

*It was a vision that threatened to drive Lenny insane.
It was a decision that would rip Gypsy's heart in two.
It was a search that would leave Don
empty and dissatisfied.
It was a dream that would enslave Will's heart.*

*On the game board of their lives, and of the world's future,
these four and their counterculture friends found
themselves polarized to opposing forces—forces that
would soon be involved in a life-and-death struggle for the
future of all mankind.*

AT THE OF THE EDGE OF TIME



HEAVEN'S

LIBRARY

WARRIORS

WARRIORS
AT THE Edge
of TIME

**AS TOLD BY
JOHN STEINBECK**

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	1
PART I – IT SHALL COME TO PASS IN THE LAST DAYS	
Chapter 1: A Heavenly Call	9
Chapter 2: The Search	29
Chapter 3: The Devil Fights	55
PART II – WITH SIGNS FOLLOWING	
Chapter 1: A Family Affair	93
Chapter 2: Don’s Deliverance	109
Chapter 3: Baptism By Fire	129
PART III – A FAMINE IN THE LAND	
Chapter 1: The Deadly Virtue	153
Chapter 2: Compassion Takes Action	181
Chapter 3: “The People That Do Know Their God”	213
PART IV – ONWARD TO THE FINAL WEEK	
Introduction	245
Sunday: Seven Days And Counting	249
Monday: Minus Six	257
Tuesday: Five Days To Go	267
Wednesday: Four More Days	279
Thursday: Only Three Days Left	289
Friday: Two Days More	303
Saturday: One Last Day	321
Zero Hour: The Covenant And The Beast	335
Conclusion – The End ... For Now	353
<i>Endnotes</i>	357

Cover by Rain and Darren

Copyright © 1999 The Family
Printed in Thailand

INTRODUCTION

The summer of 1970 was a time of turmoil for the States. The country was divided and practically at war within itself. The youth had cast aside many of the long-held beliefs of their elders and the traditional teachings of the Establishment. It was a time of questioning, a time of not accepting things just because Mom and Dad or Uncle Sam said so.

Acceptance meant that the main goal in life was just to make money, to raise a small family in a boring, well-to-do suburban neighborhood where all the houses look the same, and everyone is busy trying to keep up with everyone else, and having managed to do so, to die with the satisfaction of knowing that they had trained their kids to carry on in like manner and live a bored life ever after.

Acceptance meant going off to war and killing or being killed by people that had absolutely nothing to do with you. Acceptance meant believing in a very American god—the god *they* trusted—a god who had sanctioned the war in Vietnam so much that the science departments of even so-called Christian universities were experimenting with biological warfare for the glory of God and country.

It was a time of searching. The youth of the nation had begun to lose all faith in the moral guidance of their parents' generation and in the God they had

heard preached about in their parents' churches. They no longer believed in a God who was supposedly blessing a godless America, and who had turned his back on them—the millions of desperately searching youth. Countless numbers were resorting to extreme measures, trying anything and everything in order to find an inkling of truth. They searched high; they searched low; they searched in drugs; they searched in radical politics; they searched in Eastern religions; they searched in the occult.

Meanwhile, the true and *living* God was weeping for His lost sheep, and seeking them out wherever they had been driven. He saw that in their search for truth, many were throwing the baby out with the bath water of what society had taught them, while embracing lock, stock and barrel the teachings of the countercultures they had chosen. Because of the radical measures that so many were taking in their search for the truth, God had no choice but to resort to radical measures Himself in order to rescue them.

Thus, our very wise and practical God decided—since the churches were void of spiritual life and were driving the hippie youth away; since the government was clubbing and even gunning them down in the streets and campuses rather than listening to them, rather than talking to them; since their parents were forsaking them and casting them aside—He'd have to use their own drugs and their own music to prepare them, and hopefully to reach and rescue them before it was too late and their lives were wasted and lost. For God loved His lost sheep and was willing to go to any lengths to save them¹.

The System was using drastic measures to quell the youth revolution—beating them, imprisoning

them on trumped-up charges, even murdering them. So God had to use drastic means to stir up a *new* revolution, a revolution of love and light. Thus was born a mighty movement of His Spirit, a movement of young and radical believers and followers who, like the disciples of old, were willing to break with the old traditions and System and sleeping Church of their day, in order to create an entirely New Church—a vibrant and radical Church that would truly be able and prepared to meet the challenges of the years that lay ahead—the Last Days!

¹ Please see endnote 1 for more insight as to the Lord's use of drugs and music to lead people to Him—as well as what it could mean for you today

PART I
IT SHALL COME TO PASS
IN THE LAST DAYS

- 1 -

A HEAVENLY CALL

By Lenny

It was a sound I'd heard before—not just once, but often—just when I was beginning to doze off, just when the warmth of sleep was beginning to envelop me. It was the unmistakable sound of heavy armored vehicles trundling through the darkened streets of Denton, the little town in north Texas where I was living at the time, in the summer of 1970. The rumbling of tanks and armored personnel carriers mingled with the sound of hushed voices, and as so many times before, I heard the sound of buildings being crushed to pieces beneath the treads of the tanks. I heard shouts and cries for help. Automatic gunfire shattered the night. As I listened, it was coming closer and closer.

*Why do they keep attacking Denton, of all places?
What could they want here?*

I leapt from my bed and found that I was fully dressed, moccasin boots and all. The window was open. A soft breeze billowed the filmy curtain with a gentleness that belied the horror of the night. Without hesitation I plunged headfirst through the ground floor window, landing in a well-executed somersault on the soft green grass of my lawn.

A searchlight was sweeping the neighborhood, yet it didn't pick me. I made a crouched dash across the yard, clearing the cyclone fence with a single vault, ending up in my neighbor's yard. So strange no one else was around now.

I cried out in my heart once again—to whom, I knew not: *Why are they attacking Denton, of all places?*

A soft, reassuring voice spoke right to my heart with news that should have shocked me but somehow only came as information. "They're after you, Lenny."

Me? But why? Who am I?

"You and your friends will be a great threat to them, and a hindrance to their plans."

Me? What friends? And what plans? My friends are too busy getting stoned to be a threat to anyone.

Another voice, a hostile one, sounded out. "There he is! Catch him alive if you can!"

My heart pounded madly against the walls of my chest. My thoughts raced wildly, and my body was propelled in veritable flight around the corner of my neighbor's house as the armored personnel carrier crashed through the fence and headed across the yard after me.

How can I defend myself? I cried out in my heart once more.

This time the voice didn't answer. Instead, there in the air, just above my head, hovered a dazzling cross, as if ablaze, yet not consumed by the blaze.

A cross? I blinked. It had turned 180 degrees, and I could now see that it was in fact, a gleaming sword. Time ceased for the moment. As I took stock and decided what to do, somehow I knew that no harm would come to me. I reached up and grasped the bulky handle. It felt warm, but didn't burn.

I pulled the sword to me. My chest swelled. I felt my shoulders, arms and legs tense with supernatural strength. Slowly, with my face set and fearless, I turned toward the enemy as they rounded the corner

of the house, their searchlight lighting me up in a great blaze.

I was surprised and awed by the supernatural bellow that then came from my own throat. "It's the End!" I shouted. "Your feeble attempts at conquest shall be turned back in the face of our fiery onslaught, for your power is puny before ours!"

With that, I jerked awake. I was lying on the floor with my head on Gypsy's lap. We were in the dark room upstairs in the little commune where we'd been living for the summer, surrounded by my friends who were all very stoned and grooving on a Buffalo Springfield album.

Gypsy was staring at me incredulously, as was everyone else in the room. She said, "You're scaring me, Lenny, with all this stuff about 'the End' an' all. What's happening? You freakin' out or something?"

One of the formless voices in the dark said with a drugged giggle, "Hey, babe, he's just stoned right outta his gourd¹. I told ya this is potent weed. Lenny's jus' flyin' high an' feelin' no pain. It's cool, man. It's his trip, let him be."

I sat up and took in the room. The scene before me was far more dreamlike than my dream, like some kind of surreal painting. The air, thick with the smell of hash and incense, was cloaked in total darkness except for the black lights reflecting on Day-Glo posters that seemed to be suspended in air—posters of Dylan, Hendrix, and Joplin, others of grotesque psychedelic art. The black lights reflected on different articles of clothing, giving the impression of a stray pair of legs here, a truncated torso there, chest and arms there. It was all very disjointed and disconcerting. My head spun in a drugged stupor compounded by the intensity of the dream.

¹**out of his gourd:** colloquialism for "out of his head"

The line between the two worlds I'd been living in was becoming more blurred by the day. My recurring dream was becoming more and more real to me, while the world around me seemed to be only a fantasy.

The words of the album now caught my attention:

Somethin's happenin' here,
 What it is ain't exactly clear.
 There's a man with a gun over there,
 Tellin' me I've gotta beware.

I stood, and Gypsy looked at me questioningly.

"I just need some air, Gypsy ... just need some air. I'm cool, don't worry."

I walked out of the room and through the dark hall, down the wooden stairs, and out the screen door onto the front porch. I took in great gulps of air, like a man lost for days in the desert would drink water. The yard, the window, the night, everything was just like the dream, but ... it hadn't happened. It hadn't *really* happened. Then why did it keep coming back? Each time there was a little more detail. Why these recurrent premonitions? Why did I always feel the world was about to come to an end?

My friends didn't seem to feel the same way. They just hung loose and dismissed my doomsday feelings with, "Hey, that's your trip, man, an' it's cool, but it ain't mine." Lately they'd been less tolerant and were beginning to weary of my latest trip. I was known for having a new craze, a new cause every few weeks, but some of my friends were beginning to feel that this one was lasting a little bit too long.

Gypsy and I normally shared an apartment with my best friend, Don, but since he was away for the summer, we'd felt it was a good opportunity to live like this for awhile—communally with some friends of ours who had a band, just like a *real* family. At first, it had felt good to be able to smoke all the grass and hash I wanted. But more and more, I was feeling

lost and uncertain about my life and where I was heading.

Most of my friends, including Gypsy, had one more year left of college, but since I'd already graduated in the spring, I now had to decide what I was going to do. Study more? I didn't think I could take more head-stuffing. Get a job? Doing what?

Because of the draft lottery last November, I wouldn't have to go to Vietnam. My number had come up 360; they would only call me in the case of an officially declared war. So now that I knew I wasn't going to have to go off to some unknown jungle somewhere and kill people and maybe die. But I was at a loss as to what I *did* want to do.

The screen door opened quietly and I knew Gypsy had followed me. She was the only one of the bunch sensitive enough to my feelings to come up quietly. The others would have banged the door open with some stinging comical quip, but which I would just shrug off and pretend to ignore. Gypsy was different, and that difference was why I loved her more than I had ever loved anyone in my life.

I wasn't sure if I even knew how to love or what love was, but what I felt for Gypsy was the closest thing I'd ever felt to what love *might* be. I could honestly say I had never loved anyone like this before; every relationship I had had was for some selfish reason or because the girl looked good on my arm and made me look good to have won her. Gypsy, however, wasn't all that pretty; she was just special, different, uncannily sensitive. And she had been there to help me through the toughest time of my life this past year.

The warmth of her arm wrapping around my waist as I sat on the porch rail was a needed comfort. I stroked the back of her hand as she laid her head on my back and whispered, "I love you, Lenny."

A smile spread across my face as I remembered

the first time we met. She was so cool, so hip. I had seen her coming from halfway across the campus at North Texas State University¹. Besides the fact that she was dressed like the consummate hippie chick with long, naturally flowing light brown hair under a floppy, broad-brimmed black hat, and wearing a Mexican poncho, beads, bangles, bell-bottom blue jeans and black high-heeled leather boots, there was something unique about her that drew me to her instantly. I didn't know what she was saying to people as she passed by, but she turned every head by something she cheerily called out, and each person was left smiling and pleasantly bemused as they continued on their way.

My heart was pounding as I approached her. Any second now she was going to say it to me too. Her happy, prancing step slowed as our eyes met. I was captivated by her big green eyes; they seemed to reveal everything about her without apologies, baring completely the tender, deep, loving soul within. Her smile flickered with a slight bit of uncertainty, and her eyes turned away for just an instant, only to return in greater strength and confidence as she said, "Hi! I love you!"

I stopped, speechless. With all our hip talk about love and peace, I couldn't remember when someone had last said that to me. She kept walking, but slower. Her gait told me she was waiting; she was expecting me to do something, to say something, to seize the opportunity. The ball was bouncing in slow motion on my side of the court. Would I take action? Would I smash, spike, or lob it over the net to her? Or would I let chance and a promise of something unique in my life just slip by. I almost did, but then I yielded to the prompting in my heart.

"Hey!"

She stopped and swiveled. "Yes?" Her eyes were wide. Her moist lips hung slightly open, her head cocked to one side, and I knew I had never seen a sexier sight in all my life.

My face flushed. The words caught in my throat as they tried to escape all at once, the very effort making their exit futile.

A lovely, patient smile graced her face. She said nothing. People passing by on the covered walkway slowed and stared at this strange encounter—two people staring at each other, ten feet apart, saying nothing, while I tried to find words. With one deep breath, the ability to speak returned to me. The caged words were released in such volume that about ten passersby could hear.

"*You love me?*" There were smiles and chuckles and giggles heard all around.

"Yep, I sure do," she answered.

"You don't even know me."

"So? How long do you have to know someone to know they're part of you, and that your lives are eternally intertwined? How much interaction with others does it take to know that what you do affects everyone else on the planet?"

"Whoa, that's deep stuff."

"I don't believe *anything* is by chance. Everyone we pass we are meant to help or be helped by in some way, and *everyone* is part of our destiny."

"So you think I'm part of your destiny?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, I've got a free period now. Whaddaya say we discuss our destiny over a Coke or coffee?"

"Well, I happen to have a class. But, hey, what the heck, I'm free. I refuse to be bound by temporal schedules. Furthermore, I believe one should never miss an opportunity to discuss really important matters like destiny. However, I'll pass on the Coke or coffee. It's against my principles to imbibe the

¹see endnote 2: North Texas State.

Establishment's slow-acting residual poisons. I'll just drink a fruit juice if you don't mind."

And that's how it had begun a year before. My education started out with long lectures on the virtues of a macrobiotic diet and how the Establishment was trying to weaken and reduce the population through chemically polluted and processed foods.

My training carried on into nature, the beauty of silence, and long walks in the middle of nowhere, and proceeded to nudity—Gypsy seized every opportunity to doff her clothes and it didn't take long for me to feel comfortable with it, too—sex, freedom of expression, and letting the real you, your inner self, come out.

I figured I'd been a fairly good student, because after knowing each other for just one month, she moved into my apartment. She had an inexplicable way of setting me free and accepting me as I was, while gently challenging me to grow and change. She never burdened anyone else with her own pain (though I could sometimes sense her moments of inner torment), but she never considered it a burden to share someone else's pain.

All these memories flooded back every time she said those three words that no one else could say as often or quite as sweetly as *she* could. I turned around and said, "Me too," and kissed her.

Her passion always set me back; I just wasn't that free yet. But she was, well, always ready for love, and I could never just give Gypsy a little peck on the cheek or lips. She didn't know how to give a little; she always gave her all.

Now I needed her loving. I felt comfort and peace flow into my heart, body and soul as we kissed and caressed. My hands felt the warmth of her waist, then her torso, back and soft breasts under her thin blouse. I needed her now. She was my link with sanity. She, the craziest hippie chick I had ever met, was all that

kept me from going insane with the dreams and premonitions I had been having. I could only sleep when she was there to kiss and caress me to sleep. The nights she couldn't be there, I dared not sleep.

As we gazed into each other's eyes between kisses, Gypsy said, "Lenny, tell me what you're seeing, what you're dreaming. You only tell me it's the end of the world, but tell me everything. Share it all with me. I'm you, you're me; don't keep anything back."

"Tonight was different. It ended in what looked like a victory somehow. It was so heavy. There's always an invasion of Denton by the army, with tanks and armored personnel carriers, but this time a voice told me they were invading because they were after *me*, because my friends and I were a threat to them and to their plans. Sounds crazy, doesn't it?"

"Maybe, maybe not. I believe in you, babe."

"Then I was given a magic sword an', man, I had *no* fear; with that sword there was nothing to fear. That's when I woke up, as I dreamed I was shouting ..."

"It's the End! Your feeble attempts at conquest shall be turned back in the face of our fiery onslaught. For your power is puny before ours!" Gypsy quoted verbatim.

"I said it out loud?"

"Loud as all getout¹, Hon," she giggled sweetly.

"Everyone up there must think I've flipped out, huh?"

"Shame on you. Don't worry about what *they* think. We need to find out what that sword is and get us one."

"Yeah! Yeah, we do, that's right. But who do you think those friends could be that the voice was talking about, and where are they?"

"Well, *I'm* your friend. I'll *always* be your friend,

¹**loud as all getout:** colloquialism for "very loud"

Lenny.”

“That’s for sure, Gypsy. We’ll just have to *find* the others. You’ll stick with me through all this?”

She began to sing from the popular musical *Oliver*: “As long as you need me, I won’t betray your trust.” Then she kissed me deep and long.

“A righteous kiss *that* was,” I sighed.

“Honey,” Gypsy sighed, “you oughtta know by now I ain’t got nothin’ *but* righteous kisses. C’mon, let’s put these feelin’s to bed.”

You couldn’t really call it a breakfast table in any ordinary sense of the word, since it was one o’clock before anyone in the little commune stirred. It was a bit of a free-for-all, with everyone scrounging in the big rambling kitchen trying to find something to eat. The night before, everyone had basically passed out from smoking joint after joint of Acapulco gold. Now, as Rita’s coffee began to take effect, the topic of conversation turned to my escapades.

“Hey, man, that was some entertainment you gave us last night. You had us goin’ there for a while,” said Small Sam. Sam weighed in at about 250 pounds and looked like a local redneck cowboy, complete with cowboy boots, short hair, and a Stetson¹. But everyone knew he was the biggest dealer in town, who always managed to have plenty of Mexican-grown grass from across the border, and kept the local cops off his back by supplying them with his own gourmet blend of the finest grass.

“Yeah,” said Will, the drummer, the only one in the group with enough money to make sure our rent was always paid on time. “I know the *grass* wasn’t bad. So, Lenny, you startin’ t’ flip? I knew a head back in California who freaked out after dropping acid

¹**Stetson:** a trademark used for a hat having a high crown and wide brim

every day for a month, and he never came down again. He just lived happily ever after.”

“No, no, I’m not flippin’. It’s just a dream of sorts that keeps coming back to me—but heavier each time. It’s about the end of the world, ya know.”

“Hey, dude, now listen,” Sam said, “they been talkin’ about the end o’ the world since the beginnin’, whenever that was. There *ain’t* no end, it just goes round and round and we keep comin’ back until we learn our lessons and collect enough good karma to break the cycle and die.”

“That’s a lotta bunk if ya ask me,” Will said. “Life is nothin’ but chemical reactions, an’ when we die, the chemicals go into some other form o’ life, a worm or a plant or whatever. The only meaning to life is to try to have a blast while you’re here, an’ bed the largest possible number o’ chicks. Right, Rita?” His present girlfriend of the past two weeks giggled as he pulled her onto his lap.

Roy, the pitiful fifteen-year-old guitarist who’d been taking drugs since he was ten and showed no sign of ever coming down, said, “Hey, man, it’s not like that. I received in a mighty flash how it’s all comin’ down, an’ it’s like, man, it’s just not so simple. Like, for example, how do I know you even exist, like maybe you’re just a movie I’m watchin’ in my head an’ no one really exists but me. Or, wow, ooh, heavy, latest flash coming in even as we speak! Maybe it’s like this, maybe *I’m you* watchin’ a movie of *me* watchin’ a movie about *you*. Heavy! I never saw it like that, man, it came like a flash. So heavy!”

With a far, faraway look on his face, Roy picked up his guitar and played a couple of heady riffs and then was gone again, into the only world where he was understood, his music, where he didn’t have to make sense.

I didn’t really feel any desire to try to explain anything to these guys. My heart sank at the

realization that the search I thought had ended by moving into a commune with like-minded souls was now starting all over again, and no one but Gypsy really understood.

I had tried so many things, and yet nothing seemed to answer the deep yearning in my heart. When my cousin had first offered me drugs, I jumped at the chance. And when I'd first read about the flower children out in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, I just knew that was what I was looking for. But now, only three years later, the very freedom of the movement had become its own limitation. Everyone's dedication to do their own thing and let others do the same had resulted in no common creed, no code of beliefs. Anybody's trip was okay as long as it was his, but it was becoming obvious that we couldn't really change things that way. There had to be some sort of common goals, and we just didn't have them.

Here, Sam *looked* straight and *sounded* like some Eastern guru. Will looked as freaky as could be, but sounded like your dyed-in-the-wool atheist chemistry professor. And, Roy—well, Roy was just eaten up with drugs and no one took him seriously, though everyone liked him. Still, no one had the guts to just tell Roy to quit doing drugs and help him to get off, even though they could all see he was going to end up insane or dead before he was twenty.

I knew drugs weren't doing *me* any good either. I could see that my powers of concentration were waning and my mind and body were being numbed. When I read a book, I couldn't remember from one day to the next what I'd read. Each time I combed the long hair I was so proud of, my heart sank as I pulled large clumps of hair from the comb. It was no secret to me how my health was failing: stained and wobbly teeth, receding gums, lumps on my neck and under my jawbone from swollen glands painful to the touch.

And now these dreams....

My hippie world was crumbling. I'd hung out with these freaks for nearly four years, all the way through college and now ...

I heaved a silent sigh as I grabbed a couple of slices of bread and threw together a quick sandwich, and then walked out the door.

"Hey, man!" Will called after me. "Ya ain't sore, are ya?"

"Nah, I jus' wanna think," I called back as the screen door slammed shut behind me. I could hear some conversation, which I couldn't make out, followed by laughter, and I knew they were laughing at me again.

Besides Gypsy, my closest friend was Don, and right now I missed him a lot and wished he was there. Before moving in with the band for the summer, Gypsy and I had shared a two-bedroom apartment with Don and his girlfriend, Sherry. But he'd had to go back home to Abilene between terms, and I hadn't heard from him all summer long.

Don's father was a preacher, no less. But Don spoke little of church, and it was obviously with much reluctance that he'd had to return home between semesters. Don and I shared the same wavelength, and he would have been able to understand what was going down with me. Well, how could he really when I didn't understand myself? But he would have listened and tried to understand, and he wouldn't have poked holes in my ego like the other guys. They didn't mean it bad, they just were insensitive and basically out for kicks, while Gypsy, Don and I were searching for truth, for freedom, for answers.

Gypsy hadn't come out of our room by the time I left the house. She told me later that she'd searched everywhere for me, but couldn't find me in any of my favorite spots—down by the lake, or in the old, peaceful cemetery behind the house, or at the stream

where we used to love to go skinny-dipping. I just walked and walked and talked to the air until the sun began to set.

The beautiful gloaming of lush North Texas had set in by the time I came home. The grass looked golden, and Gypsy's hair sparkled like jewels as she sat on the porch rail waiting for me. I mustered up a smile as I approached.

"Will scored some orange sunshine¹." Gypsy said. "Everyone's gonna drop tonight. Do ya wanna?"

I thought for a moment and then slowly nodded yes.

"Ya don't have to, ya know."

"Well, are *you* gonna?"

"If *you* do."

"Yeah, yeah, I wanna."

I'd been taking LSD a lot less lately after a few major freak-outs, so Gypsy understood my hesitation and didn't want to push it. She took my hand and led me inside.

"I need to eat something. Got anything?" I asked.

"Some bean stew I saved for ya."

After a bowl of stew we went upstairs. Everyone was way ahead of us. They'd dropped about an hour before, and some were already staring into space blankly, uttering expletives² like, "Wow, that's heavy, man!" "What a rush!"

Will shoved a bowl of orange tablets at us without saying anything, but his pupils the size of saucers

¹**orange sunshine:** Also called orange barrels. A type of LSD, a powerful hallucinogenic drug, which comes in the form of a tiny orange barrel, usually containing other adulterants like speed. An orange barrel could have anywhere from one to eight hits of acid.

²**expletive:** an exclamatory word or phrase which doesn't contribute meaning, but is used to fill up space

told us he was gone. We picked up one each, toasted each other with them, swallowed, and settled back on our favorite spot on the floor.

Tonight seemed to be a Beatles night as we listened to *Sergeant Pepper's* all the way through. *Abbey Road* came on, and the first rushes hit me like ocean waves breaking over my whole body, complete with the sound. The sound was different though, and, listening as the second rush swept over me, I could hear my name distinctly. "Lenny!"

It was the same voice from the dream the night before! I felt the hair on the back of my neck stand up, and I stroked the goose bumps all over my arm. Then things began to move, slowly at first: colors and arrow shapes rising up from the floor between my legs. I was in a swirl of colors, and for the first time in a long time I wasn't afraid while tripping. I'd had some awful trips, where I didn't know who I was and felt like I'd never come down, where everyone was going to bed while I was still peaking. But this time I could feel a warm and loving presence with me.

Now there was the sword again, hovering in the air. As I reached for it, I heard the tanks rumbling behind me. I couldn't reach the sword this time, though. The tank rumbled closer and closer, deafening. Voices called out to me to surrender. I needed the sword, but I was standing between the entrance to two tunnels, and the sword was down the left one. Down the right one was an automatic rifle, a black beret and army jacket like the SDS¹ and Black Panthers² wore.

I had to choose, but I knew there was really no choice. I ran down the left tunnel and grabbed the sword. The sound of the tank began to fade, and as I looked further into the tunnel, I saw a faint light and

¹See endnote 3: Students for a Democratic Society

²See endnote 4: Black Panthers

ran for it. There was another fork in the tunnel, and on one side were lying some very groovy clothes, on the other a shimmering robe of ... of light.

“I want that robe of light!”

I scooped it up and threw it over my body, which I only now noticed was naked. There was an old-fashioned belt on the robe with a scabbard for the sword. *The sword and robe go together! I made the right choice*, I thought.

Against my will and without my permission, I flew further down the tunnel until I came to yet another fork. On the right was a stack of my favorite albums, as well as every conceivable kind of drug, and books by some cool heads like Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, and John Lennon.

I then noticed that on the left, the tunnel opened onto a gorgeous multi-colored sunset over a lake. On a rock by the lake I saw a glowing old-fashioned harp and a gorgeous book with gold-edged pages and a red ribbon marking the page it was opened to. I was drawn by the sunset, but I wasn't sure of the book and the harp, so I made sure I could get back the way I came if I went toward the sunset. I slowly walked to the harp and picked it up. I ran my fingers over the strings, and a tune that seemed to awaken my soul filled the air and echoed over the lake. I could see the notes going out, touching hearts and bringing joy to others.

For the first time in my life, I knew what it was to be really alive, to have the sky and the water shimmer with life and love! Embracing the harp, I looked down at the book and saw just one phrase, leaping out in gorgeous gold-embossed letters like the medieval monks crafted, “Ye have been with Me from the beginning,” and I felt an unfamiliar but welcome sense of belonging. I could hardly wait to tell Gypsy what I'd found, but ... I didn't even know *who* it was I had been with from the beginning.

I looked up questioningly toward the lake and saw two figures in white about five feet away from each other, both looking away and out over the lake, both of them with long flowing robes and flowing hair being whipped by the wind. The one on the left turned, and I somehow knew that it was Him—the last person I had expected to see: *Jesus Christ*, smiling with total love and total forgiveness, inviting me to come.

Now I saw that behind Jesus there was a little white sailboat with oars, fishing tackle and what looked like a basket lunch and an old wineskin. Smiling, I strode down to the boat to get in when the second figure turned. It was Gypsy, smiling at me. She had a boat too, but it was empty, without even oars or sails. She beckoned me to come to her. Then Jesus beckoned. Gypsy beckoned. Jesus beckoned. I sank to my knees in the sand, and my cry echoed round and round the lake, “Nooooo!”

The same voice I had heard last night and earlier tonight said, “He that forsaketh not all that he hath cannot be My disciple.”

“But why? She's so good, she's so much better than me. Why?” I gazed imploringly into Jesus' face, Who looked back at me with the utmost patience and understanding. Then the music from the hi-fi broke through:

“Once was a way to get back homeward,
Once was a way to get back homeward....”

Somehow I understood completely the message for me: *The past is gone. No turning back. I will never be the same again.* Then the music again:

“Soon we'll be away from here.
Step on the gas and wipe that tear away...”

I've got to leave here. Is the tear because Gypsy won't go with me? Again:

“...Boy, you're gonna carry that weight,
Carry that weight a long time...”

The sword is my weight, my cross. It's my destiny. I'm called for something, something big. And anything that's worth something costs something, some sacrifice.
The strains of the music concluded with:

“...And in the end, the love you take
Is equal to the love you make...”

I'm called to go and love others and forget myself, and I'll find happiness in the end. But, oh, the pain, the pain it begins with. Jesus' face smiled so tenderly on me as I gazed into His eyes, that I knew everything would work out somehow.

“It's Jesus! It's Jesus!” I shouted as I stood in the middle of the darkened room. “I *saw* Him. He was standing there and calling me to follow Him, because it's the Last Days and there isn't much time.”

Voices from the darkness said, “Hey, quiet, Lenny!” “That's *your* trip. Keep it to yourself.” “Don't bring everybody else down.” “Lay off, man! Religion's a bummer.”

“You don't understand! It's not like that. *This* is what we've been *looking* for. This is the *real* trip, the *ultimate* high. Don't you see? This is real. This world hasn't got long. We've got to prepare and tell others.”

“Somebody turn up the hi-fi!”

“If you've already crashed, leave us who are still flyin' alone. Go to bed!”

Realizing I was alone and no one wanted to hear, I went out of the room and downstairs. I was halfway down the stairs when I heard Gypsy come out of the room. My eyes never left hers as she came down toward me. There was a new look on her face that hadn't been there earlier. She was ashamed of and embarrassed for me. I could tell as I studied her eyes.

It was very strange. I was completely down from the effect of the acid, but the Presence that had been with me from the beginning was still guiding me. Now

I knew Jesus was taking my life and turning it around the way He knew it should go, while at the same time, with the greatest of tenderness, showing me why I had to choose between Him and Gypsy.

As she came to me and touched my arm, I said, “You're ashamed of me, aren't you?” and stepped into the fresh air of the front porch.

She followed, saying, “No, no, not really. I ... I ... just never thought it would be ... you know...”

“Jesus?”

“Yeah, I can't quite handle that. All these churches, they're the enemy, they're the Establishment, they're the stronghold of American conservatism. It seems like desertion to go over to Jesus.”

“I know, I know. But can't you see? I can't deny what I've seen and experienced and felt.”

“Lenny, you understand, don't you? *I* haven't seen what you've seen. It's just a little too much for me.”

“He told me.”

“Who told you?”

“Jesus. When I saw Him, He told me without saying a word that I'd have to choose, and ...” I didn't want to say it.

“And what?”

“It didn't seem like you would follow.”

“Follow? Follow where?”

“I don't know, but I know I have to leave here ... tomorrow. I have to find what I'm supposed to do for Him, and I know that ... I know everything will work out in the end. Gypsy, will you come?”

“I ... I ... Oh, Lenny, I can't. Not without any idea of where we're going or what we're doing.” She turned her back and looked down and away in a long silence. “I ... I think I'll just go back to Louisiana for a while. See my folks and think things over ... or something.” Then she turned and looked into my eyes with tears streaming down her face. “Lenny, please say you understand.”

“Gypsy,” I assured her, “I understand. A few months ago I would have said the same. I’ll always love you, Gypsy.”

“You never said that before. You never told me that you loved me. Only, ‘me too.’ You really *have* changed. Lenny, if ... if you learn to pray, will you pray for me?”

“I will. I will, and I’ll never give up hoping.”

She pressed her warm body close to mine and, like a frightened child, clung to me as tightly as she could. I stroked her soft hair as I gazed up into the deep blue, starry night sky. I had said yes to Jesus, and now a new power had taken control and was guiding me as I entered the perilous night of the Last Days.

It was the beginning of a new life, and I was feeling so many different things at once. In one way I felt like I was dying. Yet in another, I felt like I’d just been reborn. I felt lost and found at the same time, sad and yet incredibly happy. My spirit swelled with a strength I’d never known before, and my prayers and thoughts flew on eagle’s wings beyond the stars to a kind, understanding listening ear:

Jesus, I’ve finally found You, and I want nothing more than to follow You. It hurts so much to leave Gypsy behind; she’s the dearest one on Earth to me. But I’m going to do whatever You ask me to do, and go wherever You tell me to go. These are the Last Days and there’s nothing else to live for. Everything I’ve tried until now has only made my life miserable. I’m Yours from this moment on.

That’s how it all started, at least for me. The wheels of God’s story, history, turn on tiny cogs and tiny moments. Little did I know the magnitude of the decision I was making that day. And little did I know that at that very moment, all across the country, God’s Spirit of love was working in the hearts of countless

others just like me, answering their desperate prayers and helping them to find the same miraculous answers that I had found. And just like me, they too were having to make similar decisions, decisions that would affect the rest of their lives and the lives of their loved ones, decisions that would change the world and the course of history forever.

- 2 -
THE SEARCH

By Gypsy

I don't know how long we stood there, or how long Lenny held me in his arms, but I knew he had never loved me as much as he did at that moment. It was like he'd somehow been liberated to love fully. I could feel that he now loved me completely, but that a greater, undeniable love was also calling him away from me. I loved Lenny more than I'd ever loved anyone, and I felt as if my heart was crushing inside me. Yet, as we stood there on the porch that last night together, the horrible, frightening emptiness that had first struck me when I thought about being alone again after a year of joy and fun and heart-to-heart communication, faded away. It was washed like a film of dirt down the drain in a shower as we were bathed in some power I'd never known before. I wondered what on earth could be happening, and then I realized that Lenny must have been praying for me.

Finally he pulled back a little without letting go, looked into my eyes, and took my face in his hands and kissed me with one long kiss. I felt the wet of a tear on his cheek next to mine, and then he was gone into the house, into our room. I didn't know how to pray or who to, or I would have. I sat on the porch

railing and stared off and up into the starry night until the acid wore off and I could sleep a little.

“Lenny, where *are* you headed?” I asked him as we lay silently in bed the next morning, as the birds began to chirp cheerfully outside our window.

“I’ve been thinking about it, and I think I’ll head for Austin.”

“Why Austin? You’re just going from one freak town to another. Aren’t you looking for Christians?”

“What I’ve found doesn’t have anything to do with those stuffed-shirt church Christians. I’ve got to find ... I don’t know, something else. And I feel like, try Austin. I don’t know why.”

“Lenny, I thought I’d leave at the same time as you. That way you don’t have to tell anyone I won’t be going with you. I don’t want them to give you a harder time than necessary. Is that okay?”

“Sure, Gypsy. That’s very, very groovy of you. You’re such a first-class chick.”

After some kisses, cuddles, fondles and caresses that tend to lead to other things had led to other things and the other things were done, we rose, showered and prepared for our separate searches, camouflaged as a single journey. It took just over an hour to gather everything and stuff our backpacks with what we were taking. Finally we were done.

“Okay,” I said, “what do you want now, KP or janitorial duty on the room?”

“Janitorial?” Lenny exclaimed. “This room was a wreck when we moved in.”

“But it’s not going to be as we evacuate. Don’t give them anything to complain about.”

“You’re right as usual,” Lenny conceded, then turned quickly away. “What am I gonna do without you?”

“That’s a good question. I don’t know, my love,” and in my heart I added, *Nor what I will do without*

you.

Then aloud, “I’ll go make some breakfast and you clean the room, okay?”

I saw the back of his head nod. As I walked past him toward the kitchen I stroked his back one last time.

By the time I was finished making the muesli and squeezing the orange juice, Small Sam, wearing only boxer shorts, ghosted into the kitchen, with huge dark bags under his eyes, his short hair amazingly unkempt. He didn’t talk, just stared into space. I put a cup of coffee in front of him. He grunted and began to drink, still staring. Then Roy staggered in. Same state, same coffee. Will and the bass player, Collin, were not far behind. Same state, same coffee. Lenny and I were able to eat the first half of the meal in silence before vital signs began to be evident among the kitchen clientele.

With a mouth that sounded as thick as cotton Sam asked, “Why’re you two up so early an’ so wide awake?”

Lenny and I looked at each other, then he took the plunge. “We’re leaving.”

“Huh?!” All eyes turned on us at once.

I said, “Yeah, yeah, that’s right. Lenny has some things to find out and answers to search for, so we’re leavin’.”

Will said with a superior sneer, “Gotta follow *Jee-sus*, right, Lenny?”

Sam chimed in, “Gotta find y’r true *church* fam’ly?”

Roy said, still staring into space, “What’s wrong with *us*, The Neo-Cosmic Universal Underground American Brotherhood Church? We all believe in the great Oneness and Cosmic I Am of Universal Consciousness, don’t we? We can be your family.”

Collin stood up and said, “Listen, dudes, enough! I can dig the tracks Lenny’s layin’ down, ’cause ...

well, I believe in Jesus too. I'm even born again. I pray every night.... Well, unless I'm too stoned and pass out."

Lenny looked incredulously at Collin, his mouth hanging open. "Collin, how long have we known each other?"

"I don't know, it's all a little blurred. Three lifetimes?"

"Over three years. When's your birthday?"

"April 10th."

"Same as mine. Remember the draft lottery night and how we smoked five joints to our health since we weren't going to Vietnam?"

"How could I ever forget a thing like that?... Uuh ... when *was* that?"

"November, '69."

"Oh, yeah, yeah, right, I remember, I remember. Hey, congratulations on escapin' the draft an' the bad guys."

"And in all that time you never once told me you believed in Jesus. I never saw you pray. Nothing."

"I'm not that kind of showy Christian. I like to keep my religion to myself and let others do the same."

"Don't you know we're living in the Last Days and we need to warn the world?"

"Yeah, I read somethin' 'bout that once upon a time...."

It was Will's turn to stand up. "Enough of this about the Last Days and the Endtime!" There was a frightened edge on his voice. "There was *no* beginning and there will *be* no end. There *is* no God. There is *no* Devil. We are *not* living in the Last Days."

"Hear! Hear!" Sam agreed, as he tapped the table with his coffee mug and spilled the brew on the checkered cloth.

"Guys," Lenny answered, "I love you guys, but you got your heads in the sand. Look around. Even listen to the music. They're singing about it: 'The Eve of

Destruction,' 'Pride of Man.' This is the End, can't you see? When the police of our own country are killing us on campuses, beating us in the streets, hardhats are attacking us in New York, our parents are ashamed of us for not wanting to fight and kill our fellow man, you say it's not the End? Look at the faces of the president, Tricky Dicky¹, and his veep², Agony³, and tell *me* there's nothin' wrong.

"When a lady gets mugged and stabbed multiple times in broad daylight, screaming for help and people just pass her by and step over her as she dies, you tell me it's not the End? When we're fighting a war that we never declared, in a country most of us never heard of before, and it costs 50,000 American lives so far and how many of theirs, and for what, nothing!—you tell me it's not the End? When our soldiers in that war, guys next door just like you and me, wipe out a whole village of civilians, women and children, in cold blood, don't tell me it's not the End.

"When in the course of the last seven years we see Jack and Bobby Kennedy gunned down, and then Martin Luther King, and the government covers it up and says every time it was one man acting alone, when your government's lying to you about big things like that, don't tell me we're not close. When a madman like Manson and his followers murder people just for fun, and then say the Beatles told 'em to do it, now, tell me it's not the End. But then you wonder, when the Rolling Stones hire the Hell's Angels to be security for their concert and they kill a guy during 'Sympathy for the Devil' of all songs, you wonder, what *is* the

¹**Tricky Dicky:** referring to Richard Nixon, president of the United States from 1969-1974, and the only US president to resign from office

²**veep:** slang for vice president

³**Agony:** referring to Spiro Agnew, Nixon's vice president from 1969-1973

music telling us to do? And when the message of the music begins to change from peace and love to hate and war and the Devil, don't you wonder if it just *might* be the End?

"When the world has enough nuclear weapons to kill every one of us seven times, don't tell me they're not gonna do it, that they will exercise restraint. When the Middle East is a powder keg that could ignite into the Third World War over Israel or oil at any time, don't tell me it's not the End. Now I don't know much about Jesus. I can't even tell you how to find Him, how to get what Collin here called born again. I don't even know if I am—maybe Collin can explain it after I'm gone—but I reckon to find out. And if I do, I'll be back one more time to tell ya about it. I know you think I'm crazy, but I'm your friend. I love you guys."

No one said a word. Lenny stood up, and he seemed to stand about two feet taller than when he'd first sat down. This was *not* the same Lenny I'd been living with, and I didn't know what to think. He'd changed so much, almost from one day to the next, I hardly felt I knew him anymore. He seemed to have found everything he'd been looking for, and for the first time since I'd known him, he looked truly happy. I realized that he now had something I didn't have. He was no longer searching. My baby had grown and flown.

Lenny walked out of the room, followed by Roy with a frightened look on his face. I joined them in the next room. Lenny had his arm around little Roy and Roy was saying, "Promise?" like a tiny child afraid of the dark whose mother has just told him she would be there.

"I promise," answered Lenny.

"That scared me spitless, Lenny. It scares me when people talk like that. You come back when you find out, like you said you would."

"I will, Roy, and, hey kid, take care!"

Roy grinned that big beautiful grin of his that made

everyone love him and want to mother him, and he leaned his head on Lenny's shoulder.

We went out to the highway together. It was a pretty common sight in those days, hippies in jeans, hitching with big backpacks on their backs. Lenny positioned himself on Interstate 35W, headed for Austin, and I on 35E, toward Dallas. I could just barely make him out across the highway and down at the feeder road. A rattletrap Ford Econovan, driven by a freak couple who were headed for Dallas, picked me up. As I climbed in, I took one last look in Lenny's direction, and he was looking at me. We waved slowly to each other until I managed to pull myself away and climb in. I sat on the carpeted floor of the van and the tears began to flow.

The girl in the rider's seat with wild frizzy red hair was smoking a joint and staring sympathetically at me. "Baby, what's wrong?"

"That's my man over there. We're separating."

"Oh, baby, that's sad! That's a heartbreak! That's a bummer. Here, honey. Take a big toke on this." And she handed me her fat joint.

I held it between my thumb and first two fingers and stared at it.

"Go on," 'Frizzy' said, "take your medicine like a good girl."

"No ... no, thank you. I think I'll stay straight."

She looked at me quizzically and said, "Okay. I just wanted to help."

"I know you did. You're very kind."

"What's that good-for-nothin' guy leaving a sweet thing like you for anyway?"

I braced myself and said, "He's following Jesus."

The driver and Frizzy both turned their heads and said, "Jesus?!"

"Uh, yeah ... uh, don't you think you should watch the road?"

“Oh, yeah, yeah, right, thanks.” He turned around and said, “That is so cool! That is so right on! Like settin’ out knowing not whither kind of stuff? Is that it?”

“Yeah, I guess you could call it that.”

Frizzy spoke up again, “You see, honey, Jesus was the original hippie, wandering around without any certain dwelling place, living off the hospitality of the other freaks He met along the way. He’s ... He’s our hero. We think of Him as our guru, not this Breck-shampooed¹, lily-white Jesus of the churches, but a real radical revolutionary of the spirit. That’s the coolest thing anybody can do, the hippest and bravest thing anybody can do. Oh wow, I blasphemed calling your dude a good-for-nothing. He’s okay, I think.”

“He’s more than okay. He’s wonderful.” I agreed sadly.

“And you’re splittin’ over this Jesus trip he’s on?”

“Yeah, that’s about right. No, that’s exactly right.”

“You just couldn’t handle it?”

“No, I just always thought of Jesus and the church together and I knew the church was the enemy, so it looked like a copout. I know something real and deep and beautiful happened to my man, but I just couldn’t follow him, ’cause it ... well, it didn’t happen to me.”

“Well, Honey, we knew some cool Jesus heads back in Huntington Beach, California, and they taught us a lot, and they were anything but churchy. There was one we called Space. He was so funny, played his guitar left-handed and upside-down. He’d never touched a drug in his life, but you just knew he was high on something a lot heavier than any of us had ever had. Boy, if you got him talking Bible he could spout it off by the hour even without the Book in his hand—word for word. It was awesome!

“The rest were hippies, ex-SDSers, ex-Marines,

heavy dudes and all. They lived together, dropped out of the System and spent all their time telling people about Jesus and demonstrating and singing. They had some pretty groovy songs. They were so real and so full of what they believed in, that, well, even though Gray and I didn’t stay with ’em, we’ve never been the same again since then. Oh, some of our friends laugh at us, but we don’t care, we’ve never been so happy. I’m ashamed we’re still using the props like drugs and everything, after all the beautiful things they taught us, but ... I think He still loves us.”

“Wow! I never heard of anything like that. Jesus outside the churches? For real?”

“For sure, sweetheart. Right, Gray?”

“Oh, they were real all right. They fed us and taught us and were real friends, Christians who didn’t pull their skirts away when we walked by.”

“Did you ever have ’em do that?” ‘Frizzy’ asked. “It’s one bright Sunday morning an’ you’re groovin’ on the sunshine and happen to walk by a church letting out or just starting and, dressed casual and hip, you walk down the sidewalk where all the churchies are gathered, hanging out with their bright, shiny Bibles under their arms which they probably never even look at. Did you ever have one of those bouffant belles pull her crispy-clean skirt back to make sure that you, a degenerate hippie, didn’t soil it?”

“Yeah, yeah! Oh God, how many times?” I laughed. “Actually, though, I love to freak ’em out.”

“Ha! Me too, honey. But that’s the church people, that’s not Jesus. He loved the whores, and if He were here today, He’d probably be hanging out with the freaks, ’cause *we* can understand Him. They’d be the first to crucify Him if He came again. Jesus would be traveling the dusty roads and looking for a place to stay at night, and who do you think would take Him in? The church people in their fancy, squeaky-clean

¹Breck: a brand of shampoo in the US

houses? Not on your life. What, let Him soil the newly washed carpets, eat their hard-earned food? No! But *we* would. We'd give Him floor space to crash and share whatever food we have with Him, 'cause we're His kind of people."

"Wow, I think I just got an education."

"Oh, wow. I never introduced myself. I'm Elaine Simon, Jewish and proud of it, just like Jesus! This is Gray Goldstein. Even if we wanted to, neither of us can go back to our homes anymore. Our parents threw us out. They told us that as far as they're concerned, we're dead—because we believe in Jesus, you know. So now we're like Abraham—just wandering around."

"Hi, Elaine, but I already named you 'Frizzy'."

"Then Frizzy it is. I got so many names, one more can't hurt."

"Just call me Gypsy."

"Gypsy, God bless you! If I were you, I'd hang on to that man of yours. If he loves Jesus enough to leave everything and follow Him, there must be something very special about him. Mark my words." Frizzy took a big hit on her joint.

I lay back on the carpet and thought about everything they had said. It all sounded like so strange, but it felt so true. Mulling it over, I fell asleep for the rest of the trip to Dallas.

"Gypsy! Gypsy, wake up. This is Interstate 20 headed for Shreveport. Gypsy!" Frizzy gently shook my shoulder. "You should be able to get a good ride here and be home before sundown."

"Oh ... oh, thanks, Frizzy, Gray. Gee, I feel bad to leave you. What you told me has really had an effect on me."

It was Gray's turn to talk now that he wasn't driving. He turned full around. "Yeah, this wasn't an accident. You know, there's a place in the Bible that says in the Last Days, God is going to pour out His

Spirit on all people, and that there will be a great gathering of His true children. We've traveled this country from end to end, and, Gypsy, there's a whole generation of young people feeling that pull of the Spirit. We're happy that maybe we had a part in helping you feel the tug of His Spirit. Do you have a Bible?"

"No, no, never read a word of it."

"Not even at home?"

"My parents? Are you kidding? They've never been near a church in their lives."

"Here, I want you to have this little New Testament. Read it, and I think you'll find some groovy answers."

"Really? Gee, thanks."

Gray handed me the Bible, then took my chin in his hand, looked with love in my eyes and gave me a kiss on the lips. I looked real quick to see how Frizzy took that, and she kissed me on the lips too! I could only sit speechless, staring at these two unique people.

They gently broke the silence, saying, "We love you, Gypsy. God bless you."

I tore a page from the little pad I had in my bag and scribbled my address. "Write me sometime, will you?"

"Yeah, yeah, sure, we will," Frizzy said. I climbed out and waved as they drove away until their van disappeared over the hill ahead.

Frizzy and Gray were two angels whom God had sent at just the right time. In those few tender moments, they had touched my life and turned it gently around, and then they were gone.

Two months later, I got a letter from Frizzy. She wrote: "That day, as we drove away, leaving you there by the side of the road, I rolled a joint and lit it up. I sat there staring at it, just the same way *you* had done earlier. Without taking a toke, I passed it to Gray,

who also held it in his hand for several minutes. He even put it to his lips once or twice without dragging on it, and then finally just tossed it out the window. We looked at each other, knowing exactly what the other one was thinking. And then, without saying a word, Gray pulled over at the next litter barrel on the highway. Making sure no one was watching, we dumped our entire stash—grass, acid, our water pipe, Zigzag papers—everything! We kissed and hugged each other for a long time, and then we both lifted our hands and praised God, right there by the side of the road for a few minutes. Then we headed west, back to California, and back to those Christians we told you about. We’ve been looking for them everywhere, but haven’t found them yet. But we’re not going to give up. We know we’ll find them sooner or later, and we’re going to keep looking until we do.”

I never heard from them again, until years later, when once again, our paths crossed in the most incredible way.

It was around dinnertime when I rolled into the conservative township of Shreveport. My ride dropped me on the edge of my part of town, the wrong side of the tracks, where all the poor little white frame houses looked the same because they had been built by German prisoners of war in the '40s. I saw mine from way down the road because of the unmowed lawn, and I knew Dad hadn’t changed. As I came closer and noticed the screen door hanging on one hinge, and the torn screens of two of the front windows, I wondered why I had come home.

The Guthrie boys, two doors from my house, were on their porch. “Well, well, well, now if it ain’t Shreveport’s resident hippie and scholarship college girl all rolled into one come home,” one of them called out. “Are you gonna organize some protests against the war here? Or just sell LSD to all the little kids?”

I ignored them and walked on, my heart heavier by the second as I approached the house I had lived in and loathed since my childhood. Why had I come back? Why hadn’t I stayed with Lenny? Why had I traded Lenny for this? I knew why. I felt guilty, and once or twice a year I had to try to form a relationship with my parents.

Poor, sad Mom just slaved away and kowtowed to Dad, obeying but hardly ever smiling, never laughing, while Dad wasted what little money they had on beer and hard liquor (and who knows what else he did when he was out all night, and sometimes for several, without coming home). But they were Mom and Dad and all I had. I had to try—even if just this one last time.

I hesitated on the bottom step before ascending the porch and being hit with the stench of tobacco mixed with beer and strong liquor. Dad was home. I held the screen door with both hands to keep it from falling off, and it still protested with great metallic groans. Dad, lying on the couch in front of the television, grunted and moved but didn’t wake up. Sunday afternoon. Bad time to come home. Dad had been drinking all day, no doubt.

From the kitchen I heard Mom’s voice calling out, “Who’s there?” She rounded the corner from the kitchen with a slightly fearful look on her face. When she saw me, a faint flicker of a smile flitted across her face and then she collected herself. She walked over and gave me a quick peck on the cheek. “I didn’t expect to see you already in July.”

“I just wanted to come home and see you, Mom.”

“Well, come on in to the kitchen. I got a stew on the stove, you can eat an’ tell me all about it. Let your daddy sleep. He’s had a hard week.”

“Yeah, I bet,” I said, looking at his huge, pitiful figure sprawled on the couch unconscious in front of the TV, as the Houston Astros were losing yet another

ballgame.

I didn't tell Mom much—never had before, and I wasn't about to now. She bit her lip a couple of times while telling me that things were going all right and were about the same here at home (a complete contradiction). She put a bowl of stew, with a couple of fatty pieces of beef floating in it, in front of me. As usual, she herself didn't eat, but sat her skinny little frame down at the kitchen table facing me and smoked one cigarette after another while we talked and said nothing to each other. Then she said, "My goodness, I'd best go make up your room so you'll have some where to sleep tonight."

I grabbed her forearm as she stood to go. "Mom, I can make up my room. I didn't give you any warning. Don't go to any trouble for me. I don't deserve it."

"Nonsense. It won't take me a minute."

Poor, sad, sweet Mom. She really needed some help. I wondered if Lenny's God could love her or if He had given up on the older generation. And my dad? I was pretty sure God had given up on the likes of him. Sitting there musing, I heard Dad belch, then begin to move around. I heard his feet shuffling toward the kitchen and turned around to face him with the best smile I could put on my face.

"Hi, Dad," I said, and rose to kiss him. He never would let me, and this time he didn't either, just held me at arm's length, and looked me over as if he was waking from a dream.

"What're you back for?"

"I just wanted to see you and Mom."

"Out 'a money?"

"Dad, no. I got my own money." Even though for three years I had been on a scholarship and had my own money and didn't cost them a thing, my dad still feared that one day I might become a liability.

"Broke up with your boyfriend?" he asked as he plopped into one of the kitchen chairs.

"Lenny's ... fine, Dad."

"Didn't bring any of them drugs or weird ideas here, did ya? 'Cause I tell you, I won't have 'em in my house."

Before I could answer, he burst into a major hacking spell, long and loud enough that Mom came running from my bedroom to bang on his back and massage his neck and shoulders. As he collected himself, he just growled, "I'm hungry," and Mom hurried to get a bowl of stew in front of him before he lost what little patience he had.

Such was my welcome home. Thankfully, they both went to work every day and the house was quiet so I could ponder what to do, where to go. I couldn't bring myself to read Frizzy and Gray's Bible yet, but I thought a lot and tried to pray.

Every day I would walk out to the woods where the tree limbs laden with Spanish moss, making a dome overhead, formed a temple, hushed and holy. In great reverence I'd walk and talk to Whoever there was that listened. Then other times, I'd just keep silent and let my heart fly away into the sky like the birds, with all its confusion and questions and doubts and fears, hoping it would somehow come home fixed. When I'd let my heart go, I'd lie on my back on the soft forest floor and wait for it to return.

Slowly, after many days of this ritual, I began to feel that there was a healing process going on. I still couldn't bring myself to pray to Jesus, but I talked to the God Unknown in that most ancient sort of temples, the shade of the majestic woods, and He began to answer.

One day as I lay there on the forest floor gazing up through the intricate crochet of brown limbs and green leaves against the blue sky, something clicked.

This tree ... this natural tree ... this tree untouched in its creation by human hands, *had* to have had a Creator. Nothing so beautiful and so useful could have

just happened without a planner and a maker. Its roots held the soil. Its branches produced leaves and fruit, the delicious pecan. Its boughs afforded homes for the birds, either momentary perches or shelter for their nests. Its leafy dome sheltered me and gave me shade, comfort—and, yes, love. This tree loved me because the One Who made this tree loved me.

I looked at the world of nature I visited daily, where nothing was vile, where everything could have been exactly the same a thousand years ago, and I knew there was indeed a God and that He was indeed love. It couldn't be an accident; it couldn't have been by natural selection.

I knew art and literature well enough to know that noble, loving souls produce noble, loving works, and I knew that above us all there was a noble, loving God and Creator. A broad grin spread across my face and perfect peace enveloped me. But it was not only peace. A thrill, a charge, a passion was gripping me and I couldn't sit still.

I leapt to my feet and began to dance and shout in my secluded temple. I laughed at the overpowering sense of freedom that overwhelmed me. I longed for greater freedom, for greater intimacy with this Spirit of love, and, without thinking, I stripped down to my panties and danced and laughed and played through the woods. I was in love, but with whom? I had been smitten, but how?

I came across a stream and lay in the flow of it, letting the cool waters caress my almost naked body. God was good. God was love. God, I knew, looked down on me with smiling face. I chuckled to think if some church biddy had come along and seen me lying naked in the stream, she would have for sure thought the Devil had possessed me.

No, this God of love just could *not* be Jesus. It had to be someone freer, because this freedom felt so right. Every Christian I'd ever seen would have told me it

was wrong, that I should be ashamed to expose my body and dance through the woods like some kind of wild Indian, savage, or pagan. But I knew it was *not* wrong, that God was the One Who gave me my body, and I no more needed to be ashamed of the beauty of my nakedness than the pecan tree needed to apologize for standing there unclothed. I knew God was teaching me truth here in the woods and I longed to know Him, to know His name.

I sat up in the stream and crossed my legs full lotus and began to chant a mantra that a freak in a Hindu-ashram-type commune had taught me once. After a few minutes I began to feel lightheaded, as if I was floating. Continuing to chant, I watched the brilliant colors and graceful forms I was seeing begin to fade—the water, the rocks, the trees, the sky—first the sight, then the sound, until I was in darkness and silence. I knew my eyes were still open, but I could see nothing. A tiny anxiety grew to a small fear as I felt myself slipping away from this world. It was a relief when far, far away there appeared a tiny pinpoint of light, that grew bigger and bigger.

It was odd, though—an odd green—and it was approaching slowly. A voice in my heart urged me to yield to the light, that the fear I was feeling while looking at the light was only ignorance of the unknown, and that once I had yielded it would become normal and usual.

My heart pounded faster and faster and the voice became more urgent, more demanding—I must yield! This ... this light was enlightenment; it was what I was searching for! My search was about to end in this temple!

But ... no ... no, this was not the freedom I had felt in the woods. This was not the same voice that had taught me to love and worship the Creator, that He was love! No! This was wrong! This was ... this was, yes, evil!

The green light continued to grow. There was a human form in the light, but I couldn't make it out. I wanted to escape. I wanted to run away, but I was held captive by him at his will—whatever this form was.

Oh, God, I thought, how do I get back to You? I'm sorry. Somehow I wandered away. The mantra is evil. I know that now. Release me! Free me! Help me! Save me!

