

A
FATHER'S
LOVE

Love and Honor
(Book 6)

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Parenthesis indicate a personalization of the scripture by the character. Many scriptures in this story are used out of context, but that does not negate their ability to convey a message from our Lord. Please read with an open mind and an open heart.

Praise to my
Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
and thanks to
my granddaughters
Ashlynn and Victoria
for their support

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Britt Family History

In 1852 Travis Britt married Ruth in the Allegheny Mountains of what was then western Virginia. They had three children: Sarah, Joshua, and Joseph. While Travis was away during the Civil War, their home was attacked. Ruth, Joshua, and Joseph were killed. Sarah was left blinded.

After the war, Travis left Sarah in Chicago and moved west to settle in Harris, Kansas, where he became a federal marshal. He married Brenda Cole, a widow with three children: Mary, Cleve, and Luke. He adopted the children, and he and Brenda had four children of their own: Angus, Naomi, Colleen, and Reid. Brenda and Colleen both died when Reid was just over a year old. (Book 1, Faith and Family)

Sarah married Thomas Stewart, a doctor, and moved to Denver, where he took over a family-owned hospital. They had eight children: Joshua, Joseph, Mae, Chloe, William, Adam, Edison, and Curtis. They later moved to Harris, where Thomas opened a satellite clinic of the hospital. Five of the boys became doctors, while Adam went to work for the newly formed federal Bureau of Investigation (BI), later known as the FBI.

Mary became a doctor and chose to practice in Chicago.

Cleve became an attorney and set up his practice in Harris. He married Jenny, and they had six children. The two youngest boys died in France during World War I. Cleve was elected to the state representative's office for many years, but left Harris when he was elected governor. He never returned.

Luke was repeatedly elected sheriff and lived in Harris—except for two years when he worked as a railroad investigator. He married Kathleen, a widow, late in life. They later adopted two orphaned boys, and Luke took the position of warden at the county prison.

Angus went to school and returned to Harris as an electrical engineer. He married Molly, and they had several children. He has managed the local electrical power plant and telephone exchange for years. Angus also opened the first gasoline filling station and mechanics shop in the area.

Naomi returned to Harris after having disappeared for several years. She returned a widow with a young daughter, Ruth. She later married Marvin Wells, a ranch manager. They had several children.

Reid was employed right out of law school as an enforcement agent with the Department of Justice (DOJ). He worked undercover and was seriously injured. He was later sworn in as federal judge for the district surrounding Harris. (Book 2, Justice and Forgiveness)

Reid married Chipeta, a Ute Indian. They had five children, three dying at birth. The two that survived were Esa, now a federal marshal, and Saamel. Saamel sings with a touring group.

Reid and Chipeta adopted five children whose mother died. Their father abandoned the children and was later sent to prison for murder. The oldest child, Matt, was killed while trying to rescue Reid from bank robbers. (Book 3, Joyous Hope)

The second boy, James, was injured during World War I and is now an attorney employed by the railroad. (Book 4, Sacrifice and Service)

Stephen is an attorney in Harris, Abigail is married and is a teacher in Wichita, and Jeannie got married and now lives in Ft. Collins.

Reid and Chipeta took in Winona and Blade, Cheyenne Indians who had lost their parents. They also adopted three younger half-sisters: Aiyana, Kimi, and Aponi.

James and Winona later married and adopted Kimi's illegitimate son, the product of a kidnapping and rape. (Book 5, Redemption)

Read *A Father's Love: Faith and Family* to learn how Travis, an illiterate mountain man grew his family and became a respected federal marshal.

In *A Father's Love: Justice and Forgiveness*, Reid goes undercover in a criminal organization and rescues girls who would otherwise be slain, then becomes a federal judge.

A Father's Love: Joyous Hope tells of Reid's struggles to teach his hometown that joy in the Lord can be found following any trial as he is taken hostage by bank robbers and left abandoned and injured in No Man's Land.

Four of Travis's grandsons go to war in *A Father's Love: Sacrifice and Service*, while a local conspiracy affects the livelihood and love life of those that remain in Harris.

A Father's Love: Redemption finds many in the family revisiting old wounds. Naomi must admit she lied to her father and withheld crucial information from her daughter, while Reid must rely on an old enemy to help him recover from his worst fear.

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial,
having stood the test, that person will receive the
crown of life that the Lord has promised to those
who love him.—James 1:12

1

April 1931 Denver, Colorado

“As you know, we at First Antioch like to introduce our deacon nominees and have them tell the congregation how their spiritual conversion took place, and how Christ continues to work in their lives. Today I’m pleased to introduce Mr. James Britt. Mr. Britt is an attorney for the Northern Rocky Railroad and has lived in Denver since attending the university here. He is married to Winona, sitting here on the front row beside him. They have a three-year-old son, Travis.”

The pastor was a warm outgoing man who talked to his congregation like he was talking to an old friend. “Mr. Britt leads the religious education of the young men’s class. He is the second of twelve children and is a congressionally awarded medal of honor recipient. Many of his brothers and sisters have been a part of our congregation while attending the university. Please make sure to introduce yourself to him after the service, and give a warm Antioch welcome to Mr. Britt.”

James stood up and stepped to the pulpit. He felt very self-conscious. He knew he would have to speak in front of the entire church when he agreed for his name to be placed on the list of potential deacons. He had told God three years earlier, that he would no longer stay isolated—so he knew he had to do this.

Since then, he and his wife had gotten involved with the church and they no longer sat quietly in the back corner of the sanctuary. They had walked the center isle with their infant son and gotten involved with the other young couples attending. James felt that many people had gotten accustomed to seeing his scarred face and he wasn’t as self-conscious when he sat listening during the normal worship services. He didn’t notice the gawking or whispering anymore; or maybe he had just gotten used to it. But standing in front of everyone he knew was different.

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First Antioch was a large church situated on top of a towering hill overlooking an upscale residential area on two sides. A community park stood across from the front of the church and a few small, fashionable businesses set to the north offering an introduction to the Denver business area on the outskirts of the city. The church was probably one of the largest in Denver. Its massive steeple shown prominently above the surrounding buildings for miles.

James turned to look at the people. He tried to smile at his wife but the only thing she and the other observers saw was a slender upturn on one side of his lip. Winona recognized this slight snarl as a smile. She smiled back. The man speaking also saw his cousin, Dr. Curtis Stewart, sitting a few rows behind his wife. Curt smiled and gave James an encouraging nod.

Curt and James had joined military service together during World War 1. They worked in a medical unit along with two other cousins. Curt had been there when James was injured and he had helped care for his wounds. The young doctor had returned home to care for his cousin again, and had been there when James experienced a healing miracle. Both of the cousins that enlisted with them were now dead.

“Thank you, pastor,” James began nervously. He’d spoken in front of large crowds in the courtroom before, but he’d never talked about himself to this many people.

“As Pastor Simmons said, I am one of twelve children. Of those twelve, ten are adopted. I am one of those ten. My mother was murdered when I was six and my father couldn’t handle the thought of caring for five children alone. He was devastated by my mother’s death. His friend took me, and my four siblings, home while my father grieved the loss of his wife. My father never made the adjustment to raising us alone. He ended up in jail and the five of us were adopted by his friend. This is where I was introduced to the love of Jesus.

“My new father was a Godly man. He taught us scripture, and he taught us to love like Jesus loved. We were expected to obey our parents and God, and because we were loved so well, we wanted to please. We had lots of extended family living near us, including the man who became my grandfather. For the most part, it was a happy peaceful childhood and I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior early in life. I was a good kid and I didn’t cause my parents any problems.

“But when my older brother was killed, I could easily have lost all faith I had in a good God. My father was also injured in the same incident

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and a lot of his energy, over the next few months, was spent recovering. But my grandfather, my mother, and my aunts and uncles were there to help, and they kept the whole family focused on God's goodness and promises, and not the tragedy that my family suffered.

"My parents always expected me to help take care of the younger children, and now I was the oldest. I had to gather whatever knowledge of Christ, and whatever faith I had, so that I could guide my younger siblings and support my parents.

"My family had also taken in four other children. My dad had found them living in the middle of nowhere, by themselves, just before the incident that killed my brother. The oldest boy was just a few years younger than me, and he had been scavenging and stealing to feed and care for his little sisters. Dad brought them home.

"It was hard dealing with Matt's death and these new kids in the house at the same time. But love always wins. 'Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.'¹ 'Love never fails.'² And there was enough love in my family to endure anything.

"I watched my parents, and saw them support all of us kids; and I think I began to see how God could love so many, and take care of so many, all at the same time. My grandfather had also taken in the son of another man who was sent to prison. This boy had no other family, and he became like a brother to me. My parents and my grandfather always knew what was going on with each of the children. They knew what we needed and how to best care for each of us. And they taught us how to care for each other.

"Just a few months later, those children Dad brought home were taken away by the authorities. I saw my whole family grieve this loss and pray for the protection and safety of those kids. I felt that loss too, maybe as much as when my brother died.

"I knew my brother was with Jesus. I would miss him, but he was safe and taken care of in heaven. These children I lived with, and learned to love, had no one to care for them, no one to love them. They were being stripped away from the only family they ever knew. I questioned how God could do that to them, and to us.

"But God was gracious and restored those children to our family a few months later. I saw how God moved silently, and unseen, within their

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:7 ESV

² 1 Corinthians 13:8a

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situation to bring them back to us. None of us saw what was happening, but God was working through other people, and out of our sight, to bring them home. They were adopted too, and became my brothers and sisters.

“Four years later I went to war. The constant danger, unimaginable noise and confusion, and the injuries and death of my comrades, were disturbing to my soul. A buddy told me that God couldn’t possibly be there with us. I didn’t want to believe that. My buddy wasn’t feeling God’s presence, but I wanted to make sure God was with me.

“I knew God’s presence wasn’t about my feelings; it was about my faith. I did my best to stay connected through prayer and scripture so that my spirit could be renewed daily. My grandfather had told me to read scripture any time I could, and I found his advice more helpful than anything else I did.

“You couldn’t think about anything during battle. You could only react. But worse than the battle was the anticipation before the fighting started. It captured my mind and held it prisoner. It wouldn’t even allow me to talk to God, I was too busy preparing for what was coming.

“After the battle, all I could do was collapse in relief and try to recover my nerves. I’d walk among the wounded and those I worked with. I’d give them water and talk with them. Sometimes I would feel guilty that I survived and someone else didn’t. Sometimes I would hold a hand and pray with someone I knew wouldn’t make it.

“But the one overpowering emotion that we all had was relief. And when I dropped onto my bunk at night, there were only two words I could say to God over and over, ‘Thank you. Thank you.’

“So, I clung to the piece of paper my grandfather had given me. My grandfather had survived the Civil War and held to scriptures he had memorized to survive. Those verses were written in his messy handwriting on a single sheet of paper that I kept in my pocket. I clung to those scriptures for life itself. The Word of God, written just for me by my grandfather.”

James pulled a tattered piece of paper from his jacket pocket and struggled to unfold it; his damaged hands unable to separate the pages. Even from his seat half-way back in the church, Curt could see the creases, tears, and sweat stains on the page. The ink had run in a few places and James could no longer read what was written, but he knew what it said. He knew the words his grandfather had told him to hold tightly to.

“And then I was injured,” James began to fold the paper, “and I became numb to everything around me. My heart called out to God for

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death, but there was no response. For months I lay in the hospital, and for months God seemed too far away to reach.”

James raised his hands as he looked toward heaven, remembering the anguish of his suffering and spoke in a loud voice.

““O God, listen to my cry!
Hear my prayer!
From the ends of the earth,
I cry to you for help
when my heart is overwhelmed.
Lead me to the towering rock of safety,
for you are my safe refuge,
a fortress where my enemies cannot reach me.
Let me live forever in your sanctuary,
safe beneath the shelter of your wings!””¹

James looked back at the congregation and fell silent as he gripped the pulpit and looked around the room.

Then he continued. “When God did respond, he said no. He would not take me home. I had to remain, even though the doctors said I would eventually succumb to my injuries. My family took care of me for twenty long difficult months before healing came. It came unexpected and unexplained, a true miracle from God. God used those months to teach me to trust him totally, for everything; even for the air that I breathe.

“““As God lives, who has taken away my right,
and the Almighty, who has made my (life) bitter,
as long as my breath is in me,
and the spirit of God is in my nostrils,
my lips will not speak falsehood
and my tongue will not utter deceit.””²

“““My words declare the uprightness of my heart,
and what my lips know they speak sincerely.
The Spirit of God has made me,

¹ Psalm 61:1-4 NLT

² Job 27:2-4 ESV

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and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.””¹

James lowered his head and added, “Will you pray with me?

“Almighty God, thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving you and the people of this church. Guide me to make the right decisions and help me to listen to your prompting. Use me, Father, to serve this church and you. To the glory of your name. Jesus is Lord. Amen.”

James walked down the steps of the platform without looking at his audience. The corner of his mouth turned up as he approached Winona, taking her hand.

Just before he sat down, he saw two of his Sunday School students, Lee Foster and Rick Barber, sitting a few rows behind and to the left. The young men in his class now knew a lot more about him than they had previously. He hoped he wouldn't have to answer questions about himself later. He tried to smile, but the nerve damage in his face wouldn't cooperate, so he nodded his head at them and sat down.

¹ Job 33:3-4 ESV

2

May 1931 Harris, Kansas

Federal Judge Reid Britt saw the sharecropper walking toward the house.

Reid sat on the front porch of the simple wood frame home his family lived in. The home was comfortable. Reid and his wife, Chipeta, had raised twelve children here.

As he thought of his beautiful wife, scripture came to his heart. *Enjoy life with the wife you love all the days of your fleeting life, which has been given to you under the sun, all your fleeting days. For that is your portion in life and in your struggle under the sun.*¹

He had loved his wife well, and she had loved him. And it was fleeting. Having her with him seemed a lifetime ago, but it had only been a few years since her death. He missed her, but his three youngest girls remained.

Ayiana had been to school and studied nursing. She returned home where she accepted the position of public health nurse, established by the county, just as she was finishing school. She worked well with her cousin, Dr. William Stewart, who was the only physician in the area.

Kimi was now nineteen years old. She was simple-minded. She never finished school, but she took care of the house well and had finally learned to cook enough that they wouldn't starve. She made a good stew and could bake excellent cornbread. She could make scrambled eggs, pancakes, and boiled beef. She could boil vegetables reasonably well, and had learned to make minced meat pie. That was about all she could do.

Her younger sister, Aponi, was a much better cook. She was in her last year of school and her father hoped she would attend the university in

¹ Ecclesiastes 9:9 HCSB

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Denver next year. But he feared her interest in the middle Neuw boy was stronger than her desire to complete her education.

Charlie Neuw was a nice young man who worked for Reid's brother, Angus, as a mechanic. He was a hard worker, and a Christian. He was the son of the sharecropper that lived on Britt land.

They were a nice family and had done a good job with everything they were asked to do. They had been working for the Britts for three years. The eldest boy, Paul, had moved away, and Reid had written him an outstanding letter of recommendation to take with him. The oldest girl had married the son of the local feedstore owner.

Reid had no qualms with the boy Aponi was attracted to, he just thought sixteen, or even seventeen, was too young to get married. But Aponi had been dangling hints for months. Reid hadn't bitten. He would make Aponi come right out and tell him her intentions. So far, that hadn't happened.

Reid's son Stephen still lived in town. He was an attorney and lived above his office. He was the most eligible bachelor in town and all the young ladies fawned over him. He had been attracted to a few young women, briefly, but had yet to find the girl he wanted to marry.

His brother, Blade, lived at the Double R Ranch several miles outside of town. He had worked at the ranch since he was thirteen and was now foreman. He, his wife Enola, and their two children, lived in a small house at the ranch.

His other children were scattered. James was an attorney for the railroad in Denver. He had married Winona. It was an odd match and the family seldom mentioned that Winona had lived with the family for years before the couple married. It was a lengthy explanation that made perfect sense to the family, but others thought it a little awkward.

Abigail was married to a fine Christian man who taught at the college in Wichita. Jeannie was married and raising a family in Ft. Collins.

Reid's youngest son, Saamel, sang with a touring group ten months out of the year. They were a popular group and had even made some appearances in motion pictures. Saamel was a favorite because of his solemn and stand-offish demeanor, a characteristic his family recognized as introverted and shy. The fact that he was Indian added to his mystifying lure. It made him stand out in a way that intrigued the ladies and captivated the attention of those around him.

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And then there was Esa. Esa was the town's marshal. He, his wife, and their son, lived with Reid and the girls. But Ainena was pregnant and the house was getting crowded.

It hadn't seemed crowded when Reid was raising his children. Five boys and six girls didn't seem like a lot. But now, with adult children and two families in the house, Reid felt like there was no privacy for anyone. He loved his family, he really did. And he wouldn't kick anyone out, but when he allowed Esa and his new wife to move in, it was only supposed to be temporary. Three years later, they were all getting on each other's nerves.

Ainena had been good for the family though. She had filled a need left by the death of Reid's wife. She mothered Aponi as only a natural caregiver could, and she continued teaching Kimi. His daughter had grown under her sister-in-law's tutelage. And as much as Reid appreciated Esa's and Ainena's loving care in everything they did, Reid wanted his house back.

"Reid, do you have time for me to sit for a while?" Bill asked.

"Sure, Bill. Come on up."

Bill Neuw sauntered up the steps to the porch in his relaxed way and sat back heavily in the rocker next to Reid, causing it to immediately start its back and forward motion. Bill gave a relaxing sigh.

"Hard day?" Reid asked.

"No, not really. The family and I have had some hard decisions to make. I think we finally came to an agreement."

Reid looked at the man, now concerned about the approaching conversation. But Bill didn't continue.

Reid asked, "What's going on?"

"You know I like it here. I like the work, we have a roof over our heads, and we eat. We've never been hungry. Your family is good to us."

"But..." Reid waited.

"Being here has allowed us to recover from years of hardship. We've gotten our strength back. I'm not talking about muscle. I'm talking about hope. 'We are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known.'¹

"But 'hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to

¹ 1 John 3:2a

us.’¹ ‘And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in (me) will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.’²

“I don’t know what’s coming in the years ahead but we can look at the future again and not be scared. We see hope. We’ve got a few children grown now and on their own, everyone’s in good health, and we’ve saved a little money. We see good times ahead.”

“I’m glad to hear that.”

Bill was silent again. Reid, however, could see from the expression on his face that something else was coming.

“There’s land available for homesteading in South Dakota.”

Uh-oh! Here it comes, Reid thought. While they had done everything they could to make a sharecropper happy, and give them a comfortable life, they hadn’t been able to keep one for more than just a few years. Now Bill would be leaving them, right here near planting season, too.

Bill continued, “Paul has found some land. He’s laid claim to a hundred and sixty acres and he wants us to come up there and work it with him. We’ve prayed about it, and talked about it, and prayed some more. I don’t know how we can pass up this chance to have our own place again.

“I know we’re leaving you at a bad time, but you should be able to find somebody soon.”

Bill looked at Reid. Reid had been a good friend, as well as a good employer. Bill didn’t really want to go, but his son needed him. He’d be doing the same work in South Dakota as he did here, but at a homestead he’d be working for himself. He liked that idea.

“Well,” Reid said, rubbing his face with one hand. “I’m not going to try to talk you out of it, but I’m sure going to miss you. You’re a good man, and you’re a good friend.”

Reid twisted in his chair and put his hand out, “I wish you well.”

Bill shook Reid’s hand and stood up. “We’re planning on leaving next week. I’ll have everything done. I won’t leave anything for someone else to do later. And I’ll make sure the house is cleaned for whoever you hire next.”

“Thank you. I appreciate that. I’ll have your pay ready. Just drop by the night before you leave.”

Bill no longer looked into Reid’s face. He was surveying the front of Reid’s house like he was going to miss it. “Charlie didn’t have the guts to

¹ Romans 5:5

² Philippians 1:6 ESV

come over here with me. He..." Bill hesitated and turned to look across the porch floor. "He wants to stay until Aponi finishes school next month."

Reid felt trapped. He knew what was coming. "And what does he want to do then?"

"I'm sorry Reid, you know how Charlie is. He's a good kid. He is. And he loves Aponi..."

"Stop!" Reid interrupted. "I know they've had something going on for a while now. I've been waiting for Aponi to talk to me, but she's been avoiding me for the last couple of weeks. I figured it had something to do with Charlie. If Charlie wants to stay here, it's okay, we can work something out, but he's going to have to talk to me himself."

"He's just a boy, Reid."

"I know that. And Aponi's just a little girl, at least in our eyes. But they have adult intentions. They're going to have to deal with what they want like adults."

"Yes, sir, they do. But Charlie doesn't want to stay here."

Reid waited without saying anything this time. Bill shuffled his feet, uneasy about the conversation. Then resolve set on his face.

"He wants to get married and bring Aponi to South Dakota with us."

Reid closed his eyes, praying for strength. He leaned over, placing his elbows on his knees with his head down and his clasped hands dangling between his legs.

"Has he talked to her about it?"

"Yeah. They talked. She wants to come."

"How do you feel about this?" Reid asked.

"Well, Charlie is old enough to decide for himself, he's twenty. He could stay here and I'd be okay with it, or he could go find a job in Kansas City and I'd worry about him, but I'd be okay with that too."

"He's just three and a half years older than Aponi. That's not that much difference. I'm five years older than my wife and she was only seventeen when I married her. I like Aponi. She's a believer, she's a hard worker, and she seems to love my son. The whole family is comfortable with her. I know you have your own plans for Aponi and you don't like this, but I don't have a problem with it," Bill explained. "What don't you like? Is it Charlie?"

"No. Charlie's fine. Aponi's just...so young," Reid said. "She's got a sharp mind and I guess I was just hoping she'd do something with it."

"Didn't your wife go to school to be a lawyer?" Bill asked, knowing the answer.

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“Yes.”

“What did she do?”

Bill had him. Chipeta may have gone to school to study law, but all she did, her whole life, was raise children. And neither of them thought that was a problem. They had both been happy with what she did.

Reid didn't speak again. He lifted a hand to his forehead and rubbed it, then pressed the heel of his hand into his right eye. Without lifting his head, he said, “I'll talk to Aponi as soon as she gets in from school. Give us a little while, then send Charlie over.”

“Thank you, Reid, thank you for everything.”

Reid raised his head to look at his friend. “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you...making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”¹ Reid said. “Thank you. I appreciate everything you've done while you've been here, and especially for the way you always conducted yourself in a Godly manner. It was a joy to have you here.”

But Reid didn't look joyful.

“I'm sorry it ends this way, I wish we could both be happy for them,” Bill said. He turned and left.

Aponi arrived home and changed from her school clothes to her work clothes. She was entering the kitchen when Ainena told her that her father wanted to see her in his office.

Aponi entered happily. “Good afternoon, Father,” she said playfully. She kissed his cheek.

She only called him Father when she was apprehensive about the conversation. It didn't happen very often. The playful manner in which she entered the room told him she was nervous. She knew what he wanted to talk about.

Reid indicated the chair beside the table where he sat. Aponi obeyed.

“Bill Neuw came to visit me today. They're moving.”

“Yes, sir. I heard they might be.”

“Did you also hear that Charlie was going to stay here?”

“I knew it was a possibility.”

“Where is he planning on living?”

¹ Philippians 1:3-5

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“He said he was going to talk to Stephen and see if he could rent a room from him.”

“What else did you hear?”

Aponi froze. She didn't know what to say. Should she tell him that she and Charlie were planning to get married right after she graduated? She hadn't planned to tell him until after graduation. She knew the law. At sixteen, she didn't need her father's approval.

Should she tell him that she was planning to go to South Dakota, too? She hadn't planned to tell him that until after they were married. She had told Charlie that he had to talk to her father and ask permission to marry her. Had he done that?

“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”¹ Honey. If you know the answer to my question and you don't tell me, it's a sin of omission.”

Aponi's mouth twitched and she started blinking back tears. “I know.”

“I think you've been planning something and you've been keeping it a secret from me.”

She sniffed and ran a hand under her nose. “Yes, sir.”

“Are you ready to tell me now?”

Her face twisted and she tucked her chin to the side.

“For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.”² Reid said.

“I guess I'm ready,” she replied softly.

“You can quit crying. You're not in trouble. I'm just hurt that you didn't think you could come and talk to me. ‘Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.’”³

“Daddy, I didn't mean to hurt you. I just didn't want to say anything until...” Aponi stopped suddenly.

“Go on.” Reid instructed.

“Until I knew for sure and everything was worked out.” She was still crying.

Reid let her cry. He wanted to cry himself. It was taking a lot of self-control to keep from lashing out at her. He wanted to scream, “Don't you

¹ James 4:17 ESV

² Luke 8:17

³ Proverbs 11:14 NASB

trust me?" He realized he had been shocked by what she planned to do, but he was hurt by her silence.

They had never had trouble talking before. Why didn't she trust him with her feelings about Charlie? Why had she wanted to keep it such a secret from him when apparently Bill knew all about it?

Tears started coming from his eyes too. "Would you tell me what you plan to do?"

She sniffed a few times and looked away. "We want to get married after I finish school. He's willing to wait until then."

The judge wanted to say, "A month. How noble of him." But he heard the Spirit warn him against speaking impulsively, *"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."*¹

No, he wouldn't make such a sarcastic remark. He wouldn't hurt her like that.

She stopped briefly to look at her father again. He was looking straight at her, but it didn't look like he was seeing her. His eyes were wet and his lips were pressed together. He was chewing on the inside of his bottom lip. He only did that when he was upset.

She began to talk faster, wanting to get this conversation over with so she could get away from him. She was hurting him and she knew it. She didn't want to see him hurt like this. She loved him and she didn't want to cause any more suffering.

"He says he can save a little more money and then we can take our time getting to South Dakota and have some time to ourselves before being with his family again. We're going to live with them and help them build a home. When we finish their house, then we're going to build us one. Mr. Neuw is going to buy a tractor and they've got the two horses. All we're going to need is some farm equipment and...Daddy? Say something."

Reid had closed his eyes and his lip had stopped moving. He opened his eyes. "It's not going to be that easy. I know Bill, Mr. Neuw, has thought this through, and he and his wife know how hard this is going to be. They think it's worth the gamble to have their own place. But do you know how hard it will be?"

"Well, Charlie said..."

¹ Matthew 12:36-37 ESV

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Reid interrupted. "You're going to have to work in the garden from sun up to sun down. Your fingers will bleed and your back will hurt and you'll get sun burned, and you probably won't make enough to have new clothes when you need them. The land will have to be cleared before you can plant anything. That takes time.

"It gets cold in the Dakotas in winter and you'll need warmer clothes and a good solid place that keeps the wind and the snow out. You'll be stuck inside all winter and you'll have to have a way to stay warm. Charlie can't build a house and work the field at the same time."

The judge leaned back in his chair, resting his head and looked at the ceiling. "Aponi, honey, when you marry, you and Charlie will become one in God's sight. You will need to agree on everything. You can't get mad at him and leave. You'll have to stay with him and help him. That's what a wife is, a helpmate."

"I know. I watched Mom help you. I know it's my job to support him and help him and..."

Reid wasn't listening any more. Aponi wasn't listening to him either. She didn't understand what life was like on a farm, relying on the land for life itself—for food, water, shelter and clothing. She didn't know what it was like to do farm labor all day, and then go home at dark to take care of the house and meals. She didn't know what it was like to wait for the crops to come in and then have to harvest before the sun burned the vegetables, or the rain destroyed everything.

She saw the crops destroyed by drought, and she saw the dust storms move across the land, but it had never affected her—not really. They would just go into town and buy food at the store. At a homestead, she would have to can everything so they would have food through the winter. She knew how to preserve food, she'd helped her mother for years. And she had done it herself after her mother died. But if his family didn't store enough, they could still buy food at the market. At a homestead, there would be no place to buy food, and no money with which to buy it.

She didn't know—but he did. And he didn't know how to explain it to her so she would understand.

He had worked the farm growing up. And his own father had worked hard to get his children an education so they wouldn't have to rely on the farm for survival.

Reid had gotten up before daylight growing up, and prepared breakfast, found something for lunch, done his chores, and gone to school. Then he had come home and worked the land or hunted for food.

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Sometimes he repaired something around the farm, sometimes he skinned and processed an animal. He knew what it was like to haul water for miles because the well was dry, and he knew what it was like to watch his father climb down a dry well shaft and dig in the dark moist earth all day while he hauled bucket after bucket of dirt and mud to the surface. He knew what it was like to chop frozen wood to stay warm because you didn't get enough chopped last summer.

Sometimes he worked into the night to finish what he had started. Then he had to fix supper and do homework. He fell asleep at the table many nights while studying, only to wake up with a sore back or neck.

He didn't own a pair of shoes until he started school, and his only jacket had been a worn hand-me-down from his older brother. It was usually too big. Yes, Reid knew what farm life was like, and he knew that's why his father had worked so hard to get the children an education.

Aponi was still talking. "...and he told me he would build me a picket fence around the house. I'm going to take some of Momma's flower bulbs from the front of the house and plant them at our new home. It will be just like being here with you."

Reid knew there was no use trying to talk Aponi out of this, and he couldn't forbid her to go. In less than four months she would be living away from home anyway. She was stubborn and determined in everything she did. She would just wait until she left for Denver, then she would join him in South Dakota.

He swiveled his chair to face her and reached for his daughter. They embraced. He released her and sent her on her way. She backed away from him, watching his sad face.

"I love you, Daddy, but I love Charlie too."

"I know. I love you too. Now go on."

She stepped to the door, turned around to look at her father one more time, and fled to her room to cry.

Esa knocked softly on the door to his father's office at the courthouse.

His father seemed upset. He had for the last few days. Last night, he avoided his children by coming home late and going straight to bed. Kimi had gone into his room and he had read scripture to her before she went to bed, but he had said nothing to anyone else.

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Then this morning, Bill Neuw had caught Esa as he passed their house on the way into town. He had asked Esa a question which led to his story of moving to South Dakota. Bill had been surprised to learn that Esa's father had not told him of the move, or of Aponi's approaching marriage.

Now, Esa understood why his father had been so quiet. He was processing what he had been told, trying to get everything straight in his mind. It sometimes took his father time to manage information that was puzzling to him, especially when it upset him. Esa knew his father was disturbed by Aponi's actions. That was what baffled him.

Esa didn't want to upset his father any more, but he needed to talk before any other arrangements were made for the house. If his father found a new sharecropper in the next few days, it would be too late to ask.

Reid looked up from his work. "Hey Esa, come on in."

"Dad, I talked to Bill Neuw this morning."

Reid nodded, "So you know."

"Yes, sir. He told me. Are you okay?"

"I guess. There's nothing I can do about it, so I may as well be okay with it," Reid replied.

"It's not right for Aponi to do this. She should have at least talked to you."

Reid nodded. "Esa, I don't want to talk about it right now. I need to keep my mind on what I'm doing here." Reid pointed to the papers in front of him.

Esa nodded, "Okay. Any prospects on a new sharecropper?"

"I haven't even thought about it."

"Well, I wanted to ask before you hired somebody new," Esa began. "You know I've been saving so Ainena and I could get our own place. Well, I've been thinking, if I spend what I've saved to build a couple of rooms on the back of the barn, then we could hire a single man or a couple and they can live there. Ainena and I can move into Grandpa's house."

Reid just stared at Esa. This was way too much to think about today. Bill leaving on a risky venture, Aponi getting married and leaving, going to a place only God knows, hiring someone new, and now Esa with this sudden apparent solution to the housing problem.

"I don't know, Esa." Reid shook his head. He couldn't concentrate on his work as it was. This just added to his distracted thoughts. "Talk to Angus and Luke, then talk to Sarah. Let me know what they say."

Everything was worked out quickly. By the time Bill and his family left Harris, Charlie had moved in with Stephen. Esa and Ainena were making plans to move into Reid's father's house.

Esa began adding two rooms onto the back of the barn. It was slow work, and Esa did his best, working to build the rooms two or three boards at a time. But something would always interrupt his work.

A month passed, and graduation night arrived. The large family was gathered inside the auditorium just off the gymnasium at the center of the school. Classrooms circled three sides of the gym.

The piano began to play 'Pomp and Circumstance' as the graduates entered. Aponi walked past her family but kept her solemn expression, watching everyone's face, until she got to Charlie. He sat two rows in front of Reid, and Reid saw Aponi's hand stretch out as Charlie reached out for her. Their fingers met briefly and her face broke into a smile.

Reid felt a twinge of jealousy. Until just a few months ago Aponi would have smiled at him that way. He would have been the one she reached out to touch. She was his baby girl. She was the child he had saved from a sure death by removing her from the Oklahoma wasteland less than a week after she was born. She was the one he held while he sat in the wheelchair recovering from injury, willing life into her body while not thinking of his own; praying another child wouldn't die in his arms. She would always be his little girl.

Reid was now watching the back of Charlie's head. He wasn't watching the ceremony.

*And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?*¹

Reid heard the spirit correct him. He closed his eyes. "I am wrong, Father. Forgive me."

*Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*²

¹ 1 Corinthians 3:2b-3 ESV

² Galatians 5:19-21 ESV

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

“Lord, I’m sorry. Your law is perfect. It shows me where I sin. ‘Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.’¹

“‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.’”²

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”³

Yes, Reid knew he needed a change of attitude. Charlie was a good, strong Christian, and so was Aponi. Their lack of judgement wouldn’t stand in the way of their relationship with the Lord. He picked his eyes up to look at Aponi on the stage. She was beautiful, smart, kind, loving, and so young. “Lord, help me. I want to show love. I don’t want them to go away thinking I’m angry with them. Change my attitude. Clear my spirit of harmful thoughts.”

“Aponi Britt.”

Reid looked up to see Aponi stand and walk to the school’s principal to receive her diploma. She turned to look at her family. Or was she looking at Charlie? She smiled before returning to her seat.

The ceremony ended and the family, including Charlie, attended the reception for the graduates in the gymnasium. Aponi talked with her classmates while dragging Charlie by the hand. She introduced him to a few and ended the evening walking home with him instead of riding in the automobile with her family. She went straight to bed.

Reid wasn’t going to press himself on her. They would have a few days to talk and say goodbye before the couple married and left town.

The next morning Reid arose and prepared for his day. It was Friday, and he had to be in the courtroom today.

He entered the kitchen to find Esa, Ainena, and Kimi sitting at the table, but no one was eating. Breakfast hadn’t even been prepared.

“Dad,” Esa began, holding up a sheet of paper. “Aponi’s gone. She says she doesn’t want an emotional scene. She just wants to marry Charlie and go to South Dakota. She says one of Charlie’s friends is driving them

¹ Psalm 51:1 ESV

² Psalm 51:10-12 ESV

³ Mark 11:25

to Summersville. They have an appointment with the judge and they're going to get married there and leave on the first train out.

"We won't have time to get to her before that train leaves. The north bound train leaves early."

The sadness on Reid's face could be seen by everyone. Kimi came to him to snuggle against his shoulder. Their arms went around each other as Reid's eyes filled with tears.

He nodded. "Well, that's it then. What's done is done."

Ainena came to him and kissed his cheek. "I'll get you some toast and coffee."

Reid nodded and Kimi returned to her seat without speaking. Reid sat next to her.

"And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee,"¹ he said.

"Every blessing or promise has already been given to us through Christ. It's not being worked out or on the list of things to do. It's done. Our faith, and our faith alone, holds the hope that these promises will move from the spiritual realm to the natural world and Aponi will remember that her faith is her foundation."

Esa knew that his father's talking was his way of working this out in his heart. His father was upset, but he would be okay.

"Faith is simply believing that whatever we desire has been made available for us by Christ Jesus. I'm holding to Jesus. He will take care of Aponi and Charlie, and hopefully, they will contact us in some way. Maybe I'll get a letter from Bill."

Ainena continued to prepare breakfast and the four ate in silence. Esa and Reid went back to the bedrooms to prepare to leave the house for the day. Kimi was cleaning the kitchen as Ainena fed the toddler.

The phone rang. Esa called, "Dad, they're asking for Judge Britt."

Reid reached for the phone. "Hello, this is Judge Britt."

"Yes, Judge Fontenot. Good morning."

Reid went silent. His already gloomy face grew darker.

"Yes, that's my daughter."

"No, she does not have my permission, but she's of age. I can't stop her."

¹ 2 Corinthians 2:21-22 ESV

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“No. Go ahead and do the ceremony. Just tell her I love her and I hope she will write when she gets where she’s going. Thank you for the call, John.

3

May 1931

Denver, Colorado

Pastor Nelson Simmons moved through the serving line of the cafeteria and spotted the two men seated at a table. He took the sandwich he had ordered and moved toward the men.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” Pastor Nelson greeted the two members of his congregation. “Have you been up to see James?”

Both men looked up to find the pastor standing beside the table in the busy hospital cafeteria.

“Morning, Pastor,” Lee Foster said. “Who did you say was here?”

“Well, your Bible instructor. James Britt.” He spoke as if the two men should know this.

Both Lee Foster and Rick Barber were members of James’s Bible study group on Sunday morning. James had taken leadership of the class just over a year ago and the class had grown to more than double in size.

“He seemed fine yesterday at Bible Study. I wasn’t aware he was ill,” Rick Barber commented. “Have a seat, won’t you?”

“Thank you,” the pastor replied, pulling out a chair. “James didn’t tell you he was having surgery?”

Foster shook his head, “No. He didn’t say a word.”

“Oh,” the pastor seemed a little embarrassed. Maybe he had said too much. Maybe James hadn’t wanted anyone to know.

Simmons had wanted to get to know this new deacon better. When he saw James in the church hallway the previous day, he had asked James to lunch. That’s when he found out the young Bible Study teacher had eye problems.

James had replied by telling him, “I can’t this week. I’m having eye surgery tomorrow morning and will be out of pocket all week. How about next week?”

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“What’s wrong with him?” Barber asked.

“He’s having some kind of surgery on his eyes,” Simmons said, wondering if he should say more or if he should change the subject. He really didn’t know anything else. He didn’t know that James had experienced this same surgery numerous times and would continue to have it in order to maintain his vision.

The poison gas that engulfed him during the war had damaged his eyes, along with his lungs. Surgery was done periodically to clear his eyes of the gas’s residual effect on his sight. The scars on his face and hands, along with several amputated fingers, were a reminder to everyone as to where James had been and what he had been through.

Simmons knew that James was a very private person. The attorney seldom talked about himself, or his family, and seemed elusive at the first, and only, deacon meeting he had attended.

The pastor had visited with James only four times. Once, for just a few minutes, in the back of the sanctuary close to four years ago.

Nelson Simmons was responding to gossip from church members and the pastor had approached James searching for the truth. He found out James’s teenage sister had been abducted and raped, and was now pregnant. He understood from the few words James had spoken that he was protecting and caring for his little sister.

Yes, she was an unmarried pregnant teenager, James had told the pastor, but it was not her doing. She had not sinned. There was no reason to ostracize her from the church. James was furious that the people in this church felt as they did about her.

The pastor didn’t see this family in church again until after the child was born and the young girl returned home to Kansas. Then James and his wife had brought the baby to church and proudly walked the center isle to stand before the church, professing their belief in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and pledging themselves for his use and for service to the Body of Christ.

True to his word, James had been a blessing to the fellowship. They had been faithful attenders, served in the Sunday School, gave generously, attended fellowships, and participated in service projects; and they got to know the people of the church. Neither seemed resentful concerning the way James’s sister had been treated.

Simmons was probably one of the few people that realized the child that called James “Daddy”, was actually the man’s nephew. James and his

wife had adopted his sister's illegitimate child and were raising him in a godly home.

The second time they spoke, James approached him volunteering to teach a Bible class; and they had spoken briefly when the pastor had gone to the Britt home to deliver the teaching materials. James had been nice, polite, courteous, and grateful for the opportunity to serve, but he wasn't very talkative. Nelson Simmons had learned nothing about James during these short visits—except that he lived in a nice, older townhouse on Laurelhurst Boulevard.

When Simmons arrived at his home, James hadn't followed the normal social graces of calling his wife to say hello to the pastor. Nor had he offered Simmons a cup of coffee or invited the pastor to sit and visit. James handled the business about the study materials in the front hallway, and then he showed the pastor to the door.

Three months ago, they had talked for the last time. The pastor visited James at his office. The attorney had been quiet and it seemed his thoughts had been somewhere else when Nelson told James of his recommendation to the deacon board by a Bible class member. James had seemed reluctant to accept the candidacy, but said he was grateful for this opportunity to serve.

Nelson had learned more about the man as the pastor was leaving the railroad's law office than he had during all four of the previous visits with James himself. Simmons had run into James's supervisor, Donald Cryer, as he left the building. Cryer was also a church member and they had spoken briefly about James's nomination. Then Cryer had asked the pastor to join him for a cup of coffee in the cafeteria. Their entire conversation was about James. Cryer ended their time together by telling Simmons that James would make an outstanding deacon. James was a godly man and put all he had into everything he did.

The young attorney's testimony before the church had been an eye opener, too. It answered unspoken questions for the pastor and gave him a much better understanding of the man that was soon to be ordained to help lead the church.

Now Nelson wondered how open James was about himself with the men he mentored. Nelson Simmons knew that James was an outstanding teacher. He had heard the comments made by the other men.

It had taken time to win them over though. When James first started teaching, the young men seemed overwhelmed by the new teacher. He was

hard to look at because of the facial scars, and their silent questions about the man seemed to override their desire to learn the Bible.

But James's knowledge of scripture and his direct teaching had drawn the men into the study. They had invited others to attend with them and had talked about the outstanding teaching so much that the class had grown from a mere six members to an overwhelming eighteen.

The education director offered to find another teacher and divide the class, but James told him no. These men needed to stay together so that all of the men in this age group could learn together. James said the men were just beginning to open up to one another and the camaraderie being established needed to continue until one of these men stepped forward to lead.

Simmons now wondered how much camaraderie took place between the students and their teacher.

"I was here to visit Mrs. Parker and Robert Turner," the pastor continued. "Then I planned to sit with Mrs. Britt while James was in surgery, but Mrs. Parker kept me talking way too long. I thought I would grab a bite before I went to find James's wife."

The subject changed and the three men enjoyed their lunch together. Then the pastor stood up and said, "I've got to go find Mrs. Britt. I can't let one of our deacons go through surgery and not make an appearance with his family. Do you two have time to join me for a few minutes. I'm sure James would appreciate your concern."

Pastor Simmons wasn't worried about James's surgery. James hadn't seemed concerned; he talked of the surgery in a casual way. He hadn't mentioned the surgery during prayers with the other deacons and apparently hadn't even told his Bible study group. Therefore, the pastor wasn't too concerned about it either.

Lee and Rick nodded. They didn't know their teacher very well, but it would impress the other members of their class to say that they knew something about their teacher that the others didn't know, and checked on him, when others didn't even know he was having surgery. They might even get to know their teacher better. They stood up and followed the pastor from the cafeteria.

The three men found the door to James's room open, and they could see into the room before they entered. James's wife sat beside his bed holding his limp war-damaged hand, mindlessly rubbing his bare arm. Dr. Curtis Stewart was with her, sitting across the bed opposite from Winona, with sleeping James in the middle.

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The patient's eyes weren't bandaged, but there was an oxygen mask over his nose and mouth. Two thick black hoses ran from the mask to machinery with gages and knobs attached to an oxygen tank. Next to the doctor hung a glass bottle connected to a thin rubber tube that disappeared into the bedding beside James. The pastor wondered what kind of surgery this was. It certainly didn't look like anything had been done to his eyes.

"Mrs. Britt?" the pastor spoke softly to get her attention.

Winona looked up, but didn't answer. Her eyes were red but her face showed interest, or surprise, at seeing him.

Dr. Stewart looked up too. He stood up. "Pastor," he said, reaching his hand out to welcome the preacher with a handshake. He nodded to the two younger men that followed Simmons into the room, then he sat back in the chair.

Nelson asked, "Did everything go smoothly?"

Winona stared at him, but again; she said nothing. She glanced toward the doctor, then looked at James's hand and squeezed it.

Curt didn't answer immediately. After a few moments of uncomfortable silence, he replied with, "We never did the surgery. We're just waiting for him to wake up. He had a reaction to the anesthesia." He looked toward Winona and softly added, "We should have known better than to use gas; but he'd been doing so good."

Curt turned back to the preacher. "His lungs were damaged by gas during the war, but they've been clear for years. They've come up with this new anesthesia. It's more reliable than what we've used in the past, with less side effects. We've been using it here for over a year. We didn't even consider that he would have a problem with it."

"Oh, my goodness," the pastor replied softly, now concerned about the man he hardly knew. He had trusted the surgery to go smoothly, but it hadn't. "Is there anything we can do?"

"No, it's all in God's hands. Just pray for him."

James suddenly gave a series of shallow gasps as his chest rose sharply each time, and his eyes fluttered open.

The doctor turned back to his patient. He put his hand on the back of the oxygen mask and lifted it slightly, taking pressure off the man's face. James continued to struggle, then his body shook slightly with a series of weak dry coughs. As the coughing grew stronger, and more productive, the doctor rolled James onto his side and took the strap of the mask from around James's head, still holding the mask close to his face. The attorney's eyes squeezed tight.

“Keep coughing, James,” the doctor said. “I know this hurts, but keep coughing. It’ll help clear your lungs.”

The cough turned into violent hacking that continued as the bystanders watched helplessly. James’s right arm flew to his chest and pressed against his painful lungs. He rolled further toward Curt and lay on his stomach as he gagged, with his curled arm beneath him. His face was hanging over the side of the bed. The pastor noticed a bucket on the floor below James. Then all the air seemed to leave his lungs and his body shook with each gasp for air. Tears squeezed from the man’s eyes.

Curt rolled James onto his back. “Okay, let’s sit you up.” James nodded and Winona reached to her husband as she moved to sit on the bed beside him. She and Curt supported him as they pushed him into a sitting position with Curt still holding the oxygen mask in front of his face.

James slumped toward his wife. His head flopped toward her as he gave another series of short gasps.

“Pastor, I think all of you need to leave,” Curt said, looking toward the three men.

Nelson nodded. “Can we pray first?”

Curt nodded. “Keep it short.”

Nelson bowed his head. He reached a hand out to put it on the knee that was bent under a stark white sheet. Rick Barber did likewise. Both men closed their eyes and bowed their heads. Lee followed.

“Lord, thank you for loving James. I know that you hate what this illness is doing to him. I ask, in the name of Jesus, that you would heal this affliction; that you would show benevolence and bring healing from all sickness. Lord God, I thank you that James and his family belong to you, and that you are in control of everything that happens, from our first breath to our last sigh. Guide the doctors and caregivers. Bring comfort and strength. Show your compassion and your glory through this man. In Jesus’ holy name I ask these things. Amen.”

A gentle response came from the sick man, ““Heal me, O Lord,” — James gasped — “and I shall be healed;” — gasp — “save me, and I shall” — gasp — “be saved,” — gasp — “for you are my praise.”¹ — gasp.

James opened his eyes. He looked at his pastor briefly and then his eyes fell on the mask being held across his face. His eyes widened. “No,” he mumbled, and his breathing got faster. “No.”

¹ Jeremiah 17:14

Curt quickly jerked the mask away from James's face. The doctor anticipated James's reaction to the mask. It scared him. A damaged mask was what caused his facial burns and lung damage during the war. Any mask against his face now caused terror. Even a mask that helped him breathe caused panic to the former soldier.

Curt tried to get James to wear a mask when he wasn't having breathing problems. "Just to get over your fear of it," Curt had said. "It's not going to hurt you." James would nod, he knew this.

But James couldn't do it. Curt would put the mask in front of James's face. The mask would get closer as James watched, then he would jerk his face away saying, "I can't do it. I just can't do it." James had even tried to put it on himself, with his eyes closed. Nothing worked.

It took two doctors and all the will power James had to accept the mask used prior to this surgery. And the result had been catastrophic. Curt knew they would never get a mask on him again.

Curt soothed, "It's okay, it's gone. It's gone."

James leaned more on his wife as he turned his head to look at his cousin. The pastor noticed James's eyes for the first time. They were cloudy, like a storm had just rolled into his head and was trying to escape. The patient's pupils weren't visible and the hazel green eyes now looked faded, cold, and dead. Pastor Nelson didn't remember ever seeing them like this.

The pastor suddenly realized that James didn't drive the automobile, the older gentlemen that worked for him drove James everywhere. And Simmons had seen James holding papers close to his face when he read. He wasn't blind, Simmons knew this, but he did have problems seeing. The pastor now thought he understood why James was having surgery. His vision was impaired. The surgery was going to improve his vision, or maybe stop the progression of sight loss.

And the pastor didn't know about his lung problems. But then, the doctor had said James had been well for years. Was this what was spoken about in his testimony? Was the problem with his lungs what the doctors had expected to kill him?

James's eyes slowly closed as Winona felt his body relax. She and Curt lowered James' back to the bed and Curt softly covered the man's face with the mask again. His body gave a gentle shiver and Curt pulled a blanket from the foot of the bed.

"I'll check on him later," the pastor commented as he turned to place a hand on the other two men to guide them out the door. The two younger

men seemed to be disturbed by what had just happened before them. They had every right to be disturbed. The pastor was concerned too.

The two younger men hadn't said a word. They were still watching their teacher as they moved toward the hallway.

Rick Barber was definitely troubled. He hadn't gotten to know James very well, but he did like the man. His teacher was intelligent and well versed in Scripture. James seemed concerned about his class and the young men's relationship with the Lord. He constantly encouraged the men to show tenderness to their wives, be involved with their children, and have integrity in all they did. He encouraged them to be disciplined in both their Bible reading and their prayer life. Rick wanted to let James know he appreciated the relationship and wanted it to continue. But he wasn't a man that communicated easily.

They got to the door. Rick Barber stopped and turned back into the room. "Mrs. Britt, you call me if you need anything. Anything."

Winona looked up, but said nothing.

Winona was a quiet woman. She would sit with a group of ladies at church and just listen to them talk. Even in Sunday School she would sit with the other women and not speak. The other women accepted her, but because she was so shy, she wasn't included in their conversation. She seemed unsure of herself when she did speak. But she was always there, watching and listening.

Winona had been held in slavery as a child and had been used by men until she was rescued, at the age of fourteen, by federal agents. These raids in the Oklahoma back country had come as a result of evidence found after Federal Judge Reid Britt, James's father, had been taken hostage by bank robbers and abandoned in the middle of nowhere.

Winona's brother, Blade, had cared for the injured judge and he and his younger sisters were taken to the Britt home when the judge was rescued by federal Bureau of Investigation (BI) agents. When Winona was freed, she was sent to the Britt home too.

She had always been shy, quiet, and socially awkward, staying away from men, and people in general, that she didn't know. And because she was Indian, she was even more of an outcast. While she worked well as a private nurse, she had never attempted to befriend anyone outside her family.

Curt responded, "Thank you."

4

June 1931 Harris, Kansas

Judge Reid Britt walked into his office next to the courtroom in Harris and found his brother-in-law, Marvin Wells, waiting for him. Marvin sat on the sofa against the wall with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, staring at the floor.

"Marvin?" Reid called. It was unusual for Marvin to be here. In fact, Reid couldn't remember Marvin ever being in his office.

"Reid? Have you heard?"

"I've been in court all day. What haven't I heard?"

"The bank. It's failing. I went into the bank to get the money I need to pay the bill at the feed store. I could only get part of it from the teller, so I went to talk to Doug. He told me to keep this quiet, but I have to talk to somebody. He says the bank doesn't have the money to pay its bills. He doesn't think they'll last till the end of the week."

"You didn't see this coming?" Reid wasn't surprised by this.

"You did?"

"Banks are failing all over, don't you read the newspaper?"

"Yeah, but most of them have been in the big cities. I didn't think it would happen here."

"Marvin, you're smarter than that. You only hear about the big banks. But the smaller banks are closing too, it always filters down to us. You've seen it coming, you just didn't want to admit it. The smaller banks are being absorbed by the larger banks and those smaller ones have closed their doors. Our bank became a subsidiary of Topeka State last February."

"But that was a buy out!"

"Yes, it was," Reid continued. "They bought our bank, including the loans that were outstanding. Our bank hasn't given any loans since. Topeka State took on those loans and I doubt they have been able to collect much

on them. The buy-out didn't strengthen the state bank, it burdened it. If they are closing our bank, Topeka State probably won't be far behind."

Marvin looked at Reid like he didn't understand.

"Marvin, you know more about finance than I do. When the stock market crashed back in October of '29, people panicked. They wanted their money and the banks had to give it to them, but the banks had already lost the money they had invested. So, there wasn't enough to pay the people. Those banks closed their doors. With no money in the banks, people can't get the money they saved, and they can't purchase anything. They would have to get a loan, and that's not available. Without customers, the businesses lose money and can't pay their bills either. Businesses are closing too. It's a vicious cycle. The bank employees are out of work, and the closed businesses have let their people go. These people can't find jobs because there's no work. And it's not over with. It's going to get worse."

"And there's nothing we can do," Marvin seemed to accept Reid's explanation. "How am I going to feed the animals?"

Reid stood in front of Marvin but didn't offer advice. Marvin was an outstanding manager. He knew more about ranching than anyone in the area. Reid had never seen him question his own business practices. But this was bigger than anything either of them had seen. The judge knew Marvin was just trying to process what was happening. He knew Marvin would think this through and find a solution.

"I guess I'll have to see what I can sell," Marvin thought out loud. "If I can downsize the herd, there may be enough pasture to make it through the summer. I can plant more grain and...I'm going to have to get rid of some of the men. I won't be able to pay more than a few, and they're going to have to become farmers. I'll have to use what I have in the safe at the ranch house to pay the men I let go. I need to give them some kind of severance pay but that won't leave the rest of us much to live on."

Reid reached up to unfasten his robe and threw it onto a nearby chair. He eased himself onto the edge of another chair. He listened as Marvin worked things out in his head.

"We're going to have to grow more to eat. We won't be able to buy vegetables." Marvin looked up. "I don't have enough farm equipment. Maybe we can trade with some of the farmers—beef for vegetables."

He turned to Reid. "I'm going to have to cut off Naomi's spending today." The Double R ranch foreman stared at his wife's brother. "This is not going to be fun."

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“Naomi grew up with nothing. She’s not going to like it, but she knows how to live without spending money. Guide her gently, but be firm,” Reid advised.

Marvin continued to sit on the sofa and stare at the floor. Reid knew he was considering how to tell his wife of their sudden financial difficulties.

“I’d better start with Joey and Blade. They won’t be going anywhere. They need a say in what happens,” Marvin explained.

Joey had been raised by Reid’s father, Travis, and was married to Travis’s granddaughter, Ruth. Blade was Reid’s son and had worked the ranch since he was a teenager. Both men’s lives were deeply ingrained in the ranch, and both Marvin and Reid knew they would do anything necessary to help the ranch survive.

Reid stood up and patted his brother-in-law on the shoulder.

The federal judge had been expecting the bank in Harris to close. He had prepared himself for this.

Yes, he was part of the problem, he knew that. But he had to protect his family. He hadn’t deposited anything into his bank account for months, and he had been slowly withdrawing what was in his account. He would lose money when the bank closed its doors, but his family would survive. And they would probably have a little to help others who were not as blessed. Marvin may even need help. His brother-in-law Thomas had already suffered with the closing of the bank in Denver.

Reid had been putting it off, but tonight he would have a financial discussion with his family.

He didn’t think his daughter, Kimi, would be too disturbed by this. At age nineteen, she took care of the house and helped with the cooking, but she didn’t purchase any of the supplies. She had little understanding of financial issues, and relied on others to care for her.

His daughter Aiyana worked as the county public health nurse. She had her own paycheck and her own money to spend. She contributed to the household budget and the work. Reid hoped her job was secure. He knew her small savings was gone.

Ainena, his son Esa’s wife, did most of the cooking and managed the home. Esa would need to advise his wife, but Esa’s job was secure. He was a federal marshal.

Reid suddenly realized that Esa’s savings would be gone too. He had started construction of the rooms at the back of the barn, but they weren’t complete. He probably wouldn’t be able to finish the project.

Reid sighed. His family would be okay, but he was concerned about Sarah and her family. Thomas had a bad heart and his health had been declining for years.

The stock market crash in October two years ago had depleted Thomas's investments. They were gone. When the bank in Denver failed, he lost his savings. He still had income from the hospital the family owned in Denver, but the hospital was now struggling financially too. The profit, which supplied his income, was suffering. These fiscal losses had caused him to take to his bed. He had almost quit talking and spent the better part of his days propped in bed, either dozing or staring out the window from the wheel chair. He had almost stopped eating, too, and Thomas's son, William, had told Reid that his father's legs were retaining fluid—a sure sign that the end was near.

Thomas was now in his early eighties. He had been the town's doctor for years, but had turned his medical practice over to his son when he became ill fifteen years ago.

His wife, Sarah, was nearly thirty years Reid's senior and was more of a mother to Reid than a sister. She was now in her mid-seventies, but was still healthy and active. She cared for the house and her husband. She was an amazing woman, especially amazing since she was blind.

William was the fifth of eight children, and the only one of Thomas and Sarah's offspring living in Harris. William, a widower, had three children, Norman, fifteen; Landon, thirteen; and Bonnie Grace, eleven. They all lived in the large Victorian home with William's parents.

William was a good doctor, but his patients didn't pay him much. The area was poor, and most of the people paid in services or products. The family was financially supported by a medical contract with the mine near town and by profits from the hospital in Denver. Both were already showing signs of financial trouble.

Luke arrived at his baby brother's house just after supper. He needed to talk, and Reid was the person he wanted to talk to. Luke hadn't lost a large savings like Thomas had. Although he knew the county was having financial difficulties, he wasn't worried about losing his job as warden at the county work farm. But he was concerned about his family as a whole, and the town.

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He and Reid moved to the front porch, away from the women and children. They sat in silence as Reid waited for Luke to tell him what was on his mind.

"Well," the prison warden finally said. "That's it then. We're right back where we were when you were a boy."

