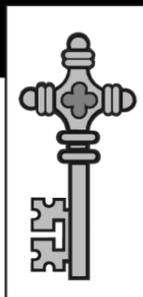


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GLENNALL'S BETRAYAL



PAUL MCCUSKER
FROM ADVENTURES IN ODYSSEY®



TYNDALE

Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
Carol Stream, Illinois

GLENNALL'S BETRAYAL

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McCusker, Paul.

Glennall's betrayal / by Paul McCusker.

p. cm.

Summary: When he finds himself transported from Odyssey to the country of Marus in another world, James gradually becomes convinced that he has been sent by the Unseen One to help a young man who is sold into slavery by his jealous brothers.

ISBN 1-58997-170-1

[1. Space and time Fiction. 2. Betrayal Fiction.] I. Title.
PZ7.M47841635G1 1999
[Fic]—dc21

99-34006
CIP

A Focus on the Family book published by
Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

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The author is represented by the literary agency of Alive Communications, 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

This is a work of fiction, and any resemblance between the characters in this book and real persons is coincidental.

Editor: Larry K. Weeden
Cover design: Greg Sills

Printed in the United States of America

06 07 08 09 10/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

PROLOGUE



Whit's End stood waiting like an old friend. The porch stretched across the front of the Victorian-style building like a broad smile. The windows, like eyes, flashed in the winter sunlight. The melting snow hung from its head like a white beret.

John Avery Whittaker, or Whit as he was better known, mounted the steps to the front door. The winter wind gently blew his wild, white hair around his forehead. Jack Allen, his good friend, followed behind him with his head tilted down and his hands buried deep in his coat pockets. They'd just had lunch together and now returned to Whit's End so Whit could check on things.

The bell above the door jingled as they entered. It was early afternoon, so the booths and tables of the section of Whit's End that served as a soda fountain were filled with kids chatting, eating, finishing their homework, or doing all three at the same time. A hum of noise came from other parts of the building as well: the toy train whistle from the "county's largest train set"; a rehearsal of a play going on in the Little Theater; The Imagination Station at work upstairs; and the general noises from the many other rooms filled with kids, gadgets, and

gizmos Whit had created to make Whit's End a fascinating place for kids to play and learn.

Connie Kendall, a teen who served as one of Whit's employees, stood behind the counter dishing out ice cream to one of the regulars.

"Hi, Whit, Jack," she called out pleasantly. She brushed a lock of her dark hair away from her slender, attractive face and up under her paper work hat.

"Hello, Connie," the two men said. Jack sat down on a stool at the counter, while Whit took off his coat to hang on a hook near the kitchen door.

"Where've you been all day?" she asked. Connie was naturally curious and loved to know what kinds of things Whit got into when he wasn't at the shop.

"Didn't you get my note?" Whit asked.

"No," she replied.

Whit's hand instinctively went to his coat pocket, where his fingers lightly touched the edge of an envelope. He'd forgotten to leave the note for her. "Oh," he said. An embarrassed smile formed on his lips but was hidden by his thick, white mustache. "I never got around to dropping it off for you."

"What did the note say?" Connie asked.

"Only that Jack and I were running errands."

"Errands?"

Jack swiveled off the stool. "Did you tell her about the

manuscripts, Whit?" he asked as he went around the counter to pour himself a cup of coffee.

"I mentioned them in the note."

"Which I didn't get," Connie jabbed at him. "What manuscripts?"

Jack explained, "A few days ago I found an old school notebook in the bottom of a trunk formerly owned by Maude McCutcheon."

"I remember Mrs. McCutcheon. She taught English literature, right?"

"Among other things," Whit affirmed.

"Anyway," Jack continued, "the notebook had a handwritten story in it that took place back in the 1950s. It was about a brother and a sister from *Odyssey* who somehow traveled to an alternate world—an alternate dimension, I guess you could say—to a land called Marus."

"Marus? I've never heard of it."

"Neither had we," Whit said.

"I guess it was a really good story if the two of you were so interested in it," Connie observed.

"Actually, it was the first of *three* stories that we've been able to find," Whit clarified. "The first was in the trunk, the second was in Maude McCutcheon's study, and the third was being kept by Mrs. Walston, the mother of a boy named Wade who had slipped into Marus in 1945."

