

A Free Online Novel

by Jennifer L. Armstrong



Missing King James Bibles Mystery

by

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When the Bibles go missing, Luke decides to investigate. But is it to save the Bibles and return them to the church, or does Luke have another motive?

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Missing King James Bibles Mystery

Chapter One

It started with all of the King James Bibles in the pews being replaced by the Amplified Version. Of course this greatly disturbed the pastor who was of the opinion that the King James Version and only the King James Version was the infallible word of God . (Never mind that Jesus and the apostles used the Septuagint.)

The church members were divided in their reaction. (The body of Christ isn't supposed to be divided, but the division was deeply-rooted in the King-James-Only controversy that had raged through the church not unlike the proverbial unquenchable fires of hell.)

The church members that shared the opinion of the pastor saw the Bible switch as being the work of the devil. The ones strongly supportive of other translations saw it as being, somehow, an act of God. A few people didn't notice the difference. One or two people wondered how the church could afford new Bibles.

Hannah Wise believed that the *sons of God* of Genesis 6 were angels and that they had intimate relations with the daughters of men in the days before the Flood.

It wasn't a popular idea but she felt that the apostle Peter supported her with his reference to Jesus preaching to the spirits in prison in the days of Noah and Jude's reference to the book of Enoch which validated the whole angels-with-women story.

In fact, Hannah believed that Jude's use of the book of Enoch as inspired literature brought into question the whole issue of canonization. The canon had to be a lot more fluid than the church taught if books outside the canon were worth referring to as authorities. It wasn't just the book of Jude.

The Old Testament quoted other historical sources like the Acts of Solomon and the Books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah and Israel, not to mention all the books of various prophets that never survived.

Nobody in her Wednesday night ladies Bible-study group ever agreed with her and her interpretation of scripture. The *sons of God* could only be local rulers engaging in polygamy; Jesus preaching to the spirits in prison was dismissed as an evangelical jaunt to hell; Jude must have been quoting from a different book of Enoch than the one we have today; and as for the fluidity of the canon, well, don't even go there.

How Hannah appreciated Luke! Her husband, who also shared the name of her favourite Bible writer, was her soul-mate. They were both religious misfits, seeking to

know God, and finding themselves agreeing less and less with man's interpretations and doctrines.

The Bible-study group wasn't discussing transcendent sexual relationships this particular Wednesday night though. They had poured over Genesis 12 but now the mystery of the Bible switch was taking priority. Nobody in this particular group was hardcore King James so they were spared from having to listen to an adamant opinion about who and what was behind the switch and how devilish the new translations were, yet they all agreed that whoever had made the switch had done so under some sort of spiritual duress and thus it was a spiritual issue first and foremost. Prayers would go up to the crystal throne room, although no one was sure what exactly to pray for. No one in this particular room had a problem with the Amplified Version but the whole thing was disturbing nonetheless.

The group of about 15 ladies met weekly at the church, first for Bible-study, secondly for prayer.

Dianne Ken, the Bible-study leader prayed first, a general prayer that covered not only the Bible switching but all the sick people mentioned in the Sunday church bulletin.

Hannah prayed for unity in the church. (Had the pastor been present, she would have had to be careful how she worded it. Church unity in their congregation was acceptable. Church unity between congregations was not acceptable since it could lead to the One World Religion that the Beast Power of Revelation would preside over.)

Elinor Wilkinson, an elderly lady, began to sing.

"Holy Spirit! Hear my prayer! Jesus! Sweet Jesus..."

This was something Hannah accepted but didn't fully understand – Elinor's ability to simply sing her prayer.

"Jesus, Jesus, wash me in your blood, make me white as snow..."

"Snow, that's something we've been getting a lot of lately."

Hannah and the rest of the group were startled. Hannah tried not to laugh out loud. It was Karen. A visitor brought by another lady in the group. The Oakville Community church encouraged its members to be evangelical and bring their friends and neighbours out to church. Clearly this group prayer thing was new to Karen.

Elinor continued to sing, oblivious to the interruption. They were all oblivious to the fact that while they were comfortably warm in one of the Sunday school rooms, somebody was out enduring the chill of the sanctuary working on another surprise for Sunday.

Hannah was relating Karen's comment to Luke while she made herself and Luke a fried egg sandwich. For some reason she always came home from Bible-studies hungry.

Luke smiled. He had never had a problem combining religion with humour. When he had changed their long since grown babies' diapers he had used to hum *I've got a river of life flowing out of me*. He was an easy-going man who had just turned 60 and was fortunate to have a full head of grey hair. ("*Grey hair is a crown of splendour, it is attained by a righteous life,*" he liked to quote to anyone interested.) Hannah being a good cook ensured that he would never be a slim man but as an electrician he was on his feet a lot and got enough exercise to compensate for her scalloped potatoes and chocolate chip cookies.

The memory of the children brought something to Hannah's mind.

"Remember when Lisa told you to leave, to just get out?"

Luke shook his head. Hannah continued.

"You know, she was about three and she told you to just leave the house and you asked her who would feed her if you left and she said she'd feed herself?"

"Oh, right! I remember that."

"Yeah, and we thought how that's so like people with God. They have no clue that without him this planet wouldn't exist and yet they go about their business thinking they're taking care of themselves and feeding themselves and not even giving it the tiniest thought that he's providing the perfect conditions for human survival."

"I know," said Luke, rearranging the salt and pepper shakers. "It baffles me that people think that God didn't have anything to do with this planet. I mean, just a small thing like the snow and the way that it only comes down a few inches at a time, maybe a few feet at the most. Yet if we all just evolved and it's all just by chance then why does the snow stop? Why doesn't it just keep coming and coming until we're buried?" He accepted the fried egg sandwich Hannah had made for him and immediately began to salt it. "So, what did you discuss tonight?"

"The sensational bits?" Hannah was squirting ketchup onto her egg. "Whether or not Sarai had sex with the Pharaoh. I said yes, absolutely. He called her his wife. They must have consummated it. Nobody agreed with me. What do you think?" She joined him at their little table in the kitchen.

The topic of Sarai, wife of Abram before he was renamed Abraham, was a favourite of Hannah's. The apostle Peter had written in one of his letters that it was Sarai's gentle and quiet spirit that had made her beautiful, not any outward adornment. As a young woman Hannah had dismissed this as impossible, spending far more time fixing up her outward appearance than cultivating an inner beauty. But now as a woman in her late 50's with her greying hair and her plump figure the scripture had become one of her favourites.

Despite that she had always thought long hair on older women made them look ridiculous, the Bible definitely indicated that long hair for a woman was her glory so she had let hers grow past her shoulders and gotten a perm that had given it some wave. Early on in the marriage she had been a lot more demanding and a lot more independent but had learned slowly that praying about a problem did far more to solve it than nagging Luke about it. The gentle, quiet spirit was cultivated over the years, and now, while she doubted that Brad Pitt would be knocking on her door, she knew Luke still found her attractive.

"Absolutely. If I were Pharaoh and I had a new wife the first thing I'd do is have sex with her. So what about this whole Amplified thing? Did that come up?"

"Did that come up?! Are you crazy? Yes that definitely came up."

"So...?"

"No new info. Lots of prayer."

"Fine source you are."

"Well, what can they really do? I doubt it's something the police would investigate too seriously. Were the Bibles really stolen, after all? They were simply replaced." Hannah got up to get a glass of milk.

“Not from Pastor Robert’s perspective. From his point of view the true word of God was replaced with an Antichrist version that is preparing the church for one world religion.”

“I wonder what he would say about my theory that Colossians 1:25 declares that the word of God in its fullness is Christ in us, the hope of glory?” Hannah poured her milk into a glass, returned it to the fridge and sat down again.

Luke snickered.

“Pastor, the word of God is in me? Why bother quibbling over translations?”

“Well,” said Hannah defensively. “It’s true, isn’t it?”

“Depends what version you read.”

“In that case they all more or less say the same thing.”

“The more or less part of it is what we’re all arguing about,” said Luke, putting down his sandwich. He sighed. “It’s an ugly and divisive issue and when the pastor stands up and says things like *the truth divides*, well, I just want to weep, really. Believers and unbelievers will be divided, of course. But scripture says that believers are united and the only way that people will know we’re Christ’s disciples is if we love one another. It doesn’t say the world will know us by our doctrinal agreement. What chills me about the pastor’s remark about the truth dividing is that it’s theologically wrong to support division in the church. We should always be striving for unity. Or, even more chilling, maybe he understands that the body of Christ should be unified and he’s saying that we people who choose to read the NIV are unbelievers.”

“Why don’t you ask him?”

“I can’t. You know what Scripture says. *Warn a divisive man twice and then have nothing more to do with him.* I’ve warned him many times by giving him articles about textual criticism and asking him to read them and get back to me about them. He never did.”

“That’s right,” Hannah nodded as she chewed her sandwich. “I forgot.”

Luke always read the Bible through the sermons and said that Jesus was his Shepherd.

“I don’t know why we don’t just switch churches,” Hannah said.

“Because we’re going to stick around until we are declared an anathema. And I’m not going to leave until someone says, I declare you to be an anathema, Luke Wise!”

All the banners were gone. They had had slogans like *Welcome Holy Spirit* and a picture of a dove and *Hail King Jesus* and a picture of a crown. There had been about eight of them arranged around the sanctuary and if most people were honest, they would have had to admit that they could only remember the words of two or three of them.

“What next?” said Luke to Hannah. They had brought their heavy NIV Study Bible with them, expecting correctly that the pastor would have all the heretical Amplified Versions removed even if there was nothing to replace them with.

The missing banners were testing the pastor’s patience, Hannah noticed. He mentioned them in the opening prayer, asking for their restoration, and then mentioned them again in the sermon. He had been aware of the problem since Thursday morning and said that it must have happened sometime Wednesday night since they had been in place Wednesday.

Hannah gasped and nudged Luke who was reading his Bible. He missed the significance of her nudge. Hannah looked around to see if any of the other Bible-study ladies were startled by the information. Only Dianne didn't look surprised.

Of course, thought Hannah. The pastor, and maybe even the police, would have already talked to her and she would have told them that we didn't see anything. It was all a bit thrilling, but scary.

Chapter Two

Not everyone knew the Bible as well as Luke and Hannah Wise.

Kurt Didimon had a saying that he often threw around in his line of work, “there’s no rest for the righteous around here, never mind the wicked.” It sounded scriptural and he used it now on this attractive brunette in her late twenties who had come to him with her taxes. How Kurt had ended up as an accountant he would never know. He had wanted to be a race-car driver but there had been no major even remotely connected to that dream when he’d gone to college.

Loser would have been the word he would have used to describe himself.

But the attractive woman sitting down in the worn vinyl chair in front of him wasn’t thinking *loser*. Handsome. OK, maybe not handsome, exactly. Not in the typical sense. Beautiful. No. That sounded silly for a man. But there was something beautiful about him, more relating to his soul maybe than to his outward appearance which was certainly not unappealing. Dark hair and dark eyes made her think of the Middle East.

“Lisa Wise,” she said. Kurt noted that her eyes were bright and warm.

“Kurt Didimon,” he said. “And I will be your personal accountant today.”

“It’s just my taxes,” she said pulling off her hat and gloves and putting them in her large purse. “Normally I do them myself, but this year I got into mutual funds and RRSPs and suddenly it’s a lot more complicated.

“Why don’t you get a cup of coffee...” He pointed in the direction of a coffee pot and accessories in the corner of the open concept small office that he shared with Bret Zinger, a fellow accountant, “...While I go through this just to get a feel for your papers here.”

Lisa got up and prepared herself a coffee.

Well, that was weird, thought Kurt as he shuffled the papers without looking at them. *Get a feel for your papers? How moronic? I never do that for a straightforward tax case.*

Meanwhile, Lisa was over at the coffeemaker, uncertainly pouring herself a cup of coffee despite that she was an herbal tea person, preferably something fruity, and never drank anything caffeinated. Hesitantly she put in a teaspoon of sugar and a bit of cream and stirred her mug.

Why didn’t I just tell him I had to go? she wondered.

“Well, everything looks in reasonable order,” said Kurt when she sat back down in front of him. “Looks like you paid the government more than your fair share...”

“Well, render to Caesar what’s Caesar’s,” said Lisa taking a tiny sip of her coffee before putting it down on the edge of Kurt’s desk.

Kurt stared at her. Her hair was long and wavy and the only make-up she wore was some deep pink lipstick that accentuated full lips. Full, was the best all-around word to describe her. Every part of her seemed filled out to perfection.

“Oh,” said Kurt, looking down at her papers because he couldn’t think of anything else to do. “Well, I think in this case you’ll be getting a little rendering back from the government...”

“Oh good,” said Lisa. She decided to just ignore the coffee and let Kurt dispose of it after she left.

“What do you plan to do with it?” asked Kurt. The question shocked him. He wasn’t supposed to talk this way with clients.

Lisa looked surprised but not perturbed.

“Well, actually, I made a promise to God that whatever I got back I’d give to a missionary project to build churches in India.”

Now Kurt looked surprised. It took a few seconds for him to think of a question.

“Does that work? I mean, can you make deals with God like that?”

“Oh sure,” said Lisa, crossing her legs and starting to look more comfortable. “Jacob did. He told God that if God would protect him and provide for him and eventually bring him safely back to his father’s land that he would start giving God a tenth of all his goods. That was when he was setting out to Paddan Aram after being blessed by his father...”

Lisa was noticing the blank look on Kurt’s face.

“You don’t know the story?”

He shook his head. Just then Bret came in with a bag from McDonald’s.

“Hey Bret,” said Lisa.

“Hey Lisa!” Bret looked surprised. “We go to the same church,” he explained to Kurt. “What are you doing here?” he asked Lisa.

“Looking for an accountant,” said Lisa. “But since you weren’t here, Kurt’s going to be my accountant.”

“Lucky man,” laughed Bret as he sat down at his desk and pulled out a Big Mac. There was no jealousy in his voice since he had a long-time girlfriend and wedding plans for the following June.

“So this guy Jacob,” said Kurt. “A friend of yours, or what?”

Lisa laughed.

“Oh no! The patriarch Jacob. Lived 4,000 years ago.”

Brett chuckled.

“Lisa telling you Bible stories, Kurt?”

Kurt ignored him.

“So, how does the story go?” Kurt had work up to his ears but he was suddenly in another time-zone with Lisa and would have given her the rest of his day if she wanted it.

“Well...” Lisa had to think where to begin. “Let’s see... How about I just stick to Jacob’s life and then if you want to know more you can ask.”

If I want to know more I can ask?! This is great, thought Kurt excitedly. *The Bible’s a big book. We could be here for days, weeks maybe.*

“So Jacob was the younger son, but he bought the birthright from his older brother Esau...”

“Stole it from him, you mean,” called out Bret.

“There’s no reason to think that,” replied Lisa, earnestly, leaning forward in her chair. “He bought it for a bowl of soup which just goes to show you how little Esau valued it. Esau could have gotten food from anybody else in the tents. He was the heir of everything Isaac had, after all. But he decided he was hungry and just had to eat right that minute and had no problem selling his birthright to Jacob in exchange for some stew and bread.” This had been directed to Bret but Lisa now turned back to Kurt.

“So, the next thing is the blessing. Jacob’s father, Isaac, wants to bless Esau before he dies, but Rebekah, the boys’ mother, knows that it should be Jacob who receives the blessing and tells her son...”

“Wait a second,” said Kurt excitedly. “I think I know what happens! Is this that one where the one brother is really hairy and so they put some animal skin on the other one...?”

“That’s right!” Lisa looked pleased. “So Jacob gets the blessing as well as the birthright and when Esau comes back from hunting game for his father and finds out what’s happened he flips out and threatens to kill Jacob. Rebekah sends him off on a journey back to her home to find a wife from her brother’s daughters...”

“Her *brother’s* daughters? He’s supposed to marry his cousin?!”

“Well, back then it wasn’t such a big deal to marry in the family and in some cases it was desirable because you didn’t want your kids marrying foreigners. Esau had married local women...”