"We're better than we were then, Luke. You know that. We're grown now and we have stable jobs and each other to turn to. Back then Dad was the only one working. He carried the whole burden alone."

"You carried it too," Luke said, looking at the youngest brother. "You worked as hard as any of the rest of us, probably more. While Thomas was taking care of us older kids in Denver, you took care of yourself."

"Dad tried. I know he did. But he was never home, and he didn't give you any money. He didn't have any to give you, he was giving it to us. You had to take care of yourself."

Reid knew Luke was right. Their dad was a good man, but he was determined his children would get a good education. That's where his meager marshal's salary had gone—to the children at the university. Reid had to either grow, or kill, whatever he ate. He wore hand-me-downs from his older brother, Angus, or anyone else in town that was kind enough to share. And he didn't own a pair of store-bought shoes until the summer he left for college. Until then, he had worn deerskin moccasins that his father had made.

Reid looked at his outstretched foot and laughed to himself. He still wore deerskin moccasins. His wife had made him several pair of deer-hide boots over the years. The pair he wore now was made by his son Blade.

Since his back injury the moccasins had been his footwear of choice. The boots he had worn through college, and in the years that followed, distressed his back. He wasn't doing manual labor anymore. He didn't need the protection the store-bought boots offered. The hand-cut and hand-sewn moccasin boots he now wore offered comfort, and didn't cause stress to his back.

"That just means we know how to survive this," Reid said. "We know how to hunt and fish, and we know how to grow our own food. There's going to be others that will need help though."

Luke nodded. "But we can't help everyone. We're going to have to be selective."

Reid looked up to see his son, Esa, standing in the doorway listening. He had no idea how long Esa had been standing there.

"What have you heard about the bank?" Reid asked his son.

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Esa shook his head. "People are scared. They've worked their whole life and now they have nothing to show for it. The past eight or ten years have made most of them soft. They don't know how to start over. I heard Virgil Donald say that if he couldn't feed his livestock he may as well shoot them all and kill himself. I hope he doesn't go that far."

"I guess this happened at the right time of year," Luke said. "We can get ready for the spring planting knowing we're going to have to grow more." Luke paused. "We probably need to figure out what we're going to do about a sharecropper. We won't be able to pay as much."

"Yeah," Reid said. "I thought about that. We may just be able to offer a room and meals. We'll have to pay for whatever else we ask him to do."

"Marvin was in the office this afternoon. He's struggling to figure out what to do." Reid looked up to watch as William's ambulance drove into the yard.

The vehicle stopped, but William didn't get out. He sat in the driver's seat staring at the men on the porch.

"William's not going to know what to do," Luke advised. "He's never labored like we have, and his shoulder will slow him down. He can probably help with some of the planting but he's not going to be able to work the fields for hours."

Reid nodded. "He doesn't have time for the garden. He'll probably have more work to do. People won't be able to take care of themselves and there will be more getting sick. We'll have to find a way to take care of him. His boys can work though. They're strong."

Esa laughed. "I've never struggled. I have no idea what's coming in the days or weeks ahead. I'm listening, but I'll have to trust Dad to know what to do."

Reid reached a hand out to his son and Esa stepped beside his father to take Reid's hand. "We'll be okay." Reid said. "“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?””¹

"For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore

¹ Matthew 6:25

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do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.””¹

William got out of the ambulance and came to stand at the bottom of the steps. His eyes ran over the faces of the three men on the porch, and came to rest at his uncle's feet. He gave a big sigh, “Father died this afternoon.”

The afternoon of the funeral, most of the county, and many from neighboring areas, gathered at the church. People stood around the overpacked pews, against the walls, and in the center aisle. Chairs were brought in from the Sunday School rooms and there wasn't a child present that wasn't sitting in an adult's lap to make more room.

Pastor Sutton welcomed the gathering and led the mourners in a song. Then he stepped to the side of the podium and helped Reid up the steps.

Reid turned at the pulpit to look at the people. He smiled sadly.

““Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

“““For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

““No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”²

“Who can separate us from the love of Christ? That's a question for eternity, isn't it? For those of us who know the Lord, the answer is ‘no one.’ But the apostle Paul wants us to be sure, so he asks about specific situations. Can trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? Today we can ask: can distress or poverty or destruction or

¹ Matthew 6:31-34

² Romans 8:35-39

homelessness or safety or rain or dust or flood or tornado or loneliness? None of these things. Will the worst circumstances on earth separate us? Will the powers of the spiritual world separate us? Will any other created thing separate us? No. Nothing. Not anything or everything. We can conquer and overcome any and all of these things through the power of the Holy Spirit. Through God's love. We are more than conquerors through Christ Jesus.

"Thomas knew this. Thomas had his own battle with the Lord fifteen years ago. Until then, as far as I know, he never questioned God. But when he got sick, he questioned God's goodness. He fought that battle in silence, and with Christ's help, he won. 'The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.'¹

"That battle was in the spirit world and Thomas found God's loving and peaceful spirit. Then he had to find a way to live differently than he had before. And he did that too. With what is happening in our country today, we're going to have to live differently too. Our battle isn't in the spiritual world, like Thomas's was. Our battle is in the physical, but if we hold to Jesus within our spirit, he will hold us in the physical.

"Instead of being busy taking care of other people, Thomas learned to be still and just know God. He fought that battle lying in bed and sitting on his front porch. Psalm 46:10 says to simply "Be still," and you will "know that I am God."

"Thomas learned how to simply 'be still.'

"I don't know how many of us have the luxury to just 'be still,' but we can know God.

“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”²

"It's about knowing God, trusting him, and relying on him for everything in life. Pray. Pray to know him. Then rely on him to answer your prayer, even if the answer is no. Because hard times bring fruit of reliance on him.

¹ Exodus 14:14

² 1 John 5:14-15

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“For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”¹

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the Lord delivers him out of them all.”²

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”³

“That was a nice service,” William shook hands with Gregory Sutton.

“Thank you, son. Reid does a good sermon, doesn’t he?” The preacher laughed knowing that Reid had taken care of the funeral. All the preacher had done was welcome the community. “I’ll be going and leave this lovely family alone. You and those boys take care of your mother.” He reached out to pat Norman on the shoulder as he moved to his automobile.

Greg Sutton was the last to leave. William’s Aunt Naomi and her family had left a few minutes ago, followed by Uncle Angus and his wife. Uncle Luke and Uncle Reid had left together. William could still see Luke walking in the distance. He was almost home. Kimi and Luke’s wife, Kathleen, were in the kitchen washing the dishes.

The church had provided a meal for the large extended family. William appreciated the gesture of love the members showed for them and for his father. Comments had been made at the funeral and William had learned a lot about his father that he didn’t know. The old man had shown both generosity and compassion to the town. William believed he had talked with more than half the town, and he was now ready to be alone with his family.

William nodded to the pastor, “Always.” And he turned to put his arm around his fifteen-year-old son. They made their way to the porch.

William was met by his older brothers, Joshua and Joseph. William had noticed the two avoiding him all day.

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:4

² Psalm 34:19

³ John 16:33

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They spoke briefly when they first arrived the day before. The conversation was mostly about their father's illness and death, and then they had turned their attention to their mother. Both brothers had thanked William for caring for their father, but they were concerned about their mother's welfare. Now that their father had died, she didn't need to work as hard.

Curt had arrived from Denver with them. He had greeted everyone, then had disappeared to be with their mother. Mae and her husband had driven in. Mae stayed close to her mother and Brayden was content to sit and read the stack of magazines he had brought with him. He had walked over to visit with Luke that morning and had talked with Reid and his family immediately after the service.

William enjoyed watching Sarah with the others. She seemed really happy with her children there, bustling around taking care of everyone's needs. She hadn't seen some of them in years.

William had seen her shed a few gentle tears, but she wasn't upset about their father's passing. She would miss him, but she was ready for his suffering to end. She had been anticipating his passing for a long time and stayed with him constantly in the days leading up to his death.

She smiled when she talked about his passing. After all, God had given her an additional fifteen years with him. Fifteen of the best years of their marriage. She held his hand, and talked to him in the minutes before he died. Now, she told her grandchildren that she had escorted him into eternity.

Adam and Edison had arrived together early that morning after driving through the night. Edison had taken a train to Kansas City and Adam had picked him up. They had driven home together. Both of them seemed out of place and uncomfortable with everyone there. They had been gone a long time and this wasn't home without Father.

It didn't really matter, everyone would be gone tomorrow and William, his three children, and his mother would return to a peaceful and loving life together.

Norman went into the house and William turned to sit on the steps alone, desiring a few minutes of solitude. But he didn't get his wish. Joshua didn't go inside but instead sat in a rocking chair on the porch behind William.

"Your pastor seems like a nice fellow," Josh commented.

"He is. He's a good friend too."

"How's business?"

William laughed. "If you mean how's the medical practice going, it's busy."

"It looks like the clinic could use a little work."

"Yeah. It does. I just have to find the time," William said. "It's hard for me to do that kind of stuff," he said, rubbing his bad shoulder. "Uncle Luke estimated the cost and it's a little high for me. I'm hoping someone will come along and trade me some materials for care. Uncle Luke said he can get the prisoners to do the labor."

Joshua looked concerned. "Do you get a lot of that? People not paying cash."

"This depression hit the people around here hard. The drought was bad last summer, too. We've lost several families that have moved from the area," William explained. "The mine and the factory have both laid people off. It's been hard on everyone. If we don't get rain soon, things are going to get worse."

Joseph had walked to the edge of the porch facing town, but returned to stand behind William. He spoke, "How hard is it on you and mother?"

William looked around. "We're okay. We've got the garden and Reid's girls come over on canning days and help mother."

"Look, William. We've been talking it over," Josh said. "Father's gone now and Mother's getting on in years. She's raised her own kids and her brothers and sisters. Now she's raising your kids. It's time for her to slow down."

"What are you saying?"

"It's for her own good," Joseph said. "We're going to ask her to come back to Denver. Life will be easier for her there. She won't have this big house to clean..."

"And she won't have to cook and wash..." Joshua added.

"For my kids," William said. Now understanding where the two oldest boys were going with this conversation.

"You've got to be realistic," Josh was saying. "She can go on another ten years working like this. She's doing manual labor. She wouldn't have to do that in Denver. She can quit taking care of your family and start taking care of herself."

"Are you serious? Is that what you think she's doing, taking care of me? Taking care of the kids?" William asked. "You weren't here when Father was ill. I've taken care of both of them and, yes, they took care of my kids. Now the kids are old enough to help and you want to take her

away from us? This is her home!" William turned back to look at the barn in the distance. "You have no idea what she really needs," he added quietly.

Adam moved beside William and sat on the brick ledge of the steps. Curt joined him.

"You've got to look at the big picture," Adam said.

"So you're going to gang up on me too."

"William, just listen to me," Adam's voice was caring. "It's not about your needs or even hers. It's about her happiness and about taking care of her. You've done it for fifteen years. Maybe it's somebody else's turn. We all love Mother. We want what's best for her."

"I think what's best for her is staying here," Curt said. "She loves it here, and she loves being with you and your children. She wouldn't know what to do anywhere else. And that's what I've been telling Joshua."

"But staying here might not be the best for her in the long run," Joshua said. "You're the only one here, there are five of us in Denver. We can all take turns. If one of us is busy, someone else can do for her."

"William, we're all stretched thin," Joseph added. "And this economic downturn has all of us on edge. None of us know what's coming next year. Don't you think it would be better in Denver where Mae and Chloe are, and where Josh, Curt, and I are? We could share the responsibility. It would help you. Take some pressure off you."

"Me!" William raised his voice. "None of you know what kind of pressure I'm under. None of you work door to door and travel miles every day to see a sick child or an old man. All of you work at big hospitals..."

Adam interrupted. "I don't."

"No, you don't," Ed said gently. "And I'm not here either. Neither of us can take Mother and care for her."

William was standing now, facing the others. "You couldn't rearrange your schedule to do something for her when she needs it. She would feel like she's in the way every time you pass her off to someone else. We've managed just fine even with Father sick. I can arrange my patients any way I want to. There's enough family here. We take care of each other."

Joshua spoke again. "But the others aren't our family."

"Yes, they are! You've been trapped in that city too long. You don't know what family is. Here we're all family—Reid, Luke, Marvin, Naomi, Esa, Blade, Stephen—we're all one family. We may live in separate houses but we take care of each other. Mother loves all of you, but is she going to

be happy away from the people she has lived with and loved all these years?

"Joseph, Joshua. You don't know how it is. You've never lived here." Both anger and concern could be seen in William's face, and heard in his voice.

"Has anyone asked her what she wants?" Adam wondered out loud. "This is where she feels at home. She knows the house, and she knows the community. She has friends here. She would have to learn a new place, and with so many other homes, I don't think she'd be comfortable. She'd feel like a stranger everywhere, especially with no friends to turn to for companionship."

"I agree," Curt said. "Her blindness is a huge factor in this. This is where she feels at home. Forcing her from this place would be cruel. It's got to be her decision."

"So do we just ignore the fact that she needs help?" Josh fumed.

"She doesn't need help here," William pleaded. "She has everything she needs."

"But she will one day," Joshua argued.

"And she has help," William shot back.

"Okay, let's all settle down," Adam instructed. Adam had always been the peacekeeper. Odd to think that now, he was the one who lived with a gun by his side.

Joshua stood up and turned his back to the others. He took a few steps away. He was so much like their father, even if he didn't want to admit it. He wanted his way. He would force his way through an argument until words turned into actions without anyone else realizing he had won.

"You're just avoiding the inevitable," Joshua said, a calmer tone to his voice this time.

"Josh," William began. "I've always looked up to you. As kids, we all avoided Father. We stayed away because we didn't want him controlling our lives. He pushed us in everything we did, you know that. You would protect us from him..."

Joseph interrupted, "Now don't start making Father out to be some kind of mean..."

"I'm not," William retorted quickly. "But you all know how he was. He wanted his way. Mother coaxed him, and pulled him, and, yes, she even conned him into leaving us alone so we could live our lives the way we wanted to. And when we all left home to build our own lives, she was happy for us. Mother is the strongest person I know. She may be small in

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size but she can take care of herself. She knows what she wants and she knows what she needs.”

William's tone was softening. “You weren't here to hear Grandpa's stories about Mother growing up. Did you know before she and Father married, she got on a train all by herself and traveled here from St. Louis alone?”

Several of the men nodded their heads. They knew this, they had read the book about their grandfather and this was in that book.

“Did you know she didn't even know for sure that Grandpa was here? She came into Harris for the very first time not knowing if she would be alone or if he was waiting for her? She'd had no contact with Grandpa for eight years. She had looked for him and thought she had found him here, but she had no confirmation. She literally walked into this town blind without anyone to meet her.”

His brothers were listening now. William could still see the determination in Josh's face, but he was listening.

He went on to tell his brother's stories of how his mother had lived, as a young girl, in the mountains alone with her family. How she had lived alone with her great-grandfather, before her father's return from the Civil War. He told them how she had learned, through trial and error to care for herself and the farm in the mountains.

He told them how, when he returned home injured, she had lovingly helped him regain his confidence and encouraged him to marry Bonnie. William cried as he told his brothers how strong his mother was the night Bonnie died. How she took care of the children, and him. How she encouraged him to continue to care for the children, despite his grief. He told them how her advice was always good, and kind, and loving, and what he needed at that moment.

As he talked, William realized he needed his mother as much as she needed her home. He could find someone to help with the house, but he needed his mother's presence there with him.

“You know. Father has just died and Mother needs time to adjust to that. She doesn't need to be ripped from her home this soon after his death. That would just be cruel. I can find someone to come live with us and help out around the house so she doesn't have to work so hard. With Father gone, she'd probably enjoy the companionship.”

“But, this place,” Joshua shook his head. “It's barren and lifeless, and poor.” Joshua was looking toward town. It did look run down, even from a distance. The old buildings needed work and what few trees stood close

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had begun to turn brown from lack of water. The drought was claiming the land.

“And it’s home,” Curt said. “If things get too bad William can bring Mother to us. He’s not going to allow her to suffer. He’ll take care of her.” Curt looked at William.

“Of course she’s not going to suffer,” William said.

“I don’t like this,” Joshua said.

“But you’ll agree to it.” Adam looked his brother in the face. “You’ll agree to it because you know William is right. This is Mother’s home. She wouldn’t feel at home anywhere else.”

Joshua and Joseph finally consented, but they also made arrangements for William to hire someone to help around the house. They would pay. They would send him the money. But they gave conditions and demanded William follow them to the letter.

5

July 1931

Harris, Kansas

The train platform had several people on it, and more were filing off the train. William stood in the shade of the overhang waiting for a package. He had been waiting days for the supplies and needed some of them urgently. He'd been told the shipment would arrive today.

He heard a disturbance from inside a railcar and turned to see several items being thrown out a window. A man getting off the train walked past the window and kicked a piece of women's clothing as he passed. He cursed. The look on his face told William he was angry.

The noise grew louder and more stuff flew from the window. William couldn't understand the angry words being thrown around inside the car.

The doctor spotted two young boys playing beside the station.

"Paul! Arnold!" William waited for the boys to stop playing and look at him. "Go find the marshal or the sheriff. Tell them there's trouble on the train."

The two turned and ran off.

Most of the people had gotten off the train headed to the Harvey House restaurant to find something to eat, or just to stretch their legs. The Harvey House didn't have as much business as it had in the past. The dining cars of the train filled the hunger needs of those riding, but the food was expensive. There were still those that frequented the fast service beside the railway station.

A middle-aged woman came onto the platform and was immediately pushed aside by another woman. She fell against the railing but managed to catch herself before she lost her balance. She stayed against the railing as another woman and three men got off.

Her hair was disheveled and the sleeve of her dress was twisted and out of place. She stood up, straightened her sleeve, and followed the others

down the steps to the station's platform. She began picking the clothing up from the floor.

A man stuck his head out the window and yelled, "We don't want you on this train with us, Jew!" He threw a small carpet bag at the woman, hitting her on the back. She stumbled before catching herself.

William moved toward her to help her pick up the items. She was crying and as the doctor got closer, he saw that her hands were shaking.

"Here, let me help you." William picked up the bag and held it opened so she could put the items in.

More noise came from the portico of the train as two men pushed another man from the car. He hit the platform hard with his shoulder and rolled onto his stomach. A suitcase fell to the floor beside him.

"You're the reason for this blasted depression. Stay away from decent people!"

The woman dropped what was in her arms and ran to help her husband. William held to the bag, but followed her.

"Oh, Berel! Are you alright?"

"Uh-huh," the man muttered. He was holding his head in one hand as he raised himself to his knees.

William reached down to grab his arm in an attempt to help him up, but the man jerked away, looking at William as if he was going to hit him.

"You're bleeding," William said. "Come this way and I'll get that cleaned up for you."

Just then a rock was flung from the portico and the person who threw it dashed into the train's car. William didn't have time to dodge it. It hit him on the shoulder and he fell on top of the man. They both hit the wood deck this time.

"All aboard!"

People began filing back onto the train. The woman turned to William with a heavy accent, "Are you okay? Oh, my goodness, I'm sorry."

"You're schmutz." The man yelled, as he got to his feet and threw his hand into the air in the direction of the train.

William looked up at him from the floor.

"Dirt," the woman said. "He called the man dirt." She looked over her shoulder at the train's car and spat. Again, William noticed the accent he couldn't place.

Esa came running up behind William calling his name. William looked up again as Esa said, "What happened?"

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William reached a hand up and Esa pulled him to his feet.

"These people just got thrown off the train by the passengers. Then somebody threw a rock at them."

"At us?" The man asked. "They hit you."

He looked Esa over several times, his eyes coming to rest on the federal marshal's badge. He had never seen an Indian before. He didn't realize Indians spoke English and certainly didn't realize they could hold a law officer's position.

Esa turned to the nearby conductor and commanded, "This train's not going anywhere right now." Then he turned to enter the railcar.

William could hear Esa calling to the people in the car and he wondered what these people thought. A sturdily built Indian with a badge, long hair, and headband was demanding their attention. Those people wouldn't get away with treating him the way they did this couple.

William turned to the couple and put his hand out, "I'm William Stewart. Are either of you hurt?" He reached a hand up to look at the scrapes on the side of the man's forehead.

The man pushed his hand away and turned to listen to the yelling in the car. "I'm Berel Jacobson," the man said, almost dismissively. "This is Perla."

"Let's get your stuff," William said, as he turned to pick up what was again scattered on the platform.

Esa had control of the crowd and was giving them what-for. He was looking for a reason to pull someone off the train.

The couple finished picking up the clothing and was stuffing the items into the bag.

Esa appeared on the car's platform with a teenage boy and thrust him onto the deck and down the steps. The boy's father followed, yelling at the marshal. Esa shoved the boy again and they came to a stop beside William and the Jacobsons.

Esa pushed the boy's shoulder. The boy looked at the marshal with defiance. Esa's face showed no mercy and he grabbed the boy's arm and shook him. "Say it," he demanded.

"Sorry," the boy mumbled, looking at Esa.

"Louder," Esa demanded.

"Sorry." The word came, but the attitude behind it didn't give the impression that the boy was apologizing.

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Esa whipped the boy around by the shoulders and grabbed his face with one hand. The father yelled and stepped toward Esa. The marshal turned quickly and wrapped his hand around the man's throat.

"If you're not going to teach your son manners and how to control himself in public, someone else will have to. That someone starts with me." The marshal shoved the man backward and the boy's father fell on his backside. Esa pointed his finger at the man and said, "Stay there."

Esa turned back to the boy who remained frozen in his grip. The teen had counted on his father to protect him. Now he was not only in trouble with the law, he was embarrassed for his father.

"Are you going to say something else?" The marshal asked strongly.

"I'm sorry," the boy breathed out quickly.

"Look at them. Your sorry for what?"

"Sorry I threw the rock."

"What else?" Esa asked.

The boy looked at the marshal. Over Esa's shoulder he saw every passenger on the train watching out the window. They were on his side, he knew this. Why didn't one of them take on this Indian?

Esa saw the father move from the corner of his eye. He pulled his pistol so fast nobody saw it coming out of the holster. It was just there—in his hand, pointing at his father. The boy's eyes went wide.

"What else are you sorry for?" Esa said.

The boy shook his head. His mouth moved slightly and his eyes were wide, looking straight at Esa. He didn't know what this Indian wanted him to say.

Esa asked, "Are you going to do it again?"

"No."

"Then tell them so."

"I won't do it again."

The marshal continued his lesson. "Now, put it all together. Apologize correctly."

"I'm sorry I threw the rock at you? I won't do it again?"

"Do you see this man?" Esa shoved the boy in front of William. "This is our town's doctor. What do you have to say to him?"

The boy shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. He didn't know.

"He's the one you hit with the rock."

"Oh," the sound came from the boy. "I'm sorry?"

Esa shook him again, reminding him to apologize correctly. "Don't make it a question this time. Now apologize."

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"I'm sorry I hit you with the rock and I won't do it again."

Esa shoved the boy away and looked at the father, holstering his gun. "Your turn."

The man stood up, brushing himself off. He turned to the couple with a snide attitude. "I'm sorry."

Esa slapped him on the shoulder. "Do it right. Teach your son how a real man makes an apology."

Piercing eyes dug into Esa as the man turned to the couple again. "I'm sorry I called you a Mocky. And I'm sorry I threw your stuff out the window."

Esa nudged him.

"And I won't do it again."

Esa let go of the man and said, "My God, whom I praise, do not remain silent, for people who are wicked and deceitful have opened their mouths against (these people); they have spoken against (them) with lying tongues. With words of hatred they surround (us); they attack ... without cause."¹

Berel Jacobson leaned toward his wife and said, "That's from Pslams."

Esa turned to the people on the train, and spoke louder,

"For he never thought of doing a kindness,
but hounded to death the poor and
the needy and the brokenhearted."²

He moved closer to the train and looked into the faces in the windows as he walked the station's wooden deck. A few people moved away so he wouldn't see them. Esa preached loudly.

"They pour out arrogant words;
all the evildoers are full of boasting.
They crush your people, Lord;
they oppress your inheritance.
They slay the widow and the foreigner;
they murder the fatherless.
They say, 'The Lord does not see;

¹ Psalm 109:1-3

² Psalm 109:16

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the God of Jacob takes no notice.”
Take notice, you senseless ones among the people;
you fools, when will you become wise?”¹

He pointed his finger at the people in the windows.

““He loved to pronounce a curse—
may it come back on him.
He found no pleasure in blessing—
may it be far from him.
He wore cursing as his garment;
it entered into his body like water,
into his bones like oil.
May it be like a cloak wrapped about him,
like a belt tied forever around him.
May this be the Lord's payment
to (the) accusers, to those who speak evil...”²

Esa came to a stop next to William and looked around, the teen and his father were gone.

William spoke softly, “That was harsh.”

Esa replied, “If they are Christians, they understand that they have sinned. If they're not, they won't understand, so it doesn't matter.”

“You pronounced a curse on them, Esa,” William said uneasily.

Esa replied, “Maybe it will bring them to Jesus and he will show them mercy, as I did.”

Berel Jacobson was watching Esa and had a newfound respect for this Indian, but suddenly caught himself. He didn't know this man at all, and he'd never met an Indian. He had initially judged this man by his race, the same way the people on the train had judged him and his wife. This was wrong.

“(I) have sinned, (I) have done wrong, (I) have acted wickedly.”³
He thought. “Oh God. ‘Forgive your people, who have sinned against you;

¹ Psalm 94:4-8

² Psalm 109:17-20

³ 1 Kings 8:47b

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forgive all the offenses they have committed against you, and cause their captors to show them mercy.”¹

The marshal turned back to the train's car. “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.”²

Jacobson leaned toward his wife, “Isaiah.”

“Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from their evil ways.”³ William sighed. “Come on, Mr. Jacobson. Let's get your face cleaned up.” William rubbed his shoulder and, turning to look at Esa. William added, “Thanks, Esa.”

The conductor raised his hands in a questioning manner toward the marshal. Esa nodded to the man and turned away.

“Mother?” William called, walking into the kitchen from the back porch. “Mother?” He called into the dining room.

Sarah came around the corner from the spare room used for storage. “William, I'm here. What's going on?”

“Come sit at the table.”

Sarah set a stack of wooden trays on the table. “What's going on?” She asked again.

“Have you got any coffee made? Tea?” William asked, looking around the room.

“No, but I can make some,” Sarah started to stand.

“No, don't get up. I'll make it.” William reached for the coffee pot and moved to the sink to fill the pot with water. As he worked, he talked to his mother.

“I was at the train station to pick up a package. People were getting off the train when this couple got off. The people on the train were being mean to them. Esa came and took care of the problem.” William rubbed his shoulder again. It still hurt. When he took his shirt off tonight, he would probably find it badly bruised.

William continued to make the coffee. When the top was put on the pot, he sat down across from his mother.

¹ 1 Kings 8:50

² Isaiah 30:15

³ Jeremiah 26:3

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“Mother, they said they were just moving across the country looking for a job. The man, Mr. Jacobson, said he used to do yard work for a rich man in Philadelphia. Mrs. Jacobson was the housekeeper.

“When the stock market crashed the man lost his business. Then the bank failed and he lost all his money. Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson lived in a cottage behind the big house. One night they heard gunshots and Mr. Jacobson went to see if he could find the source. He didn’t hear anything else, but the next morning Mrs. Jacobson found both of their employers dead in the house. The man killed his wife and then shot himself.”

“Oh, no,” Sarah whispered, her face showing horror.

“I know. The man’s son tried to blame their deaths on Mr. Jacobson and he spent time in jail, even though he had nothing to do with it. The police finally decided he was innocent and let him go.

“I know it’s not my place to do this and I don’t know if I can get the money, but I told them I could hire them for two weeks. Mr. Jacobson can do some work on the farm, and I thought Mrs. Jacobson could help you catch up with things around here. Does that sound okay with you?”

“I don’t know what she would do,” Sarah said. “But those poor people certainly need help. Of course, we can work this out somehow. I’m sure Reid and Angus will agree.”

“The problem is,” William continued. “Esa hasn’t got the rooms built at the barn yet and he discovered a problem with the field line coming from Grandpa’s house. So, nobody can live in grandpa’s house right now. There’s no place for them to stay. Do you think we could let them stay with us?”

“I don’t know why not. We have plenty of room.”

“Ooooh, you’re the greatest! They’re on the porch. I’ll bring them in and introduce you, then I’ll go talk to Reid. Maybe Mr. Jacobson can help fix that field line. It doesn’t look like any of the others have time to do much with it.”

William stood up and went to the door. “Y’all come inside.”

Reid and Angus both agreed a two-week trial was reasonable. If they could do the work needed, they would be the solution to the sharecropper problem, and Mrs. Jacobson could help Sarah and make Joshua happy. Since Sarah had agreed to provide room and board, the Stewart’s share of the man’s salary was already delivered.

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William didn't even have to raise the issue of the field line. When Luke heard of the arrangement, he said, "Do you think he can dig up that field line?"

William smiled, "I thought about that. Could you give the man some direction? He was grounds keeper at a mansion near Philadelphia, but I don't know that he knows any more than I do about plumbing and sewage."

It was the most severe dust storm Reid had ever seen. The black blizzard covered the horizon, approaching from the north west. He knew immediately what it was.

He'd seen dust storms before and they sometimes lasted for days, even weeks. He wanted to get home before it hit.

When the storm lasted for days it covered crops, grass, porches and even made its way through cracks in the windows and doors to cover everything inside the house.

Static electricity would build up when the grains of sand rubbed against metal surfaces, including vehicles and tractors. Touching a vehicle with a strong static electrical charge would knock a person off their feet. He had known of two people that had been knocked unconscious. One of them was his son Stephen.

The blowing sand wore the paint down in spots, leaving the metal exposed with a buffed, shiny finish. Paint on houses was damaged and corners of houses that caught the most wind were sometimes stripped bare.

But what Reid worried about the most, after the loss of crops, was the propane tank behind his home. A buildup of static electricity around the tank could become a serious problem if the grounding wire were to be knocked out of place by a flying object in the wind. Or if a leak were to happen, another flying object hitting the tank could cause a spark to ignite the vapors and the tank could explode and run the distance of the gas line into the house. Reid checked the tank regularly for problems.

A good rain would end this dust, but there hadn't been significant rainfall for over a year.

And then there was the sickness that came from breathing too much sand. Both the people and the animals were affected. The people tried to protect themselves—staying indoors as much as possible and covering their face when they went outside. The animals were not as fortunate. Cats,

dogs, and chickens could be confined and at least partially protected. But animals in the pasture and on open range became disturbed by the blowing sand and they ran to escape. The running pulled more sand into their lungs until the animal dropped and died of suffocation.

But something was different this time. There was no dry lightening in the cloud, and no thunder was heard. Instead, there was an eerie, continuous, distant, high-pitched hum. It wasn't dust.

The cloud was coming toward town swiftly. Rain would be nice, but as dry as the land was, a storm of this magnitude would destroy it. What they needed was a gentle long-lasting shower. But no haze of rain shown beneath the cloud. There were no water droplets shining in the sun.

The sky darkened.

As Reid watched, he realized this storm was alive. The hum got louder. A silver glistening within the cloud appeared. Reid's eyes widened as he moved toward the automobile.

Swarms of grasshoppers by the millions blackened the skies as they approached.

He got to the Chrysler and pulled onto the road when the first grasshopper hit his windshield. He turned the wipers on to knock it off, but it hung under the blade and smeared yellow across the glass. He turned the wipers off and continued slowly down the street as the bugs began pelting the automobile.

People ran for buildings and disappeared as the swarm took over the town. They attached to wooden porch floors and columns holding porch roofs. They covered wooden benches and tree trunks, and grass couldn't be seen anymore.

As Reid turned onto the road that ran past the medical clinic and Luke's house, he could see the fields covered with swarming insects. Two of the horses in the field were running frantically. But with nowhere to go, they ran in large circles trying to get away from what frightened them. Another horse was stamping his feet and swishing his tail wildly in an attempt to keep the critters off his back and legs. Old Echo was standing at the fence, looking at something on the post with grasshoppers covering her back. Reid looked closer. She was a distance away but—was she looking at her own nose?

Reid thought briefly of stopping to put the horses in the barn, but he knew that was pointless. The doors to the barn were open, as were the windows in the stalls. He could see the grasshoppers swarming into the

barn. The feed hay, and straw that covered the floor, would be gone by tonight. He hoped the feed room door was closed securely.

The bugs covered his car now. They would light for a few seconds, then finding nothing to eat, they flew off. But the sound of those that struck the car was like that of dull hail hitting the metal and glass. Reid had trouble seeing the road and slowed as he watched the fence pass through the side window.

As he passed Sarah's house and turned toward his own home, all he could see was the grasshoppers. On the left side of the road, the crops were being devoured. To the right, nothing but bugs. The road was covered. The fence, the ground, and his father's house were covered.

The trees didn't look as bad. While there were some insects low on the trees and against the ground, there didn't seem to be as many as in the pasture and on the crops.

He stopped the car and it was immediately covered. He sat in the automobile thinking. When he opened the door, the grasshoppers would swarm inside. He would need to do this quickly in order to keep as many as possible out of the car. The judge gave a big sigh. He couldn't move fast. It was always a struggle to get in and out of the Chrysler. But he had to do it.

He opened the door and the bugs came at him. They attached to his legs and the floor of the car. He swung his legs out and more grasshoppers were on the dash of the car. He felt them crunch under his leg. His foot stepped to the ground and he felt more under his foot, making his footing slippery and unstable. They were on his clothes now, his sleeves and the front of his shirt. He could feel them on his back, face, and neck. He waved a hand to brush them away but more immediately appeared.

They flew into him and dropped, recovered and crawled away.

Reid pulled his briefcase out of the back seat and slammed the door closed, trapping hundreds inside the vehicle.

Making his way to the porch, he brushed the insects from the hand rail and climbed up the steps. The grasshoppers crunched under his feet.

He looked up to see Kimi waiting for him at the door. She flung it open and ran to him, hugging him with fright, seeking protection and comfort. But there was no protection, they were both covered.

"Let's get inside," he said.

He slammed the door behind him. Kimi was already knocking the bugs off her dress.

"Ainena," he called. "Can you help us."

His daughter-in-law came from the hallway and stopped when she saw Reid and Kimi. They were fighting the grasshoppers, trying to get them off of their bodies. But as the grasshoppers fell to the floor, they hopped off in every direction.

"Do you have a flour sack or a pillow case, or something to catch these things in?" he asked.

"Sure." She turned to go into the kitchen. The toddler got excited at seeing the grasshoppers and ran into the fray, smashing some of the bugs underfoot. Others scattered.

Ainena returned quickly and held the sack open. The child was shrieking now, frightened by the grasshoppers that clung to his skin and continued hurling themselves at him.

Ignoring the screaming child, Reid took the sack. "Go close all the doors and get everything in the kitchen put away. Close it up and seal it as best you can. We don't want any of these getting into the food or into the other rooms."

His daughter-in-law scooped the child into her arms and began knocking the bugs off of him. She turned to obey as Reid and Kimi began picking grasshoppers from everywhere and shoving them into the sack.

Reid and his daughter worked to remove all the insects, but there were just too many. Ainena returned with a broom and dust pan and began sweeping.

An hour passed and most of the bugs were gone. The screens on the windows were keeping the insects out, but the windows were covered. The chirping of the grasshopper's legs being rubbed together, and the humming of their wings, created a continuous whirring noise.

The fragrant smell of the nearby trees was now overpowered by the nasty odor of insects. Reid had seen swarms of grasshoppers before, but this was like nothing he had ever experienced.

He held the sack closed as the insects inside buzzed and crawled on the fabric, creating an eerie motion within. A few grasshoppers remained under the sofa and in corners where Ainena and Kimi couldn't find them.

"What do we do with them?" Ainena asked. "If we open the door to throw them out, more will come in."

Reid shook his head. "I don't know."

"W-w-where are they coming f-from?" Kimi asked, concern showing on her face.

Reid shook his head again. "They're all over. Harris is covered. The garden is probably gone. The pasture is covered and they're inside the barn. I guess we'll just have to wait it out and see if they'll move on soon."

He handed the bag to Ainena. "Tie it closed with something and throw it onto the back porch. I don't know what else to do with it."

Reid followed Ainena to the back porch and looked through the window. Grasshoppers covered the screened area, but only a few had made it through the cracks around the screen door and onto the porch. He grabbed some dishtowels and followed Ainena out of the kitchen. He folded and stuffed a towel into a hole in the screen and laid another at the edge of the screen door, pushing it with his foot to arrange it as close to the door and frame as he could. He hoped that would stop any more from crawling into the screened area of the porch.

The judge retrieved his briefcase from the front room and went to his office in the back of the house. Kimi followed him. "I don't l-like that n-noise," she said.

Reid sat down and turned his chair slightly. He put his arms out and she slid onto his lap. She was a young lady now, and he couldn't hold her for very long without his legs hurting, but he still held her as he did when she was younger. He pulled her to him for a hug.

"I know," he said. "I don't either."

Reid turned the chair slightly and saw his Bible on the desk.

"I think I remember something that God said when King Solomon finished building the temple." He reached for the Bible. "Jump down and let me look."

He turned to the table and switched the lamp on. He began to turn the pages of Scripture, searching for what he was looking for.

"Here it is," he said, and pointed to the page. Then he read,

“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”¹

¹ 2 Chronicles 7:13-14

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“S-s-o we n-need t-to pray,” Kimi said.

Reid smiled at her simple understanding. “Yes, we do. Why don’t you and I pray right now. Do you want to start?”

She nodded. “Father God, p-please help the grasshoppers find a n-new home. M-make them go away so we can g-go back outside. I like h-hearing the ones that live h-here outside my window at night, but I don’t think they like these n-new grasshoppers at all. They m-make too much n-noise an-and they stink. Make g-t-them go away and be quiet. Am-men.”

“God heard your prayer, Honey. He says right here in the next few verses,

“‘Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive
to the prayers offered in this place.’¹

“Now, you go on and finish your chores. Keep the doors closed so the grasshoppers stay outside. Okay?”

“Yes, s-sir.” Kimi left the room.

Reid sat looking at the page of scripture. God had spoken the verse saying he would answer prayer in response to the verse saying he would send the locusts. And this verse was instructions for ‘his people,’ the Israelites—his people, believers. This verse was specific and directed toward the current circumstances.

He stood up and made his way to the telephone in the hallway to call the pastor.

“Hello. Greg, this is Reid.”

Reid was having trouble hearing. There was a buzz in the line, probably caused by the grasshoppers.

Reid spoke louder. “Yes, it’s awful, isn’t it? Listen. Kimi and I were just looking at scripture and I wanted to read you what we found in 2 Chronicles. It says in chapter 7:

“‘When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain,
or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague
among my people, if my people, who are called by my
name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face
and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from
heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

¹ 2 Chronicles 7:15

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Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.”

“Yes, I know. This is talking directly to us.”

“No, I don’t think we need to meet at the church. But we do need to pray, and the scripture also says we need to repent. We need to acknowledge the sin we know about and we need to seek God’s redemptive power for the sins we don’t see. I’ll call my people and the other deacons. Can you call the other churches and anyone else you can think of? Let’s get everyone praying tonight. We’ll pray for rain to end this drought, and we’ll pray for the grasshoppers to leave. There’s several cases of polio in the area too. We’ll pray that this disease doesn’t spread.”

Reid hung up the phone and said a short prayer asking God to allow him to contact those that needed to hear this message. He also asked that those contacted would respond by praying tonight. The whole town needed this message, and he prayed that the whole town would hear and respond by petitioning God for their collective need.

Esa came home and the house began collecting the insects again. Grasshoppers were picked off his clothing and swept from the floor. Another bag was added to the back porch.

After supper the family gathered in the front room. To a backdrop of grasshoppers thumping their legs and wings together, the family prayed. Each person prayed as they were led by the Spirit. When they weren’t praying, they agreed with others in prayer. Reid prayed that this was happening in every house in the area.

The next morning, Reid awoke to a soft humming, much quieter than the night before. A strong pungent odor filled his nostrils. He looked outside and saw hundreds, thousands of grasshoppers lying dead on the ground.

He put his robe on and took the broom with him as he stepped onto the porch. He swept a place clean to set his feet. The porch was covered. The grasshoppers that had been clinging to the window screens died there with their tiny legs stuck between the wire. Piles lay against the walls where they had fallen.

The ground was covered, but between the tiny bodies of the overwhelming numbers, Reid saw only dirt. What little grass remained after the summer’s drought was gone.

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If the grass was gone, what was left of the crops? They would need to purchase food for themselves and the horses. The chickens could eat the dead grasshoppers today, then they would need food too.

Esa stepped beside his father. "God is good."

"Yes, he is," Reid replied. "He answered our prayers."

"What do you think we need to do now?"

Reid thought a moment. "Sweep them up and burn them. That's about all we can do."

Reid looked at the house. The grasshoppers had begun eating the paint off the house. Reid figured it would be that way all over town.

"I need to go into town and see how things are there. There'll be clean up there too," the marshal said.

Reid nodded. "Check on the horses as you go in. I'll call Luke and William and see if their boys can go work on the barn for a couple of hours.

The phone rang and Esa was called into the house. He returned shortly. "The train can't get through. The dead bugs are making the rails slick and the train can't get traction. Apparently, it wasn't that bad when it came in, but trying to start moving at the station, the wheels are just spinning. If the hill near the Calhoun place is covered, the engine may not be able to make it up the steep grade. I called Luke. He's going to take some prisoners out there and see what they can do. He'll work his way back toward town. Someone else will have inmates at this end moving toward them. I'd like to know how widespread this is."

"Yeah," Reid agreed. "I'll go to the office and see if I can contact some of the towns around us. The mayor will probably call a meeting tonight or tomorrow, and we'll find out how much needs to be done. After I make the calls, I'll come home and see if I can help the girls start cleaning this up here."

Esa looked at his father. "Don't try to do too much." Reid nodded sadly. "I know."

6

August 1931 Harris, Kansas

Reid, Angus, and Luke sat in the judge's office with an engineer and the project manager of the new federal road being built through town.

The project manager said, "So, we're in agreement?"

"It looks that way," Angus said. "To go over this again: you can build on the northwest corner. One structure housing your smith's shop, office, room for the night guard to stay, and storage area. You may construct an outhouse in the far northeast corner of that plot. Have a parking area between the building and the road, and you don't touch the land to the east. We don't want it rutted and destroyed by those big wheels on your construction trucks. You get the corner one hundred by one hundred fifty feet, which I will mark off for you. Everything you do stays in that area. And there will be no explosives housed here. It's too close to our homes."

Angus was a direct and calculated negotiator. As manager and project director of the area's electrical power and communications, he had been in negotiations many times. He knew the damage that could be done by a careless group of workers with no parameters, and a foreman who didn't care about anything except getting the work done.

Reid added, "This area is going to be seen from our homes, I understand that there will be construction materials stored here in the open, but it needs to be kept relatively tidy. The dust is already bad and we don't want your materials adding to it. The dirt road that joins where you are working is used daily. I don't want it blocked at any time, and I don't want any damage to it. This is a one-year contract, if you're still around after that, we will need to renegotiate. And when you leave, the land needs to be restored to its original condition. Clean up your mess."

"I understand," the site manager said. But Reid could see that he was not happy with the conditions. Angus speculated before the meeting that

this project manager had probably never had conditions set at previous sites. He had used eminent domain laws to get his way and never asked permission for anything.

Angus had seen the proposed road work when he went to the permit office at the state capital to get his permit for expanding electrical lines across multiple county lines. The maps and paperwork had been laying open on a table in the superintendent's office. A large chunk of Britt land had been marked off in the proposal for use by the crew.

Angus knew the law, and he knew men like this project manager—ruthless, demanding, and always wanting his own way in his own time. He knew the law and knew how to manipulate it for his own use.

Angus had filed paperwork to stop this action before it was ever started. The site manager would get land, as eminent domain mandated, but he would not get the amount he wanted, nor would he get free rein over the land to do as he pleased.

“And a final clause,” Angus added. “You personally, and your company, will pay restitutions if damage is done to any of the land upon inspection ten days after you vacate. The amount will be justified in the legal paperwork delivered to the state office if there is damage.”

“What?” the project manager bellowed.

Angus held his ground. “Mr. Castor, you are getting enough land to do what you need. You are getting it at zero cost. We could demand that you pay for the land—you are paying others for the land you use, aren't you?” Angus didn't stop for an answer. “I thought so. You will agree to our terms or you will pay after I fight you in court. Do you think you have a chance?”

Angus looked toward Reid and his son James, who was in the room to record contract conditions and draw up the actual contract. Castor followed his gaze, then settled back in his chair and mumbled, “I'm sure glad I don't have to deal with people like you everywhere.”

Angus smiled knowingly. “Then, yes, we have a deal.”

Luke wiped the sweat from his face and leaned back, stretching his tired muscles. “I'm getting too old for this.”

Berel Jacobson laughed. “Well, I'm glad you're helping, Mr. Luke. I can dig a ditch, but I don't know what to do when I get to the pipe.”

Luke laughed. "This is nasty work." His boots were covered. Luke kicked at the mud. "I'm the only one that was around when this pipe was laid, so I figure I can fix it faster than Esa. I'm sure he could fix it, but it might take him a while to figure it out."

Luke looked at the small house behind him. "I love this place. Our house burned and Sarah's husband had this place built for Dad. That's probably why I love it so much. Dad's everywhere in it."

"And on the back porch," Esa called. "Especially on the back porch."

Luke turned around to find his nephew striding toward them. He had a shovel in his hand and his shirt off. He was wearing an old pair of rubber work boots that came to his knees.

He was followed by his brother, Blade, who also had his shirt off, and was barefoot. Both of the Indians had their hair in braids. Blade had his usual leather headband in place and Esa had a tattered brown bandana tied around his forehead. A style that had become habit for him the last few years.

Berel went to get a drink of water from the canteen hanging on the fence.

"Help has come," Luke said loudly. "Berel, these are two of Reid's boys, Esa and Blade."

"Marshal. I didn't know the judge was related to you." Berel Jacobson nodded toward the young Indian. Berel was still in awe of the young man, but his brother was even more impressive. Blade was taller and more muscular. He said nothing but went straight to work.

Berel watched the man push his shovel into the merk and mud effortlessly. Blade turned and Berel stepped back in surprise.

Blade's back was scarred, deeply, and it was very noticeable. But the young Indian didn't seem to care that the others saw.

Luke saw the other man's shock and stepped close to him. He whispered, "It was worth it. He's proud of his scars."

Berel looked at the two younger men questioningly. They were both looking at the mud as they dug, ignoring the older men and talking with each other. "What happened to him?"

Luke spoke quietly, almost at a whisper. "He was just a kid. He stole some food for his little sisters and got caught." That was the only explanation Luke gave. Luke moved back to the soggy hole.

Esa looked toward the house. "Dad was at school when this house was built, wasn't he?"

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

Luke nodded. "Yeah, he was here when the other house burned, but he went back to Denver a few days later."

"Did he ever live in this house?"

"Just a few months when he finished school. But your mother was here longer. She lived here while your dad was away."

Luke had stopped working again, as did Berel, who was listening to the conversation. Esa was still looking at the house.

Esa had only heard of his father being away from home during this time on two occasions. His father had spoken of both times, and both were different incidents. Esa wanted to know what Luke knew, but he wouldn't ask, not with Berel Jacobson present. These were private family matters.

Blade never broke the rhythm of his shovel. "Am I going to do all of this by myself?"

"No, brother," Esa said. "I'll help." Esa put the shovel into the mud and slung the filth a few feet away. Berel followed.

Luke sat on the ground at the edge of the mud. His normal jovial manner had changed. He seemed to be seriously contemplating something when he began talking. "Your father blamed himself for the house burning. And he thought he had caused our father's death. I'd never seen him upset like that."

Blade kept shoveling, but his eyes were on Luke.

"There'd been an incident at the mine. Grandpa had gotten in the middle of a power struggle between the mine's doctor and the mine manager. Men were being killed, but Grandpa was unaware of the trouble. His battle was with one man alone—the mine's drunk doctor.

"The mine manager did something with that doctor. We don't know what, we never found the body. Then he tried to kill another man. Your Dad saved that man, not knowing what was going on. But what Reid did brought the mine manager's ruffians to the house. The man your dad saved was the target, but your father and Grandpa stood in the way.

"Thomas and Sarah were visiting from Denver. The house was on fire and Thomas was getting the injured man out. Sarah had slipped out a bedroom window and taken the miner's wife and kids with her. They ran through the trees and she found Cleve's house.

"They set fire to the barn first, and your dad went into the fire to rescue the animals. He was shot and cornered, unable to get out. Grandpa ran into the barn to help him. They were coming out the door when one of the men stood in front of them, challenging Grandpa. Grandpa pushed your dad away and stood in front of a man that was thirty years younger.

“There was gunfire and Grandpa ended up on the ground, hurt. Your dad got back to him and managed to pull him away from the burning barn. He thought Grandpa had been shot and he blamed himself because he brought the injured man to the house.”

All three of the other men had stopped working and were now totally immersed in the story.

“Reid sat there on the ground, bleeding, holding Grandpa as he watched the house and barn burn to the ground. It was all gone by the time I got there. We couldn’t save any of it.”

“How long did it take you to get there?” Esa asked.

Luke shrugged, but otherwise ignored the question. “This road wasn’t here then.” Luke pointed toward the opening where the road went between the trees. “Cleve came to get me when Sarah told him what was happening. We had to go through town and come from the other side. Everything was still burning when we got there, but there was nothing we could do. It was all gone.

“Your dad was sitting against the corral fence holding Grandpa. Grandpa was okay. He’d fallen on his shoulder and knocked the wind out of himself, but he wasn’t shot.

“We were at the house most of the night and left to get breakfast about daybreak. That afternoon I found your dad sitting against the side of Cleve’s house alone. He hadn’t slept, and he was balled up and shaking like a leaf. He started apologizing for causing the fire and all the trouble with the mine folk.

“It wasn’t his fault. I tried to explain that to him. I tried to explain that the evil act that led to the house burning came from Satan, and I told him not to let Satan’s schemes into his mind. I told him to hold to Christ. ‘Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.’¹ ‘Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.’”²

“I sat down with him. I told him everybody was safe; but there was nothing left of the home we grew up in. That’s what was on his mind, the only home either of us ever knew. I got sad, too, thinking about it.

“He couldn’t seem to get past thinking Grandpa had been shot. It really scared him. He had just turned eighteen, he was still a kid.

¹ 1 Peter 5:8

² James 4:7

“He kept talking and then he got mad. I could tell he wanted to tear something up. If somebody had walked past and said the wrong thing, he probably would have hit them. But nobody did. He started crying. So, I sat there holding him like I had done when he was little, and I let him talk, and I let him cry.

“He talked about Grandpa laying on the ground and how scared he had been. He talked about watching the house burn. He talked about not wanting to go back to school. He wanted to stay with Grandpa. He and I both knew Grandpa wouldn't let him do that.

“We talked more and I told him how Grandpa's life was another gift from God. We started naming off the good things that had happened. Thomas and the miner were okay. Grandpa had a burn on his leg, but he was okay. Reid was hurt, but his leg would heal. Grandpa's dog had done good.” Luke chuckled. “She had attacked a couple of the men and had let Grandpa know when one of them entered the house. Sarah, and the miner's wife and kids, Thomas and the miner, had all gotten out of the house safely. All the bad men had been killed and the mine manager was in jail.

“Those men ‘intended to harm (us), but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.’¹

“Just imagine if those men had succeeded. This town would have lost twenty years of Grandpa's influence. Your father wouldn't be here. Think of the impact he's had across this country—Denver, Chicago, here.” Luke laughed again. “He wouldn't have married your mom and no telling what would have happened to her. You wouldn't be here.” Luke looked at Esa.

Then he looked at Blade, who had returned to his work, and smiled playfully. “Blade would probably be dead by now.” Blade looked up and sneered.

“Thomas would have died and how many people in Denver, and here, wouldn't be alive if that fine doctor had died then.”

Luke stopped, shaking his head just thinking about the different life he would have had without this family.

“Marshals discovered a lot of wrong doing when they searched the mine's office and the manager's home. Like I said, the mine manager went to jail. Several others were in jail too, and miners were coming in by the droves to tell what they knew.

“Your dad couldn't ride a horse because of his injured leg, so I hooked the wagon up and helped him on. We drove out to the house and

¹ Genesis 50:20

sifted through the ashes. There was nothing left. Some of it was still too hot to touch so we poked around with a stick. The only thing we found was a metal picture frame that had our momma's picture in it. But the picture was gone. Reid cried some more. That was the only memory he had of Momma. He was just a year old when she died. He didn't remember her, but he had her picture—until it burned.

"We found the Bible too. It was only half burned. The pages with the births and deaths were still intact. He took it with him. I don't know if he ever showed it to Grandpa. I guess he's still got it somewhere. I've never asked him.

"By the time we got through talking and left the homeplace, he was feeling better. I think he quoted from the book of James. 'Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.'¹

"He knew God would use what happened to bless all of us, and he did. Grandpa was really happy in this house with his kids nearby. He would have never left the old place. There were too many memories of Momma there. But God forced him to leave, and it was good that he did."

"'For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.'² Blade said, as he turned back to his work.

Luke nodded. "There was trouble between Dad and that doctor before any of the problems with the mine started. Some people thought Dad was looking for trouble, breaking into the doctor's office like he did. But he did it to help a boy that had a broken leg.

"You know how people in this town are, blathering about everything and looking for a reason to disgrace a good man. I don't think any of the gossip made it to Dad's ears. He would have ignored it anyway. He never listened to that kind of talk.

"The prophet Isaiah says to 'cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.'³

Berel Jacobson had learned that the Stewart family, along with the Britts, knew scripture well. He recognized many of the Old Testament passages they spoke of. When he quoted the Torah, the books of the

¹ James 1:17

² 1 Peter 2:15

³ Isaiah 1:16b-17 ESV

Writings, or the books of the Prophets, this family understood and seemed to appreciate his input.

He listened when members of the family quoted New Testament scripture, seeing the common teachings and understanding that this family was trying to follow God. But they were blasphemous, speaking of Jesus as if he were God himself. That was the only thing he didn't like about these people, their blasphemy.

It wasn't his place to correct them. In fact, they might get upset with him and he might lose his job. And he liked this job. So, he told his wife to keep her mouth shut when they talked of the Holy One, Blessed be His Name.

Esa replied with, "'He has shown you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'¹ Grandpa showed us what humility was. That man would do anything to help someone else, but he never wanted attention. He wanted to stay hidden in the background."

"Yeah, he lived humility," Luke said. "And that's hard to do when you're the town's marshal. But his faith in Jesus consumed his every thought, his every move."

"If he was such a humble man, how did he win the fight?" Berel asked.

"Being humble doesn't mean you have to be weak or let people walk all over you. If you're humble, you realize what Jesus did for you. You're not the victim, you're the victor. It means you think of others as more important, you make sacrifices for them, and you protect them. 'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.'²"

This intrigued Berel. He had considered himself a victim his entire life. He had been picked on and taught not to fight back. He was told to let people push him around. People had called him names and blamed him for things he had no control over. Yet he had thought himself better than these people because he was a part of God's Chosen People, and he was proud of that.

Now, these men were telling him not to think of himself as the victim. He was being told he should think of others before he thought of his own needs.

¹ Micah 6:8

² John 15:13

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

“But a humble man must step aside for the proud and arrogant, otherwise he might get hurt. A humble man must be a man of prayer,” Berel said, questioning his own beliefs.

Berel Jacobson lived in a proud culture of victimization. But what these men were saying was that this man he didn't know, this man named Travis Britt, had overcome this victim mentality through faith in Jesus Christ.

“Yes,” Blade said as he continued to dig. “He must be in constant communication with God. He must know God's heart, and he must know God's will. ‘Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.”’¹

“Love, justice, and righteousness,” Blade repeated. “Grandpa lived that way, and he taught Dad to live that way.”

“Grandpa never boasted of his wisdom,” Esa said. “In fact, I think he was kind of ashamed that he never went to school. He never did understand that he had wisdom beyond anything a man could obtain on his own.”

“He had wisdom from God, and he had it abundantly,” Luke added. “He didn't need money. His riches were his faith and his family.

““Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.””²

Luke looked toward the house again. “He used to sit on that back porch and pray for hours. He would talk a while, then he would listen to God talk to him. You know, any time I've got a problem, the first thing I want to do is sit on that back porch before I ever start praying. I haven't been able to do that with the Neuws living there.”

“Well,” Esa said. “You're welcome to do that any time you want to, even after we're there.”

“I don't want to disturb your family,” Luke said, looking at the house with a longing in his eye.

“What do you wanna do?” Esa asked, “Move in?”

“Could I?” Luke asked playfully. “I'd love to live there.”

¹ Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV

² Romans 12:10

Then, thinking out loud, Luke continued, "I don't need to be close to town anymore. You could take Cleve's house and take care of it for him. I would have moved into Grandpa's house years ago but Cleve asked me to take care of his place. Living at Cleve's would put you closer to town. Then I could sit on the back porch and become a prayer warrior like Grandpa was."

Blade broke in, "You are already a prayer warrior. You talk to God and you listen. You hear from him too."

"I do," Luke admitted. "But I've never found a place as comfortable as that back porch to pray. It's almost like the Spirit dwells there, beckoning you to call to the Lord."

"And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord."¹ Maybe the Spirit rests there because he spent so much time there with Grandpa."

"Are you serious, Uncle Luke?" Esa broke the reverent moment. "Do you really want to live there? Cause if you do, it would be great. I need to be closer to town, and Uncle Cleve's house is bigger." He laughed. "I don't plan on stopping at two kids. I could use the room. And you know Uncle Cleve is never coming back."

"Yeah, I know that. I sure would like to live here." Luke picked himself up from the ground, and making his decision quickly, he put his hand out. "Deal?"

Esa laughed and took it. "Deal."

