



## Chapter Four

The Lord tries to comfort George in his grief, but for a long while he will not listen. When finally the Spirit brings him a measure of calm George can hear.

*Do not grieve for her, my son. She's with me. She felt no pain.*

“But why, Lord? You told me to bring her here to her parents. Why did you do that when you knew this was going to happen? I know she wouldn't have been killed unless you had permitted it. She was only a sweet child, with her life in front of her. Why did she have to die now?”

*If you had taken her the other way, you would have been walking in rebellion. I would have permitted it, yes, but things would have been much worse for you and for her. She is much more blessed than you right now because her suffering is already finished; she has found her rest. With you, the suffering has just begun. Remember, you're the answer to her prayers. You have a work to do in this place. You must go see her parents this very night.*

“I know what you say is right, Lord, but I still don't understand it all. You've taken two of the people I love best away from me in such a short time.”

There is silence for a while as George sits alone in his thoughts. The Lord has said all that needs to be said. Finally, George gets up and goes a little way into the forest. Finding some soft dirt, he scrapes with a rock and his bare hands to make a shallow hole. Weeping all the time, he retrieves Julie's head and body, tenderly placing her shell in the grave. He scrapes dirt over it and covers it with rocks. Saying a prayer over the little mound, he turns away, still crying. His hands are raw and bleeding but he doesn't seem to notice. The rest of the day he sits near the grave, unmoving.

When night comes he makes a wide circuit around the town below venturing as close as possible to the house of Julie's parents. Waiting until no one is around to see, he walks quietly to the house and knocks softly on the door. When there is no answer, he knocks a little louder. Finally the door opens a crack and a frightened voice whispers, “I don't know who you are, but go away.”

“I have news about Julie. Please let me in.”

The door opens immediately, wide enough to let him slip inside. The woman who lets him in takes his arm and ushers him quickly to the back of the house. A man waits for them there.

“He says he has news about Julie. I've never seen him before, but how would he know her name?”

“If you know something, tell us,” the man says in a pleading voice. “We've heard nothing since she disappeared with her grandmother.”

“Please sit down, both of you. What I have to tell you is very hard.”

“What do you mean?” the woman asks in a strained voice, a little too loudly. “What's happened to my Julie?”

“There’s no way to make it easy. Julie’s dead, Mrs. Baker.”

The woman cries, trying to hold in the sound while great sobs rack her body. The man clumsily comforts her, close to tears himself.

“How did it happen,” he asks shakily.

George tells them the story of the encounter with Green Halcomb, the grandmother’s death and his trip with Julie through the mountains. He leaves out the details about how Julie died. They don’t press him for more.

“Julie was a very precious and unusual little girl. It’s hard to believe I knew her for less than five days. She said I was an answer to her and her grandmother’s prayers. They’ve both been praying for years for a Christian to come to this place to bring the people here to the Lord. I’m not so sure I can live up to that, but the Lord can do anything.”

“What can we do? My wife and I know that what goes on here is wrong, but we’ve been afraid to do anything. A lot of Christians have been killed here. Julie and her grandmother were the only ones left, and now they’re gone, too.”

“Well, we’re going to change,” the woman said, finally able to speak again. “I know you’re a Christian, mister. What do we have to do to become Christians, too?”

“Mary!”

“Hush, Jack. We’ve been cowards far too long. If we’re going to die, at least let it be for something worthwhile.”

George explains the plan of salvation to them, just as he did to Bob almost two weeks before. Without light for reading, he has to quote scriptures from memory.

“Do both of you understand that you’re dead in sin, and that your only hope is in Jesus Christ?”

They both respond with a faint, “Yes.”

“Then if you want Christ to come into your life, get on your knees with me on the floor and repeat the sinner’s prayer after me.”

“Lord Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner. I confess that I have sinned against you in thought, word and deed. I pray, Father, that you would forgive me my sins, in Jesus’ name. I confess Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. Now, come into my life, Lord Jesus, and set me free.”

