

## CHAPTER FIVE

Bright sunshine greeted the first day of The Academy, as we now called our school. After the months of hard work, the actual beginning of classes came almost as an anticlimax – but not quite. Just establishing a daily routine brought a sense of newness and adventure. We held our first chapel service underneath the big maple tree beside the house, straight through the door Emily and I made. The notion you could actually read Bible and pray in school came as something new both to the adults and students. Not one of us had ever actually attended a Christian school. We visited the Christian school in Pikeville one day, and talked with the staff, but school hadn't started then.

"And God said, 'It is good.' Young brethren, the world God made is good. We have done our best to destroy it. A lot of bad people out there don't want you to know about God. Some of them will try to hurt us because we are Christians. Never forget, though, that Jesus has already won the war against the Devil and all the bad people who serve him. We don't have to be afraid of him, for the Bible says, 'Greater is He that is in *me* than he who is in the *world*.' And, 'At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'

"Whenever the Devil or any of his bad people try to do anything bad to you, you just tell him to get out in the name of Jesus. 'If you face the Devil, he will flee from you.'"

After our scripture lesson, we sang a couple of songs the children knew, had a prayer together, and went inside. While Emily and Pat Major kept the younger children occupied, and handed out their books and first assignments, I worked with the older children in junior high and high school. Besides Liz Major, these included four of the Bloomington children, and one of the children from one of the new families, Kay Rathwell.

The Rathwells were latecomers to the hills. Seeking escape from the crime, crowding and confusion of big city life, they moved to Pike County from Chicago five years before. They saw themselves as free spirits, and they lived a self-sufficient life on their farm. Almost alone on this end of the county, they had schooled their two children at home. Their youngest child, Kacee, had never attended public school.

Kay was no wall flower. As outgoing and aggressive as Liz was shy and reserved, she had strong opinions, and didn't mind letting anyone know about them. I knew I would have trouble keeping her under control, but I never dreamed just how much. Satan sowed seeds of trouble in Kay as soon as she laid eyes on tall, strapping Nate Bloomington. She spied him during chapel, and once inside she made sure she sat right beside him in the cramped quarters of the high school room.

I spent the morning giving instruction and explanation to the older students. I laid out our routine to them; they had the responsibility to do the work assigned them, while I remained available for questions and problems. Instruction would, of necessity, be personal, since no more than two of them had the same subjects. The only classes we would all have together, along with the younger students, would be Bible, music, and physical education. I heard some muffled groans at the mention of "phys ed" but I knew they would enjoy what we planned to do.

At noon, we broke for our first lunch period. The children all took their bag lunches out in the yard, and Mae Mae fixed a light lunch for the four adults. We joined several of the children under the maple tree, which quickly became a favorite gathering spot. Emily and I talked with quiet excitement about our wedding day, just two weeks ahead. The children whispered and giggled a lot when they saw us together, which made me secretly proud. Other than a couple of minor scuffles among the younger Bloomingtons, lunch passed in peace.

Pat left after we finished eating, and Bonnie Rathwell arrived to take her place. The parents had worked out a schedule among themselves to help out. At least one of them would always be around.

Bonnie was – Bonnie, unique in every way. Kay tried to imitate her, but she lacked her mother's common sense and generosity of spirit. Bonnie didn't accept or understand the word "impossible"; she tried her hand at everything that struck her fancy, and invariably did it well. In her thirty-five years, she had worked as a lumberjack and a sailor, a construction worker and a fashion model. She wrote a hit song, and pinned poetry that appeared in national magazines. She found Christ in a soup kitchen on Chicago's south side, and embraced Him with the same passion she embraced everything else in her life, only more so. Fiercely loyal to her family and her Lord, her greatest weakness was blindness to any faults or weaknesses in her children. She had brought them up to be good Christians, and refused to accept the idea that they could ever be anything else until it was almost too late.

Our first week of school started the day after Labor Day, a little late by public school standards. All of the adults agreed on Friday that we had made a good start, and that the Lord had in His hand in the school. We hadn't started just a school, but a ministry. We sought to raise educated Christians, not just educated adults. Come Monday morning we wondered if we would make it past the first month, much less the first year.