Berel watched as the two men shook hands, sealing the agreement. He marveled that such a deal could be made so quickly and without any negotiation.

"Have you finished with your treaty?" Blade asked. "Because if you have, we can repair this pipe and I can go home." Blade pointed at the hole where he had continued to dig throughout the conversation. Corrosion covered the exposed clay pipe which Blade had cleaned off with his bare hand. One end of the exposed clay pipe was cracked in several places creating a hole about three inches in diameter going into a joint.

Blade stood up to his calves in black stinking mud. His arms were covered to his elbows, too.

Esa started to laugh. "You stink! If Enola doesn't let you in the house tonight, we know why."

¹ Isaiah 11:2 ESV

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Blade lifted a shovel full of mud and flung it at his brother. Esa jumped aside and leaned on his knees, laughing more. "Missed!"

Blade threw another shovel full. Esa, still laughing, went to step back, but his boots were stuck in the mud. He fell on his backside.

"Not the second time," Blade said with an odd smirk on his face.

"Get your bedrolls and I'll let both of you sleep on my back porch," Luke snickered, turning toward the truck parked on the other side of the road. "I'll get the grinder. You boys grab that new pipe.

7

August 1931 Denver, Colorado

Winona pulled the automobile into the archway leading to the drive of the Barber mansion. She slowed.

"Look at that house," James said.

"I see it. It's massive," his wife responded.

"I knew Rick's father was wealthy, but I didn't realize he was this rich. I'm not going to worry about what this is costing anymore. I thought this party would be a strain on Rick, but I guess he can afford it."

Rick had invited the entire Sunday School class, and their families, for an afternoon at his father's home just outside the city. Several had responded with excitement, a few were apprehensive, but most had agreed to come. It was the first time this group of men had been invited to a social gathering together.

The Sunday School class was disciplined and organized. Time together was used to maximize learning. There was little social interaction. James was anxious to see how these men would react with each other in a social setting.

James was also cautious. He hadn't fully recovered from the reaction to the anesthesia and was still coughing quite a bit. This was manageable at home and at the office. He had even managed to teach his class and attend the church service without problems.

But an all-afternoon party caused him to question if he should attend. He didn't know why, but he was nervous. He felt he had to go, though. As these young men's teacher, he couldn't refuse.

A man took the car when the Britt's got out and drove to the far side of the drive. James watched as he backed the automobile into a spot next to a shiny black Pierce-Arrow.

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

Winona held to her husband's arm. She didn't mind going to parties. She had gotten used to the gatherings of upper-management railroad employees and investors. But this mansion was beyond anything she had seen in the past, and her bashfulness was taking over. She wanted to get back in the car and go home.

James felt her pull on his arm. He turned to look into her searching eyes. "We won't stay long. But since we're here, we have to make an appearance. Rick went to the trouble to invite us. He said the other men from Sunday School would be here with their families too."

Winona turned to look at the line of cars next to the drive. "There's more than just your Sunday School class here."

Music filtered from inside the house as James turned toward the steps leading to the wide front walkway.

"Yeah. It looks that way, doesn't it?"

A rather stiff man in a black tuxedo met them at the door. "May I take your wrap ma'am?"

Winona tucked her head and pulled her shawl tighter around her shoulders. "She'll keep it. Thanks," James said as they walked past.

Inside, James stopped to look around. The entryway was a large open space with sculptured marble floors that seemed to extend forever. At the other end of the foyer, the doors were opened to a large expanding terrace where the people gathered. The couple stopped to survey the gathering.

A young man appeared and offered them a lemonade. Taking the glass, James asked, "Where would I find Mr. Barber?"

"I'm sorry, sir, I wouldn't know." The man turned and offered a glass to someone else.

James felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned around and the gentleman behind him took a step back, obviously shocked by James' appearance. "Oh!" The dark-haired man hesitated. "Are you a friend of the old man?"

"Old man? No. I'm a friend of Rick's."

"I heard Rick had some friends here. Odd. I've never known the two to mix their social calendars. I don't know where he is, I haven't seen him."

"I'm sure I'll find him. Thank you." Winona held to James' arm tightly. She wasn't about to let go among all these strangers.

"Gary Sanderson." The man stuck his hand out to James.

James looked at the hand briefly before he pulled his hand out of his pocket with a sigh and grabbed the man's hand with his three remaining fingers. "James Britt. My wife Winona."

The man looked at the hand as James pulled it away and then Sanderson's eyes moved back to James's face. "Well, Mr. Britt, what do you do?"

"I'm an attorney for Northern Rocky."

"Really?" Gary Sanderson had a questioning look on his face. "I would think that would be difficult."

James wasn't sure what the man meant by the comment but he responded, "Not so much. It's like any other job, once you know the routine..."

"Oh, don't be modest. It takes a lot of fortitude to stand before a courtroom and proclaim your side of an argument, even if you don't..." The man was interrupted by another voice.

"James Britt. Rick said you were coming. I'm Regan Barber." The man put a hand on James's shoulder. "And this must be your wife."

"Yes, sir. This is Winona."

"Hello, little lady. Y'all come on over this way and let's get you a fresh drink." He guided the couple away from Gary Sanderson. "Don't mind him. He can be a little crass sometimes. No sense of propriety."

Regan Barber took the nearly full lemonade glass from James. He handed the man a goblet with a pulpy pale drink over crushed ice. He took the glass from Winona and handed her the same drink. James looked at the content.

Regan laughed. "Pineapple and ginger ale with crushed cherries and sparkling water. Can't break the law, now can we? We've had to get creative with prohibition in effect."

Regan Barber was a boisterous confident man. He attracted attention wherever he went and held that attention, even if he wasn't talking. He was rich and powerful and self-sufficient, but he was also friendly and kind. While some might think him overpowering, those that knew him saw him as a down-to-earth intellectual genius.

James took a sip. He nodded. "That's interesting."

Regan laughed out loud. "Rick really enjoys your class on Sundays. He's told me a little about you, but I wanted to get to know you myself. I've seen you around church, but"—he shrugged his shoulders—"We're in different generations and 'never the twain shall meet.'"¹

He laughed again. "You've had a strong influence on him, I wanted to make sure it was a good influence." Regan was still laughing. James

¹ From Rudyard Kipling's poem, 'The Ballad of East and West,' (1892)

didn't think he could be nervous in his own home, so maybe the laughter was an attempt to make James and Winona feel at ease. "You're a little older than Rick, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir. Probably by about six or eight years."

"You know, I knew a guy at the university named Britt. He was from Kansas. Boy, could he sing. I was working on my doctorate and didn't have time for any of that foolishness, but one of the other guys in the lab told me about him.

"I went to chapel just hoping he would be singing that day. And he was. He sang scripture, straight from the Bible. With no music. No piano or banjo or guitar. It really moved me. I kept going back just hoping he would be there.

"Then one day he spoke. He presented the gospel in such a clear manner I kept on going just hoping he would be there either speaking or singing." Barber laughed. "Got me in trouble a few times—missing my lab hours. I can't remember the guy's first name."

Winona smiled and the corner of James's mouth turned up.

Regan Barber saw both and his eyes lit up. "You know who I'm talking about?"

"I think that may have been my father," James said. "His name is Reid."

"That's it! That's him!" Barber almost yelled. "No wonder you're such a good teacher. You know, I never got to meet him, he was always running off after the program ended. He never stuck around to talk."

James nodded. "Sounds like him."

"Where is he now? What's he doing?"

"He's a federal judge in Kansas," James responded.

"He did good then. I'm glad to hear that. You know, there was another Britt, too. A few years before him. Conniving cuss. Always had some kind of scam running but never seemed to get into trouble. Always something stupid that made the other guys laugh but irritated the crap out of the administration.

"He stayed just inside the school's ethical boundaries until one day he was almost kicked out of school because of something that happened in the engineering lab.

"They had to run everybody out of the building until the smoke cleared. Couldn't hold classes in the building for about a week. He was told he had to pay for the repairs to the building. The next weekend he

threw a party of some kind and charged people to attend. People went just to see what he was up to.

"Monday morning, he was in the engineering lab rebuilding the wall and ceiling himself. The dean questioned him about it, thinking he wouldn't do a good job. But when it was finished it looked great, and he had even made some improvements to the area.

"They considered kicking him out of school because of the explosion. The review went on for weeks while he worked on the repairs. But he had done such a good job with rebuilding that they dropped the review and never even called for a decision.

"I never heard what he did to cause the explosion, but the instructors in engineering started watching every move he made. I sure wouldn't have wanted all that scrutiny. His projects and papers were picked apart with a fine-tooth comb. Whatever he did was so hush-hush it was frightening.

"What was that guy's name? Was it Hamish or Albus or something with an 's' on the end?" He shook his head trying to remember. "I always thought of a cow when I heard his name."

"Angus?" James asked, laughing to himself this time.

"That's it! Angus Britt!"

"My uncle. I've heard stories about him, but never that one."

Barber watched James with a smile. A slight chuckling sound was coming from James, but he wasn't smiling. He looked more like he was snarling. Regan Barber realized James's scars ran more than skin deep. They effected the muscles and nerves in his face too.

Rick had told his father that James never smiled. He seemed to be content and he talked about life in a positive way, but he frowned all the time. Regan realized quickly that James couldn't smile.

How sad not to be able to show joy or share a glad thought with his expression. Always looking as if he was sad. And with the scars, he looked like he had experienced a lot of pain.

Regan Barber smiled. But what a poker face. And to be a lawyer. Showing no emotion or concern would be an advantage at the bargaining table or in the courtroom.

"Well, let's see if we can find Rick. Come on, young lady." He took Winona's free hand and pulled as he turned into the gathering of people. "Let's see if we can find you some womanly conversation."

Winona let go of her husband's arm and stared into his eyes with concern as Regan pulled her toward a group of young women at a nearby table. He pulled a chair from another table and slid it quickly into the group

of ladies. "Excuse me, ladies," he began, putting his arm around Winona in a fatherly way. "This is Winona Britt. Can she join you?"

The other women welcomed Winona as she sat and continued their conversation with each other. She looked to her husband. She didn't want to be left here with these women she didn't know.

James leaned over to kiss her on the cheek and whispered, "I'll be back soon."

The two men found Rick and two others from the Sunday School class on the steps leading to the open, well-manicured yard below the terrace. A group of children played with a ball in an open area.

Regan talked for a few minutes, then left James in the company of his students.

The men returned to their conversation about a problem one of the guys was having. It had started at work, but soon spilled over into his family. His wife of just a few months was ready to go home to her parents, he was saying, and he didn't know how to rectify the situation.

Alan Milburn told of going to a coworker with his problem and later feeling like the man had stabbed him in the back. The man told someone else, who had openly ridiculed the problem as being petty and juvenile in front of everyone. This made the man with the problem feel worse; as if he had no friend or confidant at work.

Emory Brownfield was giving Alan good advice, so James kept his mouth shut and let these men discuss the options open to his friend. But Alan was reluctant to take action.

As James listened, he realized Alan knew he had made a mistake from the very beginning. But he wasn't willing to acknowledge this error in judgment. Nor was he willing to listen to the good advice he was being given now. He was letting the problem grow and it was sure to explode soon.

"It will all work itself out," Alan said, dismissing everything that had just been said. There was no confidence in his voice either. The group went silent, realizing nothing they were saying was being accepted.

James spoke, "My grandfather liked to tell stories." The others looked at James. He had completely ignored the younger man's problems and was changing the subject so abruptly the others silently questioned his motive.

"One of the stories he told me as a child was about a flock of geese." James changed his speech so that he was talking with the bad grammar and poor pronunciation that his grandfather used. His body language

changed from the quiet humble man they had all seen at church to a more boisterous animated storyteller.

This wasn't the quiet reverent classroom on the upper floor of God's House. This was the great outdoors, and this was a life lesson that needed to hold his audience's attention. With just these men, James reverted to the rowdy demeanor of the soldiers he had known in France, and the friendship he shared with his brothers at home.

His Sunday School acquaintances were now seeing their mentor's comic side, not the refined, logical, prim attorney they knew only as their teacher.

"The chief goose says, 'Geese, it's time far us ta fly south ta warmer weather 'cause winter's a comin'.'"

"One a the geese says, 'I don' wanna go.'

"Ta'ther goose says, 'Wha-da-ya mean, ya don' wanna go?'

James would turn to his right as he spoke for one goose and then take a step forward and turn to his left as he spoke for the other, playing both parts in the conversation.

"'I don' wanna go.'

"'Why don' ya wanna go?'

"'I'm fed up with travelin'. I wanna stay 'ere.'

"'But win'er's a comin'. We's gots ta get ta a warmer place.'

"Again, he said, 'I don' wanna go.'

"'Well, we's a goin'.'

"Another goose says, 'E's gonna be on 'is own.'

"'I don' care,' says the chief goose.

"'Ya'll freeze,' says another goose.

"'I don' care.'

"'Well, we's a goin',,' the chief goose says, an' off they went.

"A day passes an' this goose thinks, 'What 'ave I done? I'm 'ere on my own. They's all gone ta a warmer place. Win'er's comin'. I've made a horrible mistake.'

"Then the goose realized that if 'e started right then, 'e might catch up with ta'thers. So 'e starts a flyin'. But, a course, 'e ain't flyin' in "V" formation an' 'e ain't protected by ta'thers. 'E's on 'is own. 'E 'as ta use more energy, more strength; an' it's gettin' cold an' the wind is catchin' 'im an' pushin' 'im back an' throwin' 'im up an' down."

James stopped his theatrics. "An' then 'is wings freeze.

"'E falls from the sky an' 'e lands straight in the middle of a fresh cow patty. 'E thinks 'e's drownin' in this sticky, moist cow dung. 'E's

thinkin', 'This is the end a me. I'm gonna die in a big pile a cow dump. This is gonna be the end a my life.'

"But then, the warm fresh cow patty begins ta thaw 'im out. 'E thinks, 'There's hope! There's hope! This is amazin'. I'm bein' thawed out; this ain't the end a my life.'

"'E starts ta scream with this great joy that comes from deep inside 'im."

James's chest swells and his arms circle his body in a great outward movement indicating the goose's swelling joyfulness. Then James suddenly freezes. He crouches to show fear and looks around cautiously.

He whispers, "But the screamin' attracts a wildcat.

"That wild cat comes 'long an' 'e starts lickin' the mess off a the goose. 'E's lickin' an' lickin' an' the goose thinks, 'This is amazin'. This is a miracle. Miracles is happenin' far sure. This wildcat is 'elpin' me. Wow!'

"But when the cat 'ad licked off all the dung, an' the goose was clean, that wildcat started to chew on the goose's back. 'E's got 'is paws wrapped 'round that bird 'oldin' 'im down an' 'e's a pullin' them feathers out one after ta'ther an' that goose's wings is flappin' and flappin'. An' them feathers is flyin' all in the air."

James's arms are waving everywhere.

"'E's gonna eat me!' the goose screams."

James stops in mid swing. "But then 'e thought, 'My wings is thawed out, they's workin' an' not frozen anymore. I can fly 'bove the situation.'

"So 'e pulls himself loose an' 'e flies up an' rises an' soars 'bove that wildcat."

James put his arms out and pretends to soar like he did when he played with Travis.

James stopped, frozen in the soaring motion, waiting for a reaction from the man with the problem, or any of those listening. As he pulled his arms to his side and stood up straight, he watched one man, and then another. A few more men had joined the group to listen to the story. But now, no one spoke. A few had puzzled looks on their faces.

James put his hands in his pockets and returned to being the teacher. He continued, "What's the moral of the story?"

He waited again. A few head's shook. One man shrugged his shoulders.

"We all make mistakes. Sometimes they're big mistakes, sometimes they're small. Sometimes we make unwise decisions. Sometimes we don't

do the right thing. That's life. Sometimes we fall into cow patties and life gets messy.

“When you're in the middle of a cow patty, the middle of a problem, don't scream. Don't attract the attention of people you don't know very well. Don't show your problem to someone who says they're your friend, but they're not.

“A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.’¹

“Sometimes these people who say they want to lick the crap off of you aren't your friend. And if you're being chewed on, don't stay there.

“Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing.’²

“Rise above your problems. Apologize to those you need to apologize to. Make amends with those you need to make amends with. Pay your dues, make restitutions. Accept that you did something wrong and admit it to those you care about; those that have to face the consequences of what you did. Then change your behavior. Let your actions show that you know what you did was wrong and that you have changed.

“If you have sinned against your friend, ‘go and tell him (your) fault, between you and him alone.’³ Seek restoration.

“If I made Winona cry because of my bad temper or some ugly words I said, I wouldn't just apologize. I'd show her how sorry I was. I wouldn't bring her flowers and go on with my daily routine. I'd make supper for her, I'd spend time with her, I'd let her know that she was more important to me than my own selfish desires. And I would try really hard not to do it again.”

James stopped. He was out of breath. He sucked in air trying to fill his lungs, but couldn't seem to get enough. He continued.

“If I messed up at work, I'd admit it. I've made some huge mistakes at work. I've cost the company thousands of dollars and tons of man hours. But I've managed to keep my job by learning from my mistakes and not repeating them.

“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.’⁴ If God can't hear

¹ Proverbs 16:28 ESV

² 2 Corinthians 6:17a ESV

³ Matthew 18:15

⁴ Isaiah 59:2

your prayer because of your sin, is it any wonder the sin separates us from others too.

“But, ‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.’”¹

“If you deny there is sin in your life, you’re deceiving no one but yourself. On our best day, we still sin; we still make mistakes, conscious or unconscious. But if we confess our sins, God forgives us. We can agree with God that we screwed up.

“‘Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful ... ready for every good work.’”²

Alan Milton couldn’t look at James. He was ashamed.

“Confessing our sins to others exposes our mistakes in the light. This allows for forgiveness from others. And if they don’t forgive you when you are truly repentant, that’s on them. That’s their sin.

“You still may have to face the consequences of your wrong doing. Stand up and take it like a man. You’ll be respected for that.”

Alan said, “I’ve messed up all the way through this, haven’t I?”

“We’re your friends, Alan,” Emory said. “We want you to be happy. But you’re not going to be happy if you don’t fix things with your wife, and with your boss.”

“It doesn’t matter what your co-workers think of you right now,” James said. “You go back to work and you do your job. You hold your head up and do what’s right. They’ll start to see your honesty, and your integrity, and you can rebuild your reputation.”

James started to cough. He turned from the men and put the back of his wrist over his mouth. The cough was rattling low in his throat and he tried to stop it. He held the discomfort in his chest and his lungs tried to explode as he kept the cough inside.

He looked up to see Regan Barber watching him. Barber nodded approval for instructing the young men correctly, turned, and strolled away.

James couldn’t hold the cough any longer. It came out forcefully and his body shook with the intensity of it. He felt something tear inside and a searing pain shot through his chest. He reacted to the pain by jerking upright.

¹ 1 John 1:9

² 2 Timothy 2:21

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Someone handed him a drink. He shook his head and didn't take it.

He took a step to the side and turned to rest against the concrete ledge of the brick wall. The cough was low in his chest now. He was recovering slowly and able to hold the cough inside again.

He leaned on the ledge more as his head began to clear and the coughing stopped. He took a deep breath and then coughed gently two or three times, then took another breath. He could feel the heaviness in his chest and he knew a bad spell was coming. He would either continue coughing, or he would pass out from lack of oxygen. And he had no way to stop it.

The conversation continued as the group of men talked with one another. Talk turned to a recent newspaper article about a decision the city council had made concerning reducing municipal employees pay. The men talked of the consequences of this decision.

Rick put a hand on James's shoulder. Softly, he asked, "Do you need to sit down?"

James nodded. His eyes were still closed. He was light-headed and he didn't want to open his eyes. He would probably get dizzy. The men around him would get concerned. He didn't want to attract their attention any more than he already had.

Rick guided him gently to sit on the step just a few feet behind them. James leaned against the brick wall and waited for his head to clear and his breathing to steady. Rick sat beside him.

"Do you want me to get your wife," Rick asked.

"No," James responded breathlessly. "I'll be okay. Just give me a few minutes." He knew this was a lie, but the last thing he wanted was to have a breathing attack and become the center of attention. He didn't want his wife pounding on his chest in front of everyone.

It wasn't because he was embarrassed, this had been a part of his life since his injuries. He just didn't want his wife to have to explain what she was doing. She was so timid and self-conscious. She'd probably start crying when people began asking her questions. She took care of him so well; but she didn't like talking to others.

James's body seemed to slump more each time he exhaled. He was losing air and didn't have the strength to hold himself up.

"I'm sorry. It takes me a while to recover when this happens."

"You take your time," Rick said. "We're here if you need anything."

Minutes passed and a few of the men wandered off to refresh their drinks. Rick, Larry, and Justin sat quietly, lined up on the steps like blackbirds on a telegraph line, waiting for James to open his eyes.

James turned his head slowly and looked at the three men with drooping eyes, licked his dry lips, and closed his eyes again. "It's getting better." He lied, licking his lips again. "Can somebody get some water?"

"How about lemonade?" Larry asked.

James shook his head. "Water. Please."

"Okay." Larry got up to trot up the stone steps two at a time headed for the kitchen.

"You feeling better?" Rick asked.

"Yeah."

"What happened?"

James opened his eyes. "Scar tissue won't let my lungs expand and contract the way they're supposed to. It won't let me get a clear breath. It's like," he stopped to cough again. "Like there's something in my lungs that I can't cough out. I start to breathe in, but there's nowhere to put the air."

"This started when they tried to do that surgery, didn't it?" Rick asked.

James moved his head, but the others couldn't tell if it was a nod or if he was saying no.

"How long does the doctor think it will take to get better," Rick asked.

James shook his head. "It may not. My lungs are scarred and there's nothing they can do about it. The most I can hope for is just not to cough."

"Have you had this problem all along?" Justin asked.

"No. The coughing stopped for, I don't know, ten or twelve years. It started back when I went in to have the eye surgery. They used a new gas to knock me out. Apparently, they can't put anything into my lungs but oxygen."

Rick remembered visiting James in the hospital after the anesthesia reaction and commented, "You and Dr. Stewart seem to be close. I've heard he really gets to know his patients."

James tried to laugh. "I think he does, but those Stewart brothers are my cousins. I grew up with Curt around and we went to France together. He's taken care of me since way back when I was first injured. That's been thirteen years."

Justin commented, "I don't think I've ever heard you talk about yourself before."

James sneered. "This is the first time I've seen you outside of church. There is a time and a place for everything. 'A season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die,'¹ 'a time to be silent and a time to speak.'²"

James's mind began to wander, *a time to die*; how appropriate to think of this when he couldn't breathe.

"God wasn't ready to take me on that battlefield. It wasn't my time. But I have to live with the consequences of what happened to me. Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining. 'I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, (sick or healthy,) whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.'³"

"What's it like?" Rick asked a little apprehensively. "Battle. I was too young to go. I watched the men march off to war and I dreamed of going with them. I could imagine myself on the battlefield with drums and trumpets sounding, calling me to move forward and fight."

Rick's bravado soared. "I marched with the men I saw on the street over and over in my head. We were strong and fearless. I knew our courage would hold and the battle was ours."

Rick pumped his fist into the air. "Victory!" Then he laughed. "The dreams of a ten-year-old."

James was still leaning against the wall. "I wish it was that simple. My vision of heroism and adventure was drowned out by the physical demands and the blood. I romanticized about victory and conquest, but the reality was the sobering harsh existence of survival. The true cost of war isn't just the dead bodies, the injured soldiers, and the destroyed land. It's not even the cost of millions and billions of dollars to supply and take care of the troops; it's the souls of the fallen.

"It's those men that never bothered to get to know the Savior. It's the men who turned from God because they thought Jesus couldn't possibly be there with us. It's the ones that went home thinking they had been forgotten by God."

James pushed his eyes open further and looked out toward the mountains. He pulled in a long noisy breath, but his chest never rose. He

¹ Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

² Ecclesiastes 3:7b

³ Philippians 4:11b-13

coughed gently, then started talking again. He didn't know what he was saying, he just wanted to know someone was there with him. Talking kept them listening. They wouldn't leave him, these young men, boys really. They wanted to hear about the war.

"The battlefield would be foggy in the early morning. The muffled sounds of distant gunfire and shells exploding would bring a peaceful...fear. Waiting there in the trench your heart would pound inside your chest. It would pound so hard your ears would throb.

"I wasn't fighting, I was a medic. I didn't have a gun, but I was ready. It was the moment I had trained for, the moment I would know if my courage held or not.

"For if (I remained) silent at (that) time, relief and deliverance for the (men would) arise from another place, (I would) perish. And who knows but that (I) have come to (this) position for such a time as this?"¹

"So, I went into the gas cloud. Just me. I had to do it. I was called for this time in history. I took the truck and I drove straight into it, searching for the trapped men.

"Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."² Those men depended on me. On me! I was the only one."

James looked at the men around him through cloudy eyes. His eyes were clear right now, or at least as clear as they would get. The doctors had been able to do the surgery a month ago. But he saw the yellow-green mist. It was always there. Sometimes heavier than it was now. And behind the mist were these boys. The same age he had been when he went to war. The same age he had been when he drove into the gas.

James remembered being alone in the truck searching for the soldiers trapped in the poison gas during battle. His thoughts of the war always returned to that truck.

Then his thoughts shifted and he remembered being in the trenches with the doughboys. He was only assigned to the front line a few times, but it left an impression on him.

"I'd watch the other soldiers. Sometimes fear showed on their faces. Sometimes it was the resolve for what they had to do. Determination. Anxiety. Uncertainty. Fearlessness.

¹ Esther 4:14

² 1 Corinthians 15:58b

“You couldn’t be in battle very many days when you would realize, ‘I’m not going to make it home.’”

James was jumping back and forth in his thoughts, first on the gas and the truck, then the men in the trenches. His thoughts were baffling, fluid, and his words were even more confusing to the other men.

“They all had the same question etched on their faces. ‘Would they be alive five minutes from now?’ ‘Would their courage hold?’ ‘Would they ever see their families again?’”

He looked at Rick. “But there were no drums. Our signal was a whistle. The first call came and we readied ourselves. The second whistle blew and we knew the time was now. The third whistle.” James stopped talking.

Rick waited. Justin did too. Neither understood the memories James held. Memories he had only talked about with Curt, until now.

James’s chest hurt and his head suffered from the lack of oxygen the breathing problems caused. He didn’t want to tell these men about battle, but he couldn’t stop himself. He wasn’t alone like he had been on the battlefield when he was injured. These men with him were his friends, but could he trust them with his memories? He leaned his head against the wall again and continued talking.

“The men advanced, but I didn’t have to. I had to wait until one of them fell, then I had to move quickly. There was no waiting, though. They started falling the second they cleared the edge.

“If I didn’t move fast enough, they didn’t survive. Sometimes they didn’t survive anyway, no matter what I did. Then the gas would start floating in and some of the men would panic. It was either get out of the trench or be smothered by the gas that dropped into the trenches and stayed. There was no wind in the trenches, nothing to move the gas and blow it away.

“But crawling out of the trench and onto higher ground was certain death.

“The only thing you could do was get your mask on fast and crawl low on the ground with no protection from the enemy’s rifles. With the gas, and the fog, and the bullets whizzing past, and the deafening roar of artillery, and the shaking of the ground when the shells hit...all I could do was follow what I had been trained to do, focus...focus on the injured. Forget about the dead and dying. Ignore the explosions and the bullets and the screams. Move! I had to save those I could.

“I’d pull one to safety but there would be four more withering in pain, three were calling for help, one was crying for his mother, one was trying to crawl back to the sandbags stacked up beside the trench. He was leaving a trail of blood. Men would lay there unconscious and you couldn’t tell if they were alive or dead. I was working on this one guy and if I left him, I knew he would die. But I needed to hurry or somebody else wasn’t going to make it. I worked on one after another. An arm blown off. A hole in his chest. Another’s jaw was gone and he was strangling on his own blood.

“If they could move at all, they were on their own. They had to get to the casualty clearing station themselves. But I had to make the decision who to carry back. If I made the wrong decision, I would arrive at the camp with a dead body and somebody else didn’t get the care he needed. And he died because I had made the wrong decision.”

James grew quiet. His mouth was moving slightly. Rick wondered why, he wasn’t talking and his eyes stared at Justin’s shoulder in front of him.

The others didn’t notice, but James felt his body trembling from lack of oxygen. He couldn’t focus his thinking and the rapidly changing visions in his memories dominated his unconscious thoughts. There were no conscious thoughts.

Larry arrived with the water and handed it toward James, who didn’t respond.

Rick took it. He held it to James’s lips and said, “Here, James, drink some water.”

James did as he was told. He took a sip, stopped, then took another sip. He put his hand on the glass to guide it and drank greedily. When the glass was empty, he laid his head against the stones again and closed his eyes.

“I need to sleep.” He said at a whisper. And in a moment of mental clarity, he asked, “Can you find my wife?”

Rick and Justin sat James on the sofa in Regan’s private den. James leaned heavily on the raised over-stuffed arm. Winona immediately took control. She raised James’s feet onto the sofa and pulled with all of her strength until he was flat on his back with his knees bent against the back of the sofa.

She didn't try to talk to him or get him to follow her instructions. She knew he had been low on oxygen for too long. She loosened his belt and tie, then put her ear to his chest. A hand was raised to rest below his nose, feeling for breath.

Then she stood up, leaned over, and began pounding her fist onto his chest. He moaned, but didn't fight her.

Rick leaned toward Justin, "There's a phone on the desk." Rick pointed to the desk near the window. "Call the hospital. Find Dr. Stewart. Curtis. Tell him what's happening."

"Which hospital?"

"Denver Ridge." Rick was becoming more concerned. Winona's actions were frightening.

"Get Curtis or Joseph. It doesn't matter any of the Stewarts," Rick was alarmed and was afraid Winona was panicking due to the condition of her husband.

Rick stepped beside the woman and grabbed her arm gently, trying to stop her from hurting her husband. She threw his hand off.

"Why don't you let him sleep? He said he needs to sleep," Rick pleaded.

Winona shot him an accusing look. "He needs to breathe," she whispered toward the man beside her. Then she turned back to her husband and quietly said, "Come on, baby, come on. Cough."

She turned to the man beside her, "Help me sit him up."

Rick helped push James to a sitting position and Winona moved to wrap her arms around him. She began pounding on his back as he slumped over her shoulder.

Over and over she pounded. "Now, lay him down."

She pulled one leg over the edge of the sofa and put her knee between his legs. She climbed on top of him, pushing his chest again and again. He began to cough gently. She continued pushing and pounding. He coughed more and the cough continued to grow.

James's wife knelt on the floor beside him and rolled him onto his side. "Get me a towel or something," she demanded. "He's going to throw up." James continued to cough.

Rick returned quickly with a stack of kitchen towels. Winona grabbed one and moved it below James's mouth. He coughed, retched, gagged, coughed, and vomited again.

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Winona wrapped the thick yellowish-brown phlegm in the towel and wiped her husband's mouth. "Do you feel better now?" She asked lovingly, pushing his hair off his face. She was out of breath from the exertion.

He nodded his head and opened his eyes weakly.

"You rest. I'm right here."

James closed his eyes and nodded again.

Rick watched as the violent sickness that held James prisoner, and the aggressive actions of a determined wife, turned into a tender loving scene. Winona stroked her husband's hair gently. James rolled onto his back, taking heavy clear breaths as he relaxed.

Winona wadded the towel and handed it to Rick. "You probably need to throw this away."

Justin hung up the phone. "I got Dr. Joshua. He was the only one at the hospital. He said he'd find one of the others to come out here. It may take a while."

"Don't bother them," James whispered. Winona moved to raise her husband's head and slid onto the sofa so James could rest his head on her lap. She put a hand across his chest so she could feel his breathing. He wrapped his arms around hers.

Justin shrugged. "It's too late. Somebody's going to show up."

Rick and Justin sat down in the chairs opposite the sofa to wait.

James was asleep again, breathing clearly and steadily.

Curt and Joseph arrived together and were escorted into Regan's den. Regan had joined his son and sat talking as James slept. He greeted the doctors as they entered.

Joseph started his examination. He was the doctor charged with veteran's care. He knew the problems veterans with gas injuries faced, and he was accomplished at treating them. He was familiar with James's condition. He had cared for him since his arrival in Denver to attend school more than ten years ago.

"Curt, listen to this."

Curt took the stethoscope from his brother and put the drum to James's chest. He smiled. "It sounds almost clear."

Curt put his hand on Winona's shoulder and patted it softly. She had done well.

She looked at him with expectation.

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Regan wanted to know what was happening. He'd been sitting in this room with his son, Justin, and Larry, for almost an hour waiting for the doctor to arrive. James had been asleep the entire time.

"What's happening?" He asked in his loud demanding voice. "How's he doing?"

"It's a miracle," Curt said. "His lungs sound good. They haven't sounded this clear in months."

Winona commented, "He coughed up a lot."

"Was it the same?" Joseph asked.

"No, it was more...brown. Thicker."

Joseph stood thinking while he watched James sleep. Then he nodded his head and turned to Winona. "I want some more x-rays. Can you have him come in Monday morning?"

"Sure."

"What's going on?" Regan asked again. Loudly.

Joseph, a man that commanded respect himself, ignored the man that had nothing to do with his patient.

"How long has he been out," Curt asked.

"Over an hour," Winona said.

"How long did the coughing last?"

"Not long, but it was strong."

"He was coughing earlier," Rick injected. "Then he talked some, then kind of passed out."

"Did what he say make sense? Could he answer your questions?" Joseph asked.

"Yeah, I mean, sometimes," Rick answered. "He was telling us about the war..."

Justin interrupted, "But his stories were jumping around. Like he couldn't keep his mind on one thing."

The brothers looked at each other. Joseph asked, "How long did he talk?"

"I don't know, a while. He talked quite a bit telling us about battles and what he did."

Rick jumped in, "He got the Medal of Honor, didn't he? How'd he get it? He said you were there."

"Rick!" Regan called, admonishing his son. "Now is not the time."

"It's okay," Curt said. "Yes, I was. He rescued forty-something men from poison gas. He drove a truck into the gas and brought them out. His protective gear was damaged but he kept returning for more men."

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“Is that why his face looks like it does?” Rick wanted to know everything. James had talked and now Rick thought he understood more of what a soldier went through. It wasn’t just stories in the newspaper or in a book anymore. He had found someone who had actually been there. Someone who knew the fear, and the strain, and the struggle of battle.

“Rick!” His father called again. Reproach shot through the man’s eyes. “Stop it!”

Curt looked at the son, he was just a boy in a man’s body.

The doctor spoke to the father. “He’s seen James struggle. He’s seen the result of war.” Curt sighed. “I’ll answer his questions. He doesn’t have to wonder where the scars came from. Everybody questions it. They want to know what happened to him and how much he’s suffered. Rick’s a friend, he needs to know.”

Turning to the three younger men, Curt added, “James doesn’t care who knows. It’s not that he doesn’t want to talk, he’ll talk if you ask him. He just doesn’t see a need to tell people.”

Curt sat down and looked at his brother. “You go on. I’ll stay till he wakes up, then I’ll get them home.”

Joseph nodded, “If his oxygen was that low, he’ll be out for a couple of hours.” He was talking to himself more than to anyone else. Then, turning to Winona, “I’ll be coming off the night shift Monday. Have him there early so I can get home.”

Winona nodded, “Okay.”

Curt sat back in the chair and got comfortable. He looked at Rick. “What did he tell you?”

8

September 1931

Harris, Kansas

A line of trucks arrived mid-morning and began depositing their cargo onto the land. Angus had set aside an area for the temporary office, warehouse, and smith's shop to be occupied by the crew building the new road through town. Large deposits of gravel, sand, and bitumen lay in heaps across the back of the lot.

This road would connect towns to the north, a much-needed addition to the transportation needs of the community. To the south, the road would run through Oklahoma and into Texas, connecting with a major east-west highway.

Locally, though, this would turn a seldom-used dirt road into a paved two-lane thoroughfare. It would allow the town to grow and bring travelers into the community. There was talk of building a new hotel.

Personally, Sarah was conflicted. The paved road would mean the dust would be less of a problem. But the road would run past her door and the increased traffic would mean she would have to be careful walking into town. The additional traffic would also mean more noise, and more hobos would be knocking on her door looking for a handout.

Because the house was large and had been built during more wealthy times, people thought that the family had money. But times were hard now. And with two additional mouths to feed, the family had an additional strain on the budget. William was happy for the additional money Joshua and Joseph were sending.

They had enough food. William saw to that. But repairs and upkeep at the house and the medical clinic were needed. What William could do, with the help of his boys, was adequate to keep the warmth inside during the winter. But the house was showing signs of disrepair. Hope that Mr.

Jacobson could take care of some of the issues over time settled Sarah's thoughts on the matter.

Now, as the trucks continued to rumble past the house, Sarah felt uneasy. She stood on the porch with Bonnie Grace as the child told her grandmother what was happening just a short distance down the road.

"There's five, six, seven big trucks. Some have lumber on the back and there's some kind of machinery. It's all lined up in the middle of the road."

Whop. Thud. The noise of each piece hitting the ground, along with noises from the trucks themselves, echoed in the still morning air. Sarah jumped each time there was a loud noise.

"There's men pulling the stuff out of one truck and passing it to other men who are stacking it to the side. The men on the truck don't look like they're paying attention to where they throw it."

"One of the guys has some post-hole diggers out and is starting to dig. They've got a big round pole—it looks like a telegraph pole, only shorter. Gosh, he dug that hole fast. He's finished. It must not be very deep."

The child stopped and watched a moment, then her eyes widened and her face showed understanding. "I know what they're doing. They're building a pole barn."

"I've got things to do," Sarah said. She turned to go into the house.

"Can I stay and watch?" Bonnie Grace asked.

"Stay on the porch. I don't want you going over there and getting in the way," her grandmother replied.

"I will."

9

Sept 1931

Denver, Colorado

The Northern Rocky Railway had ambitious plans to upgrade and expand its lines. The plans had been in the works for years, but with the recent downturn of the economy, board members knew they had to be efficient and more competitive than ever.

It had been ten years since the Esch-Cummins Act which returned the railroads to private operation after three years of governmental control during the war.

The Esch-Cummins Act also authorized the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to oversee the consolidation of railroad lines, creating fewer and more productive systems. Northern Rocky had profited from this endeavor by acquiring several smaller railroads and merging with Quebec, Ottawa, and MacKenzie (QOM). The ICC regulated shipping rates and oversaw the railroads' financial operations along with acquisitions and mergers. The Labor Board regulated wages and settled disputes.

James had been a successful part of several of these meetings. He was well versed in governmental regulations and knew how to navigate the uncompromising high standards of the ICC.

He was now tasked with securing approval for a crucial rail line that would connect several industrial towns which had formerly been served by smaller branch lines. This extension was vital if these companies expected to survive during the current economic conditions. This line would also streamline commerce and avoid the smaller lines which required transfer of goods at other locations.

James knew that navigating the bureaucracy of the ICC would require more than just a firm handshake and a persuasive argument. He needed a strategy that addressed the commission's concerns and promoted

more than just the railroad's stance on the issues. The towns and companies involved had expressed their interest in the project while landowners had their own misgivings. James needed to declare to everyone involved the importance of this line through these particular towns, the benefit to all involved, and ease the landowner's concerns.

He began by gathering data to support his case. James contacted engineers, economists, and local business leaders to compile reports on how this would impact the economy. He promised job creation, and planned to speak on safety matters. He knew that a well-documented proposal would have a positive impact on his negotiations.

James also recognized the importance of understanding the proposal from the ICC commissioner's perspective. The attorney studied the commissioner's previous rulings and noted the ICC's priorities, such as economic stability, public safety, and environmental concerns. James tailored his approach to support the ICC standards.

As the day of the hearing approached, James knew he was ready. He had been in contact with everyone that would ultimately be involved with the project, including construction workers and the owners of many parcels of land that would be purchased through eminent domain laws. Everything was ready.

Don Cryer walked into James's office early one morning with a cup of coffee for each of them, just as he did every morning. He sat down to talk.

"James, are you ready for the ICC meeting?"

"Yes, sir. I'm ready."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"I've read your proposal. It looks good. You convinced me. But are *you* ready?"

James looked at the man questioningly. "I don't understand."

"James," Cryer began. "I don't want to pry where I shouldn't, but you haven't been the same since you were sick last summer. I'm not complaining. You're doing your work just as well as you always have, but you seem distracted."

James nodded. "I guess I am."

"What's going on?"

James sighed heavily. "Disappointed, I guess. A little discouraged. When God healed my lungs ten years ago, I thought it was done. I thought I was through being sick. Then I had that reaction to the anesthesia and I

knew the underlying problem was still there. But I got better and hoped that would be the end of it. We know not to use any type of gas during the eye surgeries again. But the cough stayed. I've tried to ignore it, hoping it would go away." He looked Cryer in the eye. "It hasn't."

"I haven't heard you cough."

"I do, especially late at night, or if I move around too much. I can't run with Travis anymore. I can't get enough air. The question is always in my head. When will I cough so much that I can't breathe? When is it going to happen again like it did years ago? When is it going to happen again, like it did at the Barber home?"

"You can't live in fear, James."

"I know. I try. 'You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.'¹ I trust God, I do. But I also know that 'All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. (God) does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?''²

"I have to accept and deal with this, probably for the rest of my life."

"Joseph said of all the patients he has that were affected by the gas, I'm the only one whose body reacts this way. Everyone else coughs. Most of them pass out from it. I'm the only one he's seen that gets better for long stretches of time. Honestly, Don, most of the guys I've met don't want to live."

James stopped to remember a conversation just a few weeks ago with a man in the waiting room at the hospital. He had told James that he was finished. He wasn't going to put himself through this pain anymore. Just a few days later James had read in the newspaper that the man had killed himself.

He wished he had told somebody what the man said. Maybe they could have stopped what he did.

"But I want to live. And I want to know what God is doing. Did he heal me or didn't he? I've seen what the other guys go through—the ones at the hospital who have damaged lungs. Some of them can't go a day without collapsing from lack of air. Some are dying of lung cancer or..."

James stopped suddenly, lost in thought. "I've known several that have died of lung disease. I know of at least two that simply suffocated, and some have killed themselves."

¹ Isaiah 26:3 ESV

² Daniel 4:25

He continued, "I'm not scared of dying. What I'm scared of is putting my family through that torture. Poor little Travis wouldn't understand. He doesn't understand when I can't stop coughing now."

"Thank you for telling me. I get it now. I understand why you can't keep your mind where it needs to be. And now I know better how to pray for you," Cryer said. "How are your eyes? Did the surgery take care of the problems?"

"They're okay. Everything's foggy, but I can see. I've got one little spot,"—James pointed up and to his right—"here in the upper right corner that has some obscured vision. As long as it doesn't move, my vision's okay. They get dry sometimes and weirdly sensitive to cold," James gave another sigh. "I've got some eye drops to use. I should be able to go another year, maybe two, before I need surgery again."

James's supervisor smiled. "What did Travis think about the bandages?"

James tried to smile. Don recognized the slight upturn of the corner of his lip. "He wanted some of his own. He thought it was a spiffy game of Blind Man's Bluff. This was the first time he's been old enough to really pay attention to what's happening to me. He was what? Not quite two last time I had that surgery." James stopped smiling. "He just discovered that my hands look different from his. No, he's noticed it before, but this is the first time he's asked about them."

"Was that hard?"

"No. He just asked a lot of questions. We compared the size of our hands and counted fingers. It's all good. He knows now. Hopefully we won't have to talk about it again, at least until he's big enough to know the whole story."

Cryer nodded and stood up. "I'm sorry, James." Don hesitated before speaking again. "You're going to be able to handle that meeting alone?"

"Yes, sir. I can do it."

"Good man." Cryer left, shutting the door behind him.

10

September 1931 Boulder, Colorado

The day of the hearing arrived, and James stood before the stoic commissioners, ready to present his case. Why the commissioners had chosen this out of the way location to hold this meeting was a mystery to James.

James had arrived early to set up his tripod and charts, and to get himself organized. Then he greeted each of the commissioners as they entered the room, shaking hands with them and looking into their faces as he learned their names and introduced himself. But as he began the presentation, he could feel the men looking at him. He always had a few moments of self-consciousness when he had to speak before others. He knew this feeling of being scrutinized by every eye would pass as soon as he started talking. He took a deep breath and began.

“Good morning, commissioners,” His voice was steady. “Today, I present to you a proposal that holds the potential to revitalize an area of the Nebraska, Kansas, and Colorado tri-point industrial heartland. It will provide much-needed employment opportunities during these challenging times, and open the door for more manufacturing in this area.”

Commissioner Mathis, a formidable man at the center of the panel, leaned forward. “Mr. Britt, we are keenly aware of the economic difficulties. However, our primary concern is the safety and welfare of the public. Can you address the potential safety risks associated with this expansion?”

James nodded. “Absolutely, Commissioner. We have incorporated advanced engineering techniques to ensure the highest standards of safety. For instance, we have planned reinforced embankments here”—James pointed to a map behind him—“and here. We’re going to employ modern

signal systems to prevent accidents. Check page twelve in your proposal for the exact engineering specifications.”

James continued to outline the benefits of the rail line extension, emphasizing how it would revitalize struggling industrial towns and provide a much-needed boost to the local economy. As James spoke, he noticed the commissioners nodding thoughtfully. One commissioner kept his head in the papers constantly and never looked at James.

James knew that securing their approval required more than just a convincing presentation.

After the hearing, he approached Commissioner Hart, who was known for his environmental concerns.

“Commissioner Hart,” James began, “I understand that the ecological impact is a concern for you. We’ve included measures to mitigate any potential harm to the local environment. We’re especially considering that area south of Curley Mountain where the damn project is already impacting the area. It’s a delicate zone that we have studied in detail. Please read our proposed adjustments in the environmental section. I think that particular area is addressed on page twenty-three.”

Commissioner Hart raised an eyebrow. “That’s reassuring to hear, Mr. Britt. I appreciate your attention to these details.”

James gathered his charts and graphs as he stopped to answer brief, random questions, and then left to return to his office.

11

October 1931 Denver, Colorado

“James, you did it,” Cryer said as he walked in the door with the coffee.

James looked up from his research.

“The proposal passed the commission. The rail lines are approved through Lexington, Sterling, and Greenlee. We’re still pending on Rifle but I don’t see any problem with that one. It was the simplest to begin with.”

It had been several weeks since James stood before the ICC with the company’s proposal. James had forgotten about his presentation and moved on to concentrate on his next project, an inter-railroad agreement with Missouri Randolph. He would travel to a small town outside St. Louis to meet with representatives there and negotiate their use of Northern Rocky lines. The proposal received by mail had all the earmarks of being beneficial for Missouri Randolph with little to no compensation for Northern Rocky.

Northern Rocky wasn’t going to share its rail lines, and if there was going to be consideration at all, Missouri Randolph would have to bend to the will of the larger railroad. Originally, the board didn’t seem to care if the lines merged or not, but continued harassment from the smaller line was wearing the board down. They were beginning to consider the possibility. So, James was being sent to ‘feel the atmosphere’, and if possible, sway the owner to accept a more agreeable proposal from Northern Rocky.

Missouri Randolph was a small family-owned outfit with little interstate or commercial use. The economic challenges of the last few years had taken its toll on the tiny business and the family was hoping to expand and save their enterprise. The railroad catered mostly to local, in-

state commerce and passenger service. All were short runs between small towns across the state and just over the line into Kansas and Arkansas.

At least one of the Northern Rocky board members was hoping for a take-over of the struggling line. It still wouldn't be much of an economic advantage but it would give Northern Rocky a visible presence in the area to continue expansion among other smaller lines. The board saw the ultimate goal as dominance across the region. James had been tasked with arranging this.

"Well, that's good news," James said, taking his mind off the possible take-over and returning his thoughts to expanding their own lines.

"Are you going to be able to do this," Cryer pointed toward the map and papers laid in front of James.

"Sure. Why wouldn't I?"

"You're going to have to travel and be away from home for more than a week. If you need help, there won't be any." Cryer was concerned. He had taken to heart what James said about coughing and not being able to breathe. He had prayed every morning for James's complete and absolute healing.

The two men had not mentioned the previous conversation again. Now, Don worried about James being in a distant city alone.

"I'll be fine," James said. "It hasn't been that bad the last few weeks. I'm trusting Jesus to take care of me. 'And my God will meet all (my) needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.'"¹

Don replied, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."² I have to trust your judgment. When do you leave?"

"Not for another two weeks."

Don continued, "I'm leaving tomorrow for El Paso. I've got to make the connection with the Mexicans. I'll probably be there a while."

"I wish I was doing that one. It sounds like fun."

"I'd let you have it but Rosenberg's going to be there. He thinks I have to be everywhere he is." Don Cryer rolled his eyes. "I won't see you again before you leave. Can I pray for you now?"

"Sure."

Don Cryer had been a Christian since his youth, but he hadn't known what it really meant to trust the Lord until he met the Britt family. After a

¹ Philippians 4:19

² 1 Peter 5:7

week isolated on a train with the Britts thirteen years ago, he had prayed to recommit himself to the Lord's service.

He had watched as Reid delt with fear and forgiveness while taking care of James, who was recently discharged from the hospital. James had severe chemical burns to his face, hands and lungs. He struggled to breathe and couldn't hold securely to anything with his damaged hands. Reid often had to feed him because he couldn't hold the fork. He coughed constantly and would pass-out from lack of oxygen. Yet he talked and joked with the other men and seemed happy to be alive.

Reid's other son, Blade, was a conundrum. He was the youngest of the Britt men, yet he had an air of authority that matched any man of great power. His perception and understanding of events surrounding him was more than unusual for a youth his age, as was his strength and skill with weaponry.

James's uncle had recently suffered a job loss and a failed relationship with the woman he still loved. But he was a responsible, jovial man that kept the conversation lively. And James's grandfather seemed to take care of everyone despite his advanced years and an injury to his hand that had left it gnarled and twisted with arthritis.

All five men had been confident and sure of their position in God's Kingdom. They spoke openly of knowing Jesus personally, and trusted the Lord God with everything they cherished. Cryer had gotten to know these men well, and had hired the uncle to fill a position with security on the railroad. They had become close friends. Later, James was hired while still a student at the university. He was now a valued part of the company's legal team.

"I'll pray for you too," James said.

The two men knelt by a couple of chairs at the table and prayed for each other's travels and business ventures. Then Don asked the Lord to clear James's lungs so there would be no more breathing problems—ever. The two men stood, gave each other a brief hug and slap on the back, and Don Cryer walked away. James returned to his desk, reassured that he could travel without illness.

James heard the Spirit. *"He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."*¹

James sneered. "Thank you, Lord."

¹ Luke 4:10-11

12

October 1931 Reastown, Missouri

Missouri Randolph had served the local communities in Missouri, eastern Kansas, and northern Arkansas for decades. It had provided vital transportation for both people and goods. However, the economic pressures of the time were taking their toll, and the future of the line looked uncertain.

The negotiations for Missouri Randolph's expansion were set to take place in a small town just outside St. Louis, where the local railroad's headquarters were located.

James Britt arrived in Reastown accompanied by a junior lawyer and a financial analyst. They were joined by Ward Randolph, the owner and negotiator for MRR, along with his attorney and his younger brother.

The atmosphere was casual as the two sides sat down at the negotiating table. Ward Randolph, a man in his early fifties with a weathered face and kind eyes, would be the man making the decisions today. He had received a copy of Northern Rocky's counter proposal the previous afternoon. He read the brief preliminary agreement and knew Northern Rocky wasn't interested in sharing their rail lines.

Randolph wouldn't be happy with the outcome of this meeting, James knew this. But James was certain he would like the payout.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Britt. Thank you for coming," Ward began, his voice steady but strained with apprehension. James immediately knew that this man wasn't as sure of himself as he seemed in his letters or on the telephone.

"Please, have a seat. Would you like a glass of water?"

"Thank you." James made himself as comfortable as he could under the scrutinizing eyes that were assessing him from across the table.

“Missouri Randolph Railways has been a cornerstone in this area for many years. We want to ensure that any agreement reached today will protect the company and our employees, and will continue to serve the people of the MArK.”

“The MArK?” James questioned

“Missouri, Arkansas, and Kansas.”

James nodded understanding.

The negotiations began. They were complex, with both sides presenting their arguments and concerns. The junior Randolph spoke with confidence as he charted the future course of the small railway, as he saw it. The Northern Rocky team patiently listened.

James retorted by outlining Northern Rocky's plans for investment and modernization, which would improve efficiency and expand services. Ward was surprised by the investment of the larger railway company and concerned about potential layoffs and the impact on his employees.

He didn't seem to understand that only a merging of the two lines would accomplish what Northern Rocky was proposing. Maybe he hadn't read the counter proposal carefully.

“I understand your desire for modernization, Mr. Britt,” Ward said, leaning forward. “But we're not looking to upgrade. Our small company can handle the business in this area.”

Then his face seemed to acknowledge what was being proposed and he stopped to look at his companions without speaking. Then he turned back to James. The conversation went back and forth again as reasoning was discussed, ideas debunked, and cooperation re-established. They ended the day with multiple scenarios on the table.

The next morning Ward Randolph walked into the meeting alone with only his copy of the counter proposal. He didn't wait to sit before he started speaking.

“You sound like you want to take over the company.” He waved the papers over the table. “I'm not totally opposed to this, but what assurances can you give us that our employees won't lose their jobs? Many of them have been with us for decades, and they are the heart and soul of Missouri Randolph Railways.”

James tried to take a deep breath but couldn't pull in enough air. He coughed briefly, stopping to take a sip of water. “Not now, Lord, please, not now,” James silently prayed. His chest began to hurt, but he pressed on. His voice was low and steady as he internally dealt with the sudden but continuing pain.

“Mr. Randolph, I assure you that we value the experience and dedication of your employees. Our proposal includes retraining programs and opportunities for all current employees to continue working under the Northern Rocky banner. We believe your employee’s knowledge of the local routes and customers is invaluable.”

James coughed again, but continued with the negotiations.

Subjects of potential shipping, higher prices, and less rail stops were debated. Regulatory issues were discussed, along with incorporating the MRR administration into the Northern Rocky corporate offices, along with possible internal conflicts.

As the negotiations continued, James and Ward found common ground. They discussed the specifics of retraining the employees, the timeline for upgrading equipment and rail lines, and the integration of Missouri Randolph into the Northern Rocky network. James had the junior attorney make notes on everything, assuring that any changes to the final contract would be noted. Nothing said would be forgotten. Both sides made concessions as James focused on his ultimate goal: acquisition of Missouri Randolph.

After hours of discussions, a deal was reached. James and Ward shook hands, sealing the agreement that would see Missouri Randolph Railways become part of the Northern Rocky family. The local employees would keep their jobs, and the community would benefit from improved services, scheduling, and infrastructure. A member of the Randolph family would serve as a non-voting member of the board, and the family would receive a one-time buy-out payment with a bi-yearly percentage of the company’s profits for the next five years. After that, they would be issued shares in the company. Approval from the ICC was all that remained.

James wasn’t feeling any better physically as they completed the agreement. He had been coughing and having trouble breathing all afternoon, although his thinking didn’t seem to be affected.

When he returned to his hotel room later that evening. His chest still hurt, but he had stopped coughing and, while he didn’t feel like he was getting enough oxygen, he had been able to focus and hold intelligent conversations with Randolph. As he sat on the edge of the bed to remove his boots, he was surprised at how light headed he felt. Bending over caused his head to spin. He leaned back and let himself fall to the bed. Here, he passed out.

The news of the agreement spread quickly through Reastown. While there were mixed feelings about the change, many were hopeful for a

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brighter future. The Randolph family was happy with the deal made, and so was Northern Rocky.

The next morning James woke to the sound of his junior associate pounding on his door. He didn't know what had happened the day before, but at least he felt well enough to travel today. He had breakfast with his companions and left town knowing that the Randolph family had made a good decision, and Northern Rocky would benefit.

James continued to Topeka with his associates. There, he switched trains and headed for Harris. He tried to stop in Harris each time he traveled through Kansas. This trip, he would only spend twenty-four hours with his father, then he would continue home to Denver.

13

October 1931 Harris, Kansas

Reid awoke. “Lord, today, ‘in view of (your) mercy, (I) offer (my body) as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to (you)—this is (my) true and proper worship. Do not (allow me to) conform to the pattern of this world, but (may I) be transformed by the renewing of (my) mind. (Grant me the wisdom to discern and embrace your) good, pleasing and perfect will.

“For by the grace (you have) given me, (remind me) not (to) think of (myself) more highly than (I) ought, but rather (to think of myself) with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith (you have bestowed upon me.)”¹

He pulled his feet over the bed and sat up. Putting his fists into his lower back, he stretched his shoulders back, pressing in on the small of his back. Then he let his hands fall to the bed behind him and he closed his eyes, relaxing.

Early morning movement was difficult. His back became stiff from lack of movement during the night. But he needed that rest. By the end of the day his spinal movement was constricted and painful. Lying down allowed time for his back to decompress. The stiffness didn't go away, but the pain usually did.

This morning, the pain was still there. If William were home, he would ask the doctor to come for therapy, which usually helped. But the doctor had gone to the home of a polio patient this morning with Ayiana.

Putting his robe on, Reid made his way to the back porch to shave and wash his face. Then he took his time getting dressed. It was Saturday. He had some reading to do right after breakfast, but other than that, he

¹ Romans 12:1-3

could spend the day taking care of himself. His back would feel better tomorrow.

He also needed to pick James up at the railroad station later this morning. He was passing through town, going home from a business meeting near St. Louis. He was stopping for one night, but that was enough time to catch up and see his family briefly. James stopped every time he passed this direction on business.

By the time Reid made it to the kitchen, Kimi had scrambled eggs and the coffee was made. Reid took a couple of slices of bread from the pie safe and made himself a scrambled egg sandwich. He really hated the taste of this bread. It was supposed to be a modern convenience—pre-sliced bread—and a great accomplishment in the baking industry. But it tasted nothing like the bread Ainena or Ayiana made.

