

Chapter 3

“Harold, what happens to those who get left behind tomorrow morning?”

... strike!

“Harold?”

“Yes, Harrietta.”

The two-one pitch—ball three.

“What happens to those who get left behind?”

Strike two!

“They’ll miss out.”

“Leila wants to know. Can they be saved?”

“Yes.”

Ball four! Hernandez walks to first.

With two outs, the Leaders now have two men on base—Logan

Thomas on second and Oliver Hernandez on first.

“They can still be saved.”

Next is Mason Rodriguez batting for the Leaders.

“Then why are we acting as though this is the end of everything?”

“Harold, if they can still be saved, then tomorrow isn’t the end of everything, right?”

*... a swing and a hit. It’s a fly over the infield. ... Scarlet Reed dropping back. ... The ball hits the ground. She picks it up, throws to Violet Torres at third. Logan Thomas has rounded third on his way home. Torres throws to Baker at home, and Thomas is **out**.*

That’s three outs for the Leaders. At the end of the second inning, the score is the Hornets three and the Leaders one.

“Right.”

“He says it isn’t the end of everything.”

“I’m glad.”

At the top of the third inning now, Homer Foster is back on the mound for the Leaders. At bat is Scarlet Reed.

“Harrietta?”

“Yes?”

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“God still has a plan for them, just a different one. Is that right?”

*... a swing and a hit. It's a high fly toward second. ... Mason Rodriguez has it! **Out!***

The first out for the Hornets here in the third inning of the Autumn League championship game.

“Harold, God has a different plan for them, right?”

At bat now is Victoria Martin.

“Harold?”

The pitch from Foster—a fast ball over the inside corner. Strike one.

“Yes, Harrietta.”

“God has a different plan for them, right?”

“Watch, Mom,” says Holly. “Homer is pitching to Victoria.”

*... a swing and a hit: a pop fly to the right, ... over the line. It's a foul, ... and Jackson Moore has it. **Out!***

That's two outs for the Hornets with no runners on base.

“Right.”

“He says that's right.”

Next at bat is Abigail Wilson.

Foster winds up. The pitch—she swings and misses—a curve ball.

There's the pitch—a swing! Strike two, fast and inside.

*The o-two pitch to Wilson—it's low, and she lets it go. It's been called a strike! **Strike three!***

And the Hornets go down with no runs. The score: the Hornets three; the Leaders one.

“Is one plan better than the other?”

“I always thought so. But let me ask him. ... Harold, is one plan better than the other?”

“One what plan?”

“You said God has a different plan for those left behind.”

“God knows.”

“He says God knows. I don't know if he knew what I was asking.”

“Will the Great Tribulation start immediately?”

“I think so. ... Harold, will the Tribulation start immediately?”

“Yes, but not the Great Tribulation.”

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“How do you know?”

“Babylon isn’t complete yet.”

“He says no.”

“Do you ever get impatient with Harold?”

“Always.”

“Are men just like that?”

“Pretty much.”

“I think so too.”

At the bottom of the third inning, Victoria Martin is returning to the pitcher’s mound, and Julian Garcia is coming to bat as pinch hitter for Asher Cypher who has been retired from the game.

The Leaders are trailing, three to one.

“That’s odd,” says Harrietta. “Asher is our best hitter.”

Leila looks over to where Al Cypher was sitting. He is standing, obviously distraught. “This is not good,” she says. “I think that’s Asher’s father standing up over there—the FSA officer in uniform.”

“That’s him,” confirms Harrietta. “Al Cypher. He isn’t thrilled about his son being taken out of the game. Do you know him?”

... there’s a swing. Foul ball.

“Yes.”

*Martin winds up—a swing and a foul to the catcher. **Out!***

The first out for the Leaders in the third inning. No runners on base.

“Oh, look who’s here!” Leila is waving to Adam Murphy, who has just arrived. “It’s Pastor Adam. He sees us.”

Next at bat for the Leaders is Miles White.

Leila was already sitting close to Harrietta, leaving room on the bleacher seat. He comes up to sit beside her.

