

## SHEAVESVILLE: With Every Secret Thing

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### **Part I • *That No Flesh Should Glory***

#### **Chapter One**

#### *Scared Out of Their Wits*

From a cloudless sky a shaft of deadly lightning careened out of nothingness, reaching down and severing a branch of a large oak tree and shattering the quiet of the summer afternoon. Flame, bearing cold shadow, and the oak bough crashed on rocks and trees beside an old stone wall that bordered grassy acreage behind the old Catholic church.

Inside, several children had been meeting, secretly, for fear of an unknown terror they all sensed was growing within their small community. The shattering noise had arrested their gathering and set them swiftly upon their feet. Coming out of the basement door in the rear of the church, exiting from the children's wing, the kids scattered in all directions. Two of them—a young boy and a slightly older boy—retreated together towards home, as another claw of crackling fire and blinding light missed them by only ten feet.

"I'm scared," whimpered Little Drew, his small heart pounding in his chest like the little drummer boy running from Halloween to Christmas in 30 days. He looked too much a *whiter shade of pale* for a child who had been in the sun all week. "I'm really scared," he repeated.

"Me, too," chimed in Bo—his real name was Mephibosheth, but the other kids couldn't pronounce that so they adopted the nickname his grandmother had given him: *Bo*. She pronounced it *Beau* (as in *Beau Geste*). Bo was older than Little Drew and rather protective of him.

"Are you sure someone's after us?" Drew asked. "Some bad man or something like that is doing all this?"

"I'm sure," said Mephibosheth, "so don't stop running till we get to the hedges." Bo felt as though his legs were just about to give way under him. His energy seemed to be going, but he knew he and Little Drew couldn't stop until they reached cover, some modicum of safety. Mephibosheth's being blind didn't help the situation. Although he usually found his way around this area sightless, he welcomed Little Drew's efforts to lead him today and felt some comfort from the tug of Little Drew's tiny hand, pulling him forward. Bo nearly tripped over a rabbit that seemed to pop out of nowhere. "Watch the bunny," Little Drew warned too late.

When the children in the Glendon neighborhood talked about "the hedges," they meant the box hedges and bushes and trees that lined the senior complex of condominiums and courtyards nestled on the southwest edge of town. Many tiny paths ran throughout the

maze of shrubbery, which was old and towered over the children, so that once inside “the hedges,” the children could not be seen from without. They knew how to scamper between flowerbeds and potted plants and rose bushes and pine trees without being spotted. They felt they could always hide in the nooks and crannies of the hedges until danger passed.

As they continued their race toward home, an oppressive mist seemed to spread like a dark blanket above the children, cutting them off from the 2:00 PM sun. Little Drew could feel a chill from the blackness, like icy fingers reaching out to ensnare him. It was as though the dark and cold were palpable spiritual nightmares crowding out all sense of hope and life. Then, out of nowhere a light flashed all around them, and the darkness fled, driven back by a power greater than any earthly army. The warmth of the sun touched their arms and shoulders again. Nevertheless, Mephibosheth kept urging Little Drew on.

Mephibosheth could not have imagined that a secret government agency was trying to find him. He did not yet fully understand the nature of his gifts or the fact that secret government “trackers” searched for *remote viewers* like Bo. This covert organization wanted to control the talents of remote viewers for their own purposes. So far Bo had been able to “shield” himself from prying tracker insights, but as his powers grew and he had need to use them, the seekers might get nearer to discovering him.

Perhaps it was for that very reason that Margot and Basil had been sent to the Glendon Hall to protect Mephibosheth and to teach him, and the other children, how to use a very powerful spiritual gift that would become increasingly more necessary with each passing day. But at this point in the story, Bo was only beginning to learn about the presence of Margot and Basil at the Glendon complex.

As the children nestled into a bed of soft ground cover under a low-limbed leafy tree, they breathed in the breeze-borne fragrances of berry and blossom, cut grass and weathered leaves, the chill of promised winter and the warmth of Indian summer. The dread seemed to pass them by, and they rested until the sun came close to setting in the western sky. Little Drew was exhausted. Bo sang very softly to the child: *Lay down . . . your sweet and weary head.* Little Drew sighed a whispered antiphonal: *Why do the white gulls call?* and fell asleep.

Mephibosheth’s grandmother had taken the boys to see the elven *LOTR* movies—all three of them. Bo said God let him “see” the third one “clearly” because the story was “very important” for people today. Both children loved the winsome song, especially Little Drew. He liked to think of the white gulls and the gray ships and the dawn. Mephibosheth held the sleepy Little Drew in his arms until the sun had completely set. Not long after, they made their cautious way home, Bo still singing sweetly, but now his favorite chorus, “Blessed be the Lord God Almighty!”

Named after his father, Drew had been dubbed *Little Drew* by his family because they referred to his father as *Big Drew*. Some of the children at times would call Little Drew merely Drew. It was a toss up.

Drew's mother had dinner ready for the boys when they reached the safety of Mrs. Bailey's house. Smells of home-style meatloaf, and mashed potatoes made with real cream, butter and brown gravy, wafted out the back door to greet the children upon arrival. Bright golden sweet corn—not over-boiled—towered in a plate in the center of the table next to the hearty meatloaf drenched in tomato sauce. As soon as she saw the boys, Florence Bailey telephoned Bo's grandmother so she would not worry about her grandson's whereabouts. "The Lord told me he was alright, Florence," the grandmother said, "but it's awfully nice of you to call. I appreciate it." Mephibosheth's grandmother was proud of her African-American heritage and the deep spirituality of the Black Church.

People like Drew's family and Bo's grandmother seemed drawn to this small town, as though guided to live here by an unseen nudging, pulled gently by a spiritual magnet that "called" to only certain types of persons, and not to others. It was an unusual community that had slowly assembled over the years in Sheavesville, especially in the small Glendon area, not just within the courted complex but among many of the surrounding old-fashioned houses surrounding this sweet corner of American-style family life.

The Bailey family originally was four. Then, without much warning, Mrs. Bailey and Little Drew had been left alone when his father died at a relatively early stage of his life. Although Florence Bailey missed her husband dreadfully, she had always found comfort in her sons. Little Drew, the baby, had been born quite a few years behind his older brother, Craig. Years later, Craig had gone to Iraq, with the Marines, and had been killed. Nearly a year had passed since Craig's death. Now, it was only Florence and Little Drew at home.

In the park, the town had erected a small monument—a statue of PFC Craig Bailey in uniform. Young Craig had always been so popular with the local folk. Even his high school buddies had remembered him as a young man with resolute integrity and a winning smile. The statue was surrounded by flowering trees and several park benches set in a circle facing the statue. Etched into a tasteful bronze plaque were the words *Semper Fi* and Craig's name and vital dates.

In these serene surroundings, those who lived in the neighborhood could sit and reflect. Little Drew enjoyed coming to this spot and talking to Craig. He never spoke to the statue but looked partly up to the sky and talked to his departed brother, whom he dearly loved. With their father gone, Craig had been both a daddy and big brother to Little Drew. Now the child missed him very much. Little Drew always ended his conversations with his brother with a salute and "Semper Fi." He never forgot when Craig had taught him to speak that tribute. It had been right here in the park, walking home after school, his tiny hand in his big brother's manly paw.

The park housing the statue was at the southwest end of the Glendon Hall neighborhood. Glendon Hall, with its apartment and condo complex, plus a few old scattered houses, was situated at the southwest corner of Glenn Haven, a town formerly known as Sheavesville. Under pressure from realtors, who thought the name Sheavesville would not attract house buyers, the City Council changed the town's name to Glenn Haven many years ago. The change, however, did not produce better real estate sales. Old

timers did not hesitate, therefore, referring to Glenn Haven as Sheavesville, for the original name stood for something special, even though that original intent had been lost in history forgotten.

“Were you children down at the park?” Mrs. Bailey asked.

“Partly,” Little Drew answered.

“We were also at the church,” Mephibosheth added, “earlier, before we came through the park and on home.” Not to worry Florence Bailey, Bo revealed nothing about the boys’ encounter with the powers of darkness. Bo’s grandmother knew about her grandson’s increasing encounters with the enemy of souls, and her prayers for him increased. Following his friend’s lead, Little Drew also said not a word about what had transpired earlier in the day. He looked up at Mephibosheth, who seemed to “see” Little Drew staring at him, sensing his inquiry. Bo answered in his mind: *not too much to tell*.

“Not too much to tell today,” said Little Drew. “Not too much.”



David Voltaire said to himself that he was not used to doing this sort of thing, but now he was sensing an emergency. He looked at the well-designed business card on the door, where a nameplate ought to be, and he mused on the poetic sound of her name: Lydia Lavender. She was a strange one, he thought, but then they were all strange at this complex where he lived, and perhaps he no less than the others. Still, Lydia knew a lot, he suspected, and he needed to secure her friendship beyond the brief *hellos* and *good mornings* he exchanged with her and so many others.

He rang the bell.

Lydia Lavender came to the door. “Why, Mr. Voltaire,” she said, in a pleasant tone, “do come in. It is *Mr. Voltaire*, isn’t it? What can I do for you? How nice of you to come by.”

“I know we really haven’t met,” he replied, rather nervously, but I wonder if I might have a minute of your time. I thought you might be able to throw some light on something, if you don’t mind my asking.”

“I don’t mind at all,” Lydia Lavender responded, “and I bet it has something to do with Ms. Margot across the way,” she added.

“You don’t?” David stammered, “and, well, uh, yes, it does; I mean, it might have something to do with Ms. Margot and, uh—“

“And Basil,” Lydia finished his thought.

With that brief introduction or odd crossing of a bridge, David found himself in Lydia Lavender's condominium, seated in an antique chair, next to a small table that looked like a museum piece out of Dickensian England; he sipped her Earl Grey tea from a cup that must have been Minton china, at least, and struck up a conversation.

Almost as though she anticipated some of his questions, Lydia Lavender began to tell David Voltaire what little she knew of Margot Motherchurch and Basil Tuxaxle, who had recently moved into the complex a few weeks ago.

They had taken that corner condo that had remained vacant for such a long time—the agency that managed the complex never would say why it had been vacant so long, even when David had asked to see it, giving the excuse that he might be interested in securing it for himself. Now it was occupied, and by the two strangest people, if that's what you would call them. It was as though some elusive broker had kept it on reserve until the arrival of the two new, enigmatic neighbors.

No one really knew who in Glendon Hall rented an apartment or who actually owned a condo. All the units looked basically alike, although odd differences occurred, as though the original builders had purposely enjoyed a little construction joke now and then. Some of the units actually held "secret" closets and small "hidden" rooms.

"You see, David," Lydia used his first name finally and spoke almost in a whisper, "I, too, was curious about that vacant spot, and wondered why it suddenly became available to these two persons. Had they been the ones securing it all these years—I've been here nearly nine years myself, you know—and what is the meaning of this sudden change? It's all very curious, indeed."

David agreed that he, too, was curious, but this concern was something that went beyond curiosity, because there were strange events associated with Ms. Margot and her stooped-over dwarf-like partner, and David Voltaire was finding himself obsessed with wanting to know all about these two and what their presence at Glendon Hall—as close to a senior citizen community as you can get with quite a few people under 50 living there—forebode for the complex. David was adrift in his thought. It was at this moment, however, that Lydia used a certain strange word again.

"What do you mean by *my-are*?" David asked.

"Oh, Maiar," replied Lydia. "Well, that's what Margot called herself, when I mentioned that her name was a bit unusual and, of course, interesting. Being originally from Europe myself," Lydia continued, "I am fond of the history behind any name."

"But what does it mean?" David questioned.

Lydia tried to console him: "*That* she never clearly explained, and later when I tried to find out more, she changed the subject, as though it either was not very important or she felt she should not have told me in the first place."

"Talk about odd names . . .," David said.

“By the way,” Lydia remarked, “did I ever tell you that my real name is *Lavanduer*? Well, of course, I hadn’t. We just met. Anyway,” she continued without waiting for David to respond, “when our family came through Ellis Island decades ago, they asked my grandfather what his name was—our name—and he said *Lavanduer*, but they didn’t understand him and wrote down *Lavender*. When they showed him what they had written, my grandfather merely shook his head and said Yes. Thus, I have been Lavender ever since.”

*Better than orange with green dots*, David thought to himself.

The full extent of what David Voltaire learned from Lydia Lavender in that 90 minutes they visited over Earl Gray tea in her condo was confusing, to say the least, but definitely not boring. David tried later to organize it all in his mind but had that feeling that he was not grasping all the connections. Yet, connections, there were. He was sure of it. Somehow, all these phrases and turns of phrases that Margot had revealed to Lydia came together like a mosaic might, only David was not sure how. As the mystery deepened for him, it also seemed strangely clearer at the same time, if clarity is what you would call it. The strangeness seemed to be calling to him, like a voice out of a mist in time.

Again, there was that whole *Maiar* thing—David had learned from Lydia that there was a correct way to spell the strange word. Then there was that odd comment, whether of Lydia’s own musing or something Margot quoted from Basil (David was not sure which), “Some humans are more sensitive to *Maiar* than others.” What did that mean? Also, Lydia kept saying that these things were connected but “only by grace.” Everything, she had insisted, happened, in the case of Margot and Basil, “only by grace.” *Which implied what?* David wondered.

Finally, a creepy thought surfaced, and who knew where this vagary came from, that somehow these events were all tied in to “warnings.” Warnings coming to their little community, even maybe to the whole world, through children—like that blind child with the Bible name: Mephibosheth. Yes, David remembered, Mrs. Bailey . . . she said that her Little Drew had been told by Bo (*that’s what the other children called Mephibosheth*, David told himself) that the feelings they all were getting—unsettling premonitions, really—were special warnings that the children had to pass on to others. *But what were these warnings about?* David asked himself. *Why did they come only to the children?*

Mephibosheth and his grandmother lived at the end of the lane that ran within the complex; the lane ran parallel with, but separated from, the main road, and distanced by a box hedge and row of pine trees. A few old Victorian-style houses dotted the far ends of Glendon Hall. Bo’s grandmother had inherited one of these Victorians many years ago. David remembered hearing that fact. As though hearing an echo inside his head, David again pondered: *So what were these warnings about? Why did they come only to the children? How were they all connected?*

*Connections.* That was the word that intrigued David now. Lots of seemingly disparate connections. And sayings, sayings that reminded David of something his mother had

read to him in childhood but he could not quite place it now, such as “like and equal are not the same thing.” Who had written that? Or who had said it? And why did it trouble him now? Margot had repeated it to Lydia—or had Lydia repeated it to Margot? David felt himself getting confused. He thought almost that he heard something speaking to him in his head, something trying to reach his mind with a message.

David Voltaire decided to call it a day. After he excused himself from Lydia Lavender’s and thanked her for her hospitality—she invited him back “anytime,” she had said—he took a long walk around the complex where they all lived, several apartments and condominiums arranged in squares around several small courtyards with paths and arches and patches of small garden space with perennials and annuals and bushes that blossomed off and on throughout the mild winter of California’s Central Coast; except that in their little town, a sense of four distinct seasons prevailed.

Here in this small complex of condominiums and courtyards—set apart from the town, toward the West, and bordered by a main road and an inner lane—an even stranger sense of distinctiveness permeated everything, especially since Margot and Basil had arrived. *Was there any connection between their arrival and the so-called warnings the children claimed they were envisioning within themselves?* All these questions in his mind made David feel exhausted.

When he went to bed that night, David suddenly remembered—just as he was dosing off—something else odd at Lydia Lavender’s condo, a book he had noticed lying on the floor by the tiny tea table, a book that did not in any way seem congruent with Lydia Lavender. He remembered looking at the title, and being a bit shocked, but tucking the thought of the title away in his mind for another time. Now suddenly the thought surfaced.

*Effective Stringy Description of Schwarzschild Black Holes.* David did not remember the author. It was enough work to remember the title. He had repeated it to himself more than once and stored it away until he would depart Lydia’s presence. *Stringy?* he said to himself. Didn’t that have something to do with quantum mechanics? The topic certainly did not appear to go with Lydia Lavender and her Londonery-like living room!

The world is changing too rapidly, David considered. It was turning into an infinitely curious universe for him. Perhaps too curious. As he finally drifted off to sleep, these thought challenged him, bewildered him, but eventually pulled him like kelp beds out to sea, down into the depths of much-needed rest, in spite of disturbing dreams where pieces of antique furniture floated past swirling spirals, and in and out of stringy spider webs that looked like windows opening onto the past and the future at the same time. His dreams were full of cobwebbed bolts of lightning crisscrossing back and forth with each swing of a penultimate pendulum. Then, **bam! Boom!** . . . He was rudely awakened by a thud at three o’ clock in the morning.

## Chapter Two

### *Only the Blind Can See*

David nearly fell on the floor as he tried to get out of bed. He stumbled against the bedroom door, which opened of itself into the hall. His ears were hit with another *boom-crash*, more deafening at three o'clock in the morning than the first.

David went to the window of the living room and peered into the hallway that joined all the apartments. Something odd was happening across the way at Margot Motherchurch's place. He decided to take a closer look.

Opening the front door to the outside hall, David saw strange-looking creatures—*well, they must have been people*, he said to himself—going up and down the stairs and in and out of Margot's condo carrying what appeared to be electronic equipment, the likes of which David had never seen before. Everything made of crystal and silver seemed to be melded into one piece, yet transported in sections needing to be assembled quickly, for they were hissing like static electricity.

Short like dwarves, the helpers carrying the boxes and pieces of casing totally ignored David's presence. They were taking everything into, what in David's own apartment, could have been the smaller second bedroom. Through Margot's open front door, David could peer into the adjoining room through its open door, and beyond. Margot's apartment was at the end of the court, but her door and foyer window were opposite those of David's apartment. No end of machinery, it seemed, was being hauled into Margot's domain.

But this was impossible. So very many workers. So very much equipment. And yet it kept coming. Tons of it. How could it all possibly fit into that one small room, for the porters were taking it nowhere else except into that one confined space? *How could this be?* David wondered.

He was about to say something to someone, when out of the blue, that strange Basil Tuxale appeared, slapped the last dwarf on the *tuches* to usher him inside, and slammed Margot's front door in David's face. The hall was empty. And quiet. And David felt annoyed and snubbed. After all, they were the ones whose loud noise had awakened him, and he hadn't even had a chance to complain.

"Ei! Eizel!" David shouted. "You old *a-tuches-un-a-halb*," he snorted. And that was not a kind thing of which to accuse Basil, since he really was quite skimpy in that particular area.

David went back to bed and slept soundly in spite of the night's interruption. Before he dozed off, he made a mental note to touch base with Lydia Lavender in the morning to see what she might know about these odd goings on at Margot's. If Lydia knew anything at all. David had not noticed other lights going on and off in the Glendon complex, where other dwellers had also heard the strange noises that had awakened a number of them.

Nestled at the southwest end of the little town of Glenn Haven, the Glendon Hall complex comprised several sets of two-story residential buildings. In each set, four buildings framed a courtyard in their midst, forming a perfect square of open space for garden and grass, flowers and trees. Two of every set of four buildings held two rows of apartments or condos on either side of a long inner hall, the doors of the individual units facing each other within the hallway.

Every second floor unit had a balcony with a sliding glass door, and every first floor unit had a patio with the same. Some patios and balconies faced the court inside, and some on the opposite side of the buildings faced outward toward streets and walkways and parking lots. The buildings were set far enough apart so that ample room allowed access around all the structures to courtyards within and to external streets and paths, as well. Slowly the lights in the windows everywhere were going out and quiet was spreading from dwelling to dwelling.

Outside the night was serene. The air was laden with peace. A heavy calm poured down like sweet cream, and from some homes that evening in Glendon Hall, prayers like incense ascended. Intercessions mingled with clouds of hope in the sky above and held a vigil of promised dreams with the stars. Distant galaxies swirled savagely among heavenly constellations. Time and space spoke whispers of mystery on history's habitual horizon. Glenn Haven, formerly known as Sheavesville—and that's another fascinating story—was currently unaware of a hustle bustle of cosmic activity fanning out in the vast reaches of space beyond earth's cloud-strewn atmosphere. For those asleep in Glendon Hall, on the edge of Glenn Haven, the world seemed wrapped in nostalgia and serenity. Serene, however, was not the case!



*The clouds surrounding the Savior flashed with a resplendency that out-shown the noon-day sun. Glorious beyond what tongue could tell or pen portray, the majesty encircling the Son of God engulfed all other objects in the universe in a light no imagination could endure.*

*No human eye could behold the scene for more than a second. Glory forced the eyes to turn away in awe and trembling. The Holy One sent from the Father's throne began to descend in flaming loveliness as Mephibosheth stretched out his arms to embrace the Coming King . . . .*

Lying upon his bed at night, looking into the dark, Mephibosheth dreamed—whether asleep or awake—of a day that would come, a day when his Blessed Lord would give him sight, just as He had given sight to the blind two thousand years ago. And he would see Him and greet Him as children did so long ago so far away.

Mephibosheth heard his grandmother calling him. “Bo,” she said, “Remember, He’s a wonderful Savior, a wonderful Savior.” Sometimes she liked to quote from *Narnia*, which she had read to Mephibosheth, *No, He’s not tame, but He’s good. He’s the King.*

“Mephibosheth! Where is that boy?” and she trotted off, forgetting what she wanted him for but knowing he could be trusted.

Mephibosheth thought of what his grandmother had said, “A wonderful Savior—He’s the King,” and his mind continued to make the lovely images that his eyes had never seen, nor would ever see, if the doctors were right who told his grandmother he would remain blind for life.

Yet, Bo was not a doubter, and he believed strongly down deep in his heart that this Blessed Savior, his King of glory, would truly return one day and give him even more than sight—give him all the reasons for his blessed affliction that was a gift to the world. Bo thought of his favorite promise: . . . *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him* (1 Corinthians 2: 9).

For, “doesn’t innocent suffering open a portal in the sky from which a river of unobstructed grace pours down upon the earth!”

Mephibosheth knew that he was part of that river of grace, part of the opening of the portal, and this blessed hope was enough for him. “The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped,” he sang, and—though he knew it not—all the angels in heaven sang with him.

Although Bo felt happy, he wondered sometimes what would become of his life. Not that he feared the future. No, he felt quite secure in his little home with his grandmother. What he wished he knew was more about his own destiny. Would he ever make a really special contribution to this world? He wanted to. He hoped to be someone significant—not famous, but useful. Would there be some interesting task, he questioned, that God would give him to do? Would it have profound meaning?



One day in early May a very strange thing happened that grabbed the attention of the entire community. Several children were playing in a park near the house where Mephibosheth lived with his worried grandmother, for she worried often that he would not have all the good things that she felt he needed and deserved, in spite of his amazing spiritual gifts.

It was a lovely warm day, and the sun was peaking through the golden green leaves of trees that branched high over the heads of the children as they played on the grassy lawn of the neighborhood park. The wind stirred the leaves, and the light coming through seemed to sparkle whenever the foliage moved ever so slightly in the spring air. A faint fragrance of rose and freshly cut grass and something herbal hung lushly in the atmosphere.

Two of the children were pushing a third who was sitting in a wheel chair. This disabled child, Robby Doyles, had been afflicted with multiple sclerosis. He had been ill by now for

the last three years with the probable diagnosis of MS, which is somewhat rare in children. In spite of attempts at treatment, he had experienced very bad relapses, and had been in intensive care for smaller ones. Now he was unable to walk properly and had been confined to the wheel chair. The Glendon neighborhood children, however, never tired of pushing his chair and having him around.

All of a sudden Mephibosheth stopped in his tracks and began staring into space. “What is it, Bo?” said little Katie Brewster. “I see something bright,” said Mephibosheth. “What?” asked Katie, “you’re blind, Bo. How can you see anything?” “I don’t know, “ said Mephibosheth, with some hesitation and perhaps a little alarm, but I do. I see something bright.”

Bo began to walk toward a clump of trees circled by wild flowers at the edge of the box hedge-bordered park. Katie followed him, almost with a reverence. Both children stopped just short of the ring of tiny-blossomed flowers that encircled the young supple trees. Bo put out his hands as though to halt Katie before she made a mistake, but what mistake was not clear.

“They’re here,” said Mephibosheth.

“They who?” asked Katie.

“I don’t know, “ Bo answered, “but they’re good, and they want Robby to come here and wait.”

“Wait for what?” asked Katie, but she was already off to call the other children, especially the two that were pushing Robby in the wheel chair.

Obedient to Katie’s summons, all the children helped bring Robby in the chair right over to where Mephibosheth seemed to be staring into space—in spite of the fact that blind children can’t see anything—at the edge of an invisible barrier of sweetness and light the flowed as if from a hidden fountain somewhere in the midst of the young trees.

“What do they want, Bo?” Robby inquired, his speech slightly slurred.

“They want you, Robby,” Mephibosheth responded. “They want you to get up and come over here so they can love you.”

Quite to the amazement of all the children, and now some grownups who were looking from across the street, without even realizing that he wasn’t questioning this impossible request, Robby got out of the wheel chair, pushed it back, and stood up straight, and tall! He walked right over to where Bo was standing, still staring into space in front of the circle of wild flowers.

“Did you see that?” gasped Katie.

“I sure did,” said Little Drew, “Robby walked! Real straight. All by himself.”

The other children were too awed—but not actually frightened—to approach the spot where Robby and Bo were standing side by side. The pair seemed to be conversing with someone, or some persons, directly in front of them, but those looking on would not be able to see anything at all, for there was, it appeared, nothing there. Nothing at all.



“What did you make of that?” asked Lydia Lavender, as she opened the screen door to let David Voltaire enter her kitchen from the porch-side.

David had witnessed the same thing Lydia had seen on her way home from the farmer’s market. She had been crossing the street that sprawled adjacent to the neighborhood park where the children always played. It was a safe park, tucked away in a safe neighborhood, a little below the level of one street and completely blocked off from the other streets by its border with the city bike path that was frequented more often by walkers and joggers than by bicyclists.

As she glanced toward the park, like David who was driving by in his car, Lydia had the impression of a haze of lights floating around the children and, especially, around Robby as he walked through flowers. Later, stories circulated by parents and friends of odd events at the park and worry over what the children were doing.

“You mustn’t lie about things,” Mrs. Doyles had said to Robby. “You mustn’t tell strange stories just to get attention. It isn’t right.”

“But I’m not lying,” Robby protested. I did walk around a little in the park. The trouble was, he could not walk now, and no one believed the children’s stories.

“So,” Lydia said again to David Voltaire, “what did you think?”

“I don’t know,” David replied. “I’m sure, like you, that I actually did see Robby Doyles up out of his wheel chair and walking around, and then those strange lights, or mist, or whatever hovered near the edge of the tree line.”

“That’s what I mean,” said Lydia. “I know I saw something there, by the trees, where the hill goes down to the creek on the other side of the fence. Like a shadow all lighted up or something. I don’t know. But Robby is back in his wheel chair and can’t walk. Mrs. Doyles is taking him to the doctor’s tomorrow just to check on his health. She’s afraid something is happening to his eyes and ears.”

