

Chapter 7

*P*hilip Evans anticipated that parking at the Beach House would be a challenge, and he considered it his duty to do something about it since he was responsible for as many as nine additional vehicles potentially vying for a place in Earl's driveway. (After checking with Pastor Murphy about inviting his employees, describing the experience in his upper room this morning, he telephoned each of them and got an enthusiastic response in every case, excepting Russell who considered himself already well baptized.)

Philip knew about the original arrangement, as everyone did. The mysterious beauty, an old friend of the pastor's, would be returning to town in order to be baptized in the lake. He assumed that she would arrive in her limousine, for such people once accustomed to their amenities are loathe to give them up. He also knew that Leila Labaki had decided to piggyback onto the occasion and be baptized too.

He was not sure that Earl knew about the extras. He thought it likely that he had not made provisions for managing the parking for such a crowd. Therefore, Philip assigned the job to himself.

Philip knew nothing of the FSA employees responding to the invitation during last evening's meeting at the church since he and Harold were out dispensing warnings of the wrath to come. His wife had not told him about it since Pamela did not know about it either, she being involved with the Lakeview church at the same hour. A total of ten FSA employees had requested that Pastor Murphy baptize them along with two of their spouses and three youngsters. That meant ten more cars would likely show up at the Beach House in addition to the nine driven by the store employees plus Philip's own car and the Murphys' car and the two vehicles of the original baptizees, making a total of twenty-three. Philip had forgotten about Earl's Saturday sailing class, so those

the Story

four cars had been omitted from his accounting. The grand total would be twenty-seven vehicles, assuming no other friends, relatives, church members, etc. would be driving in.

Philip assumed that the limousine would be expecting to use the driveway. Therefore, his preliminary plan was to have all others park on the road and let everyone walk down the winding drive to the Beach House.

As Philip arrives, he finds a car with LEILA on its license plate, parked on the shoulder of the road just past the Beach-House driveway. He goes fifty feet beyond it and parks with his right wheels in the weeds.

The weather has been adjusted for the baptism: The remaining fragments of the overcast have risen to form puffy white clouds drifting by the sun. The lively wind that drew the sailors forth has driven them home again; and after completing that task, it slacked off and became a breeze for a short while before going elsewhere, leaving only occasional rustlings in the bright maple leaves.

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Down on the bay the remaining waves, having nowhere else to go, are washing up and dying upon the shore while out on the spit the stronger waves of the lake continue to break on its far side, making a hollow sound apart from the rushing wind that called them forth.

On the docks, *Willow's* crew has neatly flaked her sail, the little ship being safely moored back in her place at the float. *Walter* is coming in with splashy strokes toward her own mooring spot, her mains'l hanging in an awkward lump on one side of the boom. Earl and Leila are ghosting in close to the dock, unwilling to lower the sails while any trace of the breeze remains, coaxing *Wind Chaser* to catch every stray current of air that wanders by.

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Beach House Road consists of one narrow lane, and its shoulders are nearly nonexistent. Philip estimates that he can provide all of his employees (former employees, but he is not used

the Day and the Hour

to that yet) parking spots along the road even if some have to be scrunched against the bushes. What does one care about a few scratches on a car soon to be left behind?

As Philip walks back toward the driveway, his right-hand man arrives. He motions Lonnie to park just behind him.

“Glad you made it, brother,” says Philip. “I get to call you ‘brother’ now, you know.”

“I was thinking you’d be my son—if we’re in the Lord’s family together. But if you want me to be your older brother, that’s fine.”

“We’ll have to work that out later. ... I think that’s Lindsey’s car coming, isn’t it?”

“Looks like it.”

“Would you stay up here and have our people park on the shoulder as far over as they can? We don’t want to block the road in case Karen needs to get her truck out. Also, we’d better leave the driveway clear for the limo. I’m going to go and check the situation down there. Maybe there’s enough room for the pastor’s car too.”

Lonnie directs Lindsey to park behind his car, leaving space for perhaps two or three more between hers and Leila’s.

Philip hurries down the long, curving driveway. Near the end he discovers the four cars of the sailing students parked well to the side. Fortunately, they are all very small cars. It appears that there will be enough room for the limousine to squeeze by if the driver is careful. Earl has put a sign on the door of the main garage.

