

CHOICE



William C. Weidler

FOREWARD

I was married to William C. Weidler “Bill” for 37 years, until he went to be with our Lord. We had six wonderful children that we taught to love Jesus.

Bill wrote this book in 1984, during a very difficult time in our life while he was out of work for over a year. He received repeated rejection letters and stayed focused by drawing closer to God.

This story Bill gives us is a gift of himself, who he is and who he wanted to be. Strong in character and spiritually devoted to God. In this story he was able to express his love of God and family. It is clear to me that Bill is detailed in portions of this book that are very important to him.

This book is a reminder to those of us that knew him of his love for Jesus, his family, and of course his sense of humor. To those of you that never got to meet him, after reading this book you will get a glimpse of the type of man William C. Weidler was. There are parts of this book that feel like he is speaking directly to you.

I am grateful to him for leaving us this gift. I hope this book is as much of a blessing to you that it is to me.

Love,
Mary Jean Weidler

CONTENTS

Chapter One.....	1	Chapter Seventeen.....	127
Chapter Two	9	Chapter Eighteen	131
Chapter Three.....	15	Chapter Nineteen	135
Chapter Four	19		
Chapter Five	33		
Chapter Six	41		
Chapter Seven	45		
Chapter Eight	57		
Chapter Nine.....	63		
Chapter Ten	71		
Chapter Eleven	79		
Chapter Twelve.....	91		
Chapter Thirteen	95		
Chapter Fourteen.....	103		
Chapter Fifteen.....	109		
Chapter Sixteen.....	117		



CHAPTER ONE

“President Robert (Rob) Robinson has just completed his first 100 days in office at the White House!” So began the commentator of the nightly network news. Tom Weston sat back comfortably in the only chair in his sparsely furnished apartment. He watched intently as the newscaster recapped the ironic events leading to President Robinson’s first few months of office.

Weston was reminded that this was the first election under the new Election Reform Act. The Act was designed to reduce the tremendous amount of money spent on election campaigns. By providing each candidate with free national television coverage for one hour each week in the three months preceding the election, it was believed that all other major campaign expenses would be eliminated. The Election Reform Act was also the beginning of the six-year, one-term office, which was designed to remove any election advantages that might be held by an incumbent. Robinson had been chosen, by political veteran, Jeff Garland, to be his running mate as Vice President. The two of them had waged a successful campaign, based primarily on the strength of their commitment to solving

the national debt problem. By the time of the election, the public was so caught up in the issue of reducing the national debt, that it became the focus of all the candidates.

Only the Garland-Robinson plan seemed to be the most practical. Its only flaw was that it seemed almost too simple. The plan consisted of just two parts. Part One stated that each year's national budget was not to exceed the revenues collected in the previous year. And Part Two stated that a flat 10 percent of the money collected would be used to pay off the present national debt, until that debt was eliminated. This meant the repayment portion would come equally from every federal department and agency, at the 10-percent rate, including national defense.

The public apparently believed this plan was the most effective and equitable, for the election resulted in an overwhelming victory for Garland and Robinson. The unexpected event that shocked the country, however, was the sudden heart attack of Jeff Garland two days before his being sworn into office.

In recapping the first 100 days, the commentator noted that the Deficit Reduction bill was the only piece of legislation that President Robinson was able to pass through Congress. It was believed that the only reason Congress passed this piece of legislation was because of the pressure created by the public voting mandate. Every other bill submitted by President Robinson had met overwhelming defeat at the hands of Congress. The newscaster implied that this was Congress' retaliation against President Robinson's lack of compromise, in playing the political game. The question was raised as to whether President Robinson would be able to accomplish anything else, during his six-year term, if he continued to remain inflexible in dealing with Congress.

The final comment in the telecast left the viewer with the question, "What do we really know about this man who literally came out of nowhere to become the President of the United States?"

Tom Weston sat staring blindly at the television set long after the sound of those words faded from his hearing. Weston had graduated as a journalism major, but now at 28 years old, he found himself unemployed, with only a few hundred dollars in his bank account. He had been divorced about two years, and his luck had worsened ever since. The announcer's last words kept echoing in his head. "What did we really know about President Robinson?"

Slowly he rose from the chair, stretching on his full six-foot frame in an effort to get the kinks out of his system. After turning the television off he walked over to the refrigerator, opened it, and removed the last can of beer. Tom sat back down staring at the blank television screen, as he finished the last swallow of beer. Slowly placing the empty can down on the floor beside him, the vacant stare on his unshaven face suddenly brightened into an excited smile, as he shouted loudly, "That's it!" Jumping to his feet, he began to move around the apartment, wildly looking for a pad of paper and a pencil. Though he was moving about hurriedly, his mind was racing even faster.

Tom Weston had decided to answer the question put to him by the announcer. Not only was he determined to find out what we knew about the President, but he was going to dig so deep, he would find every flaw in this leader of the richest country in the world. It would be the expose to end all exposes.

Surely, Tom thought, this man must have some hidden motivation. What did he want? What was the President really after?

The next two days were spent in research. Weston was gathering every known bit of information that even hinted of President Robinson. He searched the newspaper archives, the library and even called on his old friends at the local television station, where he had worked for four years, before being fired six months ago.

He then returned to his apartment and began pouring through the pile of clippings, articles, and photographs he had accumulated. By the end of the week he had slept very little, but Tom felt an enthusiasm and energy he had not known for a long time. He was excited about his work for the first time since his divorce. It felt good to be so exhilarated. It reminded him of the time he had his first news story published, using his byline.

Going over his notes, he again asked himself the question, "What do we know about President Robinson?" Slowly the pieces began to come together. President Robinson was born 61 years ago, in a major Midwest City. He was raised by middle-class parents, and had no brothers or sisters. He married his childhood sweetheart after serving in the military. He later worked for a large Midwestern manufacturer, eventually rising to a middle management position. At 45, he began his own smaller business, manufacturing cooling components for supersonic and space-age aircraft. By age 47, he had earned his first million. At 50, he claimed to have some sort of "religious experience", whereupon he stepped down as Chief Executive Officer of his rapidly growing company, and seemed to simply disappear from public life for about three years. The first year after he emerged from his self-imposed exile he continued to maintain a low public profile, although he did reclaim his position with his company. Then about one year before the election, he

announced his candidacy for president, as an independent candidate. Failing to generate enough public support in the preceding primaries, he withdrew his candidacy and threw his personal and financial support behind the more experienced candidate, Jeff Garland, resulting in Robinson eventually being chosen as the vice presidential candidate.

Tom sat back, with disappointment creeping into his emotion. What did he have? Nothing! Nothing, that hadn't been gone over by the media dozens of times. Tom began to preview again the video tapes he had obtained from his friends at the television station. Most of it was news coverage of the election campaign and live interviews. As he reviewed the interview from a local talk show, it suddenly occurred to him that the program had been taped before the actual showing. He ran it again, carefully searching to see if there was any indication that the program had been edited. Finally, near the end of the tape, the cut from one angle to another, caught the President's face at a point that made him appear to be completing a sentence, before switching back to the interviewer. But no sound was heard. Something had been cut, probably to fit the program into the proper time period.

Weston went back to the television station to beg one last favor. If only they had kept the original tape. After making numerous promises he knew he couldn't keep, Tom was able to get a copy of the master tape. His excitement began to mount as he inserted the tape into the video recorder in his apartment. Fast forwarding the tape to the approximate area of the edit, he sat back in his chair, wringing his hands in anticipation. As the tape reached the indicated area, the interviewer asked Robinson, "What caused you to leave your successful business, for a three-year absence?"

Without hesitation, Robinson replied, "It was at that

point in my life that I committed myself to God. I needed to get away from the life I had been leading to reevaluate my priorities. As a result, I led a Christian community known as Sheepgate." As if the interviewer were not interested in this remark, or for whatever reason, she quickly changed the subject and went on to something else.

Sensing that he had a new lead, Tom decided to pursue the deleted remark and find out whatever he could about that community and the three-year period in President Robinson's life. Learning of the location of Sheepgate, Tom made arrangements to go there.



CHAPTER TWO

Tom Weston departed the cross-country bus that had brought him from Washington, to the quiet Midwestern town of Limestone. For one brief moment, everything inside of him was screaming to get back on the bus. Why had he agreed to give up one year of his life, on a gamble? After all, this might not be the story he was hoping for anyway. As he hesitated, a man with a grey beard and hair, approached him. With a smile, and a certain cheeriness in his voice, he said, "Good afternoon, are you Tom Weston?"

Tom replied, "Yes, I am, are you from the Sheepgate Community?"

Reaching out his hand to greet Weston, the man said, "Welcome to Sheepgate. My name is Bill Paige." After shaking hands, the older man insisted on carrying Tom's luggage. As the luggage was being put into the rear of a somewhat older but well cared-for station wagon, Tom noticed the bus which brought him, was starting to pull away. With a sigh, he thought it was too late to change his mind now. Becoming more optimistic, he shrugged and thought to himself, how bad could it be, after all it wasn't prison, he could always just leave if he wanted. He had

broken commitments before.

As they began to drive away, Bill dominated the conversation with small insignificant chit-chat. It was as though he were trying to help Tom to relax and feel comfortable, before he hit him with anything too serious or personal.

Each time Tom began to ask questions about the community, Bill would put him off and reassure him there was plenty of time for that later. After several miles, Tom began to become aware of the scenery around him. Everything seemed to be greener and smell cleaner than he could ever remember. The sun was beginning its descent in the west, and at times the roadway became quite dark because of the dense woods on each side. Finally, Bill turned off the pavement to a winding gravel road, barely wide enough for more than one car at a time. Tom noticed the road seemed to be gently sloping downward, when suddenly he could smell the fresh water and feel the cool lake breeze. Up ahead was a light, and then several more, reflecting already on the lake, as the last rays of sunlight sank beneath the trees.

Just after passing the silhouette of a large building near the lake, Bill began to slow down, and finally stopped in front of a smaller cottage. Light appeared from several windows and the faint indistinguishable aroma of food flowed gently toward the car. Bill remarked, "This is it." as he got out of the car and headed toward the rear door to remove the luggage.

As they entered the house, Tom noticed an attractive, middle-aged woman, with a pleasant smile, who said, "Hi, Hon. Is this Tom?" As she extended her hand, Bill introduced Tom to his wife, Jean.

Tom responded with a traditional, "How do you do?"

He sensed a warmth and sincerity from Jean as she said, "I'm so happy you made the commitment to join us." Tom was pondering the amazement within himself, at how her casual salutation had overwhelmed him with believability, when the momentary distraction was replaced by the entrance of a lovely younger woman.

Gracefully crossing the room the younger woman smiled most openly as she approached Tom and embraced him warmly. Quite startled, Tom almost missed her introducing herself, and extending her greeting at the same time. "My name is Lynn," was her opening remark, "I hope you will be happy here," she continued as her voice was interrupted by the cry of a small baby from the corner of the room. Excusing herself, she picked up the child and left the room almost as suddenly as she had appeared.

Tom, barely able to compose himself at the suddenness of Lynn's entrance and exit into his life, began to become aware of the stirrings within himself and his emotions that this brief encounter had triggered. He wasn't consciously aware of his being led into another room which served as a combination kitchen/dining area. Bill showed Tom to the bathroom where he might wash up and urged him to hurry, as supper was about to begin.

As he washed his hands, Tom splashed a little water into his face to assure himself that he was not dreaming. What had he gotten himself into? He had just met these people and already they were treating him like an old family member. He had to admit to himself, however, that he felt a relaxation and comfortableness that reminded him of a time when his life was simpler and more secure. A time when he was a little boy at home with his parents, before his father died.

Anxious to return and continue to increase the

excitement building within him, Tom hurriedly dried his hands and entered the dining area. There, he saw several new faces already seated around the table, in addition to Bill and Jean. There was a large, handsome, blond-haired man, about Tom's own age. Seated next to him, was an equally blonde and attractive woman, perhaps a year or two younger. Across the table were two younger men about 18 or 20. Bill quickly began to introduce everyone. "Tom, I want you to meet some more of our family. This is my son, Joe, and his wife, Mary, and these are my two youngest sons, Gerry and George."

Before any conversation could begin, Lynn returned to the group announcing, "I put Bobby in his playpen with some toys, hopefully, he will be quiet during supper."

"Thanks for taking him," said Mary. As they all held hands during the blessing of the meal, Tom thought, so, the baby wasn't Lynn's.

Throughout the meal, Tom kept complimenting the women on the terrific meal. He had not realized how much he had missed home cooking in recent years. He told everyone that if he stayed with them for the full year he had promised, he would surely gain 50 pounds. Everyone laughed and assured him that would not be the case, as his share of work would take care of that.

When supper was finished, Tom offered to help clear the table, but was quickly informed that it was not his night, and he would soon be added to the schedule. With that, Tom followed Bill, Jean, and Lynn out of the house and onto the front porch, as the two younger men excused themselves and disappeared through a doorway. Joe and Mary began talking to each other, as they cleared the table and began washing the dishes.

On the porch, the cool night air smelled fresh

and clean to the urban Tom. The only light, was from the half-formed moon and that pierced the darkness from the windows and door of the house. Bill and Jean were rocking slowly on a porch swing as Tom and Lynn sat relaxed on aluminum folding chairs.

Tom began the conversation remarking, "You certainly seem to have a happy family." Jean responded that, "It has not always been that way, but the Lord had blessed them." Tom continued to give them the credit, stating they must have to work pretty hard to keep all the pressures of today's society from disrupting their relationships.

Bill responded, "That was part of the reason for their being there. It was a matter of priorities, for them, family, love and relationships were more important than anything going on in the world. That was what brought them to be a part of a community like Sheeppgate. To be in the world, but not of it." Tom didn't understand how anyone could separate himself from the problems and pressures of society. Wasn't that just running away?



CHAPTER THREE

Washington was beginning to buzz unofficially with rumors of planned invasions by Russia, on smaller, less-protected countries. Concern was mounting as to what President Robinson planned to do to put a halt to such Soviet aggressive acts. Some Congressmen and Senators were urging an ultimatum, others wanted to send troops to protect these countries. Liberal groups were demonstrating for noninvolvement and isolationism. Congress was divided on spending more for aid to these countries, arguing that if we didn't solve our own financial problems first, we wouldn't be in a position to help anyone.

President Robinson was holding an emergency meeting with his cabinet and advisors. Secretary of Defense, Arthur Goldschmidt, was urging the President to be patient, stating, "The Strategic Defense Initiative program (known as 'Star Launch') is expected to be completed within the next few months, and testing has already begun." Fred Wilkerson, the Secretary of State, interrupted saying, "Any further show of strength at this time would be dangerous to the security of the world, until we are guaranteed the advantage of the first strike capability that the Star Launch project promises."

President Robinson assured the members that it was not his intention to commit any first act of aggression, but he did fear for the world, until we could convince Russia that we had the nuclear advantage.

Within hours of this meeting, Russia too was holding its own decisive meeting. Soviet Premier Marskhen was being updated by his Defense Minister, Krasha Borganiv, as to the strategy of Russia's ability to be successful, in first strike capability against the United States. "As you are aware, the U.S. believes it will soon have nuclear superiority, due to the completion of its Star Launch project. We have been successful in having the U.S. maintain its belief, that if we were to be the aggressor, we would attack with nuclear missiles. I am pleased to announce that we have now completed our true means of world domination. Everything is in place. We have . . . but to begin."

"I am happy to hear this, Krasha," said Premier Marskhen, as the smile widened on his face. Continuing to speak, Borganiv presented the group with the reason for the meeting. "Now that we are prepared to destroy the U.S., if necessary, we must decide when to attack, and to what extent."