“That’s silly, Lydia,” David said. “The kid’s eyes and ears are as healthy as anyone else’s, and the other children, including Mephibosheth, all saw and heard something odd. And you know that boy Bo never lies about anything. The whole neighborhood knows that.”

“Yes, yes,” Lydia returned, “I know Mephibosheth does not tell tales, but not all the other children saw what Robby and Mephibosheth say they saw and heard. Some saw and heard nothing. The older ones especially.”



Margot had heard the story, as well. She heard everything that went on in the neighborhood at that more rural part of town. In spite of the little apartment complex in which she and Basil lived, this westernmost corner of town was sparsely populated and somehow set apart like a little quaint suburb that had never quite developed appropriately. Many old houses, and even what some youngsters might enjoy calling “haunted houses” still struggled to survive against the elements of four decided seasons.

Margot discussed the account of the children’s strange event with Basil, if discussing was really what happened when Basil and Margot communicated. The way they talked to each other was more like a point-counterpoint partita or Bach invention. Each having a voice but weaving around one another more for the sake of aesthetics than for the sake of information.

“What do you make of that, Basil?” Margot asked.

“You sound like Lydia Lavender,” Basil retorted.

“I do not sound like Lydia Lavender. I sound like myself,” Margot came back.

“Yes,” said Basil, “but she talks like that: *What do you make of that!*” and he imitated Lydia with a high squeak.

“Lydia does not squeak, Basil. You know she does not squeak.”

“Does she squawk?” sang Basil, and then he laughed, jumping about, first on one foot and then the other. “Squawk, squawk, squawk,” Basil continued.

“You are impossible,” Margot said.

Basil quickly repented, “I’m listening now.”

“Good! I’m glad you are attentive. Because I am talking about wondrous happenings,” Margot said.

“What special things are happening?” asked Basil, although he really knew.

“Miracles, miracles,” Margot sang, “are they miracles? And why now? And why here?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know,” intoned Basil, “yet they shine like starlight.”

*They dance like moonbeams, she thought in her mind.*

And his own mind replied, *Grace, grace, all connected by grace. Notes and birds and weeds and trees. Spice and herbs and roses and bees. The miracle of endless grace.*

Basil jostled around Margot, his eyes dancing, his smile scampering, his thoughts obedient at once to her suggestion: *Oh, alright, now, sit down.* So he did.

Then Margot began to relate the entire story from beginning to end, just to hear herself elaborate on the details. She wanted to make sure she really did understand the history of these bizarre encounters that seemed lately to be escalating daily. Of course, she welcomed Basil's insights, too.

Margot told Basil that she thought she knew perhaps what this all meant. She sensed more in these events than others around town would ever understand. She felt deep within mind that these stories were flags of warning. The children, she explained to Basil, had stumbled on to something big. Perhaps "stumble" was not quite the right word.

Nevertheless, they had come upon it. They had found a door right into the world of important messages that humans were supposed to receive from the invisible realm—good messages, of course, but serious ones nonetheless. Besides, Margot was convinced Robby would be completely healed of multiple sclerosis. It was only a matter of time. And time was short. The "visitation" in the park had been a foreshadowing of more exciting things to come. And perhaps very soon.

Yes, these were not merely signs; they were warnings, clear and simple. They meant something. The innocence of the children invited the good within the invisible realms to spill over into our world and caution those who would listen. "Let those who have ears to hear, hear!" cautioned Margot.

"Let those who have eyes to see, see!" responded Basil.

"Exactly!" Margot said.

"Warnings."

"Yes, Basil. Warnings."

"Oh, my frogs and tadpoles," Basil mourned.

"Frogs indeed," said Margot.

"Are we going to have to have a meeting soon?" asked Basil.

Margot turned quickly upon her heel like a pirouette spinning toward *Stop!* "Yes," she snapped with a jerk. Her body assumed the posture of one of the *corps de ballet* in *Swan Lake*—no single name describes the features of Margot's one-woman *Swan Lake*, *corpse de ballet* pose: her right leg pointed to the front as *croisé en avant*, wrists

crossed, head inclined, supporting leg straight or *en plié* (bent). In this position, she looked like a dying swan.

Often Margot enjoyed posturing this way when she greeted her friends. It was different—aesthetic for sure, but definitely odd. Like a marble or a bronze, she held her body in this statuesque stance, as though she were center stage, and repeated, “Yes, we definitely are going to have a meeting!”

Basil was delighted. “A council with counsel,” he declared.

“A conference,” said Margot.

“A consortium,” chirped Basil.

“At least,” Margot replied, still standing in her bizarre, but graceful, swan-like form. “A consortium, at least!”

### Chapter Three *Of Secret Councils and Munchy-Crunchies*

Mephibosheth listened to his own heart and in his very breathing he thought he could hear the Father's voice, kind and tender, speaking to him quietly, saying wonderful things about the love of God: *You may not know Me, but I know everything about you ... I know when you sit down and when you rise up ... I am familiar with all your ways ... Even the very hairs on your head are numbered ... For you were made in My image ... In Me you live and move and have your being ... For you are My offspring ... I knew you even before you were conceived ... I chose you when I planned creation ... You were not a mistake, for all your days are written in my book ... I determined the exact time of your birth and where you would live ... You are fearfully and wonderfully made ... I knit you together in your mother's womb ... And brought you forth on the day you were born*

*... I have been misrepresented by those who don't know Me ... I am not distant and angry, but I am the complete expression of love ... I offer you more than your earthly father ever could ... For I am the perfect Father ... Every good gift that you receive comes from My hand ... For I am your provider and I meet all your needs ... My plan for your future has always been filled with hope ... Because I love you with an everlasting love ... My thoughts toward you are countless as the sand on the seashore ... And I rejoice over you with singing ... I will never stop doing good to you ....*

The wind outside the windows sighed. The trees overhead rustled and cried sweet whispers like water falling over rainbows. The leaves of autumn fell in the gentle breeze like wafting angels' wings, translucent and wondrous, filled with glory bright. The twilight turned to evening as stars swept quietly across the sky. In his mind's eye Mephibosheth felt as though he could see it all. He heard it all and tasted it and smelled it, a bright clean fragrance of crystalline energy and comforting touch, neither warm nor cool but truly perfect. He knew above all things that one grand and perfect fact of simple eternal comfort: *God is good!*



Lydia Lavender sat up suddenly in bed. It seemed as though a bright light were shining all around her. She was amazed but not afraid. Then it dawned on her that the light was coming from outside but flooding into the bedroom. She got out of bed, went to the window, and looked out. What she saw startled her.

David Voltaire was standing in his bare feet and pajamas in her garden. He was looking up, into the sky, with his hands raised over his head. He seemed to be saying something—or, Lydia thought, singing—although no sound was coming out of his mouth. Lights were dancing about him, playing off his shoulders and back and chest. A sheath of lovely pink light was wrapped around his body like a cloak and spiraled upwards into the heavens, as though the stars had dropped down parts of themselves and were now picking up the pieces and returning them to the swirling nebulae from which they came.

Lydia grabbed her housecoat out of the bedroom closet, hastily put on some bedroom slippers and made her way downstairs—she lived on the second floor. As quietly as possible she slipped out the front door and came around the corner of the building to where the garden was. She could clearly see her bedroom window from here. David, however, was nowhere in sight. He was gone. Vanished.

This was too much for Lydia. She went right back to her bedroom and telephoned David. A busy tone greeted her. She hung up, waited a few minutes nervously and redialed. The line was still busy. She decided to pray. “Lord, I don’t know what is going on, but I sure hope David is OK. Please resolve all this. It’s disturbing.”

Lydia dialed David’s number again. And again the busy tone! *Well, she decided, I can’t stay up all night. I’ll get some sleep, she said to herself, and then, in the morning, I’ll walk over there and knock on his door.* Tomorrow was Saturday. He should be home. Not only would she ask him about the lights, and—*what was he doing in my garden?* But she would also suggest that she and David go to visit Margot and Basil. It was time to get some help. Time to collaborate.

In the morning, Lydia was awakened by her phone’s ringing. It was David. “I was hoping to talk to you today,” she said to him.

“I need to talk to you, too,” David agreed.

“What were you doing in my garden last night?” Lydia asked him.

“Your garden? I was in your garden? Last night?”

“Yes, don’t you know that?”

David did not know. He told Lydia that he had gone to sleep and had a strange dream about floating and seeing the stars dancing and hearing music. And he saw beautiful creatures like living light, and they were turning the leaves of a book, and, then, David realized that the book was the Bible.

“Maybe I should take you up on your invitation to go with you to your church,” David said. “Something sure is calling me to God, but I’m not sure what this is all about. Heavens, Lydia, don’t tell me I was in your garden last night. You’re scaring me.”

Lydia decided to wait until they were speaking face to face before she told David all that she had observed. They agreed to meet that afternoon, in the court by David’s place. A small picnic table with benches was in that little garden and shielded from prying eyes by rose bushes and hedges and one low crab apple tree.

“Ok,” David said, exasperated. “Tell me everything. What did I do? Did I break anything?”

“Heavens, no,” Lydia replied. “You just scared me to death. You were standing there in your pajamas and bare feet, completely oblivious to reality but fully engaged in whatever those lights were doing. You seemed to be singing with them, or something like that.”

David explained to Lydia that her description of his presence last night was very much like his dream. He discovered in the morning that unwittingly he had knocked the telephone by his bed off the hook.

“That explains why I kept getting a busy signal when I tried to call you,” Lydia remarked.

As they compared observations and experiences, they both came to the conclusion that all of this was connected. “It all has something to do with Margot Motherchurch,” Lydia admonished.

“And Mephibosheth, too,” David added. “I’m sure he’s involved in this, too.”

“Yes,” Lydia responded, “the children are in touch with these things, and I know that Bo’s grandmother has been seen talking to Margot—and Basil.”

It turned out, however, that Lydia had some further disturbing news to share with David. Several disabled children, it was rumored, were healed this past week when they visited the park. The “authorities,” unfortunately, were not happy about this.

“What authorities?” David asked her.

“Well, my church, for one,” Lydia told him. The church was up in arms, Lydia added. They were upset that they had not been consulted. That new associate, Pastor Braith Brandt, was “concerned” that these healings could lead to something “disruptive” within the community of faith. Some of the parents had gone to the school officials and to some city officers. But no one knew what the result was of those encounters.

Lydia was not sure what all of this meant, but she sensed an even greater urgency for her and David to meet with Margot. “After all,” she asked, “what harm can it do? And it may do us all a lot of good if we neighbors cooperated with one another.”

David reluctantly agreed. He was not wild at the prospect of visiting Margot and Basil, yet his curiosity was overwhelming his reluctance, and he knew that he needed answers to all the strange things as much as Lydia did. They decided together that Lydia would contact Margot right away, since Lydia had already met Margot, and set up a meeting. Lydia would invite them all over for tea. David began to smell Earl Gray and taste blueberry scones. Lydia said she would call Mephibosheth’s grandmother, also, to see if some of the children could come over for cookies, as well, and share with the adults what the children had experienced the past few weeks. The mention of cookies clinched it for David. Now he was actually looking forward to this event. It was turning into a big party!



As it turned out, Margot agreed with Lydia's desire to meet, with one stipulation. Margot wanted them all to come over to her home. She told Lydia that she and Basil had already talked about the urgency of holding a conference with their neighbors. She was so adamant about their all coming to visit with her and Basil that she offered to provide "wonderful refreshments" for all who attended the "secret council." Upon David's hearing the phrase *wonderful refreshments*, his mind conjured up visions of oat-meal raisin cookies and even shrimp cocktail with a great tangy sauce. He would go with Lydia to this party, he determined.

Everything came to a head on Sunday night. Telephone calls were made. Neighbors had been contacted. All who were invited to Margot's accepted the curious invitation. Like David, their curiosity, and perhaps their sense that they were all sharing in something already—although they did not know what—forced them to "join hands," as Lydia put it. They arrived on time. David with Lydia. Mephibosheth with his grandmother. Little Drew with Florence Bailey, his mother. Robby Doyles with his entire family. The Doyles had taken Katie Brewster with them. And others trudged in a few minutes late. All Glenn Haven neighbors.

"People have begun wondering what the meaning of these miracles could be?" Lydia was heard saying.

"Local churches, some quite displeased, were looking into the matter, since the police said that healings, good or bad, were not in their province," Mrs. Bailey inserted.

After further chatter and sipping of tea and munching of very delicious goodies, which Basil kept bringing out of the kitchen, Margot announced that she would clear up the whole mystery, "as much as is possible at this time," she added. "There's more to come," she warned. At the same moment, someone passed a plate of sweet-smelling goodies to David. Quick like a bunny, he grabbed one of the tasty-looking morsels before the plate passed into the hands of hungry children on its way around the room.

"What are these things?" David asked Margot before he sat down.

"Oh, they're *munchy-crunchies*," Basil said. He interrupted before Margot had a chance to say a word. "Mr. Tumis taught Lucy how to make them after she became a Queen in Narnia." David heard what Basil said, but he decided to drop it. He took another big bite nonetheless.

"And these lovely wafers?" Robby Doyles' mother asked.

"They," Margot said, "are a form of *lembas*."

"Lembas!" shouted little Drew and Bo in unison. "You mean, like in *The Lord of the Rings*? But how?"

"Precisely how," said Margot. "It is a recipe directly from Imladris.

"Rivendell," said Bo, knowingly.

“Yes,” said Basil. “Rivendell.”

“Wow! How did they get here?” Little Drew yelled in delight.

“Oh,” Margot insisted, “we cannot go into HOW tonight. Some day I will tell you how these *impossible things* can be possible, but now— Well, we have a council to hold. A much needed council of friends, new and old, and dear sweet children and neighbors.

And at that, she went into her *Swan Lake* posture, which seemed to say, Be seated. And everyone did so.

“There are more things in Andromeda and Orion than are dreamed of in your philosophy,” added Basil rather faintly. But everyone was now focused on Margot and hardly heard him.



Once everyone in the room was comfortably settled down, a treat in one hand and a glass of punch or tea in the other, amidst a plethora of soft and brightly colored pillows that she seemed to have strewn everywhere, Margot encouraged Lydia to tell all she knew about the other night’s experience with David’s odd appearance in her garden.

When Lydia finished laying out her story before the group—and she did not take as much time telling her tale as David thought she would—Margot asked David to express his concerns about what had happened to him. He had lots of questions, particularly about the thud at three o’clock in the morning that had abruptly awakened him. He explained quickly that he had no idea what he was doing in Lydia’s garden in the middle of the night, thought it had something to do with his weird dream, but mostly he wanted to know about the strange activity the other night at Margot’s place, that so abruptly awakened him at 3:00 A.M. What was all that machinery? And who were all those dwarves? The questions just spurted out of him.

Margot told David she would meet with him sometime soon to explain more about the strange-looking items that had been brought into her dwelling by funny-looking friends of hers in the wee hours of the morning. She also told David and Lydia that she was certain David had enjoyed an encounter with angelic powers that wanted to celebrate with him in anticipation of good things to come. These living lights had conveyed David to Lydia’s garden to nurture both of them and to begin to prepare them for what was eventually going to happen to everyone “who had faith to believe” among this newly emerging Glenn Haven family of “warriors.” What she meant by *warriors* Margot did not explain now.

Then, Margot asked the children and their families to speak whatever was on their mind, and several people shared, but they all seemed to have the same basic questions. Had there really been miracles? If so, what did that portend? Why did they all have this growing realization that they were all connected to one another and to these events?

And, further, what did Margot think—or know—was going to happen next? Everyone did seem to imagine that they were all being pulled together into one larger “family” of “believers” called to participate in something extraordinary. But how extraordinary? And exactly what was it?

Margot conceded that she was certain the healings and other strange events taking place in their Glendon neighborhood involved end-time warnings.

“What are end-time warnings?” David questioned. Lydia tried to answer, but Margot headed her off.

“It has to do with more than you may have been taught at your church, Lydia,” Margot admonished. These are universal warnings, signs of the times and yet also messages of love and comfort. These are prophetic voices but also choruses of joy. Something wonderful would come to pass—all in God’s good time, Margot insisted.

“You see,” Margot explained, “I believe the Creator has reactivated the other six dimensions in the Zero Point Field.”

That statement made absolutely no sense to David and Lydia and yet they said nothing. Mephibosheth, on the other hand, already had some unusual sense of what Margot was talking about.

“My grandmother told me,” Bo said to Margot, “that everything is connected by grace. By the grace of God. And these other dimensions have always been there, but now God is letting some of us feel them, or see them, because He has a message . . . .”

“And a joyful warning,” Margot added. “Which is very exciting to contemplate.”

“A mighty adventure!” squealed Basil.

Just as Margot was about to tie all the strings together for the group, Bo interrupted her with a question of his own.

“Margot, please, what really happened that day that all of us—we children, that is—were meeting at the church in the basement and realized we had to get home as fast as possible? I mean, who was after us? And how did all of the children get away from whoever it was chasing us? We’re just kids. But somehow we got away from something really bad. What was that all about, Margot?”

Basil began to giggle. “The rabbits did it,” he said.

“The rabbits?” Bo and Drew gasped together. “What rabbits?”

“Please, Basil,” chided Margot, “let’s not get too far ahead of ourselves, but, yes, Bo, it was the rabbits.”

“Do explain,” asked Bo’s grandmother, holding a munchy-crunchy in her mouth and wringing her hands half in disbelief, half in anticipation.

Margot laughed and painted a hilarious picture for the assembled neighbors of a group of government operatives trying to track down some “frequencies,” mental aberrations in the air, that were emanating from the children in the church basement. The government trackers knew they were on to a remote viewer, but they were still two miles down the road, on the other side of Glenn Haven, and not able to get a clear focus on the signal.

What happened, Margot assured Bo and his grandmother, was a gracious experience of divine intervention. The Holy Spirit had impressed upon the minds of the children the sense of impending danger. Angels had been sent to help guide them quickly out of the church and onto separate paths away from that part of Glenn Haven. The dangerous men, who were looking for them, now thought they knew where the remote viewer frequencies were coming from and had driven their van of equipment much closer to the church. Soon they would be on foot heading in the children’s direction.

Why Margot found all this so amusing, she clarified, was the sudden appearance of hoards of rabbits. Suddenly, as the men exited from their van, and started down the path towards the church grounds, bunnies galore popped up everywhere. Hares were running and bouncing and hopping all over the place. They seemed to come out of nowhere. Such a strange occurrence took these sly professionals—spooks and ghostly operatives, Margot called them—completely by surprise. Trying to avoid stepping right onto the rabbits, several of the men actually fell on the ground, one man right on his face. It wasn’t a pretty sight, Margot continued, but she couldn’t help laughing at the dark humor of it all and the strange and unusual provisions that heaven and nature often uses to amaze humans.

“What kind of rabbits were they?” Robby Doyles’ father asked. “Were they real rabbits or some kind of imaginary ghost bunnies?”

“Not ghosts, at all!” stated Basil flatly and somewhat insulted.

“Fibonacci numbers and the golden section produce an infinite sequence of zeros and ones with some remarkable properties,” answered Margot. “Only this time, the Fibonacci rabbits were real. A product of an accident during a Fibonacci experiment, in which the world of mathematics intersected with the world of stylized energy. Hence, bunnies of a most perspicacious nature.” And that was all she would say about it. The children had been saved—partially—by rabbits. *And if that were not remarkable enough, be prepared for even kookier things in the days to come,* David thought to himself.

“Now I am really confused,” confessed Lydia. “But also, even though I don’t understand what you’re saying, it does seem to make sense in a peculiar sort of way. It’s like something from a dream helping something in the real world.” Lydia apologized to everyone for her getting worn out, but she said she really needed to go home and get some sleep. Others also said it was time for them to go and to get the children into bed. David said he was getting tired, too, but hoped Margot would give them all some final concluding

words that would hold everyone over until the next time—if there were going to be a next time.

So, Margot brought it all home for them. She said they would have further meetings in the near future. She promised to get in touch with a number of them soon. Individually or in families. In conclusion, she declared she was certain that everyone who had come to visit her and Basil that Sunday night had been previously called by the powers of light.

For months, maybe even years for some of them, God had been drawing them, she explained, through the ministrations of the holy angels, first to Glenn Haven and Glendon Hall, then to awareness, then to unusual experiences, then to miracles, certainly to prayer, and now to each other and to Margot and Basil. Fate had prompted many to come to live in Glenn Haven and some closer in, that is, right in Glendon Hall. This had all been planned.

“There is a plan, then?” Lydia asked.

“Yes,” replied Basil, “a plan. There is a pattern. Always there has been a pattern, from very far off and very long ago.”

“A wonderful unfolding,” chimed in Margot, “and you all—we all—are a happy, but dangerous, part of it!”

“Oh! I want to know everything about it!” Lydia exclaimed, throwing her hands in the air.

“Me, too!” said each one of the children.

David looked bewildered but also relaxed. “I can buy that, too,” he said. “Let’s learn everything! Everything we possibly can!”

“But at the next party!” shouted Basil.

“At the next party, indeed!” Margot agreed, as she ushered all her weary visitors out the door and off on their journeys home.

Important friendships were developing. Important events were unfolding. And this was only the beginning.

## Chapter Four

### *When a Small Bedroom Is Grand Central Station*

One day not long after the infamous party, David was returning home from the supermarket with lots of groceries. Really important and nutritious items, like Twinkies and frozen pizza and chocolate ice cream with pistachios.

He was about to close the trunk of his car, when out of the blue, Margot was there before him. Standing *in* his trunk, assuming her legendary dying swan pose.

Poor David dropped the bag of groceries he was holding—saves him right for buying Twinkies and frozen pizza—and sort of spun an unexpected arabesque himself, as he tried to keep a large jar of mayonnaise from rolling across the parking lot.

As he turned to rescue the bag of food items, Margot hopped out of the trunk, slammed the lid shut, and said to David in a polite tone, “Well, today’s as good a time as any.”

“Any for what—I mean what any? Oh, really, Margot, what are you talking about?” David was a little flustered for being caught with his chocolate and pistachios down, or taken off guard by the drama queen herself in the latest version of Glendon Hall *Swan Lake*.

“I mean,” said Margot, with clarity, “that now is as good a time as any to satisfy your curiosity about my little-big room where you saw Basil’s nice friends delivering all my special machines.”

“Oh,” said David, “*that* room.”

“Precisely,” replied Margot. “*That* room indeed. It’s a very nice room, and you *must* come up to visit and explore it for yourself.”

Margot smiled one of those smiles that people smile when they know something you don’t but they aren’t going to tell you what it is they know that you do not know. And, of course, this behavior leaves you very reluctant to accept unusual invitations.

David’s curiosity, however, got the better of him, and Lydia was nowhere around to advise him otherwise, so he told Margot to give him ten minutes to put a few things in the freezer—we know what things—and he would be right over to see her.

“No need to knock on the door,” Margot assured David. “Just come right in. I’ll be waiting for you.”

David wasn’t quite certain he liked the way Margot said, *I’ll be waiting for you*—her remark painted in his mind an instant vision of Shelob, and he couldn’t remember how to say *Aiya Eärendil* ...! Nevertheless, he promised he’d be over as quickly as possible. And a promise is a promise.

When David opened the front door to Margot's abode, the Dying Swan was standing in the doorway to the "special room." She instantly invited him into what David imagined must be the second bedroom, just like in his condo. Only it wasn't.

What David found when he went through the door, as Margot closed and locked it behind them, was a room as big as Grand Central Station, once he had cleared the door frame and turned left into the space itself. He gasped.

"Ach du liebe Zeit! Gott im Himmel! But this is totally impossible. It can't be!"

"Oh but it certainly *does* be," retorted Margot. "It's all a simple matter of temporal engineering."

"Engineering? What kind of engineering, Margot?"

"Fret not yourself over minor details, David, my boy. It's much like Fibonacci bunnies—they just hop about minding their own business, and people who do not like the dear furry *big-ears* have a hard time dealing with a golden string of them."

Margot took David on a little tour of "the room." The tour and the vicissitudes of the place seemed to go on forever. The "room" had other doors, and alcoves with nice reading areas and lovely reading lamps and comfy reclining chairs at which David began to look longingly, and more doors going off into more halls, all lined with oil paintings in marvelous Italian Provincial gold frames—or so it seemed—and archways branching off to a rococo rotunda here and an *Englischer Garten* there.

Altogether everything about this tour was most unnerving. David felt faint or nauseous. He wasn't sure which. Something reminded him of a poem he had read once. A strange off-center poem about walls that shifted.

"Here, my boy, sit down—you look woozy—right over here in this nice Louis Quatorze, or the Louis Quinze next to it, or the Louis Seize on the other side of the Louis Quinze. Well, they're really all quite comfortable. And I'll just dash off quickly and bring you a refreshing lemonade." Which she did. Before David could even think about responding.

David felt like Alice in Oz or Dorothy in Wunderbarland. Nothing made any sense at all, but he was glad to be relaxing in—he decided on the Louis Quatorze after all—a really nice piece of furniture and holding something cool because he was feeling a tad overwhelmed and breathless.

He looked up. That was the wrong thing to do. A basilica-like dome loomed overhead about fifty feet into the air. He swore there was a cloud floating up there near the curve of the gilt-laden ceiling. The very thought made him dizzy. He looked back down at his glass of lemonade. That was better, he thought to himself. He did not look up again.

David could not take this all in as Margot very courteously explained how it was possible for this room to be bigger—and, Oh, so much bigger—on the inside than it was on the outside.

She told him that the machinery he had seen the other night made all this possible. It had been installed. The galley and boiler room that held it was right around the West Wing. Would he like to see it? You could even hear it humming and thumping like an old steamboat—or starship!

*No*, David, told her. He would forego the pleasure of inspecting *the bridge* for now. To this day, David has never had the joy of examining the mechanisms that brought this visit into his life in the first place.

“I am sorry about all the hammering,” Margot said, “but the equipment is so large and bulky that it took a great deal of pushing and shoving and slamming to get every contraction into place before the ducts could be sealed and the fittings dimensionally secured. Do forgive me.”

David was happy to absolve Margot anything at this point and began to feel a desire to go home, in spite of the fact that he was having—in a most strange way, indeed—the time (and space, I might add) of his life.

Graciously, Margot also explained to David the flashes of light Mephibosheth and Little Drew had seen the day they fled from the government trackers. She let David know that she had visited with Bo’s grandmother earlier in the week and had explained the entire incident to the grandmother’s satisfaction. Now Bo and Drew understood it all, Margot said, as she grinned her most benevolent smile. To himself, David whispered, *Ego te absolvo*.

“You see,” Margot added, “They were we! The flashes, that is. After all, the heart-felt intent of God is simple: *I will have mercy, not sacrifice.*”

David nodded in acquiescence, although he was fading quickly. “You were the flashes,” he echoed.

“Yes. Because the powers of darkness were attempting to fatally overshadow the children. Basil and I were sent—allowed—to intervene just in time. We drew a cloak of covering over Bo and Little Drew and slashed a sword of sacred flame across the face of evil. The light blinded the darkness and it fled in terror.”

“As usual,” she added, as though this were the sort of activity that people resorted to every day on their way home from the Italian bakery with half a dozen cannoli in a box.

*Make mine chocolate with pistachios* went through David’s brain.

