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ONE

# Tragic News

*"JUDD, help!"*

*The girl sounded desperate. He tried to place her voice, but he couldn't. Judd called back, but she didn't seem to hear.*

*"Judd, we need you! Hurry!"*

"Nina!" Judd said as he awoke. He tried to shake the dream but couldn't. Judd had met Nina in Israel while traveling with Bruce. Because her father was such an outspoken Jewish believer, Nina, her brother, Dan, and Mrs. Ben-Judah were in constant danger.

Nina's helpless cry haunted Judd as he collected himself. There was a pain deep in his chest. Could the previous day have been a dream? Could Bruce really be dead? Judd sat up and listened to voices in the other room. Judd had come to Loretta's—Bruce's secretary at New Hope Village Church—house when he

heard Chloe Williams was in trouble. The search for Ryan had been exhausting. Judd had fallen asleep before he found out what happened to Chloe, and now he listened as Loretta and Buck Williams talked in hushed tones in the kitchen.

Loretta wept about Bruce. Buck assured her she wouldn't have to handle the arrangements for Bruce's body.

"But I don't think I can handle the memorial service either," Loretta said. "There's so much to prepare."

Buck said he would take care of both.

"It feels so good to have people in this place again," Loretta said. "Y'all stay as long as you need to or want to."

"We're grateful," Buck said. "Amanda may sleep till noon, but then she'll get right on those arrangements with the coroner's office. Chloe didn't sleep much with the ankle cast, but she's sleeping hard now."

When Loretta left for the church, Judd went to the kitchen to talk with Buck.

"I heard you had quite an experience with Ryan," Buck said. "How is he?"

Judd told him. He asked Buck's advice about Mrs. Stahley and Darrion.

"That's a tough one," Buck said. "You want to get them into hiding as fast as you can," Buck said. "If the Global Community wanted

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Mr. Stahley that bad, they'll come looking for the rest of his family. Sounds like they know too much."

"What happened with Chloe?" Judd said.

Buck quickly explained that Chloe had received a message from her father to get out of downtown Chicago. She was talking with Buck on a cell phone with a cop right behind her. Chloe didn't want to stop. Then the bombing began. Chloe's Range Rover was thrown off Lake Shore Drive and landed in a tree. That's where she stayed until Buck found her.

Buck was interested in Ryan's story. Judd explained how they found him and how Ryan helped save their lives. "Mr. Stahley gave his life for his daughter," Judd said.

"We may all be asked to do that," Buck said. "I'm not sure how much Nicolae Carpathia knows about my faith, but he's sure to find out at some point. We have to be ready for whatever comes."

"Is Verna Zee a Christian too?" Judd said, referring to Buck's coworker, also staying at Loretta's house.

"No," Buck said. "I may have put myself in real danger when I brought her here. My hope is that she'll hear the message and respond. If not, I'm in trouble. Carpathia

hasn't given any indication he suspects anything, but if Verna tells my superiors, it's only a matter of time."

"Do you talk with Carpathia?" Judd said.

"Last night in fact," Buck said. "He wanted to know about the coverage of the war here. His voice got real emotional when I told him. He said it was a tragedy."

"Makes me sick," Judd said. "Is that all he said?"

"No, he wanted me to come over there and cover meetings in Baghdad and New Babylon."

"You're not going?" Judd said.

"I told him I was working another story," Buck said. "He's getting another guy."

As they talked, Buck turned his attention to the papers scattered across the dining-room table. "Bruce's notes," he said. "Chloe had them with her in the Rover. I have to put them back together."

Judd helped get the transcripts in order. Buck had a huge job ahead of him. He not only had to read the massive pile of pages but also edit it for the church.

"Can I ask about the other story you're working on?" Judd said.

Buck reached for the phone. "Hang on," he said.

Buck called Ken Ritz, a pilot who had flown him to New York just after the disap-

pearances. "I know you're busy and probably don't need my business," Buck said, "but you also know I'm on a big, fat expense account and can pay more than anyone else."

Judd wondered where Buck needed to go so soon after his wife's accident.

"Israel," Buck said to Ken Ritz. "And I have to be back here by Saturday night at the latest."