Ayiana didn't have time to make bread very often. Her nursing duties kept her busy and traveling the surrounding counties most of the time. Many days she would leave at first light and return home after dark.

She loved her job though. Last night, she had told him that she planned to head toward the Peoria home at the southern edge of the district to check on two members suffering from polio. It was a long drive, but she felt the family needed support and encouragement. She wouldn't stay long and would be home soon after lunch. At the last minute, William had decided to go with her and had called her late last night to ask her to pick him up as she passed his house.

Sarah would make Reid a loaf of sourdough each time she made one for her family. He appreciated her thoughtfulness and tried to let her know how grateful he was with his words. But he also tried to show his love in actions too. He would bring her fruit when he found it at Tendal's Grocery, and he made sure she never ran out of coffee or tea.

Every day he would stop by her house to check on her, like a son might do for his mother. William didn't make it home every evening and Reid wanted to make sure Sarah and the children had everything they needed. He had done this during the final months of Thomas's life, too.

Now that the Jacobsons were living there and helping, he wasn't quite as concerned. He continued this habit though. He knew William was taking care of his mother, but she was the closest thing to a mother Reid had. He felt the need to maintain their close connection.

While at the Stewart home each morning, Reid would have coffee with Mr. Jacobson and go over the work that needed to be done on the property. Berel started his day with work around the house. He would be

there, and could meet with Reid before the judge went to the courthouse. This routine would change in spring when the sharecropper needed to be in the fields early.

The Jacobsons had gotten along so well with Sarah and William that, when it was decided they would stay on as housekeeper and sharecropper, Sarah had allowed them to clean out the extra room near the kitchen.

The room was originally planned for use by Sarah's father, but he never moved in. Since he wasn't using it, it had become a junk room for all the discarded and unused furniture, books, and outdated medical and kitchen supplies.

Now the room was cleaned out and furniture had been moved from upstairs rooms to make this area comfortable for the hired couple. The bed and sleeping area were against the inside wall. A nice seating area had been arranged near the small fireplace that was flanked by a window on either side looking toward Cleve's (sorry, Esa's) house and town.

The Jacobsons had almost become part of the family. Sarah and William welcomed them, but the Jacobsons seemed standoffish. They hesitated to accept invitations to attend social gatherings with the Stewarts and, while Sarah and Perla had become good friends, the Jacobsons seldom voiced their concerns or opinions about anything.

This morning Sarah had put a couple of buttered biscuits and a slice of ham on a plate near the stove. She had covered them with a dish towel awaiting Reid's arrival.

Bonnie Grace had taken her little dog, Nellie, to the porch facing the road crew's work area. Bonnie Grace liked to watch the big trucks and the activity as they loaded and unloaded gravel and sand in piles behind the shed. Often the drivers would wave at her. On at least three occasions, one of the drivers had come to say hello while he waited his turn at the loading area.

There was a lot of activity this morning. The blacksmith was clanging away at something he was repairing and two trucks waited for a flatbed to move so they could unload gravel. Nobody could seem to find the driver of the flatbed. Bonnie Grace had even seen one of the drivers bang on the privy door looking for the truck's driver. Eventually, one of the other drivers had moved the truck to the side, blocking Bonnie Grace's view of the smith's shop.

The doctor's daughter sat on the worn blue painted, wood plank floor holding the dog against her and watching the activity.

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One of the men saw her and waved. She faintly heard him yell, "Good morning, Bonnie Grace."

She smiled widely and waved back. This was Homer. They had visited several times. Every time he came to talk, he had given her a pretty colored rock he had found in the massive pile that kept growing and shrinking by the day.

Mrs. Jacobson came onto the porch. "Bonnie Grace, your grandmother wants you to come help her make some pumpkin pies. She said Kimi is coming. When Kimi gets here, you come inside with her."

"Yes, ma'am." Bonnie replied, looking up at the woman.

"Do you want me to help you up? Kimi is on her way."

"No, ma'am," Bonnie Grace said. "I can do it."

Perla nodded to the child and turned to go back into the house. She looked across the pasture to see Kimi coming down the road. "There she comes."

"I see her," the child said. But she didn't get up.

Perla continued into the house.

Bonnie Grace began to push herself to her knees as she grabbed her crutches. She struggled, but she made it to her feet while holding to a rocking chair. She positioned the crutches under her arms and saw Uncle Reid's car coming down the road behind Kimi.

Kimi stepped aside and waved as her father passed. The car slowed to make the turn onto the road being paved. The asphalt had not been laid yet, and the road was torn up by the trucks and equipment. He had to drive slowly.

Reid waved at Bonnie Grace and pulled over so he could yell at the child.

"Would you tell your grandmother I won't be by today. James is coming in on the morning train. I'm going to run some errands and then pick him up."

She was barely able to hear his rough low voice, but she yelled back, "Yes, sir. I'll tell her."

Reid continued into town, stopping at the hardware store and then Tendal's Grocery. He talked with the owner, Michael Tendal, made his purchases, and went back to the Chrysler sedan to throw the items into the back seat. He arrived at the train station as he heard the train's whistle blow in the distance.

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

James stepped off the train and immediately spotted his father. James dropped his small bag and they hugged briefly. Picking up the bag, they continued to the automobile.

Reid said, "What were you doing in St. Louis?"

"I wasn't exactly in St. Louis. I was in a little place called Reastown."

Reid turned toward his son. He knew that town. He had been there when he worked undercover for the Department of Justice. "What were you doing there?"

"The railroad merged with a smaller line based out of Reastown, and I was there to take care of the negotiations."

Reid turned in his seat to check the road before pulling onto Railroad Avenue. Thoughts of Reastown filled his mind.

"Is there a little park next to the railroad station with these big oak trees that have massive limbs that hang onto the ground?" he asked.

"Yeah, there was," James replied. "How'd ya know?"

"I was in that little town once. You don't see trees like that just anywhere. The station master told me they were over a hundred years old."

"When was that?" James asked.

"1905," Reid replied. He made the turn toward Esa's and Sarah's homes and passed the medical clinic.

"I guess now they're a hundred twenty-six years old."

They both chuckled.

James spotted the road construction equipment and shed in the distance and asked, "What's all that?"

"They're using the corner of our land to store supplies and equipment. Trucks roll in and out of there all day long six days a week. I don't know how much..."

There was a flash in front of them and Reid immediately slammed on the breaks. Before the car came to a stop the concussion of the explosion hit the car and the windshield cracked with the impact of a few rocks, then it exploded as Reid lost control of the car.

The car was thrown into a pile of dirt that had been pushed to the side of the road as Reid's body pushed hard against the door. The Chrysler came to a sudden stop. Both men were propelled into the dash and then backward from the impact.

Reid's hands were still on the steering wheel and he now rested his head against the top, recovering from the force of the collision. The echoing of the blast caused Reid's ears to hum.

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James recovered faster. "Dad." James put his hand on his father's shoulder and leaned toward him. "Are you okay?"

"Huh?" Reid wasn't sure what James said. "Yeah, I'm..." Reid looked toward James and saw Sarah's house over his son's shoulder. The back side was scattered with rock and lumber. Windows were busted out and a truck bumper was on the roof of the porch. "Oh, no!"

James turned quickly to see what disturbed his father.

Reid started to get out of the car but fell when his feet hit the dirt.

"Dad!" James yelled again and got out of the car to run to the driver's side to help his father. Thick dust and ash floated in the air, filling his nostrils and stinging his eyes.

"I'm okay. This ground's uneven. We've got to check on Sarah." Then he remembered Kimi. "Kimi's helping Sarah bake pies."

James got his father to his feet and handed Reid his cane, then he took off running for his aunt's house. The judge moved as quickly as he could toward the house. But his legs were trembling and his back hurt worse than it had that morning. He was having trouble keeping his balance. He put a hand to his head and felt the bump, but there was no blood. He kept moving.

Watching the fire burn at the workmen's shed, he noticed overturned and crushed trucks scattered a distance away. The explosion had spread debris for probably three or four hundred feet.

Reid saw James enter the house by climbing over something and then pulling himself up to avoid two steps. Reid knew he wouldn't be able to enter the house this way.

The town's fire bell began ringing at a distance behind him. Help would be here soon.

Reid made it to the house and he slowed to survey the damage all around him. The workman's shed was completely gone and a large crater lay where the shed had been. One truck lay on its side in the field to the east. It was on fire. Another lay upside down and crushed, blocking the road to his house. Part of a truck was in the field across the road, and part lay near Sarah's house.

Sarah's house had taken a big part of the explosive force. Windows were out on two sides of the house. The porch supports had been knocked out in several places and the wood siding was damaged, chipped, and burned in spots.

"Thank you, Lord," Reid said out loud, at least the house had not caught on fire.

He continued around the side of the house that had taken the worst damage, headed for the brick steps to the porch.

His ears were clearing and he now heard a faint whine. He stopped to put his hands over his ears tightly, then released them. The whine was still there. Pulsating and unsteady.

Reid looked around. Nellie was laying in the yard. Reid knew she was dead. "Oh, Lord," Reid said softly. "I'm going to have to tell Bonnie Grace her puppy is dead."

He turned around and, there behind an overturned rocking chair, sat Bonnie Grace. "No!" Reid yelled and began moving toward the steps.

He got to the child and let himself fall to the floor. She was looking at him, her eyes wide and full of fear.

Vehicles were arriving to help and people were swarming out of the cars and trucks. Men gathered around the fire truck and began pumping to build pressure so the water in the truck's tank could be sprayed on the fire that remained around the crater.

Reid went to touch Bonnie Grace and she whispered, "Don't."

The judge stopped to look Bonnie Grace over again. She was sitting against the wall, in an upright position. She had two iron rods sticking out of her at different angles. One protruded from her stomach only about two inches. The other was slightly longer and stuck out from her lower ribs.

Reid looked her over closely. She was pinned to the wall.

"Oh, honey," Reid whispered. "I don't know if I can get you off." He began to push the chair away from her and it stopped on the edge of the porch beside them.

"It's okay," she whispered back. "Just stay with me, please."

She didn't appear to be in pain. She looked frightened and—Reid hesitated—unnaturally calm.

"I'm here. I'm not going anywhere."

She was leaning on one hand and the other was on her body with the rod sticking out between her fingers.

Reid turned around and fell against the wall beside his nephew's daughter. He slid over, took her right hand in his, and got as close to her as he could, touching her shoulder. He could see the blood stain on her dress growing. The blood was beginning to pool in her lap and run down her leg onto the floor. He laid his face gently against her head. That was the best he could do. He wanted to hug her, to hold her close. But he couldn't.

William and Ayiana were both gone, and there was no way to contact them. He didn't know what to do for her. She needed a doctor right away. If nothing was done soon, she would surely die.

"Bonnie, honey, I know you know Jesus, but have you accepted him as your Lord and Savior?" Reid asked gently.

"Yes sir. Daddy and I prayed last Sunday night. I accepted him as my Savior then. Daddy said I can be baptized when the weather warms up next spring."

Silent tears were on the child's face, but she was calm. So calm.

"That's going to be great. You're going to be so excited when you come up out of that water," Reid explained. "Do you know why Jesus is your Savior? What did he save you from?"

Reid could hear the noise in front of him, and he could see the commotion at the work site from the corner of his eye, but he wasn't looking that way. His attention was on Bonnie Grace. Men and women were yelling instructions and comments about what they found. No one had come close to them yet. Reid was glad they were being left alone.

"Sin," she answered.

"Do you know what else he saves you from?" Reid asked.

She gently shook her head. "I'm scared."

"I know. He saved you from death," Reid continued to caress the girl. He wiped a tear from her cheek. "'(Jesus) will wipe every tear from (our) eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'"¹

Reid knew that the child understood death. She had watched her grandfather die a slow death over the last few years. And she understood clearly that she had never known her mother because her mother was dead. She had died when Bonnie Grace was born.

"You can't die, Bonnie Grace, because Jesus has a new place for you to live. You're going to live in heaven with him and with your mother. You will finally get to see your mother. She's there waiting for you with your grandfather.

"You know, I don't remember my mother. She died when I was a baby. When I go to be with Jesus, I'll get to see my mother, too.

"There's no reason to be scared. I'm going to stay with you right up until Jesus takes you to be with him. Do you remember how your

¹ Revelation 21:4-5a

grandmother stayed with your grandfather just before he died. She was holding his hand when Jesus took him home. I'm going to hold yours.

"Jesus said, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.'¹ Jesus wants you with him. He wants me too. We'll be there together real soon."

Reid watched as Bonnie Grace's breath became shallow and he thought he saw a whisper leave her body. Her eyes stared straight ahead.

Esa came around the corner of the house quickly. He stopped when he saw his father. "Oh, no."

James, Luke, and Stephen were right behind Esa.

Tears were in Reid's eyes. There was commotion everywhere as people worked to get the fires out and search for those injured. But Reid didn't hear any of it.

He closed his eyes. Until now he hadn't realized he had cuts on his face and one hand. Now he was feeling them. He lifted his hand to look at it blindly, not really seeing what was in front of him.

Esa crawled onto the porch without using the steps. He slid the rocker out of the way quickly and it hit the ground, breaking one of the rockers. Luke had made it up the steps. His stomach was turning and he felt like throwing up. He knelt, reaching for his brother. Reid turned from the child. Luke's eyes were on the child, but he took Reid into his arms. Reid buried his face in his brother's shoulder and began weeping bitterly.

Luke held his brother while he sobbed too. He couldn't take his eyes off the girl. He'd seen dead bodies, mutilated bodies. But this was different. This was his wife's granddaughter, and he felt every bit like the child's grandfather. They had spent many happy hours together and he loved this child.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."² Luke said softly. "William's going to need you."

¹ John 14:1-3

² 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

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Reid's tears were slowing and he pulled away from his brother. Reid nodded. "Kathleen is going to need you." Reid pushed himself up to sit straight. He asked, "How's Sarah?"

"She's okay. She's shaken up, but she and Mrs. Jacobson are okay."

"Was Kimi with her?"

"No. Sarah said she went home," Stephen said.

"Oh, Stephen. Go find her. Make sure she's okay. I want to know someone has eyes on her," Reid pleaded. "This probably scared her so bad."

"Okay. Are you okay?"

Reid nodded. "Go. Go, please."

Stephen nodded and turned to trot down the lane, headed to his father's home.

Reid heard a wheezing sound and looked around. James was leaning with both hands on the wall and his head tucked between his arms, breathing heavily. He was straining to inhale.

"James, sit down."

James shook his head. "I'm okay." He looked over at his father with tears in his eyes. "We need to get her off of there. Nobody else needs to see that."

Reid slid out of the way. He leaned back against the wall as Esa held the child and Luke pulled the first rod out. He cried as he did it.

The second rod was harder. It wouldn't move. Luke gently gripped Bonnie Grace and lifted her body to slide her off the rod that was imbedded in the wall. He pulled the girl into his arms and closed his eyes, hugging her tightly.

Reid looked up. Others were standing in the yard watching. "We need to tell Sarah," Reid said softly. "Don't let her come out here. We'll take the child inside."

Esa turned to enter the house.

Luke held Bonnie Grace in silence and turned to stare at the people and the destruction.

Reid watched the people too. He knew William's daughter had been killed, but his brain was shutting down. He was having trouble processing the scene.

Reid slowly turned his head to the side and looked up at his brother. His brother, Bonnie Grace's grandfather, if only by marriage to the child's grandmother. He watched as Luke hugged the girl to his chest, her curly blonde hair falling over his arm.

"Take her inside," James said.

Luke nodded. He held her against his chest like a sleeping child. Her head fell backward and Luke gently pushed it up with his shoulder as he situated her in his arms to carry her into the house.

Reid didn't even try to get up. James, still breathing heavy, said, "Come on, Dad. Let's get off the porch and go be with Aunt Sarah." He helped his father to his feet.

Reid was unsteady and leaned heavily against the wall. James reached for his father's cane and looked up to see a man standing at the edge of the porch.

"Is the little girl..." He couldn't finish his question. He didn't want to finish his question.

"She's dead," James said bluntly.

The man had tears in his eyes. He stuck his hand into his pants pocket and drew out a tiger eye crystal as big as his thumb. "I was going to give this to her. She likes rocks," he said.

James put his arm around his father and turned him toward the door without commenting.

People continued to arrive. The dead were being removed from the rubble, but no one was found alive. The fire was out and people wandered through the mess aimlessly, not knowing what to do.

Word spread that Bonnie Grace had been killed and people that knew her began to gather outside the house.

Mr. Jacobson arrived with William's sons, Norman and Landon, on horseback. They had been to a farm on the other side of town to deliver something for William. It had been years since Berel had ridden a horse and he was unsure of himself on an animal he didn't know. The boys had gone with him, thinking the lengthy ride would be fun.

Now they returned to a mess. They had heard the explosion and fire bell earlier, but none of them had any idea the disaster was at their home. The boys jumped from their mounts and ran into the house.

Bonnie Grace lay on the sofa. Sarah was on the floor beside the girl with Mrs. Jacobson nearby. Reid was in a chair and Esa was cleaning a cut on his face. Reid's hand had been cleaned and bandaged.

James sat in the chair beside Reid. He was leaning forward, resting his elbows on his knees as he attempted to control his breathing. He was getting air, but it was labored. He was wheezing.

Luke stepped to the boys and wrapped his big arms around them. He held them tight as he said, "Your sister was on the porch when the shack exploded." That was all he said.

Norman twisted and pulled away from Luke. He went to Sarah and knelt beside her. Putting his arm around her, she responded by embracing him. His eyes were on his little sister and they didn't move.

"Is Father back?" Landon asked as he twisted, still in Luke's arms.

"No," Reid replied. "He probably won't be back for another hour or two."

Berel had tied the horses to the corral fence and now came inside. He went straight to his wife who embraced him but said nothing.

Luke released Landon. The boy moved to the floor beside his grandmother. She let go of Norman with one arm and wrapped it around her other grandson.

Sarah said, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

"Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."¹ 'We do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death...' ² Tears came into Sarah's eyes again. She sniffled.

Reid picked up the verse, "So that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words."³

Reid seemed to gain strength as he spoke. "Remembering the truth gives us hope, doesn't it. Hope that death is not the end. It's a new beginning for a brand new life. When we fall asleep in death, we wake up to a new life with Jesus and one day, when Jesus returns, Bonnie Grace

¹ Revelation 14:13b

² 1 Thessalonians 4:13a

³ 1 Thessalonians 4:13b-18

will return with Jesus to this earth. Thomas will be with her, and Bonnie, and Chipeta, and Dad, and Matt..."

Reid let his voice trail off. He hadn't said a word since he had come in the house, until now. He had allowed Sarah to grieve undisturbed. Now, he felt the need to talk, to strengthen himself and his family.

"When Jesus came the first time he came with the soft cry of an infant. When he comes again, it will be with shouting.

"Jesus called Lazarus from the grave by saying, 'Lazarus, come forth.'"¹ When he calls us all to be with him, he's going to call, 'Bonnie Grace, come forth,' and Bonnie Grace's old body is going to come back to life and rise to be glorified. She'll unite with her spirit and soul again. But our bodies won't have the same limitations they have now. Bonnie Grace and I will both be able to walk and run and jump without pain. We can fall down and it won't hurt us."

Reid looked at James who sat watching him talk. "James is going to be able to run and jump with us and he won't be coughing. He'll be able to breathe clearly and all his scars will be gone. Thomas's heart will be strong and he won't get tired. He'll be able to run after Bonnie Grace holding his wife's hand. And Sarah will be able to let go of his hand and follow him anywhere because she'll be able to see. Oh, what a glorious day!"

Sarah let go of her grandsons and got off the floor. She moved to Reid and hugged him. "That is a time I look forward to. Thank you for sharing Jesus' hope with us."

The Jacobson's were standing in the doorway to the dining room. They looked at each other and Mr. Jacobson shrugged his shoulders. While they both believed in the resurrection of the dead when the Mashiach came, neither of them understood the verses quoted by Reid.

Reid was still talking. No, he was singing, and Sarah was singing with him.

"O come, let us sing unto the Lord:
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving,
and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.
For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.

¹ John 11:43b KJV

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In his hand are the deep places of the earth:
the strength of the hills is his also.
The sea is his, and he made it:
and his hands formed the dry land.
O come, let us worship and bow down:
let us kneel before the Lord our maker.¹

There was still noise outside but no one in the house was paying attention to it. Esa left. As federal marshal he was expected to know what had happened and control the situation. He was the one to lead the rescue and take possession of the bodies. He walked the scene, forming the events in his mind. He would spend time with his family later.

Luke had followed him. The rest of the family sat silently, waiting for William to get home.

A voice came from the kitchen.

“Mother?”

There was panic in the call.

“Bonnie Grace!”

William suddenly appeared behind the Jacobsons. His eyes were wide and fear shown on his face.

Landon stood up and ran to his father.

William looked the room over quickly. No, it couldn't be true. He spotted Bonnie Grace on the sofa and pushed his son aside to get to his daughter. He dropped to the floor beside her and started running his hands over his daughter's face, her shoulders, her arms. His hands were trembling. He got to her chest and stomach and put his hand out flat on top of a bloody spot where a dime size hole shown prominently through her ripped clothing. He dropped his head to her body. The sobs came hard.

Sarah moved back toward her son and knelt beside him. She wrapped her arms around him and laid her face against his back.

Reid realized someone else was standing behind the Jacobsons. He looked toward the man.

¹ Psalm 95:1-6 KJV

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Homer said, "I'm sorry." His speech was hesitant and his face showed sorrow. "I didn't know he didn't know. I just wanted to tell him how sorry I am that it happened; that she got hurt; that she died."

Now his words were coming fast. He needed to explain, he needed to talk. "He and the girl were standing there in the yard looking at everything. The girl said she was going to see if they needed help and pointed toward where they were putting the bodies, or pieces of bodies. He said he'd be there as soon as he talked to his mother. I thought he knew she was... I just wanted to tell him how much I liked her and how sorry..."

James stood up and moved to the man he didn't know. He put a hand on the man's shoulder and turned him around. He escorted Homer back into the kitchen.

Homer kept talking. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to tell him. I thought he knew..."

James stopped him. "Okay. It's okay. You didn't mean to tell him. I get that. Now, please. Go tell the young lady that was with him to come here. Don't tell her about Bonnie Grace. Don't say anything to upset her. Just tell her that her family wants her in the house. Can you do that?"

Homer nodded. "Yes."

He slowly turned and left through the kitchen door, stepping widely over the hole on the porch and easing his way over the busted wooden steps to the ground. He turned around and looked at James, who was standing in the door.

James nodded. "Go on," he wheezed. He remained on the porch, looking at the people now wandering slowly through the rubble. They didn't seem to be doing anything except meandering. Occasionally, someone would lean down and pick something up. James noticed there were only a few people doing this. Esa was one of them, so was Luke. Most people were standing away from the blast area, watching.

James went back into the parlor. William had stopped crying. He was still sitting on the floor with his hands stretched across his daughter. He slowly lifted his head and turned to look at Reid, and then James.

James leaned against the wall. He was breathing normally now, but his chest felt heavy. He was wheezing loud enough that Reid heard him from his seat across the room.

Reid had his eyes on William and Sarah.

William slowly took his mother's hands in his. He looked at her hands. There was evidence of blood that had not washed off. But his hands

were clean. He looked back to his daughter. The blood was nearly dry. She had probably been dead for hours.

He leaned into his mother as he released her hands and let his head rest against her. She wrapped her arms around him.

He said, "Can somebody call Oscar Dorsey?"

"Phone's out," Berel said. "Perla already tried to call..." There was no point in finishing what he was going to say. It didn't matter."

"He's probably outside somewhere," William said. "Norman, can you go find him?" Norman left to retrieve the undertaker.

William rolled onto the floor and stretched his legs out. He wrapped an arm across his eyes. "What happened? Reid, I saw your car outside."

"I don't know what happened. There was an explosion. When the concussion hit the car, it threw us off the road." Now was not the time to burden William with details.

"Where was Bonnie Grace?"

"On the porch."

William started to get up.

Reid leaned forward in his chair. "Not now."

William nodded his head. "I want to see where she died."

Reid was having trouble getting out of the chair, so William stepped to him and helped him stand. He allowed Reid to take his arm, but when Reid had trouble moving, William wrapped his arm around his uncle and helped him out the door and onto the porch.

"To the left," Reid said.

William moved around the corner with Reid and saw the blood on the wall and the floor. The freed rod was lying in the blood, and the other rod was sticking out of the wall. It had a torn piece of his daughter's dress on it.

William froze. A rocking chair set sideways against the wall. The doctor pulled it over to them and set Reid on it. He went to the rod in the wall and grabbed it. He pulled. It didn't move. He tried again, and Reid could tell by the way he let go of it this time that pulling had caused his shoulder to hurt. Reid could also tell he was getting angry.

William didn't get angry very often. Reid had just seen him mad two or three times, and each time it was righteous anger. Reid considered this time righteous anger too. There was no reason for Bonnie Grace to die, except carelessness on the part of someone with the construction crew or whatever it was that caused the explosion. There shouldn't have been anything in that shed that would cause an explosion like this.

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Reid looked back toward the site of the explosion. Several bodies, or partial bodies, were laid out on the ground. He couldn't see any of their faces from that distance, but he hoped the construction supervisor was one of them. He had never liked that man. He knew it was wrong to wish this on anyone, but he couldn't stop himself.

William turned around to look at the site also. Several people had noticed him and were watching.

William's eyes were drawn to his daughter's dog. He jumped from the edge of the porch and approached the dog cautiously. Standing over the small dog, William said, "Bonnie Grace will want Nellie."

He picked the dog up, and carried her into the house.

William sat on the porch steps the next morning, staring at the mess. He hadn't been to bed and his bloodshot eyes and unshaven face looked rough.

Luke had hooked the city's fire engine up to the truck that had been on its side in the middle of the lane to Reid's house. He had pulled it onto the land that was being used by the construction company, tearing up the road in the process.

Some men from town had been to the house and boarded up the broken windows. Several of the town's women had come to clean up the broken glass inside the house.

Angus had Reid's car taken to the mechanic's shop. He ordered a new windshield but told Reid any other repair would need to wait until he was through bashing the construction company's president. He and Stephen had immediately filed for legal action against the company. A full investigation would follow.

Repairs on Reid's car, Sarah's house, the land, and the ambulance that set in Sarah's yard would come later. And compensation for Bonnie Grace's funeral would have to wait until the investigation's report was finalized. Nothing would replace Bonnie Grace, but Angus said he was going after the company to take responsibility for her death. If the final report showed that the company had been at fault in any way—well, Angus said it would be "displeasing to the company."

Too much had happened in the last twenty-four hours. William couldn't keep up. He couldn't function. He was glad others were managing everything around him—he certainly couldn't do it right now.

Construction had stopped completely for fifty miles in both directions. As the workmen heard about the event, they came to gawk. But Esa had roped the area off. Now that the bodies had been removed, no one else was allowed to enter the area. None of the workmen would be doing anything until the investigation was complete.

William kept looking over his shoulder at the rod sticking out of the house. He wanted it gone. He didn't want to look at it, but he couldn't stop himself. No matter where he was in the house, no matter what he was doing, he was drawn to that rod.

Luke tried to pull it out, but couldn't. William had asked Angus to get it out, but Angus told him not to touch it. The inspectors investigating the explosion needed to see it there. But William couldn't stay in this house with that thing sticking out of the wall.

William started walking toward Reid's home. He was nearing his grandfather's house. Luke was living there now, but he would always think of it as Grandpa's place. Bill Neuw had kept the house in good shape, but since Luke and Kathleen had moved in with Leon and Jack, the place just looked more like a home.

Maybe it was just more inviting to William. Luke was his uncle, and he had married William's mother-in-law. He loved both of them, but he had an attachment to Luke that he didn't have with Kathleen.

Kathleen had rejected William and the boys when his wife, Bonnie, died. William had forgiven her and they had reconciled, but it left a bitter taste in his mouth.

He didn't understand her hostility toward her grandsons. She could blame him all she wanted. He blamed himself, too. The flu was running rampant through town and across the country. He'd been at the makeshift hospital at the church for weeks. He wasn't home caring for her, and she had gotten the flu while pregnant. Then she had gone into labor early.

Reid called him with the news. The doctor arrived home just minutes before the delivery. And then Bonnie died. Kathleen had gotten angry and beat William on the chest with her fists. She had thrown rocks through the Stewart's windows, and she had stayed away from her grandsons for more than a year before asking the family's forgiveness. William had accepted her apology. But things had never returned to the loving affectionate relationship they had before Bonnie's death.

But Luke—Luke was different. He was a kind, compassionate man who loved the Lord with all his heart, and followed Christ's example. He had suffered Kathleen's wrath too.

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But what drew William to Luke the most was his relationship to the Savior. Luke taught William how to truly follow God and listen to the Holy Spirit.

William wished he could hear the Spirit now. He felt so alone.

Bonnie Grace's passing to heaven was hard on him. He didn't want to eat, and he couldn't sleep. His sons and his mother would sit with him, but he didn't want to talk, not to them. He loved them, and he forced himself to be with them, knowing they needed him right now. He didn't understand why he didn't want to be with his family. They talked lovingly of Bonnie Grace, and of the horror of her death. He didn't want to hear either of these.

William was absorbed in thought as he passed the spot that was dug up to repair the sewage line. It caught his attention and he stopped to look at it. The first thought that came into his mind was, *That crater at the construction site is going to look just like that when it rains.*

His thoughts were interrupted.

"Dr. Stewart."

The call came from behind him. William turned around to see a man coming toward him. William didn't want to talk to anyone, especially someone he didn't know.

William waited for the man running to catch up, but he didn't give a greeting in return.

The man stopped, breathing heavily. He extended his hand. William ignored it.

"My name's Homer. I was a friend of your daughter."

He lowered his hand, a little self-conscious that William had not accepted it.

William waited for the man to explain, but now the man seemed to have trouble speaking.

"I wanted you to know how sorry I am about telling you the way I did."

Oh, now William remembered him. William closed his eyes, just wanting the man to disappear. But he didn't.

"I'm one of the truck drivers. I was waiting for my turn to unload gravel when the explosion happened. I'd taken a walk and I was in the field when it..." Homer pointed toward the plowed dirt in an area of the garden that had no fall vegetables.

William cut in, "How did you know Bonnie Grace?"

"We all have to wait to load or unload. A couple of weeks ago Bonnie Grace was playing with her puppy in the yard when one of the trucks made a loud noise and it scared the dog. It got away from her and ran toward your barn. I helped her catch it."

"Thank you," William said. "I appreciate your help."

"After that, any time I knew I was going to have a long wait, and she was in the yard, I would go talk to her. I really liked her. She was a sweet little girl."

William nodded. Still not wanting to talk.

"I was going to give her this rock." He pulled the tiger eye out of his pocket. "She really likes the pretty rocks."

"Yes, she does," William agreed, staring at the rock in the man's hand. He was getting impatient. "What are you still doing around here? Why don't you go home?"

The man looked at the ground, embarrassed. "I don't have a home. I was sleeping in my truck, but"—he looked back at the crater and debris—"now I don't have a truck or transportation to go anywhere else. Everything I owned was in that truck. I was hoping if I hung around here long enough the company would buy me another truck and put me to work when the construction starts again."

"Yeah. I hope they get you the truck," William said. "Thank you for your kind words about my daughter. And your friendship to her."

The doctor turned to walk away.

"Dr. Stewart," the man called again. "I noticed you were building something on the back side of the barn. If you want, I could finish that for you. You wouldn't have to pay me, just let me sleep in the barn till I find out what's going to happen."

William turned back around. "My cousin was building that so we could hire a sharecropper. When the bank failed here, he couldn't finish. We've got no money to buy the supplies." His tone was slowly changing from defeat to irritation.

"Well, maybe I could do something else. I could clean up your yard. That wouldn't take any money for either of us to do that. I'm just looking for a warmer place to sleep. I won't disturb anything in the barn."

William didn't want to make any deals. He didn't want to think. He put his hands over his eyes for a moment, then dragged his hands to the side of his face and let them stay there.

Homer saw the distress in the man's actions. "I'm sorry. I know this is too soon to ask you for help. I just thought maybe we could help each other."

"I was told not to clean the yard until the investigators get here and look at the place. You can sleep in the barn. I don't care. But you have to ask the guy that lives here," William said bitterly, pointing to Luke's house. "I've got to go."

William turned again.

Homer turned toward the house, mumbling to himself now. "I told Troy not to store those gas cylinders so close to the smith's forge. I don't know what they thought they were doing using oxyacetylene on that thing..."

William turned back to the man quickly. "What did you say? Gas cylinders?"

Homer stopped and turned back to William. "They didn't get the shipment of coal on time so Troy Castor rigged the welding gas to run the forge. There were too many cylinders to fit in the storage room, so he set them by the forge. Some of them were just too close to the heat. I told him he better move them. Just that day I told him. If he had moved them that morning, none of this would have happened."

William just stared at Homer. His expression was alarming, and Homer could see fire burning in the doctor's eyes. Suddenly, William grabbed Homer's arm and turned to pull the man with him. William moved so quickly Homer almost fell on his face.

William never said a word as he dragged Homer into the trees and towards Reid's house.

"Dr. Stewart, where are we going? Slow down. Dr. Stewart, let me go!"

But William didn't listen. He continued to drag Homer down the isolated road toward Reid's.

Just before the opening in the trees, William said, "You have to tell Reid this."

"Who?" Homer still didn't know where he was going, but he felt for the man who had his arm. His daughter had just died horribly and for no reason except another man's stupidity. He would go wherever the man wanted him to go. He would tell whoever he needed to tell.

William marched himself up the front steps and burst through the door without announcing himself.

"Reid!" William called harshly.

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James came from the hallway. "William? What's wrong?"

James's chest was rising and falling in dramatic motion, and he was still wheezing.

William stopped, noticing the man's distress, and again spoke bitterly, "What's wrong with you?"

"I don't know," James shook his head. "Maybe it was the accident in the car yesterday, or maybe it was the dust after the explosion." He didn't mention that he had run from the car to the house.

"You were in the car with your dad yesterday?"

James nodded.

"What have you done for it?"

James knew the doctor was referring to the breathing problem. He shrugged and shook his head. Hesitantly, James said, "I'm just waiting for it to clear."

William looked at James a full minute, considering what to do. "Have you been drinking coffee?"

"I had some this morning."

"Okay. You go get more coffee," William demanded. "The caffeine will lower the inflammation and hopefully open your airways. Black coffee. No milk or sugar. Why didn't Ayiana call me last night?"

"William, really? You're grieving. Besides, the explosion knocked the phones out. Angus said he'd get them repaired this afternoon."

"Has Ayiana got a stethoscope around here?"

"Probably."

"Get yourself a cup of coffee then find it. Where's your dad?"

"In bed. His back is hurting."

William felt like a failure. He had been sitting around all afternoon yesterday and all this morning, doing nothing. Both of these men needed his help and he hadn't raised a finger. He put the palm of his hand to his forehead and pressed. His eyes were closed tight. Then he remembered helping Reid out of the chair yesterday, and he had needed help walking. He knew Reid was hurt and he had ignored the signs.

Both Homer and James watched the doctor curiously.

William lowered his hand and looked at James, who hadn't moved. William's tone changed. He again sounded like the caring doctor they had always known.

"Go on, do what I told you to do." Then, looking at Homer, he added, "Why don't you get some coffee too. I'll go see what I can do for your dad."

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William disappeared into the bedroom.

James turned to the man beside him and put his hand out, "James Britt."

"Homer Noonan." Homer looked at the man's hand before taking it. Cautiously, he shook James's hand.

James pulled his hand away. "Kitchen's this way."

James made the coffee and the two sat in silence as the coffee brewed. Each poured his own cup and sat again. James was used to people looking at him, but this man's stare was intense. It made James uncomfortable.

James downed his coffee as soon as it cooled enough and said, "I'm going to look for that stethoscope William wanted."

He got up and rinsed his cup out, setting it on the edge of the sink.

Homer said, "Mind if I follow you?"

Without looking at Homer, James said, "I don't mind."

The truck driver followed James into the girl's room.

"Whose room is this?" Homer asked.

"My sisters'," James responded.

"How many sisters do you have?"

"Only two that still live at home," James replied, as he rummaged through a cabinet.

"Where are they?"

"One is at William's house. William's mother asked her to come stay with her until the funeral. The other is the county nurse. She'll be home in a little while."

"What's wrong with your father?"

James turned to look at the man. He was asking a lot of questions and James wondered why. But everything he had asked so far was common knowledge to everyone in town. The man could get this information anywhere. So, James answered all the questions.

"He broke his back years ago. He can walk, but it causes him a lot of problems."

"What does he do?"

"He's a federal judge. What do you do?"

"I'm one of the truck drivers doing the construction." Then he hesitated and asked. "Did you fight in the war?"

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The rest of the questions had been asked simply for information, but the curiosity in this final question could clearly be heard in Homer's voice. But, again, this was a question James was asked often.

He had found the stethoscope and was just standing there, watching the man. He was about James's age, maybe a little younger. He was tall, of average build, and with a face only his mother could love. He looked dirty, like he hadn't bathed since the explosion. And, from his clothes and calloused hands, he appeared to be a hard worker.

James looked straight into his eyes. "Yes."

They continued to watch each other until James could stand the uncomfortable silence no more. He scrunched past Homer and said, "William's waiting for this."

"Wait," Homer Noonan said quickly.

James turned around.

"I was in France, during the second battle of Somme. My squad was cut off and we got caught in a cloud of gas. There was a guy that drove a truck into the fog to get us. We wouldn't have made it out if it hadn't been for him. I heard his name was James Britt."

There was more silence as the two watched each other again. Homer asked, "Was that you?"

"It could have been."

"I heard he was burned so bad he wouldn't live."

"They were wrong."

There was silence again as the men watched each other. Eventually, Homer said, "I wouldn't be alive today if it weren't for you. We thought we were dead."

"I'm glad you're not," James said, still extremely uncomfortable with this man.

"Why did you do it? Why did you come get us?"

"Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter."¹ God's people don't sit by and do nothing when things are difficult. To 'love your neighbor'² doesn't mean we avoid doing them harm, it means we do them good. We intentionally 'rescue those being led to death and slaughter.'³ I knew you were there. We all knew you were there somewhere. I couldn't just move on and forget about you."

¹ Proverbs 24:11

² Mark 12:31

³ Proverbs 24:11

“But you had to know that you would probably die.”

James explained, “My respirator was damaged. If it hadn’t been for that, it wouldn’t have been bad. But death’s not the worst thing that can happen to a Christian. Paul said, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.”¹ If I go to be with Christ, my work is done, my pain is over. But to live for Christ is crucial and more important to other people, and to God, than dying.

“For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.”²

“If I’m the Lord’s, I’m here to work for him. He didn’t want you dead that day, so I did what he asked me to do. Apparently, he didn’t want me dead then either.”

“James?” The call came from the hallway.

“What’s keeping you?” William asked as he came around the corner into the bedroom.

“We were just talking,” James said. “How’s Dad?”

“I think most of it is just muscle spasms. He’s doing what he needs to do, rest and heat. Ayiana will know how to take care of him. I didn’t realize he was hurt when I sent Norman over to see if he would do the funeral. Now I can’t talk him out of it. Come on, lie down and rest a minute before I listen to you.”

“I don’t want to lie down.”

“Tell me about it,” William said, looking at his cousin questioningly.

“It started when I had that reaction to the anesthesia last spring. Now it happens any time I have trouble breathing. It feels like my lungs are pressing on my back trying to bust their way out.”

“Only when you lie down?”

“Yeah. When I lie on my back, when I lean back against a hard chair.” James shrugged his shoulders and shook his head slightly. “I can lay on my side okay. My chest feels heavy, like I’m wearing a pack against my chest.”

“Okay. Just sit on the bed.”

William listened. “Keep drinking the coffee. A cup every couple of hours. Where’d you sleep last night?”

¹ Philippians 1:21-22a

² Romans 14:7-8

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William was looking into the man's eyes. He pulled an eyelid up to hold the eye open.

"Sitting in Dad's chair in his bedroom. It was the only place I could get comfortable."

"Did you sleep?" William let go of James's eyelids.

"Probably more than you did," James sneered, trying to joke with William.

"I guess I'd better get home and get everybody ready for the funeral. Homer needs to tell Angus and Stephen what he knows. Can he hang out with you until we can all get together?"

"Sure. No problem."

"James. If your lungs are full of dust, you need to see if you can cough some of it out. Try taking a walk this afternoon, but make sure you have somebody with you. I can bring some oxygen over, but I don't have a tent. You'll have to use the mask."

"Nope," James said. "I'm not...I'm not doing that." He was determined not to use a mask.

William watched James and knew he wouldn't be able to get the mask on him. "You'll sleep better tonight with it on."

James shook his head, "No." There was determination in his voice this time.

"Okay. I'll see you at the funeral. Bring everybody by the house afterward. The church ladies are bringing supper."

Three cars arrived at the funeral together. Stephen arrived first with the Jacobson's and Homer Noonan.

Ayiana arrived with her father, James, and Kimi.

Reid was met by Luke and Blade, who immediately gathered on both sides to assist him to the chairs at the gravesite. Kimi followed quietly.

Ayiana stepped out of her car and went to meet Sarah at the ambulance. The ambulance had been parked in the yard when the explosion happened and it was marked by dents and small holes where the gravel had pelted the vehicle. The windshield and side window were both cracked.

William had asked Norman to drive. Sarah sat up front, and William and Landon sat in the back where no one could see them. William wanted to be invisible right now. He didn't want to talk with anyone, or see

anyone. All he had to do was make it through the next hour and he could lock himself in his room and be alone.

William had said he didn't want a long, drawn-out funeral like his fathers. His father's funeral had been a celebration of the man's life. But William wasn't ready to celebrate Bonnie Grace's life yet. He didn't know how to grieve for her. He wanted the graveside service in the same manner of his wife's. All he wanted to do was say goodbye.

Bonnie had died during the days of the Spanish flu, and people were being buried without ceremony. Reid had stood with William, Thomas, and Sarah to say goodbye to William's wife alone. It had been a private and extremely moving experience for William. But now, he couldn't ask people to stay away. People loved sweet Bonnie Grace, and they were grieving too. He would have to grieve Bonnie Grace alone somewhere else, and at another time.

William straightened his shoulders and put on his stoic doctor's face—the one that showed no emotion in heartbreaking situations. He had learned to control this emotion in order to keep his patients calm and attentive. Now he was doing it to keep himself calm, but he knew he wouldn't hear anything being said.

He followed everyone else and was the last to sit in the chairs reserved for the family. Reid sat on one side of him, and his sons on the other. To their left, the two grandmothers sat, with Luke beside his wife.

Reid began. "Thank you, everyone, for coming. We are here to mourn the passing of Bonnie Grace Stewart."

William was listening. He thought, *At least he didn't say celebrate her life.* Then his thoughts moved to his little girl and he didn't hear anything else said.

Reid was still talking.

“For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully
and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed body;

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all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.’¹

“King David said that God knew him, just like he knows us, and just like he knew Bonnie Grace. None of us are here by chance. God not only created us, he knit us together in our mother’s womb. We are a work of art, created by God. None of us are mistakes, because God makes no mistakes. We are all created in the spiritual image of God with a purpose and with meaning.

“Paul goes on to tell us that believers possess faith because of the cross of Christ. To bless the name of God is to speak well of him, to praise him. Worship is a celebration of who God is, what he has done, and what we trust him to do. In the spiritual world, the angels battle Lucifer for our very souls. But we live in a physical world with problems, struggles, and sins of our own. Whatever happens here, begins in the spiritual world. Conflict on this earth began with a spiritual struggle. And the only way to stop it, is a spiritual solution.

“God has already blessed us with every spiritual blessing because he created us for his pleasure. He chose us, as believers, to be holy and blameless, to bring him pleasure. We can do this because he predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ.

““Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”²

“Paul could be talking about individuals here, but I believe he is also talking about the church.

“God chose to create a group of people, the church, whose purpose is to live holy lives and to reflect his godly character in this struggling and painful world. We die with Christ, so that we can live with him.

“To be adopted gives a person the same rights, privileges and inheritance that natural-born children receive. In Christ, God adopts us for himself, for a specific purpose. Bonnie Grace has fulfilled her individual purpose, and her purpose with this Body of Christ.

“She told me, just before she died, that she had asked Jesus to live within her. She was forgiven through Christ’s blood sacrifice. She

¹ Psalm 139:13-16

² Romans 6:3b-4

completed her adoption. Now, God has given her full access to every spiritual blessing.

“When we truly praise God, we can be present in two places—here on earth, in the physical, and in the spiritual, in heaven before God’s throne. Let’s praise God and be in the spiritual with Bonnie Grace before God’s throne.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.’¹

“Before we leave, I would like to pray for this family and our extended church family, that we will use this tragedy to strengthen our faith in God and our love for each other. Pray with me.

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses

¹ Ephesians 1:3-10

knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”¹

“Thank you for coming. And for your continued love through the coming days.”

Reid was through. The service wasn't as brief as Bonnie Grace's mother's service, but Reid hoped it filled the need of the community and of William's family.

William, however, had only heard a few words spoken. Now Reid wasn't speaking anymore, and William noticed. The doctor looked up to see people moving, some toward him. William leaned over and said something to Reid that the judge didn't understand. Then William leaned forward with his elbows on his knees and lowered his head.

Several people stopped to say a few words to Kathleen, Sarah, William, and his sons, but William wasn't paying attention. He felt hands touching him, but he didn't want to hear their words of condolences. He closed his mind and continued to lean on his knees with his head down until everyone left and his son, Norman, put his hand on his father's back.

“Let's go, Dad.”

“Wait for me at the truck. I want to stay here a little while,” William muttered.

Reid watched his nephew curiously, remembering the flood of tears that had come immediately following Bonnie's service. He touched Norman's and Landon's hands as they passed and gave them an encouraging nod, letting them know that he would take care of their father.

Reid waited until the others were past him. He put his hand on William's shoulder.

“It's over William. Everyone's gone. You can let go now.”

William didn't move. He didn't respond. Reid waited patiently.

When William spoke, his voice was soft. “Did I do something wrong? Did I sin and, God is punishing me?”

¹ Ephesians 3:14-21

“William, you know God loves you. He cares for you. We live in a sinful world and all of us have to face the harsh reality of life. God is sovereign, so all that happens must at least be allowed by him. We don’t know what’s coming at any time in our life. It’s all in his hands. ‘How do you know what is going to happen tomorrow? For the length of your lives is as uncertain as the morning fog—now you see it; soon it is gone.’¹

“Bonnie Grace isn’t struggling any more. She can run and play, and she’s not going to get tired. When you see her next time, she’s going to run and jump right into your arms. ‘The good... perish; the godly die before their time, and ... no one seems to realize that God is taking them away from evil days ahead. For the godly who die shall rest in peace.’”²

“Do you think more trouble is coming?” William asked. “Is this depression going to get worse? Or the drought? Bonnie Grace has never been able to understand the economic change in the house. She continues to ask for things that we don’t buy anymore.”

William looked at Reid, “I don’t mean for it to sound like she was greedy or anything. But she didn’t understand why there weren’t cookies in the jar all the time anymore. Sarah’s been making something she calls a ‘sugar pie’ that Bonnie Grace hates.

“And she didn’t understand why her grandmother had taken one of her old dresses and cut it apart. A few weeks later, Mother handed her a new dress, and told Bonnie Grace to try it on. But the material was the same pattern as the dress her grandmother had torn apart. Bonnie Grace noticed this. She didn’t want the dress because she knew her grandmother gave up one of hers.”

“Yeah,” Reid answered. “It’s going to get worse. Both the economy and the drought. Bill and I talked before he left, and he’s convinced that the dust storms are caused by misuse of the land. He says too much has been plowed the last few years, and it’s not being given a chance to rest like the Bible calls for.

“‘You must let the land rest before the Lord every seventh year. For six years you may sow your field and prune your vineyards and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year the land is to lie fallow before the Lord, uncultivated. Don’t sow your crops and don’t prune your vineyards during that entire year. Don’t even reap for yourself the volunteer crops

¹ James 4:14 TLB

² Isaiah 57:1-2 TLB

that come up, and don't gather the grapes for yourself; for it is a year of rest for the land.'¹ Reid sighed.

"Bill always rotated the crops and rotated the fields. There was always a portion he didn't use. Every year it was different. I remember Dad doing that too.

"If this drought continues, and the crops continue to fail, there won't be enough to eat. It won't matter if people don't have money, there won't be any food.

"And if the large farmers continue to plow more land to compensate for the short crops, the land will continue to erode and the dust storms are going to get worse."

William turned to look at his family waiting behind him, concerned for their future welfare. He saw James leaning over the hood of Ayiana's car. He had his forehead resting on his arms. Ayiana was beside him, talking to him. Sarah was holding his shoulder and rubbing his back.

"I think we better leave." William cocked his head, indicating those waiting. "James looks like he's having problems."

Reid turned in his chair to look.

"I'm going to get some oxygen and bring it to your place after everybody leaves. I'll see if I can get in touch with Curt or Joseph, and see what they've been doing. I don't want to force a cough, but that may be what we need to do to clear his lungs."

Reid nodded. "You're going to have trouble getting the mask on him, but he needs the oxygen. He struggled all last night. I'm glad he's not here during the summer with these dust storms. They don't get many at the high altitude in Denver."

Reid called and gave a wave to Luke who was leaning against a nearby monument looking at his fingernails.

Luke came to help Reid to the car.

William arrived after dusk, bringing the oxygen. He was met by Ayiana. "They're both in Dad's room," she instructed.

The doctor found Reid on the bed, propped on several pillows with a book and a heating pad. James sat in the leather Queen Anne wingback chair with a crocheted blanket around his shoulders. He was wrapped up

¹ Leviticus 25:2-5 TLB

like he was cold, but his forehead glistened with moisture. His breathing was labored and his eyes were closed.

"He's worse, isn't he?" William asked.

Ayiana nodded, "Yeah. He's running a fever."

"I talked to Curt. He says make him cough. And we're going to have to force the oxygen. He said not to let him look at the mask. He'll know it's there, but if we talk to him and keep him calm, he can have it against his face. We don't need to put the strap around his head, he'll panic. Once he gets past the coughing and the vomiting, he'll go to sleep. If we wait until he passes out, then put the mask on, it will be easier. We need to keep it on him for a while, even after he wakes up.

"Stephen's car is outside, where is he?"

"In Dad's office with that Homer guy."

"Oh." William closed his eyes. "I forgot about him."

William opened his eyes to look at James again. "Go get Stephen, I'm going to need him."

Reid laid the book down and was listening. He now looked at James, too.

James had pulled the wrap tighter around his shoulders. His breathing seemed to be more panicked.

"James," Reid called. "Do you know what William's going to do?"

James nodded.

Reid asked, "Does it bother you?"

Another nod. "I'm tired of this. I understand why the other guys kill themselves. If I had to do this every day like they do, I'd want to kill myself too."

"We did this for almost two years when you were home," William said.

"I don't remember it. I don't remember any of that time."

William put his hand on James's shoulder and spoke gently, "Come on. Let's go to the bedroom."

"Do it here," Reid said, sliding himself over in the bed. "I'll talk to him."

William guided James to the bed, and James sat on the edge.

Stephen and Homer came into the room with Ayiana.

William gave Stephen and Ayiana instructions.

"We'll start sitting up," the doctor said. "Stephen, sit beside him and hold him. James, turn toward Stephen."

The doctor began pounding on James's back, trying to break up the obstruction in James's lungs. James leaned closer to Stephen with each blow. He eventually leaned into his brother and Stephen grabbed his shoulders to hold him. James's body began to jerk as he tried to cough, but nothing moved in his lungs. His breathing slowed to almost nothing. William pounded harder. James laid across Stephen's shoulder as William continued to pound. James went limp.

"Okay, let's lay him down."

Reid turned on his side and put a hand across his son's forehead, above the scars. He began rubbing James with his fingers. He held his son's arm with the other hand.

The judge began to talk. "Okay, James. We've done this hundreds of times."

William began slowly, but built pressure quickly, forcefully massaging the man's chest.

"You know the drill," Reid began. "I know you don't like this and I know you don't like what's coming next, but you can do this."

"I can't breathe," James choked out.

"You'll be able to soon. 'Do not worry about anything, but pray and ask God for everything you need, always giving thanks. And God's peace, which is so great we cannot understand it, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.'¹ I'm praying for you now."

The bed was bouncing and squeaking with William's forceful motions. Reid's voice remained steady and calm, a soothing gentle sound filling the room with tranquility, even as the violent treatment took place. James was unable to expel the cough. It hung in his chest, suffocating him.

"God has given you everything you need. He's given you help. William knows what to do, he treated you years ago. He's talked to Curt, and Curt's praying for you right now too. God's going to heal you, and I'm thanking him right now for doing that. You've had years of freedom from this disease, and that freedom will come again. I'm thanking God, because I'm sure this will come to pass."

Tears were rolling from James's eyes, but the only sound he was making were the gasps and wheezing that came when William released his chest.

"God gives you peace within. There may be fighting within your own body, and its cruel what's happening inside you, but your spirit is at peace.

¹ Philippians 4:6-7 NCV

You know God, and you know the hope to come. There is hope in this world, and hope in the hereafter. We don't understand why this came back after all these years, but we know that it's only temporary. It will pass. This could be the last time it ever happens, and that's what I'm praying for.

"Right now, you keep your mind on Jesus. 'Let us look only to Jesus, the One who began our faith and who makes it perfect. He suffered death on the cross. But he accepted the shame as if it were nothing because of the joy that God put before him. And now he is sitting at the right side of God's throne. Think about Jesus' example. He held on while wicked people were doing evil things to him. So do not get tired and stop trying.'¹

"Our eyes remain on Jesus, who gives us breath itself..."

James began to cough, but Reid kept talking.

"He went to the cross for us. He carried his burden willingly and he carries ours too. He endured what those evil people did to him and he came out victorious. You have endured what that gas did to you, and you've been victorious over it. You haven't let it stop you from achieving what you desired, what God desired for you."

James began to gag.

"Okay, roll him over," William instructed.

Reid pulled away and Stephen grabbed James by the shoulders. Ayiana took his legs and hips as they rolled James onto his side on the edge of the bed. Ayiana moved to hold James' head as William leaned over his patient to massage his back. James was coughing weakly as he put a hand into the air in front of him, groping for anything he could hold to. Stephen grabbed it and held the hand tightly.

James coughed harder, and gagged, and coughed more. He vomited again and again. And he coughed more. Again, he vomited. Then he drew in a clear clean strong breath of air and his chest shook with laughter. It was over. The blockage was clear. He heard William softly giving instructions.

He was rolled onto his back. James began to open his eyes but Reid shot his hand up to block his son's vision. "No, keep your eyes closed."

James's laughter turned to tears, knowing what was coming next. Reid's hand was rubbing his son's arm while James's body stiffened.

¹ Hebrews 12:2-3 NCV

“You’re safe here, James. You are cared for and you are loved. ‘And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.’¹

“There’s nothing shameful about your fear. Anyone would fear the mask after what happened to you. But God’s love remains in your heart. He has given you the courage to withstand even what you fear. The Holy Spirit is inside you with the gas, battling for control and fighting to push the disease from your body. The Holy Spirit’s gonna win. You know that.”

James was relaxing. He felt his brother’s loving touch as he held his arm. Both Stephen and his father were touching him, holding him, preparing him to accept the oxygen mask. Their touch was loving, not forceful or violent. James heard his father’s calming voice, and he felt his Heavenly Father’s love within his spirit.

James vaguely heard William talking as his brain drifted into silence.

The man was released by his brother. He was rolled onto his side and pillows were pushed behind his back and shoulders as the oxygen mask was positioned in front of his face.

Reid said, “Pass me a rag.” Ayiana obeyed and Reid wiped the sweat from his son’s forehead and neck.

“Curt said he’ll probably run a fever for a few more hours, but he should be okay by the time he wakes up.” He slapped Stephen on the shoulder. “Let’s get some coffee.”

Ayiana began to clean up.

Homer, who had been standing near the wall the whole time, stepped closer to Reid. “How often does this happen?”

“We don’t have to do this very often anymore. It was two or three times a day when he first came home, then it stopped for years. His lungs aren’t healthy. Something happened several months ago that irritated them again. I think all that dust he was breathing following the explosion caused this attack.”

Homer was still trying to understand. “Why is he scared of the mask? Doesn’t the oxygen help him?”

“Yes, it does. But he was injured during the war because his respirator was damaged. It let the gas into the mask and held it there. He didn’t realize what was happening and it burned his face and lungs. If he hadn’t had the mask on, holding the gas in, it wouldn’t have been as

¹ Romans 5:5

intense. Every time he has a mask on his face, he remembers the pain he endured. His mind can't think about repeating that pain.

"I'm staying here with him. Why don't you join the others."

Homer turned to Ayiana. "Are you going to have some coffee?"

"When I finish here," she replied.

"Can I help you?"

"Thank you." Ayiana handed him a basin of used cloths and picked up the other basin with the vomit. "Dad, do you want some coffee?"

"Not right now. Thank you for asking."

Ayiana turned to Homer, "Let's go to the kitchen."

Homer nodded, and followed Ayiana.

14

November 1931

Harris, Kansas

Angus received a call from the state inspector's office. The men looking over the disaster site would arrive on the afternoon train. He contacted Stephen and Reid to let them know. Both men wanted to be present during the inspection, and Angus wanted them there. No conspiracy, payoff, or falsification of records would take place under Angus's watch.

James was still in town recovering from the lung problem. He said he wanted to be there for the inspection.

Angus also called Luke, who represented the local volunteer fire department, along with the marshal and the sheriff who had been involved with the initial investigation, clean up, and removal of the bodies.

Angus met the train and drove five men to the site. Carl Howard represented the federal Bureau of Public Roads (BPR), while Elmer Luther was with the Kansas State Highway Commission. The third man was a lawyer for the construction company, Dominic Salvator.