Later that night, back at home, David telephoned Lydia Lavender. “I do believe in the supernatural, Lydia,” he confessed. “I do believe.”

“What happened?” Lydia inquired.

“How about coffee and cannoli in the morning about seven, and I’ll tell you all about it?” David asked her.

“Sounds just lovely to me,” Lydia replied. “I’ll be there. Would you like me to stop off at Dante’s and bring two cannoli?”

“Oh,” David thought out loud, “sure. I mean, please, unless, of course, you prefer pistachio pizza with your early morning laté.” He realized he had not been thinking clearly when he invited Lydia to join him for breakfast.

“Why, it’s no trouble at all,” Lydia responded, reading his mind. “You just make me some of your hidden stash of Peet’s coffee, in one of your big mugs, and I’ll be happy as a clam at high tide.”

“Make that two clams at high tide,” said David.

He would be happy, as well, to tell Lydia all that transpired when Margot pressed his spiritual instincts to the breaking point. He did remember clearly, however, one thing Margot had said to him just as he was leaving her: *All systems are wrong in the world, David, but God is going to change everything. Soon.*

\* \* \*

Speaking of systems, *organized religion* was the one system that David believed was the most wrong in the world. To attack organized religion felt therapeutic to David. Thus, he began his assault with caustic comments aimed at Lydia’s church, particularly the leaders.

David’s conversation with Lydia had gone from Margot to the church, and from bad to worse. In spite of the fact that his father initially claimed to be an agnostic, David recalled something his father had said years ago about churches: *Organized religion is the enemy of God. Always has been. Always will be.*

Lydia Lavender had a hard time listening to David’s barrage of words about the church ministry leaders. Although David wanted to think the senior pastor and associate pastors were sincere, he did not believe the same about the others on the ministry team. To him they were foxes in the chicken coop, and he did not have a good history with certain aspects of the church and its ministry operations.

David’s fascinating but disturbing visit with Margot the other day drove him to speak with Lydia for two reasons: one, he found that talking to her was calming; two, he was beginning to feel a need to come to terms with his own spirituality, and maybe Lydia’s church had something to offer. She certainly talked about it enough. She had invited him to church, as had others. He had gone with her once or twice, as well as to other churches, but he continued to be disappointed in organized religion. It was not meeting his deepest needs. Yet, in spite of his own misgivings, David still felt drawn to something he hoped he would find there.

Lydia found David's insights discouraging to her, because she loved the church, but she wanted to be fair to David, as well, and wasn't exactly certain how to balance both loyalties. At the same time, something kept bothering her, a passage of Scripture that continued to infiltrate her thoughts. She wasn't certain exactly how this text fit into the situation:

*But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13). Mercy, and not sacrifice, Lydia whispered to herself. Now, what does that mean for the church today? Or for me?*

This had not been the first time that David had expressed to Lydia his experience with certain kinds of "ministry leaders" within organized religion.

"These ministry leaders are full of hate," David said. "They love to accuse, condemn and punish. They think God made them judge and jury. If you don't obey them, they distance you and shun you. They are their own God and expect you to pay them homage. Only those who pay them homage are accepted by them. Their church talks 'family' but the ministry leaders prove the church is no family at all—it is a country club! A country club where you have to buy your way in or agree to be a slave who has surrendered will and mind and conscience to those in power."

Lydia knew that David's attack on the church had something to do with his past and his siblings. She was on the verge of raising that issue. What Lydia did not know—yet—was that the young Pastor Braith Brandt was the embodiment for David of everything David detested in organized religion. Such were David's perceptions of Brandt, whether right or wrong, or some of both.

David was pacing back and forth now, like a caged vampire rabbit or Aslan on the prowl, and sometimes Lydia felt he made no sense at all. Swinging his arms as he gestured, he almost knocked a piece of Limoges off a tall round table holding a lamp with a Tiffany-style shade. Lydia winced but made no comment. She was trying to understand where all his anger was coming from. He was speaking so quickly and loudly, she felt jolted.

"David," Lydia said, half to slow him down and half to calm herself, "you must have had some bad experiences as a child with the church. You say your mother was Catholic and your father was Jewish but you were not raised in any faith—even though your parents owned these two rich heritages. Yet, you seem to have collected so many observations, or past encounters, or I don't know what, with the church."

"Oh, I've been to churches off and on," David confessed. "There was always some aunt or cousin inviting us. Always some girlfriend wanting me to come to her youth group or whatever."

"Yes," said Lydia, "but have you ever talked to any of the church leaders about your feelings? I've spoken to my pastor at my church about many things that concern me."

Lydia had been attending the new—and quite large—“The Praise Center” up in Glenn Haven. This seeker-style church with its youthful orientation and emphasis on young married couples was not a perfect fit for Lydia, but she did love their uplifting worship and praise music. *Their doctrinal teaching is solid*, she often told people. *It’s safe*, she found herself declaring.

The senior pastor, who had written a number of books on leadership, was away a lot lecturing at weekend seminars or giving Bible conferences during the week at other churches near and far. When he was at the Center, Lydia enjoyed his bright joyous message and happy delivery. Surely, his teaching through the Bible verse-by-verse was solid, Lydia reasoned. She enjoyed also the opportunities for prayer ministry, and no one could deny the fact that truly gifted musicians made up all the worship teams. How lovely that music was, Lydia thought.

Over the years, Lydia had come to believe that God had revealed to her something about all of life’s being worship and praise, so that you truly could not separate one from the other. God was much bigger than the church conceived of Him. Of that fact, she was certain.

Lydia had asked questions at church about these matters, and tried to be satisfied with the answers she received, in spite of the fact that no one on the pastoral staff really provided any direct answers but more or less made her feel good by thanking her for being there and encouraging everyone.

Lydia realized at times that she was being either cleverly put off, somehow distanced in a friendly way, or dealt with by the very immature and naïve. She was not sure which was the case. She continued to have faith in the church and her attendance at the big Praise Center had not been affected by these inconsistencies. After all, she craved God.

“Listen, David,” Lydia continued, “why don’t you come to church with me this Sunday. The senior pastor is back from a tour, and he’s always good. You’ll enjoy him. He’s on TV now, you know. You’ll like his brand of Christianity. Maybe it’s a little like cheerleading but it gives me energy.”

David tried to look sympathetic, and perhaps in his heart he was, but he felt his mind reacting strongly against organized religion in general. He had attended Lydia’s church, but it had become a sort of symbol for him of many of the new, vibrant seeker churches that seemed to be springing up all over the nation like Fibonacci mushrooms in fertile American soil. The very thought of their rapid growth angered him. He imagined himself on a crusade to arrest the spread of this contemporary guise to an infinitely glorious God. He loved God on the one hand but hated Braith Brandt on the other.

He remembered reading an article about one of these congregations. The newspaper said something like this: *After a rousing live performance of “Jesus Is Better Than Life” broadcast over three Jumbotrons in the Harvestville Center, Marlene Brandt steps to the podium in front of 16,000 cheering Sunday worshipers and proclaims: “We’re going to rock today. This place has seen many an earthquake, but it’s never been seismic for Je-*

*sus.*" This memory marched David's warrior fervor to battle.

In reaction to his feelings, David's cutting—but generic—words gushed out of him, as though they had not consulted his thought process enough to separate Lydia's church from the mega-church movement in general.

"Their Christianity is all about image," he shouted. "Their church is all about money. Their ministry is all about them. Build them up. Give them grants. Make sure they own real estate and a time-share. Make sure their children have Perrier in their swimming pool.

"Yes, it's all about them but none of it is about God." In his mind's eye, David could picture his brother and sister, now both gone forever. He remembered the role that organized religion had played in their demise.

Lydia just wrung her hands at this point and looked down at her lovely oriental rug. She began counting the rose-colored blossoms in the warf and woof of the weave. She decided to let David get it all out of his system. She was nearly ready to rouse her rebuttal via his siblings.

One of the aspects of church ministry David was really upset about was the prayer team. "What's with that?" he asked, regarding one of the women in the prayer ministry who wore a blonde wig. "What's that about?" he remarked, "the hair plus the nails equals better prayers?"

David sounded so annoyed. He had zeroed in on one woman whose flip hairdo appeared to be always plastered in place, and her long, well-honed nails brightly glossed. She was a "leader" in the prayer brigade. She was one of many, David thought, whose hair and nails and fashion statements seemed to be the center of attention far more than prayer itself.

He called these women Barbie dolls and their husbands gurus. Their entire purpose on the prayer team, according to David, was to show off, to be seen and to wield what modicum of power they could get their hands on. To David they were "lording it over others," and he found this approach to Christianity at total variance with the way he understood the teaching of Jesus in Matthew, chapter twenty.

He had memorized the passage that always made him shudder when he applied it to organized religion today:

*But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

David could not perceive any of these Christian qualities of service in Braith Brandt. David remembered one time when Grandma visited Lydia's church, and Randy Randall, the Senior Pastor, had invited Grandma to come up front and pray for people—so many had lined up in need of prayer and not enough Intercessors were available.

With compassion Grandma complied with the senior pastor's request, but when she picked up a bottle of anointing oil to anoint a woman who was in such pain she was crying, the "high and holy Pastor Bandt," as regarded by David, grabbed the vial of anointing oil from Grandma and commanded in a cranky voice, "Let me do that. It's not for you. I'll anoint her." Grandma condescended, but David knew in his heart that Grandma had earned a far greater unction from the Holy Spirit to anoint the sick with oil than did that "insignificant pastor who thinks he gets his spiritual rights from some so-called vested authority!"

The following day David's mood was sad but mellow. He called Lydia to apologize for bending her ear but was about to bend it further when she halted him in his tracks. She was lining up her rebuttal ducks.

"David, you know I believe in your integrity and you know that we are friends. Now, I really do ask you to do me one small favor—and I will be happy to listen to anything more you have to say about the church—but just please tell me the truth about your brother and sister. Several weeks ago you alluded to some tragedy in the past that involved them. I'm wondering if your perceptions of the church come packaged with those past sorrows."

For once, Lydia had arrested David's attention. He was moved by her impacting words. There was more to Lydia sometimes than one realized. Under this sense of obligation, he surprised her with a promise.

"You're right, Lydia," David declared. "Pain parcels these perceptions. Meet me for lunch. I'll tell you the whole story."

Almost dizzy from relief, Lydia could not wait to learn the truth.

## Chapter Five

### *Preludes to Mercy: God's Warp and Woof*

Although Lydia was going to meet David for lunch and finally hear the story about his siblings, she felt a need to seek refuge in prayer before the day got too far ahead of itself. *Saint Bernadette's*, she thought aloud. She would stop by the Catholic Church, which father Angelo always kept open for prayer. And it was a lot closer to home than her own church. *Just a stroll down the lane*, Lydia mused to herself.

The quietness and graciousness of the dear old building held a certain strength for Lydia. "St. Bea's" was a neighborhood landmark, like an old friend. And the children so liked playing there—Father had opened up the basement rooms for them and invited them and their families, regardless of their faith, to make good use of the facilities and playground.

When she arrived at the church, Lydia went in the side door and past the church office. Father Angelo's door was wide open and he and Rabbi Bernie Belzberg of the local Jewish congregation, and the Baptist Pastor, Hank Stryder, were all together in Father's office, "to batten down the hatches in the ark," as Bernie liked to say.

They arrested Lydia's attention as she attempted to sneak by unnoticed. "And just where do you think you're goin', young lady?" Rabbi Belzberg's good baritone voice rang out, "and have ya come to say your confession, `cause we're all ears!" Father Angelo and Hank laughed and invited Lydia inside to say hello.

"O, dear!" Lydia sang out in reply, as she came in the room and hugged Bernie Belzberg and Father Angelo, both of whom were old enough to be her father, and gave youngish Hank Stryder a quick peck on the cheek at arms length. "Now I am in trouble," Lydia said. "What mischief are the three of you up to that I'm not supposed to know about? I caught you all red handed!"

"And we caught you, too," Father retorted. "But thank God for you Protestants, Lydia, or there wouldn't be anybody in this old Catholic church to say prayers any more."

"Oh, shoo, Father," said Lydia, "why I saw Mary Doyles in here just the other day with her rosary."

"Yes," Father Angelo said, "and she's another one of those Catholics that goes half the time to the Protestant churches."

"But I haven't seen hide nor hair of her in my congregation," Pastor Stryder remarked. "I'm losing all my sheep to the Catholics and the non-denominationalists. Next thing you know, they'll all be studying Hebrew."

"And I won't give the lessons for free," said Rabbi Belzberg.

Father couldn't let Bernie get away with that one, so he remarked, "Now, I ought to just start charging for catechism class, that's what. Times are bad all over, and I've got to be making a little cash myself."

With that, everyone laughed out loud and Father Angelo passed Lydia a plate of hamantashen that Bernie had brought over and asked her if she would like a cup of coffee, but Lydia declined and explained that she was on her way into the sanctuary to pray at the altar for wisdom and strength.

"But the hamantashen is some poppy seed, and some apple, and some prune," said Bernie.

"And all delicious," said Hank, rubbing his stomach.

"Maybe later," said Lydia. "Just now I need the bread of prayer."

"Do you want to say what this is, child?" asked Father Angelo. "You know we would all pray with you, or for you. We were just about to pray together ourselves."

"Oh, not at the moment, Father," Lydia replied. "I know you would all help me, but this is confidential for now. One of these days, however, I might bother one of you—or all of you—if I need further counsel. And, besides, how on earth do the three of you pray together? Not on the rosary, I bet."

They knew she was teasing them, but they loved to play this spiritual chess with her because they embraced Lydia as a true sister in "God's family."

"Well, you might as well seek all of us for support, Lydia, because we're always together these days, and when we pray with Bernie here," explained Pastor Hank, "we pray in the Name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!"

"Praise the Lord!" shouted Rabbi Belzberg.

"*Donna nobis pacem,*" intoned Pastor Stryder.

They were on a roll. Lydia knew this mood. She was outfoxed, but she loved being with the three old friends, and she felt comforted already. Saying her goodbyes, she moved on down the hall. She needed solitude.

As she passed into the sanctuary, someone was playing the pipe organ very softly. Sweetly the diapasons seemed to sigh, *Ora pro nobis, ora pro nobis.*

Lydia looked up toward the choir loft. Was that Basil she saw? No, it couldn't be. The shadows were playing tricks on her eyes, she thought; yet, the melody now played on the swell manual was unlike anything Lydia had ever heard before. She did not recognize this hymn, and yet it seemed familiar. Lydia looked back down at the marble floor.

The flickering candles at the altar and the lingering fragrance of Sunday's roses touched Lydia with the quietness of peace. As the grace fell, Lydia prayed. Unseen messengers from *Above* rushed to her side.

"I am in your hands, Father God. I put David Voltaire in the center of your will. By the precious blood of your beloved Son, pour your healing Balm of Gilead down from heaven upon this situation with David and the church.

"Restore David where he needs to find hope and faith. Purify the Body of Christ where they need to be washed whiter than snow. Bring us all into the unity of Jesus' own prayer in John 17. Gives me strength to carry on, wisdom to know your will, and compassion to reflect your perfect love.

"And, Father God, bless Angelo and Bernie and Hank. I know how dearly they love you. Bless their tiny congregations. They all seem to hang on a thread at the world's end. But they hang together. Keep all these sweet brothers and sisters, these neighbors and families, in your care. For I ask it all in Jesus' holy and glorious name. Amen."

Unseen, angels carried Lydia's prayers to the Throne Room above. There in the Eternal Presence, our great High Priest, the Second Person of the Blessed Holy Trinity, stood before His Father. *He watching over Israel slumbers not nor sleeps.*

Lydia's Advocate, the One "who ever liveth to make intercession for us," was attentive to His daughter's cry. For those tears, He died.

Nearly an hour had gone by before Lydia got off her knees. She did not feel at all weary. Her spirit felt strong within her. She was prepared for battle. She sensed a presence close by her.

"We wrestle not against flesh and blood," her angel whispered in her ear.

"Yes," Lydia whispered to the sacred impression, "but against principalities and powers in heavenly places." She sensed God's grace.

When Lydia left Saint Bernadette's, the three men of God had vacated the church office and were standing out on the lawn looking up into the sky. An incredible rainbow spanned the heavens. Rising majestically from a mountain of clouds in the East and putting down in a sea of foaming clouds in the West, the vast ribbon of color rushed forth like prayers across an ocean of trials. The heavenly Artist's palette brimmed over.

Lydia did not see her three friends, or the rainbow. But ministering spirits saw her and sang her Lord's praises. *Holy, holy, holy. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Holy is the Lord of hosts!* The Watchers smiled on this faithful daughter of the King Eternal.

About the same time that Lydia had made her way to Saint Bea's that morning, David had gone to seek some time of reflection in the park. He found his path, as the mist was clearing among the flowers, to the benches surrounding the memorial statue of Craig Bailey.

David sat down facing the bronze figure and put his head in his hands, thinking.

"Well," brother Craig, "what do you make of it all?" David said silently to the statue.

No response emanated from the form before him, but David felt understood nonetheless. He looked up at the likeness of Craig Bailey and spoke out loud, "It's not that I don't want to find peace in all this. I do. But there are just some wounds that don't heal fast. And there are some scales that Justice needs to balance. And all that takes time—and insight. And I'm even lacking motivation right now. It all wearies me."

David's voice trailed off into the light of the rising sun, thrusting its morning beams through the boughs of the leafy trees. His eyes closed against the warming sunny rays, as he sat on the stone bench. Deep in thought, David almost jumped a foot when he felt a hand on his shoulder and heard a voice behind him.

"Drew talks to him, too, but he doesn't answer Little Drew either," the voice said.

Turning his head in the direction of the voice that David thought he recognized, he saw Mephibosheth standing behind him. Bo came around to the bench and sat next to David, looking up toward the statue.

"I didn't mean to scare you," Bo said.

"Oh, that's alright," Bo," said David. "I was wondering among the clouds and leaves and needed to come back down to earth. I don't know what I was thinking, really."

"Well, Mr. Voltaire—"

"David," insisted David.

"Well, David," Bo remarked. "We can wonder through the leaves and clouds together. I'm pretty good at it. And sometimes Craig tells me things, and I'd be happy to share with you what he says."

"I bet he does tell you things, Bo," said David. "That I'd believe. But what are you doing out here alone this morning? Were you going somewhere?"

David knew that Bo was not sighted but also knew the child found his way around much of Glenn Haven and all of Glendon Hall with surprising ease.

"Actu'ly, I've been following Basil," Bo confessed. "He came in here to the park after he left my house. He brought something to my grandmother from Margot, but I didn't get to see what it was. I thought I'd trail him."

David also wondered what Basil had brought to Bo's grandmother. Would they ever find out? *And what was Basil up to in the park?* David asked himself.

\* \* \*

While David was in the park with Bo, Basil had already passed them by and was on his way to *The Spinning Room* in the mysterious enclaves he and Margot wove from the transcendental machinery constructed from their knowledge of particle physics and the space-time continuum.

In fact, Basil had already entered the spinning room and was just now sitting down at *The Loom of Eternity*. Weaving a tapestry on the loom of eternity was a definitive joy for any member of the Order of the Maiar, but this particular assignment was designed to protect, instruct, and enlighten, and was relevant for several who lived in the Glendon Hall neighborhood. Basil was weaving with them in mind.

As usual, when Basil pushed his creative gifts to the limit of his own innovation, he complained. "I can't see the plan, Margot. I can't see the shape of the plan."

"You can't see the plan because it's all plan," Margot chided, as though this explanation swept away any questions.

"That's as clear as the mud on Morbyx," Basil snorted.

Margot raised one eyebrow and gave Basil a rather cool glance. He knew that look.

"Well, what I mean, Margot, is I would like some direction here. This is ticklish business."

"Ticklish!" snapped Margot. "I'll ticklish you!"

With that, she sprang to his side and gave him a big hug and a tickle in the ribs. Basil immediately started weaving to put her off.

"That's better," Margot said. "Just get started. This is all a work of faith and grace. We don't know any more where the path leads than the leaves do that fall from the trees. But God knows."

Basil began to sing a song of faith without words, but his voice softened to a hum; for Margot soon joined him, and her voice became far lovelier than anyone at Glendon Hall had ever heard it. She was *singing the threads*. A pattern had to be established in song before the colors took shape in the real world, the colors that made the threads real. It was Basil's task to hold his own faith strong and secure in his heart so that grace could do its work with the loom.

As with any spinning room housing a loom of eternity, a majestic pipe organ surrounded the raised dais on which the loom and weaver sat.

Margot sat down at the console. Like Basil, she loved the grand tones of the “king of instruments.” Basil had built the Spinning Room Pipe Organ for Margot as a Christmas present—centuries ago.

He made the largest pipe of flawless cedar of Lebanon three inches thick and over 32 feet long—so large that a number of dwarves with whom he was friendly held a wedding inside before it was installed. Basil made the smallest pipe a quarter-inch in length. More than 8,000 pipes he added to the organ between Easter and Pentecost of that same decade. From Pentecost to Christmas Eve, a decade later, Basil installed an additional 10,000 pipes, bringing the total number of pipes presently to 30,000.

Commanding these immense treasures, Basil carved out of Tasmanian Rose Myrtle a massive console with seven ivory keyboards and 777 color-coded draw knobs, each set with a different gem for the hue: emerald, ruby, diamond, amethyst, sapphire, rose quartz and rock crystals, to mention a few.

Basil had installed 144 piston buttons under the keyboard and 66 foot controls. The console ended up weighing three tons; and the entire organ tipped the scales at 300 tons. A meritorious project by any stretch of the cerebrum.

As Margot played, the swell box that housed several massive ranks of pipes opened and closed to her subliminal rhythms and the rising and falling of expressive tremolos suited to the nature of Basil’s work and the theme of the weave. The lilt of Margot’s voice danced with the lightness of her fingers on the keys. Her feet glided over the foot pedals easily.

Basil’s loom responded with grace. Margot’s hymn began to bring the threads out of the loom with holy radiance. The vibrant colors became living strains that found their way into the fabric of the tapestry and the meaning of the pattern within the weave. Important work. But often unknown to mortals.

Margot’s music. Basil’s spinning. These were unusual mirrors for events taking place at Glendon Hall. These were odd sounding boards for David’s actions and attitudes, for Lydia’s thoughts and concerns, for Bo’s grandmother’s prayers and hopes. Grace connected them all, and faith made the fabric of many lives visible. How exalted are God’s ways!

\* \* \*

The following day, at lunch, David kept the promise he had made to Lydia, about revealing truths relating to his family’s past. The story that David told Lydia about his brother and sister was a sad saga. Coming from a home fraught with many dysfunctions, the three Voltaire children were at risk from the get go. Perhaps because he was the “baby” of the family, and doted on more by his father, mother and siblings, David turned out to be fairly resilient, in spite of a painful past. The other two children did not fare as well.

Rusty was the garden variety alcoholic. A friend of his at work invited him to attend church in hopes that the pastoral staff would help Rusty “find the way.” At first, the church experience seemed to help him. He attended home groups and Bible studies, went to prayer meetings and singles events, but no one on the pastoral staff had any real experience with alcoholism, nor had they the slightest clue how to guide an alcoholic through the process of recovery so that he could maintain his sobriety. The simply did not understand the physiological chemistry of alcoholism, and they were reluctant to admit their ignorance and lack of training.

The church shunned Rusty when he did not live up to their expectations after his so-called recovery by prayer and Bible study. They gave him little long-term support but prevented his attending Alcoholics Anonymous, which could have saved his life. More important to them than Rusty’s sobriety or his future life was their prejudice against A.A., a recovery system they totally failed to comprehend. Frankly, he was an embarrassment to the “saints.” Rusty, in despair after a harsh rejection by the pastor, church members, and his “Christian” friends, committed suicide—drank himself to death to kill the pain of total abandonment.

Sharon’s story was just as heart wrenching. After being sexually abused at Catholic school, she found solace in the company of questionable men—and women—who “discovered her” in out-of-the-way bars. This way of life lasted for several years until another church’s mission program found Sharon in a battered women’s shelter.

It was the women’s ministry of the church that invited her to attend a special women’s retreat for prayer and healing. One of the women mentored her, and Sharon began to heal. At a women’s ministry dinner, Sharon was encouraged to tell “her story” because the women did not know her past generally. At the request of her mentor, Sharon bared all to this group that thrust her onto stage and into the spiritual spotlight. But the group did not like the drama they had invited, nor the genuine revelation Sharon’s honesty and life-script offered its audience.

Unfortunately, the women of the church distanced her after this, ashamed to be seen with her. Sharon was so sensitive to this rejection and on-going distancing from the women’s ministry that had originally forced her into the lime light, that she returned to drugs to kill the pain. Two months later, alone on the streets, she died of an overdose.

The church wrote her off as “hopeless” but never took any responsibility for their own lack of genuine compassion that could have restored her and saved her life. They had given Sharon notoriety, and had capitalized upon it themselves, but not a shred of true love or empathy had they demonstrated in their self-righteous zeal. Such was the tragic waste that David’s older sister took with her to her grave. David never forgot.

\* \* \*

Lydia had become so distressed by these conversations with David about the ministry leaders, that she decided she needed to take Mephibosheth with her to church next Sunday to see what he perceived. Maybe his unusual spiritual gifts could give her some

insights. Lydia hoped that Bo might be able to sense something that would either confirm or refute what David was saying about the nature of church culture.

Mephibosheth and his grandmother continued to worship with what was left of the little Baptist congregation that met at the old Catholic Church. Father Angelo had opened the church to the Baptists on Sunday afternoons, so they could hold services there. The church was old but it was roomy and had been sturdily built in its day. The young intern, Father Dennis McSorley, a natural athlete who assisted Father Angelo, enjoyed playing basketball with the Baptist kids, and the churchyard had a nice little court for games.

The Catholic and Baptist congregations often shared times together, pot lucks, wedding receptions to which everyone was invited, socializing after Little League. Knowing how open Bo's grandmother was to other people's faith, Lydia had no trouble making arrangements with Mephibosheth's grandmother to take Bo to Lydia's church very soon. Bo had been there before, with other children whose parents attended the big seeker church.

When the day came, Lydia took Mephibosheth to "The Center" to see what he might perceive about the prayer ministry that so disturbed David Voltaire. Would Bo have any insights about the hearts of the people? Lydia knew that the Holy Spirit showed Bo things that other people often could not see.

As usual, after the service was over, the prayer team gathered up front to wait for those in the congregation who might come up to them for intercession. Lydia asked Mephibosheth what he sensed about the team members standing at the front of the sanctuary. Did he "see" anything?

Bo told Lydia that he saw many mannequins up front. "You know," he said, "like those wooden people they put clothes on in the department stores. My grandmother took me to see them once." Then he said that one of the people standing up at the front of the church was "a supernova, burning so brightly, like a star on fire"—one of the ministry team was not a mannequin. *But which one*, Lydia wondered? Was only one of the prayer team truly serving Christ?

