



# IN ARMAGEDDON'S WAKE

*The Millennium Bug has come and gone.  
There have been wars, famines,  
pestilences, earthquakes.  
The New World Order with its Antichrist leader  
has risen ... and fallen.  
Apocalyptic devastation has rained down  
upon all the world.  
Now it's time to start putting it back  
together again.*



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WAKE**

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## PROLOGUE

According to biblical predictions, the period of man's history that will see the Second Coming of Christ will be filled with many distinct and troubling events, one of which is a battle whose name has come to encapsulate the idea of the "end of the world"—*Armageddon*.

Scriptures found in books of the Bible such as Daniel, Zechariah, the Gospel of Matthew and Revelation (also called the Apocalypse) indicate that, Christ's Second Coming will be foreshadowed by the rise of a one world government, led by a dictator commonly called the "Antichrist<sup>1</sup>." After proclaiming "peace and safety<sup>2</sup>" and initially seeming to bring these things to society, this man will plunge the world into a period of trouble described in the book of Matthew as "great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time."<sup>3</sup>

Much of the Antichrist's wrath will be directed at those who have refused to accept what is referred to in the book of Revelation as "the number of the beast."<sup>4</sup> This is described as a "mark"—most likely an implanted microchip (prototypes of which already exist) containing one's personal and financial data—that, by decree of this Antichrist, will be implanted in people's foreheads or in their right hands. This number is somehow related to the digits 666. Without this mark, as the prophecy goes, men will not be able to buy or sell.

Three-and-a-half years after the Antichrist declares himself God<sup>5</sup> and begins his campaign of persecution of

the followers of other faiths, all believers who have received God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ—His "elect," consisting of "a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues"<sup>6</sup>—will be gathered together "from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other"<sup>7</sup> in an event known as the "Rapture."

It is then that the true children of God, both living and dead "will all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,"<sup>8</sup> so that their earthly bodies "may be fashioned like unto His [Jesus'] glorious body"<sup>9</sup> "and will be endowed "with immortality"<sup>8</sup> in the ultimate fulfillment of Christ's promise that "he who believes in the Son has everlasting life."<sup>10</sup>

Having taken His children from this earth, God will then rain down destruction on the Antichrist and his followers—those who have accepted the mark of the beast. This period of apocalyptic judgments, known as the "Wrath of God," will culminate in the great "Battle of Armageddon"—when the Antichrist will seek to eliminate any remaining traces of opposition to his regime in a battle fought near the site of an ancient and strategic city of northwest Palestine called Megiddo. His subsequent defeat by the vastly superior armies of Heaven, combined with the ravages of the Wrath of God that have fallen on his followers, will leave the earth in a state of great devastation.<sup>11</sup>

With the Antichrist and his followers out of the way, those who refused to follow him or receive his mark—but who had also not been among those that received Christ as their personal Savior and had thus not been "raptured" at the Second Coming—will be the sole survivors of Earth's apocalyptic end.

At this time the earth will be given into the hands of God's raptured children—now immortal spiritual beings—who are destined to live and reign "with Christ for a thousand years."<sup>12</sup> And they, together with the earthly survi-

vors, will find themselves faced with the arduous task of building a new and better world from the ashes of the old one.

The following story, *In Armageddon's Wake*, is set in the period of time that immediately follows the apocalyptic plagues of wrath and the ensuing Battle of Armageddon, and at the very start of Christ's thousand-year reign on earth, often called by its Latin name, "The Millennium."

#### References:

The following references are from the *New King James* version of the Bible, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>1</sup> 1 John 2:18

<sup>2</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:2,3

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 24:21

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 13:16-18

<sup>5</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:2-4

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 7:9-15

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 24:29-31

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

<sup>9</sup> Philippians 3:21 [King James Version]

<sup>10</sup> John 3:36

<sup>11</sup> Revelation 16:16-21

<sup>12</sup> Revelation 20:4.

## THE RETURN

With trembling hand he struck the match and lit his last remaining candle. So total and intense was the darkness that the light from the candle barely illuminated more than twelve inches around it. He reached over and picked up the piece of paper from the end of the table, and placed it within the perimeter of light.

It had become a morbid ritual of sorts. Whenever the alarm on his watch sounded, he lit up its screen to glance at its liquid crystal display, and to verify that another twenty-four hours had indeed gone by. This was his one connection to a reality that seemed to have disappeared in the darkness all around him. Then he would light a candle, and with his pencil mark off another day on the dirty piece of paper.

So he did now, and then stopped to count. Seventy-five days. It had been seventy-five days since that awesome day, the day that it all began. He shook his head. Or maybe it was the day it all ended.

He thought back over the past two-and-a-half months, and the strange events that had precipitated this current state of anarchy that had settled over the whole world. It was a struggle to relive his memories and to maintain a grasp on the chronology of events that had turned his once comfortable life

into this living nightmare.

Everything had been going so well, it seemed. From what little he knew of the world around him, it had settled into a period of orchestrated peace, a union of nations that spanned the globe and whose leadership had successfully brought to an end many of the armed conflicts that had been ever-present on the news in the months and years preceding. But the media had quickly found a new focus for the public—groups of renegades who found reason to disagree with this “global dictatorship,” as they dubbed it, and who actively, and sometimes violently, campaigned against its ministers and programs.

Branded as fanatics, they heralded the end of the world, the collapse of the New World Order, the return of Christ, and a host of other things that sounded absurd to most people. The media was quick to characterize the movement as “an attempt to revive the millennialistic fervor of a coming utopia” that had “long gone out of style.” It was only when the new international police force began cracking down on suspected groups for a variety of alleged crimes that the world began to hear the first of several strange happenings—happenings that were to set the stage for yet more intense events to come.

There were unexplained phenomena—mysterious escapes of certain renegades, and strange appearances in the sky—to the point that even the mainstream media began discussing the possibility that aliens were indeed visiting earth, though only the tabloids offered any details of how and where they had come from, and what their plans for humankind were.

Then came the day the tabloids were the first to hail as “The Great Abduction”—the day Jesus had returned in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, accompanied by tumultuous sounds that seemed to rip the sky open with their very force. Then countless people underwent a sudden and dramatic

change before lifting off the ground and shooting towards this glowing apparition in the sky. To those who knew, it was the Second Coming of Christ. But to the majority of onlookers left behind, it seemed the realization of a concept that had until then been relegated only to science fiction movies—that of a mothership taking back the aliens that had never belonged on earth in the first place.

It was the widespread chaos that followed this strange event that sent Stewart seeking whatever shelter he could find to escape the burning and looting in town, as civil order broke down on a global scale. Then there was the nearby river that had turned a deep red, infecting every source of drinking water, turning even his filtered tap water a bloody crimson, and rendering it undrinkable.

This was followed by a scourge of unbearable heat; the scorching sun sent men seeking relief in death. Stewart thought back to how he had taken refuge in the deep, damp cellar beneath his farmhouse, where he'd been able to survive the heat. It was still stocked with specially prepared and packaged dried goods that he had purchased during the Y2K scare years earlier.

Then there was the day the darkness began. He sighed. “And how long is the darkness going to go on?” he murmured aloud. The words brought him back to the present, and he quickly blew out the candle, not wishing to waste a second more than necessary of its luminance. And so he was left in darkness again, alone with his thoughts, and an existence that seemed little more than a living death.

He thought back to his journey from the cellar to his room, and how he had barely made it. Though he had lived in this house for nearly twelve years, he had found himself most unfamiliar with his surroundings when they were engulfed in such complete darkness. “Why did I even try to make it back?” he mumbled. Though the sound of his own

voice brought him little comfort, it was one of the few things that told him he still existed at all. He sighed again and pushed the paper away. The pencil rolled off the table and fell to the floor.

Crouching down quickly to follow the sound of where his pencil had fallen, so that he could retrieve it right away, he suddenly became aware of a faint roaring sound in the distance. "What now?" he thought aloud. He quickly stood up. As he did, his house began to tremble and unseen ornaments fell from their shelves. *No!* he thought. *An earthquake! I have to run. But where? Where do I go? I can't see where I'm going.*

He groped blindly along the walls of the room, and then down the hallway. In the past weeks of darkness, he had learned to make his way around the house quite adeptly, but with the added element of these tremors, he had to find his bearings all over again. It was several minutes before he came to the front door.

At the same instant as he flung it open, a blinding light shattered the darkness of the sky. He shielded his eyes with his hand, closing them tightly at the same time to shut out the indistinguishable brilliance before him. He closed the door quickly, still struggling to maintain his balance as the tremors continued. It was several minutes before his eyes could even take in the dim light that was now flooding his hallway.

He looked around at the home he had not set eyes on for what seemed an eternity. The hallway stood in shambles, and junk was strewn about everywhere. He didn't know whether that was from the earthquake or from the general state of disrepair his house had fallen into during the days of darkness.

Another tremor reminded him of his intention to leave the house to try to save his life. He quickly opened the door and bolted outside, but the sight before him froze him in his tracks. All was confusion. The earth was moving, shaking, undulating. Huge

boulders were being loosed from the nearby mountain and were crashing down into the valley below, which was already a scene of charred devastation. For the moment, his farmhouse did not appear to be in any immediate danger. It was built on a plateau off to a side of the mountain that was not in the direct path of any falling rocks. Still, he did not exactly feel safe.

"This must be hell!" He stumbled across the yard, the earth beneath him still scorched from the incredible heat that had sent him into hiding weeks earlier. Then he flung himself down on the ground, waiting to die.



He didn't know how long he'd lain there, but when he came to, all was still. There was light. The earth had stopped shaking. The rocks had stopped falling. There was a silence, a deep and strangely peaceful silence. He shook his head in amazement as he heard in the distance the sweet song of a bird singing, a sound he'd not heard for many months.

He opened his mouth to speak, as he had done so often for his own benefit only, but now found himself unable to do so. That one sound of hope—the song that floated through the sky as a symbol of new life—had brought upon him such a torrent of emotion that all he could do now was drop to his knees. Then, burying his face in his hands, silent sobs wracked his whole body before he fell to the ground once again—despairing, alone, afraid.

Finally he picked himself up, brushed the dust off his trousers and turned to walk back towards his house, which for some reason seemed to have been strangely spared from the great destruction that had taken place all around him. He somehow distinctly knew that a change had come over him—over the whole world, it seemed. Though he could not put his finger on what it was, he knew his life would never be the same again.





"Oh!" Christy jumped.

James spun around. "What is it?"

"I'm sorry, I was scared."

"You don't have to be scared." He held out his hands in front of him. Though made of flesh and bone, they were aglow with an unearthly aura. "Immortal bodies, remember?"

Christy laughed. "That's right. I keep forgetting."

"What was it you were scared of?"

"Nothing really. I thought I saw something moving over there, but when I took a closer look I realized it was just the wind."

"I still don't know why they sent us here." James shook his head as he looked at their rather dismal surroundings.

"And by ourselves," Christy chimed in. "I suppose they must think we can do it. The town is over in that valley. I guess we should head over there and see if we can find anyone."

Having said that, the two young figures vanished, and in the next instant reappeared on the outskirts of a small town.

"Okay," Christy said, looking to her left, "I'll start looking in this direction."

"I'll head over here," James added, facing the right.

Focusing their eyes into x-ray mode, they began searching through the ruins of the demolished town, looking for any signs of life.

Christy gasped. "Oh, that's terrible."

"What is it?" James asked, as he came over to her side.

"Look. Over there ... beyond those ruins." She pointed her finger, while James followed his elder sister's gaze till he too could see what she was looking at. Tears welled up in Christy's eyes. "It's a cellar. They must have fled there to escape the fire, but the mother's dead. The little girl has been comforting her little brother. We have to rescue them."

No sooner had that thought passed through their minds than, in the same manner of teleportation that had instantly brought them to the town, they found themselves several blocks away, outside the same building they had seen.

The house was in shambles, and had more than half collapsed. The cellar was the only room still intact, and was sealed by a heavy metal door. The doorway was unobstructed by the rubble, but was caked black with soot from the fire that had destroyed the house.

"How are we going to get through the cellar door?" James questioned. "Oh, I know ... I can just blast it."

"No!" Christy stopped him. "There are children in there! Of course you can't blast it. Besides, the door has a handle—maybe we should just try to open it."

Cautiously James turned the handle, and found that the door opened easily. He couldn't quite tell whether this was because of his new body's supernatural strength, or because it was actually easy. As the door creaked open, the sound of the two children's sobs reached their ears. The girl looked about five years old, and her brother barely two. Their faces were dirt-stained, and the tears on the younger child's face had smudged his even more. Their mother lay, lifeless, near the door. It appeared she had died only several hours before.

"Oh, poor dears," Christy said as she rushed over to their sides. "How long have you been here?"

She held them close for a moment, then tried to scurry them out the door.

"No, no," the little girl cried, as soon as she perceived what Christy was trying to do. "I want my mommy! Don't take me away from my mommy!"

"Honey"—Christy kneeled beside her, and tried to explain—"your mommy's gone to sleep and she's not going to wake up again for a very long time."

It did little to comfort the girl, who continued sobbing and crying for her mother. Christy sighed,

even as her heart ached. What could she tell this young girl to help her understand what had happened? She shot up a quick prayer, and found that her instant telepathic link with the one who was now indeed the King of kings was as clear here on earth as it had been in the Heavenly City she had just come from. *"What do I tell her, Jesus? What became of these children's mother?"*

The answer came back in words both sweet and powerful, and in a familiar voice that instantly reassured her mind that all was as it should be, *"Tell them they shall indeed see their mother again, but it shall not be for some time. They must now let her go, and this shall not be easy for them. But I will help them and be with them. Pray for them, that they may know Me, and I shall pour My healing spirit of peace upon them."*

"Honey," Christy began, taking hold of the girl's hand, "I know it's not very easy for you to understand this, but you're going to have to let go of your mommy for a while. She is not here anymore. She has gone somewhere else, and it will be a long time before you can see her again."

The girl turned to look at the figure on the floor, pondering the possibility that perhaps it really wasn't her mother. She looked confused for a moment, until Christy held out her hand again, this time pulling the girl towards her in a warm embrace.

"Dear Jesus, please comfort the heart of this little one and her brother," Christy prayed with all fervency. "Help them to know that everything is going to turn out okay. Heal their tender souls, and help them to feel from us the love that they need to keep on going."

It was a short prayer, and the words seemed entirely inadequate to Christy, but in her heart she felt them sincerely. All she could do now was trust that the seeds of hope would be planted in their young hearts, and that they would make these difficulties

easier for them to bear.

James, realizing that there was now little else they could do, picked the little girl up and held her tight while she buried her head in his shoulder and kept on sobbing.

Christy picked up the little boy, who seemed dazed and rather oblivious to all that had taken place, and walked out behind James. The dead body would be left behind for now, as all the corpses in this city would be. The survivors would have to be taken care of first.

Closing the heavy door behind them, Christy could not help but let the tears begin to stream down her face. *How could they ever forget such memories of horror?*

"So, now that we have them, what do we do?" James said, interrupting her despondent thoughts. "It's not going to be easy to find any others now that the two children are with us."

Christy wiped the tears from her cheeks as she returned her attention to the task at hand. "Let's see if we can find someone else to leave the children with, while we keep looking."

"Okay," James said. "I'll watch them while you look for someone."

Christy focused her eyes into x-ray mode again, and began scanning through walls trying to find if there was anyone else alive. "I think I see someone ... yes, it's an older man. He's very sick, though. I think it's cancer. It's amazing that he's managed to survive all that happened!"

"I'll wait here," James said. "You go and bring him back."



Within seconds, Christy was beside the old man's bed. He opened his eyes and looked up in shock to see her standing there.

"Are you all right?" she questioned, bending over for a closer look.

The man looked up, surprised. "You ... you're one of them!" he suddenly gasped. "Am I dead? Have you come to take me?"

Christy shook her head, and tried to think of something that would allay the man's fear, which was painfully evident in his round and bloodshot eyes. "No, don't worry. You're not dead. You're one of the blessed few who have survived."

He closed his eyes and shook his head, as if this was part of a hallucination he was having. "No. I should be dead," he muttered to himself, his eyes still closed. "Why can't I just die in peace and leave all this terror behind? That's what I came home to do. But no, I have to be the one to survive, to witness my wife's death and not be able to do anything about it. I have to be kept alive. I have to suffer—and in this ailing body as well. I ... I can't even move anymore..."

Christy looked down the length of his body, again utilizing her x-ray vision. "Cancer?" she asked.

The man opened his eyes again, to find his strange visitor still standing beside him, gazing sympathetically into his eyes. He gulped, then nodded silently, scared that if he answered this vision with words, it might disappear.

Christy gently placed her hands on the man's abdomen, where she had seen the largest tumor. Then she closed her eyes and sent up a prayer, continuing, as she spoke, to move her hands all across his body, stopping a little longer over the other places she had seen tumors, "Dear Jesus, You have kept this man alive through the darkest period of our world's history. Now raise him up, and deliver him of this illness. Restore his life that You have seen worthy to spare, so that he may come to know Your great power and Your everlasting and perfect love."

As she lifted off her hands, the man looked shocked. His pain had disappeared. He felt a strange warmth moving inside of him, as his body was being

regenerated by a surge of strength and energy.

"How ... how did you do that?" he asked, an incredulous look on his face.

"It wasn't me," Christy answered. "It was Jesus. But come, we have to go. I can explain more later. We'll have to walk. It's a little ways. Do you think you're able?"

Slowly and with great difficulty, the man pulled himself up and sat somewhat precariously on the side of the bed. He could feel the renewed strength and health working within him, but his elderly body was still as frail as it had been before. He stood up shakily and took some time to find his balance, then slowly began to shuffle along beside Christy. As he walked, however, he found his strength slowly increasing, as the miracle of physical healing continued repairing his broken body.

Christy smiled to herself, watching the old man's slow steps. *This is going to take a while*, she thought to herself. *I sure hope James has enough patience with those children.*



James was relieved when he finally saw Christy approaching with the elderly man. "You took long enough!"

"I know," Christy responded. "I'm not used to this. I was there in a second, but getting back really took a long, long time—we had to walk, you know. How are the children?"

James pointed to the two. They were asleep, curled up on the remnants of an old bench.

"I've been looking around while you were gone. There's a woman over there."

"Oh?"

"I've looked into her mind, and she's thinking about committing suicide. She's all alone. She lost both her husband and her little baby about one month ago, and now this earthquake has destroyed everything

but her—and she's about to try to take care of that."

"Very well," Christy responded. "I can wait here with the man and the children if you want to go."

"No," James responded. "I'd prefer not to handle this one by myself." James looked at the elderly man for a moment, and then back at Christy. "I think the children will be all right. They've just gone to sleep and they looked like they were very tired."

"Okay," Christy answered. Then she turned to the elderly man who, during their conversation on the way back, had introduced himself as Trevor. "Sir," she said respectfully, "do you think you could sit here with the children for a little while? While we're gone we can check on you from a distance and make sure everything's all right. You should be safe here."

Trevor looked a little hesitant. "What do I do if they wake up?"

"I don't think they will," James said.

"And if they do," Christy said, "we can be back here instantly. If there's any sign of the children waking up or if there's any sign of trouble, we'll return right away. Please trust us."

Trevor, remembering what had just happened, nodded his head, assured that he could trust them. "It's fine. But don't take too long."

In a flash they were gone, vanishing before his very eyes. Trevor sat down beside the sleeping children and shook his head in amazement. As he looked at the world around him, it was hard to believe any of this was real. It was too strange—and his sudden healing too good—to be true. Perhaps he was just in a long and strange dream, he thought to himself, and would soon wake up to find himself back in the miserable reality he had just left behind.



Meanwhile, James and Christy arrived outside the woman's house.

"I'll go in and talk to her." Instantly James was

gone—passing right through the door.

"James!" Christy cried out after him.

"Get out! Get out!" the woman screamed. "Get out! You ... you are the ones who killed my husband. You killed my baby."

"That's not the way it is. Let me explain..." James began, but was abruptly cut off.

"Get out!" the woman screamed, as she lifted the gun that she had planned to use on herself, and pointed it at James.

"Now that's not going to work. Even if you try to shoot me, it's not going to harm me," James stuttered.

"Get out!" the woman screamed again, and pulled the trigger with determination, sending a bullet racing directly towards James. Instinctively, though he couldn't be harmed (at least, he was fairly sure he couldn't), James transported himself out of the room, and found himself back outside, beside Christy.

"She tried to shoot me," he said, his heart still pounding from the suspense of the moment.

"I don't blame her," Christy replied dryly. "You scared the poor woman! I don't think we can keep doing this appearing-disappearing thing. I mean, at least it wasn't that bad with Trevor—he only thought he was dreaming or something. But this woman was clearly more agitated than he was even before you went in. I suppose it would probably be wiser for us to try to act a little more normal and go in through the door when we can." Even as she was speaking, Christy walked over and knocked on the door.

"Excuse me, ma'am, can we come in? We don't want to harm you in any way; we just want to talk to you."

Christy knocked again. There was silence, then finally a distraught voice said, "Go away."

"Ma'am, we don't want to hurt you." Christy opened the door a little and stuck her head around the corner. "Can I come in?" With that, Christy entered the room,

and slowly walked towards the woman.

As soon as James felt all was safe, he gingerly peered in, and then stepped in behind Christy.

"My name's Christy, and this is James. He's my younger brother. I apologize for the scare he must have caused you. He's quite talented at freaking people out, you know." She cast a quick gaze in James' direction, and then turned back to the woman. "We just want to talk to you—"

"I don't want to talk to anyone!" the woman interrupted, glaring as she spoke.

Christy once again shot up a quick prayer for guidance, and instantly felt a heavenly assurance welling up within her. "I know you've been through some very difficult times. Everyone has. We've been sent to find survivors. Once you all have been gathered together, hopefully we can start again."

"I don't want to start again, I want to end it all." The woman sobbed, and tears began to roll once again down her already tear-stained cheeks.

"There now, it's going to be all right," Christy continued. "We know what's happened to you." Christy reached over to touch the woman's arm. "We know about your husband and your little baby. I'm very, very sorry. I know it's very painful to have lost them the way you did, but please, believe me—the worst is over. You've already lived through that. Things can only get better now. Come. Come with us. Please."

Christy slowly walked over to the woman, who had slumped down in a corner of the room again, letting her hand with the gun drop limply to the floor. Christy walked over and touched the woman's shoulder, which calmed her. "They're not gone forever; you have to believe me," Christy continued, while James looked on. "Your child is safe, and you will see him again in due time. As for your husband, he, too, will have a choice to make in his time, whether to hang on to the

past, or to accept the new beginning that we are all being offered."

Then Christy took the woman's hand. Almost without realizing why she did it, the woman followed Christy's lead, and stood up. Then Christy gently led the woman towards the door.

"Don't be afraid," Christy whispered. "We only want to help you."

Slowly they made their way around the perimeter of the town, back to where Trevor was waiting with the children, who were still asleep.

"There," James said to Trevor, as soon as they came near, "we told you nothing would happen."

"I ... I don't like being here. I've heard of strange things happening on these streets, and there were noises while you were gone." The old man shifted uneasily on his feet.

"Oh?" James asked.

Christy looked concerned. Setting her eyes to x-ray mode once again, she quickly skimmed the area nearby to find a raucous gang of hardened men scavenging amongst and abusing the dead bodies that lay scattered amongst a heap of rubble a few buildings away. "Oh, ugh, that's revolting! That's horrible! Come on, we have to get these people out of here, quickly."

"Why? What's wrong?" James asked.

"There's a group of men, close by. They're ... they're the incorrigibles! I can't stand to look at what they're doing—quickly!" She gathered up the little boy. James picked up the little girl, who stirred in his arms but then went back to sleep.

"I don't think they'll be coming this way any time soon," James offered, using his x-ray vision to cast a quick glance towards the scene. He was a bit more composed, but no less disgusted at the sight of what they were doing. "They're pretty occupied for the moment. But yes, let's not waste any time in getting these people as far away from here as we can."

Trevor directed them towards a road. It was filled with litter, as most streets and houses were in this remnant of a town. "Here! Let's take this path. I used to walk it often. It leads to a secluded park a short way up the hill. From there we'd be able see anyone approaching us from the town. It would be safer than staying here."

And so they did, slowly making their way to the park, where they temporarily settled in the remains of a small roadside snack bar.



"Let's see what else we can find. We have a pretty good view from here." James went out on the veranda that appeared to have been the shop's terrace. Using his telescopic vision, he once again turned his gaze towards the town, trying to see if there were any more survivors to be found. But besides the roving gang of incorrigibles, as Christy had called them, there were no other signs of life.

After searching the town thoroughly, James traded places with Christy so she could also scan the remains of the town. But she also did not find any further signs of life. This did not surprise them, as many people had fled the established centers of civilization at the onset of the destruction that had rained down upon earth, and generally only those who were too sick, too old or too young had remained behind. Still fewer of those had been able to survive the last two-and-a-half months of devastation that had reduced this once rich and developed community to a scene of unprecedented horror.

"I think that's about it for this town," James said. "There's nothing more left for us to do there. As far as the incorrigibles, well, I certainly don't want to have to face them."

"Me either," Christy agreed. "I guess it's time to call in the 'heavies,' huh?"

"Think so," James answered. "The big boys can

take care of the rest."

"Let's start scanning through the outskirts of the town while we wait for them to come," Christy suggested. "There might be other survivors nearby who fled the town before we got there."

Using her telepathic communication, Christy relayed a quick message asking for a team of Legionnaires to come in and take care of the remains of the town, which would include ridding it of the incorrigibles. The Legionnaires—or "heavies," as some called them—were a sort of specialized work force, consisting of both resurrected earthlings (such as James and Christy were) in their new, supernatural and immortal bodies, and of purely spiritual beings most earthlings knew as "angels."

All of these served under the command of Jesus Christ, the King of kings who now literally ruled earth from His Heavenly City headquarters that orbited the planet like the giant space station that it was. From there, untold teams of "Settlers" such as James and Christy had been dispatched to search for and gather together any survivors, and help them to start rebuilding their lives, while the bands of Legionnaires were responsible for clearing and cleaning up areas that had suffered the greatest devastation.

After making sure their little group was settled, James and Christy began to systematically scan the hills around the town. It was not long before they detected Stewart in the old farmhouse.

"James, there's someone up there."

James concentrated his gaze in the same direction. "Yes, I see him. He seems fairly young—not even in his thirties, I would think. He's alone in that old farmhouse. Should one of us go up there now?"

"Maybe I can go," Christy responded. No sooner had she thought about transporting herself up on the plateau than she was there.

Stewart was startled to see her suddenly standing

in front of him.

*Oops!* Christy thought to herself. *I guess I should have thought about appearing a little further away, and then walking up to him. Oh, well, what's done is done. ...*

"Hi! Are you okay?" she asked.

Stewart nodded.

"Are you alone?"

He nodded again.

"We've come to look for any survivors," she said.

"It looks like you're one of the fortunate ones."

Stewart looked skeptical, scarcely agreeing that his survival was in any way fortunate.

"You can't talk?" she asked, as she quickly scanned his body.

Stewart just stared at her. But as far as Christy could tell, there was no physical reason why he could not talk. She figured, then, that his reluctance or inability to talk was more than a mere physical ailment, which could have been easily remedied. Nevertheless, she attempted to make conversation.

"You have a beautiful place here," she commented as she looked out on the dusty ground around the house. "Well, I mean, I can see that it used to be beautiful. You know it's all going to grow back, don't you?"

He looked surprised, and shook his head.

"Oh, there's so much we have to tell you! We have a few more people down near the town—survivors, like you. They're in the park at the edge of town, but we kind of need a place for them to stay for a while. Could we bring them all up here? It looks as though you have plenty of room. May we stay with you here?"

After a moment's hesitation, Stewart nodded yes.



The walk up the hills to the plateau took quite a while. They followed the winding road, walking slowly with their dawdling group of strangers, none of whom were in any sort of a hurry.

The woman, Belle, walked in a daze, stumbling over the smallest rocks. Trevor, the elderly man, was not strong, nor could he keep up a very fast pace. James and Christy had to carry the children most of the way. The little girl had stopped struggling, though she frequently turned to look behind her, calling for her mommy.

Christy shook her head almost in despair and whispered to James, "So, this is what we have to work with. This group, and the young man who can't or won't talk."

"Small beginnings," James said, as he put his arm around his sister. "Think of it this way: it's not too different from the kind of people we used to work with—maybe more extreme. But then, we're a lot better equipped to deal with these sorts of things now, with our new powers and all."

"You're right." Christy gazed off into the distance, as if looking into another realm. "Just think, it's only going to get better and better and better, till everything is finally restored. Won't that be beautiful?"

Encouraging themselves with that thought, they continued their trek in silence.



Stewart, who had been watching their approach, was sitting outside on the porch waiting.

"We're here," Christy announced. "This is my younger brother, James. This is Belle, Trevor, and ... uh, I don't know the children's names, they couldn't tell us." (After having left the basement, the girl had not responded to any further conversation. Her silence was only broken occasionally by a single word: "Mommy.")

There was a flicker of sympathy on Stewart's face. He turned and beckoned them to follow him inside.

Looking around, Christy was pleasantly surprised. The house looked much more orderly than it had before. The hallway was swept. Stewart had made

the beds in each of the four bedrooms and done his best to make the place look homey and comfortable.

"Do you have any food?" James asked.

Stewart opened some cupboards, and revealed an array of canned meat and vegetables such as he had been surviving on during the days of confusion.

"Great, there's something to begin with. Let's put some food on the table for these folks." James looked at Stewart. "Do you want to help?"

Stewart didn't respond, though he walked over to the counter and found a can opener, and then dusted off some dishes. No one said anything. The silence was awkward.

"Let me help dust off the table," Trevor suggested, as he shuffled over and began wiping the table with a cloth he'd found.

The little boy squealed with delight as he explored the room Christy had led him and his sister to. His sister stood looking out the window, totally disinterested in all that was happening around her. Belle came up behind them, following Christy into the room. She suddenly seemed to show an interest in the little boy.

"I wish I knew your name," Christy said as she hugged the little boy tight.

"You could call him Jonathan," Belle said, startling Christy, who had not been expecting any response.

With a perception that she had not possessed earlier, Christy suddenly understood that this had been the name of Belle's baby boy. "Yes, let's call you Jonathan." She smiled at Belle who, though not returning the smile, returned Christy's gaze.

"Dinner's ready!" James announced rather triumphantly, pleased at how quickly they'd been able to come up with something.

"Can Jonathan sit next to you?" Christy asked Belle. "I'll sit next to his sister."

Belle nodded, and reached out for the little boy.

James looked over, his eyes locked with Christy's and they smiled at one another, thankful that Belle's healing appeared to be already beginning.

Most everyone ate in silence, except for little Jonathan who kept up a continual conversation of unintelligible prattle with his plate of food throughout the entire meal.



No sooner had they finished eating and clearing away the dishes than they heard a commotion outside the house. It was getting dark, and as he peered through the window James could barely make out the forms of some men.

"Hello, can we come in?"

It was a welcome sound. "The heavies are here," James whispered, excitedly, as he opened the door.

"Hello," Christy chimed as they came in. "You're here!"

A group of six well-built, kind-looking men walked single file into the room. The first one James and Christy knew. His name was Allan, the captain of this band of Legionnaires.

As soon as they had set foot inside, Allan asked, "How's everything? Sure looks like you've found a nice place to stay." He looked around the group quickly as he mentally sized up each of the survivors.

The survivors, meanwhile, unaware of what was going on, eyed Allan and his band of heavies suspiciously.

"These are our friends," James tried to explain. "They've come to clean up the town."

"Humph! Six guys? What are they gonna be able to do?" Belle muttered skeptically.

"You'll see..." James responded.

"We'll start tonight," Allan interrupted the exchange. "There's no time to waste. There's an awful lot of places to attend to." Allan shook his head. "So, how do things look here?"



Christy looked towards the group of survivors and then back at Allan. She motioned towards the door. "Come, I'll explain things to you outside."

James offered to take charge of making sure the survivors would get comfortably settled for the night, so Christy and the Legionnaires filed back out the door and sat in a circle on the ground. Christy began to fill them in on all she'd seen in the town.

"Did you make contact with any of the men left in the town?" Allan asked.

"No, we didn't go anywhere near them."

"Well, we'll have to take care of them first. We'll have to see if there are any among them worth saving, or if they're all truly incorrigible—as you seem to have dubbed them."

"They must be. How could you save any of them after what they've been doing?"

"We have to give everyone a chance; you know that."

"Yes, but ... but..." Christy stuttered. "I just couldn't go to them—even though I knew they couldn't harm me, I just couldn't bring myself to go near them. That's why we left as soon as we could, and came here."

Allan nodded knowingly. "Never mind, we can take care of them before we begin leveling the town. We're getting used to dealing with their kind. But, you know, if any of them are worth saving, we'll have to bring them to you."

Christy nodded, but sighed at the thought.

As the band of men lifted off and flew in the direction of the town, Christy stood and watched till they were out of sight. She then slowly turned and walked inside, extremely grateful for the Legionnaires and the part that they were playing in the reconstruction.

She and James, as Settlers, were more specifically prepared and chosen for the task of establishing and

re-educating groups of survivors, or the "earthlings," as they would become known in days to follow—those who had lived through the days of terror that had cleared the earth of all workers of iniquity, plowing the ground for the seeds of a new beginning.

Neither of them were past their teen years at the time of the Second Coming, when they had been raptured along with the many millions of other Christians. Yet having been raised as missionary children and having been actively involved in evangelistic work most of their young lives, they were in many ways better prepared than others for the daunting task before them.

There were also the "Messengers," those chosen to fulfill specific missions of peace, whose primary task it was to spread the news of the new beginning wherever they were dispatched to. They were special people, indeed, with a special calling. Christy shook her head. Those mysterious and especially chosen folks—one never knew where they were or even who they were, though it was said that they too played their active parts in the restoration.



Christy returned to the house to find it largely silent. James was nowhere to be seen for the moment, and it appeared all the others had retired to their beds and were in various stages of sleep. Christy, however, did not feel like monitoring any of their thoughts or dreams—at least not tonight. She felt like she needed some time alone.

She soon found a room that was as yet unoccupied, and decided to claim it as her own. Although her supernatural body no longer required sleep, or even the refuge of four walls and a roof, being able to shut everything out behind those walls provided her with a measure of comfort and reprieve from all she had seen and experienced that day.

"Oh, Jesus," she said aloud with a sigh, "do help

me. These people need so much help, and I hardly feel capable of giving it to them.”

In times past, this would have been called a prayer. Now with her new, supernatural body, the instant mental link it provided with the all-mighty heavenly and spiritual powers was more like a direct phone call. And as by phone, the answer from her Lord and Savior came back clearly and audibly:

“You need only be a channel of My love and My words to them. It is as it was before. The power is not of yourself, but of Me. Remember that. And just as before, with as much as there is to do, you must make time to rest and be refreshed. You are welcome to slip away whenever you feel the need. And even your spirit can swiftly travel to My presence, without your body ever leaving your settlement, for a time of refreshing and communion.”

As the words were spoken, Christy began to feel her mind spinning. Then, feeling like she had left her physical (albeit supernatural) form behind, she found herself hovering, as if in a dream, within what she took to be one of the many unexplored places of wonder within the giant crystal-golden pyramid that was the temple of her God and the home of her Savior—that Heavenly City referred to in the Scriptures as “New Jerusalem.”

But her surroundings were blurred, as if she was slightly out of phase with the dimension in which she found herself. The only thing she was distinctly and unmistakably aware of was another Presence near her, a Presence that enveloped her and surrounded her with a peace that passed all understanding. And in that moment, even the unspoken questions that had filled her mind that day were answered, and everything was clear.

She turned her heart heavenward, and breathed the untainted purity of the atmosphere around her, sending forth her praises and her love to this divine

Presence, and in return her soul was filled with the peace, strength and comfort that her soul so desperately craved.

In the many other nights to come, she would continue to feed her spirit with such times of private communication and loving interaction with her Lord. Some nights, while the earthlings slept and neither her nor James' direct presence was required on earth, they would slip away back to their celestial abodes inside the Heavenly City for times of rest and recuperation with other friends and loved ones, who in turn had their own assignments elsewhere on earth.

It was in such times of companionship and feeding, and particularly the special moments shared with her most intimate personal Friend, Jesus, that she would find the strength of heart, the discernment, the instruction, even the very source of her heavenly power that she would need to do the job that lay before her.



James appeared on the scene bright and early the following morning, and so did little Jonathan. “What are you doing up so early?” James looked at him with a sidelong glance.

“Foo, foo!” Jonathan iterated emphatically.

“You want to eat?”

“Mmmm,” was the little boy's reply, as he patted his tummy.

“Okay, sit here—don't move, don't touch anything, don't do anything.”

Little Jonathan looked up at this rather harsh pronouncement, not sure whether to burst into tears or not.

Seeing his apparent consternation, James quickly reassured him, “It's okay. Here, look at this book and I'll fix you something to eat.” James tossed over a harmless-looking magazine with a smattering of bright-colored pictures throughout its pages.

*"Hello, anyone up yet?"* Allan's voice beamed through into the house.

James quickly opened the door. Allan was standing outside with a man.

"Here's one of those incorrigibles for you. He was worth saving. The rest have been taken care of, but..."—Allan looked sternly at James—"you'll have to take care of this one—he's yours. Please try your best with him." With that, Allan was gone. The disheveled man stood still, with a blank look on his face.

*What are we going to do with you?* James thought to himself. Almost immediately a response from beyond answered his question.

*"Do not invite him inside with the others just yet. He will need some time to adjust to what is going on."*

"You can sit down here on the veranda and wait," he finally told the man. "I'm trying to fix the little boy something to eat." James propped the door open with a broom handle, so he could keep an eye on the man while he continued to prepare some food for little Jonathan.

"Who on earth is that?" Christy asked as she entered the room, though by the sound of her voice it was obvious that she already knew the answer.

"Allan was up here bright and early, and look what he brought with him. He's ours too."

Christy moved out onto the veranda to get a closer look at him. Then she came back inside and looked at James. "What are we going to do with him?" she asked. "Did you talk to him?"

"Nope, the Lord said to leave him alone for now," James lowered his voice. "But one thing is sure—he really needs a bath."

"I'll say," Christy responded, eyeing the man up and down. He looked and smelt as though he hadn't had a bath for months. His hair was long and knotted together, and long, unkempt whiskers adorned his

face like an overgrown garden. Had they not known that the curse had been lifted, they would have surely thought his hair and garments were infested with all manner of vermin. The hulk of a man slumped down against the wall of the house, and stared off blankly into space, mumbling incoherent and unintelligible sentences to himself.

Christy tried to peer into his mind, but soon gave up, as there was as little coherence to his thoughts as there was to his words. All she saw was a mass of confusion, vision after vision flashing by, with one sometimes lingering a little longer than the others. Visions of the past and images of his recent past—which were by far the most disconcerting for Christy to partake of. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply, praying for all the strength and love she would need to help this unfortunate being.

## THE LEGIONNAIRES

Gradually different ones awoke, and eventually all found themselves in the kitchen, which proved a natural place to gravitate to at this time of day. Though they looked a little uncomfortable, they seemed relieved that life was going to go on, and there was an unspoken glimmer of hope that perhaps the pieces of their lives could be picked up after all.

James, oblivious to the uncertainty of those around, went about his duties cheerfully—whistling, cooking, cleaning and making sure everyone had enough to eat.

Christy wandered into the dining room and plopped down at the end of the table. After everyone had eaten, she began to converse with those around her, trying to find out a little more about each one. Before long everyone except for Stewart and the little girl was contributing something to the conversation. It was polite, and nothing deep, but nevertheless it was conversation.

“Why are you still cooking, James? I think everyone has had enough to eat,” Trevor called to him. A night of peaceful sleep had done wonders for the old man, and a healthy and almost ruddy color had come to his face. In fact, it appeared as if he had gotten a few

years younger overnight, and the weariness that had pervaded not only his body but his voice the day before had been replaced with an energy that made him almost the life of the table—together with little Jonathan.

“Oh, there’s one more of our company,” James answered with a big, somewhat forced smile on his face. “There’s another gentleman outside, and he may be hungry.” James paused. “But, then again, maybe not,” he trailed off.

“Oh, there’s someone outside?” Trevor asked. “Why not bring him in?”

“Umm, I don’t know that he’s quite ready to join the rest of us yet,” James responded.

Stewart suddenly looked up in interest at this turn of the conversation, glancing from one to the other as they continued speaking. Then he arose and went over to the front door to peer out at the rather unsightly man. He stared for a good while and then returned to the table and sat back down, looking expectantly at James, trying to anticipate his next words.

Christy didn’t say anything. James put the food he had prepared on a plate, and gingerly walked out the door. Before too long, he was back inside without the plate. Stewart looked up expectantly, keenly curious as to how they were planning to deal with this rather odd addition to their group.

James, noticing Stewart’s interest, and at the same time sensing Christy’s reluctance to involve herself in matters pertaining to this man, turned to Stewart and said, “I took the plate out and set it in front of him. He didn’t realize that I was there so I prodded him a little.” James was demonstrating as he talked. “He jumped; I pointed to the plate in front of him. He started picking the food up with his hands and shoveling it into his mouth. At least he can feed himself; that’s a first step, isn’t it?” For the first time

since their arrival, Stewart attempted a smile, obviously amused at James’ little performance.