The light still grew, even though a measure of peace returned to my heart. Then a soft, reassuring voice said one word, one word only, one word but more than enough, one word that freed me forever: "Jesus."

I clutched that one word to my breast. I held that loving word in my hands. I clung to that dear name with all my might and began to repeat softly, "Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus."

The green light shriveled like a TV set being turned off. The beautiful peace that I had just recently found flooded back into my soul many-fold.

"Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus." I couldn't say it enough. My Love was Jesus. My heart belonged to Jesus. My Creator was Jesus. My vision returned and I was calmly sitting in the bracing flow of the stream once more.

If I had thought the world was beautiful and full of love and truth and freedom before, it seemed like that one word, *Jesus*, had transformed it into an incredible wonderland in the space of a few short minutes—or seconds, I couldn't tell.

The light of the sun that played on the water was alive, like playful fairies dancing over the brook's tiny waves. The rocks on the streambed were magnified and clear as crystal beneath the flow, and of every color I could conceive of. Before, they had seemed to be a pleasant green or brown, but now I saw blues and pinks, a touch of purple here, yellow merging into bright green there. As I ran my hand over them,

there was a beautiful, sensuous feel about these newfound precious jewels.

The sound of the breeze rustling the leaves high overhead was a beautiful symphony, with the harmonies of great, wide leaves blending with evergreen needles and tiny leaves that danced wildly in the breeze like whirling dervishes. And the birds! The birds added the melody to my forest symphony. I felt myself being moved, excited—even stimulated sexually. Yes, because I knew no other feeling to compare this with. But I knew now there was a link, ever so close, between the sexual and the spiritual.

My heart nearly burst with joy, and I began to cry out, "I love You, Jesus! I'm in love with You!"

Then quietly I whispered in prayer to the One Who had won my heart that day and holds it now:

"Jesus, I'm so sorry I never knew You were the God of the wind and the woods that I have always adored. I never knew the wood nymphs and fairies of the forest obey Your bidding and move according to Your will. I never knew You weren't bound in those stuffy buildings with those stuffy people.

"I now know the church people have it wrong and have bound themselves with traditions and rules and missed Your marvelous, rapturous Spirit. I embrace the wild freedom of Your Spirit, and now that I know that the one that has been my Unknown God for years is *You*. I give my all to You to use as You want. You were my Love when I didn't even know it. Thank You, Jesus, for how much You love me and all the trouble You went to, to reach me, through Lenny, through Frizzy and Gray, and finally through Your creation that I love."

As I paused, I felt in my heart what I had to do next. "Yes, Jesus, I will read the Bible tonight, today, now. And if what You have shown me is any indication of what I will find there, I know I will love it with all my heart."

That night I didn't sleep. The Gospel of Matthew gripped me with an excitement I had never known. The parables awed me—so simple, yet profound on so many levels. As I tried to fathom the depths of the wonderful Words of Jesus, I found myself swimming in rich streams of wisdom and spiritual truth that no acid trip or psychedelic music could ever hope to attain.

I must have read the 13th chapter of Matthew ten times. I was like a child reveling in storyland, marveling at the love and wisdom of this wonderful Man Who was now my intimate Friend.

When I reached Matthew 24 and the predictions of the End, the signs to look for, I knew—as Lenny had before me—that we were living in the Time of the End, the Last Days. What was it that Frizzy and Gray had said about His Spirit being poured out in the Last Days? Where was it? I read and thumbed and sought to no avail until I fell asleep, Bible in hand, as the sun began to rise.

I awoke an hour or two later. The breeze must have blown the pages of the book, or the very hand of God had turned the page, but there, staring me right in the face was the Book of Acts, chapter 2, and my eyes instantly fell on the words: “It shall come to pass in the Last Days, saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams.”

Fear fell over me like a blanket, but it wasn't the mantra-induced fear. It was shock at the awesome realization that there is a great and mighty God Who created all things, Who listens to all our cries, small and great, and Who is able to reach down and turn a page or change a life or perform a miracle for the greatest to the least significant of His children. His presence in that room was electric, fearsome and thrilling at the same time.

I knew after the events of the last day and night that drugs were a thing of the past for me; nothing could match the thrill of union with God. The drug experiences had been like children's nursery rhymes, mere entertainment. But now I had stumbled onto the source of truth and the power of the universe. Nothing else could ever satisfy.

It was eight o'clock when I burst into the kitchen as Mom was tidying up before going to her job as an orderly at the hospital down the street. She stumbled back as she saw me. “What happened to you?”

I only then realized I was grinning ear to ear, and that my heart was overflowing with love for this poor, dear woman who needed love so badly. “I'm happy, Mom! I'm really, really happy!”

She looked at me with great concern as she dried her hands on the dishtowel. “And what, may I ask, has made you so happy?”

“You're not gonna believe it. In fact, Mom, I think it would be wise that you sit down before I tell you.”

“Jennifer!” (Sorry, I never told you my real name.) “I don't know what's got into you, but I gotta get to work.”

“Just sit down, Mom.”

She obeyed. She'd had a lot of practice at that, dear creature. “I am happy because I found the truth, and it's, I mean, He's *Jesus*.”

“Oh, my goodness! If it weren't bad enough you were smokin' LSD and takin' all kinds o' drugs, now you've gone an' become a religious fanatic! What church you been goin' to?”

“No church, Mom. Mom, I love you. Do you understand? I really, really love you.” I fell at her feet and threw my arms around her in an impassioned embrace. She held stiff and still for a couple of seconds, then struggled to free herself.

“I ... I ... gotta go. Oh, goodness, look at the clock,

I'm late already. I have to work twice as hard, 'cause there's all these young orderlies tryin' to take my place. You know that. I can't get away with comin' in late. Maybe we can talk about this some other time." And she rushed out the door, probably more to get away from me than to get to work on time.

I must have sat there on the kitchen floor for an hour, trying to sort out why she was so scared of me, of Jesus, of what I had experienced. Finally the light dawned, and I realized that the main reason I had come here in the first place was because I had been scared by *Lenny's* experience and change, and my mother was miles more set in her ways than I was.

Poor thing! She must think I've gone crazy! So what to do now?

Love her, came the answer. Simply love her, and show her day after day that you've changed, that you have peace, that you have found something beautiful and true that is no threat to her but can be a benefit. This didn't really come in words, just a realization that this was the right thing to do.

That evening as I came to the kitchen to pour myself a glass of milk, I saw Mom and Dad engaged in intense conversation on the living room couch. She was talking in a hushed tone with great emphasis and gesticulation. He punctuated her speech with disapproving grunts every few seconds. I couldn't make out the words, but I'd never seen my parents in real unity about anything before, or having anything more than the most superficial kind of conversation. I knew that they must have been talking about me and my outburst that morning.

I remember when they'd first realized I was smoking marijuana. My dad was already working on his second six-pack of beer of the evening and had only managed a few comments about how drugs weren't good for me. He then insisted that if I was

going to use drugs anyway, at least I shouldn't bring them home. Now, I could see Dad hadn't even drunk a beer tonight, and was stone-cold sober.

As I stood there in the kitchen doorway, milk carton in one hand and glass in the other, they both looked up. They straightened themselves up and asked me to come in for a few minutes.

I sat down in the overstuffed armchair across the coffee table from the couch and waited for them to talk. They looked at each other and whispered a few words about who should do the talking, and then my father started in on me.

"What's this nonsense I hear 'bout religion an' carryin' on somethin' terrible with your mama right in the kitchen where our neighbors could look right in an' see it?"

Before I could retaliate in our usual confrontational, argumentative way, that feeling came again. *Love them.* So I said, "Dad, can you please explain what you mean?"

"I mean shoutin' 'bout Jesus like one o' them Holy Rollers¹ an' fallin' on the floor, flingin' your arms round your mama so ya scared her half to death, that's what I mean. Did ya or did ya not do the things I just said?"

"Well, you could look at it that way if you had a mind to."

"Well," Mom said, "that's how I saw it and I wouldn't be one bit surprised if that's the way Miss Wilkins and Miss Weatherby across the street in that there duplex saw it too."

Rather than telling them that I didn't care one bit what our neighbors thought—never had and never would—I guess it was God Who gave me the strength

¹**Holy Rollers:** derogatory name for Pentecostal and other charismatic Christians because of the unorthodox manner in which some roll on the floor when receiving the infilling of the Holy Spirit

to say, "I'm sorry, I got carried away. I know it came on you too fast, Mom. I've been reading the Bible and learning a mess of things I never knew before. So, yes, Dad, I found Jesus and He's given me a peace and joy I never knew before."

"Now listen here, young lady, your mama an' I, we're fine people, good people, everyone knows it, an' we haven't never needed no religion to do it. Okay, maybe I drink a bit to relax, but I brought you up to be proud of yourself an' to know you're as good as anybody else an' make better grades than most of 'em. I brought you up to make us proud, an' I don't think that's too bad, do you?"

I didn't know how to answer Dad's twisted view of my upbringing and his parenting. I just didn't know what to say, and Dad interpreted this to be defiance. His fuse was never very long, and now he exploded and slapped me across the face.

"Don't you dare defy me, Miss Priss!"

"Ralph, don't!" Mom protested, clutching his upheld hand to stop it from striking again. He pushed her away, but thank God he lowered his hand and sat back down.

"Edna, you let me handle this the way I know best!" he shouted. "Jennifer, I tell you right now, I would rather see you back on them drugs o' yours an' livin' in a free love commune than talkin' about religion an' this Jesus-loves-you business. Most o' the world's problems—an' mine too—are caused by them holier-than-thou church people with their fine cars an' fancy clothes an' proud looks at us who're just plain folks, an' I won't have no religion or Bible readin' in my house. Now you go get that Bible you've been readin' an' give it to me."

How was I supposed to love him now? Was I supposed to obey him now? I sat up, my face still burning from the hard, callused hand that had slapped the whole side of my face and said, "Dad, I

love you and Mom right now more than I ever have, and while I'm in this house, I will obey almost anything you say. But I can't give you my Bible. I will keep my Bible."

His heavy jowls shook as his bloodshot eyes stared me down. I prayed for courage and didn't flinch or look away. He finally said, "Oh, all right, but keep it in your own room."

Mom walked up to me and touched my arm as she knelt beside my chair and said very weakly, "Jennifer, your daddy an' I feel that that hippie college of yours ain't doin' you any good, an' we think for now it'd be best if you don't go back, but stay here an' get yourself a decent job until we find some better college for you to go to an' finish your last year. Whaddaya think o' that?"

"It don't matter a galdurn¹ what she thinks. We decided, an' our word is law in this house."

I touched Mom's hand and said, "Okay, Mom, for now I'll stay." I had been feeling like I shouldn't go back to school, but should rather take some time to think, pray, and sort my life out. I was twenty years old, legal age to go off on my own, but if I was to show them love, I would need to hang around a bit longer. Besides, I didn't know yet where to go or what to do.

A measure of peace came over the room as we shared a few moments of idle chat about my getting a job here or there. Then I retired to my room where I sat on the floor and prayed for guidance and help, and for Lenny wherever he was, for Frizzy and Gray, and for Don—one of Lenny's and my best friends—and for all our friends in Denton, especially that the Lord, Who had so graciously bent down to find me, would find each of them. Little Roy came to mind particularly vividly, and I shed a tear or two for him as I implored Jesus to reach him. Finally, I fell into a

¹**galdurn**: colloquial form of the profanity, "God damn"

deep sleep and dreamed of Lenny and his magical sword.

- 3 -

THE DEVIL FIGHTS

By Don

In spite of the air conditioning, I was sweltering and uncomfortable in my suit and tie. I alternately tugged at my collar, loosened my tie and tried to relax by twirling my long, curly hair in my fingers as I sat in the wooden pew, enduring until the church service would be over. As my father approached the pulpit to preach his sermon, I thought about how glad I was that this was the last Sunday before going back to classes at North Texas.

The summer had been filled with sermons, both at church and at home. Dinnertime had invariably turned into long, pious sermons on the virtue of following the status quo and being a good Christian and an upstanding American, which to my father were one and the same. He routinely offered to take me to the barber, and I always refused. Normally, by the end of the meal, there was silence, and although I didn't dare so much as glance in my father's direction, lest I bring more preaching upon myself, I could tell from the occasional sighs that he was shaking his head in bewilderment.

But soon, no more church, no more long, didactic¹ sermons, no more hearing my father's insufferable

¹**didactic:** inclined to teach or moralize excessively

lectures. I knew I could endure this one last sermon of the summer with the promise of respite from churchified boredom until Thanksgiving weekend, three months away. After all, since my family were Methodists, the sermons weren't all that long compared to the Baptists and oh, man, the Pentecostals! I'd heard they'd go on for a couple of hours. I wondered what the Pentecostal wives did about the roasts in their ovens.

As my father began to speak, I glanced perfunctorily at the program, but sat bolt upright when I saw the title of the sermon and focused my attention toward the pulpit for the first time this summer. Usually I simply planned what I would eat at Roseland Cafeteria or the El Niño Mexican restaurant afterwards (the two places my parents invariably chose to go after church), but today something rang a bell. The subject was to be "The Last Days." This was what my best friend Lenny had been obsessed with for the last few months of the school year. He'd even been having some kind of recurrent nightmare about destruction and an invasion by the army.

I hadn't heard from Lenny all summer, and figured he was probably staying pretty stoned with the guys from the band he was staying with. I was suddenly very curious to see what a conservative, red-blooded American preacher like my father would have to say about the Last Days and what he would think about Lenny's dreams.

My dad, Pastor Ward, cleared his throat as he mounted the pulpit and began his sermon in the wide vibrato preachers love to use that makes them sound so insincere. "*Brethren*, I want to speak to you today on the Biblical doctrine of 'the Last Days.' As you well know, we have had many cults and sects and fanatical 'prophets' from time immemorial spouting out a message of doom and gloom and warning us that the

Last Days were upon us, and that Jesus Christ was returning at any moment, on such-and-such a day or night."

He then went on to enumerate some of the main doomsday prophet cults like the Cooneyites¹ and the Jehovah's Witnesses², ridiculing each group in his usual obnoxious and condescending manner.

Get to the point, Dad, I thought. *Don't just talk to fill up time and space and show how well researched you are on the subject.*

"We must, however, remember that Jesus Himself told us that His Kingdom was *not* coming with observation, but that it is *within* us—each and every one of us. Jesus told His disciples that *no* man knows the day or the hour. Therefore, brethren, *anyone* who tries to tell you he knows when Jesus will return, don't believe him!

"Our Holy Father didn't intend for us to spend our days preoccupied with Jesus' return. In fact, we're not even certain whether Jesus really *will* return to this Earth literally, for as you know, there is much in the Bible that is merely symbolic. Perhaps Jesus will never return. I'm not a Biblical literalist, so whether Jesus is coming back to this world literally or not, I don't know, and, furthermore, I don't *care*, for His

¹**Cooneyites:** A group in England in the late 1700s who helped promote the teaching that the Church was going to be raptured by Jesus before the Tribulation

²**Jehovah's Witnesses:** a religious denomination founded during the late 19th century whose elders at one point predicted that the return of Christ and the end of the world would occur in the year 1914. Since then, the group has updated its official doctrines, and now teaches that the earth is in a Millenium-like age of the restoration of the physical Kingdom of God. As a result, Jehovah's Witnesses often oppose recognizing earthly forms of law and government, bringing much controversy on themselves in some places.

Kingdom is already *within* us. We, the Church, *are* His Kingdom, just as Jesus taught His followers....

“If you have allowed Him to go away from you into a far country through your indifference, through your neglect of His laws and rules of behavior, through neglecting the fellowship of your church, then it is high time for His second advent in your life, in your home, and the sooner the better. Bring Him back to live in your own life by living good, Christian lives, by being upstanding members of society, by being examples to others of what Christians should be. Let’s ‘clean up our act,’ as the youth like to say, and fill our lives with the kind of goodness and purity that would make the Savior *want* to come back to live in us and with us. Therefore...”

I tuned out once more, but not to plan my menu this time. I angrily wondered what my father thought he was doing. I didn’t know much Bible—although my dad was a pastor, he never taught us the Bible except from the pulpit—but I had read enough to know that there were whole books of the Bible that talked about “the doctrine of the Last Days,” as my father called it. Although I didn’t really blame my dad for not understanding much of it, what did he think it was in there for?

Then again, I thought, *maybe none of it matters anyway. Maybe there is no God. Maybe this whole religious business—and it is a business, and a big one—is just a plot by the masters to keep the slaves in their place.* I had solid evidence of that: my father’s dinnertime lectures using the very authority of God to keep his son from questioning anything the Establishment tried to foist on its subjects.

No, that about sewed it up for me. My father explaining away everything and denying that there was anything supernatural about those prophecies (and he should know—in all, he had studied some twelve years in order to get a piece of paper that said

he was a Doctor of Divinity) had just about settled it religiously for me. I could do without God if *that* was all He was.

Now, let’s see. Enchiladas and frijoles sound good ... with a small order of guacamole on the side, and...

Back in my room in the afternoon, I scrounged through my letters to find the latest communication from Sherry, my steady girl of the last two years. I read the part I had read about a dozen times, “Don, I can hardly sit still thinking the summer is almost over and I’m going to see you soon. I can almost *taste* you. I’m so hungry for you, I think I will literally eat you up our first night together. Now, sweetheart, you be sure to get lots of sleep these last days before I see you, because you won’t be able to count on *any* the first few nights we’re together. Can you come back early, like before the weekend, so we can have some really wicked times together? Hmmm? What do you say, Baby? I’m going to do things to you that you have only imagined.”

I had already managed to convince my dad that I needed to head back early, saying I needed to see my counselor before registration. Then I had promptly arranged to meet Sherry on Thursday. Sherry, Lenny, Gypsy and I had been sharing a two-bedroom apartment together, and it would be good to see everyone again.

Looking at the picture Sherry had sent me, her in her bikini at Galveston (*Man, are the bikinis ever getting small!*), I lay back on my bed and allowed myself to indulge in some heavy daydreaming about Sherry. She was beautiful, hot, sexy, and she loved me. At least she loved my body and my lovemaking—she could never get enough. How did I deserve that?

I’d hardly had a girlfriend throughout high school, always being the studious, serious type, not too good-looking. Some of the other kids had even nicknamed

me “Four Eyes” for my thick glasses. Something had just clicked with Sherry, though, and I had to admit she had a hold on me. But she was so different from my two other best friends, Gypsy and Lenny. They were searchers like me, serious thinkers, and hippies.

Sherry was no hippie. She didn’t agree with our feelings about the state of the nation; she drank Scotch and soda, read *Cosmopolitan* and *Redbook*, and liked to watch soaps on TV. She was—in short—straight and, well, shallow. But those differences all seemed to fade away in bed, and it was like, hey, who’s complaining? She tolerated our drugs, even our hours of philosophical conversation, as long as there was a good magazine and a Scotch available.

And then there were the chocolates—*her* drug of choice—that she overdosed on whenever she was depressed. She’d begin to blimp out a bit, and then suddenly she’d be off on a crash diet. Chocolates would be consigned to the garbage; she’d be on the scales seven times a day, and I’d have to assure her continually she looked great. She’d smoke more too in those times, and I would smoke more too to be sociable. But, hey, she knew what a man liked and she was happy to give it, so who was complaining?

The ring of the phone shattered my reverie. I was home alone so I had to answer it.

“Hello?”

“Hi. Don, is that you?”

“Yeah, yeah. Gypsy?”

“Yeah, it’s me. Oh Lord, it’s good to hear your voice! How are you, man? How are you surviving in dear old Abilene?”

“Fine, fine. Looking forward to getting away from his holiness and getting back to real people—you and Lenny included.”

“Oh ... gee. Don ... ya know ... I’m not going back to school. I’m just gonna go clear my things out and then come back to Shreveport.”

“Really? Why?”

“It’s ... it’s a real, real long story, and I think I’ll save it till I see you. I’ll get back there late Friday. Let’s talk then, okay?”

“Okay. Sure. Boy, I’m gonna miss you. Did you and Lenny break up? What about your scholarship?”

“About Lenny, have you heard from him?”

“No, I thought he was up in Will’s commune with the band. I thought you were there too, as a matter of fact.”

“Well, Don, a lot has changed. Would you believe ... everything? I just got a letter from Lenny. It sounds like he’s doing fine—he’s found what he was looking for.”

“Yeah, he was one messed-up dude the last time I saw him. So what’s his trip?”

“Jesus. He found Jesus.”

“Oh no, Gypsy, spare me!”

“Don, it’s not like your dad and the churches, it’s ... it’s different. Oh Don, some incredible things have happened to me too, wonderful things that have changed my life. I mainly wanted to know if you had heard from him and prepare you for the shock that neither of us will be back to school next year.”

“Lenny either?”

“No, he’s doing something full-time for Jesus, and he said he can’t. He said, ‘there are four months and then comes harvest.’ It’s in the Book of John, chapter 4, verse 35. And something in another book called Nehemiah, about how he’s doing a great work and can’t come down.”

“Hey, this can’t be Gypsy, quoting me chapter and verse from the Bible. I knew it was dangerous to let you two out of my sight for the summer. You went and got religious? I can’t believe this! I spend the summer being convinced that there is no God and that religion is a mere opiate and means for the mighty to oppress the weak, and my two best friends go

religious on me. This is too much! This is a prank call, right? You're not really Gypsy, right? This is a dream, right? God forbid it's one of those recurring ones like Lenny was having. Okay, Gypsy, let's talk Friday or Saturday."

"When's Sherry coming back?"

"Thursday."

"Oh."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing really."

"Don't worry, as long as she has her mags, soaps and Scotch, she'll be mellow."

"I hope so. Okay, Don, I'll let you go. See you soon. Hang loose, okay?"

"Yeah, bye, Gypsy."

I slowly placed the phone back in its cradle and froze while my mind raced, trying to sort all this out. Was the whole nation going crazy? I'd heard of different freaks turning on to a new kind of Jesus trip and there was even that song I loved with the super guitar licks, "Spirit in the Sky," about Jesus, but I'd never expected my best friends to do this. Friday couldn't come fast enough for me. Sherry and her charms were now not as important as finding out what got ahold of Lenny and Gypsy.

The hours and days dragged by. All I longed for was to talk to Gypsy, to get an explanation of this "miracle change" in the two of them. The days dragged by so slowly it reminded me of the time I was driving across the desert toward California where I could see the hazy blue and purple mountains looking like they were about two or three hours away. And I'd drive two or three hours and they looked exactly the same—no closer, no farther—as if I had been suspended in time and space. I had one desire, and there was no way to make it come any faster, so the hours oozed by in a boredom and disinterest I had rarely known.

None of my music, none of my books interested me, because I instinctively knew the answers I sought weren't there. Once or twice I glanced at the Bible on my shelf and felt a certain draw on my heart, which I resisted and it faded away. I certainly had no plans of reading that. I went out to the river once and smoked a joint, but that made the time go even slower so I stayed straight the rest of the week.

Finally it was early Thursday morning. I loaded up in my very used Mercury Comet, gave Mom and Dad a hug, tousled my kid brother Kirk's hair and headed off.

Zippering along on the highway—the wind blowing my hair and the music blasting on the radio—I felt good for the first time since I'd talked to Gypsy. I was happy to be doing something concrete toward getting my questions answered. It was a long trip, affording me time to psyche myself up for Sherry, who I now did not even look forward to seeing. I didn't want to offend her, but this part of my heart, life and mind was a place she'd never entered, never even showed any desire to enter. This place had been reserved for Lenny and Gypsy, and now they were leaving me and it looked like I would have to board up their room and not use it anymore.

My parents had a room in their house that was so nice and the carpet was so soft and the furnishings so fragile that no one was allowed to enter there except on very special occasions—so special I couldn't remember the last time one had happened. So the room lay there, to the left of the front door—sterile, unused, uninviting for the very fact that it was so immaculate and useless. Was that what was going to happen to this part of my life now that the only people I could share it with were leaving?

I remembered the long, sometimes all-night sessions we'd had talking about the meaning of life, about poetry, about Dylan's lyrics, about where we,

the '60s youth, were heading and leading the country. I loved how our eyes would sparkle with the hope of a better world, the dream we had of one day making a world of love and peace and harmony—without war, without greed, without hatred, without pride, where everyone shared everything and no one claimed ownership, where the walls of convention would fall and people could be free to love and be loved, to say what they meant and felt and be what they wanted to be, to do the things they were created for. Where everyone would encourage one another, without controls, without restrictions, where all was freedom within the bounds of love.

That was our dream ... or *had* been. Now it was over; those times were history. I blinked back the tears. I knew I couldn't share those things with Collin, Will, Roy, Sam or any of the band—and for sure not Sherry. The band—well, they were all nice guys, fun freaks. But the deeper things were reserved for my soul brother and sister. Was that gone forever? I'd never had much hope of finding all the things we talked about, but there was always the feeling that as long as we could talk about them, as long as there was more than one person in the world who *wanted* those things, then maybe, just maybe they could someday be.

I reached Denton that night, exhausted, only to find Sherry perky and well-rested, having traveled up from Houston the day before. On the kitchen table were two TV dinners, two glasses of apple wine, and a candle reflecting on Sherry dressed in a filmy black negligee and smiling expectantly, looking for my reaction.

I took her in my arms and kissed her deeply. As my hands roamed over her shoulders, down her arms, and over the full length of her back, I realized how little she was wearing under her negligee. All thoughts of Gypsy and Lenny faded until Friday evening.

After a midafternoon lovemaking session, as the sun sank beneath the horizon, Sherry and I were in the kitchen in our bathrobes, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes when we heard Gypsy open the door downstairs and climb the stairs to the apartment we all shared. The kitchen was right at the top of the stairs, so as Gypsy bounded up the stairs, we couldn't help but notice the change that had come over her. She had always been lively and friendly—outgoing, yet serene—but there had always been a feeling of pain and heaviness there too. This was gone now, and the sometimes-sad serenity that she often reflected was replaced by a happy exuberance and verve that she'd never had before.

At the top of the stairs, to the right, there was a kind of sitting area with a couch, table and stereo. Gypsy tossed the duffel bag she was carrying onto the sofa there. She hurried to the kitchen to throw her arms around us both at once, kissing us each in turn.

Sherry, embarrassed, politely pulled away while Gypsy continued to hug me. Finally Gypsy pulled back. "It's so good to see you two! I just can't tell you how good it is! So much has happened!"

Sherry took a big drag on her cigarette and said, "Yeah, we can see things have really changed. Are you gonna tell us about it?"

Gypsy composed herself. She didn't want to alienate Sherry. Taking a seat on a kitchen chair she said, "Oh, that'll wait. We can talk later, after dinner. Do we have anything to cook, or shall I take you both out for something to eat?"

We opted for going out, and passed the time with small talk for Sherry's sake, while both Gypsy and I were bursting—she wanting to tell and I wanting to hear. Finally back home again, nestled comfortably in the sitting area, Sherry with her Scotch and soda and the latest *Redbook* in easy reach in case the

conversation got too deep for her, Gypsy and I each nursing a Budweiser to be sociable—beers we both forgot about until they had warmed to an unpalatable room temperature—surprisingly enough it was Sherry who first broached the subject.

“Well, Gypsy, Don tells me you’ve undergone some kind of dramatic change, both you and Lenny, and that you won’t be living with us anymore. Is that so?”

“Yeah, yeah, that’s so,” Gypsy answered her. “Lenny’s at a ranch west of Fort Worth with some kind of radical Christian group and he’s decided to serve Jesus. And I’ve decided to stay at home this next semester to kind of sort out my life a little and hopefully build some kind of relationship with my folks.”

“Did you give any thought to what we’re supposed to do with a double apartment and nobody to share it with? Are we supposed to pay the full rent?”

“Oh, no. No, of course not. Here, here’s two months rent, our share for two months, and by then I hope you find someone or some place else.”

Embarrassed at Sherry being so direct and concerned about money matters above all else, I said, “Gypsy, keep it for now. All that can wait. We can work out details later. So tell us, Gypsy, what’s been happening.” I threw a reproving glance at Sherry, who responded with an innocent shrug and a large gulp on her drink.

Gypsy recounted in detail both her and Lenny’s story while I listened intently, and Sherry politely, until we had been brought up to date. “Wow!” I exclaimed. “That’s some story! So you both believe in Jesus now?”

“Yeah! Yeah, we do. I guess Lenny’s gotten my letter to him by now, so he knows what’s happened to me, but I’m just not sure what to do with my life.”

“So what are you doing now?”

“Ha! You wouldn’t believe it, but I sell ladies’

clothing in J.C. Penney’s. I have to dress up like a real Susie Cream Cheese. Maybe something better will open up soon, but I have an income and things are going better with my folks. I just don’t know if I’m supposed to do what Lenny is doing or not. Maybe I’ll go out there and see, to this ranch, you know.”

“Gypsy, you know I’m searching, you know I want the truth, but man, I’ve had religion and Christianity up to here since I was, well, as long as I can remember. How could He be the truth?”

Sherry was reading her *Redbook* by now. Gypsy said, “Don, you say you’re searching, you want the truth, right?”

“Yeah, right.”

“Well, what I’m talking about is *not* the church. I don’t go to church. It doesn’t sound like Lenny is in church or going to church either. What’s happening in America right now spiritually—and what I can only imagine is gonna start spreading around the world—is something real. It’s not a ritual or a bunch of ceremonies. It’s not really even a religion. It’s like it says in the Bible—have you heard about God pouring out His Spirit and gathering the kids in the Last Days?”

“Yeah, maybe, I don’t know.”

“Well, that’s it. God’s Spirit just came down and told me that all the things I was looking for were to be found in Him, in Jesus.”

“You mean the better world we were always dreaming of?”

“Exactly.”

“Whew, that’ll take a leap of faith for me to believe that.”

“Just try Him. Give Him a chance. Don, you’re open to everything else like I was, but saying you’re not open to Jesus is like searching for your lost pen in every part of the room except one. You say, ‘It can’t be there so I won’t search there.’ But when you lose

something important and want to find it, you look *everywhere* for it, right? So don't rule out Jesus and the Bible."

"I'll think about that."

"Don't wait too long. Time is really short. It's the Last Days, and the Bible says Jesus is coming back to set things straight soon. You know what I think is going on, Don?"

"What?"

"Our parents have totally failed and settled for this material world and material pursuits, even the Christian ones like your folks. The poor, like my folks, are materialistic because that's what they hope for. The rich are materialistic because that's what they've spent their whole lives getting and keeping. They couldn't give us anything spiritual, so we had to look for it in drugs, meditation, and all that. It looks to me like the most spiritual people around are the freaks who dared to challenge the middle class morality trip. We didn't really have the right answers though, just the right questions, but God had to get us out of the Establishment, whether it's poor working class drunks or 'fine upstanding Christians.' He had to separate us to give us the real truth. And now He's calling us together. He's pouring out His Spirit, and I think you're one of those He's calling, Don, because you're like us, Lenny and me."

"Gypsy, look, I'm me! And I have to search my *own* way and find what I'm looking for my own way. If this is the truth I'll find it, but don't push me or rush me. I've had so many sermons, I don't think I can take any more. And I sure don't think I'm ready for the Bible. You know what happens whenever I try to read it?"

"No, what?"

"I hear my dad's voice. Not his real voice, but that voice he uses once a week on Sunday in the pulpit. I hear the Bible like that, and I just can't get into it. I

just can't."

"Can I read you something? Something beautiful? Maybe you'll start hearing it with my voice after that." Gypsy pulled out the New Testament Frizzy and Gray had given her and opened it.

From her corner, Sherry came to life then. "No! No, we are *not* going to have a church service here on Friday night. Friday night is time to raise hell, and I will not have my Friday night ruined by a bunch of Bible reading. Gypsy, I always knew you were a little crazy, you and that dreaming man of yours, but this is too much. My skin's getting all creepy-crawly with all this religious talk. You two just pick up and leave us high and dry with rents to be paid and empty rooms to be filled and say God told you to do it. Now that doesn't make me think very highly of you or your God. That's not love, just to leave others hanging."

"Sherry, she said she's giving us the rent."

"Don, it's the principle. If there *is* a God, He wouldn't do things so drastically and suddenly, where everyone is left all confused. God would do it all nice and orderly, and make sure everything is in order and no one's feathers are ruffled. That's how I'd do it. And I just can't listen to anymore of this weirdness. I'm going to bed. Gypsy, if you expected a sympathetic ear with Don and me, I hate to disappoint you, but we are not your kind of people. Don, you can choose, Gypsy and her confuse-everyone, drop-everything kind of God ... or me!"

With Scotch and *Redbook* in hand, Sherry stormed into her room, slamming the door behind her. Gypsy and I sat silently, the slamming of the door reverberating in our heads and hearts. I don't know how long it was before we spoke, but I broke the silence finally with, "You see, it's just not quite the same with me."

"Don, you know what it is?"

"What?"

"It's the test."

"The test?"

"Yeah, Lenny was tested and had to choose between me and Jesus. I was tested by losing Lenny to Jesus, and then learning Who He really was. Sherry's a test."

"Yeah, well ..." I started to respond, but Sherry's and my door opened and she stuck her head out and shouted.

"And I didn't mean take years to choose, Don. You choose between me and Gypsy and her Jesus in the next ten minutes, or you go find yourself somewhere *else* to sleep." The door slammed shut again.

My eyes stayed on the shut door, looking at it long and hard, as if that might cause a different Sherry to emerge from the darkened room into the light of the sitting area. When I turned back around I couldn't lift my eyes to look into Gypsy's, so I just stared at my hands folded in my lap.

When I said nothing, Gypsy slipped her warm little hand into mine. My fingers closed firmly around hers, and with my free hand I stroked the back of hers.

The silence was thick, hot and uncomfortable.

Gypsy struggled to find a word or two to say, but there was nothing. The next move was mine and she could only wait.

Finally my grip on her hand loosened and she knew it was a signal to release me. As we pulled away from each other our eyes met for the shortest second, then mine fell again. "I'll go talk some sense into her," I said in an ashamed whisper as I turned to the door.

"Sure," was all Gypsy could manage. I rose and, ever so quietly, opened the door to my bedroom. Gypsy could see the flicker of a candle in the room and I'm sure she knew she wouldn't see me till morning—probably late morning. Pondering her options, she must have decided, *Nothing to do here, I'd best be on my way first thing in the morning.*

Sherry was up first, at around noon Saturday. I could hear her through the slightly open door to our bedroom pattering around in the kitchen. There was the sound of crumpling paper, then her footsteps going to Gypsy's room, a pause, then her footsteps returned to the kitchen.

As I came out, she said, "She's gone. Her room's empty. Life can get back to normal."

"Normal?" I asked. "Sherry, normal was with *them*, Lenny and Gypsy!"

I crossed to the kitchen and saw the two months' rent lying on the table. Sherry assured me there was nothing else—no note, not a single word. She'd just vanished, taken all her stuff and walked out of my life.

"Now you know who your *real* friend is, who will stick by you through thick and thin," Sherry said as she pressed herself close to me and ran her long fingers through my curls. "I'll keep you happy and warm, Don, you know I will. Who needs those guys?"

While her willingness to let our best friends go without a single protest irritated me, her body undulating against mine made the significant and important seem negligible. She was right. One chapter of my life had closed. The dreams of a better world were just fairy tales. Now a new chapter about facing reality and coping with it had begun. I had landed with an unceremonious thump into the world of grim realities.

Well, at least I had Sherry to hold my hand in this brave new world. She was, after all, the more practical and down-to-earth of my friends. If I was going to follow my new road, a road without religion or God or the hope of a better world, where things were just as they seemed and life is accepted as it is, I couldn't think of a better companion than Sherry. Since it seemed so logical, I didn't understand the emptiness,

the hopelessness I felt.

Classes began, months went by, and I, a philosophy major, discovered and embraced the writings of Nietzsche¹. As a true convert to Nietzscheism I strove to fill my emptiness by denying the very existence of God and endeavoring to become the god of my own life, my own master. Evolution and Nietzsche seemed to fit so nicely together: Man was ever improving and would one day reach the perfection of a godhead, glorious in his supreme goodness, without the crutch of religion or the need for any higher power other than the “supreme self” he was building in his own mind. It was mentally satisfying, intellectually titillating, and it felt so good to be one’s own savior.

I assured myself that eventually I would, as I studied and conditioned my mind to cast off all thoughts of guilt or retribution, even be able to conquer that cold, gripping fear that often woke me in the middle of the night. It was like an inexplicable dark hand that closed round my heart and squeezed it while it beat wildly until I would lunge from the bed and rush to the bathroom sink. There, I would douse my head and upper body with water until I returned to my right mind. Sherry slept so soundly she never knew. Precious little help she would have been to me anyway.

I knew something about psychiatry and Freud, so I knew these fears were vestigial, mere evolutionary hangovers from the mental conditioning of generations of superstitious religionists, reinforced in my own life by my parents and other church people. These had conditioned me to believe that there was a God who was keeping track of all deeds and even thoughts, and would one day repay. I would soon be free of

¹See endnote 5: Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm (1844-1900)

these attacks and finally be at peace, I was sure. At least I thought I was sure, until one day I concluded my reading of the biography of Nietzsche and came to find out that this great mentor died in fear with extreme schizophrenia, a total madman, living in a ghoulish fantasy world, hearing voices and speaking in a multitude of the same, referring to himself only in the third person.

That night the old fear gripped me so tightly that I was never able to even attempt sleep. Even Sherry became concerned and poured me a Scotch and soda, which I gladly drank. Yet I was not able to find the comfort and mercy of sleep that night. It was with dark circles under my eyes and a pounding headache from the four Scotches I’d ended up drinking that I found my way to Dr. Phillingsby’s office in the Philosophy Department the next morning.

Dr. Phillingsby had an odd twitch. The left side of his mouth would suddenly stretch downward and his eyes would squint immediately after. Most students mocked the Doc for what they called the “Phillingsby Two-Step,” but I admired him for his genius and how he explained so clearly the process by which humans could rise above the need for deity.

“D-Don, how are you? C-come in. S-s-sit down,” the doctor said. He had a slight stammer too before he got wound up on his subject. Small talk was not his forte, and when he was speaking on lowly, non-intellectual subjects and exchanging social niceties, he invariably stammered.

“Thanks, Dr. Phillingsby.”

“I-is there anything I c-can do for you?”

“Yeah, there is. Can you explain this?” and I pushed the biography of Nietzsche toward him on the desk, opened to the final chapter, the account of his dying dementia. “Why did the man who gave us hope to rise above the primitive idea of needing a god or higher powers die a madman? The man who inspired

us to become overmen or supermen¹ died a maniac. Doesn't this show his ideas didn't work, that they're not true? Was he cursed by an angry God for his teachings?"

"Oh, what an idea! Cursed by an angry God? Don, I'm surprised at you, my prize student, referring to such an archaic idea. It must be a throwback to that puritanical upbringing of yours. My, my! No, not at all. This doesn't show he was wrong or cursed, no, by no means."

"Then why? Doctor, I need an answer. I can't tell you all that's happening to me, but I need to have an answer to this. This is very disturbing for me. I have some friends who say they have found peace in Jesus, and one of them has begged me to try Him. I'm tempted to do that, because sometimes I can't sleep at night."

"Oh, oh, Jesus. Really? This *is* serious then, isn't it? Hmm, let's see." The doctor began to pace back and forth behind his desk, twitching and squinting each step of the way, removing his glasses, wiping his brow with a big handkerchief, replacing his glasses, pacing, twitching, squinting, and on and on as the seconds turned into minutes. I waited and watched until finally I could see the man had no answers and I rose to go. "Don, wait, I've got it. Nietzsche was a martyr for what he believed in."

"A martyr?! How?"

"Oh, oh, where is it? Where did I put that book?" Dr. Phillingsby began to rummage through the great stack of papers on his desk, then through his bookshelves lined with somber-looking tomes from all the great philosophers, then to the table across the room where there were more unruly stacks of papers. Finally, heaving a satisfied sigh, he drew a heavy black book from under the papers.

¹See endnote 6: overmen and supermen

"Here, here it is—my special treasure!" He hugged the book to his breast for a split second and then continued. "This will explain everything, how many of the great minds of history suffered greatly and died in poverty, sorrow, rejection, and even madness. There is a very fine line between genius and madness, you know. They gave their lives for the benefit of humankind and even gave up lowly, insignificant things like joy and peace to strive for the highest heights their minds could carry them to. They were brave in facing the harshest questions of life full in the face, and daring to draw the conclusion that life *is*, in fact, nothing more than meaningless suffering and misery.

"*Happiness*, in the sense the common man means it, is an idiot's fantasy. But a kind of sublime and elevated serenity can be found in accepting suffering and misery, and using them for our own purposes, while making the most of the miserable existence we have by infusing one's own meanings where there really is no meaning."

Phillingsby placed the huge book called *The Art of Suffering* in my hand. "I think you'll find this book a great inspiration. If anything can answer your questions, this can," he said with an extra big twitch.

In a state of bewilderment and confusion, I left the office with the book under my arm. As I began reading it, though, it helped me to see that this whole idea of happiness being the goal of life was for the small-minded common man. It was not for those who were striving for the heights that Nietzsche envisioned. Happiness, I could see, came from expecting *no* happiness, from demanding no joy, from hardening oneself, from protecting one's heart, from closing oneself off, from not allowing oneself to indulge in the simple joys that always led to hurt and disappointment. With pride, I realized that I had discovered a great truth that put me above the morass of humanity. Pride had replaced my striving for

happiness and peace, and I found that my superior feeling was a fair trade—at least at first.

Will and the band had not come back to college either. It looked like the band was starting to take off. They had regular gigs in hippie nightclubs in all the big cities of Texas. Now, in the winter of 1971, they were playing as the front act before Led Zeppelin in a four-city tour of Texas, and they invited me to catch them in Dallas, sending me two complimentary front-row tickets. Sherry couldn't go. So it was that I traveled down alone and met the guys in the afternoon at Lee Park.

They were definitely heavier dudes than they'd been some seven months before. Will's blond hair was past his shoulders, his eyes hidden behind very dark, round granny glasses. Roy seemed nervous and uneasy. Only Collin was the same—always the clown, always cracking jokes and making people laugh, even strangers. But the rest of the band had a heaviness about them, and I wondered if they had discovered some of the same things I had.

As we sat in a secluded corner of the park and smoked a joint in the cold, Collin said, "Hey, Don, what's with you? You okay? You don't believe in smiling anymore? You and Sherry break up? You ain't gettin' any these days or something?"

"No, Sherry's fine. We're still together. I've just been learning a lot of really heavy things about life, that's all."

"Sounds like us," Will said. "We've come across some very heavy stuff."

"Like what?" I asked.

With an exaggeratedly wicked grin, Will pulled out a plastic bag of white powder. "Things go better with 'coke,'" he sang and then put the bag of cocaine back in his pocket. "That's only one of the things, sniffing this stuff. Besides that, and more importantly, we've

also got ourselves something of a guru."

Collin said, "Well, *Will's* got himself a guru, and he's *trying* to convince us, but I'm not so sure."

"Man," Will continued, "the things she's shown me and the places she's taken me defy the imagination."

I asked, "Who is she? What is she?"

Will leaned close to me and whispered in my ear, "Her name's *Marduke*, and she's a *witch*."

I looked into Will's eyes as he removed his glasses, and an electric shock coursed down my spine. I was struck at the complete absence of light.

"A *good* witch, you know, *white* magic. She's the reason we're on our way up. You'll get to meet her. I asked her to keep you company at the concert tonight."

I felt very uneasy and passed the joint on as it came to me, but no one seemed to notice that I hadn't smoked. The sense of oneness that we had once had was gone, and everyone seemed wrapped up in themselves—everyone except Collin. I suddenly realized that he was still looking at me. He winked and nodded knowingly.

Small Sam broke the silence and said, "Boy, that Jimmy Page is one heavy dude," referring to the lead guitarist of Zeppelin. "He knows all there is to know about ancient English religions, pre-Christian stuff, very interesting, very powerful. *Marduke* is helping us tap in."

Why does this bother me? I wondered. Why can't I just dismiss it like a fairy tale? Poor saps, believing in the supernatural. But I have nothing to fear, these things don't exist. Witchcraft, ha! No such thing. Yet I was very glad when it was time to go. As we walked back to our cars in the parking lot, Collin put his arm around my shoulder and drew me off to one side.

"Don," he whispered, "you be careful with *Marduke*. It's best not to make eye contact. She has power and she's got the guys under her spell. I'm

jumping ship after this tour. I know you're one of God's children, so don't mix with Marduke."

"I'm one of God's children?!"

"You don't know that, man? I always knew that you and Lenny and Gypsy were God's children. You were different. You had light. I must admit you don't have much now, and that's why I'm saying this. Watch out for Marduke. And whatever you've been into, it ain't doing *you* any good either, man. Maybe it's time to review your trip and trade it in for a new one?"

As suddenly as he had gotten serious, Collin became his normal jocular self again. He grabbed a hippie couple that was walking by and loudly said in the most exaggerated fake accent he could muster, "Plees, ken you help me? I am beengk stolen and forced to play een a rock end roll bend!"

When I first saw Marduke, I could see she had the cheerless serenity that I had grown to admire and was trying to achieve. She was dressed all in white, including white boots and a flat, broad-brimmed white hat. She extended her hand to me and took mine in both of hers. With a certain warmth but no smile, she said, "Don, I'm so glad to meet you. I've heard so much about you." As we sat in our seats, waiting for the concert to start, she found out I read Nietzsche and began to talk with great knowledge and enthusiasm about him. Every time I felt myself being captivated by this fascinating woman, I would hear Collin's voice: "I *know* you're one of God's children, so don't mix with Marduke," and I would pull my heart back.

God, if there is a God, I prayed as I sat next to Marduke, feeling like I was dangling in midair between two opinions, this woman seems to have something I want and have always wanted. She seems good, but Collin thinks she's evil, number one, and, number two, he thinks I'm Your child. God, here's Your chance. Show

me where this woman's at, and show me if You're real and I am Your child.

I then turned fully toward her in my seat and asked her, "What is happiness to you?"

"*Happiness!* What does such a word even mean? That's for fools, isn't it? I believe life is holy and good, all of it. Misery and suffering are part of it and are therefore good. Night and day. Light and dark. Life and death. Good and evil. God and the Devil. All different sides of the same coin. The only real happiness is found in learning to accept misery and pain as an inevitable part of life. I have found, Donald, that misery, sorrow, and pain—*especially* pain—can be even *more* pleasurable than *pleasure*. Can *you* appreciate that? Have *you* discovered the pleasure of pain, Don?"

Her eyes flashed as she gazed deep, deep into mine. I felt her pulling me into what could only be described as an embrace, more intimate than sex, though nothing touched me but her eyes on mine and her fingertips on the back of my hand.

I felt her spirit ravaging and violating mine as she softly and sensually whispered, "Would you like me to teach you the pleasure of pain?" The same electric shock I had felt this afternoon, only now greatly magnified, nearly threw me into the aisle, and with great effort I broke away from her gaze. With the mocking smile of a conqueror on her lips she said, "I shock you, I see. Never mind, I thought you were farther along. You have the look, but now I see you are not fully persuaded."

I cleared my throat and nodded agreeably, not knowing what to say but wishing I could get away. Suddenly sitting next to this "angel in white" felt about as comfortable as falling into a slime pit. But this slime pit, I knew, had no bottom, and it was imperative I keep swimming until I could climb out. She and Phillingsby were where I was heading if I didn't turn

around. For the first time I could see the logical end of my thoughts was pain and sorrow and death.

As the band came on, playing far better and tighter music than they ever had before, but without the fun and joy they had once had, Marduke kept up a running commentary in my ear. “They’re much better, aren’t they? Will has such a desire to make it, and once he began to apply himself to the principles I taught him, his drumming went from mediocre to rather good, don’t you think?”

“Oh, yes, yes, amazing. You taught him drumming?”

She stifled almost uncontrollable laughter and said, “No, not drumming principles. He just needed to make a connection with the universal power as well as make some commitments.”

“Commitments?”

“Yes. It’s really not for the uninitiated to know these things, but I’m sure you know something of Dr. Faustus¹?”

“What? You’re saying Will sold his soul?”

“Oh, Don, such an idea! That’s an archaic, puritanical idea. It’s a simple contract. No one ever gets something for nothing in this world. It’s just business—one’s heart’s desires delivered to them in return for something that is not of such great value, such as a soul. You see, most religions put everything off in the sweet by-and-by, and who even knows if there’s *going* to be a sweet by-and-by?”

“*My* religion gives you what you want *now*—the concrete and visible, instead of the nebulous and unseen. Furthermore, the debt can be paid in various ways—all at once, through some deed or action now

¹**Faust or Faustus:** A magician and alchemist in German legend who sells his soul to the Devil in exchange for power and knowledge.

or at a later date, or in installments as you go. Each contract is tailor-made to fit the needs of the individual. Religious writers, with their superstitions, have made it overly simplistic, but if you look at it as business, it becomes very practical, very common, something your parents are doing and everyone has had to do to get anywhere in this world.

“I’m the band’s agent, and much more really. I’m going to take these boys places they never dreamed of.” There was a slight pause before she continued, “Don, what do you want more than *anything* else? What would you sell *your* soul for?”

She tried to capture my gaze again, but I just looked at her forehead or her mouth now or in another direction altogether. I was waiting till the break to excuse myself. There was a God, I knew now. He had answered and exposed this woman’s evil, and manifested Himself to me to my satisfaction, while at the same time showing me the end of the road I was on. She spoke just like Dr. Phillingsby and his book of so-called higher knowledge, but anyone could see that she was evil and playing with powers I now clearly recognized as being from the wrong side. I’d gotten more than I bargained for. Now I knew for certain there was not only a God, but a Devil as well. What’s more, I could see right then that I was camped on the outskirts of Satan’s kingdom.

At the break before Zeppelin came on, I told Marduke I needed to relieve myself and stepped out into the night. As I walked in the especially cold night, hands shoved deep into my coat pockets and my head hung low toward the ground, I could see that my hippie road was beginning to fork, and I had to choose. The hour of reckoning had come—Will’s way of drugs and the Devil, or Gypsy’s way of Jesus and joy.

Nothing stood in the way now. My questions had been answered, God had shown Himself and exposed the evil of pride and self-obsessed philosophy, but ...

something held me back from saying yes.

What was it? With great concentration and care, like a surgeon delving with his scalpel into a body, I searched my heart for what was hindering me. Yes, of course, there was one thing, the obvious—Sherry. Would I be willing to forsake her? Well, I'd always known that there would come a parting of our ways someday. We really weren't matched for each other except in bed, so why not now? Why was it so hard? Why did her grip feel so tight?

With a great struggle, I was finally able to say within my heart that I would be willing to leave her for the truth. With that battle won, I returned to my car and began the drive back to Denton. I didn't have whatever it took to face the band and Marduke to say goodbye, so I felt the best I could do was slip away quietly.

There, that feels better, I thought as I drove through the night. Now I was truly free ... or was I?

No, there was something *more*, something else.... Finally, after thinking back and tracing over my thoughts and actions during the past months, I could see it, the *real* cancer, the deepest cancer: *pride*—the pride of intellectuality, the pride to exalt the mind above the heart. My flesh desired Sherry, and I could see full well that the flesh was a formidable foe—formidable, but *not* invincible. Yet as I eyed *this* opponent—my pride—this gigantic enemy that I would have to face and fight were I to follow fully in the path of the truth I had received, my heart sank.

I was bombarded with imagined scene after imagined scene of people mocking me for following a simplistic, childish, nonintellectual belief. I tried to picture myself telling someone else about Jesus with the enthusiasm Gypsy had had, and I concluded that, no, I wasn't cut out for that kind of fanaticism. Even thinking of being labeled a "religious fanatic" made me cringe. Okay, Nietzsche was wrong, but all those

other great minds couldn't be wrong—Plato¹, Kierkegaard², Hegel³, Kant⁴ and others.

I just couldn't see myself receiving all the inspiration I needed from *only* reading the *Bible*. So, I would believe in Jesus and the Bible, but also study the great works as well, and preserve my intellectuality as a gift from God. There, I had reached a conclusion, a satisfactory conclusion. I should have felt at peace. But I didn't, damn it. I didn't.

In this state of mind I arrived at the apartment and quietly climbed the stairs, stealthily entered my room so as not to awaken Sherry, and crept into bed. Thoughts, like ugly demons, plagued me until the sweet relief of sleep engulfed me. I drifted away into that special zone between death and life, the place where God will sometimes seal up His instructions in our hearts, where He can withdraw man from his purpose and hide pride from man—the world of dreams and visions of the night. The warm darkness cradled me like a baby and I willingly nestled deep within it in perfect confidence. Then suddenly...

The peace was shattered as I found myself standing in a great black void. I peered into the darkness ahead of me. *Nothing*. I peered down where my hands and feet must be. *Nothing*. I looked behind me. Only blackness. I had been happy for the black blanket of sleep, but now I wanted to see—to see something, *anything*. Why have eyes if I couldn't see?

Oh, look! There, there's a glow ahead; the sun is coming up. I could see a mountain silhouetted before the sun, black on gold, grand and mighty. Then it was as if I could see the mountain magnified, and I

¹See endnote 7: Plato (427?-347? B.C.)

²See endnote 8: Kierkegaard, Soren Aaby (1813-1855)

³See Endnote 9: Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1770-1831)

⁴See Endnote 10: Kant, Immanuel (1724-1804)

could make out a lovely, silhouetted scene on a slope near the top of the mountain. There was a brave, strong shepherd seated on a rock, while on the slope below him sheep were grazing—frisky lambs, gentle ewes, playful adolescents.

But my attention was most drawn to the several strong mountain rams standing on rocks surveying their mates and offspring, ever watchful, ever ready to sacrifice themselves for others, their great horns trusty weapons against their foes. As the sun rose higher and drove the shadows in the darkened valley away, I could see a beautiful ewe running toward me across a lush meadow, leaping as she came, sometimes gamboling in midair with joyful abandon, yet with complete steadfastness of purpose. Her joy and sense of fun was unmistakable, but her path never varied. She was headed for me. As she neared, her eyes never left mine, and a sense of warmth and well-being filled me as I looked into her soft eyes—so different from the sensation of looking into Marduke's eyes. The difference between being lovingly wooed or raped.

Suddenly she stopped and said in Gypsy's voice, "I'm sorry, Don. I can come no closer, for you are in the danger zone. Oh, I long to touch you, but we must keep our distance from the playing board."

"Playing board? What playing board?"

"Look behind you. There is enough light now to see it."

I turned and saw what looked like a great chessboard, each square big enough for one person to stand on. But this board had many more squares than any chessboard I had ever seen. In fact, behind me it stretched to the horizon and beyond and there were people of every conceivable shape, color, size and vocation, all involved in a very complicated game. Some were intent on winning, some struggling to escape, and yet others totally oblivious that they were

part of a game. I looked down at my own feet and saw I was just off the edge of the board.

"Then *I'll* come to you. *I'm* not on the board."

"You can't, not yet."

"Well, we'll see about that. I'm a firm believer in self-determination and I want to pet you, my little ewe friend, and pet you I will." And with that said, I took a determined step forward and then another. Oddly enough my hands were being drawn uncontrollably upward. Two more steps, running this time and my hands flew up over my head, my head was pulled back and even my feet flew up. I landed with a great crash on the hard ground beside the board. Wincing at the pain, I saw I was lying on hard-baked clay earth while the ewe was on soft, lush green grass. "Why can't I come to you? What's stopping me?"

"The light is still brighter now. Look at your hands and feet."

"What? I can't see anything."

"Touch them."

As I reached to touch them, I felt thin wires attached to the top of my hands and feet. Reaching behind my head, I felt a wire there too.

"You aren't free yet. You're trying to leave the game, but you aren't free from the game. Many people *try* to leave the game, but as long as the strings are attached, it's really useless."

"Well, I'll just break them myself then."

The ewe, had she been foolishly inclined, might have had a good laugh at my endeavors to break the strings by hand, by teeth, by stamping and grunting and groaning, even bellowing in frustration. But knowing how futile my efforts were, she only watched in pity. Finally exhausted, I cried out, "Why can't I break them?"

"They're the unbreakable cords of the pride of life and the lust of the flesh that you've allowed the Game Master to tie you down with. You've only strengthened

them further by your decisions. In your search for truth and freedom you've managed to get temporarily off the board, but your thoughts and conclusions have actually *strengthened* the cords that will bring you back eventually."

"Bring me back?"

"Yes, you saw what was holding you back, yet you chose to embrace and strengthen the strong cord of pride, because it is beautiful and highly esteemed among men."

"Well, naturally, pride is important. After all, I don't want to be made a laughingstock."

"The Shepherd ... see Him there on the hill? He was mocked and scourged so that your cords could be broken, Don. Would you do less?"

I had no answer.

"Don, would you like to go to the mountains with us? Lenny is one of those rams you see there. He's happy and strong and free. I'm free and happy too, and on my way to the mountain. I've seen it in a dream and in a vision and in my mind's eye, and my heart is my map to take me there. Will you come? Don, don't just think of yourself, think of others. Don't just think of today, think of eternity.

"You think you can be some kind of suffering intellectual and proudly give up joy and happiness. Is there any miserable, unhappy person that you feel really drawn to? Don't you gain more inspiration from those who are happy and free-spirited? There's freedom on the mountain with the Shepherd. Freedom and joy."

"But not pride?"

"No, not pride. For all things come from the Shepherd's hand. We can of our own selves do nothing. In place of your pride, you can receive joy. You can't have both. Don, watch me. Can you do this? Are you happy and free enough to do this?" She then jumped high in the air and wiggled her bottom, landed

and made a great circle through the meadow, leaping and gamboling with total joy. She stopped and looked at me, expecting me to admit I wasn't that happy or that free.

"Of course I can," I boasted, and leapt high in the air in indignation to prove I was just as capable of acrobatics as she. To my dismay, my feet strings tangled with my hand strings and I fell to the earth, a tangled net of strings cutting into my skin. I silently sighed and then said, "No, I can't."

