

CHAPTER ELEVEN

My treatments continued for the next three weeks. I had trouble adjusting to my name, and more trouble still adjusting to my role in life. However much the doctor tried to insist I belonged to a Satanic cult, something in me refused to accept the idea. Hoping that exposure to the rites of the Satanic Church would change my mind, the doctor sent me to several services they held right there at the hospital. The priests explained how love and healing played a big part in the rituals, and showed me a faith healing ritual. They also told me that they followed the advice of beautiful spirit guides, and that I had one, too.

At the same time, my teachers told me how mean Christians really were, how they killed people who disagreed with their teachings, and taught that you had to die before the Christian God would accept you. That didn't quite sound right to me, but I couldn't remember why. A big hole filled much of my memory, but shreds of something still stayed deep in my brain. For one thing I knew that certain drugs were bad, so I always asked what kind of medications the doctor prescribed for me. He assured me he wouldn't give me anything harmful, so I took everything. I noticed that some of the medicines made me feel very, very good, while others made me see and hear things I knew weren't there. When I found out which ones caused a bad reaction, I secretly threw them away.

The breakthrough came one day when Doc said he had a new, stronger medication to try to help me regain my memories. This time, I stayed unconscious from the effects of the medication for many hours; I'm not sure exactly how long, but the doctor said for almost twelve hours. I had some terrible nightmares while I was under, but after I woke up, I couldn't remember what they were.

When I woke up after receiving the new drug, I knew my name and my role in life, without any doubt – well, almost. I knew myself as Mark Mantill of Cleveland, Ohio, priest to His Satanic Majesty. Some small voice in the back of my mind kept screaming it wasn't so, but I learned to ignore it. That night I returned to my room with renewed confidence, and made dominating love to my wife. When she cried, I slapped her, and told her to shut her mouth.

The next day, I moved out of the hospital and into my apartment. That afternoon, I went by my desk at the Unified Being Church, as special assistant to Mr. Malovich. Everyone seemed to remember me, and several of the women seemed *very* friendly. Mr. Malovich came by to tell me that we had services that night, and he wanted me to preside in honor of my recovery. They planned several animal sacrifices, and blood-letting rituals. I licked my lips in anticipation.

Night came finally, and so did the time for our service. I donned my robe with the other priests outside the sanctuary, and led the procession out to the altar area. Pentagrams decorated the walls and floor, and the altar stood in the middle of the largest pentagram of all. Several animals lay bound near the altar, their mouths tied so as to cut down on the noise. The surface of the altar shone a dull black with the dried blood of past victims, as it should. The knives for the sacrifices and the blood-letting lay to the side, their blades gleaming in the reflected light of the candles. All the worshippers fell silent when I stepped to the head of the altar.

"All hail, Lord Satan!"

"All hail, Lord Satan!" they repeated.

"Satan rules over all!"

"Satan rules over all!"

""Lord Satan, we give you praise."

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At that point, according to the ritual, I was supposed to curse Jesus, and the Godhead. The words refused to come. Malovich, standing behind me, stepped forward to take up the chant. No one seemed to notice, but my failure disturbed me. Apparently I had not recovered fully after all.

When time came for the first sacrifice, I ripped open the living victim, a large dog, with a vengeance. The animal, whose mouth had been freed only enough for it to make sounds, let out a screech in its death agony, and blood spurted several feet away, drenching several of the worshippers with a red spray. Everyone yelled and screamed their approval. I ripped out the animal's organs, including its still beating heart, and cast them out to the crowd. They fought over the scraps of bloody flesh, and shoved them greedily into their mouths. When I finished with the animal, the blood lust came over me even more strongly, and I cast the carcass aside as I went for another victim.

The crowd's frenzy increased, and many of them tore at their own flesh, and that of those around them. Malovich reacted more violently than any of them, and even attacked me several times. I had to fend off attacks even as I tended to the next victim. Others grabbed the remaining animals, and ripped them to pieces without bothering to wait for me. When the time came for the formal blood-letting, no one needed to be persuaded. Red human blood gushed out to join the red gore that already covered the sanctuary. Some people fainted away from the hysteria of the moment, and from loss of blood. At the end of the service, the men carried out the body of one young girl who didn't survive the service. We all agreed she made a fitting sacrifice for our Master, and no one mourned her passing.

