

A FATHER'S
LOVE
JOYOUS HOPE

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To my granddaughter Abby whose interest and support have encouraged me. Praise to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is faithful to continue what he started.

We know that the same God who brought the Lord Jesus back from death will also bring us back to life again with Jesus and present us to him along with you. These sufferings of ours are for your benefit. And the more of you who are won to Christ, the more there are to thank him for his great kindness, and the more the Lord is glorified. That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our inner strength in the Lord is growing every day. These troubles and sufferings of ours are, after all, quite small and won't last very long. Yet this short time of distress will result in God's richest blessing upon us forever and ever! So we do not look at what we can see right now, the troubles all around us, but we look forward to the joys in heaven which we have not yet seen. The troubles will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever.

—2 Corinthians 4:14–18 (TLB)

CHAPTER 1

The group stood around the gravesite. The dead man had made his own funeral arrangements. He wanted to be buried the day after he died, at three in the afternoon. He didn't want to sit around waiting, he had said. He had told the undertaker and the doctor this. They had agreed to make sure it happened.

There was no preacher present. No one knew what to expect or who would speak. Then Reid Britt stepped forward.

"I was asked two months ago to handle the eulogy for the departed. I was also asked to speak a few words from scripture.

"Nicholas Gatte was a strong yet humble man. Originally from the Pennsylvania mining country, he joined the Union army during the Civil War, not too long after his seventeenth birthday. Three months later, he met my father on a mountain in West Virginia. That's also where he met the Lord and gave himself to God's service. My father cared for him when he was injured. He survived the war and went back to school. He was ordained as a minister and then served in five churches before coming to Harris. Here, he again came face-to-face with the man that had led him to Christ. They became friends.

"But I remember him as the man that cared for me when my father wasn't available. I was injured, and he was there from the first day I remember. After that, he came every day to strengthen me, to encourage me, and to support me through recovery. I can't imagine what those months would have been like if he hadn't been there to love me.

“Now his earthly body is gone, and he is free to worship at the feet of our king.”

Reid opened his Bible, but he didn't look at the pages as he spoke.

“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”¹

“As federal judge, I sometimes sit in judgment of men, determining life and death itself. The judgments I make are sometimes hard. I sometimes question if they're right. I know that other people wonder how I come to a particular decision. But we know how God

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:1–10.

makes judgments, and he never questions himself. He determines our destiny with one question—do you know my son? That's all that matters to God.

“This man before us came face-to-face with death for the first time on that mountain in West Virginia, and the next day he was confronted with the gospel. He listened, and he accepted Jesus the Messiah as his Savior and his Lord. I think we can all agree that he answered that most important question in the affirmative. That's all he wanted me to say.

“Now he wants to know if you have answered the question that God is asking you. If the answer is yes, he and God are both happy. If you answer no, or if you need help to answer it, you can talk to me or my brothers Luke, Cleve, or Angus or my dad. I'll be on the church steps.”

Reid looked to his father who stood between two of his brothers. They were burying the last of his father's longtime friends, Nicholas Gatte. He had been the pastor of their church for the last fifteen years—the man that his father had led to Christ during the Civil War fifty years ago, the man who had sat and read scripture to Reid every single day through months of recovery from injury at the hands of the Chicago mobsters. Reid knew his father would miss his friend. Reid would miss him too.

Reid turned and walked away, heading for the church steps.

The federal judge stopped, looking at the tombstone in front of him. Jake Monroe. They had buried him just eight months ago. He had sat with Reid's father drinking coffee early in the morning for the last twenty-eight years. Sometimes at the jail, sometimes at the farm, sometimes at the house just outside of town. Most of the time they sat on the porch.

Reid remembered him spending the night at his house when he was growing up. Reid was six years old. Jake would come in just before dark, bringing supper. Then he would bed down in front of the fireplace. The next morning, he would help Naomi prepare breakfast and take Reid and his brother and sister into town for school. Jake had done that every night Reid's father had been out of town for two years, between the time Reid's sister Mary had left

for school in Chicago and until his brother Luke had returned from school in Denver.

Reid could hear his father singing behind him. Brother Nick had asked his father to do this too. Nick had said he came into the faith with Travis singing, and he wanted to go out the same way. Reid smiled. He did enjoy being around the pastor.

Ten more steps and Reid stopped again. He was standing beside the graves of his mother, the sister he never knew, and the son he never met. He didn't remember any of them. He had only been a year old when his mother died. His sister Colleen had died the same day. His son was born and had died while Reid was away from home doing undercover work for the Department of Justice (DOJ). Reid had never seen him.

On one side of his mother was her first husband, and on the other side, between his mother and Colleen, there was an empty space. It was being kept for Reid's father.

Reid turned to glance toward the far side of the graveyard. There, against the fence, two small gravestones stood isolated from others. His two tiny helpless children that had died following premature births. He had held them both. One had never drawn a breath. The other he had held long after life had left its body.

He heard talking and turned to look at his father who was now being greeted by the other parishioners attending the funeral. His father was the closest thing to family that the pastor had. Everyone knew this. His father had cared for the man the last few weeks of his life. Travis had been with his friend when he crossed to be with Jesus. Everyone knew this too.

Reid knew that his father wouldn't be around much longer either. He had outlived all of his friends, two wives, three children, and four grandchildren. And his children didn't even know how old he was. He said he didn't know either.

Reid thought he had figured his father's age though, and the old man wasn't as old as everyone thought he was.

Occasionally Travis would say something about his younger days, and Reid would figure his age now using the reference his father would give. He had done this several times, and each time his father's

age came to within three years of the other dates. But like most other conversations he and his father had, he didn't share the information with anyone.

Chipeta walked up beside Reid and put her hand through her husband's arm. The four younger children passed them running and went to play in the churchyard. The older ones were visiting with their friends and headed toward the big oak trees at the edge of the open field behind the church. Reid turned and continued to the church. His wife helped him to the top of the steps, and he sat down. Chipeta continued to the location behind the church where dinner on the grounds would be served—something else Brother Nick had requested, a celebration for his entering heaven. And at this church a celebration meant food.

Ruth walked past with two other girls and waved. "That was nice, Uncle Reid." Reid smiled at the sixteen-year-old. She would be leaving in a few months for Denver. They would lose her when she left. None of the girls had come back to Harris after they left for school. Most had married while attending university. The others had married immediately after graduation.

Reid's son Matt would be leaving for school too, but he would be going east, to Chicago.

Matt planned to study law, just like his father and mother had done, just like his Uncle Cleve and Uncle Luke, and just like three of his cousins. Two of his cousins had become lawyers, and one had joined the newly formed federal Bureau of Investigation (BI).

But Matt's study would be different. Forensic science was a new and growing field, mixing science with criminal investigation. Matt would learn how to gather and process a crime scene's physical evidence to identify or eliminate a suspect. Fingerprints, footprints, dirt, measurements, toxicology, handwriting analysis, markings of firearms, blood samples, and autopsies were the new way of solving crimes. Matt wanted in on this. He called it an exciting time in history when he could mix law enforcement and medicine. Matt was interested in both.

Matt's decision caused Reid some sleepless nights. After all, he was headed to Chicago, and Reid had no good memories of that city.

Chicago. The city that had ended Reid's career as an enforcement agent for the DOJ. The city where he had been beaten repeatedly and had been left for dead.

The city's underworld had enslaved young girls and forced them into horrible situations they would have never dreamed of in their most horrible nightmares. Chicago. Where Reid had been buried alive under rubble in the darkest tunnels beneath the city. The city that still haunted his dreams and disturbed his nights.

Each time one of these dreams interrupted his sleep, he would call to the Lord God for comfort, praying quietly in the dark next to his wife until his spirit calmed and peace overtook him again. He didn't want anyone to know about his dreams. He knew the whole family worried about him, and he didn't want to be any more of a burden to them.

He had served God well. God had told him so. And he accepted the physical pain that remained from his injuries until he could bare it no longer. He usually had peace within his spirit, but occasionally, when his head or his back had been hurting for days, he would start questioning God. The pain in his body would move to his soul, and he would remember things he didn't want to remember. Then the questioning would come.

Why did his soul have to continue suffering for something that happened ten years ago? Why did those memories keep coming into his mind? Wasn't he doing God's work when evil overtook him? Why wouldn't God let him forget those terrible months in Chicago?

One night, when the pain had been especially bad, and he had not slept for several nights, Reid questioned God again. This time, the Spirit had corrected Reid saying, *Brace yourself like a man. I will question you, and you shall answer me.*¹

Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his?² (Evil) intended to harm (you), but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.³

¹ Job 38:3.

² Job 40:8–9.

³ Genesis 50:20.

But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.¹

Reid had gotten out of bed that night and taken his Bible into his office in the back of the house. He had poured over the Word until he couldn't sit any longer and had collapsed onto the table praying for relief from the pain and for forgiveness from God, reaffirming to his Lord that he would take what God sent and be thankful.

Chipeta had come in looking for him early the next morning and found Reid at the table. He had buried his face against her body and had cried, releasing his frustrations, suffering, and shame until he was so weak that he was unable to stand.

His wife had helped him back into bed and had gotten the children off to school, sending the little ones to her sister-in-law Jenny's. When the house was quiet, Chipeta had returned to Reid and lay in bed silently holding him as he slept. He awoke a few hours later, still in Chipeta's arms, and feeling better. He held his wife, thanking God for this blessing that he had been given.

The next day, Reid had read the latest crime journal report on human trafficking. The slave trade of young girls had grown again. He may have been able to take down the last organization and free hundreds of girls, but the new organization seemed even stronger and more violent.

The White Slave Traffic Act had recently been passed in Congress, making it a felony to transport women across state lines for the purpose of prostitution. This made it easier to prosecute the offenders, but those involved were now even more determined to practice their immoral act in secret.

¹ 1 Peter 4:13–16.

Someone else would have to take care of this new threat. And that's what worried Reid the most. Matt wanted to work for the DOJ. He romanticized about doing undercover work.

Matt's imagination had convinced him of the adventures he would be a part of. Adventures, yes, but danger was always present. Reid hoped Matt would learn this during his time at university, and he hoped his son's idealized thinking would fade.

Matt also said he wanted to be involved in the investigative branch of the organization. That would mean working for the BI, a newly formed branch within the DOJ.

But Matt was also interested in medicine and exploring dead bodies. He wanted to investigate death by doing autopsies. Reid knew that Matt wasn't sure what he wanted to do.

Reid, however, was sure he had done the right thing taking the lead in the undercover operation known as Larago right out of law school. Reid had infiltrated the human trafficking organization and had worked his way to near the top. He had learned who the highest men in the organization were and had learned how widespread the organization's tentacles reached. He had also managed to pull several girls out who would have otherwise been slain. Then, the operation had ended with the injuries he still suffered with.

God had asked him to fight for justice, and when he was through, God had told Reid he was happy with the work Reid had done. But his work had not ended the evil.

Reid remembered the night the Spirit had called him from a sound sleep telling him, *Every time we think of you, we thank God for you. Day and night you're in our prayers as we call to mind your work of faith, your labor of love, and your patience of hope in following our Master, Jesus Christ, before God our Father. It is clear to us, (Reid), that God not only loves you very much but also has put his hand on you for something special. When the Message we preached came to you, it wasn't just words. Something happened in you. The Holy Spirit put steel in your convictions.*¹

¹ 1 Thessalonians 1:2–5 (MSG).

Reid knew God had continued to bless him. He didn't have the constant pain in his back that he had the first years following his injuries. The doctor had discovered a new treatment that had improved the discomfort. He seemed to have more trouble walking and moving, but he was still able to move on his own. And God had blessed him with a job where he no longer had to travel. He could stay home with his family.

Reid continued to have the headaches caused by the injury to his head. But he was now able to tell when the headaches would get debilitating and was better able to avoid them.

God had brought him through months of dangerous work. Yes, he had been injured, but he was still alive. Jesus had been with him and helped him through those tough times. He had healed, although not completely, and was able to enjoy his family and do the work he was trained to do as a lawyer. He knew God had given him much. But somewhere in the back of his mind, he still wondered what else God would require of him.

Reid also remembered the day he had been asked to take the federal judge's position. God had spoken to him saying, *From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.*¹

God had given him a beautiful wife. Not only was she beautiful on the outside, but she had inward beauty and strength—a woman who could gently take care of him and his disabilities along with seven children, a woman who overcame her own insecurities to be a pillar of strength for him. He never saw her upset when he was unable to do something most husbands could do. She stepped in and did most of it herself. Or she would call one of his brothers and quietly get it done without mention of it to Reid. He appreciated her not calling attention to his shortcomings more than he could express.

God had also blessed him with seven beautiful children. Two were his own blood. That was a miracle in itself. With Chipeta's injuries during her first pregnancy and his injuries, they had questioned

¹ Luke 12:48b.

if they would be able to have children. The doctor had told him not to get his hopes too high.

His wife's first pregnancy had ended when she was attacked by two men who abused her simply because she was an Indian. The baby had died, and she had spent weeks recovering. Her second pregnancy had ended with a difficult delivery, and her recovery had been long. The baby had been weak and fought for life but was now strong and healthy. There had been no problems with the third child. After that, they had suffered a premature birth of a child that did not survive, followed by a child that never drew a breath. Then the pregnancies had stopped. While they both grieved for the children they lost, they were thankful for their two healthy boys.

They also loved the five children they had taken in following the death of their birth mother. The children were the offspring of Reid's longtime friend who now served a life sentence at the state prison. The oldest of these children, Matthew, would be the first to leave home. Reid didn't want to see him go.

Reid and Matthew had become friends soon after these children came to live at the Britt home. Matt was wounded by the death of his mother and by his father's rejection. He had arrived at their home with a tender eight-year-old heart, searching for something true and strong to cling to. He had found the gospel and a new father. Matt attached himself to Reid and had quickly loved him and had learned from him.

Reid had come to depend on Matt too. Matt cared for his younger siblings well. And when Reid became ill from the headaches caused by his injuries, Matt would take his father's place reading the Bible to his family before bed at night. Matt would care for Reid when Chipeta was unavailable or while she took care of the younger children. He had learned what to do to help Reid and what not to do and when to leave Reid alone and when to help, even though Reid wouldn't ask. Reid trusted Matt, trusted him as much as he did his own father. Matt had truly become Reid's son.

Matt would be the first of Travis's grandchildren to attend a university other than the one in Denver. Reid prayed his eldest son had listened to God when he made this decision.

More people were passing Reid saying hello and commenting on the service. They were talking about how much they would miss the pastor. Reid would miss him too.

Reid's father walked up and sat down beside Reid. "I'm glad it's over," Travis said. "He's at rest now. We done ever'thin' 'e ask us ta do."

Reid commented, "Days are going to be different without him around. I don't think there was a day that passed that he didn't come by the office for a cup of coffee."

"Yep," Travis agreed. "He'd always 'ave 'nother when 'e came by the shop."

Travis had taken over the gunsmith shop when his friend Jake Monroe had died. He had helped Jake at the shop off and on for more than forty years. He didn't take in as much work as they had in the past, but it kept him busy and gave him something to do.

Travis was a small man. His hair and beard had turned completely white. His dark, deeply lined, and weathered face shown like a map of his life. Sharp turns, deep valleys, and high mountains—his face underscored his deep gray eyes that were so expressive he seldom needed words.

Thomas, the town's doctor and Travis's son-in-law, was happy that Travis kept busy and was still able to do most things for himself. With old bothersome injuries to his hand and shoulder, Travis had to alter many of his activities. But the retired federal marshal was happy. The doctor cared for Travis well and admired the man for his tenacity and resilience.

Thomas thought Travis was probably in his eighties now, although Thomas didn't know for sure.

Thomas was in his sixties and slowing down himself. The tall, slim man with thinning gray hair and round wire spectacles was concerned about the town and Reid. Reid needed to be taken care of regularly, and Thomas was always looking for new ways to do this, hopeful that one day something new would be discovered that would solve some of his problems.

The town needed a new and younger doctor. But they had not been able to find one who was willing to come to this out-of-the-

way place in southern Kansas. Sarah, Thomas's wife and Travis's oldest daughter, prayed continually that one of their sons would decide to come home to practice medicine. But so far, two had stayed in Denver, and one had moved westward into California. Edison and Curt were still at the university. She remained hopeful that when one of them finished medical school, he would decide to come home.

Reid and Travis continued to sit on the steps. They watched others pass, headed for the gathering behind the church. They were listening to the random comments being made without involving themselves in the conversations.

Luke and Cleve walked to the bottom of the steps and stopped. "Either of you want something to eat?" Cleve asked. "I can bring you a plate?"

Reid shook his head. He didn't want anything.

Travis said, "Get me off these steps, an' I'll walk 'round there with ya. We'll get ya a plate, Reid."

Of course he would. Reid seldom wanted to eat, but his father and the doctor made it their mission in life to see that he did. Thomas often came right out and told Reid to eat. Travis wouldn't say much, but would set food in front of his youngest son and then watch until Reid put something in his mouth.

Cleve put a hand under his father's arm and helped him to his feet. He continued to hold the old man as he took one step at a time to the bottom. They walked around the corner of the church and disappeared.

Luke sat down in his father's place. "I guess now we have to find a new preacher," he commented.

"We've been looking," Reid said. "The deacon board started sending out inquiry letters as soon as Nick told us he was sick. We've gotten a few responses, but none of them look promising."

"Who's talking Sunday?" Luke asked.

"Granger."

Luke laughed. "I guess we'll hear about the woes of children gone astray again."

Luke was a big man, well over six feet, and muscular. A long full mustache extended under his nose matching the width of his eyes.

His eyes slanted downward, and the joy that showed in them overflowed to his entire face. He had been the town's sheriff for years and was liked by everyone who met him, including most of those that ended up in his jail. His streaked brown hair was beginning to show some gray, and he joked that the crows that walked across his eyes were causing the discoloration at his temples. Laughter and warm smiles showed through any expression that escaped past the boyish charm.

He was thirteen years older than Reid, and they had been close most of their lives. Luke left for secondary school in Denver when Reid was two years old. He had returned following his graduation from university when Reid was eight. Luke quickly became the most important person in Reid's life, after their father.

Luke had returned home to discover a lonely, timid boy who seemed lost at home with his brother and sister that were four and five years older. Luke had taken his youngest brother under his wing, and for the next two years, they were close to inseparable. Then Luke was elected sheriff and moved to town.

"Probably," Reid laughed slightly too.

Reid was much smaller than his brother and, if he had weighed a little more, would have been a copy of his younger father—just over five feet six inches tall but weighed nothing, according to Luke. Reid had always been small, but since his injuries ten years ago, he had almost quit eating. He told Luke it made him sick to eat. But Reid still had enough muscle to pick himself up and to move, and he seemed to be healthy, so Luke left him alone. He didn't try to push food down him the way Thomas did.

"You going to talk?" Luke asked.

"Yeah. Six of us are rotating. I think I'm number 3 on the list," Reid said.

"Well, better you than me. Come on. Let's go around back. We'll set your plate in front of you, and I'll eat off yours too." Luke laughed and stood up, putting a hand toward Reid who accepted it. Luke pulled his little brother to his feet and held to him as they descended the steps. They began moving to the back of the church.

CHAPTER 2

Reid and Matt stood beside the fence as Esa rode his horse in a circle around the inside of the large corral. Saamel led his horse to the center. He stopped and looked toward the two men at the rail.

“Go ahead,” Reid said.

“Dad!” six-year-old Saamel called in exasperation.

Reid laughed. “Go on and help him, Matt.”

Sixteen-year-old Matt smiled and ducked through the fence. He jogged to where his youngest brother stood holding the reins of a bareback horse.

“Give me your foot,” Matt said as he stopped beside the horse. “Wrong foot. The other one.”

Saamel bent his left knee. Matt grabbed his foot and lifted his brother in the direction of the horse. The young Indian boy swung his leg over the small brown-and-white horse and scrunched himself up and down a few times to position himself comfortably on the animal's back.

“Okay. Now what do you do?” Matt asked.

“Squeeze him,” Saamel said. The boy gave a gentle squeeze with his legs, but nothing happened.

“Harder,” Matt said. “Let him know who's boss. And talk to him.”

Saamel tried again and told the horse, “Walk.”

Saamel was small for his age. People were surprised when they were told he was six years old. His hair was black, like his mother's, and his face round, also like his mother's. He didn't like his hair long, so his mother let him cut it shorter than most Indian boys would

wear. He had a quiet personality and preferred to play alone rather than with his brothers and sisters. And he seemed to be attached to his father.

The horse began to move. “Are you holding your reins the way you're supposed to?” Reid called. The boy moved the reins in his hands. “Tighten them up. You can't tell him where to go if he can't feel you move your hands.”

Reid watched him round the corner and come past with a big grin on his face. “That's it. Good job. Get in the middle. Don't slide off. That's good.”

Matt walked over and turned around to stand next to the fence, hooking the heel of his right boot on the bottom rail. “Esa looks good on him,” Matt commented.

Matt was a good six inches taller than his father with a hunk of dirt-streaked hair hanging out underneath his hat. He was broad-shouldered and tanned, with a smile that told you he was sure of himself. Everyone could tell he didn't mind hard work, but his eyes were tender. They let you know that he was also capable of warmth, love, and patience.

“Yeah, he's a natural. But Saamel's still scared of the animal. I'm gonna have to get his mom out here to show off.”

Matt replied, “Yep. She's good. When's the last time you rode?”

“First year out of law school.”

“Do you miss it?” Matt asked his father.

“Yeah. I do sometimes. I miss a lot of things. But it's okay. ‘Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?’¹ ‘When God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God.’² God's given me a gift, the gift of inner joy, the gift of being able to be happy even when I'm hurting.”

“Are you hurting right now, Dad?” Matt asked, turning his head to look at his father.

¹ Job 2:10b.

² Ecclesiastes 5:19.

“Saamel, sit tall! Straighten up.” Reid was silent a moment. Then he added, “And I have the gift of a family, a family I love. You were given to me by God, and I know that.” Reid put his hand on Matt’s shoulder and shook him gently. “I’m gonna miss you when you leave for Chicago.”

“I’m gonna miss you too, Dad,” Matt said, turning to cross his arms on the top rail, looking toward his father. “Are you ever gonna tell me about Chicago?”

“No, I’m not. You’ll be in a different part of the city. You stay where you belong. Don’t go exploring,” Reid said solemnly, looking into Matt’s eyes. “I mean it!” Then, looking past his eldest son, Reid yelled, “Esa, slow down. There’s not enough room in there for you to be doing that.”

Just then Reid saw Saamel begin to slide. “Saamel!” Reid’s eyes went wide with concern.

Matt turned quickly to see his youngest brother slide completely off the horse, still holding to the reins. The horse turned sharply and took a step over the boy before it stopped. Matt took off quickly and snatched his brother from the ground beneath the horse.

Saamel was crying and clinging to Matt who turned and headed back for their father. He swung Saamel onto the top rail facing his father, and Reid wrapped his arms around the boy to comfort him, Matt still holding him from behind.

“Get the horse, Matt,” Reid instructed quietly.

Matt returned to the horse and took the reins. He positioned himself, grabbed the mane with his left hand, jumped slightly, and pulled himself over the horse on his stomach. He swung his leg over and straightened up, moving the horse toward his father.

Saamel’s crying had slowed as Reid talked to him, brushing his hand back and forth across the boy’s face as he spoke to his son. By the time Matt reached them with the horse, Saamel had stopped crying. He was nodding his head in response to what his father was saying, chewing on the inside of his bottom lip.

Reid smiled. Saamel was doing the same thing his grandfather did when he was thinking hard about something. Reid touched his finger to Saamel’s lip and continued smiling.

“Matt’s gonna ride with you. Is that okay?” The six-year-old nodded again. Matt called his brother’s name and put his hands out to help the boy move from the fence to the horse. Matt positioned Saamel in front of him and held the reins for the boy to take. They began to move inside of the rail, following Esa.

Nine-year-old Esa stopped in front of his father. “I’m riding like a cowboy, aren’t I?” he asked with a big smile.

“No, son. You’re riding like a Ute.”

Esa’s long black hair was loose and blowing in the wind. He looked like his mother and enjoyed the Indian half of his blood more than he did the white part. Even looking like a Ute, he was accepted by the other boys at school and had no problems because of his half-breed blood.

Reid said, “Show me what you can do.”

Reid looked past the corral to see his father watching in the distance, leaning against a column on his front porch. Reid waved, and his father waved back. Reid turned his attention back to his sons. Esa rounded another corner with his arms outstretched, the reins in his mouth.

Matt had saddled his own horse and had ridden with Esa on the road in the direction of the ranches.

Reid had sent Saamel home. He watched as the boy ran down the rutted dirt road between the trees. Then Reid turned and made his way toward his father’s house. The old man was still on his front porch, sitting on the steps looking at the ground. He had his arm around the big white dog sitting beside him. The dog was intently watching the ground in front of them, her ears listening and her mouth closed on her tongue where just the tip showed.

As Reid got closer, his father held up his hand without looking at his son, telling his son to stop. Reid approached cautiously. There on the ground in front of them was a timber rattler headed for the far side of the yard, its body a yellowish brown with dark brown bands running across its back and a burnt red stripe sliding down

the middle. Its gray belly appeared occasionally as it slithered along its irregular route to the brush. Under the edge of the house, Jenny's cat watched too.

Travis softly said, "I'm waitin' for the fight. I seen that cat take on I don' know how many snakes, an' she always wins. Kills 'em then eats 'em. Ever' time."

Reid smiled. "Does Jenny know that?" Jenny was married to his brother Cleve. A sweet lady who was willing to help anyone with anything, but you had to ask. She wasn't very good at seeing the obvious.

Travis laughed softly. "I ain't told 'er. She still thinks that cat is gentle an' sweet. Says she wouldn' even kill a mouse. She may not kill a mouse, but she'll kill a snake."

Reid made it to the edge of the porch and sat down. He watched as the snake slithered past the other end of the porch headed for the trees, the yellow-and-white cat stalking from behind, patiently waiting. The two men sat still, also patiently waiting.

The cat reached its paw out and hooked the snake's tail with its outstretched claws, and the fight was on. The two men sat and watched until the cat picked the snake up and carried it into the brush.

"You're not going to tell Jenny?" Reid asked.

"Nope."

"She'll be asking Thomas why her cat's not eating again," Reid said.

"I know." Travis laughed. "Not tellin' Thomas either."

Reid laughed. "So you're just gonna let Thomas try to figure out the problem?"

"Yep."

Reid continued laughing. "And you can do that with a clear conscience?"

"Yep. If we ain't seen it happen, we wouldn' know. But she still would a eat it," Travis said smiling. He let go of the dog and got up, moved closer to his son, and sat down again. Bella wandered through the yard sniffing the trail of the snake.

"Esa's lookin' good when 'e rides. What's Saamel's problem?" the boy's grandfather asked.

"He's scared of the horse." Reid shook his head. "He's scared of everything. I keep waiting for him to outgrow it. He still wants to crawl in bed with us when it storms."

"Let 'im."

"We do," Reid said. "I just keep wondering why he doesn't feel safe. Always seems like he needs more attention when I'm having problems too. Maybe he senses that. I don't know."

"I'd like ta 'ave a answer for ya, but I don'. I'll pray 'bout it."

"Thanks."

They sat silently for a few minutes. Then Travis spoke. "There's been somebody gettin' into the chicken coop. Happens every Thursday night, Bella tells me."

"I know. I sat out there a couple of nights and watched. The girls told me some of the chickens were missing." Reid smiled. "They've named all of them. They can tell you which ones are missing too." He laughed. "Last week they wanted to know who we are eating for supper."

Travis chuckled. "I'm surprised they'll eat 'em." He paused a moment and then added, "What do ya wanna do 'bout the thief?"

"Oh, I know who it is. Don't do anything. He's basically a good man. They just don't have enough. And they've got children. I've been leaving other stuff out there for them too. If I have to buy some chickens to replace the ones they take, I'll do it."

"Does anybody else know what ya doin'?" Travis asked.

"Luke knows it's happening. Apparently, Angus told him. I told Luke not to stop him. He never takes more than they need. I think I can safely say he doesn't take as much as they need."

"I'm not gonna ask who it is," Travis said.

"Good. I'm not telling."

The two men sat quietly for a few more minutes. Travis broke the silence again. "Is Matt still plannin' ta enter that horse race?"

"Yes, sir. Paid the entry fee yesterday," Reid replied.

"Which horse is 'e gonna use?" Travis asked.

“Spade. Says the horse has better endurance. He thinks he’ll do better over the long haul.”

“Huh. I’d use Rosie. She’s stronger, an’ she’s got the desire ta run,” Travis advised.

“I know. I told him that, but it’s his decision,” Reid said.

Travis nodded. “Come on. Let’s ya an’ me go rock a spell.”

The two men got up and moved toward the rockers. Cleve had recently put in railing on his father’s front steps, and they both held to it as they climbed to the porch. They sat down beside each other in the rocking chairs.

“Where’s Joey?” the younger man asked as he sat down.

Joey was the son of the man who had shot and killed the town’s marshal several years earlier. The boy didn’t have a mother, and when his father was taken to jail, no one would give the boy a home. So Travis had taken him in. He was now fifteen years old and a different boy than the one that had come to live with the former federal marshal seven years earlier.

“Out at ya ranch.” Travis smiled.

“Would you quit calling it that! It’s not mine. It’s just in my name until the boys are old enough to take it,” Reid said once again. He kept telling his father this, but his father insisted on calling it Reid’s Ranch. Its name was the “Double R.” It was actually named for Robert and Ramona Matthews, the great-grandparents of the children Reid and Chipeta had adopted.

Reid hadn’t been out there in years. Marvin was the ranch manager and was married to Reid’s sister Naomi. Marvin took care of everything. Reid had never been involved with the operations of the ranch, except to glance at the accounting books once a year.

Reid looked at his father. The man had a silly grin on his face, and Reid realized he was saying this just to get a rise out of Reid. Reid had to smile too. His father was messing with him.

Reid asked, “What’s he doing out there?”

“I think ’e likes Ruth. But ever’ time ’e goes out there, Marvin puts ’im ta work,” Travis explained. “They’ve been payin’ ’im though. Marvin told ’im ta be out there any time ’e ’ad a full day ta give ’em.”

“Maybe I should send my boys out there too. Let them learn a little about their own place.”

“Let Marvin get Joey goin’ first. Ya don’ need ta send too many tenderfoots at one time. Got ta watch ’em too close. Somebody could get hurt,” Travis said.

“Yeah. I doubt Matt would be interested anyway. I’ll have to talk to Marvin before summer break about working the other two,” Reid commented.

“Matt still wantin’ ta go ta school in Chicago?” Travis asked.

“Sent his application in two months ago,” Reid replied. “He ought to be hearing back from them soon. Sarah keeps telling him about the parties she went to. Thomas tells him about the school. Their talk just encourages him. Makes him want to go more. I’m kind of hoping he won’t get in, but he wants it so bad. He’s already written Mary and told her he was coming.”

Travis asked, “Is he gonna live with ’er?”

“No. I’m gonna let him live on campus. He’s really gonna be disappointed if he doesn’t get in.”

Reid’s father sighed. “I’ll pray ’bout that too.”

They sat and rocked in silence waiting for Matt and Esa to return. The horses were put away, and the boys walked out of the stable. Travis and his son continued to sit on the porch, saying nothing.

When the boys got near the house, Reid saw Matt’s arm fling forward pointing down the road. Bella had run out to meet them and followed as Esa nodded and continued toward home. Matt turned toward his grandfather’s place. When he got to the house, Matt plopped down on the steps and leaned back on a column that supported the railing.

“What are the two of you talking about?” he asked.

“I don’ think we was talkin’,” the boy’s grandfather said.

“So you’ve been sitting here together all this time not saying anything?” Matt asked.

Both of the men shook their heads. Matt’s father shrugged a shoulder. Neither said anything.

Matt laughed. “Okay.” He got up and started home. If nobody was saying anything, there was no point in hanging around.

Reid and his father looked at each other, turned back to look toward the stable, and continued rocking.

Reid asked, "So how serious is Joey about Ruth?"

Travis said, "He's fifteen, she's just a few months older. How serious can they be?"

"And how old were you when you married Sarah's mother?"

Reid asked, giving his father a knowing look.

"Yeah. Maybe sixteen."

"And how old was Sarah's mother?"

"Probably 'bout fourteen or fifteen."

"Uh-huh." Reid smiled and continued rocking. He'd just put doubts about the two young people in his father's head. Now he would watch his father squirm for a little while.

CHAPTER 3

Reid made his way to the steps slowly. He had asked his family not to help him. His father and brothers were all concerned and had told him so. Thomas had fussed at him, telling Reid that he didn't want to have to pick Reid up in front of the whole church.

Reid never attempted steps alone unless he had to. Even the ones on his porch were guarded by railing, and Reid clung to them every time he went up or down. He often avoided them entirely. He would use the ramp at the side of the porch that was built to accommodate the wheelchair. It also had a railing he clung to.

But for some reason, today, Reid wanted to do it himself. The steps leading to the church's platform were entirely open. Reid had nothing to hold to but his cane. Either his own strength would get him to the top or he would be flat on his face.

The congregation was on the last verse of the last song before the sermon, and most of the people in the congregation saw Reid as he stood. The song ended, and Reid moved to the bottom of the steps that led to the podium. He looked to his father and asked, "Dad. Would you pray for my words?"

Travis bowed his head and said a brief prayer asking that Reid's words would be God's message to his people and that those listening would understand and respond to God's calling. He prayed for strength and clarity.

As Travis prayed, Reid struggled onto the platform. When he got to the podium, he kept his back to the people and his eyes on the floor. His breathing was heavy as he calmed his body after reaching the top. He now held to the edge of the podium.

When Travis looked at his son again, Reid had recovered from his struggle up the steps. He turned to stand straight and strong as he began speaking.

“There was this farmer that had a mule. One of his neighbors knew this mule was a strong worker. He’d seen that mule work, and he wanted that mule for himself. So he went to his neighbor for a visit, and while they were talking on the porch, the neighbor asked the farmer if he would ever sell his mule. The farmer said, ‘Sure, if someone offered me the right price, I’d sell him.’

“The neighbor asked if he could have a demonstration of the animal’s ability. They hooked the animal up to a wagon full of hay, and the neighbor climbed onto the seat and tried to make the mule pull. But it wouldn’t.

“The farmer went to the barn and grabbed a board. He came back and whopped the mule in the head with the board. The farmer told his neighbor, ‘Try again,’ as the mule swayed, recovering from the hit. This time, the animal straightened up and pulled without any problem. When the neighbor got the wagon turned around and back to the farmer, the farmer said, ‘Sometimes you have to get his attention.’

“That mule did what he was told, but it would have been easier on him if he had done what he was told the first time instead of having to take a blow to the head.

“Sometimes God has to get our attention too. He sends trials and hard times to show us what he is capable of doing for us and to test us. He doesn’t test us because he wants to know how much faith we have. He knows. He tests us so we can know that our faith is secure.

“Let’s stand for the reading of his word. Jesus is talking.

‘I have told you all this so that you will have peace of heart and mind. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows, but cheer up, for I have overcome the world.’¹

¹ John 16:33 (TLB).

“Then Paul tells us:

‘Is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy, for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow, and don’t try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete.’¹

Reid went on to talk about this passage and others, explaining how holding to one’s faith and considering the way each person faces their trials builds stamina and endurance to stay the course that God has set forth for them. He explained that these trials have the potential to produce something good in the person’s character and that the trials exist for a purpose. Reid described how a person was able to evaluate their attitude toward their troubles and look with faith, trust, and joy toward the end result.

As Reid finished his sermon, he asked one of the other deacons to pray. This deacon was known to be long-winded, and that’s what Reid was looking for.

As the prayer began, Reid saw his brother Luke watching him from his usual spot against the back wall and Reid motioned for help. Luke made his way to the front and helped his brother down the steps and to the front pew. Reid had gotten tired standing while he spoke and didn’t think he could maneuver the steps alone. He sat down letting out a few long quiet breaths and then looked to the sheriff, smiled, and quietly said, “Thanks.”

Reid’s brother smiled and nodded.

It was the custom of this church for the man preaching to be at the exit door at the end of the service to greet the people and to receive comments on the sermon. As people began moving to the door, they saw that Reid wasn’t there.

¹ James 1:2b–4 (TLB).

Several turned around to look for him and saw the sheriff near the front, but Reid was sitting and couldn't be seen over the people standing.

The sheriff, standing in the front, was also unusual. Luke was a tall man and could easily be seen over the others in the room. Luke was never in the front of the church. Some people talked of the unfamiliar behavior in the service today, but others turned around headed for Reid or Chipeta. They would still make their comments, even if Reid wasn't at the door.

Dan McClelland walked toward Reid, stopping first to speak with Chipeta and then with Travis.

Dan was one of the teachers at the Harris school. He had come to town five years earlier after working at the Apache Mission School in Oklahoma. He and Reid had become friends after Reid's son, James, had been injured during a fight at school. McClelland admitted he had allowed the incident to happen and was a part of the reason James had been hurt. He had asked Reid's and Chipeta's forgiveness. The apology had been accepted.

Over the next week, McClelland had come to check on James daily. When James was able to do his schoolwork again, McClelland had helped him catch up with his assignments.

Reid had also been quietly recovering from an injury few people knew about. Dan McClelland had learned of these injuries and had spent time also visiting with Reid. The two men had grown to enjoy each other's company.

Dan reached Reid just in time to hear a woman, who appeared to be in her late fifties, ask Reid if he really believed what he had said. Reid replied, "God told us so in his Word. I believe every word of the Bible, so yes, I believe what I said is true."

"Well, I don't," the woman said loudly. "You can't suffer for years and still believe God is there taking care of you. You have no idea what it's like to not be able to take care of yourself and have to rely on other people to do things for you."

Reid didn't know this woman's name. He had seen her in church just a few times, but they had never spoken to each other. Reid didn't

know anything about her, and it was obvious she didn't know anything about him.

Dan McClelland interrupted, "Well, good morning, Mrs. Leachman. It's nice to see you in church today. I hope you enjoyed it." McClelland had her hand and was leading her toward the door. "Have you met these ladies?" And McClelland began introducing her to every woman they passed.

Luke asked, "Do you think Nick had people argue with him about what he said?"

"Yes, he did. I heard them," Reid replied. "You listen to them, and then you reevaluate what you said. If you still believe what you said is true, you pray for that person. If you change your mind, you pray for yourself."

Reid reached up and grabbed Luke's arm, pulling himself to his feet. They began making their way to the exit.

Reid and Chipeta walked through the crowded street with three of their children. Reid kept the girls close, calling to them over and over to stay with them. He let go of Saamel's hand and reached down to take Jeannie's, forcing her to stay beside him. Saamel moved to the other side and grabbed Reid's little finger that held to his cane, making it even harder for Reid to maneuver through the crowd. Reid looked to his son and smiled. He never had to worry about this boy getting lost.

They were looking for a spot near the starting line. It looked like everyone else was too.

The streets were too crowded for Reid's comfort. He kept looking for the children, making sure they were all safe. Jeannie was the youngest girl, and she was now seven, Abigail nine. They were reaching an age when they were wanting to venture out more on their own. They were also nearing an age that Reid didn't want them out of his sight. He prayed daily that they would remain safe and that he would not hold to them too tightly.

He had seen what happened to young girls, not much older than this, when they were abducted. Many were taken from noisy crowded areas just like this while others were taken from isolated areas where no one else could see them. There was nowhere safe. Reid was thankful that his home and his family's homes were close to each other. They all kept an eye on the children. And he cautioned the boys constantly to watch after their sisters.

Reid knew this was his own mind haunting him again.

Reid remembered what God had said, *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of God who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*¹

But as hard as he tried, as hard as he prayed, the fear for his daughters would return.

He tried to hold his tongue, tried not to put his fear into his children, and he thought he was succeeding—succeeding with everyone except Saamel. At six years of age, the boy was still as fearful as he had been when he was two. He was also shy and quiet and hung onto his father for life itself.

Reid spotted the bench in front of the gunsmith's shop. There was no one there. Good. He'd take it. He turned to his wife and spoke as loud as his rough gravelly voice could over the noise. "I'm sitting up there." He began making his way up the steps, but he couldn't do it holding on to Jeannie, so he let go of her hand to hold the rail next to the wall beside him.

When he got to the top, he looked for her. She had not followed him. She was always disappearing. "Saamel, do you see Jeannie?" he asked.

Saamel looked around. "No, sir."

Chipeta was a few steps behind Reid, still on the street. "Chipeta! Where's Jeannie?" He spoke loudly again.

He saw his wife turn to look toward him. There was a questioning look on her face. She hadn't understood what he said.

"Jeannie? I don't see her!" Reid said.

¹ Matthew 10:28 (GNT).

Chipeta looked in every direction. Reid was looking from the porch, a higher level, but he still didn't see her. She was short at seven years of age and low to the ground. She could be hidden behind anyone.

Reid's chest began to tighten. He spoke to himself softly, reassuring himself that God was there taking care of his children. "When I am afraid, O Lord Almighty, I put my trust in you."¹

He scanned down the boardwalk and into the street again. He saw Chipeta's eyes searching too.

Reid spotted his father making his way through the crowd. He was just about to call to his father to help look for his daughter when he saw the straw hat with the wide blue ribbon beside his father's right arm. Reid backed up two steps and sank onto the bench in relief. He wrapped his arm around Saamel and hugged his son, since he was unable to reach his daughter at that moment. His son was a good substitute. It gave Reid comfort to hug his children and know that they were safe.

He heard Chipeta tell his daughter that they were looking for her and not to disappear again. Then Travis sat down on the steps and asked the child, "Did ya just run off?"

"I was coming to you," Jeannie explained to her grandpa.

"Honey, ya 'ave ta tell ya parents what ya doin'. It's okay if ya stay with me, but ya parents 'ave ta know where ya is," the child's grandfather explained.

The little girl nodded, tucking her chin to her chest. Travis pulled her close for a hug and said, "Ya not in trouble. We just want ya safe. Don' run off. Understand?"

She nodded her head again and threw her arms around his neck. He gave her a brief hug, then laughed, and said, "Okay. Let me go. I can't stand up with ya hangin' on me."

Travis took the child's hand and turned around. Holding the railing, he moved up the steps to join Reid and Saamel on the bench. He pulled the girl between his knees and wrapped his arms around her.

¹ Psalm 56:3 (GNT).

"Is Matt ready for this?" Travis asked.

"He better be. He's got no time left to prepare."

They watched as horses began pushing through the crowded street. People began separating, moving to the edge of the street and onto the boardwalk.

Chipeta came to stand beside her husband, while Abigail stood near the edge of the porch. A woman appeared, unnoticed by the group that continued to talk among themselves.

"Well, aren't you going to offer an old woman a seat, young man?" she said, surprising everyone.

"Excuse me, ma'am," Travis said as he pushed Jeannie forward and stood up.

"I'm not talking to you, old man." Her snide comment caused Travis to raise an eyebrow. She was looking straight at Reid, her chin poking forward and her nose in the air.

"I'm sorry. Here, take my seat." And Reid pushed on his cane and the bench to stand up, moving to the side.

She sat in Reid's place and looked at Saamel with a sneer. Then she turned to Jeannie and asked, "Do you play with that wretched creature?"

Jeannie was not nearly as shy as Saamel. "He's my brother," she replied.

Saamel didn't like the look or attitude of this woman. He was clinging to his father's leg. Reid's hand was on the child's back, reassuring the boy that he was safe.

"Mrs. Leachman, have you met my wife?" Reid asked. Chipeta smiled at the older woman who sneered again. "Or my father?" Reid indicated Travis with a pointed finger.

Travis said, "Good mornin'."

"Well! You can sit back down. I'm not going to bite you," she said with disdain, looking to Travis.

"Thank ya, ma'am. I might take ya up on that in a little bit."

A man moved through the people on the street quickly and came to a stop near Chipeta. "Judge?" Reid turned to look at the man calling him. It was one of the town council members. "We can't

find the mayor. He was supposed to start the race. Would you come do it?"

"I don't think I need to. My son's riding in it," Reid replied.

"That don't matter," the councilman said. "You're not gonna cheat."

"No, I can't do it." Reid shook his head.

The man turned to Travis. "Marshal? How about you?"

"Gran'son," was all Travis said, also shaking his head.

"Where's Luke?" the man asked, turning to look at the people nearby.

Travis laughed. "Nephew."

The man turned to walk off. "Doggone it! That stops Cleve from doin' it too. Somebody's gonna have to." But the people on the boardwalk in front of the shop couldn't hear anything else that was said.

Travis turned to unlock the gun shop and stepped inside. He pulled a slat-back chair out the door and set it on the boardwalk next to the empty spot on the bench, near where Reid stood. "Here Reid," he said.

"Thanks." And Reid sat down, putting an arm around Saamel again. The older woman sneered at both men.

Travis shut the door without locking it and then sat down, taking the empty spot on the bench. He pulled Jeannie back in front of him.

Esa and Stephen came running to join them, followed by James.

Fourteen-year-old James said, "They're about to start. There's a lot of them entered. Spade's excited. He keeps jumping out like he's ready to go."

They heard the gun shot in the distance and the horses' hooves pounding against the ground. One cluster of horses ran past in a tight grouping, then a space, and a larger grouping followed by a few horses not as tightly gathered. Matt was near the back, but he looked good on the horse. The horse's muscles were rippling under his pelt, his powerful legs drumming his hooves into the dirt.

Esa yelled at Matt and then turned to his father. "He's gonna have to catch up if he wants to win."

"He's pacing the horse. There's plenty of time for him to pass the others," Reid told his son.

"Okay," Travis said. "It's over. Let's go home."

"Grandpa!" Stephen yelled in annoyance. "They got to come back in. We got to see who wins."

Travis and Reid both laughed.

The music started at the bandstand down the street, and people started heading that way. James tugged on Stephen. "Come on. Let's get some pie." And the two boys started moving away.

"Dad?" Esa said, stepping in front of his father. "Can I?"

"Go catch up with your brothers. Stay with them," the boy's father replied.

Chipeta said, "I'm going to walk down there just to see what's going on." She took Abigail's hand. "Jeannie, are you coming with me or staying with your father?"

"Can I stay with Grandpa?" the seven-year-old asked.

"It's okay with me, but I'm sittin' right 'ere," Travis told the girl.

"I'm coming, Mama." Travis and Reid laughed again as the girl ran off to take her mother's hand.

"It's gonna be at least an 'our 'fore they come back in. I'm gonna get a little work done," Travis said standing up. "Saamel? Ya wanna 'elp me?"

The boy nodded and pulled from Reid's arms to go inside with his grandfather.

Reid started to stand up to go with them, but he was moving slow this time, leaning heavily on his cane. He could feel the older woman watching him. As he walked past her, he tipped his hat and said, "Excuse me, ma'am." He reached to push the ajar door open farther.

"So you're a judge?" the woman asked.

"Yes, ma'am," Reid answered but kept moving.

"Well, wait a minute! Don't just run off when I'm trying to talk to you!" she said loudly.

Reid glanced into the shop to see his father and Saamel watching.

"I'm sorry," he said, turning back to the woman. "What were you saying?"

"That man said your father was the marshal? He's kind of old to be the marshal, and you're awfully young to be a judge," she said.

"Dad's retired. Has been for quite a while. And I guess I am kind of young, but they offered me the position, and I accepted," Reid replied.

"You ever kick somebody out of their home? That's an awful thing to do."

"No, ma'am. That's not my job. The city and county judges handle that. I'm federal."

"Huh!" she snorted. "You've got a big family. All those children aren't yours, are they?"

"Yes, ma'am. They're all mine, bought and paid for," he said jokingly, trying to lighten the conversation. He turned and continued in the door, his father still watching the woman.

Reid sat down at the table with Travis and Saamel. His father passed him a pistol and cleaning supplies. Reid went to work.

In the open country, Matt was making good time. He had passed several horses and thought he was now somewhere in the middle. He crossed through an open gate, jumped a fence, and then jumped a small creek covered in brush. He took his horse around a boggy area of ground while some of the riders went through it. The other horses slowed as they moved through the mud, but Matt lost no time as Spade kept moving.

Matthew and Spade passed the second checkpoint, and rounding a sharp corner, the horse next to him slipped and went down. The rider tumbled to the ground. Spade jumped across the man on the dry land, his powerful limbs tearing into the ground as they passed another rider.

Chipeta came in the door of the gun shop out of breath and dragging Abigail. "I can't find Jeannie!"

Travis and Reid both jerked their heads to look at her. "What happened?" Travis said as he got up.

"We were looking through the quilts on display beside the mercantile." Chipeta shook her head. "She was right beside me, then she was gone. I've been looking. I can't find her!"

Reid sat at the table with his chest tightening. It was getting hard to breathe.

"I'm sure she's just wanderin' 'round somewhere," Travis reassured everyone there. "Reid, ya stay 'ere. She knows ya 'ere. She might come back this way."

Reid reached over to Saamel and pulled him closer. "Abigail, stay with me," he said, putting his hand out toward his daughter. When she took his hand, he pulled her close to him also.

Chipeta turned around and left to continue her search. As Travis moved out the door, he stopped to reassure his son, "Nobody's gonna hurt 'er. Come out 'ere an' watch far 'er. If ya see anybody ya know, ask 'em ta keep their eyes open far 'er." And Travis left to search too.

Reid slowly stood, holding to his two young children. He moved them with him onto the porch and toward the edge of the boardwalk. He scanned the people on the opposite side of the street and then the ones in the road. Cleve's son walked past with another teenager, and Reid called to him, asking him to keep an eye out for Jeannie. The boy looked concerned but kept moving, acknowledging to his uncle with the nod of his head.

Reid turned around and took the two children back inside with him. He called the telephone exchange and asked for the sheriff's office. There was no answer. Then he asked for the marshal's office, but there was no answer there either, so he moved back onto the porch.

Abigail could see the concern in her father's face. She told him, "Don't worry, Daddy. The angels are taking care of her, just like they take care of you and me."

Reid smiled at his daughter. "That's right. 'God will order his angels to take good care of (us).'"¹ The judge relaxed a little, reassured by his daughter that God was still in control.

Matt made the last turn before heading for town and was coming up on the leaders. Two riders, that's all he had left to catch before the finish line. He was moving fast past the cattle yard at the railway station and knew he could catch at least one of the front horses.

But something caught his eye, and he looked into the open field toward his grandfather's house. A little girl was in the field alone with her back to him. He saw the light-brown curls blowing in the wind. Was that Jeannie? Matt slowed and looked again at the rider now getting farther away from him.

What was Jeannie doing out here alone? He turned Spade into the field and moved toward his little sister.

"Jeannie!" he called to her from a distance.

She turned, and he could tell she had done something wrong. The child's face showed guilt every time. She put her head down but cut her eyes up to look at her oldest brother.

"Jeannie? What are you doing out here?" he asked. He continued to move the horse back and forth in front of her.

"I can't find Mama. I looked for her, but I couldn't find her," she answered.

"Why are you out here?" Matt asked again.

"I was going home. I know they don't want me in town by myself. I don't want to get in trouble."

Matt shook his head and leaned over, putting a hand out to the girl. She took his hand, and he strained to pull her up. He positioned her in front of him on the horse. "Where's Dad?"

"Last time I saw him, he was with Grandpa at the shop," Jeannie told him.

¹ Luke 4:10 (GNT).

Matt sighed. He turned the horse around and saw several other riders disappearing around the buildings headed for the finish line.

"Why didn't you go back to Dad?" Matt asked.

"I don't know."

Matt picked up speed, and Spade trotted toward town. A few other horses passed him. Matt wanted to finish this race. This was the first time he had been old enough to enter, and he'd never get to do another one. When he left for Chicago, that would be it. He'd never be here for another race. His shoulders were slumped, and his eyes were watching the dirt road. His mouth was set in a semipout.

Then he heard his sister crying. "I'm sorry, Matt. I messed up your race." His heart melted.

He gave her a brief hug. "I'm mad at you, sis. So I think I'm going to have to fuss at you," he said with a smile on his face. But she didn't see the smile, and he felt her body shake as her sobs grew in strength. He laughed slightly. That was it. That was all he would say to her. He'd let her own guilty feelings work on her for a few minutes.

Matt slowed the horse as he got near the crowd and the finish line. People watched as he passed with the little girl in front of him. He had left with the other riders in the race, but he came back holding a crying child.

He saw his uncle, Angus, moving toward him with two of his sons. His uncle yelled at him, "Matt? What happened?"

Matt smiled big and laughed but kept moving. Angus continued to follow him. James, Stephen, and Esa saw him too. They ran to catch up.

As Matt neared the gun shop, he saw his father with Saamel and Abigail. He also saw his father let go of the two children and collapse against a porch column when he spotted Jeannie on the horse. Matt smiled. He could read his father like a book. The judge had been worried.

Matt laughed. *The judge*. Matt liked to pick on his father, calling him "Judge" and introducing him as the judge, like he was someone Matt didn't know well. He'd done it since Reid had been sworn in. It always made his father smile.

"She's okay, Dad. She was in the field headed home. She didn't want to get in trouble for being in town by herself." Matt laughed.

Angus reached up to take her from Matt, but Matt squeezed her tight and whispered, "I love you, girl," before he let her go. She turned her head to smile at him.

Reid slid down to the floor holding to the porch column. He took Jeannie in his arms as Angus swung her from the horse to the porch. Her father held to her as he said, "We've been looking for you. I'm so happy Matt found you."

Matt's brother appeared behind the horse. "What happened?" James asked. Abigail began to tell him, and James gave his baby sister a shake of the head and a look that let her know she was in trouble. She began to cry again.

"James, go find your mother and Grandpa. Let them know we found her," Reid said.

Cleve appeared on the boardwalk and took the girl from her father, telling her that the whole town was looking for her. Then he gave her a hug and said it was the most exciting thing that had happened all morning.

As the others continued to join them on the porch, Jeannie got over her feelings of guilt. James came back bringing Chipeta and two cones of cotton candy. He handed one to Abigail and Saamel, telling them to share. Then he pulled a wad off the other and passed the rest to Jeannie.

Chipeta hugged her daughter then backed up and shook her head. "When are you going to learn to stay with me?"

"I'm sorry, Mama," the girl said as she looked at her feet, holding to the cotton candy.

"Can we try this again? Are you going to stay with me this time?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Chipeta looked at Reid. He looked exhausted. A smile was on his face, but he slumped against the post with his legs hanging off the side of the porch. His feet were a good two feet away from the ground. She smiled at her husband.

“Boys, you can go have fun,” Chipeta said. “Esa, stay with them.” She pointed toward his older brothers. “Girls, Saamel, you come with me.”

Jeannie, Abigail, and Saamel headed for the steps to join their mother. She moved closer to her husband. “Why don’t you go home and rest for a little while? After you figure out how to get yourself off that floor.” She laughed and turned around, knowing his brothers would get him up. She headed back the way she had come.

Cleve and Angus helped their brother off the floor and into the shop, looking for his cane. Reid sat at the table as the others left. He would go home and rest. That sounded good.

The young judge moved back onto the street. Matt was still there, patiently waiting, and walked with him. They headed toward the Model T as Matt started rambling, telling his father of every jump, turn, and mudhole on the course. They were near the finish line when Matt saw the two riders that were ahead of him when he stopped. He turned in their direction to congratulate them on their win.

As he walked away, Matt said, “Dad, I’m going to take Spade back to the stable and take care of him. Then I’m coming back into town.”

Reid nodded. “I’m going home.”

As he continued to move down the crowded street, Luke ran up behind his brother. “Leaving so soon?” He laughed. “I saw Chipeta and the kids. She told me what happened.”

Reid shook his head and laughed with his brother. “I’m through. I’m going home.”

Luke knew his little brother didn’t like crowds or street parties. Luke said, “So soon?”

Reid knew Luke was just messing with him, and he smiled.

Luke continued, “Did you see Thomas? He said they was coming.”

“No. Haven’t seen them. The automobile was at the house when I came past. If it’s still there, I’ll stop and check on them,” Reid said.

Luke began walking away backward, getting louder as he moved through the crowd. “Tell him I have that stuff he left at the jail when he stitched that prisoner up last week. I told him I’d bring it to him, but he said he’d pick it up. Like I said, it’s still there.”

“I’ll tell him,” Reid said, continuing to walk toward the automobile.

4

CHAPTER

As Reid neared the Stewart home, he saw Thomas sitting on the porch looking toward the stable. He wasn't paying attention, and when Reid stopped, it didn't look like he even noticed Reid's arrival.

"Hey, Thomas," Reid gave a greeting as he stepped out of the Model T.

"Reid," the doctor responded somberly without looking his way.

Reid pulled himself to the porch holding to his cane and the brick ledge at the side of the steps. Reid knew something was wrong. Thomas would never have let him attempt these steps alone unless he was distracted by something else.

Reid sat down in the chair beside the doctor. "Thomas, tell me what's wrong."

Thomas looked at Reid, and the judge saw the tears forming in the doctor's eyes.

"It's William. We got a letter yesterday from Joseph. We didn't read it until late last night. I haven't slept, and I just can't seem to get my mind straight." Thomas leaned over and put his head in his hands.

"There was a fire in a little town near where William is. It was apparently pretty bad. They called for help from Sacramento—firetrucks, people, motorcars, and wagons to help evacuate the residents. William and two other doctors went to take care of the injured." Thomas stopped and tightened his lips, closing his eyes.

"Somehow William got burned. I can't believe he got that close to a fire. Joseph says he'll be okay, but he can't work right now. This must have happened several months ago, and he didn't tell us. Joshua

has gone to get him. Why didn't he tell us?" Thomas looked up at Reid. "That's all we know until we hear from Joshua."

Reid continued to sit with Thomas, but neither of them spoke for several minutes. Then Reid asked, "How's Sarah taking this?"

"Better than me. She says he's going to be okay. That he's young and strong and that he'll recover. But I've seen burns, Reid. I know what those people go through. It sometimes takes years, and sometimes they still can't function. And the scars..."

Reid put a hand on Thomas's knee. "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.¹ Let's not borrow trouble. You don't know how bad it is yet. Wait to find out."

Thomas put his head in his hands again and leaned forward. The silence felt like poison to Thomas. Then he heard the faint sound of revelry and music coming from town. How could people be happy right now? Reid's words were rehashed in his mind. *Each day has enough trouble of its own. Let's not borrow trouble. Let's not borrow trouble. Let's not borrow trouble.*

Thomas suddenly got up and walked to the edge of the porch.

"I'm going for a walk," he said without looking at Reid. The doctor moved down the steps quickly and out into the yard, disappearing around the corner of the house.

Reid got up and went inside. He found his sister in the kitchen.

"Sarah?" Reid called to get her attention.

"Hi, Reid," she answered without turning around. She was looking out the window, like she could see what was out there. Reid thought her blind eyes might be able to see the bright sunlight, but Reid knew she wouldn't be able to see her husband moving away from the house.

Sarah was Reid's oldest sister and the closest thing to a mother that Reid had ever had. She was small, like Reid and their father. Nearing sixty years of age, her hair was just as black now as it had been when she was twenty. She and Thomas had eight children, and

¹ Matthew 6:34.

