

Chapter 9

Adam and Clara have gotten up from the chairs; he has delivered her back to her husband and gone looking for the remaining person he needs to interview.

"I'm Pastor Murphy. I know you from the store, but I'll have to confess I can't remember your name. I relied too much on your name tag."

"Frieda. And this is my daughter, Fritzi."

"Philip told me a little about your meeting this morning. I know it was heartwarming for him to have his entire staff come to the Lord."

"It was the Spirit who did it, that's for sure. But I'm not sure about Russell."

"He's a worry for me too. He's a peculiar man. Is Fritzi going to be baptized?"

"She wants to be."

"Have you explained salvation to her?"

"No. ... She's already memorized Scripture."

"That's wonderful, Fritzi. If you will allow me to be your pastor, I could listen to you say it. Would that be a good idea?"

"She's a little shy around men. She never saw her father."

"Maybe we could sit down on those chairs next to the water, so she won't have to tilt her head back so far to look at me."

"Fritzi, would you like to go talk with Pastor Murphy? ... She's not sure."

"Well, I don't blame her at all. Fritzi, I can tell you're a very special girl. You have a Father in heaven who loves you very much."

"I know that!"

"Would you like to tell me about him?"

"Okay."

"Come on, we'll go sit with Pastor Murphy and you can recite

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your psalm.”

The pastor sits down on one of the chairs, but Fritzzi wants to remain standing. She stands before him, and with her hands folded and her head bowed, she prays to her Father:

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth.
Thou has set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings has thou ordained strength because of thy enemies, that thou might still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou has ordained—what is man that thou are mindful of him and the son of man that thou visits him? For thou has made him a little lower than the angels and has crowned him with glory and honor. Thou made him to have dominion over the works of thy hands: Thou has put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea, and whatsoever passes through the paths of the sea. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

“Did you pick that out for her?” Adam asks her mother.

“No, she picked it out herself.”

“Can she read, then?”

“I can only read the Bible,” says Fritzzi.

“She reads some. She looks at it and seems to get something from it,” her mother explains.

“My angel always sees the face of my Father who is in heaven,” declares Fritzzi.

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Earl is pretending to busy himself in the shop while continuing to steal glances outside. Evelyn and Leila are holding hands. He sees Evelyn’s Ethiopian driver wearing his Bermuda shorts.

Evelyn is aware of Earl’s awkward position.

“I’m going to speak to Earl,” she tells Leila.

She goes to the shop door and knocks. Earl opens it and steps back, saying nothing. She steps inside and closes the door.

Much has changed since she spoke to him last. That was before Leila was saved, and Evelyn was then much more concerned about Leila’s future than she is now. At that time it was

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critical that the resistance effort succeed for Leila's sake so that she would not need to be in the middle of the Reorganization whether opposing it or implementing its draconian devices as her office would have demanded. (Although her own assignment was to promote the Reorganization, Evelyn had undermined it at every opportunity and had advised Earl's resistance committee about forestalling installation of the infrastructure.)

"Earl, I'm truly sorry you won't come with us."

It was not the best way to begin. Evelyn meant to let him know that she values his company. She is aware of the gulf separating him from fellowship with her and the others, but there is no longer a reason that she knows of for his remaining on the far side of it.

However, there is a reason; there is something that has not occurred to her.

"I've had enough of women running everything," Earl says. "It appears that your kingdom of heaven will be no different. It's no place for me."

Evelyn is silent while she visits his point of view and processes this information. Seeing it his way, it strikes her that untold damage followed the bold intrusion of women into areas formerly dominated by men—not that the world is any worse for it, but what about heaven? How many men have thereby been repelled from taking the gospel to heart, being effectively sent to hell by their women? It was not always like this. There was a time when men were allowed the illusion of being leaders. She had never before considered how that subtle difference operated on the male psyche.

Evelyn sees Earl in a new way. For all his male fortitude, he is a product of his reactions to the women who have dominated him. What good is there in this war between the sexes? She knows it is a remnant of the fall. It was unknown in Eden. Still, paradoxically, it has in no wise ruined him. Quite the contrary, here is a man who would be willing to lay down his life for his friends. She loves him more than she can say. The tragic hero may

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not win the golden cup or the jeweled crown, but he wins the heart.

“Earl, remember, society in heaven is different. You have to put away your earthly concepts. The competitive spirit in this world is of the animal side of human nature. It serves the ends of self-preservation and procreation. In the kingdom of heaven, you leave that behind. You enter a new kind of life. There, we all belong to one another in our Lord. You may even see a bit of it here this afternoon.”

As she spoke, she became more beautiful than ever. It was not her smile: she is not smiling. The beauty radiates from an inner light. It tears his heart: he yearns to embrace all that she is, but he knows he cannot get there from where he is. It seems that she has forgotten his mission.

