

# **All the Voices of the Wind**

***Donald James Parker***

Sword of the Spirit Publishing

This is a work of fiction. The events and characters described here are imaginary and not intended to reflect any actual person, living or dead. The scientists, educators, authors, etcetera, who are mentioned as being part of the great debate over man's origins, are real life people.

**Copyright © 2007 Donald James Parker**

*All rights reserved by the author. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.*

Sword of the Spirit Publishing

[www.swordofspirit.net](http://www.swordofspirit.net)

ISBN 13: 978-0-6152-2183-0

## Acknowledgements

I'm eternally grateful to all of my faithful reviewers at [Fanstory.com](http://Fanstory.com) who helped teach me to write and helped proofread my manuscript. Those people include William (Buchtar) Terry, author of *Book of Spells*, Veronica (1Archangel) Mellon, Shirla (Ayasha) White, Karen (Karenina) Quackenbush, and Dante (D. Longo) Longo. The encouragement I received from all you spurred me on to greater heights.

I'd like to thank the Redpath family and Andrea Steiner for their contribution to my efforts.

I'd like to thank Jonathan Wells, John G. West, and Geoffrey Smith for the feedback they provided – in addition to the great resources they have created to give people a picture of the difficulties with Darwinist doctrine.

The lyrics to the song at the end come from "Testify to Love", which was originally written in Holland by Paul Field, Henk Pool, and Dutch artist Ralph Van Manen for Van Manen's custom-made album. According to Pool, the men wanted to express that everything reflects God's love and greatness. "I think everything in God's creation is something to testify about," he says. This song was performed by Avalon and was number one on the charts for six weeks. Check it out on YouTube. This is my favorite song by one of my favorite groups.

A big thanks goes out to Barbara Murphy who helped me with an intermediate cover. Check out her graphics work at <http://www.whisperscastle.com/index.html>. And another amazing woman, Aidana Willowraven, put together the final cover. Check her work out at [willowravenillustration.com](http://willowravenillustration.com)

Finally, I want to thank the people who read this book. Thank you for making my expenditure of time worth while. Please visit my website at [www.donaldjamesparker.com](http://www.donaldjamesparker.com) to check out all my books and links to other resources dealing with the Darwinism debate, reading materials (including software), creative writing, and religion.



## Chapter 1

### The Encounter

The lanky teenager glanced in the mirror, checking out his hair to make sure it was still neatly in place. *Hey, No need to tamper with perfection.* If ever captured by the enemy, the boy would have revealed the following: name: Jeremy Dillon; rank: senior in high school; serial number: 7 in football, 42 in basketball, and 19 in baseball.

Suddenly his attention was hijacked by a flash of blue. The small mirror in his school locker wasn't sufficient to satisfy his curiosity, so Jeremy whirled around to determine the origin of the blue streak.

Across the hallway attempting to open a locker stood a girl he didn't recognize. Beautiful long brown hair flowed almost to the waist of her blue dress. It wasn't often Jeremy saw someone his age in a dress, so this, in itself, would have captured his attention. The figure contained within that garment was the kind that caused car accidents. He gazed for a moment and a woeful thought struck him. *She probably has a face only a parent could love.*

Jeremy was conscious his mouth was hanging open. As he dwelt on that thought, the object of his contemplation succeeded in opening her locker. She placed several books in the inner chamber and twirled in Jeremy's direction with the grace of a ballerina. He felt blood rush to his face as he turned to his own locker. *Busted!*

He fumbled for the target of the mission to his locker, a book. There wasn't much time to examine the thoughts speeding through his brain, like – *how did I avoid flies entering my mouth when my tongue was in jeopardy of being branded with the imprint of a size eleven Adidas running shoe?* His game of twenty questions was cut short by a melodious soprano voice cutting through the fog of his mind like a laser beam.

"Excuse me."

Jeremy turned to the source of the music masquerading as a voice. Replaying the whole scenario, Jeremy couldn't remember what he noticed first. Was it the perfect pearl white teeth or the delicate nose or the peaches and cream complexion? He only knew for sure the pair of chocolate brown eyes that met his were the most beautiful he had ever seen. A flow of electricity shot

through his body from the bottoms of his Adidas sneakers to the top of the hair, which, after all that voltage, was probably standing straight up by now.

"Can you tell me how to get to Room 222?"

Jeremy swallowed hard to prepare for speech. "Room 222. Sure. Go down to end of the hall, hang a right, and it's three doors down on your left."

"Thank you!" She flashed him a smile he swore he would never forget, even if he lived to be a zillion years old. She was dancing down the hallway before he could say another word.

Jeremy watched the retreating figure with audio visions of two songs going through his head. "*I'd walk a million miles for one of your smiles.*" "*A wave out on the ocean could never move that way.*"

Suddenly he felt like kicking his locker. *I didn't ask her name or introduce myself! How lame is that?*

Another voice interrupted his self-lashing party. "Hey, JD. Mr. Burns was wondering how long it takes to get a book out of a locker. He wanted me to remind you a hall pass isn't a three-day furlough. I guess study hall isn't the same wonderful place without your presence."

"I'm on my way back right now. I hope my picture won't be featured on the milk cartons in the lunchroom today!"

"That makes two of us. Imagine all the people vomiting."

"Cute! NOT!"

"I told Mr. Burns you probably had a major emergency – like your comb got stuck in your hair."

"Not today. I'd have to say I've been twitterpated."

"You've been what?"

"I've been twitterpated. Why don't you go look that up in your *Funk and Wagnall's*?" The vision of Bambi having his heart stolen from him by a young female deer played itself in Jeremy's internal theater.

Jeremy slammed his locker and headed to study hall. His thoughts continued to be dominated by the mystery girl, *Does she have a boyfriend? What name would a girl like that have? It would have to be something regal to match the owner.* Possible names filed through his brain as he walked up to the study hall teacher and returned his hall pass.

"Well, Mr. Dillon. Nice to see the lost has been found. For a minute, I thought I misunderstood your purpose in going to your locker. I thought perhaps you said you went to read a book. Or maybe even write one."

Jeremy didn't respond to Mr. Burn's playful banter except to grin. He was thinking the lost hadn't been found. *But I know where her locker is, and I will find her.*

He sat down and opened his book. For a half-hour his eyes skimmed over words, but the ideas they conveyed couldn't compete with the thought stream dominating him since his encounter with Miss Perfect. When the bell sounded, sending young bodies scurrying in all directions, Jeremy realized he didn't remember one thing he had read.

Study hall was succeeded by math class. The teacher was talking about cosines today, but Jeremy was on a different chapter – coeds. He kept replaying the locker scene in his head, like the instant replay in a televised football game. He had fumbled.

*Could a girl like this ever be interested in me?* He took a mental inventory of his assets. Average looks but with great hair. Clean cut. Athletic build at six feet two inches and 190 pounds. He was the starting quarterback on the football team, the leading pitcher on the baseball team, and probably a starting guard on the basketball team. Smart. Witty, but not a smart aleck. Friendly. Polite.

*Now polite is a word that isn't very popular in high schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In an era where "in your face" is much more popular with my peers than courtesy, maybe I have to include that in the liabilities column.* Jeremy objected to himself at this point and put polite back in the asset column. He wasn't interested in a girl who didn't consider politeness to be a virtue.

His thoughts wandered back to some of the many conversations he and his father had shared in regard to relationships and sex. Jeremy had never known his mother, who had died from complications after his birth. He did know very well how much his father adored her. His dad had made it quite clear to Jeremy that waiting to find the right girl wasn't easy, but it would be worth all the effort. Jeremy had been raised with the idea that a female was a very special life form and something to be cherished.

He had taken the lessons to heart, not surprisingly, since his father was the hero of his life and his best friend. Jeremy had been Paul Dillon's entire world after his wife died. He poured himself into bringing up Jeremy to be a special young man, one his mother would have been proud of. Jeremy was truly a chip off the old block. He even preferred the music and movies of his father's era to the current offerings from the entertainment world.

*What will I tell Dad about the Lady of the Locker? What is*

*there to tell?* She was extremely attractive, but how many different ways had he learned a book couldn't be judged by its cover? Before there was any reason to tell his father anything, he needed to find out what this mystery girl was made of. If she were like most of the pretty girls at his school, Jeremy wouldn't be interested. But there was one encouraging sign. She was wearing a dress – to school. *What kind of girl did that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Maybe she's as old-fashioned as I am! God, please let that be the case.* He paused in his thinking. *Why did I include the G word?* Another lesson Jeremy's father had taught him well was that God didn't exist.

Jeremy fell back to thinking about Wondergirl's name. Another song came on his internal jukebox. *Ba Ba Ba Ba Ba Barbara Ann* was going through his head when he became aware there was dead silence in the room. He turned and saw everyone looking at him, most with jack-o'-lantern grins. With a sinking feeling he'd just been busted by the attention police, he turned toward his teacher.

She was staring right at him. "And your answer, Mr. Dillon?"