Reid's age put him right in the middle of these children. He knew them all well.

Reid went to put his hand on her shoulder. She turned to him quickly and wrapped her arms around him, burying her face in his shoulder. "Oh, Reid," was all she said. Reid stood holding his sister until she was ready to pull away. She sat down facing the table.

Reid asked, "Do you want me to call Jenny to come stay with you?"

"No, I just want Thomas. Do you know where he is?"

"He went for a walk."

Sarah's eyes were puffy, and her face had a ruddy tone. Reid knew she had been crying. She looked as if she was ready to cry again, but when she heard her husband wasn't there, she composed herself and said, "Then 'I have set the Lord continually before me; because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.'"¹

She sat up straighter, lifting her chin. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride."² Though my children are away from me and out of my protection, I will not lose faith that my God is in control and is taking care of them. He will take care of William."

Reid said, "'(He is) the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too difficult for (him)?"³

Sarah smiled and reached for Reid's hand. "If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."⁴ She said, "William is alive, and he's going to be okay. 'For nothing will be impossible with God.'"⁵

¹ Psalm 16:8 (NASB).

² Psalm 46:1-3 (NASB 1995).

³ Jeremiah 32:27 (ESV).

⁴ Romans 14:8.

⁵ Luke 1:37 (ESV).

Sarah hugged her youngest brother's hand to her face and added, "You are proof of that. You are an encouragement to me right now, Reid."

Reid put his arms around her again and held her until the tea kettle started whistling. She continued making the cup of tea she had started earlier. Reid told her that he would check on her later in the day, gave her one more hug, and left for home.

Reid got home, and he didn't seem to feel the weariness anymore. He waited impatiently for his wife to arrive. She came home bringing all the children except Matt.

"Walk with me," he said, pulling her before she got to the door.

Reid told Stephen and James what they were doing and asked them to be available if the younger children needed anything.

Reid never asked Chipeta to go for a walk. Walking on uneven ground was hard for him, and she knew it. He had already done a lot of walking in town today, and she had sent him home because he was tired. She wondered what was going on but trusted her husband to tell her when he was ready.

They began walking slowly down the road with Reid holding to his wife for support. Just out of sight of the house, Reid stopped and turned to face Chipeta. "Have I ever not been there when you needed me to be?" he asked.

The look on Reid's face disturbed her. He continued, "I know I wasn't there when you were hurt and the baby died. I should have been. If I had been there, it might not have even happened. I know I wasn't there and I'm sorry. And I know I wasn't there when I was having to work out of town. I left you alone too much. I'm sorry for that too.

"But when I've been in town, when I've been home, has there ever been another time in our marriage that I wasn't there when you needed me? When you really needed me? Have I ever been so involved in my own problems or what I was doing that I didn't see you needed me with you? Please answer me. I need to know."

She could see the look in his eyes, pleading with her to know the truth. But she didn't know how to answer him; she wasn't quite sure what he was asking. She did need him, every day, especially when he was in pain and holding everything in, pretending he was okay when she knew he wasn't. She needed him to talk to her then, to let her know exactly how he felt, to let her know what he needed, and to reassure her that he would be okay.

She needed him when he was in bed with his eyes closed and his head hurting. She wanted to comfort him then. She needed to. But he wouldn't let her. Often, he didn't want to be touched, and when the pain reached a certain level, he got confused about what was happening around him. She needed his comfort then too. How could she tell him that she needed him when he was unable to give what she needed?

She opened her mouth to try to explain, but the more she talked, the more ridiculous her words sounded. She loved this man so much, and she knew he loved her. She didn't know what had happened that he would ask her this now. She tried to explain her love for him; but again, the more she talked, the more disturbed, or confused, he looked.

"Reid. I take care of you, and I want to. You take care of me too. But when you're hurting bad you turn cold and shut me out. It never stops me from loving you, and I truly do understand. I know you're hurting, but it hurts me too."

Reid put his hand over her mouth. "Okay, let me see if I understand. You need me to tell you what's going on with me. You need me when I can't think straight. You need me when I can't move." He hesitated. "I'm so sorry. So sorry." He reached to pull her to him and held her close.

As he was beginning to wrap his mind around what she had said, she pushed away so she could look into his face again. "Now you tell me. What happened that made you question me like this?"

"I was just with Thomas and Sarah. William's been injured. Burned. Thomas is suffering because he's seen burns and knows what they're like. Sarah's looking to him for strength. She's trying to hold onto the truth and not let her fear get out of control. But she's been

in a fire and remembers how frightened she was. She wasn't burned, but she came out of it blind. She's looking to Thomas for comfort, and he can't give it. He's hurting too much. She's hardening herself against her own pain and turning to the Lord for help.

"Thomas has pushed Sarah away because of his own fear and concern for William, and Sarah's shutting Thomas out because he's not there to comfort her. They should both be seeking the Lord together."

Reid took his wife into his arms again. She could hear the distress in his voice. "I don't ever want either of us to do that. We need to be one mind, focused together, looking to the same outcome—hope."

Chipeta held to her husband, now feeling his pain for Thomas and Sarah too. "What can we do to help them?"

"I don't know. We're going to have to pray about it. Right now, I need to tell Dad about William. I guess everybody else needs to know too, but I'm not sure it's my place to tell them. I mean, Thomas and Sarah didn't call anyone. I don't know if they don't want to talk about it with others or if they want people around or if they want people to leave them alone."

"Well, you go tell Papa, and I'll go stay with Sarah a little while. I'll find out if Sarah is okay with us telling the others, and I'll see if I can find out what they need."

Reid nodded. "I love you."

"You'll always be the one I love," she said, kissing his hand. Chipeta turned to walk in the direction of the Stewart home.

"Chipeta?" She turned around to look at her husband as he spoke. "I'm going to try to do better, about telling you how I feel. But it's hard. If I don't say it out loud, it doesn't have to be true. I can ignore it better." He hesitated and then added, "My back's been hurting all day."

"I know. I could tell." She ran back to hug him again. Letting go, she said, "You've been on your feet too much. Now you be careful walking on this road." She looked into his eyes, smiled, and headed to Sarah's house.

Reid watched Chipeta get smaller in the distance as he slowly moved toward his father's home. That woman was a pillar of strength for him. He trusted and depended on her so much, and she never

complained. Scripture came to his mind. *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*¹

Yes, the church was the bride of Christ, and everything Christ did, he did because he loved his bride. Reid loved his wife too, and he hoped he showed her how much.

Another scripture came to his mind. *A good woman is hard to find, and worth far more than diamonds.*² “Yes, Lord,” Reid said out loud. “She is worth more than any amount of treasure. She is my treasure. She has been my treasure since the beginning.”

Reid thought back to the circumstances surrounding their marriage. Chipeta had been raped and had become pregnant. They had married to protect Chipeta’s honor. And then Chipeta had been attacked again, and the baby had died. Reid had not been there to protect her either time. She had suffered much.

But God used the circumstances for good. Reid now spoke scripture out loud. “We can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.”³

Reid thought of the sermon he had preached just a few Sundays ago. God had slapped him in the face. Chipeta had been there in front of him for six years, and he saw her only as a classmate, someone to study with. It took a slap in the face, her being attacked, to show him that he cared for her. God had put this woman in his life to strengthen him and to take care of him. She was there to reflect God’s love to him, to their family, and to the town they lived in.

Chipeta was accepted in town now. It hadn’t always been that way. In the beginning, she had been rejected because of her Indian blood and ostracized by the other ladies. It wasn’t until after the baby had died and Reid had been hurt that the women in town came to her, asking for forgiveness.

He stopped to rest a moment and to thank God that the Spirit had pushed him into caring for this woman. This woman was so much a part of him now.

¹ Ephesians 5:25.

² Proverbs 31:10 (MSG).

³ Romans 8:28 (MSG).

Reid began walking again, looking toward his father’s home, and he suddenly thought about his mother. His father had one photographed image of her that was taken just before her first husband had died. Reid had looked at it as a child and had imagined his mother in the house with them. But they were just a child’s dreams.

Now he thought of his mother as his father’s wife. His father had talked of her often when Reid was a boy. Reid had never considered the loss this man must have felt when his wife died. The lonely days of caring for him and his brother and sister alone, the loss of companionship, of encouragement, of care, and of love. But his father had lost two wives. How he must have suffered.

Reid tripped slightly on the rutted road and caught himself. Then he stopped to steady his legs. He saw Thomas coming toward him across the pasture near the tree line. Reid stood watching, getting his balance and letting his back recover from the jolt it had just felt. He said a brief prayer, asking God to give him the words Thomas needed to hear.

Thomas looked up, and Reid could see the irritation on his face as he rolled his eyes and looked away. He knew Thomas didn’t want to talk anymore. But God was giving Reid thoughts that needed to be passed on to his brother-in-law.

As Thomas leaned over to crawl through the fence, Reid said, “Thomas, you need to go be with Sarah.”

“I can’t. I can’t deal with her optimism right now.”

“It’s hope, Thomas. She has hope that God is taking care of William. The only way you can help your son right now is to pray. You can’t do anything else for him. And you can’t second-guess what he did. He’s a grown man, and his actions are his business. If he comes to you, you can help him, care for him, and love him the way you do me when I’m hurting. But he’s not here with you right now. Your wife is though, and she needs you. You can make a difference in her life right now. Just go be with her. Listen to her. She’ll help you too, if you let her.”

Thomas lowered his head and shook it gently. Reid could tell he still wasn’t sure what to do.

“Do you remember the story about King David in 2 Samuel?” Reid asked.

Thomas shook his head again. He didn’t care about the story in 2 Samuel right now.

But Reid wasn’t stopping. “David’s son was sick and dying. David refused to eat, and he lay on the ground praying for his son. For seven days, he cried and prayed, and no one could console him. And then his son died. King David got up and washed and cleaned himself and went to worship God. When he finished, he asked for food.

“Those with him asked, ‘Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead you get up and eat!’

“He answered, ‘While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, “Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.” But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.’¹

“William didn’t die like that child did, Thomas. Be thankful and praise God. You can still pray for him. He’s not dead. And you can still go be the husband your wife needs you to be.”

The doctor nodded. “You’re right. I know that.” Thomas turned and started walking down the road. Reid continued toward his father’s home.

Thomas arrived at home to find Sarah and Chipeta at the kitchen table praying. He stopped to listen as Sarah prayed.

“Lord, you said, ‘I will restore you to health, I will heal your wounds.’² Father, we cry out to you ‘Heal (him), Lord, and (he) will be healed.’³

¹ 2 Samuel 12:21b–23

² Jeremiah 30:17.

³ Jeremiah 17:14a.

“You have already saved his life and ‘you are the one I praise.’¹ Lord, you have also said, ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.’² Jesus is our Jehovah-Rapha, our Lord who heals. He healed the blind, the deaf, the lepers, and the lame in the New Testament.

“And in the Old Testament you said, ‘If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you.’³ Lord, you heal. You have always healed.

“I don’t know what William needs, but you do. I don’t know how badly he was hurt, but you do. I can’t take care of him, I can’t heal him, but you can. We need you today. We need your healing, your grace, your mercy, and your comfort. We need your love and hope. Father, bring us hope!”

Sarah paused as she wiped her eyes and blew her nose. Chipeta spoke to God now.

“Father, you are William’s creator. Lord, we ‘do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so (we) cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.’⁴ Lord, you know William. You have always known William. You know his faith rests in your Son. Jesus said, ‘According to your faith let it be done to you.’⁵ I know William’s faith is strong enough to overcome whatever you have set before him. He was your child before he was Sarah’s. He will be your child long after the rest of us are gone.”

“That’s it!” Thomas interrupted. “That’s it! He is God’s child, not mine. He isn’t mine to worry about. He’s God’s. ‘See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!’”⁶

¹ Jeremiah 17:14b.

² Hebrews 13:8.

³ Exodus 15:26.

⁴ Ecclesiastes 11:5.

⁵ Matthew 9:29b.

⁶ 1 John 3:1a.

Sarah added, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”¹ She stood up and reached for Thomas.

He took her into his arms and raised his face to heaven in praise as he breathed a sigh of relief.

Chipeta stood up and moved quietly out of the house, leaving the couple alone. As she walked home, she continued to pray for Sarah and Thomas and for herself and Reid. There had been hard times, and she was sure there would be more. They would all need to hold to the Lord for strength to endure what was to come. She didn’t know why she felt this way.

She felt she needed to pray for her family as she walked home. She prayed especially for her husband and for their eldest son.

CHAPTER 5

Reid stepped out of the hardware store with the part he needed to repair Chipeta’s oven door. The sun was especially bright, and he squinted his eyes against the glare. He already had a headache, and the bright sun was making his head hurt more.

He had thought about getting himself some of those sun cheaters, but couldn’t bring himself to purchase them. He already had a pair of eyeglasses that he used when he had a lot to read. They were uncomfortable around his ear on the side of his head that had been injured. No amount of twisting and pulling had made them feel any better. He had finally broken that arm off in frustration late one night and now wore them propped awkwardly on his nose and one ear.

Those sun cheaters would be uncomfortable too and would attract attention he didn’t want. He might be able to get away with wearing the dark glasses in the city, but not here in Harris. Everyone would notice and comment.

He had taken some aspirin and was going home early to see if he could get rid of the pain. He shaded his eyes, pulling his hat lower in front of his face, and looked at the ground in front of him. He rounded the corner of the building, not looking up, and put his hand out bracing himself against the wall. He held the oven part in the same hand, steadying himself as he made his way up the steps to the boardwalk using his cane.

As he reached the third step, his shoulder bumped into something, someone. This person dropped the box they were carrying. The contents bounced down the steps and spilled onto the ground.

¹ John 1:12–13b.

The collision jolted Reid and threw his balance off. He dropped his hands to the top step to keep from falling and then turned to sit on the steps.

"I am so sorry," he began to apologize but was interrupted by a familiar voice.

"Well, you should be! Look what you've done!"

"Let me help," another voice said. Reid saw a boy begin to retrieve the woman's belongings.

Mrs. Leachman had just gone to the mercantile and had purchased a large quantity of items. She had arrived at the store expecting to be confronted by Cecil Montgomery, the owner, about her outstanding bill. But instead, she had found the bill paid in full. She thought he had probably made a mistake in his accounting, but she was happy to let that mistake stand. Mr. Montgomery, however, never made a mistake in his books and knew exactly who had paid her bill, along with a few others.

Reid was sitting on the step allowing his back to recover before he tried to stand again. He had not looked up.

Mrs. Leachman was standing on the top step with her hands on her hips and her back to the sun. Reid knew he wouldn't be able to look at her.

"Are you just going to sit there and let someone else pick up your mess?" she asked loudly.

"Yes, ma'am. I am," Reid said. "Thank you, Jerry. Was anything busted?"

"No, sir. It doesn't look like it."

Reid continued to sit on the step. "Mrs. Leachman, I am sorry. Can someone help you carry this? I'll be happy to find someone."

"You have your nerve! You'll find someone," she said with a self-righteous attitude. "Can't even pick up an old lady's belongings yourself. I've never seen anyone with such awful manners."

The boy interrupted, "Ma'am, I have your things. Where would you like me to take them?"

"Nowhere!" she roared. Then she pointed to Reid. "He can carry them!"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Leachman, but I can't."

She was getting louder and more demanding as she spoke. People had stopped to watch. "The very least you can do is look at me when you try to apologize. Didn't that fancy father of yours teach you to look people in the eye?"

"Yes, ma'am, he did." Reid turned to look at the woman, but he couldn't even see her with the sun right over her shoulder. The bright sunlight sent sharp stabs through his head, and he jerked his head away, squeezing his eyes shut.

"Jerry?" Reid said.

"Yes, sir."

"Would you go across the street and get my brother?"

"Yes, sir." Jerry set the box down and ran to Cleve's law office to get Reid's older brother.

"I can carry your things, ma'am," another voice said. It was Jerry's father, Wayne. Wayne also served on the church's deacon board with Reid. They knew each other well.

But not many in town knew exactly what was wrong with the young federal judge. Neither Reid nor his family talked about his problem. Nobody talked about it. Wayne wouldn't be able to explain to Mrs. Leachman why Reid couldn't help her.

Wayne put the box under one arm and put his hand out to the woman. "Let me help you down these steps."

The woman huffed as she passed Reid and began complaining loudly to the man helping her about the irresponsible young man still sitting on the steps.

Cleve arrived quickly in response to his little brother's call. Reid had his hand over his eyes when his brother spoke to him.

"Reid! Are you okay?" Cleve began asking questions before he got to his brother. "What happened?"

"I ran into someone," Reid responded simply as Cleve arrived. Cleve sat down on the step beside Reid, putting a hand on Reid's shoulder.

"It was as much her fault as it was his," Jerry said. "She was looking across the street and not paying attention."

"No, Jerry. It's okay. I wasn't looking up. I was looking at my feet and these steps. I had my hat pulled down. I couldn't see who

was up there. Thanks for your help, Jerry,” Reid said, dismissing the lad. “Cleve, can you take me home?”

Cleve retrieved the cane from the ground and reached to help Reid up. Reid kept looking at the ground, and Cleve knew there was a problem. Reid was moving slower than usual and wasn’t opening his eyes very wide. They made their way across the street to Cleve’s automobile. Reid got in, and Cleve went to the other side and flipped a switch, then moved a lever, and went to crank the engine.

Reid kept his hand over his right eye all the way home. His head was turned away from the sun and away from Cleve. Cleve tried to talk to him, but Reid wasn’t talking. He’d only give a yeah or uh-uh in answer to questions. Cleve knew his brother wasn’t paying attention to what he was saying.

Chipeta came onto the porch when she heard the motorcar. She knew the sound of her own Model T’s engine, and this wasn’t it. She watched as Cleve got out and trotted to the other side of the automobile to help Reid.

Seeing her husband, Chipeta went to him, putting an arm around him. “What happened?” she asked, as Reid moved his weight from his brother to his wife.

“I had a collision with Mrs. Leachman of all people,” he responded. “She’s not happy at all.”

“Oh, that woman’s not happy with anything. She stays miserable,” Chipeta said.

Cleve followed the two through the house and into the bedroom. As Reid sat on the bed, he asked Chipeta to hand him the medicine on the top of the bureau. He only took it for severe headaches, and she knew that. The medication knocked him out, and he didn’t like being disconnected from his family. He opened the bottle and drank some of the dark-red liquid straight, without measuring the correct amount.

“Do you need me to do anything else?” Cleve asked.

Reid had his hand pressed to his right eye again, his face turned away. “Thanks for your help, Cleve. Would you call Thomas? Tell him I think I did something to my back.”

Cleve nodded. Chipeta looked up and smiled at Cleve, mouthing the words, “Thank you.”

Cleve turned to leave but stopped at the door, looking back into the room, watching his brother. Chipeta was lifting Reid’s feet onto the bed as he lay down, and she began to unlace his boots.

“My head was already hurting, so I went by the hardware store and got that part we needed to fix your oven. I was headed to the Ford to come home when I knocked a box out of her arms. We were on the steps beside the hardware store. I dropped the part somewhere. I don’t know what happened to it. When I looked up at her on the boardwalk, the sun was right behind her. I just can’t be in that bright sunlight anymore,” Reid explained to his wife in frustration, pressing the palm of his hand onto his right eye again. “There, I said it. Now I have to deal with it.”

“That’s okay,” Chipeta said. “We’ll figure it out together.” She kissed him and softly added, “Thank you for explaining. Thank you for talking to me.”

Cleve left intending to go back to his office to call Thomas, thinking about his little brother. Reid didn’t talk about his problems. They would see each other several times a week, at church, at the courthouse, and once in a while on the street. If they both happened to be at the courthouse around lunch, they would eat together. There were usually other people around, and while they might talk about their families, they didn’t talk about anything personal. Cleve didn’t realize Reid was still having headaches. He thought the only problem Reid had was his back.

Every time Cleve thought of Reid’s injuries, he would remember seeing Reid lying in bed at his sister Sarah’s house a few weeks after they brought him home. His eyes had been closed, and his voice harsh from an injury to his throat. His speech was sometimes broken and hard to understand. Reid wasn’t able to sit up or walk. There had been a single tear running down Reid’s face that morning, and it tore at Cleve’s heart, even all these years later.

He never found out why Reid was crying that day. Cleve had asked, but Reid hadn’t answered him. That happened a lot. Someone would ask Reid how he was doing, and Reid would ignore the ques-

tion. Now Cleve wondered if it was because his little brother didn't want to share his suffering with others.

Cleve drove past the Stewart home and saw their automobile parked outside, so he stopped to tell the doctor Reid needed him. Then he drove back to the hardware store and looked under the steps to see if he could find the part that Reid had dropped. But Cleve saw nothing. He went inside and asked for the same part that Reid had bought earlier. He would go back to Reid's this evening and fix the oven.

Wayne Hammons had walked Mrs. Leachman home and had tried to explain to her that Reid was unable to carry her box of goods. He had some physical problems and enough trouble just walking. She was unmoved by his explanation and still felt she deserved penitence from the young man.

She had told Wayne "the judge" had every advantage in life and should be more aware of those around him and those that needed assistance. Deacon Hammons had left graciously, disappointed that he had been unable to influence her opinion about one of the town's most generous and humble residents.

As Wayne and his son left town, they drove their wagon to Reid's house. Chipeta had been with Reid but came onto the porch to greet the visitors, as she did with all who visited their home. She was upset and wanted to get rid of whoever this was so she could get back to her husband. James and Stephen came out the door with her.

"Hello, Mrs. Britt."

"Mr. Hammons. What can we do for you?" Chipeta asked.

Hammons climbed down from the wagon, followed by Jerry who went to sit with Stephen on the edge of the porch. "I'd like to see Reid. We were there when he fell this afternoon, and I wanted to check on him."

Chipeta hesitated. Reid had not told her he fell. "Dr. Stewart is with him right now. He was hurt."

"I was afraid of that," Hammons said. "Do you think I could wait and talk with him when the doctor is finished?"

How would she explain this? No, Reid would not want to see him. He had already taken the medication, and by the time the doctor finished, Reid would need to sleep.

"I don't know that he will want visitors. Is there something I could help you with?"

"Well, ma'am," he hesitated. "I know Reid has some physical problems, but I wasn't able to give Mrs. Leachman a clear explanation of why he couldn't do what she asked of him. She's difficult and is still pretty insistent that Reid is privileged and spoiled. I thought maybe he would want to go over there and straighten things out. I came to offer to go with him."

"I see," Chipeta said, looking hard at the man before her. "He might want to, but he's not able to right now. I'll tell him you came by and what you said. He'll get in touch with you if he wants you to go with him. Thank you for stopping by."

Chipeta's anger at this woman for her hateful attitude toward her husband was growing quickly. She turned to go back in the house, trying to control her emotions, which were already on edge because of her husband's accident.

"Ma'am. If you don't mind my asking, just what's wrong with Reid?"

Holding her emotions in while she took care of her husband, and then while listening to Wayne Hammons, caused the anger to build quickly. She wanted to cry but instead turned abruptly and blurted out, "His skull was crushed, and his back was broken! He has constant headaches, and his back sometimes hurts so bad he can't walk. If she thinks that's a privilege, then she can just—" Chipeta threw her hand over her mouth as her eyes widened. Everything she had just said was true, but it was a mistake to say it. She shouldn't have said any of it.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Please don't repeat any..." And she began to cry throwing her hand to her mouth again. She turned away to face the wall. Wayne could see her shoulders shaking as she sobbed. She leaned on the wall and sank to the floor. The one thing her husband

had asked her never to do, she had just done—tell other people that he was in constant pain.

James turned and ran into the house. He returned quickly with Thomas who knelt beside Chipeta and spoke to her softly. Deacon Hammons couldn't hear what was being said. Then Thomas helped her up and sent her into the house.

The doctor turned to Wayne Hammons. "Wayne, why don't you come sit and I'll see if I can straighten this out?" Then he turned to the boys. "You, boys, take a walk around back and watch the younger children. Keep them out of the house, and you stay outside too."

Both of the men watched the three boys leave. Then Wayne joined Thomas on the porch. They shook hands before sitting down on the steps. They had known each other for years and had always been friendly while at church but had little contact elsewhere.

Both men sat shoulder to shoulder, facing the yard. Neither looked at the other.

"Wayne, I take it Chipeta just told you more about Reid than he wanted anyone to know. So I'm going to answer your questions, and I'm going to trust that you will keep this information to yourself. Reid's a very private person, and we need to respect his wishes."

Wayne nodded. "I'd never do anything to offend him." And then he quietly asked, "How did he get hurt?"

Thomas was silent for a few moments himself. He also knew more than he should. He didn't think Reid remembered telling him about the beatings and about being left for dead at the hands of the criminals in Chicago. Reid had spent time in the hospital and then had been brought home. He was so badly injured when he arrived home that Thomas didn't think Reid remembered any of those days.

"He was working for the Department of Justice right out of law school. He was investigating criminal activity when he was beaten by the very criminals he was investigating. He was left for dead, buried under rubble. When he was found and taken to the hospital, it took months for him to recover. It's a miracle that he can even sit up and talk, much less walk. No! It's a miracle he's alive. He should have been dead ten times over," Thomas said.

"Chipeta said he's in constant pain."

"Probably. He never tells me. I don't think he tells anyone unless it's her, maybe his father. He just calls me when he needs help. Right now, he has a headache so bad he can't see straight. But he didn't call me about that. His back is messed up again. We work so hard for him to be able to walk. Every time something like this happens, I think it's over, that he'll stop moving, and that he'll be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. But he keeps coming back. It surprises me every time."

"Is there anything I can do to help him?" Hammons asked.

"Don't let him know what you know. Don't tell anyone. I mean anyone! Be there for him, like you were today," Thomas advised. "He appreciated that more than he can express. I'm sure he'd appreciate you checking on him in a few days, but right now he just hurts too much."

"What do you think we should do about Mrs. Leachman?" Wayne asked.

"Let it go. You can't explain something to someone who doesn't want to know the truth. Reid's one of the strongest men I know. He'll be able to withstand whatever she throws at him."

"You don't think he'd talk to me about his injuries?" Hammons asked.

"No. But if you really want to know what happened, read the novel *Undercover Lawyer*. It doesn't tell the whole story, but you'll understand more. If you're going to read it, you may as well start with *Mountain Marshal*. The lawyer story will make more sense if you know the story of the marshal. They're both at the library." Thomas got up and shook Wayne's hand again. "You remember what I said. Not a word to anyone, including Reid."

Hammons nodded.

Chipeta lay down beside her husband touching him softly and looking into his sleeping face. How could she betray him like this?

He opened his eyes slowly and looked into her face that was blanketed by the shadows in the room. The shades had been pulled down, and the room had only a little light coming in from the hallway and around the edge of the shades. But her face was clear because it was close to him.

He smiled gently. But as he continued to watch through sleepy eyes, he recognized something he'd never seen before. He squeezed his eyes tight for a moment, trying to focus better, and looked into her face again.

Then he asked, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart."¹ He smiled sadly.

"Because I love you so much and I don't want to see you hurt," she replied. She couldn't tell him what she had just said to Wayne Hammons. He had enough pain right now. She'd wait until he felt better, and then she would apologize and explain her anger at Mrs. Leachman. She was still angry. How could anyone accuse her husband of being privileged or spoiled? She reached out to gently caress his face.

He had grown up with nothing except hard work and a loving father who was often not at home. Yes, he had gotten a university and law degree, but he had worked and sacrificed for it. She knew how he had spent long hours studying; she had studied with him.

He had told her his father had sold land to pay for the other children's education. He knew his father had barely enough to live on following his retirement. Reid didn't want his father to have to sell any more land. He didn't want his sister's husband to pay for his school either.

Chipeta knew how Reid had worked his way through the university as a telegraph operator at night, saving so that he would not have to work during law school and could concentrate on his studies. While he made good grades in undergraduate school, his scores had excelled at law school.

After he received his law degree, he had worked hard in a dangerous job while with the DOJ. He had been injured and had almost died. He still suffered with these injuries.

¹ Nehemiah 2:2b.

He did his job well now. As a federal judge, he often had to make hard decisions that would determine a man's life or a business's future. These businesses sometimes employed hundreds of people, and their livelihood hung in balance depending on the outcome of his decision. But he still had to uphold the law. He didn't make these decisions lightly and would pray over them for hours, sometimes days.

And he took care of the children in town. That was his passion, the children. His friend, Dan McClelland, was a teacher at the Harris school. He kept an eye out for children whose families might need help and would pass the information along to Reid. Reid would find a way to get the children what they needed. Sometimes it was clothing, sometimes food, sometimes a job for their father.

Sometimes, it was a compassionate adult to talk to. There were a few older ladies at church that Reid turned to as substitute grandmothers. He would ask them to volunteer at the school and then to focus on a particular child. Relationships had grown, and the children often stayed friends with the elderly ladies for many years.

Once in a while, Reid would find a man that would also do this. These relationships would usually flourish too. When Reid couldn't find a man to do this, his father would often show up at the schoolyard. The former federal marshal would tell stories of his Old West lawman days, and he always attracted the attention of the boys that needed a strong, moral hero. This was the only place Travis would tell these stories, and he only did it to help the boys that struggled with finding their place in a confusing and sometimes complicated life.

Once in a while, Luke would show up. His loud thunderous laughter and joking were just as welcoming to the boys as the warm hugs of the women were to the girls.

All of it was done in silence, and no one in town, including the teachers who struggled with the boys' behavior, had ever questioned where these blessings came from. Most were just appreciative that what was needed had arrived.

Reid remembered what his wife said about reassuring her that he would be all right. He now told her, "I'll be okay. Just give me a day or two to rest," and he closed his eyes.

The gossip started quickly. Mrs. Leachman lost no time in telling others of "the judge's" careless and rude behavior. People listened to her. You couldn't help but listen to her. She got in people's business and wouldn't shut up. She shared her story of being the victim of an out-of-control spoiled man who used other people as his servants and took no responsibility for his own actions.

The gossip moved around town, and while the story was repeated, there was little talk, beyond the story, of the man she spoke of. The talk was about the woman who had no understanding of forgiveness or compassion for others.

When someone would ask Reid about the incident, he would smile gently and say, "Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift."¹ 'It is to one's glory to overlook an offense.'²

¹ Ephesians 4:7 (ESV).

² Proverbs 19:11.

CHAPTER 6

Reid could hear the thunder in the distance, and he knew Saamel would be running into the bedroom soon. Reid hadn't been able to sleep anyway and decided to get up and be with the boy when the storm woke him up. Sitting with his youngest son in his own bed might keep the boy there until the storm was gone, and the child could fall asleep again. Hopefully, it would keep the boy out of his parents' bed tonight.

A dim light burned in the hallway and filtered into the bedrooms. Reid peeked in on the girls and pulled the cover over Jeannie. The night was cooling off. Seven-year-old Jeannie was curled into a ball with nothing over her pink gingham nightgown. He tucked the blanket around her shoulders, and she kicked. The covers were off again. Reid smiled and pulled the blanket back over the child. Abigail was stretched out on her stomach, next to her sister, rolled in the other side of the blanket, sleeping comfortably.

Moving to the next room, Reid passed Matthew. The young man's feet were hanging off the end of his bed. If he would slide up, he could keep his feet on the bed and under the covers. But that never happened. The boy had always slept with his feet hanging off. His feet would get cold, and that's why he wore his socks to bed most of the year.

He passed James and Stephen in the next bed. They both slept on the edge, with a wide empty gulf in the middle. Each had his own blanket.

Reid had always had the urge to crawl in between them from the foot of the bed and see what would happen when they woke up

the next morning. But he knew his clumsy movements would cause too much disturbance to the bed, and they would wake up. He had talked Esa into doing it one evening, but the boy hadn't stayed all night. He said his two older brothers kicked too much.

In the last bed next to the wall, his two youngest boys slept peacefully. Esa was in the middle of the bed, and Saamel lay curled up against him sideways, holding his flute. Reid smiled. He pulled on Esa to get him onto his side of the bed. Then slowly pulled the flute from Saamel's hand, laying it to the side. The father turned his youngest son around so that he laid straight in the bed, and Reid pushed him toward the middle.

He wouldn't be able to do this much longer. Esa was already too big for him to tug on much. He had to be careful when he moved him. Saamel was also getting bigger. It was getting hard for Reid to pull him around in the bed too. Or maybe, Reid thought, he was just getting weaker. That wasn't a happy thought.

Reid picked up the flute, moving it to the window sill. This was the one thing that Saamel did well. He had found his mother's flute in the chest in the family room. He wasn't supposed to be in that chest and had taken the flute without permission. When his mother heard him playing with it, she had taken it away from him and scolded him for disturbing something that wasn't his.

The child had cried and asked forgiveness. Then he had politely asked his mother if he could see her flute again. She had consented and had showed him how to hold it and make the different sounds. The child had played with it for hours and then returned it to his mother. The next day, he asked again, and eventually Chipeta had given in, allowing Saamel to keep the hollow wooden flute.

Saamel was proud to have the instrument and had taken great care with it. When his grandfather came to the house, Saamel had eagerly shown his grandfather how to make music. His grandfather had loved the sound, and together they spent hours with the instrument. Eventually Saamel had begun to play tunes that actually sounded good. He was now able to play the flute and repeat almost any tune he heard. It was his most prized possession and his favorite pastime.

He played it so much that his brothers and sisters tired of it and complained. So Saamel would often take his flute and go to his grandpa's house. There, he was allowed to play as loud and as long as he wanted, and nobody complained.

Saamel's aunt Sarah had found out about the flute and had begun helping Saamel with it. She had been a music teacher in Denver and loved the thought of teaching her youngest nephew and sharing music with another family member.

All of her children had learned music, but none were overly interested. As the children grew and became adults, Reid had been the only one she could share the joy of singing with. But that had ended with the injuries to his throat. His voice had changed to a rough, hoarse growl, and his singing wasn't pretty anymore.

Reid sat down on the edge and pulled his feet onto the bed just as thunder rumbled through the house. Saamel stirred but didn't wake. Reid lay down, drawing the boy onto his shoulder and wrapping his arm around him. There was a bright flash of lightning just outside the window, and Reid squeezed his eyes together to block out the light. Then the boom of thunder came.

Saamel woke up and let out a short scream.

"Shhh. It's okay. I'm right here," Reid said, pulling the boy tighter.

"What are you doing in my bed?" the child asked.

"I heard the thunder coming and knew you'd be scared," his father said.

"Did it wake you up?" Saamel asked.

"No. I was already awake," his father whispered. "Why don't you close your eyes and pretend to be asleep?"

"Why?"

"Because it's nighttime and you're supposed to be asleep," Reid answered.

Boom!

Saamel jumped and threw an arm across his father, burying his face in Reid's chest. "That one was close!" Saamel said out loud.

"So am I," Reid said quietly.

"Be quiet," Esa barked.

Reid and Saamel both giggled.

Boom!

Saamel jumped again.

Reid said, “The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded.”¹

“Are you scared too?” Saamel asked his father.

“No. God’s just reminding us that he has the power to control the weather. ‘It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding he has stretched out the heavens. When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, and he brings forth the wind from his storehouses.’² ‘And he brings storm clouds from the end of the earth; he makes lightning for the storms, and brings out the wind from his storehouses.’³”

“That’s pretty,” the boy said. “It sounds like music.”

“You can make music out of it. Ask your grandpa to help you. He’s good at making music out of scripture. We used to do it all the time when I was young.”

Saamel smiled. “If you’re not scared, why are you keeping your eyes closed?”

“I keep them closed because the sudden bright light hurts my eyes.”

“The thunder hurts me,” Saamel told his father.

“Where?” Reid asked.

Saamel took his father’s hand and laid it over his heart.

Reid asked, “Does it make your heart jump?”

“Yes, sir. It feels like it jumps out of my chest.”

“You want me to hold it in place?”

Saamel smiled. “You can’t do that.”

“Watch me,” Reid whispered.

They waited. *Boom!*

¹ 2 Samuel 22:14.

² Jeremiah 10:12–13 (ESV).

³ Psalm 135:7 (GNT).

“See,” Reid said. “Your heart is still in your chest. I held it in place.”

“Be quiet!” Esa said louder this time.

They both giggled again.

“My heart still jumped,” Saamel said.

“But it didn’t go anywhere. It’s still in your chest,” Reid said. “Now you close your eyes, and I’ll hold to your heart so it doesn’t leave. You go back to sleep.”

The child’s small soft hand reached to hold the reassuring fingers that lay across his chest.

Boom! That one was a little farther away. Reid began to softly sing as Saamel nestled comfortably against his father. Reid’s rough voice was scratchy, and his voice broke as he sang, but it soothed his son. When the boy was asleep, Reid headed back down the hall.

He looked in on Jeannie. She was uncovered, so he covered her up again. Then he went to his own room and climbed into bed. Chipeta rolled toward him, wrapping her arm around his and put her toes to his feet.

“Your feet are cold,” Chipeta commented.

“It’s cooling off,” her husband answered quietly.

“Did he go back to sleep?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Are you going to sleep?” Chipeta asked.

“I doubt it. Do you mind if I turn the lamp on?”

“That’s okay.” She laughed softly. “I’ve gotten used to sleeping with it on.”

“Thanks.” Reid kissed her gently and pulled his arm away. He rolled over, switched on the lamp beside the bed, and picked up his Bible.

It had been three weeks since the episode at the hardware store. Reid had recovered quickly and had long since gotten back to his daily routine.

This coming Sunday, he would preach again.

It was early, and the deacons had their regular Friday morning breakfast and prayer meeting. Several left to open businesses or return to their jobs or homes. Three of them stayed at the church to continue cleaning out the pastor's study in the back of the building. Wayne Hammons, Perry Pesnell, and Reid Britt had gone through the books and had decided to keep a few at the church. The next pastor might be able to use them.

Wayne took a few, and Reid had several in a stack to take home with him. The rest would be donated to the local library.

As they went through the shelves, Perry found a copy of *Mountain Marshal* and *Undercover Lawyer*. He commented on the old dime novels in the midst of the theological library. As he handed the paperbacks to Reid, he laughed at Brother Nick's taste in reading material. Reid looked at the covers briefly and threw them into the trash pile.

When Reid turned around, Wayne was watching him.

"Interesting stories," Wayne commented. "I read them. They're supposed to be true, but there's no names."

"Yeah," Reid commented. "I read them too."

Wayne continued, "I heard the author used to live in town."

"He did," Reid said.

"How well did you know him?" Wayne asked.

"He was living here when I was a kid. I worked for him at the newspaper a couple of summers right before I left for school. He sold the paper and went to Topeka while I was in Denver. Went to work at Cleve's office there. He died a couple of years ago."

Perry left the room to take a box to his wagon. Wayne asked, "Are you ashamed of what you did?"

"What?" Reid turned to look at Wayne.

"I mean, it was a good thing, stopping those men and saving those girls. Why don't you want people to know?"

"How do you know?" Reid asked, a disturbed look in his eyes.

"I went to your house the day you and Mrs. Leachman ran into each other. Your wife was really upset about you getting hurt and what Mrs. Leachman said. She told me how you were injured and that you still had pain from it."

"No, she didn't," Reid said softly, shaking his head. He was in shock. "No," he said a second time, a little louder. How could Chipeta have told Wayne any of this? She knew he didn't want other people to know.

Reid's face showed no change in expression, but Wayne saw the troubled look in Reid's eyes and knew he had made a mistake. He started to open his mouth in an attempt to fix his mistake, but Reid turned abruptly and left the building without a word.

Reid headed for the Model T. He would go home to find out exactly what she had said. Reid was angry when he started the automobile, a feeling he wasn't used to. He pulled the crank too hard and felt his back pop. He gasped! At this moment, he couldn't straighten up completely. He moved slowly to get into the automobile.

Now he was also angry with himself for not having more self-control. Anger was an emotion he didn't feel very often, and he didn't like it. He fought to calm his emotions.

By the time he got home, the anger was gone, and he was just hurt. His soul ached within him. The strain in his back, mixed with the tension he felt, made his body hurt all over.

Reid got out of the motorcar and forced himself to stand straight. He stopped at the front of the automobile to look at his wife. Chipeta had come onto the porch to meet him with a smile on her face. "How was breakfast?"

He didn't answer her but moved slowly toward the house, watching her as he hardened his face, trying to keep it from showing the pain he felt.

The smile left her face. "What are you doing home?"

He would give her the benefit of his doubt. She was innocent until proven guilty. He still trusted her. He wanted to trust her.

He walked to her but didn't stop. Grabbing her hand as he passed, he led her into the kitchen. Reid sat down and pulled the chair out beside him. His face was gloomy as he said, "Sit down. We need to talk."

"What is it?" she asked, taking the seat next to him.

“You’ve asked me to open up to you, to share my feelings with you. You told me that it’s important to tell the truth and not hold what I was feeling inside,” he reminded her.

She nodded, concerned that his breathing was getting heavy, the way it did when he was in pain.

“Now you do the same. You tell me the truth. Total honesty. Everything. Can you do that?” Reid asked, his voice harsh as he tried to control the growing discomfort.

“Of course.” She still didn’t know what was going on.

“What did you tell Wayne Hammons?” he asked.

Chipeta’s eyes got wide, and she threw her hands over her mouth, gasping. She was speechless and began shaking her head. “I didn’t mean to.” She slid her hands from her face, and they met and joined together like she was praying. “I was angry at Mrs. Leachman.” She stopped, watching her husband who now had his eyes closed and jaw clenched, listening to her. Was he angry with her? She had never seen him angry before.

“What did you tell him?” Reid repeated.

“I told him she had no right to call you privileged or spoiled. You’re not. You are the most generous, kind, hardworking man—”

He interrupted, “What did you tell him about me?”

Her chin quivered. “I told him about your head and your back. I told him you were in pain all the time.”

He opened his eyes slowly to look at her and calmly asked, “What else?”

“That’s it,” she said.

As he looked at her, scripture came to his mind. *He who trusts in his own heart is a fool.*¹ His chest tightened. Had the Spirit told him this, or was it his own uncertainty causing him to twist scripture into a lie? He fought to remember the rest of that verse, but he couldn’t.

“Then how did he know about the book?” Reid asked.

“I don’t know. I didn’t say anything about it or your job or how you got hurt.” Chipeta reached out to touch her husband’s face. She had just hurt him, and she never intended to do that. She knew she

¹ Proverbs 28:26a (NKJV).

should have told him about the conversation, but Thomas said he had talked to Wayne. Wayne had assured him that he would not tell anyone.

Reid stood up slowly, pulling away from his wife’s hand. He seemed to be having trouble standing, couldn’t seem to get his balance. But all Chipeta saw was the hurt she had just caused the man she loved.

“Okay. I’m going to go lie down for a little while,” he said calmly. He began moving past the table holding on to anything he could reach. He continued to the bedroom. He knew he needed to call the doctor to help with his back, but instead he took the bottle of medicine off the bureau. Opening the top, he drank some without measuring it, sat it back on the bureau, and lay down on the bed. His back was still hurting, and he couldn’t lift his legs to get them onto the bed. His legs were bent at the knees and hanging off the edge.

Reid’s chest hurt more, the tightness growing. He was having trouble catching his breath. He wanted to think, but couldn’t. His brain wasn’t working, and his head had begun to hurt too. He closed his eyes, trying to relax.

“Lord, what’s happening?” He was doing everything he always did to keep his back and head from hurting, but it wasn’t working. The pain was growing swiftly.

The Spirit spoke. *Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.*¹

Joy. God wanted him to have joy because Wayne knew. How could he do that? His chest hurt bad. And his head was splitting.

“Chipeta!” Reid tried to call his wife but couldn’t get a good breath. “Chi...pet...!” His voice cracked. He knew he wasn’t loud enough.

Still no response. Was she even in the house?

“Chi...p...peta!” Reid reached toward the table beside the bed, twisting his body, to grab at anything he could get his hand on. If

¹ James 1:2–4 (HSCB).

he made enough noise, maybe she would come to check on him. He knocked his Bible to the floor, but it didn't make much noise when it hit. He swung his arm again and hit the lamp, knocking it to the floor with a clatter, and the glass shade shattered. He couldn't find anything else on the table.

Then he saw the medication on the bureau. He would use more and stop this pain. Reid began to roll from the bed, from the awkward position he was already in. But his attempt to stand failed, and he hit the floor hard.

The Spirit spoke again. *If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?*¹

Reid was certain the Lord was taking him home. He softly whispered, "Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God."² He clutched his chest, and the room faded into blackness.

¹ Matthew 16:24b–26 (ESV).

² Psalm 31:5 (ESV).

CHAPTER 7

Chipeta sat on the porch sobbing and talking to God. How could she have hurt this man that she cared so much for? How could she redeem herself? How could she make up for the pain she was causing him? How would she be able to ask forgiveness? She had picked up her Bible from the table in the sitting room when she came outside, and she now held it in her hands. She needed comfort. She opened the Bible and read,

With what shall I come to the Lord and bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?¹

There was a noise in the house, and she looked up from her reading. She didn't know what that noise was. Reid must be doing something. Her thoughts turned back to the scripture she had just read.

¹ Micah 6:6–8 (NASB 1995).

No, she didn't have to offer a sacrifice. Jesus had already done that. And God had already taken her firstborn. But God required justice, kindness, and humility. She would apologize and leave herself at Reid's mercy. She would humble herself before her husband and seek his forgiveness.

She returned to her reading. As she continued, she found scripture that was even more disturbing.

Put no trust in a neighbor; have no confidence in a friend; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms.¹

Could they not trust Wayne Hammons? Reid's friend? Was she not trustworthy either?

For the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house.²

No! She didn't want to believe it! She began to plead with God to straighten out this mess she had made. She didn't want her family torn apart by what she had done. She knew her emotions and her mind were raging against her, and she needed to get them under control. But she didn't know how. She continued reading.

But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.³

She cried out to the Lord for help. She cried to him for mercy. God would fix this. He was her hope, her salvation. She dropped

¹ Micah 7:5 (ESV).

² Micah 7:6 (ESV).

³ Micah 7:7.

to her knees crying, pleading, bowing before her God asking for forgiveness.

She wasn't paying attention when her father-in-law appeared in the yard with Saamel, carrying the chicken she needed to clean for supper.

He came to her, dropping the dead chicken on the steps, his arms outstretched. "Chipeta? What's wrong?"

She stood up and allowed him to take her into his arms. He held her as her crying continued. "I've done something horrible! I didn't mean to, but I hurt Reid. I can't believe this happened. It's all so wrong!"

"Shhh. I'm sure this ain't nothin' that can't be straighten out. Where's Reid?"

Chipeta pointed into the house and collapsed into the chair. Saamel stood at the edge of the porch, staring at his mother.

Travis moved from room to room looking for his son. He walked through the sitting room and then the dining room and looked into the kitchen. He went to Reid's office in the back of the house and then turned around, going back into the hallway. At the far end of the hall, in the bedroom, he saw Reid's feet on the floor on the opposite side of the bed.

Travis moved to his son quickly. He leaned on the bed and let himself to the floor. He rolled his son over. Reid didn't respond but laid limp on his father's lap. "Chipeta! Come 'ere! Fast!"

Chipeta came into the room and saw her husband in his father's arms, unmoving. She froze.

"Call Thomas!" Travis commanded. Chipeta didn't move. "Chipeta!" Travis shouted to get her attention. She looked at him and seemed to come to her senses. She turned around and ran the few steps down the hallway to the telephone. Travis looked up again and saw Saamel hiding behind the open door.

Chipeta came back into the room, and Travis pointed his daughter-in-law toward Saamel. She shooed him into his own room.

Thomas arrived to find the two men still on the floor in the bedroom. Travis had managed to straighten Reid's body so his back was no longer twisted. His head was being cradled gently by his father. The lamp was scattered in pieces near where the unconscious man lay.

The doctor tried to revive Reid, calling his name over and over and gently patting Reid on the cheek. But he didn't rouse. Thomas took smelling salts from his bag and held it to Reid's nose. The man on the floor jerked his head away, groaned, and began panting for air as he clutched at his chest. But his eyes didn't open.

"Reid, can you hear me?" the doctor asked.

Reid continued to grope at his chest. It took a few moments for Reid to nod his head.

"What happened?"

"My...chest...hurts." He softly pushed out one word at a time between breaths. His eyes were pressed together against the pain.

Thomas took out his stethoscope and put the drum to Reid's chest. "His heartbeat is fast. Really fast. Chipeta, come see if you can calm him down."

"No, I'm the reason he's upset. I can't calm him right now. I'll just make it worse." She backed away a few steps. Thomas could tell she was upset too.

"Papa, sing to him. That always works." Thomas got off the floor as Travis began to softly sing, gently stroking his son's face. Reid's face was twisted against the pain, frozen, and unmoving as it lay in his father's lap.

The doctor went to Chipeta. He took her arm and moved her into the hallway. "What happened?"

"He found out I talked to Wayne Hammons. He said something to Reid about the book." Chipeta shook her head. Panic was beginning to show because of the fear of what she had done. She had heard the pain in her husband's voice and saw it on his face. "I didn't say anything about the book. I don't know how he knew about it."

Thomas leaned back against the wall, feeling weak. "I do. He kept asking questions, and I told him to read the book. I also told him never to let Reid know that he knew." Thomas looked down and

saw Saamel watching them from the bedroom door. He walked over and pushed the boy back into his own room and closed the door. The doctor returned to Reid and Travis. Chipeta watched from the doorway, concerned but keeping her distance.

The doctor helped Travis off the floor, and together they moved Reid to the bed. Reid was still clutching his chest. The doctor continued to care for Reid as Travis sat next to his son quietly singing, continuing to stroke his son's face tenderly. Reid was calming, relaxing. His heartbeat was slowing, but his face still showed the discomfort. Reid finally fell asleep, and they all moved to the kitchen.

Thomas and Chipeta explained to Reid's father what had happened. Travis stared hard at them both as they spoke. Thomas felt like Papa was challenging them, that cold hard stare drilling into them. It made Thomas feel like a little boy being punished by his father. He thought he probably deserved it.

Travis shook his head. "Well, Reid's gonna 'ave ta deal with it now. He can't avoid it anymore." Travis sat down putting his hand to his face and combing through his beard with his fingers, looking at the table. His eyes wandered from one side to the other and back again. Then he let his arm drop to the table, and he patted the table a few times.

Looking to the doctor, he asked, "What's wrong with 'im right now?"

"I couldn't find anything. But if his head and back were already hurting, being upset could cause them to hurt more. His body's too fragile to take much. If he got really upset, it could have caused his chest to hurt too. All of it together could have caused him to black out. I think he just needs to calm down and let his body recover."

"There's no way 'round it," Travis said, tapping his thumb nervously on the table. "We've got ta end this. Thomas, call Wayne an' get 'im over 'ere."

"Now?" the doctor argued briefly, but Travis held his ground. Thomas eventually consented and made the call as Travis went back to his son.

Chipeta and Thomas went to the porch, both anxiously waiting for Hammons. Chipeta was still upset and afraid of what would

happen when Reid saw Wayne again. Thomas wanted to talk with Hammons away from Reid, before they were confronted by the suffering man.

Travis came onto the porch holding Saamel. He had found the boy lying beside his sleeping father, crying. The grandfather had held the boy and talked with him until he calmed.

“Chipeta!” Travis called.

She turned around to see Travis holding Saamel in his arms. Her eyes widened. She had forgotten about him. She went to take her son, but Saamel wouldn't let go of his grandfather.

Travis turned to Thomas. “Call Sarah. Take Saamel an' let 'im stay with 'er far a while.”

Thomas reached to take the boy, but Saamel squirmed from his grandfather and ran out the door. He was down the road and disappearing behind the trees by the time Thomas got off the porch. The doctor returned to the house to call his wife, telling her to go outside and wait for Saamel.

“He's upset,” Thomas said into the telephone. “Would you take care of him? Call us back if he doesn't show up in a few minutes.” They didn't hear back from Sarah.

It seemed like it took hours for Wayne Hammons to arrive. He immediately began apologizing to Thomas and Chipeta. He knew he had said the wrong thing. He told them that he thought he was giving Reid a compliment and had no idea it would upset Reid like it did.

Thomas reminded him of their conversation on the porch just a few weeks earlier. He ended with, “Who were you supposed to talk to?”

Wayne nodded. “No one. Not even Reid. I know I made a mistake, and I've caused problems for everyone.”

Thomas then told Wayne of Reid's fall and the physical problems he had experienced since arriving home that morning. Wayne began apologizing all over again. It was obvious to both Thomas and Chipeta that Wayne had not intended to upset Reid.

They were still talking when Travis stepped out the door, interrupting their conversation. Using his most authoritative marshal voice, Travis said, “I want all a ya in the bedroom right now.”

Thomas began to argue again, explaining that Reid didn't need to be confronted by all of them at once. But Travis shut him up with a stern look. Papa had never looked at him like that before. Thomas submitted quickly.

Travis told all three of them to stand against the wall next to the window and not to move or make a sound until he told them to. He would do the talking. They would do the listening.

When they were in place, Travis sat on the opposite edge of the bed, away from the others. Reid wouldn't be able to see them if he kept his eyes on his father.

The former marshal's tone instantly changed from the imposing commander to a loving father. He woke Reid gently.

“Reid. Reid. Son? Wake up.” Travis was rubbing Reid's shoulder softly.

Reid roused, rolled his head a few times, and turned in the direction of his father's voice. “Dad?”

“How do ya feel son?” Travis asked.

“Tired. My whole body hurts.”

Travis nodded and spoke quietly. “It's probably gonna. Ya fell. Ya okay except far hurtin'?”

“Yes, sir. I'm okay, except for my back. I did something to it when I cranked the Ford,” Reid replied softly.

“Okay.” Travis looked up at the doctor. “Thomas will take care a it in a little bit. Did ya chest quit hurtin'?”

Reid put his hand on his chest and gripped at his clothing, his fingers making a fist as he held to his shirt. “It's tight. I think I'm just sore.” Reid still hadn't opened his eyes.

“What did ya get upset 'bout this mornin'?” Travis asked.

“Wayne Hammons found out about the book. He knows what I did with the DOJ.”

Reid kept opening his hand against his chest and pulling his fingers across his clothing, causing his shirt to bunch where his fist closed. Travis knew his son was still upset, and his next question would disturb him even more. But he had to ask so the others would hear the answer. “Why did that upset ya?”

“Because he asked about it. I don’t ever want to remember those horrible months! I can still see some of those girls in my head. The mutilated bodies of the dead ones, I don’t wanna remember.” Travis could hear the grief growing in his son’s voice. “I can still see the faces of those I couldn’t get out. The scared look in their eyes. The abuse they took! And the look of hopelessness. Dad, they had nothing to hold to! No reason to live!”

Travis continued to watch his son, stroking him tenderly, listening to every word his son said. He hoped the others were hearing the pain in Reid’s voice. His son’s physical pain didn’t come close to the pain in his soul.

“Oh, Dad! Some of those that died weren’t Christians. They’ll never have a chance to meet Jesus. Did I do the right thing? Saving some and not others? Oh, what they must be going through right now!”

Travis talked gently to his son, calming him, still rubbing his shoulder. “He made the storm be still and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.¹ Do ya ’member that scripture?”

“God told me that when I was alone in the basement after they busted my head. I couldn’t move, but I heard God. He was telling me I’d get out, that I’d be okay.” Reid remembered, his voice calming.

Travis continued, “God’s all powerful. If he can calm the storm at sea, he has the power ta calm the storm inside ya. Ya can trust God ta do that.”

“I do trust him. But it doesn’t stop the memories from coming. When they come, I can’t concentrate on anything. I try to pray but can’t focus on that either. The thoughts won’t go away. It sometimes takes days. It’s a hard fight to clear my head,” Reid explained.

A swell was forming inside the man, and his father could see it. Each gust of air into his son’s lungs brought heavier breathing and more nervous clawing of Reid’s hand against his shirt. Travis reached over and held his son’s hand, stopping the motion.

¹ Psalm 107:29–30 (ESV).

“But when ya go ta Jesus, they do stop, don’t they? In God’s time. Maybe sometimes ’e wants ya ta ’member. Why would God want ya ta ’member?”

Reid shook his head slowly. “I don’t know. I can’t think. Dad, I’m tired.”

“I know ya tired. But try. The Apostle Peter told us ta, ‘Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.’ And we is supposed ta ‘do this with gentleness and respect.’¹ Can ya try ta think? Why would God want ya ta ’member?”

Reid took a few deep noisy breaths and rolled his head a few times. “Maybe it gives me a reason to ‘never be lacking in zeal, but keep (my) spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.’”²

“Good. That’s a good answer.” Travis continued, “Jesus said, ‘Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’³ Ya ’ave ta go ta Jesus ta get rest far ya soul.”

Reid nodded and softly said, “I know.”

“Is ya soul at rest?”

Reid rolled his head back and forth in frustration. He threw his other hand over his head, searching for one of the bars on the metal headboard. He found one and grabbed it, pulling it with such strength that the bed shook. “I don’t know, Dad,” Reid said. Travis could tell he was losing his son to the confusion that was in his head.

Travis raised his voice some. “I need ya ta stay with me. Reid, pay attention ta my question.”

“Yes, sir. I’m trying.”

“Good. Now, is ya soul at rest? How do ya know if ya soul is at rest?”

¹ 1 Peter 3:15b.

² Romans 12:11.

³ Matthew 11:28–30 (ESV).

Reid finally opened his eyes and studied his father's face. But Travis thought his son could fall asleep at any moment.

"Cause God tells me so. 'He is my rock and my salvation...my fortress, I will not be shaken.'¹ I 'trust in him at all times...(I) pour out (my) heart to him, for God is (my) refuge.'² 'Yes, my soul, finds rest in God. My hope comes from him.'³

Reid had calmed. He had gotten his thoughts under control. Travis knew that was all his son had to do—focus on God. Now it was time for Reid to tell the others how he felt about them.

"Is ya upset with Chipeta far tellin' Wayne?" Travis asked.

Reid answered, taking another noisy breath, "No. I was at first, but there's no reason to be. She explained it. She didn't mean to tell him. She was upset, and it just came out."

"Good. I'm glad ya not upset with 'er. Ya love 'er, don' ya?" Travis looked toward his daughter-in-law.

Reid nodded. "With all my heart."

"Is ya upset with Wayne?"

Reid's eyes were getting heavier, and his words were coming lower, harder to understand. His voice was dropping out and then jumping back in when Reid took a breath. "No. He surprised me. I wasn't expecting it. But he doesn't know...what, what it was like. The book didn't tell it all." Reid laughed softly. The three standing by the window couldn't tell if it was a laugh or if Reid was beginning to cry. "I didn't even tell Daniel every...everything. A normal person couldn't process the evil that...went on." Reid took several deep breaths. "Dad, I'm tired. Please."

"I know ya is." Travis rubbed his son's hand. "I just 'ave a couple a more questions. Can ya answer 'em far me?"

Reid nodded, closing his eyes.

"What if I told ya Thomas was the one who told Wayne 'bout the book?"

"I'd...I'd be relieved. Chipeta said...she didn't do it and I...I believe her. If it was Thomas, at least I know who did it...and I won't have to wonder who else knows."

"Is ya upset with any a 'em?"

"No, sir. Maybe disappointed. But I'm not angry with any... any of them."