"No, you can't. You must let the Shepherd cut your strings first."

"My father believes in the Shepherd, but he sure seems to be part of the game."

"Don, I have to leave you for a while, but the Shepherd will show you your father and others as they *really* are. And then, Don, you *must* decide, for you are on the outskirts of Satan, and no man can serve two masters. You'll finally love the one and hate the other, or hold to the one and despise the other."

She turned and walked slowly away. I knew she possessed great joy, but now she mourned for me, and her walk was more a funeral march than a playful gambol. I turned away and suddenly, on the game board, saw one figure after another being highlighted before me.

My father: Strings, once broken, hung from his body, but new strings of convention, fear of man, tradition, self-righteousness and nationalism had been attached to hold him in place. Whenever the hold of the Shepherd on his heart began to pull him away from the board, there was a certain fearful look on his face till his powerful strings pulled him back with whispered reminders like, "That just *isn't* done." "What would people *think*?" "The church board would *never* agree." "It isn't *American*." "It's *never* been done that way." And he yielded without a struggle—

actually, with obvious relief.

Sherry: With a shock, I saw her face was that of a plastic doll with great blue marbles for eyes, long plastic eyelashes and a puckered rubber mouth. She was in a skimpy outfit, and I could see where her plastic arms and legs were attached to her plastic torso. I saw her strings twisted round mine, and her movements, which showed no sign of struggle at all but total surrender to the Game Master by her total obliviousness to his existence, had a powerful influence over mine. My emotions went from disgust to pity to sorrow for her dangerous shallowness. A tear tumbled down my cheek for her captivity.

Will: He stood on a square deep into the game board, gazing—hypnotized—into the eyes of Marduke, whose eyes also never left his as she stood on the adjacent square. Unbeknownst to him, her hands were giving signals to shadowy, grotesque figures floating in the air, who were attaching multiple strings to every conceivable part of his body. All he was aware of was that for some reason he could now do things he'd never been able to do before, and he reveled in this newfound power without knowing where it came from and the bondage attached to these powers.

Roy: His strings were twisted and tangled with each other and all around him. He stood still in the middle of his square, tears streaming down his face, nothing moving but his eyes darting back and forth in fear and confusion, not knowing what to do next.

Collin: He was beginning to declare his independence and head for the edge of the board, crossing squares against the rules as he left the board area where Will and the band were positioned. The strings hung slack, like a deep-sea fisher's when he lets a

blue marlin run to weary him before pulling him in. They were slack, but nevertheless still firmly attached. My eyes followed Collin's strings upward until they met the eyes of a great bird hovering in the air above the board.

"So, my tangled rebel, how do *you* think the game will play out?" the bird said to me with a chuckle. "Do you *really* think the Shepherd can cut your strings?"

I turned toward the mountain and saw the compassionate eyes of the Shepherd. "Come unto Me and I will give you rest, for I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest to your soul. Let Me break off his yoke so you can take on Mine."

The bird's voice behind me taunted, "How will *your* game play out?"

"How will my game play out? How *will* the game play out?" I repeated as I growled and struggled with the tangle of strings. The bird cackled behind me.

The Shepherd called, "Come unto Me."

I awoke, lying on the floor by my bed, tangled in my sheet and blanket, both wet with sweat.

I hastily untangled myself and ran to the bathroom sink to douse myself. My gaze rose from the sink to the mirror and my own fearful, questioning eyes.

Looking deep into my own eyes, I challenged myself, "No one ever gets something for nothing, both Marduke and Gypsy said. And they're right, I've got to give up something. What will it be—pride and the flesh or joy and freedom? Which will I choose? How will the game play out ... for me?"

PART II
WITH SIGNS FOLLOWING

- 1-

A FAMILY AFFAIR

In the Family's two-story wooden house on Piedmont Avenue in the hippie section of Atlanta, the whole Colony was gathered for a meeting, standing around the picnic tables and benches that were used to seat the seventy team members for their meals and classes. The inspirationalists stood and played along the stairs going up to the second floor and the bedrooms.

Among the crowd of disciples was Lenny, with his patchy haircut (given to him by Brother Shadrach, who held a book about cutting hair in one hand, and some scissors in the other), his memory work and toothbrush hanging from the cord around his neck, his faded jeans with the knees all bagged out from age and wear and tear, a blue work shirt, and a grin from ear to ear as they sang song after song to the Lord with great inspiration. If Lenny stood out for anything, it was for being one of the loudest, most enthusiastic, and incidentally most off-key of all the singers. But nobody seemed to notice or mind.

When the singing died down, the Colony shepherd, Brother Hezekiah, stepped up to read a new MO Letter—an unusually short one, but one that was destined to change their lives.

Every eye was wide and most mouths hung open

that evening in November, 1971, as Hezekiah read dear Dad's call for everyone to go home and visit their folks. It was "The Homegoing" Letter, with the commission to go witness to their loved ones and help dispel some of their enemies' recent lies that Family members were held against their will. They were being told to call home right away for the fare to visit either at Thanksgiving or Christmastime.

After reading for only about fifteen minutes, the short, powerful Letter was finished. The disciples stood there, stunned. They were used to class sessions of several hours, stretching late into the night, but now Hezekiah was closing in prayer and already working out details for people to make their calls home before it got too late.

Elisha Burnfree turned to Lenny, who had changed his name to Joash, and said, "So, Bro, praise the Lord! That was pretty heavy, huh?"

"Wow! I never expected that. I'm a little scared. Will I make it?"

"Well, like Mo said, if you're supposed to be here, you'll come back."

"That's easy for you to say! You joined two years ago on the road at Bear Creek Park, but I haven't even been around a year yet."

"Just remember, 'The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His.' After all the things you told me the Lord did to get you in, He's not gonna let you go that easy. And hey, man, are you also thinking about what I think you probably most likely would and should be thinking about?"

"What?"

"A potential wifey? That sweet little Louisiana gal o' yours? Hmm? Gonna bring her back?"

"Well, I must admit the thought *had* crossed my mind."

"I'll bet it has," Elisha replied with a big grin.

"I mean, there *is* a definite shortage here, with fifty boys and eighteen girls at last count."

"True, true, and 'He that findeth a wife findeth a good thing, *and* obtaineth favor of the Lord.' So sic' em, Rover." And Elisha gave Lenny a huge bear hug.

Yeah, Lenny was thinking, *this trip might be just the final pull Gypsy needs to join. I'll stock up on lots of Endtime and Warning tracts and really give it my best shot—for both her and Don*. Amid all the hubbub of the room, Lenny felt the need to really pray and commit things to the Lord before calling his folks who were back home in Beaumont. So he went to the far corner of the dining room, sat down and buried his face in his hands, crying out in strong, whispered tongues for the Lord's strength and wisdom.

"Jesus, I feel so weak and unprepared to go back out there alone. I feel like Daniel in the lions' den, but with only a fraction of his training and experience. This is going to have to be You, but Lord, I claim souls for Your Kingdom, and disciples too—Gypsy and Don, Lord, and maybe some of the others in the band. Give me Your Holy Ghost power and boldness to witness to them with conviction, but also with wisdom and love. Help me be winsome like Mo always tells us to be, and not to blast them away. Help me to have the love and wisdom to temper the wind to the shorn lambs. What everybody needs is love. If they're not going to find it here or in me, where are they going to find it?"

The Lord then touched Lenny's heart and showed him Gypsy's loneliness, and that she was doing her best, but needed someone to pull her out. He showed him Don and his confusion, and quickened to him a long list of classes he would need to have handy to "convince the gainsayers," as he knew Don might be with all that philosophy and worldly wisdom he was into. A tear rolled down Lenny's cheek as he stood up from the table.

Gypsy was sitting at the kitchen table with her mom. It had been over a year, and today, at long last, Mom had said while they did the lunch dishes together, “Jennifer, I’ve been meanin’ to ask you, what do you see in that there Bible of yours that’s so special?”

“Mom, it’s no ordinary book. The Words of Jesus changed my life. He’s a living, loving Friend Who delivered me from sadness and confusion and gave me the things I was dreaming of.”

“Well, I gotta admit, He sure delivered you from them drugs of yours, an’ for that I guess I can thank Him. You sure have done your part in cleanin’ up this ol’ house of ours, an’ ya know, your daddy won’t say nothin’, but I think he’s just a mite softer than he used to be, don’t you?”

“Oh, for sure, Mom. He’s only drinking on the weekends sometimes, and when’s the last time you saw him drunk?”

“You know you’re right, it’s been a coon’s age, an’ he ain’t never gone all night no more. No, I guess your bein’ here and bein’ so different has made a heap o’ difference, an’ if you say that’s ‘cause o’ Jesus, well, I guess I might as well thank Him.”

“Oh, Mom, do you wanna?” Gypsy asked, drying her hands as they finished the last dishes.

“Do I wanna what?”

“Say thank You to Him. Don’t you wanna meet Him like I did?”

“Like you did?!” Mom said with a sly little grin. “No, no, I don’t think I’m quite ready for runnin’ through the woods in nothin’ ‘cept my panties.” Gypsy laughed at how close she and her mom had become and how, because Mom wasn’t churchy at all, she could share even the most intimate things with her.

“Mom, you sure are a card sometimes, you know that?”

“Well, there was a time I was quite the life o’ the party, an’ maybe them days is comin’ again. They say

history repeats itself, ya know. Don’t that go for the good as well as the bad?”

“Sure seems like it ought to. But, Mom, you can meet Jesus just by praying.” Gypsy ran for her Bible and before her mom could protest, she had her at the kitchen table showing her verses on salvation.

“Oh, I don’t know if I’m that far along. Do you really think He even wants an ornery ol’ nag like me? What else does He say?” Amid all her protests and resistance, Gypsy was moving her closer and closer to that golden, life-changing moment.

“Mom, I want you to look at this one verse here, and I want you to take it for your very own. Just picture Jesus looking right into your eyes and saying these words and meaning them for you, just you.” And she showed her John 6:37.

Mom read slowly and pensively, “‘All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me, and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.’ What does that ‘no wise’ mean?”

“It means, ‘*No way*,’ Mom. No way on God’s good earth that if you come to Jesus, He’s gonna say no and send you away. He wants you. He loves you.”

Mom’s chin trembled and one huge heavy tear, stored for years, plunged down her cheek. “Oh, look what you’re doin’ to me. Cryin’ like a baby!” She stood up, buried her face in a dishtowel and headed off for the hall.

Gypsy rose and gently grasped her mother’s arm and put her arms around her. She then let her Mom cry on her shoulder for a few seconds while she softly said, “It’s okay to cry, Mom. It’s God’s Spirit touching you and releasing you. I love you, my dear, dear mother! Just let it out. Jesus loves you, Mom.” And she led her mother in the prayer Lenny had taught her in one of his letters, the prayer to receive Jesus.

She didn’t know how long they stood there bathed in that golden glow from above, but she knew the two

of them couldn't remember a happier moment together. Mom had just met Jesus, and Gypsy had just won her first soul. She knew now that there was no greater joy on earth after salvation than seeing other souls saved. While they stood there, she asked the Lord if it were possible for her to spend her whole life doing that and only that, leading others to the wonderful knowledge of Jesus. And He answered immediately.

Ring! Ring! The phone drew the rapturous pair back to earth.

"Oh, goodness gracious, the phone ringin' an' me a mess o' tears an' all. Goodness gracious."

"I'll get it, Mom. ... Hello?"

"Hi, Gypsy. It's me."

"Lenny?! Oh, Lord, is it really? Where are you? How are you? I can't believe it. What are you doing?"

"Hold on, hold on. I could answer if you'd stop for a second."

"I'm sorry! It's just so good to hear you."

"I'm at home in Beaumont, recovering from the biggest Thanksgiving dinner I've had in years, and wondering if it would be all right for me to come up and see you tomorrow."

"Yes! Yes! Oh, wait ..." Gypsy covered the mouthpiece with her hand and asked her mom. "Lenny's in Texas and he wants to visit tomorrow. Is that okay, Mom?"

"Oh, goodness, it's all happenin' a little fast, let's see..."

"Please, Mom."

"Uh, what about your daddy?"

"You can explain, can't you? Lenny can sleep on the couch. He won't be a lick o' trouble." She uncovered the mouthpiece and said to Lenny, "You won't be a lick o' trouble, will you?"

"Course not," he answered.

"He said he won't, Mom."

"Well, I guess it'll be all right," Mom said.

"Yes, yes, yes, Lenny, you can come. Oh, I can't wait. I have so much to tell you and I know you have lots to tell me. Guess what?! My mom just got saved!"

"Jennifer, you don't go tellin' him everything right on the phone! Can't ya hold your horses an' at least let *me* get used to th' idea before ya tell the whole world?"

Gypsy laughed out loud. "Mom's protesting me telling all her secrets."

"Well, that's great. Gypsy, I have a funny feeling it won't be easy to get in a word edgewise. You're bursting with so much inspiration."

Gypsy glanced her mother's way. Mom muttered that she had to clean up the living room and left the kitchen where the phone was.

"Lenny, yeah, I'm happier than I've ever been, especially having just won Mom to the Lord. My first soul! But, Honey, I've missed you so badly I can hardly stand it. And God knows I need some help to know where to go from here. So, yes, I want you to come, and the only problem with your coming tomorrow is it ain't today!"

"I'll see you tomorrow then, around noon, depending on how good time I make in my dad's '68 GTO."

"He's lending you his Pontiac?!"

"Yeah, he must really trust me, huh?"

"I'll say."

"Well, actually he just bought a new one and this is his second car."

"Well, I must say, some people really have to suffer, don't they?"

"Yes, but my dad carries his troubles like a man and suffers bravely in silence. Gypsy, I'll let you go. Bye. Till tomorrow, my love."

"Bye. I love you." Gypsy hung up the phone, shook her head one time vigorously to make sure she was

awake and shouted, “Yippee!” as she charged into the living room, grabbed her mom and started dancing her round and round and round while singing “Feelin’ Groovy.” She spun the poor, bewildered lady around until they both collapsed, laughing uncontrollably on the floor of the living room.

True to his word, Lenny arrived in Shreveport early the next afternoon, and was greeted by an enthusiastic Gypsy. Gypsy’s mother loved him too, though she had to stifle a laugh at the man’s odd haircut. But his winsome ways and good sample had soon turned him into Prince Charming himself to this woman whose own husband was anything but. That was really the only worry. How would Gypsy’s dad react to coming home and finding all these Christians occupying his formerly unbelieving household? It didn’t take long to find out.

When Mr. Wilson arrived that evening, it was already obvious he’d had a bad day. He barely glanced at Lenny when he was introduced—or Gypsy and her mother, for that matter. Hearing that Lenny was from a Christian group didn’t change his expression any either. He excused himself rather abruptly and was soon sitting alone in the livingroom, working on a six-pack of beer that obviously wasn’t going to take him very long to finish. Between gulps, he did little but stare into space, the TV set cold and dark, and not a sound escaping the room except his occasional belch. Mom looked in every once in a while from the kitchen and gave Lenny and Gypsy nervous looks as they sat at the kitchen table.

She whispered, “This ain’t no good. When he gets like this to where he don’t watch TV or nothin’ an’ just drinks, he’s feelin’ so low he’d have to reach up to scratch a worm’s ankle. What are we gonna do? You’re gonna have to break the news o’ your leavin’ to follow Jesus soon, Jennifer, but ya just can’t when

he’s like this.”

Gypsy looked at Lenny, who hadn’t said a word for the last fifteen minutes, but was asking the Lord how to handle the situation. Then he stood up, said, “Thank You, Jesus. I’ll see what I can do.” Lenny opened the fridge, pulled out a Budweiser, popped the top and walked into the living room.

“Mr. Wilson, mind if I join you?” he asked as he sat down on the chair facing the couch. Mr. Wilson stared at him and the beer in his hand skeptically for a second or two, then looked in his eyes, saw no animosity, and looked back down again.

“Yep, I mind. Drinkin’ my beer, are ya?”

“Mrs. Wilson gave it to me. We thought you might appreciate a little company.”

“Well, you thought wrong. I wanna be left alone, an’ I sure don’t have a mind t’ company with no religious fanatics. Why, them God-damned hypocrites have made my life miserable as long as I can remember.”

“I don’t doubt that.”

“They get all fancied up an’ go t’ their church on Sunday an’ pretend t’ be so righteous an’ good, an’ then on Monday they’s stabbin’ poor people like me in the back t’ get what they want.”

“Yep, it’s a shame.”

“The worst gossips I ever met is them church biddies with their long tongues always talkin’ ’bout everybody’s sins ’cept their own.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean.”

He took another big swig of beer, wiped his mouth, belched and said, “Once I was havin’ a problem—a mighty big problem. I wasn’t too old, hadn’t met Jennifer’s mama yet, I was outta high school an’ workin’ for the state doin’ road work. I was earnin’ a dollar a day, ya know, Roosevelt an’ his New Deal¹.”

¹ See endnote 11: Roosevelt and the New Deal

“Dollar a day, you don’t say.”

“Yeah, dollar a day. But back then ya could buy a thing or two with that. Ya could eat an’ didn’t have t’ starve. But I was a foolish young’un, an’ I’d drink away that dollar a day rather than buy food. I didn’t have no family t’ support, mind ya. I felt guilty, though, ya know?”

Lenny nodded sympathetically.

“Then one day I spent it on food an’ determined I wasn’t gonna drink no more. I was gonna turn over a new leaf. But toward the end of the day, my innards went all cold inside an’ my hands started shakin’ an’ I felt like there was pins an’ needles all over my body or ants or somethin’, an’ I scratched an’ scratched but nothin’ would change it.

“I begun t’ sweat like I was burnin’ up but shiverin’ at the same time, an’ I knew that I was a drunk for the first time. Lenny ...” He looked up in Lenny’s eyes. Lenny nodded sympathetically. “I was scared. Galdurned if I know why I’m tellin’ ya all this.”

Gypsy’s father couldn’t see Gypsy and her mom at the kitchen table in prayer for him. “But I didn’t wanna throw my whole life away, me bein’ young an’ ambitious with a desire t’ make a difference in my life, so I thought maybe a church an’ pastor might be able t’ help me. That was a Saturday night, an’ I determined t’ go t’ church the next mornin’ an’ get me some help. So I did.

“Now I hadn’t ever been t’ one o’ them buildin’s in my life, an’ I didn’t own a tie or a suit. So I just dressed the best way I could with what I had, an’ I moseyed on along t’ the nearest church. Hell, I didn’t even know what time they started, so I got there two hours early an’ just sat in the park ’cross the street.

“It was hot outside an’ I begun t’ sweat an’ I felt mighty horrible from not havin’ a drink in more ’n a day an’ I guess I looked purty horrible too. Then come time t’ go t’ church an’ I walked over hopin’ t’ slip in

the back an’ sit there where nobody could see me till after the service I could get a chance t’ talk t’ the parson. They had these fancy marble steps leadin’ up t’ the big wide doors, an’ all them fine lookin’ an’ fine smellin’ church people was millin’ about, socializin’ before they went in. Am I borin’ you?”

“No, it’s fascinating to hear, sir.”

“Sir!” Ralph Wilson grinned sheepishly at Lenny.

“I can’t remember the last time nobody called me ‘sir.’ Sounds kinda nice, nice an’ respectful. You mockin’ me, kid?”

“Oh, no! No, sir, not at all.”

“Well, that’s good, ’cause I won’t abide it. I ain’t much t’ look at, an’ I ain’t all educated, but I got my pride an’ dignity an’, well, everybody needs respect, now don’t they?”

Lenny said softly, “They sure do, sir.... Are you gonna finish your story?”

“Oh, yeah, m’ story, yeah, yeah, where was I?”

“On the fancy marble steps.”

“Yeah, an’ ya know the heat an’ my general state made me stagger just a bit, just a bit, mind ya, as I went up them steps, an’ you shoulda seen the look of absolute horror on the face o’ them biddies standin’ there. I saw one look at me with a real disapprovin’ look in her eyes an’ then hurry over t’ a real giant of a man in a fancy blue suit with one o’ them flowers in his lapel. He come over t’ me an’ said, ‘I’m sorry, but you can’t come in here.’

“The biddy was standin’ there sayin’, ‘Just a bum tryin’ t’ get in outta the heat. Look at him.’ I hadn’t never been so humiliated in all my life. My folks weren’t religious or nothin’, but they treated folks with a bit o’ dignity, an’ here these church folks was callin’ me a *bum*. I tried t’ explain that I needed help, but the words was hard t’ get out, an’ more an’ more people started sayin’ I was drunk an’ no good, an’ callin’ attention t’ m’ clothes. An’ then, Lenny, y’ know what

they done?”

“What, sir?”

“Cause I kept tryin’ t’ get in an’ they wouldn’t let me, an’ I kept tryin’ t’ push my way in, that big fella an’ another o’ them ushers threw me back an’ I fell all the way down them steps. There musta been about twenty of ’em, an’ I felt ever’ one on my back goin’ down. I’ve had back trouble ever since, but what it done t’ my body ain’t the worst. I landed at the bottom an’ looked up an’ there weren’t a soul there that come t’ my aid. They looked at me with hatred in their eyes like I’d done somethin’ against ’em. An’ I broke down....”

Mr. Wilson began to choke back the tears. “I broke down an’, I’m shamed t’ tell ya, cried like a baby for the first time an’ the last time in my adult life.” He dropped his beer on the floor, and Lenny quickly scooped it up and put it on the coffee table just in time to catch Mr. Wilson in his arms, as he collapsed in huge sobs on the floor. “It was the church people,” he sobbed. “They was the ones that ... finished me off ... kicked me ... when I was ... down.”

Lenny just let him sob in his arms until the fountain of tears he’d been holding back in bitterness for over two decades had run dry. Then he picked himself up, dried his eyes and blew his nose and sat back on the sofa. “I’m sorry, Lenny, I’m just an ol’ drunk, a no-account, good for nothing’ like they said I was.”

Lenny sat on the sofa next to him and said, “No, you’re not. They did that to us too. They’re *always* doin’ that. The Bible said they would. It’s a sign of the days we’re living in, that they would have a form of godliness without the power thereof, the power of love. They turned us—the hippies—away, threw us out of their churches because we didn’t dress like they wanted us to. And you know who else they threw out?”

“No, who?”

“Jesus Himself!”

“They did?”

“Yep, the church people of his day killed Him.”

“That’s right, I saw that in one o’ them movies, *King of Kings* or somethin’.”

“And it says in the Bible that one of the signs of the Last Days would be that the false shepherds would drive the true sheep away and we’d wander around lost until God Himself would gather us to Him. That’s what happened to Jennifer and me. And He loves you too, Mr. Wilson.”

“Me? How could He love me when I cursed Him so many times an’ used His name in vain, an’ profaned the Sabbath, an’ done practically ever’ sin in the Book?”

“Because He came to save sinners like you and like me.”

“You’re a sinner?”

“You bet I am, but He loves me anyway, and He loves *you* and wants to come into your heart and save you. All you have to do is ask Him in.” Out came Lenny’s ever-ready Collins 3x5” Bible, and he showed Gypsy’s dad verse after verse on salvation until he said, yes, he wanted to pray.

“You can just repeat after me.”

“No, no, I reckon I’d better talk t’ Him m’self, I’ve done Him so wrong for so many years.”

Mr. Wilson knelt down and began to pray, “Jesus, this here’s Ralph, and I reckon it’s about time we got things straightened out between us. I don’t know much about how to go about prayin’ to Ya, but Lenny here said that if I asked Ya t’ come into m’ heart You would. Well, that’s what I’m doin’, I’m askin’ Ya t’ forgive me for all m’ sins ... an’ there’s plenty. Most of all, though, please forgive me for blamin’ Ya for the bad treatment I got from some o’ Your people. Thank Ya that Lenny an’ my daughter are different. Help me

t' be like them an' a little bit like You.

"Please come int' my heart so I can go t' Heaven when I die. I hope too that I can make some new friends now that I'm goin' t' Heaven, 'cause I don't think I'm gonna know many folks up There. Yours truly, Ralph."

He was quiet for a moment or two and then looked up. "You reckon He heard that?"

"I know that He did," Lenny affirmed, putting his arms around Mr. Wilson once more. This time Ralph Wilson returned the embrace with a grateful squeeze. As they broke their embrace, Wilson looked up and saw Gypsy and Edna standing in the doorway. He hurriedly climbed back onto the sofa.

"What're you lookin' at?"

"Oh, nothin', nothin' at all," Edna said, disappearing back into the kitchen. But Gypsy bounded over to her father and threw herself in his lap and kissed him on both cheeks over and over again.

"Dad, I'm so happy! All my dreams are coming true. I love you, Dad! I love you so much!"

Ralph was obviously both uncomfortable and brimming over with joy. He didn't know how to respond. He was like a baby in a whole new, unfamiliar world, but he couldn't stop chuckling at the contagious joy of his special child. Finally he held her still in his lap at arms' length and said, "So now I suppose you're gonna wanna go galavantin' off with this smooth-talkin' evangelist boyfriend o' yours?"

"Well, Dad, first of all, about the smooth-talking part—I don't think it was Lenny who was doing the talkin'."

Ralph cocked his head and thought for a minute and said, "You're right! You're really right. Lenny, you listened to me. That's what ya done that made ya so different."

"And as for gallivanting off, yes, Dad! I want to go follow Jesus with Lenny and his friends. I'd be real

happy if you were happy about that. Are you?"

"Well, I suppose ya could do worse things with your life."

"Oh, Dad!" Gypsy threw her arms around her father once more, kissing him all over again. "You're wonderful! I love you!"

"Now cut it out or your mama's gonna get jealous of her own daughter." Ralph stood up and began to pace a little in the room.

"Now, if you're leavin' tomorrow, Lenny, an' m' daughter wants t' go with ya, there ain't nothin' I can do t' stop her, and 'sides ... I guess I don't want to. Now ya'll are gonna need some money. Edna!"

Edna appeared instantly at the kitchen door.

"Edna, don't ya think we could spare some of our savin's t' help these young'uns on their way?"

Lenny said then, "Now, Mr. Wilson, with all due respect, I know you aren't rich and I don't want you to feel like you need to do this."

"Well, I spent my share on liquor an' ... uh ... other things, so I guess we can give a little t' help our little girl on her way. Whaddaya say, Edna?"

"I reckon we can, Ralph."

"After all, we're gonna be downright rich since I'm gonna quit drinkin' an' we can save all that money."

The next morning, with \$500 the Wilsons had given them, Lenny and Gypsy bid the fondest of farewells to Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, who stood on their porch waving till Lenny's dad's yellow GTO was out of sight.

"Whew," Lenny said, "that was a battle."

"Fought and won. Thank you for loving my dad. That's all on earth he needed—someone to listen to him so he could tell his story that he'd never told anyone before."

"You're kidding!"

"Nope, neither Mom nor I ever heard that story. Where did you learn how to do that?"

“What?”

“Listen.”

“Well, there’s this really wise old guy who told us half the job of a witness is to listen and let them pour out their hearts.”

“And who might that be?”

“Oh, a guy.” And Lenny began to whistle as he drove, thinking of Mo and how, right before his eyes, he was seeing God’s Word fulfilled, how He would use David as the shepherd to gather the lost sheep from where they had been scattered, how He would use him to break off the yoke of the System that had them bound, how David himself was one of the signs that these were the Last Days. And now onward to the next battle: Denton and Don.

- 2 -

DON’S DELIVERANCE

The stairs on the outside of the garage up to the little flat where Don lived creaked and bowed as Gypsy and Lenny ascended them. They looked at each other apprehensively before tentatively knocking on the door.

There was no answer, so they knocked again, louder this time. Late Sunday afternoon—he could be out, but Gypsy had *told* him they were coming. Still no answer.

“How did he sound on the phone, Gypsy?”

“Far away. He said we didn’t need to go out of our way to come see him. I said, nonsense, we were coming, and he said that was all right too. It wasn’t like he was all that enthusiastic. Maybe ... ”

Just then the venetian blinds on the glass of the front door parted and they were staring into the glassy eyes of someone who they could hardly recognize but knew was their former best friend. They brightened up with big smiles that were met with a faraway stare. The blinds closed again, followed by the sound of fumbling at the door. Slowly it opened halfway.

“Hi, Lenny. Hi, Gypsy. How are you?” Don said without emotion.

Gypsy nodded in hesitation for a moment. Her eyes met Lenny’s. She sighed deeply and threw her arms

around Don's neck, giving him a kiss on the cheek. He lost his grip on the door so it swung open and Lenny walked on into the apartment.

"Don, it's good to see you!" Gypsy exclaimed. "We've missed you so much! How are you? Can we come in?"

A trace of a smile seemed to brighten Don's face for just a moment as he stepped back from the door and allowed Gypsy in. As soon as the half-smile came, though, it vanished. At first Lenny and Gypsy could scarcely see what Don's place looked like, it was so dark with the curtains and blinds all drawn. There was one floor lamp in the corner by a broken and torn armchair with a stack of books on the floor beside it. Lenny picked one of them up.

"Studying?" he asked.

"Yeah, yeah, getting started on my thesis. Yeah."

"Oh, that's right, you're a graduate student now. Wow!"

"Uh, why don't you two ... uh ... sit down?" Don offered. Besides the armchair, there were two kitchen chairs by a folding table, but they were stacked with musty-smelling books and papers. Don didn't indicate where to sit, so Gypsy threw herself cross-legged on the dingy carpet. Lenny took one stack from a kitchen chair, placed it on the table and sat down.

"Wanna drink?"

"Whatcha got?" Lenny asked.

"Beer. Whiskey."

Ah, whiskey. That was the smell that filled the stale air of the room. "Uh, no, just water'll be fine."

"Me too," Gypsy said.

In the corner was a little stove, sink and fridge setup, and Don filled two glasses from the faucet. With glasses in hand, the trio exchanged stiff small talk about the drive up, the weather—the kind of surface things they had never talked about before. The air was stale, the conversation was stale, and it

looked like the friendship had gone old and stale as well. Don asked no questions, answered all questions with monosyllables, and stared into space often. During those times, their eyes now accustomed to the lack of light in the room, Lenny and Gypsy could see just how unkempt Don was, how uncared-for his surroundings were.

"Don, wh ... what's happened to Sherry?" Gypsy asked, taking the plunge to ask something closer to home and heart.

Don jerked as though she had punched him. His jaws clenched and unclenched once, twice, thrice, and his eyes met Gypsy's for the first time. "She left. She left when I started talking about Jesus."

Lenny said, "Well, Don, it was bound to happen sooner or later. You guys just weren't really cut out for each other. She was bound to leave."

"I guess she wasn't the only one who was *bound* to leave, was she? What about you two? Just walked out of my life... Was that *bound* to happen? Is *that* how God works? Remember what Sherry said, Gypsy ... how she thought God should do things in a way that won't mess people's lives up? Remember?"

Gypsy almost heaved a sigh of relief that at last Don was showing signs of life, even if he *was* filled with bitterness. Gypsy moved over near Don where he sat in the armchair and took his hand. He pulled it back but she held firm.

"Don, I'm sorry I didn't stay in touch like I should have. I'm so sorry. I don't know why I didn't. Something just froze inside of me. I guess I chickened out, leaving you that morning with only a note."

"What note?"

"The note I put on the table with the two months' rent."

"Gypsy, you didn't leave a note. You walked out on me right at the time when I needed answers. You gave up on me, then Sherry gave up on me. You gave

up on me, too, Lenny. And lately I've been thinking, why don't I just give up?"

"Don, I wrote a note. I asked you to call me, to write. I told you that I just thought I should give you some breathing space to think about things. And then I never heard anything from you, so I figured you didn't want to have anything to do with what I believed in now."

Don stared into space, struggling to retrace those days that seemed so long ago. "Sherry got up first ... when I came to the kitchen ... she announced that you had just left without notice ... and she gave me the money. I remember ... hearing her moving around ... I heard ... *the sound of paper crumpling!*"

"Don, Sherry must have trashed the note."

"Yeah, she must have. But Gypsy, *why* did you leave me? Why did you forget me? Lenny, why? Didn't I matter? Look at me. Do you think I don't know what this place and I look like to you? Man, I've been feeding myself brain food, but inside I'm shriveling. You were my very best friends and when I needed you, you weren't there."

"Gypsy, I never told anyone this, but I had a dream one night after you left. You came to me and told me I had to let the Shepherd cut the wires that held me bound, but I don't know how to do that. I just don't. And that was a long time ago, and I don't know if I even care anymore."

Don stood up, bolted to the fridge and in jerky, almost panicky motions dropped ice into a short glass, then filled it with Southern Comfort¹. His hand trembling, he took two gulps, then seemed to relax for a moment. "Do you know what that means? Let the Shepherd cut the wires that bind me?"

"Yeah," Lenny said, "we know and that's what we're here for."

¹**Southern Comfort:** A brand of whiskey

Don shouted, "I didn't ask *you!* I asked *her!* Just stay out of this, you ... you ... deserter! At least she *tried*. I want to hear from her. You make me sick, Lenny, just running off and leaving us all to sort things out ourselves. You had your answers, so to hell with us. That's what you thought, isn't it? Look at me, I'm all screwed up and confused and it started with you and your *dreams* and then your *desertion*. So you just stay out of this, understand?"

Gypsy knew Lenny, and he wasn't one to take that kind of talk without retaliation. His eyes flashed, his body tensed. Then as if a cool breeze blew over, he relaxed, nodded and said, "Sure, Don, I understand."

"Don," Gypsy said, "yes, I know how ... how to cut the wires. You see, *Jesus* is the Shepherd."

"I know *that*. I'm not stupid."

"No, no, I know you aren't. Uh ... can you tell me more about the wires?"

"They were like puppet wires, like I was a puppet on a checkered game board. And there was an evil bird thing above me, controlling the strings. You said my strings were ... were ... I don't want to say."

"Don, tell me, maybe I can help."

"I said I don't want to say. Can't you hear? Are you deaf? Can you quit treating me like I'm some kind of child?"

"Okay, okay. Well, let's see, the strings are anything that hold you back, keep you bound, keep you tied to the Establishment, to the things of the world. In your case, Don, I'd just make a wild guess, and say ... uh ... pride ... intellectuality ... and ... uh, maybe something to do with Sherry? ... uh ... the flesh? Lust? Something like that?"

Don stared into her eyes with fear. "Are *you* a witch too?"

"Don, what do you mean?"

"How did you know? That was exactly what you told me in the dream, pride of life and lust of the

flesh. Are you a witch like Marduke?”

“Marduke?”

“Never mind. How did you know?”

“I just prayed and took a wild stab at it, that’s all. If I got it right, well, it must have been the Lord.”

“‘Must have been the Lord.’ Ha! So facile! Such a copout! What does the Lord care about *me*?”

“Don, He loves you and He needs you. He needs workers, messengers, because we’re living in the Last Days.”

“Who says?”

“The signs, the signs show it. Oh, Lenny, what are all those different signs?”

Lenny shrugged, then nodded for her to go ahead, that she was doing fine.

“Man’s knowledge increasing so rapidly, worldwide travel ... it’s predicted in the Bible how man would travel like crazy in the Last Days ... earthquakes increasing, wars increasing and being worldwide, famines, Israel becoming a nation again, the rise of Russia as a great power, even nuclear weapons, man’s lack of love for his fellow man, even our cars and highways—all these things are signs that the End is near. The Bible says so, that the generation that sees these signs will not pass away till everything is fulfilled, meaning Jesus coming back and making things right. Don, we don’t have long and the Lord has precious few people who are willing to give their lives to reach others. He needs people like you.”

“Like me? Look at me!”

“That’s not you, that’s just the mess you got in because you’re fighting God and the Devil at the same time. Just let Jesus in and He’ll set you free. He’ll restore your mind, free your spirit and give you happiness you never knew before—freedom and joy you never knew before.”

Don saw the conversation going just like in the dream. “Freedom and joy?” he asked. “But no pride?”

“But no pride. Because, Don, everything we are, everything we have, is a gift from God. Love replaces pride. Humility and love set us free and give us joy. Do you want that? Do you want the wild freedom of the mountain?” A sudden inspiration struck Gypsy and she scrambled in her backpack where she kept a folded mimeographed article Lenny had once sent her.

“Don, it’s like climbing a mountain out of the valley—it’s hard work and maybe even death, but it’s exciting, it’s liberating.” And she began to read him “Mountain Men.” He sat unmoving letting the words of life wash over him and cleanse him. Words from the mountain, unheard in the valley. His head had been crammed full of the words of the valley men, but he knew the difference; he could feel the difference. Here were words that made perfect sense, that echoed his deepest thoughts, dreams and longings.

Gypsy read on. “Great difference in mountain and multitude. Mountain is opposite of multitude. Jesus left the multitude behind. The mountain peaks are never crowded. I climbed many mountains and I was almost always alone. Why? It’s hard work; not very many people desire to climb mountains; it’s lonesome; you have to forsake all to do it; it’s apt to cost you your life; lots of scratches and bumps.

“Long after the valley was in darkness I could still see the sun. There’s more light on the mountain. The valley is almost always dark—full of people and things, but usually in darkness. The mountain is windy and cold but thrilling. You have to have the feeling that it’s really worth dying for! Any mountain—the mountain of this life, the mountain of accomplishment, the mountain of obstacles, of difficulty—if you’re going to climb them, they have to be worth dying for, to brave wind and cold and storm, symbolic of adversities. But on the mount alone, you feel so close to the Lord! The voice of His Spirit there is so loud it’s

almost like it's thundering! The voice of the multitude is so loud in the valley, you can't hear the voice of God. The silence on the mountain peak is deafening! You get a real 'high' on top of a mountain! It's a thrill! It's almost terrifying!

"When you make it, the mouth of God will be opened unto you. He'll speak to you face to face and will teach and reveal to you the greatest of His secrets!

"So what do you hear on the mountain? You hear things that are going to echo around the world. What do you hear in the stillness? Whispers that are going to change the course of history."

*Why would she be reading about a **mountain**?* Don thought. He had never told her about the mountain in the dream. *God had told her!* Once again God was going to the trouble to prove that He existed and, not only that, but that He cared—He cared for Don. Don knew these words were worth living and dying for. They were the words they had been groping for in those wonderful nights when they had talked together about a new and better world till the sun came up. Now there was someone who said them better, and with more conviction, a man who spoke with authority. And whoever he was, he was worth following.

Gypsy continued, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.' Where have you pictured those pastures? I've always pictured them as mountain meadows, with beautiful little crystal mountain pools. 'Restoreth my soul ... leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.' What is His path like?—A narrow and rugged mountain path! 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death!'—There's death in the valley! Life is on the mountain! Get out of the valley!—Flee as a bird to the mountain, ye who are weary of sin!"

As Gypsy concluded her reading, the three of them

sat still in the near-darkness. It was only then they noticed the sun had set and night had fallen. No one spoke, but that awkward silence was no more. This was the silence of wanting to suck out all the worth of the moment while the words they had read took full effect.

Don slowly took Gypsy's hand in both of his and said, "What do I do now?"

"Just pray."

"Pray what?"

"This little prayer." And she led him in a simple prayer to open his heart to his Savior. He followed her like the humblest of children. The power of God's Holy Spirit in the room was strong, stronger than any drug. There was perfect peace, without fear, without pride—perfect freedom and a feeling of being embraced and loved tenderly and lovingly by the most wonderful Lover ever found.

Don felt an incredible lightness and, closing his eyes, let himself float on the wings of this new love, this new power. He was drifting on a breeze or a magic river, enveloped in celestial music that could be felt more than heard. He surrendered to the prompting in his heart to let go, to lose sight of the shore and launch out into a new world.

A broad grin spread across his face as he gazed into the warm darkness behind his closed eyelids until, without warning, a pair of the warmest, friendliest, most understanding eyes he had ever seen were peering into his. His body jolted with the sudden shock, and then relaxed again for a mere split second, until a voice in his heart, clearly as any voice he had ever heard, said, "Lenny stands to face the foe..." Then, "Write it, Don. Write it."

He shot out of his chair and to the kitchen table where he shuffled among the papers till he found a pen and yellow pad and began to write frantically. Lenny and Gypsy looked at each other bemused, then

watched Don scribble whatever it was he was writing. Five minutes, then ten, passed. Don, with an awed expression, handed the paper to Gypsy and lay his head down on the table. Gypsy read:

Lenny stands to face the foe,
His sword held firm in hand.
His face is set, his forehead strong,
To battle o'er sea or land.

His ears are tuned to the trumpet's call,
He quails not, wavers nor fears.
For he has answered, he'll not look back,
Till the day I wipe his tears.

Gypsy knows My burning zeal,
And she I have ordained
To heal, to soothe, to love, to lift,
To be a cooling rain

That washes hearts and quenches thirst,
And answers souls in pain.
She'll love you long with love complete,
And love will cleanse your stain.

Donald, I have called you too,
Down from your high, high hill.
For you were lost, you'd wandered far,
And now are roaming still.

I'll use your mind if you'll give it to Me,
And embrace My stirring call
To forsake the past and shun the vain,
And yield your all in all.

Lenny whispered, "Heavy! Really, really heavy."
Gypsy put her arms round Don, whose head was still resting on the table. "Don, that was so beautiful.

I've never seen anything like that before. God really loves you and needs you. Look at that, He gave us our callings in poetry through you. That was a miracle. God just filled you with His Spirit and poured right through you. And you let Him."

Don sat up and looked at them both. "Was it like that for both of you?"

"Well, it was different ..." Lenny was now emboldened enough to speak, "but beautiful too. Everyone is different and God handles us all differently, as individuals. He knows exactly what will turn each of our keys. God bless you, Don. Jesus loves you and we love you too."

"I felt like I was on the highest high. I never knew anything like that. So beautiful, so high, but no fear, no paranoia. So, so free, just like you said, Gypsy. That's real freedom, isn't it?"

"Yes, the freedom of the Spirit. There's nothing like it," Lenny said.

"Hey, let's get some light in here, some air!" Don shouted as he turned on the lights. As he turned, though, and saw what a mess his apartment was, he said, "Hmm ... I guess the room looks a lot better in the dark. You can't see all the dirt."

"We'll clean that up, Don," Gypsy said.

"It's like the Lord, Don," Lenny said. "You have to let Him into your heart, all dirty with sin and rebellion, for Him to be able to clean it up. But there are people who love darkness more than light. The world is dividing up now between those who follow the light and those who follow the darkness."

And out came Lenny's Bible for a good feeding of the Word, until at eleven they all realized they were famished and hadn't eaten for hours. After a couple of sandwiches they dove back into the Word again until three in the morning, when Lenny and Gypsy rolled out their sleeping bags on the floor and Don retired to his little bedroom.

“Gypsy,” Lenny said in the dark, holding her soft hand.

“Yeah?”

“Don needs you. You’re the key to his heart.”

“No, Jesus is the key—not me.”

“Yeah, yeah, of course, but He’s using you and you can’t fail him. There will still be battles. The Devil had him real good. He won’t give up without a fight, and you need to see him through, whatever it takes. Okay?”

“Uh, okay, I guess ...”

“I love you, Gypsy, and always will, no matter what happens.” Lenny gave Gypsy a sweet kiss.

Left alone with her thoughts and no tiredness, Gypsy thanked the Lord for the victory of Don’s salvation. What did Lenny mean by all that? Don’s saved now; he’s free. What could go wrong? She pondered what Lenny meant until her thoughts strayed to thoughts of desire. Here she was, lying with her lover, and he loved her, she knew. But he had said that they should wait about getting involved sexually again, so they hadn’t made love since he’d returned.

Lenny hadn’t said anything, but she guessed that it must be against the rules of his group for him to touch her sexually. She needed him spiritually, and his spirit was very satisfying as far as that went, but here in the dark, in the night, her body ached and longed for gentle touches, kisses, to be caressed, to feel the warmth and comfort of naked body against naked body.

Her experience with the Lord had been one all wrapped up with a message of sexual freedom, but it didn’t seem like Lenny was quite the same. A tear moistened her eye and she prayed for forgiveness that she could be unhappy at such a time as this, when she had so much to be thankful for.

“Jesus, I’m so sorry! I don’t mean to complain—I

won’t complain as a matter of fact. I know You’ve done wonderful, wonderful things for me, saving me and both my parents, setting me free to serve You full-time with this “Family” Lenny talks about, even bringing back Lenny, my love, in the first place, and now helping us to win Don. I praise You for it all. Forgive me for letting it rain on my parade by thinking of my own selfish desires right now. You know me, Lord, I’m a lover. I love love. I love to love and be loved, and I just can never seem to get enough. And I did think Lenny and I would have some of our good old times in the sack again, but I guess I didn’t think that one through.

“Lord, but why did You show *me* that my body, my desire, my sexuality were good and pure but You didn’t show *Lenny* that? Oh, I’m sorry, here I go questioning and complaining. Lord, I’m just gonna trust You. I’ve waited this long for love, I can wait a little longer. I love You, my sweetest lover of all, Jesus.”

Nestling down in the stillness, she began to hear something odd from the bedroom—muffled cries, water splashing. Something was wrong. She looked over at Lenny, but he was asleep, sound asleep. She crept stealthily from the sleeping bag and tiptoed to Don’s bedroom door, opening it silently.

The covers of the bed were thrown halfway across the room on the floor and the sound of Don’s voice and splashing came from the bathroom where she saw a sliver of light at the bottom of the door. As she drew near the door, she could hear Don’s voice, muffled and mumbled, saying things like, “What’s happening to me? It’s all too weird.... Help me.... Not the wires ... and not Gypsy’s God either.... I want to be free.”

Gypsy opened the door and found herself staring into Don’s crazed eyes.

“What did you do to me?” he said to her. “Does your God have wires too? The birds say He does. Why

did you come here? Leave me alone. I had peace before you came. I had my books and I didn't dream anymore. Leave me alone. My ... oh, God, my ... heart..."

Don clutched his heart and buckled over the sink. Gypsy placed one hand on his back and the other on his heart and prayed desperately for him, for his healing. As she prayed, his body relaxed. Slowly he pulled himself to his full height, holding her hands in his, and gazed into her upturned face. "You didn't bewitch me, did you?"

"No, we loved you."

"It's all so strange. I can't understand. It doesn't make any sense. How did I write a poem without thinking? How did I feel so high without drugs? How can I ... how can I ... fall ... in love with ... my best friend's girl? Which part is God, which part is me, which part is the Devil? It all feels good and right and I feel so afraid. The birds came and tried to take it all away. Hold me, Gypsy, I need you to hold me."

Gypsy hesitated a tiny moment before she drew Don into her arms. She didn't understand either. She didn't understand the excited beating of her own heart. She didn't understand how she knew that what her heart was telling her to do was right, that the love that welled up in her heart for this dear, struggling friend was from God, but she was a lover, and loving is what lovers do.

Lenny had said to do whatever needed to be done, so she stepped back half a step from Don, fixed her eyes on his, and drew her thin nightshirt over her head. With a mysterious Mona Lisa-like smile, she took both of his hands and placed them on her naked breasts, and then, ever so gently, pulled his pajama pants down and let them fall to the floor.

It seemed a lifetime that they stood there touching each other softly, staring into the other's eyes, scarcely believing this moment was real. Finally Don's

fingertips began to stroke her shoulders, up her neck, through her hair behind her ears while she released the tiniest moans of pleasure.

At last he tenderly placed his lips on hers and pulled her closer and closer into him, and they met and melted and molded into one in the utmost of love—a love neither of them had ever known, for it was more than their love. It was the love of Jesus, the love of the God of the whole universe. It was their *destiny*, it was right, and it was *meant* to be. No one could ever tell these two again that love was wrong, that sex was evil, for they had touched the very heart of God firsthand that first night in the bed of passion together.

Lenny awoke early, still tired, still planning to sleep a while longer. He praised the Lord for a minute or two for the miracle the night before of Don receiving Jesus and then rolled over to see if Gypsy was awake or asleep. Strange, she was up already.

Well, that's not unusual for her, she's probably outside getting some fresh air—there's precious little of it in this musty apartment. Lenny threw his jeans on and went to the door.

It was still locked from the inside. He looked through the blinds and saw no sign of Gypsy outside in the crisp November morning air. *Huh?* There were her jeans and blouse draped over the armchair.

She must be in the toilet. She'll be out in a minute. Lenny lay back down and tried to go back to sleep, but his mind wouldn't stop racing when Gypsy hadn't come back to bed after fifteen minutes.

Well, I'll just see. ... I need to go to the toilet myself anyway. So Lenny quietly opened the bedroom door to go to the toilet. Seeing Gypsy's light brown hair spread luxuriantly over the pillow next to Don, he recoiled with a gasp, pulling back into the living room and closing the door behind him.

“Oh God! Oh God! Oh Jesus, help me!” he prayed over and over again as he paced the room. No other words came to him. His pulse pounded so strongly that he was afraid it would wake the two lovers up. His breathing quickened and his thoughts careened madly in his mind, having no direction, like panicked passengers on a sinking ship. He was soaked with sweat in the cool morning air.

“I’ve gotta get outta here. I gotta go! Oh God, help me. Hold me. I need You, Lord,” he prayed, while he threw on the rest of his clothes and frantically fumbled to open the door and escape this house that had been transformed so suddenly from a house of miracles into a house of horrors. As he scrambled down the stairs he mumbled, “I know I told her to do whatever it took, but not *this*, not *this!* How could they do this!”

Lenny visited the cemetery, but no peace was there. He went to the river on the unknown farmer’s farm, stripped off his clothes and dove into the cold, bracing water. It seemed the shock of the cold on his naked body was the first touch of sanity he had known since his dreadful discovery.

It was odd that he didn’t shiver; the water soothed his spirit, and he remembered the lake in his final acid trip and how he had forsaken Gypsy. Was he now going to insist on taking her back even if God had other plans for her? Was he going to put himself through all that agony again just because he had decided it *should* be God’s plan to let him take her back off the altar? *God* had never told him that. That was his *own* idea.

The choice was clear: pick her up and start planning his life for himself again, or leave her there on the altar and let Jesus decide. He had successfully yielded his life to the Lord now for over a year; why would he take it back now and start planning not only his own life but Gypsy’s as well? Gypsy had helped him through the toughest year of his life and

had done her job well. He had repaid her by bringing her to the Lord. Who needed Gypsy most now, Lenny or Don? That wasn’t hard to see. Don needed Gypsy.

What really hurts to think about though is, does Gypsy need Don now too, more than she needs me? Is my job done?

“Lord,” Lenny began to pray aloud, “I knew from the beginning that I had signed a blank sheet of paper and told You that You could fill it in as You see fit. I won’t take that back now. I’ve had some pain and You’ve always seen me through. I can hurt again. I trust You. At least now I’m not alone in my pain like I was before I found You. I’m Yours. Gypsy’s Yours. And Don too, now. It’s marvelous all You’ve done to answer my prayers and win all my best friends to You. That’s more than I could’ve ever asked for. Am I going to be selfish now and say I want them not only for You, but for *me* too? So, Jesus, this is a hard cup to drink. I don’t think I’ve shed the last tear over the most wonderful girl I ever knew. But here in this garden, my Garden of Gethsemane, I tell You—and in doing so I swear to my own hurt, and by Your grace I will not change—not my will, but Thine be done.”

Mingled now with the deep hurt of the fear of losing someone he loved so dearly, was an indescribable sense of comfort and peace that passes understanding. He could somehow feel the Lord’s pleasure at his having once more laid his life, his love, and his very self on the altar. The tears tumbling down his cheeks one after the other coursed their way to the corners of his smiling mouth, a sight to behold for Gypsy and Don who found him just at that moment.

They quietly walked to the riverbank and sat down a few discreet feet apart. On both of their faces he could read apology and empathy. Without a word, Lenny stood up from the water, donned his jeans and sat before them cross-legged.

“Lenny,” Don whispered without looking up. “I’m

sorry.”

“No,” Lenny answered. “It’s okay, it’s really okay.”

“Lenny,” Gypsy said now, “I don’t know what to say. I never meant it to happen like that...”

“Gypsy, look. Remember how I told you to do whatever it took? I didn’t have any idea what I was saying when I told you that...” With an embarrassed smile, Lenny wiped the tears that were running down his cheeks and tried to cough away the catch in his throat. “But while I was out here swimming—in December of all things—I realized that God *did* know. I don’t understand much. I know that most Christians would say that what you did was really wrong. But ... Don ... do *you* think it was wrong?”

“Lenny ... man, I feel so bad.... Yeah, please just ...”

“Forget about *me* right now, man. I told you I’m okay with what happened. But what about you? Was it wrong?”

“Well ... if you put it that way,” he cast a quick glance at Gypsy, “I don’t know, man. It didn’t *feel* wrong. I guess ... it kind of felt like ... well, I don’t think I would have made it through the night without Gypsy being there to pull me through. I got so screwed up.”

“Her love helped to free you?”

“Yeah, yeah, it sure did.”

“Then it’s okay. It’s not wrong. One thing I know is that God will do, and has done, just about anything to win a soul and a disciple. And He doesn’t have any limits when He’s trying to show us His love. He used LSD and the Beatles to deliver me, and I know for darn sure that Gypsy and her lovin’ are a far sight more godly than *they* are. So that’s what it must have taken for you, Don, and I’m glad for you.”

Gypsy crawled over to Lenny, put her arms around him and kissed him. “I love you, Lenny. You are so, so special.”

Lenny broke then and cried in Gypsy’s arms. Don wrapped his arms around them both, and grateful, broken, happy tears were shed by all.

As the three sat there holding each other, Lenny said, “I gave you up on that lake with Jesus, Gypsy, remember? And I don’t think I have the right to take you back according to *my* plan. I know now I just need to trust Him that He will work everything out the way He knows best.”

Gypsy asked, “Where to now?” She was referring to their relationship.

“Austin, of course. We’ve still got Will and the guys to contend with. I told Roy I’d be back. Can’t fail a sheep. Comin’ with us, Don?”

“Well, I don’t know. I’ve got a lot of very important things to do, you know, like this thesis for example, and exams coming up and—well, then there’s my career in philosophy and the general foolishness and idiocy of man’s puffed-up mind, you know, the opportunity to fill thousands of young impressionable minds with cow dung in the hallowed halls of higher learning until I’m as old and crotchety as Phillipsby. Quite a brilliant future ahead of me, wouldn’t you say? I mean, are you daring to insinuate that I should give all that up to follow the Creator of the universe and to fulfill the calling that He created me for? Huh?”

Lenny stood up. “Yep. I sure am.”

“I thought you were. When are we leaving?”

“How long will it take you to pack?”

“One day. Plus one day to de-register at the university, close my apartment and settle my bills. We could hit the road on Wednesday. Whaddaya say?”

Lenny put one hand on Don’s shoulder and one on Gypsy’s and said with great gravity, “This is the happiest day of my life, my friends. To join forces with the two dearest people in the whole world to me in Jesus’ army is more than I could have ever asked or expected.”

Gypsy gasped. “Lenny, the dream! Remember what it said about you and your friends? It’s begun!”

“Folks, we’ll never be the same again. From this moment on, our lives have meaning and purpose. And may God forbid that any of us ever turn back from this Heavenly calling. Let’s go forward to win the world for Jesus. Amen?”

“Amen!”

- 3 -

BAPTISM BY FIRE

Don had de-registered from the university, paid his bills and paid the rent on his apartment for one more month so he would have someplace to keep his things until the three of them knew exactly where to go and what to do. The three friends and now comrades-in-arms were preparing to take some time to pray about their next step when the phone rang.

“Hello?” Don said, picking up the receiver.

“Hey, man, what’s happenin’?” came the unmistakable sound of Roy’s voice.

“Roy!” Don motioned Lenny and Gypsy to come near. “Roy, how are ya, man? What’s up?”

“I don’t know, I was just groovin’ to a Jeff Beck album, kinda half-stoned, and it was like heavy, man! Suddenly there was some kinda creature, someone like Tinkerbell or one o’ those fairies or something on my shoulder who said, ‘Hey, Roy, hey, man, pick up the phone an’ call Don.’ So I did. Far out, huh?”

“Yeah, far out! We were just talking about you guys an’ wondering how ya were, where ya were and all.”

“Who’s ‘we’?”

“Lenny and Gypsy are here. They just rolled in a couple of days ago and laid some heavy stuff on me, and we want to see you guys. So where are you?”

“Austin, man, but not for long. Lenny and Gypsy

there?! Oh, man, that's, that's really, really heavy, man. I could dig seein' those guys again."

"They wanna see you too. So when can we catch you?"

"Ya gotta come *now*, man, like *yesterday*, ya know, 'cause we're finishin' up a stint with the Armadillo Club. Remember Stoney, the wild freak with the crazy Afro an' baby Armadillos crawlin' all over him? Cosmic, man, really cosmic!"

"Oh, yeah, I remember him. I heard his club is doin' big-time now."

"Yeah, well, we been playin' there, but we got some bigger stuff lined up. Will an' Marduke 're takin' us up, up and away, man. It's cool, I guess. We got a new name for the band—Ritual—and we recorded with one o' these companies whose records cover the Southwest. Record's doin' okay, so we're finishin' up at the Armadillo Club an' then goin' full-time into concerts and then pop festivals in the summer. Looks like we're on our way. After this comin' weekend we're outta here."

"Okay, then, we'll be up to catch you then." Don held his hand over the mouthpiece and mouthed 'when?' to his friends.

"Tomorrow," Lenny mouthed back.

"We'll be there tomorrow. We'll see you at the club tomorrow night. How is everybody?"

"Oh man, let's see.... Collin quit and we got a new bass player. He's weird, man—dresses all in black and silver and hardly talks, just giggles. Then sometimes when you're not lookin' right at him, he shoots *flames* outta his mouth all of a sudden. Like you see it outta the corner of your eye and then when ya look at him, he just grins real big but funny. When he does that, I get shivers, ya know. And, ya know, he's just weird.

"Marduke an' Will are real tight. Will's different—not much fun, ya know, real intense. He's got one o'

those Ankh symbols¹ tattooed on one arm, and one of those witchcraft stars² on the other, and he's got a lot of weird things in his room and strange books ya can't even understand. Lots has changed, an', Don ... uh ..."

