

## *Chapter 4*

“*E*velyn wants to talk to you. She didn’t have your phone number.”

*Number 13, Jackson Moore ...*

*“Adam, I’m coming! I talked to the mechanic who is taking care of the plane while we’re here. I told him I needed to keep an appointment to be baptized. He’s grounding the plane until this evening.”*

*... fast ball—strike!*

*“How did you manage that? Did you smile at him?”*

*“No. I didn’t even see him. All it took was a phone call. I told him where I needed to be at 2:30, and he said he would come up with a reason to ground the plane until late this evening.”*

*“Did you get his name?”*

*“He said his name is B.J.”*

*... strike!*

*“I know him! He used to have the maintenance shop here at our airport, back before general aviation got regulated into near extinction. He still comes over occasionally to service the mayor’s plane and the few others we have left. He’s a good man—comes to Grace Bible Church when he’s in town.”*

*“So you see, it wasn’t my charms at all.”*

*... fly ball to center field.*

*“Don’t be too sure about that.”*

*Out!*

*“I know. But you love me anyway. Earl’s place is on Beach House Road, is that right?”*

*Homer Foster batting ...*

*“That’s right. Turn at Shore Drive off Mountain Highway; then turn right onto Beach House Road. It’s the first driveway on your left.”*

*“I’ll see you there about two o’clock. Is that too early?”*

*“I’ll be there.”*

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“What do I need to bring?”

“Bring a change of clothes or a swimming suit and a towel if you have one.”

“I can’t wait.”

... *a swing and a miss.*

“Our waiting is nearly at its end.”

... *Hornets four, and the Leaders one.*

“Thank God for BJ, Leila.” Adam’s gloom is gone altogether.

“Who’s BJ?”

“He’s the mechanic servicing Evelyn’s plane. He’s grounding it until tonight.”

... *hard crack to left ...*

“It’s wonderful how things turn out,” Leila says, her voice betraying doubt.

... *second baseman ...*

“It will become more wonderful each hour from here on,” Adam assures her with soaring optimism.

... *out at first.*

“What do you have planned after the game?” he asks.

*Number 35, Evan Carter ...*

“Earl invited me to join his sailing class, which starts at one o’clock. Maybe I will have some time alone with him if I go early.”

... *low inside—strike.*

“It sounds like the sailing class will be getting over just as the baptizing starts. ... And after that?”

... *strike.*

“I don’t know what will happen. I want to be with him, but I don’t know what he has planned. What will you do after the game?”

... *strike.*

“There’s a wedding at one o’clock. I’ll have to be there a little early, of course. That reminds me: I need to unlock the church for those folks as soon as the game is over.”

... *four; the Leaders one.*

“Pastor Adam?”

“Yes, Leila.”

“Do you think adoptions will be allowed in heaven?”

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“That’s an interesting thought. I don’t know. But I don’t see why not.”

*At the top of the seventh inning ...*

“What happened to the sixth inning?” Adam asks.

“They played it,” says Harrietta.

“Apparently, I’m losing my grip on the world already,” he says.

“At least we kept them from scoring another run,” says Harrietta. “If Homer can keep up the good pitching, we still have a chance. Victoria doesn’t have as much stamina as he does.”

*Sonya Stern comes to bat. She scored the first run in this game back in the first inning.*

*Homer has his sign. There’s a big windup—a fast ball over the outside corner; she lets it go. Strike one.*

“There’s Alice!” Harrietta is on her feet, waving. Alice Murphy sees her and is hurrying up to join them. “Scoot over and make room for Alice,” she instructs everyone.

*Here’s the pitch—down the middle. A hard hit to third. Carter blocks it, recovers the ball, throws to first; Stern is **out** by a narrow margin.*

*One out; no runners on. Top of the seventh; the score: four to one.*

Alice comes up the steps, smiling and obviously happy to see them but also expressing surprise at finding a pretty woman sitting between Harrietta and her husband. She sits down next to Adam and reaches for a hug and kiss.