"Gentlemen, allow me to interrupt" said a small, overweight man seated at the end of the table, "As your Ambassador to the United Nations, it is my opinion that we should proceed with extreme caution. While we now have nuclear and military superiority over any country in the world, we are not in a position to withstand the rage and outcry that might result, if the rest of the countries were to unite, as a result of a surprise attack on the United States. History has not forgotten Japan's sneak attack on Pearl Harbor in World War II. It is to our advantage to prevent these countries from having any martyr, around which they

can rally and unite."

"What are you suggesting, Krimkor?" asked Marskhen, "We cannot delay for too long. I have been informed by our intelligence sources in the KGB that the U.S. expects to have its Star Launch system operable within four to six months. We still do not have sufficient background information, however, on this new President Robinson, to determine if he would dare to attempt a first strike attack. While we can now survive and win such a war, we would not wish to risk any unnecessary destruction to Soviet Russia."

"Please hear me out," Krimkor continued as he rose from his position, "What I am suggesting, is that we officially declare war on the United States, giving them a certain time limit to comply with our demands. If we allow them perhaps one hour to surrender, the responsibility of destruction will be theirs. All available information indicates within such a time frame, the United States would be so confused and divided that they would do nothing. On the other hand, at the first indication of any missile launching before the hour is completed, our plan could be implemented, and the worse destruction we would experience would be from one, two . . . or perhaps three missiles at the most."

The Premier sat in silence with the rest of his advisors, pondering Krimkor's words. Finally, rising to leave the room, he stated, "It is a good plan let me know as soon as you have reached agreement on the most appropriate time to notify Washington of our declaration."



CHAPTER FOUR

The next few days were relatively uneventful for Tom Weston, as he began to adjust to life at Sheepgate. He found himself soon immersed in a more physically demanding lifestyle, as he was given tasks throughout the community. He met challenges within himself, as he learned to care for the animals, to spend entire days cutting wood and plowing in the fields. His body began to tan and harden as the early aches and pains became a memory. Tom was getting to know most of the people of Sheepgate, and the more he talked with them, the more he was amazed at their openness to reveal intimate details of themselves. Not only their successes and achievements, but their failures, their doubts and weaknesses. They seemed incapable of any hidden agenda. They opened themselves up to a vulnerability that he had never witnessed before. Slowly, Tom began to lower his guard too. To risk that same vulnerability, frightened Tom, but yet, he felt a genuine love for these people. He felt accepted, as he was, he felt safe.

Tom was welcomed wherever he went, he was treated as if his few weeks at Sheepgate were years. He felt a particular affection growing inside of him for Lynn. She

seemed to be the most honest woman he had ever known. She was so frank, and free, not only with her words, but physically as well. For no apparent reason she would greet Tom with a kiss. While the kiss would be casual, usually on the cheek, there was a certain sincerity about it that made Tom hunger for more. He wasn't sure, however, if she too were feeling more for him. Usually being more assertive with women, Tom was reluctant to pursue the matter for fear of frightening her and losing what he had come to enjoy.

One day Lynn came out to the barn where Tom was pitching hay down from the loft, for the cattle. His first awareness of her presence came when she suddenly uttered a slight scream of surprise, as a large pile of hay he had thrown down, landed on top of her. Tom was delighted to see her and quickly asked, "Are you alright, Lynn?" She laughed and assured him everything was okay. She then asked him if he had much more to do in the loft. Tom answered he was about finished, and soon came down the ladder.

Hoping within himself, he asked, "Did you come out to see me?"

Lynn replied, "In a way. I'm looking for someone to help me pick wild berries, and I thought you might enjoy a break." Tom nodded in agreement, as she handed him a shiny metal pail. They walked casually across a large field toward a wooded area, on the other side. As they walked, they talked, and Tom teased Lynn, making her laugh. He loved to hear her laugh, it sounded so happy and innocent. As they reached the berries and began to pick them, their conversation became more serious.

Tom finally worked up the nerve to ask, "Lynn, I would like to ask you something personal, you don't

have to tell me if you think it's none of my business." Lynn assured him she didn't believe she had anything to hide. Tom then asked, "Why is it that a girl as beautiful and warm as you, has not married?" Lynn threw her head slightly to one side and stared at Tom for what seemed like an eternity. Then she smiled and told him to sit down. They sat opposite one another, each leaning back against a tree, as Lynn began to speak.

"Tom, I can't answer your question in one or two sentences, you've got to understand more about me, where I am coming from, to understand my answer. You see, I wasn't always like you see me now, and neither were my parents or my brothers, or anyone here at Sheepgate. By that I mean we didn't always know Jesus, at least in the way we know Him now. We were a typical family, I suppose. We weren't exactly poor, but there were a lot of things we did without. Mom and Dad were the first to experience God in a personal way, I wasn't really even aware of it at the time. In their enthusiasm, they eventually caused my older brothers to turn away from God and church. As I grew older, I too, seemed to grow cold toward the Lord. During my high school years, I saw God, church, and my parents as restrictions on everything I wanted, or thought important in life. I went to a private Catholic school, but it really wasn't much different from the public schools. We had smoking, drinking, drugs, and sex. I, was in the world, and of the world.

"One day when I was seventeen, and a high school junior, I fell madly in love with the boy of my dreams. He was a senior and one of the most popular boys in school. I had fantasized about him for a long time, and now he was beginning to notice me. We began to date, and my world was beautiful. During the next two months, he made me

feel so special and so loved, I thought it would never end. Eventually, after much discussion and convincing and promises, I decided to give myself to him, totally, physically, and sexually. I remember feeling guilty, but at the same time, an excitement and pleasure I had never experienced before. The next couple of weeks were heaven, and I longed for our time together. Gradually he began to call and see me less and less, and I began to doubt his love. It wasn't too long before he stopped calling altogether, and shortly after, I learned he was dating my best girlfriend.

"I was devastated, I cried for hours, for many days, I thought of killing myself. I didn't believe I had anyone I could talk to at the time, surely not my parents. Eventually, I began to confide in another girl who had been my friend. I suppose she thought she was helping me to forget them, when she revealed to me that the two of them, were openly making fun of me to others, joking and revealing my innermost secrets . . . I wanted to die.

"I couldn't go to school, I stopped eating, and I cried until my tear ducts were barren. I had been betrayed. Those I loved and trusted the most, had betrayed me, and I hated them. I wished I could kill them. The hate within me, kept me going, I even planned in my mind how I would make them suffer for what they had done to me.

"My parents were of course concerned for me, but I could not tell them the reasons for my actions and bitterness. Finally, my mother said there was nothing else she could do. She was going to pray for me, and leave it in God's hands, and she urged me to do the same. I remember the door closing behind her as she finished those words, and an anger welled up within me. How dare she talk about God. I thought, God couldn't help me. She didn't understand what I was suffering. No one could, not even

God. I became angrier and angrier, and I began to curse God. How could He let this happen to me? What had I ever done to Him? There was no God. I pounded and pounded my fist into the bed where I lay, until I collapsed with exhaustion. For a moment there was silence and my throat began to grow evermore painful within me, as I started to sob. I cried and cried, until each retching of my body became unbearable. In desperation, I cried aloud, 'My God, if you are real . . . help me!'"

Lynn sat there quietly for a moment, taking in large breaths of air, as if it were too painful to continue. Tom was speechless, he had never had anyone share such an intimate confession with him before. Why was she risking such openness with him? After her experience, how could she allow herself such vulnerability again? Then after another big breath and a heavy sigh, Lynn continued, "In the midst of my plea, I began to feel a warmth all over my body. I thought at first I must be getting a fever, but yet I wasn't sweating. As the warmth grew within me, I began to calm down and experience an inner peace that I had never known before. This awareness was interrupted by a voice within my mind. Not out loud, like I'm speaking to you, but a voice as real as anything I ever heard, a voice that, pierced my heart." She stopped briefly to consume more air, as if the air, were the fuel she needed to continue. "The voice was gentle, and told me not to be afraid. It told me I was not alone, that He was with me, and that I will be loved in a new way. An unconditional way. Just as I was with all my weaknesses and insecurities." She paused and then said, "Tom, I know that it was the voice of Jesus. For the first time in my life I knew. As sure as I know that I am alive . . . that Jesus, . . . my God . . . is real . . . and He loved me! If I were the only human to ever live . . . He loved me! He understood

my feelings, He knew what I had gone through, and He understood . . . and accepted me with open arms.

“Suddenly I was free! The bitterness and resentment, the hatred and loneliness I was feeling . . . only moments before, was gone! I had a new love! I would not be alone again! My God lives . . . and I am free!”

Tom could sense that he must have been staring in amazement at Lynn’s testimony, he tried to regain his composure. He had never heard anyone speak with such confidence about the reality of God. He thought, what faith she must have, and he realized he was envious. Tom, too had experienced some of the emotions that had plagued Lynn. When his wife left him, he had landed with a crash, as his world began to topple around him. Not only had he felt betrayed by his wife, but he felt the loneliness of separation from his son Timmy. The resurrection of these memories brought a tearful filling to his eyes, and one tiny tear managed to escape the floodgate and roll slowly down his cheek.

Lynn looked at him knowingly, sympathetically, and gently she wiped his tear and embraced him. Almost instinctively Tom put his arms around her, and kneeling, they held each other for a long time without a word. Slowly, Lynn began to lean back away from Tom, and reluctantly he released her. She looked again into his eyes and smiled a caring smile. Lynn could see that Tom too had gone through deep, hurting pain, but he was not yet free from the agony of memories. Finally, still on her knees she put her hand on his shoulder and questioned, “What is it, Tom? What is troubling you?”

“I wish I could believe as strongly as you do.” he replied. “I suppose I believe there is something greater than I am, out there somewhere, but you made it sound so real,

so personal.”

“He is, Tom, He is personal, and that’s when He can become real to you. It’s not in being good or legalistic, by obeying laws, although that’s a part of it that comes later. It’s laying down your life . . . for Him, by dying to yourself, by making a commitment, that you can be free, to accept Him. He doesn’t want to make us His slaves, He wants to free us . . . through love. Through His love for us, and our love for Him, and each other. God doesn’t wait until we get our act together before he accepts us, he died for us as we are . . . as you are, right now Tom, if you want Jesus in your life, and in your heart, you have to make a decision to choose Him. After all, Tom, what have you got to lose, has your life been all that great up to now?”

Lynn’s question struck a nerve, and Tom could feel himself flinch inwardly. He knew what a mess he had made of his life, how this was his last hope of regaining what he had lost, his self-respect. He looked at her as she sat patiently, leaning on the backs of her legs. With a deep breath and a reluctant sigh, as though he were surrendering to a captor, he said, “What must I do?” With a shriek of delight and the widest smile Tom had ever seen, Lynn leaped forward and hugged him tightly, exclaiming, “Oh, Tom, you won’t be sorry God has so much to give you. Come, let’s go back now, I want to tell Dad the good news.”

After supper that evening, Bill Paige and Tom, were sitting on the front porch of the house, Lynn and her mother were still in the kitchen finishing the dishes. The older man was rocking slowly in the glider and Tom was seated on the edge of the porch, with his hands clasped around one knee. Tom was the first to speak. “I suppose Lynn told you I am interested in learning more about a personal relationship with God?”

Bill paused briefly before commenting, "Are you really interested for yourself, Tom, or are you still gathering information for your article?"

"To be honest with you, I suppose it's a little of both. I was deeply moved by Lynn's testimony, but I am still concerned with my purpose for being here, to see what makes the President tick."

"Fair enough" replied Bill, "Perhaps the President is a good place to begin. I first met him about 10 or 11 years ago. He was one of the principle speakers at a charismatic conference, Jean and I were attending. The main focus of his presentation dealt with Christian community."

"Robinson began by establishing the need for such a community. We've had 2000 years of Christianity and the world is still a mess. For a Christian, the world is falling apart. Mankind can no longer maintain Christian values in such a world, the influence is just too strong."

Tom stopped him saying, "Wait a minute, how come the mainline churches aren't saying things like this? Why, most of the major denominations have even united, under the World Congress of Churches, isn't that in itself progress?"

"Think about it, Tom. Haven't most of those churches lost much of their individual uniqueness? Aren't they just watered-down versions of their former selves? You see, it was in this earlier division, that they had their strength. It was only in the combination of all this diversity that the true church existed. Each of them, had a piece of the true church."

"Think of the various Christian churches, as a body, the Body of Christ, if you will. The body has many, differing parts, yet each serves a specific purpose. Some parts can be cut off or removed, and the body will still live, not as well perhaps, but there is still life. What has happened today is,

that body, no longer functions on its own, it has no heart, and its mind is not that of Christ. It runs mechanically, with artificial life being pumped into it. It cannot do anything, but lie there, being fed, dependent on its manmade source of existence.

"But aside from the problems of the church, society itself was, and is, sick. People are no longer obedient to God. They have relinquished, not only their rights, but their responsibility and authority as well. Examples? Man for the most part abandoned his position as head of his house. God ordained him to be in authority or headship over his house, not in a dictatorial way, but answerable to God, with love. He is to love his wife and his children, above his own self. Women, on the other hand, are to be submissive to their husbands, as long as he remains submissive first to God. She is to raise her family under his headship."

Tom, almost laughing, said, "Bill, you can't be serious. The outside world would never stand for such a theory today."

Bill agreed and said, "Exactly. That is why Robinson urged such communities as Sheepgate be formed, not for everyone, but for those who could love one another and lay their lives down for one another. You know what has happened to the outside world. It now takes two and three incomes for a family to survive out there. The preschool children are cared for in the government-run daycare centers. The school system now exists year 'round, in an effort to keep the older kids off the streets and to further brainwash them with the Humanist philosophy. And still, teenage crime, suicide, pregnancy and drug abuse is at an all-time high. Divorce has become so epidemic, that it is now considered a way of life for most. Its news if a couple celebrates their 25th wedding anniversary. People have

become obsessed with possessions, as a way of countering the effects of inflation. Someone once made the point that people today are working at two jobs, to buy things they don't need, to impress people they don't like, which kind of sums it up.

"With all our technology, the average person is overworked, overstressed, and overburdened, in finding a way to cope. Look at the mental breakdowns, psychiatry is a big business. We have more psychiatrists, than at any time in our history, and along with it, the highest suicide rate the world has ever known.

"And Robinson went on and on, establishing the premise that the world was not really progressing, but building to its own self-destruction. He told of his own life, of becoming a self-made millionaire, having the respect of those around him, all the comforts of life, and yet, his inner being was still restless, somehow unfulfilled, still searching. It was only, when he surrendered, his life, to God, that he found peace.

"This peace and fulfillment in the Lord, led him through scripture, to the belief that the only hope for the survival of Christians, in such a world, was to pull out, to separate themselves from it. He maintained, that the concept of living in the world, but not of it, could no longer apply. The influence, and effects were simply too strong. Only, through community, that common-unity, in Christ Jesus, could the Body of Christ gather enough strength to overcome the influence of the world. Only, through mutual support, and love for one another, would this be possible. He was not just suggesting a sharing of goods, in some cooperative effort to live a cheaper lifestyle. But, he was calling us to lay down our lives for one another. Putting all others, before ourselves, sharing one another's pain and

joys, building one another up, working toward helping each other reach the fullest potential he was designed for. There was much, much more in his presentation that day, but I think you get the idea. Anyway, Jean and I were touched to the heart by his words. It was as if he had been reading our minds. In the past couple of years we had been led to the same conclusion, but didn't know where to go from there.

"After his presentation, we went to him and told him how we felt. And we asked him what we could do to make such a dream, a reality? He told us we were doing exactly what he wanted, by coming to him. He was planning on establishing such a community, but he was waiting on the Lord to lead the people to him, who were to be a part of it. Needless to say the rest is history, others who had already contacted him, and we, and some of our friends, joined him in establishing this community. Since then, there have been many satellite communities established not only in this country, but all over the world."

"Why have we heard so little about this in the secular world?" questioned Tom.