He pauses after every sentence to allow them to repeat what he says. The words are simple, repeated millions of times before, but the effect is still the same. I see the Lord touch each of the two in turn. Both of them weep as they finish, but not with grief or remorse. The light of God shines in their faces. Still on their knees they embrace each other, and George puts his arms around them both. I welcome two new angels into the house.

They rise to their feet and seek out chairs. George explains that they must begin reading the Bible and praying every day. Mary, still has Julie’s Bible hidden away; they will use that.

The talk turns to the town and to Julie. Both parents have witnessed human sacrifices, and both shudder as they tell about it. The Satanist cult started over twelve years before when Brett Halcomb began recruiting

followers for his new-found faith. He was totally ruthless, they say, destroying anyone who opposed him. He converted his son to his beliefs, but Green became so totally wild that even the townspeople refused to tolerate him.

They heard stories that he turned to cannibalism. No one was safe traveling out in the hills if he was around, and that has not changed. He does not care, they say, if his victims are life-long friends or family. Brett Halcomb settled on a way to rid himself of enemies by taking them out into the hills and leaving them tied to trees. None ever survived to tell what happened, but the blood told the tale.

“And now he’s killed my mother and my poor Julie. I hope God punishes him for all that he’s done.”

“I know,” George says. “I felt the same way. But it’s really not him, you know. If I’ve ever seen anyone who’s demon-possessed, it’s Green Halcomb. He’s as much a victim as anyone he’s killed. I’ve been praying for him to be delivered, and you need to do that, too. The Lord doesn’t want us to nurse any spirit of bitterness, because that can destroy us just as surely as Green’s demon is destroying him.”

He hardly finishes speaking when there is a loud pounding at the front door. I know who they are, for the Lord warned me.

A loud angry voice calls from outside, and the pounding continues. “Baker, get out here and bring your friend with you. We know you’ve got someone in there, and it had better not be a Christian. Get out here *now* or we’ll bust the door down!”

Jack starts toward the front of the house, but George puts a hand on his arm. “Let me handle this. The Lord is in charge, and this man has been judged. I’m the one who needs to go out.”

The Bakers don’t argue. George walks to the front door, unlatches it, and flings it open. The man at the head of the mob takes a step back involuntarily. He and all of those with him carry torches. George doesn’t wait for the leader to speak. His voice rings out loud and strong, and when I look at him I see Jesus alone.

“In the name of Jesus, I come against you, Satan. You strongman of this place, I bind you in Jesus’ name! I claim the blood of Jesus against you and over this house. Get out, Satan, you have no place here!”

As he speaks, he points directly at the man in front, who wears the robes of a Satanist high priest. The man staggers, as if hit with a fist, but the demon within him rises up. “I *curse* your God, Christian. Satan is Lord; cursed be Jesus. If there is a God, I dare him to strike me dead right here, where I stand.”

The response is immediate. A warrior angel with flaming sword drawn appears behind Halcomb, visible to everyone but him. I see the sword rise high above the man’s head and fall swiftly down through the whole length of his body. It shatters the demon inhabiting the man into nothingness and the man himself drops to the ground, dead. The sword leaves no mark of its passing.

No sound comes from the crowd. George seems as stunned as the others after the warrior leaves their sight. When George regains control of himself, he once more speaks under the power and anointing of the Spirit.

“God will not be mocked. The man who lies there at your feet thought himself greater than God, like his master Satan. He is dead, and so are you. All of you are dead in your sins. If you continue on the same path, your souls and bodies will burn in the same Hell that this man is bound for. God has given you a second chance; there may not be another. The Lord demands that you make a choice. If you want to repent of your sins, then stay where you are. If you would turn your back on the Lord, leave now. If you leave, then may God have mercy on you.”

No one moves for a few minutes, then one or two turn and walk away. Others follow. When the movement stops, about half the people remain.

