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Characters in this novel sometimes speak words that are adapted from various versions of the Bible, including the King James Version and the New King James Version.

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What's Gone On Before

JUDD Thompson Jr. and the rest of the Young Tribulation Force are living the adventure of a lifetime. Judd and Lionel Washington escape bounty hunters in South Carolina and rush inland.

Vicki Byrne and the others at the western Wisconsin hideout repair cabins and reach out to people through the Internet. Vicki desperately wants to help Judd and Lionel, but they're too far away. In addition to bounty hunters, the kids must elude citizens who are rewarded for killing anyone without Carpathia's mark.

Sam Goldberg and Mitchell Stein fly from Petra to Tel Aviv to speak with the sons of Rabbi Ben-Eliezar. Sam and Mr. Stein are thrown into prison with Aron Ben-Eliezar, and God miraculously releases them.

Since travel is so dangerous with the vigilante law in effect, Judd and Lionel travel north on foot, visiting a series of safe houses

as they slowly make their way back to their friends in Wisconsin.

Vicki is excited to hear about Judd's progress and speaks with him frequently by phone. In the back of her mind are the words of an angel who warned that someone she loved would not return "whole." Cheryl Tifanne becomes ill, and Vicki fears the girl is going to have her baby early. While others go for help, Vicki tries to calm Cheryl.

After a long stay in Indiana, Judd and Lionel set out for the final leg of their trek. Just before midnight, Lionel climbs down a steep embankment while Judd waits above on a huge boulder. Suddenly the rock tips and Judd jumps, the rock plunging after him.

Join the Young Tribulation Force as they face some of the most desperate days of their lives and struggle to survive the Great Tribulation.



ONE
Pinned

JUDD Thompson Jr. let go of the bush and scampered to his left, trying to escape certain death. Tiny rocks fell as he searched for footing, his feet pumping like a cartoon character's. Lionel was down there, but all Judd could think about was getting out of the way.

Judd lunged for a flat rock and hung on with both hands. He glanced back as the rock reared in the air like a stony stallion and hovered, blocking the clouds and sky. Just as he thought he would be squashed, the rock tipped to the right and began a free fall toward the bottom. Smaller rocks and dust covered Judd's face.

The ground shuddered with each turn of the rock. Judd pulled himself to a sitting position while the boulder crashed to the bottom.

As the dust settled and Judd caught his breath, he looked for Lionel. He had had plenty of time to get out of the way, and Judd wondered if he had jumped into the bushes by the stream.

"Guess we should have gone around, huh?" Judd called out.

No response.

"That rock was as big as a house. Good thing we got out of the way."

Still no response.

"Hey, Lionel, where are you?"

Crickets chirped and frogs croaked. Hearing the trickle of water gave Judd an eerie feeling. Everything was peaceful, as if nothing had happened.

"Come on, man, this isn't funny. You think I tried to knock that rock down?"

Judd surveyed the damage. The crashing rock had left several craters in its wake, which would make it even more difficult to get down. Any moment he expected Lionel to jump out from behind a bush and scold him.

Judd carefully took a few steps left to a small ridge. As he slowly climbed down, something hissed near his foot. He jumped and slid a few feet. When he heard the hiss again, he leaped to the ground, a good fifteen-foot drop.

His knees ached after the fall, but he was glad to be away from the snake. "Lionel?"

Judd listened closely. Rocks skittered down the hill and came to rest near him. Either Lionel was hiding in the bushes or . . .

"Lionel, I just heard a snake."

Something moved and moaned softly. Judd called Lionel's name again, but only crickets and frogs responded. Something swooped over him, a fluttering of wings and a caw. Judd ducked, then saw the outline of a crow against the night sky. When the bird lighted in a nearby tree, Judd moved toward the boulder. What he saw when he rounded the corner took his breath away.



Vicki Byrne held Cheryl Tifanne's hand and prayed with all her might. Vicki feared the baby was in trouble, but the greater fear was that Cheryl was about to deliver it without the help of the midwife.

Sweat poured from Cheryl's forehead, the girl turning her head from side to side and moaning. When the cabin door opened and Vicki turned, Cheryl dug her fingernails into Vicki's arm.

"Don't leave me," Cheryl said through clenched teeth.

"Don't worry."

Shelly came in with Josey Fogarty. Josey carried a box and placed it on the nightstand.