Christy ignored James, but his charade was followed by several moments of awkward silence. He had successfully gotten everyone’s attention, and now the unspoken question that lingered in the minds of the survivors was who James and Christy really were, and what had happened; and above all, what was *going* to happen. Christy quickly became aware of their questions, though she also perceived that neither Trevor nor Belle wished to appear too presumptuous by asking them directly for themselves. She decided to take this opportunity to fill everyone in on what was going on.

“I know you’re probably all wondering who we are—even *what* we are—and what we’re doing here,” she began. Of course, she did know they were wondering these things, but she used the word “probably” to not give away the fact that she could read their minds. They would be more comfortable not knowing this particular piece of information for the time being. “Well, let me see. Where can I begin? James and I, we’re brother and sister, and we were among the multitudes who went up in what we call the Rapture—that day that Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, and now literally the King of all kings and Lord of all lords, appeared in the sky and called His children home.

“And now we’ve come back; ambassadors, in a sense, from that crystal City you have seen in the sky—the City God Himself has built as His home to dwell among us. And those of us who have gone there, and have now returned, are still much the same people, humans like yourselves. Only we’ve been given new bodies and special powers that will help us to reclaim the earth, and to run it, under the direct authority of Jesus, the way it should have been run from the beginning.

“The fact that you folks are still here and alive

means that you either never had a chance to hear about Jesus and His plan of salvation for mankind, or if you did, it was never explained to you in a clear manner, so that you did not understand what it was you rejected. The fact that you've survived the plagues of wrath that God unleashed upon the earth to destroy those who persecuted His children shows that you have been found worthy to live on into the new world we have been sent here to build.

"We are part of a team that has been commissioned by Jesus to try to put this world back together again. Our assignment was to come to your town and find any survivors—that's you—and to do what we can to help you rebuild your lives, and to start afresh in this new age of God-given worldwide peace."

There was silence; no one showed any sign of emotion or even real comprehension of what she was saying, though, being able to discern their thoughts, Christy knew that all that she was sharing with them was indeed being understood. Even the children seemed to comprehend her explanation, though perhaps not as specifically as the others.

She went on. "You see, all those left on earth, the survivors, have a choice to make. They can either work with us to help make things right, start again, and learn from the mistakes of humanity's own history, or I guess you could say, they can rebel. This reign of peace won't be forced upon those who don't want it. Anyone can decide not to cooperate with our efforts—that's still a matter of personal decision. Our job is to give everyone a chance, and then to start work reclaiming the world and bringing order out of the chaos man has left it in."

Trevor was the first to speak. "And what about those who don't want to help?"

Christy was silent for a moment. The question was not a simple one to answer, but she knew that these earthlings would hardly comprehend the new and

greater concepts of Millennial salvation that she herself had only recently become aware of. She opted for a rather simplistic answer: "They will have time to make their decisions, time to come to terms with what has happened and the way things are to be now. Each one will be given an opportunity to help us to rebuild the world—and those who choose to take a different route, well, they will one day be brought to a final decision. But that's not something we have to concern ourselves with right now."

No one said anything; they sat in silence and thought back on the last few years of earth as they had known it. Though they knew little of the ones who had come to power and taken charge of the earth—the spiritual and unearthly beings that stood before them—they understood enough to know that there had been a struggle between right and wrong, good and bad. They knew that something supernatural had happened, and that they had somehow survived through the end of one era and the beginning of a new one. They said nothing. What could be said?

Sensing that they had heard enough for the time being, Christy looked at James and asked, "So, where do we start?"

In turn, James asked, "Does anyone have any suggestions on what to do now? Where do we go from here?"

Belle seized the opportunity to contribute. "I should think we need to find food; from what I've seen of the pantry and the basement, the food here won't sustain us for much longer, and it doesn't look like we'll be able to grow anything here immediately."

Stewart nodded and raised his hand. He went over to the drawer, pulled out a piece of paper and a pen, and in large lettering wrote on the paper, "seeds, animals, self-sufficient."

James nodded. "Good. I agree. We'll have to find some way to get more food. Then we need to begin

taking steps to help ourselves become self-sufficient. Definitely a good point! There'll be repairs to make too, if we are to stay here for a while," James continued. Meanwhile Stewart was writing furiously: "fences, repairs, the well and drinking water."

And so it began. They spent a good part of the morning discussing plans.

"I imagine we'll get a visit from Allan and his friends again soon," Christy said. "We can ask them about water, food and other items that we may be able to salvage from the town before they—" She stopped, realizing that this hadn't yet been explained, and then looked at everyone. "You know, they're planning to totally level the town." Everyone looked at her somewhat skeptically, but she went on. "They're able to do it ... they just ... do it." She shrugged her shoulders.

Christy and Belle worked inside of the house; the men worked outside. Trevor, not really having his full strength back yet, pattered around and helped where he could. Stewart quickly warmed up to James, and a bond of friendship was formed, though without words. Belle, though remaining reticent, began to warm up to Christy, and she especially took an interest in the two small children, whom she stayed with most of the afternoon.



That evening, just as Christy had predicted, Allan and his team arrived back at the farmhouse. They soon found themselves gathered in the kitchen.

"So, how was your day?" Allan asked.

"Great," James said, smiling. "Small beginnings, but it's a start!"

Still shy of these strangers, Belle hustled the children off into her bedroom. Trevor excused himself from the table and wandered off also. Stewart, keenly interested in the conversation but not wanting to look like he was, stood up and began clearing the table.

"How's our friend outside?" Allan asked, nodding towards the door as he directed the question to Christy.

"He is ... uh ... he's being very quiet. He's eating, and basically he just stares out into nothing."

"Where's he at?" asked Brad, another one of the Legionnaires. He was the one who had first found the incorrigible.

"Lost in his own world, it seems." Christy replied.

Brad nodded. "That's quite how I found him, actually. His listlessness was the one thing that set him apart from the others, whose calculated malice and rebellious hearts made them truly 'incorrigible.' I'm surprised they survived Armageddon at all. But this one seemed more lost than incorrigible, simply following what little of a crowd he could find—the poor man."

"How was your day?" James asked, attempting to change the subject.

Allan caught on. "Oh, our day was just fine. There's quite a bit to do down there."

"Did you start knocking down those towers?"

Allan was silent for a moment. "It seems the towers had already been leveled; I'm not sure how—perhaps an aftershock or something. In any case, there are plenty of other buildings for us to work on."

A guilty smile flashed across Brad's face. He quickly lowered his head, hoping no one would see it.

"Hey, maybe I could come and help you," James enthusiastically offered.

"Oh?" Allan asked.

"Yeah. I mean, I don't want to boast, but I venture to say that I'm pretty good at that sort of thing, I..."

Christy gave James a withering look, which told him in no uncertain terms to keep quiet. James stopped talking.

"Well, we might need your help down there,

actually,” Allan said. “You and the young man over at the sink. We’ve gone through most of the stores and storage places, and have come up with a fair amount of food and other goods that you could probably use up here. If you want to come down and get it, it would probably help you to get off to a good start.”

“Yes, we’re stockpiling quite a lot of different things for you down there,” Brad added. “As soon as we are able to clear all of that stuff out, we can start doing the fun stuff.”

“We could come first thing tomorrow,” James suggested.

“Tomorrow would be fine; you could come down with us, although”—Allan cast a glance over at Stewart, who suddenly noticed that, in listening in on the conversation, he had stopped washing dishes—“if you come with him, I guess you’ll have to walk.”

“True,” James affirmed.

Christy remained quiet throughout the conversation, obviously a little unsettled by something. After scanning her thoughts, Allan realized that she was still very uncomfortable about the incorrigible who had been brought up from the town.

Allan looked at Christy and said, “It’s a beautiful night outside. Wanna come look at the stars?”

The question startled Christy. She tried to scan Allan’s thoughts to see what was behind his question, but she found that his thoughts were blocked.

Without waiting for a reply, Allan stood up and walked outside. He stood on the veranda, looking out into the starlit sky while he waited for her to join him. When she did, she cast a suspicious glance at the man still seated there against the wall behind them.

“Should we walk a little, over to the edge of the plateau maybe?” Allan suggested, nodding towards the town. “We probably won’t be able to see much,

but who knows? It’s a beautiful night.”

Allan walked in silence. Christy, not able to read what he was thinking, also remained silent. When they had reached the edge of the plateau, they stood looking out over the remains of the town, which were illuminated by the bright silver moonlight, and the soft golden glow of a second moon—the orbiting crystal sphere that housed the huge Space City.

Finally Allan spoke. “You still don’t understand why we brought that man up to you, do you?”

Christy bit her bottom lip, and then simply stated, “No. He acted like an animal, just like the rest. I don’t know how you could spare any of them.”

Allan was silent for a moment, and then explained, “Well, you know as well as I do that everyone gets a chance. They can choose to move ahead with us, or they can choose to rebel. This one did not choose to rebel, and is in fact hardly in a condition to choose anything at the moment. The others were already in rebellion; they really were incorrigible, and there was no hope for them. The Wrath of God had not yet overtaken them, but it has now, and they have been delivered to the fate they deserve.

“But even their fate is not sealed forever. No one’s is. Like an account, where money is deposited and the balance grows, or money is withdrawn and the balance lessens, so their individual future is affected by their decisions and the way they choose to live their lives, whether here and now upon earth, or later in their spiritual afterlife. And so all are given their opportunity, and according to their choice, they will be judged. So even though this man’s thoughts are muddled and not very clear, and although we were barely able to make any contact with him, there is a glimmer of hope for him. And you know if there’s a glimmer of hope for anyone, we have to give them a chance.”

Christy hung her head, and remained silent.



"You have to remember that God is a loving and a merciful God, and He longs to have all men come to Him, so that He can give them the peace and forgiveness that they seek. For some it will take a long time before their hearts are ready to receive it, for others it will come more quickly. But once a person makes the right choice, no matter how bad he or she has been, He is always ready to forgive and restore and mend and heal. And we're here to help Him do that.

"But in the meantime, you don't have anything to fear." Allan tried to encourage her, "If he tries to harm you or any of the others, you would be able to stop him immediately with the powers that are available to you."

"It's not that," Christy said. "I'm not afraid of him. It's just that I'm so repulsed by him. I know I shouldn't be, and I'm really trying not to be. But it's very difficult. Even though I know everyone needs to have a chance, it's so hard to believe that he's going to make it. His mind seems so blank now, and even if there's only a glimmer of hope, he may well end up rebelling later. So why try to rehabilitate him when there's so much else to do?"

"You never know." Allan turned and looked at Christy, "You just never know. Let me tell you a story." Allan turned and they began to walk slowly back towards the farmhouse. "I died about the time that your mother and father were born—in the late '50s."

That thought struck Christy as unusual, for here, standing before her, Allan barely looked thirty years old. To think that he'd died around the time her parents were born took a little getting used to.

Being able to read her thoughts, he smiled. "I was a convicted rapist and a murderer. I had been caught and sentenced to death. Half an hour before I was to go to the electric chair, a preacher came and sat with me. He had no faith in me. He was clearly repulsed

by what I'd done, and if it hadn't been the commission he felt given him by God, he would not have come near me. Yet he felt driven to give me a chance, to at least tell me the truth. As he talked with me, somehow the words he was saying gave me hope. I had lived my entire life without hope. I was a mess. I was a wicked, mean man. I was confused. I had been in and out of psychiatric hospitals, till towards the end I didn't know reality from fiction.

"But what this man said gave me hope, and I thought if what he was saying were true, I should at least try it. It wasn't that I hadn't heard it before, but I'd never cared about it before. So, I bowed my head, knelt down and prayed for the redemption of my soul. That's how I was reclaimed. I entered into the spiritual realm with nothing but shame. It took a long time of rehabilitation, but I became a totally new person. So," he paused, "the moral of my story is, if there was hope for me, there's hope for this man. It was this preacher's driving compulsion and love—not love for me, but love for my soul—that gave me a chance. Can't you do the same for this man? After all, that's what this new beginning is all about."

Christy was stunned. She knew the words he spoke were the truth, and she was thankful that he'd taken the time to speak with her. She looked up at the giant translucent orb that hovered high in the sky above them—the city and home of these immortal beings that many still called simply Heaven. "Somehow it seemed easier up there to understand these concepts and to live them," she said, still gazing upward. Then she looked back at Allan. "But down here sometimes it gets a little muddled. My thoughts are not always as clear as they should be, and I guess my motivation is not always as pure as it should be."

"It's not always easy," Allan said. "I know that, especially when you've been away from home for a while." He smiled and looked up as well. "But, listen,

we're just beginning, and everybody has a lot to learn. There's still a long way to go, but things will get easier and better. I promise."

Christy sighed contentedly. "Thanks, I needed that."

Allan looked down as they walked back towards the farm, not saying any more.

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## THE FARM

"What are you doing?" Christy gasped as she surveyed the scene in front of her. James had put the incorrigible to sleep by inducing him into a state of total subconsciousness. Meanwhile, Stewart had gotten a large metal bowl, scissors and a razor, and had started working on the incorrigible.

"We're gonna shave his head," James said. "I can't talk much, 'cause I'm trying to concentrate on keeping this guy knocked out."

"What?" Christy asked, almost in disbelief.

"We've gotta start somewhere. This guy is filthy, and we've gotta get him cleaned up."

Stewart had closely cropped the incorrigible's hair, and was already beginning to shave the man's head.

"I don't believe it," Christy said, shaking her head.

James declined to answer, as he turned his attention back to keeping this massive hulk of a man subconscious, so that Stewart could complete his task.

Turning around abruptly, Christy bumped into Brad.

"Good morning," Brad said. "Did you sleep?"

"Uh, sometimes I do," Christy answered. "But now that we don't have to anymore, I guess we usually

just stay awake.”

“It’s still nice to sleep sometimes,” Brad suggested. “You should try it. It’s nothing like sleep used to be for us as mortals, you know. It can be quite out of this world.”

Christy smiled.

Brad now noticed the two boys as well. “I see the boys are busy there.” He could tell that Christy was less than enthusiastic about what they were doing.

“I don’t know,” she said, shaking her head. “Somehow I don’t think that’s the best way to go about helping him.”

“It’s fine,” he said. “You should just let them take care of him and see what they can do. Stewart’s really good with animals, you know. He might well be a big help with that poor fellow.”

He watched Christy with an amused look on his face, waiting to see if she would catch the joke. When her reluctant smile told him that she had, he continued, “The rest of the team have already gone down to the town. I stayed behind to lead James and Stewart to the others—that is, once they’re done with their little hairdressing stint.”

“Oh good,” Christy said with a laugh. “I’m hoping a little time away will give James the outlet for his restlessness that he needs, so that he doesn’t have to revert to such pranks.”



As the days passed, slowly some order came out of the chaos that was all around them. Using their powers, the Legionnaires began to systematically level the town. After setting aside any materials that might be useful for rebuilding homes and villages, they would cover the remaining debris with soil taken from the surrounding areas. It was not an easy job, and it required precision and skill such as they’d been trained in.

The farmhouse began to come alive. Supplies were

brought up and safely stored in a new storage shed which Stewart had built pretty much single-handedly. The children began to laugh and sing again as Belle took them into her care. Soon after the little girl had begun to talk again, she had introduced herself as Cassie. Whether it was by some uncanny insight of her own, or perhaps because she had heard it so often that she had herself come to accept it as fact, her persistent answer to repeated questions as to her young brother’s real name was, “You know ... he’s called Jonathan.”

Soon plants began to sprout. The team had also managed to gather together a small herd of livestock made up of beasts they had found scattered throughout the countryside, which had apparently fled during the great devastation. To Stewart’s great joy, some of his goats made their way back to the farmhouse, and while they already had cows for milk, he surprised them all by producing some quite tasty goat cheese.

Stewart had still not spoken, but Christy knew that it was just a matter of time. When he was ready, he would start to communicate as freely as the others. At least he was beginning to show signs of trying to communicate verbally. Prompted one evening by an extensive conversation in which the others had begun discussing nicknames to assign him, he had gesticulated quite emphatically, and then written out his name on a paper. From that time on, everyone called him by his own name, Stewart.

The incorrigible’s hair had begun to grow back, and he was also beginning to show signs of improvement, especially after the others’ repeated attempts to engage him in conversation. At first his replies consisted of little more than mumbling unintelligible gibberish, but slowly he began to enunciate his words more distinctly, and they began to understand some of his disjointed sentences. Stewart had befriended

the man, who had been nicknamed “Spartan” by the small group.

In large part, this relationship was due to the fact that Stewart never spoke, and Spartan evidently found some measure of comfort in their mutual nonverbal communication. Once the bond had been formed, true to Brad’s word, Stewart became instrumental in helping him, even teaching him how to eat and wash. Spartan’s presence soon became an accepted part of their daily routine.

The heavies had also become an accepted part of their settlement now. Although some would occasionally break formation to see to matters at other settlements, most of them spent their days working in the town, and their evenings at the farmhouse. They seemed to enjoy the break from their usual bleak deconstruction sites and the dreary work of obliterating the useless remnants of an old world. They enjoyed the warmth, the children and the company—especially the female company.



Allan and Brad stood on the edge of the plateau, looking down over the valley. “Looks like we’re just about finished here, aren’t we?” Brad sighed.

Allan was silent, and turned to look at Brad. He raised his eyebrows, as if to say yes.

Brad continued, “It’s gonna be hard to leave these guys, isn’t it?”

Once again, Allan didn’t say anything.

Undaunted by Allan’s lack of response, Brad tried one more time. “They’re doing pretty good, aren’t they? These guys.”

Finally Allan laughed. “Yes, they’re okay, Brad.”

Happy to at last have received some response, Brad continued, “You know, when we first came here, and I saw how young and inexperienced those two kids were—especially with their new powers and all—I have to admit I wondered how wise it was to have them

stuck all the way out here by themselves with this group of people—even with as small a group as theirs is. But after seeing them in action, I guess all I can say is they seem to have what it takes.”

“They’re good kids,” Allan responded. “Even with so little time for any real training, they’ve done quite well. Just think, it’s been less than three months since they’ve had their new supernatural bodies, most of which they’ve spent up in the Heavenly City catching up with old friends and meeting new ones. But then they find themselves back on earth, and almost straightway they’ve had to start engaging in some of the most challenging ‘refugee’ and ‘disaster relief’ ministries that they’ve ever been involved in. Even we have to learn so many new aspects of living with our new resurrected bodies in this physical environment, and we’ve been in Heaven for a while. Imagine how these guys must be feeling.”

“Still,” Brad interjected, “I wonder why it is that they find it so much easier than others. I guess we all thought that our missions would be easy once this all finally happened, and we had to step in and take over, but for many it’s certainly not been as easy as they thought.”

“I know,” Allan said. “I don’t think anybody really knew what it was going to be like. Most of us thought it was going to be different than it is now. We should have known, but I suppose we always tend to look at things very optimistically.”

Brad laughed. “Well, it’s not that things are going poorly.”

“No, I know,” Allan responded. “Things are going very well. It’s just that it’s different, and we all still have a lot to learn.”

Brad was very inquisitive by nature. He always had been, and he probably always would be. “But what is it that makes these young kids do so well? They’re as untrained as most of the others. They’ve

hardly got any idea of what they're doing, yet they seem to have already done so well with the group of people that they have. They've brought them in, connected with them, and they're prospering."

"I've wondered about that too," Allan said. "You know what I think it is?"

"Tell me."

"Well," Allan looked out into the distance. "I believe it's because they're going about things in a different way than some of the others."

"Well, obviously. But what?"

Allan continued, "What I mean to say is that, in some of the other places we've seen, things are going quite fine as well. But it's different with these guys. And I think it's because most of the time they act just like the survivors themselves. They don't use any of their more obvious powers unless they absolutely have to, and instead they seem to almost prefer to be like everyone else. They fit right in, and I'd say for the most part these survivors don't even think of them as being superior. And as far as I can tell, that's what has won the trust of these people a lot faster than what we've seen from other settlements."

"And not only that, but somehow they—especially Christy—have developed a certain compassion and an understanding for these folk—what they've been through and what they're going through. It is an understanding well beyond their years, though, and at least from what I have been able to see of Christy's mind, I suspect that much of it comes as a direct result of their spending time in prayer and communion with the Lord. It seems they have tapped into this source of strength and energy much more than the other Settlers around here have been prone to. This has helped them to connect with these people, to where they are in a better position to help them than many others are at this point."

"So you think that's their strength?" Brad asked.

"I'm pretty sure of it."

"Well, they sure seem to have the edge on some of the other Settlers around here."

"Yes. They are not only able to read minds, but they've been able to take the information they perceive to the Lord, and of course He gives them the insight to know what to do about it. Thus they've learned how to act and respond to their surroundings, and to those around them. I think that might be what's missing in some of the other settlements, particularly in the larger ones. The other Settlers can read minds, but they've not quite learned how to use this to connect with people on an individual basis. It's something they'll just have to learn, I suppose."

"It's not going to be so easy to leave them," Brad sighed.

"I know." Allan lowered his voice. "I've asked if we could keep an eye on them."

"Oh!" Brad was surprised.

"I'd like to continue to watch them closely, because I think what they're doing here could be a key to help some of the other settlements that are struggling a bit." Allan shook his head, almost in wonder. "There's a lot of potential here."

"The boy, James, is quite a character," Brad laughed.

Allan nodded. "I know, I know. But have you ever watched him? He's becoming quite skilled in developing the use of his powers, though I don't think he has realized their full potential yet. In time, and perhaps with a little help from us, I'm sure he'll start getting the hang of things a little more."

"What about Christy?"

"Let's watch that girl too. Though she doesn't use her powers quite the same—perhaps because she chooses not to manifest them so outwardly—she's still the backbone of this place. In both cases, I've asked if we could maybe train them a little more in the use

of their powers.”

“You did?” Brad asked. “And what was the answer?”

“Surprisingly enough, the answer was yes.”

“Well, that’s certainly new—training someone like this, while they’re out on assignment?”

“It’s a first, I know. But I guess that’s how everything’s working these days. There’ll probably be a lot of ‘firsts’ as we take things a step at a time and try and see which approaches will work best.”



At the farmhouse, everyone had his or her routine down pretty well. Dinner was a group affair, and thus far had also included the heavies. After dinner, Stewart and James would clean up. Belle and Christy would take the children out, play with them and then ready them for bed. Trevor would walk around inspecting the property and seeing to the various animals.

Every evening after dinner, Spartan, now sporting a fairly decent-looking crew cut, would bring his empty plate to the door and set it down on the floor. Although they had repeatedly invited him to join them inside, he seemed content, for the time being, to sleep under a makeshift canopy that had been built a short distance from the house. So he would just turn and lope back and settle down for the night.

“Hey, Spartan. Thanks, man,” James called after him.

Spartan looked back with a pleased smile, like a child who knows he has pleased his parents. “Okay...,” he responded slowly, and then turned and continued toward his hut.

Brad smiled as he watched this short exchange. The rehabilitation of Spartan by both James and Stewart was a constant source of amusement to Brad. They’d done marvels, though their techniques might have been considered a little unorthodox.

James looked at Stewart. “We’ve really got to make some more progress with Spartan, Stewart. Isn’t it time we taught him something new?”

Stewart looked thoughtful, and then nodded in agreement.

“Any suggestions?” James asked.

Stewart raised his eyebrows, and with his finger, pointed to his forehead, meaning that he’d have to think about that.

James laughed, “I’m sure you’ll come up with something.”

Just at that moment, Allan came into the kitchen. “Either of you seen Christy?”

“I believe she’s with Belle and the children,” James answered, motioning towards the hallway.

Allan quickly made his way to the children’s room, where he stuck his head around the door.

“Christy,” he whispered, so as not to startle the children, “do you have a minute?”

“Sure,” Christy said, and then stepped into the hallway with him.

“Can we go outside?”

“Oh, of course.” With that, Christy followed Allan out of the house.

As he usually did when he had something of some relevance to say, Allan slowly headed towards the edge of the plateau with his hands behind his back. “I thought perhaps you’d appreciate hearing it first,” Allan finally said, breaking the silence.

Christy’s heart seemed to skip a beat as she intuitively knew what he was going to say. She stopped and looked at him expectantly.

Allan turned to her. “We’ve done all that needs to be done here.” He nodded toward the valley. “The town is pretty much taken care of now. Now it’s just a matter of time before the soil will settle and the trees and vegetation to begin to grow. We’ve all become very fond of your little family here. It’s going to be hard to

say goodbye. But, just as you have your assignment, we also have our assignments, and now we have to move on to another settlement. It's not too far from here—just over the mountains, in fact. There's quite a bit more to do there, though, so it'll probably be awhile before we see each other again."

Though Christy had been expecting the news, it was difficult for her, as even in the short time she had known him, she had grown quite fond of Allan. She now looked a little crestfallen.

"I'm sorry," Allan said, "but we all knew that this would happen sooner or later."

"I know," Christy said as she quickly wiped away the tear that had stolen down her face. "It's just that you have almost become a part of the family, and I always feel so well protected and well cared for when you're around. And Brad and the others, they're so much fun to be with, for all of us. We're going to really miss you."

Allan, trying to remain strong, said, "Well, I mean, this will happen a lot. Sometimes things aren't quite what we hope or expect them to be, and it takes some adjusting to see things the way the Lord sees them. But when we do, we find in them the working of a greater happiness than we would have found had it been exactly how we expected it. It's something you have to get used to."

"I don't think I'll ever get used to it," Christy answered.

"We can still visit, of course" Allan said. "I don't know about the whole troop, but at least Brad and I..."

"You mean you'll still be dropping by?"

"Sure. We can be anywhere instantaneously, so distance is not really a problem."

"That would be fantastic."

"We can't come too often, though." He hesitated, and then continued, "I don't know how to explain this, but each time we're sent to a new assignment, we're

expected to give that assignment our all. Just as we've become totally involved with you and your work and your people, we have to do the same wherever we go. We have a job to do, and our first priority is to do that job. So it's not like we can just drop by whenever we please."

Allan stopped and looked down at Christy, probing her thoughts. He was touched by her tenderness, her sadness, her childlike joy at hearing that they could still visit, her thankfulness.

"You're reading my thoughts, aren't you?" she said.

Allan laughed. "Of course."

"It's not fair, I can never read yours."

"I know." He smiled a mysterious smile.

"But sometimes I want to," she said, looking deep into his eyes, probing with all her might, and with such intensity that it startled Allan.

"Well, if you keep that up, you might just get through one of these days."

She smiled, and backed off.

He reached out and put his arms around Christy, something he'd not done before.

Instinctively Christy reached her arms around his neck and snuggled close. He stroked her hair, and as he did so, she tilted her head back, and looked up into his eyes. At the same moment their eyes made contact, a troubled thought flashed quickly through her mind. Allan, quick to discern, read the thought in the same instant: *But it's so hard to believe that he was a murderer, a rapist.*

Allan's eyes dropped. He removed his hand from her hair and, gently reaching behind his neck, unlocked her hands and put them down beside her.

Christy was instantly aware that he had read the fleeting thought that had passed through her mind.

"I'm sorry," she said. "That was horrible. I don't know how I could have thought that!"

"Millions of thoughts cross our mind," he said. "It's

okay, really. I've had people think much worse." He smiled good-naturedly, but it did little to ease Christy's mind. She was silent as they walked back toward the house. Allan realized that she felt bad about what had happened and did his best to try to explain things to her.

"Christy, don't feel bad. It's not your fault that you thought what you did. After all, it's natural to have thoughts like that flash through your mind. There was nothing wrong with it. Let me explain something. You've probably heard it said that some folks who never did much for the Lord, though they were saved, would be raised to 'shame and everlasting contempt.' And even though we all know that 'everlasting' is just an indeterminable period of time, it seems that my personal 'everlasting' is not up yet."

She looked up at Allan, not fully understanding what he was saying.

"Let's just say that things similar to what just happened back there are simply part of my everlasting shame. I'm not proud of what I did before. It was not good, and I have to bear some of that shame. It's not going to be forever, and"—he smiled again—"to be honest, it's not so hard to bear, compared to everything I've been given, the joy that I have. So, let's just leave it at that, shall we? Let me be the one to take that on myself, okay? There's no need for you to feel bad about it. You did nothing wrong and you thought nothing wrong. As for me, it's just something that I have to live with. But it's fine, really. I can live with it because I've been given so much else. Besides," he said, "it doesn't happen so often."

Thankful for the explanation, Christy reached over and squeezed his hand. "I'm sorry," she said again. "But thank you for explaining it the way you did."

Allan pulled her towards him and hugged her as they walked back towards the farmhouse.

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## SPARTAN

"Stewart," Christy called.

Stewart spun around.

"Were you going to go out with Spartan today?"

Stewart nodded.

Christy looked a little concerned. "Spartan has seemed a bit unsettled of late," she said, and then walked over and held Stewart's hand. "Be careful, Stewart, and watch over him. Okay?"

Stewart nodded slowly, sobered by Christy's caution.

Shortly after Stewart and Spartan had left on their errand of gathering boulders for a new enclosure for some of the goats, James wandered into the kitchen.

"What's wrong?" he asked, instantly aware that Christy seemed to be troubled by something.

"I don't know," Christy said. "I can't really put my finger on it, but there's something up with Spartan."

"Huh?" James said. "I didn't notice anything."

"I guess I shouldn't worry. I just feel uneasy. He seemed very unsettled, agitated. Something's happening with him. Would you want to keep an eye on them, James?"

"All right," he said, "if it will make you feel better." Meanwhile Spartan, the big strong fellow that he



was, had started to collect some small boulders and was placing them in a pile at the bottom of the hill. Stewart was doing his best to bring the rocks down too, though he was not able to match Spartan's strength. They worked all morning, and then decided to break for lunch. Feeling tired after a strenuous morning workout and lulled to sleep by the warmth of the sunshine, Stewart closed his eyes for a minute and lay back, resting his head on a small boulder.

He awoke a few minutes later with a jolt, sensing that something was wrong. He looked around for Spartan, but the man could not be seen. Worried, Stewart stood up and walked over to where they had been gathering the small boulders. It was then that he spotted Spartan. He stood a short distance away, precariously balanced on a ledge that dropped off steeply into the valley below. Spartan was looking down, apparently planning to jump off.

Stewart panicked. There was nothing he could do—he was alone with Spartan. James and Christy were back at the farmhouse.

Lifting his hands in despair, he took a deep breath, and shouted at the top of his voice, "No, Spartan! Don't jump. No! No!"

Spartan looked up—startled first at the unfamiliar voice, and then even more when he realized who it belonged to.

Spartan wasn't the only one surprised at Stewart's outburst. A faint but unmistakable echo of it had also reached Trevor's ears, as he was working near the edge of the plateau. Sensing that something was wrong, he hurried up towards the farmhouse as quickly as he could, calling out to James and Christy.

"Christy! James! Come, there's something happening. I heard someone call out Spartan's name."

He puffed and panted as he struggled up the slight incline. James hurried out on the veranda, and Christy was right behind him. "Spartan?" she said.

They looked at each other, then instantly focused their vision on the area where Stewart and Spartan had been working.

"Oh no!" Christy shouted, spotting Spartan first. "Spartan is about to jump off the ledge. Why is he doing that? Quick, we've got to get there right away!"

No sooner were the words spoken than James and Christy found themselves standing beside Stewart who, realizing that the sound of his voice was distracting Spartan from his intentions, continued to shout. Spartan appeared very confused and unsure of his actions.

"We've got to stop him," Christy said. "But we've gotta be careful. It's a long way to fall, and we don't want to startle him into jumping."

"What can we do? Can we freeze him in his tracks?" James wondered aloud.

"I'm not sure I know how," Christy said. "But James, of course, you ... you knocked him out once before. You could do the same thing again. Only we're going to have to get up there right away to catch him."

"Okay."

James instantly concentrated all his thought power on Spartan, and as before, managed to somehow shut down the man's mind, rendering him unconscious. Instantly they were standing behind him, holding him up.

James motioned to where Stewart was standing. "We have to get him down there, but I'll have to keep him knocked out at the same time."

Christy called Stewart to come up and help. Stewart scrambled up the rocky hillside as fast as he could and then slowly, with effort, they managed to drag Spartan down to safe ground. James successfully kept him unconscious at the same time.

Once Spartan was on safe ground, James released his grip on Spartan's mind, though James continued to keep it under subjection, so that the man remained

in a sleeplike state.

Christy looked up at Stewart with amazement. "Stewart, do you realized what just happened?"

He looked at her questioningly, not understanding what she was referring to.

"Stewart, you were speaking!"

Stewart put his hand up to his mouth, as if he was making sure that he still had one.

"Thank God you were," Christy continued. "That's what caused Spartan to hesitate. Otherwise he would have been gone."

"I ... I know," Stewart stuttered, though he didn't give the phenomenon any further thought. Instead, he walked over to James, and gazed at Spartan with obvious concern. "What's wrong with him?"

James, who was trying to peer into Spartan's sleeping mind to find some clues, came up blank. "I don't know. Do you? What happened?"

Stewart shook his head and haltingly began to explain. "He ... he helped me all morning. He did seem a little ... a little preoccupied. Not his ... usual self. I lay back and just closed my eyes for a few minutes. I ... I shouldn't have. I should've taken your warning seriously, Christy. When I woke up I ... Spartan ... he was standing on the ledge. I knew he ... was going to jump."

Christy looked thoughtful, and then turned to James. "James, ease up a little on Spartan. Don't let him get up, but let's see if we can find out what's wrong."

James further loosened his hold on Spartan's mind. Spartan stirred and slowly opened his eyes. "Jump ... me...", he said feebly.

"No, you didn't jump," Christy said. "We stopped you."

Spartan looked disappointed. "Stop...", he repeated.

"Spartan," she said, reaching out and holding his

hand, "why did you want to jump?"

He gazed back into her eyes, and slowly tears welled up and rolled down his face. Christy, having established a better connection than James had been able to, now gently probed his mind, trying to read the thoughts he was apparently still unable to express.

"Oh, Spartan. Spartan, I'm so sorry. Everything's going to be okay." Turning to James she suggested, "It's okay, James. He'll be all right. You can let him go."

James now fully released his hold on the man's mind. The experience had been an exacting one for Spartan, and within seconds he drifted into a deep sleep.

"He's beginning to remember things," Christy told the boys. "I don't know what is the most difficult for him—he began to remember all that he'd been doing just before we found him. I couldn't understand everything, but apparently he had escaped from a drug-treatment center of sorts. He was under heavy medication there and was a virtual zombie. When everything happened, he managed to escape from the institution and began roaming around the city. He remembered all that he'd been doing, and it was almost unbearable for him. But I think what is even more difficult for him are his memories of the more distant past, before he was taken into the center. He had a wife and a baby girl. He loved them dearly but he was not able to care for them as well as he wanted to. He is overwhelmed with remorse. It's just been too much for him to bear, and I guess he thought that all he could do to end it was to take his own life."

"Poor guy," James muttered. Stewart looked helplessly on.

"I know," Christy said. "That's quite a burden to have to bear."



Somehow between the three of them, they managed to carry Spartan's sleeping form safely home. They took him into the house and laid him on James' bed. It seemed he would be asleep for a while, but Christy took it upon herself to remain by his side. Her love and compassion for this man were quickly beginning to grow, and she felt it her calling to be here for him at this trying stage of his rehabilitation.

As soon as he began to awaken, Christy quickly skimmed his mind, and then called for James to join them. "Everything seems to be okay," she whispered as both James and Stewart came into the room. "He remembers! Spartan..."

Spartan looked into Christy's eyes.

"Do you remember what just happened? What you were trying to do?"

He looked away and nodded.

Christy held his hand. "You're starting to regain your memories, aren't you?"

Spartan nodded again.

"Spartan, no matter how bad your life turned out in the past, you don't have to end it now." Spartan turned and looked searchingly into Christy's eyes. "Spartan, listen carefully," she continued, "we know about everything that you did, but that doesn't matter anymore. All of that is in the past. We love you for what you are now. We've all done things in the past that we are ashamed of, or that we wished we had never done." The things Allan had told her about himself suddenly came back to her mind. "Some have done things similar to what you have done, but there's no need for remorse or tears. You're here with us now, and we love you and we need you. That's all that matters, okay?"

"We can't change what has happened in the past—none of us can. Even if we made a mess of the past, now we've been given the chance to start again. You have that same chance, Spartan, just like the rest of

us, and you have to grasp it, you have to seize it, you have to hold on to that, and move on! Spartan, promise me that you'll go on. Promise me that you won't try to do anything like that again."

Spartan, understanding all that she said, nodded yes, and almost involuntarily his eyes met her gaze again. Suddenly he began to sob uncontrollably, and quickly hid his face with his hands. Belle, who had been passing by only moments earlier and had stopped to watch the exchange taking place with great interest, now came closer and, just as she often did with the children, held Spartan's body in her embrace, and comforted him.

James smiled. Stewart looked on with relief. From that day on, Spartan lived with the others inside the house.



"Christy?"

Still startled at times to hear Stewart speak, Christy looked up when he called her name. "Yes, Stewart?"

"I've been thinking. You mentioned that Spartan had a wife and a little girl. James seems to think that she may have moved across the mountains. I wonder..." He hesitated, not sure whether to continue or not. Christy listened patiently, as she had already skimmed his mind and knew what he wanted to ask. He finally found the courage to continue. "I wonder if there's any chance that they're still alive?" He looked up at Christy.

"Maybe."

"I remember when Allan was here, he and Brad mentioned that there were a lot of people left on the other side of the mountain, and that there were some quite large settlements there. It wasn't the same as on this side. I guess there were more survivors there or something."

"I know," Christy said.

"So maybe there is a chance that she's still alive."

Christy looked at Stewart. "What do you think she'd think of Spartan now? Don't you think it could do him more harm and cause more hurt if he met her and she spurned him, or she didn't want to have anything to do with him? What if his little girl was scared of him? It's very likely she won't recognize or even remember him at all."

"I know, I've thought of that too," Stewart said. "But I just can't shake the feeling that if they are still alive somehow, then Spartan needs to see them."

"It is an interesting thought."



A little later, James and Christy were discussing Stewart's question.

"I don't know, James. It might be interesting to see if there's any way to have Spartan meet his wife and daughter again. But"—Christy shook her head—"the chances of their having survived, even though there are more survivors on the other side of the mountains, are very, very slim."

"I know," James responded thoughtfully. "But I have to admit, I feel the same as Stewart. I can't help but think that it may hold the key to Spartan's healing; that somehow he needs to know that his wife understands, or that she forgave him."

Christy was silent for a while. "Well, you boys know Spartan better than I do. I mean, it's such a long shot, James, I really don't know if it could ever work out. But just the fact that you both felt the same—maybe we could see if there's any way of finding out if she is still alive. And if she's not, perhaps we need to tell Spartan."

It would be easy enough to determine whether Spartan's wife and daughter were still alive or not. All they'd have to do was beam an inquiry to the command center, or even communicate with their Lord and King Himself. But even if Spartan's family

had survived, Christy and James did not know whether permission would be given for a meeting to be arranged, and so they remained hesitant about putting in an official request. They had been told prior to receiving their assignments that there would be little interaction between the settlements. This was to give every team of Settlers time to build up their own settlements, to strengthen the survivors, the earthlings in their care, and to concentrate fully on what they were doing.

Opening up the settlements to outside influences prematurely would expose them to external contact that might not be beneficial. There was a very fine, delicate balance to be maintained in each of the settlements. The survivors had been through much. Their hearts and minds were often tender and fragile. When the time was right, they could open up further to others—once they had something to give, something to offer. In the meantime, even James and Christy weren't sure they'd be allowed access to the other settlements for the time being.



That night, as Christy lay alone on her bed, she was surprised to see Allan suddenly appear in the room.

"Allan, what a wonderful surprise!" she squealed. At different times she had tried to seek him out, but because he had been busy and also able to block out any probing, she had been unable to establish a mental connection with him. So she was elated by his sudden and unannounced appearance.

"I've been busy," he explained.

"I know, you're always busy." Christy shook her head. "I've really wanted to contact you."

"I know." Allan laughed, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"How do you know? I haven't been able to get ahold of you amidst what seems like a maze of minds out

there.”

“But I’ve been able to find you!”

“You m-mean...,” she stuttered.

“Occasionally I cast my thoughts over this way to see what you’re up to,” Allan said with a chuckle.

“So one day you were casting your thoughts over here and you witnessed my futile attempts to try to get through to you?”

Allan laughed again. “It wasn’t quite like that, but keep trying! One day you just might break through!”

Christy shook her head. “I don’t know about that!”

“So,” he said, “I’m here! I don’t have too long. What have you been trying to contact me about?”

“Well, I’m not sure that it’s really kosher to do this, but...” Christy proceeded to tell him all that had happened with Spartan. Allan was thrilled to hear of his breakthrough and the progress. He was also delighted to know that Stewart was now talking.

“That’s fantastic! Great news!”