One woman could not satisfy me that night. As a priest, I was entitled to the services of any woman I chose, and I picked two I had seen at the office that day. I sent Lanesa packing for the night, deaf to her protests. I practiced every perversion with the two women my mind could devise, but went to sleep still unsatisfied. The same sort of awful nightmares, which I could never remember, troubled my sleep. I did have one dream of a beautiful valley somewhere, but I dismissed it as a useless fantasy.

In the months that followed, I traveled with Malovich all over Ohio and surrounding states to the north and west, conducting services, and attending meetings and seminars. We spent a lot of time talking about ways to combat Christians, who still made our lives miserable. We dispatched demons after them, but these didn't always succeed in breaking through the barriers. Failing that, we spread lies and gossip about them. As a last resort, we contrived to have fatal accidents befall them. With the authorities on our side in most places, we had no fear of legal retribution.

We also perfected the art of burning churches. Empty buildings created few complications, but if an occasional Christian burned up in the process, so much the better. One bad incident created some unwanted publicity, when an incendiary device on a timer burned down a church building that the local people assumed would be empty. As it happened, 45 people were attending a special service when the device exploded, and all of them died in the blast. Though the local police ruled the fire and explosion accidental, several bleeding hearts complained loudly. Some of them had enough political influence to make themselves heard, so we decided to sacrifice the perpetrators to the greater glory of the Master. After their arrest, of course, they died of "natural" causes in their cells.

I discovered one day that Lanesa was pregnant. That didn't please me at first, then I decided we would train the child as a disciple to Satan from the beginning, maybe even make it a living sacrifice. Once I saw the possibilities, I accepted readily the notion of having a child. Often I laid hands on the mother's belly, and consecrated the unborn child to the Master. Lanesa would often cry and shudder as I did that, but I just slapped her and told her to remember who she belonged to. Once I told her that, if she didn't shut up, I'd slit her belly, take the baby, and leave her to die.

I knew that the church had a retreat of some kind down in Kentucky, but for some reason, Malovich never allowed me to go in that direction. He went down once with some of the other leaders of the church from around the country for a secret strategy meeting, but he left me behind to keep things running smoothly in Cleveland.

One day, I walked down a street on my usual route to lunch, trying to keep fit, when a strange man stopped and stared right at me. He looked vaguely familiar, but I had no idea who he was. I ignored him and kept walking. He called after me, "Hank? Is that you?" I didn't bother to turn around; he obviously had mistaken me for someone else. I didn't even know a "Hank." What a hick name!

I saw the man again in the days that followed, and I got the distinct impression someone was following me. The stranger didn't follow me himself, but he or someone definitely wanted to check me out. I suspected some fanatical group of Christians had their sights set on me, since many people knew about my position as a high official in the Unified Being Church. I started bringing along my church bodyguards, and felt more secure.

One night, not long afterward, after Malovich had returned, I went to my apartment as usual. Lanesa whined and complained, as she always did, waddling around like a fat walrus. She would have the baby in another two months or so, and I looked forward to it. The thought of being a father nauseated me, but I reveled in thoughts of having total control over that young life. Often I invited lady friends over, since Lanesa couldn't service me any more. More often than not, I forced her to watch. That night, though, I went to bed alone, refusing to sleep with my wife, who tossed and turned all night.

I never heard them come in. All of a sudden, I felt strong hands clamp over my mouth like a vise. "Be still," a deep voice said, "We don't want to hurt you."

Stubbornly, I attempted to free myself, but another pair of hands grabbed hold of my feet, and I couldn't move. I heard Lanesa's voice.

"Who are you? Please don't hurt him."

"We're friends of Hank's"

"Hank? Then you must be Take me with you; I'm carrying his baby."