Bonnie brought the official-looking letter to us, with the ominous return address, "SUPERINTENDENT, PIKE COUNTY SCHOOLS," emblazoned in all caps on the envelope. The letter oozed hostility, informing us that the Board expected us to abide by all of the requirements of the applicable Kentucky statutes. An inspector would visit the school on Monday, September 18, and if we were not in total compliance we would very soon cease to operate. The signature at the bottom belonged to Mantro Malden himself, I recognized it immediately. The fact that Mantro had taken such a personal interest in the success of our venture was bad enough; worse still was the inspector he chose to send to us: Lane Darker.

We determined not to let the bad news spoil either the rest of our day with the children, or the plans for "The Wedding," on the day following Darker's visit. That evening, all of the parents met with Auntie Mae, Emily, Rev. Parkman and I for a special prayer meeting. For two hours we stayed on our knees, praying silently and aloud, alone and in unison. We bound Satan, prayed to the Lord for victory over the Enemy, and thanked Him for what His work in our midst.

Around 9:30 we went outside together to wish one another good-bye. As soon as we stepped outside we knew something evil lurked out in the darkness. From the direction of the hill on the near side of the valley came sounds of chanting and wailing, punctuated by awful screams of terror. By common consent, all of the men, including me, rushed toward the noise, with Bonnie Rathwell hot on our heels. Even at a dead run, it took us a good fifteen minutes to reach the hill, and some of the men started to drop back. At the bottom of the hill we all stopped to catch our breath, and then proceeded more cautiously toward the yells and screams.

What we found in the lovely grove I knew so well stopped us all dead in our tracks, stunned into silence. A group of about a dozen hooded figures crowded around an impromptu altar made of logs and rocks, with a large flat stone on top. Off to one side, thrown together, lay several bound and tied animals, ranging from a chicken to a dog to two black cats. On the altar lay a bloody mass that had probably been a dog or some other creature; a man wielding a large knife still stood carving it into pieces, and offering each piece to Satan and the Lords of Darkness. The chant the worshippers lifted up to Satan made no sense to me; they might be Latin, but I never studied it.

The thought of what these people were doing, and where, struck me with staggering force. This was *my home*. This valley belonged to God, and no way was the Devil going to ruin what the Lord had started here. A holy rage took hold of me, and I gave no thought of any risk or danger as I ran toward the altar and the demon spoor gathered around it. I shook off a restraining hand someone tried to lay on my arm.

With a strength I never possessed, I grabbed the Satanic priest by either shoulder, lifted him into the air, and

literally threw him a to the far side of the altar. He took two others down with him as he fell. "You lying demon filth of Hell! By the blood of Jesus Christ I cast you out from this place! This is *God's* property, and you have no right here and no authority here! In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, be gone from this place! Get out, all of you, or by God's power I'll kill you where you stand!"

That was more than they could take. Those still standing ran off as though their lives depended on it, which it did. Those on the ground had to push their priest off before they could get up; they carried him away between them, as fast as they could. Once they left, the blazing fire that consumed me died down to embers. I started to sink down, and would have fallen but for the strong arms of Rick Bloomington.

"Easy now, Brother. I won't let you fall. Just lean against me until the Lord gives you your strength back." After a few minutes rest, I helped the others clean up the blood and gore, and tear down the altar. Rick used other rocks to smash the big altar stone. We released the remaining animals, who scooted off into the woods.

The others looked at me in awed silence as we worked. I couldn't quite figure why, since the Lord did the work; I just happened to be the one He used that night. I told them so, and they all nodded in agreement, but I wondered if I really got the message across.

Other than Bonnie, who worked alongside us, the women waited for us anxiously. We stayed gone for an hour and a half, and when things got quiet some imaginations ran wild. Mae Mae and Emily did their best to reassure the others that the Lord remained in control, but many of them still cried, in their dread of what might happen. When they heard us coming back toward the house, three of the women ran to meet us. Emily waited until I walked in the front gate to run to me, throw her arms around me, and wet my shirt with her tears of relief.