*Amelia Young, number 57, comes to bat.*

“How was Lavelle?”

“My poor sister—I don’t know what we can do. Her minister was there when I arrived.”

“That must have been interesting.”

“It was indeed.”

*... lets it go, but the pitch was good—strike.*

“I would like you to meet Leila. Leila, this is my wife, Alice.”

“Oh, I’m so glad to meet you. I understand you’re being baptized this afternoon. Welcome to the family of God. How is it with Earl?”

“He’s still all Earl, I’m afraid. There, he’s waving at us.”

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*... foul ball ...*

“How did you manage with two disbelievers against you?” asks her husband.

“It turned out to be the other way around. She had seen the light and embraced premillennial theology as well as our pretribulation Rapture.”

*... strike.*

“That’s fantastic. ... What did her minister think about that?”

*... Out.*

“It was the *minister* who made the turnaround. Lavelle was furious! They were in a big argument when I got there. Then I went into the kitchen with the reverend, and we had a friendly talk. She is extremely excited about tomorrow.

*Scarlet Reed, number 34, ...*

But Lavelle was yelling from her bedroom the whole time, so she left before long.”

“How did Lavelle treat you after that?”

“She clammed up and wouldn’t say a thing. Is there any hope for her?”

*... straight to center ...*

“I believe there is. She might have died peacefully with her cancer, but now ...

*... Out.*

she’s struggling against something,

*... end of the first half of the seventh, the score: still four to one.*

and it could well be the Spirit of God.”

*Logan Thomas, number 22, is up. He had two balls and a strike his first time at bat.*

“Has it been a good game?”

“I got here late, but I think Leila and Harrietta have seen the whole thing.”

“I’m not much of a sports fan,” Leila says. “But it has been fun to watch these kids play. Homer is quite the pitcher.”

*... hit hard into short field—fumbled, recovered. The throw to first ... is too late. Logan Thomas is safe on first base.*

“I see they’re playing the Herne girls,” Alice remarks.

“There is one boy on the Herne team, that’s all,” Adam says.

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“And they barely have nine players. Fortunately, none of them has been injured.”

“Nevertheless, they’re winning,” Harrietta adds.

*Grayson Green, number 47, comes to bat.*

“We need three points to tie the game; we can do it,” she continues. “Grayson will get a hit, I’m sure.”

*Victoria winds up; here’s the pitch—it’s a bunt! Green is off to first. Baker gets the ball, throws to Garcia; Garcia throws to first—Thomas on his way to second—Green sliding: he’s **out**. Thomas is safe on second.*

*One out for the Leaders.*

The Leaders fans are cheering wildly.

*... number 49 is up next.*

*The pitch—low. Ball one.*

*Victoria waiting. ... The pitch—ball two.*

*The two-and-o pitch—ball three! Low and outside.*

*Here’s the windup and the pitch—low. Ball four.*

The fans are standing, shouting encouragement to the next batter, Mason Rodriguez.

*Runners now on first and second. One out.*

*Eli Davis, number 14, coming, replacing Mason Rodriguez.*

*Bentley Williams, number 28, will be replacing Julian Garcia.*

*Eli Davis now at bat. Eli is fresh and eager. Let’s see what he can do for the Leaders.*

*Martin wiping the ball, getting her sign. The windup, the pitch—Eli swings: a hit into deep right field. Emma Taylor going back for it. ... It’s over her head. Thomas rounds third. Hernandez rounds second. Emma is after the ball, picks it up and throws. Shortstop Abigail Wilson goes for it. Thomas crosses home and **scores**. Hernandez rounds third. Wilson is on the ball, throws to Martin—Davis on his way to second. Martin throws home to Baker; Hernandez sliding; Baker has the ball ... **safe**! Hernandez **scores**, leaving the Leaders with three runs and a runner on second.*

The Fosters are all on their feet, except little Hannah who is on Harold’s shoulders. Leila, Adam, and Alice stand up, as it is the only way to see. The fans are screaming and stomping on the bleachers.

