



CHAPTER TWO

They come talking in low tones, still not daring to speak aloud after what they have just seen and heard. Their faces are somber, yet full of the knowledge that they have once more been spared. Most of them have seen many seasons pass, yet none like this one. Many have children who deserted the faith of their fathers to run after strange gods. George is the youngest of all who remain.

After a time of prayer and thanksgiving for their deliverance, they place George in a chair and gather in a circle around him. Marve alone is involved this time in the laying on of hands. Not for many years have they commissioned a missionary, but they still remember the ritual. Marvin asks George to close his eyes, then begins to speak.

“Father, we commend to you now this your servant, George Alfred, whom you have called forth from our midst to be your missionary to a lost and dying world. By this laying on of my hands I pray here, in this company of believers, that you would empower our brother with your Holy Spirit to perform the tasks you have set before him. We pray that your holy angels would encamp round about him to keep him safe from the attacks and snares of the enemy. We consecrate this our brother to your service now, in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

The Spirit speaks in His same gentle voice and Marve hears Him. He leaves his hands on George’s head and begins to prophesy. “The Lord says, “You shall be my voice in the wilderness, like my servant John. You will take with you neither extra clothing nor food, for I will provide your need. Those who are in the towns will take you as you are. Many will scoff, but some will repent and you shall baptize them in my name. If a place rejects you, shake off the dust of your feet against them, for I will judge and repay. Before the rains come you will return to this place, for this town shall be both the beginning and the end of that which you have been charged to do. Go and take authority over the agents of the enemy, for I have given them into your hand. Walk always in my power and in faith and my peace will abide with you.’ ”

Words of praise, sweet scent of prayer, fill the place again. The gathered saints come to George one by one, to offer their own prayers, then each goes aside to pray his or her own private petition to the Lord. Last of all, Martha comes to embrace one she loves as her own son, to laugh, to weep, to share a last moment together. When they are all finished I see the spirit of prophecy descend upon George in turn.

“The Lord has spoken to me as well. He says to all of you, ‘Prepare for what lies ahead, for you will be tested. I have set aside for you another safe haven to which you must go in a few days from now. Your homes will be destroyed, but do not weep for them. I have stored away mansions for you. Take with you only that which is necessary. As I have cared for you in the past so will I care for you always. Know, however, that the Son of Hell must have his day. You will be martyrs for my sake, but if you abide faithful, as I have told you before, you will receive the crown of life.’ ”

George leaves while the night is still young, and I go with him, as I must. My Lord Jesus is present with us, too, and He speaks to me of things to come as we leave the town. Soon we enter the area of destruction, but still on the back streets. George has to pick his way through rubble and buckled pavement. The going is slow indeed, but no one bothers him or seems to notice his passing. He walks under a veil of darkness, a gift of the Spirit, and those who look at him do not see. None of the bridges are passable, so he descends the river bank through masses of burnt branches and brush. The river itself is shallow and easily forded. The Spirit directs his feet in the crossing so that he will not stumble in the darkness.

He is directed to go to the northeast. Crossing the highway, he finds a spot where he can climb the ridge overlooking the road. He hears an approaching car as he enters a patch of partially burned trees. The car comes to a stop not far away, so he pauses to listen, thinking he has been discovered.

Sounds of loud voices reach him, then a man cries out in pain and fear. George hears clearly the sickening thud of the blows and kicks landed on the man. I can tell he feels he should help, but the Spirit restrains him. Finally the cries and the blows stop, and the car doors slam shut amidst much boisterous laughter.

After the car leaves, George moves up the road to where the beating took place. A man lies there in a crumpled heap amidst a pool of his own blood. Ignoring the stench and the mess, George kneels to check the man's pulse. The Lord speaks to him then. *Carry him into the woods.*

Obediently, George stoops to pick up the limp form. The man groans in pain as George lifts him into his arms, but he remains unconscious. I can see what George cannot; a spirit of alcoholism is perched atop the man's head. It looks like a spider, a black loathsome thing with many legs and tentacles buried deep into the man's skull. It has been slowly sucking the life from him for many years, and it writhes in fear as it sees me and knows that the Lord is there as well. "Keep away," it hisses, and buries itself more deeply into the man's skull.

