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ONE

The Rescue

VICKI Byrne heard rumbling outside the bowling alley and desperately wanted to make a break for the motorcycle. But she couldn't run. At least a hundred people inside needed her help.

She and Conrad had seen Global Community guards nearby. Demon locusts buzzed around the specially equipped vans. The guards inside wore protective clothing.

People whimpered and cried as the pastor tried to calm them. "No matter what happens, we trust in the Lord!"

Conrad ran to the front of the building. "I don't see anything in the parking lot!"

"They must be around back!" someone shouted.

Vicki took the microphone and explained what the kids had heard from Carl Meninger,

their friend working as a Global Community Peacekeeper. "The GC has discovered where believers are meeting. They want to make examples of us and a group in Maryland."

"Are they going to kill us?" a woman said.

"We don't know," Vicki said, "but we have to get out of here."

Someone banged on a metal door in the back.

Conrad shouted, "The white vans are still on the hill."

"Then who's at the door?" Vicki said.

Someone shouted and pounded on the door again. Vicki thought she recognized the voice.



Judd Thompson Jr. couldn't believe his eyes. Lionel Washington and Sam Goldberg stood by an empty box in the airplane. Beside it stood his friend Nada.

"How did you get here?" Judd said.

Nada stared at him. "Aren't you happy to see me?"

Judd glanced at Lionel and Sam. "Of course, but—"

"I stowed away in a box of pamphlets," Nada said. "I wanted to be with you when you meet your friend in New Babylon." Nada

explained how she emptied a box of pamphlets and marked it "Main Cabin."

The plane dipped and lightning flashed. The pilot, Mac McCullum, spoke through the intercom. "Better buckle up and hang on."

Nada sat by Judd. "You look angry."

"I'm not! I'm just concerned. You've put us in a bad situation."

"How?"

"This is Nicolae Carpathia's plane. We were only cleared for three people in New Babylon. When four of us get off, we could be in trouble. Or we could put Mac in a tight spot."

Judd explained what Mac had said about Judd's friend Pavel. Their visit had been cleared because "it's his last wish that I visit him."

"Pavel is dying?" Nada said.

Judd nodded.

"What's going to happen when we get there?"

The plane dropped suddenly and Judd felt his stomach surge.

"Sorry about that," Mac said on the intercom. "This is a rough one. Stay in your seats."

"I have to talk with you," Judd said.

Mac came on the intercom. "Wait till we get out of these clouds, Judd."

Judd looked at Nada. Could Mac hear everything they were saying? Could he also hear Nicolae Carpathia when he was on the plane?

"I'll let you know when it's safe," Mac said.

Lightning flashed again. Nada whispered something.

"What did you say?" Judd said.

Nada turned. Her eyes were red. "There's another reason I had to come with you."

"What?" Judd said.

Nada put a hand to her forehead. "I can't go home. I'm running away."



Vicki ran to the back door. Conrad and the pastor told her to stop, but she ignored them. The door wouldn't open.

"What are you doing?" Conrad shouted.

"Hang on!" Vicki said, finally opening the door.

Sunshine poured in and Vicki saw her friend Shelly. Behind her was Pete's huge truck and trailer. Pete ran to meet them.

"The GC are on the hill behind us," Vicki said.

"I saw 'em when I drove in," Pete said.

"How many people you got in here?"

Vicki showed him, then started to intro-

duce the pastor. Pete cut her off. "No time to chat. That guy back at the gas station, Roger, told me on the radio that there's a couple of huge transport vehicles headed our way."

"They're going to arrest us?" the pastor said.

"Not if I can help it," Pete said. "I'll back the truck up as close as I can to the door and you get the people in a single file. If we work fast, we can get everybody in without them knowing what's going on."

Conrad raced up. "The vans are pulling out. Coming our way."



"Nada!" Judd said. "You can't run away from your family!"

"To be with you," Nada said, "I have to."

"Wait. Back up. Start from the beginning."

Nada took a deep breath. "I told my mother you and I were getting more serious. She was excited for me. She likes you a lot. But . . ."

"Your father?"

Nada looked away. "She said he likes you as a person but doesn't think we should go further with our relationship."

Judd frowned. "He's entitled to his opinion."

"But he said if you return to Israel, we can't be together. I was afraid I'd never see you again."

Judd pulled Nada's head to his shoulder and brushed her hair with a hand. "You should call your folks and tell them—"

"No!" Nada said, jerking away. "They'll make me come back."

"They'll blame me," Judd said. "Neither of us wants that."

Nada stared at Judd. "You're scared of him! You care more about what my father thinks than you do about me."

Judd shook his head. "I just want to do this the right way. Your dad changed his mind once about me. When he sees how much I care about you, he'll change it again."