"There are a couple of reasons for that, Tom. First of all, we have not sought publicity, we're not interested in numbers. Those who are seeking, will find us. Secondly, the secular media is simply, not interested. They were at first, they thought we were some sort of cult, and wanted to expose us. But the few reporters who ever came here, found us boring and uninteresting, and soon left, to return to the glittering facade of the world. You, Tom, as an outsider, have been with us the longest. I pray your reason is more than just getting a story."

"That brings up an interesting question, Bill. If everything is as you say, why in the world did Rob Robinson

return to the outside, and involve himself in, of all things, politics?"

"You're asking a difficult question, Tom," Bill paused as if to get his thoughts together, and then began, "Returning to the world and leaving the community, was perhaps the most difficult decision Rob ever made. It was one of the least desires of his heart. It was only after a great deal of prayer, fasting, discernment, and confirmation that he made the decision he did. He, and we, believe the Lord was leading him to that decision."

"But why?" inquired Tom.

"When you let the Lord lead your life, you don't always know the answers to His directions. I believe we are beginning to get a glimpse of that answer now. I don't think it was an accident that he was led to support Jeff Garland for president. I don't believe it was an accident that Jeff Garland eventually chose Rob for his running mate. And, I don't believe it was an accident, that Jeff Garland died shortly after taking office, opening the way for Rob to become president."

Hesitatingly Tom asked, "Are you suggesting Garland's death was not from natural causes?"

"Of course not, Tom!" with a ring of impatience coming to Bill's voice, "What I am saying is, I believe all of this somehow is fitting into God's design. I think He has an important job for Rob, one that might affect each and every one of us." Tom was in awe. He had just received an insight into President Robinson that was unknown to the rest of the world. The possibilities were endless. If Bill was right, what series of events did the future hold?



CHAPTER FIVE

It was the early morning of July 4th, and most of Congress had left Washington to return home during the Independence Day weekend recess. President Robinson had just finished tying his necktie before going downstairs to breakfast. The silence in his efforts to not disturb his wife, was suddenly shattered as his principal aide, Marty Thompson, burst into the bedroom. Robinson started to comment on his lack of manners, when Thompson excitedly exclaimed, "Mr. President, I'm sorry, but it's most urgent. You must come to your office immediately!"

Rushing down the stairs with Thompson, the President observed a flurry of staff and aides scurrying everywhere, without seeming to have any specific purpose in mind. Robinson asked Marty what was happening. Still excited, Marty said, "Premier Marskhen was calling on the 'Red Alert' telephone!"

Entering the office and reaching for the telephone, Robinson muttered mentally, God have mercy. Noting that the telephone recorder was operating, Robinson began to speak, "Good morning, Mr. Premier, what is so urgent this fine day?"

The voice on the other end was grave and solemn. "President Robinson, the time for words and games is over, listen to me very carefully." After a brief pause he began, "As the supreme leader of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, it has been decided that our great country can no longer tolerate the imperialist aggression forced upon us by the United States. Therefore, after much deliberation we are determined to put an end to such acts, by declaring war on the United States of America. The responsibility of the circumstances which follow will be on your shoulders. You will be given a reasonable time to consider, and surrender, or else you will force us to take stronger measures. The decision is yours."

President Robinson stood there for a moment in disbelief. Was he dreaming? Slowly he sank down in the chair near him; could Marskhen be serious? What could he hope to gain by mutual destruction? Robinson could feel his heart pounding within him. He called upon the Lord to give him wisdom in this most delicate of situations. Finally, he said, "Marskhen, surely you're not serious! We must talk!"

Angrily, Marskhen interrupted, "The time for talk is over!"

"But Marskhen, surely you realize such an act will result in the destruction of both of our countries, perhaps the world!"

"I think not, President Robinson," came a confident reply, "For while your country was preparing for world domination through its Star Launch Project, we, were not the sleeping dog you thought us to be. We have found a way around your defenses . . . your missiles. Your very freedom . . . has been your weakness!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Robinson.

"I mean . . . Mr. President, your missiles and

surveillance systems are helpless against our plan of victory. While you have spent the last ten years developing a system to defeat us, by destroying any missiles we might launch, we have developed another system for defense. For the past ten years, we have been bringing the necessary components for hundreds of nuclear bombs into the United States, and building them, to destroy your key cities and defense systems throughout the entire United States!"

"That's impossible! How could you develop such a system without our finding out? How could you import such components without detection?" demanded the President.

"Your weaknesses are your enemy. Do you think it was a coincidence that the drug problem in your country has become so epidemic that it has become the first priority of your law enforcement officials? This, my friend, is the diversion . . . we needed to execute our plan. Every time, your Coast Guard and enforcement agencies were successful in stopping a shipment of drugs from entering your country, whether that was off the coast of Florida, the Mexican border or the California Coast, each time . . . it was really a diversion, so that we could smuggle our defense components into your country. A ton of marijuana or a few hundred pounds of cocaine, was a small price to pay for such a diversion. Once in the United States, our agents were free to move the components anywhere we wished. You see, we only had to bring in those components which would draw suspicion to our purposes. The remaining parts were simply ordered from your own manufacturers, to complete the project."

It sounded plausible, but was it true? Had Russia really developed such an elaborate defense, within our own country? Was it a bluff? Why now? These questions were

spinning through Robinson's head as he asked, "Marskhen, what is it that makes you feel so threatened, by us, at this time? What causes you to take such drastic action?"

"It is your Star Launch System, we were safe enough when we faced one another in a virtual standoff. But, the completion of your Star Launch project will give you the edge you need for first strike capability. Before Star Launch, we both knew, that whoever launched their missiles first would not be able to win before the other would be able to strike back. With Star Launch, you knew that you could strike first and any defenses which we had left, would be destroyed by the Star Launch system. We cannot afford to take such a risk. As a result, we developed our countermeasure, at far less expense than yours, a measure that will make your defense, useless. If we are to remotely detonate our bombs, not only are they strategically located to destroy your key cities, but your key defenses as well. I tell you this, because you do not have enough time, to locate and destroy the network."

"But, Marskhen, can't we negotiate . . . can't we compromise?"

"No! We have made our commitment, we have nothing to gain by waiting any longer. I will leave this line open and await your decision. You have exactly one hour to surrender and save yourselves, or face complete destruction. Any, attempt to launch an attack, will result in immediate detonation of our entire network of defense."

President Robinson sat motionless for a moment. Visibly shaken, praying that it was somehow a horrible nightmare. Regaining his composure, he told his staff and aides to contact as many of his cabinet, and members of Congress as they could reach, and to be at the White House

in the next fifteen minutes.

The next fifteen minutes became a whirl of activity such as Washington had never known. Phones were ringing, sirens were blaring as officials were hastily escorted to the White House. President Robinson had returned to his bedroom, told his wife what had happened, and the two of them knelt together in prayer.

Within fifteen minutes some 25 to 30 officials had arrived at the White House as President Robinson returned to greet them. Others were still arriving as the President, his face grey and anguished, began to tell them what had transpired. When he finished, all pandemonium broke loose, as those present began to shout and argue among themselves. The President called for order, and the consensus seemed to indicate that they believed Russia was bluffing, after all, what proof did we have? It was agreed to request some evidence of the Soviets' claim.

President Robinson went quickly to his office and picked up the telephone, requesting to speak with Marskhen. "Premier, how can we be certain you are telling the truth, we need uncontested proof?"

"Mr. President, we are a reasonable people, we do not want to destroy anyone unnecessarily. However, I will leave the decision to you. I will let YOU choose any given area of your country that you wish, and you will see that we mean, what we say!"

"I don't understand! What are you getting at?" said the President as excitement and panic began to well within him. "It's quite simple, Mr. President, choose any area of your country's defense that you wish and I will provide the proof you need."

Hesitating and pressured, Robinson slowly uttered the word, "Nevada." From the other end of the phone came

a deadly reply, "You will have your proof, in sixty seconds."

The President stood there with his eyes closed, slowly lowering the telephone to its cradle. What had he done? He stood there praying that his worst fears would not be realized. For Robinson, the next sixty seconds passed as if the very existence of the world were in the balance. He kept repeating to himself, "My God, what have I done? Lord help me."

The clamor of voices outside his office interrupted his prayer of pleading, as an aide suddenly burst through the office door, almost screaming, "Mr. President! Mr. President! We've just received word that a nuclear explosion of major magnitude has just occurred near Las Vegas, Nevada. All the information is not confirmed yet, but there was no indication of a missile attack. It is believed one of our missiles might have exploded in its silo."

The reality of what was happening was overwhelming. Time had now become the most precious commodity. The President instructed the aide to keep him informed of the casualties and any additional information, as soon as it became available. He then rushed back to the officials who had become little more than a screaming mob. His attempts to calm them were to no avail, as the awareness grew within him that he and he alone, was going to have to make the decision in the remaining minutes of this historical ultimatum.

President Robinson used the remaining minutes to return to his office and pray. When he finished, he called his friend, Bill Paige at Sheepgate. He told him to turn on his television set and have everyone pray, then he hung up.

With only minutes to spare, he slowly picked up the telephone and asked again to speak with Marskhen. Speaking with confidence, Marskhen asked, "Well, Mr.

President, do you have your proof?"

Quietly, almost inaudibly the President replied, "May God have mercy on you."

"Speak up, Mr. President, I can hardly hear you," said Marskhen.

"I am convinced. You leave me no choice. I agree to your demand for surrender." The words almost made Robinson choke as he spoke them.



CHAPTER SIX

Within an hour, the media around the world had heard of the nuclear explosion in Las Vegas. Literally millions were glued to their televisions as the networks attempted to provide information of what might have occurred. Their shock was increased as the commentator again interrupted with the announcement, "Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States."

Visibly upset, his collar open and his coat removed, the President appeared on the millions of tiny screens throughout the world. With his head bowed, he slowly looked up and began to speak, "My fellow Americans," then pausing, he continued, "My brothers and sisters . . . this will not only be my last speech to you . . . but without a doubt, my most difficult." He then proceeded to tell them of the fantastic series of events that had occurred on a day that began like any other day. Concluding, he said, "How history, or you judge my actions and my decision, is no longer important to me. I and I alone, had to decide, whether you and I would be the crucified, or the crucifier. In choosing, to be crucified, you are not guilty of shedding innocent blood, you still have your life . . . you have been given time. I pray

that you will all pray as you have never prayed before, that the Lord our God, will deliver us.”

Before his words were finished, the reaction was exploding throughout the free world. Never, in all of history, had the world known such panic and confusion. Riots and looting broke out everywhere. Men and women were weeping. Suicide was uncontrollable. Wall Street and the financial institutions locked their doors. The police and military were in chaos, many were joining the anarchy. Those who remained loyal, were attempting to guard the armaments. Millions began attempting to flee the cities. Food, clothing, and arms were looted from every conceivable source. The military who remained, were used to defend the government and the defense systems throughout the United States and NATO nations. Others were getting drunk, raping and plundering one another. No one was safe. Churches were filled with people praying and crying and screaming. The hospitals and emergency rooms could not handle the accidents, injuries, and assaults. Drugs were forcibly being taken from hospitals, drug stores and manufacturers, by wild, crazed mobs. The scene was beyond description. It was as if the entire free world had gone mad. Everyone was struggling for their very lives.



CHAPTER SEVEN

As the President concluded his statement, the people of Sheepgate began to cry openly and pray to the Lord. They prayed for Rob Robinson, and for the world. They knew that only God, could protect and save them from the future.

Except for the weeping, Tom could not understand the calm peace among these people who had just heard the same words as he. Why weren't they excited? They should begin preparing, they should be doing something. What good would prayer do now? In frustration, he left the assembly room, slamming the door behind him. He did not understand these people, didn't they realize what had happened? What could their God do for them now?

Lynn noticed Tom's leaving, and soon followed after him. She caught up with him, as he was standing near the lake. He hadn't noticed her approaching until she called out to him, "Tom, are you alright?"

"Alright? Who can be alright? The world, our world as we know it, is over!" There was anger in his voice and yet she detected a certain helplessness.

She touched his arm as she said, "Tom, all any of

us ever really have, is now, the present moment. Yesterday is gone forever and tomorrow, is not yet a reality. Now, is all God really expects us to deal with. If He provides the strength and the means to get through today, will He not do the same tomorrow?"

Tom looked at her, the early morning sun seemed to dance in her hair. Her complexion was rich with a pink freshness he had somehow overlooked before. The blue of her eyes seemed deeper than the lake by which they stood. He felt his body calming down from within, while at the same instant his heart began to race. He reached out and gently pulled her into his arms, holding her next to him. "If I could only believe with a faith like you have, to be at peace, while everything I've ever known is beginning to crumble around me. If I . . ."

And he stopped, searching for a way to express what was burning inside of him. Lynn took the opportunity of that pause to tilt her head upward and kiss Tom, as a mother comforts her child. Suddenly, all the frustration and anxiety within Tom vanished as the touch of her lips against his, seemed to melt into a blending of one. His senses became magnified within him, with an intensity that he had not known for a long, long time. He could hear her, as the intensity of her breathing increased. He could taste the moist coolness of her lips. The smell of her hair was fresh and clean and pure. In his mind's eye, she was the most perfect creature he had ever known. His entire body sensed her slightest movement, as he pulled her more tightly against himself. As they hesitated and resettled their kiss, Tom knew Lynn was experiencing the same awakening within her. Her hands were slowly moving over his back, gently tracing the path to his shoulders. She felt her body yielding to an embrace which left her yearning. Tom was

caressing her back as the eagerness of their kiss increased. Then slowly, almost unaware at first, Tom began to move one of his hands under Lynn's blouse and up her spine. The contact of his hand on her bare skin, his flesh touching hers, strained their embrace to an almost uncontrollable passion. As he caressed her she held him tighter for an instant, then without warning began to shift uncomfortably, as she murmured an incoherent, "Mmmh mmmh." The tone was negative, but she continued to kiss him. And Tom did not alter his persistence. Suddenly, pulling back, with the look of a child who had just received a scolding, she pleaded, "No Tom, no!" Surprised, Tom stood there at first, bewildered, as his breathing began to return to normal. He half-heartedly apologized as he said, "I'm sorry, I thought you felt the way I do."

"I do, Tom, I do!" as she continued to plead, "But we can't, no matter what I may feel for you, I cannot put you before God, . . . I love Him more. It's wrong, no matter what we may feel."

Tom responded defensively, "But Lynn, I believe I love you, and I thought you were feeling the same!"

With sympathy and understanding in her look and her voice, Lynn attempted to explain, "I do care for you Tom, but what you're suggesting, what you want, is not love. At least not love for me. There is only one acceptable place for your kind of love Tom for a Christian, which means marriage. Anything else is not only contrary to God's command, but will not lead to lasting happiness."

"If this isn't love, what is?" Tom asked, still hoping to persuade her.

"Please be patient with me, Tom. Love for me, and for all of us here at Sheepgate, is probably not like anything you've witnessed in the outside world. For US, love has

to be unconditional. It's not, I'll love you if you behave in such and such a way. I'll love you, if you promise to do . . . whatever. It's not I'll love you if, anything. It's, I love you even if you never change. I love you at your worst, when you are not lovable. I love you more than myself so that I can truly lay my life down for you. To just be, for the other person."

"But what about sex?" blurted Tom.

"Sex, is great! We're all for it! But only in its proper place, in marriage. Any of the couples here would probably tell you they have a great sex life. They believe it is a tremendous pleasure, created by God. Within the proper bounds of marriage. We don't believe God gave us His laws to be mean to us, or keep us from having a good time. We believe His laws, his commands, were given to us for two reasons. One being to protect us from the harm of going contrary to them."

"What do you mean?"

"Tom, you're intelligent, look at the results of disobeying this one commandment in our society. There's communicable disease, illegitimate pregnancy, infidelity, abortion, broken homes, divorce, rape, physical abuse, homosexuality, and perversion. Not to mention minor repercussions like stress, anxiety, guilt, anger, and feelings of worthlessness. You see it's in obeying these laws that we are protected, that we can find true and lasting happiness."

