

CHAPTER EIGHT

That summer, that joyous summer, ranks as one of the very best in my memory. All around us, we knew, evil forces worked and darkness swirled. In our valley, and in our home, though, the Lord made His presence known in a multitude of ways each new day. Our honeymoon didn't end when we returned from Carter Caves. The Lord gave us that one special time as a season of refreshing after the trials of the past year, and to prepare us for the new trials ahead of us.

As we knew he would, Lamar fit into his new role as pastor like a well-worn pair of shoes. He never used notes, though I knew he spent hours of study and prayer preparing for each sermon. He gave himself over totally to the Spirit's direction when he mounted the pulpit, and we never made it through a service without weeping or shouting, or both. It quickly became apparent that we needed a larger building; new people arrived all the time, and we just had no place to put them. We had to schedule two services until we could make arrangements for a larger building. In August, we broke ground on a new church, which we planned to build ourselves.

We also welcomed several new students who signed up for the fall term. Kay Rathwell decided to come back, but five new ones also signed up. We had just about reached the limits of what we could handle, so we decided that after we finished the new church building we would build a school house. The Lord worked in our little community in a mighty and wondrous way. We forgot for a while that the Devil was also still at work, but it didn't take too long for us to remember.

Attacks on Christian in our day and age happened with such regularity as to be common place. We endured insults and the threat of physical violence every time we went out in public. Bennie's attacks on me were mild compared to what some of our brethren endured. No one dared bother the Bloomingtons, but smaller families were less fortunate.

A group of young thugs attacked little Kacee Rathwell one evening, and only the arrival of the family dog saved him from serious injury. Liz escaped attack and rape only because she had confidence enough in her faith to face down her attackers in the name of Jesus. She came home shaken, but jubilant because God honored his Word: "Face the Devil, and he will flee from you." The kind of attack she faced, happened over and over again with other children, from other children and from adults. Our children could not go out of sight of their parents unless they traveled in groups, and even that was no guarantee.

Because Misty Valley had become a safe haven, many of our families brought their children there to play. For all the years we lived in the valley after the time we consecrated it, not one attack occurred there on any child. As the years passed, that became more and important. In those early years, we saw it just as a blessed convenience; later, it became a matter of survival.

We finished the new church building before the snow flew, in November, and consecrated it on Christmas day. Over 100 people attended our church regularly now, and new arrivals came almost every week. We looked forward to beginning the new school building in the spring.

Other than the usual varieties of harassment, the winter passed quietly. One cold February day, I noticed Emily seemed to be hiding something. She talked secretively to Pam and Auntie Mae, but they stopped whenever I got near. When I asked what was going on, Emily just smiled that private smile and said, "You'll find out later." Pam and Mae didn't help any either.

Emily cooked the evening meal, something she usually left to Auntie Mae. For her part, Auntie Mae went to

visit a friend again, leaving me alone with Pam after work. I knew then something important was going on, but still hadn't figured out what it was. After a glorious meal, Emily shooed me into the living room, to my favorite chair. She disappeared into the kitchen, only to reappear moments later with a steaming cup of hot coffee and a large piece of chocolate cake. She put the dessert and coffee on the end table by the chair, and sat down cross-legged in the floor in front of me, smiling that special smile.

"This is grand, Honey, but aren't you going to tell me what it's all about?"

"Finish your dessert first, then I'll tell you."

I grumbled a little, but did as she asked. As I shoveled the last bite of cake into my mouth, she came and sat on the arm of the chair, opposite the end table, and put her arm around me.

"I'll give you a hint."

"Emily!"

"I've missed two periods in a row. That should tell you something."

"You mean . . .?"

"Yep. I took one of those home pregnancy tests, and it came back positive. I see the doctor tomorrow."

I was speechless, not unusual for me in the presence of my wife. I grabbed her with both arms, and pulled her close. She melted against me, giggling like a school girl. We went to bed early that night.

The due date, we found out next day, was in September. We both hoped the new life would come into the world on September 19, giving us a triple celebration for that day. Two weeks later, Pam, too, discovered she would have a child.

We had almost a year of relative peace in our church family, but on March 17, something happened that shattered it. We got the word at school that morning. Mae Mae came to get Emily, to tell her she had a call from her mother. She feared the worst before she even reached the phone; Crystal almost never called, and never in the middle of classes.

Minutes later, my wife came to call me out of class in turn. Her face turned pale, and she shook as if she had a fever. I immediately gathered her in my arms, not caring that the students could still see. She wept on my shoulder, overcome with what she had heard.

"What is it, Baby? What's happened?"

"It's Daddy," she sobbed. "He had a heart attack. They couldn't do anything for him ; he died before the ambulance got there. Oh, Hankie, what will we ever do without him?"