*Crap! What class is this? Oh, yeah, math.* There was only one answer in his head and Jeremy was quite sure "Barbara Ann" wasn't correct. "I'm terribly sorry, Mrs. Krantz, but my mind was elsewhere, and I don't have a clue what the question was." He couldn't help but notice a few guffaws and duhs being uttered. *I hate it when this happens.*

"Well, just in case you'd like to get on the same page we are on, literally and figuratively, we are on problem number four on page seventeen. And, Mr. Dillon, the football game isn't until Friday. Perhaps you could focus some of your thoughts on math until then. Ruthie, can you bail Mr. Dillon out?"

As the focus of attention switched from Jeremy to Ruthie, his thoughts wandered away immediately. *Football? I almost wish it was football that was monopolizing my thoughts. Having agile, hostile and mobile athletes trying to take off my head every Friday night is certainly a lot less scary than dealing with a relationship with a female.*

Jeremy thought of the electricity that had passed through his body when his eyes had momentarily locked on to those magnificent coffee-colored orbs possessed by the girl without a name. *Argggghh. I can't stop thinking about her, but I don't even know her name. That's a problem I need to fix, ASAP.* He did his best to divert his thoughts to the textbook in front of him.

After what seemed like a month, the bell finally sounded, dismissing Jeremy from the world of ciphers to the gym and PE



class.

Jeremy walked into the locker room past several boys in various stages of undress. He was just about to turn the corner when one of the boys posed a question to the rest of the group. "Have you seen that new babe yet?" Jeremy slammed on the brakes and turned to face the group.

"Oh yeah! Talk about your summer sizzlers!"

"I wouldn't kick her out of bed for eating graham crackers!"

"You wouldn't kick any girl out of bed for any reason!" The rest of the boys roared.

Brian Witt, another boy who wasn't in the group, stepped into the circle, causing them all to concentrate on donning their gym clothes. "There's a new girl in school?" The geeks, as Brian usually referred to them, nodded their heads and looked away.

"What's her name?" Brian asked. Jeremy's ears perked up to hear the answer.

They all shook their heads and one mumbled, "Don't know."

"Figures. No biggie. I'll know that by lunch, and I'll have our first date lined up by the end of school today and will probably be buying the graham crackers by the weekend." He left them to go back to his locker.

The small group of intellectually inclined but brawn challenged youths silently heaved a sigh of relief. Witt hadn't slugged any of them in the arm muscle or put on a Vulcan death grip or slapped them in the groin. They almost relaxed.

Jeremy resumed his journey to his locker. He had his own pet names for Brian Witt. He couldn't determine which one he liked better: Halfwit, Nitwit, or Dimwit. He fantasized about hitting Witt on the top of the head so hard he'd need holes in his socks to stick his tongue out. *Or would it be more effective to deliver a knuckle sandwich which rerouted his nose through Albuquerque.*

He felt a little remorse at such thoughts. His father taught him long ago that violence was no answer to personal conflicts, at least offensively. It was OK to defend yourself, but to physically attack a weaker person wasn't a manly thing to do.

*If only Brian would give me the need to defend myself.* Brian confined his aggressive activity to those individuals who were not in a position to stand up for themselves. The thought of Brian with the new girl was almost too much for Jeremy to bear. Witt was notorious for his "love them and leave them" attitude. Women were merely toys to him, something to be used and abused.

He was striving to find a loophole in the anti-violence clause. *Would protecting a nice girl from Witt be a form of self-defense?*

Mr. Jenkins, the PE teacher, was also the basketball coach. He loved his boys to get in preseason practice in the fall. On the menu for PE class today was a series of half-court games. The coach divided them into teams of three. Brian Witt was one of Jeremy's teammates.

*Darn! If Witt and I weren't on the same team, I might be able to accidentally elbow him when fighting for a rebound. Maybe I'll get chance to collide with him on the football field in the near future.*

As usual after PE class, Jeremy had to hurry to make it to his next class, English Literature, on time. That meant that his normally perfectly coiffed hair had to receive a hasty comb job and then dry during class in whatever position the individual hairs decided to wander. At lunchtime he'd return to the bathroom and make the necessary repairs. Today was no exception, and Jeremy stepped across the threshold of his classroom just seconds before the bell rang.

Both of his feet had entered the room before he noticed the blue dress that had captured his attention earlier that morning. The mystery girl was sitting in the second column of desks and in the very front row. Jeremy's hand instinctively flew up to his wet hair and made a pass through it with his fingernails to smooth the misbehaving little rascals. His efforts, as well as his journey to his desk in the back of the room, seemed to go unnoticed by the new girl, who was busy reading a book.

He plopped down in the chair and sighed. The nice thing was he had an unimpeded view of the desk where Miss Wonderful sat. He could appreciate that view for the whole fifty-five minutes of class without the danger of the object of his adoration being aware. *This class isn't going to be as boring as I thought after the first week.*

Ms. Parks pushed a cart toward the first column of desks. She reached for a stack of books and passed them to the boy in the front seat. She then moved to the new girl's desk. As she was handing a stack of books to Wonder Woman, she cleared her throat. "Class, I'd like to introduce to you a new student at Sumner High. This is Maria Masterson. Maria, where did you move here from?"

"Madison, South Dakota."

Maria turned to pass the stack of novels back to the girl behind her. Jeremy could see the white of her smile clearly even from the back of the room.

*Maria. He finally had a name, and a beautiful and appropriate*

*name it was. The song of the same name from West Side story started playing in his head. Maria, the most wonderful sound I've ever heard. Suddenly that name will never be the same.*

Jeremy thought about that smile again. *If only it was beaming on me. Would I need sunscreen to be exposed to that light for an extended period of time?*

His thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of his copy of the novel they were reading for the class. A quick glance at the cover revealed the title, *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens. *It's like that new Garfield movie A Tale of Two Kitties.* Obviously the producers of that movie had been playing a little word game. He looked back to the front of the room at Maria. *How about A Tale of Two Pretties?*

A literary trip to merry old England and 18<sup>th</sup> century France wasn't on Jeremy's list of dream vacations. On the bright side, Maria would be reading it at the same time. It would give them something to complain about together.

*Before I can talk to her, I have to meet her. How is that going to happen?* He started visualizing the different scenarios that could play out. Only a fraction of his attention was given to the teacher in the front of the room. The words, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times," filtered through his cranial interference. The thought that these words described high school perfectly flashed in and out of his consciousness.

In addition to thinking about Maria, he ran an old movie of conversations with his father about Miss Right. The young man's parent had loved his wife very much and hadn't married again after her death. A frequent discussion between them was the importance of finding his complement, someone who made him whole and one whom he could make complete. He knew he didn't understand this concept completely, but he did grasp enough of it to know none of the girls he had met so far had the right stuff.

*Maybe no one did. Maybe I've set up such a lofty goal that I never can attain it. I'll always be comparing real females to this perfect image, and they will never stack up.* His dad had reminded him he certainly didn't need to be compromising his desires at this point in life. He had suggested Jeremy not marry until he found someone he couldn't live without. *Maria seems to be stacking up in all the right places – so far.*

Another old song ran through his head. *Love Makes the World Go Round.* Somewhere he had read a quote that love doesn't make the world go around, but it makes the ride worthwhile. It had been three hours since he first saw Maria. The 'twitterpation'

reading was still measuring on the Richter scale. He realized his world was going around at a faster pace.

At the end of his thought detour, Jeremy realized his high academic marks would be seriously jeopardized if he didn't get his mind off Maria. He wasn't worried about flunking, but he was competitive in everything he turned his hand to. Academics were no exception. *I need to get my butt back in gear if I'm going to challenge for valedictorian of my class.*

With competition on his mind, he couldn't help but think of Brian Witt and his comments in the locker room. Would Jeremy have to compete to win the love of his life? The sober realization that this could be the most competitive event in his life hit him like a ton of concrete Lego bricks. The bell sounded, signaling it was lunchtime.

Normally food was foremost in the lanky teenager's mind, but not today. Jeremy hoped to be able to somehow work up the courage to start a conversation with Maria on the way to the lunchroom. Unfortunately, she was surrounded by a group of girls who wanted to check out the new kid on the block. *A princess and her entourage.*

*On to Plan B. Wait, there is no plan B. I better come up with one, quickly.* He decided the best idea was to sit as close as possible in order to hear any conversation.

The table where Maria and her admirers sat was full. Jeremy detected an opening at the table behind Maria. He slid his tray onto the table and his rear into the seat. He glanced around to see who shared his dining quarters. *Looks like I'm having a sophomoric moment today.* He grinned at the thought, and the sophomores at his table, thinking he was smiling at them, grinned back.

*I'm going to get grief about this from my fellow seniors.* His attention was suddenly riveted on the events occurring behind him. He recognized Brian Witt's voice, and the vulgar claim Witt had made that morning in the locker room echoed in Jeremy's ears. *It appears the clown has gotten his cue and is now coming onto the stage.*

Witt started his move by striking up a conversation with the girl next to Maria. After some small talk, Brian got down to the nitty-gritty. "What do we have here? This must be the beautiful new girl I've been hearing about." He moved over to stand next to Maria. "I'm Brian Witt, the shining star of the Sumner senior class."

Jeremy thought he was going to puke. *Come on, Maria, put*

*Witt in his place.* It would be unbearable to see her fall for Witt's line of BS. *Go ahead, Maria, make my day.*

Maria continued to chew the bite of food she had already forked into her mouth as she sized up the male beside her.