"So if they walked in the room right now, ya be okay talkin' ta 'em?"

Reid nodded again. "Dad, I'm really tired." The words came out mumbled.

"Okay. I'll let ya rest. Go on ta sleep." Travis ran his fingers across his son's head a few times, then he leaned over and kissed his son's forehead. Reid was already asleep.

Travis recited scripture to his sleeping son as he reached up and loosened Reid's hand from the bed and moved it to lay beside him. "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."¹

Travis looked to the three standing against the wall for a long time. Then he motioned for them to leave the room with a jerk of his head.

They went to the kitchen, and Travis followed a few minutes later. They had not said a word to one another and were standing around the table silently when the old man entered.

"Did ya really think he was gonna be mad at ya?" Travis asked.

Chipeta dropped her head, looking to the floor. Thomas was ashamed too. Wayne didn't know what to think. This was all new to him. He'd never seen a man so moved by the pain felt by others or the loss of souls unsaved. Nor had he seen such forgiveness or felt love offered to another person the way he felt it between Reid and Travis. The love had filled the room and brought with it a peaceful atmosphere that wrapped Wayne like a warm blanket.

¹ Psalm 62:6.

² Psalm 62:8.

³ Psalm 62:5.

¹ Philippians 4:7–8.

Travis looked at Wayne Hammons. “Do ya understand why we don’ talk ’bout his work with the DOJ?”

Hammons nodded his head. “Yes, I do.”

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”¹ Travis sighed. “None a ya know Reid very good, do ya?”

They could all hear the disappointment in Travis’s voice, and they could see it in his face. Travis said, “I’m gonna go find Saamel.”

Two days later, Thomas helped Reid into the Oldsmobile. They met Luke at the church, and the two men helped Reid to the front pew. He sat by himself, asking the others to leave so he could pray alone before those coming to worship got there.

Reid had been using the wheelchair at home, allowing his body to rest. He still felt unsteady. His body had been slow to recover this time, and he still had some unusual pain.

He knew his weak body would require assistance up the steps to the platform. As the service began, Luke sat beside his little brother on the front pew. His spot against the back wall was bare.

The last song had just been sung. Luke helped Reid stand. The man that was to speak turned, asking Cleve to pray for his message. While Cleve prayed, Luke moved a chair next to the podium and helped Reid up the four steps. When Cleve finished talking with God, the people looked up to see Reid sitting in front of them, watching them.

He held no sermon notes, no Bible in his hand. Everything he was going to say would be from his heart. Reid’s voice always sounded a little hoarse, but today it was rougher than usual.

He was about to open himself to everyone he knew. He would lower his shield and be vulnerable. This was taking more strength than he would have ever imagined. Reid wasn’t sure what he was

¹ 1 Peter 4:8.

supposed to learn, but he trusted that God was teaching him. He knew this was what God wanted, and one day, he would understand.

“Well, I hope you can hear me today. I don’t have the strength to stand, nor do I have the strength to talk loudly. The last few days have been rough. But I am thankful to be here before you. I’m thankful that my family is here with me. And I’m grateful that all of you have joined us in worship. I’m not going to ask you to stand for the reading of the scripture because, quite frankly, I don’t have the energy to stand.”

Travis kept his eyes on Reid, but his heart was praying for his son.

The church was deadly silent as Reid spoke slowly.

“I could have asked someone else to take my place today, but I want to be obedient—obedient to God and obedient to the covenant I took to serve this church.”

He would stop periodically to take a few breaths and to look around the room. No one was moving. No one, including most of Reid’s family, had ever heard him admit to weakness or pain. They were all astonished.

“God has humbled me and doesn’t want me to hide behind my pride. There are things I could boast about.” Reid stopped briefly to look at Wayne Hammons and smiled. Their eyes met, and Wayne knew exactly what Reid was talking about. “But I would be a fool to do that.

“Over the last few weeks, I have had to admit my weakness to many. But I want you to know how important God’s work is and that I am committed to continue as he leads me. Understand that God takes care of his people, and in doing so, he continues to discipline and to teach us so that our faith will grow.

‘Let us strip off anything that slows us down or holds us back, and especially those sins that wrap themselves so tightly around our feet and trip us up, and let us run with patience the particular race that God has set before us. Keep your eyes on Jesus, our leader and instructor. He

was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterwards; and now he sits in the place of honor by the throne of God.¹

“I look forward to the joy that will come after this time of testing. Paul said,

‘I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.’²

“I like to imagine that Paul’s weakness came from the beatings he took or from being stoned and left for dead. I can identify with those.” Reid’s eyes met Hammons’s eyes again. “I experienced them all.

‘But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.’³

¹ Hebrews 12:1b-2 (TLB).

² 2 Corinthians 12:7b-10.

³ 1 Corinthians 15:10.

“We know that Paul’s strength came from knowing God. He tells us so. Jeremiah tells us,

‘This is what the Lord says: Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches.’¹

“Many people think that happiness comes when they are healthy or when they have money and property or even if they are clever. But the Bible says true joy comes in knowing God. We live in a world that wants us to meet our own needs and satisfy our own pleasures. The world tells us that’s where we will find happiness.

“People think they have wisdom because of the gifts God has given them or because they are intelligent or maybe even because they have traveled or have experiences that others don’t have. Some think they have strength because they are physically strong, or they have control over employees or family, or they have political or military power. People have their money or land and think they are wealthy. Some of these people find happiness in these things for a short time.

“But let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the Lord.²

“Sometimes kindness, justice, and righteousness come with a price. The price I paid years ago was my body. The price I recently paid was slander.” Reid saw Mrs. Leachman sitting near the back. She was looking down, to her lap. Reid couldn’t see her eyes.

¹ Jeremiah 9:23.

² Jeremiah 9:24.

“But it doesn’t matter.

“These troubles and sufferings of ours are, after all, quite small and won’t last very long. Yet this short time of distress will result in God’s richest blessing upon us forever and ever! So we do not look at what we can see right now, the troubles all around us, but we look forward to the joys in heaven which we have not yet seen. The troubles will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever.”¹

Reid went on to explain how God should be the source of happiness and a person’s relationship with the Lord should be desired over all else. He explained that God’s love for us was so great that he sent his own Son to die on the cross to take our sins away and to let us approach God directly so that we can have the relationship God desires with each of us.

“I don’t know that I could do that—give my son for someone else,” Reid said.

“Still, it’s what God had in mind all along, to crush him with pain. The plan was that he give himself as an offering for sin so that he’d see life come from it—life, life, and more life. And God’s plan will deeply prosper through him.”²

“I don’t understand wanting to see your son suffer and die.” Reid was looking at his five sons lined up in a row, sitting in front of their mother and sisters, James, Esa, Stephen, Saamel, and Matt. When Reid’s eyes came to Matthew, a great sadness washed over him, and he blinked back tears, quickly moving on to look at others.

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:17–18 (TLB).

² Isaiah 53:10 (MSG).

“But because Jesus died for us, we can have the relationship with God that he wants with each of us. People just need to learn to love God and to love others. That brings pleasure to God too.

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.’¹

Then Reid prayed, and in front of everyone, Luke helped him from the platform. They didn’t stop at the front pew like most people expected. Luke continued to help his brother down the center aisle. As they passed Thomas, the doctor moved to the other side of Reid and took his other arm.

When they got to Mrs. Leachman, sitting near the back, Reid stopped. He reached over and took her hand, pulling it to his lips, and kissed it gently. Then he continued to the door.

They moved into the vestibule, but they didn’t stop there to greet people as they left either. Thomas grabbed Reid’s hat from the coat rack, and they kept moving. Thomas and Luke assisted Reid as they descended the steps and went directly to the Model T.

Luke helped Reid in and Reid said, “Thank you. I’m good now. You can leave me alone. Chipeta will be here soon.” Reid pulled his hat in the direction of the sun. Luke looked at Reid, nodded, and walked away.

Thomas stood beside the automobile watching until Reid was settled and Luke was moving across the front lawn. People had begun leaving the building and were coming outside. Thomas said, “Reid, I’m sorry. This is not the way everything played out in my mind.”

“I know. It’s okay. God told me to be happy that Wayne knows. This is the way God wants it.” Thomas patted Reid’s shoulder, nodded, and turned to meet Sarah at the steps.

¹ Matthew 22:37b–39.

Reid sat alone now, waiting. Waiting for the comments that people would make as they passed him, waiting for Chipeta and the children to get to the automobile. Waiting to go home, home to his comfortable, peaceful house, home to his bed, home to be with his Lord.

CHAPTER
8

Three hours of listening to this lawyer say nothing was enough. Reid called for recess. He went to his chamber, removed his robe, and ate a few bites of the lunch Chipeta had packed for him. He drank the last of the cold coffee left over from that morning. He would make a fresh pot before he went back into court this afternoon.

Maybe by then this lawyer would decide to say something of importance. If he didn't, Reid would have a private conversation with him.

The judge left through the private entrance in the back of the courthouse and walked around the corner and across the street. Three doors down, he stopped to look at Harris. A perfectly normal day. Routine, that's what Reid liked. Nothing out of the ordinary.

He reached the steps of the bank and ascended slowly, holding to the railing. The town had asked businesses that had steps to put in railing. Some had complied, while others ignored the request. It wasn't mandatory.

Reid knew that his brother, Cleve, had made the request to the town council on his behalf. He and Cleve had been entering one of those businesses together, and Reid couldn't navigate the steps without Cleve's help. Cleve had asked him how much trouble he had around town. Reid had replied that he usually just avoided any business that had too many steps.

That week, Cleve had made the request of the town council saying that it would be advantageous to the town and to the businesses to make the streets easier to maneuver and more welcoming.

But Reid couldn't avoid the bank. He had a standing appointment with one of the officers the second Thursday of every month. But today he also had business on his oldest son's behalf. Matt would be leaving for Chicago soon. His acceptance letter from the university had arrived, and Matt wanted to leave for Chicago right after graduation.

Reid wanted plenty of time to make sure everything was set up correctly before Matt left town. Reid would transfer money to the account he had set up for himself years ago in Chicago.

The crime syndicate he had fought to take down had paid him well while he was working undercover for the DOJ. He had put most of that money in a bank account and had spent only what he needed to live on. The rest had sat untouched for close to ten years. It would now be put to good use, for Matthew's education.

This had been a moral dilemma for Reid. He had tried to turn the money over to the DOJ but was told to keep it as compensation for his injuries. He was told he had worked for that money—he earned it. But he didn't want the criminal's money. This money was earned through human trafficking and blood, so Reid hadn't touched it. Now, he thought this would be an ironic use of the funds, to train someone to fight against crime. Reid laughed inwardly at the thought of it.

The judge opened the door and stepped inside, anticipating that hated echo of his awkward movements reverberating off the fine marble tile. The tapping of his cane, the sliding of his foot. You could hear his foot slide, even wearing his moccasins. He swung the door closed behind him.

Watching the floor, he took two slow steps forward and then descended two steps, watching his feet, careful not to fall. These slick uneven foot-worn marble steps just inside the door had always been hard for him to navigate. While the bank had put railing on the steps outside, the ones inside were still open.

Reid looked up to see everyone in the room lying facedown on the floor, the room deadly quiet. Before he had time to move, the butt of a gun slammed into his stomach. Reid folded over and fell

to his hands and knees, his cane hitting the hard marble floor with a clatter as it bounced across the room.

"We'll take him with us," Reid heard a voice say. Someone grabbed him under the arms on both sides. He was propelled out the door backward, the back of his feet dragging across the steps, causing a jolt to his body. Reid was thrown onto the floor of an automobile, and a large man climbed onto the seat above him. Reid was just getting his bearings and understanding what was happening when the vehicle started moving. He saw the butt of the rifle coming toward his face. Reid flinched and turned his head as the gun came down grazing the side of his skull, and his head reeled.

Now he couldn't pick his head up, and he couldn't open his eyes. His head hurt, and his ear, something was in his ear. He couldn't do anything but bump along on the floor of this car, unable to move.

Luke walked out of the bank and headed for his brother's law office. He stopped at the door of the gunsmith's shop and watched his father. Travis was reaching for a box above him on a shelf, but he couldn't get to it. The old man wasn't tall enough, and he couldn't get his arm high enough.

Travis had experienced pain in that shoulder in the past, but Luke knew that he wasn't having discomfort with it at the moment. The former federal marshal's shoulder had been injured during the Civil War. The shoulder had never healed correctly, and Travis had always had problems. The older he got, the more problems he had. Thomas had discovered this and treated the injury on a regular basis, keeping the pain away. But the old man could no longer lift that arm very high.

The twisting of his fingers on the other hand wouldn't allow him to use that hand either. The hand injury had been the result of a fight and had initially healed correctly. But again, as Travis got older, the fingers twisted until he had limited movement. There was nothing Thomas could do about this, so the old man lived with the deformity.

These injuries had caused his retirement from the marshal service just before Reid left for university in Denver. Travis turned around to see his son watching him.

"Hey, Luke. Come get this far me, would ya?" Travis said. "I got ta move all this stuff lower. Can ya 'elp me with it sometime?"

"Dad, I need to see you down at Cleve's office," the sheriff said.

"Sure, can ya get that far me first?" The old man asked.

"Dad, now."

"Okay," Travis said, looking at his son oddly, wondering what was so urgent.

Travis locked the door, and they headed down the boardwalk. They walked past some men laying brick in the street. Travis commented, "I just don' see how that's gonna do much good. The mud's still gonna wash down from up the hill, an' them bricks is gonna be covered in no time."

Travis didn't understand any of this street-paving business. Just a few years ago, Reid had been called to the state capital to serve on a judge's panel to determine the question of patent infringement of asphalt concrete mixes. Reid had explained this asphalt mixture to his father when he returned. It seemed this was the new way to build roads. Now the town was installing bricks? This seemed kind of backward to Travis.

He looked at his son. Luke's face was hard. Disturbed. "What's wrong?"

Luke didn't answer, so Travis didn't say anything else.

They stepped into Cleve's law office. Luke walked through the outer office and into Cleve's private area without waiting to be announced by Cleve's assistant.

"Well, good afternoon, Sheriff," Cleve said. "Dad, what are you doing here? I thought we said when school was out."

Travis shrugged his shoulders and indicated Luke with a wave of his hand. He really didn't know why he was there.

"Sit down, Dad," Luke said. Taking his father's arm, Luke led Travis to a chair. Travis sat, eyeing Luke questioningly.

"The bank was robbed this morning," Luke began. "It was the Copelands and Stroud."

Cleve and Travis continued to watch Luke. This was bad, but not something that demanded their immediate and undivided attention.

"Well, it had to happen sometime," Cleve said. "They've hit every town around here but us."

"They took a hostage," Luke continued watching his father. "It's Reid."

Cleve got up and moved beside his father, placing a hand on Travis's shoulder. Cleve couldn't feel his father breathing and looked down just in time to see Travis suck in air. "What happened?" Cleve asked his brother.

"Witnesses were all on the floor, and the Copelands and Stroud were on their way out the door when Reid opened it and walked in. He didn't see anything till he got to the main floor. Morgan said Reid looked up and saw everyone on the floor, and then Stroud punched him in the stomach with his rifle. He said Reid hit the floor, and Stroud and Martin Copeland grabbed him and dragged him out the door. There were a couple of witnesses on the street that said he was pushed into a car. Stroud climbed in on top of him, and they drove off. Nobody could see him in the car. He must have been on the floor."

Luke looked at his father. "Dad, we'll find him. I'm getting everybody on this."

Travis nodded. "I need ta go be with Chipeta." He spoke softly, but he didn't move. He remained seated in the chair. It was almost a minute before he added, "Cleve, can ya get the chil'en. They don' need ta hear 'bout this on the street." Travis continued to sit, staring at Cleve's desk.

"Dad? You okay?" the sheriff asked.

Travis nodded.

"I've got to go make some telephone calls. Then I'm headed out to see what I can find," Luke said. Travis nodded again.

"I'll take care of Dad. And Chipeta. And the kids," Cleve said turning to pick up the telephone.

"Let me talk to Angus," Cleve said into the phone. Then he waited. He'd call their brother to come take their dad to Reid's house.

Cleve planned to go to the school to pick up the children—Reid’s children, his children, Joey, and Angus’s children if Angus wanted him to. He probably needed to get Ruth too.

Luke knelt beside his father. “We’ll find him.”

Travis nodded again. “Go on. Do ya job.” The sheriff’s father was still looking at the desk, his eyes darting from one side to the other and then back again.

Luke got as far as the door when he heard his father call to him. “Luke, ya need ta keep Reid’s name out a the papers. Those outlaws don’ need ta know who they got.”

“I know. I thought of that already.” Luke turned to go out the door headed for the telephone exchange. That was the only place in town where he could make long-distance phone calls. He had already made a list in his head of who he needed to call. On the top of the list was Barrett Batterton, soon-to-retire special council for the DOJ, Reid’s former supervisor and his friend. Batterton would put the marshal service and every other federal agency into action.

Then Luke would try to find Sarah’s son Adam. Adam was a member of an investigative team within the BI. Luke knew that Batterton would get in touch with the bureau, but Luke wanted to talk to Adam. Adam knew Reid’s background and could give the BI a better understanding of the victim.

The Copelands and Stroud were known for hitting banks near state lines. They would quickly cross into another state where local law enforcement pursuing them had no jurisdiction. Adam had authority anywhere within the United States. He would be able to help, if Luke could find him. It might take a little bit of searching to locate him, but the sheriff was willing to put the work into it.

Luke also knew the marshal service would be on this quickly. Word would spread, and those that had known their father would be apt to put more effort into the search.

The Copeland brothers and Stroud had avoided capture for more than three years. They typically took a hostage and would keep them for just a few days and then dump them somewhere out away from people, usually over the state line, miles away from their last holdup. Most hostages were found wandering along back roads or

would show up at an isolated ranch or farm. A few had been killed. Two had never been found. Luke prayed Reid would survive.

Luke knew the outlaws had taken the wrong person this time. This would be an all-out manhunt for the bank robbers and for the missing federal judge. He also knew that after three years, no one knew where these outlaws took refuge. No one knew where to look.

Luke and the deputy got out of the automobile to look at the intersection in the dark. They had left about two hours after Reid was taken following the reported path of the bank robbers. They continued to drive through the afternoon. The sun was about to set. To the left and straight, they would go into Oklahoma, onto Cherokee land. The right went to the panhandle and open land with few towns and little law. They were already a long way out of their jurisdiction and had seen no sign of the fugitives or their captive.

Adam had said he would be in Harris in just a few days, but Luke had wanted to do something now to find Reid. A few days was too long.

Luke walked down the road so he could talk to God without his deputy hearing. “Lord, my hope is in you. You have given me assurance that when I pray you hear me. ‘This is the confidence we have in approaching (you) God: that if we ask anything according to (your) will, (you) hear us. And if we know that (you) hear us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of (you).’¹

“I have confidence that you will answer me. Your word says, ‘No good thing (do you) withhold from those whose walk is blameless.’² Have I not walked with you faithfully? Is there anything in my life that you are not pleased with? Is there anything I need to ask forgiveness for?”

Luke waited, anticipating the Spirit speaking to him. He stood silent, but no word came from his Lord.

“God, you told me where Reid was ten years ago. You saved him from the men that beat him. Father, where is he now? Save him

¹ 1 John 5:14–15.

² Psalm 84:11b.

again. Do they still have him? Take care of him. He can't just get up and walk away. He can't come to us. He can't take another beating. We're going to have to go to him. Help him, Father! Help us!"

Luke stopped to listen, but he heard nothing. There was silence. Luke waited. He wanted to hear from God now, this moment.

"God, do not remain quiet; Do not be silent and, God, do not be still."¹ Luke said, "Lord, don't withhold your words from me. I want to hear from you, Lord! I need your guidance! Don't be still. Act on Reid's behalf. Move so that we can find him."

The sheriff turned slowly and began walking back to the automobile. They would return to Harris. Maybe when they reached home, there would be word. Or maybe Reid would already be home. Maybe that's why God wasn't talking to him. Hope surged through Luke as he climbed into the vehicle.

Reid lay on the floor of the motorcar trying to concentrate. Where was he? What had happened? He felt movement. His head hurt, but it wasn't the same pain. His eye felt like it was coming out of his head, and there was ringing in his ear. He tried to sit up, but his body wouldn't cooperate. He was tired. He wanted to go to sleep, but the movement kept waking him up. He was nauseated.

He couldn't get his eyes open. The train? Was he on the train? Was he going home? Luke was with him. Luke was taking him home. Reid relaxed. He tried to call for his brother, but he couldn't get his mouth to move. His stomach was turning. He wanted the movement and the nausea to go away.

The car slowed, and the rear passenger door opened. Reid was pushed out into the darkness on the rocky road. His body skid on the rocks and rolled a few times, and then he lay still, a small pool of blood forming under his head and arm.

¹ Psalm 83:1 (NASB).

It had been three days since the bank robbery, and the marshal in Summersville had contacted the marshal in Harris. An abandoned car matching the description of the one used in the robbery had been found just outside Summersville with a dead body near it. The marshals handling the situation had asked for a more detailed description of the judge. Middle thirties, small, brown hair, gray eyes, clean-shaven, white shirt, khaki work pants and moccasin boots. Except for the boots, this fellow matched the description. The dead man didn't have any shoes on.

The marshal had passed the information on to Luke, and Luke had decided to go see for himself—to see if this was Reid. Anything was better than just sitting around waiting. And he had to know for sure.

Matt had been hanging around the sheriff's office constantly. When the marshal came to talk with Luke, he had spoken freely. After all, the boy was the son of the judge. Sixteen-year-old Matt had begged to go with his uncle. Luke understood Matt couldn't just sit around either.

On the drive to Summersville, they had made an agreement. Luke would tell Matt everything, and he'd let Matt come with him some of the time. In return, Matt would stay out of the way, do what he was told, and leave the marshals and BI alone.

Adam and his team were on the move constantly, and no one knew where he would be next. Matt would go to the telephone exchange every morning and call Adam's office to find out where he had last been. Then Matt would call that location. He wanted Adam to pick him up and allow him to search with the BI. So far, the judge's son had not been able to reach his cousin.

They didn't even know each other. Adam was gone from home before Matt and his brothers and sisters came to live with Reid. Adam had been home a few times for brief visits, and the two had met. But Adam didn't know anything about Matt or his ability or personality. And all Matt knew was what the family had told him about Adam. Adam was Matt's inspiration for studying forensic science though. Investigative work, that's what Matt wanted to do.

The squeak of Travis's rocking chair filled the cool spring day with music like water flowing gently over rocks in a brook. It lulled the old man into an unconscious gaze that ignored everything except the feel of his grandson against his chest. This time of year, he was usually in the gardens with a flock of children teaching, planting, and cultivating both the ground and their relationships. The dirt had already been turned, and the pole beans were waiting to be planted. But the thought to finish the planting had left his mind days ago.

Travis had fought to live in the present, and he had mostly won. He had some of the worst memories a man could have, memories of war and of killing as a federal marshal, loss of his parents early in life, and the loss of his home and his young wife and children. That loss had been repeated when his second wife and young daughter had died. He had fought to forget the young girl's death that he blamed himself for, and he fought to forgive himself for his daughter's blindness that he knew he could have prevented if he had been home. And if he had a home and a job, he wouldn't have had to abandon Sarah to be raised by another man. He had forgotten these things. Mostly.

But there were still times when he watched his oldest daughter feel her way through the chores of her day. He would go home and become melancholy. The darkness, like the dark his daughter's eyes saw, would try to seep into his soul. He would plaster that fake smile on his face until the darkness was pushed away.

Jesus always won. Travis would recite scripture to himself, reassuring himself that God had been in control and everything that had happened had worked in his life for good. God had not allowed anything to happen that did not satisfy his own purpose.

Travis had also moved past the pain of watching his youngest son struggle as he recovered from his injuries ten years ago. But his heart would still break when he watched Reid struggle, refusing to give in to the physical pain, forcing him to live confined in a body that wanted his soul to die. All he could do for Reid was love him through his son's dark times. God had pulled Travis out of enough despair. *He comforts us every time we have trouble, so when others have*

*trouble, we can comfort them with the same comfort God gives us.*¹ Travis knew what it took to pull Reid out. That's all he could do for the boy—help him when his soul was drowning.

Now, all Travis could do was live in the present—missing his son and praying for his safe return. He held to his youngest grandson as if the boy held his father's life within him. Every second that ticked by on the grandfather clock just inside the door brought another moment of prayer for his son's safe return.

Cleve walked out of the house and sat down beside his father. The old man didn't seem to notice, but the boy turned his head to look at his uncle.

"Dad, do you want some coffee?"

Travis shook his head slowly.

Cleve reached over to push the boy's hair out of his face, but Saamel turned his head away before Cleve's hand got to him. Cleve touched the boy, rubbing his head and neck a moment.

"Luke called. He and Matt are headed over to Summersville to check out a lead. He didn't say what it was. They should get back to us later this afternoon," Cleve said. He hoped this information would give his father some hope.

Saamel turned to look at Cleve again. Cleve reached into his pocket and pulled out a piece of hard candy. He unwrapped it, handing it to the boy. Saamel didn't move. Cleve pushed it close to the boy's mouth, but he didn't open his mouth. Cleve smiled at the boy and touched Saamel's face gently with the back of his fingers and tried to give him the candy again. Saamel reached for the candy and took it, put it in his mouth, and turned to bury his face in his grandfather's chest. Then he turned his head just enough to keep an eye on his uncle.

Travis continued to rock in silence, seemingly oblivious to Cleve's presence. Cleve said, "He's going to be okay, Dad."

Travis replied, "I have confidence that 'the Lord protects him and keeps him alive. He is called blessed in the land. (God will) not give him up to the will of his enemies.'"²

¹ 2 Corinthians 1:4 (NCV).

² Psalm 41:2 (ESV).

Cleve nodded. "I'm leaving this afternoon for Topeka. Angus is going to keep in touch with me and keep me informed on anything that's found. I don't want to go, but I have to."

Travis nodded. "I know. Go on. Do ya job." The old man kept rocking.

CHAPTER 9

Luke and Matt drove up on the abandoned car. It was a Buick with no cover. Marshals were just standing around waiting for the sheriff from Harris to get there to identify the judge. They had already made their decision though. This was the judge.

The sheriff pulled over and got out. Luke identified himself and told the marshal he was there to identify the victim. One of the marshals pointed him toward the car. They had moved the body. The dead man was now in the back seat of the car. The marshal carelessly made a comment about the condition of the body.

Luke set his jaw and looked away, irritated by the man's casual manner, and saw the dark stain in the dirt a few feet from the car. He stared at it a moment and then moved to join the others. "You stay back here, Matt," Luke said, keeping his nephew a good ten feet away from the automobile.

"Uncle Luke, I'm going to be doing this for a living, so I—"

Luke interrupted, "But you're not doing it yet. Do what I tell you." Luke gave his nephew a stern look. This could also be Matt's father.

Matt had already seen two people violently shot—his mother, when she was killed eight years earlier, and a man that had attacked his father at their house when Matt was eleven. Matt had come to Reid's defense and stood bravely on the porch holding a rifle on the attacker. Travis had eventually shot the man from across the yard. But Matt had seen the dead body. This body wouldn't be as clean as either of those. Luke didn't want Matt to see his father disfigured.

Matt stopped, giving his uncle a huff as Luke walked on to look into the car. Luke put both forearms against the automobile and leaned in to take a close look. The body was lying on the seat, but there was a separate bloodstain on the floor. Matt saw his uncle's body relax. Luke stood up, looked on the ground and in the front seat, then looked to Matt, smiled, and shook his head. It wasn't the boy's father.

"It's not the judge," Luke told the marshals near him. "They had to get rid of this car though. There were too many people that saw it.

"Look here. Two people left, but one came back. No, two came back, but one of them was different, not the same person that was in the car to begin with." Luke was looking at footprints on the dirt road. He walked to the other side of the Buick. It had rained the previous morning, and there were clear footprints in the dried mud even though the marshals present had walked all over them.

"The two that walked away were in no hurry, and neither were the ones that came back. He came back after the other guy got here." Luke was pointing to the individual footprints.

The sheriff looked at his nephew. "The average person would have run away when this happened. Average person would have been scared and in a hurry. Not this guy. He was calm. He walked away the second time just as slowly as he did the first time. The guy that did this has probably killed before. Look at the size of that shoe. I'd say he's as big as me, probably heavier. Look here. If he'd been running, the heel print would be deeper." Luke gestured to Matt, and Matt moved to stand beside his uncle. Luke walked in a circle and came back past Matt. He put a foot down beside the other footprint as he walked past, then turned around, and squatted to look at the prints.

"This print belongs to..." Luke hesitated as he looked at the men's feet around him. "That guy." Luke pointed to a man in a dark-blue suit.

"This one is that guy." The sheriff pointed to another man.

"See. This print is a little bigger, and you can really tell it's deeper than mine. It would have been though, because the ground was wet. But this guy's bigger than I am. It's not a boot print. It's a

shoe like a dude would wear. See the sole. He stayed on the road, didn't touch the muddy areas." Luke followed the tracks down the road fifteen or twenty feet and then stopped. "He wasn't gonna get his shoes dirty. Somebody picked him up here. He walked around right here while he waited.

"Look at this." Luke leaned over and picked up a cigar end, took two steps, and picked up another. "Both butts are on his left side. Both of them. This guy was left-handed. One of the tires is different." Luke pointed to a tire print in the dried mud. "This one's new. It's the rear driver's side. The rest are almost bald."

Luke looked up and saw the marshals watching him, listening to him. "What?" Then he looked to Matt again and said, "Did you think you were the only one that Grandpa taught? He taught me too."

"This car was here when the second car drove up and stopped. Two guys got out of that car"—Luke pointed to the car that remained—"and walked back here. That fellow was probably driving the other car. He stopped to help, being friendly. The big guy followed him back to this car to help him figure out what was wrong, and the other one stood back there smoking his cigars." Luke was pointing to the different areas as he explained what happened.

Luke walked back to the car.

"They shot him"—Luke opened the hood over the engine—"here." Blood splatter was on the engine, covered by the closed hood. "Then they took his car. There was only two of them. We know Stroud's a big guy, so it had to be him and one of the brothers." Luke started walking back to his own car. "Tire tracks turn around and go back that way. Ground was wet when the tracks were made. There haven't been that many other vehicles come this way. Come on. Let's follow them and see how far we get. Matt, you drive. I'm going to sit on the front end. You drive slow, real slow." Matt turned to follow Luke to the car.

The marshals stood in the road watching as Luke climbed onto the front bumper and got a hold onto the fender. One of the marshals spoke. "Well, now we know what happened."

Another replied, "Clyde, write it down. Baker, you and Young, follow them."

Luke rode the front bumper six miles into Summersville where the road turned to brick. Luke signaled for Matt to stop, and he jumped down to give Matt more instructions. "Take each right turn until you come to dirt road again. I'll signal you to go on or turn around. We'll cover the town one street at a time. If we don't find anything, we'll turn around and try the next. Watch the cars parked on the street. Driver's side rear tire is almost new. The others are bald."

Luke climbed back onto his bumper perch, and Matt started moving the car slowly down the street. The first street turned to dirt quickly, and Matt backed the car up and continued on the paved road. The next street turned, went three blocks, and ended in dirt again. Still no tracks leading from town. Matt turned around and went back three blocks. There wasn't much of a chance to find tracks, but Matt and Luke continued working their way around town with the marshal's car following annoyingly close. Each time Matt put the car in reverse, he had to wait for the marshal's car to get out of the way.

Luke finally walked to the marshals and said, "Why don't you guys check the side streets. I know the killing happened yesterday, but if they're hanging around town, we might still be able to spot the car." Luke pointed toward a smaller road. "Look at the tires. Driver's side rear is brand new. Honk if you find it." Then returning to Matt, he said, "Maybe that will keep them out of the way."

Matt had just turned down the sixth street when they heard a horn blowing wildly just a street or two over. Luke jumped to the ground and took off running. Matt turned the car around and headed that direction too. As Matt straightened the car in the road, he saw his uncle turn the corner of the second street to the left.

The first marshal Luke got to was crouched behind a wagon that was backed up to a warehouse loading dock. Luke joined him. "What did you find?"

"Across the street, down there by the café. See that Auto Buggy. Second from the end. Brand new tire on the back, but the others are old, really old. Shotgun lying on the floor beneath the seat. Dyke went in the café for a cup of coffee. He's seeing who's in there."

Luke nodded.

When Matt drove past, Luke waved him on, hoping the kid would understand to keep going until he was out of sight. Luke watched as Matt went around the corner and took the first parking space. Luke could still see him.

Matt got out of the Rambler and walked past the café windows headed for Luke. As he neared, Luke said, "Keep going and stay out of the way. Move!"

Matt picked up speed to a fast walk and rounded the next corner. Dyke Young walked out of the café casually, stopping at the edge of the sidewalk near the Auto Buggy. He picked his right foot up and put it on the bumper of another car to adjust his shoe. "That's the signal. They're in there," Baker said.

"How do you want to handle this?" Luke asked.

"We need to clear the street of as many people as we can. Dyke's going the other way, so I'll take this side. You go across the street and quietly get everybody inside. Get somewhere in the middle and wait for us to approach them. Just cover us and watch for other people."

Luke walked across the street and started talking to people. Some moved into the nearest building, while others moved away down the street. Luke took his badge off and put it in his pocket. He stopped across from the café and pushed himself into a corner near a pillar of bricks, leaning against a window like he was waiting for someone. He looked up and down the street several times, checking to see if anyone was coming onto the street.

Two men walked out the door and stopped on the sidewalk. One was big, wearing a gray suit with his tie hanging open. The smaller man had his jacket off and thrown over his shoulder, a shoulder holster clearly visible. Rare to see, but not unusual. Men in this part of the country still wore gun belts.

Baker was behind a car and called to the men. "Stop right there!"

The two men drew quickly, ducked behind a motor car, and started firing their weapons. Young came at them from the other side and quickly shot the smaller man who jerked, then leaned against the car, and slid to the ground. Stroud had worked his way to the back of the automobile and was now visible to Luke. The sheriff drew his weapon and took careful aim. There was a short distance between

him and the big man, but the café windows were in his line of fire. If he missed his target, he might hit someone unseen by the sun's glare on the window. Luke pulled the trigger, and the man was pushed over onto the road as the bullet hit him in the shoulder. Stroud was on the ground but still moving.

Baker and Young were up and running toward their target. Luke stood and moved slowly in their direction, his gun still drawn and pointed at Stroud, watchful if the man rose again. Baker turned between two cars to come at Stroud from behind. As Young stepped over the man on the ground, Stroud raised his gun quickly, and Luke responded likewise. Stroud took a hit in the arm as he fired his weapon, and Young took a blast at close range.

Baker was on the man now and grabbed the gun. Luke moved to assist. As Luke pulled Stroud to his feet, he saw Matt coming toward them. "Stay back, Matt! Not yet!" he yelled to his nephew, then quickly turned his attention back toward Young. "Is he alive?"

Baker answered, "Yeah. But I don't think he will be for long." Baker looked toward Stroud. Luke still had his hand on his prisoner's arm when the man on the ground raised his hand slowly, unnoticed, and fired. Baker was standing right beside him and, with quick reflexes, shot the man dead on the spot.

Luke stood dazed, still holding to Stroud, a dark stain slowly growing on his shirt. "Baker," Luke said quietly just before he dropped to his knees.

"Uncle Luke!" The call came from down the street. Matt started running, turned between two parked cars and, reaching his uncle, dropped to his knees beside Luke. Matt grabbed the sheriff by the shoulders as Luke fell over into Matt's arms, almost knocking the teen over. Matt pressed a hand over the hole in Luke's chest as he lowered his uncle to the ground. Blood was all over the sheriff's shirt and jacket and now covered Matt's hand too.

Luke heard the Spirit speak to his heart. *May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of (your father) protect you.*¹

¹ Psalm 20:1.

Matt saw his uncle's eyes tighten against the pain. He moaned and took two gasping breaths and quietly said, "I AM." Then Luke's body relaxed.

The Indian boy spotted the man on the ground from a distance. He stopped and watched, then he began moving his horse slowly toward the man. As he got closer, he slid from the bare back of his mount and dropped the reins, leaving the horse to graze at the side of the road.

The boy wore knickers that had outlived their usefulness. They were too small and mostly just shreds of fabric. He also wore a tattered deer skin poncho over his bare shoulders. He was barefoot.

He punched the man softly with his toe and then again, harder this time. The man rolled slightly and moved his mouth, but no sound came out. The boy pulled a skin of water from around his neck and put it to the man's lips, pouring water in the slightly opened mouth. The man revived and drank. "Thanks." The man's mouth moved, but there was still no sound.

The boy took some water himself, watching the man. "You hurt," he said, as if the man didn't know that already.

"Can you help me?" the man asked, his speech slurred and difficult to understand. "I can't walk." The boy had trouble hearing him. There was little sound coming from his mouth as it moved.

The boy continued to look at the man. He had never seen anyone dressed this way. A nice clean white shirt, if it hadn't been for the dirt from the road, with no holes, except for where the man's shoulder was bleeding. His pants didn't have any holes or tears either, and he was wearing Indian boots. His hands were clean, but there was blood on his arm and head. His face was probably clean-shaven yesterday.

The boy didn't know why he wanted to help this man. He knew it would cause him trouble. He had enough to do without taking care of this guy.

He caught his horse and led it to the man. "Get up," the boy said as he reached for the arm that had no blood on it. This man wasn't much bigger than he was. And he didn't weigh anything. The boy was able to pull him to his feet easily, but the man wouldn't stay on his feet. The boy kept having to catch him before he fell over. The Indian turned the man around and pushed him up onto the horse's back with the man lying on his stomach.

The man was breathing hard, and his eyes were closed. He kept squeezing his eyes tighter and rolled his head back and forth like he was trying to wake up. The Indian boy took the reins and gave the horse a sharp pat on the rump. As the horse began to move, the boy grabbed the man's arm to hold him on the horse, keeping him from sliding off. They moved into the tall brush and disappeared from sight.

10 CHAPTER

The train rumbled down the tracks as the two men gazed out the window watching the countryside pass. There was nothing to look at, just open country with brush scattered about and an occasional tree grouping maintained as a wind break in the open land. They might see some random cattle, a couple of riders, or a rare structure of some kind. The land was flat. They had left the hills and mountains during the night.

William had gotten tired of counting the telegraph poles when the number had risen to over two hundred. He had tried to take a nap but hadn't been able to go to sleep.

Joshua Stewart said, "We should be there soon. You haven't said anything for hours. You okay?"

"Yeah. I just never thought I'd come back to Harris," his brother William said.

William had moved from Denver to Harris, Kansas, fourteen years ago with his father, mother, older sister, and three younger brothers. The three older siblings had spent their entire lives in Denver and were studying at university and the medical school when the family moved. Joseph had visited Harris once, Joshua twice, but neither had ever lived in Kansas. Mae had never been there. All the children that finished school in Harris had gone to Denver to attend the university, and none had returned home.

"Is it that bad?" the older brother asked.

"No, it's not bad." William sighed. "It was fun as a kid, but it's just backward. They're about twenty or thirty years behind

Sacramento or Denver. At least Reid's there. That will give me somebody to talk to."

"Have you been around him since he was injured?" Joshua asked.

"No," William replied. "I haven't seen him since he finished law school. He married that Indian girl and left Denver. I haven't seen him since. Father wrote me a little bit about what happened to Reid and his wife, but Father really didn't explain much. Sounded like he was hurt pretty bad."

"Yeah, Reid still struggles with almost everything. Seems like his body is fighting him constantly," Joshua explained. "He gets headaches that put him in bed, and his throat was injured. He can't sing anymore. His back is messed up where his vertebrae were damaged. He has pain and trouble walking. Father says that's improved a lot over the years, but he still has periods of paralysis if he doesn't take care of himself."

"Joseph, Chloe and I were visiting Mother and Father when Reid was sworn in as judge. That was an exciting day in that little town. Seemed like the whole town celebrated. Then I was coming back from St. Louis a couple of years ago and stopped for a few days. That's the last time I saw any of them except Mother and Father."

William asked, "How often do you see them?"

"Twice a year, when they come for the board meeting of the hospital. Father has no idea what goes on at that hospital anymore. He listens but never makes a comment. He keeps saying he's going to sign it over to us, but so far, he hasn't done it."

"I've lost track of everybody since I've been in California," William said.

"Well, you know Reid and Chipeta have seven children. They lost three babies and then took in five that belonged to a friend of Reid's that ended up in jail. The oldest must be about ready to finish school." Joshua laughed. "Grandpa took in an outlaw's orphan too. He's had him for years. I have no idea how old that boy is. Close to the same age as some of the boys that Reid has."

"I can see Grandpa doing that." William smiled. "The sun's starting to come in this window. Can you trade places with me?"

"Sure." Joshua stood up to let William take his seat. Joshua sat where William had been, feeling the warmth of the sun and knowing that William didn't need the heat on his body.

"I'm not going to stay long when we get there," Joshua said. "Just a day or two. I've been gone from home long enough, and I need to get back to the hospital."

"That's okay. Just talk to Father, would you?" William asked. "Make sure he knows I can do therapy by myself."

"I'll tell him, but you know he's going to want to be involved. Talk to Mother if he gets in the way. She'll make him stop," Joshua commented. "You know he means well, but I know how he is. Go over to Grandpa's if you need a break. He'll leave you alone."

"Harris! We're coming into Harris!" the conductor bellowed as he passed through the coach.

The two looked out the window and could see their family's homes in the distance.

"Did you let them know we were coming?" William asked.

Joshua replied, "No. I thought we'd get Cleve or Angus to give us a lift out there. They both work close to the station."

William nodded.

The train jerked to a stop, and others in the coach got up to leave. When the aisle was clear, Joshua stood and picked up two small bags and one that was a little larger, waiting for his brother. William stood, picked up his left arm, and tucked the fingers of that hand into his belt. William wore a light scarf around his neck that made him look like he was wearing a turtleneck under his shirt. It covered the bandages. He moved stiffly, and Joshua followed him.

On the platform, they waited as a small crate was unloaded. William stood in the shade of the station as Joshua spoke with a workman, advising the man the crate was to be delivered to the medical clinic. The man understood, but he said, "It may take a few days. The doctor is out of town."

"Really? Well, put it on the porch of the clinic, and I'll take care of it from there," Joshua told the man, handing him payment.

"Wonder where Father went?" William asked.

"Don't know. Guess we'll find out in a few minutes."

They walked the two blocks to Cleve's office. Cleve had returned to Harris after attending secondary school and university in Denver and law school in Cincinnati. He quickly became the town's lawyer, and a few years later was elected state representative. He had repeatedly been elected into that office and was well known across the state.

The assistant announced the two doctors. Cleve came out the door with his hand extended to greet them both, inviting them into his private area.

"The man at the station told us Father was out of town. Where did he go?" Joshua asked Cleve as soon as the door was shut.

Cleve had lived with Joshua for seven years while they were growing up. Cleve had arrived in Denver at age fourteen to attend school. Joshua was younger, near the age of Cleve's brother Angus. Joshua and his brother Joseph had looked to Cleve as the idealized older brother. They knew one another well.

Cleve pulled his lips tightly together before he spoke. "Well, there's a lot happening around here. You're lucky you caught me in the office. I just got back from Topeka this morning. The House is in session, and I'm supposed to be there. But I can't stay the two weeks I should with everything that's going on here. I was there a few days when... Well, before I go into what's happening here, William, I want to know how you're doing."

"I'll be okay. Recovery is slow, but I'm getting better. It got my left shoulder, a little of my neck, and arm. But, like I said, I'll be okay. Is Mother at home?"

"Yes, she's there. Both of you, sit down. It'll take me a few minutes to tell you what's going on," Cleve said, sliding a leg onto his desk. He began by telling them of the bank robbery and of Reid's abduction. He told them of Matt pestering the BI and of Luke finding Adam, telling them that their brother Adam was on his way with his team of investigators to search for Reid. They were due in the next day. Then he told them about the abandoned car and the dead body that was first thought to be Reid. He continued telling them of Matt and Luke tracking the outlaws to Summersville and of Luke being shot.

"The doctor in Summersville got the bullet out, but it messed Luke up. The gun was pretty close to Luke when he was hit. Bullet bounced around inside of him some. I'm not sure how good that doctor is either. Your Father went over there to take care of Luke and to see if he can get him home. It's only been four days since that happened," Cleve explained.

"How's everybody taking all this?" Joshua asked.

"Chipeta's as strong a woman as I've ever seen. She'll cry some, but she's still taking care of those children herself. She's got people constantly going in and out of her house. I can't tell if they are helping her or getting in her way. She doesn't say. At first, Matt was the most upset about Reid. At least he showed it more than anyone else. He got more focused though. Now he's torn between being with Luke and looking for his dad. He hasn't been to school since it happened. None of them have. Matt's not doing any of his studies. He was hoping to go to school in Chicago next fall, but if this doesn't end soon, I'm afraid that won't happen.

"The other kids want their father back, especially Saamel. He's the youngest. Six years old. He's attached to his father and beginning to show how upset he is. Angus says he just sits around and stares into space. He's scared. He clings to his grandpa when he's around.

"The kids are staying at home, and one of the teachers is going to the house after school and helping them do their work so they don't fall behind. He's a good man. A friend of Reid's. He's as upset as everyone else."

"How's Grandpa doing?"

"He's a rock, like always. But he's getting really old. I worry about him, so does your dad. Your dad thinks one day something is going to happen, and your grandpa's just not going to be able to handle it. He's just going to drop dead," Cleve finished. "Come on. I'll take you home. Your mom's there. I'm headed to Reid's, and I need to check on your grandpa."

The shelter was small with a dirt floor. The room was dark and cool. Occasionally, when Reid tried to move around, he would find a small spot that had some warmth from the sun. This time, Reid had made it to his feet and was holding to the walls as he made his way around the room. He could only get one eye open slightly but wasn't seeing much in the dark space. He could feel that the walls were made of log and sod with grass and roots growing between the cracks.

There was a window, but when he pulled himself to it, he could tell it was boarded over from the outside. There was no light coming in. He found several small rectangular openings at various heights, about six inches wide but not as tall.

Reid tried to look out, but couldn't see anything. The sun was too bright. Reid felt the shape and size of the openings, running his hand inside the area over and over. He could tell the opening was just big enough to look out and maybe put the barrel of a gun through. This was probably an old settler's cabin, and these openings were used to defend themselves from Indian attacks.

Reid found the door and pushed. It shook, but didn't open. There was no handle on the inside and was apparently bolted on the outside. There was nothing in the room but straw, a blanket, a bucket of water, and a hole in the ground. The hole stunk of waste.

Reid found the spot where he had left the blanket and half fell to the ground. He had heard someone moving around, low to the ground, but no one had answered him when he spoke. He didn't know if he had actually made a sound or not. His body didn't feel like his. His head still hurt, his eye throbbed, and his ear buzzed. He could feel himself shaking. He'd been shaking since the first time he woke up in this place.

He relaxed and allowed his eye to close again. He pulled the blanket around his shoulders and lay back down in the straw.

"Please. Is someone there? I can hear you moving. Please." Reid couldn't get his eye open again and reached his hand out. No response. No movement now. He drew his hand back in and pulled the blanket tighter around himself. Then he heard movement again.

He lay still, unmoving. Maybe if he didn't move, whoever was there would say something, do something.

Then he felt something small touch his leg softly. He resisted the urge to knock it away. It was taking great effort to remain still and not fight whatever this was. Then whatever it was moved away from his leg and touched his arm. He jumped, gasped, and cupped a hand over his face in an attempt to stay quiet. Whatever it was slipped around his hand and into his palm, pulling gently. He allowed his hand to be pulled from his face and closed his hand around the object.

It felt like a child's hand. He rubbed it with his fingers. Soft, smooth, gentle. Fingers, small fingers. Reid reached his other hand out slowly to touch an arm, and he followed it to the child's shoulder.

He gently touched the child's face and hair. He ran his hand over the child's shoulder again and down their other arm. This was a small child. This child couldn't be more than two.

Reid spread the blanket open with his hand and wrapped it around the child. He gently pulled the child to his body, wrapping the child in the warmth of the rough blanket. The child lay its head against Reid's chest and relaxed.

A child. There was a child in the room with him. Reid lay still, feeling the child's breath against him when he heard another sound. More movement in the room. He jumped again as a small hand took his finger and pulled. He allowed this hand to open his arm and the blanket, making room for another child to sit with him and cuddle against the first child.

Reid closed the blanket back around this one too. He was trying to think, trying to reason why he would be locked in this dark nasty place with two small children.

He tried to open his eyes again, but they wouldn't open.

One of the children slid closer to his face and put something to his lips. He reached to touch it with his fingers. It moved. He jerked his fingers away, and the child pushed it to his lips again. He reached for it. It was wiggling, moving. It was a worm! No. A grub.

He handed it back to the child who accepted it. Reid squeezed his face tight as he heard the soft sound. The child was eating it.

Oh, these poor children! They were so hungry they were eating the bugs they found on the floor of their prison. Reid reached for the child. The child allowed Reid to pull it closer to him and then remained still. Reid held to the children as he fell asleep.

CHAPTER 11

Joshua waited at the train station. His father was bringing Uncle Luke home.

Matt had arrived in the automobile last night and had gone straight to his grandfather's. Matt had said that Uncle Thomas was bringing Luke home on the train the next day. Uncle Luke wanted to stay at his father's house, not with Thomas and Sarah. There was no discussion about it. It would happen.

Joshua could hear the train in the distance when he saw two identical automobiles move down Main Street quickly, one after the other. There was a brief moment, and then two more raced past. Joshua knew this was Adam arriving. He wanted to go that direction to see his brother, but he needed to be here when the train arrived.

People began getting off the train, and Joshua looked for his father and his uncle. If this had happened just one day sooner, they would have arrived on the same train.

Everyone was off, and Joshua was about to go ask the conductor about the two men when his father appeared on the platform. He reached a hand out to someone else who couldn't be seen. It took a moment for Luke to appear.

Thomas looked toward the station and saw his eldest son. Thomas's face beamed. But he turned his attention back to the man beside him.

Joshua had forgotten how big a man his uncle was. Luke looked huge beside his father. The town's doctor was a tall man, but slim. Beside Luke he looked tiny.

His father seemed to have aged since Joshua had last seen him. His hat covered his head, but the silver hair could be seen beneath, shining in the late afternoon sunlight. He was wearing wire-framed spectacles. Joshua had never seen these.

Joshua climbed the steps to help Luke come down, steadying his uncle so he wouldn't fall. The man was swaying and leaned on his nephew heavily.

"Joshua! Hey, boy." Luke laughed gently. "Did you come just for me?"

Luke was always a jolly man, but Joshua wondered if his father had given him something that made him so giddy.

"Yeah, Uncle Luke. I had to come when I found out you were hurt. Couldn't let Father have all the fun telling you what to do. I wanted to boss you around too." Joshua smiled and turned to watch his father descend the deep steps. He was holding closely to the railing and coming slowly. He didn't look strong enough to be able to help Uncle Luke. Joshua was glad he was there to assist.

"Well, you're not going to tell me to do much. All I plan on doing is sleeping." Luke laughed again. The three men headed for the Oldsmobile, which was parked at the edge of the platform.

At Luke's father's house, the two doctors helped the sheriff into the bedroom. Luke sat on the bed and lifted a foot so Joshua could begin pulling his boots off. Luke flopped back onto the bed, his legs hanging off. "Okay. Now go away," Luke said with a smile.

"Not yet," Thomas said. "I want to make sure that trip didn't hurt you any." He would examine his patient to see if there was any change in his condition after the four-hour train ride.

Joshua had greeted his grandfather and then joined his father to examine the injured man. Travis watched, taking in every word the men said.

Luke said, "Does Joey want to come watch too? I must be really interesting to get this much attention. He wouldn't want to miss the excitement."

"Hush!" both doctors said together. Both had their stethoscopes out and were listening to Luke's chest.

"Do you hear that?" Joshua asked. He pushed Luke over some and put the stethoscope against Luke's back, moved it a few times, and then held it still.

"Yes, I do. It was there this morning, but it's more prominent now," Thomas replied. "Luke, you stay in bed. I mean it!"

"That's what I was trying to do when you started all this," Luke said jokingly, waving his hand around over his own chest. "Is there music playing in there?" Luke grabbed Thomas's hand that held the stethoscope and pulled it toward him. "Let me listen."

"Luke," Thomas said sternly, pulling his hand away. "I'm serious. I want you to stay calm and still. Don't get up and move around. Stay in bed. And stop your joking. We need to know what's happening with you. If you make a game of everything, we won't know when you're playing and when you're serious."

"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones,"¹ Luke said almost in singsong.

"We're not worried about your bones, Uncle Luke," Joshua said. "Now stay calm. Don't put any unnecessary stress on your body. Even a good laugh can bust something internal if it's not stable. You've got to heal."

Thomas added, "The bumping around on that train didn't do you any good. Let's see if that noise settles down over the next few hours. If it doesn't, we may have a problem."

"He'll be still," Travis said as the others began to leave the room, giving Travis instructions.

"Tell William to come see me," Luke had to get the last word in. "He'll be more fun than you two."

Adam and seven other men arrived at the marshal's office in Harris. The members of the BI were briefed by the marshal on the robbery and kidnapping of the judge. Then they were told of the

¹ Proverbs 17:22.

events surrounding the shooting of the sheriff. As they were finishing their discussion, Cleve walked in the door.

Adam moved across the room to greet Cleve with a handshake, introducing his colleagues to the state representative and the judge's brother.

More questions were being asked, but Cleve stopped them. "The sheriff just got back in town on the train. Adam, you and maybe one other can probably go out to Grandpa's and talk with him. I haven't seen him yet. I don't know what kind of shape he's in. Reid's son Matt was with him in Summersville and helped track the criminals. He was there when Luke was shot. You may want to talk to him too. He got back in town last night.

"The judge's son is going to ask to go with you to look for his dad. I'm not telling you what to do or how to do your job. But when you find Reid, you may need him along. Reid has some physical problems, and Matt knows how to take care of him."

Adam's supervisor was a serious man with a serious gun—a grumpy-looking burly man named Wilbur Bailey. He had square shoulders and a square chin and spoke with a baritone voice using few words, until he decided to tell a story. Then he could talk for hours. He spoke, "Okay, the rest of you, go get lunch. Adam. You and me are going to see the sheriff."

Adam and Bailey arrived at Travis's house just as the two doctors were leaving. Thomas hugged his son and filled the BI agents in on the sheriff's condition, telling them to keep their visit short and not to let the sheriff get excited. Joshua decided to stay and hear the questioning.

As they were introduced to Travis, Bailey pointed a finger at the former marshal and said, "We met once. I used to be with the marshal service. It was, gosh, close to twenty years ago. We were chasing down some guys that robbed a train. Had them cornered in a canyon out near Cartwright. You are the man that taught me patience. I could never have waited them out like you did."

Then, turning to Adam, Bailey explained. "The rest of us wanted to go in after them, but we all knew some of us would die. That canyon was too narrow, and the outlaws had every advantage.

The marshal here"—and Bailey flung a hand hitting Travis's chest—"just made camp and sat down. He wasn't going anywhere. Made the rest of us look like a bunch of children on a school playground with our planning and conniving to get in there and fight. But he was in charge, so we couldn't do anything without his say so."

Bailey liked to tell stories about his marshal days. Adam thought he had heard them all, but now, here was another. At least this story involved his grandfather. His grandpa didn't tell stories, so this one interested Adam.

"Took a while for the rest of us to settle down, but when we did, he told us his plan. Sent a few of us up around the rim to look for other routes out. We didn't find any. Then he sent some of the guys around the edge to watch. They were to keep out of sight and were only to shoot if they had a clear and certain target.

"Him and me and one other guy just sat by the coffee pot at the entrance to the canyon and waited. We heard a shot every now and then." Wil pointed at Travis again. "It would just be a single shot. This man never raised an eye. Next day, in late afternoon, two guys walked out of the canyon and gave up. The rest of the gang had been picked off one by one. Got all the money back."

Bailey talked, and Travis stood waiting with a disinterested look on his face.

"Then he wouldn't let us leave without burying the dead."

Bailey shook his head. "And he gave them a funeral. Prayed for their victims and for the two guys we had in custody and thanked God for keeping all of us marshals safe. Called each one of us by name. I didn't even know he knew our names. That was it. That was the last word I ever heard him say, 'Amen.' He didn't talk the whole way back to Saline. We split up there, and just a few months later, I heard he had retired."

Travis still said nothing. Adam thought his grandfather looked bored. When Bailey was through talking, Travis led them into the bedroom where Luke was stretched out on the bed asleep. Travis woke him slowly.

"Luke, wake up, son."

"Is it suppertime?" Luke asked before he opened his eyes.

Travis laughed slightly. “No, Adam’s ’ere. He wants ta ask ya some questions.”

Luke’s eyes flew open. “Finally! Somebody interesting to talk to.” Then looking toward Joshua, the sheriff said, “He’s about as grumpy as your father.”

Joshua grinned and explained to the others, “Father gave him something to make him more comfortable on the train. He’s a little scatterbrained right now.”

Adam nodded and smiled. “This should be fun.”

Bailey said, “Tell us what happened in Summersville.”

Luke made a pouty face, poking out his bottom lip. He stretched his first words out long, “I got shot.” Then spoke quickly, “Never been shot before. I don’t think I like it. Don’t want to get shot again.”

Adam laughed. “Uncle Luke, what about Stroud and Coleman?”

“Martin Coleman is dead. Stroud’s in jail. Young’s dead. Matt got away. So did Baker.”

Adam almost laughed again. “Who’s Young?”

“Marshal that followed me and Matt.” Luke’s speech was getting slower quickly. The drug was wearing off, and Luke was sleepy. He blinked his eyes widely several times and then closed them.

“And Baker?”

“The other marshal that followed me and Matt. He shot Coleman the second time. Coleman shot me. Young shot Coleman the first time. Stroud shot Young. Killed him. I shot Stroud.” Luke’s eyes flew open again. “Twice!”

Bailey wasn’t sure he liked the way this line of questioning was going. But then he realized Luke was actually answering their questions. You just had to pick the answers out of everything else that was being said and put it in the right order.

Adam asked, “Why were they following you?”

“Cause they didn’t know how to follow the car’s tracks, and we did.” Luke’s eyes got big again, and he raised his voice. “They don’t teach that in school anymore.”

Adam smiled. “You were following the car’s tracks?”

“Yep,” Luke replied. “From one dead man”—Luke pointed a finger on one side of the bed and drew an arch in the air to the other side—“to two dead men.”

“How could you tell what you were following?”

“Car had one brand-new tire on the back. It was easy to follow.

“Did you just see one of the Coleman brothers?” Bailey asked.

“Yep,” Luke said happily. “That’s all there was. Guess the other one wasn’t hungry.”

Adam laughed out loud. “Were they eating?”

“Yep. I think Stroud had a big juicy grilled steak with a mess a peas and some corn bread with a piece of sponge cake. Coleman probably had chicken omelet and some scalloped potatoes covered in cheese—”

Joshua interrupted, “You hungry, Uncle Luke?”