*... there’s a swing and a hit—a fly ball to left field. Amelia Young is reaching for it. ... The ball gets away from her. White is rounding first. Amelia gets the ball under control and throws to second. Miles White is **out!***

Two outs in the bottom of the third inning, and no runners on base.

“I see the Hornets are ahead by two runs,” he says.

“Still? I wasn’t paying much attention. Harrietta and I were

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commiserating. She's worried about Homer; I'm worried about Earl."

"We're both worrying too much about both of them," says Harrietta, leaning forward to join the conversation. "How do you stop fretting about people?"

"That's what ballgames are for," he replies, giving Leila a wink. "Everything will work out in the end."

Next at bat for the Leaders is Jackson Moore. The score is three to one with the Hornets leading.

Leila tries concentrating on the game, thinking, *Isn't this a bit incongruous? Here we all are, hours away I get it: we're trusting God.*

... It's a bunt! ... Moore makes it to first.

At bat for the Leaders next is Homer Foster.

"How did you feel Sunday Morning when you woke having had the dream announcing the day and hour of the Rapture?" Leila asks the preacher.

*Martin looks, winds up, the pitch—he swings. It's a fly to center field. ... Dropped. Foster is on his way to second. ... No, he's going back to first. ... Too late: he's **out**!*

That's three outs for the Leaders, and at the end of the third inning, the score remains Hornets three and the Leaders one.

"I thought it was nothing to be taken seriously. But it was so peculiar. ... I couldn't get it out of my head. I determined to say nothing about it, and yet I wound up telling the congregation in the middle of the sermon. A lot of people thought I had lost it, and I thought as much myself. I had always believed and taught that no one knew the answer to that riddle because it was a secret, just as Jesus had said. However, I won't deny that I, along with every other pretribulationist, was pleading for the answer because the enemy was threatening to destroy us. Our Bibles were being confiscated and the stage was being set for the Antichrist.

"When I got home, I called a friend who teaches at a seminary and found that he had the same dream. That was the biggest shock of all. It opened up the possibility of many Christian leaders having been given the same message.

Violet Torres batting for the Hornets.

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So I searched the Uninet and found there were others reporting the same thing. We all were given local times that reduced to the same universal time: four o'clock Sunday afternoon in London. After all the failed attempts by cultists trying to guess the riddle, here he came out and told us the secret almost at the very end. How sweet it was at first, but it wasn't long before the enemy knew, and he has been out this week like a roaring lion trying to bind us and blind people to the truth."

... strike one ...

"I don't understand how Earl can deny it," Leila says. "I don't believe he is blind to those things."

"A million Christian leaders agreeing on something is a miracle in itself," Adam remarks. "I don't know how anyone can deny it. ... It goes beyond natural apathy and misunderstanding."

... strike two ...

Looking back over the whirling events of the week, he perceives a vortex, a spiral becoming tighter by the hour, compressing possibilities to the point where corrections become impossible and repentance pointless. It forebodes little progress in the remaining hours, which precipitates bitter regrets.

... strike three ...

He reflects that he has not been as concerned for Homer as he might have been. *I've let Harold down. I should have reached out to that kid.*

Henry Baker is up next.

How many people out there—indeed, how many here in these bleachers—are whirling down toward the drain, ignorant or confused? Yet might they still be rescued from their delusions by just the right word spoken in time?

... infield pop fly ... out!

He looks around at the little crowd made up of his townspeople, most of whose faces are familiar to him. He detects no apparent concern for tomorrow. *It's almost too much to accept; how could this be the last day?*

... Emma Taylor ...

It looks as normal as any Saturday morning at the ballgame—

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except the attendance is down a bit; and the visiting team is smaller than usual. It could strain one's faith to the breaking point.

... swings and misses ...

In all appearances Earl is right. For his and Homer's sakes I wish he were. And all these people—could they all be wrong?

In Noah's day they were all wrong.

Noah had years to preach the warning and discharge his obligation, not just a week. This is expecting too much.

... she lets it go—strike!

Is there anything I could do or say at this late hour?—if I weren't so committed to things that don't matter!

*... **strike three!***

As the precious minutes pass, he sits incapacitated, doing nothing.

... Evan Carter is up for the Leaders.