There is a stream straight ahead, coming out of the mountains. I have opened it for you. Take him there and cleanse his wounds. Once that is done your work will begin.

George looks somewhat puzzled at the instructions but carries the man into the woods, with difficulty. He knows of no stream here, but I can tell he has no doubt it will be there. He finds it not two hundred yards from the highway, just as he is about to stop to rest. It gushes out of a large rock.

After laying the man down George pauses to think about how to clean him, as he didn't bring even an extra set of clothes with him. He finally removes his shirt and takes off his freshly-cleaned undershirt. Replacing his shirt, he stoops and dips the undershirt in the stream.

Little light comes to his eyes, so cleaning the man is not easy. He has to feel his way over the man's head and then the rest of his body, trying to find the damp spots or dried clots that mean blood and the deep places of wounds. The demon squirms and hisses as George's hands work on the man's head, but it does not release its grip.

When George finishes the job, the man still unconscious, the Lord speaks once more. *He is severely injured inside. You must lay hands on him and pray for his healing.*

George has never done that before, I know, though he has seen others do it. He hesitates only briefly, then puts both hands on the man's head. The demon scrambles about, trying to keep away. It raises two of its tentacles to cover its ears.

George gropes for the right things to say. "Father, I pray in Jesus name that you would touch this man's body and heal whatever is damaged or broken. Amen."

I see the hand of the Spirit, the Lord's own hand, go inside the man's body to do the work of mending. I have seen this many times before, but it never ceases to thrill and amaze me. It only takes an instant of time, then the Spirit withdraws his hand. The Lord smiles at a work well done. The man stirs again and begins to regain consciousness.

"Who – where am I? I remember being jumped by some goons who beat me to a pulp. Then everything went black. But – why don't I feel sore? Who are you and what did you do to me?"

"My name is George Alfred and all I did was carry you here and clean your wounds. The Lord did the rest. You were pretty well busted up."

"George Alfred? Yeah, I remember you. You run a flower shop on Main Street don't you? Wife named Betsey?"

"The flower shop is gone now and Betsey is dead, but you've got the right man."

"Oh – sorry to hear that. What are you doing out here this time of night anyway? Trying to hide?"

"No, the Lord has sent me to warn people to turn back to Him before it's too late."

"Yeah, well, I used to go to church a long time ago, but I got tired of it. Too many hypocrites there. Anyway, I'm not really sure I believe in God."

Look at the top of his head, George.

For one long instant George sees in the Lord's light. The demon gorges itself on the man's guilt, doubt and self-pity. Its body is bloated and gross. The sight of it makes George gag visibly. He has never seen a demon before, but he knows what it is. The man is too busy with his self justification to notice George's reaction.

Tell it to leave.

“What is your name?”

“Bob. Bob McCrattick.”

“You foul demon of alcohol and lust, I *command* you to leave Bob *now* in *Jesus*' name. I cast you into Hell. *Be gone!*”

“What are you – oooh!”

The demon convulses and screams. It jerks itself out of Bob's head and goes hurtling down into the ground. Bob all but faints.

“What was that? That felt *good*. Why, I haven't felt like this in *years*. If God can do that, maybe I need to hear more about Him.”

Patiently George goes through the plan of salvation, using all of the time-honored scriptures of the Roman Way, and techniques he has known from childhood. In the end he and Bob kneel together to pray and George leads the other man in the sinner's prayer. He rises as a new creature in Christ. His face glows with the light of the Lord. His guardian appears in that same moment, a sturdy angel I know named Ben'ul.

“What should I do now?” Bob asks after the tears and hugs have stopped. “Do I go with you?”

“No, your place is back in town, what's left of it. Do you know where Marvin Reynolds lives, up on Maple Street?”

“Of course. Preacher Marvin's been there for centuries, it seems like. Everybody knows where he lives.”

“Well, he can start teaching you in the Word and about praying. Besides, those people are in danger. They need a safe place to stay.”

“Well, my father-in-law, Max Trundle, has a farm over on Salt Lick. He can handle quite a few people there if they don't mind bunking up.”

“I remember you now! You married Gloria Trundle.”