<p>DO NOT PARK HERE LEAVE DRIVEWAY CLEAR</p>
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Up on the road, Jeremy is arriving, followed by Joanne. Lonnie has them park behind Lindsey’s car.

Having seen all there is to see, Philip walks back up the driveway. He is familiar with every turn since he lived at the Beach House himself for nearly nine years, well before Earl came

the Story

to town. There is a straight section about mid way where the hedges are farther apart and the pavement is wider. It would easily accommodate the pastor's car—actually, three or four of the pastor's cars. Alternatively, it could accommodate the limousine without preventing passage around it. Philip decides to use the latter arrangement, confirming his original plan. Otherwise, the limo would have to park some distance down the road, for the spot behind Leila's car that he is reserving for the pastor is not spacious enough for anything but a compact vehicle, being limited by a large cedar tree.

Conway, from the Drinking Water and Wells Department of the FSA, is arriving with his wife, Coral. These being unexpected guests, Lonnie is unsure whether they should be allowed to go down the driveway. The driver is likewise unsure; he turns tentatively into the drive, stops, and lowers his window because Philip is walking up the middle, blocking his way.

Lindsey comes around the corner from the road to the driveway with a roll of towels and her change of clothes in a bag. She beams when she sees Philip and tries to hold up her arms for a hug, but it does not work well with what she is carrying. She manages a hug with one arm. As she continues on down the hill, Philip turns back to the car.

"Are you here for the baptism?" he asks Conway. He has recognized the man and knows about his capacity in the FSA.

"We are. We're here to be baptized by Pastor Murphy. Are you managing the parking?"

On the road, Frieda is arriving, closely followed by Carl. Lonnie directs them to park farther down beyond the others.

Jeremy and Joanne come striding around the corner into the driveway, carrying towels and bathing suits.

"Hi, Phil," calls out Jeremy.

Jeremy is full of questions.

"Is there a place we can change?"

"Earl generally lets us use the house," replies Philip. "There's a bathroom just inside the back door. Lindsey is down there

the Day and the Hour

already.”

“Would you mind parking along the road?” Philip asks Conway, having finished answering additional questions from Jeremy. “We’re trying to keep the driveway clear.”

“Sure, Phil. No problem.”

As Conway begins to back out, a car goes by carrying Clarence and his wife, Clara. Philip hopes she is here as a believer, and he makes a mental note to alert Pastor Murphy. He can vouch for his ex-employees but not for their families.

Philip walks beside Conway’s vehicle as it backs up out of the driveway. Lonnie is trotting over, and he directs Conway to find a place on the road beyond the other cars.

Seeing there is more room on the shoulder in the other direction, Philip turns right and walks that way to catch the arrivals sooner. Looking back, he notices Frieda and Carl approaching with their baptism bags in hand. The girl holding Frieda’s hand causes him to pause. She appears to be about five years old, and he assumes she is Frieda’s daughter, Fritz. The little girl carries a towel and a bag, also. He makes another mental note to have them talk to the pastor and then continues on to greet the next car.

It is another one he does not recognize, driven by a woman he suspects is visiting the Martins. He lets it go by and then looking back sees her turn into the driveway.

“Why don’t these women use their turn signals before it’s too late?” he mutters.

Lonnie was not close enough to catch her either. He is greeting Clarence and Clara, who are walking from their car, both carrying bags.

Yet another strange car is approaching. Philip waves it down.

“Hi. I’m Bennie. I work for the FSA in Behavioral Health. Is this where Pastor Murphy is baptizing?”

“This is the place. I’m Philip Evans. Welcome to the family of the Lord Jesus. That’s the driveway to the Beach House, but we’re trying to keep it clear. Would you mind parking up here on the

the Story

road?”

“Funny you ask that. Normally, I would park wherever I pleased. But since last night I feel like a new man. Tell me exactly where you want me to park.”

“Anywhere you can find a spot along the road here. You could back up—wait, here comes a truck. It might be better if you pull ahead and find a place beyond the other cars.”

“Good thing I came early! Thanks, Philip.”

The truck, it turns out, is driven by Brutus of the FSA Child Weight Division. Philip catches him in time and gets the jumbo rig to park far enough off the road to let the limousine pass. Its right wheels go well off the raised roadway, and it tilts to an alarming angle. The driver struggles and squeezes out with difficulty but shows no concern about his truck getting stuck.