“What’s you got? I’ll eat it. Your father hasn’t let me eat anything since lunch yesterday.”

Bailey asked, “What about the car they used for the bank robbery?”

Luke got serious. “Had a dead man in it, but it wasn’t Reid. There was blood on the floor though, and it didn’t come from the dead man. Reid’s probably hurt.”

Bailey turned to Adam. “I guess we better head to Summersville and talk to Stroud.”

Luke closed his eyes. His speech was soft and slow. They could all tell he was about to fall asleep, but he raised a finger telling them to wait. “You through with me?” Luke was waving his finger in the air. “Go talk to Matt. I deputized Matt. Had to do it so he could talk to Stroud. Marshals are picky about who they let talk to their prisoners.” And Luke let his hand fall to the bed beside him.

It was getting colder, and Reid knew the sun must have gone down. The two children were still sitting against him, playing with his fingers. The three of them were still wrapped in the only blanket they had.

Reid wondered what these two had done the last few nights. Reid had the blanket. They must have slept open in the cold. Reid didn't understand any of this. These children couldn't survive here alone.

Reid heard a horse approaching and became more alert. The children stopped moving and pushed closer to him. He realized they were scared of whoever this was.

There was noise at the door, and it swung open, making a creaking sound, and slammed as it hit the wall. Reid jumped.

"You awake," the voice said.

"Who are you?" Reid asked.

"My name Blade. I bring food." The voice sounded young.

The two children pulled away from Reid, took what was available, and began eating. "Take," Blade said.

Reid reached his hand out and a wooden bowl was shoved into it. Reid couldn't focus on what was in the bowl. It was black in the room, and the low setting sun sent glare from the door into the inky dark. He began slowly eating. Dried meat and dried grain. Chewing was hard. His jaw didn't seem to work right. He couldn't swallow this.

"Where am I?" Reid asked.

"Safe. For now."

"Can you get word to my family where I am?" Reid asked.

"No."

"Why not?"

"No way to see people. Not safe to move about," Blade said.

"Why do you keep the children here?" Reid would try to get as much information as he could.

"Their father does not want girls. He will sell them. I keep them safe. He does not find them," Blade explained.

"How did you find them?"

"They are my sisters."

Reid wasn't sure he understood. These children's brother was holding them here to protect them from their father? This was protection?

"Your father wants to sell them?" Reid asked.

"He is not my father. My father is dead." The boy sounded bitter. "The man took my mother and holds her, uses her for money. One day I will be strong enough to kill him," Blade said proudly. "I wait to be strong, and I take care of my mother and sisters."

"Where is your mother?" Reid asked.

"She is held by the man. She will have another child soon. Then she will work for him again. If a boy, the man will take it now. If a girl, the man will kill it unless I take it first. If he finds these, he will sell Aiyana. She is old enough to be useful to him. Make money for him. If he cannot sell Kimi Tennis, she will be killed."

Reid was shocked. How could a man do this to his own children? But if he used her for prostitution, were these his children? Reid couldn't eat and set the bowl on the ground. He heard the girls scramble to it, and the hard grain crunched in their mouths.

"How will you take care of a baby?" Reid asked.

"I have sister. Older. She has taken them in the past. But she was taken by the man the last time he found us. She now makes money for him too."

"Are you an Indian?" Reid asked.

"Cheyenne."

Reid had read about the Indians that served the outland as slaves. Now this was all coming together in his mind. Servants they were called. But none of them were paid, and none could leave of their own free will. But if this man was a slave dealer, or he ran prostitution, how did Blade stay free?

"How did you avoid being sold?" Reid asked.

"I am rebellious," the boy said proudly. "I have scars. No one will buy scarred servant. I stay away until the man finds me. Then he beats me again, and I get fresh scars. When I can, I run. He cannot sell me. He cannot use me. I am free."

"Have you thought about leaving here? Going a long way off?"

"Where would I go? What is beyond the land where nothing lives?" Blade asked. Then standing quickly, he picked up the bucket that held the stale water and dumped it onto the ground. "I get water."

He left, barring the door behind him.

12

CHAPTER

Travis lay in bed listening to Luke cough. He'd been coughing for a while now, but it was gentle, the way Reid coughed right after he was injured.

Luke had been calm and quiet all afternoon. The only talking he had done had been to the BI. He was doing exactly what the doctors had told him to do. Most of the afternoon, he had slept. He even slept through the doctor's evening visit. When he woke up, he had eaten some chicken and potato soup that Sarah had made, and then he had a cup of coffee.

Travis had gotten his Bible out, and Joey had read from it. Luke had fallen asleep before they finished. Then Travis and Joey had prayed, and Joey went to bed. Travis sat in Luke's room talking to God further, like he always did in the evenings. He stayed up late into the night. He'd done this since he was a deputy marshal. His habits had never changed. Late nights, early mornings, and then an afternoon nap—that was his routine.

Travis was still listening and kept hoping the coughing would stop, not because he didn't want to get out of bed, but because he didn't want anything to be wrong with his son.

Luke quit coughing, but Travis could hear every breath going in and out. Deep, troubled, then more coughing.

Travis heard his son gag. The old man got out of bed and went to the front bedroom, turning on the light. Luke lay on his back with his eyes closed. He coughed a few more times and then took some hard breaths. Luke didn't open his eyes in response to the light.

"Luke?" Travis said as he got to the bed.

Luke opened his eyes briefly to look at his father and closed them again. Travis saw the weakness in his son's eyes. Luke tried to take a few more deep breaths, but it made him cough harder.

Travis sat on the edge of the bed, putting his hand on Luke's arm. "Roll onto ya side, son. Come this way."

Travis kept his hand on Luke as he rolled toward his father. He seemed to be able to take one good breath, then a hard cough came, followed by retching. Coughing came again, even harder this time, and it didn't seem to be stopping.

Travis turned to yell to the boy in the next room. But when Travis turned, Joey was already standing in the doorway.

"Joey, run! Get Thomas," Travis told him.

"Can't I just call him on the telephone?" Joey asked.

"No. There ain't nobody there at the exchange this time a night. Hurry! Get ya boots on an' run!"

Joey disappeared to obey.

Luke was trying to catch his breath again. Travis heard the screen door slam.

"Water," Luke choked out.

Travis retrieved the water and held the cup to Luke who had propped himself on his elbow. Luke put a hand on the cup to guide it, taking a few sips. He started coughing again and dropped back to the bed.

William sat on the edge of his bed. He couldn't sleep. The only time he felt the pain in his shoulder was at night. He tried to stay quiet and not move around. He didn't want to wake anyone and have them come to check on him. He wanted to be left alone.

The young doctor ran his hand through his thick black hair. He moved to the window quietly and looked out. The night was dark and still, not like in Sacramento where streetlights burned, and there was activity in the street that lasted long into the night.

From his third-story window of the Victorian home, William could see past the railroad tracks and into town. The town was dark,

too, with no streetlights. There were a few random dimly lit windows of other people that couldn't sleep. Only one saloon remained open, but there was little activity during the weekdays. The bar didn't serve alcohol because of the prohibition laws, but they served food, and card games were popular.

William had chosen this isolated third-story room because of its solitude. He didn't want anyone bothering him when he wanted to be alone. He didn't want his father casually walking past and sticking his head in the door asking if he was okay. He knew how his father acted when anyone in the family was sick or injured. His father was a pest, always wanting things done on his timing and his way. William wanted to avoid this.

Moving to the window on the other side of his corner room, he watched a few cows and a couple of horses in the family's pasture. There was enough moonlight to see his grandfather's large white dog roaming the pasture too. William remembered hearing the dog bark when he was growing up. That dog guarded the livestock well, but she was old now. It was amazing that she was still alive. It looked like she was still doing her job.

In the distance, William saw a light come on at his grandfather's house. Grandpa must not be able to sleep either. But as he watched, he remembered Grandpa's room was in the back of the house. Joshua had told him that they had put Uncle Luke in the front bedroom where the light had come on.

William continued to watch as a figure came onto the porch. The moonlight caught the light-colored clothing moving from the house. He saw the figure move swiftly, climbing through the fence and running through the pasture toward the house William was in.

The young doctor reached for his pants, pulled them on, and grabbed his boots. He looked back out the window and saw a boy coming through the fence on this side of the pasture. William was now certain that something was wrong at his grandfather's house.

The young doctor moved down the stairs to the second floor and opened his brother's bedroom door, flipping on the light switch. "Get up, Josh! Something's wrong at Grandpa's."

Joshua woke suddenly in surprise, blinking his eyes against the abrupt light that shown into his face. "What?"

"Something's wrong at Grandpa's. Get your clothes on," William said as he closed the door behind him and headed down the hall to wake his father.

Travis rolled his son farther onto his side, and Luke heaved. Something was coming up. Grabbing Luke's dirty shirt from the floor, Travis got to Luke's mouth just as he spewed the water he had taken in. And blood, there was blood with it.

Travis saw it but wadded the shirt quickly to prepare for more. It came again, this time with a hard cough, so hard it could have busted something on a healthy person. Then Luke collapsed back onto his pillow, panting for air.

Travis remained on the edge of the bed, his hand on Luke's arm. Luke was weak now from the coughing. His eyes were closed, but he was still conscious. His mouth was gently moving. Luke was praying. Travis kept his eyes open, watching his son, but he joined Luke in prayer.

Travis prayed for Luke. He prayed that whatever was wrong would pass quickly and that his son would live.

Luke prayed the Lord would ease his own discomfort, and then he prayed for Reid. He prayed for Reid every time he prayed. He had prayed for Reid every day for the last ten years. But since his abduction, Luke had cried out to the Lord on behalf of his brother several times a day.

Now Luke cried out within his spirit again. "Father, you told us, 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'¹ I'm praying, Father. I'm thanking you that you are caring for Reid and that you will bring him home. 'How I weep for you, my brother... How much I loved you.'²

¹ Philippians 4:6.

² 2 Samuel 1:26a (NLT).

Luke stopped praying suddenly and opened his eyes. The Spirit was speaking to him.

Because you have sought me on behalf of your brother, instead of yourself, I will favor you with news of him. In the shelter of (my) presence (I) hide (your brother) from all human intrigues; (I) keep them safe in (the) dwelling from accusing tongues.¹

There will be a shelter to give shade from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain.²

I will...rid the land of savage beasts so that they may live in the wilderness and sleep in the forests in safety.³

Luke spoke softly what the Spirit was telling him. “When you, God, went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness.”⁴ God was going before Reid. He was making a path so Reid could get home safely.

In a desert land he found him in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye.⁵

Luke began to cough again. “Dad, the wilderness,” he said louder. Then came more coughing.

“I’m ’ere, Luke. Shhh. Don’ talk,” Travis said, quieting his son, trying to keep him from coughing again.

“But, Dad—”

Travis put his finger to Luke’s lips. “No talkin’. I don’ want ya coughin’ anymore. Thomas is on ’is way.”

Luke closed his eyes tight, breathing heavy, not because he was having trouble breathing, but because the Spirit had spoken to him about Reid. He wanted to tell his father.

Every time Luke tried to speak, he would begin to cough, or his father would stop him. He had to tell someone that would listen.

They heard the motorcar arrive, and the engine shut off. Joey and Thomas came into the room, followed by Joshua and William. Luke was getting anxious. He had to tell the others.

¹ Psalm 31:20.

² Isaiah 4:6 (NASB).

³ Ezekiel 34:25.

⁴ Psalm 68:7.

⁵ Deuteronomy 32:10.

Travis got up and moved away so that the doctor could get to Luke.

“Thomas, it’s Reid!” the sheriff bellowed, grabbing the doctor’s arm.

“Reid’s not here, Luke. Be quiet and let me listen to your chest,” the doctor said as he sat down on the edge of the bed. But he wasn’t looking at Luke. He was looking toward Travis who was showing the doctors his son’s shirt.

Why was his shirt so interesting?

Thomas nodded and turned to the man in the bed.

“Thomas, listen,” Luke tried again.

“I said hush,” Thomas insisted as he put the stethoscope to the sheriff’s chest. “Luke, calm down. Your heart is racing like you’ve been running. You’re okay. We’re going to take care of you.”

“But, Thomas!”

“Hush and calm down,” Thomas said firmly, passing the stethoscope to Joshua who was now sitting on the other side of Luke.

Maybe Joshua would listen. “Joshua. Listen...” Luke rolled onto his back to look at his nephew. Joshua put his fingers to Luke’s mouth. His face looked grave.

“Luke, you have to calm down. What we’re hearing isn’t good. You’re only making it worse.” Joshua got up and moved to where his father and grandfather were standing, talking quietly. William sat down beside his uncle.

“William, please listen,” Luke whispered, pushing up onto his elbow.

“Okay. You talk quietly, and I’ll listen,” the young doctor said gently. William listened like he had all the time in the world, patiently watching his uncle’s face. William’s sharp facial features and the depth of expression in his eyes showed that he took an interest in everything he looked at.

“God told me he put Reid in a shelter, a place where he is safe for right now. He’s with somebody. God didn’t say who. He’s making the wilderness and forests safe so they can leave. We’ll find him in a desert, ‘a barren and howling waste.’ Somebody is taking care of him.

Tell Adam. Tell Matt.” Luke relaxed and collapsed back onto the bed, relieved that he had told someone what God said.

“All right. I hear you. Now you rest.” William picked up the stethoscope from the end of the bed and put it to his ears, placing the drum on Luke’s chest. He moved with the gentle elegant motion of a man that knew what he was doing. The doctor pulled on his uncle’s shoulder, and Luke rolled to his side. William moved the stethoscope to Luke’s back. Precise. Hitting exactly where he wanted. Luke knew William was in no hurry to tell anyone. Luke got louder. “Tell Adam...” Then he started coughing again.

The doctors and Travis watched as Luke coughed, and William cared for him. His nephew’s easy smile would have comforted Luke if he hadn’t been so concerned about Reid.

Then Luke heard Thomas say, “I’m going to the clinic to get what we need.”

William stopped him. “Wait. Have you got any codeine?”

“Sure.”

“Try that first. See if it will calm him and stop the cough. It’s not that bad yet. It might heal itself if he calms down,” William added.

“It’s worth a try,” Joshua said, looking to his father. “It’s really not that bad. We can give it a few hours anyway. See what it sounds like in the morning.”

“If he keeps coughing, it’s going to continue to tear,” Thomas told his sons.

William replied, “But the codeine should help with the coughing. I’ll stay here and keep an eye on him. You can have everything ready if we need it, but let’s not rush into cutting him open.”

Joshua looked at his father. “William could be right. It could heal itself.”

Thomas didn’t like this, but he nodded. “Okay. Just a few hours.” He reached into his bag, pulling out a bottle and pouring some of the liquid into a small glass cup. “It’s going to be harder to repair if it tears more.” But no one seemed to pay any attention to his comment.

Joshua took the codeine from his father and tried giving it to Luke. The sheriff grabbed Joshua’s arm, trying to push his hand

away, but at this moment, Joshua was stronger. Luke wasn’t opening his mouth, so Joshua grabbed his cheeks and squeezed, forcing his uncle’s mouth open so that he would have to take the medicine.

Luke coughed and sputtered at the taste and then said, “William, you’ve got to tell Adam.” William was watching Luke with those tender eyes, and he nodded. He looked like he was listening, but Luke wanted him to do more. He wanted William to make some kind of move to tell Adam or at least acknowledge that he would do it. He kept trying, but his pleas began to quiet as he got lightheaded, his eyes heavy. “Reid! Tell Adam...”

For the next twenty-four hours, Luke slept, the result of the medication he was being given. One of the doctors was staying with him around the clock. He hadn’t coughed anymore, and the doctors thought the sound in his chest was improving.

William decided to continue the codeine throughout the second night. Tomorrow they would give Luke less medication and allow him to wake up some. Maybe, without the discomfort in his chest, he would remain calm.

Reid sat against the wall with Aiyana beside him and Kimi Tennis in his lap. They hadn’t seen Blade. The water was almost gone. They’d had nothing to eat since Blade brought the dried meat and grain. Reid didn’t know how long it had been. One day, maybe two.

Reid’s head still hurt, but it wasn’t the same pain he’d lived with before. This was a throbbing that pulsated the distance from his eye to his ear. It would come for a period of time, and then it would leave. He couldn’t get his right eye open at all. He would scratch the dried blood off his face, head, and neck; but later he would feel the warm sticky, moisture running down his face again. When he felt it, he would press his hand over the wound, and the blood would spread across his face and dry. Later he would repeat the scratching.

Reid had talked to God when he could focus his mind. He struggled to focus. Thoughts would come as an explosion of crazy chaotic ideas that wouldn't last long enough to understand what they meant. Then his brain would go numb, with nothing heard, nothing seen, nothing thought. Afterward he would fall asleep until another explosion occurred.

There was no time in this place. It had been cloudy, and there was no sun, no warmth coming in the openings in the walls. The only way he could tell night had fallen was the lowered temperature, the pressing cold. The girls had never said a word. Never made a sound.

Aiyana stirred, and it woke Reid. The door rattled and swung open quickly. Early morning light shone into their prison. Reid squinted his left eye to see what was happening. A figure stood in the glare of the doorway holding a package.

"We must go," Blade said.

"Where?" Reid asked.

"We must go. Now. The man has left. You show me where to go. You lead us past the barren land. I have thought of what you said. I cannot keep sisters hidden. My mother is dead. My older sister is lost to me."

"Blade, I'm sorry. What happened to your mother?"

"The baby came last week. She died then."

"Blade, I'm sorry," Reid repeated.

"It does not matter. She is free of him now. We will be free too." Blade seemed to have no emotion about his mother's death.

The Spirit spoke to Reid. *Get up, and go away! This is not a place to rest! It will be destroyed, completely destroyed, because it offends me.*¹

Reid knew he had to somehow do what Blade said, to do what God told him. He would figure out a way to get them out.

Reid nodded. "Okay. We'll need supplies and horses."

Just then the package in Blade's arms began to make noise.

"What is that?" Reid asked.

Blade stepped forward and handed Reid the package. A blanket. Wrapped inside was a tiny baby.

"Oh, Lord, help us," Reid said quietly.

Blade walked from the hut without a word and returned with a sack. He pulled out bread and handed it to Kimi and Aiyana. Then he pulled out cloth, a bottle, nipple, and several cans of milk.

"My sister says we will need this."

Reid stared at what the boy had just laid on the ground in front of him. How would they do this? How could he care for these two little girls and a tiny baby in this rough land?

"Oh, Lord. You know what needs to be done. Only you know why I am here in this place. Only you know how to get us out. Help us. Show me what to do," Reid prayed.

Reid told Blade that the baby needed to eat, and Blade took his knife and jabbed a hole in one of the cans, handing it to Reid.

As Reid fed the baby girl, he prayed. He prayed for protection and guidance. He prayed he would be able to physically do what was needed to protect these children and to get them away safely. He prayed the headaches would stop, and the pain in his back would go away. As he prayed, the Lord comforted him.

*The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.*¹

*Get up and prepare for action. Go out and tell them everything I tell you to say. Do not be afraid of them.*²

*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.*³

"Yes, Lord." Reid laid the baby on the ground and began to pull himself to his feet, holding to the wall. "You will tell me where to go. I'm listening."

¹ Deuteronomy 31:8.

² Jeremiah 1:17a (NLT).

³ Joshua 1:9.

¹ Micah 2:10 (GW).

Reid didn't know where he was nor how far away he was from anywhere. But if Blade was Cheyenne and he wasn't on the reservation, there would not be many options. They must be in the public lands of the panhandle. Everybody in Harris referred to it as No Man's Land, the last place you would want to go. These were rough towns, if you could find a town.

Oklahoma had become a state just a few years ago, but there was still little law in this area. And there were rugged territorial ranch owners who fought to maintain their land and sovereignty. Reid had heard about the range wars and battles still being fought on this land. A person could be shot just for stepping over an invisible line.

Reid was trying to listen to God, and the only idea that had come to him was to head north. So that must be what God wanted them to do.

No Man's Land was just over thirty miles north to south. They would be moving slow, but they should be able to travel that distance in three or four days. Then they would be in Kansas.

Blade had stolen another horse. Reid hoped they wouldn't get caught by the wrong people. He hoped he had enough strength to stay on the horse. He hoped he could *get on* the horse. He hoped it stayed cloudy so that he could see, and his eye would stay open, and his headache didn't get worse. He hoped he could keep this baby alive until they found help.

Reid heard the Spirit speak. *Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*¹

"Yes, Lord. My hope is in you," Reid replied. "I trust you to lead us."

He moved beside the horse and dropped to his knees begging God for help again. He didn't know how he would be able to do this. It was all in God's hands, but he knew this was what they had to do. There was no other option. God had told him so.

Blade had said the little town where his mother had been held was dominated by the man that held her. His friends controlled the

town. There was no communication from outside. No telephone. No telegraph. No post office. Blade didn't even know what these were.

There were a few farms and a couple of ranches nearby, but Blade stayed away from them. Most of them also held Indian women as slaves. At least one of the ranches held male Indians too. The owners were ready to shoot anyone that came near.

Blade was known in the area as a rebel and a thief, thanks to the man that had held his mother and sister. He would probably be shot on sight if he were to go to any of them for help.

He advised Reid to stay away too. These people didn't help outsiders. They didn't want the problems outsiders brought with them.

Reid grabbed the stirrup and pulled himself to his feet. Blade pushed him onto the horse.

¹ Hebrews 10:23.

13

CHAPTER

William put the cold stethoscope to Luke's chest, and the sheriff woke suddenly. His eyes went wide and then slowly closed. "Dad?"

"It's William," the doctor told his patient. He moved to the door, called his grandfather, and returned to the chair beside the bed. "Luke, you're doing much better, but you've got to stay calm. Do you understand me?"

Travis came into the room acting like nothing had happened. "Mornin', Luke."

"Dad, I need to tell you. I need to tell you something," Luke said, his forehead furrowing. "I can't remember."

"Luke, stay quiet. When ya remember, then ya can tell me," his father said.

Luke was staying calm. The drugs were still in his system, forcing him into a stupor. He knew he needed to tell his father something important, but he couldn't think. The fog was too thick.

Travis sat down on the edge of the bed and laid his hand on his son. "Ya gonna be okay. Ya healin'. Just lay quiet. I'll get ya some soup. Do ya want some?"

Luke shook his head. He just wanted to remember what he needed to tell his father.

Travis began to hum and then he began to softly sing.

Luke quietly said, "I can't remember," as he fell asleep again.

Reid sat on the horse with Aiyana behind him and Kimi Tennis in front of him in the saddle. Blade had tied the baby to his own chest, the same way Chipeta had done with Esa and Saamel.

Reid was happy Blade had been able to steal a horse with a saddle. Reid laughed inwardly. He was *happy* Blade had *stolen* a horse? How ironic. Him a judge and he was riding a stolen horse. Blade was riding with just a blanket and Reid knew he would not have been able to do that. He was thankful for the saddle.

They left late in the day. They would only have a few hours of daylight before they would have to stop. They would stay to the open country as much as they could, skirting the edge of the high country to the west. If they could get across the Cimarron River, then they would turn slightly east. Maybe a day later, they should run into a ranch or a town and safety.

Luke was still affected by the codeine. He knew that's what was wrong with him. William had been giving it to him for days, and he didn't remember any of them. Now his brain was working again, but his body was worn out. He was tired and didn't want to move. None of the doctors were there when he woke up.

Luke was in the bedroom alone when Joey brought him some coffee. He had his books in his hand and was about to leave for school. Luke didn't know why the boy had done this. He hadn't asked for the coffee, but Luke was happy he had come in this morning. It gave him the chance to ask the boy to get Cleve. He hoped Cleve would arrive before any of the doctors got there and gave him more medicine. Maybe Cleve would listen to him.

It didn't take long for Luke's older brother to get there. Luke heard him talking with their father in another room, then Cleve appeared in the doorway.

"Well! You decided to join the living."

"Cleve," Luke said weakly. "Would you please listen to me? I can't get anybody to listen."

A concerned look appeared on Cleve's face. "Sure." Cleve pulled the chair over so he could look into Luke's face easier.

"I've been trying to tell somebody since the night I got here. But nobody would listen," Luke explained.

"I'm listening," Cleve said seriously, looking into his brother's eyes.

"God told me that Reid is okay for now. He's being hidden in a lonely place. A wasteland. A barren and howling wilderness. God's clearing the area so 'they' can leave and be safe. I don't know who he's with. God said this person is taking care of him. I don't want the same thing to happen now that happened in Chicago."

Cleve interrupted, concerned but not understanding what his brother was talking about, "What happened in Chicago?"

Luke's speech was slow, the medication still affecting him. "The angel told me he was kept away from us for twenty-one days. Twenty-one. Do you realize that's how long Mary said it was since the first beating Reid took? He took the second beating because we didn't get the message on time. If our prayers had been stronger, if we had gotten the message when God sent it, Reid wouldn't be in the shape he's in now. How long have they been keeping me drugged?"

"It's been five nights since you got home." Cleve was thinking about what his brother had just said. Was Reid really hurt because they couldn't hear from God? Did they not hear from God because they weren't praying enough?

"Cleve, you've got to get Adam the message," Luke begged.

"But that doesn't tell us where he is?" Cleve said.

"Do you remember what God told me in that alley in Chicago? We didn't understand it then either. But after we found him, it all made sense. We've got to figure out where the wasteland is," Luke said.

Cleve shrugged. "Most people would consider all this country a wasteland. Most of it is open and useless for anything, except maybe cattle."

"But us. What does it mean to us?" Luke asked. "A wasteland. A barren and howling wilderness. Don't you think that could be No

Man's Land? It's not far. You could get there in an automobile in a little over a day."

"Yeah. But that's a big place to search." Cleve was thinking. How could they narrow the search?

"But it's a place to start," Luke said, his eyes pleading with Cleve to believe him.

Cleve nodded. Luke could see him thinking. Cleve put the palms of his hands over his eyes and stretched his face to the sides. "How do we get Adam to listen?"

"He'll believe me. Matt will too. Where is Matt?" Luke asked.

Cleve nodded again. "He's with Adam. But I don't know where they are. They left here going to Summersville. I don't know where they went from there."

"If you tell Matt the Spirit spoke to me, he'll believe you. He knows the Spirit speaks to Dad and Reid. He knows I've heard from God too. He'll believe us. And Adam will believe us. He was there the night the lightning struck the men in the field. He knows God warned Reid to get out of the house. He believed Reid when Thomas didn't. He knows God spoke to Dad before the lightning struck too."

"Okay. I'll go find them. You stay calm and don't bother the others with it. They think you're confused."

"Even Dad?" Luke looked hurt.

"I think Dad's just worried about losing you. You really scared him. He hasn't said a word about Reid since we found out you were shot. Joey said those days between the time we found out you were hurt and when Thomas brought you home, Dad didn't say much of anything. He'd sit on the porch and rock, or he'd go over to Reid's house and sit there on the porch holding Saamel and rock there."

"Oh Dad!" Luke felt bad for his father. He hadn't realized his father was worried about him.

"I don't think he slept much during that time. Sarah said he didn't eat much either. He thought you were safe when you got home, and then you started coughing up blood. That night, Joshua and William sat with you, and Thomas sat with Dad. Dad wouldn't go to bed. Thomas was worried about him too."

"I'm sorry. I just can't think about anything except Reid. I forget other people are concerned too," Luke said.

Cleve added, "Luke, there's a lot going on. I'm worried about Thomas too. Joshua left two days ago. William's home, but he can't use his left arm, and Sarah says he doesn't sleep at night. Thomas is worried about him and Dad and you and Reid. You know how Thomas is. He worries about everything, but he keeps on going like nothing is wrong. Now, after you being shot, he's worried about Adam's and Matt's safety too.

"And Saamel's almost quit eating and sleeping. Dad was taking care of him, but now Dad's here with you. Saamel doesn't respond to the rest of us the way he does Dad. Saamel stayed right with Matt when he was home, but Matt's gone with Adam now. James says he holds Saamel and tries to talk to him and play with him, but he doesn't think the boy cares one way or the other. It doesn't seem to make a difference.

"The House session is in, and I need to be in Topeka, but I need to be here too. It doesn't feel right to be here, but I can't leave. I wouldn't be able to concentrate on anything if I were there. But here there's nothing I can do to help."

Cleve saw the concerned look in Luke's face.

"How long's it been since I was shot?" the sheriff asked.

"Ten Days. Five since you came home."

"Okay. I'll be good for Dad. But that's five days something could have happened with Reid. You find Adam and Matt, and then you come by here every day. No, twice a day if you're in town. You keep me informed of what's going on. And you listen to me. Please don't ignore me. Deal?"

Cleve nodded. "Deal."

The phone rang, and since William was the only one there, he answered it.

"No. I'm sorry. He's not here."

"No. He said he couldn't be reached. He was going to one of the ranches."

"How serious is it?"

"At the hotel? Is this Mr. St. Clair? This is William."

"Yes, I'm back and I'm a doctor now. Give me a few minutes, and I'll be over there to look at her."

"All right. See you then."

William hung up the phone and then called the exchange. "Can I speak with Angus?"

"Yes, Angus. This is William. My father is at one of the ranches, and there's been an accident at the hotel. Would it be possible for you to come pick me up and take me to the clinic so I can pick up a few things then take me to the hotel?"

"That's great. Thanks."

William walked up the steps and entered the hotel. Nothing had changed. Same floor, same rugs, the same pale-yellow painted walls with an oak wainscoting and the same faded framed paintings of Kansas landscapes.

William walked to the desk and asked for the owner. Curtis St. Clair came from the back room with his hand outstretched to the young doctor. "Welcome home. I heard you were back in town. How long have you been back?"

"Just about a week."

"Well, we're glad to have you back here. Listen. I was sorry to hear about your injury but you look fit. Everything's going okay?"

"Yes, sir. I'm fine," William said.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. Come on back this way. Bonnie had an arm full of sheets, and she must have tripped on the end of one of them, and down those stairs she came. I'm so thankful she didn't hurt herself any worse, but she says her shoulder and foot hurt. I figured we better check it out."

They walked through the door to the office, and sitting before William was the most beautiful young woman he had ever seen.

Bonnie had long wavy yellow hair pulled back into a loose ponytail with strands that had escaped everywhere. Her nose fit her face perfectly with a little button on the end. It was flanked by two of the warmest blue eyes he had ever seen. She was as tiny as his mother was, and everything about her was inviting.

She looked up and smiled at him. "I'm so sorry to cause this much trouble."

William was mesmerized. Her voice so gentle and pure the angels probably stopped to listen.

"No, you're no trouble. I'm sorry you got hurt. I'm William Stewart." And William put his hand out.

She tucked her chin. "I'm sorry, but my shoulder hurts too much to move."

William saw the wrinkles in her forehead and her chin quiver. It made her that much more beautiful.

"Well, let's look at it and see what's wrong," William said, moving to the shoulder that was injured. William examined the area using one hand and asked Bonnie for assistance in moving the arm a few times.

He explained, "I'm so sorry. I know it's hard for you to do this while it's hurting this way. But I injured my shoulder too, and mine's not well yet. Thankfully you didn't injure yours as seriously as I did mine. We'll put yours in a sling and let it rest. It should feel much better in a few days. It doesn't look like the bone was broken, but if it doesn't start to feel better soon, we'll get an x-ray just to make sure. Now, let's look at your foot."

William saw that the ankle was swelling, but it didn't feel like anything was broken there either. With Bonnie's help, he was able to wrap the ankle. Now the two sat in the dining room talking while they waited for Angus to return.

When William called, Angus had told him that he had a problem at the power plant and would be along when the glitch was solved. Then he would drive Bonnie home, since she was unable to walk, before taking William back to his parents' house.

Mr. St. Clair had gotten them both a cup of coffee and a piece of sweet potato pie. They were enjoying the corner table far away from the window as they quietly laughed and got to know each other.

Angus stuck his head around the corner looking for them. "Hey, William. I can't stay gone from the plant too long. We haven't got that problem fixed yet. You think you can handle the automobile?"

"Sure. I should be able to."

"Okay. It's right out front. I'm going back to the plant. Keep the car. I'll get it from you later." And Angus disappeared.

"Well, I guess it's you and me," William said. He was kind of glad his uncle wouldn't be with them.

Mr. St. Clair helped Bonnie to the car. William decided to go by the medical clinic to see if he could find a crutch or cane that might help Bonnie stay off her foot until it healed some. He couldn't find one, so he called home. If he could locate his mother, she might know where to find one.

"Hey, Mother... Yes, ma'am, I'm okay. There was an accident at the hotel, and I went to help. Do you know of a crutch stuck anywhere that a young lady could borrow while her foot heals?"

"Reid, huh? That's the only one you know of? I hate to go out there and ask Chipeta for help... Okay... No, I have Angus's car. Thanks."

William returned to the automobile, got it started, and climbed in. "Well, it looks like the only one not being used is out at my uncle's place. Mmm. I hate to go out there and ask for something, but I really think you need to stay off that foot as much as you can. You can't use two crutches with that shoulder, but one will help you not put as much weight on that ankle."

"Do you and your uncle not get along? Is that why you don't want to go there?" she asked.

"No, we get along fine. My uncle is Judge Britt. I just don't want to disturb his family asking for help with him missing and everything that's been going on," William explained.

"Oh! I didn't realize you were related."

"Yeah. Well, we'll run out there real fast and see if Chipeta knows where it is without having to look for it." He put the automobile in gear and started moving.

Bonnie seemed to get quiet. She wasn't talking anymore and had her face turned away from William. William wondered what was

bothering her. As he pulled to a stop at his uncle's home, he turned to her and asked, "Okay, what's wrong?"

She shook her head. "I'm just embarrassed. My grandmother has something against the judge. I don't know why. She's caused him some trouble and..." She shook her head again. "And now here I am asking his family for help."

William left the motor running as he got out of the automobile. "Listen. Don't worry about it. These are some of the nicest people you will ever meet. And they don't know who your grandmother is. But I want to hear about it when I get back."

William walked onto the porch watching the small Indian boy sitting against the wall. He was staring at the road, leaning his head against the wall sideways. He didn't look like he had noticed the car drive up or William walking toward the house. William walked past him and returned a short time later carrying the crutches with Chipeta following behind him.

William turned again to look at Saamel on the porch.

"Hello," Chipeta said as she got close to Bonnie. "William told me you got hurt. I'm so sorry. I hope the crutches will help. Keep them as long as you need. We're not using them right now."

"Thank you," Bonnie offered.

The two women smiled at each other, and Chipeta turned around to go back to the house. William stopped her.

"Chipeta, is he okay?" William asked, indicating Saamel.

"No, I don't think so. He wants his father back, and he's quit doing anything. I don't know what to do about him. Your father told me to keep things as normal and routine as possible around here, but it doesn't seem to be helping him." She cocked her head slightly and shrugged her shoulder. "It seems to help the others, but not him."

She continued up the steps and stopped to squat in front of her son. William watched as Chipeta spoke to him and ran her hand across his head and shoulder. She got up and walked back into the house. The child didn't respond to her.

William turned the car around and began moving down the dirt road. "Now tell me what you meant by your grandmother caused Uncle Reid some problems."

Bonnie started slowly, trying to pick out the right words so her grandmother didn't sound as mean and hateful as she was. But eventually Bonnie was talking and telling William all about the incident at the hardware store and of her grandmother trying to start problems for the judge around town with her destructive spin on the story.

"It didn't work though. Everybody seems to like the judge, and Grandmother just got her feelings hurt more. She's such a hateful woman. Then Mother told me the judge spoke in church a few weeks after that, and he mentioned the slander. Not her by name but everyone knew what he was talking about. Mother said he stopped on his way out the door and kissed her. Mother and I both think he was saying he forgave her."

William smiled. "That's Uncle Reid. He's the most forgiving man I know. Unless maybe my grandfather. You weren't in church when Uncle Reid spoke?"

"No, I work every morning. Somebody's got to do the laundry at the hotel, and my family needs the money," she explained.

"Have you met my uncle or my grandfather?" William asked.

"No."

"Would you like to? When you're feeling better, I'll take you by to visit Grandpa," William said, looking toward Bonnie.

Bonnie nodded. "I'd like that."

As they drove up to Bonnie's home, William stopped the car and sat looking at the dilapidated house with the older woman sitting on the front porch sewing. That had to be Bonnie's grandmother.

William got out of the automobile and walked to the other side to help Bonnie. He pulled one crutch out of the back seat and gave her a few instructions on using it. Then he said, "I'll check on you in a few days. Stay home and rest. Don't use that arm and stay off that foot as much as you can. Keep it propped up. It was really nice meeting you."

"I enjoyed meeting you too, Dr. Stewart."

14

CHAPTER

Night was coming quickly. Blade had the girls on a blanket and was helping Reid from the horse. The day hadn't been as hard as Reid thought it would be. But now, as he was getting off the horse, he was having trouble moving and almost fell onto Blade. But Blade was strong. He caught Reid, waiting for Reid to get on his feet, and patiently moved him to the blanket with the girls.

"I will find food," Blade said, and he left camp, going out into the dark.

The girls had clung to Reid all day. He could tell they didn't know what was happening. They had probably never been out of that cabin before. After Reid had gotten on the horse, Blade had gone in to get the girls. They had come through the door clawing and squirming, not wanting to come outside.

Blade had brought the little one out first and had carried her, clinging to him, until he pulled her off and passed her to Reid. Then she had held to him tightly sitting backward in front of him on the saddle, burying her face in his chest.

Aiyana had fought harder, but Blade had picked her up off the ground and slung her over the back of the horse easily. She had grabbed Reid so hard she almost knocked him off balance. He had reached behind him and put a hand on Aiyana's leg, talking gently to her, and she had quieted. But several times throughout the afternoon, he could feel her tears on the back of his shirt as she quietly wept.

Now, sitting on the ground, they both clung to him again. He gave the baby the last of the milk in the bottle and sang softly. His

rough voice was breaking, and he didn't even think it was a nice sound. But it seemed to calm the baby.

He wished he understood what was going on with the children. Why didn't these little girls say anything? Had they been locked in that cabin their whole life? Maybe Blade had been the only person they had been around since their older sister was taken. Maybe they had not heard enough speech to know words. But they didn't even make noises.

Reid began to talk with them. They looked at him. They were listening. He called Aiyana by name and touched her nose. She smiled. He did the same with Kimi Tennis. What would they call the baby? When Blade got back, he would ask him to give her a name.

Reid continued to talk and picked up dirt off the ground. He said, "Dirt," and let the wind blow it away. He picked up more dirt and put some in each of the girl's hands. "Dirt," he said again.

Then he asked, "Where's the dirt?"

Aiyana smiled and released the dirt into the wind. Kimi Tennis held the dirt in her hand, looking at it.

Reid touched Aiyana's lips and again said, "Dirt." He tapped Aiyana's lips a few times, and she moved her mouth, but she didn't say anything. Kimi wouldn't even try.

The Lord spoke to Reid. *They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.*¹

Reid lay back on the blanket, with the baby across his chest. The girls snuggled against him. He lay under the darkened sky praying out loud, "Why, Lord? Why don't they talk? Why is there no sound when they cry?"

There was no moon tonight. The sky was still overcast, and not one star could be seen.

Reid didn't like the dark. The skies were vast and the land open. There were no boundaries, no end to this black. He'd seen darkness before, and he didn't like it, not since the time he had spent injured in the tunnels.

¹ Psalm 19:3.

He'd always managed to have light available if he wanted to use it. But there was none now, and Reid began to feel uneasy.

This needed to stop.

He looked up into the black of the open sky and prayed, "Father, I've had enough of the lies of my own mind. It is fear, put there by the evil one. I have pushed it away with lamps, lanterns, and candles. Father, I'm asking you to push the dark away. Don't let it invade my thoughts again."

The Spirit spoke. *I am the light of the world.*¹

"Yes, Jesus, you are, and I worship you. 'Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.'"²

*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*³

"Yes, Lord. You give us light. You spoke, and light came into existence. 'Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth," and it was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night. He made the stars also. God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness, and God saw that it was good.'"⁴

Reciting scripture helped. Reid wasn't as disturbed now and continued reciting scripture out loud as the girls fell asleep. He was still watching the low hanging clouds and reciting scripture when Blade came back into camp.

He had a snake and two large agave leaves. The fire he built gave off enough light to give the camp a warm glow and enough heat that they wouldn't freeze as the temperature continued to drop. Reid chewed on a piece of agave, while Blade roasted the snake.

Reid asked, "How did you get the name Blade?"

¹ John 9:5.

² Micah 7:8b.

³ John 8:12.

⁴ Genesis 1:14–18 (NASB 1995).

"When the man took my mother, he could not say my name. It was too hard for him. Mother told him I was sharp as a knife. So he called me a blade."

Reid laughed slightly. "Well, it fits. You're a smart boy. What was your name?"

"My father called me Attakullakulla Onacona. It means Chief White Owl."

"What do the girl's names mean?" Reid asked.

"Aiyana means Eternal Blossom. Kimi Tennis is Secret Daughter," Blade explained.

They sat in the darkness watching the fire. Reid asked what they should call the baby.

After a few minutes, Blade said, "My mother was called Seke Aponi, Black Butterfly. We will call the child Aponi Catori, Butterfly Spirit."

Reid watched the snake roasting and vowed to himself that he would never again turn down a meal Chipeta set in front of him.

Reid woke up as the sun came across his face. He turned his head away and knew he would have problems if he didn't do something about the sun. He also knew that the girls, with their tender skin that had never seen sunlight, would have a problem too.

Blade got them all on the horses, and they started moving north northeast.

About midmorning, they spotted a settlement at the bottom of a bluff. Blade had never seen it before. But he admitted he didn't come this far north very often. They would head for it and see what they found.

Reid and Blade rode into town, cautious of their surroundings. They needed supplies, and this was the only place they had come across. Reid still had money. The men that had abducted him had never checked his pockets.

"We're not going to cause any problems," Reid cautioned Blade. "We're not stealing anything. We're going to find milk for the baby

and see if we can get me a hat. If we can, we'll get another blanket and something to shade the girls from the sun. You're going to have to help me and keep that baby. Let me do the talking."

Blade agreed.

There was really nothing in this town. A few shacks, hastily thrown together, and several tents. Blade spotted a wagon that could be a traveling salesman and pointed Reid in that direction.

Riding up to the wagon, Reid asked, "You selling?"

"Yes, sir! I've got everything you could possibly need. I've got pans and blankets and ammunition and flour and sugar and—"

"Have you got any canned milk?" Reid interrupted.

"What?"

"Canned milk? For the baby." And Reid pointed toward Blade. A few of the men nearby snickered.

"Well, let me see." And the man turned to dig through his wagon. He dug deeper and deeper talking to himself the entire time. Eventually he yelled, "Got three. Wait. Wait. Five." And he came out the flap and jumped to the ground, dropping two of the cans.

"Give them to the boy," Reid instructed. He could hear a fight near one of the shacks behind him. "Lord," he prayed, "keep the violence away from us."

Blade took the sacks hanging from his horse and opened one, allowing the man to drop the cans in.

"How about me a hat? Lost mine," Reid said.

"Yeah, I got that."

A scantily dressed woman walked past the horse and brushed her hand across his leg and tickled at Aiyana. Reid slapped her hand away.

"Give me one that will keep the sun off this eye," Reid added.

The man reached into the wagon and pulled out a tan hat with a wide brim and a rolled crown, showing it to Reid proudly.

"Perfect," Reid said.

"Now, something for us to eat. We've got about a three days ride ahead of us."

This merchant knew he would be making some money from this man. The beat-up man on the horse didn't seem to be worried

about how much things cost. The merchant stuck cans in a tote sack and added some jerky. He looked up at Reid. "You ever had a cracker?"

Reid laughed. "Yeah. Wrap some up and throw them in the sack. Gently. Any cotton?"

Reid noticed a group of men standing a few feet away talking with each other quietly, looking at Reid. "Please Lord," Reid silently prayed, "I can't fight. Protect us in this place."

"Got a woman waiting for you, do ya?" The man grinned at Reid.

The merchant pulled out two bolts of fabric to show Reid. Reid chose the yellow. The man began to measure it out from his chin to his hand. Once, twice, three times. "That's enough," Reid said. "Now. How much?"

The peddler began adding, flipping his finger into the air like he was counting bugs. "Twenty bucks?"

"Only because I'm in a hurry," Reid said, looking at the man with suspicion. That was way too much for what he had just purchased.

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.¹

Reid heard the Spirit and looked around. The crowd around them seemed to be growing. Reid had noticed that already. Every one of these men looked like they belonged in prison. Rough, dirty, scarred, and tattooed. There were missing teeth and missing limbs. Every one of them had a gun or a knife or both. They all looked like they could use a bath with a haircut and shave.

Reid was perceptive, discerning how safe they were. He was able to do this. He could distinguish good from evil. He knew both types of men.

Reid thought he probably looked like he could use a shave and bath too. He didn't know how long he had been away from home, but he could feel the growth on his face.

"Got a gun in there?" Reid asked. "And ammo?"

"Rifle or pistol?"

¹ Hebrews 5:14 (ESV).

Reid preferred the rifle, but he could use the pistol just as well, and it would be easier to carry. “Pistol.”

Reid was handed a used pistol complete with belt and holster. The ammo loops in the belt were full. Reid hung the belt on the saddle horn in front of Kimi and pulled the pistol out of the holster, raising it to look down the barrel, opened the cylinder and spun it, snapped it closed, and returned it to the holster. “How much?”

The man looked at Reid but didn’t answer. He knew the man was sizing him up, trying to figure out how much money he could get from Reid.

“Got any aspirin?”

The man nodded his head.

“You throw in some aspirin and some hard candy, and I’ll give you forty for the whole lot.”

The man brightened. He hadn’t even thought of getting that much. The man filled a small paper bag with candy and wrapped a handful of aspirin in a piece of paper and added them to the bag. He handed it to Blade along with the other items purchased. Then he turned to Reid and extended his hand ready to accept his payment.

Reid pulled cash from his pocket and peeled off the bills, returning the rest deep inside his pocket. He looked at the men standing around watching him. He reached to hand the cash to the peddler. But instead of placing the money in the man’s hand, Reid slapped it into the merchant’s hand and grabbed the hand at the same time, squeezing it hard, pulling the man closer to him.

Looking deep into the peddler’s eyes, he said, “You follow us, and I’ll kill you on the spot.” He jerked his hand away, looking at the man with daggers shooting from the one eye that was open. “You pass that word along too. And don’t you think that I can’t do it.”

The man was opening and closing his fingers in response to the pain Reid had just inflicted. The smile had left his face.

Reid turned his horse and started moving back through the dirty settlement. These were the same type of people he saw in the settlement in Nebraska and Kansas when he was undercover. The women and young girls, all provocatively dressed. And lust hungry

men waiting to abuse any woman available to him, waiting to fight the first man that looked at them wrong.

Reid had prayed that these establishments would be destroyed, but they kept returning to hide in these dark out-of-the-way regions, sought by evil.

These were the same dirty temporary structures that allowed the people to set up quickly and leave without having spent too much effort or money. As he watched the people watch them, he prayed for their safety and for the women held against their will. And for the men, he prayed for repentance and justice. Thoughts of his work for the DOJ returned to his mind. Disturbing. Haunting.

“How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?” Reid prayed. “Or cry out to you, “Violence!” But you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.”¹

Scripture came to Reid’s heart. *For all that is secret will eventually be brought into the open, and everything that is concealed will be brought to light and made known to all.*²

“Lord, when? Lord I’ve fought this, and it’s still going on!” Reid spoke out loud.

Blade looked at him. He was talking to himself again. The Indian boy liked this man, but he didn’t understand him.

The Spirit said, *Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.*³

Four identical automobiles moved quickly down the dirt road. They were spread out, allowing the dust to clear some before the

¹ Habakkuk 1:2–4.

² Luke 8:17 (NLT).

³ Habakkuk 1:5.

car that followed entered the cloud of gritty sand that now covered everything, including the men. They had to stay far enough apart so that the driver could see through the dust.

Adam and his supervisor were in the front seat of the first automobile. Reid's son, Matt, sat in the back with a bandana pulled over his nose and mouth with his eyes squinted, trying to keep the dust out. The members of the BI and the marshals with them had goggles.

Wil Bailey was not happy. He didn't want to come into the middle of nowhere looking for the judge with just the say so of a sheriff who wasn't talking sense. But Adam and Matt had insisted.

Wil was taking his anger out on the road, driving at a much higher rate of speed than the automobile could take on this sandy rutted highway to nowhere. Adam and Matt were being thrown around, and Matt thought the vehicle might crash at any moment. The cars that followed were having trouble keeping up and were falling farther and farther behind. But they could still see the dust cloud.

Up ahead, in the distance, Adam saw a wagon being pulled by two horses. How did he even see that? Matt didn't know.

"Slow it down, Wil. There's someone in front of us. Stop and let me talk to them," Adam said.

Wil said nothing.

"Come on, Wil," Adam raised his voice. "We're going to have to talk to somebody. Reid's not going to just show up, walking down the road. Going at this speed, you'd never see him, even if he did."

Wil slammed the brakes on, and the car skid sideways. Then the automobile spun around, left the road, and skid some more. It came to a stop sideways beside the road.

As Matt got out of the automobile, he said, "I'll ride with somebody else from now on."

He pulled his bandana back over his nose so he could breathe in the dust and closed his eyes, still trying to keep the dirt out. He opened them again and still couldn't see the horse and wagon in front of them or the other automobiles behind them. Matt closed his eyes and waited for the dust to settle.

Adam began walking forward to meet the wagon.

"Well, hello," the man in the wagon called. "Can I get you something out here in the middle of nowhere. I got everything you need right here."

Wil walked up behind Adam and crudely said, "Got any gasoline?"

"Well, no. That is the one thing I do not have," the peddler said, pointing his finger at Wilbur Bailey.

"Okay," Adam said. "How about information?"

"What's you lookin' for?" The peddler looked up to see another automobile come to a stop in the middle of the road.

"Looking for a man. He's short, little skinny guy. Brown hair. Wearing a white shirt and a pair of moccasin boots."

"Hum. That could be anybody around here," the man on the wagon said.

"Well, he's not from around here," Wil said.

"Only guy I seen not from around here is that guy I sold to yesterday morning. He never got off his horse. Had two little Indian children with him and an Indian boy on a pony with a baby tied to his chest like a squaw would do. Odd fellow. Bought milk for the baby, cotton for his woman, and a gun. He didn't have a gun. Didn't have a hat either. Looked like he'd been in a fight sometime back. Face was all bummed up. Bloodstains on his shirt.

"We was at that camp back that way. He didn't even look at the girls. In fact, he shooed one of them away from the children. Said they had a three days journey ahead of them. Then paid me forty bucks. Said he paid that much cause he was in a hurry. They left the camp and headed north. I don't know where he was going for three days with all those children. Had to be up in Kansas somewhere."

Matt stepped forward. "Was the sun shining when you talked to him?"

Everyone looked at Matt oddly.

"Yeah, sun was out. Burned us up all day yesterday."

"What color were his eyes?" Matt asked.

A few of the men that had walked up to listen snickered.

The merchant didn't respond to the laughter. He looked at Matt oddly. "Couldn't tell. One eye was swollen shut. Looked like he'd got

punched real good in the side of his head. Big ole gash right here.” And the peddler ran a finger across his own head near his temple. “He kept the other eye squinted almost closed. Bought a hat with all the other stuff he got. Said he wanted one that would shade his eyes. I sold him one.”

“That’s him,” Matt said calmly. “He can’t open his eyes in bright sunlight. Gives him headaches.”

“Yeah, he got some aspirin from me too. Asked for them like he knew exactly what he wanted.”

“That’s him,” Matt said again.

“Okay, where’s this camp you were talking about?” Bailey asked.

15 CHAPTER

Angus had not picked up his automobile, so William continued to use it. He drove to his grandfather’s and parked in front. William walked into the house and looked into the front bedroom. Luke was gone. Continuing through the house, the young doctor found both his grandfather and his uncle sitting on the back porch. He smiled at his uncle as he walked onto the porch. “Who said you could get out of bed?”

Luke looked up just long enough to see who was coming through the door and turned back to look at the trees. “No one. I’m still. I’m calm. I’m not coughing. Leave me alone.”

William’s smile widened. He knew his uncle was playing with him. He’d never seen his uncle in a bad mood.

“Grandpa, tell me about Saamel,” William asked, sitting in the chair on the other side of his grandfather.

“Why? What’s goin’ on?” Travis asked, concerned and looking at William.

“I went by Reid’s yesterday, and he was just sitting on the porch. He sat there the whole time I was at their house. Never moved. That’s not normal for a six-year-old.”

“The whole situation ain’t normal. I need ta go spend some time with ’im. Can ya stay ’ere a while?”

“Sure.”

Travis stood up.

William added, “And when you get back, I want to know more about him. I’ll see if I can figure out what’s going on in his head so we can help him.”

"I can tell ya what's goin' on," Travis said. "Is father is missin', an' Saamel wants 'im back." Travis moved down the steps, taking one step at a time, as he held to the railing. Then he continued to the road and disappeared past the trees.

William moved to the chair next to Luke.

"Has Father been by to see you this morning?"

"Yep."

"What did he say?"

"Stay calm. Don't move around. I'm getting tired of this," Luke responded.

"Do you mind if I listen?" William asked.

"Why not? I seem to be really entertaining." The sheriff smiled.

William went to the automobile to get his medical bag and returned. As he listened to Luke's chest, he talked to his uncle. "It sounds much better. There's still a whistling sound when you breathe, but it's not bad. Sit forward." William moved the instrument to listen against his uncle's back. "Maybe tomorrow you can start taking short walks. Just make sure Father or I am here when you do. We need to listen right after you move around to make sure you don't have something else going on."

Luke nodded.

Luke didn't seem to be doing much talking. This wasn't like him. William asked, "Do you feel okay?"

"Sure."

"You're not talking to me."

"You don't listen. Why should I talk?" Luke was still smiling, but William could hear the cynicism in his voice.

"What are you talking about?" William asked.

"Do you remember the night you started giving me the codeine?"

William nodded. "Yeah. I stopped Father from cutting you open again."

"I appreciate that," Luke said. You could hear the thankfulness in his voice, but it changed to discouragement. "But nobody would listen to me. You let me talk, but you didn't listen. You didn't do what I asked."

William shook his head. He didn't know what to say. "You were in a lot of pain. When that happens, people don't generally know what they're saying. You weren't making much sense."

"I wasn't in that much pain. I was just coughing. Do you remember what I told you?"

"You were talking about Reid being hidden in a lonely place. Protected by someone you didn't know," William remembered.

Luke said, "What did I ask you to do?"

"Tell Adam and Matt. But what you were saying didn't make sense. You were just rambling about Reid. I know you're worried about him but—"

Luke interrupted, getting louder as he spoke, "But do I understand all the medical stuff you say? Do you understand me and Cleve when we talk law? The message wasn't for you or your father or even Grandpa. It was for Adam." Luke sighed and softly added, "I just hope they're not too late."

"Uncle Luke, you're still not making any sense."

Luke looked straight at his nephew and said, "God told me where Reid was that night, but no one would listen. I sure hope God's protecting Reid because it took seven days to get the message to Adam. Anything could have happened during that time."

Luke turned back to look at the trees again. William was still watching Luke, still trying to understand why Luke was so insistent when scripture came to William's heart.

*But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*¹

William's eyes widened. Had he just heard from God? Was God correcting him for his unbelief? What was coming that God would tell him about?

"How often do you hear from God?" William asked his uncle.

"Pretty regular," Luke said casually.

"How do you do that? How do you hear from him so much? How do you know it's him?"

¹ John 16:13.

“Your heart has to be open to hear him. You have to want to, expect to. God wants to talk to you. He listens when you talk to him in prayer, and he wants to have a conversation with you. You just have to listen in all the different ways he speaks, like knowing different languages. It could be reading scripture, or through the preacher, or a friend, or circumstances around you. It can be in a dream, or he can talk directly to your spirit. And when you think you hear him, you need to respond to what he’s saying. If you don’t, it will be harder to hear him the next time. ‘Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”’¹ Sometimes you have to be broken with no choices left, that’s when your spirit is ready to hear him.”

William sat stunned. He didn’t know how to respond to this. His family had always been strong believers. They were taught as children to listen to the preacher and to read the scripture regularly, to look for what God had to say to them in scripture. But he had never heard his father or mother talk of hearing from God any other way.

“Can you explain that a little more?” William asked.

“You have to have the right attitude in your heart. You have to want to do what God says. Don’t make your own plans. God honors the heart that is surrendered to him. If we want to do things our own way and aren’t open to what God wants, then he won’t talk to us. ‘I take joy in doing your will, my God, for your instructions are written on my heart.’² You can know what God wants by listening to his instructions when you read the Bible. Then you can have joy in following him, and you can hear from him,” Luke explained.

William asked, “Who else do you know that has heard from God?”

“Grandpa and Reid do all the time,” Luke said. “Chipeta has. It turned her life around. I’m almost certain Adam has, but he’s never told me. And I think your mother.”

“Why do you think Adam has heard from God?” William asked.

¹ 1 Samuel 3:10.

² Psalm 40:8 NLT.

“Your brother accepts what we say easily. He believes us and doesn’t question us,” Luke explained. “Several years ago, right after Reid was hurt, when he and Chipeta were still living with your folks, God warned Reid that the outlaws were coming after him. Your dad didn’t believe him and wouldn’t listen to him, but Adam did. Adam went against your father and did what Reid told him to. He wouldn’t have done that if he didn’t believe God had spoken to Reid.

“Later that night, God spoke to Grandpa, and Adam never questioned that either. The whole time we were together that night, Adam didn’t seem surprised by what was happening. It was almost like he was prepared for it, and he knew what the outcome would be. It was right before he went to Denver for school. He stood there with his gun beside me and Grandpa and Reid like he knew what he was doing. He wasn’t scared at all. Angus was scared though. And you could tell. I wondered if God had spoken to your brother that night before everything started happening, and he just wasn’t telling us.”

Scripture came to William’s heart, and he spoke it out loud. “Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.”¹

Luke looked at his nephew. “Do you mean that? If you really mean it, and you learn God’s ways, he’ll talk to you.”

Travis approached Reid’s house and saw Saamel sitting against the front wall on the porch, staring at the road. He wasn’t moving, just staring into nothing.

“Hi, Saamel,” Travis said.

The boy turned his eyes to look toward his grandfather.

“I’m sorry I ain’t been ’ere. Uncle Luke got hurt, an’ I been takin’ care a ’im.” The boy was watching but didn’t respond. “‘Ave ya ’ad breakfast. I’m gonna see if ya mama ’as anythin’ left. Do ya wanna go with me?” Travis reached his hand out toward the boy.

¹ Psalm 86:11.

Saamel shook his head slowly and turned back to look at the road.

Travis walked inside and found Chipeta, telling her he would be with Saamel. She hugged him and offered a sincere, "Thank you."

Travis took two cold flapjacks from the pan on the stove and pulled a rocking chair closer to Saamel. He sat down and pinched off a piece of the sweet bread, handing it toward his grandson. Saamel didn't take the food but got up and crawled into his grandfather's lap, straddling the man as he faced him, and laid against his grandfather's chest.

