barbershop where poicy number bids, drug packages and informal prostitute purchase orders are dispensed. The father gets up and walks around the desk to embrace the boy’s shoulders. “A workman need not be ashamed. Your marks in school are favorable and you seem to have the right idea.”

Sister Modesta, knowing perhaps more about the barbershop than even Father Tony — she frequently bet on baseball with Sharkie’s bookie underlings — is outraged. “But father we have rules, he can’t just go gallivanting off whenever he feels like it!”

“My sister in Christ is correct son. From now on you eat breakfast with the boys and girls like you’re supposed to and then go to this shine job if you still wish to pursue it.”

“He’s seven. He should be playing baseb..,” Sister Modesta caught herself, both out of respect for the father and for the fact that she invoked the game she frequently makes wagers on.

Father Tony sits down, soothing the sister by patting her on the knee. “Sister, he’s been instructed to follow the rules. But this isn’t a prison, we do permit these precious sons and daughters of ours to expand their horizons. They will, after all, some day be adults.”

“Father Tony I just don’t think....”

“How many of the boys on your floor came to this country from another one before the first grade, by themselves, with no parents?” Ronaldo shakes his head in concordance with the priest’s words, taunting the sister with playful eyes.

“But Father the point is...”

“The point is, how many?”

The sister lowers her head and rolled her eyes in defeat saying under her breath the word “none.”

“God go with you my son,” the father said.

The news is back in the room before Ronaldo even gets there and he's greeted with the regular "shine boy," teases and insults. He just waves them off and jumps into bed opening his Bible trying to find out if any of what the father said was contained therein. He falls asleep with a the Holy Bible on his chest and later on smells sweet, honey like perfume that stings the nose a little. Chanel No. 5. He knows and feels Sister Modesta tucking him in and placing the good book on one of the many nightstands adorning the room. With his eyes closed and ears open he hears her sniffing. She was crying. What he doesn't know is why. He might think it's because she loved him and maybe that's true in a sense. But she's frustrated. She doesn't feel she's making any difference at all. Father Tony's dying, the sweet soft-skinned brown boy asleep below her is headed toward a life of crime as are most of the boys in the hall with him. She knows this. God is absent.

"Good to have you back beautiful child," she whispers planting a kiss on his forehead.