"Yeah, Roy?"

"Lenny said he'd come back when he got the answers he was lookin' for. Did he, ya know, get the answers?"

"Yeah, Roy, he did. That's why we're comin'."

"'Cause I still get kinda scared when I think about the things he told us when he left."

"Don't worry, we got some answers for ya."

"Good. That's groovy. See ya tomorrow then."

"Yeah, see ya." Don hung up and filled the team in on what had been said. They all could see this would be a battle royal.

Lenny later admitted he had never fought such a battle. Some of the older brothers in the Family had told him of invading the Devil's territory of the rock world, and now Lenny could only rely on the Lord, prayer and those testimonies to guide him. Here he was with two brand-new babes—his fresh fruit and new disciples—and besides needing to feed and train them on the road, he needed to arm himself and them for what they all could sense would be major warfare in the spirit.

After they had prayed, they waited a little while like Lenny was used to doing after major prayer sessions. Then he began to speak the string of verses that came to him:

"Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea, I will

¹**Ankh symbol:** An ancient Egyptian symbol used in witchcraft to signify the abhorrence of sexual purity, belief in fertility rites, and the worship of the sun god, Ra, the Egyptian name for Lucifer.

²See endnote 12: Witchcraft stars

help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness. Though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I am with thee. My rod and My staff, they comfort thee. I will lead you and guide you, and after receive you to glory.

“You shall not need to fight in this battle, for the battle is Mine, therefore stand back and see Me fight. A thousand shall fall at thy side and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. In this world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world, for greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world. Go forth to battle, gird up your loins and I shall be with you.”

When Lenny opened his eyes, Gypsy was staring at him, wide-eyed. “Wow, Lenny! What was that?”

“Uh, it’s called prophesying. You know, you read about it in the Bible.”

“Yeah, but it’s different when it happens. It’s beautiful! It felt so good. So God just spoke to us, huh?”

“Yeah.”

“And said we’d win, right?”

“Right.”

Then they noticed that Don was still sitting cross-legged with his eyes closed. Lenny motioned with his finger to his lip and Gypsy nodded. Another minute or more passed before Don slowly opened his eyes. He took a deep breath and stared far, far away.

Gypsy touched his arm. “Well? What happened?”

“Whoa, it was so heavy! I felt like I wasn’t here anymore, like I was floating in this warm darkness, and then I started seeing something. We were approaching that same chessboard as in the dream I had. But this time we were free—no strings, with armor on, and we were real mighty and powerful like those *Marvel Comics* super heroes.—Us, can you

imagine?

“As we approached the board, there were other people standing around in our way, but when our eyes met theirs, they just stepped out of our way, because we were headed for a certain part of the board where I could see the band guys waiting. We didn’t look to the right or the left. We had a job to do and nothing could stop us.

“At first it was like the guys were glad to see us, some of that old camaraderie was there, but then Marduke stepped out and in the air over her head were all these evil figures, demons. Then the guys got cold and distant—at least some of them.

“The demons over Marduke’s head were plenty scary, but then you, Lenny, drew our attention to the air above our heads and there were masses of angels with us—they were all armed. Then I realized that they were going to be fighting for us—the Lord was with us, and He was going to defeat Marduke’s devils.

“When we didn’t cower but kept coming—she was counting on our being afraid at the sight of her power—when we didn’t stop, didn’t fear, you could see she and the demons were afraid, and you know what they were afraid of?”

“You know what they couldn’t take their eyes off of? The huge swords we each had in our hands. They knew those swords were more powerful than anything they had, and that we could cut the strings and free their captives with them.

“Then a battle began. It was intense and heavy. It seemed like some of them and even some of the people who were with them were willing to listen to us and receive what we had to tell them. We were setting some of them free with our swords. And others ... well, they wouldn’t listen. I got that we shouldn’t be discouraged by them, but just look for those who were interested in what we were saying.”

Lenny burst into praises, lifting his arms to the

ceiling and praising God fervently. Gypsy and Don, the Spirit of God being in full power there that day, lifted their arms too, and began to shout praises as well. As they praised the Lord whole-heartedly for revealing to them such awesome mysteries from the world of the spirit, they felt as if their hearts were overflowing.

Lenny began to babble away in tongues, and without even understanding what was happening, the other two also felt the same urge to let the Spirit speak through them in an unknown language. Tongues of praise surged from their hearts in a mighty crescendo, filling them with that other-worldly joy that they would grow to know, love and live for—and even be willing to die for—in the years to come.

Gypsy and Don had never felt so free and happy. They were experiencing for the first time the ecstasies of intimate spiritual union with their loving Bridegroom—Jesus.

Now, fully armed for battle, the three headed off in the GTO to Austin, Lenny driving and Gypsy reading passages from the Bible that related to the prophecy and vision of the morning—about the armor of God and many more that Lenny would think of as they talked and read. Both Gypsy and Don marveled at how much Lenny had learned of the Word in such a short time, and they determined that they too would make learning the Word a top priority in their lives.

It was late afternoon when they pulled into Austin and down the drag, old Guadalupe Drive where the traveling hippie kids lined the right side of the street across from the University of Texas. Gypsy rolled down the window and asked one hippie couple walking down the sidewalk, “Hey, you know where the Armadillo Club is?”

“Sure, who doesn’t?” the boy said. “It’s just ... uh

... you go down here and then ... hell, I was just there last night. How’d we get there?”

“You were so stoned,” the girl said, “you can’t even be sure you *were* there, babe. Look, we ain’t so good on directions, but maybe we could show ya.” Without hesitation, the couple climbed into the car with them.

“Hey, man,” she said to Lenny, “you straight ‘r somethin’? Look at this car! And your hair!”

Lenny laughed. “No, I ain’t straight. I’m higher ‘n I’ve ever been in my life. An’ the car, it’s my old man’s. I just borrowed it. Real trip, huh?”

“Yeah, far out!” the boy said, stroking the upholstery admiringly.

Gypsy asked, “What’re your names anyway?” as they began to drive in the general direction the couple indicated.

“I’m Judy and he’s Howie ... I think. I mean, we just met last night. An’ you know how some dudes are, they give you a fake name so they can slip away in the mornin’ an’ you can’t find ‘em. So, Howie, is that *really* your name?”

Howie chuckled nervously, “Yeah, yeah, that’s my name. Can’t ya tell? I didn’t slip away. I’m still here.”

“I don’t know what he likes the most,” Judy said to Gypsy, “me, my body, or the Acapulco gold I got,” and she began to roll a joint.

“Hey! There it is!” Howie shouted, startling Lenny. “That record shop! I think we turned left here.” Lenny began to turn left. “Or was it right?” Lenny swerved right. “No, there’s the capital dome ... then it’s left ... yeah, it’s left.” By now Lenny had to swerve to make the turn, barely missing the curb and a couple of freaks hanging out.

“Hey, man, where’d you learn to drive?’ Howie asked him.

Lenny didn’t answer.

“Wanna hit?” Judy asked as she offered everyone a toke on her newly-made joint. As each one in turn

turned her down, she recoiled in horror. “You guys narcs or somethin’?”

“No, no,” Don said, “don’t get paranoid, Judy, we won’t turn you in.”

“See, Judy, it’s just like I told ya,” Howie said. “You gotta work on that paranoia problem. I told her that last night too. But, hey, how come you don’t want this weed? It’s good stuff.”

Lenny said, “’Cause we got somethin’ better, somethin’ cosmic that’ll blow your head off. ’Cause we took this stuff an’ we ain’t never gonna come down, ain’t never gonna die, ain’t never gonna be the same again. You know the song, man, *‘Like a true nature’s child, I was born, born to be wild, I can fly so high, I never wanna die.’*”

“Sure, I know it. Steppenwolf. Sure. I dig them. Hey! There it is! Stop!”

Lenny slammed on his brakes and they found themselves stopped on a hill. Down below, there was a vast field that once might have been a Little League baseball diamond, but was now filled with groups of freaks milling about or lying or sitting on the grass waiting for the club to open for the night. There must have been a couple hundred of them.

At the end of the field stood a tall, unpainted and neglected wooden mansion, topped by a huge sign that said: “Armadillo Club! Featuring RITUAL!”

Lenny, Don and Gypsy stared in silence for a moment at the sight below them. Lenny broke the silence with, “When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion upon them, for they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd.”

Howie asked Gypsy, “Does he always talk this funny?”

Gypsy looked into Howie’s eyes, smiled, and touched the fuzzy beard on his cheek.

Howie stared for a second, then turned away in

discomfort at what he considered some rather strange people. He opened the car door and got out. “Well, here we are. I got ya here, just like I said I would. It’s been nice. Uh ... see ya later.” He walked hurriedly away with great long strides, but suddenly turned round and came back. “Judy, you comin’?”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m comin’.” She got out and began to follow Howie, who walked away once more in a hurry, then suddenly he stopped, swiveled and looked back at the three who had now climbed out of the car. For a moment he stood suspended in time and space until, his brow furrowed in question, he returned a second time.

“Okay, man,” he said to Lenny. “I’m game. Yeah, I wanna know. So what exactly is this stuff you got that does all that for you? I want some. I think I’ve tried every drug made, but nothing like you’re rappin’ about.”

“Oh, well,” Lenny answered with a half-smile on his lips, “it ain’t for everybody. Not everybody can handle it.”

“Handle it?! Man, I’ve dropped three orange sunshines at a time and driven home while I was peakin’! I can take it. I can take *anything*. I ate peyote¹ with the Hopis², man, I been around. Don’t talk to me about takin’ it.”

“This ain’t no drug, nothin’ so light an’ inconsequential. This is magic, this is heavy-duty *spirit* stuff. This is an *experience!*”

“Like Hendrix?”

“Heavier, much heavier. It’s an experience you can have right now, man, that will rip your heart right out and give you a new one, that’ll blast out all the

¹**peyote:** spineless, dome-shaped cactus native to Mexico and the southwest US, having buttonlike tubercles that are chewed fresh or dry as a narcotic drug. Also called mescal.

²**Hopis:** A tribe of North American Indians in and around Arizona

old circuits in your mind and rewire you a new creation, that'll make you a baby in a whole new beautiful world that makes psychedelia¹ look drab, that'll set you on a mountain, head and shoulders above this God-damned world, with a vision that the ordinary man can't see and knowledge that the Ph.D.'s can't have. You want it?"

Howie was staring into Lenny's eyes, mesmerized. "Yeah, yeah, I want what you got."

Lenny put his hands on both of Howie's shoulders, smiled deep into his eyes, and said, "Then you gotta take Him into your heart. You can't see Him, but He's here and He's alive, and He is the heaviest dude that ever walked this earth, and He loves *you*, Howie, He knows you and He wants to live in you."

"Heavy!"

"He's Jesus, Howie."

"Jesus? Hey, wait a minute...."

"Not a *church* Jesus, the *real* Jesus, the *radical* of Nazareth, the *revolutionary* who hates the System more than you do, who loves freedom more than you do, who understands you and knows your every thought and your every deed, the good with the bad. He even knows what Judy suspects, that your name ain't really Howie."

"Hey, how'd *you* know that?" he shouted, jumping back with a shock.

"I don't know ... I just knew. He musta told me. He's whisperin' in my ear right now, Howie Whoever."

"Stan."

"Okay, Stan, just pray with me. Repeat after me."

Judy pushed her way in and asked, "Can I do it too?"

"Sure." Lenny led the two of them to pray and receive Jesus. As they finished, he wrapped his arms around each one of them in a big embrace. Gypsy

hugged them too, followed by Don. Judy clung tightly to Gypsy, her arms around her waist. Gypsy stroked her arm gently, noticing the needle marks on her lower arm. She then prayed for her extra hard that she could come all the way off the drugs she was taking.

Stan held tight to Lenny's arm and declared, "I ain't never felt love like this. This power—it's love, ain't it?"

"Yeah, that's right."

"Man, this is great! I don't know where you're goin', man, but can I come too?"

"If you're willin' to pay the price."

"I *am*, man. I tried everything, but if I can have what you have—the peace, the strength *you* got, man. I'd give *anything* for that."

"That's the price—*everything*. Now, Stan, Judy, stick with us. We got some old friends to see and a job to do. Do you know the band here?"

"*Ritual?*" Judy said. "Oh, yeah, they're great. I dig their sound."

"Yeah? Well, *we* love 'em too. That's why we're here. We gotta lay some of this heavy stuff on their heads too, 'cause they're our best friends from college."

"You know 'em? You know Will Ryder?"

"Sure do," Gypsy said.

"Oh God! He's got the grooviest hair! Those blonde curls drive me wild, and the most gorgeous bod. This is too much! I meet you all, Jesus, and Will Ryder all the same day!"

Don, Gypsy and Lenny exchanged skeptical looks, shrugged and headed down the hill toward the club.

All three of them had been out of the mainstream of the hippie scene for the best part of a year—Gypsy in Louisiana, Lenny with the Family and Don in graduate school—and the freaks at the Armadillo Club were known to be the heaviest in Texas. As the trio walked through the crowd on their way to the club, they were shocked at how much the scene had

¹**psychedelia**: the sub-culture associated with psychedelic drugs

changed.

There were two guys and three girls dressed in ragged dirty clothes, nodding, with their eyeballs grotesquely rolling up in their heads from the heroin they had just hit up.

A chick not more than fourteen with dark circles under her eyes approached Don and said, “Hey, man, I’ll ball ya if ya’ll let me crash at your pad and give me some *stuff*.”

In the middle of the field, there was one lone freak wearing nothing doing a slow motion dance. As they neared him, the light from the streetlight reflected in his blankly staring eyes like tombstones.

A couple—although it wasn’t clear who was male and who was female—both wearing black capes with hoods from their heads to their feet, both chalky-white as if they’d never seen the sun, floated toward them, faces empty and cold. Lenny’s eyes locked with theirs, and their faces twisted into horrified looks. They hurried away in the opposite direction as swiftly as they could.

“Hey,” Stan said. “Did you see that?”

“Yeah,” Lenny said.

“They’re *witches*. *Everyone* knows ’em. People say they’ve got real power. But *you* freaked ’em out! How’d you do that?”

“Jesus is greater by far, Stan m’ man.”

“Heavy! Really heavy, man.”

When the club opened at 7:00, the little group managed to get in for free by saying they were friends of the band. Lenny had also turned on the charm for the poor little freak chick in the ticket booth. It was dark inside, except for a few lava lights on the huge telephone wire spools along the wall; there were musty cushions on the floor to sit on.

On the stage, a light show cast moving amoeba shapes of colored light all over the band that was

playing before Ritual, and on the wall behind them. The music was deafening and conversation was impossible. In the middle of the floor, freaks were dancing, some wildly moving all over the floor with grotesque gyrations, others standing still swaying back and forth, others in couples or groups, others alone, some slow, some fast. Nothing seemed to make sense—like the song said, “*When logic and proportion have fallen floppy dead...*”

Lenny could see only too well that the hippie scene was degenerating into heavy drugs and the occult, into hopelessness and filth and poverty, into meaningless sex and perversion, into disease and despair.

It was clear that people had three choices: die the death with the hippie scene and move into the occult or heavy drugs and their slow demise from addiction and uselessness; surrender and melt back into the hated System and try for the rest of their lives to justify why they gave up; or follow Jesus. There was no other way. He thanked God he had pulled out when he had, and he prayed they could set as many others free as possible.

It wasn’t long before Ritual came on, amid screams from the girls and mad applause. They were tight. They were wild. They were good. And they were weird for sure.

Lenny rebuked the evil fascination he felt for their music, which he could see was not coming from any spirit he was interested in connecting with. He told Gypsy and Don by shouting right into their ears to stay in prayer and keep rebuking the Devil, because this music really did seem to have spiritual power.

Judy was wildly gyrating on the dance floor with a good number of freak boys, but Stan stayed real close. Lenny could tell he was really a little babe born again into a new world, and he was spiritually sensitive enough to recognize that this music was from the

wrong side of the spiritual tracks.

None of the four were sorry when the set ended and Will told the audience that they'd be back after a break. They had worked their way to the front of the big room at the foot of the stage, so they were able to get Roy and Will's attention. The two jumped off the stage to greet them with hippie handshakes.

"Hey, man," Will said, "it's good to see you guys. Don, I must say we were a little bent when you just took off that night without a word, but what the hell. I know Marduke's a little heavy for some people."

The disc jockey put on a record at about 130 decibels, making speech impossible once again, so Will motioned them to follow him backstage to a lounge where the other band was already smoking grass. By now Judy had rejoined them and was staring with cow eyes at Will, even seating herself right beside him.

"So, how'd ya like the music?" Will asked.

"Tight." "You played really well." "Yeah, obviously you're on your way up." The three friends each said in turn.

"But how did you *like* it?"

Judy saved the day now. "Oh, I loved it. I really, really love your music. I'm one of your biggest fans. I bought your record the first day it came out."

"You don't say?"

"Oh, yeah! I think you're the best!"

Lenny turned to Roy then, "How are you, Roy?"

"Charged to see you guys. Really, really charged! We gotta rap, Lenny. I need to rap. This Jesus thing, was it real? Was it what you were lookin' for? Was it the real thing?"

"Yep, it sure is. It's the ultimate. It's the trip you've dreamed of."

By now Gypsy had joined in on the conversation with Will and Judy, and Don was having a quiet conversation with Small Sam. It seemed everything

was covered, so Lenny took the plunge to witness to Roy deeply, as Stan hung on every word.

"I want you to know, Roy, that there's another world that runs parallel to this one, a space world, and Jesus is the Space Prince who runs it. There are other spirits who oppose Him. There's a space war going on, and everyone on Earth, whether they know it or not, is choosing sides in the war."

"Heavy, man."

"Most people are never aware of this other world, but some of us have caught a glimpse of it every once in a while on LSD. Sometimes we saw the good, sometimes we saw the bad, but we could only visit there. We weren't able to live there. But I found the key to living in this world full-time, of becoming a citizen of this world and how to be a soldier in the space army to fight the evil spirits that keep people bound. I found the key that transformed simple things like words and guitars and touches and music into mighty weapons against evil. I found the key to being on the good side, the winning side. We're fighting the battle of the Last Days like I told you back in Denton, but I didn't know then how certain victory was."

"Heavy!"

"We can't lose. We *will* win for sure. And we will help bring down to this Earth a whole new world of love and peace and harmony among people. There's a happy ending to the war, but it's heating up and we don't have long."

"Like how long we got, man?"

"This generation will not pass away till the new world has come. Jesus will usher in a new world when He returns in the clouds. All the signs are in place."

"How do I get the key, Lenny?"

"Pray. Just take my hands right now and pray this prayer after me." Roy took both of Lenny's hands and held them tightly. "Close your eyes and say after me, 'Jesus ...'"

“*Whaaaaat!*” Marduke’s surprised greeting shattered the peace of the room and all eyes turned to the door. Her eyes riveted on them, and it was clear she was ready for a fight. “What’s going on here? What the hell are you doing? Roy, who is this?”

Roy stammered out, “Marduke, th ... this is Lenny. Lenny, th ... th ...”

“Lenny? Ah yes! Lenny! The infamous Lenny! I’ve heard so much about you! And just what was it you were doing with Lenny, Roy?”

“He was about to pray,” Lenny said, standing up to face her.

“What does he know about prayer?”

“Not much, I would imagine.”

“You’re just trying to confuse the poor boy. We don’t need your prayers here, Lenny. We have all the power we need and want. Much, much more than you have to offer. You may go now. You deserted your friends a long time ago. They don’t want you back, and they for sure don’t want your world, a world for losers. Do you, boys?”

“Not really,” Will said.

“How about you, Roy?”

“Gee, Marduke,” Roy said without looking at her. “I didn’t think it would hurt to listen. It sounds real good what Lenny was tellin’ me, an’ ...”

“Shut up!” Marduke hissed through her teeth. Her eyes turned on Lenny, whose gaze didn’t leave hers as he prayed desperately for the Lord’s power and wisdom.

“You ... you weak little loser, you coward, I’ve heard all about you and your dreams. What the hell do you think you can offer these rising stars?”

“Peace. Freedom. Joy. Love. And eternal life.”

“Pipe dreams. Pie in the sky! I’m helping them to realize their dreams right now.”

“*Empty* dreams.”

“I’m making them famous!”

“Fame is fickle.”

“I’m going to make them rich and give them all the pleasures that money can buy.”

“But only for a time. At God’s right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

“Don’t you quote the Book at me!”

“Why not? Are you afraid? Does the sword of the Word that is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword scare you, Marduke?”

“Nothing scares me,” she said as she looked a little uncertainly around the room for help. Just then, Stoney, with baby armadillos on each shoulder and the two black-caped figures they had seen outside, entered the room.

Lenny, Gypsy and Don felt a blast of something like hot air rushing in and they knew the vision was being fulfilled. The demons had come to try to rescue the band and the situation. The three friends’ eyes met and they each knew the other knew what was happening.

Lenny looked up, then closed his eyes for a split second and the other two knew to pray. Then their eyes turned to their adversaries, Lenny advancing with a smile on Marduke who began to falter, seeing he wasn’t afraid.

“Marduke,” Lenny said, “did you know that a world government will rise?”

“I know that, but it won’t be *yours*.”

“I know. Did you know that a dynamic leader will unite the world very soon?”

“I know that, but he won’t be *your* man, the dead Savior.”

“I know it won’t be Jesus ... *at first*. But does your god tell you that he has but a little time? Does he tell you that you’re fulfilling the Word of the very God you’re fighting? Does he tell you that all this, down to your doctrines of devils and people having their consciences seared with a hot iron, was written in the Book

thousands of years ago? Does he let you in on the secret that your victory will be short-lived? That after a short time the great leader will be destroyed? Does he divulge to you that all those that follow him will have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone?"

"I don't have to listen to this," Marduke protested nervously as she backed up.

"The signs are all in place. This is the final conflict, and we—the weak, the meek, the losers as you call us—shall win and inherit the Earth."

"Says who?"

"Says *Jesus*, the Lion of Judah! Says the God of the whole earth. Says the Creator. And nothing you can do can stop Him or us. You can't stop our rain. Trying to stand in the way of what we're doing here today or from now on is as ridiculous as running outside with your hands up to stop the rain. It can't be done. We will conquer. We will take this world for Jesus and love. And in spite of all you would like to do, these boys here can choose. No matter how much power you have and your god, Lucifer, has, you cannot rob them of the power to choose. You can only lie and deceive and tempt and cause others to fear, but they have the choice. They can choose. So choose, each one of you!" He turned his back on Marduke and her cohorts, knowing they were powerless against him.

"Roy?"

"I choose you, Lenny."

"Not me, Roy, Jesus."

"I choose Jesus."

"Will?"

Will sneered, "Lenny, don't you know? I chose long ago. I'm with Marduke."

"Sam?"

Sam, always confident, always in control, shook his head, "I ... I ... don't know ... It's just much to try to figure out...."

"Come on, guys, let's go. We're done here," Lenny said and strode from the room, followed by Stan. Gypsy slipped her hand into Roy's and whispered, "Coming?"

"Yeah! Just gotta get my guitar." He quickly put his guitar in the case and turned to go but faltered when Marduke and Stoney stood in the way, their arms crossed over their chests. Gypsy took Roy's hand again, walked straight toward Marduke, locked eyes and said, "Get the hell out of my way, in Jesus' name!"

It was as if Marduke were thrown to the right and Stoney to the left, leaving the path to the door open. Gypsy turned to Will at the door and said, "Will, we love you, and we'll be praying for you. Goodbye."

For a second, a flicker of uncertainty shadowed Will's brow. Then Gypsy, Roy and Don were gone. Judy sat bewildered, her mouth open, but she didn't leave. Sam hesitated, stood up, went for the door, turned back, paced the room and finally set his huge bulk back in the armchair, his head in his hands.

Marduke slowly and unsteadily turned to Will. As their eyes met, for the first time he knew she was vulnerable. She had an Achilles' heel. There was a power above her. Then she regained strength and composure as she probed Will's soul with her eyes and reestablished the connection.

As the little victorious team walked down the corridor to the exit, word preceded them that someone had defied Marduke and Stoney, and had won. There was a respectful awe as Lenny led the way out. Everyone stepped aside, while at the same time searching the faces of the conquerors for their secret.

By the time they reached the exit and stepped into the cool of the night, their numbers had grown from five to ten, curious and searching freaks who were bursting with questions about what had happened inside.

Under the street lamp they sat down on the grass—

Lenny, Gypsy and Don each listening to and pouring out their hearts to a small group. The hours passed, Word was shared, prayers were prayed, hearts were touched, lives were changed, and two more decided to serve the Lord. It was two in the morning when the seven drove back to the drag and parked.

“What’re ya lookin’ for, Lenny?” Gypsy asked as they walked up the drag toward the university.

“Well, we can’t take care of all these guys, but if I know the Family, they’re out here on the drag witnessing.”

“At two in the morning?!”

Lenny pointed to the masses of freaks wandering aimlessly on the drag. “I think they’ll be here. Where there’s sheep, the Family will be there.” And there, just thirty feet in front of them, was a van with the side doors open and two big signs, one saying, “FREE FOOD!” and the other, “JESUS LOVES YOU!” There was a crowd around the food and scattered groups on the sidewalk, each one listening to one or two kids with little Bibles in their hands, showing them verse after verse.

Gypsy looked up at Lenny, and he nodded. “It’s us. It’s the Family. We’re home.”

Thus concludes the beginning—the beginning of a new life for Lenny and his friends. The two disciples that had joined them that night at the Armadillo Club stayed with the Austin Colony and were fed and nurtured in the Word. They each later made it to the mission field and won many to the Lord.

When the other five reached Denton, they were met with news of a major 10:36¹ problem with Don’s

¹**10:36:** (as in Matthew 10:36) referring to the problems that often result from the negative reactions of close relatives when one decides to dedicate his or her life to Jesus. Matthew 10:36 states: “A man’s foes shall be those of his own household.”

preacher father—namely a mental warrant because of Don’s erratic behavior. After prayer, it was decided that Gypsy and Don would go and try to sort things out with Don’s folks, while Lenny, with Roy and Stan, would head back for Atlanta, to be joined by Gypsy and Don as soon as his situation was taken care of.

However, things took a little longer than expected for Don, and by the time they finally managed to reach Atlanta, Lenny had gone on to pioneer Florida, Stan had gone to South Carolina, and only Roy was left in Atlanta—a changed young man, shining for Jesus while playing and writing inspired music.

Not long after, as it was becoming obvious that romance was continuing to flourish between Don and Gypsy, Don moved up to Nashville, in Tennessee, for awhile, so that they would each have time to get more strengthened in the faith and to prayerfully consider their future.

The three friends stayed in touch by letter, committed their relationships to the Lord, amid much prayer and consternation over what was right and how to follow one’s heart without being ungrateful and hurting the heart of another. Finally the day came that Don and Gypsy were reunited and married.

Lenny, in the meantime, had met a really far-out sister named Frizzy in Orlando with wild, red hair. It wasn’t long before they found out that they had a lot in common. They fell in love and were soon betrothed.

And so the intense battles of the spirit between the call of Aquarius and the pull of Mammon for these ones had come to a close, and sides had been chosen. Now, day by day, month by month, year by year, the gamepieces would be moved into position for the final battle to come—the children of God moved and empowered by the hand of God, and the children of sin moved and empowered by the sinister forces of Darkness that they had yielded to. As the last days of man continued to wax worse and worse, the people

who did know their God grew stronger, preparing day by day for the final events that would come upon the world like a thief in the night. Who would be ready, and who would be caught unprepared? The world would soon find out.

PART III

A FAMINE IN THE LAND

- 1 -

THE DEADLY VIRTUE

Fifty! Fifty years old today! My God! Collin thought, as he packed up his paints and paraphernalia at the end of the day.

He stepped back to look at the house he'd just finished painting and nodded approval for a job well done—approval, but no satisfaction, no fulfillment. It was just another job, something he felt he could do with his eyes closed now, the same old thing he'd been doing every day for years.

He was often tempted to rue the day he'd dropped out of college to pursue fame with Will and the other guys from the band he played bass with in college. They'd cut a record together, but he'd left them when they started getting into the Satanic side of the music world. Soon after that, they had faded away into oblivion.

But then so have I, Collin thought to himself. *Standing up for my principles sure hasn't gotten me anywhere.*

Collin had mulled over his life many times before, trying to figure out how things had ended up the way they had. In his mind, he would often go back and forth over the decisions he'd made, first telling himself that everything would have been different if he had just stuck it out in college, then remembering how

many people he knew with college degrees who were worse off than he was. He comforted himself that at least he was working; at least he had a house to go home to.

An empty house, he sadly remembered, and was depressed once again.

There was no family to go home to anymore. His wife had left him and taken the kids with her out to the West Coast. He saw the kids twice a year. Could be more according to the court settlement, but who had the money to make trips more frequently or to pay for the kids to come here? And besides, the kids thought Austin was Hicksville and hated to leave Frisco to visit him.

Fifty years old today, and no one even remembers, he thought as he loaded the ladder and tarp onto his truck, reflecting back on happier days, days when his wife had gone to great lengths to make him think she had forgotten his birthday.

He remembered the time she had thrown him a lavish surprise party at the club where he usually went after hours to work out. He chuckled to himself at the thought. *Coming out of the sauna in only a towel and met by scads of well-wishers! What a party that was! Better days those were for sure!*

“Well, I guess you want your pay now, don’t you?” In his reverie he’d walked around to the front door of the house and rung the doorbell. He was startled awake by the begrudging comment from the gruff lady in her housedress with curlers in her hair.

“Uh, yeah, that’d be nice,” Collin answered.

“Nice for who?” she retorted.

He chuckled, but stopped when his eyes met her unsmiling glare.

“Well, I mean, I hope you like the job I did.”

“It’ll do.” She turned and disappeared into the darkness of the house while Collin waited.

What to do alone on one’s birthday? he thought. *I*

guess watch TV—what else is there?

“Here. Here, take it,” she said, shoving a wad of bills into his hand, “but you’ll need to think about lowering your prices if you want to keep gettin’ jobs. Times are hard, ain’t ya heard?”

“Yeah, yeah, I heard. Thank ya, ma’am, and happy birthday.”

“It’s not my birthday!”

“Little joke.”

“*Very little!*” And the grumpy lady was gone.

Collin counted out the money as he ambled back to his truck. She’d gotten the amount right. He was thankful for that, because he had no desire to go back and try to squeeze more out of her, but a fellow had to live.

As he climbed in behind the wheel, a thought struck him. *It’s Lenny’s birthday today too! Lenny, my old college doping buddy!*

He started the engine with a great roar and eased out into the road, turning toward the lonely little house he had called home for the five years since his divorce.

Collin remembered every word of what Lenny had said to him that day long ago, just before he left the little commune they were living in to set off on his crusade. Lenny had been so shocked to find out that Collin was a Christian—he’d never said anything about God to anyone, and there was no way that they would’ve guessed it from the way he was living.

Lenny’s words had burned in Collin’s heart and mind for months afterwards: “Don’t you know we’re living in the Last Days and we need to warn the world?”

Collin had never been able to shake the way it had made him feel to see such conviction burning in Lenny’s eyes that day as he spoke. Later on, when Will and the other guys had started getting so messed up with the witchcraft stuff, the things Lenny had

said had given him the conviction to get out while he could. He knew that if he really believed in Jesus, he just couldn't go along with the whole music and drug scene anymore.

That's when he had left the group and started going back to church again. Of course, church didn't seem to have anything to do with the things Lenny had been talking about. But it was okay; it felt good. He knew that Jesus was real and that He had saved him, and he figured that going to church once a week was a small price to pay. Thinking back, he was glad he'd gotten out of the drug scene when he did, and he knew he owed that to Lenny.

Collin couldn't help thinking about Lenny now. Maybe it was the fact that they shared the same birthday. But whatever it was, it made him feel good. He hoped that in some small way they were still connected.

Lenny's still off somewhere with that strange group, he thought. Still living for Jesus after all these years. The folks at church say Lenny's group ... what are they called now? ... are deceived and even downright dangerous!

I don't know, though. When Don and Gypsy came visiting a couple of years ago, they seemed pretty Christian to me—more Christian than I am anyway. They were pretty intense about the same Endtime stuff Lenny was always talking about, and I know you gotta be careful with people like that these days. But I don't doubt they love Jesus. In fact, I felt a little ashamed of myself the way they prayed over everything and brought the Lord into everything. Maybe that's why the church people hate them so much—they make 'em feel guilty. I don't know. I really don't know.

Hmm, wonder what Lenny's doin' today way over there in Asia. At least that's where Don and Gypsy said he was three years ago—married with about seventy kids or something. He sure won't be forgotten

on his birthday, I don't imagine. Kids, grandkids, fellow missionaries ... makes you think, who's really right? Who's really happy? Who's really found the answers? All these people lament how Lenny, Don, Gypsy and Roy threw away promising lives and careers, but did they? Look at me! They might've ended up like me; most likely would have. How many people do I know who are really happy, really fulfilled with what they're doing?

Collin ran down a list of his friends and acquaintances and relatives, and had to admit that, with all his moaning about his own lot in life, he couldn't think of any of them who had a life that he envied or would like to have ... except, well maybe ... Don ... Gypsy ... Lenny, his old friends from college and the drug haze days who'd just dropped out, disappeared and recently resurfaced after all these years to say they'd found all they had hoped for and dreamed of.

At this point he pulled into his own driveway. For a minute he pictured the door bursting open and scores of friends and relatives piling out into the yard and driveway to greet him.

Heck, I'd even settle for just two, my Brad and Shirley!

But the door was still, cold, impassive, quiet. No sound of life from within—no smell of dinner on the stove, not even the once ever-present drone of the TV.

Happy birthday, my foot!

Collin had eaten dinner in the kitchen, washed the dish and watched about an hour of TV before the impulse struck him to check the answering machine. Preparing himself for only an electronic, droning kind of silence, he was startled by an oddly familiar voice from way, way back in the past.

"Hey Collin, what's happenin', man? What's goin' down with you these days? Remember me? You

probably didn't expect to hear from me on your birthday. The magic fifty, isn't it? Congratulations. I reached it a few months ago myself. Gussed who this is yet?" And then it came to him and he said it exciting with the voice on the machine. ... "Will!"

The voice went on. "I'm out in Hollywood, doin' okay. I wanted to see you, catch up on old times. I'll be in Dallas, April 30th. Can you make it up there? Hotel and meals on me, like old times. Whaddaya say? You can reach me at this number ..."

Collin scrambled for a pen and a scrap of paper, rewound the tape and jotted down the number. He sank into his easy chair in a state of shock.

Will, he thought. How'd he get my number? How'd he remember my birthday? Should I call him? What a joke! Of course I'm gonna call the only person who remembered my birthday. Even the kids didn't call. Pastor Albright didn't call. But Will did. Okay, yeah, it's true, my old drummer buddy got himself into that witchcraft weirdness back then in the band days with that witch, but we were all pretty weird then and lots has changed. I'd hate to think people think of me the same as back then, so the least I can do is give him a chance. What can it hurt?

Will walked out onto the terrace of his LA condominium in the cool of the April evening, sipping a tall drink and smoking a long cigar. He smiled grimly as his thoughts returned to those days so long ago in college and immediately after, the days when he and Collin had played together in the band that got Will on his way in the music business. Those Christian freaks—Lenny, Gypsy and Don—had ruined it all by coming to the Armadillo Club where they were playing in Austin and ripping off Roy, their lead guitarist, and getting Sam the keyboard player so muddled up it wasn't long till he dropped out of the band too.

They'd already messed up Collin so much that he'd

decided to leave the band months before. But they just couldn't leave it at that! They had to come in and screw things up completely! It always upset Will when he remembered that night when both Ritual and his exciting drumming career had come to an abrupt end.

But Marduke had fulfilled her end of the bargain, and the rest was history. She had taken him, just another drummer in a band, and given him a meteoric rise to the top of the rock world, as a producer for a major label, with plenty of financial compensation. Marduke had reassured him that he was now in a much better position to further the Cause than he could have ever been by just being a famous drummer in a hit band.

It was true. Will had seen clearly that the musicians they had bought and managed over the years were mere pawns—a dime a dozen, here today and gone tomorrow, definitely expendable, usually rather dull. The real payoff was in producing; The real power was in the hands of faceless people like him. There were faceless shadows above him too, and Marduke introduced him to new levels all the time. He knew he was quite high on the ladder but still on his way up. He felt he truly was a rising star, as Marduke had once called him.

Something really big was starting tonight: Marduke said that he was being asked to perform some very special task in return for all that had been done for him. His contract had been like that. There was no signature, no paper, but there was no getting out of it once one had sold his soul for riches and pleasure.

Will wasn't complaining, though. He'd never lacked for anything in all these years. Money, women (married three of them; slept with hundreds), power, any pleasure he wanted, and one *other* benefit that he hadn't even bargained for.

That night at the Armadillo Club Lenny had told him something about how (What was the expression

he'd used?) "consciences being seared with a hot iron" was a sign that these were the days when Christ would come back to Earth.

Will really hadn't understood him then, but since then had come to see this as one of the greatest benefits of the decision he'd made to sell his soul. Consciences and a sense of right and wrong, he had come to realize, had hindered more great deeds being done on this Earth than almost anything. That's why he had grown to hate Christians and Christianity so—for their "goodness" and sense of right above reason and logic.

Marduke had explained to him that "the end justifies the means," and that *their* end, *their* goal, was a better world. But to reach it, masses would have to die, whole populations would need to be deceived, many would have to be cheated, fed lies, killed, bankrupted and destroyed. But from these ashes would arise a brave new world under their Supreme Lord.

She had told him the time was drawing very near, and that this simple phone call he had been asked to make was going to play a big part in paving the way. She said evangelical Christians and missionaries were the greatest threat to the Plan, that as well meaning as they seemed to be, their very goodness and mercy on even the lowest forms of human life stood in the way of the Great Plan. So any blow against them was a victory for the New World Order. She said the Christian era was passing and the era of Man, of humanity taking its fate into its own hands, was dawning—the fulfillment of what Darwin and Nietzsche and Marx foresaw—the ultimate survival of the fittest.

Will recalled the battle that night with Lenny and the others back at the Armadillo Club, and his throat went dry. Marduke had assured him he that wouldn't have to meet them again, that his duties were purely

behind the scenes. He had risen high enough, she'd said, that he would never have to be face-to-face with the enemy. That was for people far lower on the ladder. He gulped his drink and dragged deep on his cigar.

Marduke had already begun to reward him for what she knew he would do, by telling him which stocks to dump, which to keep, which new ones to buy, what real estate or other investments to keep his money in, and his assets were beginning to skyrocket already. She said there was a great economic disaster coming, yet he would not only survive but thrive—if he did everything he was told to do. She said there was much more she would be telling him as he fulfilled his duties.

The phone rang.

Will looked at his watch. *It's 10:30. That makes it 8:30 in Texas—just about the time I expected Collin to call.* Will went through the sliding glass doors into the huge luxurious lounge and picked up the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Will! Is that you, man?"

"Yeah, yeah, it is. Collin?"

"Yeah. Hey, thanks for your call. You're the only one who remembered my birthday—a real blast from the past, ol' buddy," Collin said with obvious emotion in his voice.

A tinge of regret at the deception he was embarking on touched Will's heart, but he hardened himself like he had so many times before. "Well, that's to make up for all the birthdays I've forgotten over the years."

"How did you remember after all these years?"

"A little birdie told me."

"Well anyway, thanks. So you'll be in Dallas on the 30th?"

"Sure will. Got some business there. Can you meet me? I'll book you at the Marriott. Is that okay?"

"Yeah, that's fine. I'll be there."

"I'll have your room ready by noon and I'll meet you there by six, okay? We'll have some drinks and dinner together."

"Great. Sounds fun. Wow, you must have lots to tell. Whatcha been doin'?"

"I'll tell you when we meet. How's that?"

"Sure. Okay, I'll let you go. Wow. You really turned a bad day into a special one, Will. I really appreciate that. Bye."

"Bye, Collin." *Damn compassion, Will thought, it'll be the end of me yet.*

As Will hung up the receiver, he heard Judy's voice as she entered the lounge from the office she manned when there was extra work. Lately, there was always extra work.

"Will, who was that? You sounded so different."

"An old friend from college."

"Did I ever meet him?"

"No, no. He was in the band, but left before I met you."

"I ... I'm just finishing up. I'd better go on home now."

Will studied Judy's sad little face and thin figure with her coat already on, ready to go.

He thought back to that fateful day when Lenny, Don and Gypsy had destroyed everything with their Jesus, but they had brought the little 17-year-old groupie along with them, little Judy, who had stayed with him when all the others left.

There was something special about Judy, although Will didn't really know what it was he liked about her so much. Here she was in her late forties; she'd been hanging around all those years, doing just about whatever Will needed her to do. He knew that she'd always dreamed of the day when he would fall in love with her. But it hadn't been allowed. Marduke had never liked Judy for some reason, and had only put

up with her staying around as Will's secretary because she had proved to be very good at keeping him organized.

Poor Judy! he thought. *Still living in a dream world where people fall in love and live happily ever after.*

But today was a day for reliving old memories. And in honor of the "good ol' days," Will wanted Judy to spend the night.

He turned to the bar and said, "Why go? It's late. You have a long trip home, you might as well sleep here ... in one of the extra rooms." He knew she'd never make it to the extra room. "Wanna drink?" He was behind the bar now, running his fingers over the long row of bottles.

"No, no, Will, I really should be going. Thanks anyway."

"Or something ... a little more substantial?" And Will brought out the tray from the secret compartment behind the bar, like an hors d'oeuvres tray at a cocktail party, with its assortment of recreational drugs. His eyes met hers.

She hesitated in midturn, shook her head weakly. He gave her a mock imploring look. She shook her head still more weakly.

He approached her with the tray and she let her coat fall to the floor as her eyes took in the tray hungrily while sinking into the sofa and waiting for Will to serve up the treats that only came out on nights he wanted her body.

Drugs and Will: the two things she could never resist.

Collin parked his pickup in the parking lot of the Marriott. *Right on time. Wonder why Will wanted me to come so early when he can't make it till six. Just being nice, I guess.*

His room—no, suite—was ready and waiting for him. The bellboy let him know he should feel free to

help himself to any refreshments in the room or fridge; it was all on Mr. Ryder. The round table by the window was spread with a lunch of assorted classy cold cuts, European breads and a bottle of chilled white wine and a rolling table with a wide array of desserts. The fridge was full of snacks and drinks, and there was a fruit basket with some fruits he'd never even seen before.

The uneasiness Collin had at first felt in such unfamiliar surroundings disappeared when he noticed the music playing as he came in was the record they had cut almost thirty years ago.

"Mr. Ryder thought you might like to swim or visit the fitness center a little later in the afternoon," the bellboy said.

"Uh ... oh, thanks. Yeah, maybe I'll do that." Collin pulled out his wallet to tip the bellboy.

"No, thank you, sir. This is all on Mr. Ryder, including the services. He wanted you to enjoy yourself."

"Gee ... I ..." The bellboy was gone, leaving Collin alone in the quiet of the room. Their hit single was still playing, and Collin lay on the bed to let the wave of nostalgia wash over him.

Not bad bass if I do say so. Man, those were some fun days. Tight! We were tight. Both our music and our friendship.

Long lunch. Relaxing swim in the pool. Sauna. And Collin, relaxed like he hadn't been in months, returned to his room by three. *Maybe have a beer. Take a nap before dinner*, he thought as he went to unlock the door but found it already open. As he pushed the door all the way open, he saw the shapely pair of legs and well-formed backside of the cleaning lady bent over his bed. She pulled herself to her full height and turned to him with a smile as he entered.

Gorgeous. Stacked. And a cleaning lady?

"I'm just turning down your bed."

"At three in the afternoon?"

"Mr. Ryder thought you might want a nap."

"He thought of everything, didn't he?"

"I wouldn't know, sir, I'm just doing what I'm told."

Her eyes met his demurely, and he felt his emotions stirred just a little.

"Uh, thanks." *Cool it, Collin. You don't know this girl. Remember AIDS? Can't be too careful. Remember your church? Your kids?*

"Will there be anything else?" she said as she made her way to the door but stopped beside him, touching the back of his hand with her fingertips lightly. "Collin?"

Damn this loneliness. Damn! "No, no, that'll be all."

She cocked her head as her eyes searched his. Pouting slightly she said, "As you wish...."

"Well ... uh ..."

"Yes?" expectantly.

"Uh ... when ... uh ... do you get off work?"

"Four. A little early today. Why?" Now her hand was gently stroking his.

"Well, if you wanted to stop by for a drink, that'd be nice. Whaddaya think?"

"Sure. I think I could do that. Don't you have an appointment?"

"Yeah, yeah, but at six."

"Okay, then, thanks for asking. I'll be here ... Collin." And she pressed her body close to his and kissed him, then whispered sensually in his ear, "You might want to draw a hot bath just before four. There's bath foam by the tub."

She came a few minutes early and let herself in while Collin was still in the bath, and she wasted no time in ravishing him with the kind of ardent sex he hadn't known for years. It began right there in the tub, and then moved on to the bedroom. By 5:30 she

was gone and Collin wondered if she had been a dream. She hadn't even told him her name.

Why, Collin wondered, did it have to be like this? That girl didn't care one bit about me. She was just doing her job ... and doing it well, I might add. But why can't I find the sex and companionship I need from someone who really cares about me and feels the same way I do about things? If only some of those ladies at church could love me and make me feel the way that girl made me feel.

For more than a year he hadn't so much as touched the warm body of a woman, and his whole being had ached for that contact. He knew he had yielded to temptation. Heck—he hadn't yielded, he had jumped in with both feet. Now, as he dressed in his best suit and tied his tie, he felt refreshed, relieved—yet guilty as hell and lonelier than ever.

Collin went down to the lobby to meet Will. He instantly recognized him—impeccably dressed, definitely older, but still the attractive ladies' man-type he'd always been. He wore an off-white suit, a collarless gray shirt, and his blonde hair was pulled back into a ponytail.

Collin, as he approached Will with a big grin on his face, took in the single earring in his left ear—a five-pointed star, like the one he had tattooed on his arm years ago.

Still into witchcraft! But ... maybe it doesn't mean anything. He seems to be doing okay. And ... no one else has showed me this kind of consideration. Anyway, what ulterior motive could he have in being so friendly to me? I don't have anything he needs or wants.

Will extended his arms wide and embraced Collin in a bear hug right there in the lobby, then held him at arm's length to look him over. Collin was obviously touched and embarrassed at the same time.

"Had a good afternoon?" Will asked with a wink.

"Oh, yeah, yeah, I did. Thanks for everything."

"Don't mention it. Anything for one of my oldest, dearest friends who I've neglected all these years. It's high time we re-establish ties. Okay, dinner. Does Le Chateau sound okay to you?"

"Well, Will, I wouldn't rightly know, having never been inside the place. Out of my price range, you know."

"Good then, Le Chateau it will be."

Over a seven-course meal with expensive wine, they caught each other up. Will had definitely done all right for himself in the music production business, and now it seemed his conscience was prompting him to share his good fortune with others. He was fun. He was charming. He helped Collin get his mind off the emptiness of his life with fascinating stories about the music business, the stars he knew and worked with, and a number of subjects Collin felt he really shouldn't be listening to. But to hear a human voice talking to him that didn't emanate from the idiot box had become something highly unusual for Collin, and he was mesmerized.

"So how's everyone from the old band?" Will asked.

"Don't ask me," Collin retorted. "You're in the music business, not me."

"Well, I know about Sam." Silence. Will looked down for a moment. "He ... he died."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that," Collin answered. "Heart attack? He was so overweight."

"No, no, it was ... suicide."

"Oh ... wow."

"Yeah, yeah, poor schmuck. Then you know Roy disappeared with Lenny, Don and all, don't you?"

"Yeah, I heard."

"For a few years I was furious at them for wrecking things for the band, and I swore I'd tear them limb from limb if I ever saw them again. Ha! But, well, the years have a way of mellowing us, don't they? Then you look back and you realize you miss those guys,

and that something from your past that was special, is missing. With all the money and position and power I have, Collin, I'm still empty and miss those days of dreams and ideals. And you just kind of wonder, did those guys find something we missed?" Will could see Collin's eyes were a little misty, and his speech was getting through to him. "You know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I know exactly what you mean, Will. I really do."

"But I guess they're lost and gone forever. They never contact anybody from what I understand."

"That's not so. Just a few years ago Don and Gypsy came to Austin to see me. Did you know they got married? Gypsy and Don—not Lenny!"

"You don't say! So those two got married and they came to visit you. That must've been something, huh?"

"Oh, yeah. They have five kids who are mostly grown up. One of them left their group and is somewhere out in California, but the others are doing what they're doing. They were ... well, they seemed to have found something we were all once looking for but never really found."

"You don't say! How about that! That's just great!"

"Yeah, and I'm in touch with them still. We write every few months."

"Where do they live now?"

"They live in Africa, South Africa."

"No kidding! Wow! I don't suppose they have e-mail, do they, being missionaries and all?"

"Yeah, they do."

"Wow, listen, what do you think they'd do if I sent them an e-mail?"

"Flip, I'm sure. Why don't you do it? Maybe they can help you, you know, fill that emptiness."

"Okay, you talked me into it. I'll do it. Do you have their e-mail address handy?"

"Up in the room. I can give it to you when we go back to the hotel."

"How about the others? Roy?"

"Yeah, he's still with the Family, still playing music, even records some in one of their studios. He's in South America. Lenny's in Asia, married, with tons of kids, even grandkids."

"Imagine that. They call it the Family, do they?"

"Yeah."

"Do you have any of the other guys' e-mails?"

"Roy's, but not Lenny's. I got Lenny's postal address though, where Don and Gypsy said he was three years ago."

"Oh man, it'd be great if you'd give me those too, even the snail mail address."

"Yeah, sure I will. Sorry about Lenny's only having snail mail, I guess Asia is still kind of primitive."

"Don't kid yourself, Collin, we ... I mean, Western companies are moving in there and taking over, setting up all the same infrastructure, getting ready for big things to happen. The Asian crash has meant a lot of open doors for us ... I mean, Western companies over there. They've got Internet, e-mail, ISO, the works. Fantastic things are happening and we'll soon see the rise of a new world order. Nations and boundaries and borders are fading fast."

"Wow! I mean, I guess I don't understand all that, but if it means peace and prosperity and saving the earth, I'm all for it."

"Yeah, that's *exactly* what it means." Will felt a little alarm bell in his heart telling him not to say too much. He sipped his wine in silence for a moment and studied Collin, who was lost in thought too.

Poor schmuck! He's gonna lose everything real soon when the bottom falls out of the market. What could it hurt to give him a tip or two? It might even help the Cause by making him more willing to cooperate and keep us posted. Look how much he trusts me already from just a nice hotel suite and a throw with Brenda.

Sufficiently satisfied that it was good policy to take

the next step, Will said, “Collin, I know you don’t want charity, but I know times have been hard for you. Divorce. Not much work coming your way and all. So as a friend, I want to help you some way.”

“No, man, that’s okay. Don’t worry about me. I’ve got the Lord and my church, work, and I’m okay. It was just good to see you.”

“Listen, Collin, though. You don’t have to do anything about what I say, but if you happen to have a little cash on hand or something in the bank, you could invest it in Fielding Aircraft on Monday and then pull it out on Friday. I think you might make a few dollars if you do that. Again, if you don’t like to play the market, forget that I mentioned it, but just as a friend to a friend, you might want to try it.”

He looked deep into Collin’s eyes and saw that he had bought it. Will was pleased with himself for doing something concrete to help an old friend. At the same time, he felt pretty sure that it would be all right with Marduke and those above her to give Collin this type of lead. They knew that in order to get people really firmly hooked on their side, you’ve got to use a little bait.

Sure enough, back at home in LA, Marduke *was* very pleased with the addresses that would lead specifically to the targets of her revenge—Lenny and the others that had crossed her those many years ago. The addresses had been entered right away into the master computer and an Internet robot program¹ was initiated to run thorough traces on all e-mail, postings or Web browsing coming and going from those e-mail accounts.

¹**Internet robot program:** (also called a “bot” or “spider”) an automated program that searches the Internet and/or specific Web addresses for information, and indexes it into a database or other searchable record-keeping system

The first days of monitoring produced very little in the way of useful information or details concerning the homes in question. Most communications were encrypted. But among the encrypted, there were also occasional personal messages that had been left open. At first these unencrypted messages seemed to only contain personal tidbits of information, but after a time of monitoring, the head office confirmed that through these messages, they were gleaning some valuable info which was helping them to piece together a profile of the local Family’s activities, as well as various weak spots among the web-addresses in question.

Marduke praised Will profusely for his part in all this. The next step, she said, was for him to establish direct e-mail contact with Don, Gypsy and Roy. Don and Gypsy’s address showed a lot of activity, so it seemed they were based in some kind of center for the Family work in Africa. By the same token, Roy’s address seemed to be a major center for South America. From the analyst’s assessments, it seemed that these outcasts from the hippie days were now members of considerable influence in the Family.

Will lay back in his lounge chair sipping a Scotch and soda, congratulating himself for the phone call he had just received from Collin thanking him for his hospitality and for the tip that had earned him over ten thousand dollars. However, the overall feeling of well-being was interrupted when he heard the key turn in the lock of his door and the door burst open.

Marduke’s eyes were like thunderbolts. He shot from his chair, spilling his drink just as she threw her cell phone at him with all her might. He jumped behind the sofa, protesting, “Marduke, what?”

She grabbed the lamp from the table by the door, jerked the plug out of the wall and hurled it in his direction. It smashed against the end table, shattering

its glass top into thousands of pieces.

Will backed up to the dining table near the terrace as Marduke lifted his lounge chair with what seemed to be superhuman strength above her head and allowed it to crash on the coffee table with a mighty roar.

Two of the servants appeared at the kitchen door.

“Call the police!” Will cried out.

“Do nothing of the sort,” Marduke ordered.

“Yes, ma’am,” they replied and disappeared.

Will trembled in horror as Marduke advanced on him, saying, “I want nothing more than to kill you, Will, but we still need you.”

“Marduke, what ... what is it?”

“That phone call you just received!”

“You ... you ... tap my phone?”

“Will Ryder, I bought you. I own you. I own your phone; I own your condo; you and all you have is mine. Do you understand?!”

Their eyes met and he knew she was right. He knew he was powerless. He had given all that up thirty years ago.

Will had always thought that at least Marduke liked him, that they were friends, but he knew now that had been a delusion. For thirty years he had known pleasure, he’d known power, he’d known wealth, but he’d never touched love since the day Marduke came into his life. Now he knew that she could easily kill him without compunction. He knew she had the power to do so. He knew that she hated him and that only his possible future usefulness stood between him and death. And then what? Then what?

“M ... Marduke, let me explain.”

“Shut up! There’s nothing to explain that I don’t already know. No, you let *me* explain!” She advanced on Will, shaking her finger in his face. “You were going to tell me that you gave Collin a tip to ensure his loyalty and friendship so that he could help us even

more, but you don’t fool me. You did what you did because you’re a *worm*, a worm who has not fully embraced the truth of what our goals and plans are. You did what you did because you have *compassion*, you ache with the nostalgia of your innocent days, your disgusting hippie days, before I took you from the gutter and made you what you are.

“Will Ryder, we don’t trust you. We’ll be watching you like hawks, and we’re going to know every move you make. We’ll know when you’re on the toilet or the phone. We’ll know your thoughts and your whereabouts at *all* times from now on. And we hold the key to your heart.”

She turned her hand as if turning a key, and Will buckled from the pain in his heart. “We can twist and squeeze it whenever we want.” Her hand turned still more and Will cried out in pain.

“So, take my advice, my little pet....” Another turn of her hand and Will curled on the floor, clutching his heart. “You’d better do whatever we tell you to do—and nothing more.”

Her hand turned the other way and the pain ceased. Will’s body relaxed to where he lay sprawled and spread-eagled on the carpeted floor, looking up at Marduke. “Do you agree, Will?”

“Yes! Yes, Marduke,” he gasped.

“There’s a disturbance in this house, someone whose vibes interfere, someone who influences you the wrong way. Do you know who it could be?”

Will sat up, taking great gulps of air. “No ... no, I don’t know who it could be.”

“I do, Will. I do.”

“Who?”

“Judy.”

“Judy?! No, she’s no threat. She’s a weak little junkie who just happens to worship me. I can trust her with anything.”

“She’s a Christian. She has Christian vibes.”

“Marduke, for once you’re wrong. Judy’s *anything* but a Christian.”

“You watch her. And I will too. Sleep with her tomorrow night. Find out. Make her think her feelings for you are reciprocated, but—Will, we’re watching you and we have your key.” Marduke acted as if she was about to turn the key again.

Will held out his hand to try to stop her, and quickly said, “I won’t forget, Marduke.”

“Okay, Will, you have a lot of making up to do. Come. I want to hear you pledge your loyalty to me again and to our Supreme Lord.”

Will dutifully knelt on the carpet and repeated the pledge he had made so many times before, but now with a greater awareness of what he was pledging.

Marduke was now once again her usual exuberant self. She took Will by the hand, and he submissively followed her. She led him out of his apartment and into the private elevator which went up to her penthouse on the top floor. Will knew that she had something special in mind for him.

He followed her to her secret chamber where the powers of the Dark Kingdom always seemed to be the strongest and most tempting. But tonight, it seemed different. For the first time, Will was beginning to realize that all the mysteries and powers of darkness that Marduke had shown him over the years were not for the purpose of giving him more power and knowledge, as she had always said. Everything that she had ever done for him or given him or shown him had only been for the purpose of imprisoning him and enslaving him to her more and more.

As they entered the chamber, Archibald, Marduke’s homosexual supervisor, and a few others were there waiting for them. Will felt sick. He knew that there would be more oaths to be made and more rituals to perform. The foreboding realization was born in him that the more he knew, the more was being

required of him—and the greater would be the penalty if he ever tried to turn from the course he had chosen.