*Still only one out now. The score: four, three.*

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The coaches have gone to the lines at first and third.

*Bentley Williams, number 28, is coming to bat.*

Everyone remains standing, but there is sudden silence in the home stand. It seems that no one dares take a breath.

“Now I can see the game, Daddy,” says Hannah from her perch on her father’s shoulders.”

*Here’s the windup and the pitch—a swing and a hit to short field; Scarlet Reed has it, drops it, throws to first—Davis going to third. Good throw to first, caught by Sonya Stern; **out** at first. Stern throws to Martin, Martin to Violet Torres. Davis is safe on third.*

The home crowd, tense and hopeful, is letting off steam again with shouts and whistles. Nearly everyone believes that the Leaders will not be left behind.

*Miles White, number 66, coming to bat.*

Cheers go up: “Miles White, Miles White, Miles White ...”.

*Davis is leading off; Martin throws to Torres; Davis goes back and is safe.*

*The ball goes back to Victoria. She winds up; here’s the pitch—a fast ball, wild and outside. Ball one.*

*Davis leading. Victoria eyes him, fakes a throw; Davis steps back. ... The pitch—a swing and drive up the middle. Scarlet Reed has it—Davis closing in on home—Reed throws to Evan Carter; Eli Davis sliding home—**out!***

*The final score: the Hornets four, the Leaders three.*

*The winners of the Autumn League Tournament this year of two thousand—a loud horn blast comes from behind—the **Herne Hornets!***

“Thank you for letting me sit with you,” Leila says to Harrietta.

“I’m so glad to have met you, Leila. I don’t think of you as the FSA chief.”

“Thank you. Please don’t ever because I’m not anymore—except ....”

She looks to see where Earl is. He is in a heated discussion with Al Cypher. No doubt, Cypher is arguing that they would have won if Asher had been left in the game.

“Except, I still have to finish one duty: I’m supposed to be keeping an eye on Earl.”

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“You will be seeing him at the baptism,” Harrietta reminds her. “Goodbye. God bless you.”

Leila waits to see what will happen with Earl and Al Cypher. *It's a good thing there's a fence between them.*

Earl looks past Cypher to Leila and winks. Cypher turns to look and sees her watching them. He says something to Earl, nods to Leila, walks a few paces, hesitates, gets a signal from his son to go ahead without him, and heads for the car marked *FSA Security*.

Leila goes to the gate in the fence to wait for Earl. While standing there, she notices a woman with flaming-red hair step down from the bleachers and go chasing after Al Cypher. (Almost everyone knows Pamela Evans. Leila remembers seeing her before—who would not!—but does not know who she is. The name meant nothing when Harrietta mentioned her in connection with the Lakeview church.)

“That’s highly irregular,” Leila remarks under her breath. But she has no desire to inquire about Al Cypher’s actions today.

Earl is talking with the coaches. Finally, he picks up his bag and comes to the gate, looking dejected.

“I blew it, didn’t I?” he says to Leila.

She turns to walk beside him and puts her hand on his shoulder.

“You sure did. But I enjoyed the game.”

“I noticed you were sandwiched right in there between those church folks.”

“Yes, I enjoyed that too. And I’m looking forward to sailing with you. Will the weather be suitable?”

“It’s hard to say what it will do.”

“I’ll be there anyway. One o’clock, right?”

“Yeah.”

Earl goes his way, with Officer Filstein following a few paces behind him. Leila lingers on the spot where they parted, watching him go, her car being in the opposite direction. Harrietta and the girls are getting into the Fosters’ Chinese Electric 240, which is

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parked next to Earl's antique military jeep. Homer, Victoria, and Asher are walking together with a couple she guesses are Victoria's parents. Harold intercepts Earl while Filstein continues on to his patrol car parked not far away. Apparently, Harold and Earl are engaging in serious discussion.

