

Chapter Eight

I spent the next year trying to see my daughter. She was never alone, and Rafferty's goons wouldn't let me anywhere close to her. A few times, she heard me calling to her, and turned in my direction, but she never acknowledged my presence. A time or two, I even managed to beg or steal enough money for the entrance fee, but she wouldn't talk to me or even acknowledge me when I went inside the tent. She just told me to get out, and threatened to call the guards if I didn't.

One evening, which started like any other, I decided I was going to see her, one way or another. I was too drunk to care about the danger. Pushing my way through the line, I got within sight of the tent. One man I came to refused to budge. My insistence that I wanted to see my daughter didn't impress him. When I tried to push past him, his fist pushed back, and something else hit me on the back of my head. I wound up on the ground.

The next thing I remember, a man was kneeling beside me. I came wide-awake. I remember every detail of what happened next, as if it were playing out in front of my eyes.

"What are you doing? Are you the one who hit me? Where am I?"

I could see him well, even in the dim light. The kindest face I'd ever seen smiled back at me. "I just finished praying for you. The man who knocked you out is still in line –."

"*Prayed* for me? What kind of weirdo are you? I don't believe in any of that stuff."

He smiled again. "Maybe if you did, your daughter wouldn't be sitting in that tent telling fortunes."

It took a second for that to sink in. "Oh, yeah – wait a minute, how do you know she's my daughter? Nobody who doesn't know me is supposed to know that, and I've never seen you before in my life."

"I haven't seen you before either. Stop and think; when you went to that tent you were roaring drunk, weren't you?"

"Yeah, so what?"

“Have you noticed you aren’t drunk anymore?”

“Well, I guess I’m not, but I could have sobered up. I may have been knocked out for hours.”

“How did you get knocked out?”

“That creep hit me in the face, then someone cracked me on the back of my head.”

“Is the place on your face still there, where you were hit?”

“Yes, of course it’s – why, there’s nothing there! I don’t feel anything on the back of my head either. There should be a place there as big as a baseball. Say, what are you, some kind of faith healer or something?”

“I can’t heal anybody. Only the Lord can do that. He just told me to pray for you, and I did. If you’re okay, I’ll move on.”

“No, wait a minute. Maybe there is something to that Jesus stuff, like they used to tell me at home. Nothing like this has ever happened to me. If you’ll come to my tent with me we can talk some more. There’s no one there but me. My daughter doesn’t want me around anymore.”

He helped me to my feet, and I led him through the shacks and tents back to my humble abode. “I’m not much of a housekeeper, so don’t expect much.”

We made our way through the ramshackle maze of tents and shanties. In some places, we had to step over bodies, whether alive or dead I couldn’t say. My tent was like any other, except it looked like it would collapse at the first hint of wind.

“You can sit on the chair,” I told my new friend when we went inside. “I’ll sit on the sleeping bag. Now, tell me about this Jesus. Is He for real or just somebody in a book?”

He told me his own story. “My name is George Alfred. I’m from Kentucky. My mother told me about Jesus from the earliest time I can remember. My father was a drunkard who used to beat us all, but Mother never would let us hate him. After he died, she still wouldn’t speak badly of him. She said he was just a slave of sin and couldn’t help what he did.”

“My old man was a drunk, too,” I offered, wondering if it was really true. “Trouble is, he lasted until after I was already grown up and married. Died of old age. Oh, sorry. Go on.”

“That’s all right. Anyway, when I was in church one day, or one night, we had revival services. The preacher that night was from out of town and he told us that Jesus was his best friend and how we all should meet Him. Well, I needed a friend, so I went forward at the end and asked Jesus if He would be my friend, too. When I got up, I felt like a new person inside, and I felt like I really did know Jesus as my friend. Since then, I’ve gotten to know Him better and better. I read about Him in the Bible, but the best part is I get to talk to Him all of the time.”

“Now I know you’re crazy. How can you talk to someone who’s been dead for over two thousand years? Is he some kind of ghost or something?”

“He’s more alive than we are. He didn’t stay dead. He rose from the dead, and as many as five hundred people saw him at once.”

“Have you seen Him?”

“Not in the flesh, but I’ve seen Him in the Spirit and in the lives of others. I’ve heard His voice often. It was His Holy Spirit that told me to seek you out tonight.”

“Spirits! You see, I knew it had something to do with that stuff!”

“Jesus sent His own Spirit to be with us after He went back to be with the Father. That’s because when He was here in the flesh He could only be in one place at a time. The Spirit can be everywhere at once.”

“I don’t know. It sounds nice and all of that, but I just don’t think I can accept any of that.”

He stared hard at me for a minute, and seemed to see something behind me.

“Spirit of doubt come out of him. I command you to be gone in the name of Jesus!”

There was an almost audible *whoosh*. I felt as if some great load had lifted from me, and my mind was more clear than it had been in my whole life.

“What was all of that about?” I asked. “You know, all of what you said does make sense to me suddenly. I think I’d like to have this Jesus as my friend, too. How do I do that?”

With great love and patience, George led me in the sinner’s prayer. I confessed every sin I could think of, which took a little while, then asked Jesus Christ to come into my life for the second time. This

time, there was no doubt about it. I felt clean inside and out, and a feeling of indescribable joy flooded over me, from the top of my head to the tip of my toes.

The first thing I wanted to do was clean the filth out of my tent. It was full of bottles, cans, paper, and just plain filth. George helped me with some of the bigger stuff, and I used the broom to sweep everything outside. As we worked, I told George about my own experience, including my daughter's situation. He took a great interest in Lisa.

"She's under demonic bondage, Henry. A spirit of divination controls her. What it really wants is to drag her down to hell with it, along with as many others as it can. She needs deliverance before she'll ever receive Christ as her Lord."