That night, as Will lay on his enormous bed staring into the multiple mirrors over his head, and knowing that his every move was being monitored, he felt remorse and even sorrow, realizing that everything he’d been given—all these things which he had gladly traded his soul for—had not brought him any happiness. They were only part of the trap, Marduke’s evil way of holding on to him and using him.

Judy snorted in the last of the white powder on the glass slide. She laid her head back on the sofa and heaved an ecstatic sigh, her eyes closed. She turned her head toward Will sitting next to her, opened her eyes and smiled.

“Thank you, Will,” she said, as she reached out to run her fingers through his long hair that fell now over his ears and down to his shoulders. “Gorgeous hair still, Will. Gorgeous bod too.”

She put her arm around Will’s waist and drew herself up close to him. She closed her eyes as he kissed her upturned face, beginning at her forehead, working down over her eyebrows, eyes, nose, cheeks and finally her lips.

As they kissed and caressed, Will knew that there *was* something different about Judy. He’d had sex with hundreds of women, most of them in their twenties or even younger, and yet Judy could still thrill him. He could never quite figure out what she had, what her secret was.

On an impulse, he scooped her up and carried her to the bedroom, she giggling in mock protest all the way. He tossed her on the bed, peeled off his clothes and lay beside her.

Nearly two hours later, Judy lay nestled under Will’s left arm as he stroked her hair. Will took the

plunge and said, “You know, Judy, I almost forgot to tell you something Marduke said about you. It was the funniest thing.”

Judy stiffened a little at Marduke’s name, noticeably enough for Will to feel it. Then she relaxed and said with a feigned air of relaxed conversation, “What was that?”

Will chuckled and said, “She said she thought you were a *Christian*. Isn’t that weird?”

Judy rolled over on top of Will and said. “Why, do I *do* you like a Christian, Will honey?”

Will chuckled again, “No, no, you don’t, as a matter of fact. I told her this was one time she was wrong.”

“She sure was.”

“Did you go to church when you were a kid or anything like that?”

“Once or twice. Why?”

“Oh, no reason. Were your parents Christians?”

“Not by a long shot.”

“A lot of freaks got into that Jesus trip. You didn’t?”

Judy sat up, pulling away from Will. “Did she set you up to find out? And what happens if I am? Not that I am, but what happens then? What happens to me? Will, you know ... everyone knows ... I worship the ground you walk on; I’ll do anything for you. Marduke knows I love you more than anyone or anything. She’s probably jealous and looking for an excuse to get rid of me.

“Well,” Judy said, climbing from the bed, “I can save her the trouble. I can leave. I’m not blind. I’m not stupid. I know her power. I know she has you and won’t let you go. I know she could ki ... she could do to me anything she wanted to. I know ...” Judy was silent while she gathered her clothes strewn all over the bed and the floor. “I know ... who you would choose if it came to that.”

“Judy ... wait. Listen.” Will jumped from the bed, but Judy hurried into the bathroom, slammed and

locked the door.

“Will, *I’m* no Christian. I’m as heathen as they come, *you* know that.” It was a minute or two before the door reopened. “I don’t worship what *she* worships and what I suspect *you* worship. I just don’t believe in *anything*.”

She looked into Will’s eyes questioningly. “*That’s* what tonight was all about, wasn’t it?”

“Judy...” He took her by her shoulders.

She pushed him away, saying, “Tonight ... right now ... having sniffed your drugs and had my fill of pleasure and my fill of some other things too, I can resist you. I don’t know if I’ll be able to do that tomorrow, so I won’t be coming in.”

She scurried through the living room, grabbing her purse and briefcase on the way out, and was gone, slamming the door behind her.

In her pretty little flat Judy showered, dressed for bed and lay in the dark, unable to sleep for the thoughts that plagued her mind.

Why on earth would she think I’m a Christian? I’m practically a junkie. It’s too screwy. She’s just grasping at straws trying to get rid of me again. I’m sure of it. Does Will really love me somehow and is she really jealous of me? God, I hate that woman! One thing I know is she doesn’t love Will—or anyone else, for that matter. She doesn’t know what love is.

Why do I stay with Will? I’m a fool—a love-crazed, superannuated¹ groupie, who figures a throw with Will Ryder every once in a while is better than any other man all the time.

But I’ve got to stay with Will. I know if I left, if I walked out, she’d have full power over him. I can’t do that to him. I love him too much. She’s too evil. I can’t leave the field to her. As long as I’m here, as weak and

¹**superannuated:** outmoded or obsolete because of old age

bad as I am, I hope that maybe I can help him stay a little free, a little human, a little kind and compassionate. Sometimes I think he really does feel those things. Maybe it's partly because I sometimes just sit or lie here and direct my thoughts toward him—good, loving thoughts. I like to think it's having some kind of good influence on him and I think it is. I really do think my prayers ...

Ha! That's a laugh. Prayers! Why'd I think that? Prayers? These aren't prayers. They're just thoughts—good vibes directed toward someone I love. Well, who knows? Maybe they are prayers in a way. I guess they're a kind of prayer.

But prayer has to do with God and things like that. And I don't believe in that or anything. But then what makes the vibes go, what sends 'em to Will, what gives them life and power? Is that God? Am I praying? All this time was I praying and didn't even know it?

That's crazy! I've been doing this ... this vibing ... practically ever since I first met Will that time at the Armadillo Club. Of course before I met him, I'd never loved anyone else enough to think about 'em so much like I do about Will. That's why ... that's why I started vibing then. Yeah, it must just be vibes. I've been "vibing," not praying. I started doing it then because I loved Will so much. That's why.

She turned over, having figured things out to her satisfaction, fully expecting to fall asleep, but sleep evaded her yet again while a picture rose in her mind's eye. She saw two hands reaching out to her. That's all she saw. A hand of somebody on her left and another of someone else on her right, suspended in the air waiting for her hands to join with theirs.

What is this?

Then she saw the face of that guy. It was that guy Lenny. She'd never seen him again after that day, and had totally forgotten what he looked like. But now she saw him, unchanged after thirty years, his

eyes all aglow, that beautiful inviting smile on his face, that comforting feel of love and power all about him.

She saw her hand join with his and that other guy—*what was his name? ... Howie? ... No ... Stan. It was Stan.* His hand was on the other side, and then heard her voice as if on slow speed with an underwater echo saying, "Jesus, come into my heart...."

Judy flew from bed as if to run away before realizing she had no idea where to run or why she should. Warmth filled her whole body and heart, but fear gripped her at the same time.

"God ... Jesus," she found herself praying aloud, "If You *are* really there, *show* me ... speak to me. Am I *really* one of Yours? Am I really a Christian after all this time?"

Peace instantly washed over her like a gentle wave, while a strength she'd never known before filled her being. "Jesus, if that's You, touch me right now."

As unmistakable as anything she had ever felt, she felt a tender hand stroke her, down her hair, over her cheek, and down to her neck, leaving a tingling glow as it passed on.

This is too much! Marduke knew ... when I didn't even know. I guess she's battled with her archenemy for so long she recognizes a rival from miles off. Well, Marduke, I don't know how to fight you, but I plan to find out and fight for Will. I'm not leaving him to you, my enemy. I love him too much for that.

- 2 -

COMPASSION TAKES ACTION

Dear Don and Gypsy,

Hey, guys, how the hell are you? It's been light years since we last saw each other, back there in the Armadillo Club when you proselytized my band right out of existence. Well, lots has changed these last thirty-some-odd years, and after talking to good old Collin, I decided it was time to contact you and let you know I buried the hatchet years ago. As a matter of fact, now in my older years I often wonder if you guys found something I missed out on. I've done okay, have plenty of money (let me know if there's any way I can help, by the way), but inside of me there's an emptiness, and Collin suggested I get in touch with you. He said you had a peace he'd never seen anyone else have, including his fellow church members. So I thought I'd do just that.

I don't ever get out your way, but I thought we could communicate by e-mail and you could tell me a bit about what you're doing and all. Oh, I've read about your group from time to time, but I don't believe everything I read, knowing the media as well as I do. So I want to hear it from you. Write me soon, okay?

Your old friend,

Will

Don looked up from what he was reading, and focused on Gypsy's glowing eyes. He could see she could hardly contain her delight over Will getting in touch after all these years. Her eyes were darting about and it took every effort for her just to sit still. Succumbing to her impulses, she jumped up, sat on Don's lap, grabbing the e-mail printout at the same time. "Let's write him right now, Hon!"

"Gypsy, hold your horses! You remember what he was into, don't you?"

"But that was thirty years ago. Remember what you and I were into?"

"Well, yeah, but ..."

"Oh, come on, what can it hurt? We're wide open these days. We've got nothing to hide. What are you afraid of? We've got our CTP in Soweto, our Bible studies at Marjorie's house and here at home, a good reputation with the officials. The past is behind us; we're loved and respected here. What harm could it do to write Will Ryder? Do you want to stand before the Lord and tell Him we neglected a possible sheep who needed us because of his past, thirty years ago?"

That was Gypsy for you. She could never pass up a possible sheep—any nationality, any religion, any class of society. She just loved sheep, and quite a few goats too. She figured it was better to assume they're sheep and find out you're wrong than vice versa.

"Please, Hon...." She gazed deep into his eyes with those starry eyes of hers that he still couldn't resist and then laid on his lips one of her prize kisses. Just then 17-year-old Simeon entered the room, pausing in the doorway with a discreet cough. From behind him came 16-year-old Marina's voice.

"What's going on in there?"

Simeon answered, "Oh, nothing. Mom and Dad are just at it again. Nothing unusual."

Don looked up and said, "Your mom's coercing me unmercifully again, son."

"Did you crack yet, Dad, or should I come back later?"

Gypsy said, "You'd maybe better give me a few more minutes," as she began to unbutton Don's shirt with a giggle.

"No, come on in. What is it?" said Don.

"Oh, nothing. We're headed for Soweto with the donated clothes and flannelgraphs, and we just needed some transport money." Simeon and Marina were both in the room now, chuckling at their parents and their antics.

Simeon stood four inches taller than his dad. He had curly hair over his ears and bright blue eyes. Marina was a pretty blonde, with a vivacious way about her. Don and Gypsy marveled at how she had changed this year and how she had fought through major battles over her oldest brother leaving the Lord's service, and had come through stronger than ever.

Simeon was still battling, but hanging on by faith, and it was beautiful to see the strength that was being born in him through his weakness and having to cry out to the Lord and others to help him stand strong. These battles kept both him and his parents desperate in prayer. Despite Simeon's frequent bouts of questioning, both he and Marina were now growing into real pillars of the Johannesburg work, with sheep of their own that they were feeding and bringing along, several of them almost ready to drop out and join the Family.

"Oh, sure," Gypsy said, getting off Don's lap, "I'll get it for you."

"Really, Dad," Simeon said, "what was that all about?"

"Oh, an old friend of ours from way, way back just got in touch by e-mail. He got the address from Collin."

"The bass player guy you visited?"

"Yeah, him. Well, Will got the address...."

Marina interjected, "Will? Will, the drummer? The

one at the Armadillo Club with Marduke?” The kids had all heard the stories often.

“Yeah, why?”

“Well, Dad, Mom, don’t you think we need to be careful?”

“Well, *I* thought so.”

“Oh, and Mom ...” Marina looked at her mother at the desk getting money.

“I get the picture. Mom doesn’t want to take a chance on missing a sheep, right?”

Gypsy gave Simeon the money and said, “Well, you know, what if he *is* a sheep? That was thirty years ago, you know.”

Marina held her hands out like a balance. “Security. Sheep. Security. Sheep. I guess it’s pretty tough to know what’s more important. But with everything the Word has been saying about the importance of asking the Lord about everything, why don’t we just ask Him to speak to us about it?”

“You know, Sweetheart,” Don said, “that’s just what *I* was about to say.”

“*Sure*, Dad,” Simeon chuckled.

“I was ... really ... and would have ... if your mom hadn’t distracted me. You’re a distraction, you know that?”

“You complaining?” Gypsy asked with a smile, wrapping her arms around Don’s waist.

“Well, uh, no, not really. Kids,” he said with a wink, “you know, some of those *old* weapons weren’t too bad either, especially when wielded by a sharpshooter like your mom. She bagged *me* with ‘em, and in those days they weren’t just *new* weapons, they were downright *futuristic*. But, anyway, let’s use our *new* weapons on this one. We can take some time to pray about this tonight when you guys get back. Now you’d better get going. You never know what traffic will be like, and it’s not safe to be in that part of town after dark.”

They’d taped what they heard from the Lord on the dictaphone, while Sally had taken general notes on her laptop, and were going over the main things the Lord had said.

Sally, a single mom of three, was a top secretary. She’d been in an office situation till about two years ago and then, with all her kids grown up and on different fields, she’d decided to heed the call for Africa since she spoke both French and English. She was now an integral part of the work here, with her office skills and deep love for the African people.

Sally scanned the notes: “The Lord is saying to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves with this fellow, that he’s dangerous and we should proceed cautiously.... Then, He seems to indicate that we shouldn’t shun his overtures, and that there’s a certain amount of sincerity in his asking for help and spiritual input.... But then there’s a warning in the next prophecy that he’s a wolf in sheep’s clothing and to beware of those who enter in to spy out our liberties just to find something to accuse us of.... The Lord also warns us to beware of his offer of funds, that it’s a trap, and we shouldn’t fall into the deceitfulness of riches....

“It’s really kind of hard to know what to do. Some of these prophecies seem to be contradictory. He’s a sheep, but he’s a wolf; feed him, but he’s dangerous. What do you make of all this?”

Don said, scratching his head, “I really don’t know. We could pray again for further guidance or clarification. That’s what Mama would do if there was something she didn’t understand.”

Everyone nodded agreement, so they asked the Lord once more to clarify what He meant by all this, to make it crystal clear how they were to proceed with Will. There were a couple of shorter prophecies affirming that all the messages were from the Lord, and then Don received a strong message with a vision:

“This one is taken captive by the Enemy of your souls at his will, and is only now seeing that his end is near and that what he gave up was worth far more than what he has gained. He has gained the world but has lost his soul, and all he knows is that he is doomed and there is no hope for him, either now in this life or in the life to come. But as you so well know, while there is life, there is hope, and I am able to rescue him, even from the Mark of the Beast in the coming Tribulation.

“He means evil toward you, but I have brought it about for your good, to strengthen you, and for his good and for the good of another who fights, though weakly, for his soul. Proceed with extreme caution, for I would not risk the work I have begun in you here and in this part of the world for this lost man, yet I would not lose him if he would but bow his knee to Me.”

With the prophecy Don saw Will in the foreground of his vision, much the same as he was thirty years ago, but now in great torment of spirit. Behind him and to the right was Marduke, manipulating him with strong, visible cords. It seemed that Will had finally realized that he was a controlled puppet, but he sadly had to obey her bidding.

To his left and further back than Marduke stood another little female figure who also held cords attached to him, but much, much thinner and more delicate, far less controlling but gentler, more loving. She was in the shadows and Don couldn't make out her features, except that she was quite thin, and her hair was a mousy brown. Don sensed that if they accepted this mission from the Lord, they too would be sending out unbreakable, yet invisible cords to pull him in the right direction that would reinforce the influence of the female figure to the left.

As he explained it to the gathering of some twelve Home members, he told them how the figure to the

left looked oddly familiar, but he couldn't make out her features.

Just then Simeon asked, “Dad, do you think it could be that little groupie Lenny led to the Lord outside of the Armadillo Club? Remember how you said she practically worshipped Will, and had stayed there with him that night?”

With goose bumps rising up the full length of his arms, Don closed his eyes and tried to see the vision once more. This time a dim light illuminated the shadowy female figure, and he could see it was in fact Judy!

“Simeon, that's it! Oh God! That's who it is! It's Judy! Gypsy, it's Judy! How could you have guessed that, Simeon?”

“I don't know, it just came to me.”

“Wow, that's amazing!”

Gypsy asked, “Okay, that's all pretty clear, so what do we do? How do we proceed?”

“Step by step, asking the Lord each step of the way, it would seem,” Sally said.

And so they did, first answering his e-mail with a friendly letter, and then when he answered that, giving him the Web site address for the worldwide Family, recommending certain things he could read to answer his questions and fill that empty space in his heart.

Marduke lit the cigarette on the end of her silver cigarette holder and drew deeply. “We already knew about their Web site and monitor it closely. There's some interesting things there, but I don't recommend you access it, Will. Our team in South Africa will be able to handle things there from now on. You just keep your friends distracted with a flow of communications and we'll see what develops. Anyway, Will, you're doing a good job and that doesn't go unnoticed, I assure you. Just don't make any moves without checking.”

Will, behind the bar making drinks for the both of them, answered. “Oh, yeah, sure. I learned *that* lesson, Marduke. You can count on me. By the way, I’ve always wanted to thank you for setting me straight that night. You know I wouldn’t want to do anything to hurt the Cause.”

“Don’t mention it, Will. By the way, has there ever been anything that confirmed my suspicions of Judy?”

“No, no! Like I told you, she denied being a Christian, and she’s never done anything that would seem to indicate that she is one.”

“That’s funny. I can’t remember ever being wrong about these things. Anyway, just make sure you don’t involve her with these communications at all. Does she know you’re communicating with your old friends?”

“Well ... yeah ... she knows, I’ve had her do a few of the e-mails for me. You never said not to,” Will said nervously.

“I know, I know, but maybe she shouldn’t anymore.”

“Okay, yeah, maybe I could even make her think that we aren’t communicating with them anymore.”

“Good idea, Will. You do that.”

Will came from behind the bar with the drinks. He and Marduke toasted each other. “To the Crash,” she said.

“Is it going to be soon?”

“Very! There will be things happening in the new year that will bring all the world’s interdependent economic systems crashing to their knees. Then, our Supreme Lord will be able to come in and pick up the pieces and run things the way they should be run.”

As Marduke spoke, Will thought how it had been a major discovery when he had understood how Marduke read people’s minds. He had realized she actually *had* no magical power at all in that way. She could only read *faces*, and her Satanic anointing

helped her to understand their expressions better than any normal person on the street could. But he’d found that he could fool her if he concentrated on not letting his face give anything away. He knew she was now convinced he was once more firmly in her camp, but in actual fact the e-mails from the Family were wearing away at his conviction and he now very much doubted he had chosen the right path back then in his youth.

Will had been accessing the Family Web site regularly, but now he could see that he wouldn’t be able to do that from his own computer anymore. From what he read, he could see that the Family had a freedom that was so much more powerful than what the churches had to offer. There was something very attractive about this. Sadly, he realized it was too late for him. He had sold his soul, and there was no reprieve once that was done. He had eternally sealed his own fate—at least that’s the way it looked to Will.

“The groundwork has been laid for years,” Marduke continued, “and if all goes the way it should, it’s finally going to happen—everything we’ve dreamed of. Most governments have already fallen into place and are toeing the line. But the rug is about to be pulled out from under the economies of the world, and when that happens, those countries which have been resisting the New World Order will finally be forced to their knees. Soon after, our Supreme Lord will reveal himself, and what a day *that* will be!”

“But Marduke, how has the information that we’ve gathered from my contact with the Family helped further the cause of the New World Order? I don’t quite see how such a small thing could have been worth all the remuneration I’ve received in return.”

Marduke was happy to see that Will was so grateful for the few crumbs he’d been given—he was obviously firmly under her control. “Well, believe it or not,” she replied, “whatever insight we’re able to gain into the

goings-on of your little missionary friends is very important to the cause. That group of theirs might be small, but they've proven to be a big threat, a tremendous obstacle to our plans.

"There have been several attempts made over the years to put a stop to them—manipulating the media to stir up public opinion against them; even using the courts and legal systems of various countries to try to ban their activities. But so far nothing has worked. However, with your help, and the help of others, we've been able to monitor their communications to and from their major centers, and prepare the groundwork to finally put them in their place and stop them from hindering our plans any further.

"Take your friends in Africa, for example. Africa is very important to us. It's a powerful bastion of our lord's workings, and we have some of our most sophisticated followers there. But the Family in Africa has been very active. They've been aggressively proselytizing all over the continent, and doing much to influence the officials in several countries. They've been gaining quite a dangerous foothold with all of their good deeds and work among the poor.

"But when the time comes and the governments fall, the savage elements of the world are going to be unleashed. If our plans work, both urban gangs and tribal warriors will go on the rampage, and your friends will be caught right in the middle. We've been feeding each faction information, inciting them against each other as well as against our enemies, and when push comes to shove, these seething, uncontrollable mobs will do our dirty work for us. When we finally come into full power, they will have already cleansed the continent of a great number of troublemakers, hinderers and undesirables—including people like Don and Gypsy and their disgusting little mission in Johannesburg.

"Very clever, isn't it? We get rid of our enemies,

drastically depopulate the Earth, and gain control—all in one fell swoop. It will be the end of all these troublesome religions and cults, as well as the death knell of all the independent nations which have been resisting the New World Order."

It was all Will could do to control his expression when he realized that what was planned for Don and Gypsy and their children and friends and many others like them around the world was cruel slaughter by angry manipulated urban mobs. But he managed a broad smile that seemed to satisfy Marduke. "Very clever. Lucifer is a wise god, I must say."

"Yes! And the ashes and bones of our enemies and those who are useless eaters, like the indigent of Africa who are dying like flies from AIDS and other diseases, will help to demonstrate to the world the urgent need for the New World Order. Then, Africa, through the wisdom of our leader will be raised to greatness through gold, through gems, through mineral wealth, and through massive investment, just at the point when she has been brought to her knees and her population decimated. This is what Africa needs. This is what the whole world needs—not those pathetic little missionaries who have nothing to give except their faith in a dead savior."

Marduke's eyes flashed with fire as she raised her glass to the sky. "And we will see it happen, Will! We will *help* it to happen—the end of the Christian era and the beginning of the rule of Man at his best."

"Yes! Yes!" Will raised his glass to hers and they clinked in the air above their heads. His eyes met Marduke's and he could see by the way she was looking at him what she wanted. The excitement of the moment had inflamed her passions. As she set her glass down, he feigned the same emotions and began to tear his clothes off.

Judy's folks had retired to the lovely Salinas Valley

near Monterey, in central California, and she began to spend her weekends there in their small town as often as possible. There she could read the Bible without being discovered by Will and Marduke, and there she could access the Family Web site, undetected in a little cyber cafe in the out-of-the-way town. She'd been the one to receive that early e-mail from Don and Gypsy that gave the Web site address. Since then she had not been allowed to handle the African e-mails, but she now knew these were good, sincere people who had stumbled onto great and powerful truths.

There on the Monterey peninsula, she could walk on the cliffs above the mighty Pacific and strain to hear the voice of the Almighty she had come to believe in. She didn't, and in fact couldn't afford to attend any church or Bible study group without endangering her beloved Will, so the Web site of the Family became her church. There she discovered many deep secrets and reveled in the milk and the meat of the Word.

Above all, she began to understand the days they were living in. As she read about the Endtime and the Antichrist plan for world conquest, she began to understand how close she was living to the inner workings of the Satanic takeover.

This weekend was special. Will had gotten away, saying he was going to Las Vegas. He had spent one night there, but now, on Saturday, he'd come to see her at her invitation in this beautiful little valley town. They'd spent the night in a simple little motel like a couple of high school kids on prom night, and loved and laughed like they never had before. Will was freer than she had ever known him to be.

As they lay in each other's arms, Will asked, "What's happened to you? You're so changed."

"I could say the same about you, you know."

"Okay, but I asked first."

"Well, I've slowed way down on drugs for one

thing."

"After thirty years?! Impossible!"

"Impossible but true, my dear."

"But ... but ... how?"

"And you? What's changed you so much? You seem happier somehow ... but only sometimes—like now. Other times, I can see you when you don't know I'm watching, and you really look afraid."

"Well, I'm both—happier sometimes and scared as hell others. Judy, I'm in over my head and always have been, as long as you've known me. You don't quite know the magnitude of what Marduke is into; what *I'm* into."

"I may know more than you think, Will. I've been doing some reading and I know some things. I know the Crash is coming and I know a new world that looks good to some is going to rise out of that."

"How'd you know all that?"

"The Internet, of all things. So what makes *you* happy?"

"*You* do, for one, and ... well, not much else. Something I read on the Internet made me happy too, and when I think about some of it, that happiness returns. But I really can't afford to think too much about it. If I tell you something, Judy, can you promise me you'll never breathe a word of it to anyone else?"

There was such intensity in his tone and in the look in his eyes that Judy sat up in bed, touched his cheek, and took tight hold of his hand.

"You know I won't."

"Remember when Don and Gypsy first answered my e-mails and sent the address of their Web site?"

"Yeah?" Judy answered guardedly.

"Before Marduke told me not to access it, I checked it out a couple of times, and there was a freedom and power in the love they spoke of that was so different from what I thought Christians were like, that I thought maybe I'd made a mistake in the course I've

taken in my life. That scared me, but somehow knowing that there are really people who believe like that also made me happy. I know I can never get free of Marduke and her cohorts, and that scares me. I know I'm walking a dangerous tightrope that I can never get off of."

"Will, you know what changed me?"

"No, what?"

"You have to make me the same promise, Will, never to breathe a word of this to anyone."

"I promise, Judy."

"I was changed by the same Web site! As well as the realization that I *am* what Marduke said I was, a Christian! I owe that to her, because I didn't even know then that I was. She made me think about it, and sure enough I remembered that your old friend Lenny prayed with me, and things changed in my life from that day on. That was the day I met you."

"Yeah, I remember."

"And I think I was meant to stay by your side all these years for a reason ... because God loves you, Will."

"There aren't many things that could surprise me. But I would be *very* surprised if that could be true."

"I'll show you. There's a little cyber cafe in town. Let's go there tomorrow, and I'll show you things that may make you change your mind."

It was Sunday in the gloaming as the sun sank into the ocean with an inaudible hiss. Judy and Will walked along the cliffs overlooking the coastline after having spent several hours on the Net, feeding from the Words of Life. Will was agitated, rubbing his sweaty palms together as he walked along.

"It all sounds so good, Judy, but it's not for me. I could never believe all that. I could never accept it."

"Why? Because you don't want to?"

"No, I *do*. I do want to, there's nothing I would

rather than to believe what we read, that God is love. But that's not easy after all I know, and ... and ..."

"And what?"

"It's too late, too late for me, Judy. I'm happy for you, for all my friends who have found this. It's good for *you*, but it's not for me. I set my course years ago. There's no changing now."

"Will, I don't know much, but one thing I know is that it's never too late. I read once that even on the cross with Jesus a thief was forgiven, a thief and a murderer. Jesus told him he would be with Him in Paradise that very day."

"And Paul, the leader of the early Christians had originally been one of their biggest enemies and persecutors. He was tracking them down and having them killed. If there was hope for someone like him, there's hope for you."

Will turned and looked away from the sunset for several long minutes. When he turned back, he was shaking, his face contorting as if in pain, his crazed eyes staring madly into her face.

She looked away, then recoiled in fear as she saw how close they were to the edge. As she jumped back and bumped Will, she could feel from the strong ex-drummer's hands that suddenly gripped her arms from behind that with the tiniest effort he could hurl her headlong to her death on the rocks below.

"Don't you see, Judy?" he whispered wildly into her ear. "I don't belong to myself anymore. I sold myself thirty years ago. I didn't get where I am in the rock music scene without cutting a pretty big deal with the one who controls it. Don't you see, you disgusting worm, you *Christian*?! I hate everything you stand for! I will never accept these ... these ... I can never receive this savior of yours. He's my sworn enemy!"

"He loves you, Will, He ..." She struggled to turn and look him in the eye, but his viselike grip prevented

her.

His grip tightened and she could feel the insane rage in his whisper. "Don't say that again, Judy. I warn you." He leaned forward and looked over the edge now. She could see he was seriously considering throwing her off.

She prayed. An oppressive silence reigned, except for their heavy breathing, and the wind whistling through their hair. Slowly Will looked back at her.

"Don't say that again, Judy. Tell me it isn't true. Tell me He hates me, that He will send me to eternal hellfire. Tell me He is my enemy. Say it!" He shook her wildly. "Say it, Judy!"

"I can't, Will, I can't!" she sobbed.

"Why can't you?!"

"Because it isn't true. Jesus loves you. I love you."

"Stop! Stop!" He swung her back from the cliff with both his hands and she knew the next move would send her hurtling into thin air.

"Stop saying those lies! He hates me! He's my enemy!" His grip tightened painfully as he braced his legs in a move she knew meant he was about to send her frail frame flying.

"Jesus! Jesus! Help me! Help us! Rebuke Satan, Jesus!"

A mighty invisible hand descended to the space between them and threw each of them onto the ground there on that cliff above the sea. Dazed, Judy sat up to see Will with his upper body hanging over the edge of the precipice. His feet were clawing at the gravel, trying to pull himself up, but actually causing him to fall further over.

With a cry, Judy flung herself toward Will, grabbing his belt to keep him from falling. As if by instinct, she kept her center of gravity low so she could help him up without his pulling her down.

As he pulled himself up and lay panting in the grass, staring into her face, he said, "What did you

do? What did you say? What happened?" The madness was gone now and there was a new clearness in his eyes.

"I cried out to Jesus, Will, and He saved me from what you were about to do. I know it wasn't you. I know you know I love you and would never hurt you."

"Judy, I almost *killed* you. I could've killed you. Oh, Judy, I'm so, so sorry. Judy, get away from me. Stay away from me. I'm dangerous!"

"Will, do you remember that prayer we read?"

"Yes, about the door?"

"Yes. Pray it with me. I can lead you. Let Jesus set you free."

"I can't, Judy. Marduke will know. I've learned to hide my feelings from her, but how could I hide this?"

"Leave her, Will."

"I can't. Everything I know, everything I have is there. I can't leave it all behind. They're everywhere, Judy. They're everywhere, and they'd find me and kill me. Marduke showed me already that she could kill me without even touching me."

"Pray this prayer and you won't need to fear death, Will. Just pray this prayer." She knew if he didn't do it then, at that moment, it would never happen. Now he was free from the Devil's grip, but this freedom would not last long. "Dear Jesus ..."

"D ... dear ... Je ... Jesus ..."

"Come into my heart...."

On the ride home, Will never stopped talking about what Marduke's people's plans were for the future and how the crash would cause chaos, and how Don and Gypsy and their Family were to be among the victims of this chaos. In urgent tones, they discussed what they could do to warn them and how they could manage to do this without Marduke knowing and exacting revenge. Finally, as they reached Judy's apartment, Will said to her, "We'll do it, Judy, even if

it costs us our lives.”

Judy nodded. “The Bible says, ‘Fear not them that kill the body and after that have no more that they can do.’”

“I’ll remember that. I’ll remember that. ‘After that, have no more that they can do.’ Judy, I want to give you something, one thing more.” He turned on the dome light of the car and began to scribble Collin’s phone number and address on a piece of paper in his notebook. “If anything happens to me, leave town and go to this address, to Collin, my old friend. I just know he’ll help you. He’s a Christian too. He’s a good guy, Judy.”

“No, no, if anything happens to you, I don’t want to live, Will.”

“Take it, and promise me, Judy. I insist.”

“Will, I finally have you, only to lose you? I can’t.”

“What was that you were telling me about eternal life? How can you lose someone you’re going to live forever with? Judy, promise me. Promise me.”

“Okay, I promise, but, Will, I pray I never have to use this address. Please stay alive.”

“Don’t worry, I’m no martyr.” And he kissed her goodnight.

The year flew swiftly by. Spring turned to summer, summer to fall. Company after company failed. The markets were careening wildly—up to the highest heights, down to major lows, then there’d be an infusion of fresh cash and the news reports would speak of recovery. Suicides were up. Crime was up. Men’s hearts were failing them for fear.

Watching the evening TV news was a torturous ritual. There was an eerie grimness on the faces of those waiting to hear the latest developments—parents hanging on every word, not allowing a peep from their kids who studied the faces of their mothers and fathers to know how bad things were getting.

They then went to their rooms, convinced that things were very, very bad, that there was *everything* to fear and *nothing* to be happy about.

Peace, faith, trust—all were things of the past, belonging to a time when the world was simpler, when miracles really happened, when people believed that there was a God above who looked down with loving eyes and came down with caring hands to help. Now the skies held only satellites—satellites which carried the news that all was not well. Now the skies held only fear that some madman would send those hell bombs whistling their way and shatter the broken peace. Now the skies held only fear of a depleted ozone layer. Now the skies mocked at the empty, fearful, insectlike creatures of humanity below who inescapably, hopelessly awaited their ultimate doom.

Smiles and laughter were reserved for the barrooms when drink had temporarily drowned despair in forgetfulness. Bitterness and a fatalistic sense of doom had withered the smiles and dried the tears so that what was left was a zombie-like numbness over the world’s populace, like cattle herded together into the slaughterhouse waiting for death and the meatpacker’s blade. Numbness had set in from hearing of and seeing disaster after disaster, morbid murder after grisly death. Plagues, famine, suicides, perversion—consciences truly were seared with hot irons.

Marduke was delighted. She was as a child again, thrilled that a long-dreamed-of Xmas present had come through. Her happy delirium was welcome to Will and Judy, for her happiness had a way of blinding her to the moods of others. She was unaware that there had been a dramatic change in her protégé and his secretary.

All seemed to Marduke to be going according to plan. She was so busy herself that she scarcely had

time to make sure that Will was occupying himself in ways she would approve of, and he and Judy had time to read the Bible, time to study the materials that Judy regularly downloaded during her trips to Monterey, time to grow in faith and love.

Judy had rented a cottage by the sea in her younger brother's name, and there they kept their Bibles and literature. Judy, fascinated by Father David, had even downloaded some of her favorite pictures of him and had them framed for the walls of their hideaway. It wasn't often that they could get away together there, but those times were a taste of Heaven to the lovers living out their lives in the midst of Hell.

It was Thanksgiving. Will and Judy had gotten away for the long holiday weekend and had met up in their Heavenly Haven, as they called it. Friday morning, they lay groggy but happy in each other's arms, Judy drawing strength from the kind eyes of Father David, looking down with a look of benediction from his perch on the wall.

"We're like Alan Alda and Ellen Burstyn in *Same Time Next Year*, you know that?" Will said.

"Except we don't have to wait a whole year, thank God."

"No, really, even the view is almost the same." Judy suddenly sat up in bed, disturbed.

Will stroked her bare back, "What's wrong, baby?"

She turned to him, gazing for a fraction of a second deep into his eyes, then burying her head in his chest and wrapping her arms tightly round his waist. "I'm scared, Will. I'm so scared."

Stroking her hair, he asked, "But why, Judy? Everything's going so well."

"We're not Alan and Ellen, Will. There's no happy ending on Earth for us. I just saw it so clearly. We're more like Omar Sharif and Julie Christie in *Doctor Zhivago*. We've got our little hideaway, but it's just a

matter of time till we're discovered.

"Will, let's love till we can't love anymore. Let's fill up to the full on the Words that make a difference and make us strong, that help us to look to the world to come, because ... because I don't think we have much longer together here.

"My darling, darling Will, I've never been so happy. I'm living a dream come true. You've returned my love after all these years, and together we've found deep happiness. And yet I've never been so miserable, because I know that in a flash this could all end, this could all be over; something could happen and this would be our last time together till we meet in Heaven."

Will felt her warm tears washing his chest. He knew she was right. He'd always known. They'd both sensed it from the beginning and that's why they'd used every minute they had together for love, for study, for reading and praying together. But there could never be enough time. There would never come a time that they would be able to say, "That's enough. We know enough. We've loved enough. We're satisfied. We're ready to meet the enemy face to face. We are ready to die. We are ready to engage in mortal combat." That day would never come.

But they knew the day *would* come and come unexpectedly, when they would have to face the enemy and fight—maybe die—at least engage in desperate and mortal combat to the finish. They hoped and prayed that if they used the time well, they'd be ready for whatever happened—even if they didn't feel like it—and they would fulfill their calling.

They, of all people, knew the shortness of time; they had worked for years for the Evil Engineer who was hastening toward his kingdom. They, of all people, knew the seriousness of their situation; they had seen those who crossed the evil one's powers die, or be ruined or discredited—sometimes overnight.

They'd both seen great successes in the music world disappear from the scene and never record or perform again because of one misstep. They'd heard talk of getting rid of this one or that one for trying to break their contracts and then read in the papers within the week how he or she had overdosed on drugs, jumped out of a window, committed suicide or died of unknown causes. They knew full well that time was short, that the stakes were high. And yet, their newfound faith and love gave them strength to carry on one day at a time.

Judy began to desperately pray for the Lord's blessing, protection and guidance. Her fervency was contagious, and Will found himself carried along in her prayer, reaching together with her for the very throne of God. Then they lay in silence while thoughts flooded both their minds and hearts, neither knowing that their thoughts were being guided in precisely the same direction.

Finally Will broke the silence. "I think it's time, Judy. I think it's time."

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Time for what?" Judy asked.

"To warn Don and Gypsy."

Judy sat up excitedly and searched his face. "That's exactly what I was feeling. Wasn't that something! It was God speaking to us! Just like what we read about on the Family Web site about hearing from God and letting Him show us what to do."

Will was just as excited as Judy, but sobered by what they were being asked to do.

"You do know what this means, don't you, Judy? Every e-mail that the Family receives is monitored and traced."

"I can open an account they can't prove is ours."

"We should do that for sure."

"I can word it cryptically so it would be hard to

prove exactly what we are talking about."

"Absolutely. But if it's too cryptic, Don and Gypsy won't understand it either. The thing is, Judy, no matter what we do, if we expose plans of the sort that Marduke has revealed only to me, she'll know where it's coming from. She'll then confront me about this. So far she hasn't figured us out because she's so elated with how things are going. But if she stops and questions me, I don't think there's any way on earth I could hide my true sentiments from her. The ruse has worked as long as she had no suspicion, but once she suspects, there'll be no hiding anymore."

"So ... you don't think we should do it?"

"*Au contraire, mon amour.* We must. But we must go into this knowing what to expect. I suggest we write the message here together, agree on every word. Then I'll go home early. I'll drive to Las Vegas tonight, be seen gambling there, then on back to LA tomorrow, so I'm there on Sunday when you send the message from here to South Africa."

"Okay, good. Sounds good. Then I'll just come back Sunday night and see you at work Monday, right?"

"Wrong. You don't come back."

"Will, I'm not leaving you to take the rap."

"Listen, Judy, I think at first Marduke will blame it all on you. For you to come back would be certain death."

Will had always been an accomplished liar. It had been a long time though since he had tried to lie to Judy. Taking a deep breath, he decided to give it one last try. "I should be able to stave her off or stall her for a week or so, while I pretend to be looking for you, the traitor. I'll even go on a trip to find you—or so I'll say—but I'll just disappear and join you in Texas with Collin. His folks live in Del Rio, so I suggest you try to get him to go down there and I'll join you. Then if it looks like things are really hot, you ... we ... can just jump the border to Mexico."

"I don't like it."

"Judy, you don't have a choice. I'm asking you to do this to hopefully save *both* our skins. If you come back to work, we'll be connected and we'll both be *ruined*. It could even hurt Don and Gypsy somehow. You have to do it this way if we want to survive this thing at all."

Judy searched his eyes long and hard. He was thankful for all the practice he had had hiding his true feelings from Marduke, but it was all he could do to fight back the tears that longed to flow.

Finally he knew he had failed. Judy saw through him, but she recognized it was the only thing they could do. Slowly, her eyes never leaving his, without saying a word, she laid the full length of her naked body on his and loved him long.

Will was in his office on Monday morning when a call came in asking him to go to Marduke's penthouse for lunch. He took the opportunity of the trip there to pray. In the elevator, he prayed for Judy, and that she was well on her way to Texas. As he crossed the lobby to the street, he asked the Lord to touch Collin's heart, and prayed that they would be faithful to cover their tracks each step of the way. In the cab he prayed for the South African Family, and their wisdom to know what to do to avoid death and ruination of all they had tried to build.

Through the lobby of the condominium, in the elevator and up to the door of her apartment, he prayed for his own strength and conviction, and that even if he didn't know what to say beforehand, he would get it when he needed it—like it said he would in the Bible. Finally he prayed for the grace to die in faith, fearing nothing.

The door swung open and he stared into Marduke's face adorned with a broad but obviously phony smile.

"Come in, Will. Good to see you. Did you have a

good holiday?"

"Yes, very good. Won a bundle at the tables."

"Oh yes, who was it? Marvin—yes, Marvin said he saw you in Vegas."

"He did, did he? Small world, huh?"

"Yes, well, sit down, Will. We have some exciting news."

"I know. I heard," he said as he sat on the sofa.

"You did?" She was taken aback.

"Yeah, the dollar devaluing against the Euro—just like you said it would, right?"

"Oh, that. Yes, that's big news. How much did you make on that one?"

"I haven't checked with my financier yet. When I get back to the office ..." *IF I get back to the office*, he thought.

"No, no, I meant something a little more personal. But, look at me, inviting you to lunch and forgetting all etiquette. Drink first?"

"Sure, Scotch on the rocks." Her boy behind the bar went into immediate action and within seconds the drink was in his hand.

He chuckled. "No wasted time with you, is there?"

"Will, you know there *is* no time to waste." She had a martini and was already sipping. "So, Will, did you see the football game?"

Small talk continued up till and through lunch, Marduke being the perfect hostess. But once he had finished the last bite of his soufflé, wiped his mouth on his napkin and placed it under the corner of his plate, he could tell Marduke was impatient to get to the crux of the matter. She led him back to the lounge and said, "We picked up a very strange e-mail to your South African friends yesterday."

"Oh, really?"

"Yes, very strange indeed. It was some kind of cryptic warning to them from an unnamed source."

"That *is* interesting. What was it about?"

“About things only you and I know, Will—things about the crash, about chaos and anarchy in South Africa. It was warning them to get out, or to hide. I was just baffled as to where this could have come from. Do you have any idea, Will?”

“Are you kidding?! No, no. I can’t imagine.”

“Well, *I* have an idea, but there are still some missing pieces I need your help to fill in. Will, is Judy at the office?”

“Uh, no. She called in this morning saying she couldn’t make the trip from up north as she had bad indigestion. I figured it must have been Thanksgiving dinner.”

“*She* called in?”

“Yeah, she did.”

“*She herself* called in?”

“Oh, no—actually the receptionist said it was her mother.”

“Strange, don’t you think? Indigestion so bad she couldn’t make it to the phone or even lift a cell phone.”

“I hadn’t thought of that.”

“Well, of course not, since you didn’t know about this e-mail. Did you?”

“Marduke, how would I know about it?”

“Of course. Of course. It’s just that there were things only *you* knew in that message. How would Judy have known, assuming she had something to do with this message?”

Will sat in thought for a moment or two. He had already thought this one through, but he wanted to make things look as spontaneous as possible. Acting as if it was dawning on him, Will said, “I could kick myself.”

“What?”

“Well, I keep a coded journal on the computer in my study. I typed up some of those things you told me, never thinking that anyone but me could decipher the code. But I just remembered that several years

back I did a report about one of the bands we were handling. I used that code at a time when it looked like our contract with them could take a special twist, like mine did. Then later it didn’t turn out that way and what was written was all rather harmless, so I taught Judy how to decipher the code. You know, she just might have snooped and found that all out from reading my journal. You don’t think she could have done this, do you really, Marduke?”

“Who else, Will, who else?” They were both silent for a moment. “Will, call her. She can’t be allowed to get away with this. I should have never listened to you. I should have followed my own feelings. They’ve never been wrong. You need to learn to sense these things, Will, if you really want to ever get where you’re going. Anyway, call her. You need to go up there. Say it’s an urgent business matter, then you need to take care of her.”

“Take care of her?”

“Kill her, Will! Take her for a drive to Big Sur, one of those seaside cliff-type places, something like that. Easy as can be. You’re talking business with your secretary. She slips, loses her footing. Falls on the rocks. You’re distraught. Panicked. Don’t worry. No harm will come to you. Everyone will believe your story. We’ll see to that. Call her ... right now.”

“Sure, sure.” He walked a little too dazedly to the phone in a corner of the room.

“Weak knees, Will?”

“No, no, not really.” Then he turned with a weak smile. “I’ve just never killed anyone, Marduke.”

“No?”

“No.”

“Hmm, our records seem to show differently.”

“What?!”

“Do you remember Gary Gremlin, the lead singer for Netherworld?”

“Yeah, he overdosed.”

“So they say. But we have evidence otherwise....”

“What do you mean? You pinned a murder on me?!”

“Oh, just a little reminder—a little reminder that you’re a book I wrote, Will, no more than that. And if I say you killed someone, then you did. On the record, Gremlin died of an overdose. Off the record, watch your step, Will Ryder. Everyone needs to be reminded from time to time who *owns* them. Now make that call.”

When the call was made and it was clear that Judy had fled, Marduke’s face clouded with frustration and rage. She paced her lounge while Will sat quietly on the sofa, deep in thought. Suddenly she dashed into her bedroom and returned with a basket full of paraphernalia, which she set down with a flourish on the coffee table. Will saw there was a small, plain cloth female doll, some long needles and various occult items.

“If we can’t kill, we can still curse. You, Will, must curse her and her Nazarene leader. Here’s how you do it....”

Will had heard all this before, but had never had to *do* it. After Marduke had explained it all to him, she handed him the doll and a handful of needles. Her eyes gleaming, she said, “Do it, Will. Do it now!”

Will took the items, raised one needle, then asked, while praying for guidance, “What was it I was supposed to say again?”

With obvious impatience, she told him once more. By then he knew what to do and had prayed down the strength to do it. He set the doll and needles down, looked her square in the eye and said, “No, Marduke, I can’t.”

“You *can’t*?!”

“No, that’s not quite right. I *won’t*.”

“*Won’t*?!”

“No, I won’t hurt Judy, the one person I know who

has any love for me or for anyone.”

“Will, do you realize what you’re saying?”

“I realize exactly what I’m saying.”

“Don’t you remember what I can do to you?”

“Fear not them which kill the body and after that have no more that they can do.”

Will was sure Marduke’s bloodcurdling scream, with her fingers stopping her ears, would bring all the servants running. But no one came—and in fact, even the bartender was gone. There was no one around.

Marduke screamed, “Don’t you quote that Book to me! You of all people! Don’t you know He is your sworn enemy?”

“Not anymore, Marduke.”

“She got you!”

“She did. *Jesus* got me.”

Marduke’s face twisted monstrosly as she turned her hand like turning a key in a lock, expecting Will to buckle on the floor with a heart attack as he had not long ago. Yet nothing happened. Will calmly stood up and turned to the door to go. Marduke lunged at him, with her long black fingernails brandished like claws. But as if by an unseen hand, she rammed her shins against the coffee table and fell at his feet in pain.

With a quick glance over his shoulder, Will was almost to the door when he heard the lock click. Turning, he saw that Marduke, with her hand under the coffee table, had pressed a remote control button that locked all doors.

“One last chance, Will. Curse her and Him or die.”

“If I die, I have Heaven to look forward to.”

“There is no Heaven!”

“Of course there is, Marduke. I know for sure, because every coin has to have two sides. I’ve lived in your *hell* for years, but I escaped—even though you lied to me and said I never could. And now, you have

lost the key to my heart, you pitiful, miserable witch.”

Marduke’s two huge bodyguards, Cliff and Clive, appeared at one of the inner doors.

“Take care of him,” Marduke said, trembling as she turned to go to her room.

Will managed to shout, “Fear not them which kill the body and after that have no more that they can do!” before the silenced pistol in Clive’s hand belched out death.

Judy felt a sudden jolt in her heart as she sped through the Arizona desert. As it slowly began to dawn on her what must have just happened, first one tear, then another began to stream down her face. She wiped the tears away and continued to drive until her tear ducts burst like storm clouds overhead and no amount of wiping would clear her vision. As she pulled over at a rest stop and turned off the engine, her body convulsed with great, pent-up sobs.

She had been trying to convince herself that Will would somehow manage to escape and flee to her arms again, but now she suddenly knew that she would never see him again alive until they were together in Heaven. She wept and howled, feeling totally lost and alone on the deserted wilderness roadside.

She had no idea how long she’d been crying when she finally grew silent and a measure of peace returned to her soul. She lay across the front seat and stared blankly and silently into the sky through the window. Her heart then felt a childlike anxiety and expectation. Something was welling up inside her heart. Something was about to happen. Something was about to be revealed.

The sky’s endless expanse of barren cobalt blue was quietly and gracefully broken by a single fleecy cloud wafting overhead and stopping directly in her view. It was as if the very cloud stopped in its course as it saw her so far below. It was as if it smiled down

on her with reassurance. And then it was as if she could see Will’s face smiling down on her, free, triumphant, and happier than she had never seen him. The deep blue of his eyes was cleared of the haze of drugs, the cloud of fear, and the sorrow of bondage.

Without a sound being made, she knew she had it within her now to go on, that Will would be there with her, and that they were united eternally. She would yet smile again, even laugh again—the best was yet to come.

As if in a dream she started the car, rolled out onto the highway and drove on through the day, and through the next day, until she reached Collin’s little house in Austin. She could feel Will touch her shoulder as she sat in the car by the curb. She could almost *see* him nod to her to go ahead and go in. She could sense his hand in hers as she made the trip from the car up the sidewalk to the front door. She could hear his sweet voice encouraging her as she rang the doorbell, and she could feel him smile when her eyes met with Collin’s bemused look as he saw this strangely disheveled lady at his door.

It was as if she could see Will standing between them there on the little porch, with one hand on each of their arms. With only a few sparse words of introduction mumbled between them and a few clumsy attempts at breaking the ice, she found herself sitting on Collin’s sofa and she knew Will had been right. Collin *was* a Christian, he *was* a good guy, he *would* help her.

It didn’t take long or a great deal of conversation before she and Collin knew that they had both found in each other a friend in time of need.

- 3 -

“THE PEOPLE THAT DO KNOW THEIR GOD”

“What do you make of this message we just got via e-mail?” Sally asked Gypsy on a sweltering day in late November. Gypsy took it and read it over once, then twice, and finally a third time. She then closed her eyes and prayed silently.

When she opened her eyes, she said, “I think we’d better pray for Will Ryder. I think he just spilled the beans to us as far as what his people are planning in our part of the world. God only knows what will happen or has already happened to him! I think the Word on the Web site must have gotten through to his heart and this is his way of repaying us. I think we need to take this seriously—but as always, the best thing is for us to take it to the Lord.”

“You really think that’s who wrote it?”

“Yep, either him or Judy.”

“The groupie you talked about?”

“Uh huh.”

When their Home, now increased by two new disciples, John Paul and Miriam, got together that very night, the Lord confirmed that this was not someone’s practical joke, but that it should be taken seriously and that they should *prepare*, both physically and spiritually. He confirmed that they shouldn’t flee just yet, but that, though their lives

would be in danger during the confusion to follow, He would turn it to a testimony, and not even one hair of their head would be hurt.

The Lord confirmed that their witness to some of the members of the largest neighborhood gang, the Vanguard, would work to their benefit. He also encouraged them to continue to help the Muslim orphanage they had just donated a large amount of food to. Above all, He assured them that their best refuge was in the center of His will, and that if they continued to be a witness and blessing to all they met, He would protect them and bring them through any storm.

Because the parents were particularly concerned, not for themselves, but for their children, Jesus gave them a special, encouraging message. He told them that He knew that it wasn't hard for them to make the decision to lay down their *own* lives for the lost of their beloved African field, but He understood their concerns about their children being in danger. He reminded them that each child was precious to Him, and that He was going to hold them in the hollow of His hand till the calamity was past, and that the children would even, at times, be the very instruments He would use to save their lives. All three of the mothers with young children were teary-eyed after they had heard the Lord's comforting promises. Praises filled the room when the last words were given.

On the strength of all that Jesus had said to them, they prepared survival food and water, made contingency plans in case they would need to hide or move for a while, and set aside enough funds to last them if there came a time when it would be impossible to raise money. To be spiritually prepared, they all studied the Word on persecution prep and put into action all the tips they could glean—from relations with neighbors and authorities, to securing their computer files and preparing the children. There was

an urgency they had never known before that came with the realization that this could be *it*—the war, the final war between good and evil they had been expecting for years.

Having done all they could, they committed their lives and service to Jesus and lost souls, and threw themselves into their Christmas outreach. What a Christmas it was!—With over twenty shows in schools and orphanages and churches, massive distribution of the CDs, videos and posters, hundreds of souls saved, and many hungry sheep coming over to be fed the Word almost every day!

The teens and young people were growing stronger by the day, from feeding the many sheep that came to their door and from giving classes to John Paul and Miriam, who were absolute sponges for the Word. Simeon's faith was growing just from seeing these two grow, and he was beginning to see the reality of everything he had had to take by faith this last year, the reality of what his older brother had not been able to believe in during the months before he chose to go the System route.

And then it happened....

It had been coming for a while; you could see it in the headlines. Every Family member could see the writing on the wall, so no one was really surprised when the major stock markets of the world lost a quarter of their value in one day. There were bailouts by this or that part of the world until *their* markets dropped too. Finally, *no* part of the world or international financial institution—including the World Bank and the IMF—was able to help the other, and everyone went down like the great Titanic. Governments, utilities and businesses—from small shops to major corporations—began to fail and descend into confusion one after another.

The television stations had stopped broadcasting a few days before, and the Family in South Africa

was gathered around the radio listening to a special broadcast from Pretoria. The president was cautioning, no, *imploring* everyone to stay calm, to help one another, to maintain peace and order. The fearful edge in his voice was obvious. The helplessness in his soul rang loud and clear. What was glaringly lacking was any promise of relief to come in the foreseeable future. There was a lot of poetical rhetoric, saying that they would all make it through this.— But it fell on deaf ears.

Then there was *silence*. The radios had gone dead. The lights began to flicker for a few ominous seconds and then went out completely. Word spread that the government had collapsed.

Widespread looting swept the city, and the streets became a seething battlefield. Deserters from the armed forces, former police, gangs, private militias and other armed factions desperately struggled to gain control over the most important parts of the city.

There was no way of telling who was fighting for food and survival and who was fighting just to fulfill the base lust for violence which had been so purposefully cultivated in their hearts over the years. The face of the enemy was nebulous, and fear reigned supreme.

The Family asked the Lord what they should do. He told them to wait, and that it would be shown them what to do. They stayed at home, taking the time to minister to John Paul, Miriam and a handful of visitors who dared make their way past the roving bands which were terrorizing the streets.

Seven days passed. Then ten. They continued to stay home, feeding on the Word. Their neighborhood had remained relatively quiet, though they could hear the sounds of war and chaos not far removed. They kept low to the floor and stayed away from the windows to avoid stray bullets.

Simeon was getting restless and his faith was

weakening under the strain. Doubts and questions about the future began to set in to such a point that it was the new babes who were encouraging him to keep the faith, that God was going to take care of them.

That's easy enough for them to say, he thought to himself. *This is their country. They were born to Africa's troubles. But I could've been safe back in the States right now.*

If Simeon could've only seen what was happening back in his parents' homeland, he would know how far from the truth that was.

Don was teaching John Paul and Miriam late one morning while Simeon half-listened. Gypsy was giving devotions to the four OCs in the living room, and Sally and Marina were trying to figure out how to make something appetizing out of dehydrated eggs and potato flakes, when a clamor could be heard at their gate. Voices approached their front door, saying, "I tell you, *this* is where they live."

A female voice retorted. "Do you really think they'd still be here?"

"Where else they got to go? The whole world's gone crazy. We'll find 'em home all right. Believe me."

Then the doorbell rang. Don, by habit, looked toward the door and was glad to see it was locked with the bolt on and the chain attached. Precious little help *that* would be if they *really* wanted in, but at least it would delay them a bit and keep honest people honest. But how many honest people were left alive out there? Slowly, praying every step of the way, Don went to the door, with Simeon towering over him close behind.

The doorbell rang twice more in rapid succession. Looking through the peephole, Don saw three middle-aged people on their porch.

"Yes?" Don shouted.

"Is this the Family?"

“Yes, it is. What can I do for you?”

“We got this at Christmas time.” Don could see they were holding up a “Peace in the Midst of Storm” poster and another one behind it that he couldn’t make out. “We think you know something about what’s happening. We want to know. Can you tell us? We even brought a little bit of food for you.” He could see they were holding up a bag of food.

“Wait just a minute.”

The two men quickly sought the Lord, and Don said, “I got the verse, ‘they that understand among the people shall instruct many,’ and the feeling that this is the beginning of what we always knew would happen someday.”

Simeon was silent. Don looked into his eyes for some sign of agreement or disagreement. Nothing. Don had to act on what the Lord was showing him alone this time. He swung the door open, and the two men and one woman on the doorstep heaved a great sigh as they stepped inside.

They introduced themselves as Becky, Emmanuel and Brixton. Becky and Emmanuel were married, and Brixton was Emmanuel’s brother. They were invited into the living room, and began to explain about their decision to try to find them and their journey there.

“We live in Soweto and, I wanna tell you, all hell has broken loose down there. Nobody’s safe. Gangs are fightin’ each other. People are armed to the teeth and killin’ each other. Tribal war’s heatin’ up again, and we’ve just been prayin’ to Jesus to help us. Our pastor was killed right off by God knows who, so we don’t have anyone to turn to.

“There’s about thirty of us that got together ’cause we had the posters you gave out when you did your show for the kids at Christmas. We wanna know what’s happenin’.”

“Yeah, Can you help us? What can we do?”

As Don spread out an Endtime chart and began

to explain it to them, using Matthew 24 and Luke 21, the doorbell rang again. This time Simeon went with Uncle Hans Peter, the Afrikaans-speaking Dutch brother. Don could hear voices asking in Afrikaans, “Are you the poster people?” Hans spoke with them briefly, and then led the group of five into the dining room where he began to give them the same class in Afrikaans that Don was giving in English in the other room.

So it began and so it continued. As if guided by a star, the people began to flow in, starving spirits longing for answers, bringing small gifts of food as their offerings. By midafternoon there were little groups in every room, each group being taught the Word by a pair of Family members, from JETT Carolyn on up. As the shadows began to steal across the floor, everyone knew they had to make their way home before darkness turned their world into an even greater hell than it already was.