“I know—but James and Stewart feel that something is still needed for Spartan, perhaps that he even needs to see—if by chance they are still alive—his wife and little girl again.” Christy spoke hesitantly, carefully studying Allan to determine whether he was catching what she was hinting at.

Allan didn’t flinch. “So have you asked anybody about it?”

“I don’t know if I can. I mean, I’m not sure there’s any point to doing so. On one hand, if they are still alive, and he saw them, I believe it would be devastating if they turned him away. On the other hand, maybe that’s what he has to come to terms with. Oh, I don’t know. It just that something’s holding him back. He can’t go any further. He can’t shake off the feelings of failure and remorse at how he treated his wife and little girl, how he walked out on them, and all that’s happened since.”

“So what do you want me to do? I mean, there’s

not too much I can do about it that you couldn’t do for yourself.”

“I know. But, well, you’re over on that side of the mountain anyway. I wondered if you could keep your eyes open for his wife and daughter, and if ... if they are still alive, then maybe you can see what they’re like.”

“It’s a long shot. What are their names?”

“The little girl is called Jody. I don’t know his wife’s name—it’s never come up in his thoughts. Jody was about three years old when he left. She had blond hair. I saw a picture of his wife—she just looked kind of normal, brown hair, brown eyes. I suppose there are thousands of people out there like that!”

“But there’s probably not too many little girls called Jody. So, she was three when he left; how old would she be now?”

“It happened four years ago, so she’d be about seven.”

“All right. I’ll keep my eyes open.”

“Oh, thank you!” Christy sat up.

For a brief instant Allan’s eyes locked with Christy’s, then he turned his gaze away. “I’ve really gotta go! Take care, okay kid?” And then, as instantly as he had appeared, he was gone.



The weeks passed. There was always plenty to do. Occasionally James, Christy or Stewart would wonder if Allan had found Spartan’s wife and little girl. But with so much to do, there was little time to dwell on it.

One morning Christy was helping Belle outside the house when she felt a gentle probing of her mind. She stopped, closed her eyes, and began to reciprocate. Finally she tapped into the source of the communication—her face lit up. “Allan?”

From his position Allan mentally communicated his reply back. “Yes, *it’s me. We haven’t talked like this very much, have we?*”

"No." Even though they were communicating by thought over distances, Christy was easily able to visualize Allan, and he her. *"It must be pretty important?"*

*"Could be,"* Allan replied. *"I think I may have found Spartan's wife and daughter!"*

*"Oh!"*

*"Yes. There is a woman in one of the settlements here called June. She has a six-and-a-half-year-old girl called Jody. I've asked about them. It looks like her husband deserted her some time ago. It all seems to fit."*

*"Great! So, the next step is to see if we can get it cleared to meet them."*

*"You're on your own as far as that goes!"* Allan replied.

*"I understand. So what settlement is this?"*

*"It is called the Seramore Settlement."*

*"Is it big?"*

*"Huge! It's one of the largest settlements over this side."*

Christy's heart sank. *"Hmmm, that probably means it's not going to be easy to get in there, huh?"*

*"That's probably true. But, I'm sure you'll find a way."*

Christy could almost see Allan's characteristic smile.

*"Thanks."*

With that, the private conversation came to a close.

Belle looked up nervously as Christy's attention returned to the present.

"Sorry," Christy said. "I was receiving a communication from someone. I didn't mean to ignore you, but," she lowered her voice to a whisper, "guess what? Allan may have located..." She didn't have to say any more.

A look of understanding flashed across Belle's face as she responded, "Ohhh!"

Christy lifted her finger to her mouth. "Shhh, don't say anything. Especially not to Spartan."

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## CHARMAGNE

An air of harmonious busyness hung around the large dome. Spirit beings were floating in and out of the entrances leading into the adjacent rooms. At the far end, an ornate desk was laden with what looked like papers—though if one were to look more closely they would see that this was just an illusion. They were really ideas, or communications that could just as easily be visualized in any shape or form, but for simplicity's sake—especially for the sake of the many more resurrected earthlings that now freely roamed this Celestial City—they usually took on the form of a page. Occasionally an individualistic being would translate their communiqué into a shape which more accurately represented its actual content. This made for a colorful array of items which somehow all melted themselves into a perfect arrangement. Whenever one item was taken off the desk the remaining items gracefully rearranged themselves into another kaleidoscope of color and beauty.

Allan looked down at his feet nervously. Somehow whenever he entered these courts he felt uneasy and just a little out of place. He rarely came to this part of the Heavenly City, what could most aptly be described as its administrative control center. He still wondered

how he had gained permission to enter, and as always, felt very unworthy of such an honor. No one seemed to notice his nervousness, however. All were so intent on their own missions that it left them little time to peruse the countenances of those waiting. He sighed deeply, and in doing so inhaled some of the heavenly elixir. This sent a cool, soothing sensation throughout his entire body. He relaxed, comforting himself with the thought that here, in this perfect city, there was nothing to worry about.

"Allaneor Borody?" A woman stood before him, waiting to lead him down one of the many halls that extended from this central room.

Allan jumped to attention. "Yes, ma'am!"

"Welcome."

"Thank you," Allan said. At second glance, he noticed the woman was hovering, and not standing before him.

She smiled warmly and extended her hand. "Please come with me."

Taking her soft hand he followed along, just one small step behind her. She moved gracefully forward without looking behind, guiding him gently through the passageways and into a chamber that was at first hidden from sight. As they appeared to walk into a blank wall, the surfaces melted and folded sideways with a motion that left Allan feeling dizzy.

"Ahh, Allaneor Borody, so glad to meet you! We don't get such visits very often."

The woman standing before him looked surprisingly ordinary, which seemed rather odd to Allan amidst these celestial surroundings. She was noticeably unlike many other heavenly beings that flitted about these halls, and had he not known any better, he might have thought her a mortal earthling who had snuck into this part of Heaven unawares. The only hint that she represented any sort of high station was the almost regal attire she wore, though

this too did not appear at all unearthly.

Allan cleared his throat. "Oh, but it's my pleasure to be here, Madam."

The lady looked amused, and laughed in her delightful, high-pitched voice. "You feel rather uncomfortable here, don't you?"

"It's not that, really. I feel perfectly comfortable. It's ... it's just that coming here is always a bit of an adjustment for me initially."

"You can't guard your emotions from me, you know!" The lady shook her head. "So, how's everything going down on earth with your assignment?"

"Very well."

"Near the Seramore Settlement, that's where you are working now, isn't it? And before that?" She thought for a while, "Oh, that's right, you were with that young girl and boy—taking care of the town." With that, the woman looked deeply into Allan's eyes, and he felt as if his very soul were being peeled apart, exposing his innermost thoughts and passions.

She went on. "Tell me how you feel about the girl and the boy—I can see you were impressed with their work. Why?"

Allan was at a loss for words. He was slightly shaken at the ease with which she had pierced through to his deepest thoughts, had sifted through the multitude of impressions that he had stored up and had pinpointed the single one that he felt was the most important to communicate about.

She stood up and walked up to him, reached out her hand and patted his arm. "I'm sorry, I always go too fast with your type. You're struggling to get used to the change of environment, and then," she laughed, "you have to come face to face with such an odd creature as myself. I try to act as human as possible, but I don't know—I'm just not so good at it, I guess."

Disarmed by her sudden friendliness, and beginning to benefit even more from the heavenly elixir

he had breathed in deeply a few moments before, Allan breathed deeply once again and then apologized, "I'm sorry. It's true; I do still feel a little awkward when I first come in to places like this. I'm surrounded by humans down there, and somehow that makes me feel comfortable. I almost feel human myself again. Perhaps it's because I just get so wrapped up in life on earth that I lose touch with the reality of the world up here."

While he was talking, the woman led him over to a couch sitting up against the white granite wall. "Let's sit down, it will be easier for you to talk. What can I get you?" She thought for a while, and then smiled. No sooner had she done so than the wall parted—again with a dizzy array of colors—to reveal another woman, dressed in a neat miniskirt and white blouse, carrying a tray complete with cups. As she approached the couch, a table mysteriously came up from the floor to meet the tray.

"Here, let's drink something, shall we? That's more normal among you earthly folk, isn't it?" After a slight pause, she continued. "You'll need to come here more often. You should be used to this kind of thing by now."

Allan looked at her in wonder, but not because of what she was saying. As she was speaking, her face had begun to lose its form, almost like a mask dropping off, and for a moment Allan though he could see another mouth and another set of eyes peering out from behind it.

His eyes registered his absolute shock, and the woman suddenly became aware why. "Ohhh," she shrieked as she stood up, and attempted to turn around. Then she stopped. "Oh no, this can't be happening right now." She burst into peals of laughter and was suddenly gone.

"And I'm supposed to get used to this?" Allan shook his head.

It was only a second later that another figure entered the room. Allan somehow knew it was the same woman he had been speaking to, but her form was completely unrecognizable. Before him now stood a tall and most powerful angel, her majestic form revealing all the splendor of heavenly beauty. Had Allan's mind not been totally overcome with the contrast of her sudden change, he would likely have noted that her new form matched the décor around her much better now.

A melodious voice reached into his thoughts, "*I'm back again, only this time in my normal form. I hope you don't mind.*"

Allan remained speechless—which was of course fine under the circumstances. There was no need to speak. It was hard to describe the vision he saw before him; an archangel was the only word that came to him, though he did not know whether she actually was one or not. But the majesty and pure glory she carried with her were such that only the highest order of angels could boast of.

"My name is Charmagne. I'm sorry I didn't introduce myself before, I was rather preoccupied with trying to keep my form and manners as human-looking as possible that I totally forgot. It's something I've been trying to do, you know, to help all these resurrected earthlings feel a little more at home around here. I guess I just need a bit more practice. But back to the subject at hand.

"I can see that you're quite impressed with these youngsters. Tell me about it. You can talk if you prefer, as I can see that this gives you time to collect your thoughts. It must be unnerving for me to pluck your thoughts out of your mind like that, especially when I come across something that has not even crystallized into a specific thought for yourself yet. So please take your time. Ah, I feel much better now." Her laughter once again pealed across the room, and Allan half-



smiled to imagine that the joyous sound probably echoed up to the very top of Heaven.



Charmagne was truly a wonderful being, and before long Allan felt perfectly at ease with her. She listened intently as Allan described Christy and James' settlement, the people in it, and all that had transpired since they had first set it up. Charmagne occasionally asked a question, gently leading the conversation and trying to glean as much information from Allan as she could.

"So what do you think their greatest strength is?"

"Well, as all of us have had to learn, our greatest strength comes from relying on the Lord's power, and not our own. And that is just what they have done, to a great extent. From what I have been able to tell, they both spend regular time in communion with the Lord, though perhaps for different reasons. Christy because she feels very dependent on that source of personal strengthening and direction, and James because he is filled with an intense desire to learn about many things.

"And when it comes to being around the earthlings, they make a point of being as normal as possible. They usually act just like those around them. They're not trying to impress anybody, and they don't get carried away with their powers." Allan smirked, as a fleeting thought crossed his mind. *At least, not too carried away...*

Charmagne, quick to respond, sent a gentle probe into his mind. *"How so?"*

"The boy, James, he's young. He'd like to use his powers more, but she keeps him in check."

Charmagne smiled. "And what do you think?"

"He's learned to harness his powers quite well, as a result of his eagerness to learn and grow in the use of them. I believe he could easily be trained to join the Legionnaires, something I'm sure he'd be eager

to do."

"And the girl?"

"She's..." Allan hesitated a second too long, and again felt the gentle probe searching his thoughts. He looked down.

"I see," Charmagne said with a benevolent smile. "She's quite special, then?"

"Yes, she is," Allan answered. "She is intuitive. She has a gentleness of spirit within her that perhaps could be brought out more, but her tenderness and understanding already do much to bring healing. She also has an exceptionally powerful mind, and I believe with a little help, perhaps..." Allan hesitated, and looked down respectfully. "Well, there is always a need for more Messengers, and I think Christy would have that kind of potential."

Charmagne didn't respond. She merely smiled a mysterious smile. She knew well that Christy's background had made her much better prepared for the tasks she now faced—and would face in times to come—than many of the other Settlers were. On account of their very up-to-date missionary heritage, they had already been earmarked for greater ministries. In fact, their assignment of establishing this relatively small settlement was merely a preparation for the greater tasks they would be called on to perform in days to come, though neither they nor Allan were aware of this fact.

A silence followed—it was hard to determine exactly for how long, but during it many thoughts were able to flood through both of their minds.

Finally it was broken. "There is something I must speak to you about," Charmagne said. "A small misdemeanor."

Allan knew what was coming. He said nothing.

"You know it has been discouraged to pass on information from settlement to settlement. Yet you told the girl about a woman and child in Seramore."

"Yes," was all Allan could say.

"You didn't check with anyone before doing that—not even the Lord?"

"No, I'm sorry."

Again Charmagne gently probed the innermost recesses of his mind. Allan did not resist; he knew it was far simpler for her to discover his motives and his reasons for doing it than it was for him to try to explain them to her, especially as he really didn't know why he had done so. She was gentle, and it took but a moment.

Once the probing was done, silence ensued again. Allan looked at Charmagne apprehensively, expecting judgment to be passed, but when she spoke, she said nothing about the indiscretion. Whatever she had uncovered in the depths of his mind was left there by her—searched out, read, and carefully covered back over.

Her words, however, caught him by surprise.

"I think I'd like to visit the camps. It's been a long time since I've been down to earth and I'd like to see things for myself. I'd need to make sure to watch my disguise a little more carefully, though." Charmagne laughed again at the thought of her shifting face which had so startled Allan.

Allan nodded, trying to come up with some appropriate response to such a statement. Finally he hit upon what he hoped was a positive statement. "I'm sure that would be just, just," he stuttered, "just wonderful!"

Charmagne smiled—though it was hardly a smile as we know them to be. When Charmagne smiled, her whole being glowed. "I'll see you out. While you're here, please do take some time to rest and recuperate before heading back to earth. You've been busy, so take your time. Enjoy yourself."

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## VISITORS

The small home was abuzz with activity. Everyone was busy cleaning, shining and tidying. Even the two children did what they could to pretty up the house, though this consisted mostly of dropping selections of freshly picked flowers (and some accompanying grass and dirt) in places both appropriate and inconvenient.

News had reached them that visitors were soon going to be dropping by. Though most didn't really know what this meant, they simply partook of Christy and James' eagerness to make the property as presentable as possible. The house was rather old and rundown, especially after all it had been through only months earlier, but the extra shining and cleaning gave it a warm glow—or perhaps it was the mounting excitement that gave the place that extra shine.

"Brad!" Christy shouted across the grassy expanse, as she saw him sitting on the steps of the veranda.

Brad waved.

As soon as she was close enough for normal conversation, Christy asked, "What are you doing here?"

"Thought I would come and see how everything's

going. Heard you're about to have a visitor."

"You heard?"

"Yep. All the settlements around here are going to be visited—but it looks like your place is to be the first stop."

"What are these visits for—or about?"

"Dunno."

"And I don't suppose you'd tell me if you did know, huh?"

"Right." Brad answered. "But I don't think there's anything to worry about. You've made the place look pretty good, I must say. Does everyone know who's coming?"

"No, but it doesn't seem to matter. Everyone's thoroughly excited about it."

Brad nodded off in the near distance. "Spartan looks quite sharp!"

"Oh, the boys have been working on him since the early morning. They wanted to make sure that he was looking his best."

Brad and Christy walked slowly inside and enjoyed some light conversation together for a short while. Then, sensing a slight reverberation in the air around them, they stopped and waited. The air was rippling with movement, though the movement was not physical.

"Someone's coming. This must be it—hope you're ready."

Christy cast several quick glances around her. "We weren't expecting anyone just yet, but I guess we're as ready as we ever will be."

Allan was the first to walk through the open door, followed by a small entourage of human-looking beings. Second to the end was an older woman. Seeing the slightly surrealistic air around her, Christy figured that she was not, nor ever had been, a human—but was most likely an important angelic being in disguise. The woman smiled warmly as she came up to Christy,

and thrusting out both hands, took Christy's hands in hers.

"Hello, my dear. I hope we're not too early."

"No, of course not. We're thrilled to have you..."—Christy looked around at the small group that had gathered in the dining room—"all of you."

"We'll be touring some of the settlements in this area, and thought we could pop in on you first."

"We're very honored. Please, let us know what you would like to do or see."

"Why don't we start with a little tour of the property? You could introduce us to everyone. From what I've heard, you only have a few survivors here, so we should be able to greet each one personally. If you can, while introducing them, perhaps run through a brief history of each one in your mind, at least as far as you know it, and I can pick it up—better than saying it out loud."

"Yes, certainly. I'd be happy to."

Just then, James came bounding through the back door, not realizing the visitors were already present. He stopped suddenly. Christy sighed, almost inaudibly. Stewart, who was following close behind James, also came to an abrupt stop.

"Why hello, boys. I guess you didn't think we were here yet, did you? Let me introduce myself. I'm Charmagne, the caretaker of the Settlement Project on this continent. We'll be touring the different settlements in the area and thought to start here."

James, still surprised, managed to mumble a rather awkward introduction, "I'm James, Christy's brother."

Charmagne looked deep into his eyes, and then leaned over and gave him a warm hug, which quickly wiped away any feelings of nervousness within him, and conveyed to his mind the fact that this was no ordinary resurrected human being they were dealing with.

Stewart held out his hand. "I'm ... I'm Stewart, ma'am," he stuttered.

Christy felt a gentle probe in her mind from Charmagne, and quickly began to mentally review Stewart's history, as she knew it.



The visit went well. Charmagne had quickly won the hearts of all there with her charming, yet unearthly manner. The children were delighted with her. No one was exactly sure what or how she communicated with little Jonathan, who could not yet speak for himself, but it was obvious from his childish noises and motions that the two were engaged in as intelligent a conversation as Charmagne had held with the others. Spartan burst into tears when Charmagne put her warm arms around him, and sobbed like a baby in her arms. Throughout the entire visit an almost knowing smile lurked around the edges of Allan's mouth, yet as usual, Christy was not able to probe inside his mind.



After about an hour, but what seemed like many more, Charmagne had met with everyone, secretly scanned every hidden thought in every heart and had toured the property.

She didn't say much. "Well, it's a nice little place, I must say. You could probably start expanding soon, and preparing to take in a few more people."

"We'd be happy to," Christy answered. "We are fairly established now, and could begin to take on a few more folks if there was a need to."

"There's always a need, always a need," Charmagne said. "The larger camps need to be decentralized, and the idea is to eventually break them all down into smaller and easier-to-handle settlements and communities, which will eventually come under the care of those earthlings who can be trusted to tend well to them."

Just as the visit appeared to be coming to its close, Christy felt the world spinning around her till all she could see was whirling colors. Then, just as suddenly as it had started, the whirling stopped.

A melodious voice broke into her thoughts. "*Sorry, my dear. I wanted to talk to you privately, so thought I could bring you out here—it's beautiful, isn't it?*"

Christy looked around and gasped in awe at the sight before her. She was standing on top of the high mountains that separated their small settlement from the settlements on the other side. The sight was breathtaking, with the world spread out in every direction around her—a world which was beginning to show signs of healing and of being rejuvenated after the horrible devastation it had seen. But even more breathtaking was the vision of beauty that stood beside her—Charmagne, in her undisguised and powerful form.

"You're all right? It wasn't too sudden, was it?" Charmagne asked, always concerned that she wasn't overwhelming the resurrected earthlings with heavenly ways that were as yet beyond their personal experience.

"No, not at all. Just a bit unexpected."

"You don't mind seeing me like this?"

"You're beautiful, absolutely beautiful..." Christy halted, too awed for words. She had seen other heavenly beings, but Charmagne in all her splendor was more gloriously arrayed than any she had seen before, aside from the most powerful heavenly being of all—the very Creator of the Universe. It was a mark of her stature and rank.

Charmagne smiled her special smile, the type that lit up her entire body and the world around them. "I'll get right to the point, as we need to move on soon. Allan spoke very well of you and your brother—not just your abilities to get everyone moving in the right direction, but also of the great potential he saw in

both of you.”

Christy bowed her head, not sure how to respond.

“We wanted to ask if you would like to receive more specific training in using your powers. Of course, all learn as they go along, and no doubt in time you would both perfect the use of your powers. But the purpose of instructing you more fully right away would be so that you could use them to help in other sorts of assignments. We could assign someone to help you right here where you are. We couldn't exactly have you leaving this settlement right now, as these people obviously still need you, and it would be a shame to pull you away when you're managing things so well. But we can send someone here, if you'd choose to accept this opportunity.”

Without any hesitation, Christy answered, “Yes, of course. I'd be honored to, really. And I'm sure James would too—he'd love to learn more.”

“Wonderful. Then we'll see what we can do.”

After a short silence Charmagne continued, “There's one more thing. From what I have seen of your small settlement and your way of operating, and from what I've heard of some of the others, I think perhaps some of the settlements could benefit from your experiences. I know you don't think much of what has happened here, but from what I've heard it's not been as easy in some of the other settlements to reach the earthlings in the way that you have.

“Anyway, the idea has come to mind to organize a meeting, an exchange of ideas between all the nearest settlements, where all you Settlers can gather together and discuss the problems you've come up against, and any solutions you've been able to find. I believe you two would probably have a great deal to contribute. In fact, we're on our way now to make arrangements for it to happen at Seramore Settlement. What would you think of such an idea?”

“Oh, that would be wonderful!” Christy exclaimed.

Her heart leapt at the thought of being able to visit some other settlements.

Charmagne smiled, and again it seemed as if all their surroundings smiled with her. “You do know the rules about any interaction with the other settlements, don't you?”

Christy slowly shook her head. “No, not really. I mean, I know it's best that we try to concentrate on our own settlement, and that we're not to get involved with any matters of the other settlements unless specifically instructed or invited to.”

“That's right, and it will be the same when this meeting is held. You'll be free to talk with all of the Settlers, and of course with any earthlings who might come across your path, so that you don't appear distant. But you couldn't go out of your way to find any earthlings.”

Christy looked down briefly, as the possibility that perhaps Charmagne had heard that Allan had been looking for specific survivors for her in Seramore Settlement crossed her mind.

“There's a very fine balance,” Charmagne continued, “an equilibrium that it is important not to destabilize.” On a somewhat different tangent, she continued, almost as if speaking to herself, “It's a matter of trust, really—I mean, we could all take things into our own hands, but after all, who are we? Trust—it's important.” She stopped and smiled at Christy. No more needed to be said—Christy understood.

Again she was enveloped in whirling colors, and as before, Christy felt as though she was spinning through a vortex of light and color such as she had never seen before.

They reappeared outside the house. Charmagne was once again in her earthling form. Slowly they walked towards the house in silence. Allan was leaning over the veranda railing, waiting.

"It is time to go on. Allaneor Borody, shall we go?"

"Yes, ma'am." Allan bowed his head. The rest of the entourage joined Charmagne and Allan outside.

Christy's eyes twinkled as she looked over at Allan and thought, "*Allaneor Borody! Now I know your full name—it'll be easier to find you!*"

Allan smiled and winked, and then abruptly turned and looked out over the plateau. In the twinkling of an eye, the group was gone.

Brad hadn't gone on with the rest of the group, but was waiting for Christy and James as they entered the kitchen.

"Tell James," he said with a nod in his direction.

James looked at Christy, curious. Christy wrinkled her brow, not sure what Brad meant. He transmitted the explanation to her thoughts.

*"The news—what did Charmagne tell you was going to happen?"*

"Ohhh," Christy then exclaimed out loud. "James, you'll be thrilled, they're going to send someone to teach us how to, you know, how to do things better—the powers we have now, we're going to get the opportunity to develop them more quickly."

"Yeeaaaaah! Hey!" James leapt around the table, obviously delighted at the news.

"So," Brad said out loud, "when do we start?"

"You?" Christy looked at him in surprise.

"Well, who did you think would get the job?" Brad returned. Then he continued, "Oh, and of course Allan will be helping you too."

A broad smile suddenly spread across Christy's face. She turned and hugged Brad, obviously delighted at the choice of instructors.

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## LESSONS

"Christy! James!"

The door flew open and Brad marched into the dining room. "What do you say, should we start today? Looks like the place can manage without you for a few hours."

"I'm ready!" James jumped up from the table.

"Start? Now? Right now?" Christy questioned.

"I didn't give you much warning, did I? Sorry about that—I forgot till I was ready to come over, and then I figured it wouldn't make any difference whether I transmitted the invitation mentally or asked you in person—so here I am."

"I don't know..." Christy hesitated.

"Let's go, come on. I'm free!" James stated rather triumphantly, secretly hoping that perhaps he would be the sole student for the first lesson.

Brad looked at Christy. "I don't have all that much time, as we still have work to do over at the other settlements."

"I see. Well, okay, I mean, I guess I'm ready. Is Allan coming too?"

"No, not this time," Brad answered. "Allan is going to be teaching you different things than I am. I'm going to teach you how to..."—Brad paused and looked at

James—"blast things and stuff like that!"

James' eyes lit up with delight. Christy muttered under her breath, "Just what we need!"

"Manipulating molecules is perhaps a more scientific explanation—the art of handling physical elements with your thoughts, including not only blasting, but moving, building, transforming—all sorts of things, and with infinite precision. You'll need it. I've been keeping my eyes open for a place to work from. Miles away there's a place that used to be a desert. It's starting to grow over now, of course, but still there are a lot of rock formations and small rocky hills that we could work on moving and shaping. It's pretty decent for a practice range. We can be there instantly—and back here instantly when we're done."



Christy and James let the others know that they'd be gone for a little while, and then holding onto Brad's arm so that he could direct them, they left for the "training ground," as Brad had called it. Expecting a regular, dusty desert, Christy and James were surprised to see the abundance of greenery and color that dotted the still sandy ground between the rocky outcroppings. This desert was well on its way to being transformed into the fertile landscape it had the potential to be.

Brad quickly scanned the area and had soon selected a suitable practice spot. Demonstrating a precision and skill that they had not seen before, Brad painstakingly taught them how to harness the incredible powers they'd been given to carefully shave off levels of a stationary rock without causing it to totter and fall. He showed them how to roll a boulder down a rocky hillside at a slow speed, without it damaging anything on its way down, carefully directing its path by sheer mind power. He stopped some rockslides in midair, and changed the direction of others. And, to James' delight, he showed them

how to cause a boulder to explode with such force that it shattered into thousands of gravel-like pieces—and how to gather those bits instantly so that they did not scatter in all directions but instead fell into a neat mound.

They returned often to the desert range to practice, and with a lot of trial and error, honed their basic skills as Brad showed them. They dismantled hills and created new ones. They moved boulders from one side of a mountain to another with precision. They had always had the strength, there was no question of that—but under Brad's tutelage they slowly began to gain a mastery that would likely have taken millenniums to learn by themselves.

Brad worked them long and hard, pushing them to the limits of their potential skills, always challenging them to give more of themselves than they thought they could. Surprisingly, they were able to match his expectations on every occasion. It seemed there was no limit to what they could learn.

Though Brad had realized they possessed above-average mastery of their powers, he was amazed at just how exceptional they were. What had at first been somewhat of a game for him soon turned into very serious training, and they in turn saw a side of Brad that they had not seen before—his serious, dedicated nature. They realized that there was certainly more to these special men than they'd ever thought.



After a time, Brad asked permission to take them to a small city that still needed to be leveled. This was their first serious mission. They joined another group of Legionnaires, though not the same group that had leveled the town near their home. They were welcomed and treated well. The work was hard and strenuous, though the Legionnaires, who (for reasons that at least Christy didn't find it hard to imagine) seemed to be mostly guys, were well up to the task.

Christy also participated, though it was by no means her preferred use of her powers. But it was part of her training, and a part that she had to fulfill.



Night had fallen. Christy and James, knowing that everything was okay back at their little settlement, had chosen to remain at the small camp outside of the city, along with the other heavies. Though there was really no need, someone lit a small campfire around which everyone gathered. A couple of the guys were singing in a low voice, accompanied by a guitar. Tonight the stars seemed even closer than usual, and it felt as though they were twinkling just above their heads.

Christy sighed. The work stretched her mind's capabilities to the limit. Though she didn't feel weary in the same way she used to when she was a human, her mind felt strained, almost tired.

It wasn't that the using of the powers was such an exacting feat. In fact, Brad had explained, it was more of a channeling of the infinite heavenly power that was always available. The Old Testament scripture, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord<sup>1</sup>," still held true. It was only the Lord's power that enabled one to do things above the accepted limits of human capabilities, and in the supernatural new spirit bodies that these resurrected earthlings had been given, tapping into that source of power was easier than it had ever been.

Still, learning to channel that energy, especially for more complex purposes, took some getting used to. And as can often be the case when one is learning a new skill and has to practice it time and time again, it can soon start seeming tedious, so that one begins to think of moving on to something else.

"I wonder when our training with Allan will start," Christy mused as she gazed out across the fields,

imagining that the stars were moving from their places and marching in unison towards her.

"You're tired?"

Startled, she lifted her head to see Brad standing beside her. She nodded. "Well, not exactly tired, but I do feel a little stretched, if you know what I mean."

Brad sat down beside her. "Now, let me guess," he laughed. "This probably wouldn't be your first choice of a mission?"

"Not quite."

"James could join us on more of these missions if he'd like."

"Oh, I don't doubt he'll want to."

"He's good."

"He's having a blast—quite literally. Though I think that to him it's still a bit of a game. He seems to lack the depth of a real Legionnaire." Christy nodded in the direction of the boys sitting around the campfire.

"He's young. He'll learn. Soon you'll both be learning more about using your mind, and specifically your thoughts in other ways, in order to harness and channel more fully the powers God has given us. You'll need that too. That's what's going to deepen him. This is just kids' play, really, as far as the capabilities of your mind go. You're right that he doesn't have the same depth or maturity that the others have, yet in channeling the heavenly powers, as far as this type of work is concerned, he's well on par with them. But there's more—you'll soon find out, lots more."

Christy nodded, and grew silent.

Brad suddenly turned and looked deep into Christy's eyes. "You never try to read my mind. Why?"

"Well, I can't read Allan's, and I figured you're all the same."

"Oh no, we're not all the same. Sometimes I wish you would try to look deep inside of me. There might be more to me than you think." Brad laughed, patted Christy's leg and stood up. "Okay, I've gotta head back

<sup>1</sup>Zechariah 4:6 KJV.



to Seramore. They need some help preparing for these big meetings—the ones you've been invited to. See you in the morning." And with that, he was gone.



Soon Christy and James had completed leveling their section of this city. Their time of training in that particular skill over, they returned to the farmhouse, where they once again poured all their energies into their settlement and their small group of survivors. As Charmagne had suggested, they started work on a new building behind their present house. From time to time James would be invited to join up with a group of heavies for a day or so. Life went on as it had for many months before. Christy waited patiently, wondering when their lessons with Allan were going to begin and what he was going to teach them.



Eagerly anticipating the enjoyment of the stillness and the beauty of the Sunside Glen, as the valley before them had now been named, Christy made her way to the small pool that was hidden in the crevice of two mountains. A beautiful waterfall gushed from the heights, sending sparkling showers of wet mist into the air around. The water was crystal clear, and it almost seemed to sing as it lapped around the rocks forming the perimeter of the pool. Although she could have appeared there instantaneously had she so desired, she preferred to walk and enjoy the full beauty of the restored world along the way.

As she drew closer to the pool, she sensed that she was not alone. A little disappointed at the thought of her private quietness being intruded upon, she nevertheless continued. Arriving at the pool, she stopped—fascinated at the sight she found before her. Allan was standing with his back to her, half-submerged in the pool, his broad, bronze shoulders glistening in the sunlight. He brushed his fingers through his wet, dark hair, then sensing Christy's

presence he turned around, smiled, and slowly started to walk out of the pool. He was naked. Christy bit her bottom lip and tilted her head to the side, holding her breath as he slowly walked up and stood a few feet in front of her.

"So you come here too?" he said without any hint of bashfulness.

She nodded. It had been a long time since she'd felt a man's arms around her. It didn't have to be that way, but with things being as busy as they had been, it had not seemed to be much of a priority—until now. Standing in front of Allan, she couldn't help but wonder what it would be like to have those strong arms around her, those warm hands caressing her, and those soft lips kissing her.

So engrossed was she in this picture that she totally forgot how easy it was for Allan to read her mind. Indeed, had she remembered, she probably would not have allowed herself the luxury of even thinking those thoughts.

Allan didn't say anything. Instead, for the first time, he let down the guard that he usually so vigilantly held on his mind and thoughts and heart. Sensing her desire for him, he reached out with his mind and visualized himself placing his strong arms around Christy, caressing her. Although neither of them was physically touching, they began to love and woo one another within their minds. The thoughts he was projecting were so strong that Christy had difficulty discerning between them and reality. Though Allan was only projecting thoughts of holding her, stroking her, kissing her, and loving her, she actually could physically feel his arms around her. Her feelings of ecstasy further excited Allan.

Suddenly he pulled back.

"Oh, don't stop," Christy pleaded.

He laughed. "Wait, we need to do this together. Let me show you how."

"How to what?"

"How to make love with your mind. That's one of the beauties of being able to communicate with our thoughts. Think about what you would like to be doing to me, and project it into my mind."

"I can't project into your mind."

"You can. I'm letting you. Try it."

Christy cautiously proceeded to do so. She pictured herself wrapping her arms around his body, and at the same time could feel her thoughts entering his consciousness, in a most intimate gesture for this normally inaccessible mind.

"Mmmm, that's right, don't stop there," Allan encouraged her.

Excited to be able to reach into the innermost parts of Allan, Christy's mind took off. She channeled all her desire and passion for him through her mind and into his. He soon began to reciprocate, till once again it felt as though he was physically touching her.

"This is too much," Christy whispered as she found her hands beginning to caress her own body in her desire to augment, as greatly as possible, this tremendous surge of feeling that was beginning to rush through her.

"No, wait." Allan stepped forward and placed his strong arms around her warm body. "Let me do that."

Slowly he slipped her garment off her shoulders and let it fall to her feet. She stepped out of it, and then entwined her arms around him.



Allan turned and looked at Christy, who was lying naked on the grass beside the pool. Her eyes were blissfully closed and a faint smile lingered on her lips. Reaching over, he gently stroked the side of her cheek with one finger. She opened her eyes.

"Consider that lesson number one."

"I had no idea your lessons were going to be like this," Christy responded dreamily.

"What better way to teach you to control the movement of your thoughts and feelings into another person? Wasn't it effective?"

"Very effective." Christy rolled over on her side, and reaching out to stroke Allan, asked, "Can we begin our second lesson?"

Allan laughed. "I had a different type of lesson in mind for my second one."

"In that case, I don't think I quite have this one down yet. I need a little more practice."

Allan leaned over and kissed her softly on her lips. "Are you sure?"

"Uhuh....," Christy mumbled, closing her eyes, and starting all over again.



True to Brad's words, the lessons Allan had chosen to teach were very different. Christy excelled under Allan's personal tutoring. James was not as interested in these classes as he was in Brad's. Naturally, for James, they consisted of an entirely different set of exercises than Christy was being given. Still, realizing that he needed to learn these things as well, he applied himself the best he could.

Their early lessons included transposing their thoughts into another person, so that the other person actually experienced what they were thinking and could even be made to outwardly respond to it. James practiced on Spartan. Much to everyone's surprise, Spartan would at times appear to be a perfect English gentleman, complete with an authentic accent. Or, he would suddenly become a hot Latin lover, wooing and trying to win dear Belle, who, most befuddled, would desperately try to resist his advances.

Christy was not impressed, but there was not a lot she could do but humor her brother as he practiced his new skills in his way. For the most part, Christy practiced her newfound skill privately, with Allan.



"Okay, now you both need to learn how to block your minds."

"Huh?" James asked.

Allan shook his head in mock haughtiness. "I don't suppose you've noticed that some of us are able to block our minds so that they can't be probed by others?"

"Why would I want to try to read your mind?" James retorted.

Christy interrupted with what she deemed a more important question, "What is the need of blocking our minds from others? I mean, the earthlings can't read our minds. So what is the purpose of stopping our fellow workers from reading our minds?"

"Sometimes you'll be called on for a mission that you can't reveal to anyone. Should someone catch a glimpse or an idea of what you're doing, they could inadvertently give away your plans to others in their thoughts or conversations. It's not always expedient that everyone knows what you're doing. In fact, the more involved you are in the type of work we do, the more important it is that only your superiors have access to your thoughts—rather than your peers and those you live and work with daily, at least while you're on a mission."

"I understand—sort of. I can't imagine what sort of secrets would be kept, though, since everything is out in the open now anyway, but if you say so." Christy mulled over this thought for some time.



They learned many other lessons—how to stun several attackers at the same time, and even small mobs. They learned how to search through the morass of human minds in a crowd to single out one specific person, how to communicate more effectively with their superiors, and how to hold all, or certain parts, of their mind secret. They learned to discern the deepest thoughts and intents of the hearts of the

earthlings around them, and to an extent even the thoughts of their co-laborers. As with the lessons Brad had taught them, James and Christy were fast learners.

Days passed. They were days of sheer joy for Christy as she loved and learned, not daring to think how long these lessons would continue. As much as she wished they would continue for eternity, she knew they would come to an end.

## **THE SERAMORE SETTLEMENT**

Christy glanced around nervously at those she was sitting with. About fifty people were attending this meeting, from a small radius of the settlements nearest to Seramore, but Christy was disappointed to find that they were all unknown to her. She could tell none of these Settlers had much in common with her own, more active missionary background. For a fleeting second, she wished that it could have been a larger meeting, as the chance that she could have met up with any of a number of her old earth friends would have been increased. But she quickly abandoned that thought, as she knew it would only have been that much bigger a crowd to stand up and speak in front of.

In spite of what Charmagne had told her, she felt that she had very little to offer, coming from such a small settlement. The vast Seramore Settlement stretched for miles in either direction, with makeshift tents filling up most of the space. At the core of the settlement were ready-built cabins dating from when this used to be a secluded camping resort. In comparison, her little farmhouse and its few inhabitants seemed small and quite insignificant.

The first day consisted of all the Settler attendees

being given a tour of the huge settlement, beginning at its central base, an old converted restaurant, and covering the settlement to the outer limits. For the sake of simplicity and order within the settlement, the administration had grouped the bulk of the survivors together into larger sections by ethnic groups, and then families. Those adults who had no living relatives were grouped into one of several age brackets. By far the highest percentage of the population was in the 30- to 49-year-old age bracket. Young orphans were cared for by families who volunteered to adopt them. Seeing the somber looks of most of the earthlings at the Seramore Settlement, Christy was grateful that her little "family," as she had affectionately come to call it, was so content.

The meetings began on the second day. The attendees were invited one by one to explain how they ran their settlements, as well as share any tips and ideas they felt might be of benefit to the others. Many of the Settlers appeared quite nervous as they stood up to introduce themselves, say which settlement they were from, and how large their group of survivors was. They all had the same basic powers and skills as Christy and James, and most had been using them a good deal of the time. Many were by now more accustomed to communicating by thought power, and as such felt even more uncomfortable having to speak publicly with their peers, whom they knew would be peering into their minds during their later presentations, in order to more fully partake of their discourse and better understand the experiences they related.

Christy, still being used to speaking openly most of the time, did not have a problem with this. When she, on her turn, stood up to introduce herself, she instinctively blocked her mind, as she had been taught, so that the other attendees were not able to read her thoughts. This proved to be quite disconcerting for many, as they had not been aware that

such a thing was possible—though Christy remained blissfully unaware of their discomfort, and quickly sat down again to await the beginning of the first presentations.



As the meetings progressed, the presentations were interspersed with times of social interaction with the other attendees, during which Christy met and spoke with several of the other Settlers. One of them was Heif. Heif came from the settlement that was furthest away from where they were living. He was a friendly but serious-looking fellow, with big broad shoulders, curly red hair and piercing blue eyes. He had been as unfamiliar to her as the others, but something about him had caused Christy to take particular note of him. He sported a thick moustache and had a non-nonsense air about him. His settlement was also one of the smaller ones, though it contained about five times the population of her own little farm.

Although his turn to speak, like Christy's, had not yet come up, Christy knew that he had been running his settlement in much the same way the others ran theirs, and he was not satisfied with the progress being made. In truth, Heif had come to the meetings anticipating he would learn something new that could help him turn things around. Christy liked Heif. He was one of the few attendees that did not intimidate her—perhaps because of his down-to-earth nature, or maybe it was because she knew he felt less assured of the success of his settlement.

"Hey, Heif!" Christy bounded up to the burly man, and quickly skimming his mind, found that he was more than happy to have her to sit beside him.

"How are you, Christy?"

"Oh, just fine, Heif."

"You've been busy?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"You don't seem so attentive to the presentations

of the other Settlers. I can't really tell what you're thinking of instead," he chuckled, "but I have a feeling that you are spending more time skimming the minds of the earthlings nearby than the minds of us Settlers." He nodded over towards a group of other attendees.

"Yes. Believe it or not, I learn a lot more from the earthlings than..." She quickly stopped herself, realizing what she was about to say.

Heif laughed. "Don't worry. I feel the same way. I came here hoping for some solutions, but it looks like everyone's pretty much doing the same thing. I don't see a lot of Settlers making much progress with their rehabilitation plans."