We dismissed classes for the rest of the day, and headed for Moab's house. When we got there, Rick had already arrived, and Pat and Fred came in right behind us. Lamar arrived before anyone else, and Pam got there a short while after we arrived. Crystal was in good hands, but she needed her own family there with her. She had called Emily's brother, Drew, and he was on his way down from Ohio.

Just as we had one that dark December day with Rick, some of us accompanied Crystal to the funeral home. Emily stayed behind to receive visitors, at her mother's insistence. Three hours later, we arrived back at Moab's house to find a crowd of people from our church family and from the Bloomington clan. Rick's

younger brother, Mike, a Christian, came over from Martin County, and brought along Crystal's mother, Melanie. The entire clan had come to know Christ, and it warmed my heart to see them all together, praising God for Moab's life and witness since he came to the Lord.

A steady stream of people came by, bringing food and offering their prayers and sympathy. Drew arrived early that evening, having driven all the way from Cleveland. He insisted he wasn't tired, but soon agreed to go upstairs to take a nap; it lasted four hours.

Two hundred people attended Moab's funeral, filling our new sanctuary to overflowing. People from other churches came, and people who weren't Christians at all came. Lamar delivered one of his most powerful sermons ever, painting a contrast between the paradise that awaited Moab, and the torment awaiting those who never come to know Christ. He painted such a graphic picture of the torment of hell that people wept openly all over the auditorium. Six came to Christ that day, two of these over seventy years of age. As to our farewell to Moab, we made it a celebration, not a time for mourning. He had often said he wanted shouting and rejoicing when he went to be with the Lord, and we honored his request. We mourned our loss, yes, but we rejoiced for our brother.

Crystal agreed to come spend time with us as she tried to adjust to the loss; we had plenty of room. She insisted she wanted to move back home soon, but Emily had doubts that her mother would be able to live alone. Drew, who was unmarried, talked about moving back to Kentucky from Ohio, but his mother wouldn't hear of his leaving his job as an industrial engineer. As we closed up her house late in the evening after the funeral, Crystal cried, looking back at the place where she had spent so many happy years. Even before he became a Christian, Moab was what the local folk called "a good moral man." He never smoked or drunk alcohol, or took drugs of any kind. He stayed true to his wife for 43 years, and always provided well for his family. Anyone who doubted that he made a good father had only to look at Emily and Drew.

We left the house securely locked, but alone. No one, we thought, would bother anything. The Bloomingtons had left the house alone for days before, with no harm done. Two evenings later the phone rang. I answered, and immediately recognized Rick's voice on the other end.

"Hank? I'm glad you're the one who answered. Don't tell Crystal anything just yet; wait until I get there. The Devil's been at work, big time. Someone – and we're sure it was more than one – burned down Moab's house last night. None of the neighbors mentioned a word, and I just found out earlier this evening. We called the sheriff and the fire marshal, and they said it was accidental. I pointed out to them there were foot prints all around, but they said it was probably just kids from the neighborhood snooping around. They won't do anything, Hank, because we're all Christians. I'm afraid the same thing could happen to the rest of us.

"Anyway, don't say anything until I get there."

Emily knows me very well. When she saw my face, though I tried to hide my emotions, she knew something was not right. She started to open her mouth to say something, but I nodded toward her mother and shook my head slightly. She closed her mouth again, but Crystal asked, "Who called, Hankie, dear?"

"That was Rick, Mom. He's coming over here in a little while."

"What are you not telling me, Hank Crandall? I may be old, but I can still see real good."

"Rick wants to tell you something. He told me to wait until he gets here."

Crystal Bloomington had a broad stubborn streak, which she passed on to her daughter. She wouldn't let me rest until I came clean; she had already guessed what had happened, in part, anyway.

She got up from her seat and went to the window, staring out into the darkness. No one said anything, but after a few minute, Mae Mae, not Emily, went over to her. She put her arm around the other woman's shoulder. "Crystal," she said softly, "It's okay to cry. You need to let go, Sister, or your grief will tear your insides out. You didn't cry in front of your family, because you thought you had to be strong. Let the Lord be your strength, Honey. Let it all come out; none of us will be ashamed of you because you cry."

Finally she did cry, not silently, but in great wails of sorrow. So great was the tide of emotion that we all cried with her. When Rick walked in the front door, we still wept. When the catharsis passed, a sweet peace fell on the room. Rick wiped his own eyes as he came to embrace Crystal. When he released her, he looked at me with a question on his face.

"I'm sorry, Rick, but she wouldn't wait."

"Now, don't go blaming Hankie, Ricky boy. I wheedled it out of him. It's all right now; I've had my cry. However much it meant to me, it was only a thing, and things can be replaced. I have the memories it brought, and no one can take those away. Let the Devil do his worst; the Lord still sits on His throne, and I'm still His."