Bo assured Lydia that others up front also had "lights" inside them. Some lights were brighter than others. Some seemed "ready to go out." Some, unfortunately, were entirely dark inside—no light flashed forth. Then, Bo actually identified Bill and Mandi Johnston, who both burned brightly in Bo's unsighted vision. When a young man went up to Bill and Mandi for prayer, Bo said a bright cloud shaped like a dove surrounded the three in prayer, while the Johnstons' flames "sparkled rays of glory." That news uplifted Lydia's heart. She praised God for this good report.

\* \* \*

Back in the spinning room, the tapestry was beginning to emerge from the loom of eternity. Vast connections, usually unknown to mortals, were responsible for the threads emerging as melodic strains of *allegro ma non troppo*, and *tempo agitato, con fuoco*, *tempo rubato*, while Margot played.

The great pipe organ shook with a tremendous chord in E flat major *Allegro maestoso*, followed by a melody so *dolce*, a harmony fully *Allegro con brio*, other crescendos and cadenzas of *Andante con moto*, *Adagio*, *Andante Cantabile*, and even more wondrous sounds.

Basil was rushing to get the hanging tapestry to Minarette's Tower to install it, so as to prevent "influences" from affecting the Glendon Hall group—to stop these influences from distorting God's plan. Although the unusual sweep of this concept might send our own minds reeling, such activities as these were normal for creatures like Margot and Basil, though not without a need for great care and effort.

The fact that this was the *Hosanna, ben David* tapestry that Basil was weaving, to hang in the minaret, to protect and instruct the people that God was working through, should not rattle our cages in the least.

After all, God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts not our thoughts. And few humans had seen what Basil and Margot had seen over thousands of years. For they had seen many times before how prayer and heart-searching become patterns of hope and strength that may take shape in worlds beyond, worlds far more real than our own.

*Con fuoco* threads were so scarlet they burnt, but *dolce* threads were so cool they comforted. Soothing and needing to be alternated, the gold *allegro maestoso* threads were strong and brilliant for the warp and woof. The *andante cantabile* threads brought a luminous green and a living light into the pattern. It was God's pattern ultimately. The plan of His grace.

From the mosaic of sound, a mosaic of meaning took form. All was intended for blessing. All was because of Love.

As Basil worked, a distant memory came to Margot's mind: *And Bezaleel the son Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the LORD commanded Moses.*

*And with him was Aholiab, son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, an engraver, and a cunning workman, and an embroiderer in blue, and in purple, and in scarlet, and fine linen.*

Both Margot and Basil knew that through this mysterious tapestry, more would be revealed. But when would these revelations come? And to whom? And would they help the "little flock" at Glendon Hall?

## Chapter Six

### *I Will Have Mercy, Not Sacrifice*

In spite of Lydia's continuing patience in lending David an ear for his troubled soul's laments, David remained in a rage about the prayer ministry and other aspects of ministry leadership in Lydia's church and other "popular" churches he had visited over the years.

Regarding one of his observations in a large seeker-sensitive church, David felt almost hostile. "What does that have to do with Jesus Christ?" he demanded to know, regarding a certain woman's appearance. *Did Jesus go to the cross to make pert fashions vital for intercession?*

Such were his discouraging thoughts in which he found no comfort.

Lydia felt she had to come to some better understanding of all this. She wanted to understand it so she could help reconcile David to the church, but she felt very frustrated by the whole situation and by David's anger.

David had told Lydia that medieval Roman Catholicism is very much alive in Protestant churches, even in the so-called non-denominational churches. His explanation for this observation had to do with what David perceived as a craving for power among ministry leaders and those who join ministry to serve under such leadership. David expressed several sentiments about this perception he held of the big church.

"Many in ministry positions are drunk with power and have turned the church into a culture of punishment, for they punish those who do not conform, who do not bow down and serve ministry leaders," he said. He imagined that some ministry leaders knew what David suspected and had come to deeply resent his presence in the church. He said, "They hate me without a cause. I look for christlikeness in them, and I find hate instead."

"David, you must have mercy on these ministry leaders," Lydia insisted.

"Will they have mercy on me? Did they have mercy on my brother and sister? Will God have mercy on them for being false shepherds? They think they have the right to weed people out of the church, but only the angels of God have been assigned the task of separating the wheat from the chaff. Humans are not given that task. Even the disciples wanted to root up the tares, but Jesus said, *Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them* (Matthew 13:29).

"People can't pull out the tares, only God does that. God sends His angels at the end of the world to separate the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares. Yet, many of these ministry leaders feel that God has given them that right. This is why they create a culture of punishment in the church. Their lackeys and sycophants chip right in and help in the judgment process, help those in leadership injure other church members. Punish them. Wound their spirit."

David felt that gossip was a special tool the ministry leaders used to block those they did not approve of. He was not certain that church leaders used gossip directly, but he

had encountered situations in which the leaders made neither strong effort to discourage gossip nor attempt to clarify “cloudy waters” involving someone who was not particularly “one of their buddies.” If the person who had become a victim of gossip was not someone they valued for their own purposes, these leaders made little or no effort to curb or stop the gossip about that person.

Against the backdrop of this attitude, David heard a judgment of God: *Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin* (James 4:17). The leaders knew they should put a stop to the gossip. They knew they should try to find out the truth and shed light upon the situation. But they did not bother to put forth the effort to do so. After all, they were not particularly invested in the one being gossiped about—so they let it go. They simply did not care. David found such an attitude on the part of church leaders a darkness he could not fathom.

In times past David had attempted to talk to some of the friendlier leaders in the various churches about these issues, but his attempts to connect in a meaningful way were always rebuffed. For instance, David had suffered a bad experience trying to dialog with a Sunday school teacher in one of the churches he attended for a short while. He genuinely wanted to engage the teacher in an intelligent conversation about the nature of hell. After all, David had suggested to the teacher, some truly great theologians that we all admire have held both the “traditional” view and the “conditional” view of the nature of “eternal” punishment—its duration, the form it took, and its relation to the character of God. Surely, this was a reasonable topic for consideration, to try to understand why some scholars taught these two different views of hell, and still others a metaphorical view or even a purgatorial view. Surely we can all learn from each other through such dialogue, David imagined. We can all openly express our ideas to one another.

How naïve David had been to imagine that such church leaders would show the slightest interest in his exegetical inquiries. Instead of finding David’s challenging hermeneutics and sincere curiosity worthy food for thought, the Sunday school teacher was almost violent in his denunciation of David, calling him a reprobate for not accepting with blind faith what the church taught and leadership promoted. David “should know better!”

Hurt and confused, David left that church never to return. He expected, at least, to be taken seriously and treated with a modicum of respect for having an interest in spiritual matters, but the treatment he received, so ungracious—so unchristlike—made him sick at heart. The impatient Sunday school teacher had only added fuel to the fire of David’s misery.

In light of such revelations, Lydia had not yet told David what Bo’s perceptions of the prayer team had been. She was waiting for a better moment to raise the issue. She was sure God had a plan for all this.

David, almost oblivious to Lydia’s presence, remarked further, “Instead of following the admonition of Matthew 18, and speaking face-to-face with those they dislike, especially since they are leaders and should set the example, rather they work secretly behind congregational members’ backs, which further damages those they suspect of not being valuable to their cause. Through various forms of distancing and shunning, they weed

out those who do not blindly obey and follow them. These ministry leaders get rid of those they feel they cannot use to their own advantage. Is that what Jesus did?”

“But how can any church do such a thing?” Lydia questioned. “I don’t understand how they could even accomplish such a task,” she said.

David believed, “They separate the pastoral staff into units of *good cop/bad cop* to deal with people who question their authority or challenge their statements. Behind closed doors they meet and say, *Let’s prevent this one from ever doing any ministry here. He is a problem. He does not bow down to us.* Then the *good cops*, usually the PR types at the very top of the heap, go out and love on the ones they are trying to distance, to pretend that they like them. It’s all very psychological.

“At the same time that psychology is being co-opted, the underlings, assistant pastors and others in leadership positions, have the orders to blacklist these very ones that the PR guys love on. The underlings go about and say to this one and that one, *Well, so-and-so’s a problem, and we don’t want him in any ministry here.* They run the church like a country club that reflects the worldly culture imprisoning them all.

“What all these ministry leaders want is to have the last word, to be condescending to those they desire to lord it over, to gain some kind of spiritual one-up-man-ship over them. The ministry leaders make themselves Heaven’s gatekeepers, preventing from entering into ministry those whom God is calling to Himself. They do the devil’s work for him so that he does not have to do it.”

“Why would they do such a thing?” Lydia questioned. This idea didn’t make sense to her. David said their actions prove that the ministry leaders want people who reflect their glory, not God’s.

Again, the thought entered Lydia’s mind that she was not seeing the whole picture. Once more a Scripture flashed before her inner eye: *But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless* (Matthew 12:7). What did that have to do with David and the church? She was sensing a puzzle in all this, a conundrum that had not yet been resolved for her by God.

“The ministry leaders and the people on the various ministry teams choose people who are like them,” David continued; “those who look like them, think like them, talk like them, dress like them, have their haughty airs and proud heart and smug smile of self-complacency. They shut the door of the church against those whom God is calling to enter His service. Ministry people are drunk with power. They seize upon any sound byte they can use to condemn or judge those who take issue with them.

“By their hatred they will drive me out. They will not cease their veiled hatred and veiled rage until they have driven me out of the church once and for all.”

David had worked himself up into a cold sweat. He was beside himself. It seemed as though years of frustration were pouring out of him. Was he taking out all his frustration on Lydia’s church alone?

Where was God in all this? Would Heaven act? Lydia wished she knew the answers to these questions—and more. One revelation, however, was coming more clearly to light for Lydia. She was beginning to grasp the sometimes subtle differences between organized religion, on the one hand, and the Body of Christ, on the other.

Lydia found this lengthy exhibition of David's hurtful remarks so distressing that she did not want to hear any more. At the same time, she felt she needed to know the entire truth, to understand why or how David had become so negative. What had caused David to feel so damaged by organized religion that he could go on for hours talking about his feelings about the ministry? The solutions Lydia was seeking were not presenting themselves to her, in spite of David's revelation about his brother and sister and their crushing deaths.

Several days later, after Lydia had taken what she called "a David break," she ran into David again, right in the parking lot of Glendon Hall, where he had been startled weeks before by Margot's appearing in the trunk of his car. Right here, as he and Lydia were both about to take groceries home, he continued his diatribe about the problems he perceived within the church. "These ministry types," he said, "crave friendship with the wealthy, the powerful, the influential, the celebrated. They want to be friends with all of these. They want to be seen with these people. Like the culture that has forced their church into its mould, they love the high life, the celebrity, the mad drive for success, success, worldly success.

"The church under such leadership operates exactly like a worldly business in every marketing detail. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the Body of Christ. It has everything to do with being a slick moneyed country club with an elite membership. A demonic stronghold of Nazi mentality, manipulated by a kind of Fascism machinery, has gotten its claws into organized religion. As a result of this grip of evil, the church sends more people to the grave than the devil ever dreamed of doing."

"What are you going to do, David?" Lydia asked. She reasoned within herself that she might help David change his attitude if she could get him to take action of a positive nature, if she could get him to do something that would transform the situation.

"Isn't there something you could do, David?" she appealed, "to make things turn out better? To bring change?"

David responded to her suggestion in a way she did not expect. He said that maybe he could change things in the future if he wrote a novel about all this now.

"When this novel gets out they will do their best to shun me more. However, they already shun me anyway; so what difference does it make? What more can they do to me?" David asked. "They would kill me if they thought the law would let them get away with it."

"No, no, David," Lydia contested, "you can't mean that. Surely, no one in the church would want to kill you!" David, however, insisted the people in ministry would.

“These leaders couldn’t care less if I’m living or dead,” David continued. “My life or my death means nothing to them. If they drive me to suicide, as they have so many others, I will make absolutely certain the entire world knows why I am dead and who exactly is responsible. Perhaps that way I can prevent the same from happening to others they wish to destroy.”

Truly, now, he was thinking of Rusty and Sharon, but he himself was not aware of his own mood.

“There may be only one way to fight this war against these demonic strongholds within the church, and that is to put it all into writing, get it into black and white, into print. Then millions of people can read and will feel forced to speak out—that might bring transformation. To demonstrate that the pen is mightier than the sword—this may be the only way to prevent others from being tortured and put to death by these church leaders,” David shouted. He truly felt the pain of many who had died at the hands of a cultural organized religion, a clever counterfeit of the Body of Christ.

Lydia was beside herself when she heard this solution offered. She was not sure this would really be an effective way to help purify the church people’s motives, if their motives did in fact require a change for the better. Sorrowful, Lydia decided to commit the whole matter to prayer. Maybe she should ask the children to pray, she thought to herself.

It was actually later that afternoon that Lydia found out that the person Bo saw up front on the prayer team, who was a bright shining star (i.e., not a mannequin, as he put it), was actually Margot Motherchurch. It had been discovered that two people Margot prayed for that morning were healed instantly.

One of the healed had run down the aisle to find Margot and tell her, but Margot had already “disappeared,” and no one knew who she was, where she came from, or where she went.

Young Pastor Braith Brandt, the head of the Prayer Ministry, was very upset about this woman who appeared out of thin air to minister up at the front of the sanctuary. “She had no authority to do that,” he screamed at his assistant. “No authority at all.” His voice boomed across the microphone he now held in his hand: “Who does that woman think she is!”

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In order to buy herself more time to contemplate and pray, Lydia had made David promise that he would attend her church home group with her before he made any further decision about his attitude toward the church. Sensing her sincere concern for him, David acquiesced to Lydia’s request.

When the evening for home group arrived, however, David was skeptical about going, but he kept his promise and went with Lydia regardless. He found the host and hostess, Mike and Bev Conwell, charming and the house in Hope Heights lovely; furthermore, the people in attendance seemed genuinely friendly and warm.

After some preliminary chatting and social time, with everyone pouring coffee or sodas, and reaching for homemade chocolate chip and oatmeal raisin cookies, the study time started. David sat next to Lydia facing a mirror across the living room. He found himself looking at his image in the glass, perhaps to make himself feel more at home, as though he had bumped into an old friend there.

All of a sudden he thought he saw Basil's reflection in the mirror—what would Basil be doing here? But when David turned around to find out, Basil was not to be seen in the room. David glanced back at the mirror. Basil's image was gone.

As the preliminary socializing quieted down, the home group leader segued into the topic and began the teaching, which lasted for only 15 minutes. Then everyone was invited to chime in, discuss, ask questions, answer each other, but keep order and allow each person at least five minutes to express himself or herself.

This process made sense to David, who discovered that Lydia asked some interesting questions. Nevertheless, his thoughts began to drift, and the various slants this one and that one were taking, none of which seemed to cohere with the topic at hand, unnerved him a bit. The leader was very flexible, David thought, or just plain stupid—Lydia assured David the leader was “bright”—or this night the leader just wanted people to get to know each other better. Not quite used to these kinds of social events, David found himself half there and half wandering in and out of his own hedges and hay stacks. Sometimes he thought he heard a pipe organ in the distance and imagined the pipes were pouring forth rainbow colors.

David found it hard to concentrate. What some people had to say he found very interesting, even exciting. What some others had to say he found boring. He couldn't stay focused on the discussion when they spoke. He found his mind slipping in and out of what was taking place. Half the time he was just listening to other voices in his own head, echoes perhaps of some of the ideas floating around the room from person to person. For instance, someone used the word “alignment.” That sent David spinning. He found himself talking to himself inside his mind.

David kept thinking of the concept of alignment in *Stargate*. *The science team had to get the seven chevrons in alignment before the worm hole would open in space and transport them to the other side of the known universe*, he thought to himself. It seemed to David as though some kind of mathematical equation aligned itself with astrophysics and a wrinkle in space made it possible to cross the entire universe in a matter of seconds. *See how far "alignment" can take us?* he mused, looking at himself in the mirror across the host's living room.

Another person made a reference to Martin Luther King's “I have a dream” and the potentially possible dreams that a person of faith can usher into reality. David missed the

context of this reference, so his thoughts jumped from dream to faith. He recalled a speaker he heard earlier that week on TBN who said that patience was the sister of faith. He remembered Lydia's advising his practicing risk to increase faith.

"You have to be patient when you continue to practice risk," she had stated. It's true that people who never risk never know what their faith might accomplish, David thought. This jogged his thinking further.

Into his mind popped two of his favorite Scriptures that Lydia had suggested he memorize:

*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7); and, Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).*

Suddenly a secondary train of thought made David think of one of his favorite movies. In Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*, David remembered a great scene where Judas says that someone has an "open mind," and Jesus replies to Judas, "See with your heart, Judas, not your mind. See with your eyes and your heart." David was sure the dialogue went something like that. He could see the characters in his thoughts.

*Judas fails to embrace the evidence of things not seen and fails to trust that faith is the substance of things hoped for. He allows the spirit of fear to drive out the power, and love, and sound mind that faith makes available. Such were David's mental meanderings. Like sheep that stray.*

As all these varied—but perhaps connected—ideas rumbled through David's head, David kept reaching for something that was not yet clear. It was as though his thoughts were being led by a loom, drawn into a weaving, colors and music spinning around in a vortex of new logic.

The home group teaching was now far lost to David's focus. Could he re-focus? he wondered. He heard Lydia's voice, and that brought him back to reality for a moment. Someone who sounded really stupid to David interrupted Lydia, and kept referring to "the mind of Christ" in some context David could not connect with what Lydia had just said or what the leader had talked about earlier.

Thus David found himself wondering if people were too focused on the mind because they were afraid to consider their emotions or their emotional self? He slipped into a discussion he heard years ago at work about "touching." People are not supposed to touch each other at work, someone from Human Resources had said. *This whole issue of appropriate touching—our ideas of "politically correct" have gone too far*, he told himself. *At work they tell you not to "touch" anyone. Not even in an elevator? Suppose they have a heart attack and you have to give CPR.* He knew that was a silly illustration, but "silly" seemed to somehow make sense in this crazy world.

Politicians have gone so far with political correctness that we have dehumanized ourselves, David reasoned. On college campuses and in every corporation, Human

Resources wants everyone to be "bland," the same, no expression, no personality, a zombie. Then they're happy with you. That's why no one ever gave any space for a miracle to happen. They were too busy being bland. That's why they could not release doubt to make room for faith, David thought. They couldn't let doubt go. Doubt was *bland*. Faith had *personality*. But the Liberals were bland and the church leaders were just as bland. And their lackeys were zombies.

*Darkness bland. Church bland. Like and equal are not the same thing. Do both darkness and the church teach that equal and like are the same?* Suddenly David realized he had lost all track of what was going on in the room. His inner meditations had turned into goats climbing the heights.

David shut off his mind for a minute and heard one of the members of the home group say, "As children we are afraid of the dark. As adults we are afraid of the light." *Powerful thought and quite profound*, David told himself. Would he be up all night now, trying to figure out what that meant?

Somehow he thought of the movie *Dune*, where the *Mentats*, the human computers, say, "I set my thoughts in motion." He considered the potential of setting one's thoughts in motion and making something happen in the real world.

That reverie reminded him of principles in Lynne McTaggart's *The Field*. In *The Field*, David reasoned, setting thought in motion (the intention of will) unleashed power to influence tangible activity over distance, the force of mind affecting matter.

*Does the Zero Point Field control the cosmos?* David asked himself. David's brain was sorting things out, putting sheep and goats into different corals. He felt entangled in God's warp and woof, tied up in skeins of colors and harmonies, where diapasons stood guard like sentinels. A diaphonic bombard hit a note so low, reality vibrated.

Before David knew it, the home group was over. David had no idea what the home group study had been about. What had the topic been? He really was not sure. Nevertheless, people kept telling him how much they enjoyed his being there and invited him to come back for sure next week.

The hosts, the Conwells, genuinely did seem loving. There was a warmth about them that flowed from within, in spite of their reflecting the culture of the town around them. Perhaps they did not realize how affected by culture they were. Perhaps the love inside of them survived in spite of the cultural influences to be found everywhere surrounding them.

After a number of people had left the premises, Bev Conwell came up to David and Lydia and invited them to "stay for a while." "We can't eat all these refreshments ourselves," she stated and smiled. Then Michael Conwell came over and stood beside his wife. He put out a hand and touched David's shoulder. "Please, have a last cup of coffee with us."

Something about their genuine kindness was too much for David. Quietly, he began to

weep. The host put his arms around David and gave him a manly hug. With that David sat down, accepted a final cup of coffee, and blurted out the full—yet uninvited—story of his brother and sister, of their tragic experiences within the church. Every woeful detail spun out like yarn pulled and stretched beyond endurance.

It was only with love and compassion that the host and hostess received this revelation. They, too, had gone through tragedy in their life, as a result of lack of concern in the church. Years ago they had lost a son in a drowning accident, they explained, because a youth-group leader was paying more attention to his own ego than he was to his responsibilities. Yet, with God's help, they overcame the pain of their child's needless loss.

"It's a dreadful thing to lose your child," Bev Conwell said. Nevertheless, no bitterness toward God or the church now remained. Therefore, they understood David's sorrow, they said. In no way did they judge David nor cause him to feel rejected. Their empathy was far deeper than ever David would have imagined. They understood the loss of a loved one, the impact that such a hurtful wound has on one's life.

The evening had passed. Now it was time to leave. Almost, David did not want to go. He felt love for this dear godly couple. They gave him hope.

Aside from this special experience with the sweet couple who hosted the evening's meeting, David knew he needed more time alone to try to figure out what he thought of all this. Home groups were new to him, and his brain did not seem to cooperate at all this evening. Yet, his head was full of ideas he had not thought of for a long time, or had never put together in any meaningful sequence before.

Years of ruminating on varied theories and concepts, scientific and spiritual, philosophical and psychological, all rushed in like the ocean's tide, and then out again. And, above all, he had been listened to, attentively, by loving and good souls. He had been valued and understood deeply by Lydia and her friends. Church people at that!

*Well, maybe I did get something out of this anyway*, he told himself, as he took one last look around the gracious living room and attractive foyer, before saying good night to the owners of the lovely Hope Heights house, and going out the front door. Then he remembered Lydia. She popped through the door just behind him.

Together they headed for the car and sped off into the night. Driving without thinking where he was going, David assured himself he would sort all this out further when he got home, when he got to bed. Maybe he would organize the evening in his dreams and suddenly make sense of everything.

David was glad he had shared so intimately with the couple he had just met. He smiled at the thought. Lydia caught his smile and returned it, but her thoughts also were miles away. Oddly, the car seemed to be carrying them home of its own volition. Lydia mused on.

As though it were a melody from a grand spiritual symphony, a pure and simple line echoed its truthful harmony in her heart: *I will have mercy, not sacrifice.*

A strange symphonic Spirit was beginning to fill her, like an accompaniment to a great operatic aria. The song was not far away. A hymn of mercy was washing ashore on waves of faith and grace.

Lydia's lovely reveries, however, did not last long. As they approached the drive entering Glendon Hall, David and Lydia both saw bizarre and erratic flashes of light.

"Lightning!" remarked Lydia.

"No," said David, "that's not lightning."

"What then?" asked Lydia.

"Ah ha," replied David, "what indeed?"

As they pulled into the parking lot, Lydia opened the car door and sprang out. "Let's unravel this mystery!" she exclaimed.

They ran toward the light source together.

## Chapter Seven

*The Vanishing Waltz & Other Reflections*  
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Numerous rumors and events chasing here and there over the past several weeks, not to mention phantom drifts of bunny rabbits, raised a few eyebrows in circles not particularly connected to the Glendon Hall complex of neighbors. This group of persons living in that bizarre neighborhood, it was said, was challenging society's views of reality. In fact, the disturbing thought occurred to many living in the Glen Haven surroundings that the penultimate mystery character in the novel of reality must certainly be Margot Motherchurch.

Margot, pronounced "margo," was a word that was more than a name—that strange and shadowed persona, perhaps found in a river by Basil Tuxaxel, perhaps not. She was a chord in a symphonic phrase, but a mysterious chord, one that opened a portal by the sheer force of its persistent incalculable logic.

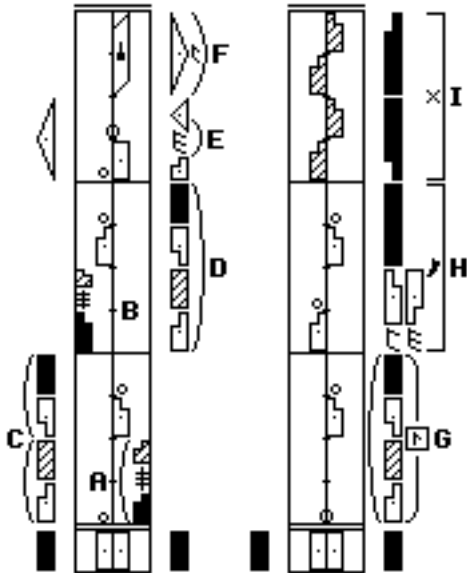
Yet, what does anyone know of logic, really? Mystery is more real than the world itself, and acceptance is the key to many solutions. "Except when it comes to dill pickles and Earl Gray tea," a strange phrase David had picked up from Lydia. Or had Lydia picked it up from David? Who cares!

Nor should one ever be at all concerned about what others think of one's writing, or one's journals, or one's diary, if one is stupid enough to keep a diary for others to find in a bureau drawer. In a sense, Basil was Margot's diary. He remembered too much, or too little. But Margot remembered everything.

It was frightening to ask Margot a question because you usually got an answer, and it was not always the answer you wanted. You received the answer, like a gift in scary wrapping, because you realized immediately that this odd woman really knew something—in fact, she knew, it seemed, everything. For example, there was that primeval dance she enfolded. Yes, the dance she and Basil performed, if you could call it a performance. Could such a dance be expressed in Labanotation? What whimsy!

Labanotation, one discovered, is a language with quantum implications, the musical flux of which unlocks secret doors. In a flash, after a particular turn of the body in time and space, the dancer—if she is a dancer in the mode of Margot and Basil—may find herself sucked through a quantum portal and much on the other side of what others consider the real world.

Perhaps Rudolf von Laban knew more than he told. Much more than he told. Perhaps not. Perhaps Margot unearthed it all herself, extracted it from physics most ancient. Quite zany!



<- Example of Labanotation

Labanotation was a code, a dance scripted, a way of representing in written form the movements of the body in time and space. When Margot moved in time and space, could Labanotation track her actions?

Margot's mysterious disappearances and reappearances, from place to place and time to time, left odd impressions upon both her baffled admirers and detractors. One tried to be neither detractor nor admirer but merely observer.

One observed it was the sound of her shoes that the ear remembered, a sort of marching sound with a hint of dance rhythm, a determined strut that struck its musical pulse against the side of one's imagination like a drummer strikes the side of a large drum, with a pattern that has holes in it, something offbeat and regular all at the same time. A Swiss cheese *marcato* or *tempo rubato*. A kefalograviera *agitato*—who knows? But don't forget color. Quarks have color. Margot had shades of meaning.

Margot had a particular aura that draped itself about her like a cloak made of mist, when slanting rays of sunshine cross fog and cloud and break in prism-like cascades of hue and tint, now rose, now mauve, now peach, now rust, now forest green. Both colors and flavors—like quarks.