This day there had been thirty souls saved, and even more who were already Christians prayed to be filled with the Holy Spirit. There was a light on every face that belied the horror outside.

When time came for them to go, they all embraced like old friends, like family. All promised they would come again tomorrow, God willing, and bring others with them. George, who lived next door, said they could use his house too if they needed it.

The next morning as they were finishing breakfast, the stream of people began. There were testimonies of how the Lord had protected them, how the Lord had helped them to tell someone else the Good News, and how *they* wanted to come hear too, or how the Lord had done some miracle of supply. This was followed by praises, shouts, songs and dances. There was never a people in the midst of adversity with hearts more full of thanksgiving and praise.

Testimony and praise times became a regular life-giving ritual as the days went by. Then there were the stories of people who had been there yesterday, but were now dead—gone to be with Jesus. Others of the growing flock told of their loved ones who were sick or wounded or dying or dead. These desperate stories were always followed by fervent prayers and crying out to God with strong weeping and tongues.

The unbearable weights that these wonderful people had been carrying for so long—the weights of oppression, of hunger and fear—were all removed from their hearts and taken far away as they came before the throne of God!

The flock grew and grew. More houses in the neighborhood were made available—the houses of people who the Family had caroled for during the last few Christmases, who had been visited when it was known someone was sick or in need, who had visited the Family Home and had always been made to feel welcome. With willing hearts, and at great sacrifice and even danger, they opened their doors to host classes and feeding of the sheep.

Then began the stories of some who had nowhere to return to as the dusk began to fall. Their houses had been burned down or taken over by some faction, and they had been driven out. The rooms in the neighborhood filled with the homeless, and lean-tos and tents were erected in the yards.

John Paul and Miriam were the first babes to graduate and become Family teachers, but within two weeks Don, Gypsy and their Home found the need to constantly be watching out for those students who seemed to understand the best and might have the potential to teach others.

Following each class, they took extra time with the students who had shown the most potential. And so, the Family membership grew in the midst of the greatest suffering and privation any of them could

remember.

Emmanuel became quite the Bible scholar, and with his booming voice and charismatic personality a growing flock formed round him. Then there was fourteen-year-old Ashley, who had the boldness of a lion coupled with the sweet singing voice of an angel. If she wasn't teaching some group, she was memorizing a new chapter—Bibles being scarce—or learning a new song from Marina. The two girls had become the very best of friends over the past few days.

No one knew where all the food was coming from. Like the story of Jesus feeding thousands with the lunch of only one young boy, the people just brought what they had, and every night there were baskets of leftovers that were taken home by the returning groups, to feed their loved ones who hadn't been able to come but were hungry at home.

Nearly a month had passed. God had literally and miraculously fulfilled Psalm 91 before their very eyes. Truly a thousand had fallen at their sides and ten thousand at their right hands, but the violence and fighting had not come nigh them.

One evening, Don sat under a tree in the yard as the sun was going down, praising God for all His goodness, while at the same time praying for Simeon, who was growing more and more morose.

Simeon was now complaining that if he had gotten out when the going was good, he would've been safe and sound in the U.S. with John, his older brother. He began to call their house the Alamo, so certain he was that they were all going to die there.

The Lord reminded Don what a hard time He had had getting through to *him* when he was young. He assured him gently that all the Word that had been poured into Simeon would not return void.

Just then Gypsy joined Don for a few moments of rest, laying her head on his shoulder.

"Tired?" he asked.

“Mm-hmm,” she purred. “Three hours sleep last night, four the night before, no breaks in the day ... but it’s amazing how the Lord has given us all strength.”

“Yeah, sure is.”

“You know, sweetheart ...”

“What?”

“I wouldn’t trade what we’re seeing happen here for anything in the world. If I died tonight, I’d die happy.”

“Me too.” There was silence, while they marveled at all the Lord had done for them this last month and how He had shown His incredible power.

“Gypsy?” No answer. “Gypsy?” He smiled, realizing she had fallen asleep between sentences.

He was stroking her hair with its crowning strands of silver when a shadow suddenly fell over him. He looked up and saw Scar, the leader of the Vanguard, towering over him. They had witnessed to many of the gang, and a number had gotten saved, but Scar had always kept his distance. They’d never talked to him, and with his enormous size and huge knife scar running from his left ear to his chin, quite frankly they hadn’t been tempted to even try. But here he was. He was blocking the setting sun, so Don couldn’t see the expression on his face.

A little too timidly Don said, “Hello?”

“C’mon, man, it’s okay. I’m not gonna hurt you.” Scar sat down on the grass and said, “I’ve been watchin’ what you’re doing, and I want you to know it’s good. You could’ve just cared about yourselves and your own survival in this madness, but you guys reached out to others, and me and my boys ... we’re with you.”

“Thanks, uh ...”

“Scar, just call me Scar.”

“Scar.”

“Did you ever wonder why you’ve got no crime with

all these people hangin’ around here?”

“Well, now that you mention it, yeah, I *have* been wondering that. I know that God is doing a real miracle.”

“Well, the people mostly love you, and that helps. But there’s a lot of poor people who don’t have anything, and lots of ’em are so desperate, they’ve gotta steal to survive—even if it’s from friends or family. But when the Vanguard tell people ‘Don’t you steal or you’re gonna answer to us,’ well, that does the trick.”

“You did that?”

“Yes. We’re the police here now. There’s laws here. No drugs. No alcohol. Come on, you thought that just happened without some help from Big Daddy Scar? You sure got a lot to learn, don’t you?”

“Guess I do, Scar.”

“But you’re not doin’ too bad with what you already know, so I’m gonna be patient with you while you learn. I had my eye on you a while back. You know why my boys liked you?”

“Umm ... perhaps because they see Jesus’ love in us?”

“Well,” Scar answered without hesitation, “it all started February a year ago when a bent-over old lady asked you to help her with some hospital bills and medicine. And you didn’t just give her medicine, but that sweet lady of yours sleepin’ on your shoulder took her to the best doctor she could find, and sat with her and made sure she got all better.

“That little old lady was my right-hand man’s grandma. He’s dead, killed by the Viceroy, and I take care of her now. She can’t stop talkin’ about you people. So as long as I’m alive and the Vanguard still have a single member ... don’t you worry.

“I’ve gotta go now, Don. See you ’round.” And he was gone.

Gypsy had been so exhausted she hardly stirred

during the whole conversation with Scar. But now with the silence, she groaned sleepily and stretched a little as she asked, “Who were you talking to?”

“Scar.”

“Who’s Scar?”

“The leader of the Vanguarders, the gang that’s taken control of this area, it seems.”

She sat up and looked Don square in the eyes. “Really?”

“Yeah, and you know what?”

“What?”

“He *likes* us and they are *protecting* us. All because of you, Hon, and that little old lady you helped last year.”

“Grandma Colletta?”

“That’s her.”

“Wow, it all comes back, doesn’t it? The boomerang is coming back. It’s like all the little things the Word taught us to do, they’re all paying off for us now—ministering to the poor, showing concern and love for our neighbors. Thank You, Jesus, for leading us and guiding us all these years!”

“Yep, it’s great to see the vision being fulfilled. Okay, sweetheart, let’s go to bed.”

“Yeah, it’s been a long day and there’s another one just like it coming.”

Another week passed quickly, and just as a very fulfilling day was coming to an end, the stillness of the night was broken by the sound of clubs smashing against metal garbage cans and coming closer. Don ran to the porch and looked down the street. He could make out a line of young men heading toward their house, making as much noise as they could on the way.

Gypsy began to pray, “Jesus, our precious Husband, our loving Protector, we need You now. You’ve hovered over us and doted over us like Your

pets till now, and now we need Your supernatural intercession. We don’t know what’s happening, Lord, but in Jesus’ name, please stand between us and any harm. Especially protect the children and put Your words, the right words, in our mouths.”

As those words escaped her mouth in a whisper, the gang of young men reached the Family house and stopped. The three or four in front stared deep into Don’s eyes as they stroked the clubs in their hands. Don and Gypsy could see the lead boy had an automatic rifle slung over his shoulder as well. No one needed to tell them, and those who had come out to see, that there was immense danger in the air. You could feel it. You could taste it. The darkness was thick, like the one that fell on Egypt in Moses’ day.

The boy with the rifle pointed it at Don’s chest. How long he stood there like that without saying a word, no one could tell, but Don had time to pray, to prepare himself. He knew that anything could happen.

“Who’s the leader here?” the guy with the gun asked.

“Well,” Don said, licking his parched lips, “Jesus is, but you may as well speak to me.”

“You’re a wise guy, huh? Think you’re smart, do you? Well, I’m not gonna do anything to you this time, but watch your step, whitey. Now ... the business we’ve come for.... Where’s John Paul?”

“Who?”

“Don’t play dumb with me, you smart-ass whitey! We know he’s here, and he’s supposed to be with us! You’d better let him go if you know what’s good for you.”

“Alright, John Paul’s here. We don’t claim any right to him. He came here of his own free will and he’s been helping his people.”

“Well, he can help his people a lot better if he’d come with us, and fight to protect his neighborhood. We’ve lost a lot of good men since this mess started,

and this army needs recruits. So we're recruiting him back."

"And what if he doesn't want to be recruited?"

"He was *born* to fight with the Viceroy's. He doesn't have any choice. Some things you're born to. Where is he anyway?"

"I'm here," John Paul called out, as he stepped off the porch of George's house behind the gang. He made his way through the gang to the front beside Don. Don could see he had no fear. "What do you need from me, Randy?"

"I come to take you home, J.P., where you belong, to fight alongside your brothers, to protect your family and friends."

"I'm fighting for my family, Randy. I'm where I belong. I'm not coming with you. Do you understand that? These people didn't force me. I'm here 'cause I love them, an' I love Jesus. I'm stayin'."

Randy's face clouded. With a lunge he grabbed John Paul by his shirt collar and pulled him nose to nose with himself, the rifle muzzle just under his chin. By now Simeon had come out, and couldn't help but notice the calm look on John Paul's face as he gazed into Randy's eyes.

Randy said in a raspy whisper, "Now you listen to me, an' you listen good, J.P. I'm not gonna kill you right now. I'm gonna give you a little time to think about things. But if you don't come with us tomorrow, we're gonna start killin' your friends one by one, an' you won't know which one it's gonna be. It may be one of the old ladies goin' home after her Jesus-loves-you Bible study. It may be one of the lily-white kids there. It may be this scrawny guy here who speaks for you all," pointing at Don.

"We'll start killin' one a day till you come back where you belong. And if you wait too long, it'll be you, J.P. There are no police to stop us, no army to stand in our way, an' you know it. So you think about

it an' give me your answer tomorrow. We'll be back, and you better have your bags packed and be ready to go. You hear me?"

John Paul was shaken, but it wasn't for fear of his life, but for the lives of others. He knew full well that Randy could do what he said—he'd been just like Randy before Jesus saved him and gave him a new life.

With his lips curled up in a snarl, Randy threw John Paul on the grass, cast his gaze round those standing there, and then sauntered off, followed by his gang.

Simeon stood behind his dad, breathing heavily, running his fingers through his long locks. Then he suddenly bolted for the house and disappeared inside. There was silence as everyone prayed about what to do next.

John Paul slowly rose and quietly told Don and Gypsy, "I'd best go start packin'," and turned to go in the house.

Gypsy blocked his way, putting both her hands on his shoulders. "John Paul..."

His teary eyes looked into hers.

"John Paul, you stay with us. You're family, and we *need* you. Did you think that when it began to cost something to be your sister, to be your brother, we'd *stop* being it?"

"Gypsy, you don't know these guys. They'll do exactly what they said. I know them. I know what they do."

Gypsy looked up at the people standing around. "What do you all think? Do we let John Paul go? Is that what this has all been about? Turning our back on our brothers when it looks like it's going to cost something?"

George was the first to speak up. "The way I figure it, every day we live one day longer, it's a miracle of God's grace nowadays. People are getting killed

everyday! I guess if the Lord wants to protect me, He can do it no matter what the Viceroy says or do. And if He doesn't, well, there's not much any of us can do. I think John Paul should stay. We've been trusting the Lord, and He sure hasn't failed us yet."

There was a round of mumbled amens from all there.

John Paul had been trying to blink back the tears, but couldn't any longer. "Gypsy, Don ... what're we going to do then?" he blurted out.

Don said, "We're going to do what we always do. We're going to pray and hear from the Lord. And we're going to believe what He tells us, like we always have.

"Okay, why doesn't everyone gather in your respective houses, and pray and see what the Lord tells you to do? We'll do the same and then we'll meet first thing in the morning."

Don took John Paul by the arm and led him on into the house where Sally had already gotten out the pen and paper.

Simeon stood around only long enough to discover what was going on, before his eyes met his dad's with an "are-you-crazy?" look on his face. Then he disappeared into his bedroom, slamming the door behind him.

The Lord spoke clearly that He would protect them, encouraging John Paul and everyone else to trust Him, and then He gave a powerful message through Marina:

"Fear not for what shall befall you on the morrow, for I am the Master and Maker of all things, and I am He that fashioned even the Waster to destroy. But no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper. Even though a thousand shall fall at your right hand, the destruction of the wicked shall not come nigh you. Their words are vain.

"I Who sit in the Heavens laugh at these, and I

rejoice for this opportunity to show My power. You shall not need to fight, but stand back and see *Me* fight, for you shall see these enemies but once more and then, though you diligently seek them, you shall never again see them after the morrow.

"Gird you like men! Stand strong, bold and unafraid, and call on Me, for as I answered the cries of Moses, of Elijah, of Joshua, of David and of your Father David in the day of fierce combat, so shall you see Me answer yet again. For I am not gone on a long journey; I am not sick or weakly; I am not sleeping. I am mighty to deliver and there is nothing that I will not do for My children who have forsaken lands, houses, families and nations to serve Me.

"This, My children, is not your end! This, My children, is not the day of your defeat! This, My beloved, is not a time to cower. This is the beginning of your brightest day! This is the hour that your greatest victory will begin to unfold! This is the moment that you begin to rise in power, and tower head and shoulders above your enemies.

"I will be glorified in you, and all those who have risen against you, all those who have turned their backs on you, all those who have mocked you, all those who have hated you, shall begin to see Me glorified in you.

"Have I not said that the people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits, and that they that understand among the people shall instruct many? Have you not seen this fulfilled? Yet you shall see greater things than these, and you shall see that you shall be helped with a little help from man and great help from My almighty hand."

Praises and tongues and shouts filled the air and lifted them all to Heavenly heights. The message was clear: Now was the hour to stand and fight, and God would not fail. As the praises died down, all the Family members melted with unfeigned love into each other's

arms. Don slipped out quietly to Simeon's bedroom.

Simeon was sitting on the edge of his bed with his head in his hands. He looked up as he heard his father slip in and quietly close the door behind him.

Don sat down on the twin bed across from Simeon, touching his knee gently.

Simeon wasted no time in getting to the point, "So, Colonel, did you draw the line in the dirt and everyone crossed it, just like at the Alamo? Is it tomorrow that we all die? Do you really think it's worth it to risk your life, not to mention everyone's else's—and all for one person?"

"Who gave *you* the right to risk the lives of those kids sleeping next door, and all those people who came to you for help? It's not enough that *you* have to be a hero—you have to take everybody with you! Now I know why John left when he did. He saw right through you guys. Oh God! I should have gone with him then, but, no, I had to listen to you saying, 'Hold on, give it a chance, all the promises will be fulfilled, you'll see.' Yeah, now I see! We're all gonna risk our lives for one guy. For *one guy*, Dad!"

"Simeon, you can say what you want about me, but what really matters (and you're forgetting Him completely in all this) is Jesus. He died for all of us and He would have done it for any *one* of us. How can we do less for one of our precious brothers?"

"But son, the Lord just spoke to us and promised us that He's going to deliver us. We're not going to die. I hope that if it came to it, I'd be willing to give my life for John Paul, but the Lord's given us some wonderful promises to stand on.

"Please ... and I know you don't want to hear this, but I'm going to say it again: Just hold on, and give Jesus this one last chance. Tomorrow you'll see that the Lord *is* going fulfill His promises to us.

"God has never failed us—never! But it takes this kind of impossible situation for God to do a miracle.

Man's extremity is God's opportunity. We *are* powerless, we *are* destitute, miserable and weak, but we have one great advantage that none of our enemies have—Jesus—our wonderful Savior and Deliverer is on our side.

"Simeon, all the promises of God are fulfilled through the fact that Jesus died on the cross. It was a seeming defeat, but He was willing to give His life for us, and God used it to save us all. If we were to cower now, if we were to turn our backs on one of our brothers now, if one brother isn't worth fighting and dying for, losing everything for, then it's all a lie. But it's *not* a lie! Everything is happening just like the Bible said it would—the exploits, the mighty deliverances, it's all starting to happen. But before all of that can take place, before the light can be seen, first, there has to be the darkness."

Simeon looked down at the floor, shifting uncomfortably in his chair while his dad continued.

"I love you, Simeon, and as screwed up as I've been sometimes, there was never a time I didn't want the best that life and the Lord could offer you. And, son, this is it. This is as good as it gets—to see the mighty hand of God deliver us in adversity. This is the fulfillment we've been waiting for. It's happening, and it's going to just keep getting better till Jesus comes back. Do you want to miss that, son? After you've made it through all these battles, do you just want to give up and quit just before the victory?"

"Believe me, I know that if you'll just hang on, the Lord is going to really use you. That's why the Enemy's trying to get you to quit. He's afraid of you and all the Word that you have in your heart. He knows that when you get strengthened, you're going to be a tremendous threat to his plans."

Their eyes met. Don searched his son's gaze. He sank to his knees and wrapped his arms around him. Simeon's stiffness melted in his father's embrace and

the tears began to flow, followed by sobs.

“It’s okay, son,” Don whispered. “Let it all out. Jesus, please strengthen Your precious son. God’s with us, Simeon. Jesus is beside us, around us, in us, and over us. He’ll never leave nor forsake us.”

“Oh, God! Dad, I was so freaked out and blamed you for it. I’m sorry, Dad. I’m so sorry. I guess I was just hoping that all this hell that’s been happening wasn’t really what everyone was saying it was, and that if I could just get back to the States, everything would be different. I kept thinking about all the great times that I thought John was probably having there in California, and thinking that I was missing out, and that it was your fault for bringing us here in the first place.”

“That’s okay, Sim. That’s okay. I understand. I’ve been feeling pretty freaked out myself a few times lately. But when I do, I just have to keep looking up to *my* Dad, right into His eyes, to know that everything’s going to be all right. And it will. Just you wait.”

“I’m so ashamed. All those brand-new babes getting the point and standing strong, an’ me cowering. I’m so sorry I failed you, Dad.”

“You’ve never failed me, son. I’m proud of you. You’re one of my arrows who’s going speak with the enemies in the gate.”

The little Family village met in the front lawns of several houses after they’d had breakfast, and compared notes on what the different groups had received from the Lord. Every prophecy agreed that they should stand strong and not fear. It was truly a beautiful fulfillment of the verse, “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast ordained strength.”

Don and Gypsy searched the eyes of the group sitting there on the grass, one by one. There were nervous eyes, there were anxious eyes, there were

excited eyes, there were looks of desperation, but there were no wavering, fearful, unsure eyes. These were the eyes of people who had overcome—or were overcoming.

“We want you to know,” Don said, “that we’re proud to know every one of you. We’re proud to call you our brothers and sisters. We love you, and Jesus loves you. We’re proud to die here with and for you if such be the will of God. But I don’t think we’re going to die....”

One of the ladies began to sing, “We have come this far by faith....”

One by one, the voices of all there joined in, mingling their voices in one great musical testimony of faith and trust in God. Complicated harmonies and syncopated rhythms drummed out on whatever was available filled the air with a song that you could scarcely believe could’ve been any more beautiful or awe-inspiring in the Heavenly City itself.

As they sang, the nervousness, anxiety and desperation were replaced by inspiration. They were ready, as a people they were ready to face the first of many tests that they would meet over the next years. They were ready as a team of people born in the midst of adversity to sing praises and glory to God, to boldly march forward with the message in the face of all odds.

The Lord knew that the enemy today was a puny one compared to what was to come, that this test was a mere quiz compared to the final exams ahead. But He also knew that His people were discovering the unity and faith and love that would see them through any and all tests.

No sooner had the song ended than they could hear the sound of clubs on the garbage cans that signaled the approach of the Viceroy. Without a word spoken, the hundred or so of the little village turned to face them, with Don, Gypsy and John Paul in front.

Some of the women took the small children inside the houses. The rest of the flock lined up across the road and into the lawns on either side of the road as Randy came toward them with more guys than he had yesterday, maybe forty men. This time several of them had rifles and handguns. Others had knives hanging from their belts. All had clubs. Randy had bullet belts crisscrossing his chest.

At a distance of about ten feet from Don and his team, they pulled up and scrutinized the situation.

“J.P.,” Randy called out, “I don’t see your bag! That’s real disappointing, ’cause all your brothers come out today to get you and bring you home.”

John Paul stood firm. “I don’t have my bag,” he said calmly, “’cause I’m not going with you. I’ve got another war to fight. I don’t want to fight and die for something that’s not even worth living for, so I’m staying right here. Randy, you’d best just go back to your neighborhood and forget about me.”

“Oh, we couldn’t do that, J.P. You heard what I said yesterday. I can’t go back on what I said and still hold my head up with my boys, not to mention my girls. Right, boys?”

“That’s right, Randy,” said Abdullah, his lieutenant. “No woman would go down for you if she heard you couldn’t keep your word.”

“So even if I wanted to, I can’t show mercy. Mercy’s for the weak. Mercy’s for people like you and your Christian friends.” There was silence while Randy surveyed the scene.

Just then Grandma Colletta hobbled over to Randy and shook her finger in Randy’s face. “Shame on you, young man! These are good people. They’re kind and haven’t done anybody nothing but good.”

Randy put his arm on Colletta’s shoulder, smiled, pulled out his pistol, and put it to her head. “Maybe we’ll start right here, right now with this old lady here. She can’t live much longer anyway, can’t do nobody

any good anyway. What do you think, boys?” There was an uneasy silence for a moment, even from his own gang.

Then Abdullah mumbled, “Yeah, yeah, Randy, we’re with you.”

“Why don’t you pick on somebody your own size, Randy?” a voice boomed from the crowd facing the Viceroy. Scar emerged from the crowd, stripped to the waist, weaponless. “You made a serious mistake not listening to that little old lady and messing with these people, Randy. Now why don’t we just settle this between you and me. Put down your weapons and fight me hand to hand.”

“And why should I, when I got a *gun*?”

“Oh, you might reconsider if you look up on the roofs there.” Randy and his gang looked up and saw Vanguard gunmen on every roof with their rifles trained on them. “You see, Randy, we could take you guys down just like pickin’ flowers, but I learned something from these people, and they don’t like killing. I don’t know if they approve of me beatin’ you up either, but I didn’t have time to ask them. Maybe I can find out later.”

Randy looked stunned at this unanticipated turn of events.

“Is it a deal, Randy? You against me? If I win, you leave J.P. and all of these fine folks alone and let them go about their business.”

“And what if I win?”

“Oh, I didn’t even consider that possibility. I didn’t think of that at all. Well ... let’s see, since we have the definite upper hand here, I guess I’d have to say, if you win, you get to go home in one piece and my boys won’t shoot the hell outta you Viceroy. How’s that?”

Randy and his top men conferred a moment. Then he turned to Scar. “It looks like we have a deal.”

“Now you’re talkin’,” Scar said. “Now you’re talkin’ Grandma Colletta, you just step right back over here

out of harm's way. The rest o' you give us a little more room here."

Randy removed his weapons and gunbelts, stripped to his waist and began to approach Scar. Both men were powerful and strong, but Scar was bigger, stronger and heavier, while Randy was lighter on his feet and quicker. They circled, each eyeing his opponent, looking for a soft spot, a weakness, darting in, then back out, then 'round and 'round. The two gangs each called out encouragement to their champion and taunts to their enemies, while the Family and its flock prayed for God's will to be done.

Randy charged first, swinging his right and then his left at Scar's face. Both blows were deflected, but he landed a sound kick to Scar's left kidney which caused the bigger man to buckle to one knee. Randy aimed another kick with his steel-toed boot right at Scar's head, but Scar grabbed the boot and threw Randy on his back.

Randy fell. But as Scar attempted to throw his huge bulk on him, Randy jumped up, stepped aside and plowed his fist into Scar's solar plexus, just above his stomach.

Everyone could see and hear Scar was hurt badly and unable to catch his breath as he staggered back. Randy seized the advantage and punched Scar again and again, until he fell back on the lawn of the Family Home. Randy hitched his pants up and delivered a kick full to Scar's left ribs.

As Randy pulled back for another blow, what he figured would be the final blow right to Scar's head, Scar, in great pain, let out a roar and rolled toward Randy, knocking him off his feet. This time he took fast hold of Randy's foot that was suspended in the air above his fallen body to hold Randy down. Scar fell on his adversary's chest and delivered blow after blow to his face until Randy was unconscious. The only sound was Scar's heavy breathing as he stood

up.

"Well, I suppose that about does it, doesn't it, Viceroy?"

Just then, a handful of Muslim mullahs began pushing their way through the crowd that had gathered, and were conversing in hushed but urgent tones with the Viceroy, while little five-year-old Becky came running down from the house to the fallen Randy.

"Mommy," she said, "this poor man's hurt. We should help him." She knelt next to him and put her hand on his chest. "Jesus, please touch and heal his hurt and make him all better in Jesus' name."

Becky was opening her eyes, just as Randy opened his. She smiled at him and asked, "Do you feel better now? Did Jesus make it all better?"

Becky stood up and looked around at all the people staring in dumbfounded amazement at her. "Did I do something wrong?"

Gypsy knelt beside her and hugged her. "No, Honey, you didn't."

"In the holy name of Allah, shame on you, Viceroy," The head mullah's voice boomed out above the crowd. "Abdullah!"

Abdullah, Randy's lieutenant, stepped forward with his head hung low. "Abdullah, you're my nephew, but I must say I am ashamed to admit that today. Do you know who these people are? These are the very people who bring clothing and supplies every month to the orphanage. May Allah be praised that I heard of this filthy thing that you were about to do! And may He be glorified that you have not killed anyone.

"Now go home, all of you. And if any of you are Muslims, I suggest you say your prayers of repentance five times today. And if you are Christians or Catholics or whatever you are, make peace with your God for this evil you thought to do. Have we not enough killing and confusion today without killing those who have

given up everything to help our people?”

Several of the Viceroy's picked up Randy to carry him away, but not before Becky gave him a pat on the one part of his forehead not covered in blood.

“Ask your mommy to clean it with hydrogen peroxide. It'll sting, but don't cry. It only lasts a little while,” she said to Randy, who was staring with mouth agape as his comrades carried him away.

Slowly the Viceroy's departed with heads hanging low, never to be seen again in that neighborhood—just as the Lord had promised.

Scar had fallen down on the grass, semiconscious. Gypsy looked around for someone to carry this huge man into the house, out of the merciless sun that beat down on them now. Simeon and Don pulled the big man up, putting his arms over their shoulders. They moved him into the house and laid him down on the living room sofa.

The sound of the excited praises outside could be heard. Everyone was telling everyone else the story as if they hadn't been there. Becky was being passed from arm to arm and showered with hugs. She had no idea why everybody was making such a big fuss over her, but she liked the attention.

Scar stared up into Gypsy's eyes. “Thank you, Scar, for what you did,” Gypsy said.

“No. Thanks to you. You gave hopeless people something to live for. It was the least I could do. I don't know what it is you have that makes you different from other Christians I've known in the past, but if you don't mind telling me a little bit about it while you're nursing these cuts, I wouldn't mind listening a little.”

“I'll do that, Mom.” Simeon jumped right in with a first-aid kit and some water and clean cloths. “Well, Scar, what we have is Jesus and you can have Him too....”

Meanwhile outside, the other gang members had

descended from the roofs and were being witnessed to by the flock. By the time noon rolled around, the Vanguard's had received Jesus to the man. And what a lunch that was, as they feasted and celebrated the victory and the salvation of some of the hardest and the toughest.

They say that all the angels in Heaven rejoice whenever a soul is saved. But the praises that were given by this thankful crowd of excited new believers must have given the angels some real competition.

In the late afternoon Don was sitting on the front porch when Simeon took a break from reading the Word to Scar. A doctor from down the street was binding up the big man's broken ribs. Like a little boy again, Simeon wrapped his arms around his dad.

“Thanks, Dad, for not letting go. Thanks for helping me hold on. He delivered us, didn't He? God helping me, I'm going to see this through to the end.”

“I know you will, son. I know you will.”

“You know, Dad, if I died today, I'd die happy.”

“I know how you feel.”

Don and Simeon sat in silence for a while, and then they each began to praise the Lord quietly with intimate words of love and thankfulness.

Don began to pray, “Lord, thank You so much for the mighty deliverance today, for setting us free from fear and fulfilling Your promises, for vindicating Your servants. But why, Lord, did You have it turn out the way it did? Why, Jesus, did You do it that way? Why did You bring Scar and then Becky and then that mullah?”

Don, fully expecting to get the answer himself, drew a blank until Simeon began to speak the message that was coming to him.

“I used the number *three* to show that My protection is perfect. My control is total. My angels who camp round about you are able to save not once, nor twice, but infinitely. I used this number to show the

utter foolishness it is to doubt My power, to fear the Enemy. For far, far greater is He that is in *you* than he that is in the *world*. By this demonstration of power in three ways, I confirm My promises in the mouth and in the actions of not just two, but three witnesses.

“If I had used only Scar, My power would have been shown, but not My love and My forgiveness. For this cause I anointed a little child to show that I can forgive even the hardest of hearts and the chiefest of sinners. This testimony of My love and the simplicity of the unfeigned love of a child shall go a long way to soften these hard hearts. And yet I used the third, the Muslim mullah, that there would be a lasting witness among one of the gang’s own relatives to remind them of their own errant ways. It was to keep them in check, to shame them that they had almost done a horrible deed to those who had been good to them and their own people.

“Finally, this demonstration today is a foreshadowing of the days to come. Yes, you, My children of David, shall do exploits in the fierce and terrible days ahead, but you shall not be alone in doing them. I shall raise up help for you from the most unlikely places, the most unexpected sources, from even the chief sinners, and from your own little ones, as well as from those who will resist the Antichrist, the anti-Antichrists.

“Therefore, nurture your little ones, for they shall indeed speak with your enemies in the gates. Continue to reach down in love to the wicked and the unlovely with humility, with kindness. Continue to patiently minister in your consider-the-poor ministries, and be patient, kind and tolerant with those who shall fight by your side against the Antichrist, for you shall have great need of them, as *they* shall have need of *you*.

“Rise up! Rise up and meet the challenge of the future with a thrill and with excitement, for from this day forward, you are My people who truly know Me,

who are truly strong, and who shall truly instruct many and do exploits. Pour out your hearts like water unto the starving of the land, for there is a famine in the land—not only a famine for bread nor a thirst for water, but for hearing the Word of the Lord. Do this and you shall never lack, but I alone shall lead you through the days ahead, and you shall be purged of your uncleanness and you shall truly be the people in whom I delight to dwell.

“Many shall come and say unto you, ‘We shall eat our own food and wear our own apparel, but let us be called by your name and let us dwell in the shadow of your glory!’ ‘For behold, darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the people, but I shall arise upon *thee*, and My glory shall be seen upon thee. Therefore now, My beloved, arise, shine, for thy light is come and the glory of the Lord shall be seen upon thee.’”

PART IV
ONWARD TO THE FINAL WEEK

INTRODUCTION

The nations had been brought to their knees, and how great was the fall of the mighty! Governments, armies and economies had crumbled beneath the merciless onslaught of the Crash—the Crash that most had chosen to believe would never come, though the signs had been everywhere, though the warnings had been right before their eyes.

After the first few regional markets had crashed and then deceptively began to slowly recover, the world had chosen to believe that the worst was over, and that now all the major economies were out of danger. They had been told that each dip and waver of the market was nothing more than a normal adjustment. After all, they had tried to comfort themselves, things weren't as bad as they had been in previous recessions.

But then, one by one the economies had capsized and begun to go under, powerless to save themselves. They cried to the great financial institutions to rescue them, but were told the reserves were depleted. The great bailouts at the turn of the century had left the coffers empty, and now there was nothing to give, they were told. Advice was offered instead. It was as if a non swimmer was being told how to swim just as he was drowning. That which had been greatly feared and universally ignored had come upon them.

Now there was nothing to do but live with it day after day; live with the hunger and the daily scrounging for something to eat, for something to feed the children; live with the fear that the next venture into the city would be the last, as gangs and anarchy ruled the streets of the once great and proud cities of the world.

No nation had escaped the cruel lash of fear and hunger, of despair and hopelessness. Finally the struggle was over—not because there was a victory, not because the foe had been vanquished, but because the worldwide masses had surrendered their wills, surrendered their hopes, and yielded to cruel fate. Even many of the segments of the media and the few governments that had once resisted the New World Order now saw that it was their only hope, the only thing that could keep them from drowning.

But God is never without a voice, and there were yet a few brave souls around the world who, while bearing a message of hope for those who put their trust in God, warned that there was worse yet to come for those who let themselves be deceived by the promises of the New World Order. Their numbers were swelling as the ranks of those who had lost hope in the world clung to their words of truth.

In those cities where there was still some semblance of law and order, many of these, like the prophets of old, distributed God's Word via posters and tracts by the thousands to the hungry multitudes. Crowds gathered round them, asking urgent questions, with eyes hungry for answers, and hearts desperate for the healing balm of they-knew-not-what. But God's messengers knew, God knew, that the multitudes were fainting, hungering—starving—for His Words of Life. And His children gave out those Words with an urgency they'd never had before.

They knew instinctively, they knew by the witness of the Holy Spirit, that this time of desperation would

be short-lived, and that a form of stability would be restored and massive deception would cast darkness over the Earth in the guise of deliverance and hope—false hope.

In the more dangerous parts of the world, where anarchy ruled and it was unsafe to distribute literature openly, the Family Homes were like heavenly havens. Many, led as if by an unseen hand, found their way to their gates, to their doors. The Homes filled with those hungry to know how to survive and what to look for. Many became so filled with the truth they had found that they felt compelled to join the ranks of God's Endtime followers and witnesses.

Meanwhile, those who hated these brave pillars of light and truth for all that they represented, and knew the threat they posed to their plans, were watching and waiting. They'd been carefully planning and engineering behind the scenes in the months and years leading up to the Crash, but now they remained strangely silent. How vocal had been their message in the days before this disaster—spreading their propaganda through the cinemas, through the music, through television and the printed page. But now their voice—the media—was strangely silent.

They were waiting, waiting till the signals and signs showed them that the world was ready to receive the final solution—their Supreme Lord who they had kept secret till now. They waited for the spirit of man to be broken, till he had become as cattle that would follow wherever food and water, sustenance and life were promised, till his dreams and aspirations for freedom and independence were drowned in the mere struggle to survive. They waited for the darkest hour, that moment when all hope had been lost, when it seemed there was no lower level for man to sink to.

In silence, from their vantage point, they waited and watched till the unmistakable signs of surrender were clear. With knowing glances at one another, with

grim determination to now begin building the new world, they nodded one to the other and set to work, moving onward to the final week, and the grand revelation of their false messiah!

SUNDAY: SEVEN DAYS ... AND COUNTING

The only light in the room came from the small reading lamps in front of each seat. The remainder was deep in soul-disturbing darkness. The room was long and narrow, and arranged so that there was only one place of prominence.

The gigantic teakwood table in the center of the room was shaped like a teardrop, round at one end and tapering almost to a point at the far end, which was facing the entrance across the room. It was as if the tip of the tear had been lopped off by a guillotine, and there at the flat end of this maimed teardrop was one magnificent black leather chair, illumined only from behind and below, so the shadowy but stately figure seated there was only seen in silhouette in the midst of a glowing aura. As he read from the neatly laid-out documents before him, none of his features were discernible to those seated around the table in front of him.

The room was draped in silence, a hushed cathedral-like silence, with muffled coughs into hands and handkerchiefs, but not a word spoken. No one dared to unwisely call attention to themselves. All knew why they were there. All knew who sat before them. All knew that this meeting would change the world forever. All were nervous; none of them had

expected the Chairman to be the first to arrive, and then to sit waiting, shrouded in a funereal silence. The only portion of the Chairman's body that any of the thirty-some people seated before him could make out clearly was his hands—strong, decisive hands. His watch was laid on the table before him, propped up so he could see the time without looking at his wrist.

He leafed through the papers while the last of the delegates reverently entered the room and found their way to their assigned seats. All heads were bowed in worshipful respect, while pretending to be intently studying the cover sheet of the papers placed at their seats. No one dared to open and read them before being instructed to do so. A discreet cough turned all eyes to the Chairman in the darkness before them.

"Gentlemen and ladies, I thank you for attending this emergency meeting. Please glance through the papers before you, as they contain the agenda of our meeting today."

In perfect unison every manuscript was opened, and every eye widened at what they saw written on the first page. Then every head turned to the Darkness at the top of the teardrop, whose shadowy head was bowed and paid no attention to their surprise. Every head returned to leafing through the papers.

Five minutes passed. The uncomfortable creaking of several chairs could be heard, but not a word had been uttered. No one looked up from their papers toward the Darkness at the head of the table until they were cued by the quiet, authoritative cough.

"So, my comrades-in-arms, you see, the hour has come, is even now upon us, the moment our people have waited centuries to achieve. Our information coming in from around the world has confirmed that almost every nation on Earth will obey our slightest command once we restore order, once we put food on the tables of their—or rather *our* citizens, once we

bring peace to their streets and end their civil and regional wars; once we solve the crises in the Balkans, in the Middle East, Africa, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere; once we assure them that no terrorist group or rogue nation will be allowed to use weapons of mass destruction.

"They are ready. They grope in darkness. They grovel in the filth of their failed independent sovereign countries. National pride, that great divider from the time of Babel till today, has been drowned in the chaos that we, in our brilliant foresight, helped to bring about. You, like no others on this Earth, know that nothing happens without our knowledge and approval. We have at last built our tower to the heavens, despite all attempts to hinder us and foil our plans. We have replaced God by engineering disaster after disaster, and now we shall replace Him yet again by saving the world in her despair.

"Each of you has the overall plans, and each of you has the dossier on your own particular portfolio. All that you are instructed to do is there. Unlike in the past when we had to keep all of our goals and plans secret, we have now succeeded in preparing the world to accept our control, so you have nothing to fear and may keep your documents and study them diligently. Every point of your instructions must be followed utterly. We will countenance no insubordination, nor shall we countenance ineptitude. You shall perform your duties or you shall be replaced within that day—if not that hour. Only the strongest, only the best shall survive into the brave new world we shall build within the next ... yes, you read correctly ... *seven days* from today!

"Now, you must go. Go forth and work. Forget sleep, forget food, forget all pleasure until our goal is achieved. The final part of the countdown has begun. You represent all sectors of society. Nothing has been overlooked—government, law enforcement, military,

education, labor, health, media, entertainment, transportation, business, finance, agriculture, religion, science, communications, the space program, computer technology, robotics, disaster relief, social work—nothing has been left to chance.

“Go and bring forth a new world from the ashes of the one we have destroyed. Do not fear to be the new gods, the supermen, for the weakened, desperate masses will follow the first sign of a wonder, of a miracle. And miracles they shall see, I assure you. They shall believe.” The Darkness stood, and his face for the first time came into the light that fell on the papers before him.

The respectful silence which had prevailed during the meeting was momentarily broken as an involuntary gasp escaped the lips of several in the room. For those who had not previously had the opportunity to see him, the Chairman’s presence was awe-inspiring; his authority unquestionable. And yet it was as if the revelation of his visage was almost too overwhelming. His face at that moment, shadowed by the dim lighting, somehow gave him the appearance of Evil incarnate, like an evil bird.

The Darkness himself broke the uneasy feeling in the room.

“In precisely one week at this same time, we shall meet here once again, and from that day neither we nor the world shall ever be the same again. Fulfill your responsibilities well, so that you may be counted worthy to share in the glory of the new world that is now being born.” And he was gone.

The final week had come, the last week before the Supreme Lord would man the helm of the ship of the world. Marduke knew she should be elated, for this was what she had lived and prepared for since childhood. Her mother had been a witch and had trained her to be one for as long as she could

remember. She’d never known *anything* except the occult and the hope of a new world, when Lucifer would rule through his anointed one. She had never even known a father. Her mother had considered that irrelevant, had spoken of him as a mere stud who gave her her special and chosen child to carry on her work.

Now, just as she was seeing her lifelong dream about to come true, everything seemed to be going wrong for her. She was furious that her right-hand man and protégé, Will Ryder, had betrayed and deserted her for the Nazarene. She was filled with livid rage that she had somehow been unable to track down his lover, Judy. Even her plans to use Will’s old friendship with several members of the Family to destroy their work around the world had been foiled. She had given orders, but the orders had been ignored due to some change of heart of those who were to carry them out. She had never experienced so many setbacks in all her life.

Marduke’s overseers were clearly not pleased. Archibald had told her that only blood could repay blood, and that whoever had helped to lead Will astray would have to pay the price. She must wreak vengeance or be the target of vengeance—no ineptitude would be countenanced.

So the day she should have been rejoicing like no other was a day of sorrow, a day of pressure to find and destroy those who had tarnished her perfect service record and reputation. Judy had disappeared. Marduke suspected that Judy had actually joined up with Will’s old friend, Collin, and when she learned that his house in Austin sat empty, it seemed clear that they were fellow fugitives.

This chaos that now covered the Earth was good for Marduke and her colleagues in most ways, but with the power outages wreaking havoc on the computer systems, she was finding it very difficult to

track anyone down except by old, conventional means—surveillance and private investigators. She knew that once the new government was established and the computer systems were in operation again, she'd be able to find Judy and Collin. In the meantime, what to do?

She stubbed out the cigarette she was smoking and then forced another one into her silver holder and lit it. How could she best hurt these Christians who had obviously turned Will against her and hurt her standing so badly? She was convinced that Will had first begun to weaken when he renewed contact with Collin and began accessing the Family's Web site. The more she thought about these horrid Christians and how they had managed to ruin her plans time after time, she determined to destroy them no matter what the cost.

Marduke strained to remember everything she had heard about Will's friends in the Family—about Don and Gypsy in South Africa; about Roy, the guitarist in Brazil; about Lenny, the one who had challenged her back in Austin years before and caused the band to fall apart, and was now somewhere in Asia. Suddenly she remembered that Don's oldest son, John, was no longer in the Family and was right here in California somewhere, working. At least he had been a few months back. But where?

With a start, her eyes fell on the computer printouts she had taken from Will's apartment after his death so she could study them for any useful information. Now she remembered there was something there about John.

It took an hour or more before she had found the mention of John in one of Don's e-mails. The last Don knew, John, about 22 now, was in San Francisco doing construction work. It was a long shot, but she had a branch of her occult head shops in Haight-Ashbury. She instantly determined to go there and

try to lure him to her, while at the same time trying to find out via her agents if there was a John Ward who had been working on any construction site in town. *It shouldn't be too hard to find him*, she thought.

She rubbed her hands together gleefully. She now had a plan. She had hopes that she could be restored to her former power and place of trust. If she couldn't get to Judy and Collin right now, or to Don and Gypsy, then at least she could get to their little lost sheep out in the brambles, a sheep amongst wolves.

"And I, my dear little helpless lost lamb, am the queen of the wolves, as you will soon find out!" she encouraged herself, as she reached for the phone to make her travel arrangements for that very afternoon.

MONDAY: MINUS SIX

The area shepherds had called an emergency gathering of all the Homes in Rio de Janeiro. After a few soul-searching songs, they played a recording from a special announcement that had been aired that morning on the government-owned radio station: Relief had been promised as coming soon because of a new world pact that had just been formulated and proposed. Statistics and surveys had shown the world was now ready to accept just such a pact. The G8¹ and the European Union had already given their nod of approval, and it just remained to pull the smaller, poorer, less developed nations of the world in—and, above all to get the Jews and Arabs of the Middle East to agree to it.

To this end, envoys of the revived New World Order were scurrying around the globe, setting the stage for universal acceptance of the New World Order's message. The message was that nationalism had hindered this from happening even sooner, but now that nations and regional alliances were awakening to the need to put the real power, the real rule, into the hands of a governing world power—a new world

¹**G8 (Group of 8):** The G7 (Group of 7) is made up of the heads of state of England, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the US, and Japan. The G8 includes Russia as well.

order—there was a promise of relief coming within the next few weeks and months. They told how a meeting of the leaders of the world had set the stage for world peace and prosperity to begin ... within the week!

A cold shiver went over all that heard it, for they knew that this could be the rise of the Antichrist! This could be the beginning of the last seven years.

Roy was the lead guitarist in his band made up of young people he had helped to train. For the most part he still acted pretty much like a teen himself, and still looked like one too. After the news report had been played, the shepherd leading the meeting had prayed. Then he nodded for the band to lead them in more songs. Roy struck the chords of the first song: “He’s Coming Soon.” Song after song about the Endtime and the Lord’s return was played. Roy could hardly believe the anointing that fell on his little band and on himself as they played the songs, old and new, about that glorious final period of man’s history.

After a half-hour of rousing rock, they broke into their final song of the set. Roy felt as if he and his guitar had somehow become one, and the compulsion he felt to motivate his listeners through music was being translated directly via the moving chords and riffs of his guitar. As he looked out over the crowd, he prayed that the songs would move each one to realize the shortness of time.

The hearts of all those present began to melt from the heat of the moment—the fire of God’s Spirit through the music and the urgency of what they had just heard from the news report. As everyone joined in singing, Roy felt as if his instrument—his weapon—was being made to speak, weep, to warn and scream! Then it was as if he was being transported high above his audience, out and up through the ceiling and the roof and out over the Earth where he could see the wounded souls of the world, reaching out for

salvation—some toward the dark figure of the false savior rising up before them, some toward the light of the true Savior—and he could see that their decision could be strongly influenced by inspired and fervent ... yes, *urgent* witnessing.

Again Roy prayed that the hearts of all the children of David there would be stirred to action like never before, for there was no question that the hour of darkness was upon them and that it was their last chance before strong delusion would deceive many—even the very elect.

Tears streamed down his face as his lead melted back into the ensemble’s playing, and he seemed to touch back down on *terra firma*¹. Michelle, their lead singer and his 25-year-old wife, resumed her singing for the last verse and chorus. As the song faded, a great wave of praising and tongues filled and flooded the meeting room. Roy lifted his hands to Heaven and praised fervently.

Then one after another, the prophecies came spontaneously, warning that the Man of Sin was even at the door, that the time left was so short as to be almost negligible, that the night was beginning to fall and everyone should do all they could, that darkness would fall across the Earth as a great blanket, that the months they had just gone through of poverty and deprivation were as bright lights compared to the period of plastic peace and rebirth that was about to come. Hearts would now begin to harden more than ever as many in the world chose to accept the Devil’s promises of stability and prosperity. Those who had chosen Jesus and His way would be steadfast, while those who had rejected Him would be hardened and equally steadfast in the way of evil, and those caught between would be easily swayed and deceived. The next few days, the next few months, were of the utmost

¹**terra firma:** Latin for “solid ground”

importance.

Michelle burst forth with a final ringing message: “Fear not, My precious children of David, My precious Bride, My beloved lovers, for this evil shall not befall you. You have run well and shall continue to run well. You shall go from strength to strength in the days ahead.

“Be not dismayed at the faces of those who have hardened their hearts, for it is all part of My plan, that I might be judged righteous when I mete out My wrath and My judgments. Search for the worthy, for the hungry. I have yet many sheep who have not bowed their knee to the Evil One. Go out into the highways and hedges and bring them in. Confirm the many I have brought your way during this time of famine; strengthen them in the faith.

“Those who go forth and those who care for the little ones and the new lambs shall each divide equally of the spiritual anointing and blessings, therefore look not with envy on one another, for now is the hour for each part of the body to fulfill its special calling with total dedication, commitment and enthusiasm. This is your hour! My Spirit even now falls on you as never before!”

Michelle then blew into the microphone as those words escaped her lips.

A second or two later a great wind began to blow through the room, wildly whipping the hair of everyone in its wake. The wind seemed to blow one way, then another, then change again. It was neither warm nor cold; its effect on their bodies was minimal, but oh, its effect on their hearts! Every heart swelled and burned. Fear washed away. Doubt, jealousy, pettiness followed in exit. The eyes of everyone in the room opened one by one, and huge grins spread across each face without exception. As tears were shed, everyone embraced their neighbor and gazed deeply into each other’s eyes. Without shame, without

shyness, without pride, they confessed their undying love till the end. Those who had wronged and been wronged were making things right, and forgiveness was dealt out in abundance. Tongues, praises, hugs, kisses and private prophecies were shared across the room by pairs and small groups who couldn’t get enough of the love and the Spirit that was there in quantity.

As Roy prayed, he received the verse, “Touch not the Earth ... until we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.”

Could this be part of God’s seal of protection and anointing? he thought. It was then that he noticed that the fiery feeling was not only in his heart, but on his *forehead* as well. Whatever this was, he realized that the fear he had felt for so long, the fear of not being able to make it through the Last Days of Tribulation, was now gone. The years of carrying on by faith, trusting the Lord to hold him up, had paid off! He knew now he *would* be able to stand strong, no matter what came his way, even if it meant death as a martyr. He would have the strength and faith to overcome and receive all those promises in Revelation 2 and 3 promised to those who overcome the world by faith.

What were the promises? He wished he had memorized them, but fortunately he had a 3x5” Bible in his guitar case. It fell open to Revelation chapter 2.

“Eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God ... not be hurt of the second death ... eat of the hidden manna and receive a stone with my new secret name ... receive power over the nations to rule them with a rod of iron ... receive the morning star ... be clothed in white raiment and not be blotted out of the Book of Life, but be confessed before the angels and God ... be a pillar in the temple of God and go no more out. ... Have God’s name, New

Jerusalem, and Jesus' new name written on me ... and to sit down with Jesus in His throne....”

It was only then Roy noticed that he was practically shouting into the mike and everyone had stopped to look his way.

Roy paused momentarily, then with a big grin, he shared the testimony of what he had just seen and heard. Then one person after another came up to the mike to share the visions and experiences they had had as the rushing mighty wind of this Latter Day Pentecost had filled their hearts and lives with a love and anointing greater than anything any of them had ever known.

Collin was sipping a beer in the back of his parents' vacation lake house in Del Rio, Texas, on the border with Mexico. He and Judy had fled here right after she arrived, the week after Thanksgiving. They were living mostly on money Will had given her and the little bit Collin had managed to withdraw from his account before the bank had put a freeze on all withdrawals. He hadn't had work all month and the news he had heard on his little radio this morning about things getting better soon would have been welcome if it hadn't been for Judy explaining to him that things getting better for the world would be bad for Christians. She'd taught him a lot of things these last few months since they'd been together. Her life had been all mixed up with top people in the witchcraft world, and she really seemed to know what she was talking about when it came to these things, so he had come to trust her.

Judy was convinced that Will had been killed by that witch Marduke, and although he didn't know how she could be so sure about it, since Will had never contacted them again, he figured she was probably right. It was like that with a lot of things that she said she just *knew*. Although he didn't doubt

her one bit, it did seem a little weird, and his church friends sure wouldn't have believed or understood. His parents couldn't even understand how him and Judy could live together and not be married. Their conservative attitudes had been a big help, though, because they were happy to let them have the lake house so they wouldn't stay in town with them and embarrass them in front of their friends. So Collin and Judy had been able to avoid being seen by anyone, and were able to enjoy this secluded little cottage by the lake all to themselves.

They both told themselves that they weren't in love—they just really liked being together—but it had gotten to where Collin could hardly imagine what it would be like without Judy. He wasn't sure how she felt, but she never mentioned leaving—though she always, every day, talked of leaving America with him. That's why she had jumped at the chance to go to Del Rio, closer to the border, as soon as she heard about his parents' cottage. She had said that God would show them when it was time to make the move and jump the border.

Now she was inside, praying and reading her Bible and some other things she had managed to download on her laptop from the Family Web site before the systems had gone crazy. He knew he should be in there praying with her, but he still felt a little uncomfortable with this idea that God could talk and say, “Go here and do this or that.” It just didn't seem possible somehow.

He heard the creak of the back screen door and turned to see Judy stepping off the back porch dressed in a bikini top and shorts. He smiled as she approached in her scanty attire. God had sure answered his prayer (well, it had actually been more of a murmur than a prayer), “Why, God, don't You give me a lady who believes in Jesus to make love to?” And here she was. She sure believed in Jesus,

and she was no prude, God bless her little heart.

He smiled, but she didn't.

"Well?" he asked.

"I think it's time, Collin—time to head for Mexico. This is it. This is the beginning of the end. I know these people. Once the New World Order is all set up, they're going to reveal their Supreme Lord, the Antichrist. With the computer systems all out of whack right now, they haven't been able to track us down, but they will ... they will once they get everything rolling again." She sat on the ground at his feet and took his hand. "Do you believe me? Will you take me there?"

"What, and leave behind all my pressing responsibilities?"

"Always ready for a joke, sweet Collin. That's a good attribute."

"Yeah, Judy, I believe you. I knew it was coming soon."

"Collin, I don't know if we'll ever be able to come back. You know that, don't you?"

"Yeah, I guess I suspected we might move south to Mexico."

"They're saying everyone is going to have to do some kind of registration before they can set the wheels into motion for recovery. I don't plan to do that myself."

"Me neither."

"Collin, I'm scared," she said, snuggling close to his side and wrapping her arms round his waist. He pulled her up onto his lap and began to kiss her gently, stroking her legs. As their kissing increased in intensity and Collin's hand had progressed to her bikini top, she whispered, "We'd better take this inside before some fisherman on the lake calls the police and charges us with lewd and lascivious behavior. That'd blow everything. Hmm, Collin?"

"Mmm-hmm."

Collin had already learned that this wonderful woman who loved Jesus so much was even more fun in a bathtub full of foam than any hired girl in any expensive hotel suite could ever be. But today, he was hoping to discover that all over again.

The sun had set when Collin and Judy quietly loaded up the truck with their necessary belongings, making sure they had their passports and all the cash and traveler's checks. They ate a quick bite in the kitchen and then set out for the border.

TUESDAY: FIVE DAYS TO GO

John had been out of the Family now for over a year-and-a-half, and ... well ... things had been very different from what he had expected. At first, he'd been able to find plenty of work as a construction worker. He'd been a good handyman in the Family, and his strength and skills and willingness to work hard and do a good job had given him the edge over many others. It wasn't long before he'd been made assistant foreman on one of the building sites, and his prospects for the future were looking very good.

Although he had managed to make a fair bit of money by putting in nearly 60 hours a week for month after month, he hadn't been able to save anything yet, and in fact was pretty deep in debt because of the car he had bought, as well as some big purchases he'd made on credit. He'd been very surprised at how much money it took just to stay on top of things and keep up with his monthly payments. In fact, it was hard to understand *where* all the money had gone.

John hadn't really had enough time to make many friends, but he had spent plenty of nights out with the guys he worked with, drinking and trying to pick up girls. This also had eaten away at a lot of his hard-earned cash, and he had seriously considered the idea of taking on a night job in addition to his construction work for a few months, in order to get a little ahead

on his payments.

After all, he had thought, the bar scene is getting pretty boring, and the few girls I've managed to get to know just don't seem to be my type.

So it was, that after over more than a year of full-time work—and very *hard* work at that—and nothing to show for it except debts, John was just about to make a few changes in his life, when suddenly everything had begun to fall apart. As the economy had begun to slide, almost all construction had come to a halt. John was laid off, and there was no work to be found anywhere—of any kind.

Less than three months after he'd cashed his last paycheck, he couldn't keep up with the payments on his car any longer, and had no choice but to give it up. That had been one of the most depressing days John could ever remember. What was he going to do now?

He'd heard on the news how things were going to be getting better. There was a lot of talk about the need for a global economy. Everything that was happening reminded him of the things he'd heard about his whole life, but he couldn't believe that this was really it, that the Crash had finally happened, after all these years. He hoped and even prayed that things would get better soon, and that he'd be able to start working again.

John wondered what his dear mom and dad were saying about everything that was taking place. He tried to imagine how things were going for them in South Africa. News was very scarce these days, and the last news reports he'd heard from there had been pretty scary. But he comforted himself by remembering that his family had been in a lot of tight spots before and had always come out alright. He had to admit, though, he was still pretty worried about them and wished he had communicated more with them. He wondered how the Family was interpreting

the events of the last few months, and what the latest prophecies had to say.

As John sat in his apartment thinking about his family and the many good times he had had growing up in different countries around the world, there was a loud knock on the door. Startled, he got up and cautiously walked toward the peephole. He knew that no one was safe these days and that armed gangs were making raids all over the city. Some of the stories he had heard were pretty terrifying, and he had taken to staying indoors as much as possible.

He carefully looked through the peephole, and was surprised to see a strikingly pretty lady dressed all in white standing outside his door. She wasn't alone, as there were two huge men behind her, one on either side, who looked like they must be bodyguards or something. The woman realized that John was observing her from the other side of the door and smiled a big plastic smile, as if to coax him into opening the door for her.

For some reason John felt very uneasy. The woman looked friendly enough. But there was something about her—not to mention those big oafs that were with her.

"Yes?" John asked, as he opened the door slightly, leaving the chain still on.

The woman appeared to be in her fifties. She was very elegantly dressed and wore a lot of jewelry. It seemed strange that she wouldn't be afraid to dress like that when the streets were so dangerous these days.

I guess she doesn't have to worry about anything with those two bruisers along, he thought.

The woman looked at him with a slight, almost sensuous smile, as if she were flirting with him. Her huge, dark eyes were piercing.

"I'm looking for a John Ward."