They argued among themselves briefly about that, but agreed to let her come. At that point, they gave me a whiff of something that put me to sleep. When I woke up, I lay in the back of a van, one with windows. I could see light coming in from outside, but my captors had bound and gagged me. I heard them talking in low voices, and when I stirred, I felt a touch on my arm. Lanesa whispered, "It's okay; they're friends, who knew you before. They've come to take you back home.."

Ridiculous. They had just kidnapped me from my home, and she hadn't done a thing to stop them. I had no doubt they were Christians, because they kept saying "Jesus" and "God" in a very familiar way. I figured I was in big trouble, assuming they would treat me the same as I would have treated them, if I had captured them instead.

I didn't know long I remained unconscious, but we drove on for what must have been hours. My kidnappers finally felt secure enough to loose my gag, and allowed Lanesa to give me a drink of water. I started cursing them and their God, and they replaced the gag.

After a while I dozed, fitfully. When I woke up again, the light of the new day crept through the windows of the van. We left the good roads, and traveled up into the mountains. That meant they had probably taken me

to either West Virginia or Kentucky. Visions of being nailed to a cross on some distant hillside came into my mind. I decided I would make their victory as costly as possible; I wondered why they had singled me out to begin with.

We went up yet one more hill, and down the other side. This time, a short while later, we slowed and came to a stop. One of the men came around to the side of the van, opened the door and helped me out. He looked like a bear, and he had little trouble picking me up and setting me on the ground. I turned around toward a big old house, and saw a tall, very attractive woman come running toward me. She was holding out her arms, and calling, "Hanky, oh my baby!" Then she stopped dead, and stared at me, as if not believing what she saw.

Something stirred in my brain, a small breeze at first, then swelling to a full force gale. "This is your wife. This is your WIFE. THIS IS YOUR WIFE!"

The truth flooded back to me so suddenly that I almost fell to the ground; strong arms caught me. I looked up into a strong, concerned face, and recognized Rick Bloomington. I knew then; I remembered. I remembered all of the angry hours of hypno-drug therapy, the verbal battles with Wentel, Malovich's hired shrink. I remembered all the lost days in the jail cell, the beatings, the torture. I remembered Max Trundle, and the day of the arrest. Most of all, I remembered my name, where I came from, and who my real wife was. When I steadied enough, I broke free of Rick's grasp, and walked the remaining distance to my wife. Her look changed from one of doubt and fear, dissolving into happy tears as she came into my arms.

I didn't want to let her go. We clung to each other for a long while, unaware that a small crowd had gathered around us. When at last we pulled apart, still holding hands, I looked around and saw a yard full of familiar faces. My young son Patrick stood close by, waiting patiently to be noticed. When our eyes met, he walked to me in his dignified way, and embraced me with same fervor his mother had displayed.

That day passed in a whirl; I told my tale a dozen times, as different groups from our church and school communities came to welcome me back from the dead. Bonnie Rathwell came, and quietly took Lanesa home with her. She had experience in dealing with pregnant young women. I didn't know quite how to feel about the woman I had lived with as man and wife, who now carried my child. She had allowed Malovich to use her as his tool, but she served an unwilling instrument. She endured a lot of abuse from me, and probably suffered at the hands of the Satanists for years.

I read somewhere that even under hypnosis, you can't be forced to do something against your basic nature. That doesn't apply as much with the new, powerful hypno-drugs used now, but the thought that I could ever willingly do the things I did, drugs or no drugs, troubled me for years. I continued having nightmares, but I remembered them from that time on. Usually, they concerned the grisly blood sacrifices I participated in so willingly, with someone I loved as a sacrifice under my knife.

Emily never believed Max's tale that I had died. She and the others in our church body prayed for me night and day, always with the assurance of the Spirit that I would return one day. As the months dragged on, some people expressed doubts that I still lived, but Emily would never hear of it. She confessed to me that she had her own private doubts during the long lonely nights, but publicly not a word of discouragement crossed her lips. The ordeal took its toll; more gray hairs adorned the top of her head than I remembered, and I noticed fine worry lines around her eyes and mouth that hadn't been there before. To me, though, she looked more beautiful with each passing day.