“You have chosen life over death. The way you will walk is not easy; many of you will face persecution and death even from those in your own families. What you will win, though, is worth all the troubles and pain you will face and much more. The Lord does not promise an easy road for you, but He does promise never to leave you. By staying here you have said you intend to repent of your sins and become a new creature in Christ. Kneel together with me to pray the sinner’s prayer.”

About thirty of them remain, of all ages, and all kneel together to pray. Rather than repeat some parts of the prayer, however, even some of these get up and leave. Twenty-five stand up in the end as new creations in Christ, clothed in white. The place is full now of guardians, just like it used to be in George’s church.

The Lord speaks through George yet again. “The Lord has showed me that some of you have special needs to be prayed for. If there is sickness or bondage of any kind, then come to me for prayer. I can’t heal anyone, but the Lord can.”

Almost everyone still there forms a line. Their complaints range from arthritis to headaches to cancer. He prays for them all. The Lord heals some miraculously right then, while others leave knowing that something at least has happened. Demonic bondage troubles many, and the Lord delivers them. Some whom the Lord touches fall to the ground as if dead under the power of the Spirit, but the people soon understand that these are fine. Others run and jump and dance for joy, while still others stand quietly, lost in their own private worlds in the Lord.

By the time he finishes, George’s voice has dropped to a whisper. His clothes are soaked in sweat and he seems hardly able to lift his arms to place his hands on yet another head. The Lord has sustained him, but his body is stretched to its limits.

He sends them home, but tells them to meet here again tomorrow night to organize a church. After they leave, Mary Baker takes him inside and obliges him to eat. After that he falls gratefully into a bed, the first one he has known for two weeks. The night is almost gone, but he sleeps well into the next day.

When he does finally waken he bears no visible effects of yesterday’s trials. Mary feeds him again and insists that he change into some of Jack’s clothes while she washes his.

“Those are about to fall off your back. I don’t know how you stood the stink.”

He doesn’t argue too much. He thanks her, relieved to be wearing clean clothes again.

Jack has gone to talk with some of those who became Christians the night before. He has taken it upon himself to encourage them and see what needs they have. Mary says he truly is a new man, a far different person than the one she married eleven years before.

“We grew up together. When we were in school we just always assumed that we would get married when we grew up. Most young people leave here because there’s no work, no way to make a living, but we couldn’t bear the thought of moving away. We’ve lived on welfare like almost everyone else here. Once there were coal mines and a sawmill, but the coal seam played out and the saw mill just closed down. My grandfather was a coal miner who died from black lung. He was my mother’s father and she used to tell me stories about what it was like to work in the mines. It was dirty, dangerous work, and many men died from accidents or black lung. Some places they had to work were only two feet high, can you imagine that?”

“I know, there used to be lot of mines around where I live. My wife’s father was a miner in one of the last

mines in the county. He died of lung cancer ten years ago. Betsey died of cancer, too. They used to say that cancer was a thing of the past, but new strains keep coming faster than they can find cures.”

“I’m sorry you lost her. I know she must have been quite a lady for you to love her so well. How long ago did she die?”

“Not long. Only a few months, but it seems like an eternity. I didn’t even get the chance to bury her.”

“But why? What happened?”

George tells the story of Betsey’s death again, and the rest of the events that took place. By the time he finishes Mary is crying.

“They burned your house with her body still inside? Then it’s only right the Lord punished them with fire. We had all of that here, too, but the fire didn’t reach most of the houses. Some of those on the other side of town burned, but the fire stopped when it reached Gran’s house. I think the Lord must have been protecting her and Julie, just like he did your church.”

“I’m sure of it. He hadn’t given up on this town because your mother continued to pray. He also knew that some of you would repent and that He would have a church here once more.”

Mary smiles. When she does I can see Julie there. Their faces are very much alike. George notices, too.

“When you smile, it reminds me of Julie. I’m sorry, I know that wound is still open. Please don’t cry. Well, maybe you should cry after all.”