“*Women?*”

“Polygamy was pretty common back then though not sanctioned by God.”

“Sounds good, eh,” called out Bret.

Kurt looked at him strangely. Bret was engaged and he was supposed to be a Christian. Besides, Lisa Wise would be enough for any man.

Lisa ignored Bret and continued.

“Well, these other women would worship idols and the most important quality a person could have in those days, and really in these days too, is to worship the one true God. So Jacob is sent out to Rebekah’s brother’s to find a suitable wife and that’s when he makes a deal with God that if God protects him and provides for him and brings him safely back to his father’s land that he’ll start giving him a tenth of everything. Well, it takes 20 years for him to make it back home, but God and Jacob both keep up their ends of the bargain and the first thing Jacob does upon returning home is to give Esau a generous gift out of all that he earned out in Paddan Aram with Laban, Rebekah’s brother. There was no church at that time, of course, so giving his tithe to Esau would have been perfectly acceptable...” Lisa stood up. “Well, I really must be going.”

“What a second.” Kurt leaned forward wanting to grab onto her arm. “So, like, did he get a wife?”

“Two, actually,” said Lisa, pulling her gloves out of her purse and putting them on. “And two handmaidens as well.”

“What?! I’d like to hear more about *that* sometime.”

“Oh, sure,” said Lisa vaguely. “Anytime. Thank you for helping me with my taxes.” She pulled on a wool hat and was out the door before Kurt could say anything else. He just sat staring at the door that led out to a hallway that would take Lisa to the street entrance.

“How does she know so much about the Bible,” he finally asked Bret whose mouth was full of french fries. He didn’t let it prevent him from answering.

“Lisa? Oh she’s one of those chicks who only reads the Bible, or books about the Bible. She gets really excited when a new book debunking evolution comes out.” Bret took a long slurp of his Coke.

“I didn’t know there were chicks like that,” said Kurt, wondering if he would ever be able to stop staring at the door.

They found out the following Sunday that the banners had not been stolen. The head of the Church Decoration committee had simply removed them for dry-cleaning and hadn't thought to mention it to the pastor who upon arriving Thursday morning had made some assumptions.

The head of the Church Decoration committee had been horrified to realize the pastor's error and too shy to mention it publicly. The banners hung, looking fresh, and people read them as if for the first time. *Victory on the Cross! You are Never Alone The Power of Prayer*

After the service, Luke got into an argument with one of the teenagers about evolution. Hannah had been busy talking to Karen, the lady who felt they'd been getting a lot of snow lately and who had surprisingly showed up for the Sunday service, and so she missed the beginning of it.

"The fossil record doesn't make sense if it happened slowly," Luke was saying with feeling. "You wouldn't have such well-preserved fossils if it wasn't a cataclysmic sudden event that destroyed those creatures..."

"What do you mean by a cataclysmic sudden event?" demanded the young man, clearly willing to defend his worldview. "You mean, like a meteor?"

Luke shrugged.

"I mean more like a global flood."

The young man snorted.

"You mean, like Noah's flood?"

Luke was taken aback, not because he couldn't defend his position, but after all, this was a kid who grew up with Sunday school. Had they taught the Noah story as history or fantasy? He was glad his kids had made it through Sunday school faith intact.

"The geological evidence," said Luke, aware that he sounded somewhat pompous, "favours Noah's flood. But very few people want to accept it because then the Bible might be true and all the things it says about God might be true and then they might have to give up their selfish lifestyles and actually get down to the real business of life which is worshipping God."

"Are you trying to *evangelize* me?" the young man sneered.

Luke resisted the urge to make a sarcastic comment about the absurdity of evangelizing someone in an evangelical church, but instead answered from his heart.

"Evangelize you? Does an astronomer talk about stars so that everybody will rush out and become an astronomer? No! He talks about comets and constellations because he *loves* it."

He had a sinking feeling that he was casting his pearls before swine and was rather glad when the young man didn't pursue the conversation and excused himself.

"Atheists! *Atheists!* In the church!" muttered Luke as they exited out the side door of the church. They couldn't go out the front door where the pastor stood and shook everyone's hand since that would hardly have been in keeping with having nothing more to do with a divisive man.

"Evolutionist," Hannah corrected him.

"Same thing, practically! Should it surprise me though?" They were now out in the chilling, though sunny afternoon, heading for their car. "Israel was full of

unbelievers. Micah said, *if a liar and deceiver comes and says 'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' he would be just the prophet for this people!*"

Hannah laughed as Luke unlocked her door and she climbed into the passenger seat, glad to be out of the winter wind.

"Not this crowd, though," sighed Luke, starting the car. "Because wine isn't really fermented and Jesus actually performed the miracle of turning water into grape juice and when the Bible says that he made wine to gladden a man's heart, he's really talking about a beverage favoured by children..."

"I know, dear," said Hannah soothingly.

"They don't want a God who is preparing a feast for us of choice meats and aged wines. They don't want a Saviour who was called a drunkard. I doubt very much that Jesus's enemies would have called him a drunkard if all he did was drink grape juice. Jesus explicitly said that John the Baptist didn't eat or drink and his enemies said he had a demon. He did eat and drink and they called him a glutton and a drunkard..."

"Don't worry," said his wife. "I promise I will never become a teetotaller."

"Oh, I'm just practicing," said Luke, making a lane change and turning onto their street. "Just in case I ever get my one and only opportunity to set this church straight on who their Saviour is. They've made up their own God. He doesn't drink. He only uses the Masoretic text. He doesn't listen to music with a beat. He established a dress code, consisting of men wearing white shirts and ties and women wearing dresses past their knees. It's idolatry, pure and simple."

"When you put it that way, it's pretty scary what they've done."

"The pastor has replaced God's righteousness with self-righteousness," said Luke, pulling into their driveway. "They make up the rules and then they judge everyone who isn't in line. Making up the rules and judging people is God's job. So now they've got a religion where they don't even need God. The only reason they keep God in the picture is to back them up. It's an ego boost for them to have God on their side."

Kurt nervously put down Lisa's taxes. He had finished them (at the expense of many other more pressing jobs). He had gone over them a second time to ensure perfection. Now he had to phone her to let her know they were done and could be picked up. Normally a deadline was established when Kurt took on a job but Lisa Wise didn't seem too concerned about the things of the world and hadn't mentioned when she needed her taxes done.

Now a phone call was normally a straightforward thing. But Kurt was *nervous*. Should he tell her he'd started reading a Bible? That he now knew the full story of Jacob and his two wives and two handmaidens and twelve sons and one daughter, Dinah who had been ravished by a local prince and who's brothers retaliated by slaughtering a whole town. It was fascinating stuff. Not at all what Kurt had thought the Bible was all about. He associated the Bible with old ladies and bake sales but had found a book brimming with sex and violence...

He picked up the phone, dialled Lisa's number (which he'd gotten from Bret who had to look it up in his parent's church directory) and found himself babbling.

"Uh, hi Lisa, this is Kurt, your accountant. Ha. Ha. Anyhow I've really been enjoying the Bible. It's great stuff. Not what I thought it would be..."

Lisa took this all calmly.

“Well, it is a great book. The best, I think.”

“Right. Well, I called because your taxes are done but I hope you don’t think me too forward if I also ask you if we could get together for coffee, or whatever, sometime and just talk over things, like, you know, Jacob and Rachel and Leah...”

It struck Lisa that this was a dream offer. She had been a Christian all her life and no Christian man had ever called her up wanting to get together to discuss Jacob and Rachel and Leah.

“I would *love* to,” she said and Kurt, overjoyed at her sincere response, was emboldened to invite her to dinner that night.

Thank you God, thought Lisa when she had hung up.

“I feel sorry for Eliezer of Damascus,” said Hannah, looking up from her Bible. It was partly a true statement and partly a test of her husband’s biblical knowledge.

He paused in his reading the local paper and thought for a moment.

“Why? He had a good life even if he didn’t end up inheriting all of Abraham’s wealth. Besides, who wants all the responsibility?”

He had passed.

How boring we are, thought Hannah, not the least bit dissatisfied. They mutually agreed that they were the world’s most boring couple, enjoying evenings at home in their small, cozy living room over anything else, listening to sermons off the internet for entertainment, or reading Christian fiction aloud to one another.

“As I read all of this,” said Luke referring to his paper, “I wonder what would have happened if only Eve had eaten the fruit.”

“A fallen woman but not a fallen man. Hmmm.” Hannah took a sip of the hot chocolate she made for them every night. “I guess there would have been no need for a second Adam so no Christ. But there would have been a need for a second Eve...?”

“Maybe not, though. Women will be saved through childbearing according to Paul.”

“Depends on how you read it, though. Does that mean saved as in salvation or saved as in protected through it? I favour protected through it since that would mean a woman who was infertile couldn’t be saved.”

“But wait a minute,” said Luke. “Infertility was the worse thing that could happen to a woman in the Old Testament. And after Leah had four children it says the Lord closed up her womb. People had to pray in order to be relieved of their infertility. Why would it be any different today? All the women in the Bible had children except for the ones who were cursed, like Michal, David’s wife.”

“Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Samson’s mother, Hannah, Elizabeth,” mused Hannah. “I think you might be right. And Leah had children after the Lord closed up her womb but she gives God all the credit. As far as Michal goes though, I rather suspect that she didn’t have any children simply because David didn’t sleep with her anymore. Anyway, maybe both interpretations of Paul’s statement make sense – salvation of a sort, though I still maintain that a woman who doesn’t have children is saved through Christ, and being sustained through the curse of painful childbirth.”

“The final chapter of Revelation is where the curse is completely lifted,” said Luke. “That’s where the tree of life is bearing fruit on a monthly basis for the healing of the nations. But man’s curse is to have to toil for all his food and yet God tells us all our

needs will be provided for if we seek the kingdom first. The curse is definitely all around us, but it seems that we don't have to live under the curse providing we personally reject the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and spiritually eat off of the tree of life."

"When I was Lisa's age I thought it was perfectly acceptable to eat off of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil provided I only ate the good. It took me awhile to figure out that the problem with that was that I had to accept the evil with the good. If I accepted art and music I'd also have to accept serial killers and tornadoes."

"I know. People want the good without the bad. Frankly, I don't even think the good out there is all that good either."

"Exactly. I had to reach the point where the world had nothing to offer me anymore so I could just turn my life over to God."

Lisa had read a book where a gorgeous man pretending to be interested in God had turned out to be a demon trying to seduce a naïve Christian woman. At the time she had smugly thought that since she didn't date unbelievers this could never happen to her. But here she was eating Caesar salad across from a good-looking unbeliever. This unbeliever, however, was talking with more passion (and more loudly) than most believers.

"...one of the things that really got me was the way Leah named her kids. You know, the meanings of the names, *Surely my husband will love me now, I am not loved, Now my husband will become attached to me.* And then finally she just names her kid *Now I will praise the Lord.* It's like, she's given up on winning her husband and is just going to focus on God."

"That's amazing that you noticed that," said Lisa, barely able to eat. Yes, there was the physical beauty to distract her – the dark hair falling errantly in his eyes, the rough bone-structure, rugged good-looks it was called. He was about her age and seemed younger in his mannerisms but the intensity when he talked made her think that it would not be long before wisdom would fill out this physical body and make him a very attractive human being.

"I mean, I sense a spiritual journey here..." His voice trailed off, perhaps, Lisa thought because he was limited in his understanding of Scripture and didn't know where to take it.

"*That's* exactly what it is," she said. "And I think we all have to make the same journey from relying on others and earthly things to relying on God."

Kurt was looking at Lisa and thinking that he wanted to rely on earthly things at this particular juncture in his life.

Lisa, sensing his emotions, started to babble.

"Not that that means a rejection of human emotions and relationships. Of course, we are to love one another and devote our lives to serving one another. But I think ultimately we must give inexhaustibly because our source of strength is God, not because the other person is loveable but because we have the love of God in us..."

"That is so...*spiritual,*" said Kurt, almost overwhelmed. Lisa had stopped eating her Caesar salad and Kurt hadn't even touched his pasta primavera. "It's like, the ultimate answers. You know what I mean?"

Of course she knew what he meant. They were on the same wavelength, soul-mates, Lisa decided. This was it. The big one. The only one. The one she'd waited for all her life.

"So, like, what do I do now?" asked Kurt.

"You lead, I follow."

"What?!"

Lisa herself was startled. The words had just popped out and they weren't some paraphrase of the Biblical command for a wife to submit to her husband. It was like a moving of the Holy Spirit in her.

"Well," she said slowly. "I think what I'm supposed to do is learn from you. The obvious thing would be for me to teach you everything I know since I know way more about the Bible. But I have this gut feeling that it's you that's supposed to be teaching me. I think the reason is because I would pass on all my preconceived ideas to you whereas you who have never read the Bible will be reading it with a mind unaffected by 2,000 years of Christian interpretation."

Kurt was just staring at her.

"So, like this is a message from God."

"I think so," said Lisa.

"Wow."

Suddenly he was hungry and started eating. Lisa found herself also able to finish off her salad. After, they ordered chocolate cheesecake.

"It seems like when people talk about church nowadays they mean, going to church because it's a good thing to do," said Kurt a few days later. They were eating chicken salad sandwiches in a deli a few stores down from his office. "But really the church is the body of Christ. So, how can it just be something good to do? It's like when people say 'I go to church and that's enough religion for me' it's really banal in comparison to what it actually is, I mean, the body of Christ... that's pretty intense."

"I think there are some major differences between religion and the Bible," said Lisa.

Kurt snorted.

"You're not kidding. I never really liked religious people, except for you, of course, but I really like the people in the Bible. OK, I've only read Genesis and now I'm reading some of those letters of that guy Paul but they're not what I thought the Bible was. It's like this spiritual portal to something bigger and at the same time it's all about normal everyday life. Like the way Jacob says to Laban, '*This was my situation. The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes. It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household.*' I mean, *twenty* years, twenty years of taking care of sheep like that. But that Jacob, I like him. He goes after things."

Lisa nodded.

"When he meets Rachel at the well where everyone waters their sheep," continued Kurt. "Although I'm not so sure about the whole Rachel thing. I know he loves her and everything, and I know she's beautiful, but she doesn't seem to be the woman she should be considering Jacob is so serious about God. Like the way she steals her father's idols and then lies to Laban about it. I dunno..." Kurt shook his head. "Leah seems nice. I like her."

Lisa didn't have anything to say except that it was just wonderful to sit and listen to a man who had opinions about the Bible. Most men she had dated had opinions about the church or about what Christians should be doing to make themselves more desirable in the eyes of the world, but Kurt was oblivious to all that. He reminded Lisa of why Christianity had once been and still could be an intense religion. Because the stories in the Book mattered. And each one of them was worth thinking about and talking about.

Chapter Three

The matter of the missing King James Bibles came up for discussion at the monthly Board meeting. Should they all be replaced? They had recently all been replaced and that's what made the pastor think the person who did it was particularly nefarious. He (or she) had not done this at a time when it could be said, 'Oh well, they were getting old and needed replacing anyhow.'

Daniel Connor had a small report to make, about how he had been to all the Christian bookstores within a 30 kilometre radius (which basically amounted to two) and there had been no purchases of 50 plus Amplified Bibles at either of them. They lived in Oakville, a small town, a bedroom community about an hours drive from the big city of Toronto where most of the churches members commuted.

"It's pretty hopeless," said Daniel. "There are a number of Christian bookstores in the city, of course, but with so many people working at them, I couldn't take the time to interview all the store clerks to see if they remembered anyone making the purchase. I can't check them all..."

"It wouldn't even have to have been a Christian bookstore," said Tom Franklin. "A lot of bookstores carry Bibles and even if they didn't have that many Amplifieds on the shelf they could have ordered them in for the person."

"Or, the person could have bought them off the Internet and had them shipped to them at some bulk rate," said Glen Hoo.