Connie held up her hand. "Wait a minute! You're talking about these people as if they're real."

"That's the strange thing, Connie. The people in the stories *are* real," said Whit. "We haven't been able to find the brother and sister from the first story, but the boy from the second story actually *lived* here in Odyssey."

"Really? Have you talked to him?"

"He died in Vietnam," Jack said sadly.

"Oh."

"And the *third* story was about Maude McCutcheon herself. She went to Marus back in the '20s."

Connie eyed the two men warily. "Let me get this straight. Are you saying you think these stories are true?"

Whit and Jack looked away without replying.

Connie giggled. "Come on, you guys. Just because someone wrote stories about real people from Odyssey who traveled to another dimension, that doesn't mean they really happened. Right?" She looked from Whit to Jack and back again. "Right?"

Whit shrugged. "I don't know."

Connie shook her head. "Mrs. McCutcheon probably wrote the stories herself or had her students write them as class assignments."

Jack sipped his coffee. "That's what *we* thought at first."

"Except that Mrs. McCutcheon didn't write them," Whit explained. "Someone called James Curtis did."

“We *think*,” Jack corrected him.

“The handwriting in the notebooks and on his note to us are the same.” Whit pulled a note from his pocket as evidence. “Whoever this man is, he’s still living here in Odyssey somewhere, and he wants to meet us.”

“Okay,” Connie said, her tone full of disbelief. “So James Curtis has an amazing imagination, and for years and years he’s been writing interesting stories about a make-believe place called Marus. It doesn’t seem like such a big mystery to me. In fact, it sounds like you two are making it into a bigger mystery than it really is.” She smiled at them. “Too much time on your hands, maybe?”

“Maybe,” Whit conceded, smiling back at her.

Jack chuckled softly but didn’t say anything.

“And maybe,” Whit countered, “it’s the *possibility* that the stories might be true that has me fascinated. I’ve spent my life pondering imponderables, asking the question *What if?* That’s how I invented The Imagination Station. I asked myself, *what if* we could travel to other times and places to see what happened there? Whit’s End happened because I asked, *what if* there was a place in Odyssey where kids could learn and have fun at the same time? Well... *what if* there is another world out there somewhere, in another dimension, and some kids from *our* world could get to it at various times for various reasons? Even if the stories *aren’t* true, it’s worthwhile to think about the possibilities.”

"What do you think, Jack?" Connie asked.

Jack looked thoughtful for a moment, then affirmed, "I agree with Whit. I mean, I'm not convinced the stories are true, but it's been a lot of fun investigating them."

"I'm sure we'll know a lot more when we finally get to meet James Curtis," Whit concluded.

The bell above the door jingled again as a man in a blue uniform stepped in. It was Frank, their mailman. He'd always reminded Connie of the Scarecrow from *The Wizard of Oz* movie. "Special delivery," he said jovially. He dropped a large manila envelope on the counter.

"Thanks, Frank," Whit said and picked up the envelope.

Frank waved good-bye and was out the door again before they could say any more.

Whit looked at the envelope. It was addressed to him in a handwriting he'd come to know quite well over the past few days.

"James Curtis?" Jack asked after glancing at the script.

"Looks like it," Whit agreed as he tore open the flap.

"James Curtis sent you a package?" Connie said, then grunted. "If you ask me, he's probably some guy who's been desperate to get his manuscripts published and figured you'd be just the sucker to do it for him."

Whit smiled noncommittally at her. He pulled the contents from the envelope. It was a black school notebook with a white

square in the center of the front and black tape on the binding.

“Another story,” Jack said with obvious excitement. Connie thought his face, normally calm and passive, seemed to light up just a little. His blue eyes flickered and his cheeks flushed with anticipation.

Whit nodded and flipped open the cover. It was the same handwriting as the others.

“There’s a note,” Connie observed and pointed to a slip of paper that had fallen onto the counter.

Whit picked it up and read aloud: “Please read—and then bring everything back to me at 10:00 o’clock tomorrow morning, Hillingdale Haven.”

“Hillingdale Haven?” Jack asked.

Whit’s heart sank a little.

“But isn’t that the mental institution outside of town?” Connie inquired.