Travis wrapped his arms around the boy and started rocking, softly humming. Saamel held to Travis tightly. The child's grandfather could feel the tears wetting his shirt, and he tightened his hold on the boy. Saamel was crying silently, and the tears kept coming. It had been a long time since Travis had cried, but he now felt his own tears coming too.

William and Luke continued sitting on the porch, saying nothing. William didn't know that Luke was praying. Praying for Reid's safe return. Praying for Adam and Matt to find him. Praying for the safety of his nephews. Praying that his brother was okay. Praying that William meant what he said about wanting to know God's ways and about having a faithful and undivided heart.

Luke was paying little attention to William as the young doctor prayed too. There was just something about this back porch that made you want to pray. William asked forgiveness from God for not doing what Luke had asked, for not following God's instructions. He asked that God would continue to talk with him. And he prayed for Luke's healing and for the little boy that needed his father so badly. Then he found himself praying for Reid.

William hadn't seen Reid in over ten years. He hadn't thought much about him when he received letters from his mother and father telling him of Chipeta being attacked and losing the baby or about Reid's injuries. He had read the letters, shook his head, and gone back to what he had been doing.

Now he thought of the man he had lived with during their time together in Denver. The man who had come into their home so quietly no one noticed he was there. He ate meals with them and attended their family Bible studies, but never said a word. He had gotten a job soon after his arrival and spent hours each day studying to succeed in that position. He began working nights and missed both the meals and the joint time with God.

Then William and his parents, along with four siblings, had left Denver, moving to Harris. Two years later, William returned to their home in Denver to begin at the university just as Reid began law school.

William's older brothers had told him to get ready, that Reid had turned bossy. Now, William realized what Reid had done.

His brothers had told him of Reid's behavior after their parents left. The man would come in from class to take a late afternoon nap. He would insist on an early supper, and that everyone in the household eat together. Then they would pray together, Reid would recite scripture, and then he would leave for work. Reid would return home just in time for breakfast, recite more scripture to the others, change clothes quickly, and then leave for class.

He had taken the lead in their home, continuing to ground the others in faith as they learned to live without their parents' presence. He would encourage the others with scripture or words of inspiration when they had problems.

Reid quit his job when he began law school, but the daily devotions continued. Reid kept his same schedule, although he allowed supper to be pushed later into the evening. But instead of going to work, he studied.

He made sure they all ate together and prayed together, just like they had done with their mother and father. No, they wouldn't have done it if Reid hadn't been so faithful to God.

William looked up to see his grandfather coming back toward the house holding his youngest grandson's hand, and it made William think of Reid more. William realized that the time in Denver, before his parents moved to Harris, was probably the only time Reid had ever experienced a real family.

William had heard Angus tell stories of the weeks they would be at home alone without their father while he chased outlaws. Angus, Naomi, and Reid were without a mother and without any supervision. Angus told them how, when Cleve returned to Harris, he had spent his time at Cleve's house and would not go home until after supper. He had laughed, telling them that Naomi stayed at a friend's house most of the time and that Reid, much younger than his siblings, was left to do all the chores alone and to find supper for himself.

William had never witnessed this because by the time he was living in Harris, Reid's father was no longer marshal, and Reid was at university. But even after his grandfather's retirement, the life Reid had lived alone with his father wasn't the same kind of life William had lived with both of his parents.

William's life had been comfortable and safe. They didn't struggle. They didn't have to work in the fields to have food to eat, nor did he have to shoot an animal and skin it for meat. Reid had to do that.

William wondered how lonely Reid had been growing up with no mother and a father that was gone often as federal marshal. Now, looking at this lonely little boy holding to his grandfather's hand, William's heart was torn in two, disturbed both for Saamel and for Reid.

For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.¹

"Lord, was that you?" William asked silently, still watching his grandfather. "You chose Grandpa? You chose him to direct his children in your ways?" William's spirit realized that he could understand God better if he spent time with his grandfather. William didn't know how he was able to understand that, but he would accept it. "Yes, Lord. I understand."

Reid's life may not have been a typical family, but his father raised him to follow God.

Travis walked up the steps and stopped beside Luke. "Ya okay? Ya look like ya need ta go lie down far a little while."

¹ Genesis 18:19.

Luke nodded. "I was just thinking about doing that." Luke got up and went into the house.

Travis sat down, and Saamel climbed onto his lap. The boy had a flute in his hand, holding to it tightly. Travis wrapped an arm around the boy and laid his head against the boy's hair.

William asked, "Saamel, what have you got there?"

There was no response.

Travis said, "He can play this flute real good. Makes the purdiest music ya ever hear'd."

"I'd like to hear it. Saamel, can you play something for me?" William asked.

Again, no response.

"Maybe later?" William was watching the boy, but Saamel didn't seem to know that William was there.

Travis began rocking.

Blade moved back into camp. It was still early. The sun was just about to disappear over the butte, but the sky would remain light for a while longer. They hadn't gotten very far today. If he could get the man off the ground and back onto the horse, they could go a few more miles before it got too dark.

Blade stopped beside the man, watching him. He lay on the ground asleep holding the baby with one arm and the two girls sitting against him with his other arm around them.

Blade took a can out of the bag and punched the top with his knife. He somehow knew that there was no use trying to get the man to move right now. They may as well eat. He passed the can to Kimi.

Reid woke to the sound of movement in the brush. He had chosen this location to camp for the night because it had a little cover and they couldn't be seen as well from a distance. Blade had wanted

to move on. He had said there was someone following them and had urged Reid to move more quickly.

But Reid knew they wouldn't be able to outrun whoever this was. The cash in his pocket was the target. He had seen the eyes turn when he had paid the peddler back at the tent settlement and knew then someone would want it. There wasn't a lot of money left, but for someone that saw Reid as an easy target, it could look like a fortune. Reid wanted to rest before anyone confronted them.

Now Reid lay awake listening. He was able to fully open his left eye in the darkness. He wouldn't be hindered by bright light, and he hoped he was on equal ground, visually, with any possible assailant.

The judge reached beside him to make sure his calvary knife was still in place. He had pulled it out of the sheath in his boot when he laid down and had hidden it under his leg. The pistol was between his thighs, also hidden, and also within easy reach.

The shadow moved across Reid's face, and he waited patiently. If he moved too soon, he might not be able to reach whoever this was, and he wanted a silent fight so others involved wouldn't be alerted.

Reid had squinted his eye so that it was almost closed, and he would look like he was asleep. He could now see the man standing above him, reaching toward him.

Reid quickly reached up to grab the man's clothing, pulling him down onto the knife blade that stood upright tightly in his other hand. Reid pulled his hand up, twisting the knife, causing more serious injury to the man. But the man fought back. His attacker was attempting to strangle him. Reid kept the knife embedded in the man and pulled again. The man's grip weakened on Reid's throat.

Reid knew the man was losing blood fast. He could feel it soaking into his own clothes. Then the man went limp. Reid pushed to try to get the man off him. Struggling, he was able to roll the man to the side.

The judge lay silently pulling air into his lungs, his body heaving as he tried to calm himself. He reached up and rubbed his throat.

Suddenly another man appeared over him. Reid reached down and grabbed the gun between his legs, raised the gun, and fired. He

saw the man jerk, but he was still coming. Reid grabbed at the man who reached for him, and the man yanked Reid to his feet.

Reid fired again as the man knocked the gun from his hand.

Another figure appeared and jumped onto the man's back, grabbing him across the face with an open hand and pulling the man's head back to look at the sky. Then the glitter of a knife appeared and slashed as skillfully as a hunter ending the life of his prey. The figure continued to pull the man backward from Reid. Released by the now dead man, Reid dropped to the ground.

Blade moved to check the man that Reid had killed. He grabbed one of the dead man's arms and pulled him into the brush. The Indian boy returned to the man he had killed and dragged him aside to join his friend.

The boy came back and stood over Reid, smiling. "You fight good."

Reid smiled. "Give me a hand." He extended his hand toward Blade. Reid struggled as Blade helped him up, and they moved together past the brush to the cottonwood trees where they had left the girls.

Blade held to Reid as Reid let himself to the ground. His shirt was covered in his attacker's blood, but there was nowhere to wash it. He took it off and pulled some of the leftover yellow cloth out of the bag. Tearing a strip off, he began to wipe the blood from his body. Reid leaned back against the tree and closed his eyes.

The Lord spoke to Reid. *Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way.*¹

The hills? For three days? They didn't have enough supplies to do this. In three days, they could be home. The hills were to the west. How could they do this? Reid fell asleep trying to understand why God was telling him to do what was against Reid's better judgment.

¹ Joshua 2:16.

William had spent all day at his grandfather's house. He had prayed and watched as his grandfather cared for William's youngest cousin and for Uncle Luke. The old man just seemed to know what to do to keep both of them comfortable. William could see the love offered through Travis's actions and could hear it in his voice. The whole house was peaceful, and nothing about the quiet disturbed him.

William could also see the open hearts of those receiving his grandfather's love. William's heart was open too. It had been a long time since he had spent time with Grandpa, and he now remembered the love he had always felt around the man.

William watched as Luke accepted what his father said without question, and he watched Saamel cling to his grandfather. But when Travis put his grandson down, Saamel waited patiently for his grandfather's return. The boy didn't get anxious or follow the old man. He just sat and waited.

Grandpa was also leaving them alone. He wasn't hovering over them or constantly doing something with them the way William's own father did. Neither Luke nor Saamel had any doubt that Grandpa loved them and wanted only the best for them. William could see God loving his children this way.

16 CHAPTER

William arrived at Bonnie's house to find her sitting on the porch alone. She had taken her arm out of the sling and was sewing. She looked up, smiling, as William brought the car to a stop.

"Good morning," she said as he neared the house.

"It is a beautiful morning, isn't it?" William replied. "I see you're using that hand. How does the shoulder feel?"

"It's much better. It's still tender and a little stiff, but it doesn't hurt like it did two days ago. I've got a whopper of a bruise though."

William laughed and nodded. "That sounds wonderful. How about the foot?"

"It's better too. I'm not ready to take off running, but maybe in a week, I'll try it." She smiled again.

"May I sit?" William asked.

"Oh, by all means. I'm sorry. I should have offered you a seat. Where are my manners?" She seemed a little nervous now. William thought it was cute.

He pulled a slat-back chair with a cane seat toward her but sat carefully when he saw the hole near the edge. They continued to get to know each other, talking about the warm weather moving in and about their families.

William told Bonnie about all his brothers and sisters. He talked of their jobs, their families, and where they lived. He told her about his career in Sacramento and about the neighboring town's fire and his injury. Then it was her turn.

Bonnie was the oldest of six children. One brother had left home and had gone to work at a mill outside Kansas City. There

were four younger children still attending school. They had moved to Harris when her father's job with the railroad transferred him there. He died two years later. That was six years ago. Bonnie's mother's mother had come to live with them this past March.

Once Bonnie started talking about the trouble her grandmother caused, she seemed to need to talk of the family's problems too. To her, William just seemed so caring and easy to talk to. The gentle gaze of his eyes watching her and the relaxed silence as he listened were both inviting her to continue speaking and answered her silent question. Did he care?

Della Leachman had lived with her son's family just outside Kansas City until she could no longer get along with her son's wife. Her son had bought her a one-way train ticket to Harris, telling her never to come back. She had arrived on the Averys' doorstep unexpectedly and unwanted. They couldn't afford to support another person in the house. But she had no place else to go. She was now making the whole house miserable.

Kathleen Avery and her oldest daughter, Bonnie, were both working to keep their home and support the family. Della's being there made things easier in that she could now take care of the house, cook the meals, and watch the younger children.

But she also made things harder. The once peaceful home was now in turmoil. She complained about everything and refused to do what she felt was beneath her. Yet she still tried to tell the others how to do things that she herself refused to do. And she didn't manage money well. She would charge freely at the mercantile, never thinking that her daughter would have to pay the bill.

She also liked to be waited on by the younger children. She would interrupt their homework to send one of them across the room to retrieve her shawl when it lay not four feet away from her.

But the biggest disturbance she made was constantly reminding them all that the home they lived in was close to being taken away. Kathleen had told her mother they needed to be careful with the money they spent. Everything they could manage to save in spending was being paid to the bank on their mortgage. They never managed

to have enough to pay the full amount. But the bank had never said anything.

Della now reminded them daily that they weren't paying their bills. The children were scared they would lose their home. This disturbed the sleep of one and worried another continually, despite their mother's reassurance that she was working and paying on the bill.

Bonnie told William that her mother was worried that one day the bank would show up and take their home without any warning.

Bonnie apologized for laying their problems out to William and reassured him that, despite their troubles, they were happy. She and her mother loved their family. They both trusted that God was taking care of them and would continue to take care of them.

Scripture came to William's heart. *I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?*¹

This was something he had never considered, until recently. He had never worried about the things in life that he took for granted, not food or clothing or a place to sleep, until his injury. Since his injury, he had to rely on others to provide him a place to live and food to eat. He was thankful he had family able to provide these things.

William left after his visit concerned about this family's future. He headed straight to the bank. He didn't know what he could do, especially since he wasn't working and his savings were gone.

When he finished medical school, he had bought equipment and supplies to set up his medical practice in Sacramento. It had taken a few years to pay this off. Then he had been able to save a little.

Since his injuries, medical bills had taken the majority of his savings. He had used the rest to support himself the last few months. His equipment and the remaining supplies were for sale, but no one in Sacramento or the surrounding area needed them. A friend had these things in storage waiting for someone to purchase them or for William to send for them.

¹ Matthew 6:25.

Now, William had no money with which to help. But he wanted to know just how close the Averys were to losing their home.

William walked into the bank and looked around. Nothing had changed here either. As he walked across the area where Reid had been knocked to the floor, his thoughts turned to his uncle. He wanted to see Reid come home safely.

After hearing about Reid's life and family here in Harris, it pained William to think of his uncle being hurt again or alone with no way to get help. He was happy God was taking care of Reid, at least according to what Uncle Luke said. Even though he wanted to believe, William had some doubt and feared the worst. He said a short prayer of thanksgiving anyway.

He'd been reading his Bible and praying, asking God to speak to him and to let him know if everything Luke had said was true. But he'd also been praying for Reid's safety. It seemed the more he prayed, the more he wanted to pray and the easier it got, but he had not felt reassurance concerning Reid.

William's thoughts were interrupted when he spotted Douglas Morgan. The doctor moved to Morgan's desk without any more thought to Reid. He had business to take care of. Douglas looked up and smiled. "Well, good morning. I wondered if I would see you. I heard you were in town."

"Good morning, Doug." William reached out to shake Morgan's hand and then sat down, pulling his thumb from the belt loop and repositioning his hand in his lap.

Doug wasn't much older than William, and the two had known each other in school. When William left for Denver, Doug was already attending school in St. Louis. He had returned after four years at university and had immediately gone to work at the bank. Doug Morgan had done his job well and had risen to the position of loan officer.

That's why William had come today, to speak to his friend's professional office. Morgan quickly noticed William guarding his arm. "What happened?" he asked, indicating the arm.

"Just an accident a few months back. It's healing slow, but I'll be okay." William brushed off the concern Morgan showed.

Morgan moved on. "What can I do for you today?"

"I want to know about the Avery place," William began without any casual conversation customary between old friends who had not seen each other for years.

"I shouldn't be talking to you about someone else's business. It's not ethical," Morgan said.

"Not even if I'm willing to help the bank with their problem?" William asked, knowing there was no way he could help.

Morgan was now cautious. He'd heard this type of question before, and it did help the bank and the people involved. It wasn't illegal, but it was still done in secret, and he wasn't comfortable with the secrecy.

He put an elbow on the desk and leaned into his open palm, his fingers wrapped around one side of his face. "I'm listening," he said quietly.

"I've been seeing the oldest girl," William began.

Morgan smiled. "Really?"

"Don't read anything into it," William advised. "She told me her mother is behind on the mortgage, but you continue to carry her without any communication."

Morgan sat back in his chair, crossed his arms over his chest, and continued looking at William. There was no indication he would comment.

"How far behind are they?"

Morgan looked at William for several moments. He twisted his mouth, trying to decide if he would talk or not. He finally decided he trusted his old friend. "It's not so much how far behind they are, but how much they can pay."

"What do you mean?" William asked.

"There is a benefactor in town." The bank official sighed. "He carries some of the mortgages of people who are having trouble. As long as the people keep paying on their loans and don't seem to be misusing the funds they have, this benefactor extends the loan so that the bank doesn't foreclose."

"You mean he's paying the loan?"

“Not exactly. He’s basically loaning the money to the loan with the understanding...” Morgan hesitated briefly. “That he may never get it back, if the loan defaults.”

William was not familiar with banking procedures and thought this sounded odd. But he was trying to figure this out. “And the people with the loan don’t know this?”

“That’s right,” Morgan agreed.

“And the people still owe the money?”

“Yes, the loan is basically being extended indefinitely as long as something is being paid,” Douglas said.

“So when the loan is paid off, the Averys will still owe money?” William asked.

“The loan will be paid off here at the bank, but the person who loaned the money to stop the foreclosures will still be owed. In essence, the loan is being sold to another lender at zero percent interest. The bank will continue to carry and collect that loan without the Averys knowing that it is paid off. But at that point, the Averys won’t have to worry about their home being taken away, that is, if the benefactor continues to do this,” Morgan explained. “It’s all being done legally.”

“Why wouldn’t they continue?” William asked. “Is that a possibility?”

“Let’s say the person died. There would be no more money paid into the Averys’ account, and the loan would resume where it is now with no payback to the beneficiary owed. But the full monthly payment would still be due.”

William didn’t know exactly how to state his question, so he just put it out there. “Is that a possibility? Could this person die anytime soon? Is he old?”

Morgan hesitated. “Old? No. But the possibility is growing every day.”

William looked at the banker questioningly. “What do you mean?”

Morgan slowly rolled his eyes to look around the room as he thought. “Nothing said to anyone. Do you understand me?”

The young doctor nodded.

“You say anything, and this could stop the deal for lots of people.”

William understood. Secrecy. That’s how this game was played. He nodded again. “I understand.”

“I’m only telling you because you’re family. The benefactor is Reid. He carries three families in the area. They all have children and all are this close”—Morgan held two fingers about an inch apart—“to losing their homes.”

William leaned into the desk and covered his mouth with his hand, his elbow on the desk, his eyes wondering over the desktop. All of a sudden, William couldn’t think. Before now he had never considered the fact that Reid was no longer working. If he wasn’t paying these bills, what was happening with his own bills. Then William remembered something his grandfather had said just that morning, *I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be a blessing.*¹

William spoke softly. “How well is Chipeta cared for if Reid doesn’t come back?”

“Oh, she’d be okay,” Morgan advised. “She could go a year or so without any problem. Their home is paid for, and she’s pretty frugal. If it came right down to it, the ranch could carry them until the children were grown. Then she’ll just have to take care of herself. But those kids would take care of her.”

“What ranch?”

“The Matthews’s ranch. The children Reid adopted. Their grandfather’s ranch is in Reid’s name until the boys are old enough to take it. It’s always made a steady income. Not as much recently as in the past, but the bank account is solid. Reid never touches that money, not even to care for those children.”

Morgan was throwing a lot of information at William. He was no accountant, and he wasn’t sure he understood all the implications of what he was being told. But he did understand one thing. His uncle was a generous and caring man.

¹ Psalm 37:25–26.

“The problem is,” Morgan continued, “without Reid’s signature each month, I can’t move the money around. If he’s not here to sign in a week, these loans become past due. We won’t foreclose immediately, but in another month, the process would begin. Once it begins, the full loan is due in order to keep the property.

“Even if Reid showed back up then, he’d have to pay the full amount. I don’t think he would do that. It would put his family in too much of a bind. There’s a lot of people in town that Reid helps that nobody knows about. If he doesn’t come back, the whole town will suffer.”

17 CHAPTER

The horses moved across the open land, heading for the hills. Reid had made his decision. He trusted the Lord and would follow him. They had not seen any sign of another person. Reid thought they should be nearing the Cimarron and would probably be able to cross late this afternoon or tomorrow morning. But God had told them to hide. Reid’s head was hurting, and his mind wasn’t working. He still questioned what God told him, even though he was doing what God said.

If they hid, they would run out of provisions. If they managed to make it to the river, they still had to get across. Reid didn’t know how to get the children across safely.

Blade turned his horse to wait for Reid. He looked in the distance, concentrating on a small dust cloud near the ground. He said, “There is someone behind us.”

Reid was just able to see ten to fifteen feet in front of him. He couldn’t get his eye open very wide, and the bright flashes of light in his vision outshined the sun. He didn’t even try to look behind him.

“How far behind us are they?” Reid asked.

“They will catch us before sundown,” Blade advised.

Reid shook his head. “I can’t move any faster. Do you see a spot we could hide?”

Blade looked around. “I see nothing. There are trees far off. If they see us and come that way, they will catch us before we get there.”

“Try it,” Reid said. “Head for the trees.”

Reid put his head down and followed Blade. There was nothing in this land. Coneflower and yucca spotted the landscape. But there

seemed to be more grass covering the ground than they had seen that morning. They must be getting closer to the river.

Reid was hurting. If there hadn't been someone behind them, he would have stopped. But he couldn't. He had to keep moving. They had to hide. He knew he wouldn't be able to fight if he needed to. He was too sore, too tired. And he couldn't open his eye far enough to see anything.

As they arrived at the trees, Reid and the girls got off the horse and settled in the shade behind some brush. Blade untied the baby and handed her to Reid along with the sack that had the majority of the baby's supplies. He took the gun belt from Reid's horse and threw it toward the man.

"You will hide. I will draw them away," Blade said. He took the reins of Reid's horse and began riding hard backtracking the way they had come.

He went a distance away and made several sharp turns to hide the direction of the horse tracks. Then turned to the northwest. Blade twisted to see how close the riders were to him. They were coming fast. That short time in the trees had allowed the men to catch them quickly. Blade picked up speed, moving across the land much faster and paying little attention to the land in front of him.

His horse stumbled and went down, throwing Blade forward. He flew through the air and landed hard, rolled over, and recovered to jump to his feet running. He looked toward the men again while the saddled horse kept moving, disappearing in the direction they had been going.

Blade spotted a gully nearby and ran to throw himself into it as the riders continued to get closer.

He watched the three men as they brought their horses to a stop beside the animal that lay snorting on the ground, struggling to rise but unable. One of the men pulled the bags from the horse and rummaged inside. He pulled a few cans out and tossed them to the ground. The bag with the hard candy was thrown beside the cans. Some yellow fabric, nothing of value.

The man threw the bag to the ground, kicked it, and roared like a bear. He pulled the gun out of his holster and put three bullets in the horse in quick succession. *Pow! Pow! Pow!*

"Come on!" one of the other men barked and started after the horse that was still running. They could see it, but it was too far away in a cloud of dust. They couldn't tell how many riders were on it.

Blade watched from the distance, waiting for the men to get far enough away so he could return to his sisters and the man that was leading them out of this misery. Blade didn't know what it was going to be like when they crossed the river, but Reid had said when they did, they would be close to home.

Home. Blade didn't even know what that meant. He had spent the last six years of his life hiding, running, and foraging for food. He had been caged, beaten, and held under the water in the river until he had passed out. Then he had been beaten some more. He was angry, and at age thirteen, he was tired.

The man with them offered him hope, something he knew nothing about. Reid had said, "By wisdom a house is built, through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures."¹

Reid had told him that his house was built by the wisdom of the gods. Not all the gods, just one. And that god had established the peaceful home that his family lived in. He said the rooms of his home were filled with rare and beautiful treasures, his wife and children. Blade and his sisters were going home with this man. They were going to be part of his treasure, more valuable than gold, silver, or money.

Blade got up and went to his horse. He pulled the sacks apart and put several cans in one sack. That would be all he could carry. He looked at the water bag crushed and spilled under the horse and knew that they would need water soon. He threw the bag he carried over his shoulder and started trotting back to the grove of desert willows. He could see them in the distance, but he knew they were farther away than they looked.

¹ Proverbs 24:3-4.

William picked Bonnie up at the hotel. She had healed and gone back to work. William was taking Bonnie to meet his grandfather, and then they were returning the crutches to Reid's house. Tonight, they would have supper with William's parents.

William and Bonnie found Travis on his back porch, right where he always was. William parked the automobile and sat watching those at the rear of the house. Luke was stretched out on the floor of the porch with one arm behind his head and one arm over his eyes. His right leg was hanging off the edge. Bella was asleep beside him with her chin resting on Luke's left thigh.

Saamel sat on the steps moving his fingers across his flute. But he didn't have the flute to his lips, and there was no music coming from it.

William opened the door for Bonnie to get out of the automobile. "Hey, Grandpa," William said.

Travis smiled and waved.

Luke didn't move and kept his arm across his face.

"Grandpa. This is Bonnie," William continued. "Hi, Saamel."

The boy cut his eyes at William but didn't say anything. His expression didn't change.

"Welcome, Bonnie," Travis said. "Pull up a chair."

As William walked up the steps, he pointed to Luke and asked, "Is he asleep?"

"No," Travis said quietly, smiling. "He told Saamel that 'e could lay there on the porch without movin' longer an' Saamel could sit on the steps without playin' 'is flute. I'm gonna fall 'sleep before any a 'em move. They both been there close ta an 'our." Travis laughed softly.

Bonnie sat down beside Travis, but William stayed on the steps watching Luke and Saamel. No one talked. Occasionally Saamel would look toward Luke, and then he would look back to his flute and move his fingers slowly across the holes.

Travis whispered, "Watch this." And Travis began to softly sing. It was the same words, the same short tune, over and over. One time. Two times. Three times. Six times. Ten times.

Saamel put the flute to his mouth, then looked toward Luke and pulled it away.

Twelve times.

The flute went to Saamel's mouth again, and William saw his grandfather smile. The boy's fingers began to move, but he wasn't blowing into the mouthpiece.

Thirteen times. Fourteen times.

There it was! The same tune Travis was singing was coming from the flute. Soft. Sweet. A peaceful melody filling the air with hope that the child was engaging with life again.

Travis's song faded to nothing as the flute continued to play. Luke still didn't move. William was beginning to get concerned about him. The doctor watched his uncle's chest rise and fall gently in a steady rhythm. He started to take a step toward Luke, opening his mouth to call Luke's name.

Travis put his crooked hand in front of William and shook his head. The leathery fingers were aged by hard work and twisted from arthritis. William stopped, now looking at his grandfather's hand and forgetting about Luke. He hadn't noticed his grandfather's hand on his previous visits.

William remembered his grandfather having trouble with that hand when William was a youth. He hadn't been able to grip with much strength, and it pained him sometimes. That was fifteen years ago.

Grandpa was compensating well. He moved around his home taking care of himself, the boy he had taken in, and Uncle Luke with what appeared to be no problems. He had adjusted well to the restrictions his hand caused. William hoped that he could adjust to the change in his life as easily. He knew that his grandfather would help him with this too.

Travis raised an index finger to his mouth, telling William to be quiet.

Saamel kept turning to look at Luke. The boy was beginning to worry about his uncle too. Saamel stood up and turned around. He walked past the dog, still playing his flute. Bella raised her head, watching Saamel as he passed, anticipating a pat. But it didn't come.

The sound got closer to Luke's face, and Saamel leaned over in an attempt to look at his uncle's eyes beneath his arm.

Luke waited. Closer. Closer. Saamel stopped playing and wrapped his hand around one of Luke's fingers, picking Luke's hand up. It moved easily as the boy pulled it from his uncle's face. Luke opened one eye to look at Saamel and smiled. "I win!" And Luke began his thunderous laughter.

Saamel smiled broadly, his tongue pressing against the back of his baby teeth.

Luke reached up and pulled the boy to the floor beside him, rolling his face into the child's stomach and digging his nose in to tickle Saamel's belly. The child laughed out loud.

Travis raised his hand to his face, smoothing his beard on either side of his mouth. But William could see the smile under his hand and knew that his grandfather was having trouble controlling his emotions right now.

Saamel pulled away and ran to his grandfather, climbing into his lap. Travis drew the child to him in a big hug. "Did ya let 'im win?"

Saamel smiled broadly and nodded his head.

William had to laugh out loud. He turned toward Bonnie. She had that beautiful smile on her lips, her whole face radiant with happiness. Her eyes seemed to dance as they twinkled with silent laughter surrounded by those golden curls that escaped from her ponytail.

William had lots of lady friends in Denver and in Sacramento. He had dated often, but he had never felt this way about any of the girls he had been with. This young lady in front of him was the sweetest, most gentle woman he had ever met. A thought came to his mind, *It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.*¹

William silently asked, "Lord, was that you?" Then he remembered what Luke had told him, and he repeated the words softly, "Speak, for your servant is listening."²

¹ Genesis 2:18b.

² 1 Samuel 3:10b.

The reply came, *He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord.*¹

William smiled. Could this be the woman that God had chosen for him? He listened as Bonnie talked with Saamel. The boy was actually talking with her. This was the first time William had ever heard the boy speak.

He walked over and helped Luke sit up, patting his uncle on the shoulder, congratulating him for getting the child to react.

"Have you walked today?" William asked his uncle.

"Nope. Been waiting on you or your dad. I'm doing what I was told to do," Luke replied playfully.

William was puzzled. It was unusual for his father not to check on Luke in the morning, but to go all day and not come by was out and out strange.

"Well, let me get my stethoscope and listen to you. We'll see about walking some right now," William said.

William turned to introduce Luke and Bonnie but found out they already knew each other. That wasn't a surprise. Bonnie worked in town, and Luke knew everybody. William went to the car, and then he and Luke disappeared into the house for a few minutes. When they came out, William said, "I'm going to walk with Luke a few minutes. Bonnie, do you want to come with us or are you going to sit here with Grandpa?"

"I'll sit here with this handsome young man," she replied, running her hand down Saamel's arm. "You men go on and have fun." She smiled and turned back to Saamel and Travis, continuing her conversation.

The men began walking toward the road.

"She's a beauty, William," Luke said. "You better catch her before someone else does."

William nodded, saying nothing, and smiled.

"I see that smile," Luke continued.

William said, "I think God spoke to me. I think he told me to marry her."

¹ Proverbs 18:22.

Luke stopped to look at William. "This is one time you better know for sure." Luke was still smiling.

They walked to the pasture fence and then returned to the house. William listened to Luke's chest again and said, "It sounds okay. Walk around the yard a couple of times tomorrow. Not much at one time. We'll take a longer walk when it starts to cool off tomorrow evening."

William picked up his things, took Bonnie's hand, and began moving down the steps, telling his grandfather they were going to return the crutches Bonnie had borrowed to Chipeta.

Travis asked, "Saamel. Ya can ride home with William an' Bonnie if ya ready ta go. Or ya can stay an' I'll take ya home later."

Saamel slid off his grandfather's lap and took Bonnie's hand with a smile. Travis smiled too. "Bonnie, I think ya 'ave a friend."

"And I love friends." Bonnie reached down and rubbed Saamel on the back. "It was so nice to finally meet you, Marshal. I hope we can visit again."

"Ya welcome ta come any time," he replied. "Saamel, I'll see ya 'morrow."

"Bye, Grandpa," the boy yelled.

William opened the automobile door, and Bonnie and Saamel climbed into the front seat together.

When Blade got back to the willow trees, he found Reid asleep with the baby next to him. The baby was awake and making noises, so Blade opened a can of milk and poured some into the bottle. He passed the can to Kimi. Blade didn't have to tell her to share with her sister. They always shared.

Reid had noticed this and had commented to Blade that the girls didn't seem to be naturally selfish like children usually were. He had even told Blade how they were willing to share their grub with him. Blade remembered Reid telling him, "And do not forget

to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."¹

This god must be important to Reid's people. He was always talking about him.

Reid had asked if Blade had taught the girls to be generous.

Blade had never taught them anything. He had never talked to them. He saw no reason to. He brought them food and water. They had a blanket. If he found clothes for them, he would bring that too.

Blade gave Aponi the bottle the same way he had seen the man do it. But she didn't take very much. She was still wiggling and making noise. It wasn't a cry, but it didn't sound happy. The Indian boy took the last of the clean cloth from the bag and wrapped his baby sister in it, stuffing the soiled cloth in the bundle, just like Reid had done with the others.

William and Bonnie sat in the kitchen talking with Sarah as she prepared supper. Bonnie helped and enjoyed the time she spent with William's mother.

Thomas came in the door dragging, said hello, and immediately went upstairs to wash up. He seemed to stay upstairs for quite a while, and Sarah eventually went to get him.

The meal was pleasant, and the two couples laughed and enjoyed one another's company. But William noticed his father hadn't eaten much. This was unusual. His father was a stickler for eating properly and not wasting food. He had not said anything about seeing Uncle Luke, so William asked, "Did you go see Uncle Luke today?"

"Oh no! I forgot. I better go over there," Thomas said, pushing his chair back.

"No, you don't have to," William advised quickly. "We went by there earlier, and I checked on him. He sounds much better. We took a short walk. He was lying on the porch playing with Saamel when

¹ Hebrews 13:16.

we got there.” William laughed. “He got the boy to play his flute, and before we left, Saamel was talking to Bonnie.”

“Well, that’s good to hear,” Thomas said, smiling gently. “That child’s always been quiet. He didn’t start talking till he was close to three. We were all worried about him. He still doesn’t talk very much.”

“But he plays beautiful music,” Sarah said.

Bonnie agreed. “Yes, he does. The song he played while we were there was just amazing. And the marshal’s singing was so sweet. You wouldn’t think a man that old could sing like that. His voice was beautiful.”

Sarah smiled, remembering her father singing when she was a child. “His voice hasn’t changed any since I was a little girl.”

Thomas picked up his coffee cup and started to get out of his chair but sat back down heavily and closed his eyes for a moment, leaning his head into his empty hand.

“Father? Are you okay?” William asked.

“I’m sorry. I’m just tired,” Thomas replied. “You, young people, enjoy yourselves. I think I’m going to bed early.”

Thomas began to stand again. William was sitting next to him and stood, reaching over to hold to his father as he stood again.

“I’m okay,” Thomas said, pulling away from his son.

But William thought his father looked unsteady, and he was moving slow. William had never known his father to leave the room when they had company.

When his father was gone, William turned to his mother and asked, “Is he all right?”

Sarah said, “He’s been tired lately. And he’s worried about Reid and Luke. He really needs to slow down. He can’t do everything he did when we first moved here.”

“There’s a lot less to do here than at the hospital in Denver,” William commented.

“Yes, but your father is getting older. He’s been talking about letting the mine contract go next year. But then he remembers the condition of those people when he first took over out there. I don’t think he’ll drop it. I better go on up there with him. You two have a

good evening. It was so nice meeting you, Bonnie. I’ll take care of the dishes later.” William’s mother stood up, reaching her hand out to the girl her son had brought home. “Come back and visit us again.”

“Good night, Mrs. Stewart,” Bonnie said. “It was nice meeting you too.”

“I’ll take Bonnie home and be back in a few minutes,” William said.

But Bonnie wouldn’t let him take her home until they had done the dishes. William helped the best he could. He was beginning to use his left hand more and was gaining strength, but he still couldn’t get much movement out of his shoulder.

As they worked, William daydreamed of what it would be like married to this woman, coming home to that sweet beautiful face in the evenings and sharing meals, chores, and scripture together.

Yes, he would make this lovely young woman his wife, just as soon as he was able to support her.

As William drove home alone, his thoughts were entirely of Bonnie. He had now seen her at work and at home with her family. He had introduced her to his grandfather and his parents. She had not been at church when he attended with his parents, but she had told him she worked Sunday mornings so she wasn’t able to attend. He knew she was a Christian from the comments she had made. She was familiar with Christian customs and got excited when William told her he was learning to listen to God. She had wanted to know more. She had also shown compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, all the virtues Colossians 3:12 spoke of.

William stopped his busy mind to listen. *And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*¹ The Spirit had just spoken to him again. He was sure of it.

¹ Colossians 3:14.

18

CHAPTER

The BI had found the camp the peddler had spoken of, but hadn't gotten much help from anyone. Bailey had told his men to be careful. This was the type of place that could band together and take them all out if they felt threatened. They had talked to one girl, briefly, who remembered the judge and the Indian children. She had told them the direction the small band of travelers had gone when they left camp. It corroborated with the peddler's story. When they left the camp, the automobiles separated, staying just within sight of each other and headed north across the open country, following the peddler's lead.

Matt was back in the automobile with Adam and Wil Bailey. Bailey's driving had calmed down, and he had let his anger go. He was now sure they were on the trail of the judge and was more focused on his mission. He felt like someone was pulling him forward, driving him into the open country and to the northeast.

As they left the camp, Bailey asked Adam if he had ever heard of the operation called Larago.

Adam simply answered, "Yes."

Bailey continued to talk as if Adam had not answered him at all.

"You're kind of young to know about it. I was still a marshal when it ended. That camp back there was just the type of place that we took down during that operation."

Adam said nothing.

Matt leaned forward in his seat, turning toward Bailey. "I don't know about it. Tell me."

Bailey laughed. "You're kind of young to be told about it." He thought for a minute and then kept on talking.

"It was an undercover operation about ten or twelve years ago. They sent a man into the prostitution and human trafficking syndicate that covered almost the whole Midwest. This guy must have been something. He spent about five months undercover. Nobody heard a word from him during that time, and then he just disappeared. Informants had reported seeing him, but nobody knew where he had gone. They thought he was dead.

"When he came out of hiding, he had enough information to take down over four hundred people involved. Criminals, marshals, mayors, judges, sheriffs, Chicago and Minneapolis policemen, city councilmen. Even a congressman. Didn't have any of it written down but had it all in his head. Gave his testimony at the trial of the top guys, and then he prosecuted some of the dirty law himself, the ones that were protecting the organization. He was apparently a lawyer. Doggone, good one too. Won every case he handled. He stayed in court for more than three years, then he was never seen in court again. That was it! He disappeared again. They say the bad guys went after him once but never laid a finger on him. They were all captured and jailed."

"Wow!" Matt commented.

"Well, Adam? What did you hear?" Bailey asked. "How'd you even know about it? You were probably still a schoolboy then."

Adam wasn't talking.

Bailey turned to Adam who sat staring at the land in front of them. "You said you knew about it. Now speak!" Bailey commanded.

Adam gave a big sigh but remained quiet.

"Adam, you better talk," Bailey ordered. His tone had turned into the roaring lion that demanded obedience.

"I knew the guy that was undercover," Adam said softly, still staring at the open land in front of them.

"Keep going," Bailey said. "Don't stop there."

Adam thought about it. How could he explain this without giving too much information? He finally decided he had to tell the whole story.

“He was injured. That’s why he disappeared. The criminals found out he was the law and beat him up. There was another undercover agent that had turned dirty.” Adam turned in his seat to look at Matt. “My father took care of him while he recovered.”

“Wow!” Matt said again. “I didn’t know Uncle Thomas ever did that with anyone except—” Matt stopped suddenly and looked at Adam hard. Then he softly added, “I thought he worked for a law firm.”

Adam shook his head. “That’s what he told everyone. Don’t you ever let him know I told you.” Adam looked straight into Matt’s eyes. “He doesn’t want you to know. He doesn’t want anyone to know.” Then turning to Bailey, Adam said, “You’re not going to say anything either.” Bailey didn’t answer, so Adam raised his voice to a stern demand. “Do you hear me?”

“Keep going,” Bailey said, unmoved by the order he had just been given by his subordinate. “You two know who you’re talking about, but I don’t.”

“My dad,” Matt said softly.

Bailey turned sharply to look at Matt and then at Adam. “The judge?”

Adam nodded. “He almost died. They brought him to the house for Father to take care of. His sister, Mary, is a doctor at a hospital in Chicago. She found him at the hospital. Uncle Cleve had business in Chicago, and Uncle Luke had gone with him so they could both visit their sister. They were there in Chicago when Mary found him. It took them more than a week to get him home from Chicago on the train. Matt, most of the family doesn’t know who beat him up. They just know it had to do with his job. They thought he was working for that law firm. You can’t let them know.”

Matt nodded his head, and Adam continued, “He couldn’t move. Could barely talk. Didn’t know where he was for a long time.” Adam shook his head, remembering. “I’ve never seen anybody as torn up as he was, and I’ve been around big city hospitals all my life. He didn’t have hardly a mark on the outside. All the damage was internal. We couldn’t leave him alone. He’d stop breathing, and we’d

have to wake him up so he wouldn’t die. We all took turns watching him. Even Curt. I think he was about thirteen then.”

Adam was silent for several minutes. Then he started talking again.

“I was there the night they came after him too. I helped him get his pants and boots on, and we headed out to the field together. He couldn’t walk by himself. I had to help him.”

Adam looked at his supervisor. How would this man take what he would say next? He turned to look at Matt. “We laid there on the ground. Me and him and our guns, waiting for them. God had spoken to me telling me to stay with him, not to let him out of my sight.” Adam was watching Bailey. His supervisor’s eyes were straight in front of him, watching where the car was headed. “God told me, ‘But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble. My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let (him) out of your sight.’¹ I somehow knew exactly who God was talking about.

“God spoke to Reid that night too, telling him to get everybody out of the house. God told him to get them to safety and then to go into the open field. It took a while to get Father to listen. I don’t think he believed us even after he did what Reid told him to do. When we got to the field, Grandpa showed up. God woke him up and told him to protect us.”

Bailey turned to look at Adam again.

“We’d already called Uncle Luke. He brought his deputy, Uncle Cleve, and Uncle Angus. We all laid there on the ground where God had told Reid to go. We watched as God spoke to Grandpa again. Grandpa told us to stay put when we saw them, so we didn’t move when they showed up and turned into the field coming toward us. We stayed there watching as God took six men down himself. None of us fired a shot, and none of us got hurt. All we had to do was pick them up off the ground and take them to jail. Three of them needed a doctor, so Father had to go to the jail that night too.”

¹ Proverbs 4:19–21a.

Now no one spoke. Bailey hadn't looked toward Adam or Matt anymore. He was watching the ground rush past in front of them. Adam looked back at Matt. He had sat back in his seat and was staring at the floor of the automobile. Adam turned around to watch the land move past too.

Matt softly said, "I will speak the word that I will speak, and it will be performed."¹ He had heard from God and knew what was going to happen, that God would lead him to his father.

Both of the men in the front seat heard him, but neither responded.

The automobile to the left started blowing his horn wildly. Bailey blew his horn and turned in that direction, the car to his right following. The four automobiles converged on one location. At the center, a dead Indian's pony.

Scripture came to Matt's heart, and he spoke it out loud again, "The horse is a false hope for safety. It provides no escape by its great power."²

As the car slowed, Bailey turned around to look at Matt. Bailey remembered hearing these scriptures as a child. But the BI team leader didn't have the confidence in God's Word that he heard in this young man's voice. Bailey now saw the certainty and the peace in Matt's face. Looking at the judge's son, Bailey felt even more certain that they would find Matt's father soon.

Adam said, "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act."³

"I'm committed," Matt responded sadly. "I know that through (our) prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for (his) deliverance. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."⁴

Adam felt a great sadness as he heard his young cousin speak these words. He wondered why he felt that way, knowing they would

¹ Ezekiel 12:25a (ESV).

² Psalm 33:17 (HCSB).

³ Psalm 37:5 (HCSB).

⁴ Philippians 1:19, 21 (ESV).

soon find Reid. And why was Matt so sad? God was delivering his father to them.

Bailey brought the automobile to a stop and turned to Adam Stewart. "Adam, sometimes you know things that the rest of the team doesn't know. I've started depending on you for that. I just thought you had some kind of good lawman's intuition. Now I want you to tell me. Are you that good or is God telling you these things?"

Adam couldn't back down now. He had to acknowledge God both for his communication to Adam and for whatever intuition he had. He responded, "He who is of God hears the words of God."¹ "For the Lord gives wisdom. From his mouth come knowledge and understanding."²

The two men looked hard at each other. Adam couldn't decide if Bailey was going to admonish him for his belief or scold him for being foolish. Wilbur Bailey had never given Adam any indication that he was a spiritual man.

Adam let it be known to all that he was a Christian, but he had not shared God's personal messages with anyone until now. Some people just didn't take God speaking directly to someone easily. After all, Adam's own father questioned his son the first time Adam had shared with his father. And Adam didn't think his father believed him, so he hadn't shared anything else.

Bailey finally nodded. "Okay. You keep listening to God and I'll keep listening to you. You keep me posted."

That was it. Adam kept waiting for more but nothing came.

The men got out to discuss the situation in front of them. One of the agents began going through the bag on the ground calling out the content. Everyone could see what was already on the ground. Another agent found a sack of hard candy and offered everyone a few pieces. Matt was listening to what was being said, but he was also looking at the ground.

¹ John 8:47a (NASB 1995).

² Proverbs 2:6.

Adam looked into the bag as the hard candy was passed to him. "There's something else in here," he said, reaching in and pulling out paper wrapping. He opened the paper and found pills.

"Matt, look at this," Adam said.

"Aspirin," Matt said as he twisted to look at what Adam held. He turned back around and continued looking at the ground and the horse.

"It hasn't been that long ago that this happened," Matt said. "Look at these prints. They're still defined. The wind hasn't blown dirt over them."

Everyone began looking out across the land like they were going to see someone walking away. But Matt was still looking at the tracks. "Four horses went that way. That peddler said they only had two." Matt pointed at the horse tracks disappearing to the west.

"But somebody that was barefooted went that way." Matt pointed in the opposite direction. "This person was headed for those trees. If he had an Indian boy and three little ones with him, this would be the Indian boy. Dad and the babies were probably hiding in the trees. Dad can't ride a horse. It messes with his back. He'd have to go really slow." He turned to point at the running horse's tracks again. "He wouldn't have been on those horses."

"If Dad's walking, he's moving slow too, and he wouldn't be able to go very far, especially if he'd been on a horse for three days." Matt didn't know where the three days came from. He could only trust that God had told him this. He continued talking, but it was now with God. "He's been on a horse for three days? God, help him!"

Matt started walking, following the barefoot tracks, ignoring the others. Adam folded the paper back around the aspirin and put it into his pants pocket. He got in the driver's seat of the automobile and started moving, following Matt. When the car got close to Matt, he stepped onto the running board, hanging onto the car's frame. Adam kept moving, leaving Bailey to ride with someone else.

One car with two marshals and a BI agent left to follow the tracks of the four horses. The other cars headed for the trees, following Adam and Matt.

It was late in the day, and the sun would set soon. The trees were casting long shadows as the men searched the area for any sign that Reid had been there. The only clue found was an empty milk can, buried in the dirt under a bush.

Matt began walking the area around the outside of the trees to the north. He was looking for tracks. Just as darkness hit, about thirty feet from the tree line, he found something. Calling Adam, Matt showed the others the footprints.

A flat, even, rounded moccasin print of the left foot with the right print heavier on the inside toe area. The man had a short stride. This was Matt's father's moccasins. Two sets of tiny bare feet scarcely making an imprint on the ground and the same bare footprint seen near the dead horse. Matt was certain these were the same prints. The middle toe of the left foot didn't meet the ground with the same intensity as the other toes.

Matt wanted to move on, to follow the tracks he could find, but Bailey wouldn't allow it. It was getting too dark, and there would be a waning moon tonight. They didn't need to search in the dark. It was too easy to miss something or get separated. Bailey was getting anxious, wanting to find the missing judge too. It was Bailey's job to find the judge, but it was also his job to take care of his men. Everyone needed rest. They would start early tomorrow morning.

19

CHAPTER

Matt and Adam were up before the sun, and as soon as the ground was visible, they started tracking. They were moving fast on foot, toward the nearby hills. The land was getting rough. Dry wash covered the area. Run off from the river had dug into the ground during flood season. The river would be high this time of year, and they would probably run into soft wet areas soon. They wouldn't be able to bring the touring cars this way. Adam spotted the sheer face of a butte in the distance.

Adam turned around and saw the automobiles moving toward them. One of the cars tried to cross a rut, but its front driver's side tire disappeared into the dry channel. The other cars stopped, and the members of Adam's team got out.

Matt kept moving. It wasn't long before the other men caught up and continued to follow them on foot. The men spread out with Matt in the middle and in front of them. They were within sight of each other when Matt lost the tracks on rocky ground. He slowed, watching the ground carefully.

Adam moved closer to him. "Do you see anything?"

"If Dad's walking this, it's really going to mess with his back," Matt commented, expressing the worry he had for his father's well-being. They came to an area where brush had been broken to make a path. "Here!" Matt yelled. "Dad wouldn't be able to move through this without leaving evidence of it."

Adam followed, and the two men moved quickly through the trampled area of brush and found graded rocks going up the side of a

steep rise. "I don't think he could make it up this," Matt said. "He'd need a lot of help."

But as Adam went a few steps farther, he found a thin piece of leather hanging on a sharp rock. He picked it up and called to Matt.

"That's a piece of Dad's boot." Matt reached into his pocket and pulled out several more pieces that he had picked up along the way.

Suddenly a shout could be heard piercing the calm morning air. The two moved quickly, ascending the steep hill, searching.

Adam saw movement and started running. As he got closer, he realized men were fighting. He ran at the man who wrestled Reid on the ground. The man had his hands around Reid's throat, choking him. Reid tried to push the man's hands apart and off his throat, but the big man was much stronger. Adam pulled the attacker off quickly. The two tussled, the big brawny man having the advantage.

Reid lay on the ground coughing and struggling to regain his senses, trying to see who had just intervened and what was happening.

Matt took his knife from its sheath and ran at the man holding the Indian boy. Blade was still kicking and squirming as the man held him, his big arms wrapped tightly around Blade's arms and chest. The boy had put up a good fight for a youth his age, but it was obvious the man was winning as they moved toward the edge of the butte.

Matt put his knife into the man's back and pulled down with all his weight. The man dropped Blade as Matt yelled, "Run!" The man fell to his knees briefly and then turned to face his attacker, the knife still in his back. He got up and ran at Matt.

A third man came at Blade.

Reid couldn't get his eye open far enough to see anything at a distance. He heard the grunts, yells, and sounds of battle. He couldn't tell what was going on. He tried to get his bearings but didn't even know which way to go to get to the girls.

Then there was a gunshot. Reid ducked to the ground. More sounds of a fight and a scream as someone went over the edge of the butte. More gunfire. Then all was quiet.

"Dad!" Reid raised his head to the sound of Matt's voice.

"Matt?" Reid's voice sounded rough, and he coughed.

“Over here, Dad.” The sound was softer this time. Reid heard footsteps and saw a shadow pass him as Adam moved quickly toward his young cousin.

“Reid, Matt’s been shot.” Reid found the direction of the call and turned, straining to open his eye. He found the forms of two men and began clawing to drag himself the short distance to them.

Adam had taken his jacket off and was pressing it into the wound on Matt’s stomach. Blood was pouring out despite Adam’s attempt to stop it.

Reid reached Matt and pulled his son into his arms.

“Dad, we found you,” Matt said softly through gasping breaths.

“Yes, you did, son,” Reid said, cradling his son’s head. He was close to Matt now, and Reid could focus his eye on his son. He knew this injury was bad.

“Dad?”

“Yes, son?”

“I’m glad we...” Matt held his breath. “Found you.” And Matt closed his eyes. “I’m not going to get to go to Chicago, am I?” A gurgling noise could be heard as he spoke, and then Matt coughed gently.

Reid was concentrating on his son, trying to think of what to do for him. But deep down, he knew there was no way to help Matt. He would bleed out soon. Reid struggled to focus his mind as he continued to cough.

There were three shots in the distance.

“No, son. You’re going somewhere even better.” Tears were in Reid’s eyes as he repeated what the Spirit told him. “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”¹

Reid could tell Matt was getting weaker quickly. Matt softly said, “I’m ready, Dad.”

¹ 1 Peter 5:10.

Reid continued, “Jesus said, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die, and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?’”¹

“I believe it,” Matt whispered.

Adam took his hands from Matt’s stomach to allow Reid to hold his son easier.

Reid pulled his son to his chest and squeezed his eyes tighter as the tears came. “I’ll be right behind you, Matt. You won’t even miss me.”

Reid pulled his bottom lip into his mouth and bit down, his breathing getting heavier by the moment. He was still coughing occasionally, and Adam could hear the heavy breaths.

Adam moved to squat next to his uncle and put a hand on Reid’s shoulder.

They sat still several minutes. Matt wasn’t talking anymore.

Adam said, “Reid, it’s Adam. I’ve got to get the other searchers over here. I need to signal them. I’m going to fire my pistol.”

Reid nodded but gave no verbal response. Adam stood up and moved a few steps away, raised his pistol above his head, and fired three times. He waited, then fired three times again, and began to reload. He looked back at Reid who still sat holding Matt with his eyes closed.

Then he moved closer to the children. “I’m Adam. What’s your name?”

“Blade.”

“Okay, Blade. Help is coming. We’re going to get all of you out of here. It’s over.”

“Is that his son?”

“Yes. That’s Matthew, his oldest son.”

“Reid told me of him,” Blade said, looking at Reid and Matt.

“He was a special kind of man,” Adam replied. “He would have made a good agent.”

A shot could be heard in the distance. Adam walked to the edge of the rocks, raised his pistol, and fired again in response.

¹ John 11:25–26.

As the other searchers arrived, Reid laid Matt gently on the hard ground, placing his hand on the boy's chest. Reid's tears had stopped, but he felt weak and let himself fall to the ground beside his son.

He coughed a few more times. His assailant's hold on Reid's throat had irritated something inside him, and he felt like he couldn't breathe.

"Reid? Are you okay?" Adam asked.

Reid nodded and continued to lay on the ground with his eyes closed and his arm across his eyes. Aiyana came to Reid slowly and sat against him. Reid rolled slightly to hug her to him and continued coughing.

"I gave all my children to you years ago," Reid said to his Lord. "You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you."¹

He was silent for a moment then added, "'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised.'"²

A faint smile came to Reid's face. "Is this what you require of me, Lord? My children?" And the tears came again.

Reid continued to lay on the ground holding Aiyana. The sun had now risen completely in the eastern sky, bright and clear.

"Reid." Reid jumped at the sound of Adam's voice. "Are you going to be able to make it? It's going to take us a couple of hours to hike out of here."

"I'm gonna give it a try."

"The sunlight's hurting your eyes, isn't it?" Adam asked.

Reid nodded. "It makes my head hurt."

Then Adam remembered the pills in his pocket, and he pulled them out and gave a few to Reid.

"Do you want to try covering your eyes? We can wrap them to keep the light out." Adam had always been good at offering suggestions that helped.

"We can try it," Reid said. "Adam?"

"Yes."

"Is Matt okay? I mean. You're going to be able to get him out with us, aren't you?"

"We're going to try. We're sure going to try."

Adam helped Reid sit up. The BI agent took bandages out of a bag one of the other men was carrying. He took the dirty wrapping off Reid's arm and looked at the scabs and fresh growth of tender skin. Then he put fresh bandages on his uncle's arm. He tore strips and folded them, placing them over Reid's eyes. As he wrapped the bandages around Reid's head, Adam looked at the healing gash and yellow bruising on the side of Reid's face that ended over the right ear. He didn't know how his uncle had survived another blow to the head.

Adam spoke. "Reid? We're leaving in just a few minutes. Do any of the little ones need anything?"

Reid's voice was sluggish. "It's been a while since the baby ate. Probably need to give her a bottle."

Blade and Kimi moved to sit beside Reid. Blade watched the activity as the bureau agents moved around the top of the butte doing their job. He watched as one of the men fed Aponi.

Wil Bailey came to Reid and introduced himself, offering condolences for Matt's loss. Reid nodded his head but said nothing.

A few minutes later, Reid heard Bailey speak loudly to his men. They were moving out. One of the men reached for Aiyana, and she pulled away, clinging to Reid.

"Aiyana. It's okay. He's going to help you. I'll be close by. It's okay." The man continued to pull Aiyana until Reid was free of her. Then Reid addressed the men near him. "Be gentle with the girls. They've never been outside of their...prison...before. They don't talk, and they don't understand what we're doing. Tell them what you're doing and talk to them. Keep them close to me. I want to know they're close."

A couple of the men assured him that they would stay close.

"Adam?" Reid called.

"I'm right here," Adam said, moving closer to Reid.

¹ Nehemiah 9:6.

² Job 1:21b.

“Are you going to stay with me?” Reid asked. Adam’s uncle seemed tired. He had to be tired. He’d been abducted close to three weeks ago. He was injured and sunburned, and now he’d lost his son.

Adam was worried about their ability to get him to the automobiles.

“Yeah, I got you.”

“Blade. Stay close.”

The Indian boy moved closer and put a hand on Reid’s arm. Reid reached over and patted it.

Blade wanted to stay with Reid. He didn’t want to take any chance that he would get separated from this man. This man had told him he was going home with him. He had said the girls were going with them too.

Blade still wasn’t sure if he could trust what this man said. He’d never seen a man that needed so much help. Nor had he seen a man that was so sure of what would happen or so quietly confident of his own actions. But Blade wanted to go with him wherever he was going.

Adam helped Reid up and wrapped his uncle’s arm around his shoulder, holding to Reid’s arm. They started backtracking the way they had come.

They moved down the hill and across the open land. Reid was having trouble walking and kept tripping, even though they were moving slowly. Wil Bailey came to help.

Reid could feel the heat coming at him from all directions, and he was glad his eyes were covered. They were closed under the bandages, and little light was getting in. His back hurt, and he was having more and more trouble moving his legs. His head still hurt, and his throat felt like it was closing, but the coughing had stopped.

Hours passed and Reid’s feet weren’t moving at all. He was still between Wil Bailey and Adam, his head lowered and his eyes still bandaged. But the agents kept him moving, closer and closer to the touring cars.

Reid was breathing hard, but he wasn’t doing any of the work anymore. Adam knew he was still conscious. Reid was still answering questions if you could understand him. His speech was harsh and

guttural, his voice low and fragmented, the words grinding against each other. His lips were dry and blistered, cracked by the hot sun and lack of water. And he’d started coughing again.

Wil let go of Reid when they got to the car and walked away. “Reid, we’re at the automobiles,” Adam said.

Reid nodded. “Where are the girls?”

“They’re waiting for you.”

“Where’s Matt?”

“They’re putting him in a car.”

“How long till we get to Harris?” Reid asked, his voice almost at a whisper and hard to understand. Adam remembered Reid barely being able to talk as he recovered from his injuries, and he worried about Reid now. His voice had a similar feel to it.

“Too long. We’re going to Coldwater.”

“Please, no. I want to go home. I can make it,” Reid said. “Put the children with me. Take us to Harris.”

“Okay. Let me go see if I can talk them into it.” Adam helped Reid into a motorcar and left to talk to Wil Bailey.

Adam, Reid, and Blade were all in the back seat with a marshal driving. Wilbur Bailey sat up front with Aiyana clinging to him tightly. Kimi Tennis held to Adam in a way a child had never held him before. Adam was uncomfortable but knew the child was scared, so he wrapped his arms around her. Blade had Aponi Catori tied to his chest again. Reid was in the middle and leaning toward Adam. Adam thought he might fall over at any moment.