The fourth man was not introduced. Angus assumed he represented the State Association of Construction and Highways (SACH), a public association appointed by the state legislature to assure quality in public construction projects. Angus served on the oversight board of the association—a position he had been appointed to years earlier when his uncle, Cleve Britt, was governor. Although he didn't know everyone in the association, he knew someone from the Construction Accident Committee would be doing their own investigation. Another man shook hands and simply replied, "Jay."

"And you are?" Carl Howard asked.

"Angus Britt. I'm with the SACH. I also represent the family involved. It's our land."

“Your land? Do you have an attorney to represent you.”

“We’ve got several, but I don’t need an attorney,” Angus smirked. “I’m an engineer and I know the specifications and regulations used for this construction. Legal council is available at my disposal.” He smiled again, offering a condescending, “You don’t want me to get my council involved.”

The lawyer glanced at the man to the side. The man that didn’t seem to have a place there.

When they arrived at the sight, James and Homer were leaning against the split rail fence on the eastern side of the property. Part of the fence was damaged where equipment had been blown into it, but most remained intact. Others stood beside two vehicles parked on the road to Reid’s house.

The sheriff, Stephen, Luke, James, and Esa each attached themselves to one of the investigators. The men walked the land carefully, discussing things they found and taking measurements of the crater and the blast’s debris area. The trucks were inspected and a discussion was held over how one of the trucks ended up where it was. One of the men asked where the truck was before the explosion. No one knew, so Homer spoke up from the fence. “It was right about where you’re standing now.”

Eyes turned to look at Homer. Elmer Luther walked over and introduced himself to Homer. The unnamed man followed. Luther asked several questions and Homer answered, pointing to different locations and explaining what he saw before and after the explosion.

“Well, I think we’ve seen everything we need to see,” Carl Howard said. He turned back toward the automobile. The other men turned to follow.

Reid was standing beside Stephen’s vehicle, watching from a distance. He looked to Angus, who was simply following the men. Reid started to say something but Angus caught his eye and gave him a stern shake of the head.

Reid continued to watch cautiously. He knew the men understood that a child had died. It had been in all the papers. And the men could see the damage to the house, but they seemed to want to ignore this.

The men were reaching the vehicles when Angus said, “Gentlemen, you have more to see.” He turned around and began walking toward the Victorian home.

They got to the house and Angus turned around to face the men. He put his hand up, indicating the house. “I’m sure you received the report

about the damage done to the property. You will notice that many of the windows are boarded up. Every window covered with plywood was blown out by the blast. You will also notice the porch supports are missing in these two areas." He indicated the two supports that were dislocated, one broken.

"The town's doctor lives here. The ambulance hasn't moved since the explosion, except to drive the family to the gravesite of their child." Angus pointed. "It was parked in the same location when the explosion happened. You see the damage to it, the clean area underneath, and the rocks around the area." Evidence of the location of the vehicle during the blast.

"There is another vehicle at the mechanic's shop. It was pelted in the same way while moving on the road. The windshield was blown out and other damage was done when it was thrown from the road."

Then he stepped onto the porch and pointed at one indentation in the paint after another. "You will also notice that the siding was destroyed, the floor was damaged, and there is an iron rod sticking out of the wall."

Bonnie Grace's dress fabric still hung on the rod.

"This rod, gentlemen, is where an eleven-year-old girl died."

Angus stopped talking to watch the faces of the visiting men. Three of them seemed to be seasoned investigators. Their faces showed only a slight disturbance. The eyes of a fourth man were fixed on the scene. The fifth man let his eyes wander over the indentions in the wall but avoided looking at the rod or the blood stains.

Reid had moved to stand near the porch. Angus directed his next statement to Reid, "Go ahead. Tell them."

Reid nodded. "I found the child pinned to the wall with iron rods through her abdomen and chest. She was still alive. I held her, the best I could, until she died in my arms."

All five men were watching him. The most stoic, the one who didn't seem to be moved by the scene at all, asked, "And who are you?"

"Reid Britt. The child was my niece."

The man looked toward Angus. "Britt? Are you two related?"

"My brother."

Another man commented, "So she was your niece too?"

Angus nodded.

"I'd like to see the body. Is it at the undertakers?"

"You can see her grave," Reid instructed. "We usually don't embalm around here, so the body goes into the ground quickly."

Dominic Salvator asked, "With no evidence, how are we to believe this happened the way you say? Do you just want us to take your word that a child died?"

"That's a stupid statement. I believe we have enough testimony from those at the scene to establish that the incident actually happened the way I said it did," Reid imposed. "The whole town was here. How many witnesses do you want?"

Dominic Salvator had a clipboard in his hands and found a clean spot on the paper. He began making notes. "Okay, who are the witnesses and how do I get in touch with them?"

Reid spoke up, "Reid Britt, Federal District Judge. I was the first to find the child."

Luke spoke, "Luke Britt, volunteer fire chief, retired Harris County sheriff, and current warden for the district prison. I pulled the child from the wall."

James had walked up behind the man, looking over his shoulder. "James Britt, attorney for the Northern Rocky Railroad. I saw the child pinned to the wall."

Salvator turned to see James just inches from his face and surprise shown briefly on his face. He turned back to his clipboard and stepped away.

"Stephen Britt, private attorney practicing in the town of Harris. I witnessed her there."

"Esa Britt, United States Federal Marshal. How many more do you want?"

"You're all relatives. I need someone that's not related to you," Salvator said in a tone that led Reid to believe he wouldn't accept a relative's testimony."

Homer stepped closer. "Homer Noonan. I work for Bitumen Construction. I witnessed the child die, and it was just as the judge said. Right there on that porch, hung on the wall like a trophy deer."

Reid cringed. It was true, but it sounded so callus.

Reid glanced around the group. Homer's testimony should be more than enough, but the way his statement was phrased made the judge cringe. He hoped Homer would be more sensitive around Sarah and William.

Dominic Salvator scribbled Homer's details on the paper. "Alright, Mr. Noonan. I will need contact information for the records. Anyone else who can corroborate the incident?"

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

A hesitant voice came from the door of the house. "I can." A woman stepped forward. Her face was lined with worry, yet it showed resolute determination. "Perla Jacobson. I saw the child after they brought her into the house. My husband did too. We were here when the undertaker picked her up. I'm pretty sure the undertaker will testify too. There was maybe fifty people that saw her."

"Very well," said Salvator, nodding as he noted Perla's information. "I'll be following up with each of you. For now, I think we have enough to proceed. But remember, any false testimonies will have serious consequences."

Reid watched as Salvator turned with the others to go to the automobile. He didn't like this man. He seemed to want a fight. There was no evidence that showed anything different than the testimony given. If this man wanted a fight, Reid would give him one.

Angus said, "It's all part of the game. The inspectors want the truth. They don't care who takes the blame, unless their being paid off. We'll find out if that happens when the final report comes in. It'll be obvious."

"The lawyer plays tough trying to protect his boss. But this guy's scared, he's trying too hard to make you think he doesn't believe you. When we get to the table, he has nothing. They can't deny any of this happened. And I'm not going to let them forget Bonnie Grace." He turned to follow the men back to the automobile.

As the vehicle pulled away, those that remained fell into an uneasy silence. Reid turned to his family and friends, grateful for their support.

He spoke to Stephen, "Let's go get William and Sarah. Now that all of that is over with, they can come home."

The final decision would come in just a few days, until then, they would wait.

But at least they could clean up the mess at the house, and get rid of the reminder that Bonnie Grace had been hung like a deer, as Homer put it. Maybe William would calm and not be as disturbed when he was at home. Maybe he could rest.

One week later the group gathered again. This time in the conference room at the courthouse. Carl Howard, Elmer Luther, and Dominic Salvator sat on one side of the table with the man from SACH. Angus still didn't know this man's name. He had never said a word. Today was the second

day of the hearing. Angus, James and Stephen Britt sat on the other side of the table.

James had decided to stay for the hearing. He'd been on both sides of similar hearings, and even similar situations that had gone to court. It never hurt to have additional representation for a hearing such as this, especially if the defendants were trying to avoid responsibility.

The first day had been boring—state and federal regulation concerns and employee compensation generalizations. They dragged it out all day, saying nothing of importance. James thought they were intentionally avoiding the issue of Bonnie Grace and property damage, hoping the Britts would get bored with listening and move on. James could feel the fight coming. This company didn't want to take responsibility, and the inspectors were showing sympathy towards the company.

The investigators had shown no indication that they believed any of the stories told to them about Troy Castor. In fact, they seemed to avoid the immediate witnesses because they were family of the deceased child. But then, the men in this room were all family, and witnesses. The land belonged to this family. And this family sought justice.

The investigative team's friend, Jay, sat against the wall. When Luke and Reid entered, Reid shook the man's hand and sat beside him. Both were observers and had no part in the outcome of this hearing.

About an hour into the meeting, Carl Howard said, "Gentlemen. We have completed our investigation and find the fault lays solely with the project manager, Troy Castor. He is the one who allowed the canisters close to the fire, even when he was advised to move them. I'll turn the rest of this meeting over to Mr. Salvator.

James gave an undistinguishable sigh of relief. They wouldn't have to fight the federal bureau or the state agency in court. He saw Angus's hand relax on the pencil he held, but his uncle gave no other sign that his countenance had changed.

Dominic Salvator began. "This company has taken a great loss too. Five employees. Equipment, time lost. Since Mr. Castor was an employee of Bitumen Construction, and because Mr. Castor is dead and cannot take personal responsibility, it seems only fair that Bitumen takes part of the responsibility. I won't go into all the details."

Reid wondered why not, they had gone into detail about everything the previous day. This would certainly be an issue in his courtroom.

Salvator kept talking, "I will focus on your family's loss."

Salvator watched the three men sitting across from him. He had no idea how deeply each man was involved and why these three were chosen to represent this family. Two were lawyers, he had learned that during the inspection of the property. One was an engineer; they couldn't try to skim some technicality past him. He understood the technical language used. And the lawyers seemed competent, especially the one that was scarred. He didn't flinch when off-handed comments were made. His face was dead-serious about everything.

"We are offering the following as compensation. One. We will provide clean up and repair to the home and land damaged, as per the contract. The land outside the designated area is not to be touched. Mr. Britt..."—the man nodded toward Angus—"will be inspecting the entire area when we finish clean up, as stated in the contract. The private road will be repaired past the site, along with fence at the edge of that land. The designated land will be cleared and smoothed. The area of the immediate explosion will be recovered and smoothed, to your satisfaction."

"Excuse me," Stephen said. "What exactly do you mean by smoothed?"

Carl Howard responded, "It's a process by which construction operations are carried out in such a manner that erosion, air, and water pollution are minimized. The land to be smoothed will be cleared of vegetative matter and trash. Irregularities shall be smoothed to the degree required for use depending on whatever your family intends to use it for, and the requirements of subsequent tillage, floating, or planning to be performed. Where possible, the ground surface will be plowed or disked prior to smoothing. Once completed, vegetation of equal or improved value will be planted."

James had described this process himself on several occasions, and the required explanation was very simple—repair the land for proper drainage and use. It sounded to him like this man was intentionally trying to either confuse the listeners, or make this explanation difficult to understand. Was he trying to make Stephen, or anyone else there, feel stupid?

Stephen nodded hesitantly, "Thank you for the explanation."

James looked at his younger brother whose eyes still showed questions. James could see his brain working to understand.

Salvator continued. "Two. We will repair the ambulance and the automobile damaged. The company sends its regrets for those injured and for the death of the child. We also understand that the two injured have

recovered. The company hopes you will accept their apology and the matter ends here.”

The man stopped, checking the men across the table for any sign of a question. Then he turned to look at the man behind him. Jay gave no response.

“The company sincerely regrets what happened to the child. We understand she had become friends with a few of the workers. There is no way to replace a child, and the company is deeply concerned about the family. May we ask how the family is doing?”

“Still grieving,” Angus replied. “As you said, you can’t replace a child. And this child was special. Her mother died when she was born and her father has a special attachment to Bonnie Grace because of this.”

Reid noticed the man beside him close his eyes and draw in a breath, but Angus was still talking. Reid knew what Angus was doing. He was making Bonnie Grace personal to these men, playing on their emotions. Searching to find out if they were as hardened as they tried to make others think they were.

Reid smiled slightly. Angus would make a good lawyer.

“Bonnie Grace has two older brothers who have loved her and cared for her for eleven years. Now their only sister is gone. Her grandmother took the place of her mother and raised the child there in that home with the girl’s father and two brothers. She just lost her husband a few months ago, and now she’s lost Bonnie Grace too. The other grandmother experienced the death of her daughter, and now the death of her daughter’s daughter.

“The big man sitting over here against the wall”—Angus indicated Luke with the nod of his head—“is the child’s grandfather. The other man is the child’s uncle. I am the child’s uncle. These two are her cousins.

Esa slipped in the door and quietly sat in the nearest chair.

“This is her cousin and, yes, you are correct. No one can replace Bonnie Grace. The man responsible is dead and therefore will receive no punishment on this earth. The fact that he died is a tragedy, just as Bonnie Grace’s death was, just as the other four men’s lost lives were tragic.

“The other four men, I assume, are just as innocent as she was in this affair. Their families are grieving too, as is Mr. Castor’s. I’m sure Mr. Castor did not intentionally blow the place up, but he did cause several deaths. We concede that his death, though tragic also, is all the justice we will receive.”

"I don't know what you expected to happen here," James broke in. "I don't know, you may have come here to offer compensation for her life. But you can't. There is no monetary compensation that can replace her."

The three men with their backs to Reid sat quietly. But James could see their faces. One looked at the table, another had tears in his eyes. James thought the lawyer looked scared.

He had come with a proposal of financial compensation for the family. It had just been rejected without the girl's family even knowing the value.

James had spoken with William and knew William's feelings on the matter. He was here to express the doctor's concerns.

James continued, "Taking money in exchange for Bonnie Grace's life would be wrong. Her life cannot be bought. She was loved and cared for, and to even consider selling her, alive or dead, is a travesty."

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."¹ We would like to have had the chance to offer forgiveness to this man. Facing this man and telling him we hold nothing against him, would have brought finality to this horrible mess. But that was not God's desire."

"You wanted the chance to forgive him?" Elmer Luther asked.

"*Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*² Obviously, Mr. Castor didn't know what he was doing," James continued. "If he had paid attention, if he listened to those advising him, if he had the good sense to store that gas away from the fire, none of this would have happened. Is it his fault? Yes. Could it have been prevented? Yes. Did he do it on purpose? I don't think so. The only responsible action we see is forgiveness."

James heard the Spirit. *The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.*³

"But you will pay," James continued. He seemed to have taken over this meeting from Angus. "There were damages you have not discussed. You will clean up all land; that land that was contracted for use, and the land adjacent to it that was damaged. Just because you agreed in the contract not to touch certain portions of land doesn't mean you will not take responsibility for what was damaged. If you feel you do not need to

¹ Genesis 9:6

² Luke 23:34

³ Proverbs 12:15

clean and repair that area not covered in the contract, then we will file for negligence, tort, and statutory accountabilities, and you can pay court costs along with clean-up.”

James was extremely confident he could make this happen and his conviction worried the opposing lawyer.

“You will repair fencing, make home repairs, and repairs to two vehicles. You will repair and ‘smoothen’ the dirt road so that it blends with the undamaged part of the road. You will pay the doctor for his cost in treating the injured, which he did while grieving for his daughter, I might add, and you will pay for Bonnie Grace’s funeral. All of this will be done to the entire family’s satisfaction. There is no discussion or negotiating on these points.”

The man next to Reid spoke. “I’m sorry. I’m Jason Castor...”

Salvator turned to Jay and interrupted, “Jay, hush.”

“No, I won’t be quiet any longer. I’m Troy’s brother, and the owner of Bitumen Construction. I’ve kept quiet because my lawyer”—he pointed at the man in front of him—“told me to. He told me that if you found out I owned this company and that Troy was my brother, you would try to squeeze every cent you could out of me. I can’t afford to lose my business.

“Troy was an idiot. I knew that, but I loved him. I let him talk me into allowing him to supervise the construction of this section of road. I knew better. I knew there would be problems, but I let it happen.

“Dominic thought you would demand a huge settlement. He didn’t want me here. He wanted to fight against it to protect me, knowing I could lose everything.

“But you’re not seeking vengeance. You’ve shown mercy. You’re only asking for what is fair.”

““Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence,”” Reid said, ““so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.””¹

Reid reached his hand out to shake Jason Castor’s hand again. “I’m sorry for your loss. You fix our property and that’s all we ask of you. Use the resources you have to take care of the families of the men that died.”

Castor nodded, “I will.” Grateful for the mercy shown to him.

James stood up. “One more thing I would like you to add to the list of damages.”

“Anything.”

¹ Hebrew 4:16

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

“Bonnie Grace’s father is the doctor. He helped us after the car was thrown from the road. We’ve already asked you to compensate him for helping us,” James pointed toward himself and his father. “He is deeply hurt by the loss of his daughter and doesn’t want contact with anyone from the company. Please find a way to show him you appreciate his mercy while leaving him alone.”

“I’ll do that. I’ll find a way to help him.”

15

December 1931

Harris, Kansas

Christmas Eve William continued the family tradition of reading the story of Jesus' birth to his family. But he wasn't feeling festive. When he was finished, the boys said good night and went upstairs. Sarah and Perla went to the kitchen to finish their work for the night, leaving William and Berel alone.

Berel asked, "Would you show me in your Hebrew Bible where it says the Messiah will be God?"

The two men had already compared William's Bible to Berel's Hebrew Bible and knew that the Old Testament held the same information as Berel's Tanakh, although it was worded a little differently. Berel had been referring to the Old Testament as 'your Hebrew Bible.'

William turned to Isaiah 9:6. He read:

“For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

“The child born will be called Mighty God, Everlasting Father. The child, born on this earth is God himself.

“Then Isaiah 10:20-21 says...” William turned to the scripture.

“In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them,’—he’s talking about the Assyrians here—‘but will

lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.'

"Did you hear it again? Mighty God. The remnant of Israel, that's you, will know the truth and return to the Mighty God. In Chapter 9 Mighty God is born as a baby, but in chapter 10 the Holy One of Israel is the Mighty God."

Berel questioned. "I've heard about Jesus but why has nobody shown me this? When I was in school, we studied the Tanakh as a history of our people, and as wisdom literature. The teachers told us it was something that we, as Jews, needed to know. I didn't know that it was also taught as the Christian's Word of God."

"Somewhere in my life I realized there was a spiritual reality. But I didn't understand it. It seemed foreign to me, a different world. But you and your family have blended these two worlds, and it not only works for you, it brings you peace."

William did feel peace right now, but he also felt alone. Without Bonnie Grace there to liven his evenings, the house felt dead. He started to comment, but Berel continued with what he was saying. That was probably a good thing, William thought. He might say something he would regret later.

"And then you tell me this Jesus that you talk to is Jewish, and you like him. You don't only like him; you follow his teachings? You pray for each other and you pray for me and Perla. This is so strange."

"Berel, we pray because we know God personally. We talk to him and he talks to us. Do you pray? Do you talk to God?"

"No, not really. I've read from the Torah at meetings, and I've read other passages. I've heard the Rabbi pray, but I've never done anything except repeat the words he says."

"Would you like to pray now?" William asked.

"I don't know how to pray. Even at my bar mitzvah they gave me a page to read. If you give me a prayer written down, I'll read it. But what confuses me more than prayer is that all of you seem to know Hebrew scripture that I never studied."

"In school we studied certain chapters and then we would skip over a lot of the passages. But you've talked about passages you call 'prophetic'. Those passages talk about the Messiah. Why do you know Hebrew scripture? This is our book, not a Christian book."

“This is the Holy Word of God. My Old Testament is the same as your Tanakh scriptures, you know that. We’ve already compared a lot of passages.”

“I don’t know,” Berel shook his head. “I’m going to have to study this.”

“Here.” William handed his Bible to Berel. He hadn’t been reading it recently. Since Bonnie Grace’s death he would open his Bible and just stare at the page, but he wouldn’t see the words. Berel would benefit from reading it. “You look at the scriptures in my Bible, then you compare them to what your scriptures say.”

“I can’t take your Bible.”

“Yeah, you can. I gave Bonnie Grace one on her tenth birthday. I’ll read it.”

Berel took the Bible carefully, like it might burn his fingers. Yet he held it with gentleness and reverence. He opened the Scripture and thumbed through a few pages. Then something seemed to catch his eye and he leaned back in his chair to read.

16

January 1932

Harris, Kansas

Over the next few weeks neither Berel or William mentioned the discussion. William hadn't thought about their conversation again. But William's silence gave Berel space to observe the Christmas celebrations and time to read scripture and to decide for himself if what was said in the Bible was true.

Then, out of nowhere, Berel showed up at Reid's door.

"Judge, may I talk with you?" Berl Jacobson never called Reid by name, nor did he call Esa by name. He seemed to respect their positions and always addressed them by their title. Come to think of it, he never called William by name either. He called him Doctor.

"Sure, Berel, come on in. Have a seat. Is there a problem?"

"No, sir. I just have some questions. The doctor and I have been talking and he explained why you call Jesus your Savior. He explained that Jesus is God. But I guess I just want to hear it from someone else. He gave me his Bible and I've been reading it."

Berel hesitated. He wasn't quite sure what he wanted to ask. He just knew that he was still confused. The whole family looked to Reid when they wanted to understand scripture, and they all looked to him for hope after Bonnie Grace died. He often seemed to be the one guiding the others. Well, not guiding them. But they certainly looked to him with respect.

Angus was a strong determined man who knew his business, and conducted it in a way that seemed to follow the Holy Word's teachings. Luke was gracious and knowledgeable. He knew and followed the same teachings. And William had told Berel that Luke was the one who taught him how to hear God's voice.

Esa and Stephen knew and followed the teachings. Berel had heard them discussing and quoting scripture too. But Reid quoted scripture and

used the Bible's teaching in his everyday speech. Maybe this man could clear up Berel's confusion.

"I see that this New Testament Jesus was born and lived in Israel. My father was born in Russia, but we were always running from pogroms, and anti-Semitic laws limited our rights and restricted our freedom. So when I was eight my father took the whole family and immigrated to the moshavot in Israel.

"I'm sorry," Reid stopped the man's story. "What's a pogrom?"

"A...riot. I remember running and hiding but that's all. I'm told the people burned and ran-sacked Jewish homes. The government backed this violence and the rioters weren't stopped. Many of our people died."

"And what's a moshavot?"

"A town. An agricultural village. The residents would establish a covenant to govern and grow crops cooperatively."

Reid was thinking, trying to understand. "Where you all working together and sharing in the harvest and the profits?"

"Yes. Like your family does. No one is in need."

"I think I understand," Reid replied. This was why so many people thought of the Jewish people as communist. It was one thing for a family to share with each other, but when an entire town formed a contracted bond to share equally—well, that did look like communism.

But as Reid thought further, it also looked like the early Christian church—except for the formal contract. The early Christians did it out of love.

*All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them.*¹

Berel continued talking. "I read about all the religious institutions when Jesus lived, and most of these practices are still within the Jewish communities today.

"But Jesus is different. I'm interested in him. He didn't try to do things the same way the Rabbi's and Jewish leaders of that day did, and he didn't try to turn the people against these leaders even though the Pharisees were against him.

¹ Acts 4:32-46a

"I looked at the prophecies in the Tanakh, about the Messiah and how we would recognize him. And then I looked at the fulfillment of those prophecies in the New Testament. They matched! I think I'm convinced that this Jesus is really the promised Messiah of our people.

"The more I read about Jesus, the more I wanted to learn. Then I read about Paul. He was a Jew and he didn't believe until Jesus spoke to him from heaven. I came to realize that Jesus isn't just the Gentile's savior, he's the Jewish Messiah."

Reid sat quietly and let Berel talk. He understood Berel's excitement when he talked about understanding the scriptures, and he knew the man had truly had a revelation from God. He wanted Jesus as his Savior too.

But so far, Berel had not asked the questions that he told Reid he needed answers to. Reid waited. And now Reid had questions for Berel. He didn't want to interrupt Berel's excitement about Jesus, but he really wanted to know the rest of Berel's story.

"I've been reading this to Perla," Berel continued. "I think she thinks I'm crazy."

Reid chuckled. "Be gentle. Give her time. She'll learn to believe too. You just need to continue telling her what you've discovered and one day, she will ask you about Jesus."

"I want to talk to her about him now. This is so exciting to discover. The Messiah has already come, and our people didn't recognize him."

Reid continued smiling. "Talk to us about your discoveries. Me, William, Sarah, Luke. You can even talk to William's boys. They're still learning, but they know Jesus too. Let Miss Perla hear you talk. She'll get curious and start asking questions too. She'll want to understand. But, Berel, I want to know. If you grew up in the Holy Land, why did you leave? I thought that's where all Jews wanted to live?"

"When the British and French started dividing the land, conflict began between the Jews and the Arabs. Talk at the moshavot was of the trouble people had fled from in Russia. The older people saw it coming to our homes again. We were still being told not to fight and if I couldn't fight when someone came to destroy our home, I didn't want to be there. I didn't want to raise crops all season just to have somebody steal them from me.

"My abba and I got into an argument and I left the moshavot and went to the city. I went to work for the British consulate. A few years later, I had the opportunity to leave with them. So I left. I don't like trouble. I didn't want to be in that land anymore."

"Where'd you go?"

"I traveled with the consulate to France. That's where I met Perla. We were married and the British emissary gave her a job too. Then we were sent to England, and then to New York in 1922. We came as British Embassy employees. We liked it here so the ambassador helped us get permission to stay."

"So..." Reid was thinking. "If you grew up in an agricultural community, you know how to farm the land?"

"I liked doing that, I just didn't like all the conflict and always having to watch when other people came into the community. I don't like to fight and I don't like trouble," he repeated.

"But you can farm?"

"Sure. The doctor told me that would be part of my job. I'm sorry I didn't get to do it last fall, but after the locust came, the ground was damaged and too dry. You have to prepare the dry ground to take the seed.

"I don't know anything about the tractor, but I can use the horse and plow just fine. Mr. Angus said he would teach me how to use the tractor."

"What's your understanding of growing crops in dry areas like we have here?"

Berel laughed. "Israel is an area of ancient, slow-moving and traditional ways of life. We have mountains, plains, fertile land, and desert, all right there together. We learned to use brackish water to irrigate the dry land and the plants did fine. Here, we can plant more drought-resistant crops and as long as we have a water source, we can irrigate. Mulching the soil will help hold the moisture. We can deepen the terraces too."

"Do you know anything about crop rotation?"

"Sure. Crop rotation and letting fields rest; fallowing, or leaving fields untouched for a season. Both helps soil get back its nutrients. That makes crops healthier. The practice is old but still used. Don't change what works." Berel grinned.

Reid thought to himself. *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.*¹

Reid smiled, "What else would you do?"

"Keep different crops in separate fields. If they mix, it lessens the quality of the plant. This keeps every crop true to its own type."

Reid was mentally keeping track of what Berel was saying. He didn't know this practice. But, thinking back, his father had done this. He heard the Spirit speak. *You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed,*

¹ Deuteronomy 8:10

*lest the whole yield be forfeited, the crop that you have sown and the yield of the vineyard.*¹

Berel was still talking. “And I wouldn’t take all of the crop. Your family believes in helping the poor, I’ve seen this. I would leave some to be gleaned by the needy.”

*“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.”*²

“I think it’s really important to observe the Sabbath year rest. But by rotating the crops so that every year a portion of the land would not be used works just as well, as long as you are on a seven-year rotation. This still gives the land time to recover.”

Reid said, “For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat.”³

“Yes, sir. That’s exactly it.”

“I like your thinking. It measures up to the standards set forth in Scripture. Now that the farming is settled, let’s go back to my original question. Would you like to pray? Do you want to trust Jesus as your Lord and Savior?”

Berel sat quietly, then softly spoke. “Farming decisions are a lot easier.”

Reid laughed gently. “Only for someone that understands farming. When you understand Jesus, the decision is an easy one too. Would you like me to pray with you, maybe tell you what to say?”

Berel looked at Reid with relief. “That would help.”

“Romans 10 says, ‘If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”⁴ Are you ready to profess your faith?”

¹ Deuteronomy 22:9 ESV

² Leviticus 19: 9-10 ESV

³ Exodus 23:10-11 ESV

⁴ Romans 10:9-10

“Yeah, I’m ready.”

“Then repeat after me.”

Berel repeated what Reid said, “Lord God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, I admit that I am a sinner and have done many things that didn’t please you. I have lived my life separate from you. I am sorry, and I ask your forgiveness. I believe that you died on the cross for me, to save me. You did what I could not do for myself. I come to you now and ask you to take control of my life; I give it to you. From this day onward, help me to live every day in a way that pleases you. I love you, Lord, and I thank you that I will spend all eternity with you. Amen.”

Berel looked up. “Is that it?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t feel any different.”

“You probably won’t right away. Becoming a believer is like planting a seed. The seed goes into the ground and you don’t see it when it’s covered by the dirt. But you feed the seed—fertilizer, water, sunshine. And it breaks through the ground just a tiny bit.

“You continue to give the seedling what it needs and it grows into a tall, strong oak tree that can’t be blown over by the wind, and its roots are deep in the ground drawing water and strength from somewhere no one else can see. Drought doesn’t hurt it, neither does the scorching sun. Snow and ice don’t break the strong limbs. But trouble comes and the smaller, weaker parts of you are broken off, and you suffer. But the strong part grows even stronger. Wait for your seed to grow and trust that the Holy Spirit is feeding you from that unknown place.

“You keep feeding it, too. Read your Bible. Read about Jesus, learn from Jesus and his followers that knew him best. Pray. You may not know what to say, but talk to him as you talk to me, or to Perla.

“All of us are here to help you grow. As you grow, everyone will see the fruit that comes from having the Holy Spirit with you. ‘But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.’”¹

“That’s a lot that I have to do,” Berel said with fear in his eyes. He felt overwhelmed.

“You don’t have to do a thing. Just allow Jesus to work in your mind and in your heart. Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every

¹ Galatians 5:22-23

branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.’¹ The fruit grows when it is cared for.”

Berel nodded, still intimidated by what he thought he had to do.

Reid quickly eased his fears. “Here, you take my Bible.” Reid put the book in his hand. “Read when you can, but make sure you read some every day. Try to find the same time every day to read and listen to God. Before you start reading, ask God to show you what he has for you that day. Ask him to explain it in a way you can understand. If you have problems, know that you can come to any of us, even Norman or Landon. They know the Bible. They can probably give you an answer.”

“I don’t need it. The doctor gave me his.” Berel handed the Bible back to Reid. “Do all of you read your Bible every day?”

“I think so. We might miss a day here and there, but when we do, we want that time with God. It becomes more important to us and we desire that time together even more. But if you miss a day, don’t stress over it. It’s okay, there’s always tomorrow.

“And you can talk to the Lord anytime. When your chopping wood or plowing. I had some really good conversations with God when I was young and working the fields. I’d go hunting and God would go with me. We had some good times then. I miss being able to do that.”

Reid sat, looking at the floor. A sadness seemed to overtake him.

“When’s the last time you went hunting?”

“I don’t know. I was maybe twenty. Twenty-one. I take my rifle and sit on the back steps sometimes and wait to see if anything comes past the house. I’ve gotten a few squirrels and a rabbit or two. I didn’t get to teach my boys to hunt. My dad and Luke did that.”

Reid sat quiet again. Then a gentle smile creased his lips. ““The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.””² ‘But those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.’³ If I needed a deer to walk into the back yard, God would provide it. But I don’t need to hunt to be happy, and I don’t need the deer for food.” Reid laughed. “Not yet anyway.”

¹ John 15:1-4

² Deuteronomy 31:8

³ Psalm 34:10b

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Reid looked at Berel, "Do you need anything else?"

"No. Thank you."

"Sure." Reid stood up. "I need to get back to my work so I can put food on the table for me and Kimi."

Berel nodded and stood up. Reid was already making his way down the hall.

17

March 1932 Harris, Kansas

The winter wind had finally died down and the ground was ready to be tilled. It had been an unusually cold winter, but there hadn't been much snowfall.

Soon after the investigator's report at the courthouse in December, Jason Castor had sent men to gather rock strewn across Sarah's yard. They had done repairs on the house, replacing windows, and grated the dirt road smooth. Other work had to wait for warmer weather.

Trucks and equipment began to arrive in Harris, along with several workmen. They got busy preparing the land near Sarah's house. Things might finally look normal around the area again. Maybe people would quit coming to look at the crater, and they would stop staring at the side of Sarah's house where Bonnie Grace had died.

Now, the ground had thawed and spring was just a few weeks away. The workmen got busy. They replaced boards and made other needed repairs, preparing the house for a new coat of paint. They smoothed the dirt road again and laid gravel all the way to Luke's house.

The crater was filled in and the land around it leveled. Fences were repaired, the barn got a new coat of paint, and both Reid's car and William's ambulance were replaced with newer models.

Then, early one morning, William left home headed out of town. The work crew was already at work near the barn and noticed him drive away. In fact, they seemed to be watching for him to leave. The workmen quickly surrounded the medical clinic and got busy.

By the time William got home at midafternoon, the medical clinic had received much needed repairs and a new coat of paint, inside and out. Crates of new furniture had been unboxed and put in place. Two leaking water pipes had also been replaced.

Angus watched everything being done and was amazed at how fast the men worked. The crew was just finishing when William parked beside the clinic.

The crew saw him and quickly finished gathering their things and disappeared. Angus escorted William around the medical clinic, inspecting the work. Angus talked about the quality of the job and the speed it had been done.

Angus told William he had scheduled these repairs so that the workmen were available while William was away. The doctor didn't have to hear the hammering or endure interruptions from the workmen. Angus seemed to be proud of this accomplishment. William listened without commenting.

The doctor hadn't thought of doing this much repair work. All he had planned to do was make the needed repairs and touch up the paint in spots.

The clinic now looked brand new.

Angus left and William sat down on the steps of the clinic. He stared at the grated gravel road in front of him. A year ago, he had looked forward to the paved road, but it wasn't worth his daughter's life.

Esa saw him from his own house and walked down the road to sit beside him.

"They did a good job on this place," Esa remarked.

"Yeah, they did. I wasn't expecting this," William replied. "This is probably their way of trying to pay for Bonnie Grace. I wanted this road, but I want Bonnie Grace more."

While Esa knew William appreciated the work done, his attitude sounded bitter. The marshal could tell William was having trouble controlling his emotions.

Esa had mixed feelings about the road too. If they had put the work area where the original proposal had specified, it would have been closer to his own house. Bonnie Grace would have probably lived, but both of their houses, along with the medical clinic, would have been damaged. And it might have been his wife or child that had been injured or killed. And his dad and James would have been right next to the explosion when it happened.

"No," the marshal replied. "This is their way of thanking you for not holding them responsible. They know that someone working for their company killed your daughter. But you can't let this destroy your life.

"What you did saved theirs, though. If you had asked for recompense, more lives would have been destroyed.

“The company couldn’t pay you. They didn’t have the money. Homer said the company is operating on borrowed money until that road contract is paid. If they had paid you anything, they would have had to file bankruptcy. The employees would have lost their jobs and how many families would be out on the street? If what Homer says is true, I don’t know how they’re paying for this.”

What Esa said didn’t make William feel any better. He was still grieving Bonnie Grace’s loss and it took every bit of energy he had to just make it through a single day. He was trying to hold himself together now. He’d been holding his feelings inside for months and he knew the dam would break soon.

William jabbed his elbows into his knees and leaned into the palms of his hands. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.”¹ He mumbled.

Esa put an arm around William and gave his shoulder a few gentle tugs. William turned his face into Esa’s shoulder and began sobbing. Esa embraced him tightly and let him cry.

When the sobs slowed, William pulled away. He leaned his face into his open palms again.

Esa kept a hand on William’s back. He didn’t know anything about losing a child, or a wife. But he understood loss. His older brother, Matthew, had been killed suddenly and violently, just like Bonnie Grace. Esa was only ten at the time, but it had affected him deeply. He thought he understood how Norman and Landon felt. They needed their father emotionally and spiritually healthy.

“Are you getting enough sleep?” Esa asked gently.

William shook his head. “I don’t sleep. I can’t get still.”

The doctor sat quietly for a moment, then he started releasing his grief through words. “I usually end up walking the house, just looking for a place to find peace. But Bonnie Grace is there and I can’t get my arms around her. I want to hold her, but I can’t. I always end up on the porch where she died. I get down on the floor, and I want her so bad. I cry to the Lord to stop this, but it doesn’t stop.

“I try to talk to God, but I can’t. All I do is get angry. ‘I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I

¹ Psalm 22:1-2

sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands, and I would not be comforted.’¹

“‘Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever?’”²

William wrapped his arms around himself with his shoulders hunched and his head down. He began gently rocking, searching for comfort.

Esa waited a few minutes before he said anything. “Do you think this is how Jesus felt when he was hanging on that cross? God turned his back on the sin that Jesus carried. Jesus had always been in fellowship with God, but while he was on that cross, was the connection broken?”

Esa remained quiet again, then said, “‘*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*’”³

“‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”⁴ William replied softly. “That’s what it feels like, that God’s abandoned me. But I know he hasn’t.”

“God was still there with Jesus, and he’s still here with you. Jesus was repeating King David’s feelings from Psalm 22,” Esa explained. “King David was crying out to the Lord because he felt hopeless and abandoned. Jesus repeated David’s words because he also felt abandoned. But Jesus wasn’t hopeless. He knew what was coming and continued to trust in his Father.”

“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”⁵ William hesitated, then mumbled, “I’m so tired.”

Esa gave the simple solution, “Go take a nap.”

“I can’t sleep. I lay down, but I can’t...” William’s words dropped off.

“Don’t you have a pill or something you can take to make you sleep? I’d be willing to bet you would feel better if you got some rest.”

William nodded.

¹ Psalm 77:1-2

² Psalm 77:7-8

³ Matthew 27:46

⁴ Matthew 27:46

⁵ Hebrews 10:22-23

"Why don't you take it?"

"It'll knock me out for hours. When I wake up, I'll be so groggy I can't function. Mother and the boys don't need to see me that way," William explained. "I can't sit down without one of them coming to sit with me. They need me, but I've got nothing left to give them."

"Can't you sleep here? You've done it before."

William shook his head. "There's always somebody coming in. If somebody found me drugged, what kind of reputation do you think I would get? Especially in this town. The slightest action out of the norm causes gossip."

"Go over to Dad's then. Aiyana would understand. There's nobody else there but him and Kimi. And you know Kimi's going to ignore you. She won't even question why you're sleeping there. Take the medicine early and get a good night's sleep. Then have breakfast with Dad in the morning. I'll go tell your mom where you are, and Ayiana can take care of any calls when she gets in."

It took a few moments for William to respond. All he did was nod his head. "I'd like to sleep."

"Come on." Esa stood up and put a hand out to William to pull him from the step. "I'll drive you out there."

Esa opened the door and let himself and William into the house. In the dining room, they separated. William went to the kitchen for a drink of water to wash the pill down.

Esa called to his father. Reid called back from his office in the back of the house. Esa entered the room and addressed his father.

"Dad. William's not doing good at all."

"I know. I've been watching him. He's been avoiding everyone. Sarah's concerned too."

"He needs sleep," Esa advised. "I told him he could rest here. He's taking something to help him sleep. Can you watch him and make sure he's okay?"

"I can do that. Where is he?"

"He went to the kitchen."

Reid stood up and the two men made their way out of the room. In the hallway, they ran into William. He came around the corner and saw

them. He froze, looked at them a few moments without speaking, then lowered his face and continued into what had been the boy's room.

Reid put a hand on Esa's shoulder. "Go on. I'll take care of him."

Esa nodded and left as Reid followed William into the bedroom.

William sat on the bed and looked up at Reid as he came in the door. But he said nothing.

Reid pulled a cane bottom chair near William and sat down. He leaned over and picked William's foot up, resting it on the edge of the chair between his legs. He untied William's boot, then pulled the boot off.

William let him do it. He was too tired to care.

Reid continued by removing William's other boot. Then he slid forward in the chair and began unbuttoning William's shirt. William put his hands up and brushed Reid's away. He left the shirt half unbuttoned. Reid reached up and continued.

William's head dropped and his eyes closed.

Reid finished and stood up, pulling the shirt from William's body.

"Take your pants off," Reid instructed.

William didn't move.

"Take your pants off, or I'll do it for you."

William stood up and dropped his pants. He was stripped down to his broadcloth shorts and undershirt.

While he took his pants off, Reid turned the bed covers down. William immediately laid down and turned his back to his uncle. Reid was just four years older than William. They had lived in the same house for several years and their relationship was more like brothers than uncle and nephew. William didn't like being cared for this way, but he knew Reid was only trying to help, and he didn't have the energy to fight him.

Reid unfastened the garters from William's socks and pulled both the socks and the garters off. He pulled up the covers. "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."¹

Reid walked across the room to pull the shade down. He sat down again and began to hum, then softly sing.

"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord,
"He is my refuge and my fortress,

¹ Psalm 34:18

my God, in whom I trust.”
Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare
and from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday.
A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
You will only observe with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.”¹

Reid sang until he was sure William was asleep, placing scripture in his nephew’s mind. Then he began to pray. The sun went down and Reid remained beside his nephew. Kimi came to him with a bowl of chicken soup. He ate it and set the bowl on the floor. William didn’t rouse.

Reid continued to sit with William and prayed long into the night, knowing that his prayers would be answered.

Tomorrow morning William would rise, eat breakfast, and spend the day with Reid. By the time he left Reid’s house, he would be renewed and be able to face the future with the assurance that his daughter was cared for and loved.

William would miss his daughter, but he would be okay. He had God’s promise that he would see her again. And he would also know that he was loved by both God and his family.

*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up
for us all—how will he not also, along with him,
graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge
against those whom God has chosen? It is God who
justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one.
Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised*

¹ Psalm 91:1-8

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

*to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*¹

Morning came and William sat on the edge of the bed with his eyes closed. He had managed to get his pants on, but that was it. He was groggy and still overwhelmingly tired. He felt he had done all he could do for now, and still needed to rest.

“Good morning,” Reid said from the doorway. “Are you ready for breakfast?”

William shook his head.

“Come on, you’re going to eat anyway.”

William nodded, unable to put up a fight. He stood and followed Reid into the kitchen in his undershirt, with bare feet. Reid put a couple of cold ground sausage patties and a spoon of scrambled eggs on two plates. He sat one in front of William and the other on the table for himself.

He turned to pour coffee. “It’s not much, but it’s the best Kimi can do. She got up early today so I have to eat a cold breakfast. I can fix us a bowl of oatmeal if you want that.”

“No,” William mumbled. “This is good.” He sat staring at his plate, but he didn’t pick up the fork Reid had given him.

Reid ate in silence as William picked at his food.

When Reid finished, he set his plate in the sink. He rinsed his cup out and set it next to the stove. Turning back to his nephew, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a coin. He slammed it noisily on the table beside William’s plate. “Mull over what that penny says, then come talk to me.”

The judge turned and left the room.

William slid the penny closer with his finger and stared at it. It was just a penny. A simple penny. What did Reid want him to do?

It was mostly copper with an image of Abraham Lincoln on it. William read it out loud,

“In God We Trust. Liberty. 1930.”

William heard the Spirit. *Do you? Do you trust me?*

William didn’t know how to respond.

Do you trust me?

The words repeated in William’s mind. *Do you trust me?*

¹ Romans 8:32-35

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Then he heard the spirit speak. *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.*¹

"I don't understand. Why? Why did you take my baby?" William asked softly.

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord.*²

"I don't understand." William repeated, putting his elbows on the table and wrapping his hands around the back of his head. "I don't understand you at all." He looked at the penny again.

In God We Trust.

"I have to trust you. I can't do anything else," William cried.

*"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*³

William sat up and repeated, "Your grace is sufficient. Your power is perfect."

*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.*⁴

William looked at the penny again.

In God We Trust.

*Our God is in the heavens; (I do) all that (I) please.*⁵ *Do you trust me?*

William repeated scripture, "'The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts.'"⁶

The doctor hesitated. Could he truthfully declare the remainder of that verse? Yes, he did, he just didn't feel it. He did trust God, and he needed to declare his faith and act like he trusted God. If he followed God with his actions, over time his lying feelings would follow.

¹ Proverbs 3:5 ESV

² Isaiah 55:12

³ 2 Corinthians 12:9

⁴ Psalm 103:11 ESV

⁵ Psalm 115:3 ESV

⁶ Psalm 28:7a ESV

People were watching him—people that might not trust God. His witness to others was important to his heavenly father, and to himself.

“You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.”¹

William needed to show his belief through his actions. He had made his decision and with more strength than he felt, he continued the scripture. “And I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.”²

William remained at the table. He took a bite. His weakness remained but his anger seemed to drain away. With each bite the feeling of hopelessness left him and the sadness began to lift. He picked up the penny and read out loud,

“In God We Trust.”

The doctor stood up and shoved the penny into his pocket. He downed the last of the coffee, and left the room.

¹ Isaiah 43:10 ESV

² Psalm 28:7b ESV

18

April 1932

Denver, Colorado

Donald Cryer knocked on the wood frame of the open door. James looked up but said nothing.

“James, have you got a few minutes?”

“Sure.”

Cryer found a chair and sat down. He leaned back and crossed his legs, making himself comfortable.

James’s supervisor often did this. It was a common morning occurrence for Donald to visit with James when he first got to the office. He usually arrived midmorning. He would bring two cups of coffee from the cafeteria downstairs and the two men would visit as they leisurely drank the brew. They would discuss ongoing cases, issues with employees, and family matters. They knew each other well and were friends. But Cryer had already visited in the office this morning; and this time, he didn’t bring coffee.

The railroad’s lead attorney got to the point quickly. “James, I’ve just come from a meeting with the president of the board. He’s asked me to find out if you would be willing to take a paid leave of absence from this office for an extended period of time.”

“Paid leave?” James questioned.

“Yes. He has a rather bold mission he would like you to take the lead in.”

James sat waiting. He had never been asked to do anything like this before, nor had he known of anyone else that had been given paid leave, unless they were injured on the job.

Cryer continued. “You know the board has always supported our veterans. The railroad even supports veterans’ groups that are not associated with the company. Now, you have a choice if you do this or not.

It's not mandatory, but it will require you to be away from Denver for an extended time. Because of this, we're going to offer you an expense account so you can take Winona and Travis with you."

"This is a very generous offer," James commented. "But you haven't told me anything about the job. It must be serious if they're willing to pay me like that."

"It is serious," Cryer explained. "This depression has affected the railroad just as much as it has every other business across the country. We've had to cut back the worker's hours for almost every hourly employee in an attempt to keep all the personnel working. Many of the higher-up salaried employees have taken pay cuts too, just like you and I have. The board only gets paid when there's a profit so they haven't made much the last couple of years either. But they're willing to pay for this knowing it will cut into their own salary."

"Are you going to tell me what it is?" James chuckled.

"Okay. You know about the World War Adjusted Compensation Act? They're also calling it the Bonus Act."

"Yeah, I've got my certificate. A twenty-year certificate of service. Bonus they said. Ha! Stupid legislation. Why didn't they just call it a pension plan and be done with it?"

"Yeah, it was stupid," Cryer agreed. "It's more of a mandatory savings account that you can't touch. But if the veterans headed to Washington get their way, it could be a help during this depression. Poor families of veterans would receive a much-needed cash infusion. This depression has caused deflation. Prices fell because demand was low. Nobody has money to spend. This would stimulate the economy. Imagine \$2.4 billion to boost spending. It would help everybody."

"Early last year Congress approved one-half of the adjusted compensation giving the veterans access to about a quarter of their bonus in the form of a loan..."

James interrupted, "A loan? If they don't have jobs, how are they going to pay it back?"

"I don't know what their thinking was on this," Don replied. "But it doesn't matter, President Hoover vetoed the bill, saying that such a generous amount would deplete the diminishing federal funds. He didn't want the offer made to all veterans. He wanted the money to go to the ones in dire need, which probably amounted to about a quarter of the veterans. His rejection of this aid was rooted in sound economic policy, but it eroded his popularity even more. Veteran's protests grew and this movement has

gained steam. These veterans are in worse shape now than they were then and they're now wanting all the money.

"Anyway, this present group of out of work veterans needs money to support their families. They're going to Washington to ask congress to pay what is owed to them now and not wait until 1945 to get their money. The railroad is providing transportation starting in Seattle and moving across the country to Washington."

Cryer really wished he could tell what James was thinking. His subordinate had said it wasn't good legislation, he didn't agree with congress's decision, but his face showed no emotion. No question. No excitement. No anger at what congress had done years ago.

The former soldier's paralyzed face was an advantage in negotiations and in the courtroom, but it often frustrated Cryer. He couldn't read his employee's face. He had no clue what the man was thinking.

But Don agreed, it was a stupid decision to pay these patriotic men in such a manner. Stupid to offer the soldiers and sailors a signing bonus after they had been discharged; and stupid to dangle the money in front of them and then make them wait twenty-five years after they were discharged to receive it. Stupid to issue them a single piece of paper and expect them to keep up with it for twenty years in order to receive money as payment for a job done almost thirty years previously.

The payment was supposed to compensate the men for lost wages during their time in the service. Military pay wasn't good. In fact, it was much less than what these men would have received in the private sector. Many of these men had steady, well-paying jobs, and they gave that up to serve their country in its hour of need. Many of the men, like James, had their education interrupted. But unlike James, they were never able to go back to school.

When the men came home from France, most found that their previous employer had replaced them with someone else. This new employee had been on the job sometimes years, and the employer was happy with the work they were doing. Many had already been trained in new skills that were needed as the flourishing companies modernized equipment and procedures. The companies didn't want to train someone else and felt it unfair to the current workers if they were to be laid off so that a former employee could have his old job back.

The foremen and managers felt bad for leaving the veterans out in the cold upon their return, but the company was the employer's main concern. No change needed to be made if the company was running

smoothly. But no jobs were available with so many men returning from the war and looking for work.

Cryer continued, "What we would like you to do is go to Washington with them. Be their spokesperson. Advise them on procedures. Make sure they are doing things lawfully. We don't want them to get into trouble and have public opinion turn against them. These are our heroes. The men we look up to."

"I have no idea what procedures they would need to follow," James interrupted, perplexity in his voice. "I'll have to study on this. I don't even know where to start."

"You start by going to visit with Senator Ben Craig. He's here in town right now and Clayton has set up an appointment with him for two o'clock tomorrow afternoon. He's a veteran too, and I'm told he's sympathetic to this cause. Ask him how to proceed. Find out who else he might know that supports these men. Make friends with him and learn all you can about the bill and how to move forward. I'll get you anything you need, just let me know."

Cryer stood up. "Like I said, you can refuse. We can find someone else. Your military service is distinguished and your reputation as an attorney is well-known. The ex-servicemen will respect you and value your council. But talk to the senator first, please. Then make your decision."

"I'm not going to refuse," James said slowly. "I just don't know that it will do any good. I hope it does, but I don't see congress changing its mind. I mean, where would congress get the money to pay them? That was the whole point of putting off payment all these years. It allows the government time to save up the cash needed to pay out. Where are they going to get it now, especially in these hard times?"

"Well," Cryer said. "That's their problem. The men that served bravely and now can't support themselves or their families have a different problem. And we have been given the task of helping them. We're not going to worry about the opposition's problems."

"I can't help it. I see both sides."

"Then use that to your advantage. Anticipate congress's response. Be prepared for their pushback."

James nodded and softly replied, "Okay."

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

James visited with the senator and began preparing his strategy. He contacted Pastor Simmons and told him of the extended time he would be away from Denver and advised the pastor to ask Rick Barber to fill in as Bible teacher until his return.

“He doesn’t know the Bible very well, but if you give him some direction, I’m sure he can follow the instructions in the leader’s book.”

James had three weeks to prepare both himself and his family for this trip.

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May 1932

Denver, Colorado

James and Winona waited on the platform as the train pulled into the station. The train was already crowded; he could see this through the windows of the passenger coaches.

The platform was crowded too. Men, several with families, congregated in small groups waiting for the train to come to a stop. Some had suitcases or flour sacks. Most carried a haversack canvas bag across their shoulders with their few belongings inside. Some wore their old uniforms, others their work clothes. A few had worn suits with holes and patches. All the veterans had their campaign medals pinned to their shirts. Those with awards displayed them too.

The train would be here for probably an hour as additional coaches and boxcars were added to the length of the train. James had seen the schedule. There were seven stops before the train reached Saint Louis. There more cars would be added.

Winona held Travis on her hip. He was getting too big for this, but the platform was crowded. She didn't want to lose him in the confusion.

James was looking for his contact, Walter Waters.

Mr. Waters was a veteran from Oregon. He was the founder and organizer of this mission. He had conceived this idea following contact with many out-of-work veterans who spoke bitterly of their treatment by the U.S. government. They had served their country willingly, sometimes eagerly, during war. They had fought and suffered to bring peace in an area of the world that desperately sought to continue the conflict.

The area was still a ticking timebomb. James had read about the French recovery efforts and the continued unrest in Europe.

To the south, the Ottoman's had continued fighting until 1923 and resisted the dismantling of the land which was broken up, and the

portioned land distributed to the Allied Powers. The Turkish National Movement fought this change and sought to establish an independent state.

A series of conflicting promises made by the British added fuel to an already volatile situation. The British support for an independent Arab kingdom had not been resolved. A secret agreement between Britain and France had followed, further escalating the struggle. Then the Balfour Declaration expressed support for a national homeland for the Jews in the same area. Under British control, this area continued to have ongoing conflicts and violence.

Prince William had never relinquished his claim to the throne of Prussia, or of the German Empire, when the new parliamentary government had been formed. And the rise of the Nazi party, a right-wing extremist group, was troubling. James had read about the numerous political party's battling for control after the fall of the monarchy at the end of the war. They were still fighting.

When the war was over, soldiers from America were sent home to find life different. They were mustered out of the service and given sixty dollars in cash and a train ticket home.

Girl friends had found other beaux; jobs were taken by others; and friends who had joined the military were dead. Those that had survived the war unscathed took care of their comrades who returned in a less fortunate condition. Many just wanted to forget the hostilities, return to a normal life, and move on.

Home was different, but the veterans made new lives without complaint. They found new jobs. Some married the sweetheart that had waited patiently at home; some married new girlfriends quickly. All desired a stable and peaceful existence. The veterans filtered back into their old lives, into the drab routine on the farm; or they might have found a job at a factory near the city. Some traveled the country seeking a less violent adventure. All wanted to forget what had happened overseas.

It was an adjustment, but they had done it. They had served their country and they had settled in to continue their noble patriotic lifestyle, proud of what they had accomplished in France, and proud to have served bravely and faithfully for a just cause.

Just when the men were settling into a new life, the World War Adjusted Compensation Act had been made into federal law. It was May of 1924. Many were excited to hear that their service was appreciated and congress had felt the need to compensate them for their loyalty and bravery. But the excitement didn't last long. They were being

compensated, but it would take another twenty years to receive the money. Many of the soldiers would be dead by then.

The only way a veteran could receive what was due him early was if he died. If he died, his widow would receive the money upon his death. The former soldiers quickly deemed the act the "Tombstone Bonus."

Receiving their 'bonus' twenty years down the line was a slap in the face. Insulting to the proud men who had served, and would serve again if called upon.

Now this awful depression had hit. They, like many others across the country, had lost jobs. As a result, many had lost homes and families, too.

James was thankful he still had a job and a home; even though his pay had been reduced and groceries at the stores were getting scarce, his family was eating.

Several passenger coaches and even more box cars made up this train. The doors to the box cars were opened and men poured out. But none of these men had families with them. James looked back to the passenger car. The men's families were in the coaches. This was good. The men understood where their treasure lay.

James saw a man standing at the top of the coach's steps as others passed him getting off the train. James moved toward him and called, "Mr. Waters?"

He called several times before the man turned and found James with his eyes. He waved.

James had Winona's hand and pulled her through the crowd as he approached the steps. Waters stepped onto the wooden platform and reached his hand out, taking James's scarred hand forcefully in greeting. "Sargent Britt, it is good to meet you. I was told you and your family would be joining us here."

James's legal knowledge and dedication would be invaluable to the group. As Waters looked at James, he knew that James's appearance would lend even more credibility to their cause. He was a living example of the debt that was owed these men. His presence would also inspire the men and give them direction.

Walter Waters turned to Winona and Travis. "That's a fine-looking boy you have there."

The Britt family stepped onto the train with Walters who had seats located just inside the door with two other men. He pointed Winona and Travis to seats across the aisle, and introduced James to the two men who were waiting for them.

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

Waters got right down to business.

"In May of 1929, Representative Patman of Texas introduced a bill that would pay us our bonuses. But it failed in the senate. Earlier this year, Patman introduced the same bill, and it failed.

"I've been trying to get the men involved, but until recently, haven't had much luck. We have a right to compensation for our service to this country and we have a right to be heard by our government.

"I thought the pay was okay when I signed up, making a dollar and a quarter a day over there in France, until I came home. Do you know the guys making the bullets we used were making more than ten dollars a day? Ten dollars a day! And there we were getting shot at for a buck twenty-five.

"That's why we're going now. These men are out of work and are desperate to care for themselves and their families. This 'bonus', they're calling it, should've been paid while we were on active duty. They should've paid us more than a private's measly thirty bucks a month. Do you realize there wasn't an enlisted man over there that made a hundred a month? Heck, the men making the trucks made more money than those of us in the trenches who took the risk!" Walter ranted. James could see the anger in his face.

"I agree, and I admire your determination to get compensation for these men, Mr. Waters. But this will have to be handled carefully. Any disruption by this crowd of people, any disrespect by the men, will be looked upon negatively."

James was interrupted by a swiftly growing noise on the train platform to his right. The other men turned to watch a shoving match between two veterans grow into a mob that pushed one man to the ground. The men standing walked away, and the man on the ground picked himself up and trotted to catch up with the others.

