

Chapter Nineteen

He had to duck down when he came on the porch. There was no chair big enough for him, but we did have a couch. It groaned beneath his weight as he sat, and his knees reached into the air well above the cushions. We offered him food and water, which he accepted graciously and finished almost immediately. After exchanging greetings and pleasantries, we waited to see what he had come to say. When he was finally ready, he spoke in slow, deliberate tones, but not without emotion. At times, he wept openly.

“I was born in Bentown. My father was a satanic high priest, and my mother was a Christian. She was related somehow to the Camps. I grew up surrounded by satanic rituals, and when I was twelve my father introduced me to what he called my spirit guide. I know now that it was a powerful demon. From the time I invited it in, the thing took control of me. I knew what it was doing, and that it was wrong, but I had no power at all to stop it.

“I grew up fast. I was bigger and stronger than anyone in Bentown, young or old, by the time I was fifteen. Nothing was too evil or horrible for me to attempt. I started by mutilating and killing animals. I would drink their blood, and eat their flesh raw. From there, I graduated to human beings. No one could control me, and no prison could hold me. Finally, even my father decided I was too dangerous to have around, especially after I started killing and eating his priests.

“The Satanists drove me into the hills. I live there like a wild animal for years; hair grew all over my body, and I looked and acted like a wild beast. When my preferred game grew scarce around Bentown, I went farther and farther away. I crossed the river into Kentucky. One night I came across an old woman and a little girl. Her prayers stopped my demon for a while, but finally I jumped on her, and killed her with one blow. I turned toward the little girl, whose screaming only excited the demon more. As I prepared to spring, a man appeared out of nowhere, and took authority over the demon. No matter how much he screamed and ranted, he couldn't move my body to strike down either the man or the girl. I know now that it was George, but at the time I only knew it was someone I had to destroy.

“I left, but I didn’t go far. I tracked the two of them for days, until they got close to Bentown. While George was distracted, looking down on the town, I killed that precious little girl.”

He had cried through most of his story. At this point, he broke down and wept. We waited silently, until he was ready to resume.

“George’s guardian angel spoke directly to my demon more than once. He saved George’s life then, and several other times. The demon never gave up, though, and he drove me after George at every opportunity. When George left Bentown, and the Security Police attacked the town, I was right behind him. He led me to a cliff he had no possible way of knowing about, and that I had forgotten. He turned aside just in time, but I went crashing over the cliff. I fell thirty feet onto rocks.

“The demon in me was strong that even this didn’t stop me. I don’t know how long I lay there, but eventually it drove me to get up and go on. Probably I had multiple broken bones, but I felt no pain. George’s trail was cold, but I picked it up again; my senses were as acute as those of a wild animal, which I was. I tracked him for months, from town to town, hanging back until the time was right. I lost the scent temporarily in Beckley, but I picked it up again after a few days of wandering around the outskirts of the city.

“After George came here to the caves, I followed him on the night after he drew off the Security Police, but the angel’s presence around him was too strong. I saw my chance after he was captured, and put out in a shed for the night. I killed the guard outside, and ate part of him. Then, the demon drove me into the shed, even with the angel’s being there. He felt strong enough to overcome the guardian, but a warrior angel appeared, too. The demon was filled with a towering rage, but there was nothing he could do.

“The last time the demon tried to kill George was when he came back through Bentown, or the remains of Bentown. He tried to force me to smash George’s skull with a rock, but the Lord wouldn’t permit it, praise his name. In the end, George cast the demon out of me, and led me to Christ. I couldn’t remember being free, but I’ve been free from that moment.

“I took George to a place I knew was a place of sanctuary, Misty Valley, which is in Pike County, Kentucky. When I was demon-possessed, I could never go beyond a certain point above the valley; it was as if there was a wall there. Now I know it was a hedge of God’s protection, just like you have here.

“George left me there, in that place of healing, while he went on to Pikeville. The brethren there were very kind and loving to me, especially Martin and Marcia Henry. A few days after George left, they felt compelled to go after him. I never saw any of them again. Word reached us later that they were all murdered by the Security Police.”

He wept again at this point. Jenny appeared from somewhere, and touched his arm. He looked at her, a startled look on his face, then he smiled.

“Thank you, little one. You know our Lord well. He told me about you.

“A few days ago, the Lord sent the same dream to me and to three of the other brethren there in the valley. He told us very specifically that I was to come here, to this exact place, and tell you that the time had come for some of you to go to the other place. I remembered this place very well, because I tried to enter here, and the church grounds, while the demon had me. The binding force was as strong as the one around Misty Valley.

“Who can know the mind of the Lord? He wants to bring most of you home to be with him. The hedge will be removed. I don’t know why that is, just that it will happen. He told me that what I say would confirm his message through the prophet child, this sweet little one here. He also told me that he has already taken two babies home to be with him, and that you shouldn’t mourn for them secretly.”

Miriam looked shocked at these words, and I knew that she had been guarding her pain, even after Jenny’s message. Green fell silent then, and no one else spoke for a while; we were just trying to absorb all he had just told us, both the horror of his past and the horror about to befall us. I knew what I had seen, or who I had seen, that night at the graveyard.