She speaks again, reminding him of the option he will not accept:

“When you are apprehended, you leave the resistance effort to others, so why not claim your victory before that happens?”

With her connections in government, Earl is certain that she *could* find a way to get him out from under the FBI investigation, behind which looms a likely prison sentence. It seems that she is merely taunting him. He refuses to look at her. She may be a prophetess, but if she will not help him, he will go it alone. Earl vows to outwit and defeat the enemy without her aid; he will not let the responsibility pass from him.

Evelyn perceives his agony. She knows that she has brought it about. She waits for words of wisdom in order to save him from feeling excluded, and she comes out with a bold statement:

“Leila is the one to satisfy your soul. No power in heaven or earth will separate you from her for long. Earl, we love you.”

He has turned his back to her and is facing the wall.

Evelyn has done all she can do, for better or for worse. She steps outside and closes the door. As she leaves, Earl turns, and looking out through the window, he meets Leila’s sad eyes. He must not be moved by these women.

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There will be time to sort things out. There is a time for everything.

He goes around to the far side of the unfinished boat, to a spot where he is out of their sight, and sits down on a stool.

†

“Do you know how late it is?” Alice says to Adam.

“Yes, it’s time, isn’t it?”

He walks to the water’s edge and steps onto the dock.

“If you will all gather around me here,” he calls out, “I would like to make a few remarks before we begin your baptisms.”

Everyone moves toward the pier, and they all crowd around the preacher.

“I would like to explain the meaning of baptism.

“You are all here because you have responded to the call of Christ. Is that true? Is there anyone who still has doubts? ...

“This is a believer’s baptism. That means you are submitting to being immersed in the water as an expression of your faith. You are telling the world that you remember the pattern set down in the Scriptures. That means you respect the Scriptures. As you are immersed in the water and then lifted up, it symbolizes your being in Christ who died and was raised again to life and to glory.

“There is nothing magic about baptism. It does not wash away your sins: it is the blood of Christ that washes away your sins. It does not make you holy: this is not holy water; only the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts makes us holy.

“Here is what I like best about this kind of baptism where we get all wet and come out with our hair plastered down and dripping and our clothes clinging to our bodies: It makes us look much worse than we would want to be caught looking in public. In other words, it’s humbling. Being humbled is bad for our pride, which means it’s good for our souls. If you take this the right way, it can be a reminder that we have nothing to boast of in ourselves. It’s only in Christ that we boast. Not that we’re proud of ourselves for having chosen him or even for being chosen by him. *We* are all wet. *He* is the one we boast of. Never stop praising him. He is the

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only one worthy of our boasting. And what a joy it is to boast of Christ! Boast of yourself, and it may give you a brief lift, but it lets you down afterward because it damages your soul. Boast of Christ, and it heals and purifies your soul.

“When you come out of the water and you’re tempted to be embarrassed about the way you look, remember that Jesus was nailed to the cross and hung there naked for you. He was not humbled: there was no need for that. He was humiliated. Now is the time to realize that he took your shame upon himself, took it to the grave, and rose holy and victorious over shame and death. The life you now live is holy only because you live in him.

“Now, I will call the order. Some of you are eager and want to be first. Some of you remember that Jesus said the last shall be first, so you want to be last. Therefore, I will call the order.

“First will be Evelyn since she was the first to request to be baptized today. Next will be Leila since her request came next. Then will come Melech since he was last to ask and after him Ruth and then Benayahu.

“Now, Benayahu, will you be able to let Evelyn out of your sight long enough to have your whole self immersed in the lake?”

“Yes, sir. I’m trusting the Lord to watch over her. He doesn’t need me as much as I thought he did. He was just humoring me. In fact, I don’t think I was necessary at all. But I’m not complaining about that. I’m trusting him to make everything come out right just as everyone else here is.”

“God bless you, sir. Let’s all say amen to that.”

“Amen!”

“Next, let’s have the FSA folks come. Then will come Fritz and Frieda. You can both come into the water together. Then Clara and Clarence. Philip, you can arrange the order for the rest of your folks.”

Adam steps off the dock, turns around, and takes off his shoes. He will go into the water dressed. He empties his pockets and puts his wallet and keys in his shoes.

Evelyn is standing ready, wearing a robe over her swimming

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suit. She pulls it tightly around her to keep it from floating as she follows Adam into the water. They go out twenty feet or so until the water is up to their waists.

“Evelyn, my sister in Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

Leila is wading out as Evelyn comes back in.

As Evelyn turns around to watch Leila, Earl slips out of the shop. While the pastor is lowering Leila into the water, symbolizing her dying to herself and being immersed in Christ—while everyone is watching—Earl walks briskly up the brick path to the garage and quietly opens the door with the sign on it, revealing one of his three automobiles.

