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Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

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Edited by Curtis H. C. Lundgren

ISBN 0-8423-4316-4, mass paper

Printed in the United States of America

08 07 06 05 04 03 02
9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Nada's Surprise

JUDD couldn't believe his eyes. The man in the apartment had a dark beard and a mustache. On his forehead was the mark of the true believer.

The man picked Nada up and hurried inside. Judd closed the door and looked through the peephole. "I don't think anybody saw us."

"Good," the man said, placing Nada on a couch in the living room.

The apartment was dark. Blinds were drawn, and a flickering light came from a computer screen down the hall.

"She's out cold," the man said, putting a hand to Nada's face. "I hope she didn't hit her head." He hurried into the kitchen and brought ice in a plastic bag. He lifted Nada's head and gently placed the ice underneath. "Are you her boyfriend?"

"I guess you could say that," Judd said.

"What do you mean, you guess?"

"Yes, I'm her boyfriend. What's your problem?"

The man gritted his teeth. "If you really cared about her, you wouldn't have brought her here." He brushed hair from Nada's face and knelt beside her. "She should have stayed in Israel."

"How did you know she was from Israel?"

Nada stirred. The man propped her head on his lap and whispered something in her ear. Finally, Nada opened her eyes.

"Is it really you?" Nada said. She reached out and touched the man's face.

"You're not dreaming," the man said softly.

She pushed his hair away, revealing the mark of the true believer. Nada hugged him.

Judd paced. *How does Nada know this man? Is this one of her old boyfriends?*

Nada sat up and slapped the man hard across the face. "Why didn't you tell us?"

The man caught her hand and she tried to hit him again. He pulled her close. "Shhh, it's all right. I'm sorry. I couldn't let you know."

Nada wept. When she had composed herself, she reached for Judd's hand and squeezed it tightly. "I want you to meet my

friend. This is Judd Thompson from the United North American States."

The man put out his hand. "Pleased to know you."

Judd shook his head. "I'm sorry. I don't know who you are."

"I'm Kasim. Nada's brother."



Vicki followed the others to the new truck. Chris Traickin knelt to tie his shoe before he climbed into the passenger seat. Pete drove and Vicki, Shelly, and Conrad rode in the sleeper.

As Pete always did, he said a brief prayer before they pulled out. "And we thank you, Lord, that you've brought a new brother to us. Protect his friends who are in custody, and release them soon."

"Amen," Traickin said softly.

Vicki watched for any GC vehicles, but none came. Traickin took off his helmet but kept the rest of his protective suit on.

"I've heard there are groups of believers springing up all around the country," Traickin said. "How many would you say are in Johnson City?"

"More than a hundred," Pete said, "and that was just one cell."

"Where did you guys hide?"

"There's a cave up in the hills behind the gas station," Pete said. "We hid there, then spread out to people's houses." Pete explained how he had crashed the truck in order to get away from the Global Community Peacekeepers.

"You're a genius," Traickin said. "You coordinated everything through that guy at the gas station?"

Pete nodded. "Roger Cornwell. Fantastic guy. If we hadn't met him, all those people would be in jail right now."

Conrad frowned and leaned close to Vicki. "I wish Pete would shut up."

"Tell me about the believers back in Illinois," Traickin said.

"Well, there's—"

"Let me," Conrad interrupted. "There's only the four of us and a little old lady and her dog. And the dog's the smartest of the bunch."

Pete shot Conrad a look.

"It's okay," Traickin said. "You don't have to talk to me."

"Why don't you tell us more about yourself?" Conrad said.

"What do you want to know?"

"How long have you had that mark on your forehead?"

Chris Traickin smiled. "The same time it showed up on everybody else. Look, why don't I give you my story?"

"You don't have anything to prove," Pete said.

"I like telling it. I had a wonderful wife who tried to tell me the truth. But I was caught up in the political world. I thought I was really important. Then my wife vanished into thin air."

"You were with her?" Pete said.

Traickin nodded. "Dana and I had an apartment in Washington, D.C., and a house in Maryland. I picked her up at the apartment late that night. She went to sleep as we drove home."

Traickin glanced out the window. His lip quivered as he continued. "I record talk shows and listen later. Dana always hated them, which is probably why she went to sleep.

"I was exiting the interstate when I saw something move. Her clothes went flat and her shoes fell to the floor. Her door was still locked, so there was no way she could have gotten out. I pulled over and looked in the backseat. She wasn't there."

"I bet it made you think, didn't it?" Pete said.

"It made me crazy," Traickin said. "One minute she was there; the next she had vanished. I retraced my route. I looked along the side of the road. Then it hit me. She had told me about God coming back for the good people, but I didn't listen."

"So that's when you believed?" Pete said.

"I went to the house and found a Bible and a book Dana had tried to get me to read."

"What book?" Conrad said.

"*Mere Christianity*," Traickin said. "It's by C. S. Lewis."

Vicki looked at Conrad. He shrugged and leaned forward to listen.

"How did you find other believers?" Shelly said.

"First, I got involved with the militia movement. It felt weird because I was always against guns and war, and here I was working next to people I'd been against.

"It was there that I met my first believer. He showed me Dr. Ben-Judah's Web site and helped me find a group to meet with."

"Where's this guy now?" Conrad said.

Chris Traickin shook his head. "He was killed at the start of World War III."

"Figures," Conrad muttered.