We talked about what had happened a long while that night. We agreed that the Valley would be a center of spiritual warfare for years to come. None of us believed things would get any better, and several expressed the belief that the Last Days had come. We decided that we should walk around the whole valley, around the ring of hills, and bless the trees, trails and rocks that surrounded us. We would pray the blood of Jesus over every rock and shrub, and bind the Enemy from ever entering the Lord's stronghold again. At the same time, we vowed to visit each other's homes, and seek the same blessings from the Lord.

A caravan of five vehicles left our house after midnight. In spite of all that had happened that evening, or perhaps because of it, we felt exhilarated, certain that the Lord had won a great victory. Our faith would be severely tested in the years ahead, but never broken.

Sunday morning dawned cool, under a light rain. The clouds thickened as we started Sunday School, and a steady drumbeat of rain accompanied the hymn service. In spite of the dark day outside, however, the mood inside stayed bright and cheerful. We laughed about slipping and sliding down the hills that afternoon as we performed the ceremony of blessing. We all listened attentively to Rev. Parkman's message, but many of us still looked forward to the end of the service. I felt a bit guilty about that, but figured the Lord would forgive me.

Somehow, Auntie Mae had prepared a huge meal for all of us that morning before church, and the other women folk brought baskets full of food to help out. Mother Nature had dashed our plans for a picnic, or so we thought, but at least we could have some good fellowship. The caravan re-formed after church, this time with the addition of my old Cherokee. The rain followed us the few miles back to Misty Valley, up to the top of the last hill . . .

I jammed on the brakes as I came over the hill, almost causing a chain collision behind me. There before me, the entire valley glowed in afternoon sunlight, and blue skies shone over head. The clouds around the valley stood up in a great wall all around, but did not enter. Clearly the rain had fallen here earlier, because water glistened everywhere, but not a drop fell now. Forever after, we recorded this as the Miracle of the Sunny

Day, one of a multitude of miracles the Lord sent our way over the years.

Before we ate our meal that day, we lifted a special prayer of praise and thanksgiving. As an added blessing, the Lord sent Pam Bullitt our way. The women had just finished setting out the food, and we were calling in the children to share in the prayer when Pam drove up in front of the house and parked her car. Mae Mae ran to greet her, and everyone else crowded around to hug her, and tell her we welcomed her. She had lost much of that haunted look she carried for so many months, and she had gained more weight recently.

When we finished praying and starting filing through the line at the serving tables, I devoted my attention to my bride-to-be. Emily, though, continued to look in Pam's direction from time to time, though I didn't quite know why. Finally, my curiosity prompted me to ask her.

"You men are so blind sometimes, darling. Something's happened with her, something good, and she's itching to tell somebody. Excuse me a minute, sweetheart."

Puzzled, I watched as Emily walked over to where Pam stood, somewhat apart from the rest of us. She leaned close to Pam and whispered something. Pam smiled and nodded, and whispered something in return. The two of them then hugged, and spent a few minutes laughing, giggling, and crying. The commotion attracted the other women, and soon a knot of them gathered around Pam. We men shook our heads in puzzlement, and resumed filling our plates and our stomachs. A few minutes later Emily rejoined me; I had prepared a plate for her, since I knew her likes and dislikes.

"Well, Precious, what did you find out? What's going on with our Pam?"

"Well, Sweet Cup, why don't you just go ask, like I did?"

"Aw, Emily, don't do this to me. You're teasing me again."

She kissed me, and grinned that not-so-angelic grin. "Pam wants to make an announcement after we eat. You'll just have to wait."

Cajole and wheedle as I might, I couldn't pry anything out of her. The meal lasted a long time, and several of the men started to grumble. When Mae Mae judged the suspense had tortured us enough, she let out a shrill whistle to catch everyone's attention; I still wish I knew how to do that.