"The men will have to be controlled," James advised the man next to him. "You know as well as I do that a crowd of people can get unruly quickly and you will lose control without any indication that trouble is coming."

"I know," the man replied, calmly. "I've got a few others that I'm talking to and we're trying to devise a way to control them and keep count of them. By the time we get off this train, we will know everyone on board. Names, ranks, family members. We're setting up an accountability method so everyone is responsible to a leader, a sergeant, who reports to his division's captain."

"Sounds like you've thought this through."

"We're trying. Any help you can give is going to be appreciated," Waters replied. "Where do you stand? What were you told to do?"

"I'm to advise you on procedures and law. I've contacted some individuals who have given me direction on who to contact in Washington, and I've got someone setting up appointments with representatives so we can personally advocate our main selling points.

"We need a group of nice calm men who can make a positive impression on the representatives. They need to be well versed in what we're asking. These men will station themselves throughout the offices, ready to make contact themselves when the opportunity arises. We'll rotate these men so the congressmen will have contact with multiple individuals and hopefully get views from more than one source. I'll be attending the house meetings and keep an eye out for sympathetic representatives. I'll try to make quick contact with them.

"Others, outside the building, will need to be instructed on etiquette and appropriate contact with the members of congress. They're to seek out those voting on the bill and talk with them as they enter and leave the building.

"I'm also contacting those that might be swayed with a little push of information. And I'm preparing for a positive vote in the House. Then we'll move on to the Senate."

"We've got a lot to talk about," Walter said, pulling a notebook out from under the seat.

Walter made some notes but continued to talk. "Where did you serve? What division?"

"Second Army Division Hospital. I was a medic."

"When were you injured?"

"March 1918. Second battle of Somme," James replied.

"Gas?" Waters guessed.

"Yeah."

"You're lucky to be alive."

"It wasn't luck, it was all God." James wouldn't deny what God had done for him. He let everyone know God was in control, even in control of his injuries. He may as well let this man know now that he was a Christian.

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

“We are ‘predestined according to the purpose of the One who works out everything in agreement with the decision of His will, so that we who had already put our hope in the Messiah might bring praise to His glory.’”¹

Waters smiled. “You’re a Christian?”

“Yes, sir. ‘Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.’”²

¹ Ephesians 1:11b-12 (HCSB)

² Matthew 5:16

20

May 1932

Somewhere in the Ohio Valley

The journey was long and tiring, marked by the kindness of strangers and the camaraderie of fellow veterans they met along the way.

The men rode in boxcars, hung onto the side of tank cars, stood in coal gondolas, and perched themselves on the top of passenger cars as they made their way to the nation's capital. Many more trains converged on Washington from all over the country.

One train, from the northwest, unloaded its cargo of men in Indiana. There, the men started walking east.

Winona entertained Travis as they rode comfortably in the crowded passenger car. He played with other children and crawled under the seats in games of hide-and-seek. His mother read to him, and other children, from a collection of children's stories in a book. When their son fell asleep, Winona passed the sleeping child to James and he held his son as he continued to talk with the other men.

Plans were discussed and decisions were made. But nothing was set in stone. Until they arrived in Washington, all plans were subject to change. They didn't know where they would camp or what conditions they would be living in. They didn't know if the citizens of the city would be sympathetic to their cause, or if they would face hostility.

Many of the men brought tents and blankets. Others had nothing, made no plans, and were willing to sleep anywhere. They had done this while in the army, they knew they could do it again.

The train rattled along the tracks, carrying its passengers closer to their shared goal. Conversations flowed easily, filled with stories of the war and struggles the men faced at home. The men in the passenger car found solace in knowing James was with them. He was intelligent and

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well-versed in procedures used to gain access to the congressmen. They weren't alone in this fight.

As they crossed state lines, the group's numbers swelled. By the time they reached the outskirts of Washington, D.C., the Bonus Army had become a formidable force, united by their cause and their determination.

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May 1932 Washington, D.C.

By May 26, City of Washington Chief of Police Pelham Glassford was already preparing for the arrival of the veterans who were calling themselves the Bonus Expeditionary Force. He told the press that no food was available for these men who were without jobs. He then asked the papers to issue a call for donations. He used his contacts in the Army to borrow cots, tents, mobile kitchens and other equipment from nearby army posts. He contacted civic relief organizations, telling them to expect the arrival of hundreds of men with their families. The men had nothing; no job, no money, and no way to pay for food or shelter. He told these organizations to prepare for the worst.

Glassford hoped that by taking care of the basic needs of the veterans there would be no looting or begging on the street. When it was pointed out that such generous accommodations would attract even more unemployed veterans, Glassford replied, "It would be far better to have 10,000 orderly veterans under control than 5,000 hungry, desperate men breaking into stores and committing other depredations."¹

Glassford was pushing for the passage of the Patman Bonus Bill by the members of Congress. The Bill was being debated in committee. Glassford hoped that the bill would pass quickly so that the city was not overrun by the veterans. Some, that had already arrived, seemed desperate.

Help also came from President Herbert Hoover. Quietly, without notice or fanfare, the president ordered that the men be provided with tents, cots, food and medical treatment. Hoover opposed the passage of the bill,

¹ The Institute of Land Warfare, The Land Warfare Papers, No. 63W April 2007. Confrontation at Anacostia Flats: The Bonus Army of 1932, by Kendall D. Gott. www.ausea.org

but he was sympathetic to the veteran's plight. Passing this multi-million-dollar appropriation would put the country's budget in the red, and he was determined to have a balanced budget.

Glassford continued to prepare for the veteran's arrival.

The Bonus Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) arrived in Washington with high spirits as the ex-servicemen and their families stepped off the train on May 29.

Single men climbed down from the top of the boxcars carrying their bedrolls and knapsacks.

James and Walter were the last out of the coach. They were met by other army and navy veterans who had come to the capital city to join those petitioning for their promised money.

Among those to meet the train was the Chief of Police Pelham Glassford. He stood in uniform on a bench in front of the station window, looking over the crowd. James had seen a picture of him and been briefed on the man.

James thought of his Uncle Luke. Uncle Luke had been the Harris town sheriff for years and was often at the train station to meet the incoming trains. He knew who was in his town and who was leaving. James wondered if this policeman was also watching for problems.

James decided to introduce himself to this man. He pushed forward and called to the man to get his attention.

"Hello."

The man turned to look down at James and Winona. He stared at the scarred man without giving a reply.

James put his hand out. "I'm James Britt." Glassford slowly took his hand.

"I want to let you know there's not going to be any trouble. None of us are here to disturb the peace of this city or to cause any problems. We're here to address the representatives and senators, that's all."

Pelham Glassford stepped down from the bench. "That's good to hear. Are you in charge of this group?"

"No, I'm legal council. Walter Waters is in charge." James turned to look for Waters and spotted him a short distance away. He yelled at Walter to get his attention, then waved him over.

Waters put his hand out to Glassford. "Walter Waters, sir."

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The chief of police responded, "Pelham Glassford."

James addressed Waters, "I was explaining to the Police Chief here that we're not going to cause any trouble."

"No, absolutely not. We're here to petition congress. That's all."

This was almost the same words the scarred man had used. Glassford knew that this group was organized and the men in charge had discussed their business in detail.

"Well, good. Welcome to Washington. We've arranged for encampment just across the Anacostia River at a location called Anacostia Flats. It's not the driest spot, swampy in areas and worse when it rains, but it's a large area, and it's open. It should meet your needs."

"Just point us in that direction," Waters said with a smile.

James wanted to smile, too. They had the support of the police. This made organizing this group much easier. "Chief Glassford, could we meet with you day after tomorrow? At our camp?"

"I'll be there. Take that street." Glassford pointed to what looked like a major street through the city. "And follow it to the river, then turn left until you get to the draw bridge. Just across the bridge you will see some tents. That's your area."

And with that, Chief Pelham Glassford turned to a blue Harley-Davidson motorcycle that was parked nearby, mounted, gave a kick to the starter, and rumbled away through the crowd.

The camp seemed to grow continually as men arrived from Texas, Arizona, Mississippi, and Missouri, along with men from every other state in the union. There were white men, black men, Indians, men of Chinese descent, Irish descent, and Italian ancestry, all living and sleeping beside each other—working for the same purpose—the money promised them by their government.

The different ethnic groups had been divided while in the service and were housed separately. They trained separately, for the most part, and were fed separately. The black men couldn't fight beside their white colleagues during the war, they had been dispensed to a French regiment. While they were paid by the U.S. government, they fought under the French flag. But now they stood with honor beside every other American veteran and sang the national anthem as loudly and proudly as all the rest.

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Streets were organized by state and the Salvation Army quickly set up a library at the center of the camp. Spirits were high as the men followed their leaders with a childlike faith, just as they had followed the military's leadership during the war.

James initially thought that he would get his family a hotel room, and sent Winona and Travis on to the hotel while he went with Walter Waters to the camp at Anacostia Flats.

After talking with the men on the train, and seeing the sprawling group of makeshift homes, he decided his family needed to live with the men he was working to help, at Anacostia Flats.

Leaving the settlement, James joined Winona and Travis in the hotel room. Winona wasn't sure she wanted to live in a tent. She had done that as a girl and didn't like the memories it evoked. Memories of men she didn't know, of abuse, hunger, and deprivation. But she understood her husband's desire to be a part of this group of men. She cautiously consented, reassured by her husband that she would be safe, well fed, and as comfortable as possible while living outdoors.

Calling Walter Reed Medical Center, where Edison Stewart practiced medicine, James was told his cousin was unavailable. So James left a message at the hospital where he had spent months recovering when he returned from France. Before James began his attempt to influence the senators on behalf of the veterans, he wanted to visit his cousin. But for now, he would have to wait.

James headed to a recommended merchant's establishment to purchase the supplies he and Winona needed. A tent, a cookstove, lantern, fuel, three cots, blankets, a few pillows, and a couple of camp stools. He would leave the remaining items for Winona to purchase in the coming days.

Winona spent the afternoon alone at the hotel with Travis. All afternoon she worried about the camp they would move to. Visions of her childhood flashed through her mind. But each time she saw a face that disturbed her, she also heard a voice.

Do not judge by appearances.¹ For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak

¹ John 7:24a

*and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.*¹

She knew that this scripture was true. God had rescued her.

Each time a memory of abuse filled her mind, she would remember God saying, *But (you will) trust in (my) unfailing love, my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me.*²

Yes, God had been good to her. He had brought her out of a life of slavery and prostitution, and given her a good home and a godly husband who was able to provide for the family's needs. She was blessed.

Winona realized that many people now lived in communities just like this and they weren't bad people, they were just less fortunate.

*As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people.*³

She was able to help. But how? Did she need to help feed these people? Did she need to buy food and share with them? Did she need to sew clothing?

Yes, she could make life better for these people. Winona decided to wait until she got to the camp and see what needed to be done.

James returned to the hotel to find a message from Ed at the desk inviting James and his family to dinner that night.

¹ Psalm 72:12-14

² Psalm 13:5-6

³ Galatians 6:10a

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May 1932

Wheaton, Maryland

A cab delivered James, Winona, and Travis to a modest townhouse on a tree lined street. The two-story red brick home boasted a simple but charming façade, with white trim and black shutters framing the windows.

The family was welcomed by a plain, nicely groomed and simply dressed woman in her late-thirties, followed closely by a young girl.

“James, it’s good to see you again. You must be Winona,” Hattie Stewart said, offering a smile and a hug to her husband’s cousins. “Come inside. Ed’s upstairs changing. He’s looking forward to seeing you again.”

James barely remembered Hattie. He had met her once or twice when they lived in Denver. And she had come to the hospital to visit him a few times at Walter Reed. She had been friendly and sat with him while she read scripture. Ed had asked her to do this, James knew. It hadn’t been her idea.

She seemed shy with the men who whistled at her and called for her attention. She would wave and blow kisses their direction, but she was focused on James. He was barely conscious much of the time and in the oxygen tent when she read to him. He remembered her voice as being distant. He was scarcely able to hear her soft, gentle words over the noise of the oxygen streaming into the tent through the attached hose. Then she stopped coming.

Ed had explained to James that Hattie had been disturbed by the wounded. She knew all the men wanted companionship and loving attention, but she was a married woman with two small children. She would become so upset by the needs of the men after visiting that she cried all afternoon. It upset the children and she didn’t want that. Therefore, she had stopped visiting.

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

Ed had voiced her apology and told James of her desire to help him. It had been a hard decision, but her need to care for the children outweighed her compassion for him.

James understood. He had felt alone and abandoned, even when she sat with him. His disfigurement and struggles were forefront in his mind at the time, and he couldn't imagine a beautiful young woman wanting to sit and hold his hand, even if she was Ed's wife, and a relative. And he couldn't tell when she touched his hand. The nerves were damaged and her touch was soft. It felt strange and foreign to him.

He held no grudge against her. He understood her concern for the children, but he still missed her presence. Just knowing that she was there, even if he couldn't feel her touch or understand her soft voice, was a comfort to him. He didn't like being alone, and he felt alone, even in a room full of men. Now, years later, he couldn't even remember her voice and he didn't recognize her face at all.

She shut the door behind the Britts. They stood in a cozy living area with a warm, inviting atmosphere. The hardwood floors were polished to a soft sheen and the Persian rug added a touch of elegance and style. Hattie pointed them toward a Mohair sofa near a cold fireplace framed in beautifully carved cherry wood. The visiting couple sat. James drew Travis onto his lap.

A modest, yet well-crafted wooden coffee table sat in front of the sofa holding a tray with coffee. Hattie reached to pour everyone a cup just as Ed came around the corner into the room.

"James," Ed spoke loudly. "Oh, my goodness, let me look at you. I'm so happy you called." James stood up, sitting Travis next to his mother. He stepped toward Ed who wrapped him in a bear hug.

The two men were about the same height, but James still had the slim frame he held as a soldier. His disfigured hands didn't have the strength of Edison's hands, so the hug seemed lopsided and awkward to James. But he loved his cousin anyway.

The scars on James's face had faded since Ed last saw him, but the discoloration and leathery skin remained. Areas of tight, restricted movement were detected by Ed's trained eye.

The past fourteen years had been good to Edison. He had gained stature and now sported a well-groomed beard surrounding his wide smile. The doctor had an air of commanding confidence.

"I was surprised when I found your message on my desk. What in the world are you doing in Washington?"

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

James backed up a step and replied, "I'm here to assist the veterans who are petitioning congress for their bonuses."

"I heard about that." Then Ed's eyes turned to Winona and Travis. He put his hand out to Winona and said, "You must be Winona. William told me you are an outstanding nurse. He said you're a natural and he didn't need to give you much instruction. You just knew what to do."

Winona smiled and softly said, "That was years ago."

Ed laughed. "It has been, hasn't it." He sat down in the armchair across from the sofa and his face got serious. "And this is Travis? You have some mighty big shoes to fill young man. Your namesake was a man we all admired and loved. I'd be willing to bet you are loved just as much."

The four-year-old smiled shyly and reached for his father. James sat again and took the child back into his lap.

"Let me go put the finishing touches on dinner," Hattie said. "Winona, would you like to come keep me company?"

Winona looked at her husband. James nodded, "Go on."

"I'm going to feed the children before we eat so we can have a relaxing dinner. Travis, do you want something to eat?" Hattie asked.

Travis shook his head.

"He had something before we left the hotel," James commented.

Hattie's daughter followed the two women into the kitchen.

James and Ed sat talking and catching up with events over the years since they had last seen one another. Then Ed asked about the bonuses the veterans were working to receive.

"I don't know," James said. "I'd like to think everything I'm doing is going to help but I honestly don't see how congress can give away that much money during these hard times."

"Have you prayed about your part in this?"

"Yeah. I have. But I haven't gotten a clear vision of what I need to do. I'm talking with people and making contacts. I'm getting the message out there, but I feel like there's something else I should be doing. I don't know what. My supervisor at the railroad, and the men I'm working with, seem to think I'm doing what needs to be done." James shook his head. "But it doesn't feel right."

"This is what the Lord says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you,

who directs you in the way you should go.”¹ What do you think he’s trying to tell you?”

James shifted Travis in his lap. The child had fallen asleep and was now leaning heavily on his father’s arm. James turned him around to lay Travis’s head across his shoulder. The boy whimpered his displeasure at being moved.

“Shhh. I’m right here,” James soothed, rubbing the child’s back as he leaned back on the sofa.

“Well, I’m an attorney and now I’m doing lobbying work. I’ve always been good at negotiations. Give a little here and hold your ground on something else. This is different. There is no give. I have to hold to the one demand these men are making.

“I feel like God wants me to do more. But I don’t know what. Being a lobbyist is going to be tough. It’s not my nature to just walk up to somebody and start talking. I’m going to have to meet with and talk with a lot of people.” James hesitated briefly. “It will take a lot of effort and time. But these men don’t have time. They need money now.”

“What about your job? Can you go back to it when this is over?”

“The railroad’s paying me to do this, but they want results, too. The sooner this gets resolved, the sooner I can get back to work in Denver. If this falls through, and these guys don’t get the funds they’re asking for, I’ll probably be called back to Denver anyway. The railroad won’t keep paying me forever.”

“So, you don’t think the veterans will get the money, and you think you will need to stay and continue fighting for it?” Ed asked.

“Exactly,” James agreed with Ed’s analysis. “If I were on my own, I might be able to support myself, but I’ve got Winona and Travis to think about.”

“It sounds like you need someone else to provide you with a paycheck.”

“Nobody’s got the money to do that,” James replied. Then he laughed. “I’d need to find somebody as rich as Regan Barber. He’s a businessman in Denver. It doesn’t seem this depression is affecting him at all.”

“Do you know him?” Ed asked.

“I’ve met the man. I know his son better.”

“Maybe you need to ask him.”

¹ Isaiah 48:17

"I can't do that. I don't think he even agrees with this undertaking. He's a pretty conservative guy," James said. "I've never heard of him supporting any charity, or funding any venture without a guaranteed return for his money."

Winona came back into the room. "Dinner's ready. We'll just be in the next room. Why don't you leave Travis here and let him sleep?"

James slid Travis onto the sofa and stood up. He took his coat off and covered the child.

"Well," Ed continued the conversation. "If you decide that's really what God wants, you had better find a way to accomplish it. Maybe you could find several businessmen and veteran's groups, or someone who could split the amount you need."

Ed stopped. He heard the Spirit speaking to him. *"In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*¹

The Spirit was encouraging Ed to help. He was to be the first to give so that James could continue working to help these men.

Ed couldn't do this. His thoughts continued as he moved toward the dining room.

*I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.*²

He didn't have the money to help support someone else like this. His salary was good, but the economic depression was affecting him too. He had no savings. Nothing to fall back on or to help if he needed financing for anything. What if one of his children were to get sick? What if his salary were to be cut like so many others? He couldn't commit to supporting James then later pull back and say he could no longer do it. This went against every economic and moral lesson his father had taught him.

The Spirit spoke to the doctor again. *Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, (exercise) oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*³

¹ Acts 20:35 ESV

² Ecclesiastes 3:12-13

³ Peter 5:2-3 ESV

Ed knew he had to do something. He was being prompted by God. "James," he instructed. "You contact that man in Denver. You tell him you already have one benefactor. You tell him you need support. You have to do this."

James stopped to look at his cousin. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying, if God is telling you to work toward this end; if you have to quit your job with the railroad to get these men that bonus, then do it. And I'm telling you God is telling me to help support you. I'm here for you.

"I love those men," Ed continued. "I've taken care of the war's wounded and I understand the veteran's needs. When they went to war, the government told them they would be taken care of. They were told the government and the American people supported them. I'm still taking care of them. Those that have been injured, like you, still need our support.

"Some are being taken care of, but some aren't. I've heard the stories of what happens in other places around the country. A lot of them feel like no one cares. They gave up homes and jobs and sometimes families to serve this country, and when they came back a lot of them came back to nothing. They feel abandoned and forgotten, especially by their own government, the one entity they thought they could count on. I'm not going to turn on them like that. I'm going to support them, and you. You tell that rich man that."

23

May 1932

Anacostia Flats, D.C.

James and Winona spent the first night in Washington at the hotel, then they moved into the tent at Anacostia Flats.

As Walter Waters surveyed the men that had arrived to be a part of the B.E.F., he found veterans who had set up housekeeping in an abandoned and partially demolished building on Pennsylvania Avenue. Others were camped on public lands, in alleys, and in condemned buildings. The encampment at Anacostia Flats was on private land across the Anacostia River from the nation's capital. The land was owned by former Assistant Postmaster General, and former Governor of New Hampshire, John H. Bartlett. The area quickly became known as Camp Bartlett.

This land was a sprawling and often swampy area where tents and makeshift shelters had sprung up overnight. Thousands more had been added since Waters' arrival. The veteran's community grew with each hour's additional arrival of sojourners.

John Bartlett was sympathetic to the Bonus Army's cause. He allowed the men to stay and instructed the police to leave them alone.

As he stood that morning watching the activity as the camp was being set up, James realized he loved these men. He loved the camaraderie he felt, he loved the considerate way they took care of their families, he loved the men's spirit. As James got to know the men at the encampment, he knew he needed to actually become a part of the B.E.F. He would get to know the veterans and the men would get to know him.

Most of them had nothing, but the hope they showed for what was happening now—for what could happen—was inspiring. But he also saw that these men needed help.

Their confidence in their elected officials was misled. Even if they won this battle, the amount of money they received would be limited and

a temporary solution. It would only last a short time, then these men would need help again. And there was nowhere else to get help. James didn't even know how congress could award a cash payment with the economy in such poor condition.

Scripture came to James's mind. *"I will not rule over you... The Lord will rule over you."*¹ These men needed jobs, and these men needed to trust in God more than they trusted their government.

*While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*²

James asked the men near him to help search for a pastor, priest, or rabbi among the veterans. Just like the disciples did sending forth Barnabas and Saul, the men that represented the veterans would be prayed over and anointed to the work they were doing.

James called another man waiting near the headquarters tent. "I need an area cleared and marked off for a church. Right there." James pointed to an area nearby. "See if you can find some lumber to build a raised platform to speak from."

The man left to obey.

James walked to the back of the tent and dropped to his knees, blocking out the noise around him. The hammering and talking vanished. The sounds of the nearby city, boat whistles, automobiles, and sounds of movement within the camp disappeared. James focused on one thing: his Lord.

*So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence."*³

James would have Walter Waters introduced to the crowd as their leader. Then they would pray for him and his ability to guide these men. He would be commissioned, like Joshua, to leadership. There would be no question in anyone's mind that his word was law in this community.

¹ Judges 8:23

² Acts 13:2-3

³ Numbers 27:18-19

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them.¹ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.²

He and Waters, and the clergymen that were found, would choose the men who would represent the group in the representative's offices. They would be instructed in what they needed to do and say, and they would be prayed over. James would make sure that anyone making contact at the capital knew who was really in control: the Lord Jesus.

James had already taken a leadership role, helping to organize the camp and ensuring that their demands were clearly communicated to the authorities.

He found himself standing shoulder to shoulder with men who had fought with him in Europe. The bonds forged in the heat of battle were rekindled as the men shared their hopes and fears.

Winona had discovered a need that she could help with too. These people were poor and hungry. They had medical needs that needed to be addressed too. Edison had told her she was a good nurse, and as she saw the needs around camp, she knew she could help.

She would provide support to the families, offering comfort and assistance to those sick or injured. She found a drug store and bought basic medical supplies and began her work.

She soon discovered that a Marine reserve unit had set up a dispensary. Volunteer doctors scheduled a rotation to provide services. She shared this information with James, and he gained permission for her to join with this unit. She began going to the dispensary daily, taking Travis with her.

The next time James talked with Ed, he told the doctor about the medical needs in camp and that a dispensary had been set up manned by volunteers. Ed immediately volunteered to assist.

There were tents and shelters made from crates, cardboard, and scraps of metal. Thatched straw roofs covered much of the area. Some of the men living in the camp had construction skills. They collected wood

¹ Acts 6:3

² Acts 6:6

scraps from trash piles and discarded materials at demolition sites. Veterans used these to build cute tiny homes within this shanty town community.

Some had small stoves and cooking implements. Most had some sort of bedding. The less fortunate had 'Hoover blankets', layers of old newspapers which they laid across themselves in an attempt to stay warm when evening came and the cool wind swept in from the nearby river.

Some men packed themselves into tents and lean-tos, while others slept in the open air with no roof.

The camp was strictly controlled by the former soldiers, who laid out streets, built sanitation facilities, and set up an internal police force. Racial lines were crossed and "a stroll through the camp was an education in the simplified business of living."¹

Each state had its own section and men formed into regiments of sub-communities within the camp. They lived together and worked for a common cause. Black, red, brown, white—men of every color—crossed racial barriers and lived side by side, sharing kitchens, eating together, and often sleeping together.

The "one example of Jim Crow segregation among the 10,000 men there and that, oddly enough, was started and maintained by colored bonuseers themselves, who hailed from New Orleans and other towns in Louisiana. They had erected a section of shacks for themselves and they insisted on their own mess kitchens."²

There was a religious tent, where veterans and their families could be heard voicing praise, trust in God, and gratitude for what they did have. Lay preachers attended daily meetings and a local Catholic priest had volunteered to hold confession at the camp once a week.

The Salvation Army lending library was always busy. Here, the camp residents were not only able to read books, magazines, and newspapers,

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- ¹ The Bonuseers Ban Jim Crow, by Roy Wilkins, reporter for the NAACP publication *The Crisis*. Reprinted from *A Multimedia Story of the "Bonus Army": In 1932, the U.S. Government Used Tanks and Tear Gas on Its WWI Veterans*—Jason M. Kelly
 - ² The Bonuseers Ban Jim Crow, by Roy Wilkins, reporter for the NAACP publication *The Crisis*. Reprinted from *A Multimedia Story of the "Bonus Army": In 1932, the U.S. Government Used Tanks and Tear Gas on Its WWI Veterans*—Jason M. Kelly

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

but were able to write letters home. The camp residents were able to purchase postage stamps, which were more highly valued than cigarettes.

To live in the camp, veterans were required to register and to prove they had been honorably discharged. The camp also required the veteran's bonus certificate. When it was produced, the veteran would receive a membership card stating they were a resident of the camp.

Despite the harsh conditions, there was a sense of hope and unity among the men and their families. Each man felt a bond with the other man, and the women's struggles were eased by the shared work. Friendships quickly formed.

In their effort to get the promised bonus, the men planned to hold peaceful demonstrations. They would march to the Capitol and plead their case to the government. Articulate men were assigned congressmen and these former soldiers would camp in the congressman's office, just waiting for a chance to speak with the senator or representative in person. Others were already standing on the capitol steps, hoping to catch a politician coming in or leaving. The anticipation was easily felt, but so was the tension.

24

June 1932

Washington, D.C.

Former Brigadier General and District of Columbia Chief of Police Pelham D. Glassford, entered the camp riding his blue Harley-Davidson motorcycle and flanked by two officers. His crisp polished uniform attracted everyone's attention.

A make-shift flag pole had been positioned in front of Waters' tent. Glassford found Old Glory raised above the hovels and lean-tos immediately. He followed the well drawn-out streets to the tent.

James stepped out of the shelter with Waters to welcome this imposing visitor in police uniform. He had arrived as planned, and right on time. Both men stood at attention and saluted the former General.

"At ease, men," Glassford said. He was obviously proud that the men had respected his former position and given him a military welcome, but he wanted to put these men at ease.

Glassford was a tall man with a stern but compassionate expression. He greeted Waters with a firm handshake, his eyes reflecting the shared experiences of war and the unspoken bond that connected them. James moved to the background.

"I'm not here as your commander or even as the police chief." He wagged his head, "Okay, I am here as the police chief, but not to reprimand you for anything. I'm here to help. I want to know what you need."

Walter and James both relaxed, as did others present.

Glassford, himself a World War I veteran, provided yet another glimmer of hope in their desperate struggle.

Walter, James, and a few other leaders gathered near the largest tent, where a simple table—a piece of battered plywood on two old worn sawhorses—and several folding camp stools had been set up for the meeting. Again, a semblance of what was seen during the war.

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They waited, some anxiously, others eagerly, as the meeting progressed. The weight of their mission pressed heavily on everyone's shoulders.

As evening wore on, the camp got quiet. The numbers of men who stood near the meeting place listening had grown. They were hoping to hear the conversation.

Glassford stood up, preparing to leave.

"Thank you for meeting with us, Chief Glassford," James said, extending his disfigured hand for the first time. He hadn't spoken much during the meeting but had listened and taken mental note of what was said. "We appreciate your support and understanding during these difficult times."

Glassford nodded. "I understand your struggles, gentlemen. I fought alongside men like you in the Great War, and I know the sacrifices you've made. That's why I'm here—to listen and to see how we can work together."

His encouragement was felt by all. Walter Waters spoke up, his voice steady but filled with emotion. "Chief, we came here because we believe in the promise that was made to us. We risked our lives for this country, and now, when we need help the most, we're being turned away. All we're asking for is what this country voted on and approved. Six-hundred dollars and not a penny more. We don't care about the interest that has accumulated. We don't care about waiting to get the maximum. We need the money now to support ourselves and our families."

Glassford listened intently, nodding as Walter and others continued to share concerns. He sat down again, knowing these men needed to tell their stories. He listened patiently. He knew the challenges the men faced—unemployment, poverty, and the constant struggle to provide for their families. He had seen it in his own community, too, and felt the burden of responsibility to do something.

Glassford turned to James, who had spoken very little. "What's your story, young man?"

James didn't have a story like the other men. He still had his job. He still had his home. His family was taken care of. "I'm just here to advise, sir. My job is secure and my family is taken care of. I'm here to help these men and advocate for them."

Glassford smiled. "But you have a story. Job and family are only part of it. Were you injured in battle?"

"Yes, sir. Gas." That was all James said.

“Do I see a ribbon under your shirt?” Glassford fingered the edge of his own collar, indicating the location on James where the blue ribbon was slightly exposed. “Let me see it.”

James looked to the table, a little embarrassed by the direct instruction—command really—and nodded his head. He reached inside his shirt with the hand that was missing two fingers and pulled on the ribbon. It slithered out of his shirt bringing with it—Glassford stood up quickly and saluted—the Medal of Honor.

James looked toward Chief Glassford and nodded, “Thank you, sir.”

Pelham Glassford sat down. “Others are wearing their awards outside their shirts. But you’re not. Why?”

“I didn’t do what I did during the war looking for awards. I did it because it needed to be done. I don’t want to be thought of as the man that did something heroic. Every man here was just as brave, we all did what we had to do, what we needed to do. The fact that what I did was recognized as bravery is inconsequential to this cause.”

“But you were also injured. Badly it looks like. If you have a job and home, why are you out here?”

“Yes, sir. I was injured. Only by the grace of God am I alive. Lying in that hospital bed in France, I promised God that I would take what he gave me and I would use it to serve Him. He gave me the training and ability to help guide these men through the legislative process. So I’m going to do just that.

“‘What good is it ... if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother ... is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to (him), “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but (you do) nothing about (his) physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.’

“‘But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

“‘Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.’¹

“I didn’t abandon the men on the battlefield and I’m not going to abandon them now. That’s what I’m doing here.”

Those listening erupted into cheers and applause. Shouts were heard supporting the man that was supporting them.

Glassford stood up to look at the men around them.

¹ James 2:14-18

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

"I understand your frustration," Glassford said loudly, his voice measured as he spoke to everyone within hearing distance. "This situation is complicated, but your cause is just. I will do everything in my power to advocate for you and ensure that your voices are heard. But understand me. You need to maintain order and ensure everyone's safety, not just your own. You need to watch to the safety and security of those you come in contact with within congress. You need to protect and respect those around you, other civilians, passers-by, tourist.

"Your numbers are great, and that concerns many people. The War Department has fear of a revolt and the potential of what this large organized group of veterans might be able to do scares them—just think about what happened in fascist Germany and Italy and you can understand their feelings. Others look at this group with everyone having the same goal as communism. Still others look at you as rebels and revolutionaries.

"Some think you want to become mercenaries and get paid for killing. They're calling you un-patriotic."

Murmuring moved through the crowd. James heard whispers of grumbling from the veterans near him.

"But I know none of this is true. I know that you are fighting for every man, woman, and child in this country. If you win, it won't benefit you alone, it will benefit the whole country. You are the ones leading this campaign to help your fellow Americans achieve a better life. Our joint hope lies with the Bonus Expeditionary Force."

The attitude of the veterans changed again and another cheer went up from the crowd. Glassford held his hands up for silence.

"I am committed to finding a solution that respects your rights and addresses your needs but you need to hold the same spirit you held as a soldier: protecting those who need protection. Protecting the citizens of this fine country. Protecting each other, and respecting your government."

Another round of applause exploded and the crowd spontaneously burst into song—

Over there, over there,
Send the word, send the word over there,
That the Yanks are coming,
the Yanks are coming,
The drums rum-tumming everywhere.
So prepare, say a prayer,
Send the word, send the word to beware,

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We'll be over, we're coming over,
And we won't come back
till it's over over there.¹

The men began to march and form into lines without instruction. They moved around the camp singing and marching until they gently faded to their beds.

The leaders of the Bonus Army felt a sense of relief, knowing that someone in a position of authority was willing to stand with them. The meeting continued late into the night with more discussions about strategies, support, and the best ways to move forward. Glassford's speech was inspiring and his presence and willingness to engage with the veterans gave them renewed hope and determination.

As the meeting drew to a close, Chief Glassford asked, "What else do you need? What can I do to help?"

"'Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience,' James replied, 'desiring to act honorably in all things.'"²

Walter Waters, James Britt, and many others thanked the police chief for his support. The bonds of trust and mutual respect had been strengthened, but they knew that their fight was far from over. With allies like Glassford, however, they felt more empowered to continue their struggle for justice.

Morning arrived and the men went about their shared responsibilities. James had done all he could, for now. He would attend House sessions and he would stay close to the command tent hoping for a breakthrough with a congressman. He helped solve problems and direct operations. He taught groups of men and women about political involvement, government, economics, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. He counseled veterans and supported Winona in her charity work.

When Winona saw a child with an infected foot, she did the best she could. She got ointments from the dispensary and bandaged the infection.

¹ Lyrics of "Over There", 1917 by George M. Cohan

² Hebrew 13:18 ESV

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She collected basins and buckets to carry clean water and manned the nursing station as much as she could.

Most needs were minor but required care. Without sanitary conditions and a clean house to recover in, it was more important than ever that injuries and illnesses were taken care of properly. Sickness would spread quickly among these close quarters.

Those cases Winona questioned, she referred to a doctor.

Edison would come a few evenings a week and see the referrals, but there weren't many. Winona was good at what she did and the other doctors took their turns.

Her biggest problem was getting her thoughts off the make-shift homes and dirty women and children. They reminded her so much of her past—of the way she had lived as a child after her mother was sold into prostitution. Her heart went out to these women and children who had no choice in how they lived.

She was still quiet and didn't hold conversations with those she helped. She examined the injuries and washed the wounds. She looked at throats, and ears, and listened as children coughed. She told the mothers how to take care of the injury or illness.

Others thought her snobbish and she wasn't making any friends. She didn't expect to. She was socially awkward and had never had a true friend, except within her family, and with the older woman who worked for them in Denver. Still, she was happy with the work. She was helping.

One week later, as the sun rose over the camp, the veterans stood together, ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead. They were united by their shared experiences, their unwavering resolve, and the belief that their fate was in their own hands. And in the heart of the Anacostia Flats, the spirit of the Bonus Army burned brighter than ever.

The person giving the veterans the most support was Washington Superintendent of Police, Pelham Glassford. He asked Congress for \$75,000 to feed the marchers, a request that was turned down. But somehow, he found a way to provide needed provisions so that the marchers would not starve.

Glassford contacted civic clubs, churches, and various agencies and charities asking for assistance with food. Wholesalers contributed and

donations came into the camp daily providing enough food for the marchers to have two meals a day.

Kitchens were set up for each state unit, and most of the men, women, and children from that unit ate together. Women worked in unison to care for the children and to cook the meals. Many stood with their husbands along Pennsylvania Avenue.

Winona continued her mission to help the women and children of the camp. She provided for their medical needs and found a place in this complex community to make a home for herself, her husband, and her child.

One evening, after she and Ed had finished with the patients and were packing supplies, Winona said, "Ed, I think I'm pregnant."

Ed turned to her with a smile. "That's wonderful. Congratulations." Then his face fell. "You don't look very happy about this."

"Ed. You don't understand. James and I have been married twelve years. Joseph said James's injuries would probably keep him from becoming a father. And I probably can't..."

The doctor took his cousin in his arms. His interruption stopped her explanation, she wasn't able to explain about her injuries from the abuse she took as a child. "Anything can happen Winona. James's body has had time to heal. You know as well as I do that miracles happen. Have you been feeling sick?"

"No, I've just been really tired."

Ed smiled. "You've been working hard too. You need to slow down. Why don't you start taking an afternoon nap? You don't have to help with these common problems. The women can help each other. If you're pregnant, you can't continue working the way you have been."

"That's what I was thinking. But James loves being with these men. He loves what he's doing. When I tell him, he's going to want me to move out of the tent. I don't want to go somewhere else. I want to stay with him."

"How far along do you think you are?"

"Maybe two months."

"I've got a friend at the Women's Hospital. I'll call him tomorrow and set up an appointment for you. Then I'll have Hattie come get you and go with you. You can talk to him about your concerns. How does that sound?"

Winona nodded. "Thank you."

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The early summer heat bore down upon the marchers as frustrations grew. Men attended their posts in the congressional halls and on the steps of congress as they had been assigned to do. They marched to and from their placements, displaying their resolve and showing the city they were collectively committed to their endeavor.

On June 15th, Congressman Wright Patman's Veteran's Bill passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 209-179.

James watched from the gallery alongside Walter Waters. When the count was announced, James closed his eyes and felt relief. They had done it. They had passed the first hurdle.

James heard the Spirit. *You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.*¹

"What, Lord, what do you want me to do next?" James asked silently. His thoughts were interrupted when he heard the men outside receive the news. Their shouts echoed through the halls of congress.

Some of the men waiting on the steps erupted with shouts and thanksgiving. Others fell to their knees and thanked God. Still others raised their hands toward heaven. The group swelled and they began marching in the street, singing patriotic songs, forming tight lines and formations as they had during the Great War. One exuberant man was hugging everyone he passed.

James tried to smile but it came onto his face as a snarl.

"What's the matter," Waters asked. "We won."

"I'm happy about it," James responded. "But we're not finished. Tomorrow, we start with the senate members."

James followed as the group of men returned to their shacks to celebrate, sing, and tell stories of triumph. The celebration lasted late into the night.

The next day they were back on the job. They now had to convince the Senate to follow with a yes vote, too.

Many of the men thought life should get better with the forward vote of the House, but it didn't. It only took a few days for the Senate vote to come.

Failed. Sixty-two to eighteen. The bill was rejected.

¹ Hebrews 10:36

25

July 1932

Washington, D.C.

The unemployed veterans were asked to go home. Many complied, but many had no home to go to. There was no job waiting for them and no reason to go anywhere. Living here with the other veterans felt more like home than their lonely existence riding the rails searching for a job. Their only hope, they thought, was the six-hundred dollars of promised bonus money. And their only friends were the other men around them.

Within the walls of the government offices, unrest lingered.

Nervous congressmen wanted to know how much power this radical segment of veterans had. So, J. Edgar Hoover volunteered the Federal Bureau of Investigation to examine what was known about the men who had registered with the group.

The War Department across the nation went to work to identify all marchers who were suspected of having communist ties. The flood of information almost buried the workers compiling the data. This revived the bureaucrat's fears of a communist revolt.

Glassford, with other city and federal representatives, feared trouble brewing. They tried to persuade the veterans to leave the city. They offered money, train tickets, and food; they offered everything but a job.

Instead, the veterans settled in and a carnival-like atmosphere ensued. The wooden platform erected at the church tent was in constant use as bands played, speeches were made, songs were sung, and sermons were preached.

Anacostia Flats became a tourist stop, and the various speeches and assemblies never failed to draw a crowd of curious spectators.

One of the most popular attractions took place every day, just before supper—story hour for the children. It was late in the afternoon and many

people sat waiting for dinner. Children anticipated the tales, but adults were also listening.

James couldn't let this opportunity pass without being involved—not today. He had a story to tell, too. He felt it within his spirit. When the stage was clear and everyone was waiting for someone else to appear, James stood up. This would be a challenge for him, his silly-self would be exposed to everyone. He would tell the story as if he were telling it to his son.

Travis loved his father's stories. When Travis realized his father was going to the stage, he leaped from his mother's lap and began clapping his hands and jumping up and down. "Daddy!" He yelled as James put his foot on the platform and pulled himself up.

James walked to the center of the platform and a hush rolled through those watching. He looked like a man prepared to give a serious speech, not tell a children's story. James surveyed his audience, turning to look at the crowd of hundreds, which stood on all four sides of the platform. Then he turned to his son.

"What story do you want to hear?" James knew what story his son would ask for—David and Goliath, his favorite.

"David and Goliath," Travis yelled. "Yay! I like that one."

James nodded and spoke loudly. "My son likes this one. David and Goliath."

Others laughed and clapped encouragement for him to continue. James heard a man near the stage groan and turn away.

James's voice changed as he took on the language and demeanor of a mountain man. He raised his voice so all could hear.

"Well, now let me tell ya a story 'bout David 'n Goliath." His voice was strong and it carried over the crowd. "Now I'm a gonna tell ya the way my grandpa told it. Now my grandpa knew the story from the Bible real good, but 'e was a mount'n man an' 'e liked to make 'is stories in'erestin'. So I'm a gonna tell ya the way 'e told it ta me."

The man on the ground stopped and turned back, now interested in the story.

James was walking around the small platform saying a few words to one side, then turning to say a few words to the other. He would lean forward and look directly at a child, then back up and talk to a distant woman using the Appalachian accent that was resurrected from his grandfather's dialogue.

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

"There was once this little town way up in the Appalachian Moun'ins. It was tucked 'way up in this cozy little ole holla'. In that town there was a shepherd boy named David. Now David took care of 'is ga'ma's goats.

"David, 'e ain't got no money, he ain't got no coat in the winter, an' ain't even got no shoes. But 'e weren' no stranger ta them there 'ills; 'e knew ever' nook an' cranny. Ever' holler an' ever' creek. Folks that was in that town liked 'im far 'is grit an' 'is kind 'eart.

"One day word spread through them 'ills 'bout a big big fella named Goliath who'd come a stompin' down from the caves up on the top peak.

"Goliath was as big as a barn an' twice as mean. 'E started demandin' that people in that town give him stuff. 'E wanted food. An' 'e wanted animals. An' 'e wanted blankets 'cause it was cold up there on the top a that moun'in."

All the children laughed as James stomped around like an ogre. Travis was jumping up and down again, laughing and clapping.

"An' ever' time they went ta church 'e would come yellin' an' makin' noise an' the people couldn' worship God. The singin' was disturbed." James looked hard at one group of children.

"There was noise when they wanted to pray." He pointed his finger straight at a boy near the stage.

"An' nobody could 'ear when the preacher talked." James cupped his hand around his mouth in an attempt to be heard better.

He turned back to look around at all the people on every side. "The good folks in that town was plum terrified an' there ain't nobody who could stand up ta Goliath an' make 'im stop.

"Well little David, 'e 'ad fire in 'is belly an' faith in 'is heart. 'E stepped forward an' said, "I can face that big ole bully."

"The townspeople scratched their 'eads wonderin' 'ow a scrawny little shepherd boy could take on a giant. David's older brothers made fun a 'im sayin' that 'e weren' nothin' but a scrawny kid who wanted attention from the grown-ups.

"The preacher called ta David, 'Ya can't go up that mount'n barefoot. Them rocks is sharp an' them thistles'll cut ya legs. Come get my boots. Ya can wear them.'

"So David puts on the preacher's boots, but they was too big. They come clear up over David's knees. When David tried ta walk 'e shuffled 'e's feet an' couldn' move." James showed what it was like for David to

try to walk in oversized boots. He hobbled across the platform, pretending to trip every few steps.

Then he stopped and pointed his finger at a group of men near the back.

“But David weren’ no quitter.

“Carry’n nothin’ but ’is sling-a-leather an’ a few rocks ’e picked up at the river, David climbed barefoot up ta where Goliath was bellowin’ ’is threats.

“Now Goliath sees this young whippersnapper an’ laughs so ’ard the moun’ins echoed with ’is howlin’.

“David stood tall. ’E stood ’is ground. ’E was as steady as a rock.” James stood tall and took a deep breath. A familiar feeling hit his chest hard and he coughed until he had lost all air. Everyone had their eyes on him, and Winona was getting concerned. She stood up, ready to move. But she hesitated. There were too many people watching.

He took another breath, but the feeling in his chest remained. He looked up as he nodded to his wife. He pressed on, not speaking as loudly, and more cautious of taking deep breaths.

“’E took a deep breath an’ loaded up ’is sling an’ took aim.” James loaded an imaginary sling and raised his arm over his head.

““You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of (these ’ere folks), whom you have (dirtied).””¹

“One swing. Check far distance.” James slung his arm around once.

““This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands...and I’ll strike you down and the whole world will know that there is a God in (these ’ere moun’ins).””²

“Two swings. Check aim.” James slung again.

““All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give ... you into our hands.””³

“Three swings. Let fly.” James swung again. His head was swimming. He opened his hand, stumbling as he released the invisible rock.

¹ 1 Samuel 17:45

² 1 Samuel 17:46

³ 1 Samuel 17:47

"It flung through the air, quicker than a squirrel after 'e's been in the sorghum." James put his hand over his eyes to shade them from the sun, watching the invisible rock fly away. He stood still, longer than he should have, but his head needed to clear. He continued, "That there rock flew straight an' 'it Goliath smack dab between the eyes." James jerked back like he had been hit himself and began stumbling backward. The crowd was laughing.

"Goliath stumbled back. He stopped an' weaved an' wobbled an' crashed ta the ground like a big ol' pine tree that's been chopped by the lumber jack."

James unintentionally fell on his backside. He froze in the sitting position and looked around. He continued, still on the floor.

"The people couldn' believe what had happen'. They let out a cheer that echoed through them there 'ills, celebratin' David's triumph." Then, as James stood, he finished his story. "That shepherd boy that ain't never done nothin' before showed 'em that even though he was small, an' 'e ain't never done nothin' big 'fore, 'e could do what nobody else could do with just a little faith an' some gumption.

"From that day on, David was a real hero 'round them 'ills. Folks told that story over an' over 'round the campfires, remindin' ever'boday that perseverance an' a good bit a moun'in grit can get anythin' done.

"So there ya 'ave it. David an' Goliath, moun'in style."

James dramatically nodded his head once and bowed deeply. His head began to swim again. He stood up. He was finished. He headed for the edge and stepped down.

Travis jumped up and yelled again. Other children joined him and so did the men and women who were listening. Travis ran to his father and flung himself into James's arms.

James caught him, but quickly set him on the ground. He took the child's hand as he pressed his other arm to his painful chest. Winona was the only one to recognize the discomfort he felt. She got up and moved toward him giving him a brief hug. She put her arm around him and they headed for their tent.

Pelham had arrived and was watching from the crowd. He smiled and nodded his head. This man was a motivator.

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

Winona returned for a second visit to the doctor at the Women's Hospital and her suspicions were confirmed. She was with child. She was happy she was carrying her husband's child, but how would he react? Would he want her to stay with him or would he want her to go home?

He would be happy with the news. She was sure of that. When they were first married, they had talked of having children of their own. They had dreamed of it.

As the years passed and she never became pregnant, they came to realize how much of a blessing Travis was to them. He wasn't their blood, but he was their child. They silently gave up hope of another baby; and although they had contacted several schools and maternity homes offering a home to any half-Indian, half-white child, none were found.

Winona smiled and placed a hand on her abdomen. She was having a baby. A child of their own. Growing inside of her.

*Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.*¹

"Thank you, Lord," she said softly.

That night as they lay on the cots beside each other, Winona told James the news.

James didn't respond immediately, and that worried Winona. Then James rolled on his side and put an arm across his wife.

"Right now, all I want to do is hold you," he said.

Winona shifted her pillow to lay across the edge of both cots. She moved her head closer to her husband's and he responded by laying his face next to hers.

Lying beside each other on the cots was awkward. The heavy rod on each side of the cot reached up to attack their ribs when they tried to hug each other. It was impossible for Winona to lay in her husband's arms. So they placed a pillow over the hump and rested their faces near each other. That was the best they could do.

"Thank you, Father, for the gift of life. Thank you for blessing us with another child. He is a gift from you, just as Travis is. 'Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.'² We praise you, Father. How you have blessed us! Oh, how you have blessed us."

James didn't speak again. He simply held his wife.

¹ Psalm 127:3

² Psalm 5:12

After some time, James let go of Winona, and turned to pick up his Bible. He opened to the book of Luke and read. Winona listened. She was happy. She was loved. And she was going to have James's child.

James continued,

“““When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that its desolation has come near. Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains.”””¹

“James,” Winona questioned. “What’s Luke talking about?”

“I’m not sure. He’s talking about the destruction coming to Jerusalem. I don’t know if he’s talking about when it happened after Jesus ascended to heaven, or if he’s talking about during the seven years of desolation before the judgment of the world.”

This scripture was terrifying to Winona, and she didn’t know why. She had read this passage before. She took her husband’s arm and hugged it, laying her face against it.

“What’s wrong,” James asked.

“I don’t know. That scripture just scares me.”

“Don’t let it scare you. Either it happened a long time ago or it’s going to happen after we go to be with Jesus in heaven. Either way, we won’t be there.”

James continued,

“““Those inside the city must leave it, and those who are in the country must not enter it, because these are days of vengeance to fulfill all the things that are written. Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days, for there will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people.”””²

Winona started crying. She was scared to death, and she didn’t know why. James laid the Bible down and rolled back to the edge of his cot to wrap his arms around his wife. Both were laying on the edge of their cots holding each other when both cots tipped toward the middle and flew out from under them. James and Winona fell to the ground between their beds,

¹ Luke 21:20-21a

² Luke 21:21b-23

still in each other's arms. Both looked into the others face and burst out laughing.

James quit laughing and rose slightly to see if they had disturbed Travis. He was still asleep. James reached toward his cot and pulled his pillow toward them. He slid the pillow under their heads and they put their faces against each other's and closed their eyes.

The next morning James rose early and took Travis with him to the mess tent. They were one of the first to arrive and they waited and talked as breakfast was prepared. Then they ate and walked through the camp while Travis played with his toy train. They arrived at a small playground just outside the perimeter of the camp. James allowed Travis to run and jump and swing. James pushed him on the merry-go-round until Travis thought he would throw up. Then they lay in the grass and laughed as they talked and joked until Travis's stomach settled.

James put the boy on his shoulders and headed back to their tent, occasionally trotting like a horse. He dropped the boy onto his cot. Travis began running his train around the edge of his cot.

Winona was up and preparing for her day.

James took her hands and looked into her eyes. "I love you, and I trust you to take care of our children. I trust you to take care of yourself. I have always trusted you. Rest when you need to. Make sure you eat and don't skip meals. Tell me when I need to take Travis, and send someone to get me if you need me. I won't say these things again, because I trust you. I love you, and nothing can ever take that love away." He kissed her and asked, "Is there anything you need from me today?"

She smiled and the love shown in her eyes. "No. I'm fine."

"Okay," James replied. "I'm going to the library. I have some research to do. Travis has had breakfast and we've been to the playground. I'll see you this afternoon."

Winona put a hand to his face and said, "I love you."

He kissed her one more time, leaned over and ruffled Travis's hair. Then he left.

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

On July 9, the bonus army newsletter was distributed. The 'B.E.F. News' encouraged the men to stay in Washington and fight for the rights of every American that had been affected by the depression over the last three years. It encouraged the men to continue to press congress and the president for help; to fight for hungry Americans, and watch for communist elements among the veterans. They were to expel radical or un-American factions from among the men.

The newsletter went on to say, "All proffers of help in sending the veterans and their families' home are clear evidence that those who deny us genuine relief seek to escape from a situation which covers them with shame."¹

The reaction was immediate.

The government painted the protesters as criminals and communists. Newspapers carried the stories of criminal records and past arrests among the protesters; rumors of hungry men with desperate actions, abused women, and delinquent and neglected children were common throughout the city. Because of this, public opinion was turning against them, whether the stories were true or not.

President Hoover locked the White House gates against the veterans and refused to see these "bums, pacifists and radicals." He ordered the guards to keep them away from the fence. He didn't want to see them at all.

The War Department was seized by fear. At no time in history had so many soldiers deliberately gathered in one place with a single joint purpose. Men in old officer's dress mixed with those in enlisted men's uniforms. It was a mocking gesture to the elite within the department which had always kept the enlisted men and the officers separated.

Racial lines continued to be destroyed as every race of man stood at attention, shoulder to shoulder around the perimeter of the capital building.

At no time in history had black, white, red, and brown soldiers joined together asking for a single response to their collective request. At no time in the country's history had these men fought side by side, sharing sleeping quarters and meals. Never had these men drank out of the same canteen as they were doing now. These men served as one body of organized veterans—Jim Crow laws be hanged!

¹ The B.E.F. News, Vol. 1 No. 3, dated Saturday, July 9, 1932. Taken from: A Multimedia Story of the "Bonus Army": In 1932, the U.S. Government Used Tanks and Tear Gas on its WW1 Veterans—Jason M. Kelly

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

The marchers continued to maintain their self-discipline and the single-purpose. The B.E.F. knew what they were doing, where they wanted to go, and how they would get there. They continued to visit congressmen and stand on the capital's steps with signs reminding people that they were still there. They held peaceful organized marches through the city streets.

They were still hungry. Donations continued but had slacked off. The army had removed much of the borrowed equipment and all meals were now being prepared at one location. But the B.E.F. would not give up until they were able to support themselves and their families the way men should.

General George Van Horn Moseley, the War Department's chief of intelligence, again called for the "drifters, dope fiends, unfortunates, and degenerates" to vacate Washington.

It was assumed that the men who had Jewish names, and many with black faces, were communists.

In truth, there were some veterans that held to communist beliefs and there were a few non-veterans who had infiltrated the ranks. These people had their own agenda and often marched with the Bonus Army within their own unit. But they were shunned by the other men and, when discovered, run out of camp. They were forced to sleep among those in the abandoned buildings and on public land. They had no right to eat with those at Camp Bartlett, so they had to provide their own meals. They didn't hold to American ideals, and they weren't wanted among the veterans.

Most of the Bonus followers rallied under such slogans as, "We Ask Very Little for What We Gave," or "First Class Mail, First Class Pay," or "Foreign Nations gave Bonuses with Borrowed American Money."

Politicians discovered that even the uneducated veterans understood American politics and economics. Someone was teaching them.

Before adjournment on July 16, congress authorized loans to be given against the bonus certificates, but few veterans took advantage of this. James wondered why congress would offer the loans. The men had no job and no hope of obtaining a job. How could they pay the loan back? And what would happen if they were unable to repay the loan? Would they go to jail?

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

Congressmen left the building near midnight that last day using back doors and underground tunnels. They wanted to avoid confrontation with the B.E.F.

On July 19, retired Marine Major General Smedley Butler addressed the veterans at the Anacostia Flats camp.

“A whole lot of people speak of you as tramps. By God, they didn’t speak of you as tramps in 1917 and 18.” He shook his head. “No. No.”

Applause broke out as Butler continued, “Let me tell you something, I’ve been all over the world, I’ve seen you on the streets in Washington. This is the most well-behaved group of citizens in the world sitting right here in this camp!

“Take it from me, this is the greatest demonstration of Americanism we have ever had. Pure Americanism. I know who’s made this country worth living in. It’s you fellows. People like you. Remember, by God, you have made this country worth living in and don’t allow anyone to tell you different.”¹ Butler spoke loudly and clearly before the men, encouraging them to continue their ongoing pursuit for their ‘just cause.’

Confidence grew and the veteran’s energy swelled as the words were spoken from the former two-time Medal of Honor recipient. The men felt validated, understood, and motivated to continue toward their goal.

James simply felt relief. Their mission of being understood by the administration was a success. This man among men, this respected grizzly Marine, understood these men. If this man could comprehend the struggle and the burden these veterans carried, others did too.

James’s determination to find new ways to achieve their goals grew inside of him. Their cause was righteous, their cause just, and they deserved the support of the country they loved so much.

The directive came from the Attorney General on July 28. Police Chief Pelham Glassford was ordered to evict soldiers from an abandoned federal building on Pennsylvania Avenue. The building was being torn down to make room for new construction and new jobs.

¹ Smedley Butler fiery speech to World War 1 veterans is still relevant today. By James Clark, updated Sept. 8, 2021. Task and Purpose website.

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

Glassford sent ten officers with orders to relocate the current tenants. The officers moved throughout the building telling the men they had to get out, they would be shown where to camp. They had to leave, and it had to be now. Today.

As some of the men were easing their way down a narrow staircase with no railing, one of the men slipped while carrying his bundle. He bumped another veteran. This man was unable to catch himself and fell from the staircase.

Veterans and police officers rushed to help the man and see if he was hurt, but he got up swinging. He rushed at the man that bumped him and knocked the man to the floor. Others moved to stop the fight, but one of the officers took a blow to the face.

Another policeman reached for his baton. That was all it took. A man, trying to defend his fellow veterans, threw a brick at the baton, attempting to knock it from the officer's hand. But he missed his target and hit another officer. Other men rushed to grab the officer with the baton and a young policeman, unfamiliar with how to handle this situation, drew his gun and fired.

When the smoke cleared, one veteran was dead, shot at close range, and another lay dying. The men scattered a short distance, and stopped to watch as the scene went quiet. Those still standing with the fallen were in shock. Two veteran policemen had the younger officer by the arms, restraining him. They had taken the fellow's gun away and watched as several members of the B.E.F. fought to save the life of the one injured.

