

## *Chapter 11*

Alice Murphy is preparing the last supper for her husband. It will be just the two of them since Felix declined Adam's invitation. He was on a roll, he said, and wanted to continue calling on people who had been recommended by those attending his lectures.

In spite of his good intentions, it seems to the pastor that his own ministry this week came out half baked, and it does not feel right to be sitting back now and letting the enemy devour the last fourteen hours. It is an anticlimax. The humble pancakes Alice is making are a fitting symbol of this flat ending that things have come to.

Mercifully, a mellower thought comes to mind: *Why not be glad to be spending these last hours alone with Alice who has cheerfully shared so many mishaps with me in this world?*

Alice is presenting the first spatula load of pancakes to his place at the kitchen table. On her way back to the stove, the doorbell rings.

"I'll get it," she says.

She goes down the hallway and opens the front door. Two tall men are standing there, men whom she has never seen before. They are similar in appearance—perhaps twins. Though there is nothing sinister about their presence, she trembles and almost cowers. She is looking up at stern faces, yet they are not unkind. Piercing intellects seem to be weighing her and measuring the stature of her spirit, even reading the secrets of her heart. She lowers her eyes and finds the spatula still in her hand. Although no uniform, badge, or anything of that sort sets them apart from ordinary humanity, they are obviously men of importance. There is an uncanny emanation of authority. Their right to be there is beyond questioning, and their purpose is not something to be inquired of casually. Certainly, she is not one to stand in the way

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of whatever they have come to do.

Presently, her unease melts away as quickly as it came, and her eyes are drawn back to their faces. They are not permitting her to be afraid. They have made peace with her without speaking a word.

Adam, wondering about the delay, gets up from the table and comes to see who might have arrived in such profound silence. Hearing his footsteps, Alice turns to face her husband. She is still speechless. He takes in the strange scene, and at once a passage from the Bible comes to mind, opening a door to a possibility. On an impulse, he urges all his sensibility through the door and embraces the possibility as fact.

“Alice, please go and set two more places at the table. We have guests for dinner.”

Glad to have her impasse resolved, she hurries back to the kitchen.

“Please come in,” Adam says to the men. “We have little food left in the house, but you are welcome to all that we have.”

“Thank you, Adam. This will be our last meal on earth for a while,” says one of the visitors. “We’re tired of lobster, and we’re hungry for pancakes,” the other says.

“I would tell you my name,” says the first, “but it’s a complicated affair. You can call me Jack.”

“Likewise, my name would be inconvenient just now,” the other says. “You can call me Flap.”

They both grin, and Adam knows he can let down his guard. But more than that, what he knows from Scripture coupled with his commitment to apply it in the present case elevates his expectation to a level that is truly out of this world.

“You have come to the right house, as I believe you must know, because pancakes are on the menu tonight!”

They follow him into the kitchen where Alice is rearranging the table.

“I’m so embarrassed about the pancakes,” she says.

“We love pancakes!” Flap cries.

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“Indeed, that’s why we’re here,” Jack says with a wink.

They take their places at the table while she goes to the stove to pour the last of the batter onto the griddle, to the cupboard to get out the remaining flour, and to the refrigerator to get the last egg. The beer can is sitting on the counter, and she slides it out of sight behind the mixing bowl. She used some of it in the first batch of batter but is afraid it will not be acceptable to these spiritual giants.

“Was that a can of beer?” Jack asks.

“Yes,” Alice replies, blushing.

“You’re not wasting it in the pancakes are you?” Flap asks.

“Well, yes, I was,” she admits.

“Oh, well, go ahead and put it in,” Jack says. “You don’t have more, do you?”

“No, this is all I use it for,” Alice says.

“That’s a pity,” Flap says.

“Their beer isn’t much good anyway, Flap,” says Jack.

“That’s true,” he replies. “But I wouldn’t refuse a can if she offered me one.”

“Don’t tease her so! You know she doesn’t have any more, Flap.”

“You’re right. I’m sorry, Alice—a little.”

“Don’t mind him,” Jack says. “We should tell you right now why we’re here.”