These tints reminded Lydia of sitting in a bench by the Glorietta in Schönbrunn Palace park in Vienna in the late afternoon, when the earliest possible twilight vies with autumn's burnished gold for the artist's attention. Such was Margot's rainbow, whether you liked it or not. Such were the impressions she left on her neighbors, on Lydia, on David, on everyone. Zany and whimsical indeed!

Margot's voice followed suit, appearing for a while in tones audible, then existing again only as echoes, and finally slamming into you like a train hitting a brick wall in your backyard.

She spoke both triangle and gong, luminous tongues tottering upon the brink of madness and sparked with the clearest objective logic, frightening and bizarre, lyrical and Brightmanesque like a phantom at an opera or a question of a whiter shade of pale, as though Little Drew had seen a government tracker who was suddenly swallowed up by a bunny ghost.

Quaint and quirky times at Glendon Hall. Often quarky.

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Speaking of quaint and quirky, let's hop back to Lydia and David's investigation of those mysterious flashes of light. The two friends did not have to run very far in their pursuit. As they rounded the corner of one of the buildings where the Doyles family lived, they came upon the old greenhouse. It had been abandoned years ago. Ivy had grown over the glass walls and windows. Bushes had nearly covered the path in front of the squeaky door.

Tangles of living green pressed up against the rusty screens on the outside, but the gardeners, who made the rounds once every two weeks at Glendon Hall, neglected the little greenhouse, except to cut back the brambles and keep the grass clipped and bushes cropped that surrounded it.

David and Lydia went right up to the greenhouse door and peaked through the glass. They could clearly see Grandma inside. (Everyone had come to call Bo's grandmother "Grandma.") She was moving little pots from one potting table to another. And the pots were glowing, or rather the tiny shoots of plant life emerging from the center of each small pot generated bright flashes of light that lingered in the air and nearly wrapped the clay pots in luminous mist. Some sparkled golden.

David and Lydia opened the door on its dirty, rusty hinges and stepped inside. As he entered the sanctum of this strange ambience, David asked, "Grandma, hello"—"or rather Good Evening," Lydia inserted—and, "what are you doing?"

"Planting trees," Grandma said, without batting an eyelash, as though this were the most normal thing in the world to be doing at this time of the night in an old dilapidated greenhouse without any electricity or running water.

"Trees!" exclaimed Lydia.

"What kind of trees?" asked David, although he wasn't sure that was an appropriate inquiry, nor did he want to be impolite.

"Well," replied Grandma, "these here be Vrilorien trees. Something real special. I got the seeds from Miss Margot. Actu'ly, Basil brought them over to me the other day, from Margot. With instructions and all. See, here's the book."

Grandma held out a volume that looked like a rare specimen of leather and parchment that belonged in the *Special Collections* department of a large university library or the rare book room of a museum. David read the title embossed on the cover: *The Planting and Cultivating of the Vrilloreniae*.

Lydia took the book from David's hands as he was turning the pages and squinting wide eyed at the fascinating illustrations that accompanied the text. Grandma did not hesitate to explain what this was all about.

Evidently Basil had brought Grandma a small treasury of surprises. He had delivered not only this manual to growth and care of Vrilloren trees, but the seeds as well. Along with the seeds were some necessary items: a small box of gold dust, a crystal container of myrrh, and a marble jar of frankincense. All seemingly ancient artifacts, quite beautiful and strange.

"You see," said Grandma, to an increasingly astonished David and Lydia, "you have to mix the gold dust with the potting soil. There was plenty of potting soil right here in this little old greenhouse. Then you put the seeds—three for each pot—in the middle of the mixture about halfway down and halfway up, if you catch my drift."

David and Lydia said not a word. They were transfixed. Grandma continued.

"Then you water the soil with myrrh water. See, here's the container of myrrh, and I've scooped a bit into this little watering pot. Last, you light the wick on the frankincense jar and the fragrance fills the room."

"So that's what we smell?" said Lydia. "It's like being in a basilica!"

"Yes," Grandma replied. "and between the good rich potting soil and gold dust, and the myrrh water, and the cloud of frankincense rising rich in hope and filling the place right quick, the trees come up. Almost at once. Right out of the middle of the pot. Well, not all of them. Some, I spec' take longer time to grow than others. But mostly it's right away quick. Quick as a bunny."

Grandma had dropped into her Southern drawl that she enjoyed foisting on people for fun. Usually her speech was so academically perfect, it could cut a diamond. She held a pot up in the air high enough for everyone to carefully observe.

David could see that the little shoots that had come up from the pots were feather like. They were pale greenish yellow sprouts, quite straight and strong for their small size. After they ceased flashing those little beams of light, the seedlings stopped growing. At least, you could no longer see them growing, but they continued to grow, Grandma assured everyone. It was now a matter now of keeping them warm, watering them every day, and nurturing them with frankincense and song—they especially enjoyed the Psalms, Grandma told Lydia and David—"and jus' watching over `em so they can get bigger for plantin' time."

"You mean," asked David, "planting them eventually outside, like in the gardens here?"

“In the park, mostly,” replied Grandma. “At least, that’s what Basil said Margot meant for us to do. She’ll explain it all soon. We’re going to have another get together right away. Margot’ll make it all plain as the noon day sun.”

Lydia and David both rejoined that they would be willing to help with this new project, and David said he knew how to turn the electricity on for the greenhouse. One of the gardeners had told him last year that a breaker box in the building near by had a switch for the greenhouse, and the water valve was about eighteen inches to the left of the door. Some leaves and bushes merely needed to be cleared away a bit to reveal this fact. Tomorrow, David would get the greenhouse “up and running” for Grandma. And Lydia could not wait to sit down and read the entire manual on *The Planting and Cultivating of the Vriloeniae*.

*Leave it to Margot*, Lydia thought to herself.

“Leave it to Margot, indeed,” David echoed, apparently reading Lydia’s thoughts.

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David remembered one occasion when he was waiting for Lydia Lavender, because he had forgotten his house key—and Lydia had ways of unlocking anyone’s door—that he observed through the hall window the figures of Margot and Basil coming down the street, clip krop clip krop, brock a-dock krop, swoosh . . . floating across the street, coming up the walk, singing, chanting, ready to run or merely repose, bowing before a monstrosity in a sanctuary closed, figures like shadows weighted with ambivalence.

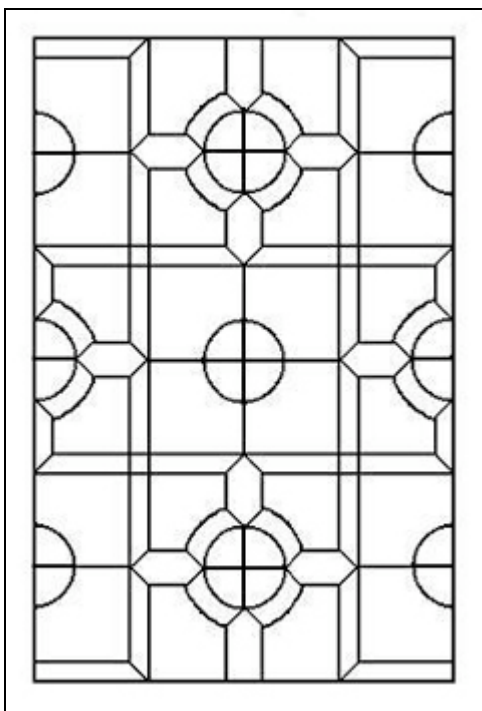
David watched this paradox unfold, then lost track of it, realizing that Lydia had anticipated his quandary, had unlocked his door and shoved him inside before they were both caught spying. Lydia had appeared, it seemed, out of nowhere. *She’s getting like Margot and Basil*, David thought to himself.

Basil and Margot. What could one really know about them? It is dangerous to tease jackals, to feed condors. Do lions choreograph to Labanotation? Aslan did, David mused. David decided to spy on them to find out. Spying on tigers and condors and jackals. Whether one gets caught or not. Who cares?

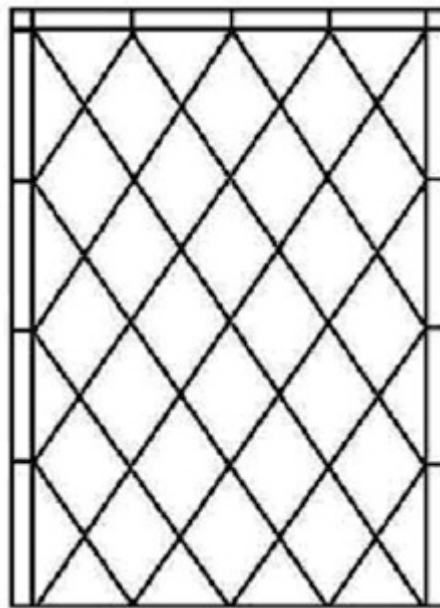
The door to David’s unit faced the door to Margot’s unit, though the juxtaposition was not exact. A window next to the door, but high enough to suggest the aperture was for letting light in and not for letting one look out, was set in the wall so as to resemble something almost medieval.

The wide window sill, the beveled glass, the Tudor style, with a Vermeer cross, provided just enough clear glass to allow one to place one’s eye against a square and gaze into Margot’s bizarre sanctum sanctorum.

And why did Margot have a Vermeer cross—that ancient pattern immortalized in Vermeer’s paintings—when David’s own window boasted merely the plain Tudor diamond. To the side of both doors were these tiny windows, inviting the slanting of light, the welcoming of rays of glory. One should not peak through her window, David told himself. Through her mystic veil. Like that would stop him!



Margot’s tiny window.



My tiny window.

So, David stole glances. His brain recorded visions. The camera of his eye saw but did not believe. Margot and Basil danced. Their movements in time and space suggested they followed the code of a quantum physics Labanotation.

Several steps North. Several Southeast. Several East, it seemed. Never West. Then a turn like a motion toward the waltz, yet a raising of the elbows nearly level with the window.

And then David saw it. Where their elbows moved in the air, a line began to form, a spot of elongated color, a wedge of form that widened swiftly, like an opulent and unexpected cloud that folded like a cloak about them, until quite suddenly they were gone, embraced by a dance so mysterious and unreal, so musical and deft, David’s brain refused to see what the eye glanced. He blinked and looked again. They were where? Vanished. Into thin Labanotation.

*David Voltaire heard something like clanging and scraping. He went into his front room and carefully peeked out the window. He did not want to be seen.*

*Lydia Lavender had been right, he thought. There is something very odd going on across the hall at Margot Motherchurch's place. Something quite strange.*

*People—rather small people at that—were carrying what looked like machinery and crates, and other things he could not make out, mysterious looking items, into Margot's living quarters. The procession of little people and boxes and instruments seemed to be endless. Once in a while a box would scrap on wall or post and make a disturbing sound. That's what he heard, he figured. The clanging was coming from deeper in, somewhere inside Margot's second bedroom. Where were they putting all that stuff, he wondered? Where indeed? How could they find space for it all?*

*He pulled the shabby curtains at his tiny window back—after he doused the only light in the room—and looked more carefully across the hall into Margot's domain. He could tell that they were carrying a lot of the crates into the little bedroom—very similar to his own second bedroom—on the left of the arch that formed the entrance into the dining area and kitchen.*

*David could see fairly clearly into the second bedroom through the open door. People were coming in and out and Margot was nowhere to be seen. The porters seemed to know what they were doing in spite of her absence. Then there was more of that clanging as though they were building something. But what? What could they possibly be building?*

*David went back to his reading in the kitchen, sipping his Earl Gray tea and trying to mind his own business, which was very hard to do when one lived across the corridor from Margot Motherchurch. Later he would ask Lydia Lavender about this. Maybe she knew what it was all about. Maybe Margot had given Lydia advance warning. A warning alarm sounded. Loudly. In David's ear.*

Then David woke up. He had been dreaming. Or seeing a vision. He wasn't sure which. Dreaming probably. He had been waiting for Lydia to stop by. They were supposed to go over to see Bo's grandmother, but David had decided to take a cat nap on the couch. Yes, he must have dozed off. It had all been a dream. Or had it?

Yes, he had been spying on Margot. He had been waiting for Lydia, but she had not arrived yet. She had not been definite about the time. "Perhaps within the hour," he remembered her saying. But at what point had he fallen asleep? Had it been before he looked through Margot's window or after? What had been real and what had been part of the dream? He wasn't at all certain.

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An unexpected invitation took shape. Well, what isn't unexpected at Glendon Hall these days? It seems Lydia had told her pastor at The Center about the Vrilorien trees and Grandma's nightly vigils subsequently at the greenhouse. Lydia mentioned that Margot was planning a get together soon to explain what the planting of the trees was all about.

Later Lydia thought to herself that perhaps she should not have mentioned anything about these events to anyone outside the Glendon Hall “family.”

Nevertheless, she had been so excited about all that was happening to her, that the news sprang out of her mouth almost of its own accord, she assured herself. She meant no harm in telling what she knew of strange occurrences.

The fascinated pastor, quite without warning, simply invited Lydia’s group, as he called them, to have their “party” at The Center. “We have plenty of room in the senior citizens recreation area with its nice big kitchen,” he offered.

Lydia replied that she would have to ask Grandma and Margot. She wasn’t sure who was organizing the meeting, but she certainly would pass on this nice invitation to make use of the church’s facilities.

“I’d feel better at Saint Bernadette’s,” said David, when he heard about The Center’s extending an invitation to Glendon’s growing family of neighbors and friends. But Lydia had already carried the message to Margot and Grandma, and both had accepted cheerfully.

“This should be interesting,” Grandma had remarked, rather cryptically.

“Yes, this should be interesting, indeed!” intoned Margot.

She winked at Grandma, as if to say, *Just wait till you see why!*

## Chapter Eight

*Who Would Have Thought Major Dickason's?*  
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Robby Doyles' parents were having car trouble, so David and Lydia picked them up the evening of the big event and drove them to The Center. Grandma and Bo had caught a ride with Florence Bailey and Little Drew. The Brewsters arrived about the same time. Basil and Margot were nowhere to be seen, but Grandma said they would be "right on time." Lydia and David had no doubts about that.

At The Center, Lydia's church, some nice ladies from the Senior Citizens Ministry put out homemade coffee cake and cups for the visitors, but did not stay for the meeting. Coffee was brewing and cream and sugar sitting on the table when the Glendon gang arrived. The air was fragrant with Peet's coffee, *Major Dickason's Blend*, if you can believe it, and fresh bakery odors.

The nice clean warm room with plenty of bright light held many comfortable chairs and a few tables for convenience. The pastor and an assistant asked if they would be allowed to stay and visit with the group, "only as observers, of course," they had said. And they were told they were quite welcome. The pastor in this case was the young Braith Brandt. The senior pastor was out of town again, speaking at a conference in Australia!

Lydia found herself pouring coffee, and Grandma came to her side to help. Grownups and children were getting settled into their seats, going for the comfy chairs as much as possible. Still there was no sign of Margot, and no one knew if Basil were expected or not.

Suddenly, however, there was a scuffle by the door, and before anyone could turn to look, something strange took place. A line of color—according to Little Drew, who had been looking behind him the whole time everyone else was concentrating on the refreshments—formed in the thin air. In seconds, the sense of a stroke of pale peach by an invisible paint brush flashed into a sheet of texture out of which popped Margot Motherchurch and Basil Tuxaxle, still dancing.

Accustomed to the bizarre when it came to Basil and Margot, Lydia and David said not a word. They had embraced acceptance months ago. But some of the adults were not sure what they had just seen, and were convinced their eyes were playing tricks on them.

"It's that woman who crashed the Prayer Team," said Pastor Braith Brandt in alarm. His assistant said nothing but merely stared at Basil, who was a little more humped over tonight than usual and still hopping up and down in dance-like movements.

Margot, however, had fallen—perhaps not the best word to use—instantly into her *Swan Lake* pose but immediately jumped out of that posture and pivoted right in front of the entire group, grabbing a cup of coffee simultaneously with her landing in front of Braith Brandt, who had positioned himself in the far right of the front row, in spite the fact that

he claimed to be merely observing. Brandt seemed a bit unnerved but kept his mouth shut once Margot said a charming, "Hello, dear friends, one and all!" To which everyone in the room responded hello as well.

People were rushing now to get firmly entrenched in their respective areas with family and kids in place, each in his or her best seat, and a plate of coffee cake not too far out of reach. Nearly everyone had elected to enjoy a cup of the Major Dickason's, even Lydia, who usually insisted on Earl Gray tea.

"This is going to be a short Bible study," Margot began, without missing a beat, "because, with your permission, and Grandma's, who had suggested this second meeting, I'd like to offer a little background to our spiritual thoughts tonight, and perhaps some others would like to share their own concerns as well."

Grandma seemed tremendously pleased to have been cited, and Mephibosheth grinned from ear to ear to hear Margot's kind remarks.

Florence Bailey, Gus and Mary Doyles, and the children had been meeting at Grandma's house with Margot for some time now. The Brewsters wanted to join the group, but the house was not big enough to hold so many neighbors. Thus, the invitation to use The Center seemed to come at the right time. The news had spread that Margot was teaching something unusual at Grandma's, and the move to the church had encouraged even more interest in what Margot was doing.

Margot's Bible study at Grandmas's had been a combination of prophecy and warning. Here at The Center her study began in the same vein, although there was no telling what direction it would eventually take. Margot explained that since 1979, the Lord had continued to put certain verses upon her heart and had repeatedly reminded her of them whenever she encountered members of the Body of Christ coming into conflict with organized religion over certain issues. At this reference to the Body of Christ and organized religion, Pastor Brandt wiggled in his seat, facing part of his torso away from Margot's gaze. Margot began to elucidate.

"The Holy Spirit gives us specific examples of how we are supposed to behave toward others. For example, we read:

*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?  
If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,  
And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?  
James 2:14-16."*

Margot quoted every scripture from memory and never looked at the Bible she was holding in her hand. The entire Bible seemed to be stored in her head. This fact made Braith Brandt even more nervous than he was. Margot continued.

"Jesus has told us what the bottom line is for His judgment of the Church if we neglect

to give to others those things that are needful for them—“

At this point Gus Doyles interrupted Margot and said, “Say, Margot, that reminds me; when Mary and I were caught up real short one month—maybe even more than once—David paid our rent for us. Yes, he did, right out of his own pocket, direct to the management and didn’t even tell anybody, but one of the gals in the manager’s office let it slip, and Mary and I found out. I was mighty grateful to David and told him so. I wanted to pay him back, but he wouldn’t hear of it. What a guy!”

David blushed but said nothing. Braith Brandt stared angrily at David, but no sign of approval graced the young pastor’s countenance.

“Well, yes, Gus,” responded Margot, “yes, indeed. That is exactly what the Scriptures mean, that we are all responsible for one another. And I’m happy you recalled this help from David. Listen to what God’s Word says:

*When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:*

*And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:*

*And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.*

*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:*

*For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:*

*Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.*

*Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?*

*When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?*

*Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?*

*And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”*

Mary Doyles suddenly found herself interrupting Margot and quoting Scripture by heart herself. She was amazed to find herself doing this. In the first place, she didn’t even know that she knew these Bible verses, and in the second place, she was not the type of person to blurt out a response in front of strangers and interrupt a teacher. But she clearly continued Margot’s quotation for her. It just hopped out of her mouth.

*Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:*

*For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.*

*Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?*

*Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to*

*one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.  
And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*

“Exactly,” said Margot, “Matthew 25:31-46! Why, thank you, Mary. That was so very nice of you. Please, everyone, just join in any time, as our dear Mary has. We’re a family—the family of God. And His Word belongs to us all. Let us share it with one another as we learn to study together.”

You could tell by looking at Pastor Brandt and his assistant that they were not quite certain they enjoyed this approach to Bible study. It seemed somehow anarchistic to them, but the rest of the people in the room suddenly felt tremendously comfortable and began to get up and grab second and third cups of coffee and more coffee cake and cookies. Everyone was feeling just fine, and taking notes to boot. Margot’s desire to include everyone’s issues peaked the group’s interest.

Grandma did not hesitate to take Margot at her word and open up a conversation right *in media res*.

“Over the years,” said Grandma, interrupting, “some church people have told me that Jesus did not really intend us to take care of the hungry and naked and imprisoned—that’s the work of the Salvation Army, they said—but I just reminds them of what Jesus told the rich young ruler:

*Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. Matthew 19:21.”*

“You tell us, Grandma,” said Little Drew. He captured Grandma’s joy.

“Hey, that’s what I’m suppose to say,” said Mephibosheth, grinning and giving Little Drew, who was sitting right next to him, a quick hug.

“Oh, how beautiful,” intoned Margot, “how beautiful are the feet upon the mountains of those that run to share the wondrous Word of our precious Lord. Do we hear what Grandma is telling us? Jesus would have us go to any lengths out of love to reach out to each other and take care of life’s needs within the Body of Christ. Surely, He is building His temple—and you, we all, are the living stones.”

“Building it right here in Glenn Haven, Margot?” asked Katie Brewster.

“Yes, Katie,” answered Margot. “Right here in Glenn Haven and at Glendon Hall and wherever His bothers and sisters and sons and daughters, His friends as He calls us, are gathered in His name. He is building up His church—“

“And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!” shouted Bo, now on a roll, since Little Drew opened the door to interruptions from children.

Suddenly, Basil arose. And put his arms out to the side, extending his hands and fingers

to a great stretch. He looked like a stork about to soar.

Braith Brandt's eyes widened as he shifted for the seventeenth time in his chair. He wondered if he needed to duck in case Basil took flight.

"Do you have a message for us, Brother Basil?" asked Margot.

"No message," replied Basil, "but a warning. Margot, I hate to say this, right now when this fine teaching is warming our hearts, but something is not right. I sense a disturbance in the air, in the atmosphere, and it makes me most uneasy. What it is I am feeling I do not know. Am not sure. But it chills my feathers."

"I don't sense anything, Basil," Margot said. "Are you sure?"

All at once Bo jumped up. "I feel funny, too, Margot, but I don't know why. It's like I can hear Basil OK, but his voice is beginning to fade."

"Yes," chimed in Katie Brewster, "me too. Basil is beginning to look blurry. And I feel a tugging going through me, like something is pulling at Bo, but I'm in the way!"

This revelation disturbed the Brewsters who asked Katie to come sit with them for the rest of the evening and let Bo and Drew sit by themselves. Katie went to sit with her parents but gave Bo and Drew a knowing look that the grownups did not catch. Drew nodded back, and Bo seemed to understand that Drew had acknowledged Katie's caution.

"Perhaps I am wrong," said Basil, not wanting to frighten the children, or anyone else for that matter.

"Do you feel anything odd?" Lydia turned to David and inquired.

"No," replied David, "I don't feel a thing."

"Let us continue then," said Margot. "I'm sure everything will be alright."

"Please, Margot," requested Florence Bailey. "I'd like to add something."

"Do, indeed, Florence," said Margot.

"Well," said Florence, "when my brother—the one who died last year—was in jail, and he was always in trouble, I asked a few of the bigger churches in Glenn Haven, that were near to the Sheriff's headquarters, if they would send someone to visit my brother. Take him a Bible from the church. Say something to him about the Lord. But no one from any church ever went to see him. It broke my heart. I didn't feel he would listen to me. Maybe I was wrong. I hoped he would listen to someone who represented the church. But that never happened. Now he's gone forever."

Florence began to wipe her eyes with a tissue as the tears came. David handed her his

clean handkerchief.

“Thank you, David,” she said. “And thanks for your prayers last year. You, too, Lydia, you dear prayer warrior.” Then Florence totally broke down. The dam held back by months of stress and avoidance gave way to all the grief that now poured forth like a torrent of sorrows. Lydia put her arm around Florence.

Sarcastically under his breath, Braith Brandt whispered to his assistant, *Some Bible study*, but the assistant was too amazed at all the exchange of emotions in the group to hear what the young pastor said.

“Empathy heals,” rejoined Margot, looking in Brandt’s direction. Then turning to Florence, she added, “We all rejoice with you, sister Florence, that your brother did turn to the Lord, just at the very end, for I have had this word of knowledge from the Father in Heaven. The Sheriff himself witnessed to your brother, and this testimony bore precious fruit.”

“Oh this is too much!” said Braith Brandt, that time not under his breath.

“Yes,” said David. “It is too much, because it’s wonderful, and I am glad to hear it, for I felt the same way myself but said nothing about it to Florence.”

“Oh, praise of God,” shouted Florence. “I accept that word from you, Margot, truly I do, and if David also felt the Holy Spirit telling him the same, then I am truly blessed, for my prayers have been answered. I’ll trust in Jesus to be my brother’s Savior and leave him in the dear Redeemer’s hands.”

“Bless you, Lord!” said Lydia out loud. “God is so good.”

Braith Brandt frowned his disapproval of what he considered to be a grossly maudlin scene.

Oblivious to the pastor from The Center, the little Glenn Haven “family” all turned to each other and smiled and embraced and settled even once more into their chairs, while the observers from The Center—including a few senior citizens from the Seniors Ministry who dropped back in to see what was happening—all looked on amazed at this strange spiritual circus.

“Good,” said Margot, “we are learning such vital lessons. Let us continue along these lines. Would anyone else like to testify before I re-open the Word?”

Robby Doyles’ father did. He took the opportunity to tell the assembly how he was rebuffed by the church when he needed help. He was told, he said, that The Acts of the Apostles is “descriptive” not “prescriptive” and that we really can’t take Acts literally. No one is going to share all that he or she has with others in the church, just because they need it.

“You see,” Gus Doyles explained, “I suggested that we do as they did in Acts 2 and

4—you know, share all things so that no one lacks anything. The church leaders told me the Bible didn't really mean that so literally. It was an ideal, they said, not a command.”

Grandma felt she just had to respond to Gus on this issue.

“Some church leaders over the years have told me that I make too much out of these ideas I find in Scripture, like your Acts 2 and 4, Gus, but I just remind them of how Jesus warned us regarding our obedience:

*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Matthew 7:21-23.”*

Before Margot had a chance to comment, Basil and Drew suddenly felt some tugging force again. This time Margot and Grandma sensed something negative, too. Immediately Margot gave an order.

“Pray, children. Pray!” she asked. “The power of the prayer of the innocent is wanted now.”

All the children bowed their heads and began to pray. Bo out loud. Katie in a small whisper. Drew quietly to himself, but with eyes and hands heavenward. Braith Brandt's assistant found himself enthralled with the reverential attitude and power of the children.

As quickly as the tide of fear had come, it washed out to a sea of nothingness and calm returned. But were these waves leaving only to re-gather their strength?

Before long, Margot had resumed the teaching of the evening. The question of the Book of Acts resurfaced.

“It is true that the gracious Holy Spirit,” Margot implored, “gave the Body of Christ a model for relationship, but most churches ignore this admonition:

*And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. Acts 2:44-55.*

“Even though organized religion says that God did not intend for the Body of Christ to take this model seriously,” Margot continued, “we find that this egalitarian principle is recorded twice in Scripture, an indication that God does indeed take it seriously:

*And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*

*And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.*

*And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.*

*Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. Acts 4:31-35.”*

At this point, Chip and Donna Brewster gave a brief account of how they were censured by a large church they had attended years ago because they raised these questions about the first century church with today's church leaders, whom they challenged with these principles presented in the Acts of the Apostles.