Neither Blade nor the girls had ever been in an automobile before. They had never seen an automobile before, and Blade was visibly nervous. He had no idea what to expect. He kept looking to Reid for support. Blade didn’t know if Reid even knew where he was sitting. Reid’s eyes were bandaged, and he seemed calm, so Blade tried to stay calm too.

The automobiles began moving, and the dust quickly engulfed everyone. Someone had given Reid and Blade a couple of bandanas. Their nose and mouth were covered, while Aponi was covered completely by a blanket. Reid coughed more.

There was no top to the vehicle, and the heat was bearing down on them all. Blade looked at Kimi, her large brown eyes staring back at him. There was no water left, no food, and nothing in sight. Adam pulled the yellow cloth over Kimi's face to shield it from the sun and dust. She squirmed but didn't let go of her tight hold on him.

Blade looked at Aiyana over the back of the seat. Her eyes were peeking over the man's shoulder as he held her head against the side of his face. She was shaking. Fear owned her. It did Blade as well. Every second that passed took them farther away from the only life Blade could remember. But it was another moment closer to this new and unknown life that he and his sisters would live with their future family.

The smile that cracked on Blade's face hadn't been seen in a long time. As scared as he was, he had a good feeling about this strange little man who sat silently next to him.

They stopped in another out-of-the-way camp and found gasoline, filling their tanks and gas cans. They depleted the man of every drop of fuel he had. They purchased milk for Aponi and got more cloth for diapers. They also found food and water. They returned to the road as quickly as they could to continue toward Harris.

Thankfully, two of the men with them were fathers and had an idea of how to care for the baby. Each time they stopped, these men would ask to take the child. But Blade wouldn't let them. He had held to the baby continually since they had gotten in the cars.

Toward evening Reid asked Adam to talk to him. Adam talked until he could think of nothing else to say. Reid never responded to him, so he stopped talking. A few minutes later, Reid asked him to talk again. Reid needed distractions from the pain and his thoughts of Matt. He also wanted Adam to keep him awake. He didn't want to fall asleep.

Just after nightfall, Reid lifted his head and let it flop backward over the seat. "Adam, it's getting dark. Take the bandages off my eyes."

"I don't have any more. I won't be able to put them back on in the morning. This dust is awful. Let's keep them covered."

"I want to see for a little while. Please. Save these. Use them again in the morning. I don't care if they've got dirt in them," Reid said. "When will we get to Harris?"

"About midday if the fuel holds out."

Kimi was asleep again. Adam passed her to Reid and then took his jacket off and laid it on the floor, trying to keep the bloodstains away from the child as he laid her on his jacket hoping to cushion her head from the bumping of the automobile. Adam unwrapped the bandages from around Reid's eyes. Reid squeezed his eyes tight as soon as they came off. Then he was able to open his left eye slightly.

"I don't imagine the guys are enjoying Matt's company right now." Reid smiled sadly. "He's probably asking them all kinds of questions about their work. He's going to study forensic science, you know." Reid laughed. "He actually wants to do autopsies. I'm going to miss him."

Bailey turned to look at Reid, unsure of the conversation. Adam reached over to put his hand on Reid's leg. When he did, Reid jumped slightly.

"Sorry. Didn't mean to startle you," Adam said.

"It's okay." Reid seemed to have suddenly lost all strength. "Did you call home and let them know about Matt?"

"No. We haven't been near a telephone. I guess I could send a telegram if we see someplace to do that."

"Yeah. I don't want to surprise them. Don't want the little ones running to the car to see him like that. I guess we could drop him off at the undertakers, but I don't want other people knowing before the family does. No, I don't guess a telegram would be good either." Reid laughed slightly and changed the subject.

"Chipeta's been trying to teach me to tell her how I feel. She says I don't tell people what I need. If she were here right now, I'd tell her my back is hurting, and I need to lie down."

Adam looked around in the car. "We can do that," Adam said, pointing to the floor. "Blade, can you get on the floor with Kimi?"

Blade slid off the seat and across the wide floor, still holding the baby. There was plenty of room on the floor for the children. It would just be a rougher ride. Adam took Reid by the shoulders and

helped him lie down. His legs were bent and hanging off the seat, his head on Adam's leg. Adam knew this wasn't a good position for Reid to be in, but Reid said nothing.

Reid reached out to touch Aponi. "She's done nothing but sleep. Is she okay? See if you can get some milk down her."

Adam tapped Wil's shoulder and asked for a bottle. Wil opened the can and poured some into the bottle. He handed the can to the girl sitting next to him. She drank some and then passed it back to him. Bailey tried to pass the can to the little girl on the floor beside Blade, but she was asleep. Bailey handed it back to Aiyana who finished it.

Blade tried to put the nipple in Aponi's mouth. She didn't want it. She kept her mouth closed.

"Is she eating?" Reid asked.

Blade replied, "No, she does not want it."

"Adam, how long has it been since she's taken something?" Reid asked.

"I don't know. Several hours."

"Oh, Lord, no! Not another one! Please! Adam, she's got to eat. She's too little." Bailey turned to watch the activity in the back seat. It was dark, but Adam had a dim lantern on the floor.

"Here, Blade. Give her to me," Adam said, taking the child and the bottle.

Adam didn't know that much about babies. His attempt to get the child to take the bottle was unsuccessful too.

"Wake her up. Thump her foot. Pinch her leg. Do something to wake her up. Make her cry!" Reid was getting upset. He didn't want another child to die. He'd taken care of this baby and kept it alive in the wilderness. He didn't want to lose this child now.

Finally, Adam got a small cry out of the baby. Then she took just a little milk before she fell asleep again.

"Don't let her sleep for too long," Reid advised. "Don't let her get into a deep sleep. Keep trying to get the milk into her."

Reid was quiet for a few minutes, then he started talking again.

"We had to fight Esa when he was born to keep him alive. He was weak. He didn't want to eat either. Chipeta was sick and couldn't

nurse. Your mother and I took care of Esa. He was a couple of weeks old before your father thought he was strong enough and would survive.

"Our fourth baby came early. We took care of her for six days before she left us. I was holding her when..." Reid stopped in mid-sentence. "Lord, take care of this child!"

Bailey and Adam had their eyes on Reid. Reid was worried about the child, but Adam was worried about his uncle. Laying on the automobile seat, he looked weak too. Reid had eaten only a few bites since they found him early that morning. The others had grabbed what they could each time they stopped, but Reid had refused almost everything.

The lantern was almost gone, and it was getting too dark to see. Adam prayed that the child would live and that Reid would be okay.

The automobiles sped down the dirt road in the dark, moving closer and closer to the Kansas state line.

20

CHAPTER

The cars moved down Main Street quickly, the lead driver honking his horn to alert people and move them out of the way. Everyone turned to look. Cleve ran out of his office and saw the automobiles turning, headed past the medical clinic.

He knew they had found Reid. He stuck his head back in the door and told his assistant, "Call Angus and Thomas! Tell them to get to Reid's!" Then, grabbing his hat, he turned to follow the cars.

The cars slowed as they turned on the narrow dirt road that passed Travis's home and ended at Reid's. The lead car began honking again as it arrived and came to a stop. Chipeta was already on the porch, and the children were following.

Wilbur Bailey got out of the car holding Aiyana and opened the door next to Adam. Blade, with his deer skin poncho and bare feet, moved through the door pushing Kimi out in front of him and holding the baby. Adam backed out slowly, assisting Reid.

Chipeta ran to the car and anxiously awaited her husband.

Reid had wanted the bandages removed from his eyes so that he could see his wife and children when he arrived. Adam had taken them off as they came through town.

Chipeta threw her arms around Reid as he put his feet on the ground. He collapsed into her embrace. Adam was still trying to hold Reid, but Chipeta was holding most of his weight now. Reid held Chipeta as she cried, holding tightly to her husband. She wasn't saying anything when she looked up at him and started running her hand over his arms and shoulders and onto his face, his lips dry and cracked. She touched what was left of the bruise on his face. The skin

had turned a yellowish gray color but was also tainted by the sunburn he had gotten. The knot beside his eye wasn't as large as it had been, but it was still tender, and Reid jerked his head involuntarily when his wife touched it.

The children were all around them wanting a hug from their father too. Reid said, "Adam, get me to the steps."

Adam moved forward pulling Reid and Chipeta with him. Reid turned and sat on the steps, letting go of Adam, and grabbed the first child within his reach. He pulled Abigail to him and hugged her tightly, kissing her face, and then reached for another child. Over and over, he hugged and kissed his children until they had all welcomed him home. But there was one missing.

"Where's Saamel?" he asked.

James pointed to the road. "Grandpa's bringing him."

The sky was blue, but there were numerous puffy white clouds covering the sun. It was bright, but Reid was able to see the image of his father, Luke, and Saamel headed slowly toward them. Saamel was holding tightly to his grandpa's arm with both hands. It looked like Reid's father was almost dragging the child to get him to move. Saamel was watching Reid, but he didn't look happy to see his father. He looked scared.

Reid realized he probably didn't look like himself. He was dirty and sunburned. His hair was messy, and there was a couple of weeks' growth of whiskers on his face. That was enough to scare the child.

Travis moved to sit beside Reid with Saamel holding tightly to his arm. Travis put his other arm around his son, drawing himself close to Reid and holding him. Reid leaned into his father and put his hand on Saamel, rubbing his head again and again, but the child wouldn't let go of his grandfather.

Chipeta continued to hold Reid's arm, and when Travis released his son, Reid grabbed his father's hand.

"Children." Reid's voice was low and scratchy. Reid leaned on his wife and squeezed his father's hand. "Matt won't be coming home." He stopped, letting his words sink in.

They all stopped moving and got quiet. Reid looked at James who stood close to him. His face had a questioning look, not under-

standing what his father was trying to tell him. He looked to the other men in the yard, searching for Matthew. Then the truth hit him, and Reid saw the shock on James's face. Stephen stood with his mouth hanging open. Chipeta slowly laid her head against Reid's shoulder and started breathing again. Reid knew the tears would come at any moment.

As Cleve passed the Stewart home, he found William and Sarah near the road, looking in the direction of Reid's house. He stopped to pick them up. As the car arrived at Reid's, Cleve, William, and Sarah got out. The happy look on Cleve's face faded as he grabbed Sarah's arm and stopped her movement. Something wasn't right.

Adam walked toward them. "Matt's dead," he said quietly and then moved to hug his mother.

Cleve stepped closer to Adam and quietly asked, "What happened?"

"We found Reid, but there was a fight." Adam let go of his mother, and Cleve took her into his arms. "Matt got shot. They saw each other just briefly before Matt was gone. William, come with me."

Adam took William to the children. They all looked undernourished. The little girls were extremely thin with sunburned faces, dry cracked lips, and big hollow eyes ringed by dark circles. William stooped in front of the girls, but they both turned away quickly. Aiyana buried her face in Wil Bailey's pant legs, and Kimi moved quickly behind Blade and grabbed the back side of his poncho, also hiding her face from this man. William turned to the wild-looking Indian boy. He looked strong. You could see the muscles over his thin body, but his face showed the bones beneath his dark skin. William turned to look at Reid. He was thin too. They all looked bad. It would be weeks before any of them looked healthy. Adam took the bundle from Blade and handed it to William. The doctor realized he had just been handed a baby. William looked up at Adam in shock, shook his head in disbelief, and walked past Reid into the house. One of the marshals followed.

Luke now moved to where Adam stood, beside the three Indian children and Adam's supervisor. The sheriff looked at Blade and asked, "Did you take care of Reid?"

The Indian nodded. Luke pulled the boy into his arms and hugged him, widely rocking back and forth from one foot to the other. "Thank you. Thank you."

Blade's eyes were wide, uncertain of what this big man was doing to him.

Luke loosened his hold on Blade and looked to Bailey, asking, "Where's Matt?"

Bailey pointed Luke toward one of the cars. Luke moved in that direction.

Two marshals stood near the automobile. One of them pulled the blanket off Matt's head. The sheriff leaned in to put his forearms on the top of the door with his hands clasp together, looking at the boy on the back seat. Watching the sheriff from a distance, anyone would have thought he was praying.

Cleve followed and stood with his brother, staring at Matt who lay sideways on the back seat of the car. Cleve pulled the blanket off farther, looking at the bloody clothes and location of the wound. Luke dropped his forehead onto his clasped hands.

Luke spoke to no one. "Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."¹

Thomas had been to see old Mrs. Simpson. Her heart was failing, and she didn't have many more days to live. Thomas hated watching his patients go slowly, knowing what was coming. He didn't even like watching those that welcomed this new adventure, sure of the hereafter and God's mercy.

¹ Philippians 3:20-21.

What was worse was watching some of the family, like old man Simpson. He was bitter and treated his wife with contempt, like it was her fault, and she wanted to die. You couldn't talk to him or reason with him anymore. His ears were closed when Thomas told him to love his wife right now. The old man's mind was made up—he was going to be alone, and it was her fault.

Thomas tried to show the dying woman tenderness. He hoped it helped her. That was all he could do for her.

Now Thomas walked the street headed back to the clinic. A sadness filling his heart. His soul felt like it was dying, and it seemed to drain the energy from him, taking life with it.

Adam and Cleve drove into town to take Matt to the undertaker. Cleve had gone inside to talk with Oscar Dorsey, and Adam stood beside the car. The days since the BI entered No Man's Land now seemed especially long. Adam was tired and dirty, covered with sweat and the grit from the dust on the road. He sat down on the running board of the automobile with his head in his hands. The exhaustion had caught up with him.

Adam heard his name from across the street. He picked his head up to look and saw his father standing on the boardwalk. Adam stood up watching his father cross the street.

He was coming slowly. Cautiously. Thomas should have been happy to see his son, but instead Thomas was scared, scared of why Adam was at the undertaker's. Thomas got to the automobile and turned his head to look into the car. All he saw was a blanket over an unknown body. Adam heard his father's breath shutter and saw him sway. Adam reached over and caught his father just as his knees buckled.

"Is that Reid?" Thomas asked.

"No," Adam answered.

Thomas said, "I saw Cleve go inside."

"It's Matt," Adam said.

Thomas seemed to lose all strength and collapsed into Adam's arms. Adam lowered his father to the ground and sat holding him.

"Uncle Cleve!" Adam yelled. "Cleve!"

Cleve came out the door and saw Thomas in Adam's arms. He dropped beside Adam. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know. Get Matt moved out and let's get Father home."

Adam and Cleve got Thomas into bed, and Adam stayed with his father while Cleve returned to Reid's house.

As Cleve walked in the door, he saw Sarah holding the tiny baby, gently caressing the child as she tried to get her to suck a bottle. He hadn't seen the children earlier. He had been focused on Reid and Matt.

"Sarah, where'd the baby come from?"

"Reid brought her home with him. There are three other children. She won't eat, Cleve. I can only get her to suckle a few times, and then she quits. And she's not crying." Cleve could hear the concern in Sarah's voice.

Cleve put his hand on Sarah's shoulder as he passed, headed to the bedroom. He looked in the door watching William and Reid. Chipeta had a dish pan of water and was trying to get Reid cleaned up. William was examining the wound on the side of Reid's head. Reid's shirt was off, and Cleve could see the injury to his arm too. Jeannie and Abigail sat on the bed near their father.

"Reid," Cleve asked. "Are you doing okay?"

"I just need to rest," Reid replied.

Cleve said, "Will you be okay if I take William for a little while? Something's wrong with Thomas."

William looked up at Cleve.

Cleve explained, "He collapsed in town. We got him into bed and Adam's with him, but you need to come see about him."

"Reid, are you going to be okay?" William asked.

"I'm okay. Go see about Thomas," Reid answered.

“Chipeta, I’m sorry,” Cleve said. “I’m going to take Sarah too. I’ll get Jenny to come care for the baby, but it may take a few minutes for her to get here.”

Chipeta nodded and went to take the baby from Sarah. William told his mother that his father needed them, and they headed out the door.

Cleve made a telephone call, telling his wife he was picking her up shortly. Going outside, he found his father sitting on the steps with Saamel and Esa. The two older boys sat a few feet away. Luke was nearby in the backyard with an Indian boy and the two small girls.

“Dad, something’s wrong with Thomas. William and Sarah are coming with me. I called Jenny to come help with the baby.” Cleve continued to tell Travis what had happened in town.

Cleve watched his father, remembering what Thomas had said—“One day, something’s going to happen, and Papa just won’t be able to handle it. He’s just going to drop over dead.”

Travis closed his eyes, squeezing Saamel tighter. “Lord, ’ave ya allowed attacks on this family again?” Travis was calm as he considered what had happened to his family recently.

Too much had happened. The problems Reid had before he was kidnapped. His son being taken by the bank robbers and injured. Luke shot. William burned. Matt killed. Saamel disturbed about his father being taken and then when his father comes home the boy won’t go to him. The children that Reid brought home and the poor condition they were in. Now Thomas.

Travis softly said, “What else, Lord? ‘I have cried until the tears no longer come; my heart is broken. My spirit is poured out in agony as I see the desperate plight of my people.’”¹

Cleve reached down to hug his father. Travis continued to pray, even as Cleve held him. “But ‘that is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him

¹ Lamentations 2:11a (NLT).

until that day.’¹ I trust ya with my chil’en, Lord. They are yaus. They ’ave aw’ways been yaus.”

Travis opened his eyes and seemed to gain strength. He let go of Saamel and turned to James and Stephen. The boys knew what he wanted. They moved to sit with Esa and Saamel. He looked at Luke and said, “I’m goin’ inside ta take care a Reid. Please stay with these chil’en.”

William and Sarah arrived home to find Thomas in bed and Adam beside him. Thomas’s eyes were open, but he looked weak. He turned his head slightly to look at his wife when she sat on the bed beside him. His face had a strange gray tone that Sarah couldn’t see.

“William, he seemed to get weak. Then he just collapsed,” Adam told his brother as the young doctor moved toward them.

William made his diagnosis quickly. “His heart is weak. It’s barely beating. There’s nothing we can do but let him rest.”

“William?” Sarah said with expectation in her voice.

Her son knew what she was going to ask. “I don’t know, Mother.” William looked at his father’s face again. His eyes were closed. “We’ll just have to wait and see how strong he is.”

“There’s nothing you can do to help him?” Sarah asked.

“I can keep him hydrated. Father has always thought that helped. Keep him quiet, and we won’t let him get excited or upset. I’ll go over to the clinic and get what I need. I’ll be back soon.”

The Oldsmobile wasn’t there. William had to walk to the clinic. That wasn’t as much of a problem as he thought it would be. The heat from the sun didn’t seem to affect his shoulder as much as it had just a few days ago. The Oldsmobile wasn’t there either. William thought it must be in town somewhere. They would have to look for it later.

The young doctor rummaged through the supplies looking for the items he needed to care for his father. He was also taking inventory of what was there. He knew that he would be the one to care

¹ 2 Timothy 1:12.

for anyone that needed help now. He was the only doctor available in town. There was no rush to get back to his father. There was really nothing he could do.

He opened a cabinet and found a grouping of papers and took them out to see what they were. It was a diary dating back close to ten years. It was his father's record of his care for Reid. But it wasn't just medical information. His father had also recorded things Reid had told him. This record included the doctor's feelings as he cared for his brother-in-law.

William began to scan the pages—page after page after page describing Reid's injuries and the conversations his father had with Reid. William had never seen anything like this. His father talked of Reid being beaten and of being cared for by Jesus in a dark tunnel. It talked of Reid's skull being crushed and of angels ministering to him. And it talked of his father's unbelief, thinking that Reid had hallucinated all of it.

His father had faith. William knew he did. He believed in the virgin birth and in Jesus's death and resurrection. He believed Jesus was sitting at the right hand of the Father. He read his Bible and prayed regularly. But he had not believed in the miraculous power that Reid had told him about.

William had learned so much from Luke and his grandfather in such a short time. William was now hearing from God too. But there was so much he still didn't know. Why had his father never learned these things from them? Why was his father's mind so closed to the spiritual world?

William continued to read, and his thoughts turned to his uncle. Reid had experienced miracle after miracle. And he knew the Lord intimately, like Grandpa did. William's father had taken care of Reid well, but William didn't understand some of the terms being used when his father talked of the treatment of Reid's spine. He would have to ask Reid about these things. He needed to go back to Reid's house and check on him.

William took the supplies and the diary and headed home.

Reid had cleaned up and had a shave. He felt his spirit gain strength, but his body didn't want to move. He lay in bed talking with his children and his wife. Jeannie sat against him, and he kept his arms around her. His wife kept patting his sunburned face with a cool wet rag.

Chipeta was torn up inside. One moment, she was happy her husband was home and safe again. But she still worried about him. She could tell he needed help. He was keeping his eyes closed most of the time, and he wasn't moving at all. And now something was wrong with Thomas. And Matt. She wanted Matt back!

Reid had not taken the medication to ease the pain in his head. He didn't want to sleep right now. He wanted to talk with his family. They needed to know what had happened to both him and Matt. They needed to grieve together.

Cleve held the baby while Jenny and Travis gave the two little girls a bath. Travis had laughed when they were finished, saying that he no longer needed a bath. He had gotten enough soap and water on him to serve that purpose.

Jenny had found clothes the girls could wear and, with much difficulty, had gotten them dressed. Everyone moved inside to give the older boy some privacy as he bathed.

Now it was Blade's turn. Luke and Blade had watched as the girls were bathed, and they had talked about it. Blade had assured Luke that he could do it himself. He needed no help. Luke would let him, but since Blade had never taken a bath anywhere except a river, Luke stayed close to supervise.

They had decided to do this outside, in the washtub. These children were too dirty to go into the house. The filthy water was emptied, and Luke showed Blade how to get water from the pump. Blade played with the pump some, amazed at the water appearing and disappearing. Then Luke took over.

Blade removed his nickers and poncho and stepped into the cool water. Luke moved away to throw Blade's clothes in the burn barrel, but he saw something out of the corner of his eye and stopped. The sheriff turned to look at the boy again. Blade's back was scarred, and the scarring ran around his body and onto his chest and stomach.

Luke put his hand out and touched Blade's shoulder. "Blade. What happened to you?"

Blade smiled proudly. "I was whipped."

It seemed a badge of honor for the boy. Luke questioned him, "Why? What did you do to deserve that?"

"I stole food for my sisters. I tried to get my mother away from the man that held her. I refused to work for the man," Blade said arrogantly.

"How many times were you beaten?"

"Many times." Blade smiled again. "He could not win. I lived."

Luke nodded and forced a smile at the boy. He turned and went into the house.

Luke walked through the house to ask James if Blade could borrow some clothes. He stopped and looked at his father, who sat in the kitchen with Cleve, Jenny, Saamel, and the two little girls. He wanted to say something about the boy but couldn't find words. Luke was in shock. He'd never seen anyone beaten like that. A concerned, puzzled look was on his face. Travis saw Luke's confusion and followed Luke into the hallway.

"Luke?" Travis said. "What's wrong?"

"The boy, Dad," Luke whispered. He was having trouble explaining this to his father. Travis had been beaten and had scars on his back too. Luke's father had been beaten only because the man that did it was evil. Travis was ashamed of his scars. But Blade, Blade had been beaten for a reason and was proud of it. "He's been beaten. He's so young to be scarred like that. I don't know how he lived through it."

Travis turned to go outside. Blade had washed and was standing beside the washtub dripping. There was no shame in someone else seeing him naked. Blade turned to look at the old man.

Travis was looking at the marks on the boy's body. The retired marshal reached out and turned Blade so he could see the marks on his back, his side, his chest, back to the other side, and around. Travis turned him around several times and then stopped. Blade smiled at him, a noble pride in his stance.

Travis recognized this posture and immediately knew that Blade had suffered for a just cause.

Scripture came to Travis, and he spoke it out loud. "For we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort... For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again."¹

Travis removed his shirt and turned around to let the boy see his own scars. Blade didn't understand the words the old man spoke, but he saw the kinship shared in their bodies. The boy turned to pick up the leather headband from the ground and pulled one of the three eagle feathers from it. He handed the feather to the old man, nodding his head toward Travis.

Travis understood. He had been raised with Indians and knew the symbolism. The feather stood for trust, strength, wisdom, freedom, and honor. The eagle represented victory, conquest, and power. He accepted the feather with a nod of his head.

The boy tied the leather strap in place with the feathers hanging down the side of his head. Luke came outside with clothes, and Travis took them from him. Luke watched as his father helped Blade, explaining the shirt and pants. Then Travis put his own shirt back on. The two walked into the kitchen, and Travis took his hat from the peg on the wall. He pushed the feather into the band and placed the hat on his own head. The two looked into each other's eyes, and a bond was formed.

¹ 2 Corinthians 1:7b-10 (ESV).

21

CHAPTER

Two Chalmers Touring cars pulled to the gate of the graveyard, and a member of Adam's BI team jumped out of the driver's seat and moved quickly to open the door and assist the passengers in getting out. The Bureau of Investigation team members had asked Chipeta to allow them the privilege of driving the family to Matt's graveside service. She had agreed.

Adam stepped out of one car and turned to help Reid out of the back, and then he put his hand out to Chipeta. Cleve joined them, and together Cleve and Adam helped Reid move slowly to the gravesite. They were followed by Matt's four blood siblings.

Travis and Luke got out of the other car bringing with them Esa, Saamel, and three of the four Indian children Reid had brought home with him.

The group attending the funeral fell silent as Reid approached. Reid kept his face toward the ground, his eyes lowered, away from the sun. One eye was bandaged, and a fresh scar could be seen next to it. His lips were still cracked and his face red and blistered.

Angus had brought several chairs from the church, and Reid and Chipeta sat down. Travis, Luke, James, and Stephen joined them. Each one of those sitting held to a younger child.

There was a large crowd. It was possible the whole church was there, along with many others from town. Adam looked around and saw Ruth standing with Joey and a number of other teenagers. This was probably the graduating class that Matt was a member of. Thomas and Sarah were the only ones from their family missing.

Behind Reid and his family, the members of the BI stood in a line. William joined his brother at the end of that line.

Kimi clung to Reid's side, and Reid put an arm around the child. He turned and quietly said something to Adam. Adam picked Kimi up and put her in Reid's lap. Reid wrapped his arms around her. She kept her face turned from the crowd and toward the members of the bureau.

Aiyana clung to Chipeta. But when she saw Kimi in Reid's lap, Aiyana crawled onto Chipeta's and buried her head in Chipeta's neck, wanting to hide from everyone too. Blade didn't know how to act. Luke had told Blade to stay with him and do what he did. Anything else and Luke would tell him what to do.

Reid spoke softly, his throat still sore and scratchy. His voice sounded like it traveled over vocal cords made of sandpaper, and it felt like it too. He didn't care if those outside his family couldn't hear him.

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.””¹

Reid bit his lower lip as he stopped talking and then seemed to tremble as he began again. Everyone could hear it in his voice. He spoke slower this time. “The new Jerusalem hasn't come yet, but Matt is now dwelling in God's house. His tears are gone and so is his pain.” Reid paused. When he spoke again, it was less controlled. Tears filled his eye and rolled down his face. “I'm going to miss him.” Chipeta reached over and took Reid's hand. Reid seemed to gain strength from her touch.

¹ Revelation 21:3–4.

“I held him...as he became...free. Free from the constraints of this world. Free from sin’s influence. Free from suffering. Free to worship the King and delight in his presence forever. He doesn’t know we’re not there. He’s enjoying himself too much to think about us.” Reid smiled sadly. “But we think about him.

“Right now, we think about him almost every moment. But that will fade. I’d like to think this will get easier, but I don’t know if it will or not. Maybe we’ll just get used to not having him around.

“If he were still here, he would be leaving for school in Chicago in about a week. I could just pretend that’s where he went. But I can’t. I know the truth. The truth is my son, Matthew Piper Britt, gave his life for another, and things will never be the same.

“Blade, come here.” Reid reached his hand in the direction in which Blade stood.

Luke nodded to Blade and softly told him, “Go on. Go stand with Reid.”

Blade moved beside Reid, and Reid put his arm around the boy.

“This is Blade. Blade sacrificed to save me. And then Matt fought for Blade. So I’m going to remember what Blade did, and I’m going to be thankful that Matt was able to save Blade.

“Things are never going to be the same,” Reid repeated. “I guess we’ll just get used to the pain of Matt’s loss and maybe learn to live with it.”

Reid took several deep breaths and then continued, “We’re going to let ourselves suffer for a little while, and we’re going to remember the good times. Then we’re going to move on. We’re going to hold to those good memories, and we’re going to keep on loving Matt. And one day, when I get to heaven, I’ll see him there waiting for me, and we’ll be together again.”

Reid stopped again. He put his hand to his eye, wiping a tear away. “Jesus said,

‘Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is

coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.’”¹

Reid softly said, “I’m through.” He leaned his head toward Blade and rested his face against Blade’s body.

Members of the BI began moving through the attendees asking them to give the family some time alone, pointing them toward the gate.

When the extended family was left alone, Travis began to sing. His children, along with their spouses and children, joined in the song. Those outside the group turned to listen as praises were being sung to God.

Bonnie left her grandmother standing alone and moved back toward Matt’s family. She took William’s hand, joining the group. As they continued to sing, Wayne Hammons walked toward Reid and squatted in front of him and Chipeta, putting a hand on Reid’s knee. He said a few words of encouragement to them. Reid nodded in response to what Wayne was saying. Then Wayne bowed his head and prayed for them.

Wayne spoke briefly to Matt’s brothers and to Luke and Travis. As Wayne moved away, Dan McClelland stepped toward them and knelt before Reid, saying a few words. Then he prayed too.

The extended family continued to sing as more people came to those seated, offering hugs, words of encouragement, and prayers.

Mrs. Leachman followed the others as they encouraged the family. She didn’t say anything to anyone, but she shook their hands. When she got to Reid, she stopped. Reid had his face turned toward the ground where the people walked, looking away from the sun with his eye closed. Mrs. Leachman placed a hand on the side of

¹ John 5:24–27.

Reid's face and gently patted it. Then she moved on without Reid knowing who touched him.

Blade stood patiently beside Reid, taking in the music and the words sung. He heard the prayers and words offered to the family. He held his questions inside and considered all that was happening and all that had happened. He looked forward to being a part of this family and what was to come.

Thomas's condition had gotten worse, and William didn't think his father had much more time on this earth. He checked on Reid and the baby daily and with Luke occasionally, telling Chipeta and Grandpa to call if either of them needed anything. He answered calls from the townspeople, and he stayed close to his mother. Adam's team had left town, but Adam remained. He would rejoin the team after his father was buried.

Two cars pulled up outside the large Victorian home. Adam looked out the second-story window to see who it was. Angus and Cleve. And they both had people with them. Adam watched as Luke, Grandpa, and Reid got out and headed for the steps.

He went downstairs to meet them. Travis was the first to enter the house. Adam started to say something to them, but as he looked into his grandfather's face, he stopped. These men were on a mission.

Adam heard the Spirit speak. *Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.*¹

Adam took a few steps back without saying anything and allowed the men to enter the house. They continued up the stairs.

Cleve and Angus helped Reid slowly ascend to the second floor. They were following Travis and Luke who entered the bedroom where Thomas lay. William looked up and started toward the men, telling them to leave. His father didn't need visitors. He didn't need this many coming into his room at one time. He was too weak, too close to death. But William's grandfather put a hand on him and

¹ Jeremiah 29:12.

said, "We come ta pray. That's all we doin'. We just be a few minutes an' then we goin'. We gonna be quiet."

William nodded his head, consenting. He couldn't deny his grandfather this.

Travis moved to take Sarah's hand in his twisted fingers and placed his other hand on Thomas. Sarah was already holding her husband's hand. Cleve moved a chair from the other side of the room so Reid could sit close to the bed.

Reid softly said, "William, come stand with me." And Reid put his hand through William's hand, the same hand in which William's thumb was resting in his belt loop. He looked at William and said, "Put your other hand on your father." William obeyed.

Adam and Cleve moved to place their hands on Thomas too. Luke sat gently on the end of the bed and put his hand on Thomas's leg.

Cleve began praying, and the prayer moved around the room. "Lord, you are mighty and powerful. And nothing is impossible for you.¹ We call to you for help and for you to heal.² Jesus suffered more than any of us when you placed all of our sins on him. And because he did this for us, we are healed.³ Lord, we cry to you on behalf of our brother, bring him health and healing, both to his body and to his soul.⁴"

Angus prayed, "Lord, you said I will do greater things than this.⁵ You told the disciples that if they had faith the size of a mustard seed, they could tell the mountain to move and it would.⁶ We have faith Lord.⁷ We have seen you work. We have heard you speak.⁸"

¹ Luke 1:37 (ESV).

² Psalm 30:2.

³ Isaiah 53:4-5.

⁴ 3 John 1:2.

⁵ John 14:12.

⁶ Matthew 17:20.

⁷ James 5:15.

⁸ Job 42:5.

Adam spoke. “God, you spoke all things into being.¹ You can speak again and end Father’s life, or you can speak and bring him back to health. Life and death are in the power of the tongue.² Jesus demonstrated this when he was on earth and spoke healing into the sick by faith,³ spoke life into the dead and dying.⁴”

Luke prayed next. “We come before you, Lord, in the name of your Son, Jesus,⁵ and we thank you that you are the Lord who heals.⁶ You are the same yesterday, today, and forever.⁷ We thank you for healing, body, soul, and spirit.⁸ You heal through your words⁹ and through our faith, in Jesus’s name.”¹⁰

Travis continued, “Thank ya, Lord, that Jesus has redeemed us¹¹ an’ that he paid the price far our sin.¹² Jesus came ta bring life an’ ta bring life abundant.¹³ Now as a joint heir with ya Son,¹⁴ we come ta ya in ’is name on behalf a our brother, Thomas. Ya want ya chil’ en ta prosper an’ be in good health, even as our souls prosper.¹⁵ Prosper Thomas’s soul. Heal ’is body. Bring ’im back ta the fullness a health that ya desire far ’im.”

As Travis was speaking, Cleve pulled a small jar out of his pocket and opened it, placing it on the bed next to Thomas. The jar contained anointing oil. Chipeta and Travis had made the oil together soon after their return from Utah.

¹ Psalm 33:9.

² Proverbs 18:21.

³ Matthew 8:8, 13.

⁴ John 11:43.

⁵ Colossians 3:17.

⁶ Malachi 4:2.

⁷ Hebrews 13:8.

⁸ 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

⁹ Jeremiah 30:17.

¹⁰ Matthew 15:28.

¹¹ Titus 2:14.

¹² 1 Corinthians 6:20.

¹³ John 10:10.

¹⁴ Romans 8:17.

¹⁵ 3 John 1:2.

Chipeta’s father, Casicas, was a medicine man. He cared for his family group. When he and Travis had visited soon after their children married, they had discussed the herbal medicines used by the tribe. Travis remembered many of the roots, leaves, and mosses used by his grandmother on his mountain growing up. He and Casicas had enjoyed sharing their knowledge with each other.

These things were fresh on Travis’s mind as he returned home to find his son seriously injured.

Travis and Chipeta had made the oil together and used it to pray over Reid during his recovery. Then Travis and Reid had used it on Esa as he struggled at the beginning of his life. They had also used it with the baby that had died. Travis had taken it home with him each time and kept it safe so that it could be used again.

William had been praying more recently. He was trying to hear from God. He wanted that two-way conversation that Luke told him about. But now, surrounded by these men with powerful prayers, he didn’t know what to say. So when it was his turn, he spoke from his heart. “Lord, my father has done so much good in this town. He has helped so many people.” William stopped, realizing he was trying to justify to God why his father needed to be healed. He knew this wasn’t right, so he changed the direction of his prayer. “He needs help now. He needs your help. Heal him, Father. Be merciful to him. But don’t do it just because I want it. Help us to accept what you want. But I’m asking you to let Father live and let it be for your glory.”

No one spoke when William finished. Reid let go of William’s hand, and William opened his eyes to see Reid pick up the jar and touch a finger to the oil. They all knew that this oil had no actual healing properties. It was just a symbol. A symbol of the Holy Spirit. Symbolic that those touched by the oil were being set apart for God’s purpose.

Reid leaned toward Thomas and touched the oil on his finger to Thomas’s forehead.

Then Reid prayed, “Lord, you said if anyone is sick, the elders of the church are to lay hands on them, anoint them, and pray for

them. You said that our prayers, offered in faith, will heal them.¹ You have given both Thomas and William the ability to understand and wisdom to heal using their hands and medicine.”²

Reid touched his finger to the oil again and looked toward the man standing beside him, raising his arm to touch William. William leaned toward Reid, and Reid touched his forehead too. “Even the touch of your son’s garment would heal.³ Use your healing touch on William so that his touch may also heal others and so that your glory can be seen by all.”

As Reid spoke, Cleve put the top back on the jar and put it back into his pocket.

“Jesus prayed and the sick were healed. The dead were raised to life. Lord, in the name of your Son, Jesus, heal Thomas. We thank you that you are the God who heals. Your good and perfect plan for us is not for sickness but for health. I’m asking you to do what only you can do. Our souls wait for this. Strengthen his body, restore his spirit, let him open his eyes with energy and strength. Thank you that you are not a man but God, a God who holds the power to speak and to act.⁴ The God whose spirit will speak for us when we don’t know how to pray.⁵ Thank you that you are always there with us and you never leave us.⁶ To the glory of God the Father, Jesus Christ is Lord.”⁷

Everyone joined in with a soft, “Amen.”

Sarah had tears in her eyes as she stood to hug her father. Travis held her a long time and then said, “And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. The Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.”⁸

¹ James 5:14–15.

² Proverbs 2:6.

³ Matthew 14:36.

⁴ Numbers 23:19.

⁵ Romans 8:26.

⁶ Deuteronomy 31:6.

⁷ Philippians 2:11.

⁸ James 5:15.

William walked out the bedroom door, overcome by his emotions. In the hallway, he turned to look at the men who had come to pray for his father and for him. They were good men, all of them godly men. He started to open his mouth to tell them thank you, but the Spirit spoke. William froze as he heard the words, certain this time of who was talking to him.

*This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.*¹ Go and tell (your family), “The Lord, the God of your father. . . says: ‘I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears. See, I will add fifteen years to (his) life.’”²

William fell to his knees in the doorway, God’s words leaving him weak and breathless. Adam ran to him, dropping to his knees also. Desperately hoping that nothing was wrong with his brother. “What’s wrong?”

William closed his eyes and turned his face toward heaven. He spoke loud enough for everyone in the room to hear, “God spoke! Father will live!”

Adam had no doubts God had spoken to his brother. After all, God had spoken to Adam just a few minutes earlier telling him that God would listen to their prayers. William and Adam remained on the floor as they hugged each other and talked of what God had told them. Then they offered thanks to their Lord.

Travis started singing praises, still holding to Sarah, and Reid joined in. The others joined in the singing too. Luke and Angus seemed to be mouthing the words, silently praising as they listened to the others. Sarah recovered from her tears and began to sing also.

William looked at his father. The man was mouthing the words with those singing, his eyes still closed. The young doctor looked around the room at the others. These men of God he had spent years with growing up now meant more to him than he could ever have imagined.

His grandfather, so much the loving father that reflected Christ to everyone he met. Luke, a man that lived among the violent and

¹ John 11:4.

² Isaiah 38:5.

lawless yet was always cheerful and had an easy, comfortable confidence of the faith. And Cleve, strong, dependable, intelligent. A man of faith and integrity.

William looked at Angus. William had seen the change in him since his arrival in Harris. Angus had always been a little self-centered and conniving, just shy of being dishonest. A man you wanted to trust but couldn't be sure of. Now Angus displayed fairness, generosity, and self-control. He had become a self-made businessman, managing the power plant and the telephone exchange while also supervising line construction and directing the town's only source of fuel for the motorcars. There was no pride or arrogance in him because of his achievements.

Reid was a quiet stable force. Determined and strong-willed, but not demanding. Practical, humble, and uncompromising, sure of himself and sure of God's faithfulness. He cared for everyone and was undaunted in the face of a challenge.

Reid had quit singing now. The bandage was off his eye, but it still looked a little swollen and discolored. Reid still wasn't opening it. William noticed that both of his eyes were closed. Reid took a deep breath and reached for Cleve next to him, softly saying, "Take me home." Cleve looked at Reid briefly and stood up, taking his youngest brother's arm. Angus noticed this and moved to Reid's other side.

Reid's brothers helped him stand and then began moving toward the door. William stood up. Adam remained on the floor but slid himself to the wall, allowing room for Reid and his brothers to continue to the stairs. William was still watching them, wondering if something was wrong.

Cleve spoke softly to Reid, but William couldn't hear what was said. Reid could have been looking at his feet, but his eyes were still closed. He shook his head in response to Cleve's comment.

Cleve put his arm around Reid, drawing him close. Angus did the same on the other side. They began moving carefully down the stairs and out the door.

William was still thinking of these men. They had come to pray for his father and had also thought to pray for him. Had they prayed for Reid's healing? If they had, they had not included Adam or him-

self. The young judge needed to be prayed for too. William would talk to his mother and brother about praying for Reid later tonight.

Travis kissed his daughter. Then he and Luke followed the other men, leaving the Stewarts alone again.

It had been five days since William's father had collapsed. Five days since Reid had arrived home. Three days since Matt's funeral. William had been to Reid's house every day to look at the baby and had talked to Reid briefly each time. But the doctor had paid little attention to Reid's health. Reid had said he was okay, that all he needed was rest. William decided they would pray for Reid, but it was also time to give Reid a thorough exam.

22 CHAPTER

Reid lay in bed sleeping. He'd had enough of the headache and wanted it gone. He knew this medication wouldn't get rid of his back pain, but he could get some temporary relief. Reid needed Thomas to fix his back, but that wasn't going to happen. If the headache would go away, then maybe he could deal with his other problems easier.

The baby was being taken care of during the day by a continual rotation of ladies from the church. They would come to the house and coddle and coo over the tiny child, holding her and rocking her constantly as they tried to feed her. She was doing better and responding to their love and the cleanliness and routine that was now available.

Luke had taken Blade and was teaching him everything. The Indian boy caught on quickly and wanted to please. He barely remembered living with both of his parents, but he wanted to be a part of this family. He wanted to please Reid, and he liked Reid's husky brother and his father.

The boys his age were nice, but the Indian boy had nothing in common with them. They tried to be friends with him, but Blade had never had any friends. He didn't know how to respond to these boys. Blade thought them not as manly as they should be, but he still watched them and was learning from them. He watched the older Indian boy too. He was still a boy, not close to being a man like Blade was. But Blade was also learning from him.

Travis was spending most of his days with Saamel. The boy hadn't gone to his father willingly yet, but he had talked to Reid as he sat on his grandfather's lap.

The two little girls had still not said a word. They played shyly with Jeannie and Abigail. They were slowly getting used to the people and their freedom. But several times a day, they would come to Reid and curl up against him, receiving comfort and reassurance from the man that had been their first contact with the outside world.

James and Stephen seemed depressed and were unusually quiet, but they were taking care of their daily responsibilities without being told. They were also spending more time with Abigail, Jeannie, and Esa. Reid didn't know if they were stepping up to become the responsible older brothers or if they were just more appreciative of their brothers and sisters. The children weren't needing him as much now as they did the first days after he arrived home. They had quit coming into their father's room as much, but Reid knew he needed to spend time with them.

Reid had given in to his body's call to take the medicine on the bureau. His headache had continued to grow. As Reid lay asleep, Kimi took her afternoon nap curled up next to him. Aiyana sat playing with Reid's fingers, occasionally laying her head against Reid's arm.

Saamel stood in the doorway watching his father and the girls.

He walked to the edge of the bed. "That's my daddy," he said softly.

Aiyana looked at him. A solemn expression on her face as she continued to hold Reid's fingers.

Saamel moved closer to Reid and again said, "He's *my* daddy!"

Aiyana picked up Reid's hand and passed it toward Saamel. Saamel didn't respond. She laid Reid's hand on his body and turned, curling up against her little sister and burying her face in the quilt and her sister's back.

Saamel didn't move for a long time. When Aiyana didn't move either, Saamel climbed onto the bed and began to crawl across Reid toward the girl. The movement and weight of Saamel's body woke Reid. He reacted quickly and grabbed the boy, jerking him from the bed and throwing him to the floor, not realizing it was his son or where he was.

Saamel hit the floor and his face contorted. He wanted to cry but was too stubborn. Aiyana raised her head to see what had happened. Saamel stared at Aiyana as if it were her fault that he was on the floor.

“Saamel. Saamel, I’m sorry.” Reid saw his son on the floor through one squinted eye. Reid reached a hand toward his son. “You startled me. I didn’t know it was you. Are you okay? I’m sorry.”

Saamel watched Aiyana with contempt as he rose and went to stand at the edge of his father’s bed.

“It’s okay. You can get up here with us,” Reid said. “Just, please, don’t crawl across me. That hurts me.”

“Sorry.” The word came from Saamel, but he didn’t sound sorry. He sounded angry.

“Come here, son,” Reid said. “You haven’t given me a good hug since I’ve been home.”

Saamel climbed onto the bed and wrapped his arms around his father. But Reid thought the gesture seemed more a statement of ownership than of love. He put his arm around his son and pulled him up a little, onto his shoulder.

“Saamel? Do you remember how your heart jumps when it thunders really loud?” Reid asked his son.

“Yes, sir.” He still sounded angry.

“How do you feel when you are all alone in bed and it thunders?”

“Really scared. It makes my heart beat like a drum,” the boy said.

“That doesn’t feel good, does it?” Reid asked.

“No, sir.”

“How did you feel when I was gone? Were you scared then too?”

“I was really scared. I was afraid you wouldn’t come back, and I’d be alone,” Saamel answered.

Reid hugged his son. “I’m sorry. You know I didn’t mean to leave you.”

“I know. Those bad men took you.” Saamel was beginning to sound less angry and more loving.

“But I’m back now,” Reid said.

Saamel answered, “But Matt’s not.”

“I know. You miss Matt, don’t you?”

Saamel nodded. His stubborn set jaw made Reid smile.

“I miss him too.” Reid hugged his son again. “Does it scare you that Matt’s not here?”

“I want him to come back,” Saamel said.

“I do too. But he can’t. He’s living in heaven now. We can go to him, but he can’t come back to us.” Reid held his son, and Saamel settled into the crook of Reid’s arm, comforted by his father’s touch.

The boy lay on the bed, looking over his father at the girl that stared back at him from the other side.

“Why did you bring them home?” the boy asked.

“Because they were alone. They didn’t have anyone to take care of them. They were scared too. I think they’re still scared.”

“Couldn’t Blade do it?” Saamel asked.

“Blade’s just a boy too. He’s about the same age as Stephen. Could Stephen take care of you?”

There were a few moments of silence, then the reply came. “No.”

“Their mother is gone, like Matt is. Blade’s father is gone too. The girls are scared. Their father will hurt them if he finds them. We don’t want that to happen. Fathers are supposed to keep their children safe, not hurt them,” Reid explained. “We need to help Blade protect them. He’s been doing it all by himself. It’s hard sometimes. He can’t keep doing it alone. And he can’t take care of Aponi. He doesn’t know how. He needs help.”

Saamel was thinking about what his father said, chewing on the inside of his bottom lip. He kept his eyes on Aiyana.

The medicine was still working on Reid, and he could no longer keep his eye open. “Saamel, I need to go back to sleep. Can you watch the girls? Help me keep them safe?”

Saamel didn’t answer. “Please, son?” Reid picked his hand up and brushed Saamel’s hair with his fingers. “Help me,” he said softly as he fell asleep.

Saamel continued to lay against Reid, watching Aiyana. She had fallen asleep too.

William came into the sitting room to find Reid in the wheelchair holding Aponi.

“Morning, Reid. How’s she doing?”

“Better. She’s eating now. Not well, but better. And she’s crying.”

“That’s good. How are you doing? I came by twice yesterday, but you were asleep both times. Chipeta said you had taken some medicine that knocked you out.” William laughed. “I need some of that stuff. Maybe I could sleep at night.”

Reid joined William in laughing. But it really wasn’t funny. “Are you still having problems?” Reid asked.

“Yeah.” William explained, “If I do the stretching like I should be doing, then my shoulder hurts at night. If I don’t do it, it doesn’t hurt. So I can either have no pain and no movement or I can move and have pain. I have to choose the pain. That’s the only way I’m going to get better.”

“I’m sorry, William. I know it’s hard,” Reid said.

Reid was the only person William would admit this to. William knew Reid understood. “I’ll make it. But you never answered my question. How are you doing?”

Reid hated talking about himself. He could get away with not explaining things to Thomas. Thomas understood what was going on. But William didn’t. Reid would have to give a better explanation. He was thinking about what to tell William. His mind wasn’t working well; he needed more coffee.

“Reid?”

“My back hurts. Your father does something that stops the pain,” Reid said. “He pushes on my backbone, and it does something that takes pressure off the nerves. Do you know how to do that?”

“No,” William admitted. “I’m going to have to learn.”

“And my head’s still hurting. I’ve always got a little bit of a headache, but when the sun gets in my eyes, it hurts worse. But I can’t get it to stop this time,” Reid explained. “When it really hurts, I can’t get my eyes open. I’ve always had that problem though.”

“Did that knock on your head make it any worse?” William asked.

“It changed it somehow. I’m not sure I can explain it though, except that I can’t get the pain to stop. I can’t get this eye to open at all. It feels swollen.”

William reached out to touch Reid’s head. “Looks like it’s still swollen too.”

“Okay,” William said getting up. “I’m going to find Chipeta to take the baby so I can give you a good examination. I’m sorry. I should have done this days ago.”

“I understand. You were taking care of your father. How’s he doing?” Reid asked.

“He’s responding some now. But his heart is still weak. He doesn’t remember anything back to before you got home. We’ve been trying to catch him up slowly, but I don’t want to give him too much at one time. Adam left this morning.”

Reid nodded. “I’m glad Adam was there with me. I don’t know if I could have gone through that alone.”

William nodded. He knew what Reid was talking about. He couldn’t have made it through Matt’s death and the trip home. William wouldn’t say it out loud, but it was Adam that talked Wilbur Bailey into letting Matt come with them. If Adam hadn’t been there, Matt wouldn’t have been with the BI, and he would still be alive.

Reid seemed to know what William was thinking.

“William, we can’t second-guess what happened. Not to me, or to you, or to Matt. ‘In all his wisdom and insight God did what he had purposed, and made known to us the secret plan he had already decided to complete by means of Christ. This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head. All things are done according to God’s plan and decision, and God chose us to be his own people in union with Christ because of his own purpose, based on what he had decided from the very beginning. Let us, then, who were the first to hope in Christ, praise God’s glory!’¹

“God’s working out his plan, and he’s using us to do it. His plan for Matt was finished. He served his purpose. He completed his time

¹ Ephesians 1:8–12 (GNT).

on this earth. You and I still have something left to do. Apparently, your father does too, or God wouldn't be giving him more time here."

William nodded again. Reid had always been able to explain what God was doing.

William called Chipeta, and she pushed the wheelchair toward the bedroom and laid Aponi on the bed. Then she helped Reid onto the bed and sat beside the baby. She watched as William examined Reid from his head to his feet.

As he examined Reid, William talked. "Did you know Father kept a diary on you? He wrote everything beginning just a few days after you were brought home. I found it at the clinic. You're a mystery to him. He can't figure out why you're alive. Has he taken an x-ray of your throat?"

"He's taken x-rays of everything," Reid said. "Apparently, he has some that Mary took in Chicago too. He likes to get them out and compare them. He keeps showing me what he's looking at, but I don't see what he talks about."

William continued, "Well, I'm going to have to find them, because this feels...strange. I need to see if they will show me what's going on. I want to get some more x-rays of your head too, just to see if that blow did anything. I'll compare them to the last ones Father took."

The young doctor continued his examination of Reid's throat. Reid still didn't like anyone putting pressure on his throat, but his head was clear enough right now to make a conscious effort to withstand the touch.

"Why don't you lay on your stomach so I can look at your back and see if I can feel what Father talked about in his writings."

Chipeta helped Reid change positions. William felt of Reid's spine. "Yeah, I feel it. I read the explanation of what he does, but I'd be scared to try it without knowing more. How did he find out about this therapy?"

"I think he read it in a medical journal. He tried it on me and then went somewhere in Iowa for training. Your mom went with him. She might be able to tell you more," Reid said.

"Well, I'll see if I can find Cleve and we'll come get you sometime soon and take you to the clinic for those x-rays. I want to look

at this more too." William put his finger near Reid's right temple. When he did, Reid pulled away quickly.

"Hurts, huh?" William said. "We're going to find out what's going on here too."

"Cleve's gone to Topeka," Reid explained. "He won't be back for a while. He missed almost a month of this year's session. He's got to read through the transcripts and catch up with what's going on."

"I'll call Angus then."

"You may need somebody else. I can barely move. With your shoulder the way it is, we may need help. Why don't you call Wayne Hammons? I'm sure he would come," Reid said.

William replied, "I don't think I know him."

"I'll call him." Reid sighed. "When do you want to do the x-rays?"

"Just find out when they can both help and let me know. As long as Father continues to improve, I'm available anytime."

Reid laughed. "Don't you start questioning what God told you. God told you he would live. Accept it and move forward."

William nodded. "I'm learning, but I've still got more to learn. Just keep reminding me, will you?"

Reid smiled, and William saw his head nod slightly.

Turning to Chipeta, William said, "Let me see that baby now." And William got up and moved to the other side of the bed.

Wayne Hammons arrived at Reid's house to find Reid sitting on the porch in the wheelchair. His hat was pulled down low over his eyes, and he kept his head down. He had his boots on and his big toe was hanging out a hole where the inside seam of his right boot had torn apart. It was the same location his foot had scraped the ground as he walked in No Man's Land.

His father had told Reid that he would repair the boots, but he had not gotten to it yet. That wasn't a problem. This was only the third time he had put the boots on since he had been home.

“Good morning, Reid,” Wayne said as he stepped from his horse.

“Hi, Wayne.”

“How you doing?” Wayne asked.

Reid gave a small sigh. He picked his eyes up to look at Wayne with the weariness and fatigue caused by the constant disturbance of his body and soul. “I’ll make it. ‘For we live by faith, not by sight.’”¹

Any dignity Reid had was gone. He couldn’t hide his pain anymore. Not the physical pain or the pain caused by the loss of his son. Some days were better than others. But today, he felt the world pressing down on him and eating at him from the inside out.

He felt emptiness in his heart and sheer nothingness had edged its way into his soul. He’d done everything he knew to overcome this feeling. He hadn’t slept the night before, but had spent the dark hours in his office reading scripture. He had prayed, asking God to take these depressive feelings away. But they remained.

There was a hole in his heart that was poured into when his children were near, but it never seemed to get full. The drain was open, and the love he felt from the children faded quickly when they left the room.

Chipeta could bring him comfort, but only for a short time. He felt his wife’s love when they laid in each other’s arms, but she needed his strength. She pulled hope from him and left his own soul exposed to his fears during the dark lonely nights when he couldn’t sleep. He’d started taking the medication on the bureau every night, but it wasn’t helping much and was causing a humming in his ears.

He also couldn’t hide his need for assistance in everything he did. His body didn’t cooperate, and with the headaches, neither did his brain. As the days continued, Reid expected to live, to endure, to survive. But he didn’t want to like this, not with this much pain. And the loneliness in his heart just brought more distance from those that could help him.

Every day he waited for his father to come visit. His father could push the fog away, and Reid would see a specter of light, a glimpse of

hope. And then his father would leave, and the light would become dim, flicker, and go out.

Wayne patted Reid on the shoulder as he passed and sat down in the rocking chair beside Reid. They waited silently for William and Angus to arrive. The silence seemed to spread like the early morning summer heat, uncomfortable and oppressive. There were no birds singing, no bugs thumping their wings together, no children making noise as they played. Reid couldn’t even hear Wayne breathing next to him. He turned his head to look. Wayne sat with his elbows on his knees and his hands cupped over his mouth, staring at the grass in front of them.

They were both uncomfortable with the silence, but neither was able to think of anything to talk about.

Angus’s automobile pulled up, and he and William got out. Angus pushed the wheelchair down the ramp and beside the automobile. He helped Reid into the automobile and out again at the medical clinic. When they had gotten Reid inside, Angus left, telling the others he had to take something to a line crew and would be back after he made the delivery.

Reid had brought the crutches and, with Wayne’s help and great effort, was able to move around inside the building. He really needed Angus there too.

William had taken x-rays of Reid’s spine, his head, and his throat. Now Reid lay on one of the beds waiting for William to decide what he wanted to do next.

The straining movement had caused Reid more discomfort, and the pain had grown steadily. Reid lay looking at the ceiling with one frozen puddled eye. Unmoving and glassy.

Wayne sat beside Reid and talked occasionally. The young judge would nod or shake his head, or he might say a few words in response. But when Reid’s eye closed, Wayne knew he wanted to be left alone.

William came into the room carrying several x-rays. He pulled the curtains apart slightly and held an x-ray up to the window. He studied it closely and began talking, trying to explain what he was looking at.

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:7.

Reid glanced toward the x-ray but quickly turned his eyes from the window and squeezed them closed. Sharp pain lanced through his head. Brilliant colored lights flashed behind his sealed eyes. He threw his arm over both eyes and turned his head away from the window, but it didn't stop the lights. William saw Reid's sudden movement and turned to look at the man in the bed.

"Oh, Reid. I'm sorry." William quickly closed the curtains, changing the strip of bright sunlight from the window to a dull filtered haze in the room.

Then he began to talk again, but Reid couldn't focus. Reid wasn't hearing any of the words. It was just noise.

When the noise finally stopped, Reid gathered his strength to ask, "What can you do about it?"

"Surgery."

"Do it," Reid said eagerly, his voice rising in pitch.

"It's not that simple. Reid, I've only got one arm. I'm going to need help."

Reid seemed to sink into the bed. That brief glimpse of hope was gone. Reid began searching for it again. "Can Naomi do it? She helped your father for years."

"I really need another doctor. I can't imagine that Naomi would be able to help stitch you up if I need her to. She wouldn't be able to probe and help me find it." William just had too many doubts about his own ability right now.

"How about Dad?" Reid asked. "He helped with surgery during the war."

"That was fifty years ago. And he's only got one hand he can use too. I don't think he could—" William stopped. He knew Reid needed help. Reid lay in bed with his arm still over his eyes. His jaw was set and William could see his fingers gripping the blanket beneath him.

"We're going to try different pain medications. Let's see if we can find something that stops the pain but doesn't knock you out. I'll figure the surgery out somehow."

23 CHAPTER

Thomas sat on the porch watching the land, the clouds, and the birds. He was moving around the house on his own but still needed help up and down the stairs. He was weak and got tired easily.

He wandered the house, sat on the porch, and followed Sarah as she did her chores. But he spent most of the day in bed or curled up on the sofa.

During the last legislative break, and at Sarah's request, Cleve had brought his sons to the Stewart home. They had moved the bedroom downstairs. The parlor that had been turned into a bedroom when Reid was injured had been moved upstairs.

Thomas had lain on the sofa and watched the activity without saying a word. But Cleve could see on his face that he wasn't happy with the change. When Cleve and William had helped Thomas down the stairs, Thomas had not said anything.