“We’ve been working with Paul Christian,” Flap announces.

“Paul has been telling folks who want to be baptized to go to the Beach House tomorrow morning before eight o’clock,” Jack adds.

“Why didn’t he tell *me* that?” asks Adam. “Please help yourselves to the pancakes.”

“The reason is he wanted to wait until he had a headcount, so you would know what to expect and be able to adjust your timing accordingly,” Flap explains, picking two pancakes off the pile.

“He wasn’t even sure the Beach House would be available,” Jack says, taking the next two hotcakes. “He was telling people to

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go there, trusting that he could get permission from Kenneth Clark. But he's been unable to reach Clark."

"So we're here to tell you that you need to be at the Beach House tomorrow morning," Flap says.

"There will be forty-nine souls for you to baptize," Jack adds.

"Forty-nine? Felix made forty-nine converts?" exclaims the pastor.

"Not yet, but he will before the night is over," declares Flap.

"Did Felix send you here?"

Both Flap and Jack have mouths full of pancake. Adam takes a big bite himself while he waits for an answer, and Alice delivers another batch to the table.

"No. ... He hasn't seen us," Jack says, finally. "But he's well aware that the Lord is working right along with him."

"Do you know where Kenneth Clark is?" Adam asks, being confident that his visitors have paranormal powers despite their manifestly mundane appetites.

"He's in the city tonight," Flap replies.

"Will he be back in time? He's my friend, you know. I'm still hoping he will ...."

"We're not permitted to say too much," says Jack, cutting him off.

But Adam is too excited, being in the presence of these heavenly personages, not to avail himself of whatever knowledge he can get them to divulge.

"Can you at least confirm the event we're all expecting at eight o'clock tomorrow morning?"

There is silence while Flap and Jack continue to demonstrate their genuine love of pancakes.

*I guess I wasn't supposed to ask that.*

"We're not permitted to say too much," Flap says, finally.

"The end of the age is at hand," says Jack.

"That means the Rapture, am I correct?"

"You had the dream," Flap replies. "Was it not the thundering voice of a lion?"

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“I understand the thunder now; at first I attempted to emphasize the sweetness that came from it, but many in my congregation were unprepared to receive such an answer to the Rapture riddle, and it has become a bitter controversy. In fact, I was as unprepared as anyone. What determined the end of the age? Were there signs we missed?”

“Signs? What do you mean by signs?” replies Jack.

“The closing of free markets,” mumbles Flap through a mouthful.

“What?” The preacher puts down his fork. “That has nothing to do with completing the church!”

“We’re almost out of syrup. But here’s some honey I found,” says Alice, taking her place at the table. “The next batch will be ready in a moment.”

“Perhaps you shouldn’t have mentioned that, Flap,” says Jack. “Now you will have to explain it to them. You will have to explain it to me too.”

“The development of humanity was essentially the development of civility,” says Flap.

Adam looks puzzled.

“You will have to explain that too,” says Jack.

“The treatment people give to each other and receive from each other is not only a measure of their humanity, it’s a measure of their rising above the Fall,” says Flap, waving his fork. “That’s the best way I can say it without using technical terms.”

“By civility he means the free exercise of kindness toward all people,” says Jack, just before stuffing the last of a pancake into his mouth.

“Not just to one’s household or clan,” says Flap. “That’s the key to understanding what I mean.”

Alice gets up from the table and goes to the stove. Everyone watches as she flips two nice pancakes onto a plate.

“It worked hand in hand with true religion,” says Jack.

Alice drops a fresh pancake onto each of Flap’s and Jack’s plates. They knife globs of butter and lather the golden bread,

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eying the syrup bottle, which is nearly empty. They seem to be ignoring the honey.

“Let me see what else we may have to put on your pancakes,” Alice says, and she goes to the refrigerator.

Adam hardly knows what to say. He is pondering Jack’s statement.

*It’s the strangest theology I ever heard.*

Adam’s puzzlement plainly shows on his face.