"It's a shame," Christy thoughtfully responded. "There's so much we can do to help these survivors progress more quickly. Maybe if people just got their instructions from Heaven more..."

"Oh?" Heif questioned. His curiosity into Christy's nature instantly grew, causing him to automatically probe Christy's mind for further information. Then he stopped, and laughed. "It's impossible to tell what you're thinking. You have this technique of blocking your mind down quite well. But why don't you let me have a little peek and see what you've learned."

Christy laughed. "I'm not prepared to do that. I really don't want everyone traipsing through my mind right now."

After a short pause, Heif thoughtfully responded, "So ... how do you do it anyway, block your mind, that is? I'd like to learn."

"It..." Christy wasn't quite sure how to answer. She didn't know if this knowledge could be freely divulged to anyone. "It takes a little bit of ... practice," she finally said, looking at Heif, raising her eyebrows and hoping that he would somehow catch on. For a brief moment, she dropped her guard to help him better understand the depth of the word "practice" as she had used it.

"Hmmm." Heif seemed to understand. "I'll say no more!" It was apparent that she had benefited from something that as yet neither he nor any of the other Settlers there had.

"Well, then I suppose I'll have to wait for you to tell us how you run your camp."

"I'd say in comparison to how I've seen things done here, we do a lot of things differently. In fact, we do everything differently."

Heif chuckled. "That doesn't surprise me. When are you going to be speaking?"

"Smallest settlement—last day," Christy answered. "I'll be looking forward to that."



Although Heif's settlement was small in comparison to most of the others attending the meeting, it was nevertheless a very interesting one. Set on the edge of a wilderness, his settlement did not have an established number of survivors, as the others did. Although the settlement permanently housed some thirty survivors, it acted as a sort of central base for still other earthlings, who preferred to fend for themselves outside the settlement, but still used the settlement as a sort of meeting place, or even as a sort of central store, where they came to trade goods for supplies, and vice versa.

This had been allowed due to the fact that most of the survivors in the remote area surrounding his settlement had already been largely self-sufficient, living their rugged life off the land even before the time of trouble had hit. As long as they did not need to be helped, Heif and the other Settlers in his settlement had concentrated on those they had found who did need help, only keeping loose tabs on the others who continued to drop by regularly.

When it came his turn, Heif stood up and in his no-nonsense manner went over the management of his settlement in detail. Besides explaining the

somewhat different nature of his settlement, the remainder of his presentation sounded very much like all the others. The only difference was that rather than offering any of his ideas as solutions for anybody else, Heif offered the idea that perhaps in all of their collective speaking they had not hit upon any real keys to making greater progress more quickly. This suggestion was quite unsettling for the other attendees. Yet, in quickly skimming their minds, Christy realized that they all knew as well as he did that this was true.

For all of their talking, it had been painfully obvious that each settlement had come across more problems than solutions, and that their attempts at reeducating their survivors were not quite as successful as they'd hoped they would be.

While Heif was speaking, Christy (who had been skimming his mind a little more deeply than the other attendees) found something that interested her greatly. Heif's settlement, due to its special nature of dealing with survivors who were not in-house residents of their little community, had been privy to news of developments from outside their own settlement. Christy had hardly spoken throughout the meetings, and most of the other attendees thought her a rather shy and somewhat odd girl—and she was content to let them think this.

As soon as the call for any questions was given, Christy was unable to contain her curiosity any longer, and she jumped up and boldly stated, "Heif, I have a question!"

Everyone turned to look at Christy, but Heif was not particularly surprised. "By all means. Please go ahead."

"Heif, from the descriptions of your settlement, it sounds very fascinating to me that you have this contact with outside survivors who do not directly belong to your settlement. I'm not sure that this

relates to any of our situations, but I'm very curious to know how you deal with these people. What do you do with them? What do they talk about? How do they survive, and how do you keep tabs on them?"

Heif stared at Christy. He had indeed been eager to share more about this aspect of his settlement, but had decided against it, as it seemed of little relevance to the purpose of these meetings. In fact, very little of what anybody had shared had seemed of much relevance to him, and he was not eager to perpetuate this trend, and so had decided on his short and rather terse presentation. But to have this slip of a girl somehow uncover his desire to speak of these other survivors was a little unsettling. Yet, at the same time he was happy that she had asked.

"The edge of the wilderness is a very interesting place to live, to be sure. The scattered folk who have made it their home are a peculiar breed, especially compared to the majority of the average urbanized survivors we generally have to deal with. In fact, there are many more survivors scattered throughout the wilderness than we have been able to keep tabs on. Many have fled there—mainly those who don't want to end up in our settlements, or have left them for some reason or another.

"In fact, I have heard reports from those who do drop by, that there are those seeking to establish their own settlements without the 'interference' of us Settlers. They like to think of themselves as 'Independents'—'Rebels,' if you will—against the rule of peace Jesus has committed to us. I don't know what they're planning to do, as there seems to be little organization and a great lack of common objective among them.

"But others are armed, and to them we are little more than invaders, occupying alien forces, and sooner or later they might try to attack us and our settlements. Already we have caught wind that some

are intent on infiltrating our settlements to discover our strengths and weaknesses, though we all know that this couldn't happen very easily unless we ourselves allowed it through our own complacency. ..." Heif's voice trailed off.

Taking a deep breath, he continued, "In fact, some of the survivors that inhabit our settlement are those who have run away from the Rebels. Others were simply lost—wandering around in the wilderness, ignorant of what was going on around them. Their rehabilitation has not been easy; in fact, their progress has been very minimal. They are not committed to being there, nor do they want to go back into the wilderness. They have not really made their decision yet. They're waiting.

"Many are still not sure of our sincerity, yet they've not made a decision to go against what we're doing. It's awkward; we have to win them—but herding them into such settlements and our being so different from them doesn't make for ease of communication."

Heif's explanation led to a fairly lively discussion, and more candidness than had been the case before. Several days of meetings had served to highlight to all that not only did most settlements operate the same, having concentrated primarily on the physical organization and setting up of their camps, but they had also shared the same lack of success in meeting the more specific and individual needs of the survivors.



Christy was the first to speak on the last day of the meetings. In skimming the minds of the crowd she saw that there was a receptivity amongst them that had been previously lacking. For this, she was very thankful. The very act of randomly skimming the mind of the crowd and so quickly being able to discern the thoughts of all attending did not go unnoticed by those at the meeting. Where there had

initially been a certain pity felt for this slight girl who rarely said anything, somehow the events of the previous day had attuned the minds of all those attending to the possibility that perhaps she knew something that they did not.

Without any preliminaries, Christy described her settlement—the way they had chosen to set it up, how they were living as one big family. She explained how she and James rarely used their powers in the day-to-day operation of the camp, and equally as rarely used them in their interaction with the earthlings. Instead, she explained, they preferred to act almost as though they were earthlings themselves. Because the settlement was so small, and she had the time to do so, Christy described the history of each of their six survivors from the beginning till the present time. She also explained how they had quickly seen the need to ask the Lord for counsel in how to handle each one, something it seemed none of the others had yet made much effort to do. She admitted that she and James didn't really know what to do or how to set up and run a settlement, but they found that by counseling with Heaven they'd gotten a lot of helpful direction that had been instrumental in their getting this far.

The testimonies of how they handled and got along with the different individuals spoke for themselves. It was obvious that their rehabilitation and re-educating of the earthlings had met with much greater success than in any of the other settlements.

As she was finishing up, she spoke with candor, "My conclusion, after having listened to days of much of the same is that perhaps you may want to try a different approach. If what you're doing is not working, then maybe it's time to try something else. Of course, you can take what you want from what I have said in much the same way as I will take what I want from what you have said. I suppose that's what these



meetings were for.”

Taking a deep breath, and with a quick prayer to the Lord that He would give her wisdom in what she was about to say, she dared to continue, “But if I were to be enlisted to help with a camp of the size such as this one, I would certainly not hesitate to ask the Lord Himself what the best way would be to deal with it. After all, He knows best, doesn’t He?”

This statement was met with a stunned silence, as if the idea was a novel concept to the other attendees. Although they all knew the Lord, most had taken their assignments as Settlers primarily upon themselves, thinking that this had been expected of them. The idea of coming before the Lord for such ordinary details of everyday life was at once a new, but also a very logical, suggestion.

Feeling the anointing welling up within her, Christy continued, “For example, He might suggest dividing up the settlement into smaller and more distinct sub-settlements, even autonomous ones that are governed and cared for by the earthlings themselves, those who can be entrusted with such a responsibility. He might say to divide it up into families—men, women, children. He might tell you to put the stronger with the weak, so that the strong could help the weak. That in itself would help with the healing. Earthlings need other earthlings to care for, to love, to nurture, to bond with. This is better accomplished in smaller groups.”

Tilting her head slightly to the side, Christy once again skimmed the crowd. She realized that although people were surprised at her being so outspoken on the subject, most were happy that she was addressing it so frankly.

She continued, “And then, of course, restricting the use of your powers around them might be a good idea to consider as well, as such deliberate shows of superiority do little to win the confidence of the

earthlings. If you want to win their trust, they have to see you as one of them.”

“Finally, you should try to find something to keep everyone busy. Idleness is counterproductive; it leaves people feeling useless and unfulfilled. Besides, there’s so much more you could do with a place this size if you got everyone busy! You could expand, you could build, and your various camps could become self-sufficient more quickly.

“Why, we have the potential here in Seramore, for example, to establish a thriving community! Maybe that’s what the Lord and His angels are waiting on. Perhaps they’re waiting for us to establish settlements that resemble the small towns of the past. And then, maybe then, we can open up our settlements to greater interaction between themselves. We all know the earthlings are not yet ready for such things at this point, but I believe that it’s largely up to us how soon they will be, and getting them ready to accept this new world of love and harmony is, after all, what we’re here for, isn’t it?”

Looking around at the crowd and smiling, she concluded, “That’s really all I have to say. Thank you for listening.”

She bowed her head slightly and quickly moved off the small platform.



“Oh, hi there, Heif!”

“Christy! That was quite a delivery.”

“Do you think it was okay?”

“It was great! Just what we all needed to hear. I’m beginning to wonder if that’s why our superiors left you till last.”

“Oh? I figured it was just because we had the smallest settlement.”

Heif laughed. “Well, I’m not going to argue, but my theory is that they arranged it that way because you had some answers. We had to listen to hours

upon hours of problems, till we finally came to the conclusion that we needed some answers. Then it was time for you to deliver.”

“I don’t know, Heif. Maybe that’s true, maybe not. But really the only person who has the answers is the Lord. We just have to ask Him.”

Heif chuckled. For a moment this girl who had spoken so boldly and confidently only a few hours before appeared to be a “regular” resurrected earthling again, no different from him, even a little younger and less experienced in the ways of the world. But he knew that there was more to her than met the eye, and he resolved that he would someday discover what it was.

“Heif, can you tell me a little more about the wilderness and the Rebels?”

“I don’t know much, just as much as those who drop by will tell. But I do know there are some fairly good-sized Rebel camps out there.”

“So why don’t we just call in the heavies to go in and take care of them, like they’ve done with the incorrigibles?”

Heif was silent for a while. He slowly responded, “I don’t know. That’s something I’ve wondered about. My only guess is that perhaps there is too much else to be done, even for the heavies, at least for right now. But then again, it seems it would be simple enough for them to move in and wipe them out. It’s a mystery to me.”

“Hmm,” Christy mused. “Well, if I ever find out and I can tell you, I will!”

Heif held out his hand and shook Christy’s. “It’s a deal.”

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## NEWCOMERS

“Christy! I heard the meetings were a success!” James exclaimed, exuberantly greeting his sister as she entered the house. He had eagerly volunteered to remain at the settlement and keep an eye on things. He was not one to attend meetings if he could at all help it, especially if there was a chance that he’d be called upon to speak.

“How did you hear so quickly? They’ve only just finished. Besides who said they were a success?”

“I have my contacts,” James laughed.

“C’mon, tell me!” Christy squealed with delight.

“The heavies dropped by.”

“Oh, are they still here?”

“No, they couldn’t stay, but they said that everyone was happy with the outcome of the meetings. They said too that our little settlement was held up as an example to all.”

“I don’t know about that! The only person who held up our settlement as an example was me!”

James laughed. “Anything happen? Tell me everything, all about everyone!”

“Well, the most disappointing thing was that I didn’t meet Spartan’s wife and little girl.”

James looked despondent. “Oh, that’s a shame.”

They had hoped that attending the meetings would afford the opportunity to meet with June and Jody—but unfortunately they had not come across Christy's path, and true to Charmagne's caution, Christy had not initiated contact with any of the local earthlings at the settlement.

Christy proceeded to fill James in on the events of the past days. He was especially interested in the other attendees, and as fascinated as Christy had been with Heif and his settlement on the edge of the wilderness.

The extra rooms they had been working on were by this time finished, and they were ready to take in a few more earthlings. Allan and Brad continued to visit, and Christy and James continued their training. Brad was the more frequent visitor. Whenever Allan had not been around for a while, Christy would summon him.



*"Allaneor Borody!"* Christy's mind searched out high and low, as far as she could project it—all the while sending out his full name, which held the key to finding him. It had become a tradition of sorts.

*"Christy, bad timing!"* Allan responded.

*"It can't be that bad or you wouldn't have answered! I haven't seen you for a long time."*

*"True. Do you think it's time for a visit?"*

*"Yes. I'm getting rusty on some of my newfound skills. I think it's time for some more practice."*

*"I see."*

Christy could always sense Allan's amusement at perceiving her predominant motives. Then he would usually manage to visit—sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied by Brad.



"So you're ready for some newcomers?" Brad asked.

"Yes. They'll probably be earthlings from other settlements, right?" Christy asked, hoping that Brad

or Allan would be able to provide a more specific answer.

"Most earthlings have found settlements by now," Brad answered. "Although there are some cities and areas that haven't been completely searched out yet. But most survivors have been found, and are, as here, in the process of being resettled. There are others, also, who have been in settlements, but for reasons of their own have left, preferring to rebuild their lives on their own. But they are being observed, for the time being, from a distance." It was not quite the answer Christy was fishing for. Brad detected her thoughts, and finished with, "But yes, you'll probably be called on to take in some people from one of the larger settlements."

"Any idea when?"

Brad laughed. "I say no more!"



Not many days later Allan paid them a surprise visit.

"Allan, I wasn't expecting you," Christy exclaimed joyfully.

"This is not pleasure, I've come on a mission."

"Oh?" James came near, eager to hear what Allan had to say. As thoroughly disinterested as he was in Allan's "pleasure" visits, the word "mission" always caught his immediate attention.

Allan, purposely speaking slowly so as to prolong the anticipation of his anxious audience, said, "The time has come for you, Christy, to..."—he hesitated for what seemed an eternity, though having only heard Christy's name, James' heart sank a little. Allan then quickly finished his sentence—"to come with me to the Seramore Settlement, from where you will be able to bring four people back with you."

"Which four?"

"Any four. It's up to you to choose."

"How am I going to be able to choose between all

the thousands of people who are there?"

After a short, thoughtful silence her eyes lit up. "Are there any restrictions on who to bring? Can I choose anyone?"

"Anyone," Allan said with a smile, already knowing at least two candidates she was thinking of.

"Can I choose...?" Her voice tapered off as she thought of Spartan's wife and child.

Allan answered her unfinished question. "Yes, you can choose them if you so wish. Anyone!"

Christy was momentarily speechless at how this had played out. "It was planned to happen like this all along, wasn't it?"

"In fact, it was."

"So all the seeking, searching and planning..."

Allan again answered the unfinished question. "It was all unnecessary, because God meant it to be. You were going to get your chance anyway."

Christy was silent again, realizing how futile her personal concerns about contacting Spartan's family had been. Truly, there was Someone who knew Spartan's needs much better than she did, and was even more concerned for his welfare and happiness. She need not have worried, for whatever God had chosen (and she knew that He did all things well), was destined and would be.

Allan, catching her thoughts, somewhat cryptically responded, "It's something we all sometimes forget, but it's a very important principle to remember. So often things are not as they seem, and even when it doesn't appear as though something is working out, sometimes if we wait a little longer, we find that everything has already been resolved."

"So," Allan said somewhat forcefully after another pause, "shall we go? I think they're expecting you."

"Go, now? Why do you always spring these things on me without any advance notice?"

Allan laughed. "Ah, but of course—I never taught

you that, did I?"

"Taught me what?"

"How to probe for upcoming events. You can do that. You should, it helps you to be a little better prepared for the likes of us."

"Oh?" Christy asked.

"I'll have to show you. Remind me."

"I don't understand," Christy said, looking a little perturbed, as she always did when she couldn't quite grasp something.

"The reason we tend to operate on a 'here we are, let's do it now' basis is because we are aware of the bigger picture and greater overall scheme of things. We know that certain things will happen and when, so when that event occurs, we can flow with it."

"But how do you know?"

"There's a place to look. Like I said, I'll have to show you. That way things like this won't be quite as much of a surprise, because you know at least that something is going to happen."

"You mean we can foresee everything—like God Himself?"

"Only some things. Many things are not made known for different reasons—maybe because we have to learn to take some things as they come. But other events can be seen in advance—especially things like an upcoming visit to the Seramore Settlement! But now we must go."

Allan held Christy's hand, and she answered, "All right then. Let's go."



No sooner had the thought been formed than they were outside the Seramore Settlement.

"I'm a little nervous, to be honest," Christy said.

"I'm sure. I would be too if I were in your position."

"Hello, Christy!" It was Josh, one of the settlement overseers. He walked up and embraced her warmly. "Allan..." He nodded respectfully towards Allan.

"It's nice to see you again, Josh," Allan answered.

"You too, Allan. And it's nice to have you back, Christy. You'll probably be pleasantly surprised at some of the changes we've made. We have sectioned off twenty-five distinct little sub-settlements now, and already the people are much happier for it." Josh smiled, "We're also trying to act more earthly when within the camp. I hope you don't mind ... walking to the main building."

Christy laughed. "We're used to that."



A group of six camp overseers were sitting around a large wooden table. "Hello, Christy," they chimed. Then turning to Allan, they respectfully added, "Welcome, sir."

After a few minutes of small talk, Josh, not wanting to delay any longer, asked, "Christy, do you have any idea how you're going to choose four people from the thousands we have here?"

"Not really."

"We don't have any recommendations for you. We know so little about your settlement."

"There are two people I'm very interested in. Remember my telling you about Spartan, the incorrigible?"

They nodded.

"I came to learn that Spartan's wife and daughter reside in this camp. I would like to meet and talk with them. I believe that they may hold the key to Spartan's full recovery. However, I can't know if they're willing to help with this until I'm able to meet with them. If they are ready for this, then I would like to use this opportunity to invite them to join us."

"Do you know their names?" Josh asked.

"Yes, the woman's name is June, and her daughter is Jody."

Josh thought for a second, and then nodded his head slowly. "Yes, I believe they're here. They've not

been brought into any of the new sections yet."

"Could I begin by talking with them?"

"Certainly. Should we bring them here or would you rather go to them?"

"Maybe it's easier if I go to them."

Josh nodded. "I'll assign you a guide. Oh yes, I know just the person. In fact, you may find her quite an interesting candidate as well. Come, follow me." He turned to look at Allan. "Will you also be coming along, sir?"

"Christy's on her own!" Allan said, and lounged back in his chair. "I'll stay here. Thanks."

Josh took Christy to one of nearby buildings. Sitting outside the house on a wooden bench was a young girl who appeared to be about twelve years old. She was intently looking off into the distance and she did not even look at them as they approached.

"Trina!" Josh broke the girl's apparent trance.

"Oh, yes?" The girl jumped up eagerly.

"I have someone I want you to meet. This is Christy. She comes from one of the other settlements. She's here to meet with a few people. You know where June and her daughter Jody are, right? Would you mind taking her to see them?"

"Not at all! It's right this way!" Sizing up Christy, she added somewhat bluntly, "You have to walk."

"That's fine." Christy chuckled at the girl's straightforward manner. Though on the surface her manner may have appeared disrespectful, with a quick look into her mind, Christy knew that this was just part of her up-front personality.

Trina chatted the entire time. "So, do you know what I was doing when you came?"

"No."

"I was actually trying to read. ... Did you see the old man standing over by the tree?"

"No."

"Well, there was an old man standing by a tree,

and I was trying to read his thoughts. I couldn't do it. But, I think one day I will be able to."

"Oh?" Christy questioned, a little surprised. "And what makes you think that?"

"I don't know why us earthlings can't become like you eventually. I really think that at least some of us are going to have a chance to become like you. I've heard that's a matter of learning to use more of our brains. Maybe we won't be able to do all that you do, and perhaps we won't have the full powers you have, but with time we might be able to acquire at least some of them. After all, you folks were just like me once upon a time, you know, before any of this happened."

"True." Christy had never thought of that before. "So that's what you were trying to do, huh?"

"Yes, I keep on practicing, though I think there's something missing. I don't really know if it's going to come to me like that." She snapped her fingers. "But I guess there's no harm in trying, is there?" Trina looked up at Christy. "So, what are you doing here, anyway?"

"I just came to talk to a few people."

"Uh-huh! That's interesting. What are you going to talk to them about?"

"All sorts of things."

Not quite catching the hint that Christy's short noncommittal answers meant she did not want to discuss the matter, Trina kept up a persistent stream of questions all the way there.

Finally they arrived at their destination. "There she is. She's standing over by the basins, the woman with long brown hair."

"Where's her daughter?"

"Dunno. Guess she's not around." Trina danced off in the direction they'd come from.

Christy called after her. "How am I supposed to get back?"

"Don't worry. I'll be back. I'm not going far!" And with that, she was gone.

Christy laughed and shook her head, "Quite a girl!"



Still smiling, Christy approached June. "Hello," she said warmly. "I'm Christy, I come from another settlement. Is it convenient to talk with you?"

The woman looked nervously at Christy. "You want to talk with me? Yes, of course. Certainly, it's fine. I'll just dry my hands. I'm sorry, I'm not..."

"It's fine," Christy assured her. "Let's sit over here."

The small, frail and rather nervous-looking woman quickly wiped her hands on her skirt, and with her head bowed a little followed Christy toward the seats, being careful to leave Christy a few paces ahead.

Endeavoring to start a conversation, Christy asked, "Tell me about yourself."

June proceeded rather hesitantly to do so. Her conversation was rather disjointed. She started off by talking about her life at the camp and about Jody—who she pointed out in the distance. With a little prompting from Christy she explained how she'd been found and brought to the camp.

"I think that's about it. That's my life," she finished.

"I see. But do you think you could tell me what happened before the great destruction started, what your life was like? Were you married? Do you want to tell me about that?"

June looked troubled, and a tear stole down her face. "I ... I try not to think about that." Then quickly she continued, "But of course, if you want me to tell you, I'll tell you. ... Of course I'll tell you. Yes, I'll tell you everything."

Wiping June's tear away, Christy said, "Just tell me what you want to. I know it must be quite difficult for you."

June proceeded to tell Christy of her life. She filled in many of the missing details of Spartan's story. "I

knew my husband, Ed, when he was a boy. We grew up together in the same small town. He was a big man, a kind man. I don't know what happened to him." Her voice trailed off. "He got into debt. He was trying to make things nice for us. I was pregnant. We had no money." She looked up at Christy. "You know those days? They were quite hard in this part of the world. We suffered a lot of hardships."

June sighed, and then continued. "He became mixed up with the wrong kind of people and somehow he got himself into a lot of trouble. I tried to tell him that it didn't matter whether we had money or not, that we'd survive. He didn't listen. He was so depressed about not being able to provide a better life for us that he got into drugs and, well, you know how that goes.

"He ended up spending what little money we did have on them. Then he started stealing in order to support his drug habit. He was always very sorry, but he wasn't able to help himself. I wasn't able to help him either. Soon he felt so bad about himself that he left Jody and me. I guess he thought we'd be better off without him. He walked out one day and we never saw him again."

Christy was carefully probing June's mind while she was talking. She saw that June had such a tender love for her husband, and that she'd been very hurt by his disappearance. She saw too that the troubles had come upon them so quickly that she had lost all hope of ever seeing him again.

"I don't know how to tell you this..."—Christy hesitated—"but your husband, Ed, is alive. He's living in our settlement."

June raised her hand to her mouth in surprise. Tears started streaming down her face.

Christy continued, "He's been through a lot. I venture to say that he's probably not the man you remember." Realizing that even though June appeared

frail, she was strong enough in spirit to be able to hear all the truth, Christy continued, "When he came to us he couldn't talk, and was barely coherent."

"And now?" June asked.

"We've made some encouraging progress with him. He had actually been in a drug rehab center before the destruction began. For a long time he couldn't remember his past, but gradually it came back to him. In realizing what he'd done to you and Jody, he felt a tremendous amount of remorse and guilt, and it has been and still is very difficult for him to cope with that. I think he needs you, and he needs his little girl. I believe you could be a great help in his full healing. I don't know if you would be willing or not, but we have an opening at our settlement. You could both come and join us, if you wanted to."

June looked up, startled.

"I realize this is a lot to absorb, but you can think about it. You can even talk with little Jody about it too, and let me know what you think later."

Realizing that it was very shocking for June to hear that Ed, or Spartan, as those at his settlement knew him, was still alive, Christy tried to comfort her as best she could. In an effort to help June regain her composure, Christy started asking her a little about life in Seramore, what she liked, what Jody liked and how she had responded to all that had happened in the years previous.

Before leaving her, Christy asked, "I hope this wasn't too much of a shock for you."

"No, it's all right. I'm starting to get used to the idea that he's still alive. It's been so long, I thought he was dead. I just need a little time, and as you said I can talk to Jody and we'll let you know. Are you staying long?"

"Take your time," Christy reassured her. "I'll be staying a while, but even after I'm gone it's very easy for someone to get in touch and let me know your decision."



Once Christy was back with Josh and the others, she explained all that had transpired.

"I think she'll likely decide to go," Josh predicted.

"I do too," Christy responded. "I just have a feeling that this might be something that she needs too."

"I would agree. She mostly keeps to herself here. I think she's a bit intimidated by the great number of people that are always around here. The idea of moving to a smaller place will likely appeal to her. Now, how are you going to chose your other candidates?" Josh asked.

Christy thought for a while. "That I don't know! I do have permission to initiate contact with the earthlings, so would it be okay to just walk around and interact with people?"

"You'd do well to take a guide—even I get lost in this place sometimes." Josh laughed. "By the way, what did you think of Trina?"

"Very talkative—and full of interesting ideas!"

Josh laughed, "That's Trina. She used to be a street kid."

"Oh," Christy said with understanding.

"She knows her way around well."

"I find it highly educational spending time with her," Christy said with a smile. They all laughed.



Christy spent the next few days at Seramore talking with many people. She found several who she felt could benefit from joining their small settlement, but still she was undecided.

"So how's it going?" Trina asked, in her usual bright and cheery manner. "Did you find your four candidates yet?" By this time Trina had managed to weasel out of someone the purpose of Christy's visit.

"There are a lot of people to choose from," Christy responded. "It's a big settlement!"

"Too big!" Trina emphatically responded.

"Oh, look who's talking—the big-city streetwise

girl!" Christy laughed.

"I know, but just because I was born in the city and lived on the streets doesn't mean that's for me, does it?"

"You seem to fit in well enough here!"

"I'm a survivor!" she said with some force. "I survived the destruction; I can survive this." Changing the subject, Trina continued, "Today I'll take you over to the east side of the camp. Then you will have visited all the quarters. I mean you haven't met everyone, because that's an awful lot of people, but I guess you've met the ones you were supposed to meet."

Trina was not her usual talkative self as they headed over towards the east side of the camp. Finally she broke the silence. "We're almost there. Do you mind if I drop by and see a friend?"

"A friend?" Christy asked—her curiosity aroused.

"Well, not really a friend. She's an old lady who used to be blind. She's not blind anymore, but, well, she's a little funny. I drop in on her every once in awhile to make sure she's all right, and has everything she needs. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. Please go ahead."

They approached a small, neat-looking shack. Trina knocked on the door.

"Yes."

"It's Trina. Can I come in?"

"I suppose so," the gruff old lady responded.

Trina cautiously opened the door a little and eased through the crack. Christy, interested in seeing who this rather gruff voice belonged to, slipped in behind Trina.

"What did you bring her for?" the old lady asked.

Trina looked back, surprised that Christy had slipped in. "She's just a friend. Do you have everything you need?"

The old lady muttered something under her breath.





After staying with the old lady for a short time, Trina said, "I have to go now. I'll see if I can drop by again sometime soon. Goodbye." Trina was out the door before the old lady even had a chance to say goodbye. Christy followed suit.

"So who is that woman?"

"I never knew my parents," Trina said somewhat abstractly. "But around the time of the destruction, I came across this lady, and well ... I helped her, and at the same time she helped me. It's ... it's hard to explain. ..." Trina hesitated, but Christy could see in her mind what she was trying to express. All at once, Christy felt compassion on the little girl, for even though she appeared to be tough, she realized that her heart was as fragile as everyone else's, and that she was desperately looking for someone to belong to. Having seen Trina in this new light, a sudden thought sprung to Christy's mind. "Trina, would you want to come back with me?"

Trina stopped in her tracks, with her back towards Christy. Slowly she turned around. "Do you mean what you said just now?"

Christy thought for a moment and then responded, "Yes, I do believe I meant what I said."

"You couldn't have any need for someone like me at your place."

"I'm sure we could probably find something for you to do."

"Well," Trina hesitated, "I don't know ... maybe!" She shrugged her shoulders nonchalantly, turned around and began to walk off, scuffing her shoes as she went.

"You'll let me know?" Christy called out after her.

"Yes, I'll let you know."

Christy smiled knowingly. Although Trina didn't appear to be all that enthusiastic about the idea, another peek inside of her mind had betrayed that her heart was rejoicing at the invitation.



At the close of the fourth day, having heard word from June and Jody that the invitation to Sunside Glen had been accepted, Christy still had not determined who the last person was going to be. She had sent up word to Heaven to see if there was any direction for her on this, but other than confirming the three choices that had thus far been made, she was not told anything more specific. It seemed the final choice was meant to reveal itself in its own time.

Josh, wanting to help all he could, suggested, "Maybe you could just take three people back with you?"

Christy shook her head. "No, I don't think so."

"Well, there's something happening tonight, a gathering of some of the young people. They haven't changed," he laughed. "They still like to get together and dance and sing and talk. And, well, you're a young person yourself. Why don't you join in? Maybe you'll meet someone there."

"Okay."



Christy looked around as she walked in the crowded room, and decided that instead of seeking out someone to take back with her right away, she would just enjoy herself. And enjoy herself she did! She danced and laughed and sang along with the earthlings, and had a fine time.



"How was your evening?" Josh asked. He had peeked in on the gathering, and quickly found Christy.

"Oh, just great! I haven't done this for a long, long time," she laughed.

"I'm sure!"

"I just had a good time. I talked with people, danced, and I even ate!"

"Good for you!" Josh encouraged her.

Just as they were about to leave, Christy's attention was drawn to a teenaged couple who were

sitting in a corner by themselves. "Who are they?" she asked.

"Oh, they're new. They just came in a few days ago."

Christy's interest was sparked at the idea of new arrivals. "Did they come in from another camp?"

"No. Someone found them walking along the road not too far from here."

Christy was surprised. "I thought that by now all of the survivors in this part of the world had been found."

"Well, apparently they've been hiding up in the mountains. I don't know how any of us could have missed them, but I guess we did."

"So how are they doing? I mean, are they adjusting okay?"

"They'll be fine. They are brother and sister. They've been through a lot—I guess everyone has."

Christy wanted to go and talk with them, but hesitated when she realized they were two, and she was only allowed to take four people back with her.

"Do you want to talk with them?" Josh asked.

"I'd like to, but I don't know if I should. You couldn't split them up, and, well, I already have three people prepared to go. I don't know if it would be fair to suddenly tell Trina that she couldn't come, and take these two in her place."



Christy couldn't keep herself from thinking about the pale young boy and girl who had been sitting by themselves all evening. Finally, seeking help, she called out, "*Allaneor Borody!*"

Soon Allan's warm presence was right beside her.

"Oh, you actually came."

"I didn't have anything else to do at this moment," Allan explained with his familiar smile. "How's it going?"

"Fine. I already have three people to take back with

me. But I just met another couple, a young boy and girl, brother and sister. They looked a bit lost. I thought that their adjustment period might be a little easier if they came into a small place like ours. But that would bring my number of additions up to five!"

"And you were told to take four?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"Okay," Allan said, standing up. "I'll check with Charmagne and see what we can do. I'll be back soon."



Christy was surprised when she walked into Josh's room only minutes later, to find Allan lounging in a chair, chatting with Josh.

"Oh, Allan!"

Allan nodded.

Josh stood up to greet Christy. "I just heard the good news from Allan. You've been cleared to take five people back with you." He cast a quick glance at Allan, then added, "It seems you have some friends in high places."

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**ALONE**

The twins—as indeed this brother and sister were—made no resistance to the suggestion of traveling back with Christy. It didn't matter much to them where they were. They were still in a daze at the news of all the changes that had come about in the world and even in the landscape around them. The trip back around the mountains took some time, as the team traveled on foot.

James had prepared Ed-Spartan, as he would now be known, for the arrival of his wife and daughter. He'd never seen Spartan so nervous.

Having an open channel of mental communication with Christy made it easy for James to keep abreast of her team's travel progress and estimated time of arrival. As the time drew near, Spartan could be seen pacing back and forth on the veranda. He refused to come into the house, no matter how many times James called him.

The newcomers were equally as nervous as they approached the settlement that was to become their new home.

"We're here!" Christy called. "Hello, we're here, everyone!"

Soon the others had joined Ed-Spartan on the

veranda, and they were waving frantically as the small group approached the house. The newcomers were lagging a few steps behind Christy. As they drew near to the house, Ed-Spartan slowly made his way down the steps.

Seeing him approach, June stood still. She was no longer able to hold back her tears. Jody held her mother's hand tightly and looked on with wonderment. "Is that him, Mommy, is that him?" she whispered noisily.

June was not able to answer.

Christy beamed an answer into Jody's mind. "Yes, *that's him, honey.*"

Jody stood transfixed as her father approached. Ed-Spartan, not knowing how to respond to the situation, stood a few feet in front of June and looked at her helplessly.

June reached out to him, and as he stumbled into her arms she cried, "Oh Ed, Ed, where have you been? It's been so long!"

By this time Ed-Spartan was also awash with tears. He reached down and wrapped his huge arms around June and little Jody.

Belle quickly wiped the tears away from her eyes and ran down to greet Trina. "You must be Trina. We've heard so much about you."

"You have? I hope it's been good!"

"All good," Belle responded. "Come on in and meet the children."

"You have kids?"

"Yes, two children. Come and see." Belle whisked Trina off into the house.

The twins, who were standing at the bottom of the steps, looked awkward.

Stewart looked down on them from the veranda with a big grin. "Hi!" he waved. They looked up at him, not sure at first whether he was an earthling or not.

"I'm just normal," he said. He motioned over to James who was standing on the other side of the veranda. "He's not normal!"

"Thanks!" James said, with a smile.

"But I'm just like you," Stewart assured them, as he bounded down the steps toward them.

They looked at one another, then looked at Stewart and introduced themselves.

"Come, let me show you around. I'll take you to your rooms. They're all fixed up." With that, he ushered them inside.

By this time Trevor had come to Ed-Spartan's aid. He was hustling him and his newfound family up the steps. "It's almost time to eat. Let me see if anything has been fixed yet."

Christy stood beside James, and gazed out over the veranda. "Mission accomplished."

"It's a pretty fine group of people. I think they'll fit right in."

"I think so."

"I'm glad there's someone new for Stewart to attend to. You know..." James bit his lip, and then continued hesitantly, "You don't know?"

Christy tried to read James' mind but was not able to. "James, you're blocking me out. What is it?"

"I've been offered a little longer assignment."

"What type of assignment?"

"I'm going to join Brad's group for a little while."

"Oh, James! I'll be here by myself."

"I'll be coming back," James was quick to add, trying to reassure her. "But I think it will be half and half—here maybe half the time, and off on assignment about half the time too."

Christy was silent. Although she was pleased for James, she was slightly unsettled at the thought of so many changes happening at once. "I'm very happy for you, James. I know it's something you love doing. Who knows? Maybe soon you'll be doing it full time!"

James hugged his sister, happy that she understood.



The new arrivals settled in, and their healing and resettlement process continued. James soon departed with Brad and team for parts unknown, to help on a new assignment.

For the first time, Christy was the only non-mortal at the settlement. She was busy, and had little time for thinking about anything other than the immediate business at hand. She missed James, and she missed Allan and Brad, whom she presumed were all very busy on assignment, too busy to even visit. She found it difficult at times to have not seen Allan since Seramore Settlement. Occasionally she would search for him, only to find that he was indeed unavailable.

She often reflected back on some of the last words he had said to her—that everything was going to work out the way it was supposed to, and there was little use of worrying about the direction one's life was taking, for in the end what God had meant to be would be. Although she wondered if he had perhaps meant more than he had let on, she knew the simple truth behind those words, and so was content to trust that, as before, so now the Lord would cause all things to work together for some greater purpose of good.

Spending so much time alone began to shape her character and personality—though it was not outwardly perceptible to those around her. The solitude and the aloneness of the nights continued to provide her with time to reflect, to think and to prepare—though she didn't know what she was preparing for.

On one such quiet night, after the household had settled down and all others had gone to their beds, Christy headed off towards the edge of the plateau, where she had often walked with Allan. It was a beautiful night, and the clear moon beamed down its silver light on the plateau. There was a special magic

in the air. The trees that lined the grassy pathway to the plateau's edge almost seemed to hide something mystical just beyond their branches.

Christy breathed deeply and sighed as she looked around at the awesome beauty, and partook of the stillness and the white glow that bathed her surroundings in mystery.

*How different it looks in the evening, she thought to herself. During the day it's so normal, but at night—it's as if the world is hiding a secret known only to itself. I wonder what it could be?* This was her favorite time—the wee hours of the night when everything was still and quiet. The only sound that could be heard was the occasional scampering of a night creature, or the gentle night breeze wafting across the tops of the newly grown trees.

She finally arrived at the edge of the plateau. The sight that unfolded before her was magnificent; the valley was awash with the same white moonlight that had lit her pathway. From this distance she could see the treetops in the valley dancing in unison to the gentle breeze that was whispering up on the plateau. She was so wrapped up in her own thoughts that she failed to sense that someone had drawn near.

"Christy."

She turned to see a familiar figure leaning up against a nearby tree trunk.

"Allan?" she whispered, overjoyed that he had chosen to share this moment with her.

Without saying another word he walked up to her and reaching out, held her tightly in his arms. She turned her face upwards to find his lips passionately searching for hers.

"Wait," she whispered, while he continued to hold her tightly, "it's such a beautiful night and it's still young; let's take our time."

He returned her gaze, searching into her soul—yet he said nothing. She tried to reach into his mind,

but could not. Again, his lips met hers, and as they stood locked together near the edge of the plateau. She couldn't remember ever having felt so much tenderness or so much passion from Allan. Any attempt she made to reach into his mind was immediately blocked, and Allan made no attempt to make love to her in any way other than physically. He held her in his arms, touched her, caressed her, and yet barely said a word. They loved into the night.

Finally when all was done he stroked her face, and tenderly pushed back the wisps of hair that had fallen over her eyes. "I must go now."

Disturbed at the tone of Allan's voice, she asked, "Is everything all right?"

"Everything's fine," he answered. "I just need to leave now."

"I'll see you then." Christy searched his eyes.

"Goodbye," he said with a smile. As suddenly as he had appeared, he was gone.

Christy stood up to leave. The night still looked as mystical as it had hours earlier. *In fact*, she thought as she looked around her, *even more so!*

Slowly she wended her way back to the house, deep in thought, yet not even sure what she was thinking. There was something about Allan's visit that had unsettled her, something that moved her soul, yet she had no idea what.

"Perhaps time will tell," she said to herself as she slowly walked up the steps and onto the veranda.

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## THE ASSIGNMENT

Weeks passed, then months, but Allan did not visit again. Slowly it dawned on Christy that Allan's last visit had indeed been a final one in some respects, at least for the time being. James' assignments kept him away from home for long stretches at a time. The settlement was doing well, and they had been able to build another house back a good way behind the farmhouse, within walking distance. Plans were being made for more newcomers to join them.

Christy continued to pay her nightly visits to the edge of the plateau. Returning just before daybreak one day, she was startled to see someone sitting on the furthest edge of the veranda.

"James!" she said with surprise as she drew nearer.

James watched her approach, yet didn't say anything.

"This is a surprise! I wasn't expecting you. Is everything okay?" She tried to reach into her brother's mind, but as he routinely blocked it, she was not able to penetrate his thoughts.

"I'm sorry I didn't warn you I was coming," James said. "I guess you must've gotten out of the habit of scanning for events like these, when they happen so rarely."

"That's okay. Are you back for a short visit or...?"

"No, we've finished another assignment. I think I'm back for a while. I don't know that there are any plans for me to move on again just yet."