“Yeah, but she left me several years ago. Max is a good man. He'll forgive me, and I know he'll do all he can to help those old folks up there.”

Dawn approaches as Bob and Ben'ul leave us. George has passed his first test in his new ministry and Bob has found a new life. Bob hugs George in a powerful embrace as they depart.

George has not slept in over twenty-four hours. He finds a copse of bushes where he can conceal himself, uses a moss-covered rock for a pillow, and soon falls fast asleep. I keep watch and worship the risen Lord.

When George finally wakes from his sleep, the afternoon is well spent. He rubs his stiff muscles and does neck rolls trying to get the kinks out. He then pats his stomach and asks, “What do I eat, Lord?”

The response is immediate. *Lift up the rock you slept on.*

With some difficulty George manages to pry the rock up from the ground. A snake lies curled up in a depression beneath where the rock had been. George almost drops the rock in alarm.

Kill and eat.

But, Lord, I've never eaten snake before. Isn't that-unhealthy?"

You must eat what I provide, my son. The creature will give nourishment to your body. Kill and eat.

George takes a rock and smashes the snake's head. Its body still twitches convulsively when he tries to pick it up, and he drops it immediately. When the creature finally stops twitching, he picks it up again and stares at it. After a few minutes he extracts a knife from the pocket of his pants and opens the blade. Trying to hide his revulsion, mostly from himself, he sits on the rock that had been his pillow and proceeds to skin the creature that has just given its life for him. Once he removes the skin, he cuts the meat off in long red strips. That task done, he cleans the meat in the stream. Remembering he is thirsty, he stoops to drink long and deep.

He uses skills learned in the long ago as a Boy Scout and builds a fire in the shelter of a rock overhang. He roasts the strips of meat on sharpened sticks and is amazed that he actually likes it. Soon he will eat other creatures he never thought of as food.

When darkness falls over the valley, George climbs the ridge above the highway, not exactly sure where he should go. He does not notice that the stream ceases to flow behind him. Even with the light of day the way is hard; at night it holds danger for those with no light to see. At the Lord's urging I take George's hand and lead him over the rough places. He knows only where to direct his steps, not who directs them. If he could see some of the places he ascended, with sheer drop offs close by, he would not walk with such confidence.

Before the night is over, we reach the top of the ridge and proceed generally in a northerly direction. George doesn't know the direction he travels; he simply walks on through the night in blind trust. Late in the night he rests briefly, but he has boundless energy, another gift of the Lord. Toward dawn he stops to find a place to camp. A highway winds far below, with a ribbon of people and houses on either side. He recognizes the place and nods; he knows now at least the direction he walks, if not his destination.

After he wakes from sleep he looks about again for food, expecting to find another snake. Instead he is directed to assorted roots and insects. When the Lord shows him grubs, he refuses to eat them; that time will come. Finally remembering he brought a small testament, he retrieves it from his rear pocket and spends some time feeding on the Word and praying. The presence of the Lord within him grows stronger after that.

The night passes like the one before, and so does the next and the next. He crosses another mountain, much larger than the first, spending three nights on the crossing. After that comes a narrow valley, then yet another mountain. By now I know that something follows us, and what it is. It dares not come too close, but continues along our path. It seems to be waiting for an opportunity, hoping George will grow careless and somehow walk out from under the Lord's protection. Waiting in vain, it finally seeks out other prey.

George has been gone almost a week. Already his beard grows shaggy and his hair, always kept so short and trim, is just beginning to grow out. More adept at finding food from the forest around him, he nevertheless has grown leaner during his nights of hard travel. He seems to relish his new life, with no one to talk to but the Lord. Occasionally he has to make detours to avoid settled places or gangs of thugs, but no one discovers him, except the creature following us.

In the dark of one night, a night like any other, removed from any reflection of moon and star, he suddenly hears a high-pitched scream. Immediately comes another, on a different scale. Without thinking of the fact that he cannot see the fallen boulders, stumps, and logs strewn about him, he rushes headlong toward the source of the screams. I take his hand to prevent him from hurting himself.

Just ahead the light from a fire flickers through the trees. Right before we reach it, a piercing wail from the lower pitched voice breaks the silence, followed by the screams of what must be a child. George bursts into the small area of light around the fire to encounter a scene of such horror that it hits him like a physical blow and sends him staggering back against a tree. I have seen this demon take hold of other people; George has seen nothing in all of his experience like he sees now.