William was finding it pleasant, however, to have a place out of the bedroom to spend the long waking hours during the night.

This morning, the young doctor had been out to one of the ranches to care for an injured ranch hand. He had later seen a couple of sick children and an old woman at the clinic. Word was spreading that old Dr. Stewart was sick, and there was a new doctor in town. While some wanted to see if this new physician was any good, others were leery of him. After all, he only had one good arm, and could a doctor really do his job with just one arm? People that remembered William from years past accepted him and encouraged others to give him a chance.

William came out of the house and sat beside his father on the porch.

“Father? Did you ever hear God speak to you?” he asked.

“Sure. Every time I read the Bible and pretty often in church,” Thomas answered.

“But did you ever hear him talk to you, in a voice within your spirit?”

“Like I said, when I read the Bible,” Thomas repeated.

“Have you ever been walking along, and he told you to go somewhere or do something?” William was probing.

He and Adam had talked, and Adam had told William that he often heard from God. William had shared what God had told him about Bonnie. Adam had gotten excited and had congratulated William both on his upcoming marriage and on learning to hear and follow God.

Bonnie was excited about God talking to him too. She wanted to know more. He hadn't told her that she was going to be his wife.

William wanted to tell his father about Bonnie. He didn't want to hide his conversations with God from his family, like his brother had done. He wanted these talks in the open so he could share with his mother and father like he did his grandfather and uncles.

“No, I haven't,” Thomas replied.

William asked, “Why do you think he hasn't done that?”

“Probably because God doesn't talk to people like that anymore. God talked to the people before Jesus came along because they didn't have God's Word to teach them. But now we have the Bible to tell us what he wants,” Thomas said.

“You've heard Grandpa, Luke, and Reid say they've heard from God. Don't you believe them?” William asked.

“I've heard them. But until I hear from God myself, I don't guess I'll believe,” William's father told him.

“Luke's been teaching me how to listen,” William said. They were both looking at the field. Neither of them had looked toward the other. Until now.

Thomas turned. “And?”

“And I've heard him.”

“What did he tell you?” Thomas asked. The tone in his voice was patronizing.

“He told me to marry Bonnie.”

“That's convenient.”

“Father. Please. I love her. I want to marry her. God confirmed to me that she's the one. He's just hurrying it along a little,” William said.

“And how are you going to support her?” Thomas asked.

“You're not going to be able to work, Father. You have the money from the hospital to live on. You and Mother will be okay. I've been taking care of your patients. I can support us with what I make,” William explained.

“You can't make enough here to support a family. I know.”

“Father, I thought you would be happy for me.”

Thomas shook his head. “Look at you. You can't doctor people with just one arm. That arm's going to limit your ability and the number of patients you can see. Even healthy and working your tail off, you wouldn't make enough! Half the people don't pay. Half of the ones that do pay, pay you with chickens and vegetables and services. It's not going to work.”

William was disappointed. This conversation wasn't going well at all. William had hoped his father would at least listen with an open mind.

“You and Mother are going to need somebody here,” William told his father. “I thought maybe you might let us live in a couple of rooms upstairs? That way we'd be here when you needed us. It wouldn't take much money to live on if we did that. I can take over the clinic as is and still get supplies from the hospital, like you did. It should be an easy transition.”

“You think I'm going to turn everything I worked for over to you and give you my house too!” Thomas laughed. “You expect me to roll over and die. I'm not doing it! I worked hard to get where I am! I'm not giving it up just because you want to impress a girl!”

“Father, let's stay calm. We're just talking. I'm not taking anything away from you. You're going to live a long time, but your heart

is weak. You know what you need to do and what you're not going to be able to do. You can't work like you used to."

"I'm going to live a long time? And you know this how?" Thomas asked. "You're a prophet now too?"

William watched his father. He never got upset like this. It had to be the result of his illness. His father had come close to death for the first time in his life. William knew that his father's view of life had changed.

As a doctor, William had seen this happen throughout his short career. Someone would come near death, and then they would recover. People would change after that. Many people became angry at their sudden limited existence. Some became more loving, understanding the loss of a loved one better. Many that didn't know Jesus were afraid of death and fought the inevitable. Some would seek the Savior.

William knew he would have to give his father time to adjust. He had needed time to adjust to his limitations too. That's why he had not contacted his family when he was injured. He needed to learn and accept what he was unable to do without his family trying to help. His father would need to figure this out for himself.

William heard the Spirit speak to him. *When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.*¹

"I'm sorry, Father," William said. "I have to follow God."

"Well, follow God someplace else! Get out! I don't need your pity or your help! Go on! Get out of my sight! Take your things and leave." Thomas turned away, not wanting to look at his son anymore.

William continued to watch his father. He wanted to hug his father and apologize for hurting him, but how could he ask forgiveness for following God?

Should he gather his belongings to leave, or should he continue the way he had been? Pretending everything was okay between himself and his father. He decided he would tell his mother about the

conversation, and he'd find out if she ever heard from God. He stood up and turned to go into the house to explain things to his mother.

William was relieved when he talked to Sarah. She had heard from God many times, and she had kept it a secret from her husband. Just like she had kept the guns a secret in Denver, like she had hidden her fears from him too. Just like many other things that they never talked about.

Sarah told her son that she loved his father dearly, but his father had always been too busy with his work to be involved closely with his family. He was a self-confident and independent man who relied on his own intelligence and ability.

His mother said she knew that her husband believed and trusted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He wanted to please God, but he relied on his own intelligence and strength to do this. Thomas had always felt that God had given him wisdom and discipline to make the right decisions and be a good doctor. God had also given him the ability to use these to understand God and follow him. He was a good man and followed God the best he knew how.

Sarah had always taken care of the house and the day-to-day activities of the children without discussing them with William's father. He never questioned it, so she continued to do this throughout their marriage. Now he was at home all day and questioning why Sarah did things the way she did. She was having to learn to live with him a different way too.

Sarah assured her son that she would take care of her husband. William didn't need to discuss anything with his father. She would tell him what he needed to know, and if William had a concern, he should come to her with it.

Sarah also told William to keep the Oldsmobile. Thomas wouldn't be driving it. William's mother told him not to discuss the automobile with his father either. She was giving William permission to use it, and she would tell his father. She encouraged him to give his father room to think about what he had said. He was basically an understanding man and would come around eventually. She knew she needed William's help. Thomas just needed to realize it too.

¹ 1 Thessalonians 2:13b.

William assured his mother that he would come to the house often to check on her and his father. He told her to call him if she needed him. He was going to stay at the medical clinic for the next few nights.

Travis stood looking out the darkened window listening to Bella bark. He couldn't see anything, but something was out there. Bella only barked like that when there was danger. She was getting farther away from his house, moving closer to Reid's place. Travis moved to put his boots on. He went to the gun rack and picked up his rifle, checking to make sure it was fully loaded without turning any lights on.

Luke heard the dog too. He had put his boots on along with his gun belt. He met his father as they both entered the kitchen, headed out the back door.

The two men moved cautiously onto the porch.

Reid had been taking the pain medicine William had given him for a few weeks. At first it helped. But the longer he took it, the less it helped with the pain, and the more side effects he experienced. The doctor had changed the dosage a few times, but its effect on Reid had not changed. Tonight, he couldn't sleep, and his head was swimming lightly.

He'd been lying in bed listening to Bella bark. He woke Chipeta, and she helped him into the wheelchair. Then she handed him his rifle. She pushed the chair into the sitting room and inhaled sharply when she saw someone standing in the dark open doorway.

"Blade?" Reid said quietly. "Do you see anything?"

"No. But the dog is troubled. She sees something."

James came into the room carrying his hunting rifle.

"James, go to the side window. Keep watch," Reid said. "Chipeta, get all the children into the girls' room. Tell Stephen to get his gun and go in there with you. Stay low."

Chipeta left to obey.

"Blade, you stay with me," Reid said.

Blade moved to push Reid onto the porch. They were both looking in the direction of the dog's barking. Bella was moving slowly

in the trees. Reid would catch a glimpse of her white fur occasionally in the moonlight. He reached up to rub his eye, then raised his rifle, putting it against his left shoulder. Briefly squeezing his eyes together, Reid pointed the barrel just in front of Bella. But he knew he couldn't make a clean shot firing left-handed. His vision was fuzzy, and with his right eye closed, he couldn't aim and fire right-handed. He'd never shot the rifle left-handed.

A shot sounded through the night. It was close. Bella yelped. Then the night went quiet. Another shot hit the house near Reid and Blade.

Reid grabbed Blade and pulled himself out of the chair and onto the floor. Blade hit the floor beside him. Reid twisted and scooted back a little, positioning himself against the wall, looking into the darkness. He couldn't focus his eye, and there was ringing in his ears. The medication messed with his senses.

"Blade, do you see anybody?"

"No."

James fired. "By the road!"

Reid twisted to look that way. Blade moved to his feet and crouched beside Reid, ready to spring into action.

There. Reid saw movement in the brush. He positioned his rifle, waiting for whatever it was to appear.

Another shot hit the floor just beside Reid's leg. Then another, but neither of them heard where that bullet hit. Then two more.

"Reid!" It was Luke's voice.

Reid responded, "On the porch!"

"You okay?"

"We're okay!"

"I got him." And Luke appeared in the road holding to a man who stumbled out of the brush and dropped to his knees beside Luke.

Luke pulled him to his feet again and started toward the house. James turned on the lights in the sitting room and on the porch.

As the man was pulled toward Reid, Blade said, "Whitmer."

Reid turned to look at the boy. "Who?"

"The man that held my mother and sister."

"Luke!" The call came from the trees.

“What is it, Dad?”

“Luke! Bella’s been shot!”

Luke shoved Whitmer hard onto the steps in front of Reid. Both Reid and James turned their guns on him as Luke ran into the trees.

“Chipeta!” Reid called.

She came to the door and saw the rifles honed in on a wounded man on the steps.

“Tell Stephen to run get the marshal,” Reid said.

Chipeta turned around to go back into the house. Stephen was already dressed and quickly came through the house to jump from the edge of the porch. He took off running down the road, the rifle still in his hands.

Luke came through the trees carrying the big dog. Travis followed.

“James, go get the Ford,” Reid instructed. “Take Bella and Luke to the clinic so William can look at her.”

James handed his rifle to Blade and turned to go through the house to get the automobile.

Luke laid the dog on the edge of the porch to look at her wound in the dim light. He shook his head. “I don’t know, Dad. Stay here.” Luke picked the dog up and turned as James brought the Model T to a stop near him. James jumped out and opened the back door so Luke could lay the dog on the floor, then Luke climbed in, and they started down the road.

Reid turned around to see Blade watching the man with the rifle pointed at the man’s forehead.

“Blade, don’t do it,” Reid said.

Whitmer lay on the steps looking at Blade with a smile on his face. Blade watched the injured man but said nothing.

Whitmer finally said, “You think you won, but you didn’t. I sold your sister. I tracked you down. You’ll never find her. I made sure your momma died too.” Whitmer looked at Reid, his brown teeth showing in the moonlight. “I don’t care how many men you send down there. Winona is gone.”

Reid could see the anger growing in Blade, but he seemed to be controlling his reaction to this hate-filled man. This was good. Reid, his father, and Luke had all been talking to Blade about love and hate, forgiveness, and revenge. It looked like Blade had listened.

Blade said, “Where is my sister?”

Whitmer ignored the question and continued to look at Reid. “It doesn’t matter what you do to me. I still won.”

This was a game between these two. A deadly game. This man on the steps showed a sick desire for power that wanted to hurt others, and he felt no regret for contributing to the boy’s mother’s death or his sister’s disappearance.

Reid turned to Blade. “It’s funny how nothing is hidden from the eyes of God. ‘Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. Do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath. Do not fret—it leads only to evil. For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land.’¹ We’re not going to do anything to this man, Blade. The law will take care of him. We’re going to wait on God because ‘he will save you from the hands of the wicked and deliver you from the grasp of the cruel.’² Didn’t God take you out of that life? He’ll deliver your sister too. You may not see it, but God will do it.”

For the first time since his return home, Reid felt the reassurance of God’s protection and love. “We can’t understand how God works because we don’t see the whole picture. We see only a tiny part that’s in front of us. No matter what hardship comes, no matter what happens, God is caring for us.”

The words meant more to Reid now than they would have just a few days ago.

Reid’s heart heard the Spirit speak to him. *Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today... The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.*³

¹ Psalm 37:7–9.

² Jeremiah 15:21.

³ Exodus 14:13–14b.

Reid knew what was happening on Blade's behalf, but this message was for him. He knew this. God was moving to help Reid too. He didn't know how, but he trusted God for whatever was coming.

What Reid knew, which Blade didn't, was that Adam's team was still out there. Reid couldn't tell Blade, or Luke, or his dad. This was an ongoing operation that required secrecy and speed. Hundreds were involved. The BI was leading the operation. Bailey was just as disturbed by what he saw at the camp in the Oklahoma panhandle as Reid was. Bailey had called for an all-out clearing of the land. When he was finished, it would be a new, free, and open area, ready for settlers, law, and justice.

Marshals had started west of the panhandle, in New Mexico and Colorado, and they moved fast cleaning out every ranch, camp, and sod hut. Bailey told Reid he planned on burning any structure where slavery or prostitution was found. They would take every man, woman, and child held against their will and prosecute everyone involved. If Blade's sister would identify herself when she was questioned, they could be reunited. Reid prayed this would happen.

Marshals from the surrounding states and Lighthorse Tribal Police from every Indian nation in Oklahoma were called in quickly. There would probably be some Texas Rangers cleaning up to the South also. County sheriffs and marshals in the surrounding states bordering No Man's Land were alerted and would be effective in closing off the area so none escaped. They would also be active in identifying and destroying any camps in their jurisdiction.

They heard horses coming, and Reid knew this would be the marshal and Stephen. Whitmer would go to jail, and Blade and his three younger sisters would remain safe.

At the medical clinic, James stopped the car and jumped out. He ran up the steps in the dark shadows of the porch and began banging on the door. "William! William! Open up!"

"What is it?" the answer came as the door was being unlocked. A very sleepy William appeared in the blackened doorway.

"Bella's been shot," Luke said as he pushed past William and continued into the exam room.

"Bella?" William was awake now, but he didn't understand. "I don't know what to do for a dog."

Luke turned to look at his nephew. "You're the only doctor in town. That makes you the vet too. You've got to look at her. You've got to try. Your grandpa's going to be heartbroken if this dog dies because you didn't try to save her."

William nodded. He'd do it for Grandpa. He had no idea what he was doing though. He found the wound and pushed the fur back. Then he pushed back more fur. "Uncle Luke, get the scissors over there," and William pointed toward his tools. "Cut this hair off. Get me a clean view."

James stepped in front of his uncle and picked up the scissors. He turned around and began cutting the dog's matted and bloody hair that surrounded the wound.

William turned to gather supplies.

He looked back at the dog and began probing the entry hole, searching for the bullet. There it was, easy to find. But he couldn't get to it. He took a scalpel and cut the dog's skin, pushing something internal out of the way, giving himself more room. He picked up another instrument and repositioned the bullet. Then he pulled it out. The wound was still bleeding, worse now after the cut William had made.

William packed the wound and got suture ready to close. He did the best he could as James watched everything.

"I don't know if she'll live. I don't know what I'm doing, but I tried." William looked up at Luke for the first time.

"Luke?" William called.

Luke was in a chair across the room. He had his hand on his upper arm. Blood was oozing between his fingers, soaking into his sleeve and running down his arm.

"Okay. My turn," Luke said calmly.

"Why didn't you tell me you were shot?" William asked as he turned to the basin to wash his hands.

"Cause the dog needed you more," Luke said.

William came to Luke, pulled a chair next to him, and cut his shirt sleeve off, examining the arm. “Okay. I’m going to do this right here. James, come grab him good. I don’t want him to jerk his arm or fall over when I go in there.”

James wrapped his arms around Luke, holding to his uncle’s arm. There was no hesitation. Fourteen-year-old James knew he wouldn’t be able to do much if Luke jumped or if he passed out. His uncle was too big.

William probed for the bullet, and Luke sat like a rock, unbreathing and unmoving, until William pulled it out. Then Luke let out a long breath and relaxed in the chair.

Luke had been going into the office and doing light sheriff’s duties, easing his way back into his job. But William knew he wasn’t back to his full strength. William bandaged the arm and then helped Luke to the bed.

The doctor sat down on the edge of the bed wiping the blood from his hands onto a towel. He looked at James. “What happened?”

“Some guy was shooting at Dad or Blade. I don’t know which. Blade knew him. That’s all I know,” James said.

“Well, let’s get Bella on the floor so she doesn’t wake up and fall off that table. I hope she lives.”

As they got the dog situated in a corner, someone else banged on the door and quickly opened it. The sheriff’s deputy walked in and saw his boss lying on the bed with a bloody and bandaged arm. He stopped, looking at Luke, and then he saw the dog.

“Yes?” William asked.

“Ah?” Frank hesitated. He turned to look at William and James. “The marshal sent me to get you. He’s got a prisoner that needs a couple of bullets taken out. I think I know who he had the fight with.”

William sighed. “First night I was actually sleeping good.” He looked at James and smiled. “Guess I’ll try again tomorrow.”

24 CHAPTER

William pulled the Oldsmobile in front of Reid’s house, and Saamel came to him before he got out of the car.

“When are you going to bring Miss Bonnie to see me?” the boy asked.

William threw his legs out the door and turned, continuing to sit in the car with his feet on the running board. “Soon. She misses you.”

“I like her. I’ve got a new song to play for her,” Saamel said.

“Can I hear it?” William asked.

“No, it’s for Miss Bonnie.”

Saamel turned and ran, disappearing around the corner of the house. William smiled and laughed to himself. Saamel was acting like a normal six-year-old again.

As the doctor entered the house, he said good morning to Chipeta who sat holding the baby. Aponi was awake and watching Chipeta as she talked to the child.

William sat down and put a finger on the child’s face. The seven-week-old baby turned in William’s direction. “She looks so much better than she did that first day. You’ve done so well with her.”

“I couldn’t have done it without lots of help from both God and the ladies at church.” Chipeta smiled. “I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him.”¹

“Yes, he has.” William smiled back. “Where’s Reid?”

“In his office.” The smile left Chipeta’s face.

¹ 1 Samuel 1:27.

“How’s he doing?” William asked.

Chipeta shook her head. “I don’t know. He was doing better a week ago, but that medicine you gave him does funny things to him. He quit taking it and he’s not talking to me anymore.”

William nodded, a disturbed look on his face. He got up and walked toward the back of the house but stopped in the doorway, watching Reid.

The federal judge had his eyeglasses hanging down the side of his face from one ear. His hands covered his entire face as he leaned on his elbows against the large table. He wasn’t moving, but William could hear his breath whistling through the palms of his hands.

“Reid?” William called to get his attention. Reid slid one hand over slightly so he could see out of his one good eye. Then he picked his head up to move it from his hands. When he did, his glasses fell from his face and hit the floor. Reid turned his head slowly to look at the glasses just under the edge of the footrest on the wheelchair. Then the judge closed his eye and slowly leaned back in the chair. William heard a sigh of frustration.

“Can you get those for me?” Reid asked, a hint of irritation in his voice.

William picked up the eyeglasses and noticed one arm was missing. “What happened to your glasses?”

“They hurt my head. I took the earpiece off,” Reid replied, sounding sluggish this time.

William looked at the glasses again as he laid them on the table. Reid hadn’t taken the earpiece off. He’d broken it off. William saw the twisted metal where the arm should have been attached.

“How’s that medicine working?” William leaned on the corner of the table.

Reid shook his head slowly, still not opening his eyes. “It’s not working as good as it was. It’s gotten to where I can’t do anything. I feel drunk when I take it. Can’t concentrate. And it makes me talk too much. I babble all the time. Then I get sleepy, but it won’t let me sleep.”

“When did you take it last?” William asked.

“Two days ago. I quit the night that guy shot Bella. I couldn’t see straight. I couldn’t protect my family,” Reid told the doctor.

William took Reid’s chin and turned Reid’s face to look toward the doctor. “Chipeta said you quit talking to her. Why?” William reached to put a hand on the side of Reid’s head, looking at the blemished eye again.

Reid nodded slightly. “She’s always wanting me to tell her how I feel. She acts like she expects things to improve throughout the day. But they don’t. It usually gets worse. If I talk about the pain, I hurt more. I’ve had about all I can take. I don’t want to talk about it. I don’t want to feel it.”

William nodded this time. He understood this. He had reached that point months ago while he was recovering from the burns. He had wanted the hospital staff to leave him alone too.

One of the little Indian girls ran into the room and climbed up the side of the wheelchair. She threw herself onto Reid’s lap, and he grunted. She buried her face in his chest, and he wrapped his arms around her. William could tell Reid drew as much comfort from the child as she did from him.

“Why don’t these girls talk?” Reid asked the doctor.

“I don’t know. I’ve tried to look at them, but they fight me. When they’ll let me touch them, I’ll try to look at them again. But from what you told me, they may not have heard other people talk enough to know how. Give them time,” William said.

“But they don’t make any noise, and they seem to understand what we say?” Reid continued.

“I don’t know,” William said again, leaning in to look at the girl’s face. He smiled at her, trying to get her to respond to him. But she wouldn’t.

“William?” Reid was still talking slowly. “What’s the difference between taking a bullet out and doing that surgery?”

“Not much. There’s just no path to follow like there is with the bullet. I’d have to search a little harder.”

“How many bullets did you take out the other night?”

Realization hit William like a punch in the stomach. He sat up straighter, and the girl followed his movement with her eyes.

He had done it. He'd taken out four bullets with no trouble. One on a dog and he didn't know anything about the dog's anatomy. One while Luke was sitting in a chair, and two at the jail with only a bag of supplies. And he had no problems because of the limitations of his arm or the situations in which he worked. He could do this!

William heard the Spirit speak. *And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*¹ William knew that God was allowing him enough movement to use his injured arm for what he needed.

"Reid, we're going to do this in the morning," William said abruptly. "Jesus is going to get us both through this. Thank you, Lord!" William looked toward heaven briefly. "I want you at the clinic before supper tonight. Don't take any more medicine. Nothing. Not even aspirin. I'll be back to pick you up this afternoon. I'll go talk to Chipeta, and we'll work this out."

Reid nodded his head. "Thank you."

William walked out of the room and found Chipeta right where she had been when he came into the house. He told her that whatever was going on with her husband would end soon. He was going to do surgery on Reid in the morning. He would find someone to stay with the children and be back to pick both of them up before supper. He was taking care of everything. All she had to do was get herself and Reid ready.

William left and stopped at his grandfather's house. The back door was closed. That was unusual in good weather. William opened the door and yelled for his grandfather. He stepped inside and saw Bella lying on the kitchen floor and shut the door behind him. Now he realized why the door was closed, to keep the dog inside. Luke and Travis came from the front room.

William explained to Travis and Luke what he was going to do and asked them if they could stay with the children tonight. He knew they would agree.

"I'm going to go see Jenny and ask her to take care of the baby and be at the house in the morning so you can come to the clinic. I

¹ Colossians 3:17 (ESV).

want you there to pray. I think, if I can get this done right, his headaches will stop entirely," William said.

"Jenny's gone to Topeka to see Cleve. She's spending a few days with him before he comes home," Luke said.

"Okay. I'll check with Molly." William shook his head. "Maybe Bonnie. We're going to get this done in the morning, one way or another," William assured them.

He left to talk to others.

It took the rest of the day to find everyone he needed. Molly and a friend of hers would take care of the children in the morning. Bonnie was coming to help in the afternoon. The housekeeper and the older boys would be there to keep things operating smoothly. One of the ladies from church would pick up the baby this afternoon and take her home for a few days.

Naomi was coming to help with the surgery, and Marvin was coming to pray with Luke and Travis. Dan McClelland and Wayne Hammons were coming too, along with any other deacon or church member that would come after Wayne contacted them.

All William had to do now was tell his mother and father. Then he would go back to the clinic to review the x-rays and get his instruments ready before returning to pick up Reid and Chipeta. Then he would read parts of his father's diary again and question Reid about some of it.

William drove to his parents' house and saw his mother sitting on the steps of the back porch, outside the kitchen.

"Mother, what are you doing out here?" William asked as he approached her.

"Hiding from your father," she replied softly. "You know, I've dreamed of the day we could spend more time together, when we could sit on the porch side by side for hours, holding hands and rocking. Or I could cuddle in his arms on the sofa without being interrupted and him read to me. We could do that now. I'd love to lay in bed in his arms. Or him in mine. But now I don't want to. He's turned nasty. He can't find anything nice to say."

"Mother." William wrapped his arm around her. "I'm sorry." He didn't know what else to say.

After a long silence, he spoke again. "Mother, I came by to tell you I'm going to do surgery on Reid tomorrow. He's had something going on for a long time right there beside his right eye. He got knocked in the head again when he was taken, and it did more damage. I need to get in there and fix it. There's several ladies from the church going to their house to take care of the children for the next few days. Molly and Bonnie are going to be there off and on. Grandpa and Uncle Luke and some of the men from church are coming to pray while I'm doing the surgery. Naomi's going to help me."

"You can't do that!" Thomas said from inside the door.

"Yes, I can." William stood up and turned to face his father. "God told me I could. I know you don't believe me, Father, but I'm listening when God speaks to me. I'm following God." There was no way he was going to deny God after he had been told to give God the credit.

"You could kill him. You don't have the skill to do that with one hand," Thomas said.

"Did you hear those gunshots two nights ago?" William asked, watching his father.

Thomas nodded. "Yeah. I heard them."

"Well, that was at Reid's house. They're all okay. But that night, I took four bullets out. One out of Bella, one out of Luke, and two out of the man that attacked them. And I didn't have any problem doing it. I can do this," William assured both of his parents.

Sarah stood up and hugged her son. "I'm going to start praying tonight. I'll be praying tomorrow morning too. Let me know when you're finished."

"Thank you, Mother," William said. He hugged his mother again then turned, walked up the steps, and hugged his father. Thomas didn't respond when William's arm circled him. The young doctor went back to the Oldsmobile but stopped before he got in, turning to look at his father.

"Father, just in case you're interested, Reid's in the wheelchair. He can't move. He doesn't even try anymore. I think he's reached his limit as far as the pain goes. I'm going to relieve some of it, but he

needs your help too. I can't do what you do to his back. I'm sure he would appreciate it if you could bring yourself to help him."

Thomas didn't answer. It could have been the hottest day in summer, but his heart was as cold as ice. He wasn't going to help his son with anything.

The sun was coming in the window, and it woke William. He got out of bed, changed his clothes, and walked through the exam room to the waiting room. Looking through the window, he saw Travis on the porch. The doctor unlocked the door and opened it. Travis didn't respond, and William knew he was already praying for his son.

William left the door open and moved back into the exam room. He looked through the door into the other bedroom. Chipeta was awake and sitting on the bed beside Reid. Reid had his arm thrown across her lap with his eyes closed.

"You ready?" William smiled.

Reid answered without looking to the doctor. "I've been ready."

"Did you sleep much last night?" William asked.

"No," Reid replied, shaking his head slightly. Chipeta shook her head in agreement.

"Well, you get to sleep all day if you want to," William said. "I'll make sure you sleep tonight too. We're just waiting for Naomi to get here. I'm going to get some coffee to help me wake up. I'll have a pot waiting for you when you wake up this afternoon. Do you want to see your father? He's on the porch."

Reid barely shook his head. "If he wants to come in, it's okay."

William smiled at Chipeta and left the room.

Travis entered a few minutes later and pulled a chair beside Chipeta. He took her hand and held it, looking at his son who lay in the bed. Chipeta smiled at her father-in-law. She appreciated that he was there with her. He was a stable force in her life. His unwavering faith gave her strength.

It seemed to take forever, but when William came back into the room to say Marvin and Naomi had arrived, the sun was still low in the eastern sky.

Wayne Hammons had also arrived, and he and Marvin moved Reid to the table in the exam room. William started the intravenous fluids that his father was so keen on and told Reid he'd see him that afternoon, when he awoke. Then he put Reid to sleep, and Naomi began monitoring the sedation.

William picked up the scalpel and stopped. God would get the glory for the outcome of this surgery. William knew he needed to give the actual surgery to the Lord too.

"Father, guide my hands. Let my eyes see what I need to see. Let my hands move where they need to move. Protect Reid if I make a mistake. You're going to get the glory for this. I can't do this on my own. It's all you, Lord."

Chipeta and Travis sat in the waiting room holding hands and staring at the wall.

Marvin went outside with the men on the porch. Luke prayed when he could, but he was having trouble concentrating. Wayne, Perry Pesnell, Angus, Cecil Montgomery, Dan McClelland, and Rusty Finchem sat around the porch. Wayne and Luke talked quietly for a few minutes, and several of the men listened to Luke's explanation of what William was doing to Reid. This seemed to bring more fervent prayer from the men for a short time. Then the men quieted.

Those on the porch would pray silently for a while, and then someone would speak another prayer out loud. Occasionally one of them would take a break and walk around the yard or stand up and stretch. Luke walked inside a few times to sit with his father and Chipeta, but he never stayed long. He was anxious and needed to move around. He couldn't stay still, and his energy seemed to disturb the other two.

Doug Morgan showed up about midmorning and joined the men on the porch. William had not come out of the exam room, so no one could give Morgan an update. He left saying he would be back on his lunch break.

The marshal showed up and stayed a few minutes. Then he left to return to town.

Three and a half hours after he started, William came to talk with Travis and Chipeta. All had gone well, and Reid was ready to be moved back to his bed. William had bandaged both eyes so that light would not hinder his early recovery. These bandages would stay on several days. The doctor told them it might be several hours before Reid would be able to talk with anyone.

Luke saw William through the window and went into the waiting room to listen. Marvin and Angus followed, and William repeated what he had just told Travis and Chipeta.

Marvin and Angus went to move Reid to the bed, and Luke went outside to give the men on the porch the report. Travis followed Luke and thanked everyone for their concern and prayers. He asked that the men continue praying for Reid's recovery. Then he turned around to join Chipeta at Reid's bedside.

Luke had gotten a cup of coffee and had come into the room where Travis and Chipeta sat. They weren't talking but sat quietly watching Reid sleep. Luke began to joke softly about his brother's bandaged face. Then he said he would go find them all something to eat. But he stopped when he saw Reid's hand move slightly. The others turned to look at what had stopped Luke's chatter.

Reid opened his fingers and turned his hand over so that his palm was up. Then he slid his hand slowly across the bed toward Chipeta. She took his hand, and he closed his fingers around hers. They all saw a faint smile come to Reid's face. Chipeta leaned toward the bed and kissed her husband's fingers. She turned his hand and put his palm against her face. She pressed her face into it, kissing the palm of his hand.

25

CHAPTER

Reid lay in bed thinking about nothing. He couldn't see anything, and there were no children making noise. There was no activity to listen to. His wife sat just a few feet away. He didn't even know what she was doing. She was too quiet. Reid remembered scripture. *Be still, and know that I am God.*¹

He was being still, and he did know God. God had taken care of him just like he said he would do. Reid smiled inwardly. He began to contemplate how God had cared for him over the last few months. His spirit was at peace, and despite the loss of Matt, his soul revived. He was blessed.

Another scripture came to his heart. *Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.*²

"Yes, Lord," Reid said silently. "I trust in you, Lord. I say, you are my God."³

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*⁴

"Yes, Lord," Reid replied again. "I have faith in you. 'Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.'¹

*I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love.*²

"Lord?" Reid suddenly felt uneasy. "Why are you reminding me of these things? What's happening? What are you preparing me for?"

*Don't be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up—the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, your Savior, the Holy One of Israel.*³

Reid had assurance that God was with him, caring for him. But he knew something else was coming. God hadn't even given him time to pull himself from this bed.

Reid began naming his blessings, allowing God to remind him of how much God loved him. "Chipeta, Dad, Luke, James, Abigail, Stephen, Jeannie, Esa, Saamel, Blade." Reid stopped. Yes, Blade was another gift from God. Why did he linger on Blade? "Aiyana, Kimi, Aponi."

Reid heard a voice say, *Who are these with you?... They are the children God has graciously given your servant.*⁴

Travis sat on his front porch watching Esa and Saamel ride in the corral. James and Stephen stood at the railed fence supervising. Blade had been taking Saamel riding with him, and Saamel was gaining more confidence with the horse because of this.

¹ Psalm 46:10a (ESV).

² Jeremiah 17:7–8.

³ Psalm 31:14.

⁴ Hebrews 11:1.

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NLT).

² Ephesians 3:17b–18 (HCSB).

³ Isaiah 43:1b–3a (TLB).

⁴ Genesis 33:5b.

Today, Blade had been to the corral early and had taken one of the horses, headed through town. Travis watched and knew where he was going. He had been to the Double R a few times with Joey. He was going again.

Blade liked it at the ranch. He liked the open spaces, the animals, and the freedom.

Marvin had noticed early that Blade was good with the horses and that Blade liked coming to the ranch. Blade had been told he could come twice a week, no more. Marvin had told Reid that Blade was still a boy and needed to be a boy, not a ranch hand, at least not yet. He needed to learn to live with and be a part of the family before he started hanging out with the cowboys so much.

Marvin had explained this to Blade too. Blade had accepted it but didn't like it.

Reid appreciated Marvin's insight. Reid felt the same way, but Blade had begun to resist the interaction with the younger children. Reid knew he was just trying to find his place in an environment that was foreign to him. It would take a while. Blade had been on his own for a long time.

Reid had given Blade more freedom than the other boys had. But Reid had also been slowly drawing Blade into the family, asking him to do more with the younger children and with him, giving Blade less and less time to himself.

Travis watched from his front porch as two people walked the road past Sarah's house. He didn't think much of it, thinking that when they disappeared behind Sarah's house, they wouldn't come out. But they continued past the house and turned onto the road coming toward him.

The middle-aged man was neatly dressed in dark-blue pants, a striped shirt, and a gray vest. He had a jacket thrown over his shoulder. The woman with him wore a faded brown skirt with wide lighter brown trim that was torn. Travis could see that even from the distance. She had a small faded blanket wrapped around her head and

shoulders. Travis couldn't see any part of her, but he knew she was an Indian.

James moved toward them as the couple stopped to watch the two Indian boys at the corral. Travis saw them talk for a few minutes before James pointed toward his grandfather standing on the porch in the distance. The man shook hands with James and began heading toward Travis. The woman didn't move. She stood watching the boys. The stranger turned around and called to her. She didn't respond, so he returned to her and took her hand, pulling her with him as he continued down the road.

As they neared, the man waved at Travis and hollered, "Hello there! Beautiful place you have here."

Travis stood up and waved back. As the two got closer, Travis said, "Good mornin'."

"The boys with the horses"—and the man pointed toward the corral—"told me to talk to you. They told me you could tell me where to find Reid Britt."

"Yeah, I can. I'm 'is father," Travis said.

"Well, good! I'm Gregory Sutton. Where can I find him?"

"He's not 'ere. Can I 'elp ya with somethin'?" Travis asked.

"I really need to talk with him." Sutton's face got serious.

"Like I said," Travis repeated himself, "he ain't at home right now. Ya can talk ta me, or ya can talk ta one a my other sons, or ya can wait a few days."

Sutton looked at Travis, trying to figure out why this man wouldn't answer his question. "I understand that Mr. Britt was recently in Oklahoma and brought several Indian children home with him."

Travis's face showed no change of expression. "Who told ya that?"

"One of the Indian agents in Oklahoma," Sutton responded.

"An' why do ya want ta see Reid?" Travis asked.

"Are those two of the children he brought home?" Sutton asked, pointing toward Saamel and Esa.

"No."

It didn't seem like Sutton was getting very far with this man, so he decided to get specific. "I was sent here to identify the children so they can be reunited with their family. Would you please tell me where they are?"

Travis looked at Sutton, unmoving. He didn't respond. He finally said, "Let me make a telephone call." Travis turned to go inside the house. He called Cleve and told him what was happening. Then he asked Cleve to meet them at the medical clinic. Reid would need to be involved.

Travis returned to the porch. "We have ta go inta town."

Travis stepped off the porch and started walking without looking at his visitors. He knew they would follow.

As they passed the corral, Travis stopped, calling James to the side privately to talk. James eyed the man and shook his head in response to what Travis was saying. Sutton heard him say, "Okay." Then James turned back toward the corral.

Saamel rode past on the horse and yelled to his grandfather, "Grandpa! I can do this!"

"Yeah, ya can boy. Ya doin' good," Travis responded.

As they walked away, Sutton heard James tell the boys on the horses, "I have to go do something for Grandpa. Get your horses put away. Stephen's gonna help you."

Sutton turned around to see James go into the large barn.

Gregory Sutton tried to make small talk with Travis, but Travis wasn't talking. His thoughts were on Reid and the children. He had a disturbing feeling that whatever was going to happen wasn't going to be good.

Travis got to the edge of the fence and turned to cut through Sarah's yard, taking the shortcut, headed for the medical clinic. Sutton could tell that he did this often. The path was worn smooth.

There were two people sitting on the porch of the Victorian home, but the old man didn't say anything to them. Sutton decided to be friendly and waved, but neither of them waved back.

As they were passing Cleve's house, James came past on a horse moving swiftly. He disappeared as he passed the cattle yard and warehouse at the railroad tracks.

When they arrived at the medical clinic, Cleve was waiting for them.

"Mr. Sutton, this is my son Cleve. He's a lawyer," Travis said.

Sutton still seemed happy. He wasn't disturbed at all by the fact that a lawyer was present and shook Cleve's hand, giving a friendly greeting.

"Reid was injured an' he's inside. I'm gonna let ya talk ta 'im, but I don' want 'im upset," Travis said. He was using his authoritative marshal's voice. It always made Cleve smile when he heard his father do this.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Sutton said. He seemed truly concerned. "We'll be gentle."

Cleve opened the door and walked through the waiting room and into the exam room with the others following. The door to the bedroom was closed. Cleve knocked softly, then opened it slightly, and peeked in. "Chipeta? Can we come in?"

"Sure."

"Reid, are you awake?" Cleve asked as he opened the door farther.

Reid nodded.

"Reid, you've got company. Dad's here, and this is Mr. Gregory Sutton." Cleve looked at the Indian woman. "I'm sorry, what's your name?"

The woman put her head down and didn't speak.

Cleve added, "And there's a young lady with him."

Reid reached his hand out, just a few inches above the bed. "Mr. Sutton." Sutton stepped forward and shook Reid's hand. A firm grip but a gentle motion.

Travis said, "Reid, these people was sent by a Indian agent in Oklahoma. They wanna know 'bout the chil'en."

"What do you need to know?" Reid asked.

Sutton began to explain, "I was told to find out the circumstances surrounding your bringing them here and to find out their names so we can see about reuniting them with their family."

Reid didn't respond, but Chipeta now spoke up. "No! They don't have any family but us."

Reid said, "Mr. Sutton, this is my wife, Chipeta."

"Ma'am." Sutton nodded to her. He didn't seem concerned that Chipeta was an Indian.

"Who do you represent, Mr. Sutton?" Reid asked slowly.

"Oh, I'm just a messenger. I'm with the Arapaho, Apache, and Cherokee joint Christian Mission. Sometimes the Indian agents need somebody they can trust, and they ask me to do these things for them."

"Okay," Reid said softly. "So why were you sent here?"

"There was apparently a raid on some land in the panhandle," Sutton explained. "Marshals and Indian police were involved. They cleaned out some rather seedy camps and discovered some ranches and farms holding Indians against their will in some pretty bad conditions. Indian agents are trying to get these poor souls returned to their families. The mission is helping them. Some of the government agents said you knew this was coming and had taken some children out of a bad situation. We're just trying to figure out who these children are and where they're supposed to be."

"With us," Chipeta said. "They're supposed to be with us."

Reid hadn't moved, and with his eyes bandaged, no one in the room could distinguish a disturbance on his face. Now, he didn't speak. The silence was deafening as everyone watched the motionless man in the bed.

"Reid?" Travis said.

"I'm thinking," Reid said slowly. "It takes me a little longer to think these days. I need some coffee."

Reid lay still. He was praying for strength. He knew what was coming. The children would be taken away.

Everyone waited. Reid raised his hand and rubbed his forehead above the bandage. "Okay. What do you need to know?"

Sutton reached into his jacket pocket pulling out some papers and a pencil. "I need to know their names and their parents' names."

Travis said, "I sent James to get Blade."

"You'll have to wait for Blade to get here. I can give you the girls' names, but I don't remember Blade's name." Reid laughed slightly. "It's a long one. And I don't know their parents' names. Their moth-

er's name means Black Butterfly. That's all I remember. Blade's folks are both dead. He told me that. The girls had the same mother, but they don't know who their father was."

"Okay, I'll leave that information blank for now," Sutton said. "How did they come to be with you?"

Reid laughed nervously. "I was taken hostage by some bank robbers. They dumped me...somewhere. I don't know where. Blade found me and took me home with him."

Sutton looked at Reid questioningly, but with Reid's eyes covered, he couldn't tell if this was truth or a lie.

"Bank robbers?" Sutton asked.

"That was back in April," Reid explained, still not moving.

"How long were you there, with this Blade?"

"I don't know. I have no idea. I don't even know what today is. They hit me in the head, and I was pretty much out of it for a while," Reid explained slowly. "I remember being on the floor of the automobile and lying on the road alone. Then I was in a shack or cabin with the two girls. That's all I remember until we left."

"Who'd you leave with?" Sutton asked.

"The two little girls, the baby, and Blade," Reid responded.

"Where'd you go?"

"North. I don't know where we were, so I can't tell you where we went. My son and my nephew found us a couple of days later just south of the Cimarron River somewhere," Reid said.

Sutton asked, "Okay. Can I talk to your son?"

Reid hesitated. "He died."

Sutton's face showed concern. Or did it show unbelief? "How about your nephew? Is he dead too?"

The Spirit spoke to Sutton, correcting his skepticism. *He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.*¹

Sutton heard and took notice. He had been wrong to doubt what this man said.

¹ Acts 10:2.

“No, he’s with the Department of Justice, Bureau of Investigation. He was probably part of that bunch that raided the ranches. You would have to track him down through the bureau.”

“Can anyone confirm what you’re telling me?”

“Blade. Adam. You can talk to the marshal in town. He talked to the other marshals when they brought us in. Matt’s buried next to the church. You can go see his grave.” Reid reached over for Chipeta’s hand. “You’re going to take them, aren’t you?”

“They need to be with their own people,” Sutton said sympathetically.

“Wait a minute!” Cleve said loudly just as Chipeta cried, “They don’t have any family but us!”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Britt,” Sutton said turning to Cleve. “There’s nothing I can do. This is procedure. We’re trying to stabilize the family structures and make sure the Indians are taken care of.”

The Spirit spoke to Sutton again. *But the love of the Lord remains forever with those who fear him. His salvation extends to the children’s children of those who are faithful to his covenant, of those who obey his commandments!*¹

Chipeta had tears in her eyes. “We are taking care of them! That baby would have died if we hadn’t taken care of her. Those children are loved, and they’re a part of our family now!”

“I’m so sorry, ma’am. I have to take them.”

Reid was still calm, so calm it disturbed Cleve.

Cleve said, “How do we file to get them back? How can we adopt them? There’s got to be a way.”

“Not at this point. I have to take them back. The tribal council will determine where they belong.”

Chipeta was sobbing. Travis had his arms around her, staring at Sutton, that cold hard look in his icy gray eyes. Cleve thought his father could have shot the man on the spot. Reid had not moved.

Cleve was watching them all. He felt confused. What could he do to stop this? He’d only been back in town two days, but he already

¹ Psalm 103:17–18 (NLT).

knew that the entire family had fallen in love with those children, including himself.

“Can you tell me where the children are? I’ll go pick them up,” Sutton said.

No one spoke. Sutton looked from one shocked and saddened face to another. “This has to happen. It’s the law.”

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a paper, handing it to Cleve. The lawyer looked at it briefly and said, “Signed. Court order by a Judge Brady Smith.”

“I know him. He’s out of Powhaska. Good man.” Reid paused, then added, “I want to say goodbye. Cleve, can you take Dad and Chipeta to pick them up? Bring them so I can say goodbye. Take your time. They won’t be going anywhere until Blade gets here.”

Reid didn’t have any strength left. The children had given him the desire, the will, to survive in that prison of theirs. If it hadn’t been for them, he would have just laid down and stayed there. Those children had been what kept him going in the panhandle. They kept him moving across the harsh land when his head and his back told him to stop.

Reid was still calm, but his breathing was becoming labored. ““The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”¹ Lord, help us!” Reid cried. This was the first bit of emotion that Reid had shown. Chipeta threw herself beside her husband, clinging to him.

Her sobs were falling on deaf ears. Everyone in the room was dealing with their own emotions. Anger at the situation. Confusion about what was suddenly happening. Dejected feelings, empty with no hope. Not an ounce to cling to. And powerless. The law was doing this, and none of them knew of any way to get around it.

Travis sat down in the chair next to Chipeta, watching Reid. He had no strength either. Cleve moved to stand beside his father, his arm around the old man, also watching Reid. Reid’s breathing had gotten slow and heavy. Each intake of air brought a disturbing noise that bothered Cleve, and the exhales shuttered. He needed to

¹ Isaiah 40:8.

find William, but he didn't know where his nephew was, so he didn't move.

"I'm sorry," Sutton said again. This time, he felt the sorrow and wanted to say, "This is all a mistake. We can work this out." But he couldn't; he had to take the children. So instead, he said, "I know this is not what you expected when you brought these children home. You seem like nice people..." His words trailed off. He realized no one was listening, and his words weren't comforting anyone.

Sutton stepped back against the wall beside the woman, allowing the family to grieve.

Travis said, "And yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you."¹ "The Lord, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with (them) and prosper (their) way."² God's gonna take care a 'em."

Travis moved to sit next to Reid on the bed and put a hand on his son. "We're gonna pray. Those chil'en will be washed in prayer far the rest a their lives."

Sutton took note of his words and saw the silent tears running down the old man's face. He looked to the man that remained standing. The lawyer looked to be in shock. Cleve was trying to think of a solution. He was blocking out the others' sorrow, searching his heart and mind, trying to figure out what to do.

Reid's breathing was calming, but when he spoke, his voice was tired. It had a low harsh tone that disturbed Greg Sutton. "Chipeta, bring the little ones back here."

Cleve began to slowly nod. He knew what had to be done. He reached for Chipeta and took her by the shoulders to pull her from her husband. She didn't resist. She didn't have the strength. Cleve put an arm around her and moved her out the door.

Reid said, "Dad, take these bandages off. I want to see the girls."

Travis looked at him and slowly said, "No. We ain't messin' this up. Ya gonna heal the right way. I'll see if I can come up with William."

¹ Acts 27:22a (NASB).

² Genesis 24:40 (ESV).

Travis got up and went to the telephone. He called Angus and asked him to find William immediately. Reid needed him right away at the clinic. Then Travis returned to his son's bedside.

It wasn't long before William and Angus were running into the clinic, thinking something was wrong with Reid.

"Reid, what's wrong?" William said as he got to the bed.

"William." The doctor heard the weakness in Reid's voice. "Take the bandages off."

"It's not time yet. Why do you want them off?"

Reid was trying to talk, but no words were coming out. He couldn't bring himself to say they were taking the children away. He was trying to contain his emotions, but his mind wasn't working very well. He needed some coffee.

"Reid? What's wrong?" William asked again.

"I'm afraid this is my fault." Sutton stepped forward from his spot against the wall. "I'm here to take the Indian children. Everyone seems to be upset by it."

William turned to look at the man. He had not seen the two standing against the wall when he entered. "What'd you say?" William's forehead furrowed. He was sure he had misunderstood what the man had said.

"I'm taking the children," the man repeated. "It's the law."

Reid said, "I want to see the children before they go."

William nodded his head, turning back toward Reid. "Okay," he replied softly. He couldn't believe this was happening.

William stood up and pulled the curtains closed all the way. He turned a lamp on and closed the door. The light in the room was dim.

The doctor reached over and opened a drawer. Pulling out a pair of scissors, he cut the bandages from Reid's face. They remained in place.

"Reid, I'm going to take them off now. You keep your eyes closed. Take your time opening them. If there's too much light, you close them again. You understand?"

"Yes," Reid answered softly.

William removed the bandage and let it fall to the bed. The doctor carefully pulled the folded gauze off the incision and both eyes. Reid's eyes were red, moist, and puffy. William examined his uncle's eyes closely, pulling the eyelids open slightly, looking at the eye.

"Okay, Reid. Try to open them," William said.

"Dad?" Angus called to his father softly from beside the door. "What's going on?"

Travis got up from the chair and moved to the door but stopped.

"William, I'm gonna open the door for a minute. We goin' out," Travis said.

William put his hand over Reid's eyes, and Travis moved into the next room quickly with Angus, closing the door behind them. Travis collapsed onto a chair and sat thinking for a moment. Then he explained to Angus what was happening with the children.

Luke came in the door out of breath. The operator was concerned when Angus had left so quickly after making several calls, searching the town for the doctor. She had found the sheriff, telling him something was wrong with the judge, and Luke had rushed over too. Travis explained the situation again.

When the doctor finished with his patient, Reid asked William, "Would you make some coffee?"

"Sure." William nodded and left the room, leaving Reid alone with Sutton and his traveling companion.

26 CHAPTER

Cleve and Chipeta returned with the children. Reid knew that these little ones wouldn't understand what was happening, but he would make sure they knew they were loved.

Kimi and Aiyana crawled onto the bed grabbing Reid roughly. They hadn't seen him in a few days and were excited.

Reid tried to laugh but the sound didn't come out quite right. He hugged them and ran his fingers through their hair. He tickled their tummies and tapped their noses. He told them how much he loved them and how much he had missed them. As they began to settle down, he told them how much Jesus loved them and that Jesus would always love them and take care of them. Kimi crawled over his stomach and snuggled onto his shoulder to get comfortable.

Reid began singing "Jesus Loves Me" to them, over and over as he held them. His voice was low and would fade in and out as he sang.

Chipeta stood next to the bed holding Aponi. She watched Reid and she watched the children, but her attention kept returning to the baby. What would happen to her? Would she get enough love? Would this baby's health slip backward without the love and care she was getting now?

Reid heard horses arriving, and he quieted. Blade and James came through the door suddenly, and Reid closed his eyes against the light.

Reid addressed both of the boys. "Blade, come here. James, please go get your brothers and sisters."

When Reid heard the door shut again, he opened his eyes and squinted to look at Blade. He asked Blade to sit next to him on the bed and explained to Blade as carefully as he could what was happening and why. Reid told Blade he would be returning to his people, and they would be his family now.

Reid had brought his Bible with him to the clinic. He couldn't see it to read, but Chipeta and Travis had been reading it to him. He now asked William to hand it to him. Reid, in turn, put the Bible in Blade's hand. He knew Blade couldn't read it, but he hoped one day he would be able to.

"Blade, I hope you find your sister. And you tell these girls how much I have loved all of you."

Reid's eyes were watering. They had gotten red, and Reid wasn't opening them as wide as he had earlier. William was beginning to get concerned. They needed to be covered again, and Reid needed to quit crying.

Reid continued, "If you can find me in years to come, you do it. You're always going to be my son. I'll be right here, waiting for you."

William could tell that it took all the strength Reid had to sit up and put his arms around Blade. He held the Indian boy for a moment and then seemed to collapse as Blade held him.

Gregory Sutton moved closer to the bed. "The train will be here soon. We need to leave."

William reached to take Reid's shoulders and laid him back on the bed, but the father continued to hold his son's hand. William took Blade's hand and pulled it away. He smiled sadly at the confused boy. "Blade, I'm sorry." William shook his head slowly, and tears filled his own eyes.

Sutton said, "Come with me." Sutton picked up Aiyana, and she began to struggle with him, reaching back toward her father. But she said nothing. The Indian woman reached for Aponi and said something in a language Chipeta didn't understand.

"Get the other one," Sutton told Blade. Blade obeyed and picked up Kimi, carrying her out the door. He didn't take his eyes off his father until he was out of the room.

In the exam room, other members of the family waited to say goodbye. Travis, Luke, Cleve, and Angus hugged and kissed each child and told them how much they were loved. Travis and Blade looked into each other's eyes a long time, and then Travis wrapped his arms around the boy and held him close.

Travis and Luke moved outside with them, knowing the other children would be there to say goodbye too.

As Sutton and the children walked toward the railway station, Saamel left the others and ran into the clinic searching for his father. He flung the door open and jumped onto the bed, throwing himself onto his father as he cried.

William was sitting on the bed, caring for Reid. He'd never seen Saamel cry. The whole time Reid had been missing, the boy sat stone-faced and stoic, showing absolutely no emotion. Now the child acted like his heart was breaking to pieces.

Slowly the other children came into the room. James and Stephen sat on the floor against the wall holding their sisters. Esa leaned against the chair that Chipeta had collapsed onto. Travis and Luke followed a few minutes later. Luke made himself comfortable on the floor between the two boys, putting an arm around each of them.

William began caring for Reid's eyes again, working around the boy that held tightly to his father. No one talked. The children weren't asking questions. They weren't making any noise or saying anything. As William looked around the dimly lit room, he realized they all had their eyes closed. Everyone was praying, except maybe Saamel. He was still holding to Reid, crying.

William continued to sit next to Reid, wanting to bandage his eyes again. But he wasn't able to. The bandages would get wet quickly and would need to be removed again. So William folded gauze and placed it on each eye without wrapping them. He would change the gauze when they got wet.

Cleve came into the room carrying a Bible and handed it to Travis.

Travis opened it, leaned toward the lamp, and began reading.

“This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears. No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit. My children are destitute because the enemy has prevailed.”¹

Luke interrupted, “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”²

But Travis continued reading, both men talking at the same time.

“My soul weeps because of grief. Strengthen me according to Your word,”³ Reid said.

Travis continued to read softly, his voice low in the background as others spoke scripture and prayers. Then the room got quiet again, and Travis could be heard clearly.

“For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.”⁴

William somehow knew that tonight this family would grieve well. When the grieving ended, hope would come. Hope? How did William know this? He heard the Spirit speak. *Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.*⁵

¹ Lamentations 1:16.

² Psalm 18:2.

³ Psalm 119:28 (NASB).

⁴ Lamentations 3:31–33.

⁵ Psalm 30:5b.

William picked Bonnie up at the hotel when she was finished working. She brought a picnic basket with her, and they drove to the edge of the river.

It was quiet, and they talked about their day and some of their hopes and dreams. William told Bonnie about his practice in Sacramento, and he told her some stories from his life growing up in Denver. Then he talked about moving to Harris. As William's stories continued, he threw in a random question. It was sudden, and the question surprised Bonnie. She didn't know how to answer. She looked at him and shook her head.

“I can't. Mother needs my help to support the family.”

William thought that she would answer this way. He continued smiling.

“Bonnie, if your home was paid off and your mother didn't have to worry about losing it, would you?”

She thought for a moment. “Probably. But it's not.”

“I had a lot of equipment in Sacramento that had to be put in storage when I couldn't work anymore. It's just been sitting there. A lot of expensive equipment. The hospital there is expanding. My buddy says they're more than doubling its size. They just bought the equipment from me. I can pay off your parents' loan. I have enough to repair a few things too, like that window that's busted and the hole in the front porch floor and that corner of the roof. That will be my wedding present to you.”

Bonnie sat looking at him. She did love him, and she did want to marry him. But she couldn't let him do this. She stood up, shook her head, turned, and walked a few steps away. She didn't want him to see the tears in her eyes.

William continued talking, “Bonnie, I'm a man, and God said a man shouldn't go through life alone. I need someone to help me. God told me you're the one to be my helpmate. He said you were my blessing. It's not going to be easy. I'm going to have to work hard to build a practice here, but the clinic is already set up. We won't have to worry about that. I've talked to my brothers in Denver. The hospital controls the clinic, and since my father is sick, I'm being put on as a contract physician. Whatever I make is ours. They're even giving

me a small stipend. As a hospital employee, I'll take over the mine contract too. That will give us a small steady income.

"The hospital sends the supplies we need at no cost to us. We can live at the clinic for a while. We're going to have to trust God to take care of us though. Father says there are a lot of people around here that need help but can't pay. Some of what I do is going to be for free. But God told me he 'will meet all (our) needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.'¹ We just have to trust him, and we'll be taken care of. Can you trust God? Would you marry me?"

She already knew how to trust God. She had been doing that for years. But there was something so sweet in the way he said these things that her heart opened. It was her future calling to her with joy and hope.

A smile slowly grew on her lips, but William couldn't see it until she turned around. Then he saw the tears and the smile. William stood up and went to her. He reached for her hand, and she looked into his deep dark eyes. "I'd love to marry you," she said.

Cleve pulled the wagon to a stop in front of the Avery home. Two of his sons were sitting on top of the lumber that hung over the back edge. They were holding it in place so it didn't fall off the wagon.

Angus arrived with one of his sons, Travis, James, and Stephen. Luke arrived on his horse shortly afterward.

They were there to repair the home and got to work quickly. Wayne and Jerry Hammons, Dan McClelland, and Cecil Montgomery arrived soon afterward to help.

Angus and Cleve set to work repairing the roof, while Travis mended the cane bottom chairs. Luke, James, and Stephen replaced windowpanes. Dan McClelland and Wayne and Jerry Hammons went to work on the porch floor and roof support. Cleve's and Angus's sons totted and fetched and kept everyone supplied.

¹ Philippians 4:19.

About midmorning, William showed up with Reid. Reid sat in the automobile as William spoke with the men and looked at the repairs that had been made.

Several of the men went to the Oldsmobile and said a few words to Reid. But when Dan McClelland walked over, he and Reid spoke for quite a while. William looked their direction several times. They seemed to be in a serious discussion. Eventually Dan left to get Cleve and included him in the conversation.

William stayed away until the men were finished and both had returned to their labor. Then the young doctor and the young judge left for home.

In the Oldsmobile, William said, "You and Dan seemed to have a lot to talk about."

"He's a good friend," Reid replied with no other explanation.

"You two got something going on?" William was trying to make conversation, but Reid wasn't talking.

Reid smiled. "Yeah."

"You feel okay? This wasn't too much, coming out here in the sunlight and dust?" William asked.

"No, I'm fine," Reid said. "Thanks for bringing me."

"Sure."

It had been just over five weeks since the surgery. Reid had recovered well, despite the small setback when the children had been taken. But William knew Reid still hurt. He wasn't moving around well at all and spent most of his waking hours either in the wheelchair or lying in bed. It seemed he had quit trying to move on his own, and despite the fact that William had asked again, it didn't look like William's father was going to help.

As they neared Reid's house, Reid asked, "Have you thought any more about going to Iowa to learn what your father does to my back?"

"Yeah, I've thought about it a lot. I contacted them and found out when I could go, but I can't afford it. The hospital only allows training outside the facility for the teaching doctors, and they don't want to send anyone to Iowa. I checked on that too. If I could get them to send a teaching doctor, then he could train me at the hospi-

tal at no cost. But they won't, and it would take months for that to happen if it did," William replied.

"When would you leave if you went?" Reid asked.

William laughed slightly. "If I were going, I would have to leave in about two weeks."