“The exercise of civility was the surest escape from the stupefying culture of warring competition caused by the machinations of Satan,” Flap explains.

“I found a full bottle of syrup in the refrigerator,” says Alice. “I don’t have any idea where it came from.”

“From your point of view, it’s part of sanctification,” Jack adds.

“Also, here’s a little strawberry jam and a little whipped cream left in this can,” she says as she sets her offerings on the table.

“I thought sanctification was the work of God within the heart of the individual,” Adam says.

“From heaven’s viewpoint,” Flap replies, “it involves both individuals and culture: you can’t separate the individual from the culture. The culture in which you developed remains with you: it’s part of you, and most of your personality is wrapped up in it.” He was making a spiral of whipped cream on his pancake as he spoke.

“One aspect of sanctification is compensating for corruptions embedded in both your genes and the culture you inherited but doing it without destroying your essential characteristics,” says Jack. “It’s a relatively straightforward process; however, the results vary depending on how much corruption you came with.” As he spoke, he was trying to copy Flap’s spiral with little coming out of the sputtering spout.

“He refers to the ultimate perfection you must attain to before you’re fit for eternal bliss,” says Flap.

“All the hereditary wrongs—whether in culture or biology—

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that are routinely blamed on God are due to the corruptions of the original creation by satanic parasites and genetic hacking—the results of the devil’s attempts to be creative in his own diabolical way, much like your cyber-hackers exercise their creativity to pervert and cripple good computer code,” says Jack.

“But the more difficult aspect of sanctification is lifting the man above the mores that the secular and religious elements of his culture have led him to believe are acceptable,” says Flap. “As you know, sanctification, in order to be complete, must go beyond removing blemishes. But do you know what that entails?”

“Becoming charitable, primarily,” Adam replies.

“Yes, but what does that mean in practice?” Jack presses.

“Loving the needy, those from whom one cannot expect repayment or advantage, is one example.”

“That’s fine here and now, but have you ever considered that there will be no needy people in the Kingdom for whom some arrangement has not been made?” asks Flap.

“I see. Charity will be a little different then,” Adam acknowledges.

“That’s right,” says Jack. “What you will find is the need to dwell cheerfully with all sorts of incredibly strange people. No longer will you be confined to your own church and family and town.”

“Do you know how difficult it is to get people to let go of the idea that they’re justified in shunning certain classes? It takes a great deal of training to get them to that point,” Flap testifies.

“To get them to give up quarreling among their close associates is hard enough,” Jack declares.

“Of course, there’s no alternative but purgatory for the hard cases, which is most of them,” Flap adds.

“Shall I make more pancakes?” Alice asks.

“If you don’t mind. They’re the best I’ve had since the Middle Ages,” says Flap.

“I’ve told you a million times not to exaggerate, Flap,” says Jack. “You said the same thing to a lady in England in 1842.”

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“Oh, yes. I suppose I did. But I remember her pancakes well. These are better than those.”

The pastor’s perplexities are piling up. He sets the purgatory question aside for the moment. “I see that we did not aim high enough in our Christian culture. We were ingrown, definitely.”

“Almost every culture and subculture in the world is at war with fabricated enemies,” remarks Jack.

“There is one exception,” says Flap.

“Not the market,” Adam says.

Alice is at the refrigerator. “Where did these come from?” she asks, holding up two large eggs.

Flap points at Jack, who shrugs his shoulders and points back at Flap.

“Think about it,” Flap says to Adam. “Whoever walks in the door is a potential customer and immediately becomes the object of unmerited kindness.”

“Seldom is *that* the case,” says Alice, breaking the eggs into the mixing bowl.

“True now, but it used to be common,” says Flap. “Two things are essential: that the customer has other alternatives and that the merchant stands to profit from kindness exceeding that of the competition—not with certainty but a good possibility of it.”

“Isn’t that type of kindness artificial, arising out of a selfish motive?” asks the pastor.

“Yes, indeed it is,” Flap replies. “But kindness is kindness, and few are deceived when it’s shallow. The more genuine it was, the better it was for business.”