She finally replied in a tone that was civil but not enthusiastic. "Maria Masterson. Nice to meet you." She turned back to her plate and fished out another forkful of hotdish.

"Perhaps I could take you on a tour of the town and help you get familiar with everything?"

"I'm sorry. I'm busy then."

"Busy then? I didn't even mention a day or time?"

"I guess you might say I'm *always* busy!"

Jeremy wanted to shout for joy.

"I detect a subtle hint that you prefer I buzz off. Your loss." Brian started to slink back to his own table. On the way he threw an insult at Jeremy, but not loud enough for Jeremy to hear over the giggling of the girls at the table behind him. "Hey, Dillon, did you get demoted to sophomore?"

Meantime, back at the ranch dressing, Jeremy was continuing to monitor the conversation behind him. He was a little frustrated because he found out little about the new girl. She seemed to ask lots of questions and get the other girls to do most of the talking. They were invited to talk about their favorite topic, themselves. He wondered if perhaps this conversational technique revealed something about her.

Jeremy went fishing for another bite of food and discovered to his surprise he had cleaned his plate. He didn't remember eating all that food. At first he suspected that someone might have been scoring from his plate. Then he realized that he'd been on autopilot.

What was going on with him? Another song from his dad's collection popped into his head. *It's only love trying to get through. Love? Could it be? Nah. I don't believe in love at first sight.* "Twitterpation is in your imagination" was his mantra as he trudged to his next class. He tried not to hope Maria would be in his American Government class. He didn't succeed, however, on either count.

Spanish class was his next class. Maria was a Spanish name. *Tal vez*, maybe she would occupy a desk in that classroom? But again, there was no sign of the blue dress in his next classroom. There was only one chance left for him.

## Chapter 2

### The Challenge

Jeremy's school day ended with his least favorite class, Physics, featuring stern Mr. Bogue. The kids called him 'Mr. Bogus' behind his back, and he definitely wasn't on anybody's list of the top ten reasons to like high school.

On the way to his final class, Jeremy realized it would soon be time for football practice. Back on the gridiron life would be good again, and maybe he could get his head out of the clouds. They had a tough game against White River on Friday. He needed to have his head on straight if they were going to get a win. *No more thoughts about girls!*

His resolution was broken just seconds later when he strolled through the door of Room 344 and spotted Maria. His heart soared to find her sitting in the seat right behind his. He was so conscious of the way he walked he found it a wonder that he didn't stumble and fall. How could something that he'd done his entire life suddenly become so hard? Trying to be nonchalant, he made his landing at the desk in front of Maria. She had her head in a book again and didn't seem to notice.

His mind raced to come up with an introductory line, but the bell won the contest. Too bad this was Mr. Bogue's class; no way could he talk to her during class. He didn't want to be the recipient of that infamous stare, which popular rumor had it would send a grizzly bear scrambling for safety.

Mr. Bogue pointed out a paragraph in their textbook that basically said all scientists believe in evolution. Maria raised her hand.

Mr. Bogue's eyebrow went up, which meant both of them in this case since they were grown together like two unmowed lawns. "Yes, miss?"

"Could you tell me exactly what they mean by the term 'evolution'?"

Jeremy turned around in amazement. He studied the pretty figure behind him. *She doesn't have blonde hair. Of course she might color it. If only I had a chance before class, I could have warned her about Mr. Nasty. It is now too late. She is going to find out by personal experience how the science teacher earned his reputation.*

"Ah, Ms. Masterson. Did you, by any chance, transfer in from some remote island in the Pacific? Or more likely from a private school or a home school? I was assuming everyone knew what evolution means."

Maria smiled. "Excuse my ignorance, but I'm just trying to establish whether you're talking about cosmic, chemical, stellar, organic, micro, or macro evolution – the molecule to man theory, also known as Darwin's General theory."

Jeremy stared at Maria. Mr. Bogue glared at Maria, who maintained eye contact with the teacher. "All of the above."

"In that case, I think that statement is totally bogus. There is a petition on the Internet signed by over five hundred scientists who find the theory of macroevolution lacks scientific merit."

Jeremy was jolted. *Did she really say 'bogus'?*

The room was normally quiet during Mr. Bogue's classes, but right now it was a sound vacuum. Jeremy was torn between wanting to continue to look at that vision of loveliness or return his eyes to the front of the room where he potentially could watch Mt. Saint Bogus erupt.

He chose the latter. The idea of throwing his body between the girl and the man who was staring daggers at her entered his head.

Finally, the instructor got himself under control and let out a very small laugh. "It appears that this is a case of mistaken identity. You've mistaken me for someone who cares what you think. If you care to follow up on this conversation and tell me about your five hundred crackpots, Ms. Masterson, try me outside of class. We need to get busy learning *science*." He retreated to the chalkboard and began writing. The members of the class exchanged glances.

*This is unbelievable. Someone actually challenged Bogus and lived to tell about it.* Jeremy snuck one last peek at Maria's face. Her smile had been replaced by a straight face, but certainly not one contorted by humiliation or defeat. *I like that face – a lot.*

Jeremy refocused his attention to the front where his teacher finished writing on the board and turned to face the class. There was a face he had never liked; now he liked it even less. Mr. Bogus was a legend at their school. His house was usually targeted by egg slingers on Halloween night. Some jokester had asked the eternal question in a new form. Which came first the house or the egg? Jeremy suffered a little guilt at laughing over someone's misfortune, but maybe Mr. Bogue deserved it. According to school folklore, he had been throwing eggs on

people's faces for a couple of decades.

Jeremy endured the lecture. He felt Maria's presence behind him the whole time. *I'm going to introduce myself to Maria right after class.* As the minutes remaining in class ticked down to zero, Jeremy got everything ready for quick action. The bell rang, and he sprang up like a pogo stick. "Hi, Maria. I'm Jeremy Dillon."

"Hi. Nice to meet you. Sorry, I don't have time to chat, but I have to run – literally. I'm on the cross-country team and can't be late my first day."

The last words were delivered like a rushing waterfall as she stepped around Jeremy and scurried for the door. Jeremy watched her disappear into the hall.

*Strike one. Is cross-country really the pressing matter she made it out to be or just a convenient excuse? Speaking of sports, I have to run myself. I've got football practice.* He put his wheels in motion and shifted gears to hurry up the pace. He dwelled upon the events of the day as he zigzagged in and out of hallway traffic. *Who is this strange new girl who wears a dress and questions Mr. Bogue about evolution? There's so much to find out. There's nothing like a good mystery to make life interesting, especially when that mystery is totally female.*

Jeremy wasn't allowed to quit thinking of Maria. She was the main topic of conversation in the locker room. Another football player from Jeremy's science class retold the events of the past hour to a captive audience. It was clear Jeremy wasn't the only one wanting to know more about Maria.

When the conversation evolved from science class to normal locker room chatter about the female human anatomy, Jeremy made a quick exit. He had heard that type of talk a zillion times, and it always bothered him. Today, however, they were talking about Maria, and he couldn't tolerate it. He had to leave before he punched somebody.

He wasn't quite dressed when he stepped outside. After pulling his football jersey over his shoulder pads and putting on his cleats, he jogged over to the footballs lying on the ground. None of the other players were out yet so he recruited a student manager to warm him up.

It felt good to be on the gridiron where he felt confident and in control. *No thinking about girls out here.* An errant throw from the student manager caused his glance to go to the side where he noticed the cross-country team stepping onto the track. It wasn't hard to spot her cascade of long brown hair. It was even harder to stop thinking about it.



The coaches and some players were on the field now. The rest of the football team was straggling out of the locker room door when a whistle sounded, prodding the stragglers to quicken their pace. The team broke into lines for warm-up drills. Jeremy, as one of the captains, was in front of the ranks.

His attention wasn't totally riveted on jumping jacks and stretching. He got a glimpse of a perfect figure jogging around the oval that surrounded the football field. *I don't know if she's good at cross-country, but she certainly looks good in running shorts and has a beautiful stride.*

After the warm-up was over, the teams broke into offensive and defensive units. It was time for a red zone scrimmage.

The coach called a play for the offense. Jeremy took his place behind the center and surveyed the defense, which shifted so that the play the coach had called would run into the strength of the defense. He had the authority to audible out of a called play, but that wouldn't work against his own teammates since they knew the audible signals.

He decided to improvise. He turned and made a motion to his running back to convey to him that he was supposed to just carry out a fake. The running back nodded his understanding. After taking the snap from center, Jeremy pretended to tuck the ball into the midsection of the running back, who carried out his assignment as the play had been designed.

The defense flowed to where they thought the play was going. Jeremy in the meantime had hidden the ball behind his back. He broke to the left as the defensive end and linebacker on that side were breaking to the middle to help stop the ball carrier. By the time they realized that Jeremy had the ball, he was already outside containment and headed to the end zone.

Only one defender stood between him and the goal line, Brian Witt. Jeremy knew that Witt would love to put a big hit on him. He angled toward the sidelines, making it appear he was running out of bounds on purpose. Witt was flying to get there before Jeremy reached the no-contact zone. Just before he reached the white chalk line, Jeremy slammed on the brakes. Witt couldn't do the same. His momentum carried him past Jeremy's center, and he only had the chance to try an arm tackle.