Leila turns around and walks back toward the school parking lot. Having lingered after the game longer than others, she is the last one to go in that direction. Adam Murphy had parked in the school lot too, and she sees his unique little car driving away. In spite of her anxiety, she cannot help chuckling at the comical "brickmobile."

†

Pamela had nearly caught up with Al Cypher.

"Are you ready to meet the Lord, Al?"

He turned to see who was following him.

"Not in public, Pamela."

"You'll regret it if you don't turn to Jesus Christ now. He's the way, the truth, and the life."

"Look, Pamela. I can put you in jail for saying that."

"There is only one way to escape the wrath of God, and that is to believe Jesus Christ died for your sins and accept his offer to save you. Otherwise, you will be guilty of ignoring this great salvation."

"That may or may not be true, but *you* are guilty of breaking the law, and I'm going to lock you up!"



## *the Day and the Hour*

On his way to unlock the church for the wedding party, Adam Murphy caught a radio news report.

*These results just in from the latest Pulpit poll:*

*10% believe the classical Rapture will occur.*

*15% believe it will be a mass UFO abduction.*

*20% believe in the earth-cleansing Removal.*

*15% believe nothing will happen.*

*25% believe nothing.*

*10% don't have an opinion.*

*20% never had heard of the Rapture.*

*3% believe they will be included in the Rapture.*

*These statistics were compiled from a survey of three thousand clergypersons from three hundred denominations and nondenominations, combining data from thirty polling agencies.*

†

Adam is having an early lunch with Alice, which will allow him to be back at the church for the wedding preliminaries well before one o'clock.

"I'm afraid this is all we have left. I've cleaned out just about everything," says Alice. "It isn't much."

"That's all right. It's better than having food go to waste. Where did these cookies come from?"

"I think you know."

"I never saw them before."

"There was a dozen of them in the refrigerator behind some old items I got rid of. They were in a glass bowl with **EAT US** on the lid, laid out in currants. I thought you put them there as a joke."

"Not I. There must be some mischief here."

"The refrigerator hasn't been as cold as it should be. I had to reboot it again. It's getting worse and worse. Maybe they grew there."

"That didn't have anything to do with it."

"If you're sure they're not fungi, I'll eat one," says Alice, taking a nibble.

Not wanting to be outdone by Alice's famous daring, Adam

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takes one of the cookies and bites off half.

“Not bad,” he says. “Tastes like a cake baked with oil. What is it?”

“I don’t know. Am I growing taller?”

“It isn’t a mushroom. You’ll have to take more than a nibble if you expect it to have drastic effects.”

“You’re right: they are good. ... Did you ask Felix about dinner tonight?”

(Yesterday, they decided to ask this man Felix, whose real name is Paul Christian, to join them for their last meal on earth. Who Felix is and why he is here is explained in another book.)

“I forgot. I’ll call him right now. ... He’s not answering or taking messages. He may be visiting someone. I’ve never seen anyone so bent on evangelizing the neighborhood. He’s not wasting any time.”

“If we’re having company for dinner, I’ll be fetching some groceries. It will take a little time to prepare it too. I planned to go right after the wedding.”

“I’ll let you know as soon as I’m able to reach him. Wouldn’t you need to pick up a little food for us anyway?”

“I planned to have pancakes. I thought you wouldn’t mind.”

“It would be okay with me.”

“There’s nearly a full bag of flour; I have two eggs left and a can of beer. There’s a quarter pound of butter in the freezer, and that bottle of maple syrup Earl gave you for your birthday still has some in it.”

“It sounds like we would have enough pancakes for Felix too.”

“I’d die before I’d serve pancakes to company for dinner! That would be as bad as leftovers.”

“You’re right. Perhaps Felix wouldn’t care too much, but I agree: we should treat him as well as we can for all his efforts.”

“Have another what-is-it.”

Adam’s phone rings.

“Hi, Philip. How did the meeting with your employees turn out? ... No kidding? ... No kidding! ... Wow. ... That would be fine

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—if you're sure they're sincere and they understand. ... All right, brother. I'll see you soon."