“It was an exercise that often went far beyond the original need for it,” Jack adds.

“That’s exactly what I’m getting at, Jack,” says Flap. “Clerks discovered the joy of serving and pleasing others, and they derived more satisfaction from that than they got from their paychecks—in spite of their education, which told them to expect the opposite.”

“I know it well,” says Jack. “It started back when people began



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using money. Those who provided goods and services to others discovered the satisfaction of receiving payment for the proof it afforded them that they had done something that someone else valued more than they did.”

“In other words, income was the tangible thanks they got for meeting someone’s need. It meant something because those who paid them the asking price gave it by their own choice,” says Flap.

“But not all such people are heaven bound, surely,” Adam points out. “There are many who cheat and many more who are honest yet give no thought to their need for sanctification.”

“You’re right about that,” replies Jack. “But understand that this was not a school of sanctification. It was a tool we often found useful. We steered many a saint into such employment because it served our purposes.”

“Now I’m confused,” says the preacher. “I thought this was something that helped prepare people to exercise the unlimited kindness they will need to practice in heaven, not on the earth as it is today.”

“So it was,” answers Flap. “But we have to see that the soul gets the practice. It’s a huge responsibility and often extremely difficult. We found that having the free-market culture available for our use lightened our task in many cases.”

“Aren’t there other roles in society that are equally valuable training grounds?” Adam asks.

“Servants of any kind are in a position to rise to the level of enjoying the rendering of service: anyone who deals with the general public and not a select clientele, that is. Nevertheless, it must be a position where the person receiving the service has options,” says Jack. “Customer service at a financial institution is a good example.”

“I suppose that rules out government employees,” Alice observes while pouring fresh batter into the skillet.

“Unfortunately.” Flap says. “They have no incentive to exercise kindness. A few do it even without the incentive, and for them the training is just as effective.”

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“You mean it really doesn’t matter how they get to the point of showing kindness to everyone—whether incentives and rewards are involved or not?”

“That’s right,” Jack replies. “But incentive works wonders. The free market was the place where it was the strongest; therefore, it worked for more people. Not everyone, of course. But we trained many that way and saved ourselves a great deal of trouble.”

“What about those of us who haven’t yet gotten to the place where we know how to be perfectly kind to everyone?” asks Adam. “I’m afraid we will create chaos if we go as we are.”

“You’ll have to spend time in purgatory, that’s all,” says Flap.

“Why isn’t purgatory mentioned in the Bible?” Adam asks bluntly.

“Oh, it is!” declares Jack. “What do you think the final age is for?”

“The Millennium? I always taught that’s when the Lord redeems the earth—civilization, culture, government, religion—making everything be what it was meant to be,” says Adam.

“That’s true as far as it goes. The more important purpose is to train people to get along for eternity,” Flap says.

“I suppose you’re going to tell me there will be shopping malls when the kingdom of our Lord is established on earth,” Adam says.

“Huge ones! ... Why not?” Jack says.

*They sound like capitalists. Who am I talking to?*

“I would not have thought any of this would be a good thing for the kingdom of God. What about family life being compromised by shopping trips, enslavement to consumer debt, and Black Friday?”

“None of those things is good, of course, but this just happens to be where we found grace flourishing on earth. We looked everywhere. Genuine kindness was invariably conditional or limited to relatively small circles. In public places, we found only grudging, superficial courtesy for the most part,” Flap recalls.

“It’s the same in the shopping mall, isn’t it?” Adam asks.

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“To some extent, it is,” Jack answers. “But we discovered this gem of an exception in some of the sales—no, it’s not really sales so much. We would rather say the *shopping* transactions.”

Alice comes with a plate of three medium-size pancakes, and the three—What shall we say? Living beings?—each take one.

“I remember one butcher in the supermarket,” she says. “Remember Ferdinand, Adam? He was the most helpful, friendly guy. It didn’t matter whether or not he was busy or how ridiculous the request was. He was always cheerful and gracious—like he thoroughly enjoyed helping all kinds of people no matter who they were.”