A lifeless body lies on the ground in a spreading pool of blood. What once had been the head of a saint of God is smashed beyond all recognition. Standing above the corpse is a giant of a man, if man he still is. His head, including almost all of his face, is covered with a bush of matted black hair, reaching almost to the ground. He wears no clothes, but animal skins cover his body. Hanging around his neck is a necklace of teeth, some of them human. His eyes glow blood-red in the light of the fire. From his mouth drips white foam, and he draws his gums back in a hideous snarl that reveals two gleaming rows of huge white teeth.

All of this George can see. I see much more; the man's features are blurred by those of the creature who inhabits him, one of the most unspeakably vile demons spawned in the pits of hell. He – or it – has taken on the form of a huge bear, but one with a smashed face and one hideous green eye the color of human mucus. The other eye is an empty black pit, but it is with that eye that he sees. In his pride he has chosen to make himself taller than the man he possesses, as tall even as me. He knows me well, for we were once friends before the Lord God cast out Satan the Deceiver with his followers.

When he sees me, he throws back his head and roars like a sick lion. “So, you've come to torment me again, have you? Well, no more. This one is the strongest one I've ever owned, and I'm not letting him go. I'll kill this girl and your puny friend there, then I'll take care of you.”

The girl, cowering several feet away, has never ceased screaming, hands over her face. She pauses occasionally only long enough to sob, “Help me, Jesus,” then she keeps up her wailing in paroxysms of fear and grief. Close by her waits an angel I hardly know. He stands his ground.

George finally regains some control of himself, just as the monster begins moving ever so slowly toward the girl. I see George steel himself, breathing slowly and deeply. He makes a quick dash that places him between the giant and the child. The demon spits a blob of white foam on him in contempt, and assumes a crouching pose like a beast ready to spring on its prey. I see Jesus take hold of George as I never have before.

“You can't touch me, demon! You know why? Because Jesus is my Lord, and greater is He who is in me. I claim the blood of the Lamb, Satan, over me and over this child. You foul beast of Hell, you have no place here. *Get out*, in Jesus' name!”

The demon laughs again, louder this time. “You puny wretch, you scab on a wart. Do you think you can frighten me with your spells and incantations? I *thrive* on Christians. See that old hag there? She was a Christian for sixty years and none of her prayers helped her.”

In spite of all his brave talk the demon relaxes from his crouch. Now, he is standing straight, towering above George but moving no closer. I can see George hesitate, but he does not forget whose he is.

He turns toward the still screaming girl. “Hush child; you're okay now. Listen to me; you have to pray, right now. Claim the blood of Jesus. *Pray!*”

Her guardian touches her cheek, and she suddenly stops screaming. Hands still over her face, she begins repeating over and over, “The blood of Jesus, the blood of Jesus.”

George closes his eyes and lifts his head toward the night sky. “Father, grant to me now the power of your Holy Spirit to defeat the enemy. Send your angels about us. Show me what I should do.”

The Lord peaks. *Have faith, for I am with you. My angels have never left you. No harm will befall you or the child. This kind of demon comes out only with prayer and fasting. Send him away now. My Word says, 'Resist the enemy and he will flee from you.'*

George takes courage from the Lord's word. He opens his eyes and looks directly at the monstrosity facing him. The demon has not moved; he has remained planted in one spot. “I command you, in Jesus' name, get out of here; leave this place. Go – *now!*”

Abruptly, without a single grunt or growl, the demon-man turns away. He trots off into the darkened woods. We hear the crashing of his passage as he moves away.

George stoops down to take the trembling girl into his arms. She is still repeating “The blood of Jesus” over and over. George holds her tiny shaking form close to himself, and tells her in soft whispers that it's okay now. Only when he prays for her does she finally fall silent. After a few minutes she begins crying, great racking sobs convulsing her whole body. George prays for the child, and again she grows quiet.

Still holding her against his shoulder with one hand, George finds a stick and stirs the smoldering fire. In the far corners of the night an anguished howl rips the silence. The beast has lost its prey.