By the time the ambulance arrived, two men were dead and bystanders had moved to encircle the scene.

There would be an investigation and the young officer would probably lose his job. Some of the veterans wanted to see him in jail. Murmuring moved through those waiting to be shown where to go. The police officers were cautious of what the men around them might do next, and hesitated giving them more instructions.

Veterans were slowly moving their belongings out of the building as the original policemen eased out of sight. Other officers arrived to supervise the eviction.

Nobody was happy.

Word spread and members of the Bonus Army began to congregate nearby. Pennsylvania Avenue became crowded with angry and upset men.

Word reached Camp Bartlett at Anacostia Flats and more people began to move toward the sight of the shooting. Someone had called for

prayer, and there were angry shouts for others to meet at the sight of the shooting.

The story reached Walter Waters and James Britt. Waters ran across the draw bridge to get to Pennsylvania Avenue, hoping to control the men and ease tension felt among the veterans. All it took was one hothead and this would erupt into something much much worse than just two dead.

James walked the camp that was in an uproar. He talked to the men he saw, trying to calm their anger at the situation and ease their fear. He met with women who were worried about their husband's safety. He advised everyone to return to their home and wait. While they waited, they should pray for the men involved in the altercation—both veterans and police. "Pray for peace," he told them.

Somehow, James ended up at the church tent with a large group of women, children, and older family members. They were calling to him for understanding and for information. Rumors were spreading of multiple injuries, multiple deaths, clashes with police, and fights among the B.E.F. members. People sought the truth.

James stepped onto the platform. "Listen," he shouted. His hands were raised, trying to quiet the crowd. "Listen to me. I don't know exactly what's happening. I've heard several stories. I don't want to spread false rumors. We'll wait for the truth. There's nothing we can do from here except pray. Please, take a seat. Pray with me."

Some sat where they had been standing. Others moved toward him to hear better. A few turned and walked away.

"We're all scared. And it's okay to be scared. But God has called us to overcome our fear. He wants us to hold to him when we are afraid. Fear is a lack of trust in God, and he wants us to trust him so that our fear is removed.

"He has called us to stand strong against the adversary. These problems on the other side of the river aren't caused by our enemies. Other Americans aren't our enemy. It was a misunderstanding that got out of control. We're all Americans. None of us want anyone hurt.

"When the Assyrians surrounded Jerusalem and King Hezekiah heard their demands, he took the letter from the Assyrian commander to God in the temple and he laid the paper before God's alter. King Hezekiah's enemy was there in front of him, and he responded with prayer.

"Let us now go to God's alter, like King Hezekiah did, not to conquer our enemy but to conquer our fear. To seek God's guidance." He turned his face to heaven.

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

“Lord, the God of Israel (and of America), enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, Lord, and hear; open your eyes, Lord, and see.”¹

He opened his eyes to look at the people. Now he was talking to them as well as to God. “We must obey the rule of law. God, you have placed the government in power, and we must obey.

“Obey the (government’s) command, I say, because you took an oath before God.”²

“We took an oath as soldiers to defend and protect this country before God. That oath still stands. We must stand firm.

““Do not be in a hurry to leave the (president’s) presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. Since a (president’s) word is supreme, who can say to him, ‘What are you doing?’”³

““Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a person may be weighed down by misery.

““Since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come? As no one has power over the wind to contain it, so no one has power over the time of their death. As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it.

““All this I saw, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt. Then too, I saw the wicked buried.””⁴

¹ 2 Kings 19:15b-16a

² Ecclesiastes 8:2

³ Ecclesiastes 8:3-4

⁴ Ecclesiastes 8:5-10a

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

James continued to pray and quote scripture. The people at the tent calmed as a spirit of peace settled on the gathering. But in the distance, the sound of angry men's shouts could be heard.

The men on Pennsylvania Avenue were furious at the killing of their comrades and were voicing their displeasure loudly. The street was crowded with tourist and the men who had been evicted were waiting for someone to tell them where to go. Other veterans arrived to show respect and honor to the fallen. Everyone seemed to know part of the story, but no one knew everything.

Police patrolled the area and occasionally shouts were directed at them, but no one took action. The B.E.F. was controlled, but fear and apprehension ruled both the veterans and the police.

The powers within the government also wanted to know what had happened.

The stories told about the incident reached the ears of the Secretary of War Patrick Hurley. He issued orders for the army to get control of the area.

Army Chief of Staff, General Douglas MacArthur, received the message and quickly called for troops to restore order around the capital. The panicked policemen had incited a riot with two fatal gun shots. He would use his troops to rectify the situation.

MacArthur believed he understood these men. They were trained veterans; they wouldn't panic like that policeman had. They would keep their heads on straight. These were battle-hardened veterans who would defend themselves to the end, and he knew the city police would be incapable of maintaining order.

Donning his dress uniform, General Douglas MacArthur stood watching as the troops arrived near the capital. First came the cavalry, in tight formation. Row after row of horsemen stretched from one side of Constitution and Pennsylvania Avenues to the other. More than two hundred troops were followed by tanks and armored vehicles with machine guns. Four hundred infantrymen brought up the rear with bayonets drawn.

Onlookers and veterans first assumed that the movement of the military on the street was a parade and stepped aside to clap and applaud the soldiers. Others assumed the parade was in honor of the fallen, possibly an escort to move the dead to a mortuary or hospital.

Veterans stepped into the street to join the military parade.

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

The parade was led by Colonel George Patton and he had his orders. Clear public land of all civilians camped on that land; expel the Bonus marchers from Washington.

Patton's personal philosophy was ingrained. He had written the guidelines on controlling domestic disturbances.

A few casualties become martyrs, a large number an object lesson...If an enemy is met in a street, deploy completely across the street in close order and direct him to fall back, unless he is in equal or smaller numbers, in which case keep moving and use the bayonet to encourage his retreat. If they are running, a few good wounds in the buttocks will encourage them. If they resist, they must be killed.¹

The crowd in the street was ordered to disperse, but the onlookers didn't understand what was happening. They were confused. Weren't they allowed to honor the fallen by participating in the military parade?

The troops moved forward and those in the street pushed against those that didn't move. Among those that stood in the street was Joseph Angelo.

There were too many people. Too much confusion. Too many orders being shouted from too many soldiers.

A little boy standing next to Angelo told his father that he was scared.

"Nothing's going to happen, son," the man said, putting his hand on the boy's shoulder. "The soldiers are here showing their support of us. Just a few years ago, I would have been there with them."

Joe hoped this man was right.

The horses pushed against the men more. Some moved, but some of the veterans stood their ground. They weren't going to be pushed aside by the troops. Many of these soldiers had served with the veterans during the Great War. Many of these soldiers held bonus certificates too. There was no reason to be scared of them.

Some of the soldiers showed determination to follow orders and gain control on the street.

¹ A Multimedia Story of The "Bonus Army": In 1932, the U.S. Government Used Tanks and Tear Gas on Its WW1 Veterans—Jason M. Kelly. Blog Post July 3, 2021.

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

Other soldier's faces were uncertain. The younger troops didn't want to go against these men who had been their heroes growing up. They had watched these men march off to war and they had cheered them to victory. They didn't want to draw a sword against their own.

"Move forward," the command came.

"Draw your saber."

The collective sound of the sabers being drawn from the scabbards sent chills down Joseph's back. He and several other men began backing up. The horses pawed and twisted, anxious to move faster.

Some of the men started shouting at the soldiers. Some picked pebbles off the ground and threw them at the horses, hoping to startle them so that the soldiers would turn the horses away.

The soldier's maintained control as the horses jerked and pulled, startled by the pelting of rocks. The troops urged the horses forward, forcing some of the men in the road backward, others were pushed into the watching crowd.

The horse's ears perked forward and their eyes widened as the riders urged them into the crowd of people.

Walter Waters understood what was happening and approached Douglas MacArthur.

"Sir," Waters saluted. "Would you give the men the opportunity to retreat peacefully?"

"Of course," MacArthur answered casually without looking at the man. "Get your men and collect your belongings. I've been ordered to clear all vagrants off public land." He turned his back to Waters.

"I'll spread the word. We're on the move," Walter Waters said, a little confused by the disrespect the General had shown him.

He turned to the men behind him. "Spread the word. Gather your families and your belongings. Move everyone to Camp Bartlett. We are to vacate public land. Send someone over to the National Mall. Have those people leave, too."

The men turned and scattered to spread the message.

Joe Angelo began to recognize a rumble and shaking of the ground. He looked past the lines of horses to see a row of tanks moving down Pennsylvania Avenue.

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

Without warning, the soldiers pulled gasmasks from their saddles and put them on. They reached down again and began hurling gas grenades into the crowd.

The marchers, by-standers, and tourists began to scatter, panicked by the smoke and sight of the grenades.

The troops advanced. Some jabbed with their bayonets. Some slammed the butts of their rifles into the veterans, knocking them to the ground. Shots were fired and more panic followed. Veterans ran for safety. Smoke was everywhere and teargas burned the faces of those running. They covered their faces and rubbed their scorching eyes. They couldn't see and squinted, trying to move away from the horror that was enfolding around them, pushing their way through the crowd of people.

General Patton, leading the charge on horseback, drew his saber and began striking the running Bonus Marchers with the flat side of his sword. One of the marchers picked himself up from the ground, and with tears streaming down his face, yelled back, "The flag means nothing to me after this!"¹

Hearing the remark, General MacArthur ordered the man arrested.

Joe squinted his eyes and covered his nose and mouth with his hand. The boy beside him screamed and started crying. His father grabbed him by the hand and yelled, "Come on, boy," as he pulled his son away.

Marchers were choking on the gas as memories of the battlefields in France flooded their minds.

Chief Glassford stood on a hill nearby observing the scene. There was nothing he could do. He watched helplessly as the veterans were pushed to the ground and bystanders and tourists scattered, horrified by what was happening.

The veterans crowded across the draw bridge over the Anacostia River, hoping to escape the teargas and smoke grenades. They couldn't believe what was happening. The army they had served so well, and been so proud to be a part of, was now attacking them without mercy.

As they reached their own camp, they felt safe. They slowed to talk with others and wondered how their own country could do this to them. Why was their own government so against them? Not only did they not

¹ World War 1 Veterans: When Veterans Stormed the Capital: March of the Bonus Army of 1932, Part 2, by Todd DePastino, Veterans Breakfast Club website.

get the help they so desperately wanted, needed, and fought for, they were viciously attacked.

General MacArthur moved with his troops as they followed the veterans to the draw bridge that crossed the Anacostia River. Here, his aide, Major Dwight Eisenhower approached.

“Sir, a messenger has arrived from the president.” The aide held the message out to the four-star general.

The distracted General scowled, “No, I can’t be bothered with pieces of paper during a military operation. Take it away.”

MacArthur waved his arm, pointing toward the draw bridge. His commanders responded by moving the troops forward. MacArthur stood, hands on hips, as torches were lit against the approaching darkness. Soldiers advanced throwing tear gas grenades and smoke bombs.

The major held a single sheet of paper, folded once, with no seal. He cautiously opened the message.

Cease and desist. Do not pursue the men across the river.

James could hear the noise moving closer. He heard the screams of women and a loud explosive sound. The ground shook. He stepped from under the tent to look down the long open roadway in the camp toward the capitol building in the distance.

Smoke bellowed from the edge of the encampment. People were running toward him and he saw a soldier in a gasmask put a torch to a shanty in the distance. Flames erupted from the structure.

James’s eyes were on the soldier in the gasmask. He was fixated on the scene. Tunnel vision closed in on everything around the soldier, blinding James to what was happening everywhere except on the face of the man with the mask.

Evening was falling quickly, but the light from the burning structures lit the darkening sky. The soldier in the gasmask put his foot on a flimsy picket fence and pushed it over. He stepped onto the fence and put the torch to a blanket inside a small lean-to where a veteran, his wife, and three children had slept just the night before. The personal belongings of the family erupted in flames penetrating the trance that held James.

Winona! She was at the nursing station to the south. James yelled for the others in the tent to run, then he took off across the compound to rescue his wife.

The fire grew and the wind blew in from the river causing the smoke and the flames to follow James as he ran. James could see the pale-yellow haze and smelled burning rubber from the teargas as the cloud of smoke darkened and grew. His eyes were stinging and he was squinting and blinking, trying to see beyond the few feet in front of him.

He ran into a woman and two little girls. They all fell to the ground. The girls were squalling and scrambled back to their mother, clinging to her. James helped them up and pointed away from the smoke and flames. "Go that way. Run!"

Other people were trying to gather belongings, but in their haste couldn't hold to anything. He yelled for them to get out, too.

The harsh smoke pricked his eyes and filled his lungs, but he pressed on through the crowd of hysterical people, driven by the desperate hope of finding Winona. Flames licked at the makeshift tents and the cries of those near the fire echoed through the night as the flames ate the distance quickly.

James neared the medical tent and flung the flap open. His heart pounded as he called out her name, his voice hoarse from the smoke. She wasn't there.

He coughed, stumbling over debris. His eyes burned and his vision was blurred by tears and soot. He couldn't see. He couldn't see in the dark anyway, and now the brightness of the distant flames caused glare that further blinded him.

Each step felt like an eternity and his lungs pulled to gather air. He stumbled again, gasping for breath. He refused to give up. He pulled himself to his feet again. He had to find her. He would not let her suffer in this poison gas like he had during the war.

The smoke grew thicker, and his strength vanished. His breaths came in ragged gasps, and his legs trembled beneath him. He couldn't go any further and he collapsed to his knees on the ground. The blazing world around him began to fade into a colorless gray. The sounds of the camp grew distant. He felt like he was choking. A profound sense of loss washed over him and the world turned a foggy haze of darkening death.

He couldn't find her. The weight of his failure pressed down on him, and he whispered her name one more time. He tried to draw a painful breath, but couldn't.

“Lord,” James whispered. “I tried. I did what you asked me to do, didn’t I? Oh God, I’m going to leave them alone.” James’s spirit began to cry. He wasn’t worried about dying. He had faced death before and had made peace with that. What scared him was leaving his family alone, with no one to care for them. No one to love them.

He heard the Spirit speak. *I am making everything new!*¹

“Father, I don’t want to leave them. Not now, not like this.”

*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*²

James heard the words the Spirit was saying to him, but he didn’t understand.

“Father, you are with me. I don’t fear for myself. I fear for my family. Who will take care of them? Who will be there to guide Travis as he becomes a man?”

Your father. I AM.

James was left speechless as that simple but overpowering revelation came to him. His father, the Great I AM. God would always be there for them. God would guide them. God would raise Travis to manhood.

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*³

Then peace came.

James fell face to the ground and rolled slightly in a failed attempt to rise.

A soft, gentle, relaxing peace overcame him. A profound and final peace. A perfect ending to a horrible nightmare.

In that final moment, all James felt was love surrounding him. He whispered “Winona, my love. Take care of our children.”

In the midst of the chaos, Winona’s heart raced. She navigated through the burning refugee camp, not realizing where she was going. She had tried to make it to her own tent. James had always said, if something

¹ Revelation 21:5

² Romans 8:38-39

³ John 14:27

happened, they would meet at their tent. Always go to their tent. But he hadn't been there. She couldn't wait, and she didn't know where he was.

She was happy Hattie had come to pick up Travis earlier today. Hattie had taken him, with her own children, to the zoo and for ice cream. She and James were supposed to join them at the Stewart home for supper.

Now she was lost. All the streets were on fire. She didn't know which way to go. She couldn't even see that the sun had gone down. The flames from the surrounding fire brightened the sky above her. She continued to run.

The flames roared around her, casting an eerie glow on the desperate faces of others trying to escape. The acrid smoke stung her eyes and filled her lungs, but she couldn't afford to stop. She had to get out.

With every step, Winona's mind was filled with thoughts of James. She prayed he was safe, that he was somewhere else. The heat was unbearable, and the sounds of crumbling structures echoed in her ears. She stumbled over debris, her legs trembling with exhaustion.

As she neared the edge of the camp, a wall of flames blocked her path. Panic surged through her, then she spotted a narrow gap between two burning tents. Summoning every ounce of courage she had, she sprinted towards it, her heart pounding in her chest.

Just as she reached the gap, a collapsing shanty fell in front of her, narrowly missing her. She screamed, backed up and briefly surveyed the remaining opening.

The sound of the pandemonium was speaking to her. *"I myself will be a wall of fire around it," declares the Lord, "and I will be its glory within."*¹

Then with determination, she jumped through the narrow opening and over the debris. Her clothes singed and her skin blistered from the heat as she fell to the ground. On the other side, she saw the open ball field beyond the camp. Others were gathered there and she saw someone point toward her. A glimmer of hope sprang into the darkness.

With one final burst of energy, Winona got up and ran towards the field. Two men ran toward her.

The hot summer air seemed cool and a stark contrast to the inferno behind her. She collapsed to the ground, gasping for breath. She was safe. Tears streamed down her face as she whispered a prayer for James, hoping he had made it out too.

¹ Zechariah 2:5

The men reached her and knelt to take her by the arms to lift her from the ground. She was coughing, but she was safe. Then a sharp pain grabbed her stomach and she doubled over, clasping her abdomen as she groaned loudly.

One of the men scooped her into his arms and began running toward the nearby road. Firetrucks were arriving and the man was looking for help. He knew she was injured.

Several of the veterans had managed to get their cars and trucks out of the camp before the fire took over. One of the women standing near a truck pushed her husband's shoulder. "That's the nurse. That's that lawyer's wife."

Her husband ran to meet the man carrying Winona and directed him to the truck. The woman climbed in and took Winona into her arms as her husband slid into the driver's seat.

Winona was still doubled over, leaning against the woman with her head in the woman's lap as the woman held her.

"I don't know where a hospital is," the man said.

"Nineteenth Street," Winona choked out, then coughed again. "Between the school and the armory." She groaned again. "Please, Lord, help me."

Smoke still rose from the burned-out hovels, and large puddles of water were scattered through-out the roads and campsites. There was nothing identifiable left. Just mounds of blackened trash. The ground was covered with a layer of muddy soot and the air was filled with the scent of smokey ash. The perfect backdrop for the conquering hero.

General MacArthur and his aide, Major Dwight Eisenhower, stood near the edge of the burned camp, pristine in their clean starched uniforms, as a publicity photographer snapped photos in the mid-morning light.

Eisenhower avoided looking at the General. His face showed no emotion, but he wasn't happy. Yesterday had been a disaster as far as he was concerned. Hundreds were injured. Several were dead. Property had been destroyed. The veterans had been betrayed. And these men would never trust anyone associated with the U.S. government again.

Thousands roamed the streets headed away from Washington, afraid to stop and rest. Afraid police would call them a vagrant and arrest them. Or worse yet, shoot them. The veterans who had come to Washington

hoping for assistance and a better life now desperately needed help; and they didn't know where to turn.

Eisenhower's boss had ignored orders telling him to stop the aggression he had shown against the men that had served their country during World War 1. He had ordered the troops to poke, prod, stab, shoot, and gas the veterans. He had watched as the soldiers under MacArthur's command burned everything these men owned, and had shown no mercy.

That morning, after no sleep the night before, Eisenhower had been ordered to his quarters to clean up. Then he was ordered back to the sight of the destruction for more photography and interviews with the media.

When they finished here, he would have to go to his office and write the General's report on this matter. Eisenhower felt sick to his stomach. He would have to write about it as if it were a victory.

The morning after the disaster public opinion turned again. Nobody was happy with the outcome of the previous day's events. President Hoover held a press conference to try and sway the masses, telling the nation that this was a communist revolution.

In Albany, New York, Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt called for his morning newspapers. He was in the middle of a presidential campaign against the current president, and watched the news carefully for any sign of weakness he could use to defeat the standing president.

The headlines blazed the news of the Bonus Army's defeat by armed troops of the United States. Roosevelt was stunned as he carefully read each word of every article.

He looked up from his papers and said, "I think I've just won the election. (Hoover) should have invited a delegation into the White House for coffee and sandwiches."¹

¹ World War 1 Veterans: When Veterans Stormed the Capital: March of the Bonus Army of 1932, Part 2, by Todd DePastino, Veterans Breakfast Club website.

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George Patton stood in the middle of the destruction. Shanties were burned to the ground. There was nothing left of the tents or the few belongings of the former inhabitants.

The ground was moist from the water the firetrucks had pumped onto the blaze to keep it from traveling to the nearby trees and structures.

Residents of nearby neighborhoods, and sightseers, stood at the park's playground and baseball field looking at the mess and discussing the devastation.

Walter Waters and Joe Angelo silently wandered through the puddles, astonished at what they were seeing. There was nothing left. Nothing. No sign that a sprawling active community had been here. The area looked like a burned-out trash dump after a hard rain.

Waters leaned over to pick up a half-burned toy train and tears came to his eyes. His shoulders slumped and his head dropped as the train fell from his hand.

He had failed. He was unsuccessful in his mission to obtain the money the veterans so desperately needed. Now these families had nothing. Not even the blankets they had arrived with.

Joe Angelo, Distinguished Service Cross still pinned to his chest, was watching Waters, waiting for guidance. Neither they, nor the other veterans wandering the streets, knew what to do. They had discussed the recent events and were curious as to what James Britt would say. He had always been the optimistic encouraging one. Always a positive word and promising ideas.

But they weren't able to find him or his wife.

Angelo saw movement over Waters' shoulder and watched as Colonel Patton turned, looked straight at him, and turned away again. Angelo moved toward the Colonel.

As he drew near, Angelo called, "Colonel. Colonel Patton. It's me, Joe Angelo. I pulled you to safety when you were shot at Meuse-Argonne in France."

Patton looked at the man briefly, he had been the Colonel's aide for most of the war. They had served together, slept together, eaten their meals together.

George Patton spoke to a nearby soldier. "I do not know this man. Take him away and under no circumstances permit him to return."¹

¹ Joe Angelo. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia

Angelo, undeterred by the comment, called, "Sir, why did you do this?"

"We hate this more than they do," Patton told his aide. "But they brought this upon themselves."¹ Colonel Patton turned away.

Joe reached his hand out. "Sir. Don't you remember me?"

The aid grabbed Joe's arm and gave him a stern look. "Go away. Don't bother the Colonel."

The aid turned to follow Patton, leaving Angelo standing in bewilderment.

Joe watched until Colonel Patton and his entourage climbed into three jeeps and drove off.

Joe Angelo turned around to see Walter Waters walking the other way. He ran to catch up. "What do we do now?"

"Move on," Waters said sadly. "We'll head towards Pennsylvania."

"Shouldn't we try to find James Britt?"

"No, he would be here if he wanted to be. He's gone."

¹ The Bonus Army Tragedy of 1932 – Forgotten History. YouTube video, September 11, 2023.

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July 1932

Bethesda, Maryland

The rhythmic sound of the machine forcing oxygen into James's lungs penetrated the otherwise heavy silence in the room. Dr. Edison Stewart stood beside the bed of his cousin.

He had received a call the previous evening.

He had expected James and Winona to arrive for supper and when the telephone rang, he knew it was James calling to say they would be late. But it wasn't his cousin. It was his friend who worked at the Women's Hospital—the doctor who had seen Winona just a few weeks earlier.

"Ed, have you heard what happened?"

"Well, I don't know what you're talking about so, probably, no. I haven't heard."

"The army attacked the bonus marchers. They used tear gas and everything. There's several dead, hundreds are injured. The fire is still raging at Anacostia. We can see it from here at the hospital."

"Our army?" Stupid question. Of course, it was our army, who else would it be? It took a moment for Ed to process what he was told. Slowly he said, "I guess I need to get to the hospital."

"No, that's not why I'm calling you. This woman your wife brought in, Winona Britt. She's here. She was injured and," the doctor's words ran together quickly, like everything else he had said while on the phone. "She's had a miscarriage."

"No." Ed whispered. "Oh, no. Is her husband there?"

"No, she's asking for him, but no one knows where he is."

"Okay, I'm sending Hattie to be with her. It will take her a little while to get there. I'm headed to Bethesda."

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“Tell her to be careful on the roads. The troops are everywhere and the marchers are scattered all over the streets. They’re scared. No telling what could happen.”

Ed arrived at Walter Reed Hospital to find the doctors already receiving wounded troops and veterans. Most of the troop’s injuries were minor. First and second degree burns on hands and forearms, a sprained ankle, a contusion on the side of the face. One soldier had a broken nose where he had fallen on the sidewalk. All were treated and released.

Ed found an orderly and sat him next to a telephone. “You call every hospital in D.C. Tell them we’re looking for a veteran with burn scars from the war. All over his face and hands. Tell them both hands have fingers missing. If he was in the tear gas, he’s going to be having trouble breathing. Find him!”

Then Ed got to work.

Most of the veterans Ed saw suffered from tear gas exposure, smoke inhalation and burns. Several had severe contusions from rifle butts being slammed into their shoulders, backs, and heads. A few had stab wounds. Those that were released sat on benches near the hospital buildings, they didn’t know where to go. A few nurses, an orderly, and a chaplain wandered among the men offering coffee, blankets, and prayers.

The most severe injuries had been taken to hospitals located closer to the downtown area, where the clash had occurred, and to hospitals on the Anacostia side of the river.

Near midnight Edison received a call from Hattie. Winona had several small areas of first- and second-degree burns where sparks had caught her clothing on fire. She suffered from smoke inhalation, but was recovering. She had asked about Travis, and about James, then she had cried herself to sleep. Hattie knew Winona needed her husband and had told her she would try to find James.

Ed couldn’t tell her anything. James had not been found.

By 3 a.m. the injured had been taken care of. Most were released. But they had no place to go. Ed told a nurse to find those that remained a bed. The very least they could do was give them a good night’s sleep and breakfast before they sent the veterans on their way.

Ed had just sat down in the glassed-in room behind the intake desk to take care of some paperwork.

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A nurse answered the telephone, "Dr. Stewart. You had better take this."

Ed reached for the phone. "Yes, this is Dr. Stewart."

"This is Dr. Cornwell at City North. We just saw your veteran, the one with all the burns. We're sending him on to you. Apparently, the firemen found him buried in mud in a burned-out part of the camp. He's alive, but he probably won't be by the time he gets to you."

"How does he look?" Ed asked.

"Well, covered in mud." Ed knew that was the doctor's attempt at jest, but Ed didn't laugh. "That's probably what protected him from the fire. We cleaned his face and put him on oxygen but he's not getting any. He's unconscious and hardly breathing at all. I don't know how, but his heart is still beating."

"Okay, thanks." Ed hung up.

Despite his years of training and countless hours of taking care of the war's wounded, Edison suddenly felt overwhelmed. He didn't know how to prepare for James' arrival. He didn't know what to do next.

He stared at the desk in front of him. Then he leaned into the table, put his head in his hands, and even though he didn't know what to say, he prayed.

'Always praise God,' he told himself. 'No matter what happens, praise God.' So he did.

"Father God, creator and sustainer of life.

I praise you, Lord.

'Praise the Lord.

Praise God in his sanctuary;

praise him in his mighty heavens.

Praise him for his acts of power;

praise him for his surpassing greatness.

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,

praise him with the harp and lyre,

praise him with timbrel and dancing,

praise him with the strings and pipe,

praise him with the clash of cymbals,

praise him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

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Praise the Lord.¹

‘Praise the Lord.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.’²

‘Remember me, Lord,
when you show favor to your people,
come to my aid when you save them.’”³

Ed felt the tears well up in his eyes and begin to run down his face.

He was still sitting at the desk behind the glass wall when he saw the lights of the ambulance pull to the doors. He stood, wiped the moisture from his face, and rushed to meet James.

James’s heart was still beating, but his lungs weren’t working at all. Air was being forced into him by the ambulance attendant who pushed the handle of the Lungmotor over and over, yet there was no response. His lungs seemed paralyzed, unable to accept oxygen.

His body was trembling all over. They stripped his clothing and began with his face and chest. Then they washed him all over with warm water exposing a blueish skin color on his arms and legs. But the warm bath didn’t help, his trembling remained.

The doctors worked quickly, but nothing helped.

His diaphragm was working. His chest was rising and falling in a steady rhythm with the machine, but his oxygen count was low. Very low. After several hours, it had only risen slightly.

X-rays of his badly scarred lungs were hanging on the lighted display on the wall, and Ed’s eyes kept moving to the picture. Maybe, just maybe, there was something in the x-ray he had missed. Maybe if he looked at it again, he would see some hope.

James’ body had quit shaking, but he was now running a temperature. He lay unconscious on the bed attached to intravenous fluids. The Pulmotor pushed air into his lungs rhythmically, the steady pulse of life itself.

Ed stood up and moved closer to the x-ray film. He looked closely at the scarred left lung.

Ed thought he saw movement from the corner of his eye.

¹ Psalm 150:1-6

² Psalm 106:1

³ Psalm 106:4

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Ed looked back toward James. Had he moved?

Nothing. There was no motion, except the rising and falling of the man's chest in rhythm with the Pulmotor. Ed just imagined the movement he hoped for.

He looked back at the x-ray again.

Movement. Ed jerked his head around.

This time Ed was sure. He returned to watch James's leg pull up in the bed a few inches and his knee fall to the side.

Ed took James's hand. "James, can you hear me?"

No response.

"James, can you squeeze my hand?"

No response.

Ed began rubbing James's bare arm. He knew James had limited feeling in his hands. He would be more responsive to touch on the arm. His arm felt cold to Ed's touch.

"James, are you cold?"

The leg moved again. It bent further, pulling closer to his body.

"Oh, James. Please let me know you can hear me," Ed begged.

James's chest seemed to quiver as he tried to draw in a breath. His eyes opened to a tiny slit as his eyelids fluttered briefly then closed again.

"James, you're at the hospital. I'm taking care of you. I'm going to stay with you. Winona is okay. Travis is at the house. Everyone is safe."

A tear shown in the corner of James's eye and his chest quivered again. Ed continued to rub his arm and talk softly. "You're having some problems with your lungs. We're treating you. God took care of you again. It's a miracle you're here. The firemen found you and brought you to the hospital."

A single tear ran down James's temple. Ed asked, "Are you in pain?"

He thought he saw a slight movement of the head. "No. You're not in pain?"

Slight movement again.

Ed wiped James's temple, removing the tear.

Scripture came to Ed's thoughts and he spoke them out loud.

"I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire."¹ Oh, my goodness, James. You were covered in mud. We had to wash you from head to foot." He laughed slightly, but still saw no response from James.

¹ Psalm 40:1-2a

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“You still with me?”

A slight nod came in response, then another quiver in his chest.

“You cold?” Ed asked again.

Another nod.

Ed pulled a folded blanket from a nearby chair and spread it over the man in the bed. “Do you want to sleep or do you want me to talk?”

No response.

“Sleep?”

Slight movement.

“Talk?”

A nod, Ed thought.

“Okay.” Ed continued scripture.

“‘He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.’¹

“We’re going to praise God, James. He is keeping you alive for a reason.

“‘But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’²

“You’re going to get through this. Everything’s going to be okay.” Ed prayed he was telling James the truth. The doctor waited but there was still no response, so he continued reciting scripture.

“‘Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him. Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. Many, Lord my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us.’³

¹ Psalm 40:2b-3a

² Exodus 9:16

³ Psalm 40:3b-5a

“Oh, James. This scripture is so true. Many are God’s wonders he has done for you. Many are the things he has planned for both of us.”

Ed looked toward heaven.

““None can compare with you; were I to speak and tell of your deeds, they would be too many to declare.””¹

Ed continued to talk softly. He asked a passing nurse to find him a Bible. When she returned, he opened the Scripture and read.

““This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

““We accept human testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

““I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.””²

James would shift his legs occasionally and Ed knew he was still conscious, at least some of the time. But he didn’t open his eyes again or respond to Ed’s conversation.

The sun had risen and an orderly had brought a breakfast tray for Dr. Stewart. The tray now sat half empty on the floor near the door.

¹ Psalm 40:5b

² 1 John 5:6-15

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

An hour passed, then two. The hallway was busy with activity. Nurses moved around doing their work and patients were transported from their rooms to other areas for treatment.

A young girl came into the room. "Dr. Stewart. You have a phone call at the desk."

"Who is it?"

"He says he's your brother, Curtis."

Ed stood up. "Stay with him. Rub his arm. Talk to him, read to him."

She looked at the doctor strangely.

He saw the questioning and confused expression. "He's awake, he's confused, and he's scared. You need to let him know he's not alone."

She nodded and sat down. She looked at the hissing equipment near the man's pillow, then she saw the mask across his face and the scars underneath. She put her hand on his arm and squeezed softly while watching the scarred hand. He didn't move.

The desk was just across the hall from James's room. Ed spoke loudly so his brother could hear him over the almost two thousand miles of phone line. The nurse at the desk and the girl in James's room could both hear Ed's side of the conversation.

"Hello, Curt?"

"Yeah. Yeah. I know where he is."

"I haven't seen a newspaper yet. How bad did it sound?"

Ed waited while Curt relayed the story from the newspaper in Denver. Curt kept talking.

Ed interrupted. "Curt, listen."

"Curt, shut up and listen."

"Winona is at a hospital in the city. She has some minor burns and," Ed hesitated. "And she had a miscarriage."

"No, she was about three months along."

"Of course, we don't know for sure, but her doctor says it could have been the smoke, or the gas used by the troops, or maybe her exertion trying to get out of the burning camp. It could be all of it for all we know. She was on oxygen for a while, she had some smoke inhalation. Last I heard she's still coughing, but she's doing better and off oxygen."

"No, she's still at the hospital. We'll bring her to the house when she's released. Travis is with Hattie."

"No, he wasn't there."

Ed listened a minute, but he got impatient.

“Curt, would you just listen. I’ve got James here. He was caught in the gas and smoke for quite a while. His lungs aren’t working at all. The Pulmotor is forcing oxygen into his lungs ... Yes, I’m being careful. I’m right here with him.”

“I know his lung collapsed. It was a miracle he survived ...”

Ed listened, took a deep breath, and held it. He closed his eyes, silently expressing his frustration.

“Curt, I need to get back in there. Now listen. He’s conscious but ... of course, he can’t talk to me with the mask and the tubes in place. His saturation rate is low. I doubt he can even form words right now. Just listen, will you?

“He opened his eyes and looked at me for just a few seconds when he first woke up. He hasn’t opened his eyes since. He’s drifting in and out of consciousness.”

“Yeah, I’m sure he saw it.”

“Do you think so? I’ll get him some eye drops. What kind?”

“I know. But there’s nothing I can do about that. He has to have it.”

Ed listened again, nodding his head. “Okay. You’re going to call Uncle Reid? Let me know.”

“Okay. Call me back.” He hung up the phone and sat looking blankly at the desk. He pushed the chair back and laid his head down on his crossed arms to rest a moment.

One of the nurses noticed his posture and got concerned. “Dr. Stewart, is everything okay?”

“I’m fine.” He stood up without looking at her and moved back into the room with James.

James had tears on his face again.

Ed looked at the young girl who said, “We could hear every word you said.” She stood up, still rubbing James’s arm tenderly.

“James? Can you hear me now?” Ed asked.

A slight nod came.

“I didn’t mean for you to find out that way. She’s okay. She really is. The burns aren’t bad. She’ll probably be coming home tomorrow or maybe the day after.”

His legs shifted under the blanket and he rolled slightly. He was struggling, Ed could tell.

Ed sat down and put one hand on his patient’s shoulder and took James’s hand in his own. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” Ed lifted James’s hand to his own face and pressed the back of the scarred hand against the

whiskers on his cheek. He rubbed the shoulder, occasionally lifting that hand to wipe tears from his own face, and from his cousin's eyes.

"When your soul is laid bare and left hanging for all the world to see; when what you wished for has been stripped away; when all you have left is your faith, trust Him. '(He) will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.'¹

"You hold to God, James. He is your rock. He always has been. 'Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal.'²

"You've taken a lot the last few hours. The last few months. But you've survived worse. You're strong James. You have to be strong for Winona and Travis. They depend on you."

James squeezed Ed's hand. "I know. I know you want to be with her. She knows it too. She understands you can't come to her. She's going to come be with you as soon as she can. It won't be long."

Ed wiped another tear from James's face, then he wiped his own eyes again.

"Curt's on his way. He's coming. He's calling your dad. Hopefully Uncle Reid will be able to come with him. Curt should be here in just a few days. Winona should be out of the hospital by then."

Ed paused, should he say more? James could take it. He was strong, but right now he needed strength from somewhere else.

Ed spoke forcefully. "James, you make up your mind to get better. You've done this before; you can do this again. You make up your mind to be off this machine before they get here. Do you hear me? Don't you give up. You're a fighter, James. You always have been. You have strength that none of the rest of us understand."

The young girl was still standing behind the doctor. She was crying and turned to flee the room but ran into a nurse standing in the doorway. She grabbed the nurse around the middle and buried her face in the nurse's shoulder. The woman in white responded by offering comfort, surrounding the girl with her arms. But she stayed where she was, watching.

James was listening, but he was in too much pain to understand what Ed was saying. His hurt didn't come from what had happened to him during the last twenty-four hours. The hurt came from what had happened over a lifetime. The lack of oxygen had brought back all the old feelings; all the old hurts had joined together to crush him.

¹ Isaiah 26:3

² Isaiah 26:4

He felt the pain of the chemical burns on his body during the war. This pain would come and go. Joseph had told him it was neuropathic pain caused by the damage to the nerves. There was nothing the doctors could do about it.

Added to the physical pain was the sting of his mother's death when he was six years old. He felt his first father's rejection all over again; and he missed Matt—oh how he missed his brother. The years of struggling to breathe felt multiplied and now weighed upon him, and he just didn't want to breathe anymore.

And his chest hurt with every push of the oxygen into his lungs. Over and over and over—the pressure was constant and growing. And all the words spoken about his scars over the years—freak, monster, butt-ugly, ogre—he had been called all these things. And jail-bird-orphan; he had gotten into a fight over that one when he was in third grade and it had resulted in a lacerated scalp and a concussion.

The thoughts kept spinning through his head. Every hurt he had experienced happened all over again. Confusion. Chaos. Turmoil. Muddled thinking. He couldn't keep a clear thought. He couldn't finish a thought. His head hurt. His head really hurt!

The oxygen deprivation was causing chaotic thinking and his mind ran amok. This happened every time he had trouble breathing, but it was much much worse this time.

All he wanted was peace, he wanted his mind to quiet.

Even if he could talk to Ed, he wouldn't. He wouldn't talk to anyone about his feelings—ever. He held them inside so tightly he sometimes thought he would burst. His father had always known what to say to calm James. Curt was good at it too. He needed one of them, both of them. Oh, how he wanted his father's loving arms right now.

James didn't have a voice to use, so he cried out to the Lord within his spirit. “How long, Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?”¹

And the Spirit responded. *“Because the poor are plundered and the needy groan, I will now arise,” says the Lord. “I will protect them from those who malign them.” And the words of the Lord are flawless.*²

¹ Psalm 13:1-2

² Psalm 12:5-6a

“Why now, Lord? Why do you say this now? Why didn’t you do it yesterday? Why didn’t you give us a positive vote? Why didn’t you protect those innocent people? So many people lost everything. I lost my baby! And this tragedy didn’t need to happen! These were good people.”

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”¹

“But those people have nothing now. How will they survive? How will they live?” James lamented before his Lord.

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?²

James wasn’t listening, his heart hurt too much and the lack of oxygen was making his mind fuzzy. “Lord, all their clothes are gone. Everything they have is gone.”

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?”³

“Lord, you tell me you’re taking care of them but you’re not going to grow them clothes. Where are the people going to go? The birds aren’t going to bring them food like the ravens did with Elijah, are they?

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.⁴ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ... For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.⁵

“Lord, what are we to do? I can’t help them. I can’t even help myself.”

¹ Matthew 6:19-21

² Matthew 6:26-27

³ Matthew 6:28-30

⁴ Ephesians 3:20 ESV

⁵ Matthew 6:31-32

*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*¹

"I'm sorry, Lord. I was trying to do your work on this earth. Did I do too much? Did I not do enough? Was this my fault?" James knew he was blaming himself for everything that happened. The world was on his shoulders and it was weighing him down. The oxygen deprivation was crushing him.

*Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.*²

"Lord, did I do something I'm not aware of? When was I silent? What do I need to ask forgiveness for? 'Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.'"³

*You are a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.*⁴

James was crying again, and he couldn't stop. God had called him righteous. His motives were pure. God said he knew how to rescue him. God would hold the unrighteous accountable on judgment day.

Ed wiped his patient's eyes again. "James, you need to stop crying. Stop thinking about what happened yesterday. You and Winona are both safe now. Are you in pain? I'll give you something if you need it, but I really don't want you to relax. I want you to fight. Do you want something to make you sleep?"

James didn't respond.

"I'll read to you, that will distract you from whatever is going on in your head."

James gave a slight nod and Ed picked up the Bible.

¹ Matthew 6:33-34

² Psalm 32:2-3

³ Psalm 139:23-24

⁴ 2 Peter 2:7b-9

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort...”¹

¹ 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

27

August 1932 Washington, D.C.

Evening had fallen as Edison Stewart stood on the railroad's platform as the train from Denver arrived. Several passenger cars were attached including two sleeper cars and a dining car. There was an unusually nice private car in front of the caboose. Ed scanned the platform as people began to disembark, watching for his brother and uncle.

"Hey Ed!" The call came from behind the doctor. He turned to see his brother, Curtis, standing on the platform of the private car. Reid Britt stepped out the door behind Curt.

Ed started toward the car as Curt maneuvered down the first of the steep steps. He stopped, turned around, and accepted a stepstool from another man behind Reid. Ed placed the stool next to the top step and turned around to take Reid's arm. He helped the federal judge to the next step of the coach and then moved the stool down to the next step. This continued for three steps before Reid stepped onto the concrete platform of the train station.

Curt turned around just as Ed got to him. They embraced without a word, then Ed grabbed Reid.

"He's better. He's still got a long way to go, but he's better."

Reid smiled sadly.

"How's Winona?"

"We brought her home this afternoon and put her to bed. Travis won't let go of her. She said they've never been separated overnight before. She's still got some discomfort but she's getting better, too."

"Has she seen James?"

"I took her by there on the way home, but he was asleep. She held his hand for a few minutes and loved on him, but she never said anything.

When I told her we needed to go, she let go of his hand and left.” Ed shrugged his shoulders. “I’ve never seen anyone act like that.”

“She loves him hard,” Reid said.

“And she’s intuitive,” Curt added. “She knows what he needs sometimes before Joseph or I do. Sometimes before James does himself. She probably knows what she needs to heal quickly too.”

“Yeah,” Ed commented. “After watching her work with the people at the camp—well, it seemed she worked instinctively.”

Reid turned to a man standing behind them. “Ed, this is James’ supervisor, Don Cryer. Don, Edison Stewart.”

The men shook hands and Ed pointed them toward the automobile.

“Where are we going first?” Curt asked.

“It’s getting late in the day. I thought you would want dinner. You can see Winona and Travis. It’ll be late by then so let’s just wait until morning to see James.”

“Which is closer?” Reid asked.

“The hospital. It’s just a few miles. The house is further,” Edison explained.

“Drop me off,” Curt said.

“I’ve got a nurse with him.”

“I’ll stay with him. I’ll tell the nurse she can go home,” Curt said.

“I’d like to see him too,” Reid uttered.

“I think we all would,” added Don Cryer.

28

August 1932

Bethesda, Maryland

The four men stepped into the room and Ed dismissed the nurse. The bed was inclined slightly with James's head up. He appeared to be asleep. The facemask remained in place. The Pulmotor was pushing air into his lungs, making a rhythmic puffing noise as the motor hummed.

Ed spoke softly, "He's trying to breathe on his own but he's just not getting enough oxygen. We've turned the machine off a couple of times and he pulls air into his lungs, but it only takes a minute or two before he gets tired and quits. Then we have to turn the Pulmotor back on.

"Sometimes he gets upset and breathes against the machine. We have to turn it off and start it again to get him to cooperate."

Curt nodded and walked over to sit beside James on the bed. "James." Curt put his arm under the man's shoulders. "I'm going to sit you up." Curt pulled him onto his shoulder and stuffed a pillow behind James's back. Curt gave a gentle tug and James rolled toward him. "I've got you, James. I'm here." The visiting doctor adjusted the mask for comfort, pulling the strap from around his head while holding it against his face.

"He can adjust himself to the machine if you talk to him. He listens when you give him instructions." Looking to his brother, Curt said, "His lungs cause pain in his back when there's a blockage. Anytime he can lay on his side or propped up, it helps."

"He's been moving his legs a lot," Edison commented.

Curt nodded. "He does that. I don't know why. He can't remember doing it later."

Ed nodded, wishing Curt had told him all this on the phone three days ago.

James' chest rose sharply twice. He raised his head and settled onto Curt's shoulder. His eyes were still closed. He reached his hand around to clasp Curt's arm with three fingers.

Reid sat on a chair next to Curt. He put his hand on James's arm. "James. Son?"

James opened his eyes to look at his father, but also saw the mask on his own face. His heart began to race and his breathing became more labored. "It's okay," Reid said. "Close your eyes and just listen to me."

James slowly closed his eyes, now breathing against the rhythm of the machine. He was trying to exhale, but the machine was forcing an inhale. He choked in the process.

Curt said, "Steady your breathing. We're here. You know that now, you've seen us. Come on. Steady. In ... In ... That's good, you're doing good. You'll be off this machine in no time."

"James," Reid said. "Curt's going to stay with you tonight. I'm going to check on Winona and Travis. I'll be back early tomorrow." Reid stopped briefly. "You get some sleep. Tomorrow, we need to talk. Can we do that?"

Ed looked at Reid oddly. How did he expect James to hold a conversation?

But to Ed's surprise, James nodded.

29

August 1932 Wheaton, Maryland

Hattie opened the door to let the men in. She greeted her husband with a brief hug and then turned to the man with the cane.

“Uncle Reid, it’s nice to finally meet you. I’m sorry it had to happen this way though. I’ve got dinner waiting for you.”

“Hello, Hattie. I wish it could be under better circumstances, too.” He gave her a hug. “I think I want to see Winona and Travis first. Can I do that?”

She nodded, understanding his desire to be with his daughter.

“Second door at the top of the stairs. I fed Travis about an hour ago and he fell asleep on the bed beside his mother. I’m glad you’re here. Winona needs somebody she knows well. She’s sweet, but she hardly talks to me.”

“Come on,” Ed gestured for Reid to follow him.

Reid did follow, and Ed took his arm as Reid reached out for the banister at the bottom of the stairs. They made their way slowly to the second floor.

At the top, Reid said, “I’ll go alone.”

Winona lay in the bed with her legs loosely covered with a sheet. Reid could see the bandages underneath. Travis lay next to her, sleeping peacefully.

Winona looked at her father, her hands trembling as she clutched the thin blanket that lay across her thighs and midsection. Her mind was numb from the events of the past few days. Losing the baby had left her feeling hollow, a void that seemed impossible to fill. But the horror of the fire and

the fear she still felt for James crept into her dreams when she closed her eyes.

Her father remained in the doorway, his eyes filled with a mixture of sorrow and concern. He looked older, the lines on his face deeper than she remembered, with a touch of gray hair at the temple. She had just seen him eight months ago, at Christmas, and she missed him dearly.

"Winona," he said softly, stepping into the room. "Is it okay if I come in?"

She swallowed hard, the lump in her throat making it difficult to speak. "Dad," she whispered, her voice breaking. "I... I lost the baby."

He crossed the room, enveloping her in his strong arms. The scent of his shaving soap and the touch of his hands brought a rush of memories. She clung to him, the sobs she had been holding back finally breaking free. He held her tightly, his own tears mingling with hers.

"I'm so sorry, sweetheart," he murmured, his voice thick with emotion. "I wish I could take away your pain."

The moment caused Reid to want to wince, he had done this so many times, he didn't want to do it again. But he pushed forward, squeezing her tighter as memories flooded his mind. He had held his wife after a stillborn birth, and he had held her as he told her their daughter, only six days old, was now in Jesus' arms. She had held him the night they both grieved over Matt's loss.

But the hardest memory to relive was the afternoon following their visit to their first child's grave. The baby was born after Chipeta was attacked by two cowboys on the road outside of town. The attack had caused her labor to begin early, and the baby had not survived. Reid was away from home and didn't know any of it was happening. Chipeta had been injured and near death when Reid's father, Travis, had buried the child next to his own daughter. Neither of them had grieved the child's loss until that afternoon.

They had been to church for the first time in months, then they visited the child's grave. They didn't speak until they arrived home and were shut in their bedroom alone. Then, as his wife told him the details of the attack, they both wept. Reid wept for the suffering his wife had to endure alone, and they both wept for the child they lost. Chipeta released her pain and grief for the first time, feeling safe in Reid's arms.

Now Reid felt all that pain come back at once and he held to his daughter for life itself, feeling her pain as well as his.

Winona buried her face in his shoulder, finding solace in the comfort of his embrace. For the first time since the miscarriage, she could truly release her feelings to someone. Her father was here, and maybe, just maybe, she could get herself under control before she went to see her husband. They sat on the bed for what felt like hours, a father and daughter feeling the same loss, the same pain, the same love for each other.

Reid didn't know what it felt like to lose a child this young, without even feeling it move in the mother's womb, but he did understand the feeling of empty arms. He knew what it was like to comfort his wife following the loss of a child, and he tried to comfort his daughter in the same way. He knew the pain would never truly go away.

Reid reached over and turned the lamp off. The night was black outside and the light from distant windows was seen, along with the headlights of a passing car in the distance.

Winona knew that this moment was the beginning of her healing. She didn't have to face her sorrow alone. With her father's support, she would find the strength to rise tomorrow and be strong for James.

She nestled onto her father's shoulder and closed her eyes. "I didn't know where James was, Dad. There were explosions and noise. I looked up and there was smoke and fire at the other end of the camp. I didn't know what was going on."

She coughed and Reid knew she hadn't fully recovered from breathing the smoke.

"James was at the tent. At least I thought that's where he was. But when I got there, he wasn't there. I was so scared..."

Reid let her talk. She needed to talk, and he needed to hear what had happened. He let go of Winona briefly to put his hand on Travis's head. He had already been told Travis had not been at the camp. He thanked God for that.

He had read several newspaper accounts of what had happened. What Winona didn't know about the fires, he knew. Ed had told him they had sheltered Winona from knowledge of the army's actions. She didn't know that the soldiers had actually caused the fire and she didn't know the gasmask was to protect the troops from the teargas. Reid knew she wasn't ready to hear these details.

"I saw troops with gasmasks. I can't imagine what James felt when he saw that. He gets upset every time he sees an oxygen mask at the hospital. He has to close his eyes and turn away."

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

Winona kept talking of the events of the last few days. She talked about her fear for James and her fear of the fire. She talked about how proud James was that she was pregnant and how he had told her that he trusted her with his children. And now, not only had she lost their baby, she had failed him. She cried more.

"He's not upset with you, you know that. I saw him briefly when we dropped Curt off at the hospital. He can't talk right now. He's still struggling to breathe. Ed said he knows about the baby and he's sad about it, but he's not upset with you. He's worried about you and wants to be with you.

"Ed tried to reassure him that you're going to be okay, but he needs to put his eyes on you to know for himself. He needs you to be strong when you go see him. You need to grieve together, but I don't know if his body can take that just yet. You'll need to be steady when you see him. He doesn't need to get upset. Do you think you can control your crying when you see him tomorrow?"

"I don't know. I can't seem to stop."

"Well, you just keep crying tonight. You tell me all about what happened."

An hour later, Winona's crying had slowed and she had stopped talking as much. Reid held her and brushed her shoulder with his fingers. He began to hum, then softly, he began a lament in song.

"How she sits alone,
the city once crowded with people!
She who was great among the nations
has become like a widow.
The princess among the provinces
has been put to forced labor.

She weeps bitterly during the night,
with tears on her cheeks.
There is no one to offer her comfort,
not one from all her lovers.
All her friends have betrayed her;
they have become her enemies."¹

¹ Lamentations 1:1-2

“Dad?”

“Yes, dear.”

“A couple of nights ago, James and I were lying in bed and he was reading from the book of Luke. Jesus was talking about the destruction of Jerusalem. He was saying that it would be horrible for pregnant and nursing mothers. I got scared. I felt like he was talking to me.” She started to whimper again. “I saw the destruction of the camp. James was telling me not to be scared, but I could see it in my mind.”

“Oh, child. You have always had a keen sense of understanding. Do you remember when God told you that you and James were to get married?”

“Uh-huh.”

“It took a couple of years, but it came true. And do you remember when James got shot, and you knew he would survive?”

“Yeah.”

“And do you remember just before your mother got sick, and you called to ask if she was okay? You called three times before she ever let us know that she didn’t feel well. Do you remember?”

“I remember.”

“You, my beautiful girl, have been given a gift, a gift of wisdom and sensitivity of spirit to see what will happen, and the understanding to act on that knowledge.

“Do you remember what William used to say when you were taking care of the people in town who had the flu? He said you understood their illness and knew what they needed, sometimes even before they knew they were sick. He said you could identify a person who was about to fall victim to the disease before there were any symptoms.

“Curt says you can see inside James and know when he’s getting congested, even when he doesn’t realize a breathing attack is coming. He says he’s seen you hand James the eye drops when James hasn’t asked for them. James uses them anyway and a few minutes later he says, ‘I didn’t think I felt bad, but I feel better now.’

“I have no doubt that you knew what was coming. God was preparing you. ‘By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.’¹

¹ Hebrews 11:7 ESV

“Noah was warned about the coming flood, and he feared God more than he feared the ridicule of man. He took God seriously and acted on what God showed him. He built the ark even though there had never, in the history of the world, been a flood. And he believed and acted on that belief for a hundred and twenty years without wavering.

“God gave you a vision of what was coming. Did you act on it?”

Reid stopped talking, allowing his daughter time to think and process her thoughts.

She began hesitantly. “I think so. We got interrupted and I forgot about my fear right then. But the next day I thought about it again. And then the next day too. I think maybe that’s why I called Hattie and asked her to take Travis that day. That was the first time I’ve done that. I’ve never let Travis go with someone else like that before, and I don’t really know why I did that day.”

“See,” Reid said. “You followed God’s prompting. You protected your son. ‘I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, “My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.”’¹

“God makes known to us his purpose, from the beginning of time to the end, and we have to take responsibility for our part, whether we understand his plan or not. We listen and we know him. He gives us wisdom. His will is going to be accomplished. We can do our part, or not, but he’ll get his way. It’s better for us if we obey.

“Come on, it’s getting late. You need to rest. Does Travis ever wake up during the night?” the boy’s grandfather asked.

“Not usually.

“Okay,” he said, sliding off the bed. “I’m going to see if Hattie has a blanket I can borrow, just in case I need it. I’m going to be over here in this chair. You just let me know if you need anything. I’ll be right here.”

“Dad, you can’t sleep sitting up.”

“I’ll be fine. Now you get some rest.”

¹ Isaiah 46:10

30

August 1932 Bethesda, Maryland

The hall was deserted as Ed accompanied his uncle toward the hospital room. It appeared most of the patients were still asleep. A woman stood in the hallway working at a cart with medical supplies.

She looked up at the two men coming toward her. "Good morning, Doctor Stewart."

"Morning, Mrs. Watson."

The woman watched the two men, observing the other man's slow gait for a moment, then went back to her work.

Two nurses sat at the unit's desk surrounded by paperwork. They spoke to the doctor in a casual manner.

"Good morning, Dr. Stewart."

"We didn't hear anything from your brother last night. He never came out of the room," the other said. "But James must have been awake. We heard Dr. Stewart talking to him."

Ed nodded that he heard what the ladies said, but he didn't reply.

Edison pushed the door open. The room was dark except for a single dim lamp on a table next to the bed. Curt sat on the edge of the bed with one leg on the bed, bent at the knee, and his other foot propped on the chair beside the bed. He had his head on a fluffy pillow against the wall above the low headboard of the hospital bed. His head was leaning back with his mouth open and eyes closed. He was asleep.

James still lay on Curt's shoulder, but he had shifted to his other side and was propped with several pillows under his shoulder and chest so his body lay at an odd angle. The mask's strap was off his head and the mask set awkwardly against his face, propped by a pillow. It allowed a small gap, permitting air to escape. He was asleep too.

Ed went to adjust the mask and James jumped slightly. Curt immediately grabbed James to steady him. James settled back on Curt's shoulder.

Curt looked at Ed and quietly said, "You're early."

"I wanted time to check on James before I start my shift," his brother said.

Curt looked to his uncle, "He had a good night. Once he settled down and quit fighting the mask, he went to sleep. He woke a couple of times. I rubbed his back and he went right back to sleep."

Ed was adjusting equipment. "The pressure's up." He commented.

"He was complaining of a headache before he went to sleep. I thought it might be his eyes, so I put some drops in them. I think that helped some, but when I turned the pressure up, his heart seemed to slow. It was easier for him to relax," Curt explained.

"I want his blood oxygen this morning, but I don't want to wake him," Ed commented.

"He's awake."

Ed looked at James. His eyes were closed and his face was hanging sideways off Curt's shoulder, just like it was when he had walked in the door. "How can you tell?"

"James, you awake?"

There was a slight nod in response.

"See."

"Okay. The nurse will be here in a few minutes to draw blood. I'll see you later."

"Thanks, Ed," Reid said, then turned his attention to his son.

"Okay, James," Curt said. "I'm going to lay you down so you can talk to your dad."

James nodded again.

Curt pulled his arm out from under James and moved the pillows, leaving James on his side with a pillow under his head and another folded and tucked behind his shoulders.

"I'm going to get some breakfast. Do you want some, James?" There was no response. "How about you, Uncle Reid?"

"I ate already, thanks."

Curt left without another word.

Reid pulled a chair near James's face. He sat down, leaned toward the bed, slipped an arm under James's head, and wrapped it around to hold his son's shoulder. He laid his forehead against James.

James seemed to grow anxious and his breathing got heavier.