"How do we go about doing that?"

"I'll have to go to her tent, and confront that thing face to face."

"She hardly ever comes out. When she does, they watch her like a hawk. On a good day she takes in several thousand dollars, and that's new dollars, not the old worthless ones."

"I guess she offers people what so many of them want so desperately: hope for the future. It's such a shame they look for hope in all the wrong places. Well, I guess I'll just have to be one of her customers."

"That's the only way I ever got to see her. I think she finally complained to her bullyboys and they roughed me up tonight. Anyway, it's too late now. She'll be closing soon. You'll have to get her tomorrow morning."

He nodded, and seemed to be listening to someone else for a minute.

"Well, Henry", he said then, "Let's just join in agreement and ask the Lord to be with me tomorrow when I go to see her. The Lord said, 'Whenever two or more of you agree as touching anything, it shall be done for them by my Father who is in Heaven.'"

It sounded good to me, so I nodded, and we knelt together on the floor. George prayed for both of us.

“Father, Henry and I come in agreement now as your Word says to pray for Lisa, his daughter. We pray, Lord, that you would deliver her from the bondage of demons she’s been under for so long. Be with me, Father, as I go to see her tomorrow. I pray that your power would work through me and that you would use me to cast out the spirit that controls her. And I pray, too, Father, that you would give me the words to say that she might receive your son, Jesus, as her Lord and Savior. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

“Amen!” I repeated as we got to our feet. “You sure pray a good prayer, brother. The Lord’s going to do it; I just know He is.”

George unrolled a sleeping bag he carried on his back, and took it to one corner of the tent. He told me good night, and in a few minutes he was sound asleep. I laid on my own filthy bag, but it took me a while longer to drop off to sleep. My mind was racing from one thought to another. I realized I had repeated to George the lie I always told about Papa (I couldn’t bring myself to call him Pop anymore). I asked the Lord to forgive me for that, and promised I’d straighten that out tomorrow.

The next morning, I got up early, which I hadn’t done since I lost my job, and rounded up some sardines and crackers from the aid tent. That was our breakfast. George blessed the food before we ate, and it tasted like bacon and eggs to me.

After we finished, George went off to talk to Madame Sophie. He was gone for about an hour, and returned with Lisa. I was amazed; I was certain Rafferty’s crowd would try to stop him.

George described what happened when he entered her tent. “As soon as she saw me, the demon in her recognized the Spirit of Christ in me. I was concerned it would give me away, so I ordered it to come out of her right then. She wasn’t too happy about it, because she was afraid of what Rafferty would do when he discovered she had lost her fortune-telling abilities.”

Lisa did seem different, but somehow the old Lisa was still there. I gave her a hug, but she didn’t really respond to it. I figured she was just adjusting to her new life. She did pray the sinner’s prayer once we got inside the tent, and I was ecstatic at the thought she had accepted Jesus, too. I dismissed the nagging doubt in back of my mind; George didn’t seem to doubt what had happened.

“We’ll have to leave here right away,” George said a little later. “The Lord hid Lisa and I to allow us to get away from the tent, but He will not do that again. They won’t stop searching until they find her, and when they do none of us will be safe.”

“But where can we go?” Lisa asked, a little too sweetly, I thought.

“I have some relatives up north of here, in Fayette County,” I offered. “There was never any love lost between us, but I know some of them are Christians.”

“Good,” George replied, “But let’s pray about it first. What sounds like a good idea to us might not be what the Lord has in mind at all.”

We prayed again, with Lisa joining us on our knees. George was satisfied that we were doing the right thing.

I gathered up what few possessions I had, and George rolled up his bag and reassembled his backpack. I checked outside, and, so far as I could tell, everything was clear. We headed for the trees on a hill near the tent. We weren’t half way there before we heard shouts.

“There she is! With those two men! Run quick and tell Mr. Rafferty!”

We made it to the trees. As we entered the woods and began climbing the hill, George stopped, and shouted, “I’m going to try to draw them off! Keep running and go as far away as you can before you stop. Keep going north and I’ll meet you later. Don’t argue, Henry! Go on!”

I hesitated for a second, then ran after Lisa, who hadn’t broken stride. There was a huge commotion behind us. The mob must be after George. I prayed fervently that he would be okay.

When I eventually got Lisa to slow down, we stopped while I got my bearings. I knew we were southeast of Beckley to begin with, because that’s where the airport was. Based on where the sun was, we were headed north, but too far to the west. I knew we weren’t too far from Interstate 64, and figured it would be easier to find our way if we moved parallel to it. I had a good sense of direction, which I got from Papa, and we managed to work our way through the hills until I could see what had once been an unbroken ribbon of concrete. It was now just a succession of massive, broken slabs, many twisted into impossible shapes.

We hugged the right of way near the road, which was easier to navigate than the fallen tress and briars in the hills. I wasn't young anymore, and I was out of shape, but the Lord gave me strength. On occasion, we stopped to rest, but we made good time. We passed the intersection of 64 and 77, then proceeded more cautiously around Beckley. The night was well advanced, under a dim moon, when we followed the exit for Route 19, which would take us toward Fayette County. The road was intact here, and we had to take to the hills again. It was almost impossible to see anything.

I made an effort to talk to Lisa on the way, but she was still distant toward me. Maybe the change I expected would come gradually, but I couldn't help believe something wasn't quite right with her.

It reached the point where attempting to go on was too dangerous. I wasn't familiar with the terrain, and we could easily fall into a ravine or over a cliff. We found a place near spring to rest for the night, and I immediately began praying for George.

Lisa didn't seem much interested in praying. She acted rather bored, and just sat down on a rock. I said a prayer for her, too.

I was still praying, when I heard Lisa squeal in fright. I turned around to see a bright light, and a very big man dressed all in white. George was standing there with him.