The school had continued without me, with several of the parents stepping in to fill the gap. Patrick, they told me, turned into a tower of strength beyond the measure of his years. He helped with the classes, putting aside his own plans to attend college, and actually ran the school on a day to day basis. All the myriad small things I had always done to make things work he took on his own shoulders. When supplies ran low, and some of our suppliers stopped selling to us, Patrick found them in new places. When conflicts arose between parents and teachers, Patrick stepped in to settle them. He had the spirit of encouragement, and people who talked

with him came away feeling better about themselves and their problems. He was a natural administrator, and a facilitator. My pride in him, always great, now knew no bounds.

A jail sentence still hung over my head. Eventually, Max would hear I had returned home, and attempt to recapture me. I had decided already I would rather die than go with him again, and told Emily as much. The thought of losing me again, this time for good, terrified her. She begged me to go somewhere safe, even if it meant leaving her behind. I refused to even consider going anywhere without her.

Liz found out about my death and rebirth, and came to see me soon after I returned to the valley. She came with Bandy, and her young daughter, Mary. If ever I saw a perfect family, I thought theirs surely fit the description. Liz and Bandy absolutely worshipped each other and their child, and Mary had the sweet disposition of a child who knows her parents love her unconditionally.

"We would love to have you in Bentown," Liz told me when we settled down to talk, "but things are worse there than here. Brett Halcomb is really stirring things up, and the Satanists grow stronger all the time. Sometimes I fear for our little church, if anything ever happens to either of us. Anyway, I gave some thought on the way over about your problem, and prayed to the Lord for some guidance. The idea he gave me struck me as so strange that I doubted for a while if Goad had really spoken to me. Every time I tried to push it away, though, the Spirit brought it right back to me. When I finally stopped to think about it, I realized that the Lord really does have a sense of humor.

"Brett Halcomb married a scatter-brained young girl named Bessie Camp. She professed to be a Christian as a child, but never really grew into a personal relationship with our Lord, Jesus Christ. Brett swept her off her feet, in more ways than one, and she married him, in spite of all the warnings from her family and from the church. They have a boy, Green, who's as big as a house and mean as a snake. Anyway – Bessie has some cousins she told me about, over to the east. She especially likes one of them, Miriam, who used to come visit her during the summer. I met Miriam once, and she really impressed me as a strong warrior for Christ. The Lord, I believe, wants you to go to her and her family until Max finally returns to the Lord – and he will."

The idea of leaving my beautiful valley again didn't appeal to me. I couldn't forget how God had promised to use this place as a place of shelter and refuge, yet for me it had ceased to be a safe haven. If I stayed here, though, I would clearly step outside the bounds of His protection, and the rest of the people here might suffer because of my disobedience. Emily and I went off alone to pray, down by our favorite spot at the brook. We came back in full agreement; we would go to West Virginia together, and stay as long as the Lord wanted us there. Patrick, young as he was, would stay behind to run the school, and the church would find another teacher to replace me.

We packed a few belongings, hurriedly, along with a few memories we didn't want to leave behind. Pam and Lamar, Fred and Pat, Rick and Alberta – all the people we loved so well, and others that had joined us over the years – came by to see us off that night, well after dark. We piled everything into my ancient Cherokee, worn and wheezing though it was, and followed Liz and Bandy out of the valley. The old jeep had been almost totally rebuilt over the twenty-odd years I owned it, but it was always "my car," no matter how many incarnations it passed through.

We came into Bentown in the middle of the night, praying that no one would see us. I parked my vehicle in an old shed near the house while we went inside for a while. Bandy found us some fuel, and Liz gave us some sandwiches she put together for us in a rush. After consulting a map to find the route we had to follow, we set out once more, deciding it was better to keep moving. Two hours later, we found our way to old U.S. Route 60, a winding road that follows an even older pioneer trail. As the night lightened into morning, we found the little side road we searched for. Our new home lay only a few more hills away. We never dreamed how long we would stay there.