James seemed different. He was pensive and quiet—not at all the James she was used to. Christy sat beside him and waited quietly. Finally unable to contain her curiosity any longer, she blurted out, "What is it, James? You're so different. Something has changed you."

James looked down. "Yes, I guess you could say I finally grew up."

Christy laughed. "Well, I suppose *that* was bound to happen sooner or later."

James remained silent for a while longer as he gazed out over the veranda.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Christy finally offered, breaking the silence.

"Yes! I'd forgotten how peaceful the nights were around here. The world has truly gotten more beautiful, almost without any help from us. The Lord is doing it, you know."

Christy waited patiently. After a long silence James finally confided, "We were working our way through one of the last unsearched areas along the coast and we came across some people."

"Oh?" Christy responded.

"Yeah, I guess every neighborhood has its incorrigibles," James continued, without taking his eyes off the beauty that was before him. He stood up slowly, and leaned out over the veranda.

"I see," Christy said, beginning to understand what had happened.

"Normally the other guys have taken care of that. But being on a more permanent assignment now, and not just in training, I had to start taking my turn."

Christy remained silent.

"It's different than looking inside of Ed-Spartan."

James turned to look at Christy. "Some of these men were despicable creatures without an ounce of goodness in them. I came face to face with them and I had to step inside of their minds, into their very soul, and work through it inch by inch, bit by bit, memory by memory, thought by thought, from the beginning to the end. On that I had to base our recommendation of whether they were worthy to remain or not. If there was even a speck of hope, we'd recommend they stay, but it was rare to find even the smallest light within them."

James shook his head and then continued, "I guess that's what it took to grow me up. It wasn't pleasant."

Christy reached out and covered his hand with hers, still not saying anything.

"I'm sorry," James apologized, "I just need a little bit of time to..."

"I understand," Christy nodded as her brother's voice trailed off.

After a few days, James was almost his old self again, though some of his former lightheartedness had left him.



It was another beautiful morning. Stewart was the first to greet Christy. "Hi!"

"You're up early, Stewart."

"I'm preparing."

"Preparing for what?"

"James told me that Brad and a couple of the guys are going to be coming by today."

"Oh? That's news to me! We haven't had visitors for a long time."

"Well, that's why I'm up early. I couldn't sleep."

As James had so rightly predicted, a few hours later Brad and a couple of his friends came bursting through the door.

"Long time since I've seen you!" Brad greeted Christy.

"Sure has. How's everything?"

"I think we've pretty much recovered from our last assignment." Then, looking around, Brad added, "How's James?"

"Oh, he's getting back to being the same old James."

"I don't think you'll ever see the same old James," he responded, all the while searching Christy's mind.

"Just visiting?" Christy asked.

"I am visiting, but I am also a bearer of great tidings!"

Christy looked at him questioningly.

"I have a message for you."

Christy's heart leapt, hoping that the message was from Allan.

"It's a message from Charmagne," Brad continued. "She'd like to see you."

"Really?" Christy asked, surprised, yet at the same time a little nervous about the request. "What for?"

"One never knows what Charmagne is calling you for." Indeed, Brad had no idea what Charmagne wanted with Christy. "She'll be waiting for you. I'm supposed to take you back with me. But we can wait a few days to give James a chance to settle back in first."

"It sounds like I need to be prepared to be gone for some time," Christy mused, more to herself, as she knew Brad would not be able to provide any confirmation to this thought. But she would find out for herself soon enough.



Charmagne, appearing in her human form, was her usual bubbly self. "Why, my dear, thank you for coming. It's so good to see you again. Is everything going well?" She searched Christy's mind and looked deep into her spirit, leaving no secret hidden. Charmagne smiled, and with genuine empathy consoled Christy, "I'm sorry, I'm really sorry about

Allan. But you're wise to just leave it. It's best. That's the way it is with the Legionnaires, they come and have to go." She paused, then continued, "It's not for good; it's just for now."

Christy looked down, not knowing how to respond.

"Let's get down to business, shall we? I can see that you are desperately curious as to why you're here"—she laughed—"and I can also see that you have no idea why!"

Charmagne sighed, and as with her smiles, the whole world seemed to sigh with her. "I'm sorry, dear. I really shouldn't do this to you." She searched deeply into Christy's mind again before continuing. "I know you've heard about these Rebels, or Independents as they call themselves. Well, it's time to begin doing something about them. And we'd like you to help."

Christy sat still and was very attentive. Her heart began beating wildly.

"We'd like you to go into one of the Rebel encampments."

Christy held her breath, not sure whether she was hearing correctly or not.

Charmagne gave her a moment to collect her thoughts before continuing. "There is work to be done there. You need to find out what's going on there, and take appropriate action. Of course," she added with a mysterious smile, and almost as an afterthought, "we already know what's going on."

"I don't understand," Christy responded. "If you already know what's going on, then why would I need to go? You could tell us what action to take, or even intervene directly."

"That's a question many of you have. Let me try to explain. But first, before I continue there's another important detail I must explain—no one can find out about your assignment, unless you are specifically instructed to tell them. You can't tell Brad. You can't tell James. You'll have to keep your mind blocked at



all times. You can't let your guard down even for a second, lest someone should find out what you're planning to do."

Christy nodded slowly—not totally understanding, yet accepting.

Charmagne then went on to explain, "This is still man's millennium in many ways. The restoration of earth, the resettling—the attending of it is being left largely in the hands of you resurrected earthlings, as you are the ones who know the human spirit better than we do. Of course, Jesus knows the heart of man better than anybody, yet He has chosen largely to work through folks like you, rather than us solely spiritual beings, at least for the time being. So for now, even we are limited to working with and through you, because that is how the Master has instructed us. We suggest, direct, guide and govern, but only through you.

"Of course, you have been given greater access to the celestial powers than you had before to help with this job, because God knows it's no small task. And that, to give a simple reason, is why you must be the one to look into the Rebels without our direct intervention—it is the way God means it to be."

Charmagne looked at Christy and then continued, "Although we, in our spiritual power, are able to see into the hearts and minds of man when the Lord has ordained it, it's not always expedient for us to act on what we see. It is important that the earthlings learn to trust you and to respect the power invested in you as the appointed rulers among them. And it is precisely for the purpose of strengthening your skills and enhancing your experience as rulers of this Millennial world that missions such as these are entrusted to those such as yourselves."

Charmagne laughed gently and went on. "It also helps to strike fear into the hearts of the Rebels, for they will then more clearly come to recognize our

power when it is manifested in the hands of you human ambassadors of our celestial domain. They will learn that you are indeed a force to be reckoned with. So many reasons, so very many reasons..."

"I see," Christy responded.

"Yes, you do, don't you? You understand." Charmagne looked soberly at Christy, "That's good. Before I tell you any more, I need to know if you're prepared to go ahead with this assignment. It's not going to be very pleasant. You'll not be able to call on many people—and much of the time you'll feel as though you're on your own, although of course you won't be."

After giving Christy a few moments to absorb all that she had related, Charmagne continued, "I don't know what else to say. Can you imagine, Charmagne at a loss for words? I can give you some time to make your decision, if you need it."

Christy realized that Charmagne already knew what her decision was going to be. "I don't need any time. What is my task but to help restore the earth to its rightful state? Whatever I'm called upon to do, I will do. There's no question about that. It doesn't matter to me if it's difficult, or if I'm going to be alone or working with others." She looked down, and almost inaudibly whispered, "It doesn't make any difference, I'm here to do whatever needs to be done."

Charmagne covered Christy with her warmth and love. "Now, a few details. You will be taking two people from your settlement with you, to accompany you on your journey. The only prerequisite is that they need to be earthlings. You can choose whomever you want. You know your people. It's up to you."

After giving time for that thought to be absorbed, Charmagne continued, "You are to be sent to one camp in particular. It's run by a man named Gailan, and it is a short distance into the wilderness from Heif's settlement, of which you know. In order to enter

the Rebel camp, though, you'll have to take on the form of an earthling."

Christy looked up in surprise at this last statement, not understanding exactly what Charmagne meant.

"We will have to..."—Charmagne hesitated—"change you. If you still choose to accept this assignment, you will be given the body of an earthling. You will bleed, your fingernails and hair will grow, you will look and feel and behave as an earthling. You may wonder why this is necessary, and it is because many in these Rebel camps have at one time or another lived in settlements.

"They are sensitive to those with powers, and can easily distinguish a Settler or a Messenger among a group of normal earthlings. Some are even able to discern when their minds are being read, as they are sensitive to the probing, so you'll have to be careful with the powers you have.

"Thus, the fewer powers you have, the more convincing your disguise will be. You'll keep some powers—the power of your mind and your thoughts. You'll still be able to read minds and use your mind and its power, though even with these more unseen gifts you'll have to exercise extreme caution in how and when you use them. But you'll no longer be able to materialize and dematerialize. You won't be able to transport yourself instantly. You'll have to eat and sleep, and you'll need to eliminate."

Charmagne stopped again to give Christy the time she needed to absorb the information she was rather rapidly imparting to her. "Do you understand?" she said at length.

"I ... I think so," Christy hesitantly responded. "So let me see if I get this right. I'll retain some of my powers, but I will lose most others. I'll act like and appear to be an earthling. The only powers I'll keep are the powers of my mind. I'll be able to read minds,

search thoughts and implant thoughts inside of the minds of others. I'll still be able to stop objects through thought power?"

"Yes, yes, exactly. Anything that you already do with your mind you can continue to do, but your body will look, act and respond as that of a mortal earthling. Are you sure you still want to go ahead with this?"

"Definitely!" Christy responded without hesitation. Unable to constrain her questioning mind, she couldn't resist asking, "But why do I need to go in as an earthling among them? Why couldn't this information be gathered by watching them un-awares?"

Charmagne, always eager to teach, obligingly answered, "Let me simply say this. Even though you once were an earthling yourself, you still have much to learn about the actions and hearts and minds of other earthlings. There are so many varied personalities and hearts and motivations that can determine what a man does and thinks and acts like. Of course, you are already aware of this much more than we are, but even you still have to grow in this area of learning to work with the human spirit. And that is yet another reason for this mission that has been chosen for you."

"It's true," Christy said, more to herself than to Charmagne. In fact, she had meant to think it, but in a place like this, one's thoughts seemed to automatically turn to audible words, whether they were consciously spoken or not. And so her growing fascination for a mission of this kind was made obvious in her next question. "I know very little about the Rebels—only what I've heard from Heif. Could you tell me perhaps what I can expect, and what sort of things I'm supposed to look out for, or even do among them?"

"That's a rather big question. I'll try to answer as best as I can. Many of the surviving earthlings have

no idea or understanding of what has happened, and at first glance many might have fit the profile of Rebels. It did not take some very long to choose to defect from our established settlements to join the Rebel camps.

“Yet, I think you may find that there is a ray of hope for most. But unless they are given a choice, unless our reign of peace is clearly explained to them, how will they know? Some in these Rebel camps are simply there because they have been swayed by others, and not for any conscious decision of their own against our rule. They have only heard that what has happened is a bad thing.

“Those who have not yet made a decision based on the truth as it really is, need to hear the other side of the story. They need to hear that this has been ordained from the beginning—that it is as natural a course of events in the history of earth as the dawning of a new morning after the night season.

“And just as there have been proclaimers of God’s great plan since the beginning of time, so there must be now. Many times the messengers have had to adapt, to change, to act like those around them. If they had behaved differently, the people would have perhaps said, ‘You don’t know how we feel, what we are, or what we need.’

“It is the same now, and it is for that reason that you resurrected earthlings have been sent to help those of your own kind accept this new plan. And thus you must become human again to go amongst those who have chosen not to accept or acknowledge the authority of the Settlers. That is why you have been chosen to become a Messenger to the Rebels.”

After another pause in their conversation, which allowed this rather unusual concept to sink in, Charmagne continued, “Oh, one last thing before I forget. As far as contact with any others, you will be put in contact with one person—what we call a

Mediator. One will be specifically assigned to you, and this Mediator will be constantly monitoring your thoughts, and will be able to communicate with you—and intervene on your behalf with greater powers when it is warranted. You shall feel the presence of your Mediator, Edel, once you’re back on earth.”

“And that’s it?” Christy asked.

“For now. If there is anything else that comes up, we’ll be sure to let you know before you go. You can rest here for a while, before the transformation is made. Take a little time to relax and enjoy yourself, as it will seem like quite some time before you’ll be able to enjoy these heavenly pleasures again.”

## THE PLACE OF NO SORROWS

Christy leaned up against a tree, so lost in thought that she was barely conscious of the beauty that surrounded her. Though this particular area of the Heavenly City was strikingly similar to the terrain on earth, the golden glow that bathed the beauty before her gave it a mystical appearance. *Messenger? Did Charmagne call me a Messenger?*

Pondering all that she had been told, she barely noticed anything else around. In fact, she was so engrossed in her thoughts that she was startled to see a familiar person approaching.

“Brad! You’re still up here? What are you doing?”

“Someone told me I could find you here. I thought, seeing that I was in the area, that I could look you up and see what you’re doing.”

“Oh, I’m just thinking!”

“Sometimes I think you think too much!” he retorted.

She smiled, but gave no response.

Brad cautiously asked, “Are you interested in coming into the Fair? I thought you might like to, it’s always lots of fun!”

“I don’t know,” she laughed. “I really have a lot of thinking to do!”

"You can think as you go! You'll enjoy it—besides, maybe you'll meet some old friends there."

Cocking his head to the side, he gallantly held out his hand and invitingly said, "Let's go."

As soon as she took hold of his hand, they were there. The golden glow was everywhere. Its richness enhanced the brilliance of the many colors that filled the scene around them.

"Every time I come to the Heavenly City I realize there are so many places to visit, places I've never yet seen," Christy exclaimed in wonder, breathless at the beauty that surrounded her. "I think it would take all eternity to visit every place in the Heavenly Fair!"

Brad agreed. "I think so too. In fact, I think it just keeps on growing and changing. It never seems the same to me."

"It's fascinating. There are so many people here!"

"Something is about to happen," Brad said, eagerly looking off into the distance. "I believe Charmagne is going to make an appearance."

Christy was surprised. "She doesn't visit these places so often?"

"Not usually—it's not every day that her kind show up here. That's why I thought you'd like to come. Their public appearances are quite impressive."

Seeing a crowd gathering in the distance, they glided over to where a sort of platform stood. It was hard to tell whether it had always stood there or whether it had been specially placed there for whatever event this was to be. Chairs lined the front of the platform, and a long walkway led up to it from behind. A crowd had surged around both sides of the walkway, straining to get a glimpse of whoever or whatever was to be moving along it.

Before long the music began—the beautiful symphony, the golden sounds that matched the golden glow of the golden city. It was not just music that reached your ears, but music that reached into

your heart and wrapped its tender fingers around your soul. It was music that comforted and excited, music that seemed to tell tales of untold mysteries—tales that one could only faintly perceive.

Sighing with contentment, Christy closed her eyes and drifted off as a blissful heavenly feeling enveloped her. She listened as the music built up to a crescendo. When she had met Charmagne for herself, she had appeared ordinary enough. Aside from their brief communication where Charmagne had appeared in all her heavenly splendor, Christy had no idea that Charmagne was any different from the majority of the other spirit beings that inhabited this magic city. However, the tones and very atmosphere of the music in some unperceived way nevertheless clearly conveyed the important rank of the approaching figure.

Breathing gently, Christy slowly opened her eyes to behold the magnificent spirit being she had set eyes on once before. She couldn't help but stare and fully take in the sight of the beautiful Charmagne, revealed in all of her glory. Amidst all the people, and in this public setting, her majesty of form was even more accentuated than it had been when they two had been alone together.

Not knowing why Charmagne was making such a grand appearance, Christy could only surmise that she perhaps had an announcement to make to all—or maybe she just wanted to have some fun. It was well known that even the most powerful of the spiritual beings were not beyond enjoying themselves in this land of mirth and eternal happiness.

Majestically, Charmagne sometimes walked, sometimes glided, along the walkway. Her entourage followed at a respectful distance, and what a sight it was to behold! Accompanying her were all manner of people, spirit beings, animals, and the most delightful array of companions that one could ever hope to find

all in one place at one time—such was Charmagne.

Christy smiled and fairly jumped up and down with sheer delight at the beauty and the wonder of the sight that was passing before her, and the joy that was emanating from not only Charmagne, but all those who were following in her wake.

As the procession slowly passed before their eyes, Christy began to feel a presence she had not felt for a long time.

*Could it be?* she questioned. She looked around the crowd somewhat anxiously, searching out all those around her.

*No, he's not here,* she thought to herself. *But I can feel it. Where's Brad? He's gone too.* Searching deeply into the crowd she found no sign of Brad. A little agitated at not being able to pinpoint Brad's location, she again turned her gaze towards the procession passing in front of her, and as she did her eyes became riveted on it. There, directly in front of her, walking along the platform, was Allan!

A whisper left her lips, "Allan!"

In the same instant she perceived that a very beautiful woman walking beside him was a female Legionnaire. They held hands, and it was apparent that they had spent much time together. For a split second, Christy was able to see into the woman's mind, and in so doing, instantly felt the woman's deep love for Allan, and her unswerving loyalty to him and his cause. Afraid to search any further, she quickly closed her eyes and closed her mind.

About to cry, and feeling as sorrowful as she could feel in such a place, she thought to herself, *He went from my life, and now I know why. This woman is majestic in spirit and beautiful—how could I have ever been so foolish to think that he was seriously interested in me? He was just fulfilling his duty in training me.*

Brad was at Christy's side in an instant. The scene before her now seemed to be moving in slow motion.

Allan and the beautiful lady accompanying him had barely moved from the time Christy had first seen them till now. Quickly Brad put his arm around Christy, stroked her soft hair and whispered, "No more tears, remember?"

Grasping for something to help her keep her emotional equilibrium, she tightly clenched Brad's hand. "But..."

"I know," Brad reassured her, "I know. But you can't let Allan know that you have seen him, or distract him in any way. You can't let these remnants of your earthly feelings get in the way. Remember, there are no disappointments here when you see things as the Lord sees them. As difficult as you think it to be, you have to let it go and come away with me."

Realizing the truth in his gentle reminder, she quickly turned her gaze away.

"Come away with me, now," Brad said. "I didn't realize this was going to happen; if I had I might not have brought you here. ... But then again..."

If something was not meant to be, it would not happen in this realm. There were no mistakes here, and everything had a purpose and was part of a greater plan.

Falling into Brad's embrace, Christy's eyes locked with Charmagne's. As they did, Christy felt great understanding and compassion. *"Go, child! I'm sorry—but so it has to be."*

In an instant Brad had transported Christy to one of the most strikingly beautiful places she had ever seen. It was truly beautiful—in a place that was already filled with beauty—a beauty that transcended even the splendor that normally filled the heavenlies.

"Where is this place?" Christy asked in wonder, wiping the moisture from her eyes so that she could more clearly see where she was.

"Believe it or not," Brad said, "this is called 'The Place of No Sorrows.'"

Christy nodded. She could easily see that there was no room for sorrow or tears here. In fact, she had almost instantaneously forgotten the emotions that had threatened to overwhelm her moments before. It was as if the very atmosphere around them—the same atmosphere of purity that allowed no shadow of dust or taint of decay to enter this perfect city—had washed away every trace of her distressed emotions. Instead, she knew that by simply accepting the greater will and plan of the Lord, she would once again be filled with the peace of knowing that He would give her what was best, and the happiness of knowing that His plan was being fulfilled.

"It becomes a little less awesome after a few moments," Brad whispered, "though it doesn't lose its power."

"Gorgeous!"

"Why don't you sit down with me, relax, enjoy it and wait until you're able to collect your thoughts once again—or at least some of them," he laughed.

"How did you ever discover this place?"

"I've been here before."

"I've never seen such beauty. I have never imagined such beauty! It's unexplainable!"

"I know. I guess that's why you rarely hear anyone talk about it."

Christy closed her eyes, in awe at the heavenly show that was unfolding before her. One moment she was surrounded by a pastoral scene, the next moment a new wave of beauty rolled across the horizon, revealing a beautiful sunset on a beach. Another wave, another beauty, with each one more impressive than the last. Not being able to remember what had just preceded, Christy realized she couldn't tell which one was the most beautiful.

"It's an amazing place."

"It never loses its magic or magnificence, no matter how many times you visit."

"There's no one around?" Christy asked, glancing back and forth.

"Maybe not," Brad responded. After a short moment of silence, he finally mustered up his courage and consoled Christy, "I'm really sorry about Allan."

"It doesn't seem to really matter here," she responded absently, her mind now dwelling only on the beauty around them. She turned to look at Brad and was startled to find that he had become as beautiful as the changing scenery around them.

"You're looking quite handsome there, farm boy," Christy laughed as she watched Brad chew on a piece of straw.

He nodded his head, "Thanks!"

"I didn't realize that the beauty is not only reflected in the surroundings, but also in one another."

Looking her up and down, and then gazing into her eyes, Brad noted, "Oh, it's certainly reflected in those around!"

"All of a sudden you've become everything I've ever wanted! How can that be?" Christy laughed in amazement. The feelings (if that's what they could be called) that were welling up within her were almost beyond her own control, though she felt no desire to control them. They seemed to be moving her towards some definite destination by a will of their own, as if she was a wave being gently rolled towards the beach by the force of the waters around her.

"It must be a part of the deal. Unfortunately, it's not going to last forever."

"Oh, it has to! It must!"

Brad's broad smile showed his amusement.

"Do you feel," Christy hesitated, "do you feel the same about me right now?"

"Depends what you're feelin'," he drawled. "I'm having very good feelin's about you right now."

Reaching over, Christy pulled the straw out of Brad's mouth, and instead placed her lips gently on

his.

"Mmmm." Brad was delighted with her obvious intentions.



It was difficult to say how long they spent making sweet love together, for time really did not exist for them any longer. It was almost like waking out of a dream that had spanned many days, and yet lasted only minutes. Christy opened her eyes, and, looking up into the beautiful golden and blue sky, watched as a soft gentle breeze blew through the tops of the trees and sent the feathery branches swaying gently in perfect rhythm. Sensing that it was time to go, she stirred more, and finally sat up.

Brad was quick to respond, "Oh, don't go! Don't wake yet—this is too good to leave."

"I think I have to go."

"No, you never *have* to go," he lazily replied. "Let's just stay here like this forever."

Christy shook her head in amazement. Looking over at Brad, she realized that the appeal for him that had overcome her earlier was now gone. Gazing around, she also saw that the beauty that had been was no longer the same. They were back in a lush, secluded corner of greenery on the fairground.

"Brad, wake up!"

He refused to stir.

"The handsome farm boy of my dreams seems to have vanished!"

"What?" he exclaimed, sitting bolt upright, obviously a little disappointed at her comment.

"Oh, it's over," he slumped back down on the ground.

"How did that happen?" Christy asked, astounded at what had just taken place.

"I don't know. It always creeps up on me when I'm not expecting it. You think it's going to last forever. You want it to last forever, but suddenly you find

yourself catapulted back into reality," he said, his tone genuinely questioning whether anything around them could by any definition be called reality.

Christy laughed, "I'm sorry, but I do think this is our reality for now."

"What a pity," he muttered in a half-amused tone, referring more to the fact that he was no longer Christy's true and only love.

"How did you do that? How did you take me to that place? Why aren't we there any longer?"

"You ask so many questions," Brad retorted, "and so soon after coming back!" He thought for a while. "Okay, first question first, how did we get there?" He smirked as he asked, "Do you want to go back?"

"Brad!"

"I don't know how to get there. It's just that sometimes you need to go there, or you know someone else needs to go there, and you just hold them by the hand and you're there. I don't know how, I don't even know where it is. It's a special place, reserved for special times with special people! And when you're ready you just come back. I often think of it as a place where your spirit is rejuvenated, restored and strengthened. But I really don't understand the whys and wherefores. I've asked, but I've never received a straight answer, so it must not be something I should know."

"It's a very special place," Christy whispered respectfully. "Very special!"

"What are you going to do now?" Brad asked, gently probing her mind at the same time.

Christy was now well able to block her mind, and had made it a habit to do so. "I need to do a little bit of work up here. Then I'll be heading back to earth."

"That's it, huh?"

"How about you?" she asked Brad.

"I'm just taking a break between assignments. Your brother is not coming with us on assignment this time,



you know. James apparently needs to stay back for some reason." Again he probed Christy's mind to see if he could find out why James needed to stay back, but his probing returned no response.

"Yes, it's nice to have him back again," Christy answered blankly, knowing that Brad was sensing that something was up.

Feeling it a little too dangerous to stay around Brad any longer, for fear that he might actually get through with his probing mind, or that she might inadvertently let her mental guard down (which was easy to do with those you knew well), she said her farewells and was gone.

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**DOWNGRADING**

*"James! James!"* Christy gently searched for her brother.

Startled to find his sister calling from afar, James responded, *"Christy, why aren't you back?"*

*"James, I'm not going to be coming back right away. I need your help. I can't tell you what I'm going to be doing or where I'm going, but can you do a favor for me?"*

*"Of course."*

*"I need to talk to Stewart. Can you please wake him up and tell him that I need to talk to him in this way, so he won't be startled when I try to get through to his mind?"*

*"Will do!"* James said, not questioning his sister's request, realizing that he was not in a position to do so.

A while later Christy located Stewart, *"Hi, it's me, Christy."*

There was silence.

*"Stewart, I know communicating in this way is different, and I normally don't like doing it—but I need to talk to you. When I ask a question and I need your answer, I want you to think in words the answer you want to give me. As you do so I'll be able to catch it. It's*

*important that you don't say anything out loud as you're thinking it, and it's important that you don't mentally form my question either. No one can tap into our conversation as I'm beaming down, or tune into what I'm saying to you unless you somehow repeat it. Do you understand?"*

Stewart thought, "Yes!"

*"That's it! Great! Now, I'm going to try to ask you questions that just need a yes or no response, okay? Let's see, where do I start? Stewart, I've been asked to undertake a mission. I can't explain it to you in any detail now, I'm sorry, but I need to take a couple of people with me—earthlings, that is. Naturally I thought of you as one who could help. It's going to be dangerous, it's going to be difficult, and it's especially not going to be easy for the earthlings who come along with me. That's about all I can tell you right now. I realize this is pretty fast, but what do you say, would you like to join me?"*

Surprisingly Stewart did not seem at all disturbed by Christy's request. "Yes," he thought confidently.

"You understand what I'm asking, don't you?" Christy questioned.

"Yes."

*"There's one more question, Stewart. I need to take someone else with me. It needs to be someone who has seen a lot, who has been through a lot, who would not be surprised or find it difficult, no matter what situation they find themselves in. They need to be able to take a pretty tough situation without complaint, without fear, and to be able to go on no matter what happens. For some reason I've not been given a very clear picture of who else to ask.*

*"I know this sounds strange, but I think it may be best for you to make that decision. I don't know why. It must have to be someone you're comfortable with and someone you feel confident will be able to handle the situation with you."* Christy laughed, realizing how

absurd the thought must sound to Stewart, who had been used to following their more supernaturally informed suggestions and instructions most of the time, "So, can you come up with a suggestion?"

Once again unperturbed by her question, Stewart solemnly responded, "Yes."

Finishing up their rather one-way conversation Christy beamed down, "That's it, Stewart. I'll contact you a little later to see what you've come up with, okay? Bye."

Christy was fairly certain that Stewart would choose Ed-Spartan, though for some reason that thought disturbed her a little. *But who else would he feel as comfortable with?* she thought to herself.



True to her word, Christy once again searched out Stewart in the late afternoon. "Hi, Stewart! Same rules apply, except that this time you'll have to tell me a name—but that's all. Just yes, no, and a name." Christy chuckled, greatly encouraged by Stewart's calmness at her requests.

"First, though, are you sure you want to come?"

She'd barely asked the question when Stewart emphatically replied, "Yes!"

"Great! Who do you propose our travel partner should be? Remember, just the name."

"Trina."

Christy was stunned, "Trina, are you sure?"

"Yes!"

"Why Trina? I was certain you would have chosen Ed-Spartan!" She waited for his response, which did not come.

Realizing that he could not answer such a complicated question with a yes or no response, she continued, "I was really expecting you would choose Ed-Spartan. I never thought about Trina. I don't know about Trina."

"You said it was my choice!" came the reply. Then

as suddenly as Stewart had broken through with this thought, he stopped, obviously nervous that he had said more than she had instructed him to.

After thinking for a moment Christy apologized. *"I'm sorry. I should not have voiced my hesitation like that. I said it was your choice, and I believe it is your choice. If you feel Trina is the one who should join us, then by all means, she should be the one! Can you ask her if she'd like to come along? Remind her that she's not to think about it any more than she has to, in case someone should intercept her thoughts. You'll just have to ask her and then be prepared to leave pretty much right away if she agrees to come."*

Stewart nodded, understanding the instructions fully.

*"Do you remember the place where Spartan almost jumped off the cliff? Why don't you wait for me there, and I'll join you. I'm fairly certain she'll agree, knowing Trina."*

Again without hesitation, Stewart responded affirmatively.

*"I'll let James know not to be surprised at anything that happens over the next few days. Give me a couple of days and then you can try to work it out, okay?"*

*"Yes."*

Christy need not have worried about James. He'd already received the message that Christy would be gone for some time and that she would be taking two people from their settlement with her. He was instructed not to try to find out what was happening, and not to be surprised at whatever happened. At times like this, one did not question instructions. It was easier, and by far the wisest course of action, to simply flow with them without question.



Amused at how closely the building she had just entered resembled a hospital, Christy smiled.

"Who would have thought that a place like this

would exist here!" she said, greeting the man dressed in white who came up to her.

"All is not as it seems, my dear," he chuckled. "It helps us to focus a little more on what we're doing. If we can make it somehow relatable to how things were, it helps things to flow much more easily."

"And which ward do I go to?" Christy asked with an amused look.

The man looked down at a clipboard and muttered, "Let me see. ... What are you here for? Aha! Ohh! My! Well, that's quite a tall order. You'll be heading upstairs. I can take you. It's probably best that we just keep this between ourselves for now."

The white walls glowed.

Others appeared. Someone said, "It's time to start."

"Fine, I'm ready." Christy was a little nervous, not knowing how it would feel to have her body downgraded.

Instantly recognizing what she was thinking, one of the women assured her, "It doesn't hurt a bit. You won't feel anything. We'll put you to sleep and let you dream while we do what we have to do. We have to make sure we get everything right."

"How will I get back down to earth?" Christy hesitantly asked, as the realization suddenly dawned on her that she would no longer be able to transport herself, and would be limited to moving as the earthlings did.

"We'll take care of everything," they assured her. "You'll just wake up and you will find yourself there already. We know where you want to go, don't worry."

"So, I put myself into your hands, close my eyes and go to sleep—and when I wake up, I'm almost human again?"

"Something like that, yes."

"How comforting!" Christy dryly commented.

The man who had brought her there chuckled, "You'll need to get used to the idea."

"Are you sure you want us to go ahead with this?" one of the ladies asked. "I sense that you're a little hesitant."

"Sure I'm hesitant. They used to call it cold feet!"

"Ahh, cold feet," the man nodded with understanding, "Cold feet—imagine that. Just think, soon you'll be able to feel what it's like to have cold feet again!" He winked at Christy.

No sooner had the words left his mouth than a gentle numbness began to creep over her mind. For a moment Christy instinctively struggled against it. She tried to remember what she was doing and why she was doing it. She was afraid that she might wake up and have no recollection of what she was supposed to do.

A reassuring feeling swept over her, and as it did she heard the encouraging words, "It's going to be fine! It's going to be all right, don't struggle against it."

The warm, rich, velvety, comforting, soothing voice encouraged her. Yielding to the comfort that was offered, she soon slipped into a deep sleep. The most vivid dreams she'd ever had kept her mind busy, while Charmagne's helpers went to work.

She felt nothing. She seemed to live a thousand lives in her dreams, with adventure, romance and the most captivating stories and visions she'd ever had, prancing in front of her eyes—amusing and entertaining and preparing her. Though she did not know it at the time, they strengthened her in ways that were not perceptible to her. Thoughts and feelings were implanted, memories were given back that had been long forgotten, memories of what it was like to have an earthly body. In fact, everything was given her that was needful to help her appear in every way as an earthling again.

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## THE MISSION BEGINS

An uncomfortable sensation was passing through her body. Christy stirred and rolled onto her side. The feeling continued. Upset at being woken from her deep sleep in this way, she slowly opened her eyes and lifted her head. With a jolt she sat upright, suddenly realizing that she had been deposited not too far from her settlement, close to the place where she was to meet up with Stewart.

"Pins and needles!" she muttered incredulously. "Pins and needles! What a weariness—bodies!" She sighed and slowly sat up, continuing to rub her leg, and feeling as if the weight of the world was upon her. "Oh, you poor beings," she said, thinking of the earthlings. "You have to be weighted down like this all the time!"

She shook her head again, as a strange feeling passed over her. *What is it?* She began searching her mind for some clue as to what she was feeling. It happened again. She pressed her stomach. *It's related to my body ... hunger!* She laughed out loud, "I'm hungry! I can't believe it! I'm feeling hungry!" It seemed so long since she'd felt that way. "Well, this is going to be real interesting. Just think of all of the sensations I'm going to experience again!"

Suddenly she was startled to feel a presence near her, though there was no one in sight. "Who's there?" she asked apprehensively.

"Edel."

Startled by the one-word reply on her inner channel, Christy responded in like manner. "Oh, you're here with me now?"

"Of course. I was with you from the moment you started to go to sleep, when they began working on you."

Recognizing the silky smoothness of the voice, she said, "That's right! You were there. You helped me not to worry."

"I'm here to help you. We have a perfectly clear and secure channel. No one can intercept our communications."

"That's a relief," Christy replied. "I'm sure we're going to need that. Do you know what's going to happen?"

"I know more than you do."

"Does anyone have a plan? Nobody seems to know exactly how this is going to play out, not even Charmagne."

Edel laughed. "Oh, Charmagne knows."

"She does?"

"Uh-huh. And it's up to us to try to figure out what she already knows. I think the first step is to meet up with your friends. They're here already and they're waiting for you. They look mighty eager to get started."



As Christy began to make her way towards the place where Stewart and Ed-Spartan had been working that near-fateful day, she asked, "Edel. That's such an unusual name. Can I ask you a little about yourself?"

"No," came the response.

Thinking that Edel was joking, Christy continued, "Are you a spirit being, or...?"

Silence ensued.

Undaunted, Christy tried again, "Are you a male or female?"

Silence. The silence persisted as Christy walked towards the spot where she was to meet Stewart and Trina.

"Finally, she's coming!" she heard a voice excitedly exclaim.

Looking up, she saw Trina pointing towards her. Stewart, shielding his eyes from the sun, was also obviously trying to make out the small figure that was approaching. They stood still and waited for Christy to approach.

"Hi! Why are you staring at me?" Christy asked.

"I'm sorry," Stewart answered, unable to take his eyes off her. "It's just that you look a little different. ... You're sweating!"

"And you're dirty!" Trina echoed, in amazement.

"You look different, real different!" Stewart observed, "It's you, but ... is it really you?"

Laughing at their surprise in seeing her with an earthling's body, Christy answered, "I'm sorry I couldn't prepare you for this, but yes, it's me and I have a very earthly body now."

"Oh!" Trina exclaimed. "That's fascinating! You mean they can do things like that?"

"Guess they can! I'm sorry I couldn't give you any details on what's happening. I don't know how to thank you enough for dropping everything and joining up with me, not knowing where you're going or what you are going to do."

"No problem," Trina confidently responded. "We know we're on the right side, so it doesn't really matter what we do, does it, Stewart?"

"That's right," Stewart said, nodding.

"Besides," Trina whispered, "it sounds like it's going to be quite exciting."

"I don't know about that," Christy hesitantly

replied. "I'm not so sure about the excitement. I think it's going to be pretty hard going; it's not going to be so easy. Being weighted down with these bodies..."

"What's the big deal?" Trina interjected. "We're always weighted down with 'these bodies.'"

Christy laughed. "You'll have to bear with me. It takes a while to get used to having an earthling's body again."

"I bet it's not as easy as it was being transformed the other direction," Stewart chuckled.

"You're right about that! But here we are—and so it begins!"

"We weren't sure what we were doing so we packed a few belongings and brought some food along with us as well—not much, though. We didn't realize you'd be eating too!"

Christy wondered whether it would be enough. "Do you think we need to go back and get more?" Then, remembering her spiritual guide, she sent up a mental question to Edel. "*What should we do?*"

There was no response.

"*Are you still there? What's happening?*" she questioned.

No answer.

Not knowing what to do, and without really thinking very deeply about it, Christy said nonchalantly, "Well, I guess we'll just have to go with what we've got. Maybe we'll find food along the way or something."

"*Bad move!*" Edel beamed down.

"*You're still there?*" Christy was happy to hear the voice.

"*We need to talk!*" Edel said, rather sternly.

Christy, shaken by the short responses she was suddenly getting from Edel, turned to the others and said, "I'll be back soon."

Stewart and Trina looked at one another a little puzzled. "We'll be fine," they said at length.



Christy walked until she found a place where she could slip out of sight behind some boulders.

"Yes?" She searched for Edel.

The velvety voice, suddenly full of reassurance again, started to talk. "*We need to lay down some ground rules. First of all, I'm like a silent partner. I'll be with you wherever you go, but I'm not going to communicate with you all the time. Though no one is able to tune into what we're saying to one another, unless you're extremely talented at hiding things, it's very obvious when you're in communication with someone in this way. Just the sheer speed with which you can understand situations and make decisions gives you away. And as you are supposed to be an earthling, that just won't work.*"

"*I understand, but out here there's no one around, so can't we at least communicate more here?*"

"*It's time to practice—otherwise it will be much more difficult for you when you're surrounded by strangers. I'm going to leave most of the decision-making to you and your companions. You no longer have the same abilities as you had before. It has been a long time since you operated as a true earthling, so it would be wise to be a little less quick to make decisions and talk it out more with your companions.*"

"*The basic game plan of the mission is that you need to make your way to the Rebel camp. You know where the Rebel camp is, so you just need to start heading off in that direction. As far as the choices along the way, as long as they're all made in the right direction, it's not really going to matter how you go about some of these things. If you're about to make a real bad choice or a wrong decision, I'll let you know, but in order to help you to become as normal as possible, you'll probably feel like you're on your own most of the time. Of course you won't be, because I'm always there watching over you, watching out for danger. I'm*"

*constantly with you."*

Christy was silent. Suddenly the realization of what it was like to have an earthly body and to play an earthly role was beginning to come back to her. She questioned again, hoping for a different answer. *"But why does it have to be this way? Are you sure you can't tell me what to do at least while we're out here?"*

With infinite patience, Edel explained again, *"I could tell you what to do while you're out here and there's no one around, but since I won't be able to for the greater part of your mission, you may as well get used to it right from the start."*

*"I'm not sure I really like this idea so much any more. ..."*

*"It's a bit too late to go back now, isn't it?"*

*"I guess so!"* Christy stood up. *"Thanks for the chat. I understand the ground rules a little more clearly now."*

Silence ensued.



"Is everything okay?" Stewart asked, as Christy plopped down on the ground beside him, with a slightly dejected air about her.

"Everything's fine. Just some counsel from beyond, if you know what I mean. So, what do you all think we should do about the food?"

Stewart was quiet, and even Trina had nothing to say. After a long silence, Stewart gently said, "It may help if we had some idea what we are going to be doing, and maybe from there we could make our decisions."

Christy chuckled. "You're obviously much more used to this type of thing than I am. I haven't needed to eat since I got my new supernatural body, so you can imagine how new this all is to me—though you'd imagine I'd still be used to it."

Stewart nodded, and smiled broadly—all the while thinking to himself that some very interesting days were ahead.

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## THE EDGE OF THE WILDERNESS

Christy filled Stewart and Trina in on the bare details. She told them that they would be traveling for a while, heading towards the edge of the wilderness. She explained that they were to attempt to find and enter a Rebel camp. Though they were awestruck at the thought of what lay ahead, the fact that it was not going to be immediately upon them helped them remain calm and not too perturbed.

After some deliberation they decided that, although they would be able to find some food along the way, it would be best to take a good supply with them. Hearing of the distance they needed to travel, they also concluded that it would be helpful to ride on horses instead of undertaking such a journey on foot. Stewart was chosen to go back to the settlement to harness up four of their fittest and strongest horses—one for each of them to ride on, and another to carry any extra supplies, which Stewart would also gather. It would be dusk before he could return.

Trina, by far the more talkative of the two and the most likely to say more than she should, remained with Christy. Being assured that she would have received a resounding no from Edel had it been the wrong proposal, Christy was confident that they had

made the right choice.

It took Stewart the remainder of the day to collect the needed supplies, saddle the horses and load them with their burdens. They were willing beasts of burden, and as Christy noted upon their arrival back at their meeting place, they also seemed very happy to help with this mission.

Christy had not lost her rapport with the animals, and just as she could read the minds of the earthlings, she could likewise communicate with and perceive the thoughts of these fine beasts. Rubbing their flanks as she passed by she reassured them, "Well, I'm certainly glad to have you coming along."