As Witt reached out his arm to grab the ball carrier's leg, Jeremy forcefully reached out and thrust down on Witt's helmet, sending the wannabe tackler tumbling to the ground. Jeremy danced down the sidelines and high stepped into the end zone. A roar of approval went up from the offensive players. Some

cheering even reverberated from the cross-country team members who had been stretching in that vicinity. Jeremy glanced to see if Maria appreciated his beautiful stiff-arm and run. She was looking in the other direction and had apparently missed everything.

As Jeremy trotted back to where the offense would huddle again, a consoling thought hit him. *I just made Witt look like a clown.* He wanted to taunt the defender and let him know the stiff-arm was for Maria. He fought back the temptation. Coach Blakely frowned on his players talking smack, especially in practice. Coach wanted the aggression directed at the opponent and not at teammates. Someone else got in a jab instead. An anonymous voice from the offensive side suggested Witt needed to put his jockstrap back on.

\* \* \*

Jeremy's dad was preparing dinner when his son arrived. The young man took a deep sniff. "Umm. Smells good!" He reached out his arm and joined his father's in a special father-son armshake that had been a tradition for many years.

"How did school go today?"

Jeremy thought of the encounter at the locker, literature class, lunchtime, science class, and the football field. He said with absolutely no doubt, "It was a very interesting day."

"Anything you care to elaborate on?"

"Nah, just kids' stuff."

They ate in the family room while watching *Monday Night Football*. By the time the game ended, he had done all of his homework except read one chapter from *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Their night ended the same way it always did.

"Good night. Love you, Dad."

"Love you too, son."

Jeremy retreated to his bedroom, plopped into bed, opened the novel and read the prologue. "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." *Hopefully this wouldn't be the worst of novels.*

His mind wandered from the book to his dad's question about school. He was anxious to go to school the next day. Jeremy couldn't wait to be back at his locker. Unbelievably, he was even looking forward to literature and science class.

When he finished the required chapter, Jeremy switched off the light. As he passed from daydreaming to dreaming, his last conscious thoughts were about his wardrobe for the next day. *I don't have a thing to wear.*

## Chapter 3

### And on the Second Day

Jeremy's alarm blasted on at the usual time. Normally he tapped the snooze button before he finally dragged himself out of bed, but today, just as he reached for the plastic procrastinator, Maria's image popped into his head. He pressed the off button and pushed himself to a sitting position. A song started playing in his head, *"When I woke up this morning, you were on my mind."* The last thought from the night before muscled its way into his consciousness. *What am I going to wear to school?*

He turned on the light in his bedroom and opened his closet. The unofficial uniform at school was jeans, T-shirt and tennis shoes. Official was going to be ignored today. Jeremy wasn't sure about the phrase "clothes make the man", but he was hoping that clothes did make the girl – notice the man.

He grabbed a pair of Dockers and a matching plaid shirt. He looked longingly at his Adidas but instead lifted a pair of penny loafers. "Sorry, guys," he said to his sneakers.

After a quick shower and a long visit to the bathroom mirror where he donned his chosen ensemble and brushed his hair until it was perfect, he grabbed his backpack and whistled his way down the stairs to the kitchen.

His father, sitting at the table reading the morning newspaper, looked up. "Morning. What's up with the fancy duds?"

"Not really fancy, Dad. Just a little *neater* than usual today. It's nice doing something different for a change."

"Or for a girl?"

"Jeez, Dad. I don't think girls are impressed by nice clothes. I thought since I'm a senior this year and my days of being a kid are almost over, I should start acting more mature."

His father laughed. "You're the most mature teenager I ever saw. Speaking of change, I see you prefer I change the subject. How was football practice yesterday?"

The two shared breakfast and conversation about the thing that brought them closer together than anything, sports. Jeremy's dad hadn't been good enough to be a varsity athlete, and it burned within him to have a son who could make up for his shortcomings. Much to his credit, he hadn't pushed Jeremy but rather just encouraged him to participate.

The two had spent endless hours playing catch with a baseball, playing one-on-one hoops in the driveway, throwing footballs at a tire swing, and lifting weights in their garage. Dad was Jeremy's biggest fan. The reverse was also true. Jeremy would run through a brick wall for his father.

Jeremy's father had made sure that success didn't go to his son's head. The virtue of humility had been drilled into his head along with other tidbits of wisdom such as 'look the ball into your hands' and 'never give up the baseline.'

After a few moments of breakfast bliss, Jeremy looked at the clock. "Gotta go!"

"So early? Usually you don't leave for fifteen more minutes."

Jeremy's face turned red as he searched in vain for a response.

"OK, OK, you can tell me about the girl whenever you're ready! Have a good day." He gave his son a big hug, another family tradition. In starting this tradition the elder Dillon had made clear his intentions. If anything ever happened to one of them, the other one would be left with a lasting memory of that farewell hug.

Jeremy was almost out the door when his father shouted to him. "Want to go fishing on Saturday morning? We'll be back in time for some college football on TV."

"Sounds good, Dad! Bye!"

Jeremy strolled to his Saturn, a dependable car, though definitely not a chick magnet. *What do I care? Who wants a girl that's impressed by a pile of nuts and bolts?* He thought about fishing as he started up the engine. When he and his dad wanted to get away from the city, they headed to isolated fishing holes where often they just drowned worms for several hours. Even that was fun, and when they did catch some fish, it was frosting on the cake. He enjoyed just being with his father. Thoughts of Maria pushed their way back into his consciousness. *Could Maria possibly enjoy fishing?*

He arrived at school early to wait near his locker. When Maria showed up, he would make his move. After waiting for five minutes, Jeremy was already feeling like a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs. It seemed like he'd already combed his hair and rearranged his books ten times. *What can I do for an encore to avoid being arrested for loitering?*

The sound of a female voice just down the hallway captured his attention. "Good morning, Maria."

This was the big moment. He turned in the direction where his audio compass indicated he would find Maria. He glanced to the

left and right and everywhere, but he saw no sign of her. He was confused. Then he saw Maria, Maria Sanderval. *I forgot there were other girls named Maria.*

His heartbeat and breathing returned to normal. *What's up with that?* He was more nervous than if he was shooting free throws at the end of a tie game with 3000 people screaming. *Get a grip, dude! Be cool, calm, collec—*

Down the hallway, today wearing a dark green dress, came a combination of Mt. Rainer, the Columbia River, and the Wenatchee Forest all rolled into one. He couldn't take his eyes off her – until she looked his way. At that point in time, Jeremy decided his shoe needed some attention and bent over to pretend his laces needed to be tied.

*Oops. No shoelaces in my penny loafers. OK. Smooth recovery now. Flick away some imaginary dust.* By the time the good old "fixing the shoe trick" was completed, Maria had arrived at her locker. *My big chance is finally here. No fumbles today.*

*Isn't this the point in a western movie where the guy bites on a bullet for courage? I don't have a bullet, but maybe a number two lead pencil would do the trick. Nah. I'd probably bite right through the pencil and wind up getting black all over my teeth, inflicting damage to the inside of my mouth, and ruining a perfectly good pencil. I'll just have to tough this one out.*

His penny loafers started moving, one in front of the other, until he stood almost right behind the green-clad female. *Now what do I do? Should I tap her on the shoulder or cough?*

He hadn't yet decided what to do when suddenly she closed her locker and headed in his direction. He was too startled to move, and she wasn't aware he was standing in her way. When she saw a big body on a collision course with her own, she slammed on her brakes with an audible squeal. She glanced up to see who owned the tall frame she had nearly run into.

"Sorry," was the only thing to come out of Jeremy's mouth. *That was a good start. Only one word, but it was a two-syllable one!*

"No problem. It was just as much my fault. If you don't like my driving, just stay off the sidewalk!"

"So...um...how did you like your first day of school here?" *That's a lame question, one that everybody is probably asking her, but at least the ball is over in her court. Maybe she'll deliver a lengthy response, giving me an opportunity to get my wits about me so I can say something more intelligent.*

"It is tough moving into a new school my senior year, but it

went OK."

"Yeah. I bet it was. I mean...it is. I mean...I've been here my whole life. I don't know what it's like to even move to a new house, much less a new school."

"Take my word for it that moving isn't a picnic. Lots of work involved."

Jeremy didn't have a reply. His mind was going around about a thousand miles an hours, but the gearshift was in neutral.

"Well, I better get down to homeroom," she finally said.

"Room 222."

"How did you know that? Oh, wait! You're the guy who gave me directions yesterday!"

"Guilty as charged. I hope you didn't get lost. If I'd had more time, I'd have printed something off of Mapquest but... All seriousness aside, I felt a little guilty I didn't offer to walk you down there so I knew you made it without a problem."

"Wow, that's sweet of you!" She gave him a smile that, coupled with the word sweet, made his heart start galloping like the proverbial Russian racehorse.

"Actually, I would have, but I was late returning to study hall and really didn't have the time. Today, however, I have enough time to escort you and make sure you don't make a wrong left turn at the Black Forest and end up in Albuquerque – if that's OK with you?"