Still questioning, Tom asked, "You said there were two reasons for the Ten Commandments, what is the other one?"

"We believe the other reason God gave us His laws, was to show us that no matter how hard we try to obey them, somewhere, in some way, we all fail. We may not break all of them, but that is not the issue, if we break only

one, we have failed. I know some people think they haven't. They say, 'I never killed, or I never committed adultery,' etc. And to that degree, they haven't. But, what about the things we should have done, or failed to do? What about our thoughts? Jesus said, 'He who hates his brother is a murderer.' By showing us we can never succeed in keeping the law, He shows us why we cannot be worthy of sharing Heaven with Him. Why we needed Jesus, as a Savior, from our sins.

"Tom, I believe you love me, you're still just a little confused in your priorities and values. Have you ever thought about committing yourself, wholly to God?"

"What do you mean by 'wholly'?" questioned Tom, "Do you mean like a priest?"

"I mean, placing God as the center of your life. Basing your lifestyle, your priorities, your values, on Christ's principles. Literally giving up your life and your desires to put God first. Do you think you could totally surrender yourself?"

"Look Lynn, I've told you before, I wished I could have a faith like yours, but I'm just not that strong in my belief."

"That's just it, Tom, you can't do it totally on your own. When you surrender to the Lord, He will send His Spirit to you to help you." Lynn's excitement was rising as she felt Tom was growing more and more enthusiastic. Finally she said, "Tom if you are willing to commit yourself to Christ and repent of your sins, we could pray for your baptism in the Spirit right now."

"Lynn, I love you, and want to share what you have . . . tell me what I must do."

"Come." she said, "Let's go to the rest and they will pray over you." Grabbing his hand, they ran excitedly back

to the meeting room.

As they entered the room Tom was reminded of the event that had caused him to leave that same room but a short time before. Some of the people were praying with their arms raised toward Heaven. Others were singing in a strange language he had not heard before. And still others were off to the side conversing gravely. Tom's enthusiasm started to diminish as he again experienced the seriousness of the situation.

Lynn paused for a moment, quickly glancing around the room. Seeing her father, she pulled Tom across the room to where Bill was conversing with some of the other men. Interrupting them, she said, "Dad, Tom wants to commit himself to Jesus, could we pray with him for the baptism of the Holy Spirit?"

The graven sullenness left Bill's face as a wide smile took its place. "Honey, that's terrific! Let me get Frank and some of the others, we can do it right now!" said Bill as he went quickly to gather the others.

Reaching the center of the room, Bill called loudly for everyone's attention, "Hey, everybody, can I have your attention?" As the people began to quiet down, Bill said, "Thank you everyone. I know you are all still confused and disturbed by the news of our country's surrender. Many questions remain to be answered. Many of you have been praying. I think the Lord may be giving us an answer. Most of you have met Tom Weston by now, and you know why he came here. I believe God is using Tom to tell us what He wants us to do in this time of crisis. Tom has asked to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. I see this as God's way of telling us we are to continue just as we have been, taking one day at a time and trusting and praising the Lord." Soon heads began nodding in agreement and some said, "Amen!"

Bill then asked if some of the members would stay and help pray over Tom, while urging others to go home and pray with their families. As a group of five or six men and women came to the center of the room, they gathered around a single chair, and asked Tom to sit in it. As Tom sat down, they began to lay their hands upon him, some on his head and shoulders, even some kneeling before him put their hands on his knees and legs.

Bill asked one of the group if he would lead them. The man he asked, Frank Warren, was a large, imposing man. He must have been six feet four and weighed over 270 pounds. While he was a heavy man, he didn't give the appearance of being flabby. His body was solid, indicating a lifetime of physical labor. His face, with its ruddy complexion, gave the appearance of a little boy after a summer of playing outdoors. Despite his huge, almost intimidating proportions, Tom felt at ease in his presence, sensing a gentleness that was not obvious from appearance alone.

Frank began to speak slowly and quietly at first, with the others also murmuring quietly, almost inaudibly. Tom could make out some of the words as they praised the Lord. Soon they stopped, as if filled with an inner strength and authority. Then Frank spoke directly to Tom. "Before we begin to pray with you for the baptism in the Spirit, I need to ask you if you are willing to commit yourself to Christ. If you are, I will ask you three questions. I want you to think about each of them, before you answer, and then say a prayer expressing your commitment to Christ. We will then, pray with you to receive God's Holy Spirit, and any other gifts of the Spirit, He chooses to give you. Particularly the gift of tongues. Do you have any questions?" Nervously Tom replied, "I've heard several of you praying in tongues,

and . . . I guess . . . I just don't understand the significance of this."

"Don't be afraid of it, Tom. It is perhaps the least of God's gifts, but yet an important one to each of us as an individual. You see, the gifts of the Spirit . . . such gifts as healing, prophecy, discernment, wisdom, etc. are primarily given to the Body of Christ, his church as a whole, to build it up, to bring praise and glory to God. The gift of tongues is such a gift, but it also has specific meaning for the individual using it. It will build up your faith, your prayer life, it will help you to grow in the new life you are about to begin. Let me give you an example, if you've ever tried to pray for any length of time, we find that we soon tire and run out of words. Through the gift of tongues, praying in the Spirit, We are able to continue to pray, unceasingly. And better yet we can pray about those things in our lives and the lives of others, of which we're not even consciously aware. We can receive inner healing for ourselves and others, in areas in which we are not even aware. It becomes a communion of your spirit with that of God's. Believe me Tom, you will still be in control, but your yielding will be a blessing. Okay?"

"Okay. If I'm going to commit myself, then I might as well ask for it all!" Tom said with eagerness.

"Good." said Frank, "Are you then ready to make a commitment to Christ?"

"Yes!"

"Now think about your answers to these next questions. Do you renounce Satan, and all evil and wrongdoing?"

Thinking of the temptations in his life that he had given in to and the unhappiness that resulted, Tom said resolutely, "I do renounce Satan, and all evil and

wrongdoing!"

"Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God, that he died to free you from your sins, and that he rose again to bring you to a new life?"

Growing more confident, Tom said, "I do!"

"And finally," Frank continued, "Will you follow Jesus as your Lord?"

Momentary doubt crossed Tom's mind at the thought of surrendering his control of his life. But he quickly put the thought aside, thinking, if I can't trust God, who can I trust? With even more enthusiasm he answered, "I will follow Jesus, as my Lord!"

Frank then said, "Tom I want you to now pray to God from your heart expressing your commitment to Christ. Just talk to Him."

With a swallow that was difficult to consume and an awareness of a pounding within his heart, Tom began, "Dear Lord, Jesus Christ. I want to belong to you totally, from now on. I want to be freed from the dominion of darkness and the rule of Satan and evil. I want to enter into the light of Your Kingdom and be a part of Your people. I will turn away from all wrongdoing. I ask Lord, that you forgive me all the sins I have committed. I offer you my life, I promise to obey you as my Lord. I ask you to baptize me in the Holy Spirit, and give me the gift of tongues." Tom stopped, feeling a tension well within him as his heartbeat raced with such an intensity that he was certain those around him could hear it.

The momentary silence was broken by the peaceful voice of Frank. "Very good, Tom. We will now pray with you and I ask that you try to yield to whatever you feel the Spirit is doing within you."

The small group began to pray together at once,

praising and thanking and offering glory to God. Some just repeating, "Praise You, Jesus, thank You Lord."

Tom began slowly and quietly saying, "Praise You Lord, Glory to You, Jesus, thank You Lord." He continued to pray as he suddenly realized it was becoming more and more difficult to swallow. Emotion and uneasiness were beginning to build up in him. For no apparent reason he felt as though he were going to cry. Swallowing hard, he attempted to sniff inward the moisture that was secreting in his nostrils. Tightening his eyelids even more firmly he attempted to hold back the flood building within. As his sniffing became more frequent and difficult to control, his tears overcame their surface tension and began to overflow the banks of his eyes. Embarrassed, he began to move uneasily in his chair.

As someone handed Tom a box of tissues, Frank said comfortingly, "It's alright Tom, let it out. God is cleansing you with the gift of tears."

The assurance of Frank's words was like the opening of a gate to release a stampede of cattle, the tears poured forth endlessly. As the tears many hurts and disappointments were flowing out as well. His uncontrollable as he wept away disappointment, hatred, broken unfulfilled dreams. Gradually continued, Tom felt as if the he had experienced in his life tears became completely the many years of bitterness, promises, disillusionment and the tears began to diminish and, blowing his nose, Tom began to feel a sense of joy from within, that he could not put into words. He felt so happy, as though a tremendous weight had been removed, a weight that he had carried for so long he didn't realize how heavy it was, until it was finally taken away. He felt clean and pure and renewed, it was as if he were experiencing life

for the first time. All resentment and anger left him. As he was basking in this new peace, hoping it would last forever, his joy was interrupted by the calm quiet voice of Frank who urged him to continue praying and praising the Lord, and to try to yield to the Spirit, through tongues.

Tom again began praying aloud with those around him. His prayer was one of simple thanks, as he said, "Thank You Father. Thank You Jesus. Glory to You Lord. Praise you Jesus." Then, as though his own spirit tired of the repetition, he began to allow new, strange-sounding words to come from his mouth. He did not understand what he was saying, but the more he said, the more comfortable it became. He was amazed at how easily this new language flowed from him, how effortlessly he could continue to go on and on, not understanding a word, but knowing in his heart he was communing with God. And it felt good.

Eventually everyone stopped praying and thanking the Lord. As they and Tom stood up, he could see by their faces that they were happy for him, as happy as he was. Spontaneously and naturally everyone began hugging him. Tom could feel the sincerity of the love in each squeeze and caress of his back, and he knew he loved them as well. Finally, feeling the joyous emotion within him searching for an outlet, Tom simply threw his hands upward in the air and shouted, "Alleluia!" And everyone clapped their hands.



CHAPTER EIGHT

The Soviet leaders were still ecstatic with their victory over the United States. Their success was beyond their wildest hopes. Not a shot fired, not a life lost, and yet they had taken what was once the most powerful nation on Earth. The new question which now emerged, which quickly turned their delight to serious reality, was, now that they conquered the U.S., could they hold her? Many in the United States were certain to resist Russia's occupation and control. But how much resistance, and for how long? Would Russia have a large enough military force to dominate a country as vast as the United States? Immediate control of the major arsenals seemed to be a first priority. Yet, the highest priority must remain the continued satellite monitoring of the U.S. missile sites. Until enough troops could be sent to maintain control, Russia had to remain fearful of any attempted missile launch by the United States. Whether by government or guerrilla forces, any attempted launch was to be noted immediately and dealt with severely.

By the third day, Washington D.C. was completely under the control of the Soviet occupation troops. Congress, the White House, the Pentagon and various law enforcement agencies and their occupants were under house arrest. The elaborate computerized defense network facilities were under the strictest Russian guard. The largest military airlift the world had known was underway, as Russia poured thousands of troops and armament into the U.S., quickly overcoming numerous minor resistances.

As the days fleet by, the sheer magnitude of the power displayed by the victor, was more than enough to overcome the fragmented, untrained and disorganized resistance. President Robinson was seen daily expounding passionate pleas not to resist, to maintain law and order, to conform to the new government. Privately, the citizens cursed and spit upon his image. They viewed him as a traitor.

Soon the days turned to weeks and the months began to build. All hope of overthrowing the victor faded, as attempts at resistance became fewer and fewer. Despite any inner feelings, the captives began to conform to the new reign of power, as their freedoms and rights were endlessly chipped away. Some adapted quite readily as they learned that collaboration was their ticket to survival and position.

Gradually, a lifetime of freedom was exchanged for life itself. All signs of capitalism were beginning to diminish, as fortunes and power were stripped from their former owners who had not fled the country in time. Even those who reached Canada feared that their survival was only a matter of time. The labor force in America remained intact for the most part. The major changes were the outlawing of unions, cutbacks in incomes and alteration of many of the

goods manufactured.

The people were required to register with the government, as vast records were compiled. Using information already gathered on computers from census and tax forms, credit investigations and purchases, insurance, medical and employment records, the new government had the resources to peer into the very soul of most of its new citizens. Each was to obtain a control number on his right hand.

By now, virtually all resistance in any form had ceased, as all attempts were met swiftly and coldly with death or imprisonment. The populace had resigned itself with survival and adapting to make their new lifestyle as comfortable as possible.

As the Communist government stabilized, and confidence among the officials grew, more and more restrictions were imposed on the people. The last of the freedoms which made the United States great was now under attack, religious freedom.

Through a computerized search of an individual's tax records, the officials soon learned if a suspect had ever been a serious member of any organized religion. Methodically, Christians, Jews, Moslems, whatever, were searched out and brought before the authorities. The people so charged, were to renounce their beliefs in a Diety and swear allegiance to the U.S.S.R. Failing to do so would result in death or imprisonment in a labor camp. Buildings of worship were closed or destroyed, and the cream of the faithful were skimmed from the surface. Quickly the remainder attempted to go underground with their faith.

All those apprehended, who renounced their faith, were tattooed with a number on their forehead, providing easy identification of them as a one-time believer in a

religion. Once so marked and identified, any future arrest for anything of a religious nature resulted in death.

To emphasize the point, it was decided that a live telecast would be presented to the entire country in which former President Robinson would be required to face this religious ultimatum.



CHAPTER NINE

Except for the children, the entire Sheepgate community had assembled in the meeting room to view the special broadcast involving former President Robinson.

Speaking perfect English, the Russian commentator began the presentation by again explaining the demands regarding this loss of our last, most precious freedom. He then announced that the former President wished to pledge his allegiance to Communism and renounce his faith in God.

As Robinson was being led into camera range, it was obvious to those at Sheepgate who knew him, that his walk seemed slow and labored as if he were experiencing a great deal of pain. He was finally seated in a chair, as the commentator began to speak to him. "Mr. Robinson, you know the requirements to remain a citizen of good standing in the expanded Soviet Socialist Republic. Do you now deny your God, and swear sole allegiance to the Soviet Socialist Republic?"

When the camera zoomed in on a close-up to receive Robinson's answer, it was apparent that he was wearing an abnormal amount of make-up, particularly

around his left eye. With the downtrodden look of a man defeated, Robinson paused and said, "I cannot, and I will not!" Surprised at the response, the commentator quickly repeated the question reminding him of the seriousness of the consequences, should he refuse. Again, without hesitation, former president Rob Robinson looked directly at his questioner and said, "I will not deny my God. It is in Him alone that this world makes any sense, God is your only hope . . ." With that, the screen suddenly appeared blank and soon only background music was heard, as televisions throughout the U.S. saw only the Soviet emblem.

Moments quickly passed, the music was interrupted repeatedly by a voice which said, "Please stand by, we are experiencing technical difficulties." Approximately 45 minutes passed until the screen was again illuminated by the appearance of the Russian commentator, who now introduced Comrade Krimkor, the Russian Ambassador to the United Nations. As the camera panned to Krimkor, the viewer was reminded of Robinson, by the empty chair where he was seated.

Smiling with a false facade, Krimkor stammered as he delivered his unprepared Statement. "My fellow citizens . . . It is with deep regret that we were not able to provide you with your former president's final remarks. Had you been able to hear him, it would have been obvious to you that he is mentally disturbed. We are now forced to provide him with appropriate psychiatric evaluation. Perhaps after a little care and treatment, we will be able to have him complete his allegiance to the Soviet Socialist Republic. Remember, this total commitment is necessary for the peaceful transfer of your capitalistic lifestyle, to that of the glorious cooperative life under communism. The complete peaceful transition will only be possible so long as there is no dissension. Again, comrades, I regret the delay, and

thank you for your patience."