Pastor Robert James looked grim, determined; yet he had no new ideas for how to go about the investigation that the Board had informally undertaken. When the police had been called in, he had insisted that fingerprints be taken from the new Bibles but the results had been inconclusive. Too many people had handled the Amplified Bibles that first day in the pews. Being winter, it was also likely that the culprit had worn gloves while making the replacement and even if the person hadn't, if they had no police record they would never be identified. Pastor Robert had had a vague idea that if they at least had the thief's fingerprints he could have then systematically worked his way down his list of suspects by inviting them over to his place for dinner and then taking their used glasses to the police for comparison. The police had advised him to just contact the insurance company if it really irked him that much. It was clear the matter was closed as far as they were concerned.

They had prayed as a group about the matter, of course, but Pastor Robert, a plump man in his late 50's with a receding hairline, sensed that not all the deacons were praying for the safe return of the KJV Bibles. He didn't suspect anyone in the room of the prank but he didn't get the sense they were all on the same side so he had chosen to continue to pray about this particular issue at home.

For now, the board moved onto other matters. Like who was going to be solicited to give a quote on paving the parking lot. The spring thaw was around the corner and many members were getting tired of gravel and muddy shoes.

Lisa was hesitant to invite Kurt to her church. For one thing, there was the awful King-James-Only controversy with the pastor not failing to make a weekly mention of how inferior the modern translations were and how they had omitted the deity of Christ in

this particular scripture by only referring to him as Jesus when the King James read Lord Jesus. (Never mind that a few scriptures down, the NIV or the NASB would have a reference to the Lord Jesus.)

The whole thing made Lisa sick. The pastor had successfully divided the church into two camps.

It was a battle for the men, Lisa decided. She had seldom run into a woman who cared what Bible translation her fellow-believers read. The issue only came up if her husband was a fervent King-James-Only man. So Lisa avoided the topic whenever possible. She had this vague idea that someday a great spiritual battle would take place in the church and somehow the men would have to reason with the pastor and when he failed to “reason together” with them, he would have to be ejected from their assembly. Meanwhile, her contribution to the whole matter was prayer, something that she firmly believed was capable of moving mountains.

So she prayed about inviting Kurt to church and got no sense that she had to and decided that wisdom alone could have told her not to do it. It was as if God were performing an experiment right before her eyes, about how the Bible could transform a willing heart and even more significantly for Lisa, how the Bible could be understood without the benefit of commentaries, preachers and ministries. It was so exciting. She could hardly wait to see what happened next.

Kurt proposed to her.

“What?!” said Lisa, a potato chip actually falling out of her mouth. She was at his office for lunch, finally getting around to picking up her taxes. Bret was out somewhere with a client.

“Why not?” said Kurt. He got down on one knee. “I love you. I need you. You’re everything I want. If you had just a quarter of the passion I have for you this could be an amazing relationship.”

Lisa sat there stunned.

“But we’ve only known each other, what is it? A couple of weeks? Has it even been that long?” She sat silent for a moment but Kurt didn’t seem perturbed as he remained on one knee.

“You’ve been reading the Song of Solomon, haven’t you?” she asked suddenly.

Kurt blushed slightly.

“Sure,” he said, feigning casualness. “OK and I didn’t refer to you as having teeth like freshly shorn sheep, but...”

“You’re right,” said Lisa interrupting him, lost in her own thoughts. “We should get married. It’s about passion. And we have passion. And we have God. So we should get married.”

“That’s a yes, then?” said Kurt.

“Yes, that’s a yes.”

“Great,” said Kurt standing up.

“Sooooo,” said Lisa.

“What do we do now?” said Kurt, pulling his chair around the desk to sit beside her. “Just be in love. And kiss a lot. We can kiss a lot. You know, your kisses are better than wine, and all that.” He blushed again but he leaned forward and kissed her

boldly. Lisa was glad the potato chip had fallen out of her mouth. And yes, his kiss was better than wine.

“I suppose we’ll have to have a wedding and all that,” he said when they were done.

“Yeah, and counselling, I guess,” said Lisa. “If we want a minister to marry us.”

“It’s kind of a bother,” said Kurt.

“It is,” agreed Lisa who at one time thought pre-marital counselling was probably a sensible idea but now it just seemed to be a dreary regulation.

“Well, let’s just be in love for now and then when we’re burning with passion, like that guy Paul said, we’ll just run out and get married any old way,”

Lisa liked the simplicity of that and found Kurt’s lack of concern over the whole wedding ceremony thing refreshing. They would be married in the sight of God no matter who married them.

Lisa didn’t mention that she was engaged to her parents. She was living in their basement and quite often joined them for a meal, unlike her brother Denny who lived at home but only seemed to sleep there. It was not a conventional engagement with a set wedding date so there was no point in them worrying about her marrying her unchurched accountant.

Anyhow, they only wanted to talk about the King James Bibles going missing. It seemed that a few copies had made it back into the pews but with extensive margin notes explaining why a lot of the readings were faulty or misleading to someone living in the 21st century. In 1611 *to let* meant to hinder, *fair* meant beautiful, *quick* meant living, *suffer the little children* meant to allow the little children to come to Jesus. There were many other examples of word evolution.

Errors were also highlighted. In Acts 12:4, the King James translators had translated the Greek word, *pascha*, as Easter, when it was actually referring to the Jewish holiday of Passover. And there were many more.

Anyone sympathetic to the new versions recognized the gesture as trying to make a case that 1)The King James Bible wasn’t inerrant and 2)There was a need for a more modern translation.

The King-James-Only people were in an uproar, enraged at the abomination of desolation that had been committed against the pure word of God.

“Pastor Roberts is actually having the handwriting analyzed by a professional,” said Hannah who had learned this from Diane, her Bible-study leader. She squirted some ketchup onto her meatloaf.

“Paid for out of his own pocket, I hope,” said Luke putting some mashed potatoes in his mouth. “Otherwise I’m not giving this church anymore of my tithes.”

“We don’t tithe, dear,” said Hannah.

“Silly me” Luke slapped himself. “I forgot that we don’t live under the old covenant and under the Levitical priesthood anymore. Let me correct that... Otherwise I’m not giving generously to this church anymore.”

“Dad, you’re preaching to the converted,” said Lisa who hadn’t contributed anything up til now.

“Yes, I really must have the pastor and his family over for dinner so that your Dad can tell him all the reasons why he doesn’t do 90% of what the pastor teaches,” said Hannah.

“Scriptural reasons,” said Luke reaching for more peas.

“Oh Dad,” said Lisa, “You’d keep the poor man up all night with all your theological views.”

“I really must get around to starting my own church,” said Luke. “That way people could pay me to express all my theological views.”

“Why don’t you start an Internet ministry, Dad?” said Lisa, her mind not really on the whole topic. Her mind wandered as her Dad answered.

Kurt. Kurt. Kurt. Kurt proposing. Kurt being so in love that he’d forgotten to give her back her taxes. Kurt telling her about how much he liked David killing Goliath and wondering why the story had never seemed all that exciting up until now.

“It really got me going when he said he was a soldier in the Lord’s army. It’s like he had this bravery that most people will never know. And he was a man after God’s heart. He really went after God. I just started reading the Psalms. He’s something else. A poet-warrior. It’s like something out of mythology, or something. That’s what’s neat about the Bible. It’s larger-than-life but very real and down-to-earth, I dunno, I can’t explain...”

That was OK. He didn’t have to. Lisa always got it the first time around.

One thing Kurt couldn’t get over was the amount of sex and violence there was in the Bible.

“I always thought Christians were against reading about sex and violence,” he said. “But now I see they really can’t be because you can’t move too far into the book without hitting some guy going into a prostitute or some guy killing his brother. I mean, I know it’s different than reading the paper or going to a movie because this all has God in it. And that’s another thing that blows me away, is how God is so real. I mean, he actually comes down to see what’s happening with the Tower of Babel and to visit with Abraham before Sodom and Gomorrah get toasted. Like, I don’t imagine there were too many atheists back then. Nowadays people think they’re religious if they believe there is a God, but what a joke if you lived when Abraham did and you told someone you believed in God. He’d be like, so what? And do you want a medal for believing the sky is blue?”

Lisa almost laughed out loud at the memory.

“So, what next?” her father was saying.

“Well, I don’t know,” said Hannah.

“I mean, he gets the handwriting analyzed and then what? He finds out the guy’s an introvert from the way he writes his R’s and then he starts doing personality tests on all the people in his church? Or better yet, why not just get handwriting samples from all of us and submit them to the police for comparison with the Bibles? I wonder what you’d get these days for desecrating the pure word of God? Stoning? Burning at the stake? Sometimes I am really relieved we live in a democratic culture rather than a church-led state. I know that sounds heretical considering I’m a Christian, but can you imagine it? If the KJV people had their way anyone who doesn’t read the King James would be labeled a heretic. I’d have to read my NIV behind locked doors and hide it under my mattress in case the pastor dropped in unexpectedly. And if I ever did get

caught I'd be excommunicated or persecuted or maybe even crucified, except that anyone who reads the Antichrist Bible is probably not even worthy of crucifixion..."

Lisa wondered what kind of conversation her father and Kurt would have when they first met.

Hannah was distressed when she came home from her Bible-study. She turned on one of the oven burners and started buttering bread for a grilled cheese sandwich. Luke joined her in the kitchen.

"Elinor's been diagnosed with some unpronounceable disease," she said. "She's been given a week to live. *A week*, Luke."

Luke nodded as he absorbed the news. Hannah pulled a block of cheddar cheese out of the fridge and started slicing pieces.

"She has faith though," Hannah continued. "She feels God has told her he'll heal her. Oh listen to me saying *she feels* as if there's any doubt. God has told her he'll heal her so she's in good spirits and just asks that we hold her up in prayer that she'll be able to continue to stand on His promises. Pastor Robert came over to her house after the diagnosis and laid hands on her and prayed for her healing."

Luke nodded to show he was listening.

"I don't know that I'd have that much faith. I mean, she's told everybody, her kids, her doctor even, that God has plans for her and He's not going to let her die."

"Which may not be good if she dies."

"You think she's going to die?" Hannah placed the sandwiches into the frying pan and joined him at the kitchen table.

"Oh, I don't think anything. I just know that if she dies a lot of people are going to be thinking, *some God she worshipped. Tells her He'll heal her and then kills her.* Even believers could have a niggling doubt if it happens. I don't like the idea of telling everybody..." Luke continued to think.

"But if she is healed," said Hannah. "Then everybody will give God the credit..."

"Everyone who wants to, who already believes He can do it. The unbelievers will just say it was the power of positive thinking."

"Poor Elinor. But she's in such good spirits. Full of faith. Praising God for all He's been teaching her and showing her the last couple of days. She's been told she might not live another week and she's just so full of faith and praise..." Hannah got up to check on the grilled cheese sandwiches. They weren't ready so while she was standing she poured them both a glass of milk.

She stood quietly for a few minutes, lost in her own thoughts.

"How does Lisa seem to you these days?" she asked, finally.

"Fine."

"She seems, oh I don't know, cheerful in a subdued way. Maybe she's met someone."

"Where would she meet someone?"

Hannah shrugged.

"I don't know. But whoever he is I hope we get to at least hear about him soon."

Luke laughed.

"You like to jump to conclusions, don't you?"

Hannah got the ketchup out of the fridge before turning the sandwiches over.

“So what did you do tonight?”

“Surfed the net. Checked out some of the King-James-Only sites. I don’t know how much more of it I can stand. The misinformation, I mean.”

“Oh well,” said Hannah, her generic statement.

“Well, the only reason we’re sticking around is that I want to see what happens next.”

Hannah put their sandwiches on plates and they ate in pleasant silence.

“I love babies,” said Lisa staring at a young mother and child a few tables away from them in the deli. “Like, look at that baby. He’s looking at his hands as if he’s never noticed them before.”

Kurt looked over and the baby began to blow raspberries, spraying his mother. Kurt laughed.

“Yeah, he’s cute.”

An Asian waiter came over and took their order. An herbal tea, a coffee, and two egg salad sandwiches.

“You know,” said Lisa when the waiter was out of hearing range. “I heard this story about a young Chinese guy who was either a waiter or a busboy at a busy diner across from a big church somewhere in the States. The Christians would all come in after church and get lunch there and they would just treat this poor Chinese guy like garbage and barely tip him and he just grew to hate Christians. When he went back to China he vowed to wipe out Christianity. His name was Chairman Mao.”

Kurt whistled.

“Talk about one man making a difference for so many people. Aren’t Christians persecuted in China?”

“Big time. It makes me want to go out of my way to be nice to anybody who might just be here as a student and who’s going back to another country. Maybe they’d go back and turn things around. You know, make Christianity the state religion, or something.”

“I dunno,” said Kurt. “Wasn’t worshipping God the state religion for Israel and they were, like, totally immoral, sometime even worse than the godless nations around them? I finished Judges and the two Samuel books and there’s a lot of seriously disturbing stuff for a country that all knew God.”

“Yeah, you’re right. That’s why...”

Lisa stopped herself. She was about to say ‘That’s why God promised through Jeremiah that He would write His laws on His people’s hearts’ but Kurt hadn’t gotten that far and she didn’t want to spoil anything.

“What?”

“Nothing,” she smiled both at him and the waiter as he returned with their hot drinks. “Just jumping ahead too far.”

When Kurt was paying their bill she was warmed to see that he left an extra dollar above the expected 15% tip for their waiter.

Elinor didn’t even make it to Sunday.

Pastor Robert announced her death and that funeral arrangements were still in the process of being made.

Hannah and Luke looked at each other, eyes wide. Hannah felt sad and a bit shaky at the reality of the death of someone you'd talked to only a few days earlier but not an overwhelming pain since Elinor was a casual friend, not someone she was in constant contact with. But the theological implications! She and Luke would have a lot to discuss.

"It's a faith buster," whispered Luke.

Chapter Four

“It’s a faith buster,” Luke repeated when they got home, as they took off their coats and hung them on the coat rack.

Luke followed Hannah into the kitchen where Hannah got a can of cream of mushroom soup out of a cupboard and began opening it. He sat down and continued talking.

“It’s a lot like the whole drill, 1)God is good. 2)God is all-powerful. 3)So why does God allow suffering? Except that this is 1)God told her He would heal her. 2)She had faith. 3)She died.”

“I know,” said Hannah as she stirred some milk into their soup, now in a pot on the burner. “I know, a lot of people struggle with the whole issue of suffering but there’s no confusion for me because God was pretty clear to Israel that He brought disaster on them so that they would turn to Him. And it makes sense because prospering them didn’t cause them to turn to Him. In fact, it turned them into idolaters.”

This was a familiar discussion for them. They often worked out their theological questions out loud with one another and then reviewed them in subsequent conversations.

“Yep. Not to mention, the whole argument of God allowing suffering is ripped out of its theological context. Right from the start, God explains the whole thing in Genesis 2 and 3. Man chose to eat off of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and has been paying the price ever since. Any individual that wants to eat off of the tree of life and go from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light is welcome to do so.”

“And the New Testament talks about God chastening us as sons because He loves us. So I understand all that. But this Elinor thing. I can’t figure out the theological context. What is it?”

“I don’t know! I wish I knew. Enemies of Christianity will certainly be able to look at this as a sign that we’re fools. That doesn’t bother me. What bothers me is not being able to figure out what’s missing in all of this. Naturally, the first thing to doubt is that God ever really spoke to her. But I don’t like that because it brings into question all the times Christians feel the Holy Spirit working in their lives and it’s going to cause people who have been walking in faith to say, well, maybe we should walk by sight because it’s more empirical.”

Hannah continued to stir soup.

“It hasn’t busted *my* faith, if that’s what you’re worried about,” said Luke.

“Oh, I’m not worried about that,” said Hannah, getting some bowls out of the cupboard. “This is a theological conundrum to ponder. No, what I’m thinking about is, who was that guy with Lisa?”

“*What?*”

“They came in late and sat about five rows behind us and left right after the final prayer before I could even make my way over to meet him.”

Luke laughed.