After the game is over, he must spend his time performing predetermined and unavoidable tasks: the baptism of the saved, a wedding of no consequence.

... drive to the outfield.

If I were one of those old-time, salty preachers, I'd be standing on my seat right now ...

... right-field fence.

shouting warnings to these folks. But then

... safe on second.

It could turn out otherwise.

... Logan Thomas ...

The thought of going back to the way it was before Sunday is potentially petrifying and must be avoided at all costs.

Must the door be closed on doubts and locked absolutely? Does true faith need fear competition?

... fly to outfield.

Are not creative corrections shut out when faith blindly protects herself?

*... **out** at home.*

What is the proper attitude to this?

... runner on second.

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Total trust in the word received must come first.

Trusting the Word, yes, but have I rightly read it? I think so, but I still worry!

Why not celebration? Is any worry worthy of unseating joyful anticipation of what lies ahead?

It really should be a time to celebrate.

... Grayson Green ...

Then why be dejected, Adam? Why not let your witness to these people be your head lifted high with a happy countenance? You came in, in front of these folks, looking as though you were expecting to be tossed to the lions.

... line drive to third ... out!

The early saints may have been happier going to the lions, already tasting the sweetness of their salvation, than I have been today. I was under bitter conviction for escaping my duty—until I saw Leila waving!

So why, Adam? Why are you doing this?—submerging yourself in regrets over inevitable outcomes. If nothing went wrong, you would think you were dreaming of a different world!

He tries to imagine himself abandoned to the joy that lies ahead, mirth sweeping away sadness.

... Oliver Hernandez ...

It doesn't work for me. He is unable. He would not feel free to act in a carefree manner right now. *I wonder why not.* The answer hits him as if it were the diagnosis of a deadly disease: he does not believe that the Rapture is certain.

... pop fly to the infield ... out!

Not with his whole heart does he believe it. Something is holding him back. O dreaded compassion that would wait forever and bolt the gates of hell!

At the end of the fourth inning: the Hornets three, the Leaders one.

The fourth inning came and went, and Adam scarcely noticed what happened. Instead of taking in the drama of the game, making use of the diversion offered him, he dug down, turned over the rock of his soul, and played the game of startling himself

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with the creeping things beneath it.

“Pastor Adam?” Leila’s voice is near his ear. “Are you all right?”

He swallows hard and struggles to bring himself back to his present company.

“I’m here,” he says in a weak voice, “—just got carried away with regrets and forebodings.”

She has turned toward him, and he is drawn to meet her eyes.

“I found the fourth inning a bit boring,” she offers, relieving him of the need to explain. “The score stayed the same.”

Her friendly face and intelligent eyes smite him from an entirely new direction. Here is a bright, cheerful soul freshly baptized in the Spirit and manifestly tinged with a holy light. The contrast between her hopeful radiance and his doleful brooding is the difference between day and night. He determines to make the best of what remains of this rare opportunity to enjoy her presence. It means renouncing his regrets. How easy she is making it already! There is no room for both Leila and his gloom. Or so it seems at this moment.

“We need some runners coming across that home plate,” he says, stating the obvious in his eagerness to grasp the moment. “I thought Herne wouldn’t do so well today against Earl’s boys. And it appears they’ve barely scraped a team together.”

Isabella Young, number 58, is leading off the fifth inning for the Hornets.

Harrietta leans over with a word of reassurance: “There’s still plenty of time for us to win.”

“Of course,” replies Adam. “I’m sure Earl has everything under control.”

... she swings and hits—a grounder out to right field. ... She’s safe on first.

No outs here at the top of the fifth.

“Is that good?” asks Leila.

“For the team, I think so. But I know what you mean. We men have a lot of trouble with pride.”

Sonya Stern, number 23, is at bat.

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“It’s not just men,” she says evenly.

*... It’s a drive to left field. ... Isabella Young is safe on third.
Sonya Stern is **out** at second.*

“You must be right.”

Amelia Young, number 57, is up next.

“How do you manage to live with things being out of control?” she asks.

“It takes faith—lots of it,” he replies curtly, determined to avoid revisiting the weighty subject.

... sinker—ball one.