A buzz of conversation broke out at Sheepgate with the conclusion of Krimkor's words. Doubt and confusion became more and more evident. In some cases arguments began, as voices became louder and emotions rose. Eventually, Frank Warren stood up and said, "Quiet down everyone, I'd like to say something! It's obvious from what we have just seen and heard, it's only a matter of time before each of us will be faced with this same decision. As I see it we have only two choices, life and death, or, death and life! No one can make this decision for you. You will need to pray for God's help, His strength, His courage! Pray for yourselves, for your families, for all of us!"

With that, the community began to leave, some quietly, others still talking and arguing.

After supper that evening, Gerry and George were doing the dishes and Bill and Jean, Joe and Mary, and Tom were gathered in their usual positions on the porch, perhaps for the last time of the year, as the fall breeze placed a chill in the air. Lynn had just joined them, bringing sweaters for her mother and Mary and a blanket for Bobby. Joe began the conversation, "Dad, I just want you and Mom to know that Mary and I have discussed and prayed about the situation, and we are remaining committed to staying here at Sheepgate, no matter what happens."

"I'm glad to hear you say it son, but your mother and I never doubted your decision would be any different."

Tom, unable to contain himself any longer, suddenly blurted out, "You all make it seem so simple, so easy to make a decision which could take your very life . . . I'm sorry, maybe I don't have the same kind of faith as the rest of you, or haven't been a believer long enough, . . . but I just can't make a decision as serious as this, that quickly!"

"What's the matter Tom? You sound almost angry with us." asked Bill.

"Now that I think about it, I guess I am!" confessed Tom in an aggravated tone.

"What is it Tom?" pleaded Lynn.

With a deep sigh, Tom continued, "It's not really your fault, it's just that before I came here, I wouldn't have had any trouble making a decision like this. I would have probably been trying to find a way to take advantage of the situation. But now . . . in the months since you prayed over me . . . I feel torn apart, I truly believe, . . . I know there is a living God, Who loves me . . . and yet I . . . I'm afraid to die."

There was a brief silence and Jean said, "Tom, none of us wants to die. As Christians, we don't believe we can come to any other conclusion. But Tom, we really can't speak for everyone, Christian or not. Everyone has to make his own decision. There will probably be some here at Sheepgate, who will not decide as we have. I believe that decision, the grace to make that decision, is enhanced, to the degree that each individual has been able to let go of his life. To that degree that they have chosen to die to themselves, for others."

Interrupting, Bill added, "That's right Tom, the more you've already given up your life for the Lord, the easier it becomes to ultimately hand that life over completely, when it's called for. Don't feel bad, no matter what you decide, just make it the most honest and unselfish decision of your life."

"Or death." Joe said jokingly, as everyone laughed.

Still pondering, Tom commented, "You know, I thought I'd grown a great deal since my baptism in the Spirit. I've reevaluated my life and my priorities, I'm devouring scripture. Daily I feel closer to God. And yet,

when something like this comes up, I feel like I'm back at square one. I become filled with doubt. The old feelings of my sinfulness and worthlessness begin to return, and I feel scared and confused."

Reassuringly Joe said, "Welcome to the club. What you're talking about is normal. I don't know any of us who haven't gone through those feelings, and at times are still going through them. But you see, that's all they are . . . feelings, you don't have to accept them or respond to them, learn to let go of them. Following the Lord is a daily commitment."

"Sometimes the commitment is moment to moment," added Mary.

"Believe me," Bill continued, "We've all had doubts. It's at those times when the only tangible proof that what you have is real, is the memory of what you've experienced. Those experiences are sometimes your only strength. And sometimes, God requires even more. Sometimes, the only strength you have, the only thing you will be able to cling to will be faith. And faith is a tough one. You can't see it, hear it, touch it, smell it or taste it. Just trust."

Before Tom could comment, Lynn took his hand, and pulling him to his feet, she said, "Come on, Tom, let's take a walk before they overwhelm you with their preaching."

Everyone laughed, and as Tom and Lynn walked away from the house, Jean was heard to yell out, "Don't stay out too late, the weather's getting colder."

Despite the chill in the air, it was a beautiful October evening. The harvest moon had risen about halfway in the sky and seemed bigger and brighter than ever. As Tom and Lynn walked slowly toward the boat dock at the lake, they had their arms around each other's waist. Lynn tried to put

her head against Tom's shoulder as they walked, but the irregularity of their cadence made the effort awkward. Tom laughed at her as she forfeited her attempt. Seeing a slight hurt in her expression because of his laugh, he gave her waist a gentle squeeze of reassurance. Their relationship had grown in the short time since Tom's baptism.

Arriving at the dock, Tom leaned back against the rail and pulled Lynn closer as he kissed her tenderly. As he released her from the embrace, Lynn said, "Ummmh, that was nice."

Tom smugly replied, "My pleasure, Ma'am." as he gestured with a half-hearted bow.

Lynn smiled and turned toward the lake, resting her arms on the railing. For a moment both were silent as they drank in the beauty of the moon reflected on the still lake. Breaking the silence, Lynn asked, "What are you thinking about?"

Somewhat soulfully Tom replied, "I was thinking that I love you very much, and how different it is now from what I thought love was in the past." Lynn smiled approvingly, and Tom continued, "I suppose this is what scares me most about the thought of death. It would mean losing you. The thought of it makes me angry . . . I feel cheated. Just when I find you, it might only be for a short time . . . and then it's all to be taken away."

Consoling Lynn said, "I feel a lot of what you feel Tom, I love you. I wish things could be different for us. But look at it this way, we have now . . . and we have God. What happens is insignificant to what lies ahead, to spend eternity with Him."

Unconsoled and aggravated, Tom replied, "Do you have to bring God into everything? What about us? Aren't we entitled to something?"

Pleadingly Lynn answered, "Oh Tom, don't be jealous . . . not of God! He made our love possible. If we are to call ourselves Christians, He has to be in everything. We do . . . everything we are. He, is our only hope!"

"Don't pay any attention to me Lynn, I'm just feeling sorry for myself. I know you're right of course. My humanity is just getting in the way of my spirituality," Tom said excusing himself, "Come on, let's go back, you're starting to shiver."



CHAPTER TEN

On Thanksgiving day, the first snow of the year had fallen and blanketed Sheepgate, giving the outside an untouched, virgin appearance. The Paige household was busy with activity as a special meal was being prepared. The younger boys were setting the table. The women busily prepared the food, and Joe and Tom were attempting to start a fire in the huge living room fireplace. Bill visually supervised, while continuing to talk on the telephone.

Soon Jean's voice was heard calling from the dining area, as she announced, "Come on in, everything is ready!" Though Bill was the last to enter the room, everyone was not yet seated. Tom and Joe had just finished washing after their battle with the fireplace, Mary was securing Bobby in his highchair, Gerry and George were already seated and Jean and Lynn were placing the last bowls of vegetables on the table.

Eventually everyone was seated and they all joined hands, as Bill said the blessing. "Dear Lord, we do give thanks to You on this Thanksgiving day. We thank you not only for our food, but that we are still together, unharmed. We ask, Lord, that you continue to show mercy on your

people in these troubled times. Amen.” And they all said, “Amen!”

The meal began with more excitement than usual as everyone exchanged the customary compliments of the feast that lay before them. Bill quickly became the center of attention, as he began to tell them of his telephone conversation with his two older sons, Mike and Tony, “As you know I was just talking to your brothers. They send you their love and blessing. They and the other families are well, and for the moment, everything is okay at their community. Mike said he didn’t believe they would be able to visit us this Christmas, as travel was getting to be more and more difficult. Tony thought it best that they not leave their community at this time.

“They indicated that the townspeople and many of their neighbors had withdrawn and become less friendly toward them. Probably fearing guilt by association. A certain degree of fear and confusion is beginning to develop in their community also, and they don’t believe everyone will stay. It’s much like ours.

“Mike also told me that the Soviets have announced they will be broadcasting an important program over all channels today at 3:00 p.m. He thinks we ought to watch it. Other than that, they requested our prayers and said they will be praying for us as well.”

There was a noticeable silence after Bill’s statement and some stopped eating altogether. Jean was the first to speak. “Let’s not get down, this should be a joyous occasion of thanksgiving. Let’s live in the now. And now we don’t have any problems, so enjoy!”

Everyone responded to Jean’s request and the festiveness was regained. To an outsider, everything seemed normal, but to Bill and Jean it was a facade.

After everyone’s appetite was satisfied beyond their normal confines, George and Gerry made their usual protest of having to do the dishes after all the big meals. With a word of authority from Bill they soon quieted down and began the task. Looking at his watch, Bill asked Joe and Tom to contact the others in the community and urge them to meet in the assembly room for the 3:00 p.m. broadcast.

The assembly room was just about filled as Tom entered with Frank Warren and his wife, Liz. Tom’s eyes quickly surveyed the room in search of Lynn’s presence. Observing her seated near the large window opposite the fireplace, he excused himself and rushed to join her. He barely had enough time to sit down, when the familiar Soviet emblem appeared on the television screen.

Once again the presence of Ambassador Krimkor appeared on the screen, as a voice introduced him to the audience.

Krimkor began to speak as the camera zoomed slowly in on his lined, aging face. “My fellow citizens, once again it is with deep regret that I must speak with you in this manner. I am speaking to you today regarding the behavior of only a few of your people, who have stubbornly refused to cooperate with the peaceful transition of our government, into the one great empire of Soviet Russia.

“In particular, I am referring to those who obstinately cling to their childish, superstitious Christianity, instead of swearing their sole allegiance to the Soviet Socialist Republic. We cannot and we will not, (his voice beginning to rise) tolerate such disobedience.

“My friends, we do not wish you any harm. By nature, we are a people of peace. If it were not for your own good and the good of our glorious country, I would not even feel it necessary to mention. But, if we are to

become united, it is necessary that this traitorous liaison be eradicated from this land.

"It is not that this is such a serious problem. It is more a matter of the delays, that will be caused to our progress, if such an undermining threat is not eliminated. In time, we will be able to remove this cancer from your soil, but many have compounded the problem by going underground with their dissent. Still others are known to us, but are located in remote areas of this country.

"As loyal citizens we urge you to report to the authorities, anyone you suspect of being a Christian or of Christian activities. To do so will be to your credit as loyal citizens of the Soviet Union.

"I now, must present to you a most unpleasant lesson of what may happen to anyone who refuses to put aside this religious foolishness and swear allegiance to the new government."

The scene on the television switched to an outdoor courtyard, and the announcer began to describe the event. "Citizens! What you are about to witness will not be pleasant, I urge you strongly however, not to turn off your television sets. It is a lesson we hope will not have to be repeated. It is presented to you as an example of the determination of our government to eliminate this menace and any other disunity."

As the scene unfolded, it was soon obvious that the viewers were to witness an execution. A small squad of soldiers were marched ceremoniously into view and put at ease. Then, after a moment, that seemed forever, another small group slowly entered the courtyard. Two soldiers flanking a third man, were literally carrying him in by the arms, in an effort to hold him up, as they led him to a chair near the garden wall of the courtyard. The trio was followed

by two other soldiers, who in addition to their own rifles, were carrying the weapons of the two soldiers in front.

Upon seating the man in the chair it was evident that he would not be able to remain seated, unassisted. As the man was being tied to the chair, the camera zoomed in for a closer view of the event. Suddenly someone from the audience at Sheepgate cried out, "My God, it's President Robinson!" Though recognition was difficult, it soon became obvious to the rest of the community that she was right. The buzz of voices which followed made it difficult to hear the remaining comments over the television. But the grim reality of the scene was unobstructed. Gasps and cries of anguish rang out from the group as the sound of the simultaneous explosion produced by the rifles echoed through the assembly room.

Tom turned to look at Lynn, who had diverted her attention toward the window, in an effort to escape the outcome of the horror which had taken place. As she stared blankly out of the window, the snow began to fall once again from the grey skies, and tears rolled slowly down her rosy cheeks.

Many within the assembly were weeping, both men and women. Some had fallen to their knees in prayer. Others were filled with fear and anger.

Pulling Lynn toward him, Tom attempted to comfort her. Lynn sank deep into his embrace, seeking safety and security.

Their hearts were saddened for President Robinson and his family, and they were feeling sadness for themselves as well. They knew their lives were to change, their persecution was near. They feared for their families and they feared for the steadfastness of their faith. Could they remain firm until the end?

Bill and some of the others took control of the group and began leading them in praise and worship of God, thanking Him for His many blessings, and praying for His strength to face the future. After a joyful thanksgiving and a renewed filling of grace, Bill urged them to return to their homes and contact their relatives and friends while they could. He also requested that all the heads of households reassemble in the meeting room at 9:00 a.m. the next day, following prayer service.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

For many at Sheepgate the intervening time passed somewhat mechanically. As 9:00 a.m. drew near the assembly room began to become a buzz of conversation, as husbands, wives, widows, widowers and singles gathered for the encounter.

Tom and Lynn were the last to arrive, along with Bill who politely requested everyone to quiet down. Once this was achieved he began to speak to them.

“My brothers and sisters. The future does not appear too bright. We are going to be tested in our faith as never before. I do not know if this is the beginning of the end, or not. I do know, if we remain steadfast in God, He will bring us to victory!

“I’ve gathered you here this morning to present the alternatives as I see them. We will probably be faced with a military confrontation, soon. It is no secret where we are, or what we profess. If you decide to remain here, you can expect to be persecuted. I believe if you leave, you will only be delaying the inevitable. There appears to be no way you will be able to exist without denying your faith. It is possible, I suppose, to attempt to immigrate to some country that is

not yet under the Communist control. But again, aren't you really just prolonging the inevitable?

"Of course, you are the only one who can make your decision. I only remind you to make your decision with prayerful consideration, of the path that you believe the Spirit is leading you.

"If any of you decide to leave, we will do what we can to assist you. May God be with you."

Again the buzz of conversation broke out everywhere. Many were torn in their loyalty, their faith, their fear for their safety and very survival.

By the next morning, most of the community had seemingly made their decision. About one-third of Sheepgate had decided to leave. Some had left already, others were preparing to do so. The community had tried to provide them with as much materially as could be spared. In addition to money, food and clothing, they provided them with other items which might be bartered, including wedding rings and other personal items of value.

Later that day Tom and Frank took the pickup truck and headed into town for supplies. They felt they should stock up now, while they still could. When they finally arrived at the edge of town, the activity seemed typical at first. People walking down the street, working in their yards, the usual traffic at the service station and children playing in the park. As they slowed down and approached the local supermarket, the townspeople began to notice them, and the pickup truck, with the Sheepgate logo on its sides. Some stopped and stared as they drove by, others shook their heads pityingly and one old woman shook her fist at them angrily, while still another spit at them and cursed. Tom and Frank looked at each other silently, wondering, is this what it's going to be like?

When they finally parked on the supermarket parking lot, Frank said, "You better stay with me. Let me do the talking, I've known these people longer than you." As they left the truck, Tom noticed that Frank locked the doors. This was the first time he had seen anyone lock anything since he arrived at Sheepgate. Entering the store, they noticed that everyone seemed to step back from them, as if they were carrying some dreaded disease.

Frank smiled and extended a friendly, "Hello." to a couple of men he knew. Though they returned the greeting, they quickly left the premises. When they reached the service counter, Frank said to the elderly woman behind the counter, "Good morning, Vera, is Harvey around? I've got a big order for him."

Vera looked over the top of her glasses and angrily snapped back, "We don't want your business anymore!"

Attempting to act surprised and confused, Frank continued, "Why Vera, what's the matter? We always pay our bills!" Becoming more excited, Vera grew louder and her face reddened in her attempt to get them to leave. The customers all stopped and watched the little drama unfolding before them. Within a moment, Harvey came out from his office behind the service area to see what was causing the commotion. Quickly quieting his wife Vera, he asked Frank and Tom to come to his office. Frank had known Harvey and Vera for six years and he was still somewhat shocked by her behavior.