She laughed. He wondered if she was familiar with his old Bugs Bunny line. She didn't answer immediately. A mini cloud came over her face for just an instant, but then the sunshine of her smile came out and chased it away. "Why not? Better safe than sorry, I always say."

"My dad says that one a lot."

"Really? Are you and your dad pretty close?"

"He's my best friend. Has been my whole life, as far back as I can remember."

"That's really cool."

"How about you and your dad?"

The mini cloud returned and stayed a little longer this time. "My father passed away this summer. That's why we moved here. My mom decided she just couldn't stand all the bad memories. She got a better job offer, and here we are."

"I'm so sorry. Not that you're here. I mean about your dad."

"Thanks. Anyway, he and I were very close, especially during his fight with cancer. We talked for hours. My mom and I are really close too. They say that there are no closer friends than two

soldiers in battle. My mom and I went through a figurative war for almost two years. I wish we could have gotten this close without losing my dad, but *c'est la vie*."

Normally when Jeremy heard that phrase he joked by replying, "La vie. What else do you want me to say?" However, this wasn't a situation for joking of any kind, especially his lame joke. "I never knew my mother. She died when I born."

Maria pulled up. She almost looked like she was going to cry. "I'm so sorry. I can't even imagine what it would have been like growing up without having either my mom or dad."

They resumed their journey, weaving in and out of the students who gathered in small clumps to get their preschool dosage of gossip. Of course, Jeremy and Maria had no clue they were the topic of conversation after passing by.

They reached the portal of Room 222 much too soon in Jeremy's opinion. "By the way, there's a question I've wanted to ask you."

Her eyes narrowed. "OK, go for it."

"Do you always wear a dress to school? I like it, but nobody wears dresses to school here."

A look of relief flashed across her face. "Not always, but I do frequently. I don't try to be like other people. You seem to be overdressed yourself. Do you always wear Dockers and dress shirts?"

*Only if you want me to.* "Maybe I like to march to the beat of my own drummer too."

"Ahh. A little Thoreau. I'm impressed."

"Really? If a little Thoreau impresses you, come to the game Friday and watch me make some big throws? I'm the quarterback."

"Oh, I should have known you were a jock. I'm more impressed by a little Thoreau. But I probably should show some school spirit and show up to support my new school, huh? I've always been a cheerleader in the past, but I got here too late for that."

"Bummer that you won't be a cheerleader."

"I'm running cross-country, and I have some responsibilities more important than cheerleading anyway."

The first bell sounded. Jeremy had three minutes to get to the other side of the school. "I'll see you in Lit class."

Jeremy hastened his pace to avoid being on the receiving end of more verbal abuse from his study hall teacher. He replayed his conversation with Maria in his head. *Did I score any points? She*

*did say she might come to the football game. There is some reason for optimism. All in all, I have to be a bit pleased with myself. I made a plan and carried it out. I was a little less nimble of speech than I wanted, but hopefully that problem will go away with time.*

The first three periods dragged on. Jeremy took a break from his constant thinking of Maria to consider time. *There must be a scientific theory to explain why time goes so slowly when you want it to go fast.* After PE Jeremy showered quickly. He wanted to spend every possible second he could in Maria's presence.



## Chapter 4

### The Invitation

When Jeremy reached the English classroom, he spotted the green dress in the front row immediately. He would now make his grand entrance. But before he could arrive at Maria's desk, she started up a conversation with her neighbor behind her. *She didn't even see me!*

He trudged on to his own desk. As he was sitting down, he saw Maria give a little hand wave in his direction. *Is she waving at me?* He looked to see if she was waving at one of his neighbors, but he saw no evidence of that. He looked back at Maria, but now she was facing forward. *What a moron! She probably thought I was ignoring her. I blew it again.*

When the bell rang for lunch, Jeremy was ready to make another move. He had to get to Maria's side before all the girls got a chance to surround her again. He sprinted to the front of the class at the first sound and was at her desk before Maria stood up. "Would you like to sit with me at lunch? I'd love to hear more about your dad."

Jeremy couldn't help but notice that there was some hesitation in her eyes and mouth. Much to his relief, she answered, "OK."

The majority of students hurried to the lunchroom to get a good place in line, but Jeremy and Maria strolled along leisurely. He really wasn't interested in food today. If he had to choose between looking into those brown eyes or eating, especially cafeteria food, the choice was a no-brainer. Today he could have both, and he was pumped. His joy was short-lived, however. In an attempt to make conversation, he brought up his frustration with *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Maria looked at him with that face of mental pain that he had first noticed in the morning.

"Oh, my gosh! *A Tale of Two Cities* is one of my favorite books. This will be my third time reading it."

*Open size eight mouth, insert size eleven Adidas. How am I going to escape from this quicksand I just blundered into?* "Maybe it just starts out a little slow, and it'll pick up as I figure out what's going on?" He glanced over at Maria to see if his damage control

attempt had any impact.

"I promise you, Jerry, if you give it a chance, you will find it a wonderful piece of literature."

He winced. *How do I correct her without making her feel like an idiot?* "My name is actually Jeremy. A lot of my friends just call me JD, you know for "Jeremy Dillon". And I promise you, Maria, I'll try to keep an open mind with this book. Maybe I'll need a little help in figuring out its redeeming qualities. Perhaps you could share your insight and understanding with me?"

"For sure, JD." She pronounced the last two syllables in a way that made his heart soar.

He'd heard that name thousands of times, but never had it moved him like this. "So you come from South Dakota, huh?"

"Yes. Ever been there?"

"I have. Dad and I have done quite a bit of traveling together in the summers. We visited Mt. Rushmore and the Badlands and"

"Wall Drug."

"Yeah! How'd you know?"

"Same tourist spots that everybody hits. And if you made it to the eastern part of the state you maybe stopped at the—"

He chimed in so they said in unison, "Corn Palace." They both laughed. *Our first laugh together.*

"And that's about the extent of what people know about South Dakota from traveling through on I-90. The Corn Palace is only about sixty-five miles from my old home."

"Do you miss it?"

"Well, sure. I lived there my whole life. But it is beautiful here. I can't look at Mt. Rainier enough. It's like trying to quench a deep thirst, and I can't. Every time I look at it, it seems different."

"Enjoy it while you can. When the rainy season hits, you won't see it for long stretches."

"That's what I hear. One of the kids told me if you can't see Mt. Rainier, it's because it's raining. If you can see Mt. Rainier, it means it is going to rain."

JD nodded. "That's about the size of it. It gets a little depressing sometimes, but you stop thinking about it after a while."

"I'll try to remember that when the time comes. Perhaps you could share your insight and understanding with me on how to cope without sunshine?"

His eyebrows went up. "OK. No problem." *Of course she might have to tell me that the rains have returned because I might not even notice this year.* It seemed like his head had been up in

the clouds since the moment he first laid eyes on her. He was sure that walking in the rain with Maria would bring a totally new way of looking at the daily drizzle, as he referred to it. *I don't see how I would ever be without sunshine with her around.*

"Maria, I was wondering if, perhaps, you'd like to go to a movie or something – sometime?"

"Oh, Jeremy. I'm extremely flattered, but I don't quote-unquote date."

Jeremy's face felt funny. He felt it contorting in strange ways which he couldn't control.

"Jeremy, it's nothing personal. You really do seem like a nice guy. There's just something I have to tell you so you understand why I don't date."

*Oh no! She has some rare disease or something and is going to die.* His heart was now feeling the same contortions his face has gone through. JD couldn't help but notice the pathos in the face of Maria as she gazed at him.

"It's not something I can explain in one sentence, trust me."

Jeremy didn't know what to say so he kept silent.

"If you really want to hang out with me, I do have one suggestion. You could come to church with mother and me. We're trying to find a church, and this week we're trying Calvary Community. If you want to go with us, that would be cool."

"Ch...ch...church?" JD stuttered. He didn't remember ever suffering from a speech impediment before.

Maria nodded.

"But I've never been to church before."

"Really! Well, I'd never been to Sumner High School until yesterday. That didn't stop me."

"Well, yeah, I understand that, but I don't believe in God, and my dad has warned me against church, and...and...."

"I'm not trying to twist your arm. It's just an offer. If you decide you want to go, let me know."

Jeremy was sure that Maria could see the wheels churning in his brain and the tug of war going on in his body.

The bell rang. Maria grabbed her books and got up to depart. "I'll see you in science class."

Jeremy wished they were not in school right now and slaves to that little sound device which directed their steps from one room to another. He didn't want this conversation to end. "Maria, I'll think about church, OK?"

Maria smiled. "No problem." She walked away.