Leila wades back and steps out of the water, her swimming suit dripping, and takes the towel offered by Alice. She wraps herself in it and immediately goes to the door of Earl’s shop, gently pulling it open and quietly stepping inside while Earl backs his Thunderbird roadster out of the garage.

Discovering his absence, she knows intuitively that he has fled the premises. Nevertheless, hoping to be wrong, she hurries out and runs all the way up to the garage without caring who may be watching and careless of the sharp pains on her bare feet. The door is open, the T-bird is gone, and the smell of its exhaust hangs in the air. She feared this would happen. A weakness and dizziness comes over her. She steps inside and reaches to the forklift to steady herself.

Thoughts are racing through her mind: *I must find him*. But she doubts that her surveillance team will be able to keep up with him if he wants to escape. *Maybe he went to his office*—at the paper. *Maybe he went to the Burns house*—to play horseshoes. *No*. She understands him. He has been pushed too far. *He won’t be coming back*. The thought is paralyzing but not to the exclusion of tears. *Who ever cried of a broken heart immediately after being baptized?* She is glad that no one is nearby, and she lets the tears flow. *Tears can’t make me look any worse*.

After some minutes she regains her equilibrium and pulls the

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towel tight about her shoulders. The cold, clammy wetness of her clothing is causing her to shiver. She walks deliberately back down the stairs, passing under the golden leaves, back down the brick walkway, and into Earl's house. The bathroom door is closed; Evelyn's bodyguard is standing near it. Leila's heart is too heavy to bear company; she wants to be alone. She passes through the kitchen, through the dining room, and comes to the parlor where flames are leaping in the fireplace.

She stands at the hearth, absorbing the warmth of the fire. But the cold, numb feeling in her breast will not be relieved by anything in Earl's house but Earl himself. If only he were here, she would pour out her anguish to him. He would then understand and not reject her love. In spite of the fire, her teeth are chattering.

The sound of a footstep and the creak of a floorboard warn of someone's approach. She looks up, and in the mirror above the mantle she sees Evelyn standing in the doorway. Leila turns, shivering, and by her desperate look invites Evelyn in. The older woman wraps her in a hug, careless of the wet hair and damp towel.

"He ... left," Leila says shakily.

"It's my fault, not yours," Evelyn replies. "I tried to coax him to join us, but I'm afraid it had the opposite effect."

Leila does not answer immediately. Talking is difficult when your teeth are chattering. But the combined effect of the fire and the warmth of Evelyn's embrace is beginning to subdue the shivers.

"No. ... It's ... my doing. ... I tried to show him how I feel. He must have taken it the wrong way. ... I don't blame him. He wasn't expecting anything like this many people. I should have warned him candidly instead of trying to bind him. Now he's gone. I'm afraid he's gone forever."

Evelyn is silent, giving Leila time to spend the excess of her grief.

"How could I have been so foolish? ... Of course he would

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resent this intrusion! ... I should have told him all I knew; then we could have gone somewhere together and saved him from having to be here.”

“But what then?” Evelyn asks.

“I know. We would be followed everywhere by the surveillance squad. He hates them! How can I blame him for that? And they’re out there because of me. If I were an ordinary woman, I wouldn’t be a threat to him. But I can’t escape being who I am even if I don’t want to be who I am. I would rather be a cleaning woman working for him than one who wields authority over him. Then he would have been comfortable with me. We were doomed from the beginning.”

“My dear, there is always hope. Nothing is impossible with our Lord in heaven. He put you and Earl together for a reason. Never doubt that. This is your test of faith. Though hope seems desperate, it never is desperate in him. I will hope for us both until you regain some courage.”

Leila’s shivering has subsided. Evelyn is her comforter, and the fire is warming her legs. She needed something tangible to replace her worthless scheme to stay with Earl as long as the day lasted. Now she has it. She would have clung to Evelyn with her arms if they were not wrapped in the towel. She will trust Evelyn’s trusting for her. Like a child being consoled by her mother, she forgets her fear and drinks in the comfort, counting it the grace of God.

“Dry clothes will make a difference,” Evelyn says. “Let’s get your clothes and find a place to change.”

Evelyn takes her up the stairs where they find Earl’s office door open. She leaves Leila there, bidding her farewell for the last time.

“We will find you in heaven—very soon; it won’t be long.”

†

Melech had gone after the limousine with Ruth accompanying him. Down the driveway it comes, parking in front of the gaping garage.

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Adam and Alice are proceeding up the brick walkway, accompanied by Evelyn and Benayahu. Slowly, they mount the three steps. The bodyguard opens the door for Evelyn, and she turns to Adam.

“I’ll see you in heaven—tomorrow. Don’t forget me.”