“I’m afraid it is,” Whit replied. His eye scanned the first page of the notebook. It was dated *March 21, 1934*. Under that was written: “The Chronicle of the Betrayed.”

CHAPTER ONE



James waited in the bushes until the black-and-white police car passed by. The two men inside were looking for him.

He waited, crouched like a small animal hiding from a predator. When he was sure the road was clear, he grabbed his bundle of goods—bread, cheese, and a slice of apple pie—and stood up. He adjusted the suspenders that were buttoned to his tattered wool trousers. His shirt, once white, was smudged with dirt and grass stains.

His Aunt Edna would scream if she saw the state he was in! She'd make him wash his face and comb his short, brown hair, which now stuck out like a porcupine's quills. But Aunt Edna was probably screaming anyway, he figured. Why else were the police looking for him? This was the third time he'd run away from her in as many weeks.

He gave his cap a tug and sprinted across the black tar to the field on the other side. The weeds were tall, almost like wheat, and would give him easy cover if someone came. He looked ahead to the forest that would provide his way of escape. It was about 100 yards away, across the sea of weeds that moved like waves beneath the gentle breeze.

It was a beautiful spring day, perfect for escaping Aunt Edna.

He was determined not to get caught this time. He had no intention of going back to Aunt Edna and her strict ways. She was a cruel ogre as far as he was concerned, and no law or lectures could persuade him otherwise. When his parents were still alive, they never made him wear the awful clothes she made him wear. Or forced him to read all those books. Or

made him do sums and fractions. Or dragged him to church every Sunday morning, and Wednesday evening. His parents let him do what he wanted.

“You don’t understand what it’s like,” he had said to her during their last argument.

“But I *do*, child,” she replied.

But how could she understand what it was like to have your parents lose all their money and their home in this thing called the Great Depression? How did she know what it was like to be left behind with *her* while they packed his two sisters off to nicer relatives around the country? What made her think she knew how it felt when the news came that they’d been killed in a bus crash on their way to California? Killed while going to find work; while going to find a new home; while going to find *life*.

“You don’t know! You *can’t!*” James had shouted at her, slamming the door to his bedroom as a punctuation mark.

Later, when she had gone out to shop, he had collected his belongings: a torn photo of his family that he shoved into his trouser pocket and his father’s ring—given to him after the accident, of course—which he tied on a string and put around his neck. After wrapping up the food in a rag in case he got hungry later, he had slipped out the back door, crept down the alley to avoid the tattletale eyes of the neighbors, and dashed away from the musty, old houses.

James wasn’t sure where he’d go. Maybe he could find his two sisters, and then they could all escape together. Maybe they could start a new life in California as their parents had wanted. Maybe—

A horse’s whinny caught James’s attention. He looked in the direction of the sound—over there near the woods—and was surprised to see not only one horse but two, and a couple

of wagons, at the edge of the trees. The wagons were large and enclosed, with doors at the back and windows on the sides that were shuttered. James had seen similar wagons when his parents took him to the circus a few years before.

Hope rose in his chest. Maybe a circus had come to a town nearby. Maybe he could join it and become a world famous trapeze artist and tame lions and get fired out of cannons and travel all over the country!

As if to affirm his hope, a man dressed in an odd costume rounded one of the wagons. He wore a shirt with a rainbow of colors going up and down both sides of it, and he had knee breeches and long white stockings and black boots. He walked up to a large campfire and began to kick dirt on it, as if to put out the flames.

Funny, James thought, the horses, the wagons, and the campfire all look like they've been here a while. But I didn't notice any of them when I started across the field. How did I miss them—or that mist that's moved toward me from the forest?

It was strange to have mist like that in the middle of a sunny spring day. Yet somehow the mist didn't mute the colors of the scene. The green grass, the rainbow colors of the man's shirt, and the remains of the fire were all so vibrant, as if they'd been hand-painted on glass, like stained-glass windows in a church.

It had gotten noticeably cooler in the past few minutes, though, and James's skin went goose-pimplly.

The weirdly dressed man spotted James and stood watching him with his hands on his hips. James wondered if he should run in another direction, just in case the man was the type to take him back to Aunt Edna. But the man was so unlike anyone James has seen in Odyssey that he wanted to believe he'd be friendly, if not sympathetic. The man might even give him a ride somewhere in his wagons. James started walking toward him.