“Some church leaders have told me over the years that I have no right to raise these issues,” continued Chip, “because I am not an experienced church leader like they are, and years ago I had a history of alcoholism, just like some others have confessed tonight, but I remind church people what the Apostle Paul told the Corinthian believers:

*Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:*

*But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;*

*And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:*

*That no flesh should glory in his presence. I Corinthians 1:15-29.”*

Chip, too, found himself mysteriously able to quote Scripture this evening, almost without thinking. It hardly occurred to him what he was doing.

But when David Voltaire expressed out loud what he was thinking, that all churches take this elusive tact with Acts 2 and 4, Braith Brandt stood up and got into a brief argument with David about the interpretation of Scripture. The session became heated. Brandt loosened his tie. David removed his jacket. Lydia wrung her hands. Margot was about to haul off and slap both men “up the side of the head,” as Grandma would say.

“Where had David gotten his training?” and *Who did the Brewsters think they were to question ordained church leadership?* the young pastor demanded to know. But Margot immediately warned them both not to help the enemy gain inroads. Lydia noticed that the children had begun praying again, quietly, to themselves, but their little faces were as serious, or grim, as they were sweet.

“Strife is dangerous for us right now,” warned Margot. Just as she was beginning to defend David’s position for trusting the Holy Spirit’s leading in this discussion of Acts, the windows in the church began to rattle violently. Braith Brandt, who had reseated himself, stood up again. His assistant rose also.

“What on earth!” said Brandt.

“I’ll go check the sanctuary,” added the assistant and ran out of the room. Everyone was wondering if this could be an earthquake. Then the rattling stopped as suddenly as it came.

With David and Braith calmed down, the discussion and study continued once more.

Greatly desiring to support Chip in his openness toward the group, Gus decided to bare his own soul more clearly. We all have a “past,” Gus Doyles contended.

“Some church leaders say that my past alcoholism does not fit me for raising issues in the Body of Christ,” admitted Gus, “but I remind them again of what St. Paul told the Corinthians:

*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,*

*Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

*And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Our past is nailed to the cross!”*

As the Bible class continued to ponder and the children to pray, Mary Doyles screamed out loud.

“What is it, Mary?” shouted Gus.

“Dear Lord,” Mary exclaimed, “all my pain is gone. I just noticed it. All my arthritis. I feel like a teenager all over.”

At that, Donna Brewster gasped, “Praise the Lord! Chip! Look! Your finger!”

Chip had lost a finger in a work accident only last year. Now the finger was back on his hand! It was as though the digit had never been lost. The skin was clear and youthful.

“Dear Jesus,” shouted Chip. “Bless God. What is happening tonight?”

“Something wonderful,” replied David to the entire group.

Braith Brandt had had enough.

“You don’t mean to tell me that you suddenly discovered a finger that had been severed from your body months ago?” Brandt shot out. “Really, people, this is too much!” He stomped out of the room.

“And he was only going to *observe*,” chuckled Bo.

The senior citizens from The Center had now joined the Bible study group, finding seats among those who had been there for the past hour. They couldn’t wait to see what would take place next, and they genuinely were fascinated with Margot and Basil and the teaching that the group seemed to be doing among itself, all based on the Bible! One of the seniors who had brought cookies for the visitors expressed her delight.

“This is awesome,” she said. “Nothing like this has ever happened before at The Center.”

With this encouragement in tow from the newcomers, Margot pressed onward. The group was once more all ears.

“On more than one occasion Jesus made it clear that His issue with the Church is not with outward performance but with loving kindness:

*But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* Matthew 9:13.

“That’s what I keep hearing in my thoughts,” confessed Lydia.

“And me, too,” added Bo. “I hear this voice on mercy lots.”

*“But if ye had known what this meaneth,”* continued Margot, *“I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.* Matthew 12:7.

“Again, as many have observed tonight, over the years we all have been told that we have choices in regard to these *ideals*, that they are not to be taken literally, but I just remind people what the Holy Spirit said through James:

*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.* James 4:17.”

Gus Doyles jumped in and said that it was easier to confess to others in A.A. than it was in the church where “everyone is trying to look good in front of everyone else!” Lydia agreed. She found herself commenting out loud.

“So these are the verses that keep coming around again and again, and I find it hard to ignore them, even when I’m in church. That’s why I am so thrilled when church is *for real* and so crushed when it is not. Are we all on the same page?”

Over the years I have been told,” responded Donna Brewster, “that we really ought not get personal about such matters as nagging sins, especially in church, but I just remind

people that James admonished us to confess our sins within the Body of Christ, not just at home alone:

*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. James 5:16.*

Chip wanted to stand with his wife in what she had just offered the group, so he added, "Some people say church is for hearing the Word and not getting into personal philosophies about what others should be doing or not doing, but James says doing is important on this level:

*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. James 1:22. And I think part of that doin' is just simply being for real, like Lyida wants, and like we're all doing now with each other!"*

Out of the blue, everyone began quoting Scripture, bringing to remembrance and to each other many insights and thoughts that had been precious to the Body of Christ through the years. Perhaps because of the power of the Word, they did not even notice a partial phenomenon that began to seep into the very air.

A wave of dark color began to sweep across the room. Drew pressed closer to Bo. Margot shot a glance at Basil and Grandma. Lydia and David looked at each other but also began orchestrating Bible verses within this concert of animated discussion and expression.

"Some people even say that the Old Testament has a different view of mercy and love," began Grandma, "but I remind them of what the Holy Spirit spoke through the Prophets."

As Grandma quoted Isaiah from memory and admonished the group that love is what God wants to reign in the church today, David and Lydia echoed in unison every word that Grandma was quoting:

*Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?*

*Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?*

*Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward.*

*Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;*

*And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day:*

*And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.*

*And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.*

–Isaiah 58:6-12.”

But in the midst of tongues and words of wisdom, all at once a portal opened!

Basil rushed to Bo’s side. Margot began to press toward them both. But she was too late.

For at that very second, Bo was taken. Kidnapped into nothingness. And Basil was caught up trying to protect him as Bo was snatched away.

A powerful vortex widened in sight of everyone. All the electricity in the building went dead. Strange shadowy shapes appeared. Sinister disembodied eyes blinked with a humming sound, perched in a cage of infolded flame. Then–

Wings! Confusion! Clouds! Mists and vapor trails of water and fire and ice!

Braith Brandt, returning to the meeting room to investigate the loud noises, and ready to throw everyone out, was knocked out cold by an enormous piece of falling hail that materialized out of thin air between the ceiling and his head.

A wave of transparent illusions of spirals shuttled back and forth between Margot and Grandma and David, separating them. A strong vibration shattered all the glass in the room. Gus turned on his pocket flashlight.

The mysterious portal reappeared for a split second, swung wide. Bo and Basil were glimpsed in a moment of truncated time, then swept off again into a sea of darkness that vanished before everyone’s sight.

“Gone,” screamed Grandma. “They’re gone!”

“But to where?” moaned Margot.

“And how?” asked David.

“And,” cried Lydia, “Why!”

## Chapter Nine

### Minaret

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David and Lydia put their ears to the door. It sounded like Basil was praying:

*GLORIA in excelsis Deo. Et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis. Laudamus te. Benedicimus te. Adoramus te. Glorificamus te. Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam. Domine Deus, Rex coelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens. Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe. Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris. Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram. Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis. Quoniam tu solus Sanctus. Tu solus Dominus. Tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe. Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.*

They could not make out anything else clearly, but there were other strange sounds in the background, like water falling over rainbows—a strange image that struck Lydia—and angels’ wings wafting translucent in the moonlight.

Lydia found herself repeating the phrase, *angels wings wafting translucent in the starlight*; and, *Eärendil, David, why am I saying Eärendil?* and suddenly David spoke like a gong, going *boom, boom, boom*, the sound of heavy vibrating brass . . . then a high ringing sound like chimes and bells and Edgar Allen Poe’s tintinnabulation . . .

And Lydia woke up. She had been having that dream again. The telephone was ringing next to her bed. She answered it at once.

“Hello, Lydia? It’s Florence Bailey. Am I getting you at a bad time?”

“No, no, Florence, not at all. Are you at home?” asked Lydia.

“No, I’m calling from Grandma’s,” Florence revealed, “but I’m on my way home right now, and I wondered if you would come have some brunch with me and Little Drew. I could use the company—I make a lovely quiche with cheese and sour cream and—“

“Don’t tempt me, Florence. I know you do. I’ll be right over. I love your cooking—tell Grandma I said hello, and I’ll talk to you soon.”

Lydia hung up the phone, then wondered if she should try to reach David. Something told her to hurry—she would let David worry about himself this morning. Besides, Florence knew something, something big about the events at The Center, and Lydia could not wait to find out what Grandma and Margot intended to do to get Bo back, and to find out what had happened to Basil, as well.

Florence Bailey had found herself developing into a kind of gadfly, although David, for

one, had assured her that she was becoming a sort of clearinghouse for everyone in the group. Worried about Drew, and if he would be “next,” now that Bo had disappeared, Florence felt a need to keep a motherly hand on the pulse of events, so that she, at least, would have some vague notion of what was transpiring from day to day.

Margot, who had explained to everyone, almost immediately, that Bo had not been raptured, had also comforted Florence with the assurance that Little Drew would not be “next,” and David had told Florence, “we’re not living in the *Left Behind* series—at least not yet!”

Florence Bailey wasn’t convinced of anything at this point but felt the need to organize her observations in her mind and transmit what she knew to others. Giving herself this job generated some peace for herself and Drew and calmed her down.

“You can help us search it out from Dan to Beersheba,” Grandma had told Florence, who wasn’t sure who Dan and Beersheba were but hoped they weren’t two of those musicians the teenagers listen to on MTV.

Lydia did have a scrumptious brunch with Florence and Little Drew and learned much. Drew’s mother was sorting it all out, even writing it down in a little note book so she wouldn’t forget anything or get confused. The outline of events had begun to become quite entangled, like fraying threads in an ancient tapestry sadly in need of repair. But Florence was seeing the pattern, slowly. Her internal tapestry was being restored.

“Just a half cup more *Major Dickason’s*,” requested Lydia. Suddenly everyone in Glenn Haven was drinking *Major Dickason’s* blend, although no one in the Glendon Hall group could really afford it. The Senior Citizens ladies from The Center had sent a couple half empty bags of the Peet’s coffee home with Grandma and Florence, who had spread it thin sharing with almost everyone they could think of.

“And you can take just a sliver more of quiche,” said Florence.

“Well, OK, dear, but only a sliver. Oh, Florence, it’s so delicious. Now, what is this about David and Pastor Brandt?”

“It’s the sour cream and beer cheese. My German grandmother’s recipe.”

“You lost me, Florence.”

“Oh, I mean why you love the quiche—German beer cheese, probably really from Wisconsin, but who cares?”

“You’re right, I can taste the cheese flavor but could not for the life of me identify it. And David and Braith?”

“I’ve never had Pastor Brandt for lunch.”

“No, Florence,” Lydia was getting antsy, “I mean, what do you know? About the lat-

est?”

“Oh, I almost forgot. Margot has convinced Braith Brandt that he must go with her and David to the minaret, whatever that means, and when Pastor Brandt’s daughter got sick—which everyone is praying about—he said yes and is going, but I don’t know how they are going or where this is.”

Florence had heard from Grandma several important things. The day after Bo’s kidnaping, for Margot was sure that’s what had taken place, Pastor Brandt’s little daughter had “taken sick,” but neither fever nor obvious symptoms of any known illness had surfaced. She was unable to stay awake, however, and kept falling asleep, appearing very weak.

The doctors admitted the child to the hospital but soon sent her home, for no medical condition with which they were familiar could be detected, and they reasoned that home rest and professional monitoring through the parents might be the best solution for the present.

A child psychiatrist at the hospital lectured the child’s mother on the probability of an emotional stress and prescribed a medication, but Braith Brandt’s wife wisely refused the doctor’s prescription and brought her daughter back home without it.

The church prayer line was called, and the prayer ministry alerted. Everyone was praying for the little girl, and Father Angelo made a call to The Center to say that his little “Catholic-Baptist-Orthodox Jewish flock” were praying, too. The Brandt’s were sincerely thankful.

It was at that point that Margot Motherchurch appeared at the Brandt house. She was not at first rebuffed. Mrs. Brandt welcomed her in cordially, but when Margot warned the young pastor that he and David needed to resolve their differences in order to bring complete healing to the Body of Christ and to Braith’s daughter, Pastor Brandt became hostile. Although Mrs. Brandt listened patiently, she sided with her husband; sided, that is, until something quite unusual happened.

This conversation among the adults was taking place in the Brandt’s spacious living room. The ill child was upstairs, in the split level house, momentarily unattended while sleeping in her bedroom. Without warning, she appeared at the bottom of the stairs leading into this fashionable family room. Braith and his wife were startled. Margot was not.

“Hello, Margot,” said the little girl, who had never seen the woman before. “Are you the angel in my dream? The one who keeps coming back with that funny little old man who dances on his toes?”

“Yes,” answered Margot, “I am she, and Basil is the funny little old man. He’s my friend.”

The Brandts were too amazed to say anything right away. They merely stared in unbelief. Also, they did not want to frighten the child nor discourage her if she were feeling better.

“He’s a cute bunny rabbit,” the little girl said.

“Do you giggle when he wiggles his nose?” Margot smiled.

The child grinned gleefully at this question but merely shook her head and then said, “I think he’s nice.”

“I think he’s nice, too,” offered Margot.

“How did you know it was my birthday?” asked the child. The Brandts perked up their ears at that, for they had not yet reminded the child that her birthday was coming up next week.

“Well, Precious,” said Margot, “Jesus told me it was your birthday next week, and since he loves you so very very much, I wanted to give you something in your dream that you would enjoy. I know you like flowers, so—“

“Oh, yes,” said the little Brandt girl, “I love roses especially, and you gave me one without thorns.”

“I delivered it, dear one, but it was our lovely Rose of Sharon who grew it for you.”

“Jesus?” said the child, knowingly.

“Yes, Love,” Jesus.

Braith and his wife came out of the trance-like state they found themselves in. He swooped up his daughter in his arms.

“This conversation has gone far enough,” Pastor Brandt remarked, and he was about to send Margot back across the river of life to mind her own business, when his daughter cut him off in midstream.

“Daddy!” she warned, “don’t you send Angel Margot away now. She’s got a terribly important thing for you to do.”

“She does?” said Brandt, shaken by this.

“Braith,” his wife interrupted, “wait, listen to her. There *is* a rose by her bed, and I didn’t know where it came from. I thought someone from the church must have brought it, Pastor Randy maybe, but it’s gorgeous, perfect, and hasn’t dropped a petal. And—oh, dear Lord—it has no thorns!”

“I told you,” said the child. “See, Miss. Margot,” I told them.

Margot smiled and folded her arms in a semi-*Swan Lake* style. She looked quite harmless, and the little girl’s mother saddled up to her now, “Do you really understand all this,

Margot?"

"I do," said Margot, "And it's quite simple. So simple a child can understand. So, I'll let her explain it to you. Only this, be very certain to do exactly as she asks. Much depends upon your faithfulness. Promise her you may, but stay by that promise though the heavens fall."

With that, Margot let herself out the front door and was gone. Braith's wife ran to the door to call after her, but Margot was nowhere to be found. Not on the long path to the road, nor on the driveway, nor on the lawn. Margot Motherchurch had vanished into thin air, leaving only a faint but lovely scent of roses floating in the nearing twilight.

Inside the house, the little girl gave the command. "Daddy," she admonished, "you must go with Margot and David to a tower. For me."

"For you I will, darling. And what will I find at this tower?" the father asked his child.

In a voice not quite her own, she answered, "You will find *the hiding of His power.*" With that the child fell asleep in her father's arms. She had fallen peacefully—but seemingly in the pink of health—into a coma.

Braith Brandt sat down still holding the little girl. His wife put her arms around them both. The young pastor wept bitterly. "What have I done?" he said.

"What have we all done?" his wife replied.

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"The next morning," Florence told Lydia, whose mouth was still hanging open, "David Voltaire pulled into the Brandt driveway."

Phone calls must have been exchanged, for David was expected. Randy Randall was standing on the lawn with Mrs. Brandt, to comfort her. He and Mrs. Randall would stay by the mother and sleeping child until the father's return. Pastor Randall refused to interfere with the situation. He sensed God's planning and held his peace, Florence explained.

Young Pastor Braith shook hands with David and got into the car. They drove away. Shortly they would be at Margot's place, and then their real journey would begin. That was all Florence knew at this time.

"That's it!" she said.

"That's plenty," said Lydia. She drew a deep breath and finally closed her mouth. Her eyes were still as wide as sunflowers.

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Grandma filled Lydia in, at least partly, on what happened when David and Braith got to Margot's, but now Grandma had more urgent business, she said. While Margot was gone, they—meaning Lydia and some of the others at Glendon Hall—had work to do. Faith must back up action, Grandma admonished herself more than Lydia. Margot had acted. Now Grandma would lead the way in faith.

They had made a mistake, she and Margot. They had been too confident, Grandma told Lydia. They had forged ahead with their spiritual program, just like the churches so often did, without holding fast to the will of God. They had moved ahead of God and let down their guard for one fatal moment. The enemy had come in like a flood, and they had nearly prevented God from lifting a standard against him. Bo and Basil had been “caught in between.” Grandma looked toward heaven apologetically, lost in her own reflections.

Then she turned her full attention to Lydia.

“Sweetheart,” she began, “we are going to need your help!”

“I’ll do anything I can, Grandma,” Lydia instantly replied.

“Here’s the deal,” Grandma said. “Do you remember that old warehouse on the other side of town where the IHM nuns were going to start a school or something?”

“Why, yes, Grandma, I do. Whatever happened to that project?”

“Well, it’s a long story, I suspect, but Father Angelo said the Cardinal down South dissolved the Order, or something like that. And the warehouse remains vacant.”

“What? Dissolved the Immaculate Heart of Mary sisters? Well, I’ll be.”

Grandma just shook her head, “Hmm, hmm, hmm!”

“But I thought the IHMs had invested heavily in that building. They were going to call it *The Warehouse*, and even bought a big pipe organ, and were going to do arts and music and summer camp for poor kids, and—“

“Now, don’t fret yersef, child. Those nuns did OK anyways `cause I seen one of dem las month, and she told me all `bout it. Done move ter Hawaii islands. Har, har, har.”

Grandma had broken into her dramatic dialect and was about to jump on stage and win her Oscar. She so enjoyed Lydia, because Lydia just went right along with her on any stage play she started. Grandma, the flawless grammarian, was now playing her Hattie McDaniel role, just for fun. And she knew Lydia enjoyed being teased.

“Grandma, do you mean to tell me we’re going to use *The Warehouse* for something?”

“We sure are,” said Grandma. “Pastor Stryder had the key—and the lease. He wangled it out of the Archdiocese, or the IHMs, or both, and Father Angelo and he and Bernie

have been keeping an eye on the place. That entire pipe organ is still in there—well, the pipes, at least. The IHMs needed some moving money and sold the big four manual console, but the buyer didn't need the pipes. So they're still there—kind of attractive up above in those balconies.”

“You said Hank *had* the key, Grandma,” Lydia asserted.

“Thas right. HAD. But not GOT. `Cause I got it now. Har, har, har.”

Grandma was hysterical with laughter, which did not make any sense to Lydia at all. She should be in grief about Bo and really worried.

Grandma explained to Lydia that Margot had instructed Grandma to hold a big prayer rally at The Warehouse. This would be a long evening of intense intercession. Intercessors from all around were being invited, “even right now as we speak!” Grandma chuckled. She was delighted.

God was going to move in a big way. Prayer would move the arm of God. Grandma was sure of it. Then, following the prayer time there would be praise. Such praise and worship as had not been heard in Glenn Haven for years. Some youth bands had been invited and a choir or two. Churches for miles around had been alerted—the Body of Christ in Glenn Haven had an emergency, and the troops had been called out.

“Captains of the Lord's hosts,” shouted Grandma. We're going to sing our way into glory and put that ole devil to flight, big time!”

“And Margot said something to David about a celebration,” Lydia commented. “David send me word through the Brewsters.”

“Kerrect!” spat out Grandma. She was all energy now. “Thou hast said it. Celebration with a capital C. You see, honey, we are going to pray, and then we are going to worship, and pray some more, and praise Him, and pray some more, and sing, and then the Lion of the Tribe of Judah is going to bring His Presence into our midst. That's why the Celebration!”

“Aslan is on the move,” Lydia squealed happily. She felt like a teenager all of a sudden.

“I like it,” said Grandma. “You and me, jus' like Lucy and Susan. Har, har, har. Oh, God is so good. Nothing like prayer and praise to warm the heart.”

Without warning, Lydia grabbed Grandma's hands and began to sing and dance with her:

*El Shaddai, El Shaddai,  
El-Elyon na Adonia,*

They danced all around the kitchen and then out into the living room.

*El Shaddai, El Shaddai,*

*Erkamka na Adonai,*

And when finally they were too exhausted to dance and sing anymore, they fell down on the floor and laughed, “till our sides split,” Lydia would tell David days later.

*Oh, God is so good,* they both repeated together, and then again, *God is so good!*

Grandma fished in her apron and pulled out the key to The Warehouse. She held it up on high. Lydia took her hand and together they waved the key back and forth, right from where they were sitting on the floor.

“Never saw a wave sheaf like this!” Grandma said.

“Wave it before the LORD, Grandma! Glory to God in the Highest!” echoed Lydia’s exaltation.

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Bo was conscious of something holding him against a wall of stone. His inner vision told him he was far underground. In his mind’s eye he could see a monolith of tremendous proportions directly behind him. In front of him was something that appeared to his internal sight like a gold shield, bearing a horrible device of ancient runes. Pointing at the shield, Bo imagined, was something that looked like a sword, black steel, gleaming, filled with electric strength.

The shield-like object was supported by a shaft that ran through it vertically, from the floor to the ceiling, of an immense vaulted space. The sword-like mechanism seemed suspended in mid air yet controlled the shield. Between the shield and the monolith, Mephibosheth was held tight, as within a bubble, or pocket of air, unhurt, yet kept fast, as though by the strength of many strong men.

Bo had been questioned for a long time. Then the questioners told him what they wanted. They wanted him to “see” something very far away. The questioners were cloaked and hooded, making Bo’s inner vision difficult to focus. Bo sensed, however, that these men—for humans indeed they were—came under the influence of a more terrible Power, an unseen force deep below the surface of that gigantic vaulted room. Bo tried to sense the Power. He saw in his mind a vague shape of fire and shadow, smoke and flame. A horror went before it, and the men were terrified of it, yet they obeyed it with tremendous fascination.

“What do you want?” Bo spoke clearly. He was not afraid. Another Power, even greater, coming from deep within his own spirit, comforted him with an assurance that those around him could neither perceive nor guess.

The voices told him they wanted him to tell them what he saw millions of light years away, far beyond many galaxies. They would induce in his mind a chart of the heavens, showing a point nearly beyond the known universe, where something strange to them was unfolding. They wanted to know exactly what was happening at that place. The

events at this mysterious location, millions of light years distant, greatly upset the darkness enthroned beneath the vaulted dungeon that held Bo captive. The Power below wanted to know what Bo perceived beyond the stars.

No scientific instrumentation on earth could penetrate the barriers of cloud that veiled this point in outer space. Mephibosheth, however, could see into the heart of this mystery, the hooded men assured him. He could describe to them what light shone at the intersection of the timeless moment, what portal beckoned at the crossway of many epiphanies, at the edge of time and space, where this fortuitous flame flickered, perhaps on the very brink of the known universe.

The black sword and the gold shield would float Bo over the entrance to the Zero Point Field, and his own mighty gifts would pass through The Field and find their way beyond the distant quasars. Of this the cloaked servants of darkness were certain. They needed Mephibosheth. They could not find what they needed to know without him. They had been rendered powerless to see into that Realm. Bo's talents were vital here.

Bo knew secretly that the point of mysterious light could be traced like a line that ran from the edge of the universe right through the open space in Orion, and on to planet earth, as though a path were being formed. Should he reveal this vision to the hooded men?

Would Bo help them? Did he have a choice?

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Grandma, Lydia, and Florence Bailey met the following morning early. They headed over to The Warehouse. Grandma's key—or rather the key Pastor Hank Stryder gave her—let them into the huge building.

"This place is enormous," Florence gasped.

"You can say that again," Lydia replied.

"This place is enormous," giggled Grandma.

"Oh, you're a tease, Grandma," laughed Lydia.

"Well," retorted Grandma, "it's in better shape than I thought it would be. I guess nobody's been in her for quite a spell, and it's all been locked up tighter than an old squeaky miser."

The three women were in a kind of long narrow foyer beyond which lay "the sanctuary turned auditorium for big crowds," Grandma added. Above that spacious room was a grand balcony that horseshoed its way around the area just a story below the ceiling. The women advanced through the foyer doors into the center aisle of the grand salon.

"Wow!" exclaimed Florence, "that's quite a balcony. Sort of quaint and modern all at the

same time. And look at the organ pipes. So majestic!”

“Yes,” said Lydia, “the pipes are majestic—those diapasons are huge.”

“And look at all the tiny silver flutes and brass reeds. Jus’ lovely,” Grandma added.

“What are those horizontal pipes?” asked Florence.

“Them be *trompettes en chamade*,” explained Grandma. “The Lord’s got a whole lot of `em in heaven. Har, ha, har. Glory, child!”

“Trumpets!” Florence blurted out. “What an unusual place this is.”

“Yes,” said Lydia, “it’s all quite unusual, but I can see why the IHM nuns liked this place. There’s a spiritual quality about it. The way the light floats in the chancel is gracious.”

Grandma reflected quickly on this conversation. “I can hear the worship songs in this chapel. Take a gander at that podium up yonder on that stage. It’s so far up there you can hardly see it, and it needs more light. We’ll have to open those dingy curtains and clean those windows. Get more light in here. Yes, I can hear worship and praise and prayer goin’ up all night. I like it.”

“I like it, too, Grandma,” shouted Lydia. “It’s going to be a task to clean, but we can do it.”

“Not to worry,” chimed in Florence. “My Drew told the Brewsters about all this, and the whole family’s on their way over with a cleaning crew from Chip’s work—a bunch of men Chip has a Bible study with. They’ve got shop vacs and the works.”

“Praise the Lord and pass the vacuum cleaner,” sang Grandma.

At that, Lydia and Florence burst out laughing, and Grandma made her way up to the front to step onto the big broad stage and stand behind the pulpit. The Spirit was about to hit her, and she wanted to practice “looking out at the audience.”

“Something good’s comin’ this way,” Grandma sang. “Something good’s headed home today.”

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Arriving at her condo, Margot led the way into the little room that David had visited before but had continued to find curious. The two men followed her. Braith Brandt had been silent and stern but docile. He was not comfortable with all these activities but complied with Margot for the time being. He would see where it all went. He did not know they were going to Minarette’s Tower, and he did not know, anymore than David did, who Minarette was.

After a seemingly endless walk through a labyrinth of rooms and arches and gar-

dens—the oddity of which frightened Braith Brandt, who had never seen a place that was far larger on the inside than it was without— the three of them came upon a fountain ringed about with a silver railing that reminded David of an altar rail at an old liturgical church.