"Uh ... that's me," John answered hesitantly. "What

can I do for you?”

“It would be a lot easier for me to explain if you were to invite me in,” she said, as she cocked her head to one side.

John still felt a little strange about the woman, but couldn’t really think of any reason why not to let her in. The way she was dressed, he didn’t think there was much of a chance that she was there to rob him.

“Oh ... sorry. Of course. Please come in,” John responded politely, as he took the chain off and glanced a little warily at the two huge men standing behind her.

“It’s okay,” she told John, as if to reassure him. “They’ll stay outside.” She nodded to them as she brushed past John and went inside.

Neither man responded. They stood stiffly in the hallway as John closed the door behind him and went to offer his visitor a cup of coffee.

Marduke’s agents had managed to find John easily enough. The owner of the construction company where he had been working remembered him well and talked highly of him. He explained how difficult it had been to have to let John go, as there was something special about him that had endeared John to him from the very first day he had applied for a job. But what could he do? There was no work anywhere, and his company was fighting to stay solvent until things got better.

“You must be wondering what in the world this is about,” Marduke said, stating the obvious. “I’m here to offer you a job. I was told that you’re a very dependable and hard-working young man.” She paused slightly, and then continued to cast her net. “I’m afraid, however, they *didn’t* tell me that you were so good-looking too! I have such a soft spot for handsome young men like yourself.”

John was practically speechless. He could hardly

believe what he was hearing. It all seemed a little too good to be true, and kind of weird coming from this strange woman who had just appeared out of nowhere.

“A job?” he asked. “What kind of a job? How did you hear about me?”

“I own a chain of specialty book stores. We have branches all over California, as well as New York, and I’ve been looking for someone like you who I can train to manage one of my largest stores, here in San Francisco. The agency which helped you to get your last job gave us your name and referred us to your former employer. It seems that you’ve made quite an impression on people.”

As Marduke explained briefly the conversation she’d had with his former boss, John quickly forgot all about his initial reservations about this obviously wealthy and interesting woman.

“I understand you’ve been without work for quite a while now,” Marduke continued. “Dreadful, isn’t it? Things are such a mess! We’ve even had to close most of our shops for a while. But from all indications, things are going to be improving very quickly in the weeks to come. If you’re interested, and you prove to be as bright as you look, I think you’ll find that what I have to offer you is much better than anything you could ever find in the construction business.”

Though John was indeed very interested, he still was a little lost for words and didn’t quite know how to respond.

“Well? What do you say?” Marduke prodded further, hoping to get a quick decision. “Would you like to come with me to the shop so I can show you what the job would involve? I only have a couple of days left before I need to get back to LA, so if you’re interested, we’ll need to get things in motion right away.”

John nodded his acceptance of her tempting offer

and got up to put on his coat, while Marduke finished her cup of coffee and lit a cigarette.

As the driver pulled up in front of the interesting little shop on a side street in the Haight-Ashbury district, John realized that he hadn't even asked the woman her name yet—and she hadn't given it.

Marduke's Magic Moments, Mmmm ... that name sounds so familiar, he thought as he looked at the sign above the shop door.

"Marduke ... Is that your name?" John asked.

"Yes, it is!" she answered proudly.

As they were getting out of the car, Marduke handed John the keys to the security gate and door. He opened them and walked hesitantly inside. As John walked through the threshold, the sound of ghostlike howls and muffled screams greeted him. He turned quickly to Marduke, and saw that she was quite amused by his reaction.

"Just a recording," she laughed. "Those little bells that go off when you open most shop doors are so boring. So I put in these haunted house sounds as kind of a joke. What do you think?"

"Oh ... I don't know ... yeah, I guess it's kind of cool. I like it."

John turned and continued on inside. He was surprised to see that the store appeared to be little more than a fancy head shop and occult book store.

"Cozy, isn't it?" Marduke boasted. "Look around all you want."

John, feeling inexplicably nervous, browsed around and picked up a couple of books that caught his attention. They looked somewhat like the *Who Said They're Dead* series of letters that the Family had published a few years back.

"I see you've found something that interests you. Do you know about making contact with spirits from the other world?" Marduke asked.

"Well, I used to read a lot of things that were kind of like this," John answered.

"Oh, really, how interesting! I thought I sensed a spiritual sensitivity in you. What kind of things did you read?"

"Uh, well ... I was brought up in kind of a ... a Christian group. But I left all that a couple of years ago."

"Umm, sounds interesting. Did this group have a name?"

"Yeah, it did ... I mean, it does."

"Well? What was the name?"

"Oh, you wouldn't have heard of it."

"Try me."

"The ... the Family."

"Ah, the Family. Father David ... Mo Letters ... very interesting stuff. Very unique. I know them; I know them well. You see, to be truly spiritual, one must be very open and broad-minded. I accept all religions."

John was surprised to meet someone so knowledgeable about the Family, and so open. Then, in a sudden flash of memory, it all came back to him—the stories his mom and dad had often told about some of their earliest witnessing experiences. He used to love to hear the testimonies about the time they had gone to see some of their old friends in a rock band in Austin, and how they had been confronted by a witch named Marduke. He remembered that she had been furious when their friend, Roy, had decided to leave the band and follow Jesus with them.

Could this be the same woman? After all these years? he wondered. With a name like Marduke, it almost has to be her. But, that's crazy! It would be too much of a coincidence.

Something told John to leave immediately, to leave and never come back, not even *look* back. But something else was pulling on him. It was as if there was a tremendous battle going on inside him. He felt

his heart racing. If this really *was* the same woman, he was curious to find out if the things his mom and dad had told him were really the way they had said. He wanted to find out for himself. In the months that he'd been away from the Family, he'd tried lots of things that they had said were empty and fruitless. And, yeah, as a matter of fact, he'd found that things *were* pretty meaningless out here. But this was different. This was a real opportunity! He couldn't just throw it away.

"Did you ever *know* anyone from the Family?" John asked, curious to see her reaction.

Marduke hesitated for a few seconds, and then, sensing from John's expression that he must know something, answered, "Yes, I think I did, as a matter of fact. It was years and years ago. They were young and perhaps a little foolhardy; I think it was before they actually had joined up with the Family. I'm not sure ... I didn't really know them well; I don't even remember their names. But they were very good friends of some of my associates, especially close to one of my dearest friends, Will Ryder."

John remembered his mom and dad often talking about Will, the drummer. Over the years, they had prayed many times for the Lord to work in his life.

"I think those people you knew were my parents, Don and Gypsy Ward." Again John watched to see her reaction.

"I can't believe it? This is incredible! After all these years! What an amazing coincidence. I've always wondered what happened to them. They seemed like such nice people." Marduke was thrown slightly by John's question. She cringed inside as she said the words, but still managed to put on her nicest smile. She was happy that John didn't seem to be very observant, and that his time away from the Family must have left him pretty insensitive to what was happening in the spirit.

John, however, began to feel very uneasy again. He'd heard so many wild stories about this woman, and about Will Ryder, too. But it just didn't make sense. Marduke didn't seem at all like his parents had described her. She seemed so friendly.

Besides, he said to himself, *she obviously likes me a lot. Mom and Dad were probably super self-righteous with her back then. Things will be a lot different with me.*

The spiritual warfare was beginning to heat up as John's guardian angel struggled to get through to him.

Marduke abruptly interrupted his thoughts, saying, "We need to discuss your salary and other benefits. I'm sure you're very interested in finding out everything. Believe me, John, you're a very lucky young man. The more I get to know you, the better I like you. And now, to find out that I knew your parents years ago. I'm sure this must be a sign, and I want to do something to ... I mean, *for* your parents, and in memory of my dear friend Will who died a few months ago."

"Oh, I remember my mom and dad talking about him. I'm sorry to hear that."

"Yes, it was a great loss. But look at me, remorseful over the past, when we have such a future ahead of us. If you let me, John, I can open up incredible doors to you—not only this little job right now, but many things in the future that will be even more interesting and beneficial to your career plans."

The battle taking place in the spirit world swung again to the other side, as John was lost in thought, imagining what it was going to be like to get his car back again—no, a *better* car this time—and wondering what Marduke had meant by "incredible doors" opening up for him.

Marduke smiled. Although there had been a few tense moments, she could see that the first part of her plan was working. She felt as if she could already

taste the sweet taste of vengeance—vengeance against those despicable Christians and all the trouble they had caused her over the years. Now, one of their beloved young sons was blissfully following her like the proverbial lamb to the slaughter.

“Come,” she said. “I’ll drop you at your apartment, and then we can meet again in a couple of days to go over the final arrangements. Unfortunately, I’ve got business to attend to tomorrow. Why don’t we make it Thursday for lunch, shall we?”

John tried his best to thank Marduke, but again he couldn’t find the words to say, and so settled for an awkward, “Sure, wow. I ... I really appreciate this. Thanks.” It was still a little hard for him to grasp everything that was happening. His mind was racing, wondering how much money he was going to be making, just when things had seemed so dark.

“Don’t mention it, darling,” she said, almost embarrassed by his sincere and naive gratitude. “I’ll pick you up at noon Thursday, and we’ll go out for a nice lunch. There are still a few good restaurants open—if you know the right people. Stay with me, John. I promise to take good care of you.”

The crossing into Mexico seemed to have gone without incident, and Judy and Collin were enjoying authentic Mexican *fajitas* in a little roadside café in one of the border towns. Drinking the local *cerveza*, Collin said, “Look, Judy, we’re across the border now, and there are quite a few other Americans here. We don’t stick out that much. Why don’t we just stop here?”

“No, Collin, it’s not safe. It’s too close to the border. It’s too American. These border towns are more loyal to American interests than to their own. After all, that’s where all of their business comes from. If Marduke found out we were here, I bet she could buy every cop in town and they’d be willing to save her

the trouble of killing us.”

“So what then?”

“We have to go where we can really hide out.”

“Oh, I get it, out in the country on a farm or something.”

“Collin, you’ve seen too many movies. Do you think we could blend in in the Mexican countryside?”

“Uh, I guess not.”

“Marduke’s people would just have to ask, ‘Have you seen two gringos in a pickup truck around here?’ And they’d say, ‘You mean the big man with the little lady with brown hair an’ a pickup truck? Si, Señora, everybody in a hundred miles knows about them. They are living next door to my cousin Jesús Maria in the next village. If you really wanna find them, I can take you there for only twenty dollars.’”

“Okay, okay, I get the picture. So what do we do?”

“Mexico City!”

“Mexico City?”

“The biggest city in the world. There we can blend in. There we can get lost. Pay in cash ... only use pay phones or avoid using phones at all ... stay in small hotels ... lie low.... You can hide in any city of the world for years if you’re careful. You don’t stand a chance in the countryside.”

“Okay, good. That sounds good. That makes sense. Now I was thinking if there was just some way we could get in touch with Roy down in Brazil.”

“Well, that’d be great if we could, but I can’t think of any way we can. E-mails are mostly down, and even if they were operational it wouldn’t be safe. The one method we have of communication that might work is prayer. I don’t have a lot of experience, but there was this Roman guy in the Bible who was praying about what to do, and God told him where to go and told the Apostle Peter to be expecting him.”

“Oh yeah, I read that once. You think God can still do that kind of stuff today?”

“Collin, what do they teach you in that church of yours, that God is dead or sick or something?”

“No, not dead, just a little old and tired ... kind of retired, I guess,” he said with a grin.

“Well, I believe in a living and very healthy God, and I’m fighting a living, vengeful, hateful but sick Devil. Let’s go back to our room and shoot up some prayers for God to lead us every step of the way, and to get in touch with Roy somehow.”

As they paid their bill and left, the fat tourist with the flowery shirt and the gaudy sombrero he had just bought whispered to his equally bulky female companion, “You go to the post office where there’s a phone that still works. I don’t care how long it takes for you to get through to Marduke, we’ve got to let her know that they’re headed for Mexico City and are trying to get in touch with somebody named Roy in Brazil. I’ll stick with them.”

As Harry ambled down the street behind Collin and Judy, he thought what a stroke of good luck it was that someone had needed an old-fashioned private eye, just when he was down to his last savings.

WEDNESDAY: FOUR MORE DAYS

Will was deep in thought by the shores of the section of the River of Life that ran through the estate where he was quartered in the Heavenly City. It was here that he was getting the basic training he needed before he would join the rest of the population of the City proper. It was kind of like early morning, but not really. That was just the closest thing it could be compared to. The cool breeze was perfect, as was everything else. Will needed this time to commune with Jesus every day before he started his orientation classes that had been quite painful for him, seeing how much damage he had done in his thirty years of serving the Enemy.

Will’s tutor was a former Wicca priest named Wallace, or Wally for short, who had been converted on Hollywood’s Sunset Strip in the early ’70s, and had spent fifteen years lecturing all around the world until he too had been killed at Marduke’s orders.

How wise of our precious and loving Savior to give me a tutor who knows the world I came out of so well! Will thought gratefully.

Just then a large, gold-speckled carp drew near the shore and seemed to stare right into Will’s eyes. Those eyes looked so familiar that Will couldn’t break away from the fish’s stare. It was not unusual, he was finding, to meet extremely friendly animals, and

he was learning they could even communicate in simple language. But this one was extraordinary, even by Heavenly standards. Suddenly, the shape of the fish's head and body began to transform, and Wally emerged from the river with a big smile.

"Ha! It was you! I knew I recognized those eyes!" Will laughed.

Wally loved to demonstrate to Will how puny were the powers of the Enemy, and that anything he had and could do he had only learned from the Almighty. It was just that the *Devil* loved to demonstrate his powers out of *pride*, while *God's* powers were far more purposeful and used much less ostentatiously. Will could see Wally was fairly bursting with excitement as he waded up to him, already completely dry.

"What is it?" Will asked. "You look like you have something really big to tell me or teach me today."

"Today we won't have class, Will," Wally said, sitting down on the grass.

"No?"

"No, today's going to be a field trip day. Actually, the next few days. We've got work to do."

"Really?!"

"Yup. You're not aware of much that is happening on Earth right now, are you?"

"No, not since the day I died and we helped hook Judy up with Collin. Then you brought me up Here and ... well, I've seen a lot of *past* events, but nothing present or future. Why? Is Judy all right?"

"She's all right. But she's praying some pretty irresistible prayers and so are some others, and Jesus told me today that He wants *you* to be a helper. Now, Will, you need to know it's highly unusual for a newcomer like you to be sent on such a mission, but these are highly unusual times, and even Jesus needs all the help He can get. Armies of new recruits are being sent to Earth to help in the final war of the worlds which has begun."

"It's begun?"

"You know about the last seven years—the seventieth week of Daniel. Well, that will begin in only four days—Earth time—from now. Judy and Collin are on the run, and they need our help. They are praying to get hooked up with Roy, and with no e-mail available to them, you and I have just been appointed their Heavenly e-mail service, among other things. Like to travel?"

"Well, yeah, I guess...." Will replied, blinking, and in that one blink of the eye he found himself seated on the left arm of Jesus, the *stone* Jesus high above Rio de Janeiro, in the wee hours before dawn. He looked across Jesus' face to see Wally perched with a grin in Jesus' right hand.

"Good place to start, don't you think, safe in the arms of Jesus?"

"The best. Where to from here?"

"Well, let me explain."

Roy and Michelle, after lovemaking and prayer, had fallen into an unusually deep sleep soon after midnight. There was a soft light that fell on Roy's face the last hour of night, which woke him slowly and gently. He blinked once or twice, and then reached for the lamp on his bedside table to turn it off, groggily wondering how it got turned on. As the switch clicked in his hand, the harsh yellow light turned on, shocking his eyes. He sat up in bed, quickly turning the lamp back off.

Slowly, with his eyes still half-closed, he began to try to figure out what was going on—the soft light was still present. Finally he forced his eyes open and saw by the window two glowing figures. Startled, he jumped from bed with a muffled shout of, "Whoa, what's happening?"

He looked down at Michelle, still peacefully sleeping.

An oddly familiar voice said, “Don’t worry, she won’t wake up. This is kind of a dream—*your* dream. But then again, it’s not *really* a dream...”

“I know that voice,” Roy mumbled, sitting back on his bed, scratching his head. Looking down at the floor, he jumped again when he saw two pairs of glowing sandaled feet approaching him. Looking up, his eyes met Will’s—Will, his old music and witchcraft buddy. “Rebuke the Devil! Rebuke the Devil...”

“In Jesus’ name,” Will added, grinning from ear to ear.

“What kind of dream is this? Jesus, please wake me up. The Devil’s transformed himself into *Will*, looking like an angel of light.” Turning to Will, he said, “The Bible says the Devil can do that. You don’t fool me for one microsecond, Will. I’m just going to point my finger at you and zap you in the ...”

“Name of Jesus?”

“How come you keep saying His name? You’re supposed to hate His name. This is one weird dream. Jesus, if You don’t mind, I’d just as soon wake up.”

“All in due time,” Wally said.

“And who are *you*?”

“I’m Wally, a former Wicca priest.”

“Oh, Lord, I’m surrounded by them. Michelle, wake up. Jesus, help me! Oh, Lord, forgive me for drinking that third cup of coffee ... and not praying harder before going to bed and...” Roy’s mind was racing, trying to think of any other sins he had committed that would have warranted this visitation from the dark forces.

“Roy, Roy,” Will interjected, “relax, we’re on *your* side! I got saved before I died.”

“Died?”

“Yeah, Marduke killed me. But I got saved first. It’s a long story and we’ll have plenty of time later to tell you. Some other dream.”

“I’ll pass on that one, if you don’t mind.”

In an attempt to make Roy feel more comfortable, Will and Wally sat down by his bedside as if they were sitting in comfortable armchairs, but there were no chairs there. This in itself wasn’t a great deal of comfort to Roy, but he was beginning to calm down anyway.

“We have a message for you, Roy,” Will said. “My girlfriend, Judy, is with our old buddy, Collin, and headed for Mexico City. They’re both on *our* side, and running from Marduke, who is hot on their trail and is planning to kill them. They’re praying to meet you somehow. I’ll be with you any time you need me through this mission, along with Wally, my teacher who has been teaching me the Heavenly ropes since I went to Heaven. If you tap in—and I know you children of David know how—we can talk all the time and we will show you where to go, what to do. We’re lots better than e-mail or the Internet—primitive imitations compared to the real powers at *your* command.”

“Far out!”

“Cosmic, don’t you think, Roy, old pal?”

“At the very least.” In a sudden burst of emotion, Roy tried to hug Will, but just passed through him to the other side. “Whoa, is this ever weird!”

“Sorry, Roy, I haven’t learned yet how to solidify Earth-style,” Will said.

Turning, Roy said, “One thing at a time, I guess. You start with simple basics like Heavenly e-mail and dream invasions?”

“Something like that,” Wally said. “An opportunity is going to come your way tomorrow to go to Mexico City. Take it, Roy.”

“Okay, okay, guys. I can dig this whole conversion story, but if you want me to go thousands of miles away, I’m going to need some kind of proof this whole thing’s for real.”

“Name your proof,” Wally said.

“Okay, okay, let’s see. ... Uh ... I got it. See that

3x5" Bible on the desk?"

"Yeah."

"Okay, when I wake up in the morning, I want it open to a page, any page, and the first verse my eye falls on has to have the word "Will" in it."

"You sure you don't want a harder sign?" Wally asked, with some expectancy.

"Believe me, Roy, this guy can do some doozies. Ask for something harder," Will said.

"No, no, that's fine. I figure that would just about do it. You do *that*, and I'll be on my way to Mexico City. I suppose you'll be telling me the rest of what to do as I go. How am I going to explain all of this to my co-workers?" The two figures began to fade.

Then they were gone! Slowly Roy lay back down on his pillow, touched Michelle who was still sound asleep. "Weird dream, the weirdest, man ... so weird...."

The rooster from next door crowed, and Roy woke up.

"You'd think we were living on a farm with that rooster crowing," he mumbled as he stumbled from bed to the toilet. Returning to bed, his hand brushed against the Bible on the desk. It fell face down and opened on the floor. Picking it up, his eyes fell on the first verse, which read, "Whosoever will, let him come and drink of the water of life freely."

An electric shock coursed through his body from the middle of his back up to his cranium—causing his hair to stand on end—and down to his toes, raising goose bumps all the way along. The ghostly events of the night came back in indelible detail as he realized that before the day ended, an opportunity for him to go to Mexico City, along with all the traveling arrangements, would arise. The sun was straining to surface above the horizon, and it seemed like it was standing still. He could hardly wait for Michelle to

wake up, for the Home to rouse, so he could tell the teamwork and get this show on the road.

"Good job, Will," Wally said, as they flew high above the Atlantic Ocean.

"Ha! We almost got rebuked right out of his bedroom. Good to see old Roy's as crazy as ever."

"He's a precious soul in Jesus' Kingdom, one who has grown to know the strength of weakness and will come to be still more mightily used of the King."

"Where are we headed now?"

"Africa, for another wee-hours mission."

"Africa? Why?"

"Marduke's met John, Don and Gypsy's son. She intends to use him to exact her vengeance on the Family."

"Why don't we just go straight to wherever John is and save him?"

"It's not that simple. You see, John's not praying very much. He's on a self-imposed spiritual furlough, while the Enemy's hard at work on him. Very dangerous combination, but not at all uncommon. Most of the Christian world has been on furlough, sad to say, while Satan is having his heyday. That's why we can't help John directly. The only thing we can do is alert his mother and father to pray like never before for him. And there's hardly any power as great as the prayers of mothers and fathers. That should do the trick."

"Boy, there's nothing I would like more than to do battle with Marduke."

"We will, Will. All in due time."

Land loomed in sight, the marvelous and wild expanse of Africa's bush land. A herd of wildebeests¹

¹**wildebeest:** Afrikaans for wild beast, also called gnu, large African antelopes which have a drooping mane and beard, a long tufted tail, and curved horns in both sexes.

could be seen thundering across the vast grasslands. Adult lions slept lazily in the shade of the trees, licking their chops after a delicious antelope lunch, while their cubs practiced crouching, slinking and pouncing on the prey, their siblings. Will and Wally chuckled at their antics, but couldn't stop to enjoy them to the full. There'd be plenty of time for that in the Millennial Kingdom soon to come—minus their present eating habits, of course.

It wasn't long till the rambling, smoking, smoldering, disheveled open sore on the face of the Earth that had once been the thriving metropolis of Johannesburg lay beneath them. There were two or three spots in the city below them that gleamed with unearthly splendor. They were Family Homes surrounded with ample angelic armies clad in splendid golden armor, forming a dome of protection around and above them. Will and Wally, approaching one of the golden domes of angels and spirit beings, were met by Wasu Nabi, in the air above the home of Don and Gypsy.

"Will," Wally said. "This is Wasu Nabi, a mighty warrior and chief of his Zulu tribe."

"Praise God, it's an honor to meet you," Will said.

"And I you, little one," Wasu said, giving him a bear hug. Will hadn't been called that very often, but next to this giant, he accepted it gladly. "We have much to do. These people are easy to get through to. You can pick who to speak to. Hundreds of prophets in one square mile."

As Wasu and Wally conversed, Will studied the sight below in somber realization that, except for the miracle of his conversion, this whole marvel below him could have been destroyed by Marduke's cohorts—with his help. Of course, Will now had begun to know God's unfathomable powers to prevent evil, but it didn't diminish the sorrow he felt at the evil he had almost done.

Below him he saw a large part of the town clad in the glow of salvation—the part of town that Don, Gypsy and team had transformed through their witnessing, care and teaching into a Heavenly haven of rest and peace. He could hear the happy praises of the people who had come to know their God in the depths of despair. People, young and old, emerging from houses, were embracing their neighbors, sharing what little food they had with each other, nursing each other, caring for the children of other families. Truly a little slice of Heaven lay below him, and he had come very close to destroying something so beautiful just because he hated and feared what he couldn't understand.

And now there came a queen! Even from up in the sky he knew the youthful bounce of Gypsy's walk. As she walked down the little neighborhood road he could see her stop to say a short and encouraging word to each one she met, ending their talk with a squeeze or a hug or a prayer. It was as if she already lived in the world where time was no more. She seemed unhurried and carefree. No trouble was too much to take on her tiny shoulders.

"What do you think, Will?" Wally asked.

"Gypsy? Gypsy for sure. Uh, is it okay to do it in a dream again?"

"Will, I don't know if we have time to wait till they go to sleep."

Will, visibly disappointed, said, "Oh, okay, whatever you think. I just thought that worked so well with Roy, and maybe you could teach me a little about solidification in the meantime."

Wally looked at Will with a big smile. "Oh, I get it."

Wasu Nabi interjected, "Gypsy tired today. She arrange with Don to sleep after dinner. She made vigil through the night with a dying man we escorted to the City this morning. Maybe you won't wait long. Long enough for solidification lesson, I think." A

gorgeous grin flashed across Wasu Nabi's raven black face as he clapped Will on the back, sending him flying toward Earth, followed by Wally.

THURSDAY: ONLY THREE DAYS LEFT

"It was the weirdest thing," Gypsy told Don, and their son and daughter, Simeon and Marina, as she woke up in the morning with a slight fever and headache. "It seemed so real."

"What, Mom?" Marina asked.

"Will came to me. He lay right down beside me. He was as real as you, Honey, lying there."

"Must have been crowded in bed with all three of us there. I don't know if I appreciate him climbing in without my permission," Don said with a chuckle.

"He said that he had gotten saved through Judy and our Web site, and that when they had sent us that e-mail warning, Marduke had found out and had him killed. He explained that he was here on a mission to alert us that John is in trouble, and that we need to pray for him. He said he would be going there to try to help him, but it was largely up to our prayers and John's willingness to listen to the Lord. He said Marduke is after him to wreak vengeance on us because of Will's conversion and us slipping through her fingers. She has just located Judy, and she has found John in San Francisco. He said John needs our prayers now. So I wanted us four to really pray for him right now."

Simeon said, "Mom, of course we'll pray. But don't you think that all of these people you've been caring

for these past months would want to be there too and intercede with you for John? I know you don't want to disturb everyone else with your troubles, but I think we should have a major prayer meeting. We're dealing with major powers in this Marduke lady. I'd say their power is getting to be pretty total right now, considering the news we're hearing of how close their world government is. We'd better really pray for some major Heavenly protection for John. I know if I were where he is right now, I'd really need a lot of prayer power."

"Simeon's right," Don said. "Let's gather everyone out front. By the way, sweetheart, what was that about Will being in bed with us?"

"Oh, yeah, he said the funniest thing, he said he had just learned to solidify, and he wanted to be close to me and let me know how sorry he was for everything he had done. It seemed like he needed to know that I had forgiven him, so we ... we ... well, we ... touched, nothing fancy, just ... touched, kind of ... you know ... all over."

"You touched?"

"Touched, yeah, that's right. We touched."

"Touched! I swear, if you aren't the wildest girl I ever met, my dear." Don hugged Gypsy with a hearty laugh. "Okay, let's help you out to the front so we can gather everyone."

"I'm okay now. I feel better already." Gypsy was up from bed and moving toward the door.

It wasn't long before over a hundred people had gathered, having heard that a Heavenly visitor had warned Gypsy of danger for her son. Sally and her ever-present memo pad and pen were there. After a song or two of love and praise to their Beloved Husband and Lover, prayers were prayed with great gusto and power of the Spirit for the Lord's intercession on John's behalf. Then there were soft praises and tongues dying down to a deep stillness so silent

it could be felt. Big Emmanuel, their first new visitor after the Crash, and now one of Don and Gypsy's chief helpers, burst forth with a powerful prophecy.

"This one is My child, though he has strayed from My house. Many of My helpers have been dispatched to his rescue. Therefore fear not for his life, but pray for his yieldedness. Pray for memories to break through to his darkened mind, for he has fallen into a state of forgetfulness, and he is unaware of the dangers. He is deceived by the seeming peace and prosperity promised, and has forgotten all the things he has been taught. Pray that I can quicken to him the Word that was so faithfully poured into him all through his life, that he can see this vile woman for what she is and cry out to Me even in the gross darkness he has chosen. I can snatch him as a brand from the burning. If he does not do this, there is little I can do for him, for he is ensnared and encircled by demons who desire to have him, to sift him as wheat. But if he so much as turns his face toward the light, as in the Letter 'Crystal Pyramid,' the sticky blobs of demonic darkness will begin to melt away, and it will cause at least a tiny crack in the coating of darkness and forgetfulness round him.

"Through even the tiniest crack I can squeeze a messenger, and as you know, one of My anointed messengers is more than a match for the Devil and all his minions. John has many helpers waiting to help him. Your part is to pray for him and to trust Me while you carry on with your blessed work. If you put My work first, I will care for that which you have committed unto Me—this, My precious son who has wandered into a far country and is now eating husks with the swine. Fear not, for he is Mine, and I do not lose My children."

Prophecy after prophecy came, with promise after promise for John. There was nothing to do but trust. As Gypsy lifted her arms to praise the Lord, she could

see Will's smiling face in the clouds. He seemed to be saying, "Thanks for the touch. Leave your son to Jesus and us. We won't fail you." And he was gone.

Wally was sitting, forming a circle in the air with the thirty mighty, fully armed angels from the Johannesburg team, who had been temporarily assigned to them because of the prayers of the children of David below. He was waiting to explain the whole mission when a message entered his heart that these prayers were so fervent that twenty more elite special force angels were soon to arrive from the Heavenly realm. A few seconds after the message was given, they flew in, armed to the teeth, and took their place in the now-expanded circle.

Will turned from staring down to Earth at Gypsy to find fifty angels and spirit beings sitting around who hadn't been there before. "Wow, what happened?"

"Well, while you were staring cow-eyed at that heavenly enchantress below," Wally kidded, "their prayers were being answered with some elite troops. Care to join us in a planning session?"

Wally then said to the circle of spirit beings, "He's a converted black magic boy ... and a hopeless ladies' man." A roar of laughter went up from the troop, and those near Will gave him hearty claps on the back.

"So, you guys ready to rumble?" Wally asked.

"Nothing we'd like better." "Let us at 'em." "Yeah!"

"Okay, here's what's happening."

John was unaware that there was a godly contingent of fifty-two spirit beings—some hovering around him in his room, and others in the air all around his apartment building—as he opened the door for Marduke. He was also unaware of the sticky blob of demonic hinderers who were accompanying her and who let out a gasp as they saw the brilliant Heavenly light of the host of the Lord surrounding John. He didn't notice that, as Marduke waited for

him to join her, globs and gobs of goopy demons surrounded him and perched on his shoulder and made a black force field around him. He only noticed Marduke's big, toothy smile and pleasant greeting. He didn't even notice that her eyes were unable to smile or that she nervously fingered her rings as she led him downstairs to where her BMW was parked, ready to bring them both to the restaurant.

"You aren't invited on this ride," said the sergeant of the demons to Wally and his team.

"Not that we would want to. We're here to make sure you don't do any harm to John," Wally said.

"He's ours and you know it. He doesn't want your help. He's chosen to be free from your control and go his *own* way. He wants what Marduke has to give."

The squad surrounding Marduke's car were grotesque foot soldiers of the armies of Hell—ugly, gnarled, dirty, and smelly. Will cringed as he saw the black, sticky demons. To think he had worked on that side for all those years and hadn't seen it for what it really was. Just at that moment, a darkly handsome, netherworldly lieutenant in shining black, spiked armor stepped up to the car. The demons snapped to some semblance of attention as he kicked them out of the way to the left and right.

Mantor, the lead angel, whispered to Wally, "That's Marduke's personal guard, Ashkerran."

"So, you're answering a mother's prayers, are you?" Ashkerran asked sarcastically. The other demons gasped as they heard those words.

"*We are*," Mantor said, as he boldly stepped forward, almost nose to nose with Ashkerran, who momentarily faltered and took a step back, "and the prayers of many more, for this mother has many who love her and would lay down their lives for her."

"You don't scare me."

"Yes, we do." Mantor turned his back on Ashkerran

and said to Will. “One thing you can always be sure of with devils: you can’t believe a word they say. The truth is often the direct opposite of their words. This puny creature is shaking in his boots, for he knows one thing full well—that we never fail, due to our Lord’s unmatched power.”

“Ha! You’re powerless as long as John chooses to listen to us. You know the rules. You can’t get to him unless he wants you to, unless he yields. As long as he continues to choose his own way—our way—he’s ours for the fire-breathing dragon to singe. Your David said that himself. You see? We know the books too. John is surrounded by *our* force field until he lets *you* in.”

“Caked in your goo, you should say. You call that a force field?” Mantor and all the angels laughed heartily. “Enough, let’s go.”

“You’ll have to get past us.”

“Fun!” said one of the burliest angels as they sent Ashkerran and the ugly demons flying left and right and surrounded Marduke’s sedan as she and John were driven to their appointment over lunch.

John hadn’t eaten like this since his days of witnessing and provisioning when he was still in the Family. There seemed to be no end to Marduke’s generosity. He was also amazed at how much she understood about the spirit world and the things David had taught the Family. She knew about contacting those who had passed on to the other side; she called it simple basics. She understood that God created evil as well as good, and seemed to know how things worked. She talked intelligently about the Prince of Persia spoken of in Daniel 10, almost as if she *knew* him.

It was quite fascinating to John to get this kind of insight on things. She even understood about how “all things work together for good,” saying some people

don’t understand how even *evil* can bring about good. He was quite amazed how close she was to some of his dad and mom’s beliefs. She seemed to have a lot of respect for what his parents were doing—maybe even more than he had. John was convinced that Marduke really liked him, and that he could trust her. After all, she said she was working toward world peace and unity among all men. That couldn’t be bad, could it?

On the other hand, John was sure his parents wouldn’t approve at all. But that was one of the reasons he had left. They had always seemed so overly protective and suspicious of things—even things that seemed quite harmless to him. But he didn’t need *their* approval now. Besides, he felt they’d never be happy until he went back and started working for the Lord again, which he had no plans of doing just yet. Maybe after he’d experienced life in the world and had some fun, before the Antichrist took over or something like that, but not now—not when everything was just starting to fall into place for him.

“John, we need to get things settled concerning your new job,” Marduke said as she opened another pack of cigarettes. “I’m betting on you, John. I think that you have a lot of potential. I have so much faith in you that I’m willing to make you the manager of my store with a salary of \$1,000 a week, starting first thing next week. After one month, if you do as well as I think you will, I’ll put you over the two other stores in the area, and double your pay. You stand to be earning \$8,000 a month in just one month from now.”

“Wow! I never dreamed it would be *that* good! That’s so ... so neat of you. Thank you!”

“I know I’m taking a big chance, John. But I’m trusting you to prove to me that I’m not making a mistake. Of course, for that kind of money, I hope that I can count on you to do a few favors for me now and then besides just selling a few books. What do

you say, John?”

John was almost speechless, once again not knowing how to show Marduke how much he appreciated what she was doing for him.

“I mean, yeah ... of course. Whatever you need. You can always count on me. But what kind of things do you want me to do?”

Marduke looked deep into his eyes, touching the back of his hand with her fingertips. “John, there are *no strings attached*, I promise.”

“Strings attached!” Wally saw his opportunity and shouted the words as loud as he could, praying that John could hear him.

Suddenly John’s memory was jogged once again. He remembered the dream that he had heard his dad talk about several times over the years, a dream in which his dad had seen himself on a playing board, and everyone had controlling strings attached to them. In his mind’s eye he could see how in the dream Marduke had been distracting Will with her hypnotic promises while her demons were attaching strings all over his body. John pulled his hand back with a startled jerk and looked nervously around.

“John? John! What’s wrong?”

“Oh, nothing, nothing at all, I just need to think. It’s ... a big decision.”

The Heavenly spirits crowding ’round the black blob of a demonic force field who had been surrounding John and Marduke were shouting instructions and reminders, verses and memories, but the demons around him were doing their worst to cause interference—mumbling something that sounded like a cross between dark chants and radio static. Finally, when the Lord’s hosts saw that Wally had been able to get through to John with the memory of the dream, they shouted loud praises to their King.

As Marduke had said those two little words—“strings attached”—she who had dug the pit suddenly found herself caught in it. There was a tiny break in the field, and Will jumped at the chance. He squeezed through to stand by John’s side. There were shouts of protest from the demons, and he could see Marduke was flustered, but they were all powerless. It was a thrill to feel the power of God in the midst of battle. John had opened a tiny door, allowing God’s Spirit to get through.

Will had to block the sight and sound of these denizens from his consciousness to concentrate on getting the vision of Don’s dream through to John. He could feel the gooey fingers of the demons pulling on him, so he grasped fast hold of John’s arm and kept whispering words of warning and encouragement to him. John began to sweat, and told Marduke he wasn’t sure, that he had to think about it.

Good, Will thought, He got the vision I transmitted. Now let’s try a message.

“John! Remember the Devil himself is transformed into an angel of light. There are many spirits gone out into the world, but you must try the spirits whether they are of God or not. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.”

John didn’t seem to be getting it.

“But why?” Marduke asked. “I’m offering you a chance of a lifetime. Why would you even hesitate?”

“Oh, I ... I don’t know. I just feel like I need to sleep on it. Can I tell you tomorrow?” John asked as he suddenly got up from the table.

Marduke was sensitive enough to know that war was raging. She sensed the opposing spirits nearby. She tried her best to control her anger and put on a big smile.

“Well, darling, I don’t have much time. I’ve got to

be getting back to LA tomorrow, and I'd really hoped to be able to tie things up today. If it's a question of more money, John, we can discuss it," she said lamely as she signed for the bill. "I tell you what. I'll drop by tomorrow morning, before catching my flight. I will need to have your answer by then, John. Please do consider this carefully."

Wally had instructed Will to hang on tight to John as they moved along toward the car. There was a steady stream of grumbles and complaints and empty threats about his presence among them, which he actually rather enjoyed answering back in taunts and jibes, knowing that his accusers were powerless. He could feel the Heavenly host was following not far behind.

Once John had said goodbye to Marduke and was safely inside his apartment, the demons had to turn around and go with her. Now the whole host could get closer. All through the afternoon they fought to get through to him.

John turned on the radio and managed to get one of the few stations that had been authorized by the government to broadcast periodic reports. He just caught the last part of it, but the announcer was explaining something about an international agreement being in the final stages of completion, and that once all the parties involved had signed, things would quickly move toward resolving the economic crisis.

As he sat there on the edge of his bed listening to the announcer's statement, slowly but surely, everything started to make sense. Suddenly, it hit him in a huge wave of revelation. All the Word that had been stored in John's heart began to rise up from where it had been lying dormant, and he slumped back on his bed.

My God! This is it! The international agreement! This must be the AC pact to bring in his world government and take over the economy! What have I been doing?! And how does all of this tie in with Marduke? Why would she suddenly show up out of the blue, offering me the world at a time like this? She must be part of it! Marduke has been trying to get me to sell my soul in exchange for a place in this New World Order of theirs.

John suddenly remembered the verses that the spirit beings had been trying to remind him of all afternoon. "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God. ... Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God."

John determined that tomorrow morning when Marduke showed up at his apartment, he would ask her point-blank what she thought of Jesus. He didn't necessarily want to work for the Lord, but on the other hand he didn't want to work for the Devil either. He sure didn't want her attaching those strings to him.

That was what she did to Will, wasn't it? She gave him the world in return for his soul? Wow! And that's what she's been trying to do with me! Boy, have I been dumb, or what? Maybe I should ask her how Will died. I need to get some more answers from her before I commit to anything concerning this job of hers.

Wally and Will shook their heads at each other. "He's getting some of the message," Wally said, "but he's pretty thick and hard to get through to. He ought to get out of here tonight and never see Marduke again."

"Well, you know what it's like when they wave all those tempting offers in your face," Will sympathized. "It's hard to see anything but dollar signs when you're in a situation like that. And it's not easy to turn your back on it, either—even when you know that it's not going to last."

"Will, you know her, and I know her. What do you

think she's planning right now?" Wally asked.

"She wants revenge. If John doesn't go along with her, she'll kill him. She'll have him killed and make it look like some punk or thug did it."

"Right, exactly what I was thinking. But we don't want to leave this to mere guesswork, so Mantor sent some spies over to try to find out her exact plans. They should be coming back soon to let us know. In the meantime we need to keep working on him, to try to reopen these terribly clogged channels of his. You just wonder how people who have the light can get so far from it, don't you?"

"Yeah, I guess you and I knew the darkness so well, we *knew* there wasn't anything better than the light once we found it."

Two beautiful, powerful female angels glided through the ceiling into the room, followed by Mantor and a few others.

"What's up?" Wally asked.

"You were right," they said. "She's arranged something with Cliff and Clive, her bodyguards. After she leaves John tomorrow morning, if he refuses her, one of them will be in the hall of the building, posing as a bum who will ask him for money when he comes out and then knife him. If he manages to escape that one, the other will be downstairs pretending to be an everyday mugger and will pull him into the alley where he'll kill him, take his money and run."

Wally chuckled, "Two can play at that game, can't they, Mantor?"

"Oh," Mantor replied, "I've been a *bum* lots of times, but I think I'll be a black *mugger* tomorrow."

"And, Will, we haven't taught you the class in invisible solidification, have we?"

"No, no, you haven't."

"Okay, class will start tomorrow with a simple demonstration." Everyone chuckled except Will, who really wasn't so sure what was going on.

"Guys," Will said, "one thing though. John'll be okay, won't he?"

"He'll be fine," Mantor said. "But he needs a little scare. He needs to feel the heat a little from the fire-breathing dragon. He needs a lesson he won't forget. That should set him back on the right path. Once we do this job in the morning, a couple of us can stay with John, so you two can get on over to Mexico City. You have a big day ahead of you tomorrow."

FRIDAY: TWO DAYS MORE

No one could remember *ever* seeing the Chairman sleep. And for sure since the meeting that had been held five days earlier, those who were close to him knew for certain he had *not* slept. He seemed to run by pure inspiration, drive and determination, running from committee to committee, making sure everything was set for the great day. Now, it was three in the morning. Most everyone was struggling to stay awake by drinking large cups of thick, black coffee, and were sitting bleary-eyed, with their chins propped up on their hands, having presented the lengthy reports they'd been told to prepare. The Chairman sat alert, showing no signs of fatigue. Only a glass of water was before him.

He studied the faces of those present, all of them his top people, heads of their respective committees. He searched for signs of weakness or tinges of uncertainty in any of them, but he was satisfied that they were all professionals who would carry out their responsibilities with pride and excellence. They'd been trustworthy through years of secrecy, and now, all was to be revealed to the world.—All, that is, that he had *chosen* to reveal.

They had spent years laying the groundwork for this very moment. They had worked brilliantly and tirelessly to prepare the public and convince them

that in order to survive, they must be willing to leave the old ways behind and accept a new order for this new day. The entertainment and news media, in movie after movie and article after article, had faithfully followed the lead and had helped to convince the world that a whole new system of government was needed, a *world* government, with the necessary authority to *police* the world and to put a stop to all ethnic and religious rivalry, and to bring peace to the many volatile hotspots that were continuously erupting around the globe. They had also made it painfully clear that a totally new economic system was needed, a *global* electronic economy that was capable of coordinating and merging the many weaker economies of the world into one easily manageable paperless world economy. They needed someone with solutions to the many complicated, almost nightmarish, problems that were now facing them in the 21st century.

A slight smile crossed the Chairman's face as he remembered the many meetings that had taken place over the last few years and how far things had progressed in such an incredibly short time. Everything had now fallen into place, and according to all reports, conditions were perfect. The masses, particularly after this horrendous Crash, were like dumb sheep, willing to follow any shepherd who could lead them back to safety and prosperity. They were desperate and clamoring for someone, *anyone*, who was capable of saving the Earth and establishing worldwide peace and stability, as well as bringing financial order to their decimated economies.

"So you see, your Excellence, all is prepared for the grand demonstration at the great event on Sunday morning. It will be broadcast via satellite to every station on Earth. Tomorrow, ninety percent of all TV stations will be back in operation throughout the globe, just in time for the greatest event in world

history. We praise and honor you for the perseverance and determination with which you have inspired us to meet this deadline. All will be exactly as you ordered it to be."

"I expect each one of you to do your part in making sure that we do not have any last-minute surprises. Only *you* know what's happening; I have revealed the deepest secrets to you. This is an honor, a privilege, and an awesome and fearsome responsibility. Take it as such, gentlemen and ladies, and do not fail me now—nor ever!"

As he stood, the roomful of his top computer wizards, scientists, economic and technical advisors stood and bade him farewell with crisp bows and salutes. Then he was off, gone to the next meeting and planning session.

Marduke arrived alone, with the top down on her fiery red convertible Porsche. Things were going very, very well. She had had her people on the Mexican border monitoring those who crossed, and they had spotted Judy and Collin, who were now in Mexico City. She planned to have some of her hit men stay with them until the festivities were held on Sunday, when the great Seven-Year Plan would be unveiled. And now, today, she was going to exact revenge on Don and Gypsy, one way or the other. She was sure nothing could go wrong, and soon she would be welcomed back into the upper echelon of her coven.

As she got out of the car, she casually nodded at Clive, who was slouched against the front wall of John's apartment building—looking like a bum, swigging at a liquor bottle, poorly concealed in a brown paper bag. Down the street a few yards she saw Cliff in the alleyway, looking like a typical gang member. He was wearing running shoes, ultra baggy jeans and an expensive Adidas windbreaker, and smoking a cigarette. Everything was ready if need be.

All she need do was give the signal. As she entered the building, Clive shadowed her as she went up to the fifth floor.

Marduke felt inexplicably uneasy. Though she couldn't see them, she could sense the spirits of the angelic helpers who were crowding around her. She was on their territory, turf they had taken over in the night, as John became more and more receptive and open to their voices. When her foul spirits had tried to follow her in, ten angels stood in their way and edged them back out and down the stairs onto the sidewalk, where they encircled them and held them as if they were horses in a corral. Clive, as simple-minded as he was, sensed nothing—nothing at all. He had a job to do; it paid well, and he'd probably have the afternoon off if he did a clean, fast job. He could go have some fun in the red light district.

Clive melted into the shadows at the end of the hall as Marduke knocked on the door.

John opened the door with a somber face and invited Marduke to come in and have a seat at the linoleum-covered folding kitchen table. "Want some coffee?"

"No, John dear, I don't have time. I just wanted to fill you in on your duties at the shop. They'll be expecting you down there on Monday. All the other workers are girls; I think you'll enjoy it there. They're sure looking forward to having a good-looking young man like you in the shop."

"Well, that's very nice but, Marduke, please sit down."

She did, followed by John across from her on the second folding chair.

"I ... I can't take the job," John began.

"But why? Is the pay not enough?"

"No, the pay's fine—incredibly generous. Too generous, in fact. But I have my reasons."

"Reasons? John, you can tell me. You can level with me. You can trust me."

"Like Will could trust you? I wonder. Marduke, you showed yourself very tolerant of religions—all religions, you said. But there was one thing I learned when I was a kid that came back to me yesterday, one way to determine just how tolerant you really are."

Marduke blanched a bit, stiffened noticeably and said, "And what was that?"

"What do you think about Jesus? What do you think about Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross? Do you believe Jesus is the only begotten Son of God?"

"Well, John ... I ... I definitely think the Christ ... uh ... lived. I think He lived in Palestine and was a great, a very great thinker."

"That's not my question. Do you believe He was the Son of God like He said He was?"

"Well, that question is really very irrelevant."

"There's nothing irrelevant at all about that question, Marduke. Do you believe it or not? What do you think of Jesus?" Words formed in his heart and burst out his mouth involuntarily as John shouted: "In the name of Jesus, I *demand* you tell me exactly what you think of Him!!"

Marduke's eyes narrowed, her teeth clenched and she hissed, "I hate Him. He is my archenemy. My whole purpose is to destroy Him and His domain, of which you and your parents are a tiny part. It would give me great pleasure to destroy you for what they did to me!" As she said those words, surprise and frustration spread across her face.

"Thank you. That's why I won't work for you."

"You little worm! Do you think you can say no to me and get away with it? Do you know how Will died? Your parents got through to him somehow and took him from me. He deserted me for this ... this Carpenter

of yours. I killed him and I will kill you and send some body part to your parents so they will know they cannot escape my wrath.”

It was John’s turn to blanch, and his throat to go dry. “You’d better go,” he said weakly.

“Yes, I’ll go, my little worm, but you’d best watch your back. You’ll never know when it’s coming, but come it will.” She stood up and stared into John’s frightened eyes. She felt her power come again and she decided to enjoy the moment, the feeling of being in control.

With great pleasure she began to tell him some alternative methods she might have of killing him. But now he was hearing a voice deep in his heart strengthening him, telling him not to fear, that he would escape her wrath, that he would live to serve the Lord again, that this was the war of the worlds he had always heard about, that now was the hour to stand up and fight! The voice bubbled up from the stagnant depths of his heart in a power he had long forgotten but instantly recognized he could no longer live without.

He knew it wasn’t himself who now shouted, “You want to declare war? Then, yes, let’s have it, Marduke! There’s nothing we would rather than get it out in the open and get this over and done with. You know and we know that you won’t be able to resist the power of God and our Lord and King, Jesus Christ! We meet your challenge in the mighty name of Jesus! We defy you. We don’t fear you, you pitiful witch. Why fear someone who can only kill the body and then have nothing more that they can do? Remember, Marduke? Do you remember those words? I’m back, Marduke.”

Marduke screamed, turning a ghostly white. “Will, are you here? Are you tracking me?”

“Yes!” John shouted, to his own surprise. “I *am* here and you will *never* prevail. You will go from defeat to defeat, because now you’ve locked horns with an

indestructible, undefeatable Enemy. Your power was enough when you dealt with the little wimps and minions of Satan in the past, but now you have challenged your very nemesis, and you’ll know nothing but disappointment and defeat. There will never be another victory for you until the day when you die at the hands of those you tried to serve. You’ll die for your ineptitude. I know you weren’t really inept, you were never disloyal—it was just that you underestimated your Foe.

“This, Marduke, is the day all saints have dreamed of since the beginning of time immemorial: the final showdown between good and evil. We know that once this pact is confirmed, it will begin your last seven years, and that is all the time your lord and king has. This is not your victory; this is the beginning of your *end*. We lock from this day forward in deadly combat with you and your lord. We rebuke you in the name of Jesus Christ!”

Marduke grabbed hold of the table as she began to faint. With her hand to her throat and gasping for breath, she staggered for the door, opened it and stepped into the hall, closing it behind her. She leaned there against the wall for a moment, then turned to Clive, nodded fearfully and descended the stairs. From his window John watched her go. As if in a dream, he went to his bedroom and packed everything he would need for a trip, he knew not where. He was amazed at the words that had come out of his mouth, and knew that it hadn’t been his own voice—it had been the voice of prophecy.

Clive waited patiently in the hall. He didn’t know that Mantor and Wally were waiting with him and that Will joined them after Marduke left.

While waiting, Will asked, “So what was this about invisible solidification?”

Wally winked, “You’ll see soon enough. We just

have to wait till John comes out. Timing is *all-important*.”

Will had gotten used to the world where one was not bound by time, and it was really difficult sometimes to get used to being back in the realm of time, as it seemed to go so slowly.

At last the door opened and John came out. Now he was walking toward them—though he didn’t know it—with a suitcase to go down the stairs. Clive began to stagger toward him. “Hey, buddy, got some spare change? I ain’t eaten today.”

“No, I’m sorry, I don’t have anything to spare. Please let me pass.”

John recognized him as one of the guys who had been with Marduke the first day she showed up at his apartment, and tried to walk away as fast as he could.

As Clive stood in John’s way, Wally winked at Will and tied Clive’s shoelaces together.

Clive stepped out of the way just enough for John to get by, but continued begging for some change. Just as John was about to get by, Clive’s massive hand grasped his arm in a viselike grip. John turned to look into the cold eyes of his would-be murderer as a knife emerged from his coat and was raised above Clive’s head ready to be plunged into his chest. John tried to get away and pushed Clive back.

Just as John pushed, Mantor also pushed, breaking Clive’s grip on John’s arm at the same time. Wally held Clive’s knife arm immobile. Clive staggered back, amazed at the strength of this young boy. John had made it down to the next floor and turned back just in time to see Clive lunge after him. Wally gave him a firm shove, making him, his shoelaces being

tied together, fall head over heels. John watched in shock as Clive tumbled down the stairs to the landing below. He gasped as Clive lay there without moving. John then saw that the knife that had been intended for him had instead been plunged deep into the heart of his would-be assassin.

John stood staring in disbelief at the widening pool of blood on the floor, wondering what he should do now.

“Go!” Wally screamed. “Get out of here! We’ll cover for you! Just get out!” Mantor was already halfway down the next flight, also calling John to go, to get out of there. Will hovered in the air between floors, marveling at all that was going on. With sudden decisiveness John turned and walked quickly down the stairs. As he disappeared down the stairs, Will watched Wally materialize as a bum standing right where John had been when Clive fell at his feet. Just then a door on the fourth floor hall opened a crack and a terrified lady peered out to see what the commotion had been. A stifled scream signaled that she had seen the body—and Wally standing over it. She slammed and locked the door again behind her. They could see through the wall that she was calling the police. Wally waited patiently, but motioned for Will to go outside to the alley where Cliff would be waiting for John. Mantor would be guarding him.

By the time Will was outside, Cliff had already pushed John into the alley, drawn his 9 mm, with silencer, and had it trained right on John’s heart. Poor John was sure getting his taste of the Devil’s judgment today. As if from out of nowhere appeared a huge black, who approached Cliff without fear.

“Yo, dude! Whatcha got there, white boy? Izzat a gun? Don’t you know this is *my* turf and I works here, and nobody interferes with rockin’ Mantor, baby?”

Cliff barked out, “You stay back or I’ll kill the boy and you, both.”

“Now let’s not do nothin’ we’s gonna be sorry for in the mornin’, baby.”

“I mean it, nigger. I’d just as soon kill you as look at you. Stay back.”

“Okay, my trigger-happy honky moot, why don’t you just start with me?” Mantor said. “I bet you can’t hit the broad side of a barn with that BB gun.”

Without hesitation Cliff fired two shots. To his surprise, Mantor continued advancing without so much as missing a step. The next thing he knew, Mantor had wrested the gun from his grip, lifted his huge bulk with one hand, and thrown him down the alleyway to come crashing down in a heap on the garbage cans in the alley.

“Next time you wants to pick on somebody, white boy, pick on somebody your own size, ya hear?” he said, bending over Cliff, who gazed stupefied up at him. “And tell Marduke when ya sees her, she’d better lay off our people, ’cuz we got her number. I wants you to tell her these words. I wants you to memorize ’em, baby, an’ say these exact words. Tell her, ‘You’d best watch your back. You’ll never know when it’s coming, but come it will.’ As stupid as you are, you think you can remember that?” Before Cliff’s eyes, Mantor faded away.

Cliff scrambled to his feet and, white as a ghost, bolted out of the alley past John. John stood staring, while Cliff turned the corner and passed from view.

“Hey, John baby, why stand you gazin’, man?” Mantor’s voice said behind him. John whirled to see his black rescuer there once again. “We’d best git you on your way. The apartment building’s crawlin’ with police already. Follow me.” And he led John out and down the street, motioning Will to go back to be with Wally.

Inside the apartment building the police were

questioning Wally, who was explaining in an alcohol-slurred voice, “Yeah, we was friends, but he ripped off my flask o’ whiskey, my hard-earned booze, so’s I tied his shoe laces together while he was sleepin’ and took it back. He come at me when he woke up with that there knife in his hand. Then he fell down these here stairs and stabbed hisself. I swear I didn’t do nothin’ at all to him. I didn’t mean him no harm.”

“Well, we’re going to have to take you down to the station and run some tests on the knife—fingerprints and all. Routine stuff, you know. At least you’ll get a cup of coffee and a decent place to sleep tonight.”

“Okay by me,” Wally said, winking in Will’s direction.

They couldn’t talk together on the way down in the police car, but finally, after Wally had been booked and assigned a cell, they were left alone. Wally said, “Well, I guess we’d best make our getaway. They’ll wonder why on earth I escaped when the tests will show no one’s prints on that knife but Clive’s, but we need to get on down to Mexico. We’ve got a lot to do.” He faded from human view and together the two of them strolled through the bars, through the walls, past the guards and back into the streets where they took to the skies heading south.

As they flew, Wally explained, “Mantor will help John hook up with some Family members still in the States, and hopefully they can get him out of the country and harm’s way. Now we need to tend to Judy and Collin. When Cliff reports to Marduke, she’ll be livid and will go after them with a vengeance. Of course, that’ll be Cliff’s next mission! The ministering spirits in South Africa are going to be giving the people there some dreams that John is okay, the mission was accomplished, but that they should keep praying for him.”

Roy and Michelle’s Home had received a call shortly

after Roy had just finished explaining his strange dream and revelation. Their live-out friend and supporter, Julio Manteza, who had an important post in the Mexican embassy, called to say he had been called to return to Mexico City for a few days on some urgent business—something to do with the international accord that his government was being asked to study. He was hoping that a couple of Family members could accompany him on the trip, as he realized the seriousness of everything that was taking place, and felt he needed someone there with him who he could pray and counsel with. He explained that all their expenses would be covered.

So, just as Will had explained it would happen in that wild, dreamlike experience, Roy and Michelle were now in Mexico City in a plush five-star hotel, praying for God to show them what to do next. Julio had been called to an important meeting, so they had the afternoon free. They sought the Lord and asked Him if they should go out in search of Collin and Judy, or what they should do. They both received that they should look for them in a place where other Americans would probably be hanging out.

“What does that mean? Where would Americans hang out?” Roy thought out loud.

“McDonalds?” Roy and Michelle looked at each other in surprise, as the name popped out of both their mouths.

“That’s what I got.”

“Me too,” Michelle said. “I think that’s where we’ll find Judy and Collin.”

“I guess so. I mean, if they’re on the lam, where better to blend in than a place like McDonalds? We can ask at the desk where the nearest one is.”