As Brutus swings down the road toward the driveway, the car that turned into it reappears, its driver having realized that parking on the road is to be preferred. She is hesitating, wondering which way to turn. Both Philip and Lonnie are motioning to her to come their way. Finally, she turns right and stops by Philip, lowering her window.

“Sorry about the congestion,” he says. “Are you here for the baptism?”

“Yes, thanks to Leila and her message. I’m Sanela from the Healthy Retail Stores Project.”

“Oh, I remember you now. We had some disagreements with your department back when we were in the old building.”

“I’m really sorry I caused you so much trouble.”

“I forgive you. I think we’re sister and brother now, is that right?”

“That’s right,” she agrees. “Aren’t you excited? I can hardly wait!”

“Now that you’re headed this way, see if you can find a place to park off the side of the road along here. ... Here comes someone else. Stay right where you are for a minute.”

It turns out to be Vicki, and Philip has her park behind Brutus’

the Day and the Hour

truck.

“Okay, now you can go ahead and park on this side,” he says to Sanela. “It looks like there is a spot you can get into up there. I’m trying to keep the space behind Leila’s car open for Pastor Murphy.”

Realizing that more cars are coming than predicted by his calculation, Philip decides to send all of his people on to Lonnie. Francis arrives, and he points him down the road to where Lonnie is standing.

Close behind Francis is a car Philip does not recognize, and he steps out to meet it.

“Are you here for the baptism?”

“Yes, I’m Felice. I worked for Leila in Forms and Permits. This is my daughter, Faith.”

“Welcome, both of you. Your best place to park would be up here on the road. Pull as far over as you can to keep it passable for larger vehicles. It might be easier if Faith gets out now since there won’t be any room on your right side after you’re parked.”

Another strange car is approaching. It stops for Philip’s advice.

“Hi. I’m Amna from the Safe and Active Routes to School Department.”

“Welcome, Amna. I’m Philip. You’re here to be baptized, is that right?”

“That’s right. I heard the gospel at Grace Bible Church for the first time last night. I mean, I understood it for the first time. I can’t believe I missed it all my life. Thanks to Leila, who invited us to reconsider, some of us have just made it under the wire. I feel like my new life has already started, and I’m halfway to heaven, and I haven’t even been baptized yet!”

“It looks like Pastor Murphy and Alice are here, Amna. Could you back up? I see a place where we can fit you in behind the car that’s behind the truck.”

“Hi Philip!” calls out the pastor. “You’ve gotten yourself quite a job here. Has the limo shown up?”

the Story

“Not yet. I’m trying to keep the driveway clear for it. I’ve reserved a spot for you behind Leila’s car.”

Adam is relieved to hear that Evelyn has not yet arrived, since he had told her he would be here at two o’clock. Now he can start worrying about the possibility of her being detained again. He lets Alice out near the driveway.

Everyone is stepping back onto the slender shoulders wherever they can find places to stand, making way for an approaching FSA patrol car. Adam is glad to see it, since it tells him that Earl is still here. The officer stops and waits while the pastor maneuvers Alice’s little electric car into the slot reserved for it.

Adam and Alice are marching down the driveway when a sound makes Adam look over his shoulder. The gleaming grill of the limousine is right there, nudging them from behind. They step aside to let it pass. Evelyn has her window down. She is trying to maintain a dour composure, but when she looks up at Adam, her face breaks into a smile. The driver having slowed to a crawl, she has time to reach out and squeeze Alice’s hand.

“So that’s Evelyn’s smile!” Alice whispers. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“What didn’t I tell you?”

“You told me her looks gave her a lot of trouble, but you weren’t specific. Why didn’t you say she’s a beauty queen?”

“You met her at church Thursday.”

“Does she like stories?”

“I believe so.”

“How surprised she’ll be when she finds out who I am.”

“Wait until you find out who she is.”

“How old is she?”

“The same age I am, almost.”

“No! That can’t be right.”

“She does look a lot younger when she smiles.”

Philip, who had been walking behind the limousine, slows his pace to stay in step with Adam and Alice.

the Day and the Hour

The long car comes to a halt in front of the no-parking sign. The bodyguard emerges and opens the door for Evelyn. She gets out and stands by the car, tall and straight, waiting for Adam and Alice.