“It’s so hard,” she says between sobs. “We were such bad parents to her. Oh, we weren’t mean, we didn’t beat her. But – we tried our best to discourage her from being a Christian, and we even tried to stop her from seeing my mother. We were so afraid she would be hurt or even sacrificed. We couldn’t figure why Mother hadn’t been killed long before, but for some reason they never bothered her. I know now that the Lord wouldn’t let them hurt her. She had a long, hard fight, and she did it all alone for several years. She wouldn’t let us keep Julie away from her; she’d come over and get her, and we weren’t brave enough to stop her. When Halcomb wanted to initiate Julie into the cult we wanted desperately to say no, but we rationalized that she would at least be alive. When she left, we almost went crazy with worry. We were afraid she and Mother were already dead. Until you knocked on the door, we wanted to believe they were still alive, but we just couldn’t stop worrying.”

Aft her long speech, even longer because it comes out between sobs, she buries her head in her hands and weeps uncontrollably. George starts to comfort her, but then thinks better of it and stays where he is. Jack comes in shortly afterward. He mouths the word “Julie,” to George. When George nods he goes to comfort his wife as best he can. The Lord comforts them both in their grief.

Peace returns. They spend the afternoon in pleasant sharing about the things of the Lord. The people in this place have been without instruction for so long that they are ignorant almost everything concerning the Word and the beliefs of Christians. The Bakers know little of the story of the life of Jesus and next to nothing about the Old Testament. They refused to listen to Julie’s Gran, the only one left in town who could have taught them. Mary had been raised in a church, but the knowledge she gained there was superficial and mostly forgotten. George shows them some of the important places in Julie’s Bible and makes them promise to read it every day. The afternoon vanishes into evening.

Dusk falls, time for the newly born to gather. Jack has done his work well; those who came the night before, and some who were not there at the end, soon fill the yard. George comes out to join them, and reads from

the Word in the light of the torches. He teaches about some of the names for Christ in the Gospel according to John. Jesus is the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life; the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Most of all, He is Savior and Lord, the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings.

“If you have not received Him as your Lord, do it now. I see some here who were not in our midst last night when I prayed with you to receive the Lord. Don’t wait any longer; come on now, while there’s still time. The Lord will receive you still.”

Six people, two of them children, step forward. This time, George talks with each one and prays with each in turn. All six profess that they have received Jesus as their Lord, but three are liars. A grinning demon of deception guides each of these, two men and a woman. George is troubled, for the Lord has told him what I can see plainly.

“Some of you who have confessed the Lord are liars. You are wolves in sheep’s clothing. Your purpose is to destroy the church of Christ.” His voice rises so that he is almost shouting. “You will not deceive us, Satan! You will not blaspheme the Holy Spirit of God!. You three – get out! You are none of Christ’s. I curse the lying spirits who brought you here. If you do not leave us, then may the Lord strike you dead just as he did your high priest last night!”

All three leave hastily, but one man jeers at them as he leaves. “Just wait until he leaves, you bunch of holy rollers. See how long you last.”

After they’re gone a warm spirit of praise settles over the assembled body. They begin singing spontaneously, calling to remembrance songs some of them have not sung since childhood. One of the most powerful moments of praise comes when they sing the old Sunday school song, “Jesus Loves Me.” I see the Lord walking among them, smiling, and touching each in turn. Some shout, others weep, others dance in holy glee. It is like the night before, only with an air of freedom and a greater sense of the majesty and glory of God.

When they grow quiet, George gets up again to speak. “Beloved brethren in Christ, the light of the Lord has indeed again come to this place. The Lord says that you must reclaim that which was dedicated to Him. His house has been turned into the seat of Satan. We must go and reclaim the sanctuary!”