"How refreshing!" exclaims the pastor.

"What happened?"

"Philip's employees are all confessing Christ, not in spite of the Rapture but because of it. He's pretty sure some of them will want to be baptized. He wanted to check with me first before asking them."

"Oh, this is grand, isn't it?" exclaims Alice.

"Earl will be surprised. ... I think we best leave it that way."

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Following tradition, members of both teams repaired to the Lakeview after the game. The rule is that the managers share a table, and the manager of the losing team buys lunch for the manager on the other side.

Victoria Martin's parents went to sit with another couple while she and Homer took a table together. Victoria invited Asher to join them.

There had been discussion in the car on the way over about the outcome of the game. Various theories explaining why the manager replaced Asher with an inferior player were put forth. Only Asher was silent; he alone knew of the animosity his father held for Earl Clark, and he suspected that Clark had reason to dislike his father. Nonetheless, that he should be caught in the middle of the conflict seemed unfair. While walking into the restaurant, Earl had spoken to him and offered his sympathies, which lifted his spirits a little, but as recompense for what seemed to be unfair treatment, it was insufficient.

While waiting for their lunch orders to be taken, the discussion resumed:

"I'm not a natural baseball player," Asher admitted. "I work hard to keep my batting average up. So I score our first run and then get replaced by a guy who doesn't practice and can't hit."

"Garcia didn't last long," said Homer. "A foul, a pop-fly out, and he never got to base or caused a runner to advance."

"He hesitates in his swing," said Victoria. "It's like he doesn't have his heart in the game."

"So Mr. Clark put Williams in, who isn't much good either," said Asher.

"One swing and he was out, but at least he got Davis to third," said Homer.

"Little good it did: he never made it home," said Asher.

"I liked pitching for Williams," said Victoria. "Did you see the grin on his face? He was thrilled to be in the game. But I'll have to agree: he didn't merit such favor. I think your manager had some

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other purpose in mind besides winning the game. Maybe it was to give more of your guys a chance to play.”

“I know what it is,” said Asher. “He has something against my dad.”

“Victoria’s lunch is on the house for pitching a winning game,” said Clio. She was reaching over the table, pouring water.

“Thanks,” said Homer. “I was going to pay for it.”

“If you’re not going with us tomorrow morning, you need to be saving your money, kiddo,” Clio replied.

“I’ll have one of these,” said Asher, as he pressed the Select button next to the picture of the lamb gyro being featured on the tabletop display.

Clio put the pitcher down next to the picture and took out her dinerPad to take orders from the pitchers. Victoria was tapping the tabletop, paging through the menu.

“Homer?”

“Just bring me a ham sandwich,” he said, leaning back with his arms folded.

“I’d like the chicken-salad sandwich,” said Victoria. “Do you want me to select it here?”

“I’ve got it,” Clio replied. She picked up the pitcher. “Hold on to what you believe, dear. Don’t let Homer fill you with doubts.” She started to walk away, and then she turned and added, “Listen to what she says, Asher.”

“How did she know?” Homer demanded, as soon as Clio was out of earshot.

“The Spirit is moving,” said Victoria.

“I thought she was a witch,” said Asher.

“Don’t you know what happened here on Tuesday?” Victoria asked. “Everybody in Herne heard about it.”

“I know because my aunt was involved,” said Homer. “But that doesn’t have anything to do with it. Everyone knows about the rule for being on the team, so how did she know Asher isn’t committed anymore?”

“I haven’t told anyone but Homer,” Asher confirmed. “But I

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don't care who knows. We need to listen to the prophets."

"There's no way for it to happen," countered Homer. "The laws of nature don't allow it."

"There are spiritual laws that are higher," said Victoria.

"That's right," said Asher. "There's a new nature."

"They can't just come along with something that goes against what's always been taught," maintained Homer.

"The Spirit can," said Victoria. "Your church no longer rejects it, so why do you keep saying it's a hoax when everyone believes it isn't?"

"I don't think everything that gets reported is true," Homer replied.