

**CAUGHT
IN THE
NET**

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INTRODUCTION

Robert knew exactly where he was headed. With his face firmly set, he marched with speed and focus along the same route he covered earlier that day with Susan. He cut across the corner of the grass surrounding Memorial Library, trod past two more buildings and around to the back of Baldwin Hall.

He stopped cold.

Up ahead, he saw an old dormitory with pink flowers growing by one particular first-floor window. His heart pounded in his chest and his breath came in short, shallow gasps.

The window by the flowers was the only one lit.

His eyes probed the night and he listened for any indication someone else might be near. All he heard was the sound of distant traffic penetrated by the chirp of an occasional cricket. Ominous college buildings were hemmed in by amorphous trees and shrubs lurking in shadows cast by sporadic streetlights.

So finding no excuse to forestall him, Robert hunched over and crept with great stealth toward the lit window, crouching behind each bush along his path to scrutinize his surroundings yet again. Robert couldn't remember when he had ever been as frightened.

After what felt like a month to him, he stopped and squatted behind a shrub about six feet from the window. Creeping closer, Robert cautiously peered into the lighted room from the side. Inside was a small bedroom with one single bed covered by a slightly rumpled spread and a desktop computer rested upon on a small table in the far left corner. Robert noticed some computer cables strewn on the floor next to the bed.

There was no turning back now. He had to get inside.

Robert edged with care down the side of the building, rounded the corner and stood in front of the entrance door. He reached out warily and turned the knob.

It was unlocked.

Robert held his breath and with pounding heart, stepped into the building. He tiptoed down the hall and tried to figure out which door led to the room where his friend might be held hostage. He tried door

number 106, but it was locked. Next he went to number 108. He listened with extreme care for any sound on the other side of the door, but heard nothing. He pled with God to be with him, turned the knob and tentatively pushed the door open a few inches with his fingertips. He poked his head in and saw the room was empty. It seemed to be a small sitting room with an open door that led to the bedroom he saw through the window.

Suddenly Robert heard voices. It sounded like men were coming in a door at the end of the hall outside. Robert darted into the room and closed the door behind him. He looked frantically for some place to hide. The voices sounded closer and closer and, dear God, it sounded like they were dragging a body!

Robert made a quick decision. He leapt toward the easy chair in the corner, yanked it away from the wall, and crouched down behind it. He pulled the chair as close back into the corner as possible and compacted himself as much as he could. He held his breath, every nerve on alert. How did he ever get into such a predicament?

Robert's thoughts travelled back a couple days.

CHAPTER 1

“So we see, class, from looking at the book of Acts, that advancing the gospel is seldom, if ever, cut and dried,” Mr. Price said. “As we can see in these last few chapters, the early church went through various trying circumstances as they sought to obey Jesus’ great commission to spread the gospel to Judah and surrounding areas. The most famous evangelist in the New Testament, Paul, had quite an experience himself in his conversion. Let’s look at that now. Would someone volunteer to read the first nine verses of chapter 9 please?”

No one volunteered.

“Lorraine, would you read, please?” Mr. Price asked.

Robert’s mind began to wander as Lorraine started reading in a halting monotone. He looked around the small familiar church library where his class met before the church service. Hundreds of books like soldiers at attention (Mr. Price said)

surrounded the room from floor to ceiling. Robert, however, saw them as a crowd of wise old friends observing the class with calm, loving interest. The same six students came each week. Jane and Dan were black like Robert while Karen, Vivian, and Lorraine were white. Robert thought it was cool the students were divided equally by race. Occasionally someone would bring a visiting cousin or a neighbor, but that was rare. They always sat in the same chairs—three on one side, three on the other. Mr. Price was white, middle-aged and slender with grey hair that was thinning a bit and wire-rimmed glasses. He had what Robert liked to call a “spiritual sparkle” in his eyes. He usually wore one of four solid color V-neck sweaters over a long-sleeved white dress shirt. Today’s sweater color was charcoal grey.

That morning the sun beat strongly into the room projecting a clear, bright beam that bounced off Mr. Price’s back and splashed onto the floor. Robert started musing about spending the afternoon with his good friends Reggie and Susan. Maybe they’d take a walk or play some cards. Robert wished his friends would come to church with him, but they never seemed interested, not at all.

“Robert. Robert! Would you read verses ten through nineteen please?” Mr. Price asked.

Embarrassed, Robert began to read. He was envious of those first Christians his class had been observing in Acts. They'd had such exciting lives. Angels woke them up in the middle of the night to miraculously help them escape from jail and they touched people that had been seriously disabled who were immediately healed. Evil men threw them in jail, but a sudden earthquake set them on the road to freedom. Adventure followed adventure. In contrast, Robert's life was so boring. Nothing ever changed. He had homework, homework, and homework. And when he didn't have homework, he had school. And when he didn't have school, he had to mow the lawn, clean his room, and visit his grandparents. He wished he had some excitement in his life.

"Don't you think Ananias must have been scared when God told him to go see Saul?" Vivian, generally a quiet doodler, asked Mr. Price.

"What do you all think?" Mr. Price forwarded the question to the class.

"I think when God tells you to do something, you just do it." Dan said.

"That's easy to say," said Lorraine whose comment surprised the class as she was generally shy and quiet, "but what if you thought Saul would kill

you or take you to prison? You might decide you had something better to do.”

“Yeah, but that’s where faith comes in,” Karen, Mr. Price’s daughter, replied.

“You’re absolutely right, honey, but Lorraine has a point too,” Mr. Price replied. “Faith can be easier in theory than in practice.”

“Yeah, I guess so,” Karen said with a sigh and her father took note.

After class, the students chatted awhile then ambled out of the room to attend the service.

Jack Price turned to his daughter.

“Is something bothering you, Sweetheart?”

“Oh. I don’t know,” Karen said.

“Is it something somebody said in class today?”

“No, not really,” his daughter replied.

“Is school getting you down?” Mr. Price asked.

“Not exactly,” Karen said.

“Sweetheart, if something’s got you down, I want to know. I love you. You’re a treasure to me. You’re very precious to me and your mother.”

“Well...um,” Karen said.

“Yes?” her father asked gently.

“It’s just that...”

“Yes?”

“Well, I know we’ve talked about it before.”