Vicki awoke and heard someone crying. For a moment she couldn't figure out where she was. *Judd's house*, she thought. He had asked them to stay at his house while he went to Loretta's. Vicki had crashed in Judd's parents' room. Chaya sat on the edge of the bed, her shoulders shaking.

"Are you OK?" Vicki said.

Chaya shook her head. "I couldn't sleep," she said. "I called my father about my mother's funeral. He said I shouldn't bother. He doesn't want me there."

"That's all he said?" Vicki said.

"He asked about Bruce; then he told me this would be our last conversation."

"He can't keep you away from your own mother's funeral," Vicki said.

"He said he would turn his back if I came. I have betrayed the Jewish faith by becoming

a Christian. I have betrayed him and the memory of my mother."

Vicki put an arm around Chaya as the older girl sobbed. "I prayed that her death would soften him," Chaya said. She was clutching the note she had found in her mother's hand.

"At least you know where your mom is now," Vicki said.

"I know she's in a better place," Chaya said, "but my father . . ."

Lionel and Ryan were in the kitchen fixing breakfast. Ryan held out a plate to Vicki when she sat down.

"You're our guests so we're pulling out all the special food," Ryan said.

"If I can keep him from eating it all," Lionel said.

Ryan and Lionel seemed to be working together. Their rivalry the past year had been fierce at times, bickering and fighting almost daily. Vicki wondered how long the truce would last.

As they ate, although they were sad, they kept remembering funny stories.

"When I moved into Bruce's house, I forgot my toothbrush," Vicki said. "I asked Bruce if he'd take me to buy some toiletries, and he got all serious. He told me he'd never had a teenager in his house and knew there



were things I'd need. He was about to launch into this big speech about growing into womanhood when I stopped him and said, 'Bruce, I just need a toothbrush.'"

Everyone laughed.

"What do you think Bruce would say about Darrion and Mrs. Stahley?" Ryan said.

"He'd be proud of what you did," Lionel said. "If you hadn't been there, they might not have made it. They sure wouldn't have heard about God the way you told them."

"None of it would have happened if I hadn't gone to see Bruce," Ryan said. "He started the whole thing."

Chaya had talked with Loretta late the previous night and brought everyone up to date on Chloe and Buck. Though Amanda was safe, Rayford Steele remained with Nicolae Carpathia. Amanda said Rayford was flying to New Babylon.

"Carpathia gives me the creeps big time," Ryan said. "I think he's Satan himself."

"That's not what Bruce told us," Lionel said.

Chaya nodded. "Bruce taught that the Antichrist would not be indwelt by Satan himself until halfway into the Tribulation. The guy's evil, no doubt. But even with the war and all the death, things will get worse."

Darrion rushed up the stairs. "Turn on the television!" she said.



"Why Israel?" Judd asked Buck. "I've heard that's the one place the war hasn't touched."

"I'm not covering the war," Buck said.

"Then why go?" Judd said.

"I'm not sure how much I should tell you," Buck said, "for your own safety."

"With what we've been through," Judd said, "I don't think you could tell me anything that would endanger my life more than us hiding family members of a Global Community traitor."

"In the middle of trying to find Chloe yesterday, I got a call from Dr. Chaim Rosenzweig," Buck said. "He's friends with Rabbi Tsion Ben-Judah."

Judd reminded Buck he had met the rabbi's wife and two adopted children on his trips to Israel. Buck looked away.

"We watched the rabbi's televised speech too," Judd said. "And Bruce kept us up to date. It was exciting to watch the rabbi speak to all the new believers in Teddy Kollek Stadium. What's happened?"

"They can't find him," Buck said. "Dr. Rosenzweig said he was going to Nicolae for

## *Tragic News*

help and I begged him to leave Carpathia out of it. I haven't heard anything more, but I assume the prophecy from the two witnesses at the Wailing Wall is correct. Dr. Ben-Judah will be protected in spite of the murders. So I feel I have to—"

"Wait," Judd said. "What murders?"

Buck stared at him. "You'd better sit down."



Lionel flicked on the television in the kitchen. The Stahley girl looked upset. Mrs. Stahley was there a moment later and watched with her arms folded.

The news anchorwoman was nicely dressed, but the worry showed on her face.