The fine gray mare turned her head towards Christy and nudged her gently, as if to say, "We are also very happy to be a part of this."



It was a long and somewhat arduous journey, especially for Christy, who was hardly accustomed to the rigors of horseback riding in a human body, and soon found most of it aching and sore. After the first couple of days of travel, they resigned themselves that it was going to take some time. They soon settled down to a moderate pace, occasionally breaking to eat, and camping each night.

There was not a lot of discussion along the way. Each one seemed to be lost deep in their own thoughts—wondering what the future had in store for them. They did not see anyone as they traveled—the surrounding countryside appeared to be deserted. Although there were some settlements scattered here and there, they widely circled around them, so as not to come in contact with any of the inhabitants—either the earthlings or the Settlers. Their supplies would last a while yet, and the fewer settlements they came in contact with, the faster they would reach their destination.

They soon approached a desertlike expanse and

were encouraged, as it marked the halfway point of their journey. From that point on they pushed themselves more and moved at a faster pace, not wanting to linger in those parts any longer than was necessary.



Their journey was finally drawing to a close. As they were settling around their campfire one night, Christy spoke softly, "There is one last settlement between here and the wilderness. I can't shake the thought that perhaps we could stop off there to rest and take a little time to learn more about the area ... and even about the Rebel camps."

Stewart and Trina were uneasy with her suggestion.

"Do you know anyone there?" Stewart cautiously asked, not wanting his question to give any indication of his feelings.

"Yes, I know Heif. He's one of the Settlers. I think we'd be safe with him. He would recognize me, and no doubt he would be surprised to see me in this form, but he's a shrewd fellow, I don't think he'd say anything."

"What do you think, Trina?" Stewart asked.

Trina, unwilling to commit herself, replied, "I don't really know."

Christy sighed, understanding that it was not going to be easy for either of them to commit themselves to a decision. "Well, why don't we just think about it tonight, and see how everyone feels in the morning?" They readily agreed to that proposal.

The uneasiness that each one felt grew as they settled down for the night, though this remained unspoken, as no one wanted to unduly worry the others.

Before closing her eyes, Christy looked up at the starlit sky and sent out a silent plea, "*Edel, please! I know you are here. You said you would always be with*



me, every step. It would be helpful to have some reassurance about our plans." She waited. There was no response.

She yawned, closed her eyes, and rolling over, was soon sound asleep.



Unbeknownst to them, a small group of Rebels had been stalking them from afar the entire day. Waiting until they were assured they'd fallen into a deep sleep, the Rebels then began to furtively make their way to where the horses were standing. These hungry and desperate men had been traveling on foot, and they were only too eager to relieve the small group of travelers of their belongings. The horses shifted uneasily and neighed softly as the Rebels approached, for they knew that they were not kind men.

"You four go for the horses," one of the men whispered. "The rest of us will take their supplies. We're going to have to make a dash for it; the horses are unsettled and they're going to wake someone up soon. We'll have to grab the horses and run before those guys are awake enough to realize what has happened."

The other men nodded in agreement.

"Okay," the leader said tersely, "let's go!"

At his command the small group of Rebels rushed toward the horses, who by this time were sidestepping, and nervously lifting their heads into the air, calling for their masters. Without the slightest hesitation, four of the Rebels grabbed the horses' reins and, quickly mounting them, galloped away.

The remainder of the men rushed for the supplies, quickly picked them up and likewise ran off in the direction the horses had taken.

Christy, Stewart and Trina awoke at the sound of the whinnying horses. Even though they were startled to hear them so unsettled in the night, they did not immediately perceive what was happening, and

because of their somewhat disoriented, half-awake state, they were not able to stop the men from taking off with almost all of their supplies, and their horses.

"Oh no!" Christy shouted, as she stomped her feet. She had finally come to the realization of what had happened. "Why did this happen! What's going on?"

Trina stood in shock, with her mouth wide open, gazing off in the direction of the galloping horses.

Stewart shook his head in despair. "We can't go after them. They're already too far away now and it's dark. It would be too difficult to find them—not to mention that they know their way around these parts and we sure don't."

"Why did this have to happen? Everything's been going so well so far."

Stewart shook his head, signifying that he didn't know.

Trina still said nothing.

Despondently Stewart asked, "What are we going to do?"

Trina sat back down by the blackened campfire. "Someone should have stayed awake and kept watch. We knew we were entering Rebel territory."

This comment did little to comfort Christy. Changing the subject she asked, "Do we have any food left?"

"Yes, the leftovers from our last meal. We have a few things in our rucksacks, and..."—almost as an afterthought Trina added, "we still have our bedrolls!"

After sitting around dejectedly for a while, they lay down one at a time and began to drift in and out of sleep, realizing there was little else they could do till morning. Dawn was fast approaching and their sleep was light—but still, it afforded them some rest.



Just as the day was beginning to break, Christy was awakened by Edel's voice, "Christy."

She opened her eyes and lazily rolled her head to

the side, momentarily forgetting what had just transpired, and not sure exactly who was calling her.

*"Christy,"* the voice called again.

Startled back to reality, Christy opened her eyes wide. "Edel?" she whispered.

*"Yes."*

*"Why was the presence of the Rebels hidden from me? Did you ever consider waking me up before our horses were stolen?"* she asked in an exasperated tone of voice.

Edel did not respond immediately. After a pause, the gentle voice continued, *"I thought about it, but it was all part of the plan to let the horses be stolen."*

Christy was astounded at that answer. She sat bolt upright and shot up a quick rejoinder. *"What do you mean?"*

*"It would be more help to you if you did not have your horses at this point. You were wondering whether you should go and visit Heif—well, you don't really have any other recourse now, do you? Now you'll have to go there to stock up on supplies. You could have just ridden up to his settlement, but this way it will be more authentic. If anyone would still be watching you..."*

*"Are they?"* Christy interrupted, with some concern.

*"If anyone is still watching you,"* Edel repeated, *"it would be much more understandable and almost to be expected that you would stop by one of the settlements now that you've lost everything."*

*"I hadn't thought of that."*

Referring to Christy's earlier somewhat strained response, Edel offered some advice. *"I have a suggestion, something that you may find helpful in the days ahead."*

There was no immediate response from Christy.

Undaunted, Edel went on, *"When things seem to go awry, rather than bemoaning your fate and feeling that things are not going the way they should, perhaps*

*you should stop and look again. Maybe if you were to look a little more deeply at the situation you could better understand why things happen.*

*"Believe me, nothing is accidental; nothing is unplanned. Everything is working towards a greater purpose, and it would do you well to remember that. It is more helpful to see the greater purpose behind things than to take disappointments or setbacks at face value.*

*"Nothing is only as it seems. Remember that. It is as true for you now as it was when you were among us and could more easily understand the greater picture of what goes on in the realm unseen to earthlings. Many times in the days ahead it may look like things are going wrong, or they're not turning out the way you had hoped. Whenever that happens, don't start doubting your mission, but instead reevaluate, reassess and try to see things in a new light."*

After imparting these words of wisdom to Christy, Edel was suddenly gone. Christy lay back down with her eyes closed and thought of all that had been said. With the rising of the sun, her companions likewise rose from their slumber.

*"Well, where do we go from here?"* Stewart meekly asked, obviously hoping that Christy had made a decision during the wee small hours of the night.

Christy gave a little half-smile and responded, *"I believe the decision has already been made for us. We don't exactly have any other alternative but to go ahead and approach Heif's settlement."*

*"Where is it?"* asked Trina, joining in on the conversation. *"Is it far from here?"*

*"I don't think so. From what I recall, it was right on the edge of the wilderness."* Shielding her eyes against the rising sun, she looked off toward the east. *"There is a river winding its way parallel to the mountain range you can see in the distance, and I believe the river borders the wilderness. I remember Heif telling me that his settlement was close to the*

river, so hopefully, if we can make our way to the river and walk alongside it, we should be able to find it.”

“Should we go right or left, once we get to the river?” Trina questioned.

Christy, looking off to the right, responded, “I don’t think there’d be any settlements up that way, it looks too desolate; but there’s some sort of a clearing down that way.” She nodded towards the left. “I could be wrong, but I think I’ll take my chances on going that way.”

“Me, too,” Stewart agreed.



After packing up their few remaining belongings and putting on their rucksacks, they began what they hoped was the conclusion of that part of their journey. By the time the sun had risen high they had made their way to the river.

It was an unruly river. The frequent twists and bends in the river’s course stirred up the water, which frothed and foamed over the large boulders that lay along its edge. Occasionally Christy glanced over into the wilderness. The thin vegetation creeping down to the riverbank gave it a rather desolate appearance. Further back the dense forest had firmly taken root.

Towards late afternoon they came to what appeared to be the boundary of a settlement. The ground was tilled, and obviously tended to. They walked on until they came to a tightly strung barbed-wire fence, about the height of a man. Unable to climb over because of the barbs, they decided to walk alongside of it until they came to an opening. After traveling about half a mile they saw small buildings scattered in the distance. Animals were grazing peacefully around them. The barbed-wire fence soon gave away to a somewhat shoddily made, rough wooden fence. Encouraged that they were coming closer to some sign of civilization, their spirits rose.

It had been some time since they’d seen any other faces, especially friendly ones.

Finally, in the distance they caught sight of an old colonial-style wooden house.

“This must be it!” Christy said with relief.

Coming closer to the house, they saw two men leaning over a wooden gate, watching them approach—but saying nothing. Christy could immediately tell that they were Settlers, and she realized that they would soon figure out that she was not as she appeared.

*Oh, I wish one of them had been Heif,* she thought to herself, not sure what response these Settlers would have.

As they came closer she could distinguish these men and their rugged-looking features more clearly. While they stood watching, a woman slowly came out to stand beside them—she was also a Settler.

Not a word was spoken as the small band of travelers approached the waiting Settlers. Christy felt them gently trying to probe her mind, and soon perceived that they were startled not to be able to do so, although they contained their surprise very well.

“Hello,” Christy’s welcome rang out, as they came within earshot.

The men nodded but didn’t say a word. The woman looked at them with an air of suspicion, though in being able to search into her mind, Christy could tell that in reality the woman knew there was nothing to worry about from these travelers.

Relieved at their ability and their willingness to not mention any of what they had immediately discerned of Christy’s rather unusual nature, Christy approached them confidently. “We’re traveling these parts. We were heading for the mountains, but last night some men stole our horses and supplies.”

The woman looked expressionless as she replied, “That doesn’t surprise me!”

Stewart and Trina were a little taken aback by the rather cool welcome they were getting from this Settler. Hearing the door open, Christy glanced up expectantly. Standing there, and seeming to fill the entire doorway, was a very welcome and familiar sight. She barely restrained herself from calling out his name.

"Well, well, what have we here ... some weary travelers," Heif said as he approached, trying his best to give no sign of recognition. As he approached, Christy gazed deeply into his eyes and was relieved to see his very warm acceptance. "What can we do for you?" he asked.

"We were heading for the mountains on a search mission," she began to explain. "We're ... umm ... trying to find someone. ..." Her sentence trailed off rather lamely. Reaching up, she ran her fingers through her stringy hair. Its knotted and slightly greasy texture had once again become familiar to her, and in its own way seemed to give her a handle on the human role she was still adjusting to. "We've been on the move since everything happened. We don't know what we want to do yet."

Heif nodded with understanding.

"We were just robbed. Some men stole our horses and..."

Before she could finish her sentence Heif cut in, "Oh, you had horses?"

"We were stocked with enough food and supplies to get us into the wilderness, but it's all gone."

"I suppose you're wanting us to restock you?" Heif asked.

"We could work for it," Christy quickly responded.

"You work for a week, we'll feed you, and then we'll send you off with enough food to make it to the nearest camp in the wilderness. No horses though," Heif added. "You'll have to go in on foot like everyone else does around here."

"Thank you." Christy tilted her head to the side and looked up at Heif. "That sounds pretty good to us."

"What are your names?" Heif asked.

"I'm Christy. And this is Stewart, and Trina."

Heif reached over and, after fumbling with the latch, opened the gate wide. "Well, come on in. You've been traveling all day? You must be tired and hungry."



They were given a mattress and space on the floor in a big dormitory, along with a dozen or so other earthlings.

The woman who had been on the greeting committee informed them, "Dinner will be served in about twenty minutes, you can come and join the line-up. We don't have a lot here, but you're welcome to eat as much as you need."

As they walked over toward the dining room the woman introduced herself, "My name is Maxine, I'm Heif's wife." She then beamed silently at Christy, "*And I've heard a lot about you.*"

Christy didn't respond. Surrounded by earthlings, and no doubt some Rebels or some who might one day end up joining the Rebel camps, she certainly did not want to give herself away.

"So what can you do?" Maxine asked.

Stewart was quick to reply, "I can do any sort of labor. I can chop wood, tend to animals, farm. I don't mind what I do, I've done it all."

"Well, it shouldn't be a problem trying to find something for you to do then. And you," she nodded toward Trina.

"I'm really good at running errands," Trina said with a twinkle in her eye.

"What else?" Maxine responded, a little gruffly.

"I can wash clothes, wash dishes, take care of kids..."

"I don't know about you taking care of kids,"

Maxine said, "but we could use your help—we have a lot of dishes that need washing."

"And you?" she asked, turning towards Christy, obviously wondering what she was going to say.

"I'm a teacher."

"But you're here today, gone tomorrow. That's not much use to us."

"I can tend your horses, I'm good with animals."

Maxine sighed. "Well, we'll have to see where you fit in then, won't we?"



While walking back to their dormitory after dinner Trina whispered to Christy, "What are we supposed to say if people ask us what we're doing?"

"Maybe you can say that you think your parents are in the wilderness and you're going to find them. That we have relatives in the camps. We could say we met together while we were all at Seramore and ... well, I don't know."

Stewart built on the conversation. "We can say we didn't like Seramore, that it was taking everyone too long to get things set up, and that we just decided to split from the settlement. From what I've heard, I don't think that's so unusual in these parts."

"True, I think there are times when people leave the settlements, especially the bigger ones, as it's hard to keep track of everyone. But I don't know if we can say we were all at Seramore, because we weren't—and we may well run into someone else who was there. It would be odd if we weren't familiar with the camp. But Trina, you can talk about Seramore." Turning to Trina, she continued, "You should ask a lot of questions, find out all you can about the Rebel camps from the people here. Hopefully I'll be able to talk to Heif tomorrow."

As they drew close to the dormitory they ended their conversation. No one said much to them as they settled down for the evening. The earthlings were a

rough-looking crowd, and Christy was thankful not to have to engage in conversation that night.

They were soon asleep, as the last leg of their journey and the previous night's broken sleep had taken its toll on them.

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**HEIF**

They were woken early the next morning. Following the routine of the others in the dormitory, they made their way back to the dining room. After entering the room they waited in line, plate in hand, for their breakfast. Once they'd been served they sat quietly by themselves at the edge of a long table.

The conversation around them was a little more lively than it had been the night before, but still no one tried to include them. Word had gotten out that they were not there to stay but were just passing through, and to the rest of the earthlings at the settlement, it seemed little use getting to know them. They were considered drifters, here today and gone tomorrow, untrustworthy and generally thought not worthy of investing time or conversation in.

Towards the end of breakfast one of the Settlers stood up and announced where everyone would be working. He left the newcomers till last. Finally he said, "Trina, you can go out back and start helping with the dishes. Stewart, you'll be joining me. We have some work to do out in the fields. Christy, we have some mares soon to deliver, we need to bring them into the stables. You can help on that team. Just wait there; someone will come to get you."

Trina, anxious to begin her day, stood up and began noisily clearing the table, whistling as she worked. She had soon spirited herself into the back kitchen and it was not long before her shrill voice could be heard amongst the others. Stewart went to stand beside the Settler who had made the announcements, and waited till it was time to go. Christy remained seated and waited.

She didn't have to wait for long. She soon felt a big hand pat her shoulder, "Christy, let's go." Turning, she saw Heif standing behind her. Obviously relieved that she would be spending the day with Heif, she responded, "I'm ready, sir!"

"Good," was the gruff response. He turned and strode out of the dining room without even so much as a backward glance at her, confident that she would follow.

She found it a little difficult to keep up with the tall man's strides.

"We have to go to the far end of the settlement; that's where the mares are kept." He turned to Christy with a kinder look now. "I thought you'd appreciate taking a long walk this morning."

"Oh, yes!" she enthusiastically responded.

Once they were a good way from the house he slowed down to a more leisurely pace so Christy was better able to keep up with him.

"So, how's everything, Christy?"

"Very different, Heif."

"I'm sure. I knew you were special the first time I set eyes on you. You're not a Settler, are you?" he asked, with his eyes narrowing. "If you were a Settler you wouldn't be doing this."

She didn't completely understand what he was saying, but not wanting to converse about this particular subject, she changed the conversation. "The others, are they okay about this—our being here and all?"

"They're fine. We see a lot of unusual things happening out here, and I don't think anything would surprise them. That's why they were chosen for this job. They're the right ones to have out here as they are prepared for anything. I sense that you're not able to tell us very much about what you're doing."

Christy laughed and with candor explained, "I don't know what I'm doing! I don't know the end from the beginning. I take one step at a time and then, once I've taken that step, I look down and see the next step to take. But as far as projecting the end of my journey"—she shook her head—"I'm afraid I really don't know anything about it."

Heif joined in her laughter. "Well, you're safe with us. We won't breathe a word of this in our thoughts, or verbally, to anyone that comes by—not to any other Settlers, or Messengers, or Legionnaires. That was something we all had to agree to before we were entrusted with this assignment. Should anything happen here or should we have visitors or people passing through, we were told that we would not be able to breathe a word of it to anyone else, no matter who. We can live with that."

Christy was relieved. "You've been especially prepared for a place like this."

"Yes, it seems so. We have our part to play out here, and well, we play it."

"Nothing is really as it seems out here, is it?" Christy asked.

"It depends what you're expecting to see," Heif cryptically responded. After a minute or so of silence, he asked, "So, if you're on a searching mission, like you said, I assume it's to find the Rebels, huh?"

"Yes, I suppose that much is obvious. Is there any kind of direction you could give?"

"There are all sorts of little outposts around here, some more established than others. Some camps are little more than groups of roving bandits who prey on

the other Rebels or travelers, I guess like the ones you came across. Sometimes they make forays into our settlement too. The biggest Rebel camp is said to be located near the base of that mountain you can see in the distance there. They've all laid claim to their territories, you know. In a way you could say they've started their own settlements.

"From what I've been able to gather, the largest and most organized camp is headed by a man called Gailan. He's a bad man, but he's a smart man. Apparently he has gathered quite a following, and has managed to turn his encampment into quite a productive little community. Though the land is arid and not fertile enough to grow crops, they breed horses and other livestock, which they graze on the plains. At least, that is my guess, as that is the main commodity others from the wilderness always bring to us to trade for the food and supplies we have.

"At the same time, I believe he is seeking to extend his influence over the other smaller encampments and settlements out there. He's trying to establish a power base which he could use to further his own agenda—to build up his own little independent kingdom.

"The problem as I see it is that he's setting up a counterfeit system, and unfortunately a lot of people who don't know any better will be satisfied with that. He works quietly, quickly and subtly, convincing everyone he comes in contact with that his way is better. He's turning all of these people into Rebels without their ever having had an opportunity to see the truth for themselves. Unless someone leaves his camps, there is little hope that they will hear anything other than his side of the story—and it's not a very pretty story, at least as far as our part in it is concerned.

"Apparently this man is gaining ground quite fast out there, to the point that he has almost become a legend amongst the wilderness dwellers. Anyhow,

that's about all I know. Hopefully that's of some help to you."

Christy had been listening silently to all that he'd been telling her. "Oh, yes, that's very helpful."

"If you stay here with us for one week we can give you enough food to make your way there." Then, almost as an afterthought, he added, "You might have to change your story, though, it needs a little work."

Christy agreed. "I know. ... We hadn't prepared that far in advance."

"Well, you have a week to think about it. I'm sure you'll come up with something by then."



They worked hard throughout the week, laboring from morning till night. It wasn't an easy life, but Christy could see that those who had made the commitment to stay in the settlement were happy. Though very basic in many ways and lacking what many of the other settlements had, there was a certain camaraderie amongst the earthlings. The hardness of the fight only served to draw them even closer together. Each victory that was won—though perhaps small in comparison to what had been accomplished in some of the other settlements, was nevertheless a great victory for those who were struggling hand in hand on the edge of the wilderness.

After two days in the settlement they began to feel more at home, and were happy for the additional company that was afforded them. Trina soon made friends amongst the earthlings, and though they looked upon her with amusement, in her own winsome way she managed to learn a great deal about the surrounding countryside and life in the wilderness.

Stewart was by nature rather quiet, and he did not find it as easy to make friends amongst the other earthlings, especially not in such a short time. Christy kept busy tending to the mares and other animals,



which she had an affinity for. There was more than enough to do, and she found it a welcome relief from the pressure of being responsible for her own settlement.

As the week drew to a close, Christy was concerned that she had not heard from Edel. Yet, during these times she often felt Edel's presence, though a silent presence it remained—with not even one thought or word being projected into her mind.



They were to set out for the wilderness the following day. True to his word, Heif ensured that they had plenty of supplies, as much as they could carry between them. Still perplexed with the long silence from Edel, Christy wandered outside and leaned over the gate. The soft misty evening air was refreshing as it washed over her mind and soul. After having been out for only a short while she felt a now-familiar hand on her shoulder. She didn't turn to see who it was; there was no need to do so.

"You must be nervous."

Still without taking her eyes off the scene before her, Christy responded, "How can you tell?"

Heif laughed, "Well, to be honest I couldn't tell, but placing myself in your position I surmised that you must be."

Finally turning towards Heif, Christy looked up and said, "I am. I don't know what to expect."

"It's hard to say," Heif answered, looking off into the deepening darkness. "I don't know how you're going to enter the camp, but you know you're going to have to have a pretty foolproof story as to why you're going there."

"I've given that a lot of thought, but I can't come up with anything that would sound plausible or that is realistic enough. We have talked about it between ourselves, but I feel that there's something I'm not understanding. I can't see the full picture or under-

stand what I'm supposed to do. I feel that there's something missing, a piece of the puzzle that I haven't grasped."

"I'm a little worried for you. I know I shouldn't be because, well, I know there's nothing to worry about." Casually and gently kicking the gatepost, he continued after a moment of silence, "Must just be a remnant of the past—you know, to worry when there's really no need to worry anymore."

"It's difficult not to sometimes; it's almost instinctive to start worrying when facing the unknown."

"It is. I don't know if you fully comprehend what you're getting into in going into the Rebel camps. They're not very pleasant places. I often wonder how so much coldness can exist in such a beautiful world as this. Once you begin entering into Rebel territory you will notice that things change. They don't have the same benefits we have—they're beset with all kinds of plagues, bad weather, problems. Life for them is nearly as hard as it used to be on earth before."

"Is it because they're in rebellion?" Christy asked.

"Yes, I believe so. They aren't able to fully benefit from all that the rest of the earthlings benefit from. You feel it when you're on their territory. There's a chill in the air; you wouldn't expect to feel that anymore, but it's still there."

He turned toward Christy, "Even disguised in this way you're still so warm, so vibrant. It's going to be such a contrast. I don't know how you're going to fit in. It's going to be painfully obvious that you're not one of them."

Christy shook her head. "I don't know. I really don't know how it's supposed to work."

## THE DREAM

They busied themselves the next morning packing their supplies, preparing to leave, and saying their goodbyes. Later, as they filed through the narrow gateway, no one took the time to look back. They were taking heavy hearts with them, and preparing themselves for whatever was going to greet them.

They had been instructed to follow the river till they came to a place where it narrowed. It was there that they would be able to cross to the other side. Indeed, it happened just as they had been told. Towards the end of the day they found themselves at the very spot that had been described to them—fallen trees lay across the narrow expanse of the river, stretching from one bank to the other, providing a rough but fairly safe walkway across. They decided not to cross the river that night but instead to make their camp near the river's edge.



Christy sat close to the campfire and fed it with the small dry twigs and branches that they had gathered. Though restless, Stewart and Trina finally dropped off to sleep. As Christy sat in the darkness, she pondered all that had happened during the weeks before, seeking to understand what she was supposed

to do next.

Almost imperceptibly at first, the idea came to her. It was as a small seed that was just beginning to take root. She allowed herself the luxury of exploring the thought extensively, and was pleasantly surprised to find that she was able to build on it. Many thoughts and ideas had passed through her mind in the days immediately preceding their departure from Heif's settlement, but as she had taken the time to think each one through and explore the possibilities it offered, all had come to naught. This time it was different. She felt a glimmer of hope.

One could not enter the camp as anything other than an earthling, and, she smiled to herself, a somewhat reprobate earthling at the worst, or a very undecided and confused earthling at best. She knew it would be difficult to appear confused or weakened in her mind. But she dared not think any further, but then hesitantly continued, *Couldn't I act like a reprobate? What an interesting thought!*

"Yes," came the silky response, *"a very interesting thought!"*

"Edel!" She could almost feel Edel smiling. "I don't know," she whispered out loud, "if I have the courage or the ability to pretend such a thing."

*"I can help you. I can give you feelings, memories. I can give you insight into how it feels within to be like that. You've read people's thoughts from the outside often, but if you're adventurous enough I can help you feel like that from the inside. Not all the time, but I can at least give you glimpses and flashes so that you are able to sustain the façade."*

Christy hesitated at the thought of anyone taking over her mind. First it was her body ... and now her mind? *"That's another commitment."* Faltering, she continued, *"You want to take over my mind—and I'm simply to trust you for the outcome, for the way I'll act or the insight I'll have at those times?"*

*"Yes. You grasp things very quickly, don't you?"*

*"I suppose I do. It would seem wise to try to do so, especially when you're talking about handing over your soul to another."*

*"You're not handing over your soul, you're just feeling someone else's feelings for a fleeting moment. It may not sound so appealing, but it will be necessary if you are to sustain your act for as long as you'll need it."*

*"Why didn't you tell me this at the very beginning?"* she asked.

*"You would not have understood. You wouldn't have seen the need for it."*

*"What about the others? What are you going to do to them?"*

*"Nothing,"* came the prompt reply. *"We don't need to do anything. They're fine. Trina is a born actress. Give her the idea and let her run with it. She's a master at pulling herself out of tight situations. She can hold her own."*

*"Well, what about Stewart? He's not like that at all!"*

*"Stewart is reticent. He rarely speaks his mind, and even when he does, it's hard to discern exactly what he's expressing. He should also simply be himself. People are not going to be so interested in Stewart. He'll be able to blend in with the rest; I don't know that anyone is going to be looking at him very closely. But what about you? If you're willing and if you're prepared to go through with this, then all you need to do is let me take over and let things take their course."*

*"You're going to give me another personality?"*

*"No, I'm going to give you insight into another personality so you won't have any difficulty playing a role. Don't worry, you'll still be you. Nothing could ever, ever change that or take that away. All we're doing is giving you an understanding and comprehension that's not normally given, the temporary feelings of someone else so you can understand and act as that person."*

*But you'll still be you. You'll think your thoughts, you'll have your own natural reactions and impulses, but you'll just have to keep those inside for the time being and instead learn to react in another way."*

"I sense that my acceptance of this is a foregone conclusion," Christy finally blurted out, as the realization dawned on her as surely and as completely as light fills the sky each morning.

"I think we're starting to have a better understanding of one another," Edel acknowledged.

"Well then, of course, if that's what needs to be done, I'll do it." She sighed a deep sigh and gave in to the fleeting thought, "What is to become of me?"

Edel did not respond to that thought. Instead, as if it had not even been heard or noticed, Edel continued, "We will need to start working on it right away."

Christy quickly responded, "And tell me, how do you intend to do that?"

"Just leave it to me."

"Can you prepare me at all?"

"You'll begin to have feelings, just as you feel things now, only they won't be your feelings. You'll be able to determine that they're not your feelings, but so slight will the difference be that you'll be able to act and respond naturally on the things that you feel. It will happen gradually. Don't worry, I won't let it happen all at once, as that would be a little overwhelming. Instead we'll start with a little here, a little there, so that over the next few days you'll learn how to respond, how to react."

"I don't want to suddenly start acting differently around Stewart and Trina. Do I explain it to them?"

Edel was silent for a good while, maybe thinking, maybe asking, maybe seeking answers. Christy did not know. All she knew was that she had to wait, as the conversation had not come to an end.

Edel's voice suddenly beamed in again. "You should

*go to sleep. I'm going to send you a dream. In that dream you'll see the person that you will pretend to be. I'm also going to give a similar dream to Trina and to Stewart. The dreams will be so strikingly similar that they won't have any difficulty believing that it is all part of the plan. When they wake you can tell them all that I've told you."*

Edel's tone of voice changed ever so slightly, "It's not going to be so pleasant; but don't worry, I'm going to give you plenty of respite. There are going to be times when you can be yourself and be together with Stewart and Trina, when it will be like nothing happened. They're going to have to get used to the idea that you're going to be playing a role. Hopefully by the time you arrive at Gailan's camp you'll all be prepared.

"Oh, one last thing," Edel said, "just before you enter Gailan's camp you will find it the most difficult to come to terms with the feelings that you experience. But remember, I'm going to be there all the time. Once you're in the camp the feelings will be less encompassing, and much more manageable."

The night was suddenly silent, and Christy knew that Edel had said all that was going to be said for the time being. She dawdled as she prepared for the night. On the one hand she was curious as to what lay before her and what was going to be shown her, but at the same time she was uneasy, knowing that from that time on things would be different.

Finally she lay down on her back and with her hands behind her head stared up at the night sky, hoping to lose herself amongst the stars, or to be transported to some of the beautiful places that she'd visited in times past.

Eventually she dozed off into a restless sleep. She would wake off and on through the night, startled, wondering if she'd perhaps had the dream and had not remembered it. Then, at last, sleep came—a deep sleep that lightened gradually into the world of

dreams, the world just beyond her consciousness. And then she appeared, the person she was soon to emulate—and the story she was to tell.

It was as if Christy was observing this person, looking on, not feeling but watching how this girl reacted and responded. The girl in her dream was strikingly beautiful and, though she did not realize it at the time, bore a remarkable resemblance to Christy in appearance. There was a hardness about her beauty, a coldness. Her long auburn hair flowed down past her waist. Her skin was pale, pearl-like. Her deep, blue-black, piercing eyes were perhaps the most outstanding feature of all. Her small petite nose and cherub lips gave an initial impression of an innocent beauty, though this was soon betrayed by her coldness and hardness. Her delicate hands gesticulated as she talked in a deep, smooth, but strangely cool voice. She moved quickly, yet precisely, with an air of definiteness.

Christy watched the girl reacting with a group, supposedly her friends, and was repulsed by the outward show of warmth yet overt disdain shown for them in their absence. She looked on as she used a man to help her gain a position that she had been vying for, and watched in disgust as she spurned and mistreated him afterwards.

Then came the story, the unfolding of the events upon earth that Christy had been fortunate enough to miss for herself—the earthquakes, the shouts and screams of those trying to save their lives. She saw this girl running, barely escaping the city with her life as it collapsed around her. She saw her running, hiding, and stealing and plundering when it was all over and she returned to the city. She made her way right to the house of one of her supposed friends, who had been more affluent and lived in a more exclusive area of this large metropolis. She found her friend lying dead beneath some debris, but barely took

any notice of her. Instead, she busied herself with rummaging through the remains of the house to find any of the valuables she knew were present there.

There were other scenes too, equally as disturbing. She soon realized that this girl was exhibiting very human responses. She understood the pride of life, the greed, the shallowness, and all that went into making this person what she was. Someone who, with all her good looks and winsome ways, was as reprobate as the worst criminal Christy had confronted. It was a very disturbing dream—and it was equally as disturbing, Christy realized upon awaking, that she would have to act as that person.

Nevertheless, she now had a story to tell, and knew where “she” had come from, and where “she” was going.



Stewart was the first to wake. After spending some time down by the river, he leisurely strolled up towards Christy and sat down with a very distant and perplexed look on this face. Trina too soon awoke and began casually looking through their supplies, probably hoping to find something to eat.

For a while no one said anything, until unable to contain himself any longer, Stewart blurted out, “I had a dream last night!”

“You did? Me too!” Trina responded.

“It was awful!” Christy agreed.

They looked at Christy with eyes wide open and asked, “You also?”

“Yes, I think we all had similar dreams. You dreamt of a woman with long hair, dark eyes, so cold and hard.”

“And there was a man who helped her, yet she turned on him.”

They went on describing the different scenes they'd all seen in their dreams, sharing their perceptions.

At last, almost inaudibly, Stewart muttered half

under his breath, "She ... she somehow looked like you, Christy."

Trina glared at him, and then indignantly hissed, "Don't say that..."

"But it's true!"

Hoping to placate Trina, Christy agreed with Stewart, "I know she looked like me."

"But you didn't have to say it!" Trina, still glaring at Stewart, muttered.

They sat for a good while that morning, listening as Christy explained as best she could all that had been told her by Edel the night before, as well as their story, as she had seen it in her dream. She also explained about Edel, the presence that would be their guiding voice and spirit during this experience. It helped her to explain it to the others, as in so doing she was able to reinforce in her own mind the different things that had been told her. And, oh, how she clung to some of the promises Edel had made, especially the promises that she would still be herself no matter what was to happen.

"I suppose it's all necessary," Stewart mused, "so that whatever is supposed to happen can happen. I understand." Turning, and looking at Christy, he added, "But I can't say I'm really looking forward to it."

"Me either," Trina said. "I think we'll feel as though we're on our own sometimes."

"Yes, but not all the time—remember that! You have to promise me ... I think the only way I can go through with this"—she looked pleadingly at them—"is if you promise me that no matter what I do or say, and no matter how I act, you'll remember it's just a role. It's not me! I want you to promise that you will remember that. Most of the time it's going to be just like it is now. I'm going to be the same; it will be normal. I imagine it's mainly only going to be when there are other people around that I'll be different.

So, please, can you remember that?"

Trina and Stewart both nodded solemnly.

"I promise," Stewart said.

Trina stood up, and with a rather uncharacteristic show of emotion, she threw herself down on Christy's lap, wrapped her arms around her and started sobbing. "I promise, I promise, I promise. Just don't leave us. Always be there, okay?"

Christy barely kept back her tears as she clutched Trina's slender body close to her, and rocked her back and forth.

## FEELINGS

Slowly the change began. At first the thoughts and feelings that passed through Christy's mind were fleeting, and so miniscule that she took little notice of them. But gradually that began to change.

They safely crossed the river and slowly began making their way towards the base of the mountain range. It was not very easy walking through the thickly forested areas. The load which Christy had previously been able to carry without any difficulty suddenly felt very burdensome. The straps cut into her delicate shoulders, leaving red ugly marks. At one point, the jolt of their journey caused one of the snaps to break loose, and the sudden loss of balance caused Christy to stumble over a root. She managed to twist her ankle and get knocked against a tree in the same move. "Ouch!" Christy bellowed, as she angrily threw her rucksack down on the ground. "That damned thing!"

Shocked with this sudden display of temper, Trina and Stewart looked at Christy, wide-eyed.

"What are you looking at me like that for?" Christy asked. "Is there something wrong with being frustrated? That seriously hurt!"

Still looking at her incredulously, they said nothing.

As slowly as it had swept over her, the frustration and anger Christy had been feeling seeped away. Realizing what she had done, she plopped down next to her pack and rubbed her hands over her face.

She looked up at Trina and Stewart who remained standing, and apologized. "I'm sorry. It's starting, just as Edel said it would. I've been feeling different since this morning, but until now I've not put it into words, or said anything about it. At first I didn't realize what was happening, though I suppose I should have, as Edel said it would soon begin. I guess I'm just getting weary and tired of trudging through the forest like this, and then getting knocked into that tree didn't help matters at all."

"What are we supposed to do when you act like that?" Stewart asked.

"I don't know. I suppose you just have to act the way you would if anyone else were to behave like that. I know you wouldn't normally choose such a person for your constant companion, but if you were in a position where you were around them I imagine you'd learn to work with it."



It had begun with twinges of passing bad moods, frustration and anger. She felt contempt for her travel companions because of their simplistic outlook on life. As the day progressed, so too the strength of the emotions she was feeling likewise grew. Towards the end of their second day's journey she would, for long periods of time, not feel at all like herself. At best she felt detached and unemotional, and at worst the angry outbursts caused her to unleash her scornful tongue on those she was traveling with. As Stewart had so rightly predicted, it was not very pleasant for Trina and him, though after their initial surprise at Christy's change of character, they tolerated it. Stewart suffered in silence, ignoring Christy's outbursts, whistling or humming to himself. Trina, who was a little more used

to such manners, would shrug her shoulders and make some noncommittal remark.

As they settled down for their evening meal, Christy, who had by that time reverted to her normal self, was feeling very repulsed by the character she was portraying. She could feel that Stewart and Trina felt uncomfortable and distant from her—not knowing when she was going to switch back and forth between personalities. This only served to make the loneliness that she was beginning to feel even greater. As Christy dejectedly gazed down at the ground, tears welled up in her eyes and slowly rolled down her face.

Realizing that the others were paying little attention to her, she quietly brushed the tears aside with her hand, and breaking the silence she apologized, "I'm so sorry! I know I've not been a very pleasant person to live with today. Any time there is a hardship or some difficulty, my reaction to it is so vastly different from what it was before. I hope it's not going to be like this all the time, it's almost like I'm becoming another person!"

Not knowing what they could say to encourage or comfort Christy, Trina and Stewart instead tried to make light conversation about their journey and their day, wondering how far away the Rebel camp was, and debating whether they would come in contact with anyone before coming upon the camp.

And so the evening progressed with small talk. At times Christy felt unfamiliar feelings welling up inside, but weary with the strain of being constantly hit with these, she did her best to subdue them and instead said nothing. It was then that she felt the first little glimmer of hope—that there might be a way to control the feelings she was experiencing, to work with them so that she could let them motivate her actions when needed, and then suppress the same responses when it was not necessary to display them.

Exhausted by the events of the day, Christy



announced that she was going to try to get a good night's sleep. Stewart and Trina were quick to agree. Before long they had all settled down for the night. Knowing that the continuation of their journey was not going to be easy, they were glad for the relief that would be afforded them during the night.



They journeyed in like manner for two more days till they finally reached the base of the mountain range. To their consternation they found no camps there, neither were there signs of any in the vicinity. They began to move eastward along the base of the range, as that was where Heif had indicated the Rebel camp might be located.

Finally, on the fourth day they began to see some signs that the area was inhabited. Coming to a clearing they saw a path leading off—obviously a fairly well-traveled trail. They looked at one another apprehensively, knowing that this probably meant that the Rebel camp was within close range.

Christy, who had been practicing managing the feelings and emotions as they welled up within her, began to find them becoming increasingly difficult to handle. Although she was for the most part able to keep her thoughts and words to herself, the struggle within was at times almost too much to bear. Waves of despair, anger or frustration began washing over her with very little time of relief in between. Never had she felt more miserable than she felt at that time. She could no longer keep back the tears as she was stumbling along behind Trina and Stewart. They were not tears of sorrow, but tears of anger and frustration.

Then, as suddenly as they came, the feelings would recede, gradually lessening and giving her a moment of respite. Yet even during the times when she was not plagued with such emotions she felt unsettled and confused with what was happening, wondering how she was supposed to act in any way normal while

being so constantly engulfed with such feelings.

It was hard to believe that Edel was still her constant companion, as had been promised. *For*, she thought, *how could anyone put up with me during such moods of extreme despair or anger?* Still struggling with these thoughts, she barely noticed what was up ahead till she almost ran into Stewart, who had abruptly stopped directly in front of her. Trina was standing beside him nervously shifting from foot to foot.

"What are you stopping for?" Christy asked.

No sooner had the words left her mouth than a man's voice boomed, "What are you looking at?"

Christy was relieved to finally see someone. She elbowed her way between Stewart and Trina, "What do you mean, what are we looking at? If you hadn't seen anyone for days you'd be staring too!"

"Where are you going?" he asked. The man, leading two horses, slowly approached.

"We heard there's a camp around here. We're making our way towards it."

"And which camp would that be?"

"Gailan's camp."

"And what makes you think Gailan would want you in his camp?" the man responded, apparently trying to buy a little time while he sized them up.

"I hadn't heard he refuses anybody."

"We'll see about that." The man stood squinting and shielding his eyes from the sunlight that suddenly pierced through the roof of the forest.

"What are you doing out here anyway? And how is it that you know about the camp, when you obviously have never been there?"

"Why do I have to tell you?" Christy rudely replied.

With equal coolness the man responded, "If you don't tell me, I'm not going to take you to Gailan's camp."

In a mocking tone, Christy answered back, "You

suppose we couldn't find it ourselves?"

The man was silent for a moment. Looking the three up and down he finally acquiesced, "I'm heading back that direction now, taking the horses to the camp. You can come along with me."

"Thanks," Christy uttered, though from the tone of her voice it was obvious that the thing she was most thankful for was that the man had finally come to his senses.