“She did it on purpose, probably. Didn’t want us nosing around into her affairs. Don’t worry, Hannah. We’ll meet him eventually and I’m sure we’ll like him. Just pray if you’re worried. Hey! That’s it!” Luke whacked the kitchen table with his hand.

“That’s the theological context I’m missing with this Elinor thing! You told me Pastor Robert laid hands on her and prayed for her healing?”

“Uh huh.”

“Well there you go! We’re supposed to call for the elders of the church to anoint us when we’re sick, yes, but we’re also told that some people have the gift of healing. Clearly Pastor Robert does not have the gift of healing.”

“So, what did you think?” Lisa asked, the next evening.

“I think I would have liked to have met your parents,” said Kurt.

They were at his office. Miraculously, Kurt was managing to stay on top of his work even with all this time he was spending with Lisa. Often he had to work in the evenings just to keep up but Lisa was agreeable about hanging out with him after she finished her clerical job, even if he could only give her half an ear. Lisa had a job in the office of the public library.

“Bret couldn’t stop going on about me coming to church,” continued Kurt, pulling some file folders from a drawer. “From the way he went on you’d think that I waltzed down the aisle, prostrated myself in front of the lectern, publicly declared all my sins and then stripped down for a baptism.”

Lisa laughed.

“Bret’s a strange one. I can’t figure him out.”

“Well, I’ll tell you this. If being a Christian is just about going to church once a week and saying some sinner’s prayer at the age of 11, then Bret’s right in there, ticket to heaven and all. But if it’s about reading the Bible and stuff like prayer, well, then he’s no Christian. I’ve been talking about the Bible to him and he knows nothing. He knew there were ten commandments but he could only name three. I asked him if he ever prayed and he just looked at me like I was a religious crack-pot. I pray now, you know.”

“Really?”

“Oh yeah. It’s great. It really works. I lost my keys the other day. I prayed that I’d find them and I found them in my boot. Like, I would have ever thought to look there. They must have dropped in there when I took my coat off.”

Lisa laughed.

“I love you,” she said.

“Well thank you,” said Kurt putting away a file and pulling out another one.

“And, of course, I love you too. Do you pray?”

“Oh yes.”

“I assumed you did.” He examined some papers and decided they weren’t too urgent. “Well that’s it for tonight.” He shut off his computer and rolled back his chair. “What now?”

Lisa shrugged.

“Ice cream?”

“In *February*?”

“OK. Hot chocolate?”

“Sounds good.”

They put on their coats - Lisa also added a hat, scarf and gloves - and set out in search of hot chocolate.

As an electrician, Luke moved around quite a bit. He worked for an electrical company that specialized in renovations and today he was at an office that was having their lunchroom expanded by eliminating the adjacent offices. Unfortunately for all involved, the employees had no other place but the lunchroom to go for their lunch unless they just wanted to eat at their desks.

It was 2 o'clock and most of the lunch crowd was gone, making it much easier for Luke and his fellow worker, Glen Strong, to continue pulling wire. There was a small radio on a table in the corner that also had the coffee pot and accessories. Dr. Laura was on and telling a woman off for talking about going back to work when her maternity leave ended.

A short dark-haired woman in her early 30's who had just arrived with a bagged lunch, got up from her chair to turn off the radio.

"I hate her," she explained to Luke and Glen.

"If you hate her then you must feel threatened by what she's saying and deep down know that what she's saying is true," said Luke, pausing in his work.

Both Glen and the woman looked shocked.

"What do you know about raising kids?" the woman said with hostility.

"Listen," said Luke. "I can give you ten good reasons why you should quit your job and stay at home with your kids."

"I'm listening," said the woman defiantly.

Since Glen was listening too, Luke didn't even bother to pretend to be working.

"One," he said. "Because nobody loves your kid more than you do. In fact, most people don't come anywhere near loving your children."

The woman looked grim.

"Two, because if you don't raise them, someone else will, whether it's their peers or television or the government-run schools or the penal system."

"I resent your implication that because I choose to work outside the home that my children will become juvenile delinquents."

"Three," continued Luke. "Because you can live in a smaller house and give up the second car and go camping for your vacations. Four, because it's the right thing to do even if it's hard and it frazzles you and requires you to make materialistic sacrifices."

"I'm not materialistic," said the woman.

Luke just raised his eyebrows and continued.

"Five, you will never feel guilty for having spent *too much* time with your kids. When you're old you'll regret that you didn't stay home with them. Six, because it's really hard to get to know your kids in the evening when you're trying to make dinner, do laundry, return a couple of phone calls."

"My husband and I spend quality time with the kids..."

"Luke snorted.

"They don't want quality time. They want quantity time. They are small and vulnerable and they *need* you. They look to you for security. They will remember the scary things that happened to them as children for the rest of their life..."

"Don't you *dare* try to make me feel guilty!" said the woman angrily, looking like she was about to get up and slug Luke.

"That will be point seven, I think. Eight is because this is your only opportunity to raise your kids and it will go by *so* fast. When they're grown up they mostly won't

want you around and then you'll have plenty of time to pursue a career. Nine, because it's fun. Kids are a blessing. They're a joy and it's fun to paint with them and play spaceship with them and build a tent for them."

The woman stood up.

"Finally," said Luke quickly. "Because the world will go on if you don't work but it would mean the world to your kids if you stayed at home with them and gave them the message that being with you is better than anything else. Do you think it's enough to just have a picture of them on your desk? Do you think they appreciate that? No! They want *you!*"

The woman stomped out of the lunchroom.

"I guess she'll be eating at her desk for the next week, or so," said Glen. "Boy, you don't hold back, do you?"

Luke shrugged.

"The truth matters."

"Listen, my kids *like* their daycare. They'd freak out if we pulled them out."

"Well, you oughta know, I guess," said Luke in a tone that clearly indicated the opposite. He resumed pulling wire.

"You're lucky you don't get fired."

"I don't worry. We've never gone hungry and yes, my wife always stayed at home with the kids."

Hannah attended Elinor's funeral that day by herself. Luke and Lisa were both working and hadn't known Elinor very well, although Hannah had had her over for dinner once.

The funeral wasn't held at their church or conducted by Pastor Robert, but in a community church one town south of them, which Hannah found intriguing. Elinor was a devoted Amplified reader. Was it possible she had not want a King-James-Only pastor officiating at her funeral? Hannah briefly considered that Elinor may have had something to do with the Amplified Bibles appearing in the pews but dismissed it within seconds. Elinor was a sensible, God-fearing woman in her 60's, not a likely candidate for causing a stir. On the other hand, she had clearly snubbed her pastor when it came to her funeral arrangements.

There were about two dozen or so people from her church but Hannah didn't recognize anyone else as she entered the sanctuary and took a seat in the back. Elinor had been German and the strong-features and blonde hair of most of the people suggested that Elinor had had a lot of relatives living close by. There were at least 200 people in the church. Hannah wondered how many of them had heard Elinor's declaration that she would be healed. How many had now decided that this God-thing was a bunch of bunk?

She said a quick prayer that this funeral service would have a positive effect on everybody here and that hard hearts would be softened.

After a few hymns said to be Elinor's favourites, a pastor looking slimmer and older than Pastor Robert took over the lectern and declared that Elinor was in heaven now and proceeded to preach a message that boiled down to a hundred years from now you're either going to be in heaven with Elinor or burned up in hell fire.

Hannah, assured of her salvation and therefore not pondering her destination, was interested that the man did not preach the Dante's vision of hell – souls in eternal torment

writhing in agony. The currently popular way of describing hell was to say it was eternal separation from God.

It all drove Luke bananas because it assumed man had an eternal soul to begin with and ignored the concept that *the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life*. Luke had had many a near-violent debate with Bible-study leaders about this topic where they had assured him that the scripture was consistent with the doctrine of eternal hell but that death didn't mean death as Luke was defining it. Hannah had never really understood the whole thing. But she did agree with Luke. If Adam and Eve had had an immortal soul, they would have never been driven out of the Garden of Eden, lest they eat of the Tree of Life and live forever. Maybe this would be a good church to go to if things got any worse at their church.

There were to be some refreshments at a home of one of Elinor's children but Hannah didn't feel like intruding on the family affair and headed home.

By the end of the day she had spent so much time thinking about Elinor and why she had died despite her faith in God healing her that she could barely put together a dinner. She managed to make a potato salad while baking some frozen meat pies in the oven.

"I know God is under no obligation to do anything for us," said Hannah when they sat down to eat. "But I just want to understand His word. Everybody that asks seems to get healed by Jesus and the apostles."

"Yes," said Luke taking a huge spoonful of potato salad and plunking it on his plate. "But Jesus and the apostles were healing people as signs to confirm their message."

"But what about all those things Jesus said like *ask for anything in my name and it will be given you* and the scripture that says *all things are yours*. If all things are mine why should I be sick to the point of dying?"

"All things are yours?" said Luke thinking as he started on his meat pie. "Doesn't that make you think of God's promise to Abraham about the land of Israel, all this land is yours. And yet, as the book of Hebrews says, he died not receiving the promise. But he died in faith knowing the land was his and his descendants despite that the Jebusites and Perrizites and Hittites and all them were occupying it."

Hannah nodded slowly as she took a small bite of potato salad.

"I mean, Elinor is healed now. And God knew exactly how long she would live because Psalm 139 says *all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be*. To us this life is a huge deal but to God it's just a tiny blip before we inherit eternal life. From God's perspective the issue of suffering is minor compared to the issue of eternal life. 1,780,000 years from now the most horrific suffering on this earth will seem about as awful as a paper cut, especially since God has promised to wipe every tear from our eyes."

"In that context it does seem to all make sense," agreed Hannah.

"The Bible is a very complex book," said Luke, pouring some more ketchup on a meat pie. "And the people who live by it are very complex people. I think we want things to be simple so that we can just 'claim God's promises' and get on with our lives. But things aren't always black and white. And don't get me wrong. There is a kingdom of light and a kingdom of darkness, one ruled by Jesus and the other ruled by Satan and there's no neutral kingdom. But within the kingdom of light there's a lot to ponder.

Like, for example, lying. It's a sin to lie. That's the law. But there's a higher law of love at work because Rebekah lied and told people she was Isaac's sister when her husband asked her to. Rahab lied about the spies she was hiding and ended up a hero of faith and part of the lineage of Christ. And, of course, Sarai told people a half lie that she was Abraham's sister instead of his wife and ended up in Pharaoh's and Abimelech's harem which is shocking because the implication is if your husband says go sleep with another man, in faith, you can do it."

Hannah laughed.

"Don't get any ideas," said Luke.

"I want to tell people the good news about the kingdom of God," said Kurt when their macaroni and cheese dinner at the deli arrived at their table.

"Uh-huh," nodded Lisa.

"Well, when you get rid of everything in your life that isn't God, suddenly God becomes very big. I mean, I don't watch TV anymore. I don't do anything but read my Bible, work, and get together with you. I've been reading all those books about Jesus and so I figure what I should do next is go out and tell people the good news about his kingdom."

"OK," said Lisa.

Kurt looked surprised at her calm reaction.

"Well, I guess what I'm wondering is, will you come with me, wherever I go, I mean?"

"Of course."

Kurt looked relieved.

"When we get married, we'll be a team," said Lisa. "We'll be one. I think that's the essence of a Christian marriage. I think it's funny how Christian marriage counselling says stuff like go on dates together and go away for weekends together, for the sole purpose of spending time together. I think that's a very late 20th century idea. Two people who get together with the only thing in common being that they like to spend time together are going to have a tough time of it. I've always thought couples should be joined by a common lifestyle and a common cause and temporary separation doesn't damage the oneness because the other spouse is going out on behalf of the team and the united ideals of the team whether it be Christian service or patriotism or socialism or whatever. But I also think that a couple will live their life closely together because of their common ideals. So yes, I will go into the jungle with you, if that's where we go."

"I guess that's the big question now. Where do we go? How does a person become a missionary?"

"Well, I think there are organizations that you can go through. They tell you how to raise money and then they send you somewhere..."

Lisa looked down at her macaroni and cheese that had remained untouched up until now. The possibility that she might someday soon be eating bugs in the jungle suddenly made her very hungry for it and she reached for the ketchup bottle before starting to eat.

"I want to go by faith. Faith says you can tell a mountain to jump into the sea and it will. Can't we just get on a plane and go?"

“Sure,” said Lisa, her mouth full of macaroni and cheese. “I don’t know much about the history of missionaries but that’s probably what some of them did do a hundred years ago.”

“I’ve got my condo I could sell. It would only get us a couple of thousand after I paid off the mortgage...”

“I’ve got a couple of thousand in my savings account...”

“That would be enough to get us some plane tickets and maybe take care of us for a month,” said Kurt. His dinner was getting cold. The waiter came back to see if everything was OK and Lisa ordered some chocolate cake. Who knows when she’d next see chocolate cake?

“So, we’ll have to pray about where to go,” said Kurt. “Because I’m completely in the dark about this. But I think that that’s God idea that we work on it together from this point. Thanks for doing this, Lisa.”

“No problem,” said Lisa wishing she’d ordered some tea with the cake.

“I mean, I finally feel like I’m living,” said Kurt. His gestures were getting expansive. “Maybe you don’t know what it’s like, growing up with God and all. But for me, I never thought about him and now it’s like he’s running the whole show and things are finally starting to make sense to me. I’ve got purpose and direction and I feel really good. I wake up and I wonder what God’s going to show me today when I used to wake up and just dread having to go in and face all those taxes.”

Lisa laughed at the irony of him hating taxes when that’s what had brought them together.

“I feel pretty good myself, Kurt. God is showing me a lot through you. You’re having a real relationship with him and his word whereas for people like me, it’s easy to fall into a rut of just being religious and going to church and being good and that’s not satisfying in the end either.”

The waiter brought Lisa’s cake and that seemed to bring Kurt back to his present surroundings. He started eating his macaroni and cheese. Lisa ordered a blackberry tea and wondered what her parents would say.

Her parents took it calmly.

They sat in the living room and listened as Lisa started off with the bit about taking her taxes into Bret but ending up with Kurt all the way to agreeing to go anywhere with Kurt that God led them. Even Denny joined them halfway through the story.

“I can’t argue with that,” said Luke, when she was done. “It does sound like how God would work. Especially when you consider that God often does things the way we don’t expect.”

“Burlington?!”

Her parents were shocked when a few days later, Lisa brought Kurt home to meet her parents and to announce that after their marriage they would be moving from Oakville to Burlington.

“I know, it’s weird, eh?” said Lisa. “But it’s the only place that keeps popping into our heads.” She and her Kurt smiled at each other. They were in the Wise’s living room having some after-dinner tea and gingerbread.

“I thought you would be going to Ecuador, or something,” said her father. “Not that I’m not thrilled that you’ll still be within driving distance...”

“Well, we kept praying and over and over again the word Burlington just kept popping into our thoughts and everyday life. Kurt kept finding the name in the taxes he was doing. I found myself watching ‘100 Huntley Street’, which I rarely do, which I noticed at the end of the show is based in Burlington...”

“A lot of ministries work out of the Crossroads Centre there,” said Hannah Wise. “Maybe you’re supposed to go there...”

Kurt shook his head.

“One thing I feel strongly about is that we not be affiliated with any ministry. I think we’ll go to a church but I don’t think our work will be connected with a church either.”

“We’ll just have to wait and see,” said Lisa quickly.

There was a moment of silence.

“Well, we’ve got a wedding to plan,” said Hannah to fill the empty space.

Kurt and Lisa looked at each other.

“We don’t really want to do anything elaborate,” said Lisa. “We were hoping that Pastor Robert would just marry us after church in a Sunday school room, or something, and then we could all go out to lunch, us and Kurt’s mom. We really don’t want to be bothered with a wedding.”

Hannah was relieved. She and Luke had had an elaborate wedding but the whole thing had been planned by her mother and had taken months of dedicated work to pull it off. Doing the same thing for Lisa was something she had not looked forward to but that she would have done if necessary. Maybe she could just get some of the church ladies to decorate a Sunday school room with flowers and streamers, or something...