"All right, fellows, Pam wants to tell us all something. A few of us already know, of course." She waited until the women stopped giggling. "Sister Pam, you're like a daughter to me, and I'm so happy for you."

Pam stepped out of the crowd nervously, and came to stand beside Auntie Mae, who gave her a hug. "I've met this guy I really like and – we're not getting married yet, or anything, but we really like each other. He moved here a few months ago, and some of you probably know him. His name is Lamar Leighton. He's a Christian, but he stopped attending church for a while. He wants to recommit his life to the Lord, and he's coming to church with me next Sunday morning. I want all of you to pray that I'll make the right decisions this time, and not be blinded by emotions. That's all I have to say right now."

She walked hurriedly back into our midst, amidst a chorus of "Amen's!" and "Praise God's!" I couldn't have been more thrilled; I still considered her very special. I had seen the man around, and remembered him as handsome and good-natured. I prayed right there for spiritual discernment for Pam and for the rest of us.

Around 3:00 in the afternoon, we divided up into teams, children and all, and set out with small bottles of oil to anoint and pray for all the surroundings of Misty Valley. For the next several hours we spent a solemn but joyous time erecting a spiritual wall of protection around the valley. Even the children, usually so lively and

noisy, picked up on the mood, and paraded solemnly about with the adults, stopping with us every few feet to pray and anoint. When we finally came together again in the early hours of evening, the same quiet hush followed us. After a season of prayer and meditation, the families all left to return to their own homes; we agreed that next weekend we would begin blessing all of the homes.

Pam lingered with Auntie Mae, Emily, and I after the others had gone. I could tell, this time, that she had something else she wanted to say, because she looked straight at me. Tears ran down her cheeks, and I was afraid I had done or said something I didn't know about. Then she smiled through the tears.

"Hankie, I haven't told you for a long time how special you are to me. You *are* my big brother, and I'll always think of you like that. I'm thrilled and happy that you and Emily have found each other. I prayed for a lot of years that you would find just the right woman, and God sent her your way. I suspect you had to trip over her before you noticed how sensational she looks." Mae Mae and Emily both nodded in agreement, and Emily squeezed my hand as she smiled at me. "I seek your blessing now, and I want to ask you to pray for me, just now."

Tears already dimmed my own eyes, and I had trouble seeing Pam's face. I nodded wordlessly, and reached for my handkerchief to dab at my eyes. Emily took the handkerchief from me, and tenderly wiped away some of the tears that continued to flow. When I thought I could manage to speak, I stepped over to Pam, and laid my hands on her head. The other two women also reached out to touch her.

"Father, " I began in a shaky voice, "in the name of Jesus, I ask you to bless my dear sister, Pam, in this new relationship she's begun. I pray that your Holy Spirit would direct her in every decision she makes, and I pray you would grant to her a spirit of discernment, that she might know if this man is truly your child. I thank you for sending my dear sister my way when I needed a friend. You used her to save me from persecution when I was a child, and to save my very life after I was grown. Now, Father, as you have used her as a blessing to me, may I be a blessing to her in any way you see fit."

I started to close the prayer, brief as it was, when I felt a powerful grip on my spirit, an urge to say words I had not at all thought to say. "Wait – this has never happened to me before. Pam, the Lord has a message for you; this isn't from me. The Lord says, 'My daughter, I have seen your suffering. I have heard your prayers. Turn loose of the feelings of guilt, for they are tools of the Enemy, Satan. I have set you free; do not remain any more in bondage. As to this man you love, you need have no fear. I have brought him to you, and you to him. He has already returned to me, and comes to seek you out even now. Be at peace, for I have met your need and fulfilled your heart's desire."

The words came unbidden, and stopped without warning. My hands dropped away from Pam's head, and we all stood in frozen tableau. Not until later did I reflect on what had happened, or what it meant for me. My only concern at that moment centered on the overwhelming sense of God's sovereign presence, and the glow of light and understanding that replaced all the doubt and guilt in Pam's eyes. Just then, we heard the sound of an approaching car. All of us knew who drove it.