As they shut the door behind them, Frank asked, "What's this about you're not wanting our business, Harvey?"

Looking surprised, the balding little man exclaimed, "Good God, man, didn't you see the broadcast yesterday? This is getting close to home . . . I shouldn't even be talking to you!"

"So it's that bad, huh?" asked Frank. Harvey nodded. Pleading, Frank continued, "Harvey, you're a Christian, you've got to help us!"

"I'm not the kind of Christian you are!" replied Harvey coldly.

"We have to have these supplies, we'll pay whatever you ask!" pleaded Frank.

Harvey remained silent for a moment. Looking up from his desk at the big man standing before him, he said, "I'll help you. But you have to do it my way and it will cost you double. Agreed?"

With defeat in his voice Frank said, "Agreed, what do you want?"

With a slight smile on his face, Harvey continued, "Leave me your list and meet me back here tonight at 10:30 p.m. How much did you want?"

"We have \$600.00!" Frank replied.

"Okay, I'll give you half of everything on your list, but keep it quiet! Now get out of here!" demanded Harvey.

Tom sensed a pressure building up within the large man he had come to love. And he wondered what would happen if that strength were unleashed. As they returned to the pickup, they discovered that it had been given a flat tire and pelted with eggs. Quickly they changed the tire and drove out of town.

Frank hadn't said a word since they left the supermarket. Pulling off onto a dirt road about three miles from town, Frank finally broke the silence. "Well, Tom, things don't look too good do they?"

"It sure doesn't." Needing to hear the human voice, Tom continued, "You know, for a moment back there, I thought you were going to punch someone."

This brought a hearty laugh to the big man as he

said, "For a moment, I did too, Tom, I did too! By the way, Liz and I are glad you decided to stay at Sheepgate. I know you are filled with God's Spirit, but is it because of Lynn?"

"Have I become that transparent?" questioned the younger man.

"Well it wouldn't take a detective," grinned Frank as he added, "but seriously, she's a fine girl and I've come to have a lot of respect for you as well."

Tom, a little embarrassed by the compliment, admitted, "You're right Frank, I am serious about Lynn."

"Then what's the problem?" Frank replied.

"You come right to the heart of the matter, don't you Frank?" Frank smiled again, that big grin that made him look like an overgrown kid.

"I'm not certain what the problem is. I love her and I've even asked her to marry me. She says she loves me, but wants me to wait for her answer. It's very frustrating."

Frank reached over and put his large hand on Tom's shoulder. With a slight reassuring squeeze he replied, "I don't know the answer either Tom, but I know Lynn well enough to tell you this, she's a very strong-willed young lady. She doesn't take a commitment lightly. I don't know why she is stalling you, but believe me if you will respect her wishes she won't leave you disappointed." There was an authority in Frank's voice that put a certainty in Tom. He felt reassured and comforted .

The two men continued to talk until they realized the sun had descended on the horizon. As they became aware of the lateness of the hour, Frank began to express a confidence to Tom. "This will probably be our last trip into town. Not only because of the resentment growing there, but frankly, this is the last of our money. I'm afraid the community is going to be a little disappointed when we

only come back with half of the supplies.”

“What are we going to do when that runs out?” questioned Tom.

“Trust in God!” snapped Frank. He wasn’t really angry at Tom’s question, but angry at himself for feeling his own doubts. Apologetically he added, “We will get by. All that we are buying now are those items we don’t grow at Sheepgate. Come on, we better start heading toward town. Everything should be alright, but I want you to stay with me, and be careful.”

Frank was quiet on the return trip to town, much as he had been when they left hours earlier. Tom was reflecting on the conversation that had taken place throughout the day. Frank was a good man and a good teacher, he answered many of Tom’s questions about this life, centered in on God, he put Tom at ease and dispelled many of his doubts. Tom marveled within, at the dramatic change in himself since coming to Sheepgate. He was now a believer in God. His priorities and values had changed. and, he was in love, perhaps truly in love for the first time. He was continuing to think about Lynn, when his thoughts were interrupted by the abrupt stop of the pickup, as Frank parked in the rear of Harvey’s store.

Harvey met them at the loading dock door and ushered them quickly inside. The store was empty, but Harvey appeared nervous. Though it was cool in the storage area, beads of perspiration were developing on Harvey’s balding head. He urged them to quickly check the supplies and pay him. He told them to move all the supplies to the outside loading dock before they put it in the pickup, so that he could lock the door and go home before his wife suspected anything. No sooner had the last box been brought outside, when Tom and Frank heard the

crash of the metal overhead door close behind them. The sound was much like the closing of a prison cell door. The two men shook their heads and began loading the supplies onto the truck.

As they were reaching for the last two boxes, they were startled by the sudden appearance of three men carrying clubs. Approaching Frank and Tom, the largest of the three, spit on the ground near Frank’s feet and said, “We don’t want your kind around here anymore!”

Putting the last box into the pickup and closing the tailgate, Frank said, “Don’t worry, we’re leaving and we won’t be back.”

“What makes you think I’m worried, Christian? When we’re through with you, we know you won’t be back!” With that, he and one of the others began to attack Frank, hitting him with their clubs and knocking the huge man to the ground. Tom took one step toward his friend, when he saw the third man begin to swing his club at him. Instinctively he kicked at the man striking him in the chest. The force of the blow caused the man to drop his club. Tom quickly reached for the fallen weapon, only to feel all of his senses leave him, as he received the full impact of being kicked in the side of his head.

Knocked to the ground, Tom tried to shake the confusion from his mind as he raised his arms to fend off another kick from his assailant. As the attacker attempted a third kick, Tom grabbed him by the leg forcing him to fall to the ground. Tom literally climbed the body of his aggressor and began pounding his fist into the attacker’s face. Blood began spurting from the subject’s nose and mouth. Tom then felt the limpness of the body beneath him as the subject lapsed into unconsciousness.

Seeing that Frank was still being beaten by the

other two men, Tom recovered his assailant's club and rushed to aid Frank. He struck the smaller of the two on the back of the head and the man's body fell limp across Frank. The larger of the two then jumped up still holding his club, yelling, "You're going to pay for that, sucker!" Tom sensed his only chance was to strike the first blow. Leaping toward his subject, he let loose with the full force of his strength and felt the club crack in two from the force of the blow.

Tom's exhilaration quickly changed to despair as his heart sank to the pit of his stomach. He stood there with half a stick in his hand, as the huge assailant started toward him carrying an ax handle. As Tom stepped back, the large man jeered, "You're dead meat, punk!"

Tom stepped back once more and realized his back was against the wall. In a last plea for help, Tom shouted, "God help me!" Facing his attacker he saw the man raise the ax handle high, to deliver the death blow. The man now seemed to be towering above him, when all at once, Tom realized the man was being lifted into the air. Frank had regained consciousness and was now picking up the last attacker high over his head. With almost a superhuman effort the man was thrown crashing into the wall next to Tom. He fell to the ground and did not move.

Frank pulled Tom by the arm and asked, "Are you alright? Can you get to the truck?"

Tom replied, "I think so." and they quickly got into the truck and drove away.

Once their adrenaline and blood pressures returned to normal, Tom was the first to speak. "My God, Frank, I thought you were dead."

"It will take more than that to get rid of me," Frank smiled as he added, "How bad are you hurt?"

Taking inventory, Tom tried to open his jaw all

the way, but the pain prevented him from doing so. As he reached up to feel his jaw, he became aware of the fracture in the fingers of his hands as well. "Not too good, but I think I'll live," was Tom's reply as he asked, "How about you?"

Frank said, "I think I busted a couple of ribs." Then feeling the open laceration on his forehead, he laughingly added, "And I don't think Liz will think I'm as pretty as I used to be." They both laughed and then grimaced in pain as they drove triumphantly back to Sheepgate.

The lights were on at Bill Paige's house as the two combatants stopped their pickup truck in front. No sooner had Frank turned off the ignition, when the Paige family and Frank's wife Liz rushed out onto the porch excitedly. "Where have you been?" "We were so worried!" "We didn't know what to think!" "Are you alright?" came the questions and comments as the group ran down the steps to meet them.

"We're okay," said Tom as he limped toward them.

"Oh Frank, your face, what happened?" Liz exclaimed throwing her arms around him.

"Easy Hon, easy." Frank painfully cautioned her.

Helping the two warriors into the house, the light revealed the full extent of their pain. The cut on the left side of Frank's head had stopped bleeding, but the two-inch opening looked deep as it lay open about one-half inch. The right side of Tom's face had swollen, and if it were not for the obvious pain and caring by those present, it might have been comical enough to elicit a laugh. Frank did most of the talking since it proved too uncomfortable for Tom to speak. After Frank finished relating the details, his wounds were cleaned and dressed. Bill told Gerry and George to unload the truck, then he and Joe helped Frank and Liz back to their home. Jean and Mary began cleaning up the

mess in the makeshift emergency room, as Lynn helped Tom to his room.

Once inside, Lynn began to cry as she confessed, "I was so worried. You wouldn't believe the thoughts that went through my mind. I certainly kept God busy tonight."

"It's okay Lynn, I'm back in one piece. I think.," said Tom softly trying not to open his mouth. Lynn put her arms around him and pressed her lips next to his . Tom paused for a moment and then pulled back pleading, "I'm sorry Honey, but it hurts too much."

Kissing him lightly on the left cheek she commented, "I'll owe you one when you're better."

Tom attempted to wink an already partly closed eye as he said, "I won't let you forget it." She then kissed his cheek again and said, "Goodnight. I love you." as she left the room. With a great deal of pain Tom undressed and laid down exhausted on the bed.



CHAPTER TWELVE

Shortly after the remaining countries of the free world recovered from the shock of losing their big brother protector, the United States, delegates from the Society of Common Market Nations met secretly, in a private chalet near Zurich, Switzerland. The emergency meeting was called by its three presidents to decide what action could be taken to preserve their freedom.

The presidents of the Commission, Parliament and National Council had decided among themselves to appoint a special President of Security Affairs. His purpose was to protect, at all costs, the ten member nations and the master computer, located in Luxembourg. For him to have the authority, it necessitated the unanimous approval of all ten nations. The result of such approval, would in effect, put complete power and control of all ten countries into the hands of one person. Thus making this alliance the most powerful single obstacle to communism .

The man selected for this appointment was, Daniel Belial. He was a slender, dark-skinned man of Arabian descent. At middle age, he had come into the limelight of

the world, only in the last ten years. His earlier background was sketchy at best. He supposedly possessed numerous degrees, and was considered an expert in economics, political science and military strategy. His hobbies included computers, where some considered him a programming genius, and world history, for which he was a noted authority. He was not married and seemed to lead a very private lifestyle. Though he was a private person, he was thought to be both charming and disarming, when involved in social situations. His oratory was highly praised and he was called a real spellbinder.

The three presidents were unanimous in their praise of Daniel Belial's ability and integrity. As a result, very little effort was required to obtain the desired vote of approval for this new and tremendously powerful position. Daniel Belial, was now the President of Security Affairs for the Society of Common Market Nations.

At no time since the creation of the Society in 1957, had there been such a cooperative effort of the nations involved. Now, under one head, the total resources of these nations could be combined for whatever purpose that leader desired.

The actuality of the ultimate power was not made public, and even the nation's leaders themselves were probably not fully aware of the implications of their decision. They saw their unity as the only hope against communist domination.

No sooner was the meeting adjourned, when Daniel Belial appointed the other three presidents as his immediate cabinet of advisors. Obviously, a well-planned strategy was beginning to unfold.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

By Christmas, all outside communication by mail or telephone had been eliminated at Sheepgate. For all practical purposes the community was isolated from any outside contact. Travel to or from Sheepgate was determined to be too dangerous since the incident with Frank and Tom. Occasionally, contact with other Christian communities was attempted by shortwave radio, but so far such efforts proved fruitless. Incoming news by television and radio was available, but it contained only such propaganda that the Communists deemed to be important.

The self-imposed imprisonment by the people of Sheepgate made them more determined than ever to remain faithful to God. As their activities lessened to the one purpose of survival, they used their extra time to strengthen their faith, through praise and worship and teaching. Though they had been gathering more and more frequently as a body, for meals, it was decided that everyone should have Christmas dinner in their homes, as families. As a special treat, a cow had been killed and meat distributed according to need.

As the women of the Paige family prepared the

meal and the aromas filled the house, Bill couldn't help but remark to Tom and Joe, "Today, it almost seems like nothing has changed. As though it were a Christmas like those of Christmas past." They both agreed, but in their hearts they all knew it might be their last.

Just then, the door was thrown open as Gerry and George came stomping in, their arms full of firewood. "It's beginning to snow again!" yelled George as he slammed the door with a kick of this foot.

"I think it dropped ten degrees while we were out there!" added Gerry as the two of them dropped their load near the fireplace. "We put a good supply of wood under a tarp on the front porch. It should last for a couple of days," was Gerry's last remark as he shook the loose snow from his heavy coat.

"Hurry, and wash up, we're almost ready!" came the sound of Mary's voice from the dining area.

Once again, Tom and the multi-generations of the Paige family gathered around the large oak table. Bill, as family head, reached his hands out toward those around him, as each member grasped the hands of those next to them. They formed an unbroken chain, a circle of prayer. Bowing their heads, Bill prayed, "Heavenly Father, we thank You for the blessing of this special Christmas meal. We thank You that we are all well and still together. We don't know what trials may lie ahead, but we know that whatever lies ahead, You will be there to strengthen and comfort us. For now, we thank You for today and we thank You for each other. Amen." and the others echoed, "Amen!"

They spent longer than usual at the meal, as though they were wishing it would never end. Finally, they moved into the cozy warmth of the living room, to exchange their gifts to one another. This year their gifts would not

be from a store. There was no money for that. Nor was it yet safe to leave Sheepgate. This year their gifts had to be personal, something from their talents and hearts. Perhaps it was because of this that each one looked forward to the opening of the gifts with an almost child-like enthusiasm.

Jean was the first to distribute her gifts to her family. As they opened them, the smell of cakes and cookies and other treats began to fill the air. "Oh mother!" exclaimed Mary and Lynn, "We didn't know you had the ingredients for these things."

"I've been saving them for this special occasion," was Jean's response. They all hugged her and delighted in the tasteful reminder of days past .

Mary asked that they open her gifts next. Bill and Jean were the first to do so. Carefully, Jean unwrapped their present and refolded the paper so as to save it for future use. Bill commented, "Jean, if you take any longer, I'm going to have a heart attack." The rest laughed as Jean gave him an aggravated frown. Then, as she began to unfold the cloth which lay on her lap, she revealed a beautiful hand-embroidered tapestry of many different colors. Holding it open for all to see, the tapestry disclosed the family tree of the Paige clan. The trunk and main branches of the tree formed the outline of the cross. In addition to the names of the family members, were dates of important events within the lives of those depicted. It was a beautiful testimony to a life centered on God. Tears came to the eyes of both Bill and Jean, as they hugged their daughter-in-law for her thoughtfulness.

The rest received lesser, but equally beautiful embroidered mementos.

Gerry and George gave handmade cards, pledging to do everyone's dishwashing chores for the next forty days,

to which everyone cheered.

Tom presented each one with a hand-tooled leather cover for their Bibles, to which Lynn exclaimed, "Oh Tom, it's beautiful! I didn't know you were so talented."

"That's just to prove my early years as a Boy Scout weren't wasted," came Tom's lighthearted reply.

Joe used his carpentry talents to provide each with a token of his love for them. To Tom he gave bookends, to his mother a new cutting board. For his brothers a hall tree for their room. He repaired the leg of a night stand for his father and a bookcase for Lynn. For his wife, some new closet shelves. And the best gift of all, for his son Bobby, a wooden rocking horse.

Lynn said, "My gift to all of you, is a new song I've written. I hope you like it." With that, she picked up her guitar and began to sing:

With each beat of your heart, it's Jesus knocking at your door.