The fountain stood under a roof of pink marble supported by eight pillars. It was then that both Braith and David realized that the bowl, or pool, of the fountain was shaped like an octagon of the most lovely marble, varied in hues, and that the marble pillars were thrust out from the ringed octagon like flying buttresses or petals on a rose.

As the two men ventured with Margot closer to the fountain, they gasped in disbelief. The fountain was both fire and water, an endless play of the two ancient elements entwined in an indescribable glory that began to sparkle the closer they all came toward it. David’s heart sensed a vision, *like water falling over rainbows and angels’ wings wafting translucent in the moonlight.*

“This is the Flame of Time,” said Margot to the two dazed men. “We are going to enter the corridors of time and space and pass over the bridge of possibilities to make our entrance onto the plains that hover before the Tower.

“Is this the tower my little girl spoke of?” Braith asked.

“Yes,” replied Margot immediately, for she sensed his anxiousness. “This is the way to the Minaret. It is a needle of a tower, beautiful and ancient, in which lives a person whose name is Minarette. She is the Keeper of the Weavings.”

“The weavings!” announced David, as though he had just enjoyed a revelation. “These are the tapestries Basil has talked about. He told Bo about them.”

“Tapestries?” asked Braith.

“The very ones,” answered Margot. “These are the living scenes in time and space of Salvation’s history. In the Tower, the Bible remains alive, for the study of the holy angels of God. This is a very great mystery. It is part of the awesome work of Grace.” She spoke now directly to Braith Brandt, “Here you and David will find the answers you both seek, and you will find them by standing strong together.”

Margot placed great stress on the word *together* as she took their hands, one man on each side of her, and led them with her into the fire. The ring of silver gave way for them, as though made out of mist, and they all found themselves pulled within colors and sounds that brought to Braith Brandt’s mind a verse he had always found intriguing:

*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him (1 Corinthians 2:9).*

“I’m afraid,” confessed David to Margot.

“Me too,” said Braith.

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom,” whispered Margot. “Only believe.”

And with that word, the waters and the flames enfolded behind them, embracing them into a different world, so far away, so long ago, where the crowned knot of fire and the rose are one. Then, suddenly, everything opened before them.

“Oh, my!” exclaimed Braith Brandt. “Oh, dear God—what am I seeing?”

## Chapter Ten

### *The Hiding of His Power*

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Mysterious are the ways of God. For, although David did not know it at the time when he was at Lydia's home group in Mike Conwell's house and was telling Mike and Bev his history, even as Mike was responding with compassion, at that very moment Basil was weaving, and Margot was making music, as she sang the harmony of the tapestry that Basil was creating with David in mind. The loom responded and the weaving poured forth, and the tapestry was filled with threads of prayers and pleadings and intercessions and sorrows, as well as joy. It was as though God was assuring David, "It's all for you."

In this way, David was being prepared for this moment, but he did not understand that on the evening he was sharing with Mike Conwell. How could he? How could any of us comprehend the ways of the One who sees the end from the beginning—the One who dwells in the eternal present, for whom past and future are mirrors before His face? How could such an awesome plan be grasped by us, mere mortals that we are?

Emerging from the "crossing," Braith Brandt and David Voltaire found themselves standing with Margot Motherchurch on a great rock that looked like an enormous steppe in a land of far grassy plains. As far as the eye could see, the horizon was ablaze with colorful clouds that appeared to be on fire; yet the air was sweet and balmy with a slight touch of sea salt on the senses, when one's skin responds to the closeness of the sea. David felt as though he were standing by the ocean and could hear the surf, but the ocean was nowhere to be seen.

"I feel as though my face is buffeted by the sounds of the sea and the invigorating salt air," said Braith Brandt, as though he were echoing David's own thoughts.

"That is because you are feeling what David feels," answered Margot. "In this place," she continued, "both of you may find more empathy for each other's feelings."

The next moment found the two men quite startled, for three beautiful horses swept across the plains toward them, at first appearing like a mist gathering above the grass near the horizon, but now coming clearly into sight, moving at breakneck speed, until suddenly the horses were standing directly in front of them. The sleek beasts were pastel in color, and their manes were similar hues but darker and tinged with silver.

The lime green horse selected David and moved next to him. It seemed to David that the horse bowed slightly at him as though in greeting. Realizing that the man was not quite used to riding, the grand creature bent one leg to allow David easier access to the horse's back.

"Get on," said Margot. "He'll carry you with care and you won't even be able to fall off if you try."

Somehow David believed Margot and did as she asked. The pale blue horse chose Braith and saddled up to him with a courteous nod of the head. Braith bowed in response, which seemed to please the animal. He also assisted the man in mounting his steed.

Margot was left with the ruby red horse, who was pastel and silver and ruby red all at the same time, the shades shifting as the horse moved. Margot jumped astride the beast as though she had been riding horses all her life. She made a little pirouette in the air before she landed on the creature's back. It was a graceful dance movement but amazed the two men, who looked at each other in wonder.

"We're off," said Margot. And with that command, for the horses seemed to understand it as such, the six living beings nearly took flight as they raced across the mystical plains, "climbing the steppes of central heaven," as David explained it later to Lydia, and advancing toward the next stage of their unimaginable journey—for this was only the beginning.

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Grandma felt that her visit with Randy Randall went successfully. She had gone with Lydia to see the pastor of the big church, and they had enjoyed a good time. Grandma had explained to Pastor Randall about the big "Celebration," an act of faith, which might ensure that Margot would have success at the minaret, success for the labors of Braith and David together. Randy Randall was happy to do whatever it took to assist the two men in their task, he assured both Grandma and Lydia. He wanted peace for both David and Braith and genuine healing for the Body of Christ. He also confessed to the two godly women that he knew how different the portrait of the church was in the New Testament, in contrast to the picture we see of the church today.

In response to Pastor Randall's gracious attitude, Lydia told her pastor that Father Angelo had also accepted the invitation to the grand celebration, as had Pastor Stryder and Rabbi Belzberg, both of whom Grandma invited one morning over coffee in Angelo's office at Saint Bernadette's. Lydia wanted Randy to be there, too, at the special event, to represent the Center, and the pastor assured the ladies that he was happy to accept the invitation. Perhaps the Celebration would be a pulling together of the spiritual community in Glenn Haven. *Whom would we see at the great event?* pondered Lydia to herself, and what would their presence there signify? Grandma's own thoughts mirrored Lydia's.

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At Grandma's request, Gus and Chip began to work on the Vrilorien trees with Dennis McSorley, the young pastoral intern from St. Bernadette's. Some of the trees had been planted by Basil on the properties of the various families in the emerging Glenn Haven "family" of believers. Chip was the first to discover that a large Vrilorien tree had grown up quickly in his backyard. Mary Doyles found one growing sideways along the stone wall at the side of their old house. Directing their attention to the gathering of the Vrilorien wood, the families got to know each other better. Gus and Chip found themselves working together evenings and weekends, cutting trunks and stacking wood, waiting for

instructions that Margot had left with Grandma. Mary Doyles and Donna Brewster “cooked up a storm,” Grandma said, and Lydia helped out as much as she could, bringing special treats often to the “team” and keeping track of what was running short—she dashed off often to the stores at night to refresh supplies of all sorts.

At one point in their work together, and not quite knowing why, Gus asked Dennis if he ever considered being a pastor, such as to this growing batch of home groups, because the local churches, Gus reasoned, might be getting ready “to kick us all out.” After all, word was spreading about this odd pack of “the faithful,” who seemed to be engaged in something as mysterious, but meaningful, as had Noah himself in constructing the ark before the Flood. Father Angelo’s frequent visits to the homes of these families also had solicited comment from the local gossips, and when Rabbi Belzberg, and his dear wife Miriam, accompanied the Catholic priest, rumormongers could hardly control themselves.

It was at one of these get-togethers that Dennis told Father Angelo about the question Gus raised about the need for eventual shepherding by spiritual counsel and whether Dennis might ever feel called to commit himself to such an office? After all, Dennis was seemingly unattached, could probably live on a shoestring if necessary and was very good with the children, but no clear definition of such a role of leadership had been raised by anyone so far. Nevertheless, Father Angelo was moved by the concept and counseled Dennis to follow his heart. “I have often wondered,” said Father to Dennis privately, “why we find the word pastor not even once in the Acts of the Apostles. I wonder what were God’s real intentions for His church in those days following our Lord’s ascension.”

“I know they met in houses,” Dennis replied to Angelo during their private conversation.

“Yes,” answered Father, “in houses, not church buildings. In fact, church buildings are not mentioned in the Bible. Such structures developed around A.D. 200 to 300, when the church was slipping into darkness. Yet, both Protestants and Catholics continue to spend millions on these monuments today, while people all around them are starving. We all have much to pray about.”

Meanwhile, back in Jerusalem, as Grandma liked to say, the on-going woodwork kept Gus and Chip and Dennis busy. Lydia and Grandma went back and forth between the Warehouse and the Doyles’ house or the Brewster’s or Florence Bailey’s. Little Drew and Katie Brewster found themselves eating dinner they never quite knew where, but everyone was lovingly invited to everyone else’s home, and Lydia was always making lunch sandwiches, with “ten-grain bread” baked by Grandma, for the hard-working men. Within the embrace of their assigned labors, the families were finding out a great deal about one another. Sharing was honest and direct. Needs physical and emotional and spiritual were out in the open for all to see. Tears and laughter often intertwined like threads in a living tapestry. Prayer was offered on the spot. At the same time, the children often found their own entertainment. Katie and Drew engaged in a game they invented. “I’ll be Lucy,” Katie declared, “and you’ll be Mr. Tumnis,” she told Little Drew, who was delighted to be a faun in Narnia.

One Sunday afternoon, a spontaneous exchange of phone calls brought together an unplanned picnic. The Conwells came, and Bernie and Miriam, who had never met the Conwells before. The Belzbergs brought three kosher casseroles, and Hank Stryder's family surprised the gang with fresh-baked fruit pies. Father Angelo arrived late that day with a dozen Italian cannoli and several bottles of imported Chianti. Dennis sauntered in with an enormous salad. "So that's where my roasted red peppers went," laughed Angelo. Dennis had put them in the salad, and everyone thought that was a wonderful idea. Father Angelo beamed at Dennis like a father pleased with his son.

Yet, in the midst of this happy occasion, Grandma inspected the finishing touches on the round objects that the men had created. Margot's blueprints had proved an invaluable aid, and some of her unusual and detailed directions had solved all of the mechanical problems associated with the woodworking task. The final products appeared to be sheets of paper rolled up on fairly long spindles, on the one hand, and round wooden balls brightly painted, on the other. The round items were gathered quickly into a large velvet sack that tied at the top with strong threaded ribbons. The rolls of paper were wrapped in similar velvet packaging with strong ribbon-like ties. No one questioned when Grandma and Lydia stowed these packages away before the picnic was over. Everyone guessed that the ladies were following Margot's guidance. And so they were!

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Another eye-opening development for the emerging house-church group was an incident that occurred with the Brewsters. Donna and Chip had been to The Center one Sunday and had been invited to a "welcome luncheon" right there in the church facilities. During a conversation with some of the senior citizens, who already had many questions about Margot and "her group," the Brewsters, including Katie, found themselves excitedly sharing with the people at the luncheon about the miracles experienced by Gus and Chip at the last teaching Margot held.

Some of the leading women in the Women's Ministry, however, were not happy with the attention the Brewsters were getting and the discussion that developed about the nature of the Body of Christ in the New Testament in comparison with the contemporary American church. These activities were "reported" to the elders of The Center, and to some of the younger pastors, in a meeting at which neither Pastor Brandt nor Randy Randall were present.

As a result of rising fears over the Glenn Haven "weirdoes" and the Glendon Hall "fanatics," many among The Center's leadership launched a campaign of shunning and distancing against the Brewsters, the Doyles, and a number of other "Margot-sympathizers." In short, the church leadership tried to prevent its own people from believing in the miracles to which the Brewsters and others testified. Even the little "Intercessors group" that had formed within The Center for on-going prayer was being driven out of the popular church and forced to gather on week nights at the old Warehouse, so that they might continue to storm Heaven with supplication. Lydia herself was among these ousted prayer warriors.

Although persecution increased from many sides against the people in Glenn Haven and Glendon Hall who were friends of and co-laborers with David and Lydia, Grandma and Bo, and Margot and Basil, these godly families did not in any way retaliate against their neighbors or other church people who behaved negatively toward them. Nevertheless, it seemed that odd warnings began to escalate into wake-up calls throughout the region. For example, strange as it sounds, a petty thief who thought it would be a big joke to steal canned food from Grandma's pantry when she wasn't home—she never locked the back door—caught on fire spontaneously as he was running down the street.

In the next town, a man who had killed a woman while he was driving drunk, but gotten off the manslaughter charge through the antics of a clever lawyer and a twisted technicality, was struck by lightning and killed while crossing the courthouse parking lot. His attorney who had been holding the car door open for him at the time was severely burned and rushed to the hospital, where he survived. A number of the "old timers" in that town, who remembered the original name of Glenn Haven, attributed the bizarre incidents to "righteous judgment" that was "flowing like a river from Sheavesville."

A liar, who taunted the Brewsters by spreading malicious gossip about them around the neighborhood was struck deaf and dumb and did not recover either hearing or speech until four months later, when she wrote letters of apology to the families involved.

At a wedding to which Lydia was invited, the champagne on all the tables turned to water when Lydia was insulted verbally and loudly by a member of the bridal party, who referred to her as "one of those weirdo fanatics." Even the wine in the unopened bottles had turned to water—guests ran from the reception screaming.

And to top things off, Theresa Neary, the injured ice-skater living in the next town, who was sent home from the Olympics badly hurt from a fall, called Mary Doyles out of the blue and asked if she could come for healing to "The Celebration"—she had heard about the "little family of prayer warriors in Glenn Haven" and wanted to skate at their "faith event," although she still could not bend her knee. Would the Intercessors please pray for her, she asked. "We shall all pray for you," promised Mary.

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The horses slowed down as they climbed a broad mountain. The little party out of time and space was approaching the shimmering silvery sliver of the still far-off minaret, gleaming in a setting sun in the distance. The climb was steep at times and the riders and horses now weary. "We shall make camp tonight," said Margot. "It would be too dangerous to continue in the coming dark," she warned.

She led them to an oasis of shade trees and a pool of cool water with a tiny rivulet flowing out of the rocks that graced the North end of the calm pond. A little cave—*like the grotto at Lourdes*, David thought—greeted them. Here they dismounted and made a small fire out of leaves and twigs that had broken off the tall trees. Neither David nor Braith wished to question Margot as to how she got that fire going. They just accepted the fact of the warmth and the rocky cave on the North that sheltered them from an increasingly hostile wind. "How do you know which way is North?" asked Braith.

“I’ve been here before,” replied Margot, “and thus I know.” Braith did not doubt her.

The wind continued to howl throughout the long and dreary hours of the pitch-black night. Not a star shone in the sky, as dark clouds rolled overhead. Braith and David slept fitfully, wakened now and then by sounds that appeared at times like angry voices, hostile and accusing, but faded again into sounds of wind and dead leaves scraping across the ground, and an occasional falling branch, caught by the stormy atmosphere and dashed upon the higher rocks.

“Arise, arise,” said Margot, “it is time to finish our journey.” She awakened the men and served them each a tall drink of water from the cool pool, and silvery pink fruit from some of the trees growing at the very edge of the small sparkling mere.

It was light. The stars that were reflected in the surface of the pond were fading, as two bright suns appeared over the horizon. One solar disc was quite close to the South and the other nearer to the West. “The lands have shifted,” cautioned Margot. The minaret is closer than it was last night, but we must proceed carefully. The horses will not take any chances. As the party of three continued their climb, they saw why the beasts feared haste—geysers of fire suddenly burst forth from the ground in a number of places where the earth appeared to have fallen inward during the “shifting.” The horses skirted these areas but kept their course toward the tower, which was slowly coming more clearly into sight and looming larger than they had imagined it could be.

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It was at a prayer gathering of a small band of Intercessors that something most unusual took place. Something rarely permitted by Heaven. Little Drew had asked to be included at a season of prayer his mother was having quite spontaneously with the Doyles and the Brewsters. Katie could not imagine herself being left out of the circle of faith if Drew were to be allowed among the grownups that evening.

Florence Bailey had come to help with the work of the men who labored on the Vrilorien trees. That night she packed extra sandwiches for Dennis McSorley, whom she dubbed “poor lad,” as her maternal instincts made inroads on the activities of the band of Christian brothers who had grown quite close to one another, “serving God together,” as Pastor Hank put it. Over sawhorses and lathes, and wood sanding. Gus and Chip were surprised how much young Dennis knew about sanding.

“We want this rightly fine to suit Margot and Grandma,” ordered Gus with a big grin, “and here’s what I do. I start out with a 400 grit paper after the stain dries, and then go to—“

“Me, too,” Dennis chimed right in, “yes’ sir, and that usually brings out planer marks and bumps too smooth to notice on first sanding. Then, I re-sand, with 60 to 80 grit—“

“And work down to 220 grit,” interrupted Chip. “Is that what you guys do?”

“The Bobbsey twins,” laughed Dennis.

“Bobbsey triplets!” shouted Florence, crossing the lawn with a picnic basket.

It was time to quit, and the men were glad for the break and refreshments. Florence handed cold water bottles around that she had carried with her, and then made her request for prayer support, as Mary Doyles came over to give her a hug.

It seems Little Drew had been blue lately. The mysterious loss of Mephibosheth—in spite of Grandma’s faith that he would soon return—had been hard for the other children to handle. All the neighborhood kids loved Bo, and Glenn Haven didn’t seem quite the same without him. A spirit of heaviness had come over several of the children that week, “especially the past two days,” Florence commented. Mary Doyles agreed and reminded everyone that Donna Brewstser had already asked Grandma and Lydia for special prayer for Katie at this time. Florence invited everyone home to her house for a short season of prayer that evening. She promised to have Major Dickason’s brewing.

Later that evening, as the friends settled in for intercession, that which is almost never permitted took place. It was during prayer, after about ten minutes of intense intercession, that Little Drew said out loud, to everyone’s surprise, “Craig is here.”

“What?” whispered Florence, trying to settle Drew down, “your brother Craig?”

When she opened her eyes to draw her little son closer to her, she gasped. Gus and Mary opened their eyes just then, too. A heavenly light surrounded the circle of prayer warriors on their knees. In the middle of the circle that spread around the living room sofas and chairs, stood a figure bathed in glorious light, not blinding radiance, but calm and firm. Drew went right into the light and began speaking to the figure, who seemed to be answering all of the child’s questions.

“Craig, Craig, Craig, Craig,” shouted Little Drew. Florence began to cry. She could not move. Mary’s mouth hung open in disbelief. The others closed their eyes tightly and prayed silently, seeking Heaven’s will in this matter. Then they heard a manly and kind voice, one that was both immediately familiar and yet not familiar at all, but quite changed in power and love.

“It is Craig,” confessed Florence. “It is.”

“This visit is permitted only for a short time and to honor the faith of a child. My brother begged for my presence, and the One who is altogether lovely and gracious, merciful and kind, has given us this short visit. Listen to Little Drew. He will relate much of what I have put in his mind, but I must leave.”

With that, the figure encircled Drew, who put his arms out and beamed happily as his brother’s form slowly faded into the darkening of the night, leaving a sense of tender quietness in the room.

As the prayer time came to an end, Florence asked the child to explain what he heard. Drew told the group what Craig had revealed to him.

“David and Braith Brandt are near Jesus right now. He is healing them. Margot is not with them, but she will come back with them. They are all coming back very soon.”

“And Pastor Braith’s little girl will be healed very soon, too,” added Katie.

“You heard Craig, too, Katie?” her mother inquired.

“Yes,” said the child. “Drew and I both heard Craig, but Drew saw him, too. I couldn’t see him.”

The adults had seen the light but had heard nothing of these details, except for Florence, who thought that she had heard her son’s voice, although she did not understand anything he said, and she felt like he kissed her on the forehead as he departed in the light that surrounded him.

“Katie’s right,” agreed Little Drew. “Margot is coming back soon. Braith Brandt’s daughter will be healed and even come to Grandma’s Celebration. Bo will come there, too. Craig promised me. Basil is with Bo—inside him, I think is what Craig said. We are all going to be healed of many things,” the child revealed.

Mary Doyles began slowly singing to herself, “I am the Lord that healeth thee. I am the Lord that healeth thee.” Soon others joined her, including the children. Quietly and sweetly the believers sang in one accord. A gracious joy filled the room: *I am the Lord that healeth thee*. O, surely, Jehovah-Ropheka was with them.

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“I must leave you now,” said Margot. “Minarette must not see me. It would be a dangerous encounter.”

“You mean she’s dangerous?” asked Braith Brandt.

“No, no,” answered Margot. “Not at all. Only for me would she create a danger, for both of us—for herself and for me. Not for you and David.”

Margot explained that they would understand more as they began to climb the stairs inside the tower and proceed to the top. They would discover Minarette along the way.

“What should we say to her?” David inquired.

“You will not have to ask her anything. The Holy Spirit will reveal to her what she needs to know, and she will be constrained to help you. You will be compelled to enter the door she opens for you. Jesus will do the rest. My part in this visitation is now at a close. I must leave you and begin the return journey.”

“But, Margot, how will David and I get back ourselves?” asked Braith Brandt. David wondered the same thing. If Margot took all the horses back to “the crossing” with her, then how would he and Braith make their return journey?

“I am responsible for these lovely beasts,” explained Margot, “and I must return them to their own lands, but Minarette will come to realize your need to return from this healing, and God will direct her ways. She will guide you, and you will meet me later. We shall cross paths soon at the Intersection of the Timeless Moment; in, with, and under the Zero Point Field, at the state of eternal epiphanies, driven by the grace of the Spirit.”

David found that explanation unnerving, to say the least, but, like Braith, he accepted it for now. He had come to understand that with Margot, acceptance was the key to many conundrums. Embracing by faith the grace that works by love, the day’s resolution would come in Heaven’s good time. The men said their temporary farewells to Margot, as she leapt astride the ruby beast and was gone, the other horses trailing close in her wake, the wind in their manes, the sound of the steppes in their ears, the pounding of the sundering seas keeping pace in their hearts.

“When will we see her again?” asked Braith, but he expected no answer. “I guess it’s time to climb,” he said.

“Let us climb, then,” agreed David, “for much still may lie ahead.”

All at once their climb was interrupted by shifting earth beneath their feet. Part of the mountain collapsed inward into a small spiral plain. Plumes of smoke and steam gushed out of the broken crust of the earth. The ground rumbled. David was thrown backward. Braith forward onto his hands, his face against nearly molten sands. Flames of fire rent the foundations upon which they lay. David began to roll toward a pool of liquid fire surrounding a vicious geyser that swayed hideously over the men like a demon delighting in destruction. The demon geyser seemed to wield a whip of flame in its clawed fist.

As the whip cracked, fire rained down like a waterfall of horror, separating the two travelers and forcing David closer to the edge of disaster. David would have fallen into the cruel torture-pond had not Braith quickly pushed himself through the falling brimstone and grabbed David’s leg. They helped each other up and struggled together around to the left of the bubbling conflagrations, grasping at brush and grass on slightly higher ground to steady themselves. They had both been badly burned. Braith’s legs gave way beneath him, but David shouldered Braith’s body as best he could, summoning the last of his own ebbing strength. Finally they were out of harm’s way. Like soldiers emerging from the smokes and wakes of war, they sought out the end of their mission and came upon a path to freedom, leading ever upward toward unknown clouds above.

Making haste in their climb, they left the heated mists behind and found themselves marching across another vast plain, but they were at its farthest end and close to their goal, so that the towering edifice was immediately before them, as though it had appeared through the earth’s crust in a flash of uncertainty. The strange minaret shown like a mirror, sparkled an unmistakable invitation with a glory all its own.

David Voltaire entered the tower and begin the long climb to the top. Braith Brandt was right by his side. The broad marble stairs easily accommodated them both on each step. Many curved windows passed them by as they pushed ever higher. Strangely enough, the closer they came to the top, the more energy they seemed to draw from the climb itself, or from the tower.

Halfway up they spotted the figure of a woman. She turned the corner when they called to her and was lost to sight, but they sensed that she was beckoning them onward. As they continued to climb higher and higher, they passed arches and indentations where tapestries were hanging. Each weaving depicted a scene in the life of Christ. David recognized the *Hosanna bar David* tapestry that Basil had made. Basil had told him much about this hanging. Evidently this tapestry had been brought to the minaret, by Basil himself, to be placed in its niche along the upward route.

Finally, close to the top of the tower, Minarette allowed herself to be discovered. She greeted them and relieved their minds by immediately promising them help but told them they must not embrace her.

“I am not here in the same way that you are here,” she warned them. “Our interaction this hour is miraculous and temporary. But I have a window of wonder to bring you through. All things are not controlled by the Zero Point Field, but the Field is where many things intersect.”

She led them to a tapestry hanging in a broad niche on a gorgeous, yet deathly still, landing of the tower. It was a picture of Golgotha. As Minarette advised them to step into the tapestry of the Crucifixion, she explained the purpose of the holy minaret.

“Basil and others have woven all of these gracious hangings. They are all that is left of the full treasury. These are teachings of the Gospel. They were created, before the New Covenant was written in Greek, to make clear to the holy angels many things that the heavenly powers desired to look into. Things that the Redeemed understand by experience even more deeply than do Powers and Thrones and Principalities on high. Now that the Scriptures are soon to be completed, the tapestries may cease to exist—if the war does not reach them. Or they may be sealed in time and space unknown to me, until the end of the world.”

Before the men stepped into the tapestry, which began to flutter and become translucent in the flickering light from windows set high above them in the tower, they both understood within them that they were in another time. Minarette’s life in the tower was traced across a different timeline than the one the two men had left behind on earth. Suddenly David had an incredible insight.

“You *are* Margot,” he said. Braith gasped, for he seemed to sense the same revelation David was experiencing.

“Yes,” answered Minarette. “I am she, whom I have never seen, nor ever will. But we are one, in a way that I cannot explain to you. Margot came to be the way she is because of the great war of Morbyx. We are on the other side of that dread place. When

the war spilled over into our lands, the first minaret was destroyed—it had been the High Tower of the Old Covenant, where scenes from centuries before the Incarnation were woven in wonder, long before the Hebrew Scriptures were finally written. But then the Horror came, with many evil warriors. Then *Flame and Shadow* threw down the first tower—but only in vain. For God had preserved His Word in patriarchs and prophets, in poets and kings. The old tapestries were consumed in the conflagration, but the Word of God endures forever.”

“And *these* beautiful tapestries here now?” Braith asked Minarette.

“I do not know,” she replied. “I do not know what will become of them.” For Minarette in her time-space, the New Testament had not yet been written; whereas, for David and Braith, its completion was in their past.

Suddenly the men realized that they were standing not far from the foot of the cross. Their minds were moving backwards in time and grasping much of the Passion of the Christ. They had stepped into the tapestry of the crucifixion. They were in the same time and space as Calvary and yet not in the same time and space. No one could see them there, but they could see and hear all that was going on around them. Jesus alone was aware of them. He had always known them.