“I was thinking of Linda,” says Adam. “She radiates cheer—makes each person feel special. She calls me the coconut-water man since that’s primarily what I buy at the market.”

“Ferdinand and Linda are good examples, indeed. Also, we found that women especially took to the jobs where they helped other women shop for clothing—complete strangers. The patience and kindness that some of them developed were rare virtues—beautiful, wasn’t it, Jack?”

“Absolutely, it was,” Jack replies. “This phenomenon really shouldn’t exist anywhere in this world, but somehow it sprouted up in a commercial setting. So, we used it to our advantage. Can you blame us for that? Why wouldn’t it provide us the same advantage in purgatory?”

“Do you mean the purgatory of the Millennial kingdom?” Adam asks.

“Yes. Sorry,” says Jack. “I think of them as the same thing—that is, the earthly branch.”

“I still don’t see how you can be so enthusiastic about this minor aberration in the emporiums of godless materialism,” Adam says, mustering a bit of eloquence in defense of his hard-earned world view.

Flap holds up his hand, signaling a time out while he clears his mouth.

“Godless, you say? Nothing is independent of the providence

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of our Lord. The consumer markets are a vital link in the life of the world. Without them, there would be no spur for development and no aiming for physical well being. There would be no efficient transportation systems, no high-speed communications, and food production and distribution would not meet the needs of the world's population."

"These economic engines sprang into existence just when needed to feed and clothe the world," Jack declares, holding up a dripping chunk of pancake on his fork. "Do you think this was an accident or according to the wishes of the devil?"

"And don't forget, the same economy, with its communication and transportation technology, evangelized the world," Flap says.

"Now, let me make sure I have this straight," Adam says. "After Christ returns and sets up his kingdom on earth, there will be more automobiles and highways than ever. Is that what you mean?"

"Their equivalent or better," Jack says. "Don't rule out advancement beyond what you know. You can't begin to imagine how much potential your Creator managed to fit into your material universe. It will take most of the thousand years to bring it all out."

"And people will be running here and there, looking for the perfect thing to buy?" Adam presses.

"You're picturing what you know, where people are idolaters," Flap says. "Those will not be allowed to buy or sell, so shopping will not be inflaming sin."

"Curiouser and curiouser," Alice says, delivering another plate of golden cakes to the table. "But I like it."

"It is most peculiar," Adam says. "Isn't it only a small fraction of society that's involved in selling things to the public?"

"Oh, not as small as you think," Jack says. "Leave us a little butter, Flap, will you? It involved everyone at one time. The shoppers often benefited nearly as much as the service people. You see, grace once received is inspiring, and it occasionally fosters like behavior. Furthermore, there is the other side of the

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coin: Being kind to the merchant reaps benefit to the customer. You don't often choose the person representing the item you're interested in, but you need to exercise kindness in order for the experience to be satisfactory."

"An accomplished shopper knows how to bring out the best in a perfect stranger who happens to be the sales person being dealt with. It's a marvelous skill that will serve well in eternity," Flap says.

"If free markets are so good, how did they get started in the devil's world?" Adam asks, still unwilling to give up his ecclesiastical bias.

"Don't think the devil has been for them," Jack says. "They're simply what people do when you leave them alone, and the devil never managed to change mankind that much. What mitigates against free markets is, of course, diabolical: bullying, thievery, and various interventions. These factors have been present and overbearing in most markets throughout the history of the world."

"Truly free markets flourished rather lately," Flap says, "thanks in part to improvements in transportation and even more to the model of a free society implemented on a grand scale in the USA."

"Surely the ideals and practices of true religion have contributed to sanctification. Please don't tell me they haven't," Adam pleads.

"Religion alone was insufficient to overcome the pressure of depraved social conditions," Jack explains. "There were too many disadvantages. Civilization with and without religion was serving Satan primarily—and no surprise, for he dominated most of the rulers of the world."

"The conditions faced by saints and sinners alike were not allowing them to exercise charity save to those within a small circle," Flap adds.

"There were great saints who met the challenge," Jack admits. "But the mass of humanity lived and died without the opportunity to develop unqualified civility."