“Pastor Robert’s going to want to do marriage counselling with you before he marries you,” warned Luke.

Kurt shrugged.

“I don’t like it, but if we have to do it, we’ll do it.”

“I think that’s why Kurt and I have a problem with the church at times,” said Lisa.

This was the first time Luke and Hannah had heard that Lisa had a problem with the church.

“It can’t just trust the moving of the Holy Spirit,” said Lisa. “Like Pastor Robert is always up there talking about revival and how the church’s heart has to be changed first before there’s going to be any revival and I sit there thinking, but nobody just trusts the Holy Spirit to lead them.”

Kurt and Luke nodded.

“And this whole thing with Elinor,” continued Lisa. “You know that Elinor asked him to lay hands on her and heal her?”

Luke and Hannah both nodded.

“Well, he was discussing the whole thing with her daughter, Susanne, afterwards and told her not to get her hopes up because Elinor may be in denial over the diagnosis.”

Luke and Hannah raised their eyebrows in shock.

“Susanne assured him that her mother had been assured by God that she wasn’t going to die at this time and that her mother most certainly wasn’t in denial, so you tell me, whose faith was weak in that whole matter?”

“Well,” said Luke slowly. “*That* is interesting.” He thought for a moment. “Maybe you guys should talk to the Baptists about getting married.”

“Well,” said Luke after they had left, agreeing that Lisa would call a Baptist minister the next morning. “What did you think?”

Hannah knew he was referring to Kurt.

“He reminds me of Luke Wise in his early 30’s.”

Lisa looked up the number of the closest Baptist church and called it on her coffee break. The associate pastor seemed more eager to talk than listen.

“Yes, yes, we know a lot about what’s going on in the Community church.”

“Let me ask right off, are you King-James-Only? I’ll just say, I hope you aren’t.”

“Oh no!” Pastor Paul assured her. “We are definitely not. In fact, Pastor Robert has made it such a contention among his fellow pastors that he no longer meets with us. The pastors meet once a week at Tim Horton’s and Robert has been pushing us and pushing us to watch a video he has that’s supposed to persuade us but I think the only one who watched it was our Anglican pastor. He was interested because the King James Bible is, of course, an Anglican publication. He said the video was full of so much misinformation about the King James Version and the Textus Receptus that he was shocked that anyone believed it.”

“Well, I am familiar with that video,” said Lisa. “It’s persuaded many people in our church who aren’t as educated as most pastors...”

“What is particularly shocking is that Robert has a PhD in theology,” said Pastor Paul.

“I didn’t realize that,” said Lisa slowly. “I find that disturbing because he should know the history of the Bible then.”

“Absolutely. Our church prays for your church because you’re being led by a man who has broken fellowship with all the other churches in this area...”

“That’s what disturbs me the most,” Lisa interrupted. “He puts his so-called truth above love.”

“We should be unified by our love for Christ, not for any particular translation.”

“Well, having said all that, what I’m calling you about is marriage counselling. My fiancé and I don’t trust the spirit that is leading Pastor Robert and we had hoped that someone there might be able to marry us.”

“Absolutely,” said Pastor Paul. “I’m qualified to do it, if you like. I’d just like to meet with you and...”

“Kurt.”

“Kurt sometime this week if you like.”

They made an appointment for the following evening.

Two weeks later, Lisa and Kurt were married in a Sunday school room of the Baptist church. The two marriage counselling sessions had basically been a discussion of Bible translations and the working of the Holy Spirit in Oakville. Pastor Paul was sorry to see the couple moving to Burlington but Luke promised he’d keep Paul updated on their activities.

Lisa was baking some filleted chicken breasts for chicken burgers and making a garden salad. Kurt came in as she was chopping tomatoes.

“I really honestly thought we’d end up somewhere hot,” he said going over to the thermostat. It was set for 64 degrees Fahrenheit. He turned it up to 68. For some reason he knew his high temperatures in Fahrenheit and his low temperatures in Celsius.

“I know,” said Lisa looking around at their little kitchen with its old pine cupboard doors that desperately needed painting and the worn tile floor that needed replacing. They had put all of their money into a down-payment on the tiny house in the outskirts of Burlington. “I was thinking more of a tropical hut with me wearing stylish summer dresses and wide-brimmed straw hats.”

Kurt nodded.

“And a little town close by so that in the cool of the evening we could go sit in an outdoor café and drink cold beer and watch the people pass by.” He tossed his winter coat on the back of one of the vinyl chairs they had picked up at Goodwill as part of their kitchen table set. For some reason, the little house had no closet near the front door to hang up coats.

“How did it go?” Lisa asked.

“Well, I can’t say we’re not being blessed,” said Kurt. “The first place I had an interview they took me on. Same amount of pay as in Toronto which is great because the mortgage on this place is less than my condo was.”

“Wonderful!” Lisa had stopped chopping a cucumber.

Kurt sighed deeply.

“It’s not really what I want but until we figure out something better, it’ll do.”

“What do we really want?” asked Lisa.

“To know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Chapter Five

“What are you going to do with your holiday?” asked Hannah. She and Luke never went anywhere so she wasn’t hoping for an announcement that they were going to the Bahamas for the next week. She just needed the information to plan her own schedule.

Luke took a sip of his wine. It was Friday evening and Hannah liked to make the evening special with wine and candles to commemorate the beginning of the Sabbath. Of course, everybody else in their church considered Sunday the Sabbath, a point that drove Luke bananas since in Genesis 2 God clearly designated the 7th day as the Sabbath. The fact that Jesus may have risen on Sunday didn’t change that. Luke didn’t even believe that Jesus had risen Sunday morning, but more likely Saturday afternoon after having been crucified on a Wednesday. The women were rushing to the tomb early Sunday morning before sunrise and when they got there he had already risen. Jesus had said that the only sign that he would give anybody would be the sign of Jonah who had been in the belly of the whale three days and three nights. Well, three days and three nights sounded pretty explicit to Luke and he didn’t see how people could buy into the Good Friday/Easter Sunday tradition.

“I’m going to offer my services to Pastor Robert,” he said to Hannah, piercing a piece of roast beef and putting it into his mouth. “My plan is to solve this missing King James Bibles thing.”

Hannah stopped reaching for the mashed potatoes and raised her eyebrows in surprise.

“Do you want to play detective with me?”

“Well, sure,” she said. “But why do this?”

“Many reasons,” said Luke reaching for a roll and beginning to butter it. “One, adventure. Two, I want to know who did it. Three, if I find out who did it, I have the power to help protect their identity.”

“Well, how are you, I mean *we*, going to do it?”

“With the authorization of Pastor Robert we are going to interview everybody in the church starting with the more obvious candidates.”

Hannah cautiously ate a mouthful of mashed potatoes.

“Do you think Pastor Robert will let you?”

“Why not? He doesn’t know where I stand on the whole thing. He’ll appreciate my offer to help restore the King James Bibles to the pews. Meanwhile, I’ll get a feel for who’s pro-KJV and who’s pro-modern translations. If there’s more King-James-Onlyers we may have to find another church, but if there’s enough moderns we may at least be able to present a unified front somewhere down the road.”

“Well, it does sound adventurous,” said Hannah. “Count me in, I guess.”

After dinner Luke called Pastor Robert who seemed overjoyed by Luke’s enthusiasm to solve the mystery and didn’t seem to mind that Luke’s investigations might require him to approach most, if not all of, the members.

When he got off the phone with Pastor Robert, he called up Pastor Paul who had heard rumours about all the KJVs going missing at the Community Church. Luke had no problem recruiting Paul as an advisor in the whole adventure.

The Wises had Pastor Robert over for afternoon tea on Monday. Hannah served chicken salad sandwiches and some homemade almond cookies while Luke established the day the crime had taken place.

“I and the rest of the congregation noticed the Bibles missing on Sunday, of course. My wife said that one lady in their Wednesday Bible-study group is in the habit of just borrowing a Bible from the sanctuary rather than bringing her own so they weren’t missing before then.”

Pastor Robert nodded as Hannah poured him another cup of tea.

“My theory is they went missing on Saturday. I’m in my office at the church on weekdays unless I’m out visiting someone but on Fridays I’m usually in my office preparing my sermon. Everything was fine in the sanctuary before and after I left at around five.”

“So nobody officially used the church on Saturday?” asked Luke. He was too wrapped up in his detective work to drink his tea. Hannah sat in a wingback chair tucked in the corner while the Pastor sat on the couch. Luke was sitting on an ottoman close to the Pastor and leaning forward eagerly.

“Not that particular Saturday. The teens use the gym occasionally on Saturdays. Sometimes I go into finish up my sermon but not that particular Saturday...”

“Now, who would have the key to get in for the teens?”

“Tim Danlop, the head of teen ministries.”

Luke nodded.

“Anyone who’s the head of something that meets in the church has a key. Dianne Ken has one,” he nodded to Hannah, acknowledging her involvement in the weeknight Bible-study.

“Did the lock look forced open or did the intruder have a key?”

“The police say he or she had a key since nothing was broken. They checked all the windows too. Nothing looked forced.”

“Hmmm.” Luke scribbled something in a notebook on his lap. “Did you talk to everybody who has a key to the building about this whole matter?”

“Well,” the pastor rubbed his chin as he spoke slowly. “Frankly, all the people who have keys are people I trust. I didn’t want to offend them with accusations.”

“The people with keys are probably innocent,” said Luke. “But they all have family and friends who might have borrowed their key...”

Pastor Robert looked like this was the first time that had occurred to him.

“I see what you mean,” he said nodding. “I didn’t take that into consideration.”

There was a moment of silence that Hannah filled by offering everyone a sandwich. Luke absentmindedly took one while the pastor indicated that he was full.

“It’s still awkward,” said Pastor Robert. “I wouldn’t want to accuse some of my most trusted people’s families of doing this.”

“That’s OK,” said Luke. “You don’t have to. I can talk to them and feel things out. I can even talk directly with other family members and I don’t have to bring your name into it. I’m doing this for my personal satisfaction and if I inadvertently offend someone the consequences will affect me not you.”

The pastor seemed satisfied with that.

Lisa was feeling a bit discouraged..

They were not settling into life in Burlington and truthfully, Lisa didn't want to. The one church they had tried, basically because it was only a five-minute walk from their home, was full of people who didn't seem to care about Christianity. The Didimon's based their impression on the fact that the pastor was in the middle of a series about how evolution was compatible with the Bible because the Bible couldn't be taken literally. Nobody among the two hundred or so people attending seemed to be perturbed by this.

Kurt was content. He was reading the Bible and had discovered that the reason for Christians to meet together was to encourage one another.

"At the moment I don't need encouraging," he said. "And until we figure out who we're supposed to be encouraging, I'm just going to read on my own. I don't even think that pastor had the gift of teaching anyhow."

But Lisa was discouraged.

So, on Tuesday morning, Lisa offered to drive Kurt to work so that she could have the car for the day. He readily agreed.

"I want to check out the Crossroads Centre," she said as she drove him through the morning traffic. "I feel drawn there today."

The Crossroads Centre was the studio for a Christian variety show filmed daily in front of a live audience, as well as a headquarters for several ministries.

Kurt nodded.

"Well, if anyone offers us a job to El Salvador, take it."

Once Kurt was at work, Lisa consulted a map and headed in the general direction.

"Truthfully, I'm glad they went missing. We were going to have to pay for replacing about five of them because I let the kids colour in them."

"What?!" Luke laughed. He liked Leslie Feldman. He and Hannah were visiting her Tuesday morning in her chaotic little household consisting of three lively children under the age of five. Her husband was a deacon who had a key because he was in charge of the communion paraphernalia

"Well, Adam's family is Jewish, you know, so he and the pastor got talking one day about the authority of the Masoretic text and ever since then Adam has been a favourite of the pastor. I thought it was a little bit suspicious that after that Adam's name got put forward to be a deacon. The pastor actually asked him what Bible version he reads and he said, truthfully, the King James. I personally read the New American Standard but Adam says I shouldn't tell anyone. The whole thing makes me sick."

As she was talking, Leslie Feldman was absent-mindedly distributing gingersnaps to her children and redistributing toys that were being disputed over. Hannah tried to help the situation by smiling at the kids and distracting them from their fighting.

"Did you know," Leslie continued, "that all of the other deacons are King-James-Only and that all of the board members are too. If a nomination from a church member comes in for a person who isn't King-James-Only, the board won't even allow that person nominated to get past the initial screening process. All of the people we vote for every year are King-James-Only. The power to vote is a joke."

“I suspected that that might be happening,” nodded Luke. He had been forthright with Leslie about his nonaffiliation with the King-James-Only movement in the church. “What really bothers me about that is, even if Pastor Roberts got booted out, it would be the board who would elect a committee to find a new pastor. The next guy would be King-James-Only too.”

Leslie nodded.

“Anyhow, I guess I’m getting so hostile that I just ignored it when the kids started colouring in them one week. Adam didn’t notice till the end of the service and then he was horrified to see that they had decorated five of them. I pretended that I had been so interested in the sermon that I hadn’t noticed. I don’t even pay attention to the sermons anymore. I think Pastor Roberts is the devil’s own. It used to be a wonderful, caring church before he came along. I was part of a Tuesday morning ladies’ Bible-study so, of course, everybody knew what version I used. But when Pastor Robert came along and started poisoning everyone’s mind they all started switching over to the King James. Then suddenly I was the evil one for using a corrupted Alexandrian heretical text. None of those women talk to me anymore.”

“How did Adam end up a deacon under those circumstances?” asked Luke.

Leslie shrugged as she removed a crayon from her crawling baby’s chubby fist.

“Somehow it never got back to him. I don’t think everybody rushes to Pastor Robert to rat on people. Frankly, he’s got such a mild personality I don’t think he inspires a whole lot of respect. It’s the King-James-Only issue that divides people. He’s constantly pushing videos and books on people and they read them and suddenly they adopt this cause as if it’s their own. That’s how it was in my Bible-study group. It got to the point where I couldn’t even go because they all spent the whole time trying to persuade me that there were, like, 40,000 omissions in my Bible. I read every argument against King-James-Onlyism and countered everything they said but they wouldn’t listen to reason.”

“The King-James-Only position is full of so much misinformation,” agreed Luke. “If people take it as a fact there’s very little we can do. They don’t seem to mind ignoring the reality of history.”

“We know a wonderful pastor at the Baptist church,” said Hannah leaning forward. “His name is Paul. Maybe he could tell you about a Bible-study group that would work for you. I believe that they have a ladies’ meeting one morning every week that even provides nursery-care.” Hannah glanced at the children who were now removing cushions from all the chairs that the adults weren’t sitting on.

“That might be what I need,” said Leslie’s looking around her dishevelled house.

Hannah scribbled down Pastor Paul’s direct number and gave it to her.

After Leslie Feldman, Luke had booked them for a lunch appointment with Tim Danlop, the youth pastor. They met him at the church. He had his own tiny office that he told them was actually a broom closet, which he announced with some annoyance in his voice.

“I’d like to see some more priority given to the teens,” he said waving his hand around the room as he leaned on his desk. Luke remained standing while Hannah took Pastor Tim’s seat, the only chair that would fit in the small room. Since the broom closet/office was located at the far end of the hallway, past all the Sunday school rooms

and well beyond the hearing range of Pastor Robert's office, Tim was talking in a regular voice.

"You're going to ask me about this whole King James thing? Frankly, I tell the kids to read the NIV. It's a lot easier to understand. Why make it any harder for them?"

"What does Pastor Robert say about that?" asked Luke.

Pastor Tim shrugged. He was a man in his mid-30's with stylish brown hair wearing a black crew neck sweater and Levi's. Hannah knew that he was married to a similarly attractive and stylish wife named Donna and that they had one little boy named Donnie.

"So far, very little. I've been around here a lot longer than him. I guess you know I grew up in this church. When he came four years ago I just kept on doing what I've always done. He's asked me to read the books and watch the video but since none of it has persuaded me, I just carry on."