Stewart and Trina glanced at one another with some relief, and for once were both thankful that Christy was able to behave as she was. In her normal state of mind she would not have been nearly as convincing as she now was. Meeting the man and responding to him had likewise also given Christy peace of mind as she too realized how difficult it would have been to otherwise play such a role.

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## GAILAN'S CAMP

Trina's talkativeness was not always considered an asset, though it could find opportunities for usefulness. Walking alongside the man, she attempted to start a conversation, "So, what's it like in the camp anyway?"

"You'll soon find out!"

The man was obviously not too interested in Trina, or where she had sprung from. There were plenty of kids around the camps, and he presumed she was just like the rest.

"How long have you been in the camp?" Trina asked, as persistent as always.

The man looked down at her, trying to decide whether he would answer or ignore her. Trina grinned broadly, inviting him to engage in conversation.

"A year or so," he finally muttered.

"That's a long time. You must have been here almost since the beginning..."

"Beginning? What do you mean, beginning?"

"You know, after the destruction and all."

"Yes, I suppose I have been here since then."

"Did you ever go anywhere else?"

"What do you mean, 'anywhere else'?"

"You know, like the settlements. Gailan's camp

isn't exactly the only place around here you can be."

"I've checked out a few other places, but"—he sniffed and spat on the ground—"I couldn't say that I really found anything else that suited me."

"Then it must be a pretty good camp, huh?"

"It all depends what you like. Yeah ... what do you like, anyway? Where'd you all come from, and what are you doing roaming these parts of the woods?"

"Me," Trina said, "I'm just looking for somewhere to fit in. I don't know what I want to do. I was at a large settlement called Seramore for a while, but it was so disorganized. No one really knew what they were doing. Maybe they're a bit more together now, but I didn't want to hang around and wait to find out."

"Seramore? I've heard that name before. But isn't that one of those alien rehabilitation camps?" He eyed Trina suspiciously.

"Alien? I never saw any aliens," Trina smirked, as if to say, "How could you think something so childish?" She continued glibly, "No, it was just like, you know, a refugee camp or something. After the nearby city was destroyed, we survivors had to go somewhere. But like I said, it was quite disorganized. I don't even know why it was called a settlement. It was anything but settled, ha!"

"Hmm." The man was a little taken aback by her forthright manner, and decided not to pursue that line of questioning. "And what about them?" The man now nodded back in the direction of Stewart and Christy.

"Stewart doesn't say what he wants, he's just tagging along. I don't think he knows what he wants to do. In fact, I don't think he wants to do too much of anything," she said with somewhat of a sneer, trying to give the impression that Stewart was a drifter. Trina then lowered her voice, "And, her majesty..."

The man smirked.

"I think she has her sights set a little higher than Gailan's camp. She's an Independent if I ever saw one. I don't even know why she's interested in going to Gailan's camp, except that she was very determined to go there, so hey, I wasn't going to argue. But I think she's probably looking for some position or some adoring audience or something. She doesn't want to just be a small-time girl; she's got big plans."

The man muttered half under his breath, "Well, with looks like hers, she might just be able to succeed there."

"I think that's what she thinks too," Trina continued. "And I guess she figured that Gailan's camp would probably be the largest, and therefore the best place to try her hand at gaining some popularity."

Christy, walking a few steps behind, looked down and laughed within herself. Though Trina attempted to keep her voice down, she knew Christy could hear what she was saying—and had in fact suggested she speak those very words. Trina was already beginning to fulfill her purpose.



As they approached the outskirts of the camp they soon realized that newcomers were not such a welcome sight. People looked on with cool disinterest as they made their way along the narrow road—for the path that they had been following had now broadened into a small, rough dirt road as they approached the camp. Christy, Trina and Stewart were wide-eyed as they approached what appeared to be a small village. It was very small, but nevertheless still a village.

"Surprised?" the man asked.

"Yes, this looks pretty well established to me," Trina responded.

"We're making good progress," the man sneered, "better than anywhere else in this part of the world, I'd say."

The man tethered the two horses outside a small building and barked sharply over his shoulder. "Wait here. I'll be out in a minute."

They waited while the man went inside the building. He soon came out with another taller man. As the two men approached, Christy eyed the other man up and down. He was tall, well built, handsome and, she noted, definitely much more well groomed than the first man they'd met. She moved forward a few steps, and greeted the tall stranger, "Hello!"

The tall man nodded, and eyed the three newcomers with suspicion. He introduced himself. "My name is Austin." He extended his hand to Stewart.

Stewart, barely looking up, feebly muttered, "I'm Stewart." He lamely shook the man's hand.

Trina extended her grubby little hand, "I'm Trina. How do you do, sir?"

Christy, offended that the man had slighted her in leaving her till last, did not hold out her hand.

Austin dropped his hand quietly to the side as a strange grin briefly passed across his face. "And your name?"

Trying to sound as disinterested as possible, she curtly responded, "Christy."

"Well, Christy, Gilbert here mentioned you and your friends were looking for a place to stay. You're welcome to stay in the camp if you like. You'll need to either pay for or work for your stay."

"Pay for?" Christy quickly retorted. "And with what?"

Austin ignored her response.



They were offered basic lodgings and were given a fairly solid meal that evening. Austin had been quite forthright in asking what they felt they could contribute if they were indeed interested in staying on at the camp. With his customary shrug of the shoulders, Stewart quickly responded that he was willing to do

anything, and able to do most things. Trina too, by now, had her answers down pat. She was quick to offer her services helping with the domestic side of things.

"And what did you do before all of this happened?" Austin asked.

Christy was startled. It had been a long time since she'd been asked that. "I can do a lot of things."

"That's not what I asked," Austin was quick to retort. "I'm sure you're a very capable young woman, but what did you do before all of this started? You must have done something."

Christy only hesitated for a moment, then decided to give an honest answer, "I was still studying."

"Oh," Austin flatly responded, "well, we probably don't have a lot of use for the type of things you were studying." He paused shortly, then continued, "Can you type?"

"Yes, I can."

"Very well?"

"Quite well."

That seemed the end of the conversation for the time being. In fact, he said little more to them at all—though just before parting that evening he assured them that he would have something for each one to do the following morning. "I hope you're not too tired from your travels," he curtly mentioned. "We cannot take too much time for rest here. There's a lot to do." His eyes narrowed, "And we don't know how long we have to do it."

"Quite a visionary!" Christy muttered half under her breath, yet still loud enough for Austin to hear. There was no response to her cutting remark; in fact, he acted as though he had not heard her.



It was a relief to once again sleep in a bed. Their quarters were well set up, especially considering that it was supposedly not a very well-established camp.

In looking around, it didn't take Christy long to realize that it was much more established than she had thought it would be, and than Heif had indicated in his conversations with her. The two girls shared a room, while Stewart slept in a smaller room just down the hallway. There were other people in the house, but as at Heif's settlement, they did not mingle with the newcomers at first, but instead left them well alone.

Christy woke with the morning light shining through the window. Hearing the sound of pots and pans clanging, it did not take Christy long to join the others who were, by this time, already sitting at the dining room table. Trina was often one of the first to rise, and being unable to contain her energy any longer than was absolutely necessary, had already prepared a fairly substantial breakfast, which she'd set out for Stewart and Christy. It appeared that the others who were living in the same quarters had already eaten and were busily preparing to begin their day. Though cordial, they still did not attempt to engage in any conversation.

Trying to make conversation, Christy asked one of the men who was leaving, "Do you know what we should do now?"

"Nope. But my guess is you'll soon find out!" the man answered. "They don't believe in loafers here. They'll be sure to find plenty to keep you busy."

"And keep you out of trouble," a young woman chimed in, "in case that's what you'd think of making around here."

A cheerful-looking little boy stood at the door. "I've come for Stewart. We'll be joining the team out in the fields today."

Stewart was not quite prepared.

"I'll wait outside then while you get a few things together. There's no need to pack any lunch; someone will bring it out to us."

Though Stewart didn't relish the idea of being separated from the two girls so soon, he was at least comforted with the thought that he would be kept plenty busy.

Trina likewise was soon called upon to help in one of the larger communal kitchens. Breakfast was eaten separately each morning in their respective houses. Lunch was usually provided for them at their place of work, and dinner—or so they were told—was usually eaten at one of the nearby dining halls.

Just as Trina was leaving with the group of young people who had come for her, a frail-looking elderly woman asked for Christy. Christy had been expecting that she would soon be called upon to help.

"Hello, dear, I believe you'll be joining us over at the typing pool today. You type well?"

"I can type fairly well," Christy lazily responded, affecting a bored tone and giving the impression that she was not so interested in her new vocation.

Sizing her up, the elderly lady quickly concluded that she was probably not worth engaging in conversation with.

Christy sensed this, and she was satisfied with that. The different feelings that she had been experiencing were no longer as intense as they'd been immediately prior to her arrival at the camp. She was relieved at this, as she was better able to cope with the feelings, yet still manage to be herself. She found it easy to respond to the feelings and sensations she was experiencing, and the outcome was much more realistic and believable than if she had been merely acting or pretending—though it did not threaten to take over her mind or spirit as much as it had previously.

Christy and the elderly lady walked quite a distance, deeper into the camp. It was then that Christy realized their lodging was on the outskirts of the small village. They walked up to a structure which

closely resembled a town hall, where quite a few men were standing guard. Though they looked fairly casual and relaxed, she could sense they were ready to defend their post with their life should it be needed. They entered the building and walked toward the far end of the large hall. Christy soon found herself amongst a small pool of typists, who were diligently laboring, typing away on manual typewriters.

She marveled at the sight of so many manual typewriters, "It's quite impressive that you were able to come up with these!" She looked out over the group of women.

"Do you mean the women or the typewriters?" the elderly woman dryly asked.

Christy said nothing, and wondered if perhaps she had met her match. It was obvious that the elderly lady was not going to put up with any nonsense.

"You can work here for now. You'll work until break. We have a fifteen-minute break in the morning, a half-hour lunch break, another fifteen-minute break midafternoon. You can use the break times to do whatever you need to do. We believe in working hard. After all, everything is provided for you."

The lady turned and walked away without even a backward glance. Christy settled herself in the chair and placed her fingers on the middle row of the typewriter keys. Thankfully it was a skill that she had not lost. When the lady reappeared she brought an assortment of papers with her, and a box of filing cards.

"Whatever is written on these papers," the lady curtly ordered, "needs to be transferred onto these cards. One person, one card. All the particulars on this paper transferred to this card. If you find any information missing, please keep the card separate. This is a sample card. This is how it is meant to be filled in, and this is what is on each card."

Christy sighed, not concealing her assumed dis-

dain for the task she was asked to perform.



And so Christy's days progressed. At times she was disappointed with the slow speed at which things were advancing. Life as an earthling in the Rebel camp was not bad in some respects. They worked as hard as most of the earthlings worked in the settlements. But at the same time there was an air of sadness and a lack of excitement about the camp. Although the settlements had seen their share of problems, the daily routine here seemed to present a much greater degree of drudgery. Besides merely existing, the average person had little vision for anything else. Perhaps these were simply the kind of people Gailan had preferred to fill his camp with, but likely there was more behind the largely unmotivated and dreary looks of those Christy saw about her.

She soon realized that there were three distinct groups in the Rebel camp. Each group kept well to itself, though there was no specific rule to this effect. She noticed that newcomers, such as herself, were automatically relegated to the lower strata, the Workers, as they were called.

Though not apparent at first, she soon discovered that the Workers were also divided into two separate classes. There were those who had spent greater amounts of time in settlements and who had made deliberate decisions to leave them, usually because they had not liked the way things had gone or were being done there. Then there were others, the more uninformed, such as Gilbert, who had either never joined a settlement or had spent so little time there that their decisions to leave could hardly have been attributed to any defined reason of their own. They were ignorant of even the most basic truths, and seemed oblivious to the fact that the earth was now under the control of their resurrected peers.

They were slowly being educated, but their

education was so bigoted and one-sided that the account of all that had happened was vastly different from what had really occurred. The more informed of those who had left the settlements for the Rebel camps were not the least bit interested in the truth, or concerned that people were being given a twisted account of all that had transpired. It didn't matter to them. They didn't care.

Those who had proven their loyalty to Gailan and his ruling elite were called Caretakers. They were more aware of what was happening within the camp—including the deliberate spread of misinformation, and the reasons for it. They held to the aim of creating a society of people who had no desire for or interest in the truth as it was taught in the settlements.

They exerted a subtle control over the Workers, and conditioned them to believe that there was no right and no wrong, that it was all a matter of personal choice and opinion. Their purpose was to keep the Workers under subjection, and yet provide them with an illusory perception of independence, so that they would have the motivation needed to continue to reject the system of slavery, as it was described, that was being instituted in the "approved" settlements.

The Chiefs were members of a small group at the pinnacle of the camp's internal structure—the inner circle, Gailan's top men, the elite class. Theirs was the passion—the brains behind the "independent" system, the fervor to resist all outside domination, to retain their independence and freedom, and to exercise their right to rule over and govern the helpless and ignorant working class beneath them.

The collapse of the now bygone New World Order had created a vacuum for a new governing system, and Gailan and his Chiefs saw it as their duty, perhaps even their destiny, to rebuild their own form of order from the chaos that had resulted. To them, the Workers, and even the Caretakers, were mere

pawns in a new game of world domination in which they were the chief players, pitting themselves against their unearthly counterparts at the settlements.

It was difficult to determine whether they really believed all that they taught or if their words were designed merely to instill within the Workers the sort of distant fears that would keep them from seeking to find out the truth of what lay beyond for themselves, and to encourage them to remain contentedly within the "safe" and "free" haven that had been provided for them.

The Chiefs were not only highly intelligent, but they also had a keen perception of what was happening around them. They were aware of the powers and the missions the Settlers and Legionnaires had been given. Yet they thought little of it. The Chiefs believed that so long as they kept within their boundaries and didn't interfere with the rest of the world—or at least those who were supportive of Jesus' rule—they would be left to build their own kingdoms.



The three newcomers were closely monitored for the first weeks, though they soon blended in with the rest. With all the plans that were being hatched and the purported progress that was being made, they quickly slipped into a type of obscurity. Christy's communication with Edel during this time remained scant, though she continued to receive occasional confirmation that things were progressing as they should, as well as reminders to wait patiently whenever she began to feel like making something happen, or precipitating a crisis of some sort.

This time of waiting proved helpful to Christy. Not only did she begin to be accepted by those she worked with, but it also afforded her the time to get familiar with her own character as it was meant to be. As she became more comfortable with the role she was to play, the feelings and emotions she felt became less

intense. She found it increasingly easy to slip back and forth between the two characters, to be herself when alone or with Trina and Stewart, and to put on her cold and heartless front when with others.

Being very beautiful and exuding a cold type of charm, she was soon noticed by many, and was thus afforded the privilege of being able to accompany some of the menfolk to the few social gatherings that were held—particularly Weston, one of the Caretakers who oversaw the department where she worked. Such events gave her opportunity to mix with members of the ruling elite, the Chiefs. It was during one such gathering that she once again spoke with Austin.

He had made his way towards her, being careful not to make his destination too obvious lest anyone was watching. He casually stopped and chatted with others along the way. Finally, after much effort at concealing his true intentions, he stood before Christy.

“Christy, hello! You look stunning tonight!”

“Thank you.”

After a somewhat uncomfortable silence, Austin continued, “And how’s life at the camp? Have you been able to chat with Gailan yet?”

Tempted with what would have been a sharp and disrespectful answer, Christy bit her tongue and said nothing.

“So how is your work? Are you treated well?”

“Umm, I guess I’m treated the same as everyone else.”

“Oh, you mean your companion”—Austin nodded towards where Weston was standing—“hasn’t seen fit to give you any benefits?”

Christy raised an eyebrow, “That might not go over so well with his co-worker.”

“Ah, you mean Mrs. Shute. Yes, that might well be true. Quite shrewd, aren’t you?”

Again she responded with silence.

“Do you like the work you’re doing?”

“No, not really. It’s very boring.” Looking straight into his eyes, and with all the confidence she could muster she said, “I surely hope you’ve got more than that to offer here?”

“Oh, so you’re wanting more?” he queried.

“Wouldn’t you?”

He didn’t answer, but tilting his head to the side, he appeared to show some agreement. “Well, I’d best be off. Nice talking with you.”

Christy nodded politely, and then he was gone. No one had noticed that in those few seconds that he had lingered silently in front of Christy, he had let down the superficial front he always hid behind. For a moment it was as if both of their masks had been uncovered, and both thought they were staring at the real person behind the other’s eyes. In one there was an inner light; in the other, an oppressing darkness. But it lasted only a second, and as soon as Austin had turned, the look was gone. Indeed, there was no way of knowing whether anything had actually happened.

Christy did not have long to ponder the encounter either. No sooner had Austin left than Weston was at her side. “Shall we dance?”



Most nights were free, which she was thankful for as it gave her time to rest and meet with Stewart and Trina. With their vastly different responsibilities, they spent less time together. In fact, it soon became increasingly more difficult to justify their friendship, as Christy was rapidly moving up into a higher circle, while Trina and Stewart remained Workers—knowledgeable workers, nevertheless only common workers.

Because of his adaptability, willingness to work hard and apparent loyalty to the cause, Stewart was given more responsibility. Although he would not



attain the rank of a Caretaker, he was nevertheless often placed in command of whatever team of Workers he would be working with. Because of Trina's youth, she was not placed in a position of responsibility.

Perhaps because of her brief exchange with Austin, or perhaps because of her closer and more frequent contact with the Caretakers, Christy was soon privy to more information and was trusted to type internal documents and communications. She soon discovered that there was quite a network between Gailan's Rebel camp and other distant Rebel camps. To her surprise it seemed there were even "international" connections (national boundaries no longer existed), though she was not privy to those. She could have found out much more information had she used her powers; however, as Edel constantly reminded her whenever she was tempted to do so, it was not the time for that, nor was there even any need for it. Should she be discovered, she would find her mission abruptly over without it ever having the chance to come to its completion.

Besides, she soon realized there was really no need to find out what was going on because someone, somewhere, already knew. At times she struggled with this concept as it sounded so incongruous—she was infiltrating the Rebel camp, yet she was not sent to retrieve or discover information. Although her natural tendency and inclination was to do so, there was another plan for her, which as yet was not clear.



As Christy's responsibilities increased, so the time spent with Austin also grew—purely on a business level at first, naturally. He began to drop by with different assignments for her, or to check on how she was proceeding with different projects she had been given. She soon moved into a smaller office, set off from the main hall, where she worked directly under the elderly lady, Mrs. Shute.

Sometimes at night, when she had no other

commitments, Christy would slip away into the darkness to an isolated place. It was during these evening strolls that she spent much time thinking, and whenever possible communicating with Edel. She was aware of Edel's presence at all times, but there was little communication between them—she supposed because there was little need for it.

After trying unsuccessfully one evening to engage Edel in conversation, she gave up, and instead began reflecting on her days. Something was disturbing her, but up until this point she had not been able to discern what it was. She knew she was gaining favor with those in control, partly due to her abilities and, she wondered, perhaps partly because of Austin's sudden interest in her. And then there was Austin—she was not sure whether Austin's interest was only in her abilities or if he perhaps had some other motives...

Disturbed by that issue, she whispered out loud, "What should I do?" She was half-hoping for, though not expecting, Edel to come to her rescue.

As was often the case, her question was met with silence. It appeared all that was happening was indeed part of a greater plan. She felt that changes were imminent, and that something was soon to happen. After pondering this point for a good while, she finally came to the conclusion that perhaps her time of learning to blend in was almost over, and that the real work was about to begin.

## **AUSTIN**

Aside from Weston, Christy was alone on duty that day. She heard the door open, and expected that it was Weston. Without looking up she giggled, "So, will you be receiving your invitation to this evening's dinner held in Gailan's honor? I have all of the invitations typed up, but I'm so sorry, Weston, I didn't notice your name among them. They must have forgotten. ..." Still without turning to see who had entered, she continued in a half-mocking tone, "Or maybe you just haven't quite attained the desired level of dedication to their cause to be invited to this one. It's too bad. ... I guess I'll just have to end up being somebody else's date this time."

As she finished her jesting, she swung around to see how her comments had been received. To her dismay, none other than Austin stood at the door. She held her breath, unable to imagine what his response to such badinage would be, and wondering if she had perhaps gone a little too far with her caustic remarks.

With a very serious look on his face, he approached her slowly. She waited nervously for the judgment that was about to be meted out. Without any change of expression on his face he began, "Indeed, you'll

not notice my name among the invitees, as mine was a personal invitation." Silence ensued for a moment, till at last he continued, "And I think I will take you up on your offer to be somebody else's date. Saturday at seven. I'll send someone for you. Now, back to work."

Christy could hardly believe her ears. It was unheard of that she, a Worker, should be invited to such an event—a gathering comprised almost exclusively of the Chiefs—by one of the elite upper class. But, invited she had been. *And, she thought, go I certainly must!*



The gathering was not really as Christy had imagined it would be. She'd had visions of old, formal dinner affairs, with the guests seated around large tables.

*No, she thought as she glanced around the room, it's certainly nothing like that!*

Although she had dressed modestly, for she possessed little in the way of earthly belongings, still she felt overdressed. The glow from the oil lamps gave the room a rustic appearance. The floor rugs and sofas scattered around added to the casual air. Wooden tables laden with food lined one side of the room. The soft clinking of glassware revealed that the liquor had begun to flow. A small band of musicians were in the far corner strumming their guitars and providing soft background music.

Christy didn't know how long she waited by the door, though it could not have been more than a couple of minutes. As her eyes slowly adjusted to the dim lighting, they fell upon Austin, who was leaning up against the wall on the other side of the room. He watched as she entered the room, yet made no attempt to greet her. As soon as he realized he had caught her eye, he lifted his glass in a salute.

The man who had escorted Christy to the dinner

held her elbow and gently guided her across the room. Thankful that she could sink down into the sofa, and feeling so uncomfortable that she wished she could sink into oblivion at the same time, Christy sat and waited. She didn't know where to look, and momentarily wished she had never accepted the invitation.

Her escort soon returned with drinks in hand. Normally Christy would not have accepted, but in her nervousness and almost without thinking, she had finished half of it before she realized what she had done. The rather strong alcoholic drink warmed her and at the same time afforded her some relief from her nervousness.

Sensing her uneasiness, her escort tried to engage her in casual conversation, which Christy did her best to respond to—although with some difficulty, as she was sorely distracted by her surroundings and feelings of inadequacy.

"You don't look quite as confident in this setting as you normally appear!"

Christy looked up, startled to see Austin towering above her. She had been so lost in her own thoughts that she had failed to notice his approach.

"Mind if I sit down?"

"Of course, please." She frantically tried to regain her composure.

"So"—he reached out and gently tapped her knee a couple of times—"I'm glad you made it. I'm sorry I couldn't escort you here myself, but it was impossible to get away. Are you surprised to see this?" He looked around the room.

"I can't say it's exactly what I was expecting, and I feel a little out of place."

He laughed. "You'll get used to it. Gailan likes it like this—casual, friendly. I'm sorry, I hope you weren't expecting a formal dinner. This is a far cry from that! I find it most amusing to sit back and watch the evening disintegrate"—he laughed—"as it most

certainly will." Changing the subject abruptly, he continued, "So, tell me a little about yourself."

"I don't really have too much of interest to say," Christy responded. "My life was fairly simple before, nothing very special or outstanding." Suddenly Christy began experiencing feelings and was flooded with memories and visions. They all felt strangely familiar to her, as if she had felt and seen them before, though she could not tell whether they came from the dream she had had those many nights before. Nevertheless, the sudden barrage of these things gave her the impetus to continue. "I suppose when everything happened I..." She hesitated, then went on, "I felt cheated. I had always hoped to go somewhere, to do something, to become someone great, but then all of a sudden just like that," she snapped her fingers, "it was all over. I lost everything and everyone. I wandered around for a long time, passed through a few different settlements, but all the time I felt there had to be something more."

"And so, here you are. And still I am left to wonder—what makes you think you'll find what you're looking for here?"

Truthfully, Christy answered, "I just had a feeling that this was where I was supposed to be."

Austin looked off into the distance, lost in his thoughts for a moment. Then, wanting to move on, he held her arm. "Come, let me introduce you to some other people. Would you like more to drink?"

Christy looked at her half-empty glass. "No, thank you. I probably shouldn't have had any of this to begin with. I'm not used to it at all."

"Some wine then?" Before she could answer, he beckoned someone over, "A glass of wine for the lady, please."



Austin introduced her to many in the room that evening, though there were some he obviously

purposely avoided. He did this in such a way so as to not make Christy feel uncomfortable, yet perceptive as she was, she was quick to notice it.

Christy had been half-expecting that the inner circle would be made up of uncouth men, and she was somewhat surprised to find that this was not the case. For the most part they appeared to be well-educated, more genteel types. *All with the manners of aristocrats*, she thought to herself.

She was able to keep up conversation with those she was introduced to, and though appearing a little haughty or conceited herself, she tried the best she could to affect an air of pretended humility. She could tell she was, in the natural, somewhat outside of her station, and felt it important to act as though she knew that to be the case, for she realized that it would be painfully embarrassing were she to continue with her overt conceit amongst such people.

At times throughout the evening she caught Austin standing off, watching her with amusement, observing all that she did. Towards the end of the evening he took her gently to the side, "I must say, you are doing quite a bit better than I thought you would."

"Ohh?"

"I didn't know how you would react in a situation such as this. It seems you are a fast learner."

"I may be a little too arrogant for my own good," she sharply retorted, "but I'm not stupid!"

"I can see that."

There was one group of people that Austin had carefully avoided introducing Christy to, though off and on throughout the evening he had gone over to them.

"Is Gailan over there?" Christy looked over towards the subdued group of people sitting at the far end of the room.

"He is," Austin affirmed, without turning to look at them.

"Which one is he?"

"You can't tell?"

Christy searched the group and almost allowed herself the luxury of trying to probe their minds.

"No!" came Edel's sharp and quick response.

She recoiled hastily.

"Is everything okay?" Austin asked with some concern, noting her troubled expression.

"Yes, I'm fine. It must be the wine. I'm sorry."

"He's the older man, with gray hair—can you see him?"

Christy spotted him right away. He was sitting almost out of view, engaged in an earnest conversation with a young man sitting to his right. "He doesn't look at all like I expected he would." She scrutinized his rather frail-looking frame, wondering what it was about this unimpressive-looking man that struck fear into the hearts of others.

"He may not look like much, but he has a powerful mind," Austin informed her, with a twinge of pride in his voice.

Expectantly, Christy asked, "Do you think I'll ever get to meet him?"

"I doubt it. He's not really very interested in women at all."

"Oh," Christy flatly responded. Not wanting to appear overly inquisitive, she turned her gaze from him, and in an effort to change the conversation began asking Austin a little about himself. But he remained very reserved in his answers, and acted indifferent about his past life. The only passion he appeared to have was for the present.



As he had promised it would, the evening soon disintegrated, with the company becoming all the more raucous and coarse, till Christy could in all honesty bear it no longer. Sensing her impatience to leave, Austin offered to escort her home.

Christy demurely accepted his offer. "Thank you."

The night air was brisk. They walked in silence for most of the way. Nearing her home, Austin looked up at the sky. "It's beautiful, isn't it? This is such a beautiful world. It shouldn't belong to anyone; it's too beautiful."

Knowing that it would be easy to inadvertently slip and say something that would reveal her true feelings, she gave no response.

"I love being outside in the night air," Austin continued, oblivious to her silence. "You feel so small, yet so big. Rather than feeling like the conquered, you feel like you're the conqueror!"

Christy's silence continued. She hoped he would interpret it as indifference.

He did. "Well, enough of my ramblings. Why would it be of much interest to you anyway...?"

"Thank you for an enjoyable evening," she said simply, relieved his oration had come to an end.

Austin courteously responded, "You're welcome. The pleasure was mine."

Deciding to take the risk, and mustering up as much sincerity as she could find within her, Christy haltingly continued, "No, really, I very much appreciate your taking the time with me this evening. I realize that it was not something that you did lightly. I enjoyed meeting a different crowd of people. Really, thank you!" she hurriedly finished.

Sensing that her words were heartfelt, Austin warmly assured her, "The pleasure was all mine. Please don't thank me. We'll have to do it again some time." He smiled, and gently squeezed her shoulder. Then, turning, he briskly walked off into the night.

As she went inside, she pondered the events of the evening, replaying many of them and analyzing whether or not she had played her part well. She need not have feared, for her many days of practice had not been in vain, and it was highly unlikely that those

she had met would be able to see beyond her façade into the real Christy, unless she deliberately let them. Yet, in spite of the assurance she felt, that night she was burdened by a twinge of confusion—though she did not know why.



"I've noticed that you're spending quite a lot of time with Austin," Trina, as frank as ever, stated. "So, how's all that supposed to work?"

"How's what supposed to work?" Christy echoed belligerently.

"With Austin? What's the purpose of that?"

"I don't know what the purpose is, but I don't think that it's wrong."

"What is he like?"

"I know he's a Rebel, and maybe this will sound very strange—but as far as being an earthling, he's pretty normal. He's even sweet at times."

Trina's eyes were wide with wonderment, "He is? Have you ever tried saying anything to him about things?"

"No, it's never seemed appropriate. I still need to be very careful with him."

"I wonder what's going to happen with that..."

"So, how's everything been going with you, Trina?" Christy asked, changing the subject.

"Well..." Trina drawled, a little reticent to offer a response.

"What have you been up to?" Christy inquired.

"Ummmm."

Christy, unable to resist any longer, quickly sifted through Trina's mind. "Oh no!"

"Well, what would you do? There are literally thousands of people who have never heard anything about what's happening out there, other than the propaganda they're fed here. It's not fair. I can't stand back and not say anything!"

"But if they catch you..."

"I'm fully aware of what they'll do if they catch me." Soberly, Trina looked off in the distance. "I know I wouldn't stand a chance. I'm careful, though."

"I'm sure you're careful, but one day you are bound to say something to the wrong person."

Trina looked up at Christy. "And when that happens ... where will you be?"

"I don't know. But I sure hope I'm in the right place."

"Me too."

"And I suppose Stewart is doing the same?" Christy asked. Seeing Trina's face, she immediately realized that he indeed was.

"We talked about it together and we decided that we couldn't leave people in ignorance; it's not fair. I don't understand why Edel hasn't told you what we're doing!" Trina raised her eyebrows, "Are you sure you're listening?"

"Yes, I'm listening," Christy laughed, taking no offence at Trina's forthrightness. "Mind you, Edel doesn't have much to say these days—never has."

"Well then, if Edel's not warning you about it, it must be all right."

"We'll soon find out, won't we?"

Christy was quite perturbed by this turn of events, which she had hitherto been unaware of. Searching for Edel she questioned, *"Is it right? You know what they're doing; you can see them. Please tell me if they shouldn't be doing so."*

With surprising speed, Edel beamed back, "Yes, it's right. It's all part of the plan."

*"I don't understand why I'm not able to do the same. Is it Austin? Is he a key player in all of this? Is he supposed to be my main focus?"*

There was no response.

"Should I be doing the same?" Christy continued with her line of questions.

*"Your time will come. Don't worry. Let them do what*

*they have the faith to do, and wait for your time. You'll know beyond the shadow of a doubt when it is your time; there will be no question. Until then, wait patiently as you have been. Only be cautious."*

With that parting warning, Edel had said all that was to be said for the time being.

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## WILDERNESS SECRETS

Although she'd had the assurance from Edel that all was as it was supposed to be, the news that Christy had just heard disquieted her. She was not exactly sure why she found it so unsettling. *After all*, she told herself, *this is what is supposed to happen. It's not as though our time here is going to last forever.*

She knew mankind still retained the majesty of choice, to choose whether to do good or evil, and as such, the future, at least to her, remained unpredictable. As it had been before, so it was now. So much was based on the choices of the individual, and every choice would add to the picture of the future. Then eventually, the picture would become more complete, and the future would become the present. But all the while, the future was being shaped by what one chose and what one learned—whether for good or evil—in the present.

She knew that ultimately, nothing could happen without Jesus' permission, and that even at this same moment He was with her—though His eternal presence while she was in her mortal body was not as easily sensed as it had been before. (It was, in fact, for this very reason that Edel, her Mediator, had been assigned to accompany her so closely on this

mission). Still she looked ahead with some trepidation, not knowing how the grand finale was to be played out—though if there was one thing she could be sure of, she knew that there would be a final scene, and that it was to be played out very soon. Even now she felt the curtain was being drawn.



“Are you ready?” Austin asked, a little sharply.

Knowing by now that it was not wise to cross Austin when he was under pressure, Christy merely nodded yes. She picked up her bag and headed over to where he was standing with two saddled horses. Without saying a word, Austin turned and mounted his horse. Christy, untying the reins from the post, did likewise.

And so they rode off down the same path that she and her companions had first traveled along many months back. She did not know where they were going, nor did she intend to ask.

It was a pleasant morning, neither too hot nor too cold. A light breeze gently wafted through the treetops and stirred up the leaves, as the two horses sometimes trotted, sometimes walked and occasionally cantered along the road. After riding along in silence for about a half-hour, Austin reined his horse in and began to walk at a slower pace, all the while straining his eyes as he looked into the distance, apparently expecting someone to arrive soon.

Spotting a group of men up ahead, he motioned for Christy to wait. She complied without hesitation as he cantered up to the group of men.

Christy watched with keen interest as Austin reached into his pouch, took out some documents and passed them over. She had ridden out with him on several of these exchanges. It was always the same; the rather tense short journey, and then the command to wait while Austin rode on ahead and exchanged papers. She knew that had she wanted, she could

have easily discovered what they were passing on, and, she supposed, even what they were talking about. It was often a great temptation for her. To Christy's credit, she was able to resist the urge to do so, for as she had told herself in the past, her mission was not to discover information—that in itself would have been an easy task to accomplish. But what her mission was, she still did not exactly know.

Christy smiled as Austin approached, but refrained from speaking. She knew that when he was ready to talk he would initiate a conversation. Until then it was best to say nothing.

They slowly rode back together, their horses keeping step as they walked side by side. Austin was visibly relaxing as they went on. Coming near to where the path opened up into a bigger road, just before entering the outskirts of the camp, Austin suddenly veered off to the left and motioned for Christy to do likewise. They rode single file along a narrow, winding and obviously little-used track. Still, Austin had not spoken—though Christy, being too engrossed in the untouched splendor of the surroundings, was not bothered by this.

After traveling for another half-hour, the pathway abruptly ended at the foot of a small hill. Austin jumped off his horse and tethered it to a nearby tree. Walking over, he held the halter of Christy's horse while she jumped down.

Christy finally broke the silence, “It's beautiful!”

“It is, isn't it? I don't have time to come here much, but whenever I do I always vow to do so more often.” He laughed. “Sometimes I think my nose is way too close to the grindstone, as the expression goes! This beauty surrounds us everywhere, yet we barely take time to enjoy it. Come, I have something I want to show you. I think ... I think you'll like it!” He smiled an uncharacteristic and almost shy smile.

Momentarily taken back by his boyish charm,



Christy marveled at seeing this rarely revealed side of Austin.

Austin once again smiled broadly. "So there's more to me than you thought, isn't there? And," he said, taking her by the hand, "I feel there's more to you than first meets the eye."

For a second Christy was tempted to worry that perhaps he had learned more about her than he should. She dare not search his mind to see what he was referring to, and so was dependent on her earthly intuition.

"At first you acted like such a stuck-up little brat! But I can see that there is a softer side to you that you hide from everyone."

Christy kept her eyes on the ground ahead of her, and silently heaved a sigh of relief as she realized that he had not discovered her secret. Content, and in fact happy that he thought this about her, she coyly shrugged her shoulder.

They climbed the small hill at the foot of the larger mountain. It was not a very taxing climb and they soon arrived at the top.

Austin warned Christy, "Soon you'll see what I meant when I said I had something to show you. I didn't know if you would appreciate it, but in getting to know you more I realized that you would probably enjoy it as much as I do."

Holding her by the hand, he walked up the last stretch, then standing somewhat triumphantly on top he proclaimed, "See? You didn't know this was here, did you?"

Just as he had promised, it was truly a sight worth beholding. Behind, looking back over the way they had traveled, the view was not particularly awesome; however, in gazing out this direction it was breathtaking. The hill dropped sharply. Directly below them, the sparse forest opened up into a small but beautiful green valley—almost perfect in its beauty, a secret of

wonder, hidden as it were by the large mountain that loomed to the side of it and the steep hills that rose on the other side.

"Beauty in the wilderness," Christy whispered, as she took in the view in front of her.

"Yes, you could say that. You probably didn't think you could find something like this tucked away in the midst of the wilderness, did you?"

She hesitated, and then deciding to see how far she could take the conversation, asked, "I suppose there are always hidden beauties in the wilderness?"

Austin turned his eyes toward her, trying to decide if she was hinting at something or not. "It's very rare, actually, to find something so beautiful amidst all this."

It was then Christy's turn to try to determine if there was any hidden meaning in his words. They feasted upon the scene before them till their eyes and hearts were satisfied.

Then Austin whispered, as if to speak would have somehow broken the spell of the moment, "I have something else to show you."

"More beauty?"

"I'm not sure it's quite as breathtaking. Come!"

She walked alongside Austin while they traveled back down the way they'd come. Just as they approached the base of the hill, they veered off in a slightly different direction.

Breaking the silence, Christy plucked up the courage to ask, "What do you want to do, Austin? What's your ambition?"

Austin chuckled softly. "Well, that's a rather bold statement from someone such as yourself. What makes you think I have any ambitions?"

"Oh, I know a man with ambition when I see one," she quickly retorted. Then she continued, "Why did you choose this type of life?"

"Sometimes I wonder myself," he answered

soulfully. Then shaking his head, he looked at her and sharply responded, "I don't like the idea of being dominated by anyone."

"But," she said, floundering for an instant, and not knowing exactly how to react to his statement, "you are dominated."

"No, I'm not dominated. The people who live out there are dominated. They've given up their freedom of choice; they've sold themselves into slavery, and no matter how much they maintain that it's to a good slave master—it doesn't make any difference in my opinion. Independence is freedom. Subservience is slavery."

"Which makes you a slave to Gailan."

"I suppose it looks like that to you, but the difference is that I still have my freedom of choice. I can choose to stay with Gailan for as long as I so desire, but if and when I don't like what I'm doing, then I'm free to go. The poor bewildered subservients out there have no such freedom. If they want to go, what choice do they have? None! They're herded around like cattle, they're told how to live, what to say, what to do, what to think. No one's going to tell me what to think."

"What about all these people you have here in the camp?" Christy stretched out her arm as if waving it in front of a crowd. "You're not giving them any choice either. You're the ones telling them what to think."

"We're telling them the truth."

"Oh, and what would that truth be?" Christy asked sharply.

Austin made no response. He knew he would not convince her, and he did not feel like exposing his personal values to the scrutiny of her sharp mind—and the harangues of her even sharper tongue. So he remained silent.

Soon they approached a small cottage, delightfully set in almost perfect surroundings.

"It's gorgeous!" Christy couldn't help but exclaim.

"I thought you'd like it. Wait till you see inside!" Again his shyness had returned. "I've set things up to make it as pleasant as I can. I love to come here. It reminds me of when I was a boy. I used to take off by myself, and I claimed a little hut just like this in the woods near my parents' house. That's where I used to spend my 'days of solitude.'" He laughed.

"Days of solitude?" Christy questioned.

"I was an only child, and my parents didn't have a lot of time for me, so I spent a lot of time by myself—hence my 'days of solitude.'"

They sat outside on the steps leading up to the door. Austin opened his canteen and drank deeply from it. He then passed it on to Christy, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand as he did so. Christy wondered how and if she could continue their conversation.

"Austin," she continued, not turning to look at him, "have you ever seriously taken the time to listen to what the 'slave masters' on the settlements have to say? Have you ever been to one? You speak so much of freedom, and yet you have not allowed yourself the freedom to consider that maybe they are right, and you are wrong." She turned and gazed deeply into his eyes.

"I didn't know you were such a philosopher." He shifted his gaze away from her. "I've already made my decision." His voice took on a strange coolness. "I'm not really interested in discussing these matters any further."

Christy waited for a moment, wondering if he would say anything else. He didn't. She stood on the steps and gingerly opened the door, peeking inside as she did. She was pleasantly surprised to see how comfortable the room looked. The older furniture and rugs scattered around the room gave it a very welcoming appearance.

"It's so quaint."

By this time Austin had joined her. Christy glanced at him nervously, wondering if she'd said too much. However, he had so totally regained his composure that she wondered if he'd ever lost it.

"I have some wine," Austin answered. "Can you imagine anything better than enjoying a good wine in such a beautiful place as this?"

Christy hesitated to speak. She could indeed imagine much better things.

Austin, noticing the distracted look in her eyes asked, "So tell me, what are you thinking of? It must be quite good to be better than this."

"I'm sorry," she laughed. "I'm thinking of the past, but the past has gone, hasn't it? And we're here, so," she cheerily continued, "let's enjoy our wine, shall we?"

Somewhat puzzled, but at the same time sort of relieved to see that Christy appeared to be herself again, Austin poured two mugs of wine. "To the future!" He held his mug high.