The first one to speak after Green stopped was Jenny. “You mustn’t be afraid, because fear has torment. The Lord says you will die as soldiers in his army, and that some of those who witness your

death will be convicted of their sins, and turn to him. When the flow ceases, the hedge is gone. I can do nothing until those bound for the other place have gone.”

I finally found my tongue. “Which ones, Jenny? Which ones are supposed to go the other place?”

Green was the one who answered. “The children. All of those under the age of twelve, including Jenny. One that they trust will go with them. She is the daughter of one who came late, from Beckley.”

Hoping against hope, I said, “Lisa?”

He paused, and nodded. “But not the parents. They must stay, or all will die.”

Besides Carol and Stan, Homer and his wife Lydia were the only parents of small children left; the others had been killed. Lydia, a quiet woman who kept to herself, let out a sob. Homer tried to comfort her, but he was distressed as well. Their two little boys were ages seven and nine.

“When?” Miriam asked, breaking her silence. “How much time do we have?”

“I must leave in two days,” Green said. “I can offer no more. I don’t know how much longer the Lord will give the rest of you after that, but you will know when time comes.”

Our lives had been a succession of dizzying heights and wrenching lows, and we descended into the valley again. No one sang or laughed over the next two days. Lydia cried constantly, and the other women could do little to comfort her. Like Libby and Robbie before her, she thought God was cruel and vindictive. The fact he was saving the lives of her children didn’t matter; he was taking them away from her. “They might as well be dead,” she said bitterly, over and over.

It was Homer who finally brought her out of it, to my vast surprise. On the morning of the day the boys were due to leave, he took her off into the woods. I never knew what he said to her, and neither of them would talk about it. When they returned, though, she was dry-eyed. She cried after the boys left, but not at the leave-taking. I thought she was very brave, when she hugged both of her sons, telling them to obey Lisa. She told them they were going on a great adventure, and that the Lord had some great things in store for them. One of them replied that Jenny had already told them the Lord wanted them to go. They cried, but they didn’t cling to their mother.

The other children were sad about leaving, but Jenny had convinced them all that they were doing the Lord's will. Her own parents, Stan and Carol, were as sad as anyone else was, but both of them had accepted her departure. Stan told me, "She doesn't really belong to us. She's the Lord's. We've known ever since we became Christians that there was something special about her. God has his hand on her in a most sovereign way."

Stan and Carol, and Homer and Lydia, weren't the only ones losing a child. Although I was overjoyed that my daughter would have a chance at more years of life, the fact she was leaving me was hard to bear. The night before the departure, she came to our room in the barn. None of us slept much that night. We talked from time to time, but mostly the three of us just sat, and hugged, and kissed, and cried. To Betty, Lisa was as much a daughter as if she had given birth to her. In just the few months they had known each other, my wife and daughter had grown extremely close.

Late in the night, I felt compelled to say some things that I had said before, just not under these circumstances. "Lisa, my dear, sweet daughter—I am so very proud of you. Short of the Lord himself, and my darling wife, you have brought me more joy than anyone or anything else. What thrills me most is that, one day before long, we'll see each other again, and never have to say goodbye again. If I had my choice of all the children in the world, you would be the one I'd pick."

She burst into tears again, and flung her arms around me. I didn't think she was ever going to let me go, and I really didn't want her to. When she finally pulled away, my shirt was wet with her tears. "Daddy, you are the only man I've ever loved, besides my Lord Jesus. I give God all the praise for restoring you to me. The time we've spent together since we were saved has made all of the other years before disappear. Wherever I am, and wherever you are, you'll always be my daddy. So far as I'm concerned, Betty is my mommy, and I treasure every second we've spent together."

It was Betty's time to cry then, but we all just cried together. We went to sleep in each other's arms for an hour or two, and the time came for final farewells.

We filled several containers of food and water for their journey; as always, the supply met the need. Green had no trouble with the load. He also carried the clothing packs for the younger children. We

offered him a gun, but he assured us he didn't need one. "When the final trial comes, none of you will need guns."

I wasn't sure what that meant, since we were supposed to die as soldiers in the Lord's army, but I didn't ask. We would discover the answers to all of those questions soon enough. Green wasn't finished yet.

"Miriam, I have one more word for you. The Lord says I should tell you that his servants Hank and Emily served him faithfully in Misty Valley until they died. They both went to join the Lord at the same moment, and they're waiting to see you once again."

That made my sister smile for a moment. It faded as she remembered what was happening.

We walked with Green, Lisa, and children until they reached the top of the little hill above house. They turned right on Camp Town Road, headed on up the hill. We watched them until they were out of sight, and turned sadly back to the near-empty house. The house wasn't as nearly as empty as the aching spot inside me.

We tried to comfort each other that night, but there was little comfort to be found. The nearness of death and the absence of so many we loved made rejoicing impossible.

Two weeks later, the food stopped flowing. The hedge was gone.