Won't you please let Him come in, He wants to give you so much more.

With each beat of your heart, whether asleep or wide awake.

He provides for you each day, each and every breath you take.

With each beat of your heart, please don't let your love be fake.

For they hung Him on a cross, and He died, just for your sake.

With each beat of your heart, lift your hands and offer praise.

For the Father gave His Son, and His body He did raise.

As she sang, they sat there attentively listening on the outside, but reflecting inwardly on the comfort of the moment. They dared not dwell on the future, for fear of what may lie ahead, would overwhelm them.

Sensing the mood of the festivities heading downward, Lynn quickly switched to an upbeat melody and urged everyone to sing along. The Spirit of the group was soon rebuilt, as they joined her in a chorus of joyous song. Throughout the evening they continued to sing, and talk and praise the Lord. For a while, for one day, they had escaped.

As the evening grew late, Bobby had fallen asleep beside his rocking horse. Mary noticed, saying, "I better get him to bed."

"No, wait a minute." interrupted Bill, "I haven't given you my gift." Mary paused and Bill continued, "You've all heard me speak many times about taking advantage of the now in our lives. Of not putting off, letting people know how we feel about them and perhaps waiting too long and having to live with the regret of not being able to share with them, how much they mean to you."

"You're not going to give us one of your talks, are you, Dad?" teased George.

Smiling, Bill shook his head no and continued, "No, I just decided it was time I put into practice what I preach. I've written each of you a letter, you might call it my love letter to you." Distributing them, he added, "Don't open them now, wait until you are alone and can put aside any distractions."

Handing a letter to Tom, Tom seemed a little surprised and confessed, "Thank you. Bill, I didn't know I was included."

Putting his hand on Tom's shoulder, Bill said, "Of

course you are, Tom.”

Tom replied, “I want to thank all of you for what you’ve given to me since I’ve been here. You’ve given me family, and love, you’ve led me to a God I didn’t believe existed. You’ve shown me, how you give your very selves to one another. I only pray I can do the same for you.”

Jean added, “You became part of our family when you accepted God. We’re all in His family.” With a round of hugs and kisses, they then departed to their rooms.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The remaining days of winter and early Spring, were peaceful at Sheepgate. Though the community had long since consumed the last of their more perishable foods, they still had an ample supply of canned fruits and vegetables. They were eager to begin the Spring planting, in anticipation of fresh foods. Once a month they had slaughtered either a cow or a pig, to provide them with meat. Now, their limited stock was dwindling. They were determined to plant extra soybeans to supplement their protein needs.

By Easter most of the work was completed. After a joyous celebration of praise and glory that Sunday morning, it had again been decided by the community that each family should share their meal and the rest of the day privately.

This was to be a very special day, because some of the members of the Paige family were waiting for this day, to make some surprise announcements. As the family seated themselves around the table for Easter dinner, Bill started to reach out for the hands on each side of him, when he was interrupted by the unison voices of Mary and

Lynn, "Wait, I have something to tell you!" Surprised, the two young women looked at one another in disbelief, and then they laughed.

"Go ahead Mary, you tell us first!" said Lynn.

"No that's alright, you go, Lynn," replied Mary.

"Well somebody go, I'm getting hungry!" said George impatiently.

Then Mary began, "It's nothing too special, it's just that Joe and I are going to have another baby."

"Oh Mary, that's wonderful!" Lynn exclaimed, as all the others joined in. "Congratulations!" said one. "When are you due?" said another. "Bobby will have a brother," said George excitedly, to which Gerry added, "Or sister!" "Congratulations, Joe!" was Tom's remark. "Oh, it was my pleasure." laughed Joe.

"Wait a minute!" cried Mary, "We haven't heard Lynn's news!"

"Well hang onto your seats everyone . . . Tom and I are engaged!" beamed Lynn.

"Oh, is that all?" teased Joe. "It took you long enough." replied Gerry. "Can we eat now?" added George. Detecting a look of hurt in Lynn's face, Bill said sternly, "Alright, now cut that out! They're teasing you, Honey. We're all very happy for both of you."

Laughing and happy they quickly apologized and congratulated Lynn and Tom. "I don't know why you would want to get into a family with brothers like this!" replied Mary, adding, "I've had to put up with this for five years!"

"You love us and you know it!" was their defensive response .

"This is to be truly a day of joy. Let's pray now before this delicious food gets cold." Once again, they all joined hands and Bill proceeded to lead them in a prayer

of thanks, "Heavenly Father, what a beautiful day You have made. We thank You for the glorious resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, who died to save . . ." Suddenly, the door was thrown open with a loud crash against the wall and two figures entered the doorway, filling the opening.

"Mom and Dad we're home!" came the familiar voice of the taller of the two figures. Practically leaping from their chairs, Bill and Jean ran from the table to the doorway screaming, "Mike! Tony! Are you alright? How did you get here? We thought you might be dead."

By this time, the others too had hurried over to greet them. Mike and Tony, the first and third born of the Paige family looked terrible. They were dirty and their clothes were torn and wet. They had not been eating regularly or well. Dark circles had formed around the eyes of their unshaven faces. Mike coughed a great deal and both seemed weak and tired.

"We're okay! It just feels so good to be home," was Tony's answer.

"It's by the grace of God that we're here, there were times I almost gave up hope," Mike confessed.

Sitting them down, they removed their wet shoes and Mary gave them each a hot cup of coffee. "Don't talk too much, 'til you've eaten and cleaned up" ordered Bill.

"Same old Dad, giving orders." laughed Tony.

"Believe me it's good to hear friendly voices," added Mike as he asked, "Is anyone going to introduce us to that fellow over there?"

Looking in Tom's direction, Jean answered, "Mike and Tony, this is Tom Weston, the newest member of Sheepgate. And I might add, your sister's fiance."

"You mean someone is going to save her from being an old maid?" taunted Tony.

"Oh, if I weren't so glad to see you, I'd murder you!" lashed back Lynn. Tom laughed, and Lynn poked him in the rib with her elbow.

After their Easter dinner, everyone sat silently around the table as they listened to Mike and Tony relate what had happened at City on the Hill, the sister community to Sheepgate. Mike told them how communist soldiers had arrived at their community, and when they refused to deny God and swear allegiance to Communism, their leaders were executed.

"My God, you mean the Nauman's were killed?" Jean cried out.

Mike explained, "They were only going to kill Lou, but his wife, Rose, insisted they go together."

"Mom, killing a woman, didn't seem to bother them at all." added Tony.

"Anyway, that night, the community decided to try and escape," continued Mike, "I believe most of them made it, at least away from the community. We all separated according to families, and have put our survival in God's hands ever since. So, for the last three weeks, Tony and I have been trying to make our way here. There were very few who were willing to help us. The only help we got was from people in remote farmhouses, no one in any town would help. Some even tried to turn us in to the authorities. Dad, I believe we're all living on borrowed time."

Bill told them of the conditions at Sheepgate, adding that he agreed with their analysis of the situation. He urged his family to continue to stay close to God and pray for strength, for what was to come.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Tom and Lynn had chosen the Thursday before Pentecost, to be married. This was the anniversary of her parents, Bill and Jean.

They were to be married by the Spiritual Director of Sheepgate, Ed Sampson. Sampson was an ex-priest, who had left the Catholic Church when it formed an alliance with the World Congress of Churches. The World Congress of Churches was formed six years earlier in an effort to create a one-world religion. By doing so, the Catholic Church had relinquished many of its former dogmas, and Ed Sampson felt he could no longer remain faithful to such an institution. He was a learned man, in his mid-fifties, and had become a part of Sheepgate a little over five years earlier. Remaining single, he had immersed himself in the study of scripture and eventually filled the position of Spiritual Director of Sheepgate.

As the day of the wedding arrived, the entire community was caught up in the celebration. Not only were they happy for Tom and Lynn, but the excitement took their minds off of the pending gloom around them.

The assembly room was adorned with handmade

decorations. There were ribbons and strips of gaily colored cloth, candles of all shapes and sizes. Banners hung everywhere, each with some encouraging message or scripture passage of love. It was obviously a creation of a loving, caring people.

When all of the community were seated, Ed Sampson led the procession of Tom and Joe, from a side room to the center of the room. The seats were arranged in circular fashion, forming ever larger rings, like the ripple of a pebble thrown into a pond. Four aisles led to the center, breaking the circles into four equal groups, affording everyone an equal view of the event.

As the trio took their position in the middle of the circle, Tom brushed some lint from his blue suit and gave a little sigh. Joe then whispered, "Hang in there, it will be over soon." Tom smiled and raised an eyebrow.

Soon Liz Warren began playing the traditional wedding music on the piano in the corner of the room, as Mary advanced in step to the tempo. She was wearing a pink summer dress, with tiny straps at the shoulders. She smiled widely at everyone, as she carefully placed her bouquet in her left hand and moved to a position to the left of Tom and Joe.

After a momentary delay, Lynn and her father made their appearance, and for a brief instant Tom's heart began to beat faster with nervousness. The moment the bride began to walk down the aisle, Tom began to relax once again.

All heads turned, as Lynn and Bill began the brief walk down the aisle. She was wearing her mother's wedding dress which had lost much of its whiteness, since the discoloring of age had taken over. But it didn't matter, Lynn had never looked lovelier. Her brown hair gently

danced on her shoulders as she walked. Except for a subtle shade of lipstick, she wore no makeup, yet her cheeks were rich in color with the naturalness that only nature could provide. Her small bouquet of fresh cut flowers was carried carefully in her right hand. Her left arm was enveloped with that of her father. Bill seemed particularly pleased and happy, as he escorted his only daughter down the aisle to her intended.

Reaching the center of the gathering, Bill relinquished his daughter to Tom who extended his left arm to Lynn for her acceptance. Changing hands with her bouquet, she stopped for a moment and gently pressed her lips to her father's, with a kiss that said, "Goodbye, I love you." Then placing her arm in Tom's, they turned and faced Ed Sampson.

Ed paused for a moment, smiled at them and began the ceremony. "My brothers and sisters of Sheepgate, on behalf of Tom and Lynn, I welcome you in witnessing this union in Holy Matrimony," then he addressed the couple, "Tom and Lynn, you are here before this community of believers to enter into a union of oneness with each other. God has called you to give up your former life, to die to yourselves, for each other, so that, in becoming one, you will reach wholeness. God has chosen you to complement one another, to love one another, to lay down your life for one another, in unity, with each other, and in unity with God."

As he paused, Tom and Lynn knelt down in submission. Ed then continued, "Now, Lynn, do you accept Tom as your husband, to respect him from this moment on, to submit to him in everything, as the body of Christ, His church, submits to Christ, as its head?" Looking affectionately at Tom, Lynn responded clearly, "I do!"

Turning his attention to Tom, Ed continued, "Tom, do you accept Lynn as your wife, to love her from this moment on, to give yourself for her, to create a relationship that is cleansed and pure and faultless, without imperfection, to love her as you do your own self, to take care of her as Christ cares for you?" With a smile of happiness and a glance in Lynn's direction, Tom answered, "I do!"

"Then, Tom and Lynn, your life must be controlled by love, just as Christ loved you when He gave His life for you, as a sweet smelling offering and sacrifice that pleases God. For this reason, you shall leave your father and mother and all others, and cling to one another as to become one. Once so joined, you are no longer two, but one flesh, and no man can separate what God has joined. Therefore, from this moment on, be as one and draw your strength from God and His mighty power. I now pronounce you. One, in unity, with God as your head. Go in peace and love, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus."

Tom and Lynn turned toward one another, looking for an instant, with a perception of total commitment and surrender. Then embracing, they kissed into a blending of one. The entire community rose to its feet in applause and shouts of praise to the Lord.

For the rest of the day, the community continued its festive mood. There was much joy in the celebration, as gifts were opened, jubilant singing, dancing and expressions of advice and wisdom were exchanged. It was the perfect antidote for the impending depression.

When the evening grew late, Tom and Lynn thanked everyone once again, and excused themselves. At last they were alone in the Paige home, alone in Lynn's

room. They had removed their wedding clothes in favor of more comfortable nightwear. Tom was wearing a blue terry cloth robe that belonged to Joe. Since it was too large for Tom it hung down past his thighs to about four inches above his knees. When Lynn left the bathroom, the profile of her slender body became a silhouette against the brighter background for only an instant. In that instant Tom could feel his heart quicken. She was wearing a loose flowing, knee-length, blue nightgown and her hair was still dancing freely at her shoulders.

Tom held out his arms, and Lynn quickened her step to reach him. They embraced tightly, and Tom kissed her forehead and then her lips, as Lynn hugged him more tightly. Tom could scarcely believe he had found so much happiness in the year since he arrived at Sheepgate. Not only was he happy with his love for Lynn, but he now had a peace within himself. He knew who he was, who God was, and his joy knew no bounds.

Picking Lynn up in his arms he carried her over to her bed, as she kissed him and stroked the back of his head and neck. He gently sat her down on the edge of the bed and sat down next to her, putting his arm around her. As he started to kiss her again, Lynn stopped him saying, "Tom, would you mind terribly if we said a prayer first, . . . together?"

There was nothing she could do that Tom would mind this night. He smiled and answered, "Of course not."

Remaining seated next to one another, they held hands and prayed a prayer of thanks to God, each offering their lives to God and each other. When they finished, Lynn patted Tom on the hand, smiled lovingly and said, "Thank you, that meant very much to me."

"And you mean very much to me." responded Tom.

As they kissed, Tom slowly lowered Lynn back onto the bed. And the two became one.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The next morning promised to be a beautiful spring day. The morning dew had not evaporated, and the morning sun glistened on the droplets which clung to the flowers and leaves around Sheepgate. Lights began to appear in the homes of the community as its occupants set about the tasks of another day.

The members of the Paige household were particularly happy this day, as they made a special effort to perform their chores as quietly as possible. Quiet whispers were exchanged as each family member reached the kitchen and asked Jean if the newlyweds were up yet. As the last of the breakfast dishes were washed by Jean and Mary, Tom and Lynn sheepishly made their entrance. Lynn asked, "Is it too late for breakfast?"

"Well, good morning, sleepyheads," teased Mary.

"Your breakfast will be ready soon," answered Jean cheerfully.

Tom and Lynn seated themselves at the table, and Lynn was becoming increasingly annoyed and embarrassed by Mary's poking and teasing her. Sternly, she insisted,

“Mary, stop it!”

“Ah, to be young,” taunted Mary.

“Leave them alone, they’re happy,” Jean urged Mary.

From the distance, the mechanical roar of heavy machinery was beginning to increase in intensity. It was quickly evident that some large vehicles were headed toward Sheepgate. As the whine of the motors increased, the people of the community began to emerge from their homes. Soon a small convoy of military vehicles made their appearance on the wooded road.

Tony responded with a mixed tone of excitement and despair in his voice, “It’s the Communists they’re coming just like they did at City on the Hill”

“Quick, we better get away!” yelled Mike.

“Wait!” ordered Bill, “Where would we go?”

The small group of armored vehicles and trucks pulled to a noisy halt, forming a half-circle around the community waiting there. Quickly the soldiers jumped from the trucks and surrounded the group with their weapons in a ready position. Some of the children began to cry as their mothers were comforted by their husbands.

Emerging from the cab of an armored vehicle, an officer of about thirty years of age, issued an order in Russian.

About half of the company of soldiers quickly searched their captives, while the remainder made a search of the homes and buildings of Sheepgate. A few of the community, mostly children, had remained inside and were soon brought out. Also removed were a few rifles and shotguns the community had used for hunting.

Once the stragglers were added to the group, the Officer began to speak to them in English. “I am Captain Treshkin, my men and I have been sent here to overcome

all resistance to peaceful governing by the Soviet Republic. Who is in charge here?”

Bill stepped forward, releasing Jean’s hand. “I am the spokesman, only God is in charge!” he responded.