"To the future," Christy echoed.

Both drank deeply from their cups. Feeling drowsy with the warmth of the early afternoon sun, Christy yawned, stretching her arms above her head.

Austin watched lazily, as the short shirt she had been wearing lifted up to expose her midriff. His eyes slowly followed the contours of her body from head to toe as she swayed with feline-like grace. He was soon standing in front of her. Christy was a little taken back by his sudden close proximity. In an effort to put a little more distance between them, she shuffled back and sat on the edge of the dining table.

Austin spoke as he moved closer to her. "You're very beautiful, you know?"

Christy didn't really know how to respond. She realized how vulnerable she was, alone in the wilderness with a very handsome man, whom she suddenly saw was very intent on making some

advances. She closed her eyes, desperately asking, "*Edel, what do I do?*"

Not really expecting a response, she was not surprised when she did not immediately receive one. Her heart started beating faster. She bit her lower lip, which unfortunately only served to make her appear all the more vulnerable and innocently beautiful. Austin reached out and brushed his fingers through her hair.

"You act so tough," he whispered, "but I can see into your soul. You're really very gentle."

She lifted up her eyes to look at him, and as she did he gazed deeply into them, "Why do you pretend to be so cold when you're really so warm?" He continued gently stroking her hair.

It was with great difficulty that Christy tried to contain the different feelings and sensations that she was experiencing. She was confused. She did not know where these feelings were coming from, or what to do with them. *Are these feelings that have been given me?* she wondered, almost afraid to think it through any further. *Or could it be that they are my feelings?*

It was all happening so fast. She found Austin's lips gently kissing her cheeks, her neck, and soon her lips met his in a long and passionate kiss.

Struggling to free herself from his grasp only served to make Austin's passion stronger. "No, don't pull away from me," he whispered, as his body pressed closely against Christy and his lips continued to seek hers. She was overwhelmed with a feeling of helplessness, yet at the same time she couldn't help but return his passion.

"I want you! I've wanted you for a long time! I have waited for this moment," he continued whispering between his kisses and caresses.

Unable to help herself, Christy found herself swimming in his passion and emotions—as suddenly

his feelings came charging into her very being. She no longer wanted to stop herself; in fact, she was no longer able to even if she had so desired.

His hands began gently caressing her body. Then suddenly, as if seeing a ghost from the past, she remembered how it had felt to have Allan's hands caressing her body—the beauty and strength she had felt. She found herself remembering how pleasant and how passionate his lips were on hers, and how in comparison this was a mere shadow of the love that he'd offered her. As she again relived her moments of passion with Allan, she felt his presence very near—his spirit, his soul, his heart, his love.

Mustering up all the strength she could, she tore herself away from Austin's grasp, and sobbed, "No, I can't, please! Don't!"

Austin, shocked by this sudden transition, backed off and looked questioning at Christy. Breathing deeply, he tried to control himself. "What's wrong?" He was obviously displeased and at the same time disoriented by the sudden change in Christy.

"I'm sorry. I can't explain it, it's just..." She buried her face in her hands and started sobbing, "I can't do this. I can't explain why, but I'm sorry, I can't. I know I'm at your mercy and there's little I can do, but please, I implore you, don't—not now. I can't. Please understand!"

Austin pulled out a chair and sat down, obviously at a loss for words. "I have no intention of forcing you to do anything," he finally said. "I'm sorry, I thought that you..."

Interrupting him before he could say more, she responded, "I know, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have encouraged you."

Obviously deeply puzzled by Christy's actions, Austin poured himself another glass of wine and finished it in two or three gulps. "Well, I don't know that we need to stay much longer. It's going to be

getting dark soon, so we probably should be on our way."

Thankful for this suggestion, Christy nodded her agreement, gathered her belongings and went outside. She untethered her horse and was soon sitting upon it. Austin did likewise. Neither spoke as they journeyed back to the camp.



Although Austin tried to act normal around Christy, she could tell that it was not easy for him. He obviously had little interest in pursuing their friendship any further. In moments of near despair, Christy wondered if perhaps she had spoiled whatever plan had been mapped out for her. She need not have worried, however. What God had destined to be would be, and *it would be* soon.

## **MISSION FULFILLED**

Sensing the undercurrent of surprise that was running through the camp, Christy waited expectantly for the announcement she had heard Mrs. Shute would soon be making. She dared not try to discern or read the minds of those around her, as tension seemed to be mounting in the camp and she did not want to aggravate things.

Mrs. Shute's announcement was curt and to the point. "We've all been asked to gather at the playing field. I believe there is some business being attended to there that we have been asked to participate in."

The playing field was located at the back of the village. It was an open-air arena encircled by hills on three sides, and by virtue of this was fairly secluded. This was where the camp meetings were held, though they were a rare occurrence.

Christy shuffled in with the crowd and managed to get a seat on one of the bleachers where everyone had gathered. A swiftly constructed platform stood in the center of the playing field. Looking up and towards an overlooking hill, Christy noticed two lone figures on horseback, surveying the scene below. She could not see who they were, for the distance was too great. The air was thick with expectancy and some

tension. Christy could almost imagine the somber sound of a drum roll as one of the Chiefs took his place on the platform.

By this time, a large crowd had gathered—it appeared as if most of the camp was in attendance, many people shifting uneasily, anxiously awaiting the proclamation which was soon to be made.

One of the Chiefs, a man Christy recognized but had never met, began to speak.

“We are very sorry to have to bring you all together here like this, at this time, away from your many responsibilities. However, it has recently been brought to our attention that our camp has been infiltrated by people from the outside, people who have no allegiance to Gailan or to the cause we fight for. Not only do they have no loyalty to Gailan, but in their own damnable way they are actively trying to tear down everything that we have striven so hard for, everything we have been”—he quickly corrected himself—“everything *you* have been laboring to build with your blood, your sweat and your tears. They have been trying to tear down everything you have given *your* life to preserve.”

Christy's heart almost stopped. Suddenly her senses were reaching new heights of awareness, as if she was receiving surges of power from Beyond. She knew instantly who the infiltrators were. She had no doubt that Stewart and Trina had finally been discovered and were about to meet their fate. At the same time she felt that this must be *it*, her time of truth.

The Chief continued, “As you are all aware, we cannot tolerate this in our camp. When each of you arrived you were given the choice; you were told explicitly that if you did not like the way things were run, if you did not agree with our common shared goals and ideals, you were free to leave. It is not acceptable to stay, to receive our hospitality and to

speak against the very hand that is feeding you. They have no defense, they have no excuse for what they have done, and we have no recourse other than to follow through on that which we have promised for any found in their position.” His loud voice could easily be heard across the entire field, and even up into the hills, as it was not a wide expanse to cover.

No sooner had he finished speaking than two pitiful figures with hands tied behind their backs stumbled up onto the platform and were made to stand behind the Chief. Christy could clearly distinguish Stewart and Trina. Not caring for the consequences anymore, with as much force and might as she could muster, she beamed into their minds her support, compassion and the assurance that she was in the right place, where she was supposed to be—and that she was prepared, willing and indeed, about to do what she had been destined to do. To her surprise (though in retrospect she realized she should not have been surprised), they had perfect clarity of mind and were totally accepting of all that had happened, as they themselves realized that they had finished all that they had been called to do.

An uneasiness was spreading like a cloud of mist across the crowd that had gathered. Christy gazed around the outskirts. She noted that they were encircled by Caretakers who were obviously prepared to move on the crowd should there be any disturbance in any section.

Skimming the minds of the people, Christy could tell that there were some who were not in complete agreement with what was obviously about to happen. To many, Trina and Stewart had, in their own quiet and unobtrusive manner, shared hope—a hope that many had previously not had, a hope which had laid dormant inside their souls, suppressed by the oppression of those who were ruling. Nevertheless, the hope was there, and as with a tiny seed being

germinated by the warmth of the sun and the tears of rain, so too was their seed of hope beginning to grow.

Many whose lives and souls had been touched in this way knew that the hope Trina and Stewart shared had not been in vain. There was a glimmer of faith that indeed perhaps all that they had imparted was a more honorable version of the truth than the supposed truth that had been so brashly proclaimed by those running the camp.

But not everyone felt the same. Those who had not heard anything from Trina or Stewart were not moved by the sight of the two figures standing before them. Still others knew of the truth, and were rejecters, and indeed had been the ones to report Trina and Stewart's "subversive" activities. These were gleefully looking on, hoping that the demise of these two would once and for all squelch any idea that there was something better out there to be found among the "subservients," as they called them.

Christy knew that some of those who were indifferent and who had not yet had an opportunity to hear the truth as it really was, deserved to hear it, needed to hear it, and she realized that she was there to tell it—not just to tell it, but to proclaim it! *But how?* she wondered, looking around, for there would be little room for proclaiming any truth in a setting such as this, with the Caretakers tensely nervous, edgy, and ready to pounce on any appearance of dissension.

The Chief went on, "As has been the case with other dissenters and as will continue to be the case, they have a sure reward promised them for their disloyalty, and even worse than their disloyalty, for their subversive ways.—*Death!*"

Many in the crowd gasped at the severity of the sentence passed on such young folks. Though they had, in their time, seen others sentenced to death, there was a certain sense of a grave injustice being

committed. These two did not deserve such a fate, that was obvious—Trina, a mere slip of a girl, and Stewart, a simple man at best, one who believed and spoke of a better way.

Yet others felt the sentence justified. An isolated voice rang out from the crowd, "Down with the subservients! Kill them!"

Soon others joined in, and were likewise chanting, "Down with the subservients!"

Another shouted, "They deserve to die!"

The response from the crowd was muted, and though some were chanting their death call, many remained silent with their faces cast down. Two men with rifles came up on the far edge of the platform. The Chief moved over to the far side and waited while the riflemen took aim.

Christy could bear it no longer, and at a sudden nudge from within, she suddenly jumped to her feet! "No!" she shouted, with her voice ringing out loudly above all of the others. At the same time, she galvanized all the power in her mind to totally immobilize the two riflemen.

The Chief, quick to sense that something was not as it should be, commanded the riflemen to shoot. They stood still, taking aim, but unable to do anything. The Chief swung around and, spying Christy standing up in the bleachers, yelled, "Take that damned woman away!"

Christy realized she was in immediate danger. Those around her made no move to detain her, for a change had come over her appearance. Although she was still very much in an earthly form, her true nature was being revealed, even as she stood there. For many, this was the first time that they had seen such a dramatic outward display of the type of power that the "enslavers of man" exercised upon people.

Those immediately around her were not about to make a move towards her. They were both frightened

and awed by her bold appearance and dramatic stand. Some of the Caretakers, however, did not have the same respect or awe for her, and they were joining up and making their way over to where she stood.

Keenly sensing the approaching danger, she hesitated, not knowing how to respond. For her power, though still as available as it had been before her transformation, was not as strong as it had been, since it had not been put to very much use during the passing months. She tried the best she could to pinpoint those who were intent on doing her harm, and to immobilize them. But each time she split her power in this way, it seemed to lessen its grip on the others.

With all the power left within her, she beamed up a mighty plea for help—a plea not just to Edel, but to anyone who was listening and who could come to her aid, for she knew she would not be able to contain the Rebels on her own for much longer. In fact, not only would she not be able to contain the Rebels, but more importantly, she would not be able to do what she needed to do. Her true mission and calling had at last revealed itself.



The two men on horseback remained on the hill, watching all that was going on. In one flash, Christy soon distinguished that it was Gailan himself looking on, together with none other than Austin. Realizing that Austin was now seeing her as she really was momentarily distracted her. It was merely a fraction of a second, but in that same instant she failed to see the riflemen that still had their rifles trained on Trina and Stewart.

During the short space of time that Christy had allowed herself the luxury of thinking a human thought, Trina and Stewart were killed, shot in the back by the two riflemen.

She watched in horror as they fell. She could barely

restrain herself from rushing down to where they were.

“No...!” she screamed out as loudly as she could. “You murderers! You’ve killed the only thing that’s good, that’s true, that’s pure, that’s honest in this whole camp! How could you?”

Some of the crowd made it obvious that they agreed with her sentiments, and the growing dissension and division only served as a further distraction to those who were trying to keep the situation at bay. Still, Gailan and Austin did not move.

Then she began to speak out boldly, “What do you want? What are you doing with your lives? What have you chosen? You think you’ve chosen freedom—freedom from bondage, freedom to do as you will, freedom to live life as you want. Is this what you call freedom—this destitute life that you’re leading here? Is this what you were destined and ordained for? Is this what your life is all about? This life without any vision, a life of servitude?”

“You think you’re not serving anyone? What a joke! You think you’re free! Is this”—she stretched her hand towards the platform where the still bodies lay—“a picture of freedom?”

Even as she spoke, her power began to lessen and her ability to keep back those who were intent on harming her continued to diminish. Realizing that they were fighting a losing battle in allowing the people to listen to her, the Caretakers began diving in amidst the crowds before them. They began attempting to section the crowd off, round up the people and herd them back towards their houses. As much as Christy wanted to, she had no power to stop them. Some who refused to go, who wanted to stay and hear what Christy had to say and who turned aside from the Caretakers were shot. Even their having an interest in the truth—regardless of what choice they would ultimately make—made them dangerous threats to the conformity that had so painstakingly been



established.

Christy was once again threatened with despair in seeing the carnage before her, and realizing that she was unable to contain it. Were she to focus on trying to stop the Caretakers, she would not be able to concentrate on delivering the message that she was destined to convey. She was soon no longer able to keep track of those coming for her. Even as she continued speaking, some directly in front of her, at the bottom of the bleachers, were making their way over to try to stop her.

Faltering, she appeared confused and unable to keep control of the situation any longer. She need not have feared, for in her moment of greatest weakness she felt great strength flowing into her body, a strength that bathed her spirit, a clarity that she had not felt for some time. It was then that she saw the others, appearing seemingly out of nowhere, and gathering in an even wider circle around the one made by the Caretakers. Bands of Legionnaires had come to her aid! Never had she been as thankful to see these fine warriors as she was at that moment.

She felt a very warm presence close to her. Brad barely gave her any sign of recognition as he stood guard beside her. His intensely fierce countenance was enough to ward off any attempts on Christy's physical life. Tears flooded down her face as she realized with relief that the aid she had so desperately needed, the help she had sought had indeed arrived. Their presence would now make it possible for all there to hear the truth.



Christy looked up towards Gailan and Austin. Sending as much power as she could that direction she made direct contact with Austin's spirit. As she spoke, she too was speaking directly to his soul. He stood still, watching.

Gailan was beginning to feel very edgy, realizing

this was now a lost battle. He turned his horse to go, yet Austin did not follow. He too had to hear the truth. He too had a decision to make.

She yelled out across the expanse, "Is this what you call freedom, Austin? You say that you don't want to be a slave, you don't want to be dominated by anyone or by anything. You say that you're not dominated here, you are your own free agent, you're free to come and go, you're free to make your decision as to whether you want to stay here or not.

"But what about all of these people who were in your care? Did they have this same freedom that you proclaim you have? They had no freedom. You fed them lies. You fed them with fear. You fed them with oppression. Yet you think that you hold the key to freedom. These people were not free, and you knew it! And now they too know.

"But the saddest thing, Austin, is that you and those like you think that you have freedom. You don't! Every man on this earth serves a master—you're a slave, either to the will of God, or the ways of man. You're not free; you're a slave just like the rest of these people are slaves. You're a slave—not just to Gailan, but to a master far worse than he could ever be.

"You're a slave to your own heart, your own sinful heart that is deceitful and desperately wicked. Don't you see? He who chooses not to do good doesn't choose indifference. He doesn't choose *another form* of good, he chooses evil.

"There are only two choices, Austin: the choice to serve the power of God, which is good, right, truthful and honest, or the choice to serve the impulses of man, which have proven themselves throughout history to be selfish, greedy and given to all manner of unrighteousness, seeking always to probe yet greater depths of depravity and perversity. Though sometimes to you it seems almost the same and you

say it doesn't matter, the outcome is vastly different.

"We are building a new future, Austin. Every single person here is building a new future and helping to define this new beginning for mankind. What future are you offering them here? A future of enslavement to the same misguided system that nearly wrecked the world God created? Or can you offer the same happiness and promise of a rebirth of beauty and happiness in their own hearts, even as the world's beauty is being reborn all around us?"

"You don't have to go the way of man, Austin," Christy pleaded, reaching into his spirit with every ounce of strength that she had. The remnants of people looked on in awe, as not only was she reaching into Austin's soul, but she was reaching into the heart of every mortal there.

"You are a slave, Austin. You'll always be a slave. Freedom has nothing to do with dominion. Freedom has nothing to do with being able to choose your own destiny. Freedom is knowing the truth. Freedom is knowing the future and being assured of it. Freedom is having room to grow. Freedom is being able to reach out to others and give them something positive. Freedom is building a new world, a better world, building a world of hope, joy, love, goodness.

"Striving to rebuild all that we tried to leave behind in the last world—that's not freedom, Austin, that's bondage. That's bondage to the same masters that you've always been in bondage to. You have a chance to find true freedom! Take it! You don't have to continue following this path you've chosen!"

Austin was captivated by all that was said, for her words truly were reaching inside and entwining themselves around his heart. He looked at the beautiful young woman, obviously endowed with much more power than he could ever hope to attain to, telling him what real freedom was. And for a moment he almost galloped down the hill to her.

But again, another fleeting second, an imperceptible flash, a moment of time—that was all it took. He hardened his spirit, he closed his mind. Christy watched in silence as he reined his horse around and walked off over the crest of the hill, beside Gailan. So close! So close to knowing the truth. So close to accepting the truth. So close to freedom, yet so far from it.

"Should I stop them?" Christy asked.

"No!" Edel's voice, as strong and comforting as ever, responded. "*No, they have their future ahead of them. Let them go.*"

Tears were streaming down Christy's face. She knew that she had done what she was supposed to do. In baring her soul before Austin she had likewise bared her soul and given the truth to all those who had been forced to remain.

"And now what?" she whispered, half to herself. "I can't do anything else. I can't take any more." She felt very weak, and as if all goodness, strength and power had been drained from her. Brad and some of the other Legionnaires quickly and efficiently took command of the situation. With their immense pool of power they were able to sift through all the people who remained and begin to take charge of what had once been Gailan's Rebel camp.

Those who did not want to stay did not need to stay. Those who wanted to learn more of the truth that Christy had so eloquently presented were free to remain and do so.

"Brad," Christy said, gazing at him, "I'm so glad you came. I didn't realize you knew where I was."

"We've been here all along," he answered with a cryptic smile. "We just haven't been visible to anybody. These people had to make their choice, and had we appeared any sooner, our presence might have easily intimidated them into an insincere decision. Now they have made their decisions, and those who have chosen

the way of freedom by submitting to God are now free to follow us to the settlements, without the shackles that the rebellious have sought to place upon their minds.

"I sure missed being able to communicate with you. But to hear your speech was one of the most awesome experiences I've had while on earth. To see how your words—well, I know they weren't yours, and that they came from the very throne of God Himself—but to watch them reach into the hearts and minds of these people, setting some free with the power of Heaven, and driving others even deeper into their obstinacy, it was simply awesome."

Christy's gaze turned towards the platform, where the lifeless forms lay huddled on the edge. No one had moved them.

"They've gone. They're not there anymore," Brad reassured her.

"It was my fault. ... I didn't stop those men." Christy's voice quivered with emotion. "I was distracted. If only..."

"It wasn't your fault. It wasn't a mistake. It was supposed to happen. If not, we could have stopped them. But they knew it was coming. They had been prepared for it, even as you had been prepared for your mission. And now that mission is over. The job has been done. Those are just their empty shells. I am sure they're receiving their reward right now. And I think your reward is waiting for you too."

"Reward? What reward?" She shook her head. "I don't deserve any reward. I've been so muddled, so confused and so swayed by circumstances and those around me."

"I'm not sure that's the way everyone else sees it. I guess you'll soon find out, though." Brad took her by the hand. "Come with me."



Christy once again experienced what it was like to

be translated from an earthly body into a spiritual being. It was a very pleasurable experience, to be sure. It felt like she was shedding many weights—the weights of time, the weights of the flesh that she had been so encumbered with, and embracing and donning a robe of strength and renewal.

Brad took her once again to the Place of No Sorrows, for that was where she was first meant to go. Only this time it was different. It was a time of quietness. A time of rest and repose. A time of sanctuary where her spirit was regenerated.

It was almost as though it was recalibrated and resynced to be in perfect union with the Eternal One, the most magnificent of all spiritual beings, and the Creator of all. The fears, the worries, the earthly mortal feelings and experiences that had blemished her pure spirit were gently and tenderly washed away. Although the remembrance of them remained, it was a remembrance that fostered only growth, understanding and tolerance. It did not leave her with any condemnation, for there was no room for condemnation, only growth.

And it was here that she received the great reward that Brad had spoken of while they were still on earth—the reward of meeting and becoming as one with this same Great Spirit, feeling once again His total love and unconditional acceptance, as if it had been for the first time. It was a reward that went beyond any gift her heart could have imagined.

As she took time in this place of rest, this place of sanctuary, her spirit melted into His, till she no longer felt like a separate being. Truly, there could be no greater reward than the peace, warmth and love she felt at that moment.

And as she came out of her time of sanctuary, she felt refreshed, and once again very much like the young girl who had agreed to a new mission on earth—howbeit a much wiser girl. She had now been endowed

with a majesty of spirit that was not previously so evident, a glow, a spiritual aura that shone even more brightly and brilliantly than it had before—an evident manifestation of her reward. She had attained the rank of Messenger, and her very being now reflected this.

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## A MESSENGER'S REWARD

“My dear,” Charmagne warmly exclaimed as Christy approached. “How good to see you!” Charmagne’s warm embrace soothed Christy’s already comforted spirit. Such was Charmagne. The warmth, the beauty, the spontaneity and the excitement that exuded from her, even in the human appearance she now frequently portrayed, was apt to wash over all those she had contact with, leaving them eternally changed. With every contact one had with Charmagne, one became a little wiser, a little more spiritual. Such was the way with all of the spiritual beings, beginning with the Lord Himself. It seemed the more they gave to you, the stronger and more brilliant they became, for in giving they only increased their own strength. Hence they were never afraid to give.

“And how are you?” Charmagne inquired. Again, this was one of those questions that reached into the depths of your soul and sought out the answer before you had a chance to respond to it. “You feel rested. That’s good. And I see that you have received your reward—and well deserved it was.”

Christy looked down at her feet, unable to comment. She had reconciled with the fact that she had not been as strong as she felt she should have been

during her time in the Rebel camp. She knew that no one could have gone through what she had and remain totally unscathed. It was not expected. Yet she still felt an occasional twinge of regret whenever she thought about her time on earth.

Even as these thoughts were flashing through Christy's mind, Charmagne intercepted them. "It's not bad to feel some regret, for we should never feel satisfied with what we've done, or else how would we strive to do better? And as for us? How do we feel about your accomplishments on earth? Well, you have received your reward! What do you think?"

Charmagne laughed, and then continued, "I hope you didn't think I was going to tell you not to feel any regret. You see, there's a reason and purpose behind all of our feelings. Sometimes they help us to see truths that we may not have seen otherwise." Then, abruptly changing the subject, she asked, "So, what are your plans?"

"I hadn't really thought about it." Christy was startled. She'd thought little about the future, having been so engrossed in the events of the present.

"Well, I suppose it's time to begin to do so, for life surely goes on."

"I have no ambitions." Groping to see if she could find some idea of what she wanted to do, she lamely proposed, "I suppose I should go back to my little settlement."

"Yes! That sounds like an excellent idea. You've done such a good job there, and really things are only just beginning as far as all of that goes. We have great plans, as you know. And we do need to keep making progress in the settlements, building, growing, expanding and opening up. We need you for that."

A wave of relief swept over Christy, relief that at least for the time being—or so she hoped—she'd be able to settle back into a somewhat normal lifestyle. "And tell me," Charmagne continued, "do you have

any questions that are unanswered. Is there anything?" She looked questioningly at Christy, almost demanding an answer.

"I wondered if I could see Stewart and Trina."

"Oh, you'll see them soon enough, don't worry about that. I think they're just as eager to see you too!" Charmagne smiled.

Christy took a deep breath, not knowing whether she should proceed with her next question. Charmagne looked expectantly at her, already knowing what she was planning to ask. "I don't know the protocol with such things, or if it could even work out," Christy stuttered, "but I really owe much thanks to Edel." She carried on quickly, not daring to look at Charmagne, "To be sure, I don't even know what was done, and I think I barely perceive the strength and help that Edel was to me, let alone understand all that went on in this realm, but if it would be possible—of course, I don't even know if it is possible, or if Edel is the type of being I could see, but I would very much like to offer my thanks to Edel."

Charmagne solemnly nodded, "Of course. I think that can be arranged, but..." She stopped as Christy looked questioningly at her, wondering what was going to follow.

Nothing did, for Charmagne had intercepted her own words and for some mysterious reason known only to herself, did not continue.



Christy waited in that wonderful realm for an indefinite time, till the time came when she was finally told she would be able to personally thank Edel. A guide led her along a long, well-lit corridor. The floor curved up and melted into the walls which were towering high above her, effused with light from beyond—that beautiful golden glow that permeated every part of the City. There was a stillness in the air, a quietness.

In most places there was always much that could be intercepted, much happening, many thoughts, feelings and experiences passing through the surrounding atmosphere, in fact, so much excitement at times that the air around seemed to be shimmering and rippling with expectant anticipation. Yet here all was still. All was quiet.

After walking for an indeterminable amount of time, they came up to what appeared to be a door set in from the main wall.

Her guide turned to her. "I cannot go past this point. You alone have been given permission to enter."

Christy felt a little nervous, not knowing what was awaiting her past the door. Nor did she know how she was going to be able to adequately express her thanks. She also felt a little shame in knowing that Edel had seen into the very depths of her being, her soul, her every thought, day upon day for as long as she had been engaged in the mission. She knew that the thoughts that had passed through her mind, even her own thoughts, had not always been pure. *And what must Edel think of me?* she mused.

Sensing her hesitation, her guide reassuringly motioned for her to enter.

Christy breathed deeply, and, with a boldness that she really did not feel, stepped up to the door. She gingerly reached out her hand, as she did not know exactly how she was supposed to enter through the door. Her hand disappeared. She looked sideways at her guide who was fading by the second. Taking another deep breath, she stepped through the door.

To her surprise the room was dim, very dim—so dim, in fact, that she could barely make out a few shadowy forms. She could vaguely see someone standing at the far end of the room, with their back turned towards her, seeming to look out through a window—yet there was no window there. No light entered in and no sound could be heard. Then slowly,

as if sensing her presence, the form turned and began advancing towards her.

Christy was transfixed, not knowing where to look, what to do or what to say, or how to respond to this one who had been with her and who knew her every thought. She was thankful at least that whatever it was, it was appearing in human form.

It seemed to take an age for Edel to come close enough to where she could begin to more clearly make out the form that was approaching. As Edel advanced towards her, she once again felt the very familiar presence that had been with her through her darkest and most harrowing experiences while in the Rebel camp. Yet now she could feel Edel's spirit, as a fellow spiritual being, in a much cleaner way. Her senses had been so tuned that she could almost feel the dedication that it had taken to be so committed to her mission. She could sense the sacrifices that had been made to be in such a quiet and restrictive place for such a long period of time. All at once she realized that Edel had been totally cut off from everything elsewhere, as she had, during the length of the mission,

She also sensed that it had not been easy for Edel. Not only had the mission come with personal sacrifice, but there were also sacrifices and commitments made during the time of the mission—somehow her mission had affected Edel in a very personal way. Christy had not been able to understand or perceive any of this while in an earthly form, but being now once again a purely spiritual being, it took little to understand these things.

She didn't know how long Edel's approach took. It only took a split second for these thoughts and feelings and the understanding to pass through her mind. But in another way she felt that the approach had taken eons, and that she had been standing transfixed in one spot for age upon age, waiting for Edel to be

revealed. How strange time was in this realm!

Soon Edel would be close enough to distinguish the features. She closed her eyes, preparing herself for the time when they would communicate from one spiritual being to another. And, in that moment, while her eyes were closed and her heart was being prepared, she felt a presence that she had not felt in such a close and personal way for a very long time.

Tears streamed down her face and she was unable to open her eyes for a time, so enraptured was she in feeling the presence of the one she loved so dearly. She did not question why at such a time she would be experiencing this; there was no need for questioning in this place, nor was there any use for it. What was meant to be revealed would be revealed; what was not, would not.

Finally she opened her eyes, and there before her stood Allan.

"Allan?"

He smiled.

Christy shook her head in amazement, "I don't understand. You mean it was you? You were with me all the time? You are Edel?"

"Yes, I'm Edel."

"I didn't know! Why didn't you tell me?"

"You know I couldn't have told you—though sometimes I thought I must have almost given myself away. It was hard not to."

"I came to thank you for staying with me through everything. I'm only just realizing the great personal sacrifice and how difficult it must have been for you too, to have to watch me go through these things, to be with me."

Allan smiled as he reflected on all she was saying. "I felt called to do it, and I'm glad I did. I couldn't have wished for a more fulfilling mission, really!"

"You just disappeared!" Christy suddenly blurted out. "You just disappeared from my life. I didn't know

where you had gone; yet all the time you were there. You were there with me, weren't you? You just couldn't tell me. I thought you were so far away, yet you were so close, so intimately close. You couldn't have been any closer. I missed you so much."

She reached out for Allan. He stepped back a few paces. "No, not yet. I'm sorry, you can't touch me. I, too, was especially prepared for this mission. I still have to come back to my normal state. I am not able to touch, or..." He faltered.

It was then that Christy realized how very, very spent he was, and how much this face-to-face meeting and communication was taking from him. It was sapping his very strength and spirit, for he had been prepared to be in such a state that he could devote his time and entire being to being one with someone on a very spiritual plane. To meet someone face to face, who although still a spiritual being, was on a different spiritual plane than he, was very taxing for him.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't realize. I should never have asked to see you."

"I'm glad you asked to see me. I wanted you to know. I couldn't bear the thought of you thinking that I had just deserted you and no longer had any desire for you, or need to be with you. That's not true."

Reaching into his mind as she had done in times past, Christy understood what a great sacrifice it had been for him too. She saw how difficult it had been for Allan to disappear from her life in the way that he had, knowing that she did not understand. In this realm, when things were done, normally you understood—either you were instructed or you comprehended. To not understand something, when your whole being yearned to understand, was not a commonplace occurrence.

"It wasn't too bad." Christy tried to encourage him, "I mean, it was very difficult when I saw you..."

"Yes, you saw me walking behind Charmagne, didn't you? I didn't know at the time, but later when I came in here and had so much time to sift through every memory and every part of your being, I relived that. I experienced what you had felt at that time. I'm happy that you discovered the Place of No Sorrows."

If it were possible to blush, Christy would have.

"I'm glad that you were able to find peace, for truly you could not have gone into that mission had you been in such a state of not understanding."

"What are you going to do now?" Christy asked. Then she quickly continued, "I'm sorry, I probably shouldn't have asked. I can see that it is becoming increasingly more difficult for you to converse with me. I know I need to go."

"No, I can answer you. I don't know exactly what I'm going to be doing now. I've been asked if I would like to stay on up here in the City. There are a lot more missions like this that I could help with. I suppose it takes a certain type of person to do what you did, and it takes a certain type to do what I did—and, well, I have been asked to stay on."

"Does that mean our meetings must always happen like this?"

He looked down, and then with what little strength he had left he looked up at Christy, "I don't know. But at least we've had a chance to see each other again, and now you understand, don't you?" His eyes pleaded with her.

Once again tears rolled down Christy's face, "Yes. I understand, I really do. Thank you. Thank you for everything."



Christy didn't know how it happened. She had not been aware of the fact that she was leaving the room and Allan's presence. But to her surprise she suddenly found herself back on earth, near her settlement. She shook her head, *Well, I guess that was that.*

She had been placed back down at the very same spot where she had first come to earth with her earthly body, when she had met with Trina and Stewart. She soon transported herself to her house. Eagerly she looked up and saw a familiar form leaning over the veranda, in much the same way that she, too, used to peruse the scene before her each evening.

"*James!*" she beamed.

"*Christy!*" was James' quick response. James watched as she approached, and slowly walked down the steps to greet her. "You look different!"

"I do? I don't feel—well, actually, I guess I do feel a bit different too."

"So you've received your reward already! Your place is most definitely defined. You're the most beautiful Messenger I've ever seen!" James chuckled, as he gave her a warm welcoming hug. Everyone's going to be so happy to see you."

"I have so much to tell you, James."

"I know. I can tell you have a lot to say—but I want you to tell me slowly. I don't want you to just beam everything into my mind, I want you to sit down and explain everything to me, from the beginning till the end. Surely you can do that now?"

Remembering those she had taken on her mission with her, she faltered, "Oh James, I'm sorry. Trina and Stewart, they..."

"They're fine!" James said.

"What?"

"They're here! They chose to come back and help."

"They're here?" Christy was overjoyed at the idea of meeting Stewart and Trina as spiritual beings. "You mean they..."

"Yes, I don't know how they managed that. I think it was part of their reward. They received a martyr's reward, you know—it's apparently quite a special case."

"They did? That's so wonderful! They truly were



martyrs for a good cause.”

James continued, “They’ve not said a word. They refused to tell me what happened, and I’ve not searched too deeply into their minds. I’ve managed to contain my curiosity, for we thought it only right that you should be the one to tell us. Can you tell everyone?”

“It’s a little too late to begin right now.” Christy laughed. “Maybe in the morning. So tell me how things have been going here.” Christy linked her arm with James’ as they walked up the steps and sat down beside one another on the veranda, happy to be once again back together.

And so the night passed. James and Christy filled each other in on all that had transpired during the time she had been gone. And though they could have passed on everything in a timeless moment, instead, as James requested, they talked slowly. It was only when words could not properly express what they wanted to say that their conversation attained a deeper plane as they reached inside one another’s mind.



There was much rejoicing at the little settlement, and it was almost like old times. In fact, it was even better. James was much more mature. Christy really didn’t miss his childish ways at all.

Trina and Stewart were beautiful spiritual beings, glowing with true martyrs’ spirits. It was indeed a rare case, on account of the special circumstances under which they had given their lives, that they had been accorded this measure of their reward early—becoming citizens of the Heavenly City with new, supernatural heavenly bodies. Having returned to Sunside Glen, they had been given the commission to learn the task of running this little settlement of theirs from James and Christy. James and Christy, in turn, had been commissioned to teach them, after

which they would both be called on to the new and greater ministries this time of training had prepared them for.

And for the rest, they were happy and more sure of their convictions than ever before. The future ahead was theirs to be had, shining brightly with all hope and truth and promise. Each one, whether spiritual or earthling, felt a renewed conviction in the commissions they had been given—to pursue the future and to make this world what it was truly meant to be.

There were times of almost, but not quite, sadness for Christy when she would reflect upon her dearest of all friends. She knew that Brad’s group of Legionnaires was busy reclaiming all those from Gailan’s Rebel camp who wanted to be reclaimed. There was much activity on the edge of the wilderness. No one sought after Gailan or Austin. They had moved on to another place where they were pursuing their plans with renewed vengeance. Their time would come. It was not yet meant to be.

## EPILOGUE

With much excitement in his voice, James rushed up the steps two at a time and burst into the kitchen saying, "Brad's all done! They're coming here for a break!"

Christy looked up in surprise. "Oh, I didn't know that!"

"Yes, I just discovered they're going to be here soon, this evening."

Christy's heart warmed. She was eagerly looking forward to Brad's team's arrival, for though they were a rough and rowdy bunch at times, they added a liveliness to the camp which was always a welcome change from the rather quiet life they normally led.

"Well, hold on to your hats," she wryly commented. "They've been busy a long time!"

"They're really gonna want to have some fun!" James exclaimed gleefully. "And won't they have some tales to tell! I can't wait to join up with them again, now that my job here is nearly over."

Christy smiled. They had both been informed that the time had come for them to move on. Christy was to take on another assignment as a Messenger, and James would join the Legionnaires, and in fact (though he did not yet know it) was to be made a captain over his own band of heavies, working for

and reporting directly to Charmagne herself.

"I'm going to tell everyone that they're coming," he called out jubilantly as he ran out the door as swiftly as he had entered it.



They appeared just as the sun was setting. As was customary with Brad, he flung the door open wide and enthusiastically burst into the room. Though he did not say, "Here I am," his very presence broadcast that same message to all who were in the room.

"Brad," Christy warmly greeted him, "so good to see you."

"And I'm most pleased to see you, mademoiselle," he responded with his usual charm. He pulled out a chair, turned it around and straddled it. "So how's life at the settlement?" Brad had a strange smirk on his face, and as much as she tried to probe his mind to find out what the reason for it was, he would not let her.

"Brad?" she questioned. He said nothing.

Some of the other heavies who were traveling with him trickled into the kitchen, immediately feeling at home—yet coming in with much less fanfare than Brad had.

Christy looked around as they came in and nodded hello to each one.

"Oh, life's pretty good here. We're bracing ourselves for the days to come," she raised her eyebrows.

Brad chuckled, "Well, you know, we've been working very, very hard. And now," he sighed, "it's time to play. And we shall also play very, very hard."

"I'm sure," Christy laughed. She did not look up immediately as a shadow fell across the doorway.

Trina, who was standing directly across from Christy, looked up at the door in utter amazement.

*Oh no!* Christy thought. *What have they done?* A million thoughts flashed through her mind in that instant. *Did they bring back another incorrigible?* A

little anxiously she glanced over towards the door. At that moment the whole room, and in fact the whole world was silent.

She could barely form the words, "Allan!" There was Allan, leaning up against the side of the door, looking on with great amusement—fully decked out in his impressive Legionnaire outfit.

"Christy," he nodded in acknowledgment.

Almost inaudibly she whispered, "What are you doing here?"

"I'm back on the job. Just finished an assignment."

"But you told me you were going to stay."

"No, I told you I was asked if I wanted to stay. You never asked me if I was planning to do so." Christy was speechless as he continued, "The decision was mine to make, and it wasn't a very difficult one. This is the life for me. This is what I do best."

*"But what about ... her?"* Along with her mental question, she beamed an image of the female Legionnaire she had seen Allan walking with before. *"She loves you greatly. I could tell you were very happy together."*

"And so we are," Allan beamed back. *"She is a dear friend of mine, and we are very close. But you see, love doesn't stop there. My love doesn't stop there. Love is all around us here. It is all part of the beautiful love of Heaven, the love of God, the love that is as God Himself, because He is love—love that knows no boundaries, and that brings with it joy and untold benefits for all who are touched by it."*

*"It flows through everything here, from the humblest blade of grass to the greatest structure and the Heavenly City itself. It is, as God Himself, a power greater than you can imagine. The more of it we allow into ourselves, the richer it flows out and the greater it becomes, amplifying itself many times over—and that is what makes Heaven as beautiful as it is."*

*"The love you and I have shared together, and the*

*love we can still share together, is no less beautiful or right than what I share with her—not in my eyes, not in God's eyes, and not in her eyes either. Your happiness is my happiness, just as my happiness is hers, and hers is mine—and so we all share and are beautified by these emotions and passions that, in this place of perfection, are no less than the heart of God beating within each one of us.”*

Even as this exchange was taking place, Allan reached out and enveloped her being, and transported her to the place where they had first truly known each other. The pond looked even more beautiful, bathed in the light from the setting sun. The surroundings seemed electric. For a moment she wondered if everything was really as it seemed to be—then, looking out across the pond and seeing Allan stand with his arms out welcoming her, she realized that not only was it as it seemed, but it was going to be better than she could ever have hoped.

She deftly untied her tunic and let it slip over her shoulders and fall to the ground. Reaching back she unloosed the band from her hair, and as she did so, shook her head gently from side to side, letting her hair cascade down her slender back. Allan stood, transfixed by her every movement, unable to take his eyes from her. As she began to walk towards him, her eyes locked with his and a feeling of anticipation rippled through her body.

“Oh, you're beautiful,” Allan whispered as she approached, “so very beautiful! I've wanted to hold you and feel you close to me for so long. We were so close yet so far apart, and now you're here, with me.”

As she stepped into the edge of the water he slowly walked up and stood in front of her. Reaching out, he began gently stroking her hair, running his fingers down the side of her cheek, under her chin, between her breasts—softly, gently teasing and caressing, handling her with all the gentleness he could find

within him.

Unable to bear even being inches apart, Christy flung her arms around his neck and nestled close. They held each other tightly as their lips met in a deep and passionate lingering kiss.

Barely able to tear himself away, Allan drew back, and looking deeply into her soul, with all the force of love that he could muster, spoke directly from his spirit to hers, “I love you. I need you. I want to be one with you.”

Christy smiled. In so totally accepting his words and in yielding to his deep feelings, she had no need to respond. All that had to be said had been said.

As the sun said its final goodbye, before slipping under the cover of darkness, they became one in spirit and soul. In a flash, all the past had faded away, and the only thing that was left was the future, and what could be made of it. But Christy gave these things little thought. What God had destined to be would be.

And so it was ... a new beginning.

The ... Beginning