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# ONE

## The Suspects

THE newest member of the Young Tribulation Force shook his head as Morale Monitor Melinda accused him of working against the Global Community.

*They don't know where Vicki and Lionel are,* Conrad Graham thought as Commander Blancka fumed.

"You helped Vicki escape," Melinda said, still groggy from sleeping pills Lionel had given her the night before.

"You're crazy," Conrad said. "You and Lionel blew that. I told you questioning her was a bad idea!"

"That was part of your plan," Melinda said.

The commander interrupted. "Graham, tell me about the call."

"Some guy said you wanted to see

Melinda," Conrad said. "I just delivered the message."

"You didn't verify it?"

"There was no reason," Conrad said.

"Besides, everything's been crazy around here."

"He knows something and he's not telling," Felicia said.

Conrad turned on her. "How do we know Melinda didn't set this up with Lionel? Ask her what she was doing in that cell—"

"Lionel drugged her!" Felicia said.

"Enough," Commander Blancka said, glaring at Conrad. "Until I sort this out, you'll stay locked up like Stein."

"But, sir—"

"Take him away!"



Judd and the others inspected the underground hangar and found scattered rocks and dirt. Airplane equipment lay strewn about.

Mark pointed out the steel girders. "That's why we're safe here," he said.

Judd found the wall the GC had cut through to get to him and Ryan. Plaster and flooring from above covered the hole.

"We have only one way in or out," Judd said, showing Mark the collapsed secret door in the hillside.

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"We can dig a new opening," Mark said. "Won't be fancy, but we'll have another exit."

The kids grabbed tools. After a few minutes, Vicki threw down her shovel. "Have you guys forgotten Darrion and Conrad?" she said. "They're facing Blancka!"

"Darrion said the same thing about you," Judd said, "and look where she is now."

"At least she cared enough to do something," Vicki said.

"Don't give me that!" Judd shouted. "I risked my life to get back here."

"To do what?" Vicki said. "Save us?"

Mark and Shelly stopped digging.

"Settle down," Lionel said. "We're on the same side, remember?"

"Yeah, but Judd always has to show us who's boss," Vicki said.

Judd shook his head.

"The GC are going to figure out who Darrion is," Vicki said. "We have to get her out."

"They'll probably trace the cycle back here," Judd said. "That's why we're digging."

Vicki rolled her eyes. "My point exactly," she said. "You care more about yourself—"

"If Darrion had listened, she wouldn't be where she is."

"Like you've never made a mistake," Vicki said.

"Judd's right," Lionel said. "Conrad's our best bet to get her out."

"He might not even know they have her," Vicki said.

Judd reached for Vicki's shoulder, but she jerked away.

Lionel stared at them. "Is something going on here?"

Judd scratched his head. "Give us a minute."

Lionel returned to help Mark and Shelly.

"You're upset about Darrion," Judd said.

"That's not all," Vicki said. "We got out of there so fast there wasn't time to bring Phoenix."

"You're worried about a dog?"

"I promised Ryan. Maybe promises don't mean that much to you—"

"Stop it!" Judd said. "I know you promised, but risking your life for Phoenix doesn't make sense."

"You get mixed up with a biker gang and try to jump a motorcycle over a river, and I don't make sense?"

Judd took Vicki by the shoulders. "This is partly because of us."

Vicki squinted. "Don't flatter yourself!"

"I care for you, Vicki, but—"

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"Get this," she interrupted. "I don't go for arrogant types who think they're always right. If you want to be friends, fine. Other than that, no."



Conrad sat back against the cell door.

"Know anything about Vicki?" Mr. Stein said from the next cell. When Conrad hesitated, Mr. Stein added, "I only want to know that she is safe."

"If the GC don't know where she is, she's OK," Conrad said.

Mr. Stein sighed. "You are one of them, are you not?"

"What do you mean?"

Mr. Stein told his story. His wife and daughter Chaya had believed Jesus was the Messiah before Chaya was killed in the earthquake. Mr. Stein had laughed at them. "Now I'm not so sure they were wrong. I read a part of the New Testament last night, plus some of Tsion Ben-Judah's Web site."

"The Web site got me too," Conrad said. "Then Judd and Vicki explained it, and it all came together."

"I do not know what to believe," Mr. Stein said. "I have so many questions."

Conrad inched closer to the bars. "I don't know that much, but like what?"

"All right," Mr. Stein said, "if Jesus really is the Messiah, how could he forgive someone who has been against him all his life?"

"That's me too," Conrad said.

"But—," Mr. Stein said. "I am a Jew who rejected his Messiah. And the way I treated Chaya! Surely God could not forgive such an offense."

"There are stories in the Bible about people who turned around," Conrad said.

"That is not my only problem," Mr. Stein said. "If this is all true, God has caused millions to die or suffer."

"I don't think he's mean," Conrad said. "I think he's trying to get our attention."

"But there's another problem. If my wife and daughter were right, Nicolae Carpathia is the Antichrist. With all the good he has done, how can I believe that?"

A guard came and took Mr. Stein away. A few minutes later another prisoner was led in. Conrad peered through the dim light to see who it was.



Vicki retreated to a corner. She was crushed but didn't want anyone to know. She had



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hoped Judd had feelings for her, and several times he had started to say something but never finished. Under the desk in the rubble of New Hope Village Church, she felt close to him. But now he had changed, and Vicki felt foolish.

Shelly came and sat next to Vicki. "Mark punched through the dirt wall about half an hour ago, no thanks to you."

"Sorry."

"What's up?"

Vicki shook her head.



Judd sat by what was left of the Stahley's pool, throwing in clods of dirt and watching them break apart. He wanted to tell Vicki how he felt, but it was clear her feelings weren't as strong as his.

Evening shadows stretched across the Stahley property.

*Vicki is too young anyway*, Judd thought. But her angry words had hurt him. They had been through so much together. And now this.

Something caught Judd's eye at the edge of the woods. Branches moved and leaves rustled. He sat still. The sounds stopped. Judd relaxed. Then came the squawk of a

radio. He dropped and crawled toward the house. Inside, he moved to the window. Nothing.

He quietly called Lionel and told him to watch the other side of the house. Suddenly, Judd spotted two uniformed GC officers heading toward them and more scattered in the woods. A helicopter flew overhead.

Lionel ran to Judd. "How could I have been so stupid!"

"What?" Judd said.

"My radio! It has a homing device. I led them right to us!"



Conrad motioned to Darrion. She seemed to recognize him but looked cautious. Conrad pulled back his hair and showed the mark on his forehead. "Do they know who you are?" he said.

Darrion shook her head. "The commander kept saying he couldn't place me. I said I was Laura Grover and that I'd found the motorcycle in a big house. I have to figure a way out of here," Darrion said.

"Hang tight," Conrad said. "They might turn you loose in a few days."

"And if they figure out who I am?"

"Then I'll have to get us both out."

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Vicki and Shelly ran to the others when they heard the commotion.

Mark said, "The GC is tracking Lionel's radio. Be ready to run."

Vicki frowned. "Give me the radio."

Lionel handed it to her. "I hope you know what you're doing."