We never rebuilt the house. Auntie Mae said we should build a little cottage, or a big cottage if she wanted one, for Mom Bloomington near Mae Mae's own house. Crystal argued with her about it, but Mae Mae had her own stubborn ways. When we built the school, we would build the cottage after that. Meantime, Crystal sold her farm to a newcomer, Burgan Malovich, through an agent. She set part of the money from the sale of the property and the insurance settlement aside for her old age (whenever that might come), and put the rest in trust for her two children.

We didn't see Malovich until after Crystal closed the deal; if we had seen him before, Crystal never would have sold him the land. The man positively reeked of evil. He had the cold black eyes, thin mustache, and black suit we associated with Mephistopheles, the operatic incarnation of Satan. His voice was as cold as his eyes. He spoke words that sounded polite, but dripped with malice. If ever I looked in the face of evil, I saw it in Burgan Malovich.

"He gives me the creeps," Emily whispered later, as we went back to the car. "I've never seen a man that *looked* so evil. To think, he'll be living within five miles of our home, and only two miles from the church." She shuddered; I knew exactly how she felt, and Crystal echoed the sentiment a few minutes later.

We checked a little further, something we should have done before. Malovich owned a school of some kind in Cleveland that operated in secret, and a publishing company. The only books he published glorified the occult and urged the practice of Satan worship. He ranked high in the United Church of His Satanic Majesty, a once clandestine organization that now worshipped and recruited openly. His friends included those in high places in politics, entertainment, and business. What a man of his wealth and stature would want with a few hundred acres of land in such an isolated area we couldn't imagine. Whatever he planned to build, site preparation for it began within days of his purchase of the land. The men working on the project either knew nothing or refused to tell if they did.

Our church family united once more to surround the valley, our church building, our homes, and each individual with God's care and blessing through prayer and anointing. We worked on the new school building with renewed vigor, and the Bloomington clan made plans for Crystal's new house seat. Classes went on as usual, and we agreed that the children made excellent, even spectacular, progress. Just how well they did was illustrated in a way we hadn't planned or thought of. The Shady Grove School challenged our elementary students to an academic contest, apparently in hopes of humiliating us. Our academic team crushed them, with Carmen Majors leading the way. We left the entire Shady Grove School, students and staff, in a state of shock. We refused to let the children gloat over the victory, insisting that they give glory to God, but we did reward them with pizza and ice cream.

By July, a little over 90 days after we started, we finished our new school house. It boasted three classrooms, a library, a computer lab, and an office. Almost everyone in the church, and all of our students and staff, contributed in some way to the project. We sawed, hammered, measured, cut, and carried together, laughing and sharing all the while. We consumed gallons of lemonade, buckets of home made ice cream, and sandwiches by the hundreds. One of the more enjoyable parts of the experience came in watching Liz and Kay work together. Once school let out, they came early and stayed late every work day. They worked side by side in whatever they did, constantly bantering and teasing as they sawed and hammered.

Work proceeded on Malovich's property at a rapid pace as well, but to the accompaniment of curses and coarse laughter. We kept a close watch on the construction crews, and made sure our families were secure. A few incidents flared up, but the construction bosses quickly squelched them. For the time being, for some reason, Malovich cared about good community relations. The reason for the pretense and posturing became abundantly clear not long after we finished our school. Bonnie Rathwell brought us the bad news, and it was *very* bad.

"There's a sign up now over at Malovich's place. You're not going to believe what it says."

"Well, maybe not, but you *are* going to tell us aren't you?"

"Yes, Brother Hank, and, believe me, I'm not joking. The sign says, 'The Future Home of His Satanic Majesty's Pike County Academy and Training Center.'"

"How'd they get all of *that* on a sign! I know, I shouldn't be joking about it, but we expected something like this since Malovich bought the place. The Devil can't stand it when the Lord does something new and great, like this school. He always has to have his counterfeit. He couldn't destroy us directly, or from within, or through the public officials, so he's trying a new tactic. He'll fail there, too; we just have to remain constant in prayer, and trust God to defeat all the Devil's tactics."

Recruiters and staff for our new rivals soon arrived, all of them from out of the area. They tried unsuccessfully to recruit some of our own students, offering every manner of bribe and inducement. Not one family gave in, either to the offer of gifts or to the threats that followed. As a matter of fact, very few of the local children, Christian or not, signed up for the new school. The majority of the enrollees came from surrounding counties, and would have to be housed on campus. Because of construction delays, the dormitories weren't ready on time, they delayed the start of their school until the latter part of September. We dreaded what we knew must follow, but God still ruled, and we were His people.

On the hills around the Satanists' school, fires burned well into the night. The same kind of chants we heard above Misty Valley that dark night now echoed in the hills above Moab's old home site. It made Crystal physically ill just to think about it. The new school's curriculum, as advertised, included courses in black magic, necromancy, and the Satanic Bible. The teachers required each student to bring an animal which would later be used in a sacrificial ritual. Bizarre stories about what happened at some of those rituals circulated, and the school didn't bother to deny any of them. The Devil must have his day.