Vicki didn't know what to believe. Traickin sounded genuine, but the part about God

coming back for "good people" made her wonder. She glanced in the side mirror and thought she saw someone behind them. She kept watch as the truck rolled toward Illinois.



Judd sat hard on the couch and stared at Kasim. He remembered pictures Nada had shown him of vacations when they were younger. He had seen a couple of Kasim in a GC uniform, but in those, Kasim had no beard or mustache. *No wonder Nada fainted*, Judd thought.

Nada was clearly upset with her brother. They spoke in a different language until Judd said, "English, please."

"I was just asking how he could do this to his family," Nada said, turning to Kasim. "Why not send us an e-mail or pick up the phone?"

Kasim put a finger to his lips as footsteps sounded down the hall. "Let's move into the next room."

When they were settled in the computer room, Kasim began his story. "I was questioning my loyalty to the Global Community. I met a man named Dan who—"

Nada interrupted and explained they had

talked with Dan in a GC prison. "He's the one who told us to come here."

"So that's how you knew," Kasim said.

Judd explained how they had read the computer files embedded in his daily log.

"You read my diary?" Kasim said.

"We thought you were dead," Nada said, "and you never gave us any reason to doubt it."

"I'm getting to that," Kasim said. "I met with Dan several times. I don't know why he trusted me, but he told me the truth. On the morning of the earthquake, I made my decision. I was on security detail on the ground floor of Carpathia's building."

Kasim took Nada's hands in his own. "You have to understand. I was not just choosing God; I had to choose against Nicolae. He was my whole life, everything I had hoped for. To turn from him was so difficult, but after reading and researching, I had to do it.

"I walked outside and prayed the prayer Dan had written for me. Afterward, I felt like a weight had been lifted from my shoulders, and yet, another one had taken its place. How could I be against Nicolae and work for the Global Community?"

"What happened?" Nada said. "How did you survive the building collapse?"

"I went inside but noticed something

strange. Dogs barked. People walking them were being dragged down the street. Then I remembered that animals can sense the vibrations of the earth.

"I ran inside and told everyone to get out. They stared at me. I said there was an earthquake coming. One woman got on an elevator. She was laughing. They all thought I was crazy."

"Did you run?"

Kasim nodded. "But before I went outside, I took off my radio and my badge and left them in the lobby. I ran as fast as I could. At the time there was a field a few blocks from the building."

"Where the park is?" Judd said.

"Yes. I ran there, hoping no buildings would fall on me. The earth opened up and nearly swallowed me. I spotted the helicopter on top of Carpathia's building and figured he made it out. Then I saw people falling from the chopper. It was terrible."

Nada put a hand on Kasim's shoulder.

"Judd heard he kicked people off the helicopter who were trying to get on."

"I believe it," Kasim said.

"So, how did you get here?" Judd said.

"When I left my badge and radio in the building, I knew I was walking away, but I

hadn't fully formed my plan. I knew I was a believer in Christ. That meant I was an enemy of the Global Community. When the building collapsed, I knew I would be counted along with the other dead."

"So you disappeared," Judd said.

Kasim nodded again. "Getting out of the country was impossible. I found Dan and he let me stay here."

"They didn't find you when Dan was arrested?" Judd said.

Kasim held up a hand. A radio squawked in the hall. Kasim switched the power off in the apartment, and the computer went dead.

"Quickly," Kasim said, "follow me." He raced to a back bedroom. Judd noticed there was nothing out of place in the apartment.

Kasim lifted the carpet in a closet. Underneath was a door. He opened it, and the three climbed down a ladder mounted to the wall. Someone was putting a key in the door to the apartment as Kasim repositioned the carpet and closed the trapdoor.

The room below was long and narrow. Kasim told them to keep quiet and showed them a video monitor hooked to a small television.

"Where are the cameras?" Judd whispered.

"In the smoke detectors," Kasim said.

Two GC Peacekeepers moved furniture and

searched the apartment. One opened the blinds. "What was the report again?" the man said.

The other Peacekeeper was right above Judd, inspecting the closet. "Neighbor across the hall heard a scream. She looked out and saw somebody coming in here."

The Peacekeepers moved to the other end of the apartment. Kasim whispered, "Dan knew they would try to catch him one day, so he built this hideout. Then he rented the apartment above and cut the hole. The people who moved in here never knew the back bedroom was supposed to be four feet wider."

Judd noticed a refrigerator and cans stacked in the corner. "You must have enough food to last a month."

"Two," Kasim whispered. "It was packed so full I could hardly crawl in when Dan was arrested."

"Why didn't you call us?" Nada said. "Mother and Father were so upset."

"Dan found the GC files confirming my death," Kasim said. "I was afraid an e-mail would be traced, and the same with a phone call. Dan was arrested before I could get phony identification. Without that, there's no way I can get out of the country."

The Peacekeepers moved to the kitchen. One opened the refrigerator. "No food in here. Why don't we just rent the place to somebody and let them keep an eye on it?"

The other Peacekeeper walked into the living room and sat on the couch.

"Oh no," Nada said.

"What?" Kasim said.

"We forgot something."

"Hey, look at this," the Peacekeeper said, bending over and picking something off the floor.

Judd gasped. The man held up the ice pack Kasim had brought to Nada.

"The ice is still frozen," the Peacekeeper said. "Secure the building. We're not letting them get out of here."