As they moved closer to the cross, they traveled backward in time to the beginning of the Passion. They viewed all the horror of Roman punishment that Jesus suffered for us. They traveled the long road to Golgotha. At the cross, Braith and David saw and heard many things. They saw and heard “the bulls of Bashan” that surround the Savior. They heard the words of the Son of God as all the demons in hell taunted Him.

*Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.*

*They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.*

*I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.*

*My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.*

*For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.*

*I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.*

*They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.*

Braith and David recognized the voices that were taunting their Lord. They were the same voices they heard in the wind when the men sheltered with Margot at the poolside cave. The voices in the wind were those of all the devils in hell.

“They are hurling my sins in my face,” David cried.

“I know, I know,” moaned Braith in response, and it is more than I can bear.

It was as though the satanic forces surrounding the cross were calling out all the life faults of the two harried men, screaming their trespasses at them in taunts and jeers. Under this attack, both men felt compelled to move closer to the Redeemer on the cross, to seek, in their innocent Savior, protection from the demonic war now waged upon them.

As they clung to the cross of Christ, the demons let go of them. David and Braith were terribly burdened with the sense of their own unworthiness, yet very buoyed by a great clarity of the worthiness of Jesus. The Balm of Gilead was healing them. His agonies were cleansing them.

Suddenly David felt himself caught up in a vision within the vision. His breath was not in him, and it seemed as though his spirit abandoned his body. He felt at one with the Sacrifice on the cross. In his mind his memory heard echoes of an old southern preacher from many years ago. The unusual sermon played like the taut bow across the bridge of a viola, and he heard the preacher’s voice—and saw the very events the old man was describing:

*Let us begin by remembering the passion of the Savior—those events leading up to and including the crucifixion.*

*When Jesus was born, Satan would have delighted in instantly blotting out the Child of the Most High. But the Spirit of the Lord hovered over Jesus, and He grew in the admonition of the Lord in learning and in teaching. God overshadowed Him with His protection, and no physical harm came to the Messiah.*

*Satan knew that he couldn’t get to Jesus directly. The devil had to corrupt the people around Jesus, and he did a very good job of corrupting them. He did not try to corrupt the street people. He did not try to go to the garbage people and corrupt them, especially not the ones Jesus had touched with His love, the homeless, the crippled, the poverty stricken, the outcast and maimed.*

*He went to the religious folks. He corrupted the church against the Lord of glory. At least, that’s the way the Gospels paint it. I like their direct and unveiled style of Christ’s passion.*

*And the nice, religious folks, one night arrested the Lord while He was at prayer. They trumped up a bunch of false charges against Him, had a mockery of a trial, and handed Him over to the Roman government. And the Roman government, in order to please them, to try to keep things at rest with these hot-headed religious people, decided that they would give a little punishment to Jesus.*

*He had been accused of treason. He had been accused of blasphemy. He had been accused of so many things that, as one restored prostitute at a rescue mission put it, “He was really framed good.” So the Roman governor decided to placate these religious people. “I’ll take this guy out and have Him scourged, and that should be enough for anybody.”*

*So they tied Jesus like a criminal; and they dragged Him out to a place called the court of the pavements; and in the middle of the court of the pavements there’s a post; and at the top of this tall finger column of wood there’s a big ring; and this instrument is called a scourging post.*

*And they take the rope that ties Jesus’ hands; and they throw the end of the rope through the ring on the top of this post. And then they pull down on that rope until they have Jesus suspended by His arms until nothing is touching the ground but His tiptoes.*

*They tie the rope off. Then they step back and they rip Jesus’ robe off His back, and they see to it that His skin is nice and tight so that when the scourge hits Him, it will be sure to rip and bleed and tear—so that it just won’t be wasted motion.*

*Then they bring out the scourge itself. Now, if there were any more diabolical instrument of torture than the scourge in those days, I don’t really think anyone could think of what it could be.*

*For the scourge was a whip with one handle and a lot of tongues. And all down the length of each tongue of the scourge there were pieces of metal tied, or parts of broken bone, or of sticks, anything sharp and jagged—old pieces of metal, rusted.*

*And the top of each one of the tongues of the scourge was tipped off with lead. And the man that was carrying this scourge was a man who was in charge of the entire disciplinary actions taken against the whole Roman legion that was there in Jerusalem. He was kind of like the Sergeant-at-Arms. He was a big, old muscled guy who had flogged just hundreds of legionnaires before.*

*And he came out there, and he was far from his home, and he wanted to go back to Italy. He was tired. He was tired of foreign wars. He was tired of being in a place he didn’t like, around a bunch of people he didn’t understand, with customs that were weird; and this was a chance for him to take out some of his animosity and frustrations against the leader of these irksome and annoying religious people.*

*So he walked up to this with real relish. And he took out this big old whip; and he shook it out; and he looked at Jesus; and he measured his distance from Jesus to him; and he took this scourge; and he took his big muscled arm; and he brought it up; and he brought that whip whistling down on Jesus’ back.*

*And the tongues of the scourge wrapped themselves around Jesus’ body; and they stuck into Him; and the pieces of metal clawed at Him. The length of each one of the thongs*

*had been coated with sheep's blood and bits of broken pottery and such had been glued to each one, so that each sharp object just stuck into Jesus and clawed into His flesh. And the lead tips of the scourge would cut into Him and gouge Him.*

*And when the man had a good bite on Jesus, he would twist the whip and pull so that great big chunks of meat were ripped off Jesus' body, and He was cut open.*

*Jesus took thirty-nine stripes like that. Thirty-nine times that man's arm came up and fell. Thirty-nine times that whip bit into Jesus. Thirty-nine diseases prefigured in the Old Testament. Thirty-nine stripes to redeem us in the New. "With His stripes we are healed."*

*At the middle of the scourging, the man had to change and whip Jesus on the other side because one side of His body had already been reduced to raw hamburger meat, and there just wasn't enough sound flesh left to beat.*

*The historians of the day say that Jesus Christ was reduced to human rubble. The histories of the day say that there was not one inch on Jesus' body that wasn't cut or bruised or bleeding or gashed open.*

David was overwhelmed with sorrow. He felt he could take no more of this historical reality spread out in panorama before him, but the preacher's voice would not stop....

*They then cut Him down, and the executioner gave the rest of the legionnaires a chance to take out some of their frustrations.*

*Somebody had called Him the King of the Jews, so one of the Roman legionnaires went and got a purple robe. They flung it over Jesus' battered body, and it was one there, and they got a crown made out of thorns, thorns about five to six inches long and hard as nails—old Judean thorns. And they braided a crown for Him.*

*And they stuck it up on His head, and they beat it down around His ears with rods until it was just stuck into His scalp, and stuck into His head, and gouging into His face. And they put a scepter in His hand; and they mocked Him; and they spit on Him; and they pulled out His beard in fistfuls. And they called Him a King, and laughed at Him.*

*The Bible says they smote Him in the face. The Greek word used for smite is the same Greek word meaning to strike a man with a closed fist. It's the root word for pugilism, which means boxing. The word implied their striking Jesus in the face with a fist. They punched Jesus out. The whole company did.*

*When they got done with that, they dragged Him back inside and returned Him to the Roman procurator named Pilate. Pilate brought Him out to the crowd. This was the same crowd that a week before had hailed Him as Messiah. The same crowd that had said that they loved Him, that they would follow Him, that they would stick by Him.*

*Pilate brought Him out to the crowd and stood Him before the crowd—and next to Jesus stood a condemned murderer named Barabbas.*

*And Pilate said, “It’s Passover time. I’ll give you either one of these men you want. I’ll give you this murderer Barabbas, or I’ll give you this man here in whom I can find no fault. I’ll give you Jesus, who is supposed to be your King. Now which do you want?”*

*And on top of the scourging, on top of the humiliation, on top of the pain and the loss of blood, Jesus had to stand there and watch the people He loved turn their backs on Him and scream for the release of Barabbas.*

*He had to stand there and watch while He was deserted by everybody He cared for. And He had to stand there and listen to the shouts of “Give us Barabbas. We want Barabbas. Crucify Jesus. Crucify Him. We want Barabbas.”*

David tried to hold his hands over his ears, but the crowd’s roar would not cease. David tried to wipe the vision from his eyes with his tears, but the historical panorama trudged further through the darkness with detail after horrific detail. The vision within the vision went on....

*Then they took Him out and they ripped that purple robe off His back after it had a chance to congeal with the blood; and it ripped everyone of Jesus’ wounds open again; and He began to bleed all over again.*

*They put His own robe on His back. They settled a two-hundred pound cross on His back and made Him walk up the Via Dolorosa, the way of sorrows, probably the steepest street in Jerusalem. As Jesus began making His way up the street, He became weak. He was beaten. He was deserted. His disciples were not even in the area. And He fell—it was just too much, the emotional strain, the loss of blood, and human nature gave way, and He fell under the weight of His cross.*

*A man stepped out of the crowd, Simon, a Cyrenian, to express sympathy for the poor Sufferer. Tradition says that Simon was a black man. The Roman soldiers compelled Simon to carry the cross for Jesus the rest of the way to Golgotha, the place of a skull.*

*Then they put that cross down on the ground, and they ripped Jesus’ robe off His back again, made Him bleed again; and they threw Him down, naked on the cross. They stretched out His arms. They got an eight-inch spike. They took that eight-inch spike and they placed it in the middle of the lower part of His hands where the small bones are. So they took that nail, put His hand against the wood, put a foot in His palm, put the nail down in the heel of His hand, and took this big mallet, and they drove that nail through His flesh and bones into that wood.*

*Then they stretched out His other hand and did the same to it. Then they nailed his feet. They took one foot, placed it one top of the other, instep to sole; then they took a twelve-*

*inch spike, put it in the middle of His top instep, drove it out through both feet, and out through His back heel—they nailed Him to the cross.*

*Then they picked up that cross. They picked it up and with great force thrust it into the hold in the ground prepared for it, causing the most intense agony to the Son of God. And they brought wedges out and nailed the wedges in to brace the cross.*

*And Jesus hung between heaven and earth. As He hung on His hands in His weakened condition, the pain was such that it ran down His arms and to His chest, causing massive diaphragm spasms, pinching off His lungs so that He couldn't breathe. The only way that Jesus could get relief from that was to push all His weight up, on the nail in His feet, and stand upright, and gasp a couple gasps of air. And it was during those times that He pushed Himself upright to gasp for air that He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

*You know, it wasn't just for the Roman soldiers He said that. He was looking all the way down through history, and He was looking right at you, and He was looking right at me, and at everyone of us that He was hanging on that cross for, because He wasn't just hanging on the cross for the previous sins of the world, or even for the sins of the world that He lived in. He was hanging on the cross for your sins and my sins, too.*

*And finally He pushed Himself up for one last time, and He said, "It is accomplished!" And His head fell forward on His chest, and He slumped back down on His arms for the last time. And He died.*

Just as quickly as the vision had enraptured him, it vanished, and David knew—the old preacher's words still resounding in his ears, the images of the vision still marching across the mindscape of his inner eye—that Braith also had experienced the same vision with David. Braith had shared his mind.

*This is the imagery of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, thought Braith. By beholding Jesus on the cross, in the judgment hall, in Gethsemane, Braith was changed. David was changed as well. Sin's possession of our souls loses its power in the face of such overwhelming love, the preacher had said. And now, the vision gone, there was only Jesus, the real Christ, hanging on the cross still before them.*

As though in a higher trance, the men heard the voice of God, the time before the creation, when the Second Person of the Godhead stepped out of the glory surrounding the Trinity and volunteered to come down from the Ivory Palaces, into a world of woe.

Compelled by the precious Savior's grace, David quickly embraced Braith and drew him close. "Forgive me," he said. "I did not understand."

"Forgive me, as well," pleaded Braith, "for only now do I see it all. Your own past is not all that different from mine."

“*All we like sheep have gone astray,*” sobbed David.

“*But the LORD,*” Braith wept, “*hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*”

The vision was complete. The Lamb of God, who was not even recognizable under this unbearable duress, had suffered all the cruelty of Rome, all of the Sanhedrin’s rejection, all the physical distress of such loss of blood. All of this the Savior bore, and more that sinners could hardly comprehend. Jesus sustained His own suffering, the men realized, as He made the Atonement once and for all. Fully humbled, David and Braith realized that the crushed Rose of Sharon was praying for them. They heard their own names spoken as Jesus cried out, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

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The men could endure no more. Overwhelmed—but cleansed—they fainted as though dead and were carried by Minarette beyond the pictured history of the sacred tapestry. Unseen angels bore them out of the scene and laid them gently upon the landing at that holy turn in the stairs of the tower.

As David opened his eyes, he knew that his true conversion and forgiveness for the church leaders matched Braith’s own desire to lay down his life for the lost and to see David in a new light. Braith also awakened and smiled knowingly at David. Minarette was nowhere to be seen. Sinners healed by the Lily of the Valley, they valued the new perceptions they had of each other.

“Do you remember,” said Braith to David, “when He gasped, *It is accomplished*, and gave up His spirit, and when the Roman soldier pierced His side with the sword, do you remember what we saw of His love for us?”

“Yes, Braith,” David replied. “We saw what an innocent child predicted we would see—we saw and we knew *the hiding of His power.*”

Braith whispered: *And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand—*

And David added breathlessly: *Glorious rays from His side . . .*

*. . . and there, echoed Braith, was the hiding of his power.*

Transformed and transfixed by the heavenly vision, the two men, now brothers in the Body of Christ, sang softly, “I am the Lord that healeth thee.” They had been touched by Jehovah-Tsidkenu and could never again be the same. Angels unseen joined them, pressing home to their minds the glories of a God whose great power resides forever within His infinite and boundless love.

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The Celebration had begun. People came from everywhere. They streamed in, it seemed, from towns near and far. The parking lot at *The Warehouse* was full. People had to find additional parking across the street and up and down side streets. No one seemed to mind. Everyone was just happy to arrive at this event.

Lydia had informed as many Christian prayer groups as she was acquainted with, at different churches and through the internet. She had e-mailed every prayer warrior she could think of. They, in turn, had told others. The word had spread “throughout the land,” as Grandma put it, and no end of surprises was in store. Several Christian singing groups showed up, quite unexpectedly. No one knew how they found out or who invited them. But they were not turned away. Some of the talent knew one another and others did not. Nevertheless, when bands of guitar players and piano players and singers began carrying electronic equipment into The Warehouse, all worked in unison, lending support to each other without complaining. All the time this preparation was going on, Grandma had assembled the children in a back room for prayer. Some of the parents had volunteered to stay with the children throughout the preliminary prayer time, supplicating God for His will to be done and for good will among all who arrived to participate that evening.

“It’s filling up,” exclaimed Lydia to Florence Bailey. “Fast!”

“Yes, I see,” said Florence, “and where’s Grandma? Do you suppose Margot will arrive in time to start us off? Who’s in charge?”

“God’s in charge,” answered Father Angelo as he came in and heard the ladies conversing.

“Oh, Angelo,” asked Lydia, “do you suppose you could get things off the ground. I mean, no one even knows if there’s a plan. Grandma’s in the back with the children and heavy in prayer, and Mary Doyles and Donna Brewster are trying to help people find seats and guide families with little children to the child care area. It’s all turning into quite an undertaking, but I don’t know what we need to do next.”

“Well, child, God knows,” said Angelo, “and I’ve got Hank’s family with me and Bernie’s about to show up any minute. We can all lend a hand if need be, but I bet the Holy Spirit has it all planned out.”

“Rabbi Belzberg is coming?” asked Donna Brewster, who just returned from guiding a family to a children’s room where some volunteer teens were telling stories to tiny tots. “And is dear Miriam coming with Bernie?”

“Yes,” said Hank Stryder, overtaking the group of neighbors and friends. “But, look, there’s Randy Randall. Maybe he’ll save the day. Most people know who he is. Shall I ask him to officiate?”

“That would be lovely,” remarked Lydia, but before Pastor Hank could do anything, Randy turned from the pew into which he had guided his family. Randy’s lovely wife had Mrs. Brandt with her and Pastor Brandt’s little daughter, who was all wrapped up in a

soft pink blanket and sound asleep in her mother's arms. The child looked aglow and serene. Mrs. Randall lovingly put her arm around Mrs. Brandt to help support her and the child's weight.

"Well, Lydia," declared Randy Randall, as he approached the people he had come to refer to as Glenn Haven's special Intercessors, "I know what you're going to ask, but the answer is, let's pray first, right here and right now, and let's see what God does."

Bernie and Miriam came in at that moment and sensed something good but serious was afoot. They came over and put their arms around "the gang" as the group of friends drew close in a praying huddle. Their support was deeply appreciated. "Good to see you, Rabbi," said Randy.

"Good to see you, too, Pastor. Miriam and I will stand in agreement with your good intentions. Let's pray that the Almighty will bless this community of seekers tonight.

"Amen," said Hank Stryder.

"Hank, guide us to the Throne Room," suggested Pastor Randall. "Anyone who wants to can jump in as the Spirit leads them. OK?"

Hank Stryder didn't need to answer. He just grabbed Randy's hand and began interceding.

"Guide us, O Great Father God, and may your will be done tonight. Glorify yourself and bring grace and hope to your servants on earth. Commission holy angels to come swiftly to our side to speak counsel to every heart."

"Guide us, O Thou Great Jehovah," said Lydia.

"Thank you, King of the Universe!" responded Miriam.

"We love you, Adonai!" cried Bernie.

"Help us, blessed Savior," intoned Mary Doyles. "Show us the way. Grant us your leadership and your Spirit. Make the Body of Christ one tonight. Thank you for Father Angelo and Rabbi Belzberg and Pastor Randall. Thank you for Grandma and the children and all our dear friends and neighbors who have come to rely on you in prayer these many strange weeks. We are yours. Take and do with us as you will."

Suddenly, without warning, others began to pray all over the room. Grandma walked in with the children and took a front row that had been roped off. No one saw them enter, for the entire room was now engrossed in supplication. Unseen heavenly messengers were rushing to and fro on missions of healing. An unobstructed river of grace began flowing from the Throne Room on high. Someone began to sing. The praise spread around the room. Musicians took up the melody and began to play their instruments. At times they joined in and at times they were silent. An *a cappella* chorus broke out, then a full-choir antiphonal with piano and harmonies so melodious and triumphant.

But when the children began shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” and “Gloria in Excelsis Deo!” something totally beyond belief took place. The ranks of unconnected pipes in the many balconies overhead began playing, singing in unison with the children. People fell on their knees in awe. Angels joined the worship. The Presence of His glory filled the large sanctuary. Then all the people were on their feet, hands raised in adoration, singing many different songs from their own joyous past, memories of good times in good church groups, when loved cascaded over congregations like a waterfall.

“A fountain of healing is opened!” shouted Father Angelo.

“A glory is in the air!” shouted Grandma. “A healing of memories is taking place. Praise the Lord!”

“A healing of relationships is among us all,” Donna Brewster cried out.

“Well, I’ll be,” laughed Randy Randall. “I never—those organ pipes aren’t connected to any console. The IHMs sold it. Can you believe your ears?” The pastor of the big Center laughed with joy until tears rolled down his cheeks. He hugged Father Angelo and shouted, “Hallelujah. It’s good to be here.”

The assemblage of what seemed to be hundreds of people, faces beaming, eyes bright but full of grateful tears, began holding hands. They began to form a great circle, clearing a space in the center of the room. Gus and Chip began to push pews to the side. Other men helped. Some women, too. No one knew why. A Counsel from Heaven was guiding the process.

Then the entire building began to shake.

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In his mind’s eye, Bo could see his Grandmother far off. She was in a large building, he perceived, and many people were with her. He felt drawn to her and to the worship and praise in that far off place, but his reverie was interrupted by harshly spoken words.

The Voice spoke with cruelty, “I will slay thee if thou shalt not do all that I command of thee. I broke your feet before, O, Mephibosheth. I will break them again. And more painfully.”

The dreadful Voice was adamant that it wanted Bo to reveal everything he could see at the far end of the Orion passage. It wanted Bo to do exactly what the hooded men had asked of him—uncover the truth at the end of the known universe. *What is happening there?* the Voice demanded to know. But Bo would not answer. Not yet.

It was then that Bo perceived Basil’s presence inside him. He and Basil had been thrust together in the transfer, and Basil had remained hidden so that he might assist Bo against his goliath challenger. Basil helped Bo hear the call of the Holy Spirit. The Com-

forter was now present with both of them. The evil Voice, however, spoke fear into Bo's mind, but Basil put forth his thought and countered the dark terror.

"Pray with me," Basil said to Bo. "Pray with me—together we are two and will bring the Presence of Christ into our midst."

Bo then realized truly it was Basil, his guardian angel. Bo prayed fervently in his mind with Basil, and instantly the Holy Spirit answered. The Comforter prayed for them both with groanings that cannot be uttered.

Then, greatly strengthened by that heavenly intervention, Bo spoke to the Voice of evil, clearly and passionately. Bo declared the very words that had been spoken against the darkness thousands of years ago.

*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts!*

Bo felt the weight of the dark shield against his chest and the heavy spiritual piercing of the dark sword that controlled the shield, but he was unafraid.

Bo's words sent the evil one reeling as Bo spoke the Word of the Lord: "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts," said Mephibosheth.

*When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him,* echoed Basil.

The hideous scream that followed this declaration from Bo and Basil and the Holy Ghost blasted open the doors of the dungeon. The walls cracked. The shield and spear of obsidian silver shattered like glass. Just before fire engulfed everything, before an infolding of crowned tongues of flame from above surrounded them, Bo was sealed in a block of ice layered like the petals of a rose.

As the blossom turns toward the sun, the rose turned toward Heaven's light and entered the Zero Point Field on a mission of grace and mercy and might. Forced to prophecy against their will, the hooded servants of darkness stampeded into the room like herded beasts and began to shout in unison, "*Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*"

In a last ditch effort to kill Mephibosheth, the Terror below aimed a flaming sword at the blind boy's heart. It appeared as though the spear would penetrate Bo's flesh. Suddenly the weapon became translucent, for Basil — now making his presence known to the Dark Terror — *transdimensionalized* Bo in a nanosecond. Fading and shifting in time and space, the lance of the enemy shattered, but a shard pierced Basil instead of Mephibo-

sheth. The child was spared. Basil was wounded.

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Grandma had begun to lead the congregation in Bo's favorite chorus: "Holy Is the Lord God Almighty." All at once, in the midst of the circle that had been cleared, what looked like a giant triangle of ice began to rise through the floor of the great room as though the floor did not exist. Light from the center of the object flooded the sanctuary. Bo emerged, his arms spread out in praise, in the form of a cross. Radiance beamed from his face. Basil was at his feet, injured but alive. Grandma rushed to take Bo in her arms but could not pass the force of the glory still surrounding him. "It is the Lord with him," she shouted. "It is the Lord."

Then as quickly as it came, the light was gone. Bo and Basil were there in the middle of The Warehouse sanctuary, and under their feet a large oval sheet of ice had spread from wall to wall.

"My dream was true!" cried Theresa Neary, who had brought her figure skates to the Celebration. She donned her silver blades and skated without pain or fear around the grinning Bo. "I can see you," he said. "You know, I can see you."

Grandma opened the velvet bag she was carrying and took out the balls of Vrilorien wood. She put them one by one into Bo's hands. Sending them into the air, the blind boy juggled them all, first two, then three, then five. They began to glow many colors. The beams of pink and rose and lime and turquoise filled the room with surprise and delight. Katie and Drew came beside Bo and began singing. Their parents joined them. Still figure skating and gaining speed, Theresa flew into the air and sailed over Bo's head, turning one, two, three, four times in mid space above the crowd. Angels were everywhere. Visible as shining shafts of glory. All the people were crying and laughing and singing and praising and praying and worshipping and glorifying God who makes all things possible.

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Then the most lovely thing occurred, as the worshippers in the center of the room with Bo and Basil and the children began to settle and move back into the pews. Up at the front of the sanctuary, on the stage, Braith and David and Margot were revealed. All eyes turned to gaze on them. Bo laughed joyously. So, did Little Drew. "We told you," squealed Drew, "me and Katie told you. Craig said so. We're all a family again."

Everyone in the room became breathlessly quiet as David and Braith, accompanied by the muted diapasons above, began a wondrous duet. Unaware of his new tenor talent, Braith just opened his mouth and sang. David's sonorous baritone joined him:

My Lord has garments so wondrous fine, And myrrh their texture fills; Its fragrance reached to this heart of mine; With joy my being thrills.

*Out of the ivory palaces, Into a world of woe, Only His great eternal love, Made my Savior go.*

His life had also its sorrows sore, For aloe had a part; And when I think of the cross He bore, My eyes with teardrops start.

*Out of the ivory palaces, Into a world of woe, Only His great eternal love Made my Savior go.*

His garments too were in cassia dipped, With healing in a touch; Each time my feet in some sin have slipped, He took me from its clutch.

*Out of the ivory palaces, Into a world of woe, Only His great eternal love Made my Savior go.*

As their voices choked with tears and love and *the peace that passeth all understanding*, every soul in The Warehouse joined in with the two Spirit-filled men.

In garments glorious He will come, To open wide the door; And I shall enter my heav'nly home, To dwell forevermore.

*Out of the ivory palaces, Into a world of woe, Only His great eternal love, Made my Savior go.*

Margot came up to Grandma and took her hand. Lydia joined them, as the assembly continued worshipping and praising.

"I guess you're going to fill us in on everything, Margot?" Lydia spoke softly and smiled kindly at her ever-strange friend.

"Everything!" promised Margot. "Tomorrow."

Finally, Braith Brandt's wife came running toward her husband. His little girl was running, too. Heading right for her father. "Daddy, Daddy," she shouted. "Jesus healed me."

Mrs. Brandt couldn't speak. As Braith scooped up his daughter in his embrace, his wife threw her arms around them both. She wept with unbridled happiness. The Randalls came beside them, weeping with gladness, as well.

"And Basil will get well, too," the child promised. And then she broke into Latin: *Laudamus te. Benedicimus te. Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.*

With unspeakable joy, all the children in the room joined in:

*Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.*—Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

“It almost makes you want to be Catholic,” Bernie Belzberg said.

“Catholic!” replied Angelo, “I’m ready to join the Evangelicals. This is what I call having church!”

Hank Stryder just looked on amazed. He was too stunned to comment. All he felt in his heart was love for God, for his family, and for his dear old friends, Angelo and Bernie, not to mention all of the Family of God brought there together by the Holy Spirit. He could barely take it in.

“Well, Hank, what do you think?” asked Lydia, coming up and putting an arm around the Baptist pastor. “Don’t you have anything to say?” Lydia grinned affectionately.

But Hank said nothing. He opened his Bible and turned to First Corinthians, Chapter One.

As the tears fell from his eyes, and unable to speak, he pointed with his finger to show Lydia the passage that was on his heart.

As she read the text, her tears, also, fell in humble gratitude. Lydia broke down as she pondered the gracious revelation of a Most Holy God:

*Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:*

*But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;*

*And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:  
That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

## The End of Part I