Luke nodded.

"I've taken flak on both sides, believe it or not. The King James parents give me lectures on the inaccuracy of my Bible and insist their teens use the King James. So I just say fine. It's a family decision. The important thing to me is that the teens stay in fellowship with God and one another. Having fellow-Christians as friends is a big obstacle to some of the snares of the teen years. But some of the people who aren't King-James-Only think I should use it anyway, just to be in obedience to Pastor Robert. They say I'm teaching the kids to be disobedient to authority." Pastor Tim shook his head. "I don't like what this has done to our church. We're very divided. When I was growing up here this was never an issue."

Luke nodded.

"I agree one hundred percent. Since you've been so frank with me, I'll just ask you outright, did you have anything to do with the Bibles being switched in the pews?"

Pastor Tim burst out laughing.

"I like you, Luke. Pastor Robert told me that you were going to be our detective to get to the bottom of this and I thought, I couldn't ask for a better person. You really got under the skin of one of our teens over the whole evolution thing. In fact, it's inspired me to start working on a Creation vs. Evolution Bible-study for them since I hadn't realized how most of them are completely indoctrinated with Darwinism. To answer your question, no, I didn't organize a posse of teens to pull off this mad prank. Sorry."

Lisa was part of a TV audience and wondering why she was here.

The show had started with a couple whose marriage had fallen apart due to the woman's alcoholism but God had gotten them through. She and Kurt were doing quite fine and she didn't connect. Next, a woman sang about the love of her Saviour. Fine, but it didn't tell Lisa why she was here. Now they were onto a whole talk about Promise Keepers.

Lisa glanced at her watch. An early lunch would be nice. She hoped the prices in the cafeteria open to the public were reasonable. Maybe she'd check out their bookstore before heading back home. With the show being filmed live she had no choice but to stick it out to the end though.

"Our next guest has traveled all through El Salvador preaching the gospel..."

Lisa's eyes widened.

"...missionary work in 20 countries...always in need of new people because the mission field is growing by leaps and bounds in places like Africa and India and China..."

Lisa settled back to meet her destiny.

Hannah insisted that they stop off at the grocery store to pick up one of their barbequed chickens, some potato salad and some rolls since Luke had just announced that he had invited the Hoos over for dinner that night.

"You could have let me know this a little bit earlier," said Hannah.

Luke shrugged.

"How could you have prepared anything if you were out all day with me?"

"Well what did you think we were going to do for dinner?"

"Order Chinese?"

The only thing that prevented Hannah from hitting him on the arm was that he was driving.

"No comments like that when they're here," she said as they pulled into their driveway.

Hannah just had enough time to toss a few dirty dishes into the dishwasher and check to make sure the downstairs bathroom was clean before Mr. and Mrs. Glen Hoo arrived.

Glen was on the board and was in charge of church outreach, which at this point seemed to consist solely of maintaining an ad in the local newspaper.

Luke ushered the couple into the living room. Though they were in their late 30's they had no children and Hannah knew that they both worked in Toronto. While Glen dressed in an unobtrusive beige sweater and pants, Mrs. Hoo was stylishly dressed in a black business pantsuit with high heels that she didn't bother to take off.

"Glad you could make it," said Luke as they sat down. Having bought all the food, dinner was ready, but Luke felt seating their guests in the living room first would make things a bit more comfortable.

"Not a problem," said Glen. "Anything to help you get to the bottom of this."

Mrs. Hoo didn't seem to care whether or not they got to the bottom of this.

"Do you have any ideas? Any suspicions...?" began Luke.

"Well," said Glen crossing his legs. "I think it would have to be someone reasonably intelligent if they were going to write in all those margin notes of the returned Bibles. Not that the person's notes were intelligent," he was quick to add. "Clearly the person has no respect for the pure word of God. But the notes in the returned Bibles indicate that the person is familiar with someone of the common arguments used by the people who defend the modern translations."

Luke nodded. He was practicing the apostle Paul's admonition to be a Jew when with the Jews. There would be no arguing against the King-James-Only position tonight.

Hannah who had laid out all the food on the dining room table and was now worrying that the chicken would be getting cold, signalled to Luke that dinner was ready. After sitting down at the table and asking a blessing, they resumed the discussion.

"Is there anyone you know of who's passionate about defending the new translations?" asked Luke.

Glen thought for a moment.

“I know Pastor Tim refuses to preach the message of the pure infallible word of God. It’s a source of frustration for Pastor Robert. There was talk of me replacing Tim as youth leader,” Glen smiled modestly.

Hannah raised her eyebrows and looked at Luke.

“But, of course, the teens love Pastor Tim,” she said.

“Oh yes, but he’s corrupting their minds by encouraging them to read the modern translations. They’re getting a watered-down version of the gospel that minimalizes the deity of Christ. The modern translations have so many omissions that it shocks me that parents even allow their children to read them...”

Luke smiled sympathetically. He took his frustration out on the chicken, carving it up with a savage intensity. Hannah distracted the Hoos by passing around the potato salad and the rolls.

“Not everybody, unfortunately, has listened to Pastor Robert’s teachings,” continued Glen. “I would say about 25% of the congregation is ignorant of how corrupt their modern translations are. They claim to be too busy to watch the video or read any of the books. They have time to watch television, no doubt.”

Glen shook his head sadly.

“Well,” said Luke, passing around the carved chicken. “I’d like to get to the bottom of this whole missing Bibles thing.”

“Don’t forget,” said Glen. “It’s not just the Bibles going missing that’s so disturbing. It’s the replacement of them with those Amplifieds. And then to make matters worse, actually returning them all with all those margin notes...”

“Returning them all?” Luke looked startled as he put down his fork. “I thought only some of them were returned.”

“Oh no. They were all returned with their despicable margin notes. But Pastor noticed and managed to get most of them out of the sanctuary before people started arriving for church.”

“All of them were marked with notes?”

Glen nodded as he buttered a roll.

“I believe so. He mentioned it to me after the service.”

What a waste of effort, thought Luke. *All those notes written in the margins for nothing.*

“So, what happened to all those Bibles?” Luke asked.

Glen looked startled.

“I mean, both the King James ones with the margin notes and the Amplifieds. Did they go to charity?”

Glen looked uncomfortable.

“Well, I suppose Pastor did something with them...”

“I mean, there was a lot of money tied up in those Bibles,” said Luke.

“Yes, that’s why it was so wicked to take them and desecrate them!” said Glen angrily.

Luke was wondering how many garbage bags Pastor Robert had filled up with Bibles.

“Any idea who might have done this?” he asked.

“None whatsoever. I don’t imagine I associate with the people who did this thing.”

Mrs. Hoo had been quietly playing around with her chicken, ignoring the potato salad and rolls.

Impulsively Hannah asked her what she thought of the whole thing. She looked up, surprised at the attention.

“Well, I... not much, I guess. I know it’s important to Glen, but when I read the Bible it’s a Cantonese one my mother gave me when I was a little girl.”

“Oh, how lovely!” said Hannah smiling. “Was she a Christian in China?”

Luke was grateful for Hannah who engaged Mrs. Hoo in a pleasant conversation about her upbringing in China. He had nothing further to say to Glen.

Ironically, after dinner Lisa phoned them to say that she and Kurt were going to be going to China to work in a school for Christian orphans.

Chapter Six

Daniel Connor worked shifts so Luke and Hannah had to meet him after work at five in the morning. He suggested Tim Horton's where he sat waiting with a coffee and a honey glazed doughnut, reading the morning paper. Luke joined him while Hannah went to buy them some coffee. They were the only patrons in the doughnut shop, but the drive-thru was keeping the two employees busy so Hannah had to wait several minutes before she got her two coffees and toasted bagels with cream cheese. Yawning, she carried the tray over to the table.

"I went as far as Mitchell's in the east of Toronto," Daniel was saying. Daniel was a board member and as far as Hannah knew he was the deacon assigned to Sunday School under Pastor Tim. "But they're too big to remember selling anyone all those Amplifieds."

Hannah sat down and handed Luke his coffee and bagel.

"Too many employees all working too many shifts to do any amateur detective work," he continued.

"What about the money," interrupted Luke. "Where do you think the person who did this got the money?"

"Well," said Daniel slowly, leaning back in his chair. "That is the strange part. It's a lot of money to spend for just a practical joke."

"I'll say," said Luke. "Though I know the particular Bible they bought was about as cheap as you can go without buying paperback."

"Still, when you add up all the Bibles it comes to a lot of money."

"I hope they didn't just get thrown in the garbage," said Luke forthrightly.

Daniel was slow to reply. He took a long sip of coffee before answering.

"Not the garbage, no," he said.

The recycling then, thought Luke. He looked down at the bagel Hannah had put in front of him as if noticing it for the first time.

"Well, keeping them would have been pointless," said Daniel defensively, even though he hadn't admitted anything. "Anyhow, you can take it up with the pastor. My theory is that whoever did this probably used their tithes for this. Saved up for a few months or weeks."

If they tithed, thought Luke. He had been reading in Deuteronomy how the Israelites were supposed to take one tenth of all their flocks and food and go to wherever the Lord had put His Name and eat it in the presence of God. The Levite would share in the abundance. That kind of tithe did not get mentioned in the church. It was only every third year that one was to take a tithe to the priests and the needy in the community. The churches took all this and summarized it as give a tenth of your income to the church. The poor theology of it frustrated Luke.

"What do you see as the future of the church?" asked Luke abruptly. "I mean, the church is divided into two irreconcilable camps, those that say that the King James is the only word of God and those that say it isn't. Can a house divided against itself stand?"

"Of course not," said Daniel. He paused before elaborating. "Well, I would say that the future is that those who do not believe in the infallibility of God's true word will either come to see the truth or they will drift away..."

Luke and Hannah exchanged briefs looks, which did not go unnoticed by Daniel.

“How about you, Luke,” he said going on the offensive. “Where do you stand in all of this?”

Luke tried to keep his laugh light-hearted. He took a bite out of his bagel. After he had chewed and swallowed he answered, hoping he didn’t sound defensive.

“I’m investigating the whole thing for Pastor, so at this point when I interview people I can’t allow my viewpoints to affect my investigation. For this duration I’m trying to remain neutral. My objective is simply to get to the bottom of this.”

“Well,” said Daniel, taking the last bite of his doughnut and crumpling up the cellophane paper it had been on. “I guess you wouldn’t be bothering with all of this unless you were as outraged by it all as I am.”

“I am outraged,” said Luke truthfully.

“Well,” said Daniel pushing back his chair and standing up. “I’ve got to get home. The wife will be expecting me.”

“Thanks for helping out,” said Luke.

“I don’t know that I’ve been much help.”

Luke stood up and shook his hand.

“When we put together everybody’s story I think we’ll come out with the truth in the end. Sort of like when you put together all the gospel accounts you get the truth of Jesus’ life.”

Daniel stared at him before picking up his coat and leaving.

“Something tells me I’m never going to be a deacon in this church,” he said to Hannah as he sat back down.

“I think he’s right,” she said. “He wasn’t much help.”

“Oh, at this point it doesn’t really matter.” Luke picked up his coffee and took a sip. “I’ve got a theory and I’m just verifying who’s on what side.”

Hannah smiled.

“I know better than to ask you what your theory is Hercule Poirot.”

Luke grinned back.

“Yes, I’m saving it for the grand smash finale. However, I don’t think I’ll gather everyone in a room and there reveal the identity of the thief. This one I think I’ll just let go. I’ve got a feeling we aren’t battling flesh and blood but spirits and principalities and that this war between good and evil is going to be fought quite some time yet in our church.”

Hannah sighed.

“Sounds grim. Maybe we should go to China with Lisa and Kurt.”

“What?!” Luke laughed. “And spoil their honeymoon? I think not.”

Thankfully Kurt and Lisa had found a mentor just as freethinking as them. Kevin Diamond, the man Lisa had listened to on the television show, wasn’t the type of missionary who believed in finding a mission organization with which to set up fund-raising and training, all of which could take up to a year to accomplish.

“If the Spirit says go, go,” he said to Lisa and Kurt at dinner at their place. “The only model I have is Jesus. He had no place to lay his head at night. I literally sleep outside when I travel to the warm countries preaching the gospel.”

Kevin Diamond was a rugged man in his late 30's with dark hair just past his shoulders. His clothing had a vaguely grunge look to it – ripped jeans, a faded white shirt and black hiking boots. The spirit in him made him attractive, made his face alive with hope and purpose.

“Do you have a place tonight?” asked Kurt.

Kevin laughed.

“Now that you ask, no.”

“Well, you can stay here until we clear out.”

“Tell me more about this Chinese place,” said Lisa.

They were seated at their small kitchen table having finished a meal of chicken paprika and scalloped potatoes. Lisa stood up to put the kettle on for a cup of tea.

“It’s a little outpost of Christian civilization. An orphanage run by a few folks from Indiana. It started with five orphans and is now up to twenty-five, most of them girls due to the pressure in China to have only one child. Last time I talked to them they were desperate for more help. You can imagine, two people and twenty-five kids. When I was at Crossroads I called them just to make sure the situation is the same and it is. They said, come on over, like, yesterday if you can.”

“We’ll sell the house and the profits will be the plane tickets and whatever else we need. After that, we’re just living on faith,” said Kurt.

“I’ve never seen the righteous begging for bread,” replied Kevin. “This couple, Annie and Emil, run their whole operation on faith. They don’t work through any missionary organization and they have no way of receiving funds but somehow those kids get fed.”

Lisa poured hot water into three cups and brought them to the table.

“I’m so excited,” she said.

“You folks should do fine out there,” said Kevin taking a tentative sip of his tea and then putting it back down because it was too hot. “You love God and you’re eager to serve him. Things probably won’t work out like you expect but God will do extraordinary things with your lives. That’s been my experience.”

“I’ve suspended all of my own expectations,” said Kurt. “I don’t know if Lisa told you but I just recently started reading the Bible and learning about God. I don’t know or really care much about church and religion...”

“I think church and religion are often a substitute for knowing God,” said Kevin, leaning forward. “It’s important to hang-out with other Christians and that’s how church got going but somewhere in the last two thousand years it’s taken on a life of its own. You’ll find with Emil and Annie that they don’t do the church thing. They can’t. They’re in the middle of nowhere as far as Christianity is concerned. But you’ll definitely see Christ in them. And fellowship with them will be very sweet to your Spirit.”

Lisa laughed.

“I’m really looking forward to meeting them and just following God on this adventure. I think you’re right about church taking on a life of its own. We even call it ‘going to church’ rather than referring to it as ‘the church.’ It can get stifling with all of its preconceived rituals and ideas. God is bigger than any of our rituals or ideas and I’m looking forward to getting to know him better on this journey.”

“You’ll definitely get to know God better,” said Kevin, sipping his tea. “It’s called living by faith and boy if it doesn’t start to make God seem more real than anything else in the world I don’t know what will. I can’t count the number of times I’ve been walking along some dusty road in some backwoods of some country that most North Americans have never heard of and it’s getting dark and I’m praying, ‘Dear God, I need to eat and I’m tired and I have no place to sleep’ and five minutes later a pick-up drives by and it’s some guy who’s actually willing to stop and pick me up and take me home and give me a full meal and let me sleep in his barn...”

“And the people in the countries you go to are receptive to your message?” asked Kurt putting a spoonful of sugar into his tea. With Lisa’s influence he was experimenting with liking tea.

“Many are. And my theory is that it’s not enough to just get them to say ‘Jesus died for my sins, hallelujah, praise God’ and then move on to another village. I like to stick around long enough to train some people and get them reading the Word. I usually only have about five or so copies of the Bible in their language because carrying more than that would break my back, so I’ve get them going on reading it aloud to one another on a regular basis. Then I try to get back to them later with more Bibles depending on how remote they are. Some of the places I end up are quite modern by our standards and once they become Christian I can link them up with places where they can get Bibles.”

He yawned and Lisa noticed how tired he looked.

“Go to bed, if you like,” she encouraged him. “The only thing we can offer you is the couch.” She stood up and walked down the small hallway to their linen closet to get him a blanket.”