Her retreating figure kept his attention until she was out of

sight. He snapped out of his trance and realized he had to hurry to his next class. *I don't need to add tardy to my current laundry list of troubles.*

To say Jeremy's mind wasn't on his class work the next two periods would have been a candidate for the understatement of the year. He kept envisioning himself sitting beside Maria for a whole hour, or however long church lasted. And then he returned to reality and considered the obstacles. Jeremy's knowledge of church came basically from the few times he had witnessed a scene in a movie or TV show where people were attending church. *What will Dad think and say? Will I have to ask permission to go?*

*I'd meet Maria's mother; that's a special thing.* He had a big appreciation for mothers since he'd never had one. His thoughts often dwelt on what it would be like to have one. How different would his life be? *But why would anyone who didn't believe in God go to church? But, on the other hand, how can I pass up an opportunity to be with Maria? On the other hand, how can I betray my father by going to a place he has warned me about? Arghhh! There are too many hands involved here!*

The internal struggle was almost too much for him to handle. *I wish I was at football practice, running wind sprints that caused the agony of lactic acid buildup and lack of oxygen to make me forget this emotional pain which is driving me bananas.* But before he'd have that opportunity, he'd have to go through science class with Maria so close to him he could turn around and touch her. *In a way I wish she'd never moved here.* Immediately after that idea, he thought of the term 'growing pains.' He remembered the aching in his legs during the years he was gaining height quite rapidly. Some nights the aching had kept him awake. *Maybe I'm going through some type of emotional growing pains right now; a necessary evil for reaching the goal of manhood perhaps?*

When Jeremy reached his desk for science class, he was almost relieved that Maria was talking to the girl behind her. She seemed to have made lots of friends at school already. The term "friend" was very vague. JD wondered how many people he knew at school. He prided himself on knowing so many kids, but were they really friends? He really didn't have any close friends at school who he shared special things with. His dad had really been the only close buddy he had ever had. The other people were really just acquaintances. He had never gotten beneath the surface with anyone his own age. *I wonder if Maria makes friends or just acquaintances.*

His thought processes were interrupted by a pencil hitting the floor. He reached down to retrieve it before spinning in his chair to return it to the damsel in distress who had lost it. Maria smiled and reached out her hand to receive the writing utensil. In making the exchange, the very tips of their fingers met for just an instant. Jeremy felt a hundred volts of pure electricity go through his entire body. The shock of the current seemed to clear the fog in his head.

Just before the final bell rang, Jeremy turned to Maria. "I'll go!"

He was rewarded with a beaming smile, enough to send another shockwave through him. *I wonder if my reaction would register on the Richter scale.* He turned around and noticed Mr. Bogue glaring at him. *Why do I have this juvenile desire to stick my tongue out?*

This was Tuesday. He had four days and parts of two others to fret about his decision. *Dad isn't going to like this one bit.*

*What possible reason does Maria have for not dating? I got a feeling I'm not going to like that one. Why does life have to be so complicated?* His mind wandered from science class to English class. This was the best of times; this was the worst of times. He'd never been so happy when he got that smile from Maria and knew he would be with her on Sunday. However, he felt yucky when he considered the possibility of clashing with his father.

His reverie was brought to an abrupt halt when he became conscious that Mr. Bogue had asked him a question. *Why does this always happen to me?* He sat there with a blank expression on his face, one that matched the state of his brain at that moment.

"Were you paying attention, Mr. Dillon?"

"Not very well."

"If you don't pay attention, you will end up paying the piper. Just being a smart kid isn't going to cut it in my class. I hope you realize it's not far from the penthouse to the outhouse."

In any other class, Jeremy's fellow students would have laughed out loud at the last remark. In Mr. Bogue's class they just laughed deep inside and mentally marked another cipher on the Mr. Bogus side of the students versus Bogue score sheet. It was possible, if you didn't count the house eggings, that Mr. Bogue had never been scored on. *Maybe Maria put a cipher up on the students' side yesterday.*

The final bell sounded, and it was time for football practice again. JD had barely cleared the door when he heard his name spoken quietly. *Oh, this is going too far. Now I'm hearing her voice*

*in my head.* Then it dawned on him that she was right behind him and could have actually spoken to him. He put his engine in neutral and turned to find out.

"Jeremy, one thing I wanted to say, just to make sure about something. I'm happy that you want to come to church with me on Sunday, but I want to make one request. Please, pretty please, don't get hung up on me. I'd love to be friends with you, but I'm afraid that's all it can be. I'll explain it in detail on Sunday if you still want to go."

JD swallowed hard. *It really is hard to talk with your heart in your throat.* "Don't you have to be running?"

He noticed a touch of sadness come to her face at that remark. "Yes, I do. I just didn't want you to put yourself in a position where you could get hurt. I don't want to hurt you." She looked up into his face, which turned away from hers as he walked away.

*So you don't want to hurt me? Too late! A touch of anger took over and dictated the next few thoughts. How egotistic can she be? Thinking I'm in danger of falling for her. Where does she get off? She is absolutely – absolutely – absolutely right.* He had already fallen for her, and now his hopes were dashed. Thoughts of football practice didn't bring relief. He just wanted to go home and sleep to avoid whatever it was tearing up his insides right now.

The slogan on the locker room wall spoke to him. "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." The sledding was definitely tough right now. *I gotta suck it up and keep going in a forward direction. My classmates, teammates, and community are relying on me. I can't just roll up in a fetal position and pretend I'm making things better.*

Jeremy discovered the mental and physical exertion of football practice caused the sharp pain in his mind and heart to subside to a dull ache.

## Chapter 5

### The Discovery

His father, a college professor, taught a night class, so Jeremy had to dwell with his thoughts alone for a few hours. His mind raced across the spectrum of boy-girl relationships. He also replayed conversations with his father dealing with disappointment.

The most vivid memory came from a chat after his team lost a heartbreaker in a baseball tournament. Dad had given him a big hug and explained that things don't always go the way we want them to. It doesn't matter what happens to us in life; it is how we respond to what happens. Bad stuff is inevitable. People have to learn to deal with it and keep on going. Death of hope is very similar to the death of a person. We grieve and then the grief gradually goes away as new hopes arise.

*This too shall pass. Just as good things like a championship season are here and gone, the bad things will pass on just the same way. They just seem to stay longer. Hope is a four-letter word, but it is a key ingredient to the recipe of life. What is it like for people who don't have a dad to explain these matters? How do those kids learn to cope with the real world?*

Jeremy realized that it was foolish to put all of one's eggs in the same basket. If the basket were dropped, all of the eggs would be broken. *The same is true of life and hope. All of my fragile hopes shouldn't be placed in a container that's almost as fragile. So perhaps the Maria situation is hopeless. But I still have football season, basketball season and baseball season. But what if I get hurt and can't play sports? Where would my hope lie then? It seems like I need to have lots of eggs and lots of baskets. There's college next year. Life wouldn't be over. And if there's one girl like Maria out there, isn't that evidence there must be even more like her?*

*What's it like for people who have physical problems such as blindness, deafness, inability to walk? And then there are the people who aren't physically attractive, talented, or very smart? Where do all those people find hope that brings meaning and happiness to their time on Earth?*

Jeremy knew he had to complete some more reading in *A Tale of Two Cities*. They were reading about a man who had been

imprisoned for eighteen years for simply being a witness to a crime. *How does a person without physical freedom find the mental freedom to find hope?* All of these heavy thoughts were too much for him to handle alone. *I wish Dad was here to talk to. Or better yet, Maria.*

*And what about church? Do I still want to go, knowing that Maria will never feel about me the way I feel about her? I could enjoy a couple of hours of Maria's charm and not think of the future. Why would I do something Dad won't like? It doesn't make sense to buck Dad's will just for a little pleasure. I'm a little curious about this church thing, but not that curious.*

*What was it like for Dad when my mother died? How did Dad find hope to keep going?* Jeremy had a sudden desire to look at pictures of his mother. He went into the family room and opened up a photo album he had frequently viewed. *What was it like when Mom and Dad first met? How did their relationship go from stranger to sweethearts to spouses? Why did Mom fall in love with Dad and vice versa?*

He stopped suddenly. In one of the pictures of his mother, he noticed a necklace that had escaped his detection in the past. It reminded him of Maria for some reason. *Why? Ah, she has the same thing around her neck, a cross.*

In one of many conversations he shared with his father, Jeremy had learned that the cross was like a good luck charm for superstitious people known as Christians. *So why was his mother wearing one of those things?* This picture was taken just a month before Jeremy was born. *I have a mystery on my hands.*

He put the photo album back in its drawer and sat on the couch, deep in thought. He now understood how his dad had coped with the loss of his wife. He had a baby son to throw his energies into. Jeremy had been his father's hope. No wonder so much love had gone into the relationship with his son. The boy now felt like more responsibility had just been piled on his shoulders. *What would it be like for Dad to lose me? Where would his hope come from then?*

The mystery of the crucifix, along with everything else, was too much for him to deal with. All this thinking made him tired. He ascended to his bedroom, jumped into bed, and resumed reading *A Tale of Two Cities*. He drifted off in the middle of a sentence.

\* \* \*

Jeremy was awakened by the alarm clock performing its



appointed duty, like the bell in a boxing match summoning him to step into the ring called life, where he would be the punching bag of feisty science teachers and girls that didn't want to date. The magnetic pull of Maria was considerably weaker today. He wanted to see her, but he knew it could be painful. He put on his jeans and Adidas. *No sense being different today.*

On the way down the stairs, Jeremy remembered he had gone to sleep before his father returned home. It was a very rare night that the two hadn't communicated with each other. He also remembered the picture of his mother.

"Good morning, Jeremy."

"Morning." Jeremy busied himself getting breakfast.