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“Mere survival was task enough for most,” Flap says.

“But when the Scriptures finally broke away from the control of the clergy, seeds were scattered, and they began to grow into cultures in which freedom became possible and practicable,” Jack says with relish, no doubt remembering the days when this began to happen.

“The devil worked hard to stamp out each one of them; you can be sure of that!” Flap exclaims.

“But he overdid it in one case,” Jack says. “Certain persecuted pilgrims were removed from the lion—the British empire, that is—and planted in the New World, and land of milk and honey was the result.”

“Out of the brute came something sweet,” says Flap.

“That’s clever, Flap,” says Jack.

“For the first time in the history of the world, social freedoms were established on a large scale,” Flap says. “It was exciting to watch the development though it didn’t come without bloodshed and the destruction of the lion.”

“It was the culture in the USA with its freedoms to compete one with another in a constructive way that fostered civility as never before,” Jack says. “I see you’re getting the picture, but you still have doubts.”

“It’s those dark spots that are bugging him,” Flap says. “Adam, there were dark spots and failures, for Satan was incensed that such a thing had taken root and gotten out of control.”

“In fact, the good that was accomplished for the kingdom of heaven has never been appreciated,” Jack says. “I don’t blame you for having missed it in this day and hour.”

“The USA became the greatest generator of nearly sanctified souls the world has ever seen, believe it or not,” Flap says. “The devil worked hard to destroy the system—injecting his corruptions at every opportunity and making the corruptions famous.”

“Your rather significant progress in civility went unmeasured and unappreciated and is today virtually unheard of,” Jack says.

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“Altogether, it not only aided sanctification, it created more saints than all periods of the world’s history combined.”

“Their energy and goodness and ingenuity brought the light of the gospel to other nations and wrenched untold numbers of slaves and poorer freemen from the devil’s hold,” Flap says.

“Now it has been shut down with employment guarantees and welfare payments, so the incentive to treat others kindly has virtually vanished,” Jack says. “Mostly, it is large enterprises with teams of lawyers and lobbyists that have survived the regulations, and since the employees are made secure by laws and union contracts, they have no incentive to exercise civility.”

“Everything is rapidly degenerating to the stultifying drudgery of the managed economy,” Flap says. “Most of the fun in making a living has already been taken back by the devil’s operatives.”

“Now the White Horse—what you call the Reorganization—will introduce subhuman civility. It’s a copy of the infrastructure of hell,” says Jack. “In fact, most of the computer code is the same.”

“The USA was the jewel of this dispensation,” says Flap. “Though not without blemishes, it was far more valuable to the kingdom of heaven than anybody imagines,” Flap says.

“Except us,” Jack says.

“Right. Except us,” Flap agrees. “I said ‘any-body.’ Are we bodies?”

“That’s debatable,” Jack says. “But let’s not debate it now.”

“All right.” Flap says. “Sorry, Adam. I know you would be interested. But Jack gets tired of repeating things, and we’ve done it a million times. That’s why it’s debatable. He’s not supposed to get tired—ever.”

“And that was the reason the USA was not able to ward off the attacks from within,” Jack says, ignoring Flap’s aside. “It became incapable of destroying pathogens precisely because the good people did not believe how good their goodness was. The sweetness that was tasted at first became bitter in the stomach.”

“Being undervalued, there was too little will to defend free

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enterprise. That was Satan's most effective effort: disparaging America to Americans," Flap says.

"As the culture of freedom in the USA died, so did the other useful cultures of the world," Jack says.

"The end has now come," Flap says. "We can make no further use of any of it."

"You mean 'little use,' not 'no use,' Flap. And you know this isn't the reason for the end. The man was asking about signs—whether he had missed a sign."

"There was no sign; he should know that," Flap says.

"But you could have told him that. Instead of spending so much time talking, we could have been eating more," Jack scolds.

"I know. But I wanted to offer these lovely folks something for their hospitality. I thought this was as good a reason for the end of the age as any, if there needs to be a reason," Flap says.