“More than a mustard seed?”

“No,” he replies, realizing that he owes her an explanation.

Leila marvels at the uplift of her spirits from being near the pastor. There is no room for him and her worry, or so it seems to her at this moment. She is feeling better about Earl already.

Ball two. Two-and-o for Amelia.

“I don’t know anymore, Leila. I’ve had a terrible time accepting certain setbacks, but the game is helping me get over it.” What began as an honest admission came out a lie. “No, that’s not quite accurate,” he confesses. “You are helping me get over it.”

Ball three.

“I was thinking a while ago how incongruous it is of us to be sitting here watching kids play baseball when our time on earth is so short,” she says.

Ball four. Amelia walks. Runners now on first and third.

One out for the Hornets at the top of the fifth inning.

Scarlet Reed, number 34, bats next.

Seeing an opportunity to switch the focus away from himself, he replies, “It’s part of your job, isn’t it?”

“Yes. I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else right now. Am I wrong being primarily concerned about Earl, almost to the exclusion of everyone else?”

... strike one.

“It’s exactly what I would do if I were you, honey,” says Harrietta. “Same reason we’re all here for Homer.”

“The Lord hears your prayers and honors your dedication, Leila,” replies her pastor. “Although Earl and I have been the best

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of friends, there is nothing I can do directly right now. I think he's a little sore about"

... strike two.

"About Evelyn?"

"Yes."

"Is it my pride that hurts when I think about that?"

"I would have to say it is, but it's nothing to be ashamed of. It comes with love as we know it. There is a higher form of love that we will be experiencing more fully. In this life some of us are privileged to taste a little of it. It knows jealousy only for the freedom of others, not their bondage."

"That would be a great relief. I can almost imagine it. I'll try to be that way. I think Evelyn is one who knows that kind of love."

... pop fly ...

"She has experienced a lot of disappointment and loss. That seems to be what develops the capacity for *agape* in people. It's one of those paradoxes."

"I loved her immediately, but I didn't know why or what to call it," says Leila.

"It can be infectious."

"I'm afraid Earl didn't catch any of it from her. I think duty is more on his mind than anything, and I'm not sure where that leaves love."

The bases are loaded, and Victoria Martin comes to bat for the Hornets.

"Watch Homer strike her out," enthuses Harrietta.

"It would be ironic if she hit a homer," says Adam.

Homer winds up. There's a swing and a grounder up the middle —hits the pitcher on the leg. ... Homer has it, throws to first.

*Isabella Young, coming in from third, **scores**. Victoria tagged **out** at first.*

Homer appears to be unhurt.

"You're a prophet," remarks Leila.

Adam laughs, which delights her, and she laughs too.

Abigail Wilson is up next.

"What's funny?" asks Harrietta, demanding her share of the merriment.

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"I'm sorry," says Leila. "It was a little play on words is all. I'm glad Homer wasn't hurt."

"He should have thrown home," Harrietta explains. "He was getting back at his girlfriend. Now they're leading the Leaders by three."

... grounder inside the first-base line; Jackson Moore has it, and Wilson is out.

At the end of the half inning: the Hornets four, the Leaders one.

"Harold just said we only have twenty-one hours," Harrietta announces. "Pastor Adam, have you had time to think of the glory of it?"

"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; I cannot attain unto it."

"Isn't it true that people longed for this day hundreds or even thousands of years ago?" asks Leila.

Mason Rodriguez is up for the Leaders.

"Yes. We're incredibly privileged," replies her pastor. "If we were given the choice of when to live, out of all of the ages of mankind's existence, I'm sure we would choose today. But I pity those who will remain here through tomorrow."

... a drive to shortstop—out.

"What about Earl? Will he have to endure the wrath to come?"

Julian Garcia is up next.

"I think not, but it's something I can't explain. Earl is unable to desire heaven right now, and that compels him in the direction he's going. But it could turn quickly."

"Will he change before it's too late?"

"I hope so, Leila. It will be a miracle."

"And if he doesn't Is everyone who gets left behind cut off from being with us?"

"Jesus Christ is coming for his bride. That includes us as well as all who have died in Christ."

"Could there be exceptions?"