When Jeremy sat down at the table, Dad finally broke the silence. "You're awfully quiet this morning. Everything OK?"

"I guess."

"I see the Dockers are back in the closet." Jeremy only nodded. "Are you sure there is nothing you want or *need* to talk about?"

Jeremy swallowed. His dad was putting him on the spot. He figured the best way to answer a question you're not sure you want to answer is to ask a question back. "What makes you think I might?"

"Jeremy, I've watched you every day for seventeen years. Your face and body language are both testifying that something isn't right."

*Great! I thought a person didn't have to testify against himself.* "OK, so there are a couple of things on my mind. There's this new girl at school." He stopped.

"OK. Am I supposed to guess what difference that makes? Is she beating you up for your lunch money?"

"Funny, Dad. Actually she's on the football team, plays quarterback and is better than I am."

"Don't forget I'm the comedian in the family. Why don't you give it to me straight? No reason to be embarrassed."

"You want it straight? OK. First, you give it to me – *straight*. Tell me about that cross around Mom's neck in her picture."

His dad's eyes widened. "Where did that come from? Those pictures haven't changed in eighteen years. Why are you asking this question now?"

Jeremy rolled his eyes. His dad was playing the same answer a question with a question game. He looked at the clock. At the rate this conversation was going, it would be time for lunch before they got to the point. "You know, Dad, I really have to get going."

Perhaps we can resume this conversation tonight."

"Sure."

"OK, I'm outta here."

He gave his dad their customary hug, but he felt strange doing it. There seemed to be something not quite right, and it didn't feel good. One more thing in his life messed up. He bounded up the stairs into the bathroom to finish preparing for school. *Life is full of junk that's a pain in the neck. And the stuff accumulates as I get older.*

## Chapter 6

### And on the Third Day

Driving to school was difficult for Jeremy. Normally he faced the challenge of school with the same spirit and fire in his eye that he had on the football field. Today he felt like a deflated balloon. The scene of getting turned down by Maria kept playing in his head. *Rejection sucks. People get rejected for positions in sports, love, careers, and whatever. Rejection is one of those speed bumps in life that everyone has to learn to deal with. I can't get upset at Maria for rejecting me. I'm going to take this like a man.*

As he was driving by the school on the way to the parking lot, a bright yellow car he'd never seen before caught his attention. The passenger side occupant exiting from the vehicle stuck out as much as the yellow paint. The dress and hair were unmistakable. He hadn't even reached school yet, and already he'd seen her. His first impulse was to park hurriedly and run to reach his locker before Maria finished her visit to the lockers. He caught himself. *Hello! Try to maintain a little male dignity here.* He forced himself to slow down and tried to put on an air of coolness as he strolled into the school.

Their paths didn't cross during the day. Despite his resolution to not let it happen, he approached the English classroom with a pounding heart. Maria wasn't in her seat. She didn't arrive in the ensuing moments before the bell rang either. He felt weird inside. *It is like the absence of sunshine at a picnic. Everything is dreary. There's no way that discussing a dreary novel is going to pick me up from the funk I'm in right now. Where is she? She has to be at school. Has she dropped this class to avoid me?* He stewed about that question for the rest of the day.

Science class came and with it the end of the mystery. She was sitting in her desk when he walked in. At least now he knew exactly how he would start a conversation.

"Where were you during English class?"

"I had a doctor's appointment this morning. I hurt my knee last night in cross-country and needed to have it checked out right away."

"Is it OK?"

"No major damage. I just sprained it. The doctor said to lay off the running for a few days, and then I should be back to normal."

"Cool." Jeremy studied her ensemble for today, a black skirt with a white blouse. Again she looked like two million dollars.

"You're back to casual dress, I see."

*She did notice.* He looked down and noticed the book on her desk. It was titled *The Myth of Modern Dating Methods*. He pointed at the book. "So, is this why you don't date?"

She broke into the most beautiful laugh he had ever heard.

"OK, what's so funny, Maria?"

"This book isn't about social dating, you know, boy-girl stuff. It's about the technique of determining the age of rocks and fossils."

*What kind of girl is this? Most girls are reading romance stuff, if they read at all, and she's reading a scientific publication.* He didn't get a chance to pursue the conversation because the bell sounded.

\* \* \*

After class, JD escorted Maria to the door. "Have you decided about Sunday?" Maria asked.

*For not wanting to date, she sure is persistent about this church venture. She seems to really want me to go with her. I'm getting mixed signals here.* "I'm still thinking about it. I guess you don't have to run off today."

Maria laughed again. "No, I don't. But I believe you do. Football calls!"

"Trying to get rid of me, huh?"

"I wouldn't want the entire school mad at me for keeping their star quarterback away from practice."

"You have a point there. Don't want you starting off on the wrong foot. See you later." He realized he had to pull himself away. It was almost like Maria exerted a force of gravity that was tugging on him. *It ought to be against the law to be that beautiful.*

\* \* \*

Jeremy was driving home after practice when he remembered the conversation awaiting him at home. *I really didn't know what to tell Dad about Maria. Actually I don't know anything at all for sure, except I'm off balance. What kind of countermove can I make to get my equilibrium back?* And deep down inside him the question remained. Did he really want to get his balance back or was he enjoying this episode of emotional vertigo?

His dad was putting the finishing touches on dinner when JD strolled in. They shared their ceremonial armshake.

"Hungry?"

"Do bears sleep in the woods? Do ducks waddle? Does—"

"All right! I get the picture. Meal fit for a wolf coming up in two shakes of a lamb's tail."

"Sheesh, Dad. Mixing your metaphors a little bit there, aren't you?"

"Maybe you can put a cork on your critique of my language long enough to shake the salad?"

"I'm not sure I can ignore your murdering of the English language." Jeremy had to dodge quickly to avoid a potholder Frisbee whizzing towards his chest. "After I finish shaking the salad, did you want me to shake the lamb's tail, too?" Dad laughed at that one. Things were almost normal between them.

Jeremy took a deep whiff. "So what's causing that awesome smell from the oven?"

"Garlic bread and lasagna."

"Score!" bellowed Jeremy. He loved lasagna, but normally his dad never prepared it because it was time-consuming. He usually had to get his lasagna fix at Olive Garden. *This is a special treat. Wait a second. Am I being bribed? Maybe "bribe" is too strong a word. How does sweet-talked fit? It really does seem that Dad is taking steps to smooth over a bumpy situation in advance. I better be on the alert.*

They dwelt on small talk during their meal. Jeremy considered it a warm-up before the big game. There was an air of expectancy in the room.

Jeremy cleaned his plate for the second time. He contemplated trying for a third. "Anything for dessert?"

"Not much. Just a little cake...and some whipped cream...and some strawberries."

That was all he needed to hear. All thoughts of a third plateful of lasagna and salad went by the wayside. Strawberry shortcake was his favorite dessert. No way he was stuffing himself with other delights and not leaving enough room for the sweet stuff. *Definitely sweet-talking is the appropriate word now. Dad is buttering me up for something.*

Two pieces of cake drowned in strawberries and engulfed by real whipped cream vanished down the seventeen-year-old mouth, sometimes dubbed the human vacuum cleaner by his dad. He was now officially stuffed to the gills.

"Get enough to eat?"

Jeremy groaned. "I ate so much I don't think I'll want to eat tomorrow."

"Yeah, right. That'll be the day. You'll probably be back down here snacking before bedtime, Hollow Leg."

"That's Mr. Hollow Leg to you!"

"Maybe we can just leave the dishes and retire to the living room?"

"Sure." *The fireworks are about to begin. Time to strap on my seatbelt.*

Jeremy and his father sat down on the couch. They looked at each other for a minute. His dad broke the silence with another attempt at cartoon humor.

"Meanwhile, back in Frostbite Falls, our heroes Rocky and Bullwinkle had been left hanging over the Falls. Things look bleak for the twosome as Natasha and Boris gleefully do the wave at the bottom as Natasha says—"

Jeremy frantically signaled a time-out.

"What? You don't like Moose and Squirrel?"

"Can we just get to the point? I have homework, and we still need to clean the kitchen and—"

"OK. I get the hint. The big question is who is going to go first?"

"It appears you're not chomping at the bit to talk, so I'll answer your question. You see, this new girl is absolutely gorgeous." He stressed every syllable in "absolutely".

"That's nice, Jeremy, but what does that have to do with your mother, or the price of rice in Brazil?"

*Dad just can't quit trying to be the funny guy, even in a serious conversation.* "Well, like I said, she is about the prettiest girl I ever saw and—"

His impatient father resorted to sign language. He issued a circular motion of his hand to urge his son to push his thoughts out of the rut.

Then the words came tumbling out like they were going over Frostbite Falls. "And I asked her for a date and she said she doesn't date and then she said if I want to spend some non-date time with her I could—"

"Whoa, Nelly! You wanna run that by me again – in slow motion? Or maybe leave gaps between words so it doesn't sound like one giant word?"

Jeremy repeated his words more slowly.

"I still don't see the big deal—"

"She wants me to go to church with her this Sunday!"

Mr. Dillon looked as if he had just been kicked in the shin. "Church?"