“Hello,” James said when he was close enough to the man to be heard.

“Hail,” the man replied in a deep, resonant voice. He was a dark-skinned fellow with black hair, a thin, black mustache, and a gold earring in his left ear. His eyes were bright and piercing. He looked like the picture of a gypsy James had once seen. “What brings you to us?” the man asked.

“I was walking across the field and saw you,” James said, then abruptly added, “Are you a gypsy?”

“Gypsy?” the man asked.

“Or part of a circus?”

The man looked perplexed, as if James had used words that made no sense. He said, “We are traders. Are you here on an errand? Perhaps you are a message boy for someone who wishes to do business with us?”

James didn’t understand what the man was saying either. “No. I’m by myself,” he replied.

“Pity.”

“Are you going to Odyssey?”

A puzzled expression spread across the man’s face. “Odyssey?”

“The town near here.”

The man shrugged indifferently. “We are going up the mountain, if that is what you mean.”

“Mountain? What mountain?”

The man gestured toward the mist-covered woods.

James was truly confused now. No mountain stood behind those woods. Any mountains the man expected to find were in the other direction.

Suddenly a young woman came around from the back of the wagon. “We are ready, Papa,” she said, then saw James. “Oh.”

James was taken aback by her appearance. She had wild,

dark hair barely contained by a red scarf. She wore a torn peasant dress that hung loosely from her shoulders. But her eyes really caught his attention: dark and piercing, just like her father's. James thought she may have been the prettiest woman he'd ever seen.

"Who is this?" she asked the man.

"Some boy," he said and began to kick dirt at the fire again. "I want to make sure this fire is out. It wouldn't do to be blamed for burning down the mountain. Connam would have us imprisoned."

"Or one of his sons would execute us."

"All the same."

The young woman turned her attention to James. "Why do you linger, boy?" she asked. "What do you want?"

James was going to say he didn't want anything. He changed his mind when he suddenly heard car tires screeching to a halt behind him. He spun around and felt his heart jump into his throat as he saw, through the mist, a police car on the road. Two officers climbed out and pointed in his direction. One called out to him.

"Oh, no," James gasped.

"What is the matter with you?" the young woman asked, craning her neck to see what he was looking at.

"The police. I can't let them catch me," James cried as he tried to think of what to do. The woods. They were his best hiding place, he thought.

The young woman looked at James. "The po-*what*?"

"The police! I ran away from my Aunt Edna, and they'll take me back." James watched as the two officers stepped into the field and made their way quickly toward him. "See?"

The young woman looked at James, then followed his gaze across the field. "I see nothing but a field in the sunshine."

“Sunshine! What about the mist?” James exclaimed. It engulfed him now, so that the police came in and out of view. One second he could see their badges flickering in the waning light, their batons swinging from their belts against their legs. The next second, they were lost in a gray curtain. “I have to hide,” he said, then ran toward the woods. Ducking behind the largest tree he could find, he waited. He hoped they hadn’t seen where he went.

James heard the young woman say in a pleading voice, “Papa!”

“No,” the man said, stamping out the last of the fire. “We don’t have time for children who are not right in the head.”

“Papa, please.”

“He’s not one of your stray puppies, Fantya.”

“You heard him. He needs our help.”

“From what? He talks about mist when it is clear and sunny. He uses words that make no sense. *Po-leese*. What does it mean?”

James ventured a peek around the tree. The officers still hadn’t arrived. Maybe they were lost in the mist.

“Papa, *please?*” the young woman said softly.

The man sighed. “We can take him as far as Dremat,” he offered, sounding like a man who had lost this argument many times before. “He could run away from there, if that’s what he wants. Does that satisfy you?”

“Yes, Papa. Thank you.” Fantya turned and approached James at the tree. “Boy?”

“Go away,” James said in a harsh whisper as he ducked behind the tree again. “I don’t want them to know where I am.”

Fantya waved a hand toward the field. “There is no one there.”

“They’re in the mist.”

“There is no mist,” she said firmly. “Look.”

James cautiously peered around the tree again. His mouth fell open in astonishment.

The mist was gone.

The police—and their car—had vanished.