“Believe me, a couch is luxury,” said Kevin standing up. “Yes, I think I will turn in if you don’t mind. I am kind of beat.”

While Kevin slept, Kurt and Lisa started planning their trip to China.

Luke was reviewing his list of people who had keys to the church building.

“Your Bible-study leader, Dianne Ken, has one,” he said. “Do you think she was in on this?”

“I doubt it,” said Hannah. She had just come home from her Bible-study and they were eating Jamaican patties with some leftover coleslaw. “She’s very into being submissive to the authorities over you. She doesn’t buy into the King-James-Only thing but she doesn’t speak against the pastor. In fact, she recommended to one lady that she get a King James Study Bible tonight. Heather said that her Bible was wearing out, it’s an NIV, and Dianne said she should get a King James Version to use as her primary Bible and just use her NIV to clarify obscure meanings.”

Luke looked thoughtful.

“It’s a concessionary stand, but the pastor still wouldn’t be pleased. The modern versions are supposed to be based on the Alexandrian line of Greek texts and the Alexandrian texts are supposed to have been perverted by people who wanted to suppress the deity of Christ. I would like to add that if that was their objective, they did a lousy job since the deity of Christ is still found in every version he speaks out against. But my point is, the pastor is always saying that we shouldn’t take counsel from the ungodly, so I doubt he would want us using Satanic Bible Versions as our commentary on the True Word of God.”

“In any case,” said Hannah, “Dianne would have to be one mighty fine actress to have been the one to exchange those Bibles.”

“Fine,” said Luke. “I won’t jeopardize your standing in the Bible-study group by interrogating her.”

“Who are your suspects so far?” asked Hannah, pushing back her chair and standing up to get them both some water. Up until now she had just been offsetting the spiciness of the Jamaican patties with coleslaw.

“Pastor Tim is the most obvious one,” said Luke. “He wouldn’t have to sneak into the church because he works there and because he works there, he would know when the best time to pull off something like this would be. It’s possible he did it just as a prank or even as a serious statement...”

Luke sat staring ahead, his Jamaican patty half eaten.

“You know, I think I’m really going to have to dig deep with this key thing. Even if this Bible switch thing didn’t get done by a key-holder, a duplicate key could have been made so easily and given to someone else a long time ago and that person could have passed it on to someone else and the original person with the key may never even know it if the key was duplicated by a husband or wife that didn’t bother to ask permission first. So I’m going to have to go back and interview family members.”

“Well, and to add to that,” said Hannah, “there’s the side-door. How many people have a key to that?”

“*What?*” said Luke, staring at her. “I thought the front door and the side-door use the same key!”

“Oh no. They used to. But last winter they were having so much trouble with the front door lock they changed it and distributed new keys. I remember because it was such a bother for the Bible-study group. Dianne had a front door key but it wouldn’t work so we were all parking around the side and going in that way. Finally when they changed the lock it took them so long to redistribute the new keys that we were still going in the side-door for about a month. Everybody was complaining since the entrance to the side-door is very icy in the winter because the overhang that runs along the side of the building just drips all the melted snow onto the pathway and then that freezes to ice. You have to walk along holding onto the wall, which is hard for some of the older women. Dianne sometimes would get there early and prop the front door open with a brick to save us that walk.”

“But the same people that have front door keys would have side-door keys?”

“Oh no,” said Hannah taking a sip of water. “Half my Bible-study group has one. The pastor before Pastor Robert believed that the church belonged to everyone and that if somebody just wanted to come in and enjoy the peace of the church sometime they should be able to. All the members were given keys.”

Luke groaned and held his head.

“So how many people have keys to that side door?” he asked.

“Anybody who’s been here for more than six years.”

Luke’s groan continued.

“That’s eighty percent of the church,” he said. He sighed deeply and looked up. “OK. Forget that avenue. Why didn’t Pastor Robert tell me this?”

Hannah shrugged.

“Maybe he doesn’t even know. He’s got his key to the front door. When would he be with someone, going in the side-door, who would pull out his or her key to let them both in? It’s an improbable scenario.”

Luke crumpled up the list of people with keys and was about to toss it in the direction of garbage container, but at the last minute changed his mind and just left it on the kitchen table. He was reluctant to dispose of any evidence, no matter how slim.

“Well,” he said. “I’ll just keep plugging away at it from the perspective of who’s pro-King James and who’s pro-modern.”

Chapter Seven

Caz (short for Cassandra) Tyndale was definitely pro-modern. She was in charge of the small music ministry of the church, heading up the ten-person choir and overseeing the various praise and worship groups. A tall, slim, forceful, black woman, Luke could see why Pastor Robert had never opposed her on the issue of Bible translations.

“Now he’s a nice man,” she said to Luke and Hannah, Thursday morning. She was meeting with them at the church where she often came to play the sanctuary’s piano. Quite often she performed her own compositions for special music and had always received an enthusiastic response for her liveliness and upbeat praise and worship songs. “But Pastor Robert thinks church music stopped with gospel. I’m sure that’s why he appointed me to head up the music ministry. He assumed we’d all be singing ‘Swing Low Sweet Chariot’ and ‘Why Me Lord’?”

They were sitting in the first row of the pews. Caz leaned forward toward them.

“Now I don’t mind doing the old favourites and I’ve certainly got no problem with the classics like ‘A Mighty Fortress is Our God’ and all that, but there’s just been too much good modern stuff to ignore. Like Rich Mullins, for example. Amazing man. And really, the whole contemporary music thing has breathed new life into the Christian music scene.”

Luke and Hannah nodded. Their CDs consisted of choirs and their different renditions of ‘A Mighty Fortress is Our God’, but Lisa had an extensive collection of contemporary Christian music that they could both appreciate Caz’s point.

“Now Pastor Robert has said to me that he thinks that rock music is the devil’s beat.” Caz sighed and stood up. “And as you know from his sermons, he’s very concerned about the fact that a lot of contemporary Christian stuff is, as he calls it, just an imitation of the world’s music. Now I don’t know about you, but if I had a son who liked heavy metal, I’d rather he be listening to the Christian stuff that says things like “resist the devil” than what the world is telling him.”

Hannah, who did have a son, nodded wholeheartedly. She had bought Donny many Christian CDs that she had no desire to listen to herself.

“So I walk a thin line,” said Caz, sitting down at the piano and beginning to play a familiar tune. “I’d like to broaden the church’s repertoire of Sunday music but I don’t want to offend those who consider themselves over me.”

“Yes,” said Luke. “I’ve never really understood the pastor’s argument though. Maybe Christian rock and rap are just an imitation of the world, but so is Christmas. It was just an imitation of a pagan holiday with Jesus thrown into it to keep the Christians from being tempted to celebrate Saturnalia.”

“Well, you talk to the pastor about it,” said Caz, her eyes on the piano keys. “Because somebody has to broaden his mind a bit. Now I know you’re here to discuss this King James Bible thing, so I’d like to say, my Mom used to read to me every night from the King James so I’ve got nothing against it. It’s a fine version. I myself, however, read the New American Standard. I don’t know if Pastor Robert knows this so I’d be happy if you keep this to yourself.”

Luke nodded.

“I’m under no obligation to reveal any of my investigation to him,” said Luke. “Truthfully, I’ve always dreamed of being a Sherlock Holmes and now I finally have my chance.”

Hannah laughed.

“I’m Watson then, I suppose.”

Caz smiled as she played.

“Well, do you want to interrogate me? Ask me if I was in the building on the day it happened and all that?”

“Sure,” said Luke.

“Well, I was,” said Caz. “I usually come in Saturday morning to work on my music and just do a bit of rehearsing for the next day if I’m performing.”

“But pastor said no one was scheduled to come in on Saturday.”

Caz shrugged.

“I’ve never discussed it with him, but that’s my routine.”

“Was anyone else in the church that Saturday?”

Caz paused.

“Well...the thing is, I’m so busy doing my music the entire youth group could be out playing basketball in the foyer and I wouldn’t notice.”

“But no one came in the sanctuary?”

“Not when I was doing my music. I start at about eight and I’m always done and home by noon. I don’t want to miss the weekend with my kids. But Traci’s thirteen and Nathan Jr.’s sixteen so they like to sleep in on Saturdays. That’s why I do it in the morning. When they were little, Nat would stay home in the evening to watch them while I’d sneak out after they went to bed.”

A few ladies from Caz’s choir came in the entrance at the back of the sanctuary.

“Well, we’ll let you get back to your music,” said Luke standing. Hannah followed his lead.

“Thanks,” said Caz standing. She shook their hands. “I always enjoy getting to know people better.”

“Where to now?” asked Hannah as they were exiting out the building and walking down the brick-lined path that led to the parking lot.

Luke glanced at his watch.

“We’ve got some time to kill before we see Tom Franklin.”

“Tom Franklin?” They had arrived at their car and Hannah checked her car door to see if it was unlocked. Luke unlocked her door with his key.

“He’s a tall quiet man,” said Luke when he was in his seat. “One of the guys who does the communion but always on the other side of the sanctuary.”

Hannah nodded as she vaguely recalled such a man.

“I’m not sure what else he does around the church. I mean, it seems all the board members are also deacons and have other responsibilities around the church. Anyway, we’re meeting him in two hours in Toronto, on his lunch. He’s an accountant for some company that distributes eyeglass frames.”

It turned out that Tom Franklin was the church treasurer. Luke and Hannah had hung out at the Tim Horton’s across the road from Tom’s office, the prearranged meeting

spot. Hannah and Luke were eating chicken salad sandwiches while Tom, when he came in, ordered the chicken stew in a bread bowl.

“Yes, it certainly has caused a big to-do,” he said as he took his first few tentative sips of the hot stew. “Pastor was adamant that we replace the Bibles right away, but truthfully, the financial situation doesn’t permit it. That’s why we haven’t done anything. Whoever did this certainly made a big financial sacrifice to buy all those Bibles.”

“Whatever happened to all those Bibles?” said Luke wiping some mayonnaise off his mouth with a napkin.

Tom sighed.

“They were supposed to be thrown into the garbage. Pastor was so mad he didn’t even want to recycle them in case some person working at the recycling depot started reading one. Well...” Tom paused, looking as if he was pondering his next statement. “I said I’d take care of them. I didn’t lie and say that I’d put them in the garbage. I just said I’d take care of it. Gathered them all up and put them in the garbage bags Pastor gave me and when nobody was around I stuck them in my truck. I took them all down to the Salvation Army. I couldn’t stand just putting them out by the side of the road. It would have been throwing out money. Now, I know the Bible says store your treasures in heaven and that the love of money is the root of all evil, but I do believe a person can come to the saving knowledge of Jesus by reading any translation. I’ve read the King James all my life and I do think it’s the better version, but if my teenage son wanted to read another version I wouldn’t stop him.”

Luke nodded.

“Very wise,” he said.

“Truthfully, at this point I don’t care if you tell the pastor what I did. I’m getting pretty tired of this division and secrecy. No one’s allowed an opinion around here unless you quote from the KJV.” Tom shook his head. “It wasn’t always this way. Before Pastor Robert, there was harmony in this church. I’ve been treasurer for fifteen years and my wife and I started attending right after we were married. I’ve seen a lot and believe me, these are dark days.”

Luke nodded.

“I believe you.”

Tom continued eating his soup.

“Why are you investigating this?” asked Tom after a few minutes of silent eating.

Luke looked surprised.

“Well, I, I suppose I fancy myself a Sherlock Holmes...”

Tom shook his head.

“There’s more to it than that,” he said. “You’re not a King-James-Only lackey. I’d know if you were. You’d be looking at me with horror if you were.”

Suddenly Luke realized that this man he’d always thought was quiet was probably just being wise.

“OK,” said Luke smiling. “The truth is, I want to protect whoever did this. I don’t want them to get caught. So if I investigate it rather than a pro-KJV person, I can present a report to the pastor that shields the guilty party.”

Tom nodded.

“Glad to hear it.”

“Well, I’m very glad to hear that all those Bibles didn’t get thrown out.”

Tom shrugged modestly and smiled.

“Does Pastor Robert know your views?” asked Luke.

“We don’t talk much,” said Tom. “He’s not that interested in accounting. Like most people, he only talks to me about money when he needs something. Like to buy some more Bibles, for example. Which, of course, we don’t have the money for. We’re just getting by on a monthly basis. To buy more Bibles is going to take a massive donation by someone or a fund-raiser, so I don’t know what we’re going to do about it.”

Luke looked thoughtful.

“Is it possible that the person who did this knew about the church’s low funds and that it was highly improbable the Bibles would be replaced right away?”

“Anything’s possible,” said Tom. He had finished his stew and was working on eating the bread bowl. “The finances aren’t a secret. They get distributed annually at the meeting and anyone who wants a copy of the current situation is free to ask.”

“Has anyone asked lately?”

“I dunno. You’d have to ask Kelly, the secretary. She’d be the one they’d go to. Watch what you say though. She’s one of the strongest supporters of the King James Version that I’ve ever met.”

Things were moving quickly. While Kurt went to work, Lisa called the real estate agent they had purchased their house through. By the time Kurt came home the house was sold.

“*What?*” said Kurt.

“Yes. Apparently somebody else had been interested in this house when we bought it and told the agent that if it ever went up for sale again to let them know.”

Kurt surveyed the small interior with its faded walls. “I guess there must be gold buried in the basement, or something. Did you tell Kevin?”

“Yep. He’s off to some unpronounceable place in Indonesia tomorrow. We’ll have to wait for our passports and our work permits before we book our flight. Kevin recommends we fly to Beijing and then make our way from there.”

“Make our way from there, as in donkey-cart, raft up a river, and then finally being led into the interior by some natives we’ve hired type-thing?”

“Something like that. Though I think you’ve been reading too much about David Livingstone.”

“I have never read a thing about David Livingstone. All I know is that some guy named Stanley said, ‘Dr. Livingstone, I presume?’”

“Well, that was at the end of a long life of doing missionary work and exploring Africa,” said Lisa. “He could have had a relatively comfortable life if he had just stuck to the missionary work in the established areas. But he had a passion for reaching the remote areas. There were times that he was separated from his family for five years as he went exploring. Sometimes his wife would come, but they nearly lost their kids to thirst on one expedition. His wife was a daughter of African missionaries so she understood the rough lifestyle. As a kid she’d actually been taken by some natives on a war-raid, only to escape and make her way back...”

Kurt was staring at her.

“I read a biography once,” she explained. “Why are you staring at me like that?”

“Kids,” said Kurt. “Are we going to have kids out there?”

Lisa shrugged.

“I don’t mind either way,” she said.

“What, are you just going to have him or her under a bamboo tree?”

Lisa laughed.

“OK, maybe we should hold off on the kid-thing for awhile. After all, our job there is to look after all those other wee ones. It would be a bit unfair to bring some more into the situation.”

On Friday morning at 9:00 a.m., Luke and Hannah were in the parking lot of the church waiting for Kelly Danes, the secretary, to arrive. They were sipping coffees that they had picked up at Tim Horton’s.

“Have you ever talked to her?” asked Luke.

Hannah shook her head.

“I don’t know much about her except that she’s a single mom. Her little boy is about seven or eight, I think. I imagine this job is perfect for her. Get him off to school and then come over here for four hours work.”

“She only works part-time?”

“Oh yes,” said Hannah. “If you want to call the church and get a live person you can only do it from nine til one. After that it’s the machine. I’ve never called the church in the afternoon and had the pastor pick up the phone so I don’t know whether I’ve just called when he wasn’t here or if he doesn’t bother picking up the regular church line.”

“I’ve never tried to call the pastor,” said Luke.

“Well my calls have basically been to inquire about what time something starts. There she is,” said Hannah, as an older maroon Ford pulled into the parking lot.

Kelly pulled into the handicapped parking spot directly in front of the brick pathway that led to the entrance of the church. Luke had chosen an unmarked space, opting to not even park in the ‘Visitor’ spot.