"I suppose there could be. Most rules have exceptions."

... pop fly to the infield. ... Out.

"Before you came, we were saying that tomorrow isn't the end

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of salvation,” says Harrietta.

Miles White, number 66, is up.

“That’s true; the game isn’t over tomorrow,” the pastor replies. “Tomorrow starts the interlude before the seventh inning. It’s appointed that many will be saved; others will be immersed in severe delusions.”

... grounder to second. Scarlet Reed has it, throws to first—out.

At the end of the fifth inning: the Hornets four; the Leaders one.

“I hope he doesn’t have to suffer,” says Leila.

“Most all of these folks we see here will be suffering a great deal. Some of them have heard of the coming calamities; a few have read the book of Revelation. Some have been led to disbelieve what it says about the future by teachers who have been misled themselves. Others are indifferent. It has been a constant desire of mine to find a way to communicate the urgency of taking God’s Word seriously. Now, here we are, and time has run out.”

“I know it breaks your heart,” says Leila.

At the top of the sixth, batting first for the Hornets is number 45, Violet Torres.

Adam falls silent, brooding again, but on a happier note: *What an enormous blessing to belong to this family—these dear people: the miracle of Leila and her testimony, my faithful wife spending her morning visiting her hostile sister, ...*

... strike one.

Harold over there—what a stalwart guy he is.

He feels overwhelmed by this blessing, the privilege of being a member of this family.

Was that you, Adam, so downhearted during the fourth inning?

What a difference it makes to be thankful.

... strike two.

Yet that setback was real. Was it a reality check?—to alter the tone of your ministry?

If there was any value in it, how late it was!

Or was it a partial truth inspired by the enemy and put there to discourage you? You need not answer: it’s too much to attempt

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to comprehend right now.

That's one reason to be thankful that the time is short!

... strike three!

However, the concert this evening, mandated by the government, is such an unfortunate event that he continues to resent it. The church is required to present something of interest to the entire community once each month. Tonight's concert was scheduled months ago.

Henry Baker comes to bat.

"Trust me, Adam."

"Who said that?"

"Who said what?" asks Leila.

... throws to second—safe!

Emma Taylor is batting next for the Hornets.

"Somebody said, 'Trust me, Adam.' It sounded as if it came from the PA system."

"I didn't hear it."

"It was clear as a bell."

"Was it timely?"

"Bless you, Leila, it was timely!"

... out at third. Taylor slides to second—safe!

"I heard a mysterious voice last night," she says softly. "It seemed to come from the airplane's radio, but I don't think it did. Has anyone mentioned last night's beautiful sunset to you?"

"No. Did we miss one?"

"I'm not sure. I heard this voice say it was for me. I thought I was seeing the colors of heaven. But Earl didn't see the same thing, though he was right there. I would be afraid to tell that to anyone else."

Back to the top of the order, Isabella Young, number 58, is up.

"Tomorrow morning we'll find out, won't we?"

"Whether we're both crazy?"

Homer gets his sign.

"Um-hm."

... strike! It was a high, wide curve.

"I'm excited to be baptized."

the Story

“Did anyone tell you that fifteen more will be joining you?”

“Are they FSA people?”

“Ten of them are your employees, two are their spouses, and three are their children.”

... ball ...

She brought all these folks to the Lord in one day, and I haven't made one convert all week. “Leila, whether it's right or not, I'm proud of you, and I wish you were my daughter. It will be my joy to baptize you. There's nothing I would rather be doing.”

... the one-one pitch—strike!

“Thank you. Don't forget Evelyn. Without her, there would be no baptism tomorrow.”

... grounder to second.

Adam is quiet.

“Did I say something that's troubling?”

... out at third.

“Evelyn will not be coming. She was notified last night that they're taking her to Baltimore today. It's a government flight, and it couldn't be changed.”

“Excuse me,” says Leila. “I have a call. ... Evelyn, nice to hear from you. ... That's wonderful! I've been wanting to talk to you. ... No, we went flying instead. ... Earl's upset about something—hasn't been himself since Wednesday night. ... Pastor Adam happens to be right here sitting next to me. We're all at the baseball game.”