Amid a chorus of amen’s he leads them up the narrow lane and down the little main street of the town. The church sits locked and empty, but one of the people has a key. They open the door, and the whole crowd surges inside. They tear down and destroy all of the pentagrams and grinning masks. Some of the men smash the altar used for the adoration of Satan. At George’s urging, the congregation surrounds the building with prayers, walking around it praying and blessing every window and door. Some of them bring water and brushes and the place is thoroughly scrubbed. Satisfied that they have rid the place of demonic influence, they hold the first worship service held there in the Lord’s name in over twelve years. Bursting with the joy of their triumph in the Lord, they return to their homes. George returns to spend another night with the Bakers.

While all of them sleep, someone pays their newly reclaimed church building a visit. Early in the morning someone knocks on the Bakers’ door. A few minutes later, Jack Baker comes to awaken George. He looks pale and angry.

“What’s wrong, Jack? What’s happened?”

“The church, George. Last night, someone from the sheriff’s office came and sealed the church. There’s a notice on the door saying the building has been confiscated for public use.”

“For public use? Whatever could the sheriff want with an old run-down building like that? Sorry, but it is in pretty bad shape. Let’s go see.”

Hurriedly he gets dressed and the two of them walk the hundred yards or so between the house and the church. A small knot of people has gathered around the door and more are coming all the time. As Jack said, a red piece of tape stretches over the door, meant to serve as a seal. Nailed to the door itself is a public notice forbidding anyone to enter the building without prior authorization from the sheriff.

An angry buzz of conversation swirls around the doorway. Some people are all for holding church right then and there. The piece of tape is, after all, only a piece of tape, they say. One of them impulsively steps up to the door and rips off the notice and tears it to shreds. A chorus of cheers greets his action. The cheers die away when the crowd hears an approaching car. Seconds later, a sheriff’s deputy drives up, the blue light flashing on top of his cruiser. He brakes the car to a hard stop and jumps out.

He is a small man, with a mean, arrogant look about him. He looks at the door, then down to the scraps of paper lying near it. His voice is little more than a squeak, like a door opening on rusty hinges.

“You people are in *big trouble*. You just destroyed an official notice, and that’s a crime in this county. You either tell me who did this, or we’ll come back and arrest the lot of you.”

“Then you’ll have to arrest us all,” says Jack Baker, with a boldness that would have astounded him two days earlier. “This is our church and nobody’s going to use it but us.”

The deputy whips out a night stick and strikes Jack full in the face with it. The stick comes away bloody, and Jack falls to the ground with a gash across his temple. “Anybody else want to get smart? I’ve got more of the same for anyone who tries.”

One of the women begins singing a hymn, very softly, and the others join her. George goes to tend to Jack. The deputy isn’t quite sure at first how to react to the singing, then he laughs. “A bunch of holy rollers, real crazies. We thought you all were Devil creeps, but you’re even worse. Let’s see how long you sing when I bring back a couple dozen deputies to bust heads.”

George straightens up from where he is kneeling beside Jack. “That won’t be necessary, Officer. I’m your man. I tore down the sign.”

The deputy grins broadly. “Well, well, a nigger. We don’t get many of those in these parts. Sheriff will *sure* be glad to see you. We’ll have a regular party over at the jail.”

The man who had ripped off the sign spoke up quickly. “It wasn’t him, it was me. If you have to arrest somebody, I’ll go.”

A chorus of other voices rises up, each claiming to have done the deed. The deputy reacts first with confusion, then anger. “Shut *up*, all of you! I’ve got my man. He’s already confessed and that’s good enough for me.”

He replaces the night stick in his belt and extracts his gun from its holster. Walking over to his intended prisoner, he presses the gun to George’s temple. “One more word, one more move out of any of you, and I’ll spread his brains all over the street. Doubt if he even has any. Now, *back off!*”

Satisfied with the reaction to his orders, he lowers the gun and motions George with it toward the car. With a look of determined resignation, George walks ahead of the man toward the flashing blue light. The deputy opens the door and motions him into the back seat. He slams the door almost before George has a chance to

sit down. The deputy laughs that same mean laugh as he opens the door of the driver's seat. George begins to pray.