"There's some pain medication in here—"

"Good," Vicki said, grabbing a bottle.

"Wait," Josey said. "If she's in labor, she shouldn't take anything."

"I need something for the pain!" Cheryl screamed.

Josey pulled Vicki's arm and whispered, "This medicine will go right to the baby. It could endanger the child."

"But don't they give women medicine for pain before they have their babies?" Vicki said. "That's what happened with my mom."

"They can give them all kinds of things, but the patients are on monitors, checking heartbeats and oxygen levels. We don't have any equipment, and the medicine is the wrong kind."

"Vicki!" Cheryl shouted.

"I'm right here," Vicki said, then turned back to Josey. "We have to give her something."

"Not until we know for sure what's happening," Josey said.

Shelly reached in her pocket, and plastic rattled. She pulled out a half-eaten roll of candy. "We could give her this."

"That won't do anything," Vicki said.

"But if she thinks it's medicine, maybe it'll calm her down."

Josey nodded. "It's worth a try."

"Give me one," Vicki said.

Cheryl's hands shook as she sat up and grabbed a glass of water. She popped the piece of candy in her mouth without looking at it and downed the glass, water dripping from the corners of her mouth and onto her bedsheets. Cheryl closed her eyes and lay back, trying to catch her breath.

"Try to relax," Josey said. "You and the baby are going to be fine."

"Is the doctor coming?" Cheryl said.

"She's a midwife—it's like a doctor, without the hospital," Vicki said.

"How long before she comes?" Cheryl gasped.

"Won't be long," Vicki said as she glanced at Shelly and Josey.

Vicki had been in the room during part of her mother's labor with her little sister, Jeanni. It had been a long process, and Vicki hadn't seen the worst of it, certainly not the kind of pain Cheryl was going through.

"Call Marshall and ask him if there's anything else we can do for her," Vicki whispered to Shelly. "The minute he makes contact with that midwife, have him call us."

Vicki took Cheryl's temperature and it was normal. "Stay still. Help will be here soon."



Judd moved around the rock, horrified. Lionel lay motionless on the ground. The left side of his body appeared to be pinned under the boulder.

Judd stared at the scene, unable to move. Was Lionel breathing? Had the rock crushed the life from him? Judd finally knelt and placed a hand on Lionel's neck. *A pulse.*

Lionel's head lolled to the side, and he opened his eyes. "It hurts."

"What does?"

"My arm."

Judd let his eyes adjust to the dim light. He had thought Lionel's whole body was under the rock, but only his left arm was pinned. "I'll have you out of here in a few minutes, just hang on."

"I'm not going anywhere," Lionel mumbled.

Judd looked around for something to wedge under the rock and came back with the biggest stick he could find. He shoved it as far under the rock as he could and pushed, but the wood cracked. He had a sinking feeling there was no way the rock would move.

"Hold on. I'm going to try something else," Judd said.

Lionel said something and Judd leaned close. "What?"

"Backpack . . . can you get it off?"

Judd pulled one side of Lionel's backpack off, then loosened the strap on the other side and pulled it free. He placed it under Lionel's head, and the boy sighed and nodded.

Judd found a sharp rock near the stream and began digging a few feet from Lionel's trapped arm. He hoped to dig a hole big enough to pull Lionel free, but a few scrapes against the earth and his heart sank. Lionel was pinned under a rock weighing thousands of pounds. Without some kind of jack or mechanical device, he was stuck.

Judd ran a hand through his hair and took the cell phone from his backpack. He dialed the safe house in Salem, but there was no answer. There was no one to call, no one he could think of to help. He would enlist the prayer support of others in the Young Tribulation Force, of course, but where else could he turn? He and Lionel were on their own.

Judd walked toward the stream again, racking his brain. If only they had gone around the hill. If only he hadn't sat on the boulder.

"God, you sent that angel, Anak, to Vicki

and the others. It would only take one finger for him to lift this rock and help Lionel. Please, I need your help. I need to get Lionel out of there, and there's simply no way."

Judd walked back to his friend and sat. "How're you feeling?"

Lionel's eyes fluttered. "I tried to get out of the way, but I tripped. I'm lucky the rock didn't roll one more time or I'd be flat as a manhole cover." He took a breath and blew it out. "There's no way to get me out, is there?"