“Don’t do it, James,” Reid said softly. “You keep your breathing steady and even. You’re not going to get better if you fight the machine. I’m here with you. You stay calm and you breathe with the machine. That’s right. That’s good.”

Reid was quiet, allowing James time to settle back into rhythm with the machine.

“I’m so proud of you,” Reid started. “You did all you could to help those veterans. Did you know they have voted on issuing those bonuses six times, and it failed all six times. But there were more votes for passage this time than ever before. You helped do that, James. You gave the veterans hope.”

James’s agitation seemed to grow, but Reid continued.

“Stay calm. Feel the air come in and breathe then. Good. Measure your breathing and listen. Everything is good. It’s all positive. We’re not talking about anything to get upset about.”

Reid’s voice was still low, a quiet calming whisper.

“You did everything right. What happened wasn’t your fault. Sometimes bad things just happen and then everybody suffers.

“We can rejoice when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to be patient. And patience develops strength of character in us and helps us trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady. Then, when that happens, we are able to hold our heads high no matter what happens and know that all is well, for we know how dearly God loves us, and we feel this warm love everywhere within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.”¹

“The troops got their orders from their commander, and soldiers are supposed to obey their commander, you know that.

“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good.”² Government officials, like General MacArthur and Colonel Patton need to receive our thanks for taking these jobs. They make hard decisions and they make mistakes sometimes. We make mistakes too. All of us want to do what is right, but sometimes what we think is right can hurt people. When that happens, we need to pray and ask if that is really what God wanted us to do. After all,

¹ Romas 5:3-5 TLB

² Titus 3:1

we all really work for God, not other people. We're all going to have to give an account to God one day for everything we do, good deeds, our mistakes, and intentional sin.

"Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment."¹ Me, and you, and the general, the colonel, and even the president, are all going to stand before God on the day of judgement. We have to live in a way that we can be proud of what we do, and won't be ashamed.

"But it's not just what we do. It's about our motives too. 'A person may think their own ways are right, but the Lord weighs the heart.'²

"Why did you help the veterans?"

Reid knew James couldn't voice his answer, but he waited for James to think about this.

"I know why you did it. Because they needed help. They needed hope. They needed someone to guide them so that they could make the right decisions. I imagine, because you were there to guide them, they were controlled and helped each other. They encouraged each other and that made their days better.

"We can still do that. What we do right now will help someone, or discourage someone. Winona is going to come to see you later today. You can help her by remaining calm. She wants you to get better. She needs you to hold her in your arms. If you stay calm and remember to breathe with the machine, you will be able to do that much sooner."

Reid stopped to watch James's chest rise and fall in rhythm with the sound of the machine.

"You're doing good. You've been doing good the whole time I've been here."

Reid paused again. He had tears in his own eyes but he wasn't going to let James know. He wouldn't move his hand to wipe them away, nor would he move his face away from his son.

"You are so loved. By me, by Winona, by Travis. Curt loves you too, and Ed. Stephen asked me to call as soon as I talked to you. I'll call him in a little bit. He'll talk to Ayiana, and Kimi, and Blade, Esa and Uncle Luke, and Aunt Sarah and, there's just too many people to call by name.

¹ Ecclesiastes 11:9

² Proverbs 21:2

“And God loves you. ‘This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.’¹ Love is an act of the will. To love someone requires a decision to act on their behalf. You made the decision to love those men. You acted on your decision.

“And love is sacrificial. It cost God his son. Jesus chose to act, to love us. You chose to act, to love those men. Jesus saw man’s deepest need and gave himself to be the sacrifice that was required to forgive sin. If we profess love but we’re not willing to be inconvenienced and give up our comforts, I don’t think we really understand love.

“Love also forgives when something hurts us. What those soldiers did hurt everyone. It hurt you, and it hurt the other veterans. It hurt Winona, and it even hurt Travis. He doesn’t want to see you or his momma sad or in pain. What they did hurt this country too. The public doesn’t understand why they did it any more than you do. And it hurt the soldiers. Most of them didn’t want to hurt the veterans. They didn’t want to burn the tents or destroy everything those people owned. They certainly didn’t want to see you laying here like this.

“We’ve got to forgive them and love them too.”

A soft knock came on the door. Reid looked up to see a distinguished man in a policeman’s uniform. The judge raised his head further but kept his hand on James’s back.

“Good morning.”

“Hello. I’m Pelham Glassford.” He nodded his head toward James. “Is Mr. Britt accepting visitors?”

“He can’t talk to you but come on in. He’s awake.” Reid pulled away from his son.

“Mr. Britt. I just found out you were here. I wanted to let you know how sorry I am this happened. It was out of my control.”

James opened his eyes weakly and looked at the man. It wasn’t his fault, James knew this. This man had tried to help.

Reid put his hand out. “Reid Britt. I’m his father.”

The two men shook hands.

“I understand Mr. Britt’s wife was injured too,” Glassford continued. “I hope she’s doing okay.”

¹ 1 John 4:10

James's breathing got heavier and Reid turned his attention back to his son. Minutes passed as Reid talked to James, calming him and allowing him to relax.

"I'm sorry," Reid turned back to the policeman standing near him. "James hasn't seen Winona yet. She was just released from another hospital yesterday. She's getting better physically, but the burns don't hurt as much as the pain they both feel from losing their unborn child." Reid turned back to James. "They need each other, but they can't be together right now. It's hard on them both."

Glassford's face fell. He didn't know she was pregnant. He didn't know what to say. Reluctantly, he simply said, "Oh, I'm sorry."

Reid saw that the man was uncomfortable, and he spoke in an attempt to ease the apprehension he saw in the other man. "Our time on this earth is short in comparison to eternity. Their child's time was even shorter. Jesus has this child now, cradling him, soothing his cries. One day we will be in Jesus arms too."

Reid was now talking to James, not Glassford. "Then I will see my children, and you will see yours. In the meantime, I will 'Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.'¹ 'I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living,'² on this earth. You've got Travis, and he's a blessing. Think about him."

"You sound like you've lost children too."

"Yes, I have. Three babies and a sixteen-year-old," Reid replied. "James's older brother was shot while protecting a younger brother. 'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.'"³

Reid turned his attention back to James, but he was still talking to Glassford. Reid didn't know why he was telling this man so much, but he just seemed like a man that needed to know these things.

"My first child was murdered by a man who didn't like my wife just because she was Indian. She was eight months along and he abused her, causing her labor to begin. The child didn't survive. I lost a baby girl who was only six days old and a boy that was stillborn. I know what it's like to lose a child. Then we almost lost James to the war. It's only through God's mercy that we have him."

¹ Psalm 27:14

² Psalm 27:13

³ John 15:13

"How many children did you have," Glassford asked.

"Fifteen. And now four are gone." Reid stopped briefly. "My father had children die, I had children die, and now James knows that pain too. '(God) heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.'¹ The Lord God is the healer of emotional pain, bringing restoration to the heart."

"Does he have other children?"

"A four-year-old son who doesn't understand any of this. That's a blessing."

James placed his hand on his father's arm, his eyes pleading with his father. He was distracted and his breathing had gotten out of rhythm again. He needed coaching to regain the proper pace.

"Close your eyes," Reid advised. "Close them, tight. Think about what you're doing. Get back the rhythm. That's right."

"His protective gear was damaged during battle. That's why his face is scarred in this way." Reid ran a finger around the edge of the scars on James's forehead and the side of his face. "The gas got into the mask without him realizing it. Now any mask causes him to get upset, even one that helps him. He knows it's irrational, but he can't stop it."

"Because of this injury, his lungs aren't getting the air he needs. He stays confused. It's scary when you're confused and can't understand what's going on around you," Reid said, remembering his own confusion after the head injury.

Glassford and Reid kept talking like James wasn't in the room. James listened. He wanted to get into this conversation, he had things he wanted to say, but he couldn't. He had no voice. He was struggling just to breathe. He wanted to open his eyes and look at the man. You could tell so much from a man's facial expression and body language.

James almost laughed. Except nobody could read his face. His paralyzed face had only one expression; okay, maybe two, if you counted the sneer. All people saw when they looked at James were the scars. James wondered if anyone saw him. The real him.

James's father was still talking. "And despite everything he's been through he handles his job and faces his coworkers and other attorneys with honor and distinction."

"He's an attorney?" Glassford should have realized this, James had said he was there to advise the marchers.

¹ Psalm 147:3

Reid nodded. "Each day he gets up, he chooses to be there for his family, his job, his church, and his community."

"I can see that," the police chief said. "I've watched him at the camp, and I've seen him working with the veterans. What he does takes a level of resilience and determination that goes beyond physical endurance—it's mental and emotional fortitude. I saw his inner-strength and his commitment to those men. I'm not sure I could have done that facing the challenges that he faces."

Glassford smiled. "He got up on stage in front of the whole camp to tell the children a story. But I don't think the story was for the children. It resonated with the adults as much as it entertained the kids. And it struck home with me. I'm sure the other men understood the point he was making. He is a living testament to the power of the human spirit, showing that true strength lies in the ability to endure, adapt, and thrive in the face of life's battles."

Reid shook his head. "No, it's not his spirit that drives him, he draws his strength from the Lord. 'So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.'¹

"God has chosen James for a special purpose—a unique opportunity awaits him. God's been preparing him for it, helping him, and building his faith and resilience. He's learned compassion and he's learned perseverance. He has a sharp mind and the courage to face anything life throws at him. This is just another step toward God's ultimate goal for him."

James was listening. Was God preparing him for something else? He had felt like God wanted more but he hadn't been able to figure out what it was. He knew God had chosen him to save those men in France. He knew God had placed him in Reid's home as a child, to teach him and to guide him. He knew God had chosen him to be Winona's husband, and Travis's father. He knew God provided the job he now had—it was laid in his lap, a gift from God.

Was what his father saying true? His father had a unique way of understanding the Spirit. He had an uncanny ability to explain the unexplainable in a way that was easily understood. Did his father know something else was coming in his life? James listened again, more in tune with what his father was now saying.

¹ Isaiah 41:10

“Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”¹

God was equipping him for what he needed to do in the future. This tragedy, this refusal to pass the bonus bill, this loss of a child, this routing by the army, this was all a blessing? It was to prepare him—but for what?

Hope surged through James. His spirit rose and soared beyond his physical body, praising God—the constraints were loosed and he suddenly felt...freedom.

The Spirit spoke, *Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*²

He was no longer a slave to his despair and fear. He opened his eyes, looking at the mask on his face. It didn't bother him. Seeing it there didn't cause fear. He squeezed his father's hand.

Reid turned to look at his son. He was relaxed. He wasn't struggling. His breathing was easy and his eyes were wide open. Reid smiled with understanding, “Praise God.”

Reid got down in James's face and looked directly into his eyes. “Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”³

Reid hugged his son.

Pelham Glassford didn't know what was happening. He watched, confused, as Reid turned.

“God has performed another miracle. Look at him. He's breathing!”

Curt came in the door. “James, I brought you some eggs. We're going to try eating something, do you think you can do that?”

Curt stopped, watching the man in the bed. He understood and smiled. “You can eat, can't you?”

¹ Hebrews 13:20-21

² John 8:35-36

³ Isaiah 53:4-5

James gave a soft nod and put his hand on the side of the mask. Curt set the plate down and rushed to help James. "I've got it. Take it slow." He pulled the mask away slowly, ready at any moment to put it back.

Curt held the mask about six inches from his face. James was breathing heavy, struggling, but he was breathing on his own. Curt moved the mask further.

James licked his lips and tried to speak. No words came out, a snarl curled onto his lip.

"James!" Curt was electrified. "James, look at you. God did it again!"

Curt stuck his head out the door and spoke loudly to a nurse, "Get Edison in here!" Then he returned to James. Moisture filled Curt's eyes as he put an arm around James and hugged him. "You are a walking miracle. 'Because God loves us, none of these troubles can ever beat us.'¹ Nothing can stop you."

Nothing can stop you. James took these words to heart. Whatever God had planned for him, nothing but God alone could stop it.

James had no strength and was getting tired quickly. He rolled onto his back, taking long clear breaths of air. Curt pulled the pillow from behind him. The patient picked the oxygen mask up from the edge of the bed, put it over the lower part of his face, and closed his eyes. He heard the Spirit speak. "*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*"²

Curt took the mask from James and positioned it so James didn't have to hold it. The strap was pulled around his patient's head. The visiting doctor turned to the equipment and as he adjusted it, said, "I'm going to lower the pressure so it's not pushing as hard. You let me know if you need it back up."

James nodded. Reid leaned over and kissed his son on the forehead.

Ed ran into the room to see his uncle standing beside the bed with his face turned to heaven and his eyes closed. He was talking, but Ed wasn't paying any attention to what he was saying.

Another man stood beside Reid in a policeman's uniform and Curt was on the other side of the bed. He looked happy, or excited, or both. Curt turned to look at his brother just as Ed understood what Reid was saying.

"I will exalt you, Lord, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. Lord my God, I called to you for help,

¹ Romans 8:37a EASY

² Matthew 19:26

and you healed me. You, Lord, brought me up from the realm of the dead; you spared me from going down to the pit. Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name.”¹

““You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever.””²

Reid opened his eyes and lowered his head.

Curt spoke excitedly, “God’s done it again. He can breathe! He can wear the mask without thinking about the other one!”

Curt grabbed Ed’s shoulders. Ed was looking at Reid and James, but Curt wanted Ed to look at him. He wanted Ed to understand. “He’s breathing on his own. He put the mask back onto his face himself!”

Ed pulled away and went to the bed. “James? Can you take the mask off?”

James opened his eyes slowly, reached up, and pulled the strap of the mask over his head before he let his arm drop heavily onto the pillow beside his head. His breathing was heavy but he was doing it himself.

Ed put the stethoscope to the man’s chest. He listened. Everyone in the room was quiet. Ed said, “Okay, put the mask back on.”

James obeyed. Then he pulled the mask off his mouth and whispered, “I’m really tired.”

“Okay,” Ed said, adjusting the mask back into place. “You’ve been fighting hard for days, you rest.”

The doctor turned to look at the equipment and then the other men. “His lungs don’t sound clear, but they’re much better than they were just two hours ago.” Ed smiled. “He’s been struggling for days. He’s going to be tired. We’ll let him rest. He’ll need time for his body to recover. I’ll get some more blood gases and check on him again in a few hours.”

“Aren’t you excited?” Curt asked. “Amazed? Dumbfounded?”

“I’m cautious. I’ve seen miracles happen, but I’ve also seen great improvement just before a shocking downturn. I’ll say he’s healed when he’s off the oxygen completely.” Ed turned quickly and strolled out the door.

“Well,” Curt said, still staring at the door. “That’s balled-up.” He was confused. Ed hadn’t accepted his patient’s incredible recovery for what it was—a miracle from God.

¹ Psalm 30:1-4

² Psalm 30:11-12

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

"It's okay," Reid said. "Ed's got things going on that we know nothing about. We're going to praise God knowing he has performed this miracle and James is healed. Ed will realize it too before the day is out."

"Chief Glassford, why don't you plan on visiting with James when he gets out of this hospital. It should be just a few days."

Reid reached to pick up his cane. "I'll walk you out."

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Ed had already left for the hospital. Curt came downstairs and was filling his plate from the buffet. James sat next to Travis as the child picked at his breakfast. They were sharing a plate and James was having to coax the child to eat.

James picked up a biscuit with butter and apricot jam in the middle and took a bite, then he offered a bite to the child. James bared his clinched teeth as best he could and gave a small growl at the boy. Travis smiled and growled back, then opened his mouth wide and chomped at the biscuit like an animal.

Reid had the newspaper spread out on the table next to his breakfast plate but saw the playful meal his son and grandson shared. He smiled.

The judge would comment on an article from the paper, which no one cared about, then he would read silently more of the national and city news.

Reid said, "Colorado Senator Benjamin Craig just dropped out of the race citing health problems. Wasn't he a supporter of the veteran's bonuses?"

James nodded and spoke softly, "Yeah. He was a strong supporter." James sounded short of breath. Any talking at all left him winded.

Curt commented, "I think Regan Barber was one of his financial supporters."

"Where did you hear that?" James wheezed out.

"I don't know. It's sort of general knowledge around the hospital. You know—hearsay."

"Oh! I forgot about a letter Don gave me before he left," Reid said. "He asked me to give it to you when you were feeling better, then I forgot

about it. Curt, would you run up and get it from my suitcase. It's in the pocket on the inside of the lid."

"Sure." Curt crammed a fork full of egg into his mouth, picked up a slice of ham, and turned to go upstairs. He folded the ham and put the end to his mouth as he rounded the corner into the den.

"Who's it from?" James whispered.

"That guy you were talking about, Regan Barber."

James was through talking. He'd said all he could for the moment. But his mind was spinning with thoughts. He had written Regan Barber explaining that he thought he needed to do something more for the veterans. He had told Barber about his conversation with Ed and the veteran's needs. He said that Ed was willing to donate so that James could continue working if the bonus was not approved for payment. He asked Regan Barber if he knew of anyone else who might be willing to commit monthly so he could continue working. He told the man his end goal was not the bonuses, it was help for the veterans in need. He couldn't bring himself to ask the man for help directly.

This letter must be Barber's reply.

Curt returned with the letter to pick up a knife and split the flap open. He pulled the letter out, opened it, and handed it to James.

James held the letter close to his eyes. He turned the letter so the light fell on the page better, and squinted, then pressed his eyes together and tried to focus again.

Curt was watching. "Your eyes bothering you?"

Reid looked up.

"I don't think so. They don't hurt. I just can't seem to focus." James was rubbing his eyes.

He handed the page to his father, who was sitting across the table. "Please, Dad."

Reid read out loud.

My dear James,

I read your letter with great interest. You sound like you are a man on a mission, and it's a good cause. However, I can't bring myself to fund an individual with no accountability, nor would I be willing to ask others to do so.

I would, however, like to talk with you when you return to Denver. I have inside information on a political

position which may come open in a few weeks. I believe you would be a good candidate to replace this person. You could work for the veterans much more effectively from within the bureaucracy. Changing laws and having direct access to those in power would give you an advantage over being outside the system trying to fight your way in. If this interests you, contact me as soon as you return to Denver. We must move quickly.

Reid looked at James. "Have you thought about political office?"

James shook his head.

"Would you want to think about it?"

James didn't respond. He offered Travis another bite.

"I'd have to leave Denver," he whispered.

"Is that a problem?"

"No. I don't guess it is." James stopped to breathe. "When are we going home?"

"Don left the private coach for us. We just need to contact the railroad and have them schedule the connection to a train going that way."

"Can you get us out of here tomorrow?"

"I'll call them." Reid began to fold the newspaper. "Are you sure you're ready to travel?"

James nodded. "Winona's ready to go home too. She told me so."

"Okay," Reid said. "We'll get it done." He stood up.

Ed answered the door. "Good evening, Chief. I'm glad you were able to make it."

"Thank you." Glassford stepped into the room and Ed closed the door.

Spotting Reid, Glassford said, "Thank you for calling me and letting me know you would be leaving tomorrow. I did want to talk to your son again."

"Come on in," Reid said, standing up.

"Travis, why don't you come with me and I'll tell you a story before you get ready for bed." Reid put his hand out to the child.

Travis jumped up and ran to take his grandfather's hand.

"You headed upstairs?" Curt asked. "Hang on, I'll go with you."

Glassford watched as Reid and Travis got to the bottom of the stairs. Reid let go of Travis's hand and Curt stepped beside his uncle. They moved slowly up the stairs as Travis stood at the top.

"Come on, Grandpa."

"Patience, son. 'It is good that one should wait quietly,'¹ I'm coming as fast as I can."

Glassford turned back to the two men that remained. He reached to shake the hand of both men.

"Your father called to say you were leaving town tomorrow. He knew I wanted to talk with you. I came to the hospital to see you."

James nodded his head. "I remember you being there. That's all."

Glassford smiled and helped himself to a chair, sitting on the edge. "I wanted you to know that what happened was a tragedy and I'm not happy with the way things were handled. It got out of control. It should never have gone that far. I don't even know how the army got involved.

"All I was able to find out was that orders came from above General MacArthur. Then he decided to get involved himself. He's an egotistical man. My word! A photo shoot in front of the burning camp! How can he be so callous, so vain?" Glassford shook his head. He simply didn't understand why General MacArthur did any of this.

"I've read some of the newspaper articles. But it's over with," James whispered. "I'm ready to move on."

"I wish it was that easy. I'll have to deal with the aftermath of this for months. I've got a young officer facing charges of inappropriate use of a weapon. Nobody's said anything about manslaughter yet, but it's probably coming. I had several officers hurt, though none of the injuries were serious. I'm going to have to attend meeting after stupid meeting listening to everyone involved give excuses for their mistakes and blame those mistakes on someone else."

"That doesn't sound like fun," Ed commented.

"I think it all boils down to someone was scared of a revolt. And this group of veterans could have done it."

James didn't understand. "You mean somebody thought we wanted to take over the government?"

"The economic hardship, the radical political movements within the country. You were a large, organized, controlled group of trained men," Glassford explained. "If the wrong person spoke and got the group fired

¹ Lamentations 3:26a

up with socialist unity or communist demands to rise up and create a new economic class, we would have been in trouble. The group could have easily caused widespread public disorder. Somebody got scared.”

“We never meant for any of that to happen.”

“I know that. Now the powers will never have the chance to find that out,” Pelham lamented. “Nobody’s talking to the veterans.”

“I’ll talk to them,” James said.

“They won’t listen. No one controlling the hearings has even asked to talk with a veteran. Nobody cares what the veterans think.”

James sat stunned. While he had thought senators and representatives were listening to what the bonus marchers had to say, he now realized they didn’t care either. They just appeared to listen so they could brush the veterans aside and move on. His need to speak for the veterans within congress seemed more urgent.

Glassford continued, “I also wanted to let you know that I’m sorry about what happened to you and your wife. That’s a crime in itself, but I’m sure we won’t hear any concerns for your welfare.”

“Thank you for your concern. But we’re okay.”

“No, the situation is not okay,” Pelham howled. “Two men are dead. You and thousands of others suffered physical injury and loss of goods. Many of the families lost everything they had. They’re worse off now than they were when they got to Washington!” He stopped to control his anger. “But I wanted to address you personally. What happened to your family was...” He couldn’t continue, he didn’t have words, “appalling.”

Looking at the floor, he shook his head.

“The cruelest crime in history,” James interrupted, wheezing a little, “was Jesus Christ’s arrest and crucifixion. He suffered ridicule, horrible beatings, betrayal, and was abandoned by his closest friends. He was nailed to a cross. It was the most horrific crime in history. He did nothing wrong and died because he told the truth. Did he seek retribution? Did he ask God for justice? No. He accepted his fate even though he was totally innocent. He had done nothing wrong. Yet he was punished.”

Glassford watched James with interest.

“But what followed didn’t serve him justice,” James continued. “It gave us redemption. Us, the people who sinned. The people who caused him to go to the cross to begin with. He loved us and therefore he did what his Father asked of him. He loved us, and the worst crime in history became our salvation.”

James drew in a deep breath and coughed gently. Then continued, his voice softer.

"I can't believe that what happened to the veterans is going to be any different. They're not going to get compensation for what they lost. They won't receive justice. But I have to believe something good will come from this.

"Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks (and woe to the victors who command armies), who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent."¹ Judgement is coming. It comes to all of us at one time or another.

"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter."²

James stopped again, breathing hard. Ed was watching James hold in his cough. James glanced at the doctor mouthing, "I'm okay."

"So you think the people that caused this will eventually pay?" Pelham asked.

"Maybe not on this earth. But 'we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.'³

"For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."⁴

"We should all speak and act knowing that we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ one day. If we don't show mercy, we shouldn't expect to receive mercy. If we don't offer hope, there is no hope to be found." James spoke softly, his voice raspy. He coughed again, pressing his fist to his chest.

"But on this earth," Glassford said, "there will be no justice."

"I cry, "Violence!" but I am not answered; I call for help, but there is no justice."⁵ 'Powerful men attack me, but not because of any sin or rebellion of mine. For no fault of mine, they run and take up a position.'⁶

¹ Isaiah 5:21-23

² Isaiah 5:20

³ 2 Corinthians 5:10

⁴ James 2:13 ESV

⁵ Job 19:7

⁶ Psalm 59:3-4 HCSB

Edison added, “Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the (president). (Citizens), be subject to (those over you) with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.”¹

“There was no fault in what the veterans did,” James added, “or what I did. It sounds like the sole reason for our destruction was fear by those in power. Fear is sin. Fear is a lack of trust in God. We all do it, we all fear things, and we all need forgiveness for allowing it to creep into our lives. We let our fear and anxiety overtake our trust in the Almighty.

“When I released my fear of the gasmask to God, he healed me. That fear I held for fourteen years was holding the sickness inside my body.” He coughed again.

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”² All suffering doesn’t come from sin, but a sinful lifestyle will result in sorrow and anguish for someone.” James’s voice was a whisper now.

“Our sin brought suffering to Jesus. “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross,’—James coughed—‘so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.”’”³

James’s voice could barely be heard and his breathing was labored. “Nobody else has done that. Nobody else has taken on the punishment of another person and healed them. It’s all Jesus. It’s always been about Jesus, and it always will be.”

James broke into a coughing fit, but he held his hand toward Ed, telling the doctor to leave him alone.

“James, you need to quit talking,” Ed said.

He nodded, “I know.”

Glassford glanced at the doctor, acknowledging that he understood the other man’s needs.

“I appreciate you talking to me. It’s given me something to think about as I go into these hearings.” Pelham stood up. “I’ll get out of here so you won’t be tempted to talk,” Pelham smiled.

¹ 1 Peter 2:17-19

² James 5:16

³ 1 Peter 2:24

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

James nodded and stood up, too. He whispered, "Thank you for coming by."

"No, thank you for explaining this from a Biblical perspective. It eases my mind to think that something good will come from this. You have a good trip home."

32

August 1932 Denver, Colorado

James and Curt arrived at the Barber home and were escorted into Regan Barber's den.

"Have a seat, gentlemen, I'll go get Mr. Barber," the servant said. He left the room, leaving the two men alone.

James said, "This is a nice room. I like this polished redwood." He ran his hand across a shelf and then moved his eyes closer. "That carving is beautiful."

Curt laughed. "You don't remember this room, do you?"

"Should I?"

"You slept on that sofa all afternoon."

James realized what Curt was referring to, the afternoon of the party one year ago.

"Oh." James moved across the room and sat on the same sofa. Curt took the chair he had also sat in the same afternoon.

The room was dimly lit by a floor lamp in the corner and a lamp on the table at the end of the sofa. The drapes were pulled closed.

James commented, "It's dark in here."

"Having trouble seeing?"

"A little. It'll be okay."

The two men talked casually about nothing, but the air was thick with anticipation.

James knew this is what the Lord had planned for him. He trusted God to see this endeavor forward into the election. He had no doubt he would win, but he understood he had to run a good campaign and make a reputation for himself, or he wouldn't be respected among the senators when he arrived in Washington.

While Regan Barber had called this meeting, James knew that he needed a vision for his campaign and stance within the senate. And he had none. He could only trust that the Holy Spirit would give him the words he needed when the time was right. James was a good negotiator and God would make him into a good statesman.

Regan came into the room and his commanding presence took control immediately.

"James, it is good to see you again." He shook hands with James and turned to Curt. "And Dr. Stewart, I assume you are going to help James with his campaign?"

"No, sir. I wasn't planning on it. I'll support him, but today I'm just here because he needed a driver and I was available," Curt grinned.

"You do know that I have vision problems?" James asked.

"I do now. It doesn't seem to slow you down."

"Not much." James said without any further explanation.

"Okay," Regan moved on with a knowing nod. "James, I believe it's time for a new voice in the Senate. Someone who truly represents the people and fights for their needs. With Senator Craig's retirement, I think you could be that person."

James shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "Mr. Barber, I appreciate your confidence in me, but I have no experience in politics. I'm just a veteran who saw an injustice and decided to help. I feel God's calling for this though, but I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know who to turn to. Running for office seems... daunting. But I'm willing to try."

Barber nodded again, his fingers tapping rhythmically on the arm of the chair. "I see your hesitation, James. That's exactly why you're the right person for this. You've seen firsthand the struggles and injustices that veterans, and Americans in general, face. You have a genuine desire to make things better. Not being eager to be in control of things just makes your stance among the politicians favorable to a more democratic and inclusive methodology. A more laid-back attitude can certainly make a politician more appealing and easier to approach. There's definitely something to be said for leaders who don't seem power-hungry. Simply focus on collaboration and listening. Consider all options, then make your stand on a matter knowing that you have looked at the issue from all sides."

Regan paused, confident of what he was saying, but hearing the young man's concern. "James, I've seen many politicians come and go. What makes you different is your authenticity and your passion for justice. You don't need to be a seasoned politician to make a difference. You just

need to care and be able to understand the bureaucracy. Any fool can vote yea or nay. Your job will be to decide what's best for the majority and vote your conscience."

The fire of determination slowly reignited within James. He knew God wanted him to do this. James spoke, "This economic depression has left many of our fellow Americans struggling, including our veterans. I intend to ensure that our veterans receive the support they deserve. Job training was offered to those of us that came back with injuries, I don't know why it can't be offered to all veterans.

"I understand that jobs may not be available when the veteran returns home, but if they are willing to give up their livelihood to serve our country, the very least employers can do is give preference in hiring when they have an opening. The private sector may not be open to this, but federal jobs should certainly be made available.

"During this depression we need to create jobs, if only temporary, not only to take care of our citizens, but to increase spending and relieve the burden on the overall economy. If all we did was put the veterans back to work, think of what that would do to the rest of the nation."

"How do you plan to do that?" Curt asked.

"By pushing for infrastructure projects. By funding large-scale public works venues, we can create jobs for millions of Americans, including veterans. These projects can improve roads and water systems, create parks, build bridges, maybe even damn up a few rivers to power electrical plants and channel water into dry areas for farming."

"Dams for electrical power?" Curt asked.

James sneered, "I talked to Uncle Angus."

"Your proposal could help everyone. But as a private citizen with a private company, how would hiring a veteran help me?" Regan asked.

"Well, sir. Veterans have been trained in discipline, leadership, and teamwork. They can adapt easily to new and changing situations and they have learned loyalty and commitment. That's an advantage to begin with. And by offering a tax break to the company, the company would increase profits and maybe lower prices. Any increase in sales or service would quickly increase economic development in that region and that would increase the tax base to the government."

"I like the sound of that," Regan Barber said. "What else are you going to do for veterans?"

"The Veteran's Administration was just formed two years ago, so I know somebody is working on the veteran's problems. But we need to

make sure that no veteran is homeless and all injured veterans receive continuing care, even after they are discharged. Both of these issues should be addressed for all veterans, regardless of race. As I said, job training and even education should be included.”

“This sounds good,” Regan said, turning from being the listener to the adviser. He stood up. “You’ve got my support. We’ll start with a fund raiser next Saturday. I’ll let you know where and when. Now, you need a campaign manager. We don’t have much time until the election.”

“I’ve taken care of that already. I talked to my Uncle Cleve and he’s agreed to serve in that capacity.”

“Your uncle? What does he know about politics?”

“Well, he was state representative for I don’t know how many years. But it was years, my whole childhood. Then he was governor of Kansas for two terms. He’s a lawyer, a career politician, and he’s never lost an election. He’s also gained some marketing experience the last few years. He’s recently been involved with advocacy for more national cemeteries, burial benefits, and survivor’s pensions for veterans and their families. He’s a supporter of veteran’s benefits too.”

“How long has it been since he was in politics?”

“Four years.”

“When can he be here?”

“Two days travel time.”

“Get him here. I want to meet with him before the fund raiser.” Regan walked to the window and opened the drapes, looking out.

“Is there anything else I can help you with?”

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for (congressmen) and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”¹ James replied. “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”²

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,”³ Curt injected.

Regan Barber looked at the two men and nodded. “Your right.” He hesitated and seemed to be considering his next statement. Then he

¹ 1 Timothy 2:1-2

² 2 Chronicles 7:14

³ Psalm 22:12a

abruptly said, "Registration for the election closes Thursday. You have two days. Get signed up. We have less than three months to get this done. Let's get at it."

And with that, Regan Barber strolled from the room.

Curt watched Barber leave and then turned to James. "Next stop the office of the Secretary of State?"

James nodded.

33

September/October 1932

Across the state of Colorado

The fundraiser was a huge success. All of Denver's elite appeared to be there, and Senator Craig's presence seemed to boost the excitement for a new statesman who could take his place—a man with the courage and determination to tackle the established bureaucracy.

James and Cleve worked together to build the campaign on a platform of patriotism, veterans' benefits, and overall economic growth. Although he still wasn't sure how congress would find the money, James still promised to fight for the immediate cash payment of the adjusted compensation certificates, which weren't due to be paid out for another thirteen years. But James also thought of the veterans who put their faith in their government, and not the Lord. He wanted to address this issue too.

In Pueblo, he argued that veterans needed money now, not years down the line, to survive the economic hardships of the depression. He argued that the influx of that amount of money into the economy across the nation would benefit all citizens, not just the veterans. He encouraged all citizens that were able to also help. He told them that it was not only the responsibility of the government, but of the church, and of individuals, to help others when they are in need.

“““There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore (God) command(s) you to be openhanded toward your fellow (countrymen) who are poor and needy in your land.””¹

The senate candidate traveled across his state, speaking at town halls, veterans' organizations, and public gatherings. James shared stories

¹ Deuteronomy 15:11

of his comrades in Washington who had been left destitute, and he called for the government to honor its promises. He told stories of people helped by the veterans, stories of bravery and sacrifice on the home front; stories that instilled hope in everyone that heard him speak. His speeches were passionate and heartfelt, encouraging to both veterans and civilians alike.

Veterans approached him in every town, telling him of their support and offering their own stories of inspiration and sacrifice.

Despite the opposition he knew would come from established politicians; his message struck a chord with the electorate. He emphasized the importance of supporting those who had sacrificed for their country and argued that a nation that neglected its veterans was failing in its duty.

"I stand before you today not just as a candidate for the U.S. Senate, but as a fellow veteran who has witnessed the struggles and sacrifices of our brave servicemen. We fought for our country with unwavering courage, and now, in these trying times, it is our duty to fight for the rights and benefits we have earned," James said in a speech at a park in Colorado Springs.

His sister Jeannie and her family approached offering their support and introducing him to a few of the town's leading citizens, who also offered support.

"Our nation is in the grip of a great depression, and the hardships we face are immense," he told the people in Greeley. "Families are struggling to put food on the table, and many of our fellow citizens are without work. Even with this turmoil, we must not forget the sacrifices made by our veterans. They answered the call of duty, and now it is our turn to answer theirs. Supporting them will help bring prosperity to everyone."

As James stepped onto the platform to speak in Rifle, another man stepped beside him. "Folks, do you know who this is? This is the man who brought the railroad through this town. That track that's being laid, he's the one that did that. This is the man that's putting us back to work at the mine. The mine closed and this town would have died if it hadn't been for him. Now the mine is about to reopen and that railroad will allow us to ship across the country.

"It also allows us to ship the farm products into the areas most affected by the drought. We're able to sell more to the people that need that food the most."

James wanted to smile at what this man was saying. He was campaigning for James, and he didn't even know this man's name.

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

In talking to the farmers, James said, "I know you have problems with people eating from your fields. I know this is troubling to you, but God tells us in Leviticus,

““When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.””¹

"If you have food, there is always a little to share. If you have work to do, offer that person a chance to earn his meal.

““Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.””²

"We all have a responsibility to help others, and putting a person to work so they can help themselves is the best way to do that."

In Monte Vista, James visited the state Soldier's and Sailor's Home. "I am here to advocate for immediate cash payments of your bonus certificates. These bonuses were promised to us as a token of gratitude for our service, but they are of little use if we must wait until 1945 to receive them. You need this money now. Your families need this money now. It can help rebuild our lives.

"We must also ensure that our veterans receive the medical care they deserve.

““If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.””³

"The establishment of new soldiers' and sailors' hospitals and the expansion of medical services will not only benefit our veterans but also

¹ Leviticus 19:9-10

² Ephesians 4:28

³ Isaiah 58:10

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

create jobs for doctors, nurses, and support staff. This is a win-win for our entire community.”

The people in Denver heard him say, “My platform extends beyond veterans’ benefits. I believe that the well-being of our veterans is innately linked to the well-being of our entire nation. We must address the needs of all our citizens, both veterans and civilians alike. And we must support our active military.

“We need comprehensive relief programs to provide jobs, food, and shelter for those in need. We must invest in infrastructure projects that will create employment opportunities and stimulate economic growth. And these projects will put people back to work.

“I am the candidate who will

“‘Open (my) mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute.’ I will ‘Open (my) mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.’”¹

At his own church, James was asked to say a few words at the end of the service. He spoke of his gratefulness to the church for supporting him, and his thankfulness that the Lord had placed this mission on his heart. And again, he spoke of the need for Christians to step up and help those in need. It wasn’t the government’s responsibility to care for those displaced and out of work, it was the responsibility of Christians to help.

“‘Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’”

“‘Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’”

¹ Proverbs 31:8-9 ESV

““And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

““Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.”

““Then they also will answer, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?”

““Then he will answer them, saying, “Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.””¹

Speaking at the university in Denver, James spoke of his alma mater. He told how his education had led to his understanding of the intricate connection between education and financial stability, and how his military service had impacted his academic performance, teaching him perseverance, and giving him an understanding of time-management.

“It taught me self-discipline, problem solving, and leadership skills.

“Education is a cornerstone of my platform. We must provide educational opportunities for our children and the children of deceased service members, and for all our young people. By investing in education, we are investing in the future of our nation. Our children won’t be able to continue farming like our fathers did. Times are changing, and our children need to be taught new and forward-thinking methods of agriculture, construction, engineering, medicine, finance, technology, and communications.

¹ Matthew 25:34-46

A Father's Love: Love and Honor

“For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.”¹

“Together, we can build a brighter future for our veterans, our families, and our country. Let us honor the sacrifices of our servicemen by ensuring they receive the benefits they deserve. Let us work together to lift our nation out of this economic crisis and create a prosperous and just society for all.

“May we bless God with our choices, and may God bless America.”

¹ Ecclesiastes 7:12

33

November 1932 Denver, Colorado

James walked into the storefront office on Shipline Street. He had rented an office on the ground floor of the railroad building. Northern Rocky was openly endorsing him for U.S. Senate.

This had been his campaign headquarters for the past two and a half months. The election was two days ago and James had retreated to his home, locked behind closed doors, alone with his wife and son.

He had avoided looking at the newspaper, listening to the radio, or meeting people he knew on the street. He had refused to talk on the telephone. He was confident he would win. It was God's will. But he wanted to forget about the election for just a little while to spend time with his family. Now, Regan had called him to join them at the campaign headquarters. The final election results were in.

Cleve met James at the door, but he didn't look happy. "Where have you been?" He asked low, leaning toward James. "I've been calling but you wouldn't return my calls. That man that works for you, what's his name? He said you weren't in. How do you expect us to know what's going on if we can't reach you? How do you expect to know what's going on if we can't reach you?"

Don Cryer interrupted. "James, come this way." He took James' arm and led him away. Cleve followed, his normally contented face now showing irritation.

James knew that this campaign had been hard on Cleve. He had gotten old in the years since James had last seen him. While Cleve had said he was happy to help James by becoming his campaign manager, he had shown signs of annoyance and frustration with the work. It was good that this season of campaigning was over.

Don dragged James through the people and onto a small platform built in the far corner.

James lifted his head to look at the crowd jammed into the small room. Cleve followed him onto the platform. So did Regan Barber. Winona stood against the wall holding Travis, who stood on a chair to see better through the crowd.

“Speech, speech, speech,” the crowd chanted.

“What are you going to do first?” another yelled.

James lowered his head and said a short prayer for the right words, then he lifted his face to look into the faces of those that supported him. To his shock, his father was there, smiling, looking back into his son's eyes.

Reid nodded and James gained confidence. Keeping his eyes on his father, James began.

“My grandfather liked to tell stories. He told a story that he learned from a Lakota elder while confined to a teepee during a snowstorm in the Dakotas. It went like this:

“Once, when the world was young, there was a medicine man with a good heart. He had spent his whole life helping people. All he did was serve other people.

“One day he got a message from a village up river—the people were sick. They needed help. So, he packed everything he could carry and as fast as he could, he set off on this long journey upriver to see if he could save this village.

“To get there, he had to take this long winding path up the side of the mountain. On one side of the path was a sheer rock face going straight up, on the other side was a sharp, deep cliff dropping off straight into the river. It was spring. The snow was melting and the river was running fast down the mountain.

“On day two of the journey, he was struggling up a path with his pack on his back. He rounded a sharp corner and standing in the middle of the path was this man holding a rope. One end of the rope was tied around his belly.

“As this medicine man approaches, the other man calls out, ‘Please I need your help. Can you hold this rope for me?’

“The medicine man, wanting to help, takes the end of the rope as he asks, ‘Why do you want me to hold this...’

“But before the medicine man can finish his sentence the other man throws himself off the cliff. The medicine man tightens his grip on the rope and he's leaning back against the cliff”—James is showing the crowd how

the medicine man held the rope and leaned into the cliff—"and he dug his feet into the sand and rock to keep from being pulled over himself.

"He yells, 'What are you doing? Why did you jump? Climb back up.'

"The man, hanging at the other end of the rope says, 'Just hold on. Don't let go.'

"The medicine man didn't know what the man was doing. He didn't know why the man had jumped over the cliff like that, so he held on. But the rope started to slip.

"The man hanging on the other end felt the slip and yelled, 'Hold on, don't let go. Don't let me fall, don't let me drown. Tie it around your waist. Don't let go.'

"The medicine man calls down to him, 'Climb up, I can't hold on. The rope is slipping.'

"But the man yells even louder, 'Tie it around your waist, I'm going to fall, tie it around your waist.'" So, the medicine man does. He doesn't want the man to fall.

"The medicine man is leaning, pulling, holding the man that is dangling off the side of a cliff over a swollen river, using every bit of strength he has, calling to the man, 'Climb up, I can't hold on, climb up. I have to be somewhere else. You need to climb back up. I have people who need me.'"

James pantomimed the actions of the medicine man.

"The man screamed even louder, 'Don't drop the rope! Don't let go! I don't want to drown, don't let me die!'

"The medicine man pulls with all his might, struggling, pulling, trying to drag this man back to the safety of the path. He calls to the man below, 'Please help me, I'm trying to get you to safety, climb up the rope.'

"But the man just dangles there, continuing to call to the medicine man, asking him to stay, to hold on, not to let him fall, not to let him die. But he does nothing to help.

"Hours go by, the medicine man's body is trembling with fatigue. He can't hold on much longer, holding this weight, calling back and forth with this man. He doesn't know why he's doing this. He doesn't know why the man jumped over the edge. He's tiring and the sun is setting. He knows he needs to get to this village. He knows he can help the people there, and they desperately need his help.

"Finally, he calls down to the man, 'I have to go. You're not telling me what you're doing, you're not helping yourself. Climb back up to safety. You're not helping me drag you back up. I have to go.'"

“No! Don't let me drown! I'll die. I'll die!”

“The medicine man stood there on the side of the cliff with his heart breaking. He wants to help. All he wants to do is help. But this man won't even help himself. The medicine man knew it was the man's choice to jump off the side of the cliff to begin with.

“He prays to God for guidance. He prays, ‘What do I do?’ As the sun sets, he knows that other people are sick and suffering and he can help them. Many people were waiting for him. People he could help. People he could save.

“Finally, with a heavy heart, he calls down to the man, ‘This is your last chance. Climb up and save yourself or I'm going to let go.’

“There is silence and the medicine man wondered what's happened. Then the man calls up, ‘If you let go of that rope I'll die, and my death will be your fault. My blood will be on your hands.’

“The medicine man breathed deeply and thought, ‘one life or a hundred?’ He untied the rope from his waist and he let the rope drop. He heard the cry of the man and a distant splash as the man hit the water.

“He picked up his pack and began walking. As he walked, he prayed for the man. He prayed that he would swim and get to safety, that he would survive. But as he took each step toward the village, he knew that this was not his fault. The man had made his own decision. The man had refused to help him, the man had refused to help himself. The burden of this man's life was not on his shoulders alone.

“The medicine man made it to the village barely in time. If he had come any later, he couldn't have saved anyone. The medicine man worked hard and saved men, women, and children in the village. His heart went from heavy and burdened, to light, with joy in his heart, knowing that he had made the right choice. He believed in his heart that the man chose to swim, instead of sink.

“Many people make choices. Some of those choices can make them sick, the choices can cause them pain. We can put a lot of energy into trying to save these people, but if they are like that man on the path, not willing to help themselves, if they're not willing to hear what we say, if they're not willing to take what we offer, if for some reason they can't accept what we're trying to do. Then, I have to believe that our effort is wasted.

“I have to believe that the majority of the people are like those in the village, trying to help themselves and calling for help only when they truly need it. And those are the people I'm here to serve. They may not be the people that make the most noise. They may be the people that sit quietly

in their village and go about their day-to-day tasks hoping and believing that help is just around the next corner.

"Maybe that help comes from somewhere else. Maybe I can be that help. I have to try."

Anthony Rosenberg, president of the Northern Rocky Railroad, moved to the platform beside James. Regan Barber stood on the other side. They took James's hands in theirs and raised their arms upward, holding James's hands above their heads in victory. Camera flashes went off across the room and shouts of triumph filled the air.

James looked back toward his father and saw his brother Stephen and sister Kimi. Joshua, Joseph and Curt stood behind them. Their sisters, Chloe and Mae, along with their husbands. Other faces began to emerge from the crowd. Rick Barber, Allen Milton, and Emory Brownfield, along with others from his Sunday School class. There was his pastor, Nelson Simmons, and near the back wall, Homer Noonan—one of the men he had saved from poison gas during the war. A fellow soldier, a fellow veteran. This was one of the men he was working to help.

The celebration continued as person after person came to James offering their congratulations and wishing him well in Washington.

As the hours passed and people began to leave, James again spotted Homer sitting next to Stephen at a table full of envelopes. They were opening the envelopes and unfolding the pages inside. Three stacks of papers set in the middle of the table.

"What's this?" James asked.

"Messages from your constituents. Some are congratulating you, some are asking for help," Stephen explained.

"There must be hundreds," James commented.

"This stack is congratulations and 'welcome to the senate,'" Homer put a hand on one stack. "This one is people wanting help with something." He moved his hand to another stack of just two pages. "And this one is personal." Homer indicated a lone letter beside the others by tapping his index finger on it.

James picked up the letter and began to read.

My Dear Mr. Britt,

Congratulations on your remarkable victory! Your dedication and hard work, along with your commitment to serve the veterans and the people of your state has paid

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off. This is a testament to your leadership and the trust your constituents have placed in you.

As you step into this new role, remember that you have the power to make a significant impact on the lives of many. Your integrity and passion to serve those you love will guide you in making decisions that benefit your community and this nation.

But guard your actions. Many will perceive them as contrary to what you intend. Make clear your intent in all things. Stay true to your values, listen to the voices of those you represent, and continue to work tirelessly for the betterment of our society. Your journey as a U.S. Senator is just beginning, and I have no doubt that you will accomplish great things.

Accompanying this letter, you have received a painting which I did while in Verdun, France, in 1917. It is the interior of an eleventh-century church. Just a few days after I completed this painting, the church was destroyed by enemy artillery. I am passing it on to you as a token of our friendship. Hang it in your Washington office and when someone asks about it, tell them our history together, from the war in France to the war on the streets of Washington.

I will not be in Washington when you arrive. I have resigned my post as Superintendent of the District of Columbia Police Department. Too many differences exist between myself and other leaders in this community and I am being used as a scapegoat for the disaster of July 28th. I have, therefore, left Washington. Because of you, and what you taught me, I hold no animosity against these people. Thank you for teaching me forgiveness. I know something better is coming and I await that time.

Give my best to your father, your wife, and your beautiful son.

Once again, congratulations on this well-deserved success. I wish you all the best in your new role and look forward to watching your career and seeing the positive changes you will bring.

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Yours truly,
Pelman Glassford

“How did he get this here so quickly?” James was perplexed.

“Apparently, he knew that you would win. He sent it to Dad and asked him to make sure you got it at your victory party,” Stephen said.

“Where’s the painting?”

“I’ll get it,” Stephen stood up. James sat in his place looking at the envelopes and pages on the table.

James looked back at the letter. There was more. He shifted the pages, shuffling the one that was on top to the back and dropped a page in the process. It floated back and forth in the air and came to rest on the floor.

Homer leaned over to pick it up.

Glassford had written scripture on the page. James read silently.

The Lord is a God who avenges. O God who avenges, shine forth. Rise up, Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve. How long, Lord, will the wicked, how long will the wicked be jubilant?¹

When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.²

But the Lord has become my fortress, and my God the rock in whom I take refuge. He will repay them for their sins and destroy them for their wickedness; the Lord our God will destroy them.³

James didn’t know how he felt about this. Pelham Glassford appeared to have accepted James’s words and was seeking the Lord. But his words also sought revenge. These were also King David’s words, though, and God was fully aware of the evil that possessed the land. Like King David, Pelham Glassford wanted justice.

Homer interrupted his thoughts, “You’ve got a lot of reading to do.”

¹ Psalm 94:1-3

² Psalm 94:19

³ Psalm 94:22-23

"Yeah."

"Want some help?"

"No. I think I need to do it myself."

Out of nowhere, Homer said, "Ayiana and I are getting married."

James turned quickly to look at Homer. "Really?"

"Yep. She's a wonderful girl. And your family has been great."

"Did you get your truck?" James asked.

"I got it. The money came in and it took me a while to find a truck. But the company didn't hire me back. I don't think they liked what I said about the gas cannisters and site foreman," Homer explained.

"I wondered what kind of an impact that would have on their decision."

"It's okay," Homer continued. "Like I said, your family's been great. I'm staying with Stephen and Uncle Angus has set me up in business for myself. I'm starting a trucking company. Right now, I'm just hauling sand and gravel and stuff I can put in the dump truck. But when I get enough money, I'm going to buy a flatbed, and then a dozer, or maybe a tractor and backhoe. We'll see what works the best.

"The mine isn't operating any more, but there's a whole bunch of aggregate of rock and mineral fragments they sold us real cheap. Angus has hired some men to dig it out, and I'm hauling it to a wholesaler in Saline. Angus says it will take us maybe a couple of years to dig it all out and by then the business should be up and going. When I can get other contracts, I'll take them too. He's teaching me the business end of things."

"He's the one to do it. Whatever he touches turns to gold."

Homer nodded in agreement. "Once I make two or three runs and see what our profit margin is, then Ayiana and I will get married. We're going to live with your dad for a while..."

James began to laugh uncontrollably.

"What so funny?"

James couldn't stop laughing. "Dad just got rid of Esa and now you're moving in?"

"Well, I'm not going to be there much. I'll be off in my truck and Ayiana doesn't need to be living by herself somewhere away from family."

James had stopped laughing, but he was still snickering when Stephen returned with a large flat crate. He set it on the floor with a heavy clunk. The end was open and Stephen began to pull the canvas from the packing straw. The straw fell onto the floor in small clumps.

Stephen held the painting up to look at it himself. "Look at that."

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James waited for Stephen to turn the painting around. When he didn't, James asked, "Is that my painting or yours?"

"He said it was yours."

"Then turn it around and let me see it," James instructed, then his eyes became captivated.

The painting showed the interior of the ancient church bathed in a warm golden light streaming through the intricate stained-glass windows. The light was casting a kaleidoscope of colors on the stone floor. The high, vaulted ceiling was adorned with ornate frescoes and delicate carvings. It drew the eye upward, evoking a sense of awe and reverence.

In the foreground, James saw elaborately carved wooden pews, polished to a deep luster by centuries of use. You could almost smell the air filled with the faint scent of incense and aged wood. The altar was draped in rich red velvet and adorned with gilded candlesticks, surrounded by flickering candles that cast dancing shadows on the walls.

The serene atmosphere of the church invited the observer to contemplate the history and devotion that filled this sacred space. You could almost hear the distant echoes of choral hymns and the soft murmurs of prayer.

Stephen set the painting on a chair and stepped beside James and Homer, who had both stood up to observe the painting better.

"It's a moment frozen in time," James said reverently. "It's beautiful. Look at those brushstrokes."

Stephen commented, "Wouldn't it be awesome to worship in a place like that?"

They stood immobile, mesmerized by its beauty.

Don Cryer walked over to the men and put his hands on James's shoulders. "Are you guys ready to go get something to eat?" He spotted the painting and froze too. "Oh my."

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March 1933 Washington, D.C.

The continuing depression had cast a long shadow over the nation, and the people were yearning for change. In the heart of Washington D.C., new senators were about to be sworn in. Among them was a man who had grown up at the edge of the Kansas prairie, a man who had served bravely during wartime, and a man who continued to stand, firmly grounded in Christ's love and salvation.

Senator-elect James MacDaniel Britt stood tall on the steps of the Capitol, his heart beat with a mixture of apprehension and anticipation. He was a man on mission, but he would also be a man of integrity and honor. His humble beginnings had brought him from the small town in Kansas to the nation's capital building.

His journey to this moment had not been easy, but with a clear mind and a Spirit filled heart, he would move forward to fulfill whatever destiny God had for him.

The steps and surrounding area were crowded with people. Senators-elect, and their families, moved toward the capital as reporters swarmed the people looking for a story. A man with a press tag sticking out of the band of his hat moved among the crowd searching for something.

James kissed his wife on the cheek and reached to pick up his five-year-old son. He pointed at the building in front of them and said, "That's the capital building. That's where Daddy is going to work now."

"Wow. It's big," Travis said.

"It sure is," James replied, feeling the weight of his new position.

The man wandering through the crowd spoke to James. "Were you elected? Are you one of the new congressmen?"

"Yes. Colorado senate," he responded.

"Can we get you on camera? Would you make a statement concerning your feelings about the situation this country is in?"

James thought for a moment. This was his new life. This is what he was appointed by God to do. He couldn't refuse.

He nodded, set Travis on his feet, and followed the man toward the camera. One of the other men ripped the hat from his head. James jerked his head around to look at the man. Apparently, this was something the man did often. He had thrown the hat onto a case setting on the steps and wasn't paying attention to James, but had a notebook out studying the words on the page.

"Just tell us how much faith you have in this country and what you think it will take to get us out of this depression. Look at the camera and speak clearly. If this is good, we'll run it as a newsreel at the motion pictures. Ready?"

James looked away, thinking. What would he say?

"Say anything you feel like saying. Tell us how much you love this country. Encourage the people."

James nodded. "I'm ready."

The ticking of the camera began as another man turned the camera on and adjusted the lens. "Okay. Start talking anytime."

James glanced at Winona, who had moved to stand beside the camera with Travis. She smiled and he saw the love in her eyes. He watched her face, not the camera.

"I believe in this country," he started slowly. "I believe in the hope that the citizens of this country hold. The promise of what this country holds, and the potential of its citizens inspires me to love this nation even more.

"The fundamental truth is that there is a natural connection between virtue, moral integrity, and happiness. By fulfilling one's duties, we will reap the benefits. Moral and ethical authority will lead to the well-being and prosperity of the people.

"God's divine favor cannot be expected for a nation that disregards moral and ethical principles. Our national success is tied to obeying the eternal principles of justice and order. This is ordained by a higher power."

James seemed to be building steam as he spoke. His confidence grew as The Almighty gave him words, spoken from his heart.

"The foundational values of freedom, independence, and the enduring spirit of democracy reflects my deep belief in the importance of

preserving individual rights and the promotion of the people being able to govern themselves through the election process. This is the precious and fragile nature of freedom. Maintaining our liberty is a critical responsibility.

“The destiny of our republican form of government is ultimately dependent on the actions and choices of the people, not congress. The success or failure of power in this great country rests in the hands of its citizens and those they elect.

“Morality, governance, and the prosperity of this nation are all interconnected. I have just taken on a heavy responsibility, and I entrust to the people the liberty of this republic. And I call others to honor, and civic duty.

“Proverbs 11:14 says, ‘For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.’ Let our guidance be the Lord, and our trust rest in him.”

“Outstanding!” The man standing beside the camera said. “Give me your information. What’s your name? What state are you from? Did you serve during the war? Is this your family? Let’s get a shot of you walking up the steps with your wife and son. What did you do before you were elected?”

The man was asking questions faster than James could answer them. He took Winona’s hand and picked up his hat.

“No. No. No. Wait. You need to go to the bottom and start over. We need the full shot.”

James turned to look at the camera again. The man was still filming. He put his arm around Winona and waved. Then he took Travis’s hand and continued up the steps, leaving the man calling for more information.

Just inside the door, James sighed. “Well, I wasn’t expecting that.”

He looked at his wife a long moment, “You take Travis and go on to the gallery. I’ll meet you in the rotunda when the ceremony is finished. I think we’re supposed to go to the garden for photographs later.” He sighed. “More cameras. Pictures are not my favorite activity.”

Winona put a loving hand to his face. “You’ll do fine. You’re the most handsome man I know.”

“Your prejudice,” he said as he turned into the hallway.

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As Vice President Charles Curtis raised his hand, the crowd fell silent. James took a deep breath, and repeated the oath of office with the other incoming senators-elect.

“I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.”¹

His voice was steady and clear, promising to uphold the Constitution and serve the people of his state with integrity, honor, and dedication.

The applause that followed was thunderous, echoing through the marble halls of the Capitol. James looked out at the sea of faces. He knew that the road ahead would be challenging, but he was ready to face it head-on.

He looked up to wave to the crowd along with other senator's taking the oath. His wife and son were smiling at him from the third row of the gallery. Their lives had just changed. He didn't know if it was for better or not, but what he did know, was that on this day, the three of them began a new chapter of their lives. And it was a chapter that God had ordained.

¹ The Oath of Office, www.senate.gov/about/origins-foundations/senate-and-constitution/oath-of-office