"This report out of Chicago has pushed aside war news," she said. "An international business leader and a high-level member of the Global Community is dead this morning. Maxwell Stahley, who made his fortune in international security, was found dead of a gunshot wound in an office building in a suburb of Chicago."

Video footage showed men carrying Mr. Stahley's body from the Global Community building.

"Mr. Stahley was found alone in a pool of

blood in a first-floor entryway," the woman said.

Mrs. Stahley covered her mouth and turned her head.

"He wasn't on the first floor," Ryan said. "He was on the fourth floor with the other guy."

"Also missing are Stahley's wife and daughter," the anchor said. A picture of the Stahley family flashed on the screen.

"I hate that picture," Darrion said.

"The motive is not clear," the woman continued, "but a source close to the Global Community confirmed that a large amount of money had been taken from one of Stahley's bank accounts in the U.S."

"They found it already," Mrs. Stahley said. "I transferred the funds last night."

"Will they be able to trace it to Judd?" Vicki said.

"I put the money into several different accounts to be safe," Mrs. Stahley said. She looked at Vicki. "One of them was Judd's."

A spokesman for the Global Community appeared on a satellite hookup. He vaguely answered questions about the war, then turned to the Stahley report.

"We must let the investigation run its course," the man said. "This is a great personal loss of a devoted colleague. I do believe it will be important to focus on the

mother and daughter at this point. They may be in danger, or perhaps they know something about the murder."

"You wanna find them because they know what's really going on," Ryan said to the TV.

"Are you suggesting his wife and daughter might be responsible for the murder?" the woman said.

"We're not ruling anything out at this point," the spokesman said, "but we would like anyone who has any information on the whereabouts of these two to get in touch with the Global Community immediately."

A phone number flashed on the screen.

"That guy looks nervous," Vicki said.

"My husband left important documents behind," Mrs. Stahley said. "Documents that might save our lives."

"Where are they?" Vicki said.

"That's the problem. They're at our house in a secret place."

The phone rang. Chaya answered. She looked startled, then covered the receiver with her hand.

"It's Loretta," Chaya said. "The police just called the church."



"Who was murdered?" Judd said, sitting warily.

"I found this out from Dr. Rosenzweig," Buck said. "He respects Dr. Ben-Judah but couldn't understand why such an educated man would throw away his reputation by proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. He was afraid religious zealots would kill Ben-Judah."

"And they did?" Judd said, holding his breath.

Buck shook his head. "Chaim called to tell me about the rabbi's wife and children."

"No!" Judd gasped.

Buck's voice grew tense. "All killed," he said. "I'm very sorry."

The words felt like a sledgehammer. The air went out of the room and Judd couldn't speak. Couldn't think. Buck kept talking, but Judd couldn't concentrate.

"Chaim said Ben-Judah's house was burned to the ground," Buck was saying.

"You sure it was them?" Judd managed.

"Chaim says it was a public spectacle. I assume the rabbi is in hiding. At least I hope so."

"That's why you're going to Israel?" Judd said.

"It's not what Carpathia thinks, but yes. I need to find the rabbi."

Judd put his face in his hands. "The dream," he said. "I had a dream about Nina

last night." Judd explained his relationship with Nina, Dan, and their mother. They had taken Judd in. They had driven him to historic sights in Israel and explained their social customs. They had eaten together and talked about their faith. Judd had invited them to America. Now they were dead.

*Or were they?* He could hope. Judd thought a moment. "Maybe they're just trying to lure the rabbi out of hiding. If he thought his family had been killed, he'd come out for sure."

"What could he do if they're dead?"

Judd slammed his fist onto the table. "I don't get it," he said. "The two witnesses promised protection, right?"

"Moishe said anyone who threatened the rabbi would answer to him," Buck said. "I thought the rabbi's family would be protected, too."

"I don't think they're dead," Judd said.

"Dr. Rosenzweig wouldn't have told me that unless it was true," Buck said.

"You said yourself Carpathia has the power to make people believe a lie," Judd said.

"But there's no reason," Buck said. "You've just gone through a gut-wrenching experience with Ryan. You've lost Bruce. Now this.

## ON THE RUN

I don't blame you for being upset. But you have to face the facts."

Judd wanted to keep arguing, but he knew he shouldn't. "I need a favor," he said.