Will and Wally had split up and each had been joined by one other Heavenly helper. Will was with Judy and Collin, while Wally stayed with Roy and

Michelle. Will was pleased as could be to be by Judy’s side again. She was doing so well. She seemed so strong and steadfast, he couldn’t help but marvel. He was surprised, too, at how easy it was for him to see her so comfortable with Collin, holding hands with him as they walked down the busy street. It didn’t hurt him to see them together, as he had thought it might. He realized that the Lord had given him a whole new way of looking at things, and he was happy that she was all right. Will’s teammate, Lucretia, a veteran who had lived during the days of the Early Church, was encouraging him in the way he liked and needed—she was quite the affectionate type.

It was very different working with Judy and Collin than working with full-time Family members. Judy was praying, but her senses were not as in-tune as those who had spent years preparing for these days. Will and Lucretia had to work through Judy’s and Collin’s flesh, using their hunger to get them where they needed to be.

“Judy, I’m starved,” Collin said, “and as much as I like Mexican food, I’m dying for a good old-fashioned ‘red, white, and blue’ burger and fries. Hey! Look! It must be the Lord’s will,” he chuckled, “‘cuz there’s a McDonalds.”

Judy sighed. “Oh no! I can’t stand their hamburgers. Oh, well, I guess it’s probably a good idea to eat there. At least we won’t stick out. Okay, I give in. Let’s go.”

They didn’t notice the portly couple who followed a safe distance behind them, and seated themselves a little distance from their table.

Collin wolfed down two Big Macs while Judy nibbled some chicken, praying about their next move. She kept getting to wait, to be still and know that He is God, that kind of thing, when a fellow with a much younger girl on his arm entered from the main street

entrance. Her attention was drawn to them inexplicably. She nudged Collin and whispered, “Look at that interesting looking couple.”

Collin looked up midbite and dropped his sandwich in his lap with a gasp. “Judy, it’s Roy!”

Judy, scrambling to clean up the mess in Collin’s lap and hoping no one had noticed, shushed Collin. “Collin, quiet! Really? It’s them? Our prayers worked?”

“Yeah, yeah, they did. That’s them. Whaddaya think? How should we approach them?”

“They’re in line. I’ll go join them and whisper to them. If you went they’d make too big a scene.”

Judy hurried up to where Roy and Michelle were standing waiting for their order to come up. Standing behind Roy, she spoke in a low voice, just loud enough for him to hear. “Don’t look around, Roy. Don’t act surprised or anything, but I’m with someone who wants to talk to you, an old friend named Collin. Now you can slowly turn around, but just act like you’re running into someone that you know.”

Roy turned to her slowly, his eyes wide and expectant. “Well, hi, Judy, so good to see you. Honey, look, it’s Judy.”

Michelle extended her hand. “Judy, what a pleasant surprise to run into you here.”

It was Judy’s turn to be surprised. Her face pleasant and smiling, she asked Roy, “How did you know my name?”

“We had a visit from an old friend of ours—Will. He came to us in kind of a dream and told us you would be with Collin. I know it sounds crazy, but that’s what happened. It’s a long story which we can fill you in on while we eat. Where’s your table?”

Judy had to fight back the tears at the mention of Will. She pointed to where Collin was watching them. They made a polite little wave to him and motioned that they would join him as soon as they ordered.

The portly man, seeming to finger his glasses,

snapped yet another shot of the four antisocial cult members he had been hired to track. Now he needed to deliver the film to a guy named Mario at the address Marduke had given him in a deserted warehouse. Once he had done that and had given Mario the name and room number of Judy and Collin’s hotel, his job was done, and they’d get their money and could head back to the States. It was a dream come true that he and Margaret had managed to pick up this extra cash during such hard times.

Back in Judy and Collin’s hotel room, the four spoke excitedly about all that had happened. Judy’s eyes were moist with tears as she heard everything that Will had explained to Roy. So she had been right! Marduke had had Will killed just as she had thought. She could hardly believe that he was now helping them from the spirit world and that he had gone to so much trouble to protect her. Will, floating near the ceiling, was a little moist-eyed too. Collin was sitting on the bed in dumbfounded amazement at the power of God.

“Okay now, Judy, Collin,” Roy said, “we’ve learned over the last few years that the first and best thing to do is to tune in and receive God’s messages for us, personalized instruction that never fails. So we suggest we do that right away.”

“How do you do that? Do I have to do it too?” Collin asked.

“Well, you will one day, I’m sure,” Michelle said, “and if anything does come to you, please share it with us, but don’t feel any kind of pressure.” Michelle whipped out a little micro recorder and checked to see if the batteries were strong. “Okay, let’s do it.”

Lucretia had a message to deliver through Michelle and another of the veteran spirit helpers with them was going to speak through Roy. Will was told he

could try to transmit a vision to Judy. Collin was too awed to receive anything this time.

Michelle hesitated since the message she began to receive was so specific, so Roy began to speak his first.

“Behold, what manner of wonder I have done—even more than you now know or can imagine—and I will continue to keep you, My beloved children, Judy and Collin, and I will see that you are safely brought into the folds of the children of David. You have been snatched in this Latter Rain as brands from the burning of that wicked land that has forsaken Me to follow after her whoredoms and her weapons of mass destruction. Her days are numbered, and even before the final hour when judgment shall come upon this weary and wicked Earth, this land that I call Babylon and the Whore shall feel the fiery wrath of My indignation. For she has become full of devils and demons, and a cage for every unclean and hateful bird.

“It is wise that you have come out from her midst, and I will now lead you to a land of ripe fruit and warm hearts where you shall be safe for the time being. Yet even now you are in danger and must walk circumspectly, for there is a contract out for your life. Stay close to Me and I shall see you through. Seek Me at every turn.”

As his voice faded away, Michelle, emboldened by that last warning, spoke these words, “Beware of a man named Mario. Beware of a man in white pants. Steer clear of the man with the limp, for he bears weapons and seeks to kill you. Beware of the time of the festivities. Fear not, but take nothing for granted. My angels are about you and shall keep you, but you must know that Marduke knows where you are, and she is full of anger. She is doomed to defeat, but in order for My plan to work you must give Me the utmost

in cooperation.”

Judy saw ... no ... *felt* Will as well as saw him. He was full of light and joy. If she had thought him lovely before, now he was radiant with the radiance of a warrior returned from battle. She knew he was there with them and was going to be with them through the next few days. She felt the greatest of comforts somehow, knowing that one who knew Marduke and the workings of her kind so well was right by her side.

They all praised the Lord for His wonderful revelations and promises. Michelle exclaimed how difficult it had been for her to share specific names and such things, but they all remembered how many miracles of this sort had happened in the Bible. They were bemused as to what these festivities were, as no one had heard of anything like that scheduled for the near future.

In further prayer, as they continued to petition the Lord while the sun set and night fell, Jesus showed them to return to their hotels. They would meet once again at McDonalds tomorrow, and then part until they would hopefully meet again at the airport on Sunday. The Lord told them He would show them what to do *when*, not *if*, they ran into the people He had warned them of.

With tears, prayers, hugs and kisses they parted. Each of them was bursting with praiseful hearts for all the wonders they had seen. Truly they each knew their God was great, good and kind, and more than a match for anything the Devil could throw their way in the days and years to come.

SATURDAY: ONE LAST DAY

It was the wee hours when Harry and Margaret pulled their compact rental car up in front of the dark warehouse on the edge of the small factory district. Most of the factories had been boarded up for months, so there were no security guards around. Just as they heard a distant clock tower strike two, they were standing before the metal door of the building. They could hear the sounds of movement on the other side, then of a padlock being unlocked and a chain being removed. With some effort the door creaked open. They could only see the silhouette of a medium-sized man who motioned them to follow him back through the enormous stacks of crates and boxes to a tiny, dimly lit office at the back. Their escort stopped before he came into the light and motioned them to proceed on into the office.

With the ding-a-ling of the door as they entered the room, a voice from a back room called out, "Mister Harry?"

"Uh, yes, I have the pictures you asked for. I mean ... that is, if you're Mario."

Mario emerged smiling, a slight fellow with a thin mustache. Behind him came a large, unsmiling man with a limp. "Yes, I am Mario," the slight man said. "May I see them please?"

"Yes, of course, and on this slip of paper is the

hotel and room number where they are staying. Marduke said you would take over from here.”

“Yes, that is right,” Mario said, as he spilled the contents of the brown envelope Harry had given him on the desk. “Hmm, good work. Good likenesses from all different angles. You are very good at your job. A shame, really.”

“A shame. What do you mean?” Harry asked, his brow furrowed.

“Oh, nothing—nothing at all. It’s just a shame you can’t continue to work with us on this project. These cults are so dangerous and destructive and who knows what they might do next—you know, nerve gas like in Tokyo, mass suicide. It’s awful, just awful. And there are so few people to fight them, it seems a shame not to continue to use your services in our just fight.”

Harry’s chest swelled with pride and Margaret patted his arm admiringly. She hadn’t been helping him long, but after the Crash, when he couldn’t afford other help she had begun to do a little bit here and there. It made life more interesting since the kids had left home for college and marriage.

“Yes, everything is here that we needed.” Mario picked up a briefcase from the floor and set it on the desk, opening it to reveal within another envelope with a large amount of money in US dollars. “Count it to make sure it’s all there.” When Harry was satisfied, Mario said, “Domingo, show our guests out please. *Adios, amigos, and gracias.*”

Domingo nodded and limped out the door, toward the door of the warehouse, with Harry and Margaret close behind. At the warehouse door he found it had been locked once more. He fumbled with a set of keys, then growled something in Spanish, and headed back to the office.

Harry and Margaret figured he had the wrong keys and waited. Harry glanced at his watch one time, just

before shots rang out, and he and his wife slumped to the floor with bullets through their skulls. Domingo returned, took the briefcase and shuffled off toward the office. Several shadowy figures emerged from the dark and stuffed the bodies into some large bags.

On this, the sixth day since the Chairman’s early morning meeting, a strange stillness coupled with an intense sense of expectation fell over the whole Earth. It was as if the very elements and nature herself held their breath to behold the things ordained to come upon the Earth. There was no really reliable worldwide communications system operating yet, but somehow, there was very little action in the different skirmishes, civil wars and terrorist activities going on everywhere, on every continent. The guns fell still, the gangs stayed home, the soldiers rested and chatted in hushed tones about things they had heard that were frightening, yet thrilling and promising at the same time.

Random radio reports on the government broadcasting station had reported that there would be an announcement made on television in the late afternoon of Saturday, and that most of the places where TV stations were not yet operable would be set up to broadcast by that time. It was rumored that the broadcast would be announcing that the plan for world peace and restoration was about to be unveiled, that the envoys rushing around the globe had succeeded in negotiating an incredible master plan that would set the infernal planet back on its feet.

It had been announced that Saturday’s broadcast would come without advance warning, thus millions sat glued to TVs, most of which had not received a broadcast in months. They sat staring at the field of gray snow or flat blue on the TV screen before them. It would have been laughable if it weren’t for the empty, starving faces of the people who watched, longing for relief and answers; if it weren’t for the pitiful brokenness and desperation in the eyes of those

who watched and waited.

Every place of business had set up a TV in some corner of its premises for its clientele to be able to catch anything that might be announced. This was the only way to lure anyone out of their own quarters. No one wanted to be more than a couple of minutes away from the set at any time. What was to come? When was it to come? No one seemed to know for sure, but those who were together in their homes or place of business or on the now-quiet battlefields were suddenly alive, theorizing what it could be.

In Family Homes, there was of course a much greater certainty of what was about to take place. And all around the world there were many thousands of believers who had, at one time or another, received and accepted the testimony of the Family concerning the time of the End. In particular, the last few months of fervent, desperate witnessing had touched the hearts of many who now guessed that this would be *it*—the World Government of the Antichrist which the posters and literature of the Family had faithfully warned of for so long. Many other Spirit-filled Christians around the world had also done their best to prepare for what was about to take place, having understood from Bible prophecy that these indeed must surely be the Last Days.

Little did anyone know how great the strong delusion that they would soon witness was going to be—so great that it would be a struggle even for the very elect to continue to believe. The Evil One had planned for this day for millennia. Now he was ready to reveal his plan, and the world was ready to receive it.

Roy and Michelle met up with Julio in the evening and explained the miracle that had happened with Judy and Collin. He was quite inspired by this testimony of prayer and dreams in the night, and

especially happy to know that he had had a part in helping to bring about such a miracle. At this point, they didn't feel led to tell him about the great danger they were all in, as it might burden him too much and cause him to worry unnecessarily. After all, he had enough on his mind already with the important government meetings he was having to attend, and the serious implications of what his government was considering.

Julio was able to fill them in on some of the latest international developments over the last few days, which only helped to confirm everything that they had been feeling. After talking and counseling together for several hours, Julio asked Roy and Michelle to lay hands on him and pray that the Lord would give him Heavenly anointing and wisdom for the meetings he needed to attend the next day. As always, the Lord spoke. He assured them that He would put His Words in Julio's mouth, and that He would give him supernatural guidance, helping him to be as wise as a serpent, but harmless as a dove.

Julio's taxi dropped Roy and Michelle at McDonalds, and he continued on toward the government buildings where his meetings were being held. About ten minutes later Judy and Collin walked in and sat down at the table with them. In excited tones, Judy and Collin explained that the Lord had done a miracle, and they had been able to book on the same flight out as Roy, Michelle and Julio on Sunday. It had cost more than four times what the flight would have previously cost, but the Lord had confirmed that it was His will. They were also able to sell the truck—at much less than they had hoped to get, but at least it was something. Abandoning it would have been their only other option.

They hadn't met anyone named Mario or with white pants or a limp, so they felt fairly safe thus far. Neither

had they seen anything that could be termed “festivities.” Far from it—it seemed everyone was very low key, barely smiling, much less celebrating.

Will asked Wally as they stood outside the McDonalds, “Aren’t they getting a little too relaxed, considering what we know?” With that he motioned to the car cruising by slowly, Mario and Domingo straining their necks to eye the group of four through the big glass window of the restaurant.

“Well,” Wally said, “they very well may be—at least Judy and Collin, with the euphoria of everything going according to plan. We just need to keep working on them, and especially keep reminding Roy and Michelle never to let down their guard for a minute. Let’s go inside. Mario and his gang aren’t going to carry out Marduke’s orders until the festivities begin. So for now they’re safe. We’ll need some reinforcements by then.”

“Have you told headquarters already?”

“Will, *they* told *me*. Remember, it’s headquarters who sees all, knows all, where we come from—unlike this sorry excuse for a world with its clumsy communications and reconnaissance.”

With that, Will and Wally coasted through the glass and sat themselves down with those they were guarding and guiding.

The TV sets, which were riveted to the walls in the fast food restaurant, had been switched on but remained blank. Suddenly there was a tremendous sound of static and the screen went haywire for a few seconds while all eyes turned to the most conveniently visible sets. The picture came and went several times. The only thing that could be seen was an attractive woman seated at what looked like a news desk. She was not a newscaster anyone recognized, not from CNN or BBC or any of the stations they had had until

a few months ago, nor was she Mexican.

Almost a full minute passed before the picture steadied enough to remain on and the sound returned. The announcer asked, “Are we on?” Muffled answer. “Should I go ahead?” Muffled answer. She nodded, turned to the camera and smiled. “Good evening or morning or afternoon, wherever you are. This broadcast is being sent via the newly restored Iridium satellite system to every working television station on the Earth at this very moment. This is the first of many steps that will be taken toward rebuilding the infrastructure of our world society.”

From in the TV studio cheers could be heard, which were followed by ecstatic cheers from all those around them in the restaurant.

After pausing for a few moments, as if anticipating the cheers, the woman continued, “We are now going to take you to an undisclosed location where a man of indisputable genius and inspiration will make a short address to you, the citizens of the world. He has almost single-handedly masterminded the landmark international agreements that are even now working to set the world on a steady path to recovery.”

There was again some static and trouble steadying the picture, but the figure of an impressive-looking man came on and off and on and off again. He was attired in some indistinguishable sort of military uniform, and he was undeniably quite handsome and charismatic. When the picture and sound were suitably tuned, he wasted no time.

“My fellow inhabitants of this planet we call Earth, I greet you. Soon, I am going to be announcing to you matters of extreme significance, things that will affect all of our futures immeasurably, and help to turn our ever-smaller globe into the paradise of peace and haven of rest it should have always been.

“You may ask, ‘Who is this person making such grandiose claims? Should not one of our great

international leaders be speaking to us at such a time of need as this?’ You’re right, my dear friends. I am not one of your well-known, lofty leaders; I am but a humanitarian, a humble servant, bringing aid to a troubled world. And I have labored for years, working toward the solutions I will be revealing to you tomorrow, in exactly twelve hours from now.”

“Five-thirty in the morning, Mexico City time,” Roy said.

“I have not desired the acclaim of worldwide recognition. I have only desired world peace and prosperity. With fame comes many corrupting temptations which few can resist. For this reason, I have chosen to remain unknown and work behind the scenes towards the universal goals humanity has dreamed of, while those who received open recognition had to deal with and maneuver around threats, bribes, lobbies, scandal, blackmail, tempting deals and all the vortex of politics in the modern world. I feel ... or rather ... I *know* and am *convinced* that these distractions work to divert a man of purpose from the goal which he knows is best for the world—the goal of lifting this suffering planet from its morass of despondency and inability to solve its gargantuan problems.

“Working this way, quietly, without fanfare or recognition, we have been able to cement an agreement so simple yet so brilliant, that we stand assured that it will be received with joy and gratitude by humanity. I will say no more for now, but hopefully in twelve hours we will have even more TV stations online, and we urge everyone to tune into our broadcast. At this time, we will not reveal the nature of the agreement nor the location of the broadcast, but we will be so bold as to say that tomorrow will usher in a new era of peace, love, harmony and understanding among peoples. Tomorrow, you will begin to see ‘swords beaten into plowshares and

spears into pruning hooks’ and ‘peace and goodness covering the Earth as the waters cover the seas.’”

With those words, the broadcast was over.

A great shout of joy and liberation sprang from everyone in the restaurant. People began to jump up and hug strangers and dance round the tables.

The four Christian friends sat in dumbfounded amazement.

“He quoted Scripture!”

“He made it sound so good.”

“He’s so handsome; you don’t pick up at first how cruel he looks.”

“Yeah, the fierce countenance the Bible speaks of.”

“Judy, Collin,” Roy finally said, “do you realize what we just saw?”

“Yes,” they answered. “We just got our first glimpse of the Antichrist, didn’t we?”

“That’s it. This is the beginning of the End. Thank You Jesus!”

Michelle looked at Roy with some concern. “Roy, how’s it affecting you?”

She turned to Judy and Collin, “Roy has always had a battle with some fear over the End. How is it, Honey, now that it’s really here?”

“It’s great! Wow! There *is* no fear. Ever since that meeting last Tuesday, all my fears just got washed away. I just feel excitement. But, you guys, look at what’s happening all around us. What would you call this?”

Looking at the people dancing, singing, hugging, ripping up napkins and tossing them into the air like confetti, they all said at the same time, “Festivities!”

“Right,” Roy said, as Will and Wally heaved a sigh of relief. “I think we’d better get out of the hubbub and go home. I also think you guys should come stay with us in our hotel. We should stay together since it’s already begun. Two are better than one, and four are better than two in this case.”

“Okay, let’s make a move,” agreed Collin.

Mario and Domingo had been circling the block until the whole world burst forth into the first sign of rejoicing it had known in many months. Masses poured into the street, making it nearly impossible for the car to get back to the restaurant. Will and Wally were looking anxiously both ways down the street as the four friends exited the McDonalds.

Seeing the car approaching, they signaled the twenty or so angels who had materialized as revelers, and pointed to Mario and Domingo’s car.

The head “reveler” nodded and led his party down the street right in front of the car. Domingo leaned on the horn for them to get out of the way, but to no avail.

Mario thrust his head out the window to see if he could see Judy, Collin and friends, only to be met with sensuous and distracting kisses from three of the female “revelers” who pulled him out of the car and began to dance with him in the street.

Domingo jumped out of the car shouting for them to let his boss go, when three of the male “revelers” lifted him on their shoulders and carried him down the road away from the restaurant, singing as they went. The girls danced Mario in the same direction as he struggled to get away. They managed to keep this diversion up for nearly five minutes while another group of angelic revelers were parting the way for Roy and his friends through the crowds to Judy and Collin’s hotel.

Wasting no time, they gathered their things, paid their bill and hurried down the stairs to the street. There, right in front of the cheap hotel was an empty taxi with a smiling driver just waiting to take them away. They climbed in and, without a word said, the cheerful driver headed off down side and back

roads with no traffic, no people, and pulled up in front of Roy’s hotel. It was only then they all realized they had never told him where to go!

Roy, in the front seat, offered him the fee. The grinning driver shook his head.

“*Gracias,*” Roy said. “*¿Como se llama?*”

The very Mexican-looking driver turned with big friendly eyes and said to Roy in a fluent American accent, “Just call me Wally, bro.”

“Whoa, is this ever heavy!” Roy whispered, scratching his head.

“*¡De nada!*” said the driver as he sped away. Within ten seconds the empty street had filled up with cars and revelers.

“Roy, you nailed to the sidewalk?” Collin shouted.

Roy slowly turned and followed the rest of the team inside and up to the room.

They found Julio already in his room and explained that their friends had had to check out of their hotel earlier than expected, saying they could sleep with them in their room. Julio, however, insisted on paying for another room for them. No one wanted to separate, though, until bedtime, so they stayed in Roy and Michelle’s room, talking and praying together about what to do next.

Julio explained what had resulted from the meetings he had attended and shared the little information that he had been able to find out. He, too, had seen the broadcast that afternoon, and was full of questions about the plan that was about to be unveiled before the whole world.

Before deciding to try to get some sleep, they prayed once more together, fervently seeking the Lord for His guidance, and He spoke beautifully.

Collin received his first little prophecy, and Judy received two visions. Best of all, God poured out His Spirit of love and joy on them, and Judy and Collin laughed and joked and had the best time they had

had in months, maybe years. When bedtime rolled around, they were both exclaiming that they had finally found their home and family.

Finally alone, Roy and Michelle lay in each other's arms on the bed, marveling at how much their lives had changed in just one week.

"Honey," Roy said as he looked deep in Michelle's eyes, "my life has never stopped changing ever since I first got saved. But one of the biggest and best changes I've had in all those years was you, Sweet-heart. You took this old lonely geezer and lit his spark, and it was all because of 'The Goals of '98' and 'The Law of Love' series, remember?"

"No ... what do you mean?"

"I know you just reached out to me because you were trying to obey the Law of Love and to help there be less lonely people in the Family."

"Why would you think that?" Michelle asked, surprised and slightly embarrassed.

"I have my sources, darlin'. True, or not?"

"Well ..."

"True or not?"

"Well, yeah, but then you ... you just swept me off my feet, you old Casanova you."

"I've been called Don Quixote before, but never Casanova."

"No one knows you like I do."

"Wanna know me a little better, in the Biblical sense of the word?"

"Anytime, darlin'."

Mario and Domingo had finally managed to extract themselves from their escorts, and rushed back to the restaurant to find their prey gone. The hotel was just around the corner, so they began to run there, but were delayed at every turn. Crowds would not part.

Domingo, with his immense size, was used to

pushing his way through any crowd and having people just step out of his way. But this time something was strangely different. Even petite ladies and children didn't move, and in fact, couldn't be moved. Mario was eyeing him critically at his inability to make his way through the sea of people until he tried himself and found his strength must be somehow sapped as well.

It took them half an hour to get to the hotel, only to find their prey had rushed in with two friends, paid their bill and grabbed a taxi and departed, no one knew where to.

Domingo asked, "What are we going to tell Marduke?"

"Nothing!" Mario snapped. "We are going to tell Marduke nothing! We are going to find them. What is that other guy's name?"

"Roy, I think."

"Roy ... Roy what?"

"I don't know."

"What good is that going to do?"

"I don't know."

"Don't you know anything?"

"I don't know."

"Shut up. I need to think." They sat down on the shabby sofa in the tiny lobby of the hotel while Mario thought about what to do. "Okay, we'll get Carlos to cover the hotels. Their friends were staying in a five-star hotel, Harry told Marduke. That narrows it down. Maybe Judy and Collin checked into the same hotel. Carlos can ask for Collin Cummings and Judy Westerton, and hang around the restaurants and bars all night if it takes that. You and I will go to the airport and check out all passengers headed for Rio. They won't slip through our fingers again, I tell you that for sure."

"Good idea."

ZERO HOUR: THE COVENANT AND THE BEAST

It was three in the morning when Marduke's phone rang. She hadn't slept, yet she was barely conscious, having drunk one Scotch after another in her anxiety over the outcome of the Mexico City operation. She wondered why she had heard nothing from Mario and his team. Maybe this was him now.

"Hello?" she slurred expectantly.

"Mahduke, dahling," her overseer, Archibald, cooed. "I and a few others are wondering just how things are progressing with the Judy project."

"Oh, very well—very well, I assure you. My team is well aware of their whereabouts and is closing in on them. In fact, I thought when you called it would be them giving me the final bit of good news."

"Oh, then I'd best keep this short if you are expecting such an important call, dearie. I just wanted to make sure you were awake. I knew you wouldn't want to miss the broadcast."

"Oh, of course not. I wouldn't miss that."

"The way things are going, dahling, that might be as close as you ever get to our divine Chairman."

She gulped and cleared her throat, struggling against the cold fear that gripped her.

"I need to tell you that by the time the festivities that will undoubtedly follow the announcement have

died down, if our prey are still functional, we might say, there will be no more chance to unseat them, at least for a while.”

“But why?”

“Because word has gone out that, following the announcement, there will be a time of reconciliation, a time when it seems that all factions, all religions are accepted, a time of worldwide and general amnesty. It would be inappropriate for anything of this sort to happen that could be traced back to us. So time’s a-wasting as they say, my sweet Mahduke. You only have today.”

“Uh ... Archie ... you really don’t need to worry....”

“Oh, did I make you think *I* was worried? Oh no, silly me. I’m not making myself clear! No, no, not at all! It’s *you* who have to worry—not me.” And he burst into raucous laughter. When he calmed down, he said quietly, “I do hope you still have your boutiques.”

“Yes, I do. Why?”

“Well, if you botch this one, you *will* need some means of livelihood, won’t you? Maybe you can sell a few books to keep yourself going,” he said as he abruptly hung up the phone.

It was 5:25 in Mexico City, and the five were gathered in Julio’s suite to witness what they now knew was the beginning of the last seven years of man’s rule of the Earth. Coffee, buns, butter and jam had been brought up, and prayer was being offered up before broadcast time.

Then it began. They all could see that television was making a comeback today in all its former splendor. Every high-tech effect was once more evident. The camerawork was perfect. The computer graphics were perhaps even better than they had been before the blackouts. There was a sweeping view of what looked like Jerusalem to begin with, until the camera focused on a draped balcony, beneath which,

in the square below, stood a large crowd of people, both Jews and Arabs, with representatives from every other part of the world as well. Music swelled from a grand orchestra to one side.

Finally the same stunning TV anchorwoman they had seen yesterday introduced the Chairman by name, and said a few words about his origin and background—all of which, Roy and Michelle noted and commented on, fulfilled what the Bible had to say about the “Man of Sin.”

The woman went on to explain that he had inspired a small group of dedicated visionaries with his ideas, who were then able to convince some global-minded people of wealth and means to back him while being willing to remain behind the scenes, none of them seeking any glory but the satisfaction of knowing that their actions were for the good and salvation of all humankind.

This inner core had continued to grow and increase in stature and power until at last their dream had been achieved when all the formerly nationalistic leaders had realized that the solution to the mammoth problems the Earth faced had to be a global one. The solution had to be a total uniting of all nations under one benevolent, yet empowered, body concerned for the welfare of all, from the greatest to the least. When nothing else had worked, they had finally been willing to commit their power and resources to furthering the vision of the Great Chairman.

In closing, she explained to the audience that once they had heard the broadcast that was being aired simultaneously in every major language on Earth, they would then be in a position to choose for themselves if his idea was not the best—in fact, the *only*—way to save the planet.

“But enough said *about* him. Let us hear *from* him,” she said proudly.

He then appeared, tall and stalwart, ruggedly

handsome, with the carriage of a king and lofty ruler, yet with the simplicity of a man of the people. His words were smooth; they were forceful; they were persuasive. No one could remember hearing such a righteous, such an apparently sincere and charismatic speaker on the world stage in many a year. His very presence filled a need for greatness, after decades of world leaders who were sex- and money-crazed, weak and indecisive, hypocritical and vacillating, vindictive and small-minded. The masses were sick and tired of leaders who could not rise above the level of the common man. They wanted someone strong, someone with conviction, dedication, principles that he was loath to compromise.

After but a few short words, the masses were convinced this was their man. It was as if that Man of Whom was said, “Never a man spoke like this man,” had returned.

As the camera scanned the crowds, highlighting different groups of listeners, it was clear that the orthodox Jews in the crowd were at first pleased that the Chairman was of Jewish origin. Then, as he continued to speak, you could see rapturous looks on their faces as he spoke of Jerusalem and of the rebuilding of the Temple. It was easy to read on their lips the words that were being spoken—“Messiah.”

Yet the Arabs seemed to sense also that here was a man they could talk to, who would listen, who understood their plight. He had worded his statements in such a simple and clear, but well-chosen way that Jews, Arabs, and even Christians could see his perception was one of truth and justice, and that it just might work.

No issue was left uncovered—war, poverty, refugees, disputed territories, distribution of the wealth, religion, disease, social welfare, human rights—every problem was touched on. As he spoke, everyone could easily recognize that his proposed

solution was the only way to solve each of these problems; his proposal was so simple, yet so obviously brilliant.

Roy gave a running commentary throughout, mostly for Collin’s sake, as the words were so convincing, so deceiving.

Collin said, “If Judy and you guys hadn’t come into my life, I’d have been out dancing in the streets too. God help the world. They think their savior has come!”

Julio added, “I thank God for you, too—my Family! I am grateful that He chose to bless me by allowing me the opportunity to learn His Words and to be used as one of His chosen servants, however He wishes to use me in these dangerous days ahead.”

The Chairman’s simplicity echoed his words of yesterday, that he was but a servant. You had to know the Word—especially Endtime prophecy—and look deep into his spirit to recognize the diabolical workings of the Evil One trying to convince the world to follow his way, in glorification of man and his own ability to solve his problems.

The speech was not long, but those who watched felt the questions they had had were answered, the fears they had had were allayed.

There was a musical interlude while dignitary after dignitary came out on the balcony to shake the Chairman’s hand and sign the Covenant on the white-clothed table before them. Each one took the commemorative gold pen with which he signed, and held it aloft to wild cheers and shouts, before placing it in his pocket as a souvenir for his part in the so-called greatest event in history.

As the last dignitary exited, the Chairman stepped forward once more to say in closing, “You, my fellow citizens of the New World Order, are your *own* hope, your own *destiny*, your own *saviors*. You have always had within you the potential of your own and world

salvation. I have only released it by giving you hope. This is the dawn of a new day for humankind. Go forth in courage. Go forth in friendship. Let us go forth in love for all men and greet and create the new world on this new day.”

He bowed and stepped back as the orchestra began to play ‘Thus Spake Zarathustra,’ Richard Strauss’ dark, yet triumphant man-glorifying hymn and tribute to Nietzsche’s book of the same title. The crowd below burst into wild and frenzied cheers mingled with hugs and dancing. The camera crew began to interview person after person. People from all religions and backgrounds were extolling the wisdom and the brilliance of the man they had just heard.

Michelle spoke up. “You know, I think we had better make our move to the airport before the dancing in the streets starts again. It may be way too early, but I’d rather be there early than too late, if you know what I mean.”

“Very wise, Michelle,” Julio said. “Maybe we can get to the airport, check in, and in the departure lounge we can go over all that we have heard and what it means for our future.”

“Good!” Roy said as they set to work to get on their way.

Meanwhile, in the lobby below, dressed in a pale blue shirt and crisply ironed white slacks, Carlos was keeping careful watch on the elevators. Once it had been confirmed that Collin and Judy were in the hotel, he had settled in to wait for them and had just finished watching the Chairman’s speech on the large screen which had been setup in the lobby.

Lucretia’s eyes flashed as she instructed the team that had been assigned to her to ensure the Family group was able to get to the airport and on their way to Rio in spite of three would-be assassins watching for them.

Truly, Will thought, *she’s in her element. She’s a dyed-in-the-wool warrior, every inch of her.* She strode back and forth in the air above the city between the airport and the hotel, her scantily-clad, supple and well-toned body a downright distraction for Will. He admired her spirit, but her body was quite awesome as well! *Tune in, Will*, he said to himself. *These instructions are life and death for your friends!*

“It is not the Master’s will that these three messengers of Satan should die,” she said. “Therefore our job is to delay, to hinder, to distract, to foil, but not to cause death. These are cheap gangsters, not dedicated Satanists, so their spiritual power is very puny, and your mission should not be a very difficult one. Satan himself is interested in their mission succeeding, so his demons will definitely be present in force, but these gangsters are not going to be very in tune with them. Have fun; guard your man. And get our friends on the plane. May Jesus be your strength!”

“And yours!” they saluted.

Lucretia turned to Will. “Wally is with the team as they pack their last things. We will join him now. These three”—she pointed to the three angels standing nearby—“will keep an eye on Carlos.” And she flew off toward the hotel. Will and the others followed close behind.

Julio had called for their bill to be prepared, and then had gone down alone to settle the account and arrange for a vehicle to take them to the airport. But once there, he was told that it would take a little while as they were having problems with the computer. He had called up and asked the four to come on down as soon as the porter arrived to get their luggage. He nervously noticed that the wild dancing and celebrating had already begun in the street outside and that, in keeping with the holiday mood, the

usually quiet, unobtrusive music played over the hotel's P.A. system had become more upbeat.

Hurry! Hurry! he thought.

Carlos, having never seen Julio before, hadn't noticed his presence. He glanced at his watch. Mario had contacted him from the airport to let him know that the next flight to Rio was in the early afternoon, so it would most likely be a while before they came down from their room to leave the hotel. He had drunk five or more cups of coffee during the night and then had delayed his bathroom trip, not wanting to miss one moment of the astounding broadcast from Jerusalem. But now he could scarcely hold it any longer.

Goosey demons were croaking to Carlos to wait, to hold it, while the three angels urged him to go, that now would be a good time to relieve himself before they were likely to come down. Finally, nature—spurred on by the supernatural—won out, and he decided he could afford to go now. As he disappeared into the men's room, the elevator door opened and Roy and his entourage appeared.

"Oh, thank the Lord you're here," Julio said. "Their billing computer keeps hanging, and things are already beginning to liven up in the street." Little did he know that there were other more urgent reasons to be on their way quickly.

The angels had managed to blind Carlos' eyes, and he had chosen a stall with no toilet paper. When he noticed, it was too late to change. He coughed discreetly, trying to get the attention of anyone nearby, but there didn't seem to be anyone. "Excuse me," he whispered, to no avail.

There was one man washing his hands who heard but ignored him.

The minutes drug on as the night clerk tried to get the bill straightened out. Collin, Roy and the others were keeping their eyes out for anyone matching the descriptions Michelle had gotten in prophecy of those they should look out for. It was now almost seven, and the street party was in full swing. When, Lord, would they check them out? The girls were praying desperately for things to start moving quicker.

Will, who had been pretty good with computers while he was alive on Earth, peered into the workings of the slow-moving computer, and with a few flicks of his fingers, bypassed a few steps in answer to their prayers. To the surprise of the clerk calling up the info, the now-discounted bill and all details popped up immediately.

Lucretia looked approvingly at Will and nodded her head in admiration.

With the bill paid, the group headed toward the door, and then were being loaded into the vehicle as Carlos, having had to creep over to another stall for paper, emerged from the toilet. As an afterthought, he went to the desk to ask if Judy Westerton was still in her room. "No, sir," was the reply. "They just checked out. In fact, they're just loading into the limo there." The unsuspecting clerk pointed to the white limousine Judy and Collin were climbing into. Carlos bolted for the door, his hand on the pistol in his jacket's outer pocket.

Collin saw him running toward them with his hand in his pocket, and pushed Judy in, climbed in himself, slammed the door, and shouted excitedly, "White pants at three o'clock! Let's move it, baby!"

Roy shouted to the driver, "*¡Vamos rapido!*"

The driver didn't know Lucretia was telling him to step on the gas as well; he just knew for some reason he leaned hard on the accelerator and screeched away,

leaving two long, smoking rubber patches just as Carlos emerged from the hotel. The porter at the door scratched his head at this unusual display of driving from one of their dignified chauffeurs, but was jolted back to reality when Carlos grabbed him and demanded he get him a taxi immediately.

By the time he had one, the limousine was long gone, so there was no use trying to follow him in hot pursuit. Well, Mario might need some help at the airport, so Carlos told the driver to take him there, only to give up after two hours of stand-still traffic.

Meanwhile, the three angels hindering him in the cab grinned and congratulated each other, while praising the Lord for a job well done.

At the airport, Mario had paid old Enrique, the porter, to change clothes with him, and now he was waiting where the taxis would bring in departing passengers. Domingo was inside, near the departure lounge for the next flight to Rio. They had also bribed the clerk on duty in the airline office to let them look over the manifest and had confirmed that their targets were indeed scheduled to fly on this plane.

In the limousine, Julio was full of questions about their rather unorthodox departure and what “white pants at three o’ clock” meant. As they crept along through the traffic and the masses, two of the team kept a lookout for anything suspicious while the others explained the whole situation to Julio, who took it fairly well and in stride.

By the time they finished telling him all, he heaved a sigh and said, “I have a feeling this is only the beginning of such excitement. Am I right?”

“You got it, Julio,” Roy said. “One thing I was thinking, though, was that our escape just now from the man in white pants who was obviously after us was a miracle of God’s grace, but we were more

concerned with hurrying in the flesh than we were with keeping our antennae pointed upward, you know what I mean?”

“It’s true,” Michelle said. “Let’s just all get quiet right now and see if there are any further instructions for us. We still have a man named Mario and the man with the limp to contend with, unless they’re the same person or that was Mario, but he sure didn’t limp. But while we pray, let’s *watch* and pray. We’re barely crawling through this sea of people and cars, and it would be very easy for someone on a motorcycle to catch up with us.” All agreed and tuned in to the Heavenly signals, much to Lucretia and Will’s delight.

The messages they received concurred one with the other. They were in the Lord’s protective force field; nothing would happen, but they must walk circumspectly. When they met their adversaries—when, not if—they would need to instantly and without hesitation do the thing their helpers told them to do, for their lives would depend on it.

Soon the sea of people seemed to part miraculously and it wasn’t long before the limo pulled into the unloading zone for departing passengers. A porter was immediately there and loaded their piles of luggage onto his trolley, with a big smile. He looked a little refined and slick to be a porter, but times were hard all over. He looked like he might have once been a stockbroker who had lost everything and thereby fallen to these depths. However, Roy felt an urge in the spirit to keep a close eye on “Enrique,” the name he read on the man’s tag.

As they headed for the check-in counter, Collin walked beside Enrique and began to make small talk.

“Do you speak English?”

“*Un poquito, Señor.* A little.”

“I’m Collin. Your *nombre* is?”

“I am Mario ...” A look of surprise flashed across his face before he said, “I mean, Enrique.” He could

see it was too late. Somehow these people were onto him. All eyes turned to him as they stopped in their tracks. It was now or never. He reached into his coat for the pistol. Collin threw his strong arms around Mario and fell to the floor on top of him, pinning his arms in place so he couldn't pull out his gun.

"Police! Get the police!" Collin called. "Someone get them. The rest of you go on to the check-in counter."

Mario kicked and tried to bite, but Collin, who was a former high school football player and had managed to stay somewhat in shape, was able to hold him down until the police and security guards rushed over.

"He's got a gun! He was trying to pull it on us when my friend held him down!" Julio shouted in Spanish. The police and security guards pulled theirs and motioned Collin to let him go and stand up. By this time the head porter had joined them to see what had happened with one of his men.

The head porter told the police, "This is not Enrique. This is someone else."

Mario stood up, put his hands on his head and dejectedly watched as the gun was pulled from his jacket. He was handcuffed and taken away while the police explained to Collin and Julio that they would need to answer some questions at the police office in the airport. They had time, they thought thankfully.

An hour later Domingo was eating a candy bar at the kiosk near the departure gate, with Wally standing less than an arm's length away. Wally had just received the whole story of Mario's arrest via telepathy from Lucretia, and knew it would not be very long till the team would be headed this way.

He hatched a plan as he tuned into what the security attendants with the metal detectors at the entrance to the departure lounge were saying. One of them, Alejandro by name, was due to go on break,

but needed to wait for Bene to return from his.

Wally sent one angel to delay Bene while another stayed with Alejandro till the signal would be given to put the plan into motion.

Domingo saw them now—the team of five, his target—coming toward him. Two shots and his assignment would be taken care of. Judy first: she was the most important to Marduke; then Collin, if all went well. He shoved his hand deep into his right pocket and felt the icy assurance of his gun.

With a sigh, he put his hulking frame into motion and started limping toward them. Closer they came; closer he came. It seemed like an eternity as the space between them narrowed. Then their eyes met.

Domingo looked away from their gaze as he continued to limp toward them, but he could see from the corner of his eye that there was some consternation in the group. How could they suspect anything? They had never seen him before. But they knew. Somehow they knew. He had to do it *now*!

He began to pull his pistol up when suddenly there was the sound of the screaming beep of an overly excited hand-held metal detector. Alejandro, passing just in front of Domingo, looked surprised at the metal detector he still had in his hand, surprised that he had forgotten to leave it at his station, and then even more surprised at this huge man pulling something bulky from his pocket.

With sudden realization Alejandro shouted, "*¡Pistola! ¡Pistola!*" and pushed Domingo down. The pistol came out, waving wildly in the air, firing involuntarily and harmlessly. One kick from Alejandro and the pistol went flying across the floor. Screams, panic and mayhem followed. Domingo clambered to his feet and ran as fast as his crippled leg could carry him, his face filled with fear at this unexpected turn of events.

Alejandro, closely followed by Bene, tackled him and wrestled him to the floor. Domingo did not resist now. He knew well enough that right now the only charges he could be given would be carrying a concealed weapon, as no one had been killed or hurt. Better to quit before he had done something he'd have to pay for with the rest of his life. Little did he know that once released, he had his former employers to contend with.

Julio looked over to his four traveling companions and said, "You know, I am never going to forget this trip!"

"I bet you won't," Roy said. And neither will any of us. Man oh man, are the angels watching over us or what?"

"I think they really are! *Dios está con nosotros, No?*"

"*Sí, Julio,*" Michelle said, wrapping her arm around his waist. "*Seguro que sí.*"

As the plane flew far above the clouds, each of the Lord's children quietly praised Him for delivering them from the mouth of the lions, for guiding them every step of the way, and for doing nothing without revealing it first to His servants the prophets. They each took stock of their lives—not thinking of the past, but of the future, the final seven-year period of history that was evidently beginning today. They had seen that the weapons they were equipped with were more than a match for the Enemy and his puny weapons. They had nothing to fear as long as they stayed in touch with Jesus. They each knew they had fought and won an important battle against the Wicked One and, as ancient and mighty warriors of yore, they each found themselves looking forward to the campaigns that lay ahead.

Will, Wally and Lucretia watched as the plane disappeared in the afternoon sky toward the south.

Wally turned to Will and said, "You did very well,

Will, my willing pupil. Well done, my friend."

"Oh, thank the Lord. It wasn't me," Will said. "It was just Jesus and you, the great team I had to work with. Boy, I wish I had known a long time ago how great it is on the Lord's side!"

"And it only gets better," Lucretia said as she slipped her hand into Will's. She had touched Will before, but this time the sexiest thoughts began to race through his mind. He turned in surprise to look into Lucretia's expectant eyes. He had seen some "come hither" looks in his time, but this ... this ... was the "come hither" of all "come hithers."

"I'll be seeing you, Will," Wally said with a wink, as he sped away into space.

"Yeah," Will half-gasped-half-whispered, unable to pull his eyes away from the gaze that was caressing, undressing and arousing him. He blinked and suddenly found himself in a bedroom full of tapestries of exquisite hue and intoxicating perfume.

Lucretia loosed the few clothes she had on as the lights dimmed, and whispered to Will, "Jesus wants you to know how much He loves you, and how thankful He is that you gave your life to Him. He asked me to tell you that later, He will thank you personally for the wonderful job you did in helping His children. But right now, let's thank Him together for the wonderful love which He's given us and the Heavenly life that we have, thanks to Him and His love. Let's celebrate this wonderful victory, Will. We can do whatever you want, and for as long as you want."

"Oh, I want, I want," he whispered intensely as his hands roamed her lovely body and his lips touched hers.

There were few words shared as the five settled into their seats for the flight to Rio. Each one sat contemplating all that had happened during the last few days and all that was sure to happen in the days

to come. Roy got out his micro recorder and quietly dictated the rest of the message that he had started to receive in the limo on the way to the airport.

“Now begins the hour of your destiny, the hour I’ve been preparing you for. As you face the foe with sword in hand, the armies of the Wicked One will be turned back.

“Do not fear or marvel as you see nation after nation give its power to the Beast. For they will take his yoke upon them, and for a time, it will seem that world conditions are improving. Yet all will ultimately come crashing down around him, and I shall break his yoke from off their necks.

“Be not dismayed, for the Word you have planted in the hearts of many shall germinate and take root. The greatest harvest is yet to come. Ground those you are ministering to in My Word and My ways, and continue to win others as I lead you to them. Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

“You have prepared diligently for the days that lie ahead. Satan has done much to try to stop you, but as you have seen during these last days, he is no match for Me or My servants. You have experienced and known My wonder-working power as never before.

“I tell you, of a truth, these wonders are but a taste of the marvelous glories that are to come. For you have believed in these things by faith and have held on through many trials, tests, and heartbreaks. But you shall see the reward of those who walk by faith. Judge no more by the seeing of the eyes or the hearing of the ears. Walk by faith; walk in the spirit; heed My whispers and My voice. I shall be with you at all times, guiding, loving, encouraging and strengthening you. The days of preparation are over; the days of battle are come.

“Let it be known to all My children that you have seen the glory and power of God; forget it not. Remind

yourselves continually of all that I have kept you through, and run the race with patience that is set before you. Fear none of those things which are to come, but be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.”

CONCLUSION – THE END ... FOR NOW

As we come to the conclusion of this part of our story, you may ask what has become of our main characters—the heroes and heroines, villains and villainesses.

What became of John? He found his way, with the help of his sometimes visible, sometimes invisible traveling companion, Mantor, to a Family outpost in New Jersey, where he is praying for the opportunity to cross the ocean to join his family in Africa. While waiting for the doors to open, he's using the time to study the Word and learn the many lessons he has missed out on. Now he knows that time is of the essence, and that he's cramming for an exam, so he's wisely forgoing all vain activities in order to make sure that he catches up.

Judy and Collin are receiving training in Rio. Though the adjustment to Family life is difficult for them, they're making the grade and growing.

Marduke, stripped of all her formerly major responsibilities, is reduced to running her bookstores. The hour of her judgment has not yet come, but come it shall. Come it shall.

All over the world the Family, with its unique ability to muster its members quickly and effectively in wholehearted labor for the poor and destitute, are the perfect ones to help rebuild after the chaos. Their

talents are being called upon on every continent, and with this mission and recognition of their contribution comes a period of prosperity. There is so-called freedom of religion, and witnessing the milk of the Word is allowed, though not encouraged. But witnessing the meatier matters must be reserved for clandestine witnessing to those who can be trusted. The body of believers continues to grow quietly and secretly.

Lenny and Frizzy in Asia, Don and Gypsy in Africa, Roy and Michelle in South America—all continue to grow in wisdom, stature and knowledge of the Lord along with their children. They rejoice to see the fulfillment of the many promises that had been given for their young people, as they take their place in God’s Endtime army, lifting high the banner of truth. These next three-and-a-half years are the tense and final arming and accoutering¹ of the army of the Lord for the war of the worlds—the Great Tribulation to follow!

The last seven years have begun, and things will never be the same again. For those who know the truth, every day is another confirmation of the warnings in the Word against the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition. For those who sit in darkness, it seems that man has finally picked himself up from the morass, dusted himself off and achieved a righteous and fair government.

After the initial arrests and executions of those who committed unthinkable crimes during the months of mayhem, things have now calmed and a sense of peace is restored. Financial growth has begun and areas of the world that have never known wealth are beginning to prosper. A new and fierce loyalty and pride of accomplishment is born, bringing with it a hardening of many hearts.

¹accoutering: outfitting or equipping for battle

The passage that comes to mind is that one in Revelation, “Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give to every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation 22:10-12).

Many worship the Beast even in these days before it becomes compulsory to do so. His and his false prophets’ great signs and wonders are being performed daily, and only those equipped with the knowledge of the truth can resist the temptation to believe and follow the greatest lie the world has ever been told. Only those who are sensitive to God’s Spirit realize the spiritual darkness that has fallen over the Earth.

Though all seems to be as it should, however, an inexplicable emptiness and coldness permeates this supposedly perfect welfare state. The official voice of the media contends that whatever problems that remain to be solved are either directly or indirectly the fault of the last few pockets of resistance—those religious fanatics who naively refuse to give up their independence and a few previously-held inalienable rights. If they could only be convinced to join with the rest of the world and forfeit certain small freedoms for the good of the majority, a perfect society could be achieved; total peace, justice and harmony would prevail upon the Earth.

As the weeks and months wear on, and the promises of the “perfect” society ring more and more hollow, the journalistic rhetoric against those who dissent and disagree becomes more strident, more intense. The general amnesty begins to wear thin, and repression rears its ugly head once again—this time with no voice raised against it in the media. The vast majority have accepted the Beast’s cause.

Imagine the shock when the “peace” of this brave new world is shattered with the news that there are rumblings of war from the Middle East once again. Who could be dissatisfied with the reign of the Chairman? Who would dare defy his masterful plan? Who would be so arrogant as to challenge the world government and the unquestionable authority of its police force? *That*, however, is a story that is yet to be told.

For now, brave children of David, arm yourselves, for the day of your destiny has come. Your path is right; your cause is just; your reward is sure, and no sacrifice can ever be too much. Rise up and fight with courage and faith until that seventh trumpet sounds and the mystery of God is finished, the completion of His Kingdom in you and all of His faithful children throughout the ages! Count yourselves blessed above all generations, that you were chosen to live in these days, God’s warriors at the edge of time!

ENDNOTES

i– A message from Jesus on the drugs and music of the hippie scene, and today.

(Jesus speaking:) I, the Lord, am the same yesterday, today and forever. Just as from the beginning of My Story, the Bible, until today, there are countless examples of My using *unorthodox, even shocking, even seemingly immoral* methods to further My work and plan, so do I still. Many of your parents were brought to Me through these methods, just as the young man, Lenny, in this story.

Especially in the troubled days of the hippie movement, I *had* to use the tools at hand. Those in the churches, who were nominally My children and servants, had rejected the hippies and spurned them. The System of America and the West, while professing Christianity, but making My laws and love of none effect by their traditions, could not help them with anything but the System’s transparent answers, which the kids could see right through.

The only ones who were going out of their way to speak a language the youth could understand were the rock groups, some of them sincerely and some of them insincerely. Nevertheless, either way, a tiny part of My message was being preached through the music of the day. As your Grandpa so eloquently explained in “Who Are the Rebels?” the parents knew My Word, knew My will, but did not give it to their children. So in the absence of spiritual answers, the youth turned to drugs and their counterculture lifestyle and music.

So, because of My yearning love, My searching love, I went

down as your Father David and his children did, into the drug dens and the dives, to rescue these poor, searching youth, not for them to *remain* on drugs, but to pull them *out*, not for them to keep listening to the music that asked some of the right questions but gave none of the right answers, but to live in newness of life in My Kingdom.

Lenny knew full well that the drugs were a dead-end street. Due to the limited time and space to tell the story and for interest sake not all could be told, but he knew that his life would be short if he continued the drugs indefinitely. He knew, and was searching for answers and a way out, and I used the spiritual experiences he was indulging in to reach him and many like him. Does this make the drugs good? No, My children, they were *death*. They were only useful because there was no other way. Like the hypocrites of *My* day, the hippies' elders had shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against them, the door to the church became the door to Hell, and lack of love, and intolerance and prejudice and bigotry, so I had to use the backdoor of the culture the youth had embraced.

So does this mean I could use this backdoor with *you*, that these things are not so bad? No, I tell you, children of David, your parents have lavished My saving Word upon you from childhood, have taught you My ways, have listened to your heartcries, do truly love and understand you and have laid down their lives for you. And most of all, you have the Word in enormous abundance at your fingertips; you have spiritual experience unprecedented throughout history at your disposal; you have thrills and ecstasies awaiting you, if you will but reach out and receive and believe.

Do not think you can return to these weak and beggarly elements and that I would use them as I did in Lenny's case. For you know better; you *have* better; you have been taught better things and I have better hopes for you. You will be treading on the Enemy's territory, taking a trip into the spirit world without My police protection, encountering spiritual beings without My name and My permission, and this is a frightful thing to do. Therefore beware, for the times they are a changin' and have changed, and the Devil is much more on the rampage in the world of drugs than he was in the days described in [the

early part of] this story.

During those days, his leash was much shorter, and I held him back while I gathered My children out of the hippie counterculture. He roared and tried to protest My "robbery" of what he hoped to make his kingdom, and he hated most of all how I could use his music, his drugs, his lies to the youth to turn them to the truth. It infuriated him and delighted *Me* and all those in My Kingdom who beheld it. But now that the Words of David have circled the globe and been printed in abundance for you and the world, you are without excuse.

The times have changed and I will not take it lightly if My children choose to dabble or dive into the world of drugs. I will still be there with you, but I will likely allow the Enemy's fire to singe you and scorch you, or even *worse*. Therefore beware, and thank *Me* for My mercy on [those such as] Lenny, and for his yieldedness to turn to *Me* and away from the beggarly elements once he had received the truth. (*End of message from Jesus.*)

ii– North Texas State University

A university situated in Denton, Texas, a small college town 37 miles northwest of Dallas. It was dubbed "North Texas State University" in 1961, though this name was changed to its current "University of North Texas" in 1988.

iii– Students for a Democratic Society

A student organization in the US during the '60s which became known for promoting New Left principles of participatory democracy in which all citizens would decide the major economic, political, and social questions. Some SDS members later formed splinter groups, including the Weathermen, who were dedicated to overthrowing the government. While never a major factor in American political life, the SDS played a significant role in the '60s student movement and the anti-Vietnam war protests. Its emphasis on grassroots democratic activism strongly influenced the development of other social change movements, such as the environmental and women's movements in the '70s.

iv– The Black Panthers

The Black Panthers Party was a militant Black American political organization advocating that a radical restructuring of society was needed in order to establish political, social and economic equality for all. The original Black Panther members were greatly influenced by the teachings of Black Muslim leader Malcolm X.

v– Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm (1844-1900)

German philosopher who reasoned that Christianity's emphasis on the afterlife makes its believers less able to cope with life on Earth. His written works include *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883-1892). Nietzsche was born on October 15, 1844, in Röcken, Prussia. His father, a Lutheran minister, died when Nietzsche was five, and Nietzsche was raised by his mother in a home that included his grandmother, two aunts, and a sister. He studied classical philology at the universities of Bonn and Leipzig and was appointed professor of classical philology at the University of Basel at the age of 24. Ill health (he was plagued throughout his life by poor eyesight and migraine headaches) forced his retirement in 1879. Ten years later he suffered a mental breakdown from which he never recovered. He died in Weimar on August 25, 1900. In addition to the influence of Greek culture, particularly the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, Nietzsche was influenced by the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, by the theory of evolution, and by his friendship with the German composer Richard Wagner.

vi– overmen and supermen

According to Nietzsche, the masses—whom he termed the herd or mob—conform to tradition, whereas his overman or superman is independent, and highly individualistic. The overman concentrates on the physical world, rather than on the rewards of the next world promised by faith in God. The overman is a creator of a “master morality” that reflects the independence of one who is liberated from all values, except those that he chooses to accept.

vii– Plato (427?-347? B.C.)

Greek philosopher. A follower of Socrates, he founded the Academy (386), where he taught and wrote for much of the rest of his life. Plato presented his ideas in the form of dramatic dialogues, as in *The Republic*.

viii– Kierkegaard, Soren Aaby (1813-1855)

Danish religious philosopher. A precursor of modern existentialism, the theory that the individual exists in an indifferent universe, and regards human existence as unexplainable, stressing individual decision in the search for religious truth, thereby contradicting Protestant teachings.

ix– Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1770-1831)

German philosopher who proposed that truth is reached by a continuing dialectic, the process of arriving at the truth by stating a thesis, developing a contradictory antithesis, and then putting them together and resolving them.

x– Kant, Immanuel (1724-1804)

German philosopher.

xi– Roosevelt and the New Deal

Roosevelt, Franklin Delano (1882-1945), 32nd president of the United States (1933-1945). Roosevelt served longer than any other president. He held office during two of the greatest crises ever faced by the United States: the Great Depression of the 1930s, followed by World War II. His domestic program, known as the New Deal, introduced reforms within the free enterprise system and prepared the way for what is often called the welfare state. His leadership of the Democratic Party transformed it into a political vehicle for liberalism.

xii– witchcraft stars

The six-pointed star, or hexagram. Is used to “hex” or to cast black magic or to put a spell on somebody, to conjure up demons. Sometimes called by the name of “Solomon’s Seal” the symbol is said to possess mystical powers. (A variation of this six-pointed star, formed of two interlaced triangles, is

called the Magen David, or Star of David, and is the symbol of Judaism.) The pentagram, a five-pointed star in a circle is also a witchcraft symbol. The pinnacle with one point up symbolizes witchcraft; two points up means demon-worship or Satanism. A two-points up five-pointed star symbolizes the goat head, which Satanists believe is representative of the Devil, and they use this goat head and worship it like they are worshipping the Devil.