The Murphys and Philip round the last bend to find the limousine with Evelyn watching for them. She rushes to them and links her arms with Adam and Alice. They remain there, talking, while Philip instructs the driver about parking.

Hugo from the Historic Designation Board is arriving. Lonnie greets him as he exits his antique roadster, and sends him ambling down the driveway to join the others.

Adam, Alice, and Evelyn are proceeding to the steps under the golden-yellow maple boughs. Evelyn's bodyguard follows, carrying two canvas bags. Looking back, Adam notices that Evelyn's secretary is coming too, and she too is carrying a bag. The limousine is backing up the driveway under Philip's direction.

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Down on the dock, having completed *Walter's* mooring to everyone's satisfaction, Earl's sailing school stands on the float, marveling at the crowd that gathered in their absence. They are reluctant to mingle with landlubbers after being in the fellowship of wind and wave. It is like returning from a successful military campaign and finding your homeland occupied by the enemy. Earl expected to see Adam and Alice—and Evelyn. But he does not know why the others are here. Regardless, it falls on him as commander of his navy to see his sailors safely home.

"Fall in behind me," he commands. "Forward! ... Harch!"

Leila grabs Earl's arm, the *Willow* ladies follow, and *Walter's* crusty crew takes up the rear. Earl surveys the enemy lines ahead and notices several hardware-store employees.

As the fearsome force steps off the dock, the baptism occupation gives way, shuffling off the path. Leila spies Evelyn coming down the walk, linked together with Adam and Alice, and she breaks away from Earl, dashing up to greet her, while Earl turns aside and disappears into his shop. The remaining four, led

the Story

by the intrepid ladies, hold their formation, not turning right or left, marching up the walkway. The bodyguard sees them coming and responds to the challenge, whirling out in front of Evelyn with a fierce look for the insurgent sailors who simply swerve around this flotsam, snubbing the lubbers and proceeding to their cars.

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Up on the road, Naenia of the Office of Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization is the last to arrive though Lonnie does not know it yet and continues to wait for others.

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Evelyn is making introductions.

“Pastor Murphy, this is Ruth, my secretary, and Benayahu, my faithful guard and companion of many years.”

“Thank you both for coming. This is truly a great day.”

“Pleased to meet you, Pastor Murphy,” says the bodyguard.

“When I told Ben about you, he asked me whether he could be baptized too,” says Evelyn.

“That means you know Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, Benayahu?”

“Yes, sir. By his grace I received him on Monday when I first heard about the Rapture. I was home with my wife. She had been praying for me most of her life. I was just stubborn. I always knew she was right, but I was stubborn. When I heard about those dreams, I knew I had to admit she was right.

“I asked forgiveness first of my wife for causing her so much worry, and then I got down on my knees and asked God to forgive me for having insisted on my own way. And that was it. He did the rest. I reckon I’m a new man by the blood of Jesus Christ according to his promise, and I think Ms. Newton knows it. I’m hoping, if I be real nice to her, she will let me be her bodyguard in heaven.”

“Yes, I do know it, Benayahu. The Lord looks wonderful in you.”

“Does your wife know you’re being baptized here?” asks Adam.

the Day and the Hour

“Oh, yes. She would be here if she could. But we had no transportation. We’re still under the rulers of this world for a little while.”

“And Ruth would like to be baptized too,” says Evelyn. “We spent some hours last night sharing. She has a remarkable testimony.”

“Please tell me about it, Ruth. If you would like, we can go to those chairs near the water and be a little more comfortable.

“By the way, everyone!” Adam says in a louder voice. “Earl is letting us use the house to change into whatever you will be wearing into the water, and you can change out of your wet clothes there afterward.”

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Philip, having completed overseeing the limousine parking, is back on the street with Lonnie. After several minutes without traffic, they conclude that their task is over. He sends Lonnie down the driveway to join the party. But for himself he walks to his car for a little rest and calls Pamela.

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Earl is working on the boat hull under construction in his shop. He was intending to correct the mistake he made nearly a week ago—the planking-sequence error he discovered yesterday. He thought this afternoon would be an ideal time to get it done while Leila and Evelyn were being baptized. He is rechecking plank widths on both sides of the hull and comparing them with a table in his notebook. He keeps making mistakes; it is not coming out right.

the Story