"You don't know my father," she said. "He can be so stubborn."

Judd smiled. "A family trait?"

Nada opened her mouth wide and punched Judd in the shoulder.



Vicki helped people onto the truck. Pete told them to move to the front and sit in tight rows. Some panicked and pushed their way inside.

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"Where are you taking us?" an older man said.

"Away from the GC," Pete said.

Locusts buzzed at the back door but apparently flew away when they realized the occupants were believers.

Conrad returned. "Can't see the vans. Probably take them five minutes to get past the ridge."

Vicki nodded. As people hurried past she said, "Stay calm." She noticed a woman with a small electronic device. "What's that?"

"I record the meetings," the woman said. "I play it for people who can't get here."

"Can I have it?" Vicki said.

"But—"

"Trust me," Vicki said.

The woman handed over the recording and Vicki raced to the office and put it into the machine. A man's voice came through the speakers. "Before we get started, we want to let anyone who wants lead us in prayer."

"Perfect," Vicki said. She turned up the speakers full blast and found the switch for speakers outside the bowling alley.

When she reached the back door, Pete was closing the truck. "Let's get out of here."



Once the plane made it through the storm, Judd headed to the cockpit.

"How were you able to hear us?" Judd said.

Mac stared at him. "Can't tell you. Let's just say the conversations back there are relayed to the rest of the Tribulation Force."

Judd explained the situation with Nada.

"The GC let you come because of Pavel's condition," Mac said. "Carpathia has no idea the cargo hold is jammed with Ben-Judah's studies in different languages. An extra person is gonna raise a red flag."

"Why do they have to know?"

"Cargo's one thing," Mac said. "Human beings are another. If the guards notice Nada, we could be in trouble."

Judd scratched his head.

Mac said, "What kind of ID does she have?"

Judd went back and got it from Nada, then showed it to Mac. "Her brother was with the GC in New Babylon. Killed in the earthquake."

"You serious?" Mac said.

"He was a Peacekeeper in Carpathia's main complex."

Mac flipped a few switches and pulled out

his cell phone. "What was her brother's name?"

Judd told him and returned to his seat.

A few minutes later, Mac called Judd and Nada forward. "I got through to one of my superiors, one of the few who hasn't been stung yet. I told him I'd located a family member of a deceased GC worker who wanted to pay her respects. They're putting you up in the main complex. Who knows, you might even get to meet Carpathia himself."



Vicki sat next to Pete as he pulled the truck out of the parking lot.

"So far so good," he said as they chugged onto the road back to town.

"What about all the cars in the parking lot?" Vicki said.

"I bet the GC will hang around and wait for people to come back."

"And then nab them," Vicki said. "Guess we just lost our motorcycle."

Pete gave a low whistle. "Up ahead."

Coming around a curve in the distance were the two vans, colored lights swirling on top. Between them was a huge bus with the Global Community insignia on the side.

"Stay calm," Pete said.

The first van passed going far over the speed limit. The wind from the bus nearly drove Pete off the road. The second van slowed and blocked the truck.

"Let me handle this," Pete said.

"I should warn the others," Vicki said.
"Some of us could get away."

Pete put a hand on her shoulder.

A GC Peacekeeper stepped out of the van and was swarmed by locusts. The man slapped them away from his white protective suit and motioned for Pete to roll down his window.

Pete didn't seem nervous. "What can I do for you?"

"You just came from that bowling alley back there."

"Me and my little sister got sidetracked. Had to turn around."

"Where you headed?"

"Got a delivery in town," Pete said. "Hope we make it before the load goes bad."

The man moved back, swatting at locusts. "What kind of load—"

"Sure was a wacky bunch back there," Vicki interrupted. Pete gave her a look.

"What do you mean?" the man said.

"I heard all this preaching and hollering,"

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Vicki said. "You need to put those people away before they hurt somebody."

The Peacekeeper looked toward the bowling alley. Vicki noticed through her outside mirror that the other van and the bus had reached the parking lot. Several officers in protective gear pointed guns toward the building.

A radio squawked from the other van.

"They're here! We need backup!"

The Peacekeeper rushed back to his van and sped away.

"Good work," Pete said.

"Thanks," Vicki said. "Wonder how long it'll take them to figure out it's not a real meeting?"

"Hopefully long enough to get these people to safety."

Pete took the curves at full speed and Vicki wondered how those in the back were holding on.

"Up there!" Vicki shouted, pointing. The ramp to the highway rose in the distance. She jumped in her seat. "We've made it!"

Pete put up a hand and shook his head. A siren wailed behind them. Vicki's heart sank as she checked the mirror.