"Anyway, it's all over; that part is true," says Jack. "The Lord will be making sweeping changes starting tomorrow."

Adam opens his mouth to ask for details.

"That's all we're permitted to say," Flap says.

"Would you entertain a question about purgatory?" asks the preacher.

"You're wondering about the dream that came up on Tuesday and how it fits in," says Jack.

"It doesn't *fit* in," says Flap. "It *is* in."

"Now, explain that to them, Flap. And explain it to me too."

"Personally, I liked Lazar's dream. That's all I meant," says Flap. "I thought it was a brilliant heavenly purgatory."

"You don't mean it's really like that?" asks Adam.

"Oh, it is like that. Wouldn't you say it's like that, Jack?"

"Aren't you being a little obscure, Flap?"

"How would *you* explain it?"

"I wouldn't try," says Jack. "I would just say it was a nice dream and leave it at that."

"I've had a little experience with dreams, and they don't always make sense," says Alice.



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“Exactly so!” cries Flap.

“In fact, you’re only a sort of thing in the author’s dream,” says Jack.

“If she were to wake,” adds Flap, “you’d go out—bang!—just like a candle.”

“I wouldn’t!” Alice exclaims indignantly. “Besides, if *I’m* only a sort of thing in her dream, what are *you*, I would like to know.”

“Ditto,” says Jack.

“Ditto, ditto!” cries Flap.

“Hush! You’ll be waking her, I’m afraid, if you make so much noise,” says Alice.

“Well, it’s no use *your* talking about waking her,” says Jack, “when you’re only one of the things in her dream. You know very well you’re not real.”

“I *am* real,” says Alice, and begins to cry.

“You won’t make yourself a bit realer by crying,” Flap remarks. “There’s nothing to cry about.”

“If I weren’t real,” Alice says—half laughing through her tears, it all seems so ridiculous—“I wouldn’t be able to cry, and ....”

“I hope you don’t suppose those are real tears?” Jack interrupts.

“I know we’re talking nonsense,” Alice says as she brushes her tears away, “and it’s foolish to cry about it. But it brought memories back from my childhood.”

“There you go!” cries Flap. “That’s what Lazar’s dream was about.”

“Thank you, Alice, for those delicious pancakes,” says Jack.

“Thank you, Alice, I’m going to recommend that you get an award for your performance,” Flap says.

“Adam, God-speed to you until we met again,” says Jack.

“I have one rather selfish request,” Adam says. “As long as you two are here, perhaps you could help us out.”

“Your request has been granted,” says Jack. “For the benefit of the readers, what is it?”

“Thank you. We’ll sleep well tonight and be ready for those

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baptisms,” says Adam as Jack vanishes.

“Oh! Where did he go?” exclaims Alice.

“Now, make sure your alarm clock has a fresh battery,” says Flap with a grin, and he too vanishes.

“Are we dreaming?” Alice asks. “Did you see that? He left his grin behind, and it faded slowly.”

“No, I didn’t. He must have done it for your benefit. They were angels. Angels come and go like that. Generally they leave rather abruptly. I think it’s a little awkward for them to be speaking to us at all, and social graces are a little beyond them.”

“I thought their sense of humor was interesting.”

“I thought they were trying hard to emulate human humor—rather unsuccessfully.”

“Could it be that humor in heaven is like that?”

“Among angels, perhaps. But I’m wondering whether we should take any of it seriously. Maybe it was all a joke.”

“I don’t think so, Adam. Maybe a vision, but not a joke.”

“You’re right; I shouldn’t have said that.”

“Their plates are clean, did you notice? Their places look just as they did when I set them.”

“Hm—reminds me of the Rapture.”

“Do you think it might have been a vision?” Alice asks.

“How could we both be seeing the same thing?”

“The same as if we were both in the author’s dream; it would be easy—just like you and so many others heard the same thing a week ago.”

“I suppose that could be,” he says, “but I do believe we have received information that we have to act on tomorrow morning.”

“Oh! It couldn’t have been a vision,” Alice exclaims. “There are two syrup bottles, and we started with one.”