"Would you like to take Bonnie with you?" Reid smiled. "You're planning on getting married soon. Why not get married and go together?"

"That would be nice, but like I said, I can't afford it."

"It'll be my wedding present to you," Reid said. "Find out what it will cost and let me know. Make your plans."

27 CHAPTER

Summer was coming to a close soon, and the children would be going back to school in just a few weeks. Ruth would leave for Denver soon. Every time Reid saw Ruth, he would think of her leaving for Denver, and that would make him think of Matt leaving for Chicago. He hadn't wanted Matt to go to school in Chicago, but as time passed, he felt more and more certain that Matt had made the right choice. But it didn't matter anymore. Matt was gone.

Everyone was accepting that the Indian children were no longer theirs. The whole family missed them, especially Reid. Blade had filled part of the hole that Matt had left in his father's heart. Without Blade, that hole was bigger. Reid also missed the two girls. They would come to him several times a day for a hug and reassurance. Reid loved them doing that. Aiyana liked to play with his fingers, and Kimi always wanted him when she was ready to take her nap. He couldn't lie down to rest without thinking of them.

Travis still wore the eagle's feather in his hat. And he kept the two cornhusk dolls he had been making. Every time he saw the dolls sitting on his grandfather's hutch, Saamel would ask about them. His grandfather kept telling the child that he was going to finish them one day.

Chipeta wouldn't put the cradle away. She left it on the bedroom floor near the window. Reid would see her stop occasionally and gently rock it. She would sometimes curl up against his arm at night and softly cry. He never asked her why. He'd just lean into her, and sometimes he would join her.

Luke had returned to work and seemed to have no lingering effect from the two bullets taken out of him. He was making his rounds of the town with the same jolly humor and quiet confidence he had always had. But sometimes he would come to sit with Reid. No matter what Reid was doing, Luke would sit quietly near him without disturbing anyone. Reid knew Luke missed both Matt and Blade.

Reid's eyes and head had healed. He still felt some occasional discomfort behind his right ear, but the headaches were mostly gone. He could look into the sunlight again.

Reid was getting ready to return to work. He was using the wheelchair at home, and William had requested two from the hospital in Denver. Reid could have one wheelchair at home and one at the courthouse. They wouldn't have to carry it back and forth. Cleve had put in a couple of ramps to make it easier for Reid to navigate the building and the area to the judge's bench. Even when Reid used the crutches, the ramps made movement easier.

The other wheelchair would be kept at the medical clinic, anticipating Thomas one day needing it.

Today would be a long day. William and Bonnie were getting married, and the wedding was taking place at Reid's house. Reid would officiate. Everyone at his house would be family, with the exception of a few of Bonnie's friends and her family. The Averys would now be a part of the Britt family too. That was a lot of people.

Cleve and his boys had brought benches and tables from the churchyard that morning. They had left to get cleaned up and rest for a few hours before the party began. The party would probably last well after dark. Joey, James, and Stephen had hung lanterns in the trees at the edge of the yard.

Molly, Jenny, and their daughters had cut flowers that morning and had put them in mason jars and in baskets. They had decorated the porch in the bright yellow, blue, and pink wildflowers that bloomed in the hottest part of the summer. Colorful quilts

were folded near the steps for use by the children and young people who wanted to sit on the ground, allowing the adults the use of the benches. All the women had made food, and everyone would share a meal following the ceremony.

Chipeta had spent most of the morning cooking and the afternoon getting the children cleaned and dressed for the occasion. Now they sat in the house, scared to move because of their mother's threats to keep themselves clean while she got herself ready. Reid had started a game of charades that had entertained the children for a while. Afterward, they moved on to play "I spy." Reid left that game to lie down for a few minutes before the guests began to arrive.

Saamel came into the room. "Daddy, Grandpa's coming. Can I go outside with him?"

Saamel was dressed in Ute clothing his mother had made for him. He was going to play a Ute love song on the flute. It would be the first time he played in front of more than just a few members of his family. Bonnie had heard him play the song that Chipeta had taught him and had asked him to do it at her wedding. Saamel liked Bonnie and had agreed. Reid hoped his son would follow through and not shy away when he saw the crowd.

Chipeta had insisted he have traditional clothing if he was going to play the Ute song. Saamel had fought her, but she won that battle. Travis had made him a headband with some rooster tail feathers. It looked just like the one Blade had worn. With the headdress, Saamel was satisfied with the outfit.

"What did your mother say?" Reid asked.

"I didn't ask her," the boy replied.

"What was the last thing she said to you?"

"She said not to get dirty and to stay inside until someone got here," Saamel replied.

"Follow her instructions. They haven't changed," Reid said.

"Yes, sir." Saamel smiled. "Grandpa's here. He's someone." Reid smiled as the boy turned to run from the room. He heard Saamel call from the hallway, "I won't get dirty!"

James came into the room. "Are you ready to get up?"

Reid nodded. He reached a hand out, and James helped Reid sit up and move to the wheelchair. Reid arrived on the front porch as Cleve and his family were driving into the yard. Bonnie's family arrived walking, without Bonnie.

Kathleen Avery came to Reid and explained that Bonnie was still getting ready and that her friends would be bringing her shortly. Della Leachman nodded to Reid but said nothing.

William arrived and said hello to everyone in the yard before he sat in a rocking chair beside Reid.

"Reid, I want to thank you again for doing this. I know it's a lot of work and effort for your family," he said.

Reid laughed. "We're not doing anything. Just letting you use our yard. Cleve and his boys and the women have done everything. Okay, Chipeta did cook a little bit. Molly and Jenny have done as much as Chipeta has though. We want you to have a nice wedding. Start you off with good memories."

"Well, I appreciate it," William said. "Do you know if Mother will come? I asked her yesterday, but she said she wanted somebody to stay with Father."

"She's coming. Wayne's going to sit with your father, and Angus and Molly will pick your mother up on their way."

"I thought Father would get over his little tantrum by now," William said. "I never thought he would do this."

"You don't know how someone will react to suffering. Paul said, 'Join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.'¹ Don't give up that holy life for anyone. Thomas will come back to the faith at some point. He can't stay away if he's a true believer. God's purpose will be worked out. 'Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he

¹ 2 Timothy 1:8b–9.

predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will."¹

William nodded.

They were silent for a few minutes, both men considering Paul's words. Then Reid asked, "When are you leaving for Iowa?"

"Tuesday. That will give Bonnie a few days to get her stuff moved into the room at the clinic. When we get back, she'll be set and won't have to worry about that. Class starts the following Monday. We'll have a couple of days to spend together before I start my studies. Thanks for paying for this. I couldn't have done it any other way," William said.

Reid laughed. He knew that William had paid off the Averys' loan, including what Reid had paid. Morgan had told him. Now Reid was using that money to pay for William's training. "I'm being selfish. I'm paying for your training so you can help me."

William laughed too. "But you didn't have to let Bonnie come. I appreciate that and the extra money. You're making the trip nice for both of us. Thank you."

"You're welcome." Reid smiled.

The family and guests continued to arrive. Reid could see all the activity in the yard from the porch. He watched and smiled quietly.

Most of Angus's children were already there. Everyone was waiting for Angus and Molly to get there with Sarah. They were the only ones missing. When they arrived, Thomas got out of the automobile too. That was a surprise to everyone.

Travis met his daughter at the car and said a few words to Thomas, who seemed to ignore him. He moved to a bench and sat down alone without saying a word.

William pushed Reid closer to the edge of the steps and moved to sit near the bottom.

Luke got everyone's attention with his loud booming laughter, pointing the guests toward Reid, who spoke quietly. Reid welcomed everyone and gave them a brief overview of events of the day. He told them what they would be doing and when the food would be

¹ Ephesians 1:4–5 (ESV).

eaten. He invited them to stay as long as they wanted and to enjoy themselves.

Chipeta pushed Saamel in his father's direction. The six-year-old walked slowly toward Reid with his head down, and the boy's father knew that his timidity had kicked in.

Saamel, in his full Indian attire, moved to stand beside the wheelchair, looking at the floor. Reid reached over and pulled the boy closer and kissed his forehead. "Do you want to do this?" Reid asked softly.

Saamel nodded.

"Are you scared?"

Saamel nodded again.

"Would it help if you didn't have to look at them?"

Saamel nodded. Again.

"Then sit on the porch," Reid told his son, "just like you do when you're by yourself. Close your eyes and pretend they aren't there. Can you do that?"

Saamel looked into his father's eyes.

"I'm proud of you, son." Reid smiled and put his hand around Saamel's neck, rubbing the boy's cheek with his thumb.

Saamel smiled back. He knelt beside his father, closed his eyes, and put the flute to his mouth. His fingers began to move over the holes of the flute, but the boy wasn't blowing into the mouthpiece. Everyone waited in silence.

Then it came, a sweet, haunting sound that filled the air and seemed to bring with it an eerie calm. It was like a bird song calling to them, telling them of happiness, a melody bringing forth the collective feeling of love and adoration, soothing the soul and bringing joy to the spirit.

No one moved. Not a sound was heard, except for the music. Saamel forgot about his audience. He played as if he were the only one there. When he finished, he kept the flute to his lips and opened his eyes.

Reid was watching his son from just a foot away. A surprised, shocked look appeared on the boy's face as he opened his eyes and the people that had listened began to applaud. Saamel sat watching

everyone for a moment. The boy suddenly jumped up and grabbed his father, hiding his face against his father's arm. There were a few comments of "how cute" and "aww" heard from the people on the ground.

Reid smiled widely and put his hand on the boy. He spoke to him gently. "That was perfect. You didn't make a mistake. It was beautiful. You did such a good job. Thank you."

Then the boy pulled away, jumped from the porch, and ran to his grandfather who wrapped his arms around his young grandson, hugging him tightly.

Reid continued to smile, watching as Saamel climbed onto the bench beside his grandfather, still holding tightly to his flute.

"Well," Reid said, moving his eyes back to the small crowd. "Only a marriage between two people that truly love each other could top that today. William, Bonnie, step forward."

The couple got up from the separate locations where they were seated and joined hands beside Reid on the porch. Reid turned the wheelchair slightly to look at them.

"The wisest king that ever lived, King Solomon, gave us words concerning the heart.

'Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm, for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away. If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned.'¹

"The book of 1 John tells us that God himself is love.² So if God himself is love, you can't love another person unless God is there in the middle. Keep God in the middle, and love will survive anything." Reid looked at Chipeta and smiled.

¹ Song of Solomon 8:6-7.

² 1 John 4:8.

“Before you say your vows, I want to give you just a few words of advice. And for those of us who are married already, please join me in using this as a reminder of what a good marriage is and how we are to love.”

Reid stopped to look at the other married couples in his family. He knew they were all happy and had done well in their marriages, even if Sarah and Thomas were struggling right now.

He continued slowly.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”¹

Reid stopped to let the words sink in, then he continued, “A good marriage is made of hard work. The little things become the important things. Always hold hands and always say, ‘I love you.’ Never go to sleep angry.” He stopped again. He didn’t want everything said to run together and become lost. “Stand together as you face the world. Show your appreciation in words and actions, and show gratitude in thoughtful ways. Forgive and forget what needs to be forgotten but also remember the good times. Give the other person the pleasure of growing and be the right person for your spouse. Don’t try to make them the right person for you. And remember why you chose the other person.”

Reid continued, and the couple listened as the vows were given. They each responded by saying, “I do.”

When the vows were completed, Reid said,

“Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:4–8a.

of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.”¹

Then Reid prayed for them.

When the ceremony ended, Reid introduced the couple as husband and wife, and the congratulations began to flow.

Reid sat on the porch watching the children play and the adults visit, eat, and enjoy themselves. Thomas came to sit beside Reid, bringing two plates with him. He handed one to his brother-in-law.

Reid accepted the food with a “thanks” and took a bite. He set the plate on his leg and continued to watch the people in the yard.

Thomas said, “That was a nice ceremony.” That was all he said. Reid looked at him, said thanks again, and turned to continue watching the people. But from the corner of his eye, Reid saw that Thomas wasn’t eating either. He turned back to look at the doctor.

Thomas said, “I haven’t seen you since you got back.”

“I know,” Reid said quietly. “I came to see you a few days after you got sick. I’m sure you don’t remember it.”

“Sarah told me,” Thomas replied. “She said you all prayed for me.”

Reid nodded, turning back to look at the people in the yard.

“She said God told William that I would live.”

Reid nodded again. “God still has a purpose for you, Thomas. I don’t know what it is. Nor does William. You’re going to have to find that out for yourself.”

¹ Colossians 3:15–17 (MSG).

"I can't envision what he wants me to do. I can't work anymore. At least, not like I did. I always thought that being a doctor was my purpose. Since I've been able to get out of bed, I've just felt lost."

"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails,"¹ Reid said. "You don't have to know what God's plan is. God knows. 'The plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.'"²

"Well, I wish he'd tell me," Thomas said, sounding a little irritated.

Reid looked at Thomas. "Do you really want him to?"

"What kind of question is that?" Thomas asked, raising his voice. Travis and Sarah heard him and looked his way. So did several others.

"Well, you don't think that God talks to William," Reid continued to talk softly. "So do you really want God to talk to you?"

"I don't know. I would like to know why God let me live but took Matthew."

Reid wanted to say, "So do I," but he didn't. He hadn't thought of his son all day. It was probably the first day since his death that had happened. Now Matt was in his thoughts again. He wasn't able to say anything to Thomas right now.

Reid pulled his bottom lip between his teeth and closed his eyes, praying that God would keep him steady and focused on this gathering, asking God to keep his heart from sorrow until everyone left.

"Papa said you did the funeral yourself. I couldn't have done that if it had been one of my sons. You're so much stronger than I am." Thomas looked toward the man in the wheelchair and saw moisture in Reid's eyes. "I know how close you two were. I love my sons, but I've never had that closeness with any of them."

Thomas reached over and grabbed Reid's plate. "You're going to drop this if you're not careful." He handed the plate back to Reid.

Reid took the plate and held it on his lap with both hands.

¹ Proverbs 19:21.

² Psalm 33:11.

The two sat in silence for several minutes. Eventually, Reid said, "Do you want a better relationship with your sons?"

"It would be nice. Right now, I think they just tell me stuff so I can tell their mother. If she could read the letters herself, I doubt they would even address them to me. Love hurts," Thomas said.

"Thomas." The compassion could be heard in Reid's voice. "Love doesn't hurt. It heals. Love brings people together and brings goodness. What hurts is betrayal, thoughtlessness, uncaring actions, careless words, and being self-centered."

"Love is the greatest gift God gave us. Love knows to be kind and not to hurt others. Love is what we want from the minute we're born. A baby naturally wants love from his parents. He wants to be cared for, and if he's loved, he thrives. That desire and the ability to love exist within us from the moment we are conceived. But it has to be cultivated. Didn't any of your babies just look at you, and you saw the love in their eyes?"

Thomas looked at his plate. "Yeah, I've seen that."

"Why don't you try to build a stronger relationship with them?" Reid asked, leaning forward in the chair.

"I don't guess I know how. What am I going to do? Write them each a letter every week?"

"Why don't you start with William? He's here close to you. I imagine, if you spent time with him, you would find someone you don't know very well. You could learn some things from him, and you could teach him some of your tricks. I'm sure he would appreciate that as he tries to build his practice here. Sarah would help you, if you asked her," Reid advised. "This would be a good time to love on your wife more too."

"Yeah, she doesn't like me very much right now." Thomas had to admit that much. "I guess I need to ask her forgiveness too."

"We all have people we need to ask forgiveness of. And we all need to forgive things done to us by other people. 'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.'"¹

¹ Ephesians 4:32.

“I need forgiveness,” Thomas said again. “I know that. And William probably thinks I have no confidence in him at all. Papa said the surgery he did on your head helped.”

Thomas was sitting beside Reid, and he could clearly see the scar on Reid’s temple.

“Yeah, it did. It helped a lot. I can get in the sun again.” Reid laughed slightly. “I’m still having headaches, but they haven’t gotten nearly as bad.”

“I never would have seen what he saw in that x-ray.” Thomas shook his head. “It wouldn’t have occurred to me to look for anything wrong there.”

“He’s a good doctor, and he cares about his patients, not only their physical problem but every part of their life. He’s going to do good here.”

Thomas scowled and turned away from Reid. He didn’t know why he was even talking to Reid. His young brother-in-law always had an answer. It usually had something to do with hope or forgiveness. That never bothered Thomas in the past, but talking to Reid now annoyed him.

Reid talked about having joy, but Thomas wondered if he was really happy. The smile that stayed on Reid’s lips showed happiness, but his eyes said he was sad or maybe in pain. Reid’s joyous hope was sickening though. Thomas didn’t want to hear any more of his upbeat advice, praising William for doing good.

Thomas now recognized the pain in his brother-in-law’s eyes and the rigid posture of his body. But Thomas didn’t care. He was callous and unfeeling. Any empathy he had formerly had for other people was gone, and if Reid didn’t ask for help, he wasn’t going to try to alleviate any of his pain. William could do it.

Thomas made his own excuse for not being happy himself. Suffering took too much out of a person. He was too tired to be happy. Thomas wanted to detach himself from these rosy people in his life, Reid, Sarah, Luke, and William. Even Papa, as quiet as he was, bothered Thomas. But where else could he go at this party? Sitting here with Reid seemed the best option right now.

Mrs. Leachman stepped in front of the two men, carrying a piece of German chocolate cake. “I thought you’d be finished with your food by now. I brought you a piece of cake.”

“Thanks.” Reid smiled at the woman, leaning back in the chair. “Why don’t you set it right there on the porch, and I’ll get it in a few minutes.”

Reid took another bite from his plate.

Mrs. Leachman pulled a rocking chair across the porch noisily to sit next to Reid, interrupting his conversation with Thomas. “That was a nice wedding, Judge.”

“Thank you,” he replied.

“That was also a nice funeral you gave your son a few months back.” Mrs. Leachman was talking to Reid, but she wasn’t looking at him.

Reid gave a half smile and nodded his head, knowing that she didn’t see him. Saamel came to his father holding tightly to his flute in one hand and two cookies in the other, digging his elbows into Reid as he climbed into his father’s lap. Reid passed his plate to Thomas and said, “Would you set this on the floor please?”

The doctor took the plate and Reid offered, “Thank you.”

Saamel turned himself around and leaned back on his father. Reid wrapped his arms around the boy. Saamel smiled at Thomas and offered him a cookie.

Thomas shook his head but said nothing.

“When I first met you, I thought you were just another do-good hypocrite that talked big. But you’re not. I don’t know what you were talking about that day in church, but you sounded sincere. Then Bonnie met your family, and I heard her telling Kathleen about them. But I don’t understand you.” Mrs. Leachman looked directly at Reid for the first time. “Why did you take in all these children?”

“Because they needed someone to take care of them,” Reid replied. “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this—to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”¹

¹ James 1:27.

“Did you really want those other Indian children?” she asked.

“Yes, I did,” Reid said. Saamel turned around to look at his father’s face, took his last bite of cookie, and slid off his father’s lap. He stood staring at Thomas.

Thomas smiled at the boy but continued to say nothing. The doctor turned to watch the conversation with the woman he didn’t know and listened. He hadn’t seen the Indian children, but Sarah had told him about them.

Mrs. Leachman made a face at Reid. She still didn’t understand him. “Do you still think that suffering brings joy? Did what happened to you make you happy?” Reid heard the hint of a spiteful attitude in her voice.

“Joy comes from knowing God personally, from knowing that God loves me and takes care of me, and from following him, not from my circumstances. The Psalmist said, ‘You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.’¹ Happiness comes from what’s happening around me. Joy comes from within, from the presence of God’s Spirit living in me. Sometimes we just use the words interchangeably, and sometimes we get them confused,” Reid explained.

“I still don’t understand it. There’s nothing in this world to be happy about. God lets bad things happen, and you still say you get joy from knowing him. God let you get taken by those men. God let you get hurt and let your son die. He let your brother get shot. God let William get burned, and he let William’s father get sick. He let Kathleen’s husband die. How can that give anyone joy?”

“Mrs. Leachman, have you met Thomas Stewart, William’s father?” Reid indicated Thomas by lifting his hand toward the doctor. The woman leaned over to look past Reid, but Thomas gave no response, so she leaned back in her chair.

“God allowed these things to happen not because he wanted them to happen, but because he gives us free will to choose our own path. The men that took me and the men that killed Matt and shot Luke chose to do those things. We got hurt because of their sin.

¹ Psalm 16:11.

William got burned, and Thomas got sick not because God wanted it, but because of the circumstances. It’s just the way things are in a fallen world. Sin entered the world and the earth groaned. ‘The earth is defiled by its people. They have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt.’¹ Reid stared at the people gathered in front of him without really seeing them anymore. He was tired.

Reid continued, “Bad things happen, and we suffer because of what happens. But God is using them for good, to serve his greater purpose. ‘And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.’² ‘God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.’³”

Reid stopped to think for a minute. When he was tired, his mind didn’t seem to work as fast. He needed some coffee to perk him up. He tried to explain further. “Two of the men that took me and shot Luke have been stopped. They won’t hurt anybody else. The men that killed Matt have been stopped too. None of that would have happened if I hadn’t been taken. How many more would have been hurt or killed by those men if they were still out there?”

“My being taken led me to bring four homeless orphaned children home with me. I don’t know what’s going to happen to them now, but I know they knew love and safety for a short time. I know they were introduced to Jesus and they’re being prayed for every day. William’s injuries brought him back here. He was able to take care of his father and me. He wouldn’t have met Bonnie if he hadn’t come home and maybe if she hadn’t fallen down those stairs. I think their marriage is a good thing. I don’t know why Thomas got sick, but God is going to use it to serve his purpose too.

¹ Isaiah 24:5–6a.

² Romans 8:28 (ESV).

³ 2 Corinthians 5:19–20a.

“God gets the glory for everything good that happens. ‘Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”’¹ If you believe God is working, then you recognize his glory. It’s not just random luck.”

Flute music began to fill the air again, and the people in the yard got quiet, turning to look at Saamel. He was sitting alone, against the wall on the porch.

Thomas didn’t hear the music. He was thinking about what Reid had just said to this woman. He had to agree—it was good that William had come home, for him, Luke, and Reid. And Sarah was enjoying having one of her children home again.

Reid pulled on the wheels of the chair to back up from between the other two and turned to watch his son for a few minutes. Then he left to go into the house, headed to the kitchen to get some coffee.

28 CHAPTER

Sarah was in the yard hanging up the laundry when a dog appeared nudging her leg and jumping on her to say hello.

“Well, who are you?” she said, leaning down to run her hand over the dog’s head and neck.

The dog got excited and began jumping hysterically, spinning and running in circles around Sarah. Sarah laughed. “You are a happy fellow.”

The dog began to playfully bark. Sarah squatted on the ground and called the dog, “Come on, fella. Come here.”

The dog wasn’t listening. He was too excited. He ran at Sarah, bumping into her hard and knocking her to the ground. She reached an arm out to catch herself, and her hand hit the side of the clothes basket, tipping it over. The dog ran at her again and grabbed a towel from the basket, dragging it away. He dropped the towel and turned. She didn’t see him coming as he jumped on her, knocking her down again as he grabbed a pair of Thomas’s pants and ran off with them.

“Thomas! Help!” Sarah called as she was laughing. This dog was just playing, but it was too wild for her to handle.

“Thomas!”

Thomas came out the door and saw what was happening. He started down the steps as he began yelling at the animal.

“Hey! You go on. Stop it!”

The animal ran at him, but it wasn’t playing this time. This was serious barking. He was trying to keep Thomas on the porch.

Thomas continued down the steps as the dog came at him again, leaping over and over, hitting Thomas with his paws midsec-

¹ John 11:40.

tion. Thomas went down on his hip, trying to catch himself as his arm hit too. But he wasn't able to stop the momentum, and his head hit the edge of the steps. He was dazed.

With the dog away from her, Sarah was able to get up. She started toward her husband, calling his name.

She had heard the noise when he hit the steps, but she was too far away to see what had happened. "Thomas, what happened?" He wasn't answering her, but she could hear him moaning.

The dog was in front of her, growling as he watched Thomas, guarding her from her husband. It kept bumping her legs and wouldn't let her get near the porch.

It would have been funny if Thomas was still talking, but Sarah didn't know what had happened to her husband.

Suddenly Bella slipped under the fence and came at the other dog. She barked a few times, and Sarah knew it was Bella. The young black-and-white dog submitted quickly to the large older animal and crouched on the ground as Bella took him by the throat softly growling. Everything went still.

"Thomas?" Sarah called again as she headed for the porch.

"Sarah, I'm comin'." Sarah heard her father call to her.

"Papa, where's Thomas?"

"On the steps," Travis called as he passed the laundry scattered over the ground.

Travis arrived at the steps the same time his daughter did. "He's bleedin', Sarah. He banged 'is 'ead. Call William."

"I'll be right back," Sarah said, as she headed toward the telephone to make the call.

Travis went back into the yard and grabbed a towel from the ground. He returned to Thomas and pressed the towel to the gash on his son-in-law's head, helping him sit up.

Sarah came back onto the porch. "He's on his way. How's Thomas?"

Travis laughed slightly. "He's 'wake but I don' think he knows where 'e is."

Sarah found them and sat down beside her husband. Thomas was sitting up now, but if Travis hadn't been holding him, he prob-

ably couldn't have stayed there. Sarah pulled him into her arms, and his head fell onto her shoulder as Travis continued to hold the towel to the cut.

William arrived with Bonnie and together they got Thomas into the house and onto the bed. William closed the wound and bandaged his father's head.

Thomas wasn't talking, but William could tell that his father had become aware of what was going on. Thomas would scowl and pull his head away as William worked. And he kept rubbing his hip.

"Were you hurt anywhere else, Father?" William asked.

Thomas didn't answer him but continued to squirm, trying to avoid William's touch.

"Father, hold still. Stop being such a baby. Your little tantrums are getting old."

Thomas held still but the expression on his face still showed contempt for his son.

"Okay, you're done," William said as he began to gather the bloody laundry that was used to keep the bed clean.

Travis had been standing near the door watching. He now shook his head, not liking his son-in-law's ungrateful manner. "Do everything without grumbling or arguing,"¹ he said softly. "Help and give without expecting a return... Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we're at our worst. Our Father is kind. You be kind."² I'm goin' home." Neither Travis's voice nor facial expression showed any emotion at all.

William turned around to look at his grandfather. "Bye, Grandpa. Thank you!" Then the young doctor turned back to his father and firmly added, "Don't get up."

Looking at his mother sitting on the edge of the bed, William said, "He's okay. He needs to stay in bed a little while. He can get up this afternoon if he feels like it." Turning back to his father, he insisted, "But only if you don't get dizzy."

¹ Philippians 2:14.

² Luke 6:35-36 (MSG).

William had second thoughts. He picked up his stethoscope and turned back around to listen to his father's heartbeat. William shook his head. "Okay, I changed my mind. Don't get out of bed until I come back this evening."

Thomas huffed and turned to look toward the other side of the room. Sarah ran her hand lovingly over her husband's face. "Bonnie's doing the wash for me. I'm going to start lunch. William, would you and Bonnie stay?"

"Sure, Mother. We'd love to." The young doctor turned and saw his father's fuming face.

Sarah left for the kitchen.

"Father, you're going to have to get over being mad at me at some point. Your making Mother miserable, and I'd like to have my father back."

"I apologized to you. I'm letting you stay at the clinic. I'm letting you keep the Olds." Thomas tried to defend his actions.

"But you're not being nice. You resent my helping you. You don't want me here, and I can feel it. Don't you think Mother and Bonnie feel it too? How long are you going to make life miserable for people?"

Thomas scrunched down farther into the bed and rolled over so he faced away from his son.

"Father, I know you love Jesus. I know your spirit wants to be like Jesus, but your flesh is winning. Ask Jesus for help. 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'¹ 'For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other.'² Fight, Father! Jesus will win the battle for you if you just allow him to do your fighting. Let him in."

William watched his father who didn't move. William was through. He didn't want to fight, and he didn't want to be around his father when he acted like this.

¹ Matthew 26:41.

² Galatians 5:17a.

"I'm going to tell Mother we won't be staying for lunch. Proverbs says, 'Do not eat the food of a begrudging host, do not crave his delicacies, for he is the kind of person who is always thinking about the cost. 'Eat and drink,' he says to you, but his heart is not with you.'"¹

William began packing the supplies.

"No, don't go," Thomas said with a sigh. "Your mother gets mad at me every time you leave because of me. She wants you here. Stay."

"No, Father. You have to want me too."

There was a noise in the kitchen, and the men heard the women laughing. William smiled. His mother and his wife got along so well together. They enjoyed each other's company. He wished they could be together more often.

"William!" There was panic in the call.

William moved swiftly to the kitchen. He found his wife holding a rag around his mother's hand with a broken bowl and vegetables scattered across the floor.

Bonnie looked at her husband. "She cut herself."

William took his mother's hand to look. A large bleeding gash lay across her open palm. William wrapped the dish rag back around it. He squeezed her hand tight and helped his mother to a chair at the table.

"I'll be right back. Hold this tight. I'm going to get my bag from the bedroom."

As William bandaged Sarah's hand, she explained how it happened. "I dropped the bowl." She laughed. "It went flying and hit the side of the table. I reached down to start cleaning it up, but I put my hand straight onto a shard that was sticking up. I wasn't careful enough."

"It's okay, Mother. Bonnie's cleaning it up, and you're fine. It will just take time to heal." William froze for a moment. "You and Father can heal together." He laughed.

William pulled his mother against him and wrapped his arm around her. She wouldn't be able to use that hand for a while, and

¹ Proverbs 23:6-7.

William was considering what he needed to do to take care of his parents.

He spoke to both of the women. "Father still doesn't want us here, but you're not going to be able to use that hand for several days. I can't leave you two here alone. It may be a battle zone, but I feel like we need to stay to take care of you both."

"Oh, William. I would love that. I get scared when it's just me and your father here. Sometimes I call his name, and he doesn't answer me. I don't know what I'd do if he passed out somewhere. I wouldn't know where he was. What if he needed something, and I couldn't do it?" Sarah said. "I'm not strong enough to help him move around when he feels weak, and now, I'm not going to be able to cook or wash."

"How often does he feel weak?" The doctor was concerned.

"It happens. Sometimes. When I help him to the bed, I'm scared he's going to pull both of us down. I'm just not strong enough to help him like that."

William nodded. "Okay. I'm going to go to the clinic and get a few things. We'll stay till your hand is good anyway. We're going to take care of things, but we're going to stay out of his way as much as possible. I'll be back in a few minutes. Bonnie, anything specific you need?"

Bonnie hugged her husband. "I'll go later and get what I need." Then turning to her mother-in-law, Bonnie said, "The floor is clean. I'll get lunch ready."

Thomas woke startled for the fourth night in a row. It was the same dream. And it was strange. Papa was there with Sarah, but Sarah was a little girl and Papa was young. Thomas's own father, Joseph Stewart, was there with Thomas. But Thomas was a little boy too. And there were two boys he didn't know and William. But William was a man. And Bonnie was taking care of the children. They were at the house in Harris, and everyone was having fun. The children were playing, while Papa and his own father watched from the porch.

Each time Thomas had this dream, the younger him would get farther and farther away from his father. And William would get closer to Papa. Papa and William seemed to be almost the same person, interchangeable, connected. William was drawing the children toward himself and the two men on the porch, while Thomas kept falling, stumbling. He wasn't able to keep up with the other children.

Thomas relaxed on his pillow. It was just a dream. That blow to his head must have been worse than he thought. He'd had this same dream every night since it happened, and he couldn't get it off his mind.

Thomas closed his eyes again, ready to go back to sleep.

*I will strengthen (your house), and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them back, because I have had compassion on (you), and they will be as though (you) had not rejected them, for I am the Lord their God and I will answer them.*¹

Thomas's eyes flew open wide. What was that? Thomas somehow knew for certain that William and his other children had prayed for him and would forgive him. He knew that he could build a better relationship with his children.

Thomas lay still in the dark beside his sleeping wife. His mind was running in all directions, but he couldn't keep a single thought long enough to consider it. Yet he somehow knew within his Spirit what God was telling him.

*If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today...All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God.*²

*But who can discern their own errors? Forgive (their) hidden faults.*³

Thomas continued that scripture as the Spirit spoke it. "Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me."⁴

Thomas knew he had sinned. He had been ugly to his son, and he had denied God's power to speak to people. Maybe it was jealousy. William was young. He was just a few years out of medical school

¹ Zechariah 10:6 (ESV).

² Deuteronomy 28:1-2.

³ Psalm 19:12.

⁴ Psalm 19:13a.

and had the latest medical training. He had taken care of Luke better than Thomas could have. William had stopped him from doing unnecessary surgery, and Joshua had sided with William. Maybe that's what hurt the most. Both of his sons were better doctors, and they had not learned from him. He had given up his teaching position at the hospital when he moved to Harris, and his skills had become stagnant. Then William had stood up to him and corrected him. Maybe that's why he wasn't angry with Joshua. Joshua had followed his father until William had protested.

Or maybe he was angry with William because William had not told them when he was injured. That still bothered Thomas. William didn't come home or tell them of his injury, until he couldn't take care of himself anymore. Then he hadn't contacted his father, he had contacted Joshua.

But William had also done something with Reid that Thomas had never been able to do. He stopped Reid's headaches. William had taken the initiative to learn what to do for Reid's back and had helped with that too. Thomas could have done that, but he didn't. Why hadn't he wanted to help Reid?

"Lord, I let my jealousy and hurt feelings get in the way. I have sinned—sinned against you and sinned against my family." Thomas spoke out loud. "Forgive me!"

Sarah woke, listening to her husband speak. She knew he was talking to God.

Thomas heard the Spirit speak again. *Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.*¹ *I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare.*²

"You're talking about William, aren't you?" Thomas asked.

*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*³

"I tried to, Lord. I taught them your Word!" Thomas tried to justify his actions, more to himself than to the Lord. But he knew

¹ Psalm 127:3.

² Philippians 2:20.

³ Ephesians 6:4.

God knew everything. He had not done all he could to teach his children. The guilt had weighed heavy on him the last few years, since all of his children had left home. He needed to admit this to God and to himself.

The Spirit spoke again. *Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*¹

Thomas knew he had not loved William the way he should have. William came home injured, and Thomas had taken offense that his son wouldn't let him help with the therapy. William didn't even want him to look at the scars. Thomas should have loved his son anyway, but instead he had closed his eyes to what his son did need—understanding and compassion.

His son had also come to him wanting to learn more about God. He was searching for the truth, and Thomas had ridiculed him and told him how wrong he was. Why didn't he just admit he didn't understand this aspect of the Father? Why didn't he encourage his son to learn from Papa or Luke?

And Reid. Reid had lived in his house for years, both in Denver and in Harris. He was just like a son to Thomas. He had ignored his son's request on Reid's behalf, and Thomas had not taken care of him.

Thomas could have helped Reid. He knew that. It wouldn't have taken much effort to do what Reid needed. Thomas realized he had avoided Reid out of spite for William. But Reid didn't need help anymore. William was doing everything. Thomas would ask Reid's forgiveness too.

The Spirit was convicting Thomas of his sin. Now Thomas felt even more guilt. He was just being mean when he had allowed Reid to suffer.

Thomas cried out loud, "For the sake of your name, Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great."²

¹ 1 Timothy 5:8.

² Psalm 25:11.

Sarah listened to her husband struggle with God. She wasn't going to interfere. She would let the Lord do his work within Thomas's spirit.

"I believe!" Thomas said loudly. "I do believe, both in your Son and in the Spirit. The Spirit does speak to your children."

*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.*¹

"I believe in your Son, and I praise you, Father God! 'Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. He fills my life with good things.'² William was right. I was wrong. Forgive me! Forgive me!" Thomas cried.

*But if from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.*³

"Yes, Lord. I will." Thomas now lay exhausted on the bed. He realized the cut on his head was throbbing. He felt weak, and Sarah somehow sensed that the conversation was over. She rolled toward Thomas and took him in her arms without saying anything. She wouldn't disturb his thoughts. He needed to simmer in them so that he would remember. But she would give him comfort, expressing her love in a physical way as God expressed his in a spiritual way.

Thomas accepted her comfort and laid his face against her chest. As his body began to relax against her, Thomas realized he didn't have a relationship with his son. Why would William have come to him? He'd never come to him before, not with anything. None of his sons had. They had always gone to each other. Even when they were young in Denver, the older boys had gone to Cleve and Luke. Thomas had thought it cute the way his sons had taken to their uncles. Now Thomas realized his sons had gone to Luke and Cleve because he had made himself unavailable to them. He began to softly cry, thinking of how he had always been too busy for his family.

¹ Acts 16:31b.

² Psalm 103:2–5a (NLT).

³ Deuteronomy 4:29.

He needed to talk with his son, to ask his sincere forgiveness this time, and he wished the morning would come soon. He'd talk to his son at breakfast, as soon as he saw William, no matter who else was there. And he would write all of his other children, asking their forgiveness too.

Sarah tightened her arms around him, and her spirit began singing praises to God.

Reid moved down the street slowly. William had returned from Iowa weeks ago and had quickly helped with the pain Reid felt in his back. Now, as the weather began cooling off, Reid was back at work and able to move around town using the crutches. He could drive the Ford again, if he could get someone else to crank the starter. And he was slowly transitioning to the walking sticks at home. Recovery was going well, and life was settling into a comfortable routine for the first time in months.

School had started, and the children had come home the first day telling their parents that Dan McClelland was not at school. Mrs. Yates had told them that he would be back at some point. He had gone out of town on business, and she didn't know how long his business would take. When he returned, he would again be the sixth-grade teacher. Until then, Bonnie was filling in. She didn't know what she was doing, but she was following Mr. McClelland's instructions. All the students liked her. They were now weeks into the school year, and Dan McClelland still had not returned.

Chipeta was left home alone for the first time in her life. Saamel had started first grade, the last of their children. She didn't know what to do with herself, so she had begun going to Reid's office at the courthouse a few times a week and was helping him.

It had been almost twelve years since they finished law school. She remembered quite a bit and was handling much of the correspondence with minimal help. She would ask every day if Reid wanted her to go to the post office to pick up the mail and drop off

what had been completed. Reid always said no. He wanted to pick up the mail himself.

He hoped correspondence would arrive from Dan McClelland, but so far none had come. He didn't tell Chipeta what he was looking for. He didn't want her to get her hopes up if their plans fell through. He simply told her he needed the exercise and liked getting out of the office.

Reid had sent Dan McClelland on a mission for him. The judge found out that Dan knew Gregory Sutton. They had worked together occasionally when Dan was teaching at the mission school on the Apache Reservation.

The teacher had told Reid that he understood how the tribal councils operated and he thought it might be possible to get the children back, if they were patient and followed the proper procedures. McClelland had left just a few days after his conversation with Reid at the Avery home. He headed to Oklahoma, to find Gregory Sutton and the children.

While Reid had not heard from McClelland, he had received a letter from Greg Sutton. Sutton had, again, apologized for causing the family sorrow and wrote that he hoped the incident had not set back Reid's recovery. He also wrote that he could no longer do this work. There were too many things he was asked to do at the reservations that he felt were wrong, even if they were lawful, like taking these children from a loving family.

The children were now at the residential mission orphanage. Their physical needs were being cared for, and they were being offered spiritual food. There were nice ladies taking care of them, but Sutton knew they were not getting the love and personal care they had gotten with the Britt family.

He wrote that the girls never talked and sat by themselves most of the time. They seemed to like small, cramped, dark spaces and would often hide from their caregivers. They didn't interact with anyone unless they were forced to.

Sutton wrote that Blade was a problem too. He wasn't making friends and stayed to himself. The boy also didn't follow rules well. He did the work he was assigned to do but would disappear unex-

pectedly and would sometimes be gone for hours. He was learning to read but refused to study outside of the classroom. He was also leaving his building at night and slipping into the girl's dorm to visit his sisters. It upset the girls when their brother was caught and taken from them. He was being punished several times a week. But the punishment didn't seem to matter. Nothing caused his behavior to change.

The baby was kept separate from the others and was left in her bed alone most of the time. This family wasn't together. They were torn apart.

However, this was the law, and Sutton understood this, but he didn't think it was right. Sutton thought he might like to find a nice quiet country church where he could serve God's people.

Reid had stopped in the middle of the letter to pray for the children. Blade had worked hard, even if it was misguided, to keep his sisters with him, and now they were separated. This saddened Reid greatly, but he smiled when the Spirit reassured him.

You have planted them, and they have taken root. They grow and bear fruit. You are always on their lips (and not) far from their hearts.¹ I am with (them) and will watch over (them) wherever (they) go, and I will bring (them) back to this land.²

When Reid got back to his office that day, he prepared a letter and sent it to Sutton giving information about his own church's need for a pastor. Now he waited for a reply from Sutton too.

Reid left the post office and headed for the bank. This was the last errand he needed to do before he returned to his office to continue going through the mound of paperwork that had stacked up over the summer. He was almost to the bottom and had begun to schedule court dates beginning in just a few weeks.

The judge had been greeted by many as he walked the street that morning. He was moving slowly across the new "Belgian block" Main Street, nearing the bank, when he heard someone call his name.

"Judge Britt!"

¹ Jeremiah 12:2.

² Genesis 28:15a.

Reid stopped and turned around. He didn't know this man. He began moving back the way he had come, approaching the stranger.

Reid smiled as he reached the man and stuck his hand out. "Good morning. What can I do for you?"

"I'm John Coleman." And a sinister grin appeared on the man's face. But Reid was no longer smiling.

"I wish I had known who you were when you were in our car last spring. I would have done more of this." And with great power, Coleman punched Reid in the stomach.

Reid folded, but only because the judge was holding to the crutches with both hands, he stayed on his feet. Then he dropped one crutch and swayed some but stayed doubled over. Coleman made another comment and pulled Reid roughly to a standing position and slapped him across the face, holding to the front of Reid's shirt.

But Reid was ready for him this time. He had pulled the knife out of the sheath in his boot as he recovered from the punch to the stomach. As Coleman pulled Reid closer to him, Reid plunged the knife into the man. A surprised and stunned look came to Coleman's face as Reid twisted the knife farther into him.

But Coleman wasn't giving up that easy. He clutched Reid's hand and jerked it and the knife away from his body. The blood-covered knife fell to the ground. Coleman grabbed at Reid with one hand, wrapping his big hand around Reid's throat, squeezing and cutting off Reid's air. Reid stood on his own two feet and slammed the top of the crutch into Coleman's chin. He turned the crutch quickly and punched him in the stomach with the longer end, sending the man backward.

Coleman was bleeding badly from the knife wound, but he just wasn't stopping. The punch in the stomach caused him to release his grip on Reid's throat, but not before he managed to pull Reid forward in the process. Coleman continued to stagger backward and reached into his jacket. But he didn't have time to pull out a gun.

The marshal appeared on the sidewalk and ran at Coleman from behind. He grabbed the outlaw, twisting his arm and forcing the man forward and onto the ground. As Coleman fell forward, he swung his other arm, and his closed fist clipped Reid in the Adam's apple.

As they hit the ground, the marshal put his knee in the man's back to hold him still. He looked up at the judge. Reid was still on his feet with one hand on the grip of the crutch in front of him. He was leaning over, resting his head on the top of the crutch as he coughed. He looked up and tried to smile at the marshal, but with every intake of air, Reid felt the invisible hands tighten around his throat. Another cough interrupted his breathing, and he felt dizzy.

Luke appeared and reached for his brother as Reid's face turned ashen, and he lost his balance.

The marshal began to rise with his prisoner as he kept his eyes on the judge. "I'll call the doctor to look at this guy, then I'll send him to see you."

Reid nodded.

"Come on, little brother," Luke said. "Let's get you home."

29

CHAPTER

About lunchtime, William entered Reid's bedroom. The doctor could hear his uncle's labored breathing. It was a deep throaty sound as he tried to draw a full breath, exhaled briefly, and then tried to draw in another deep breath. But when Reid saw William, he seemed to give up and settled for short shallow breaths. The doctor pulled a chair across the room to sit next to the bed where Reid lay.

William's lips separated and curled upward into a warm smile. "You really did a number on that guy today. Took me close to two hours to patch him up. Another quarter inch, and I wouldn't have had to worry about him at all."

Reid silently laughed, but the laugh turned into a gentle cough.

"Your back okay?" William said.

Reid nodded.

"Luke said he choked you and you got hit in the throat." William raised Reid's chin with his hand and leaned forward to look at the bruises. "Does your throat hurt?" William asked.

Reid closed his eyes as the doctor touched him, and Reid nodded again.

"Feels like you've got something stuck in your throat. You're having trouble breathing, aren't you? Feels like your throat is closing off? Like he's still holding onto you?"

Reid looked at William. William was smart. He was figuring this out without Reid saying anything.

Reid nodded.

"That's why you never want to eat, isn't it? It makes your throat hurt, and you can't breathe?"

Reid nodded again, still watching William with drooping eyes.

"Has it improved any since you were first injured?" the young doctor asked.

"Some," Reid whispered.

"When you can't breathe, it makes you sleepy, doesn't it?" William asked.

Another nod.

William smiled. "But you're scared to go to sleep." That was a statement, not a question.

Reid looked into William's eyes and knew the doctor knew everything. But how did he know?

William saw the question in Reid's eyes. "I read Father's journal. Remember? He said you couldn't swallow, that your throat would close off when you slept and that you would stop breathing. You knew that was happening, didn't you?"

Reid nodded.

"You knew they were watching you too. To make sure you didn't stop breathing for too long?"

Reid nodded and coughed again.

"We know there was some physical damage to your throat because of your voice. When I felt your throat, I thought that cartilage and muscles were probably damaged, along with your vocal cords. Your wind pipe could have some damage too," the doctor explained. "When any of it swells, it pushes in on your windpipe. I don't know what we can do about that. Just see if we can keep the swelling down. Have you taken some aspirin?"

Reid shook his head this time.

"Let me get you some." William left and came back with a small cup of milk and took some aspirin from a bottle in his bag. He handed them both to Reid. The injured man rolled slightly and put the aspirin and cup to his mouth, but he had trouble swallowing. William helped him sit up, patiently waiting. When Reid was able to swallow, he collapsed back onto the bed, closing his eyes.

William took the cup. "Does your stomach hurt when you take aspirin?"

“Sometimes,” Reid whispered with almost no sound coming out. Then he coughed gently.

“You need to eat something when you take aspirin. Don’t take any if you haven’t eaten. It’ll mess up your stomach. I want you to try eating more, but not all at once. Keep a plate somewhere close. Take a bite every once in a while. You should be able to get a plate of food down in the course of a day. That will be more than you usually eat, isn’t it? Can you try to do that? Eat stuff that’s easy to swallow. Don’t irritate your throat.”

Reid nodded.

“Okay. Keep taking the aspirin, and the swelling should go down in a day or two. I’m going to sit here.” William sat back, making himself comfortable. “You sleep. I’ll make sure you don’t stop breathing for too long.”

Reid opened his eyes gently, looked at William and smiled. His eyes told his nephew thank you. Reid’s eyes closed slowly, and he went to sleep.

Chipeta stepped onto the porch as William and Thomas drove into the yard. William stepped out of the automobile and smiled. “Is Reid home?”

“You know he is,” the Ute woman answered. “He’s in his office.”

William turned to his father who was getting out of the Oldsmobile. “I’ll be back in a little while.”

Thomas nodded. “I’ll be here.”

William smiled at Chipeta and winked as he held to his father and Thomas moved up the steps of the porch. Chipeta smiled back, wondering what William meant by the wink.

Thomas gave Chipeta a hug and moved toward the door. He hadn’t hugged her in years. She turned to look at William again. He had a crooked smile on his face, and it reminded her of her father-in-law’s smile.

When Thomas got to the office door, he saw Reid leaning over his desk reading. He held his broken eyeglasses in place, and there was a half-eaten plate of food on the table.

“Am I interrupting your meal?” the doctor asked.

Reid looked up and shook his head.

“What happened to your eyeglasses?” Thomas said.

“I broke them,” the judge said at a whisper.

“Did you get William to order you another pair?” the doctor asked.

Reid shook his head again. “I like them like this,” he whispered.

“Why are you whispering?”

“I got in a fight. Got hit in the throat.” Thomas made a face, gritting his teeth, closing one eye, and tucking his chin in, knowing this could have hurt Reid badly. Thomas had overheard William telling Bonnie about Reid stabbing a man in a fight, but he’d only heard part of the conversation. William had said nothing to his father, and Thomas had not asked about the incident.

“William said to give it time and it’ll heal. I should be able to talk then,” Reid explained.

Thomas nodded. “Did he tell you not to talk now?”

Reid nodded.

“Good,” Thomas said. “I want to talk this time. You just listen.”

Reid sat back in his chair, laying his eyeglasses on the table and turning to watch the doctor as he stepped to the window. The judge waited patiently as Thomas looked toward the trees behind the house.

“Reid, I’ve acted poorly, and I want to ask your forgiveness. I was angry with William, and I took my anger out on everyone.” Thomas stopped a minute to think, then he corrected himself. “No, I think I was angry at myself. I think God caused me to get sick so I would pay attention to him. He’s been trying to tell me something for several years, and I wouldn’t listen.”

Thomas turned around to look at Reid. “Reid, you know I love you like you were my own son. Of all your brothers and sisters, you were the hardest to get to know. But once I got to know you, I loved you the most. Maybe it’s because you were the most like Papa. Maybe it’s because I held you when you were just a baby. I don’t know.”

Thomas turned to look out the window again and continued talking.

“I do love your father. I’ve always admired the man for his ability to follow God and press on through anything that happened.

“When you came home injured, you showed that same faithfulness. I got to know you even better during those months, better than I ever knew any of my own sons. I know you don’t remember it, but you talked to me the first few days you were home. I loved it. None of my sons ever talked with me like that.”

Thomas stopped to look at Reid again. “But I didn’t believe some of what you said. I thought you had hallucinated about Jesus and the angels. I should have known better.

“But you needed me during that time, and even after you moved out of the house, you needed me. That’s something else my sons never did. They never needed me. At least they never showed me that they did. They never came to me asking for help.”

Reid interrupted, “They needed you.”

“You’re not supposed to talk. You’re supposed to listen,” Thomas said, pointing a finger at Reid. “I was feeling bad when William and Josh came home. That day I brought Luke home, I didn’t think I was going to make it. I knew there was something wrong with me, but I didn’t want to admit it.

“William was home, but he didn’t want me around. He wouldn’t accept my help when I offered it, not with the bandages or with therapy. Then, even with his injuries, he took care of Luke better than I was doing. Joshua saw that too. I got my feelings hurt. The bitterness was growing even before I ended up in bed. When William came to me, I criticized and degraded him. I never should have done that.

“I guess when I got sick, I just let everything pull me down. I quit thinking about serving God, and I was just thinking of myself. Problem was, I always served God on my terms.”

“Anyway, I wanted to say I’m sorry. I’m sorry I didn’t believe you when you said Jesus took care of you in those tunnels. I’m sorry I didn’t listen to what you *weren’t* saying during that time. I wasn’t paying attention to you, just like I didn’t pay attention to my own sons. I should have noticed how you felt those weeks you thought

Chipeta and Papa were dead. I don’t know why I didn’t see it. You were hurting inside. I saw that much, but I just let you hurt alone.

“And I’m sorry now. I’m sorry I didn’t help you months ago when I should have. I knew you were suffering, but I was mad and I took it out on you and William, the two people that could have helped me the most. I’m sorry.” Thomas shook his head. “I know saying I’m sorry doesn’t fix anything, but I am sorry.”

Reid started to open his mouth, but Thomas threw his index finger into the air and said, “Don’t talk. You don’t need to talk. You need to heal.”

The young judge reached for his Bible lying on the table and quickly found the verse he wanted. He handed the Bible to Thomas and pointed.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”¹

“I know. But some of us have sinned more, and we need more forgiveness,” Thomas said.

Reid took the Bible and found another scripture, pointing, to call his brother-in-law’s attention to the correct verse.

“And the person who keeps every law of God but makes one little slip is just as guilty as the person who has broken every law there is.”²

“I know.” Thomas sighed.

Reid again took the Bible and looked up another verse.

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited

¹ Romans 3:23.

² James 2:10 (TLB).

me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me.”¹

Thomas smiled. He had taken care of Reid. He had taken him into his home and provided clothing, shelter, food, and drink while he went to school. He had taken care of him when he was injured and looked after his needs long after Reid moved from his house. Reid was a stranger when he arrived in Denver at age sixteen, and now, they were family.

Reid reached for the Bible again. He returned it to Thomas, pointing again to show the doctor what he wanted to say.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”²

Thomas smiled. “I love you too, Reid.”

Reid struggled a moment to get out of his chair. He reached for his canes and motioned for Thomas to follow him. They moved onto the front porch, and Reid made a sweeping motion with his hand, showing Thomas the new day, fresh and bright after an overnight rain.

Thomas looked around and then looked to Reid again. “It’s a new day. We get to start fresh. Is that what you’re telling me?”

Reid smiled and nodded. He pointed to a rocking chair a few feet away and motioned with his finger for Thomas to pull it near the other rocker. Reid sat down to enjoy the cool morning.

Thomas pulled the chair beside Reid and sat down. “So, who did you get in a fight with?”

Reid replied at a whisper, “John Coleman.”

“Quit talking!” Thomas said smiling. “Who won?”

¹ Matthew 25:35–36.

² John 13:34.

Reid began to silently laugh.

Luke helped Reid up the steps as Reid prayed out loud. Out loud. It wasn’t very loud, and Reid wondered if the people in the back would be able to hear him at all.

He sat in the chair beside the pulpit and put the palms of his hands on his knees, leaning on them, pushing his shoulders up to near his ears. “It is good to be back. Seems like it has been forever. But I hope this will be the last time I speak before this congregation.”

A murmur could be heard through the building. Eyes turned to look at one another.

Reid smiled. “Next Sunday Reverend Gregory Sutton will be here to speak in view of a call as our pastor.” Reid sat back in the chair. “I’ve met the man, and I like him. I hope he preaches well.

“I think all of you know what happened to me and to my family since I sat in front of you last time. It hasn’t been easy, but I want to let you know that God has been faithful to us. He has brought us through these trying times, and we still have his joy in our lives.”

Reid looked to his wife, and they smiled at each other.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result

in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”¹

Reid looked toward the double doors in the back of the sanctuary. They were open, letting the cool autumn air into the room crowded with worshipers. He wasn't paying much attention to who was coming in the door. People often came in late. But now Dan McClelland stood against the backdrop of the bright fall sun. Reid quit talking and watched his friend with anticipation.

Others in the room turned to look at what Reid was staring at. Next to Dan, Gregory Sutton appeared, a wide smile on his face. Then a wild-looking Indian boy stepped beside them. A gasp could be heard coming from some of the more proper women. Then two small Indian girls appeared. The girls spotted Reid and began running down the center aisle toward him, and tears filled his eyes. He stood up, holding to the thick carved pulpit beside him, and grabbed his crutches clumsily. He started moving toward the steps with his eyes still on the girls. Luke didn't see him. He was watching the children too.

William and Wayne Hammons both ran to help Reid, catching him as he lost his balance on the second tread. He didn't go any farther but dropped to the steps and reached out as the two little girls ran into his arms, throwing themselves at their father. He caught them both and hugged them to his chest, burying his face in their hair. Blade followed them at a walk but stopped next to Luke. The boy stood watching the reunion. Luke reached over and squeezed Blade's shoulders with his big arm, drawing the youth to him. Reid looked up and put a hand out toward Blade. The boy reached for it. Reid pulled him into his embrace with the girls.

Chipeta watched her husband, frozen in place. Then she looked toward the back and standing between Dan and Greg Sutton was a young Indian girl holding a baby. A baby that was now six months old.

¹ 1 Peter 1:3–7.

Chipeta got up and headed for the child. Without being introduced, she knew who this girl was. This was Blade's sister, the girl that had been used against her will to make money for the man that held her, the girl that had been sold by the man that was now in jail. The girl tucked her chin to her chest, averting her eyes from the people that watched, ashamed of being seen by everyone.

Chipeta called the baby by name as she reached the back of the church. She approached the last few steps slowly with her hand out toward the girl. The girl didn't respond, so Chipeta reached for Aponi and gently took the baby from her. She hugged Aponi, wondering if the baby remembered her. Then she put her hand to the Indian girl's chin and raised her face so she looked into Chipeta's eyes. Chipeta smiled and said, "Welcome to the family." She reached out and pulled the girl into her embrace.

Standing beside Reid, Wayne Hammons commented, "Blessed is the one whom God corrects... For he wounds, but he also binds up. He injures, but his hands also heal."¹

William looked at Wayne and responded, "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him."²

Luke moved to put an arm around both men. "Blessed be the name of the Lord, from this time forth and forevermore!"³

Aiyana pushed back away from Reid's arms and put her hands on his cheeks. In a clear voice, she said, "Daddy."

¹ Job 5:17–18.

² James 1:12 (ESV).

³ Psalm 113:2 (ESV).

REFERENCES

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Parenthesis indicates a personalization of the scripture by the character.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jean DeFreese Moore received her bachelor of fine arts degree from Louisiana Tech University. She spent most of her career in the media relations office of the athletic department at Louisiana Tech. Jean's writing began in high school where she was awarded membership into Quill and Scroll, a national honor society for high school journalists. She continued her writing as a contributor to her hometown newspaper and through a collection of stories on the DeFreese family history.

She has now completed her third contemplative novel. The first, *A Father's Love: Faith and Family*, tells of Travis Britt, an illiterate mountain man in the mid-1800s. He is unintentionally thrust into the Civil War and loses almost everything he loves. But, following God, he is able to rebuild his life and leave a legacy of faith for his family. The second story, *A Father's Love: Justice and Forgiveness*, focuses on Travis's youngest son, Reid, who is called by God to serve justice within a criminal organization that stretches across the Midwest. *A Father's Love: Joyous Hope* continues the story of Travis, Reid, and their family as Reid steps forward to fill a rotation in the empty church pulpit. His quiet faithful spirit is pleasing to God and an encouragement to others. But even a faithful follower can be tested. *A Father's Love: Sacrifice and Service*, takes the family from a local conspiracy, which affects their livelihood, to the deadly Spanish flu pandemic and World War I. Travis returns to his roots, hoping to find the love he left in his cherished mountains. Instead, he finds a fresh love and appreciation for his current family.

Jean was one of many contributing artists to paint the entry hall mural at the Lincoln Parish Historical Museum housed in the Kidd-Davis House built in 1886. She also served several years as a set

designer for a dance academy and has taught art at a private Christian school. Jean is an accomplished artist. Her exhibit “The Life of Jesus in Acrylic Pour” was scheduled to be a part of the showing, “Risen: An Easter Celebration,” which opened the same week the Covid-19 lockdown hit her city. The exhibit was quickly changed to an online exhibit and was viewed over 31,000 times on social media and 1,200 times in video form. This show has now been exhibited, in full or in part, for more than eighteen months at four separate venues. Jean enjoys a full-time role as grandmother to seven and part-time as church secretary. She is also involved in her church’s children’s ministry and active in her local Painting with Prayer group.