“Hello Kelly!” called out Hannah as she stepped out of the car. Her boldness came from the awkwardness of the situation. It was probably rare for Kelly not to be the first to arrive.

“Oh, hello,” said Kelly, not overly friendly. She was a short plump woman in her early 40’s with dusty blonde hair down to her shoulders. As he stepped out of the car Luke thought she looked tired as she didn’t match his wife’s enthusiastic greeting.

“Luke and Hannah?” she said as she headed for the front door to unlock it. “Pastor mentioned you might get around to talking to me about this whole thing. I don’t think I can be much help, but I’ll try.”

They were now in the dimly lit foyer of the church with Kelly leading them down the main hallway to the church office.

“Have a seat,” she said when they were in the small office that Kelly worked in. Pastor Robert’s office led off of Kelly’s and only looked slightly bigger than the room they were in and all the extra space was taken up with bookshelves. Luke could have spent hours in the pastor’s office just checking out what was he was reading but he doubted he’d ever get the opportunity.

“Well, one place I can start is whether anyone asked for a copy of the church finances lately,” said Luke.

“Nope,” said Kelly taking her seat at her desk and picking up a piece of paper to examine it. “Of course you could ask our treasurer...”

“I’ve already talked to him and he said if anyone had, they had asked you.”

“No, sorry,” said Kelly, really looking at him for the first time. “Is it important?”

Luke shrugged.

“It’s one avenue to explore. But if no one was interested in the finances it’s probably not worth exploring.”

“Well, I’ve been mulling it over a lot,” said Kelly. She started to look a little bit more enthusiastic. “I know it didn’t happen when I was here, or when the pastor was here, so either the person just got lucky or the person knew our schedule.”

Luke sat up straight.

“That’s it!” he said. Hannah looked at him startled. Had he solved the mystery? Would he divulge the solution to Kelly? She watched as her husband had to fight to look nonchalant. Clearly Kelly was not an ally in this.

“I just had a thought. A possible avenue worth pursuing.”

“Well, good,” said Kelly when it was clear he wasn’t going to explain any further.

“When does the pastor come in today?”

“Probably around twelve. He had to go down to the hospital to see Mary Fountaine’s son who was in that car crash and after that he’ll come back here to work on his sermon for a few hours.”

“Great,” said Luke, beginning to stand.

“What is your theory?” Hannah asked Kelly. She felt they were leaving a little abruptly.

Luke sat back down.

“Well, as I said, it’s someone who knows the schedule well, or who just got lucky. I’d rather it be someone who just got lucky because otherwise it’s someone I probably know well and I’d hate to think anyone I’m close to in this church could have done such a serious thing.”

Luke nodded in a way that he hoped was sympathetic. When it appeared that that was Kelly’s entire theory, he stood up cautiously, glancing at Hannah to make sure it was OK. She stood up.

“OK, well. We’ll be back later to chat with the pastor. Thanks for your time.”

“No problem,” said Kelly looking a little disappointed.

Hannah felt bad that they hadn’t made the investigation seem more exciting. If Kelly was like the ladies in her Bible-study group, she would have enjoyed mulling the whole thing around a bit more. But Luke felt if you weren’t going to get any more facts, opinions weren’t much use to him.

“So what was your big thought?” asked Hannah once they were outside and heading for the car.

“Who was scheduled to see him that Saturday?” said Luke. “Everybody except me probably knows that Kelly works weekday mornings and that the pastor is usually in during the afternoon. How many people know he occasionally went in to work on his sermon on Saturday, I have no idea. But the person who did this probably did their homework and made sure that the pastor stayed out of the building that day.”

Luke unlocked the car doors.

“How would whoever did this also be inserting Amplified Bibles in the pews?” asked Hannah getting into her seat.

“Clearly the person who distracted him was an intentional or unintentional cohort. It’s possible the person didn’t even realize they were being used.”

“Now,” said Hannah thinking out loud as she pulled on her seat belt. “Would this event have been planned in advance so that the pastor would know to finish his sermon on Friday rather than Saturday? Otherwise, the pastor could leave from whatever it was he went to, go to the church and discover the switch.”

“Not if the event was in the late afternoon or evening. Then he would have visited the church in the morning. Besides, I doubt the pastor checks the sanctuary too closely. He probably heads straight for his office. The primary reason to get him out of the building would be to make the switch. When we go back we’ll ask him who he visited that Saturday evening.”

“How is Lisa and that young man...?” Pastor Robert snapped his fingers in an attempt to remember.

“Kurt?” said Hannah.

“Ah, that’s right, Kurt. How are they doing?”

“Well,” said Hannah slowly. “I guess you heard they got married.”

Pastor Robert nodded.

“Well, now they’re off to China to do missionary work.”

“*Really!* Incredible. Did he come from a missionary background?”

“No,” said Luke more boldly than Hannah would have. “In fact, he has no religious background. I hope he keeps it that way. He has the purest understanding of the word of God of everyone I know. I told Lisa, do yourself a big favour, never interpret the Bible for that man. Let him interpret it for you. Thankfully she’d already figured that out for herself.”

Pastor Robert stared at him.

“Well,” he said finally. “I found seminary very helpful...”

“It’s not for everyone,” said Luke. “God speaks directly to some people as he does to my son-in-law.”

Hannah smiled, partly with chagrin at the insult to Pastor’s education and partly with pleasure at the pride Luke had in Lisa’s husband.

“In any case,” said Luke. “We’re here to ask you what you did the Saturday evening before the Bibles were discovered switched on Sunday.”

Pastor Robert smiled.

“Am I a suspect now? Do I need an alibi?”

Luke laughed.

“Hadn’t occurred to me. I’ll have to consider that one if nothing else pans out.”

The pastor was flipping through a Day-timer on his desk.

“Let’s see...where is it...what date was that, anyhow? Oh here it is...That Saturday evening my family and I were at the Feldman’s. Do you know them? Adam and Leslie Feldman. He’s in charge of communion. Wonderful children.”

“Yes,” said Hannah when it was clear that Luke was so lost in thought he wasn’t going to say anything for a while. “We’ve talked to Leslie. A sweet girl. Very busy with the kids.”

“At that age they’re a handful,” agreed Pastor Robert. “She spent a lot of time talking with my wife while Adam and I talked. He’s Jewish, you know. Always gives me wonderful insights into the Old Testament. That evening we talked about the Holy Days in Leviticus. He almost persuaded me that we should celebrate Passover instead of Easter. They don’t keep Christmas, of course. They celebrate Hanukkah. There’s such a wide diversity of Christian culture in our church. I learn so much getting to know everybody in the congregation.”

“Mmm-hmm,” said Luke, deep in thought. Hannah was looking forward to hearing his thoughts afterward. If Leslie and/or Adam were involved in the conspiracy, then who made the switch?

“Well, that was really the only question we had,” said Luke, standing up. “We’ll have to try to put some pieces of the puzzle together and then fill out the gaps.”

“Thanks for all the work you’ve put into this,” said Pastor Robert standing and shaking Luke’s hand. “You’re back to work next week?”

“Fraid so. But I think I’ve done all the legwork. Now it’s just the headwork. You know, sit in my chair like Sherlock Holmes and once I’ve eliminated all the impossible scenarios, come up with the improbable scenario that will solve the case.”

Pastor laughed.

“Just don’t go smoking any pipes. Bad for your health.”

“Well!” demanded Hannah as they were walking down the hall to the exit. “You’ve got it all figured out, don’t you?”

Luke shook his head and put a finger on her lips.

“The walls have ears, my love,” he said.

Hannah sighed.

“Now can you tell me?” she asked when they were in the car and pulling out of the parking lot.

Luke shook his head again.

“I’ve got a theory. But it’s too big to divulge right now. I’ve got someone I have to consult.”

Hannah looked out the window and tried not to sigh too loudly.

“Hannah, you’ve heard everything I’ve heard. You should have a theory too.”

“No dear. I’m just dim-witted Hastings to your Poirot, I’m afraid.”

When Luke got home, he took the cordless phone into the bedroom and was in the room with the door closed for about an hour.

“Now can you tell me?” asked Hannah when he came out.

Luke shook his head.

“Well, who were you talking to? Can you tell me that?”

“Pastor Paul,” said Luke. “He’s going to pray about the whole matter and get back to me.”

Hannah’s shoulders drooped as she picked up her coat and purse and started heading for the door.

“Where’re you going, my dear?”

“To the library. To get out a good mystery.”

Chapter Eight

The plane tickets had been bought. The passports were in Lisa's purse, along with traveler's checks, temporary work permits, and the all-important address and directions to get to their destination in China.

In lieu of having her parents see them off at the airport, Lisa had invited Luke and Hannah for a visit in their small house on the Saturday before the Sunday morning that they left.

There had been very little furniture in the house to begin with, but now with all their most important possessions in four suitcases by the door and everything else donated to the Salvation Army, they were seated on some fold-out lawn chairs that Luke and Hannah had brought. Lisa was in the kitchen putting Kentucky Fried Chicken and potato salad on paper plates while she listened to her husband tell her parents about the journey they were making. They had expressed concern that there might be some danger traveling an unusual route into an unfamiliar country.

"I'm not worried," said Kurt. "We've prayed about this and I think it's going to be very exciting." He reached for Lisa's purse and pulled out a map to show Luke and Hannah the exact route they'd take.

Lisa smiled as she opened up the bags of plastic cutlery that came with the meals. Kurt had had no exposure to Christian's and the clichés about 'being safe in the will of God'. She tried to avoid passing on the common expressions to him because she was more interested in finding out what would become his common expressions after directly reading the Bible and not just absorbing it through sermons and ministries.

After Kurt had finished talking and they were eating, Lisa asked, "So, what did you guys do with your holidays?"

Hannah quickly turned to Luke for his reaction. It had been a full two weeks since his holiday had ended and she still didn't know who had done it. Luke had called Pastor Paul a few times but they hadn't seemed to come to any conclusions.

"Well," said Luke slowly, "with all apologies to my dear wife who I've left out of the loop for the last little while, we were trying to solve the mystery of the missing King James Bibles."

Lisa laughed.

"Did I mention that whole thing to you, dear?" she asked.

Kurt nodded as he took a big bite of chicken. Who knew what kind of food awaited them in the interior of China.

"Did you have to do it surreptitiously?" asked Lisa.

"Oh no. I had Pastor's approval and everything. Interviewed everybody that seemed relevant to the case, although I by no means was exhaustive. I could still be interviewing people and trying to get some more information but I'm afraid all I'd get is opinion and speculation. Your mom and I got enough information for me to strongly suspect I solved the case. The only thing is, I don't like the ramifications of revealing the truth so I'm just acting like I fizzled out."

"Well, why can't you tell me your theory?" demanded Hannah.

"Oh, I can," said Luke. "I've just been so busy working on a way to confirm my theory."

“Well, why don’t you just ask the people outright?” asked Lisa.

“I don’t want them to then feel any pressure to replace the Bibles in the church. It’s not their fault the Pastor decided to get rid of the Amplifieds and the ones that got returned.

“What don’t you just break into the person’s house in the dead of night and rummage around until you find proof?” suggested Hannah facetiously.

“I thought about that,” said Luke, putting some salad in his mouth and swallowing before he spoke again. “But I might have to go through a few houses. No. That’s not true. Probably just two houses.”

“Luke, I’m going to throw something at you if you don’t just tell me...”

Luke sighed.

“Pastor Tim, Tom Franklin and Leslie Feldman.”

“The youth pastor, the treasurer, and that woman with two or three children who always sits near the back because her kids are so noisy?!” Lisa said.

“Possibly Caz Tyndale was in on it too.”

“The head of the music ministry?!”

“Leslie Feldman extended a dinner invitation that kept him out of the building and the other three all have keys and good reasons for being in the building if anyone happened to stop by unexpectedly. It’s definitely the work of a few people, not an individual. For one thing, it’s too expensive for one person to go out and buy all those Bibles. But it’s just the type of thing you’d come up with if you were sitting around complaining about the current administration. It would be especially natural for those in the upper echelons of power who are against the current administration to hang together and share their grievances.”

“The whole thing didn’t accomplish anything lasting, though,” said Lisa. “In the end it was just a silly prank.”

“We still don’t have King James Bibles in the pews,” said Luke. “And I’m told we won’t for awhile due to the financial crunch. Truthfully, I suspect a lot of the people who are against the King-James-Only thing are withholding their financial support right now because they don’t want their money to go to replacing the Bibles. It’ll be interesting to see what the future holds for this church...”

Epilogue

The old-timers had been around, seen a lot, let a lot pass and put their feet down when things had just got out of hand. Three of them had been on the committee to recruit Pastor Robert James but he had never mentioned his favourite Bible version and it had never occurred to them to ask.

Slowly, he had worked his way into their comfortable little church, winning people over to his side, until to suggest that they vote him out would have caused a split in the church and ultimately, its death. With its membership of about 100 people and a weekly attendance of 250, they could sustain their current church building and presence in the community. A division between the King James supporters and the modern supporters would have resulted in two weak churches neither of which could sustain their current building.

The seniors had discussed the issue through and through. There were those in the group of 30 who read the King James because they preferred it, but none because they thought it was the only true Bible. Stan Spencer had seen to that. He was the unofficial head of the seniors ministry, he was a long-time reader of the Living Bible, and he wasn't going to let any of the sheep under his care be deceived. He had led a quiet 10-part Bible- study in his home about the history of Bible translation and textual criticism. The seniors felt like they were in seminary, but they came out of there confident in the authority and authenticity of their modern translations.

Now, senior citizens are no less mischievous than teens, or say, teen ministry pastors. The only difference is that they have the money to indulge in some of their pranks.

No one remembered who suggested it.

"Wouldn't it be funny if one day we came into the church and all the King James Bibles had been replaced with, say, Amplifieds?"

They all, including Stan, had a chuckle at the thought.

Well, as the scripture goes, *after desire has been conceived, it gives birth to sin...* In other words, one thing lead to another and the next thing they knew they were pooling their resources and buying Amplified Bibles from someone's son who sold Bibles wholesale to theological institutes of learning.

The decision to make the switch Saturday evening had nothing to do with Adam's invitation to the pastor to come over for dinner. (Of course Adam had made the invitation. Leslie would have never extended an invitation for something that would require her to tidy an outrageously chaotic house and then cook a special meal when she usually could barely manage spaghetti.) With 30 seniors at work in the sanctuary the job had taken ten minutes. No one from the church drove by in those ten minutes and noticed all the cars and even if they had it wasn't unusual for there to be cars in the parking lot when the teens were doing something.

Remorse had set in almost immediately and when they met at Tim Horton's after the heist, Stan suggested they make the switchback on Monday and maybe even confess their part in the whole thing. Unfortunately, Helen, whose son was the Bible salesman, had taken off with all the King James Bibles and was at this very moment driving them all to Toronto to give to her son. Unbeknown to everybody except his mom, he had

given them a discount based on an exchange for the old church Bibles which he could easily sell to some of the lesser known Bible colleges that were always grateful for a good deal.

Helen didn't have a cell-phone and no one even knew her son's name so there was no way of getting a hold of her before her son took possession of the Bibles.

On the Monday after the Sunday that the switch had been discovered, they met to discuss what they must do now.

A few of them suggested just outright confessing and offering restitution. They agreed to fast and pray about it. When the police were called in, they all freaked and unanimously agreed not to say a peep. They were all sworn to their grave to secrecy and they all reasoned, none of them would have to carry the weight of their guilt a whole lifetime, so it wasn't that bad.

But then Helen announced that, by some miracle, her son had not been able to exchange the Bibles as planned and that they could have them all back. The seniors unanimously agreed to return them, but couldn't resist organizing a work party first to make a few marginal notes in all of them. Though returning the Bibles was a flop, it did diminish their guilt somewhat, first for taking the Bibles, and secondly for not just standing by but at least making an effort to get the truth out to people.

Stan started up another Bible-study in his home for the seniors, a five part series on the topic of Repentance: The Key to Standing Before Your Maker in the Judgment. All attended.