Agitated by the remark, Captain Treshkin snapped, “Soon you will not be so quick to persist in your mythology. What is your name?”

“Bill Paige,” he answered as his eyes studied his adversary.

“Is this all of your community?” the captain continued questioning.

Panning the group visually, Bill answered, “Yes!” adding, “We are not resisting you. We mean you no harm.”

“Your very existence is resistance, that is the harm!” argued the captain, “For your own good, I suggest you refrain from any further comments, and only answer my questions. Understood?”

“Understood.” Bill answered, quietly lowering his eyes.

“Very good!” continued Treshkin, “You and your community have been charged with resisting the supreme authority of the Soviet government, by failing to deny your deity and swearing allegiance to the Soviet Socialist Republic. It is within my authority to provide you with the opportunity to alter these attitudes and seek the necessary rehabilitation, so that you may become productive citizens. You see, we mean you no harm. If you are harmed in any way, that must be your decision. Each of you will be given an opportunity to correct your distorted thinking. Failing to do so, will result in your elimination as a deterrent to peace. Your children of course, will be spared and enrolled in our schools where our change agents can correct their thinking. What is your decision?”

Stunned with the suddenness and finality of the decision, the community stared at one another in disbelief. "All of you who choose loyalty to Russia, step forward!" commanded Treshkin.

"Give us some time," Bill pleaded.

"You have had months, you now have one minute," insisted the captain.

With great fear and confusion, the community attempted to comfort one another as the moment quickly passed with no one stepping forward.

Increasingly aggravated, Treshkin continued, "Your time is up . . . I don't know if you are stubborn or just stupid, but you are playing with your lives. In time I know many of you will change your minds. My orders are to select one of your number each day you refuse. The person selected will be executed for treason, with you as witnesses. This will occur each day, until you decide where your loyalties lie."

The sound of his words caused the group to embrace one another even more tightly, as some began to weep quietly. Mary hugged Bobby tightly to her bosom, as Joe pulled her closer to himself. Lynn squeezed Tom's arm so hard, he flinched in pain. Tom felt a sudden rush of doubt, confusion and fear flooding his mind. To avoid panic, he tried to fill his thoughts with Lynn and prayer.

"Enough!" commanded Captain Treshkin, "You have made your decision, now I will make mine." Though his mind was already made up to choose Bill, as the leader of the community, he said with a jest, "Is there a volunteer?"

Pushing his way through the group, Frank Warren stepped forward. Seeming to tower over the Russian, he said defiantly, "Will I do?"

Liz screamed, "No, Frank don't!" as Mike and Tony held her from running forward. Jean quickly attempted to

comfort her.

Angered at the readiness with which Frank responded, Treshkin glared at him, as he said, "You have taken my words lightly, we shall see how brave you now are." Gesturing to a small detachment of his troops, they immediately stepped forward and seized Frank, who did not resist. They led him to the side of the barn and tied his hands behind him. Frank refused to have his eyes covered, as four soldiers assembled in formation about twenty feet in front of him. The Sergeant in charge then walked ceremoniously to the right of the four soldiers and called them to attention. Most of the community turned their heads or looked down, the murmur of their prayers were overshadowed by the commands of the Sergeant, as he coldly ordered his men, "Ready . . . Aim . . . FIRE!"

The unison of the four shots echoed over the lake and through the surrounding woods. As the echo disappeared, there was a momentary silence throughout the valley. Suddenly Liz shrieked in terror as she broke loose from the restraint of Mike and Tony. Rushing forward, she threw herself on the huge form now lying motionless on the ground, and she sobbed bitterly. The Sergeant started toward her, but was stopped by the captain who ordered, "Leave her!"

Turning his attention to Bill, Treshkin ordered, "You will force me to use this same procedure each day, until you become reasonable. Tell your people to return to their homes and stay there. If anyone attempts to leave, my men have orders to shoot them. Now take three others and bury the traitor."

Bill called Tom and Mike and Tony to help with the burial of their friend, as Jean and Lynn took Liz into their home. The rest then departed to their homes, deeply

saddened by the events.

After they had dug about three feet into the ground, the soldiers guarding them, ordered them to stop. It was deep enough. The four men strained as they lifted the huge body of their friend and placed him in the shallow grave. Replacing the dirt, they silently prayed, for Frank and one another. When finished, they returned to the Paige household, where they found soldiers guarding the outside of all the homes.

Entering the house they found Jean still trying to comfort Liz. Bill went over to the couch where she was seated, sat down beside her and put his arm around her. Pushing her face hard into his shoulder, she began to cry uncontrollably as Bill reassured her, "Go ahead, Liz, let it all out." Jean patted her on the shoulder and looked lovingly at Bill. As Bill looked back at Jean, tears welled in their eyes.

Tom washed his hands and went to Lynn's room where he found her seated on the edge of the bed, reading the Bible. Sitting beside her, they threw their arms around one another, and Lynn exclaimed, "Oh Tom, I was so afraid! I'm so glad, God gave me you!" and she held him closer. Tom remained silent, not knowing whether to reveal to her his own fears.

Throughout most of the day the Paige household was relatively quiet. Liz had been given a sleeping tablet and was now resting comfortably. Bill and Mike were reading their Bibles. Joe and Mary stayed in their room with Bobby, as did Tom and Lynn. Jean went about cleaning the house, as Tony began painting the living room in an effort to keep busy. Gerry and George went through the motions of building a puzzle. Outside, sentries stood in silent vigil.

That evening, after a supper which was barely eaten, the Paige household met in the living room. Mary, frowning,

looked at Tony and asked, "Did you have to paint in here today? The smell is terrible!"

"I'm sorry," he replied, "I just had to keep busy."

"I know you're all upset about what happened," Bill began, "I'm afraid our time has come." There was silence, as most nodded in agreement. Bill continued, "I know you are all strong in your faith, but I thought it might be good for us to talk together about any fears or concerns we may have. It may be our last opportunity."

Tom was the first to speak, "Isn't there something we can do? Do we just have to stay here and be killed, one by one?"

"What can we do? Where can we go?" asked Bill.

"Tom, the outside world we knew, no longer exists! The people out there are struggling to survive, . . . to cope. Many are willing participants to the system, others are merely submitting, so they can exist. They're not going to risk their lives for us, they've already risked their souls to stay there," continued Mike.

"We wouldn't have been able to go on much longer, if we hadn't reached Sheeppgate when we did," added Tony.

"I agree with Tom" interrupted Liz, "I'm not as strong as you or Frank"

"Liz, what Frank did was not out of strength. You know how he was, always doing everything and going out of his way for others. He did what he did out of love. Frank gave his life to buy us more time," said Jean, consoling her.

"Damn it! It's just not fair!" Tom exploded, "For the first time in my life I find true happiness and love through you and Lynn and God. Only to have it taken away. We've got to do something . . . we've got to try an escape . . . go to Canada or somewhere."

Bill responded sympathetically, "We can appreciate

how you feel, Tom. But I believe we are being summoned to a higher calling. To bear witness to Him, with our very lives. No one here can speak for you, you have to make your own decision. We will pray for you and our love is with you, no matter what you decide.”

Tom sat back on the couch with Lynn, still feeling completely frustrated and angry. What should he do? What could he do? Could he give up his life without a fight? Was he afraid to die? Did he fear his faith was too weak? Had he not been a Christian long enough? As these questions raced through his mind, he became more and more confused and frightened.

The rest of the evening was spent with everyone trying to express their love for one another, sharing happier times, shedding tears, hugging and kissing. As the hour grew late, they gradually departed for their rooms, reluctant to do so, for tomorrow would come too quickly.

As Tom and Lynn walked slowly to their room, she gently massaged his back, trying to relieve the tension she could feel inside him. Upon closing the door, Tom asked, “Honey, am I wrong? Shouldn’t we be trying to survive?”

“Tom, sit down, and please try to hear me out!” pleaded Lynn, as she paced slowly back and forth, trying to search for the right words, “I love you! Nothing makes me happier than the thought of spending the next forty or fifty years with you. But, . . . I . . . agree with Mom and Dad and the rest. I don’t think we would have a chance out there. If I must die . . . I would rather die with my family. I . . .”

“I don’t want to lose you now!” interrupted Tom.

“Please let me finish, Tom,” she continued, “I would hope and pray that you felt the same. Yesterday, we were married. We made vows to each other, Tom. I promised then, to submit to you in everything. I will keep my promise. I

love you, no matter what you decide. I will be with you.” She then pushed Tom back, down on the bed and began kissing him.

Tom, only half responded to her affection. The impact of her words hit him squarely in the heart. The decision was to be his responsibility. Not only must he decide for himself, but for his most cherished love as well.



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The following day the sun was just rising over the hills surrounding the valley, all the households of Sheepgate were suddenly awakened by the soldiers pounding on their doors. They were told to assemble outside in five minutes. Soon the residents began streaming from their homes, pulling jackets and sweaters tightly around them as protection against the early morning chill and dampness.

Once assembled, and the soldiers verified that all the homes were empty, Captain Treshkin again made his appearance. He smiled pleasantly and greeted them. "Good morning! I trust you all slept well. Now that you have had more time to consider your situation, I hope we will not have to repeat the events of yesterday." Slowly scanning the group, as if searching for an indication of confirmation to his words, Treshkin continued, "Have you come to your senses? Are you going to save your selves and become loyal citizens?" There was silence from the group, who stood there looking soulfully at him. "All of you who have reconsidered, step forward," he commanded. No one moved.

"Very well, have it your way," he said defeatedly,

“Who will be your volunteer today?” There was a pause, and then Bill raised his head proudly and marched forward determinedly.

When he reached the Russian captain, he stopped and said, “I forgive you.” Before Treshkin could say anything, Jean stepped forward to the side of her husband. Then Mike and Tony came forward, followed by George and Gerry. And then Liz. As Joe kissed Mary and Bobby goodbye, to volunteer, many from the other households were beginning to step forward as well.

Fear began to well within Tom, when suddenly his heart was pierced with the words he had vowed at his wedding. To love, as Christ loved, to give his life out of love. The commitment to these words filled Tom with peace and courage as he kissed Lynn to join the rest. And Lynn walked with him, hand in hand, gazing proudly at her husband.

Treshkin’s face began to fill with anger and hatred at the defiance of death displayed by the community. How could they be so foolish? Glaring at Bill, he struck him across the face with the back of his hand and yelled, “I don’t need anyone’s forgiveness you will be my volunteer!” Nodding to his men, they pushed the group back into formation. Again the execution party led their captive to the side of the barn and proceeded with their ungodly ceremony. As the shots rang out, Bill’s sons and Tom, held and consoled Jean, Lynn and Mary.

Before Treshkin dismissed the group, he told them, “You have persisted in your stubbornness. Therefore, tomorrow, I will take two of you. This number will double each day until you change your mind, or the problem has been eliminated.”

As the others returned to their homes, the Paige household was allowed to remain, as Mike and Tony buried

their father next to Frank. They then returned to their home in sadness.

Later that night after Tom and Lynn withdrew to the privacy of their room, Lynn said, “Tom, I’m so proud of you. I know how difficult your decision was. It is not easy to willingly choose to give your life. I love you so much.” Turning toward him as they lay there in bed, she put her arms around him and kissed him.

Continuing to hold her in his embrace, Tom responded, “Honey, everything within me wanted to run today. I have never been so afraid in all my life. But it suddenly hit me as Bill and the others started to step forward. It hit me, that everything that has happened to me since I came here, was either the biggest lie I ever got caught up in, or, it was completely true. The strength of the others stepping forward, strengthened me, their faith removed my doubts. Your submission to my decision, convinced me of your love. My vows of commitment to you, pushed me over the brink, to step forward, in faith of a God who loves me more than I love myself. I love you too, my darling, even if it is only for one more day.” And they clung to one another in a tightening embrace.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

In the months which followed the appointment of Daniel Belial as President of Security Affairs for the Society of Common Market Nations, practically all power had been taken over by him. While appearing democratic, he had grown to dictatorial proportions in authority. It was on this Pentecost Sunday that he called an emergency meeting of his immediate advisors, the presidents of Commission, Parliament and National Council.

As the trio seated themselves in Belial's chamber, it was evident that they were now submissive to this man they had put into power. His authority and influence had far surpassed their own. Looking slowly at each of them seated across his desk, the stern grimness of his face slowly changed to a smile of pleasure. He then addressed them, "Gentlemen, everything is now ready. The communist threat has been so preoccupied with its own internal problems, that they have had to postpone, the advance of their domination of the world. Their control of the United States has taken them longer than they expected, and this has given us the necessary time to prepare for a first strike offensive."

“Surely, you don’t mean to attack Russia!” exclaimed the president of Parliament.

Again smiling, Belial continued, “My friend, not only do I plan to destroy Russia, but China, as well. I shall end the communist threat now, once and for all! then, we will be the most powerful government in the world. With the United States and the communist threat eliminated, we can achieve a one world control, with peace forever!”

The National Council president excitedly asked, “Do you think we can really pull it off?”

“I know we can!” Belial answered confidently, “Now go, and prepare your statements. Within the hour, I will launch a nuclear attack unparalleled in the history of mankind. When it is over, we shall be in power.” The trio hurried in their departure, for there was much preparation to be made.



CHAPTER NINETEEN

The sun was just beginning to crest the hills surrounding the Sheepgate valley, and the soldiers began pounding on the doors of the residents, to assemble them once again. As the soldiers began to take their positions, it became apparent that the usual activity was absent from the homes this Sunday morning. No lights, no voices, no movement, not a sound. The soldiers began to look at one another, puzzled and curious as to what was possibly occurring. Was it some sort of trap or plan of attack? Had they somehow escaped? Did they commit suicide? Why had they refused to emerge?

Captain Treshkin stepped from his vehicle and ordered, "Where are they? Why aren't they assembled?"

"I don't know, Sir!" replied a sergeant, "They don't seem to be in their homes."

"Ridiculous! The guards were posted here all night, weren't they? Have your men go in there and drag them out. But use caution!" Treshkin commanded.

Following their instructions, squads of soldiers burst into the homes in a military manner. Soon they emerged, all with the same response, "The house is empty, there is no

one there!"

"You fools!" blared the captain, "I want the names of every man on guard duty last night. They must have escaped. Find out how, and where. Send patrols out to find them. That many men, women, and children can't just disappear, without a trace. Find them!"

Angrily, Captain Treshkin stomped up the porch of the Paige home and entered, as if to convince himself that they were really gone. Looking around, the house was empty of life. The beds were unmade, clothing was lying on chairs beside them. As he entered the bedroom of Bill and Jean, he noticed the pillow was propped up against the headboard, as if someone had been reading. On the bed were a pair of women's glasses, an open Bible, a pen and a notebook, which appeared to be some sort of journal. The journal was turned to a new page. All that was written on the page was the date, May 1, and the Scripture passage, I Thessalonians 4:16-18. Glancing at the open Bible, Treshkin noticed that the heading at the top of the page read, I Thessalonians 4, 5.

Curious, he picked up the book, deciphering that the words written in the journal meant the fourth chapter of Thessalonians, he quickly scanned to the sixteenth to eighteenth verses, where he read, "No, the Lord Himself will come down from Heaven at the word of command, at the sound of the archangel's voice and God's trumpet; and those who have died in Christ will rise first. Then we, the living, the survivors, will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thenceforth we shall be with the Lord unceasingly."

Treshkin hesitated momentarily, a feeling of fear and doubt over taking him. Angrily he threw the Bible back on the bed, and left the Paige house slamming the door

behind him. Walking down the steps, he crossed the lawn in the direction of the barn. As he neared the graves of his two victims, he stopped, frozen in his tracks. His mouth opened in amazement as his jaw fell toward his chest. A cold chill ascended his spine. His knees seemed to lose their strength and buckle under the weight of his body. He fell to his knees, put both hands to his face and began sobbing, as he knelt there before the two empty, open graves.

THE END