"There's a way. I just haven't found it yet." Judd rummaged through his backpack and pulled out a flashlight. Though the area surrounding him was bathed in moonlight, under the rock it was dark. Judd switched the flashlight on and pointed it toward Lionel's trapped arm. Blood streaked Lionel's shirt and pooled in the dirt.

If I don't get him out of here, he could bleed to death.



Vicki looked for any improvement in Cheryl's condition but found none. The girl thrashed and squirmed, holding her stomach. When the phone rang, Vicki thought it was Marshall with the midwife. She quickly answered but heard Judd's voice.

"We've got a situation here," Judd said with emotion. "There's been an accident."

"What happened? Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. A little scratched up, but fine."

After he explained what had happened to Lionel, Vicki covered the phone and relayed the message to the others.

"Tell everybody to pray," Judd said. "I need wisdom about what to do."

"He should put a tourniquet on that arm to stop the bleeding," Josey said, taking the phone. "You have to make this decision carefully, Judd, but if you think there's no chance to save that arm—"

Judd interrupted and Vicki strained to hear but couldn't. Finally, Josey said, "If the bleeding doesn't stop, you have to stop it. A tourniquet will do that. At least he won't bleed to death."

The two talked a few minutes, and Josey handed the phone back to Vicki. "Judd, can you get back to the last safe house and get help?"

"It's an option, but not a very good one."

Vicki explained what was going on with Cheryl, and Judd said he would pray for her. Judd promised he would call and give them an update by morning.

When she hung up, Vicki felt low. Cheryl's

condition seemed worse, and Lionel was in grave danger. She asked Conrad to carefully word a prayer alert and send it over the kids' Web site.

Shelly put a hand on Vicki's shoulder. "God's going to help us. I'm sure of it."

Vicki nodded. "I just wish he would hurry."



Judd pointed the flashlight under the rock. The boulder completely covered Lionel's hand and forearm, but there was a small crevice that left Lionel's elbow uncovered. His arm was swollen, and blood pulsed from the wound.

"How do you feel?" Judd said.

Lionel blinked. "My head feels kind of light, like I'm going to be sick."

Judd examined the arm and concluded that Lionel's hand and forearm were crushed. Whether they would ever heal once he got out of there—if he got out of there—Judd didn't know. But from what Josey said, his first priority was to stop the bleeding.

"I'm going to put a tourniquet around your arm before I leave," Judd said.

"Leave? Where are you going?"

"For help. There's no way I can move this

thing. Maybe I can get back to the people in Salem."

"Even if they come, how are they going to move it?"

"That place was an old farm equipment store. They're bound to have something. A couple of inches and you're out of there."

"Then what?" Lionel said.

Judd patted Lionel's shoulder. "We'll figure that out." He took off his belt and carefully strapped it around Lionel's arm above the elbow. He pulled it tight, and Lionel winced as Judd made a mark on the belt for the new hole. "Where's your knife?"

"Left front pants pocket. Sorry, but I can't reach it at the moment."

Judd smiled. That Lionel still had a sense of humor was a good sign. Judd found the knife and spent several minutes jabbing a hole in the belt. "This isn't going to feel good, but it's necessary."

"Whatever," Lionel said.

Judd took a breath, then pulled the belt as tight as he could around Lionel's arm. Lionel's scream echoed through the woods, and Judd nearly let go, but he knew this was Lionel's best chance of getting out alive.

Lionel wiped his forehead with his right hand. "Sorry I yelled like that."

"Don't be," Judd said, putting the knife in Lionel's right pocket. He pulled out the cell phone and dialed the safe house in Salem again. No answer. Judd handed the phone to Lionel. "Keep this and call Vicki if you need someone to talk to."

"But you might need it."

Judd shook his head and opened Lionel's backpack. He sorted the food and made sure Lionel could get to it, then gave Lionel all but one bottle of water. "I'll be back before sunup. Sundown tonight at the latest. Can you hang in there that long?"

"Only one way to find out," Lionel said. "Don't take any chances back there."

Judd nodded and checked Lionel's arm to make sure the bleeding had stopped.

"There'll be a lot of people praying for you. Concentrate on staying alive."

"That's been my full-time job since the disappearances."

Judd grabbed his flashlight from the backpack, headed into the night, and took a final look back. Lionel waved and tried to smile.