"Yeah. Anyway, that's what started this whole thing. Last night I got out the pictures of Mom, and I noticed that she was wearing a cross. Now it's your turn. What's up with that?"

"Now the fog is clearing. Well, I guess it's time you heard the whole story. I tried to keep this from you, and maybe that was a mistake."

"Keep what from me? That my mother believed in God, and you were teaching me that was BS?"

"Hold on, son. Let me start at the beginning. And don't judge me till you walk a mile in my moccasins, OK?"

"Fine. You tell the story, and I'll *try* not to interrupt."

"I fell in love with a beautiful secretary in the school where I worked. I was able to get her to like me, but she said we could never be anything more than friends because she would only date someone she could marry. The hang-up was that she was a Christian and wouldn't marry an unbeliever. She had a passage in her Bible that said something about being unequally yoked with a non-believer. I didn't want to lose her. I became a Christian as a result, and she consented to date me. We were both able to fall completely in love at that point and decided to marry."

"We got pregnant and life was very good. It remained that way until that fateful day when you entered the world and she suffered complications which took her life. I prayed for three solid days that she would recover, but she still died. The most wonderful woman in the whole world was dead, and God didn't lift a finger to stop it. I decided there couldn't be a God. How could a loving and kind God let your mother die? She didn't deserve it. I didn't deserve it. You didn't deserve it."

Jeremy had never seen his father get so emotional. The tears were poised on the rims of his eyes, but he refused to let them fall. He brushed them away with his hand before gravity caused them to splash on the carpet.

"I'm not quite sure why I didn't tell you. I guess I just didn't want you to know I'd once believed in God. Maybe when that decision was made, I was a little messed up. Definitely I had some guilt about her death because I was the one who got her pregnant."

At this point Jeremy broke in. "And I've always felt guilty because I was the one who caused her to die." Now he was close to tears as well.

"I couldn't and I didn't blame you. And I didn't want to blame

myself. How could I live with that? But I could and did blame God. But how can you blame someone who doesn't exist? I just walked away from the whole thing and swore that you would never believe in that myth. So now you know the whole story, and I can quit hiding it."

"I don't know what to say."

Paul shrugged. "What did you tell Miss Wonderful about going to church with her?"

"I said I'd think about it. I wanted to talk to you before I gave an answer."

"I don't think it's a good idea. I think you'd only be setting yourself up for some pain."

"Because I might get rejected by her, or because I might end up becoming a Christian?"

"I guess I worry about both."

"I don't know what to feel about that, Dad. It's a little insulting that you chose not to provide me with the opportunity to make my own decision in these matters. And it is a little bit hurtful you chose to withhold something from me that apparently was very important to my mom."

"I don't know what else to say."

"So what am I going to do, Dad?"

"Well, I think you're going to have to decide this one for yourself. You're almost a man. I need to start trusting you with decisions you're going to have to live with for the rest of your life. It's not easy letting go of the desire to keep your life on the perfect track, but I'm afraid I have to do it for your sake. I gave you my input on the matter, and that's where I leave it. You make the decision, and both of us will learn to adjust to the consequences."

They both sat in silence for a couple of minutes. "Why don't you go do your homework? I'll take care of the dishes."

"Are you sure?"

Paul got up from the recliner. "Yep. I'm sure."

Jeremy got up too and walked over to his father and the two did their armshake, maintaining contact longer than usual. "Love you, Dad."

"I love you, Jeremy. And please forgive me if I was wrong in keeping silent."

"You were only doing what you thought was right. You can't fault a man for that."

Jeremy slowly trudged up the stairs. His mind was still analyzing the conversation with his dad.

*Why would I go up against the advice of my father? The best*



*response is to just say no. That's what I'll do. Just say no. But what would my mother have counseled me to do? She would have probably said yes, but I'm going to go with Dad on this one.*

Having made the choice for the next day, it was time that he focused on his homework. He shut out all the distractions the best he could. Finally, he was able to shut his homework and go to sleep. He fell into unconsciousness with the words repeating in his head. *Just say no.*

## Chapter 7

### And on the Fourth Day

Jeremy robotically went through all the motions to prepare for school. His heart was heavy. He was going to say no, but the thought of long dark hair and the music of her laughter and those eyes, which he found totally indescribable, all silently argued against his decision. He thought that if Maria asked him to run through a brick wall, he would try it. But then again his dad would advise him against that effort. It really was his dad's advice that was the deciding factor here. Jeremy dallied longer than usual and entered the kitchen shortly before he would have to leave for school.

"No breakfast this morning?" Paul questioned over his newspaper.

"Nah. I'm not hungry today."

"I'm going to get my ice skates!"

"What are you talking about?"

"I always said that hell would freeze over before you ever turned down food. I was going to draw a few figure eights on the ice."

Jeremy got a sudden inspiration. He grabbed a piece of paper and a pen and drew a big 3.5 on it and lifted it above his head.

"Is that my score for the skating performance?"

"Wrong! That's your score for the joke! Wait till you see the Romanian judge's score. One point for the home team."

"OK, I'll concede that one. That should make the score about 144 for you and two million for me."

"Yeah, dream on, Dad."

"So you really ate so much last night you're not hungry this morning?"

Jeremy wasn't about to explain to his dad that his lack of desire for food was really not related to a full stomach. "I gotta boogie."

Paul grabbed the piece of paper on the table and held it over his head. "Now what?"

"That's your dance score." The puzzlement hadn't left Jeremy's eyes. "The boogie happens to be a dance."

Jeremy groaned. "Don't even think about counting that one!"

"No matter. You're never going to catch me. Now you better

run off to school and let those educators try to teach you as much as your old man has."

"Actually I better run off to school before the BS in here is so deep I need to shovel my way to the car."

"Ooooooh! The comeback kid attempts another score...sorry, wide to the right. You should have quit while you were behind."

*It's no use trying to get in the last wisecrack with Dad.* JD just waved him off and uttered, "Bye."

He was almost at the door when his dad threw out his last comment. "Love you, Jeremy. What about our hug?"

"Oops." Jeremy ran back and gave him the hug. "Right back at you."

The jousting of wits would recommence when he returned. *His dad might have a big lead on me right now but most of those scores were racked up when I was younger. I'm now able to hold my own. I'm bigger and physically stronger already. Someday I'll surpass him in the intelligence department, including humor.* He noticed that the heaviness in his heart had lifted to a degree. Humor was such a strange thing. *Maybe I should do my senior paper on this somewhat strange ingredient in human life. I could use my dad as a case study.*

It was impossible not to think about Maria upon his arrival at school. He was just approaching the sidewalk that led up to the school when that yellow car pulled up in front of him. He watched as a nylon-clad leg appeared from the inside. Jeremy's thoughts went back to his earlier attempts at being an Olympic judge. In his mind he was raising a big ten above his head right now. The rest of Maria appeared, waved goodbye, and turned to walk up the sidewalk that Jeremy was about to use. She saw Jeremy and smiled. *No way she's a ten!* He took down the ten and put up an eleven.

The two fell into step together and exchanged small talk. The question about church hadn't come up, yet. Jeremy took a big stride to reach the door first and held it. He made a small mock bow to Maria, and she returned a small curtsy. "You, my fine sir, are a gentleman and a scholar."

Jeremy's heart revved up like a racecar at that statement. He was used to people sucking up to him since he was a sports star, and he had grown a little immune to all the praise, but this comment from Maria had a real impact on him. They fell in step again. It just felt so natural and so right to be at her side. It was like throwing a perfect spiral pass. Or the way his fingertips felt when he shot a basketball that drew nothing but net.

"So, are you going to go to the football game tomorrow night?"

"Probably not. We still have so much unpacking to do. This is our first full weekend here."

Jeremy felt one of those arrows of misfortune strike him. "But you have time to go to church?" He glanced at the cross around Maria's neck and thought of his mother.

"We *make* time for church. And speaking of church...you're answer is?" Her eyes posed the question as much as her words had.

He made the fatal mistake of looking into those eyes before he delivered his memorized speech. After one second, he mentally tore up the prepared script and winged it. "I have a proposition for you."

"Oh, no. It is only 7:30 in the morning, and I'm being propositioned. Maybe I forgot to tell you that I'm not that kind of girl." Her eyes and smile revealed that she was playing with him.

"Sorry. Let me change my wording. I have a trade to offer you. If you go to the football game, I'll go to church."

Maria halted. Jeremy wondered what thoughts were going through that pretty head. "OK, Mr. Quarterback. You have a deal."

Jeremy was elated. He was a little perplexed how his "just say no" strategy had ended up as a resounding "Yes." He would later attribute this to the hypnotic effect of Maria's eyes. At this point in time he didn't care that the best laid plans of mice and boys had gone astray. She would be in the stands tomorrow night watching him compete, and he would be in church with her Sunday.

Another idea struck him. "Maybe I could help you unpack after church?"

"You would do woman-type work?"

"Carrying heavy boxes isn't woman's work. Big strong men *do* come in handy around the house *sometimes*, you know."

"That's true." Maria acted like a light had just gone on. "Were you going to bring a big strong man with you?"

Jeremy inwardly groaned. He could envision Maria mentally chalking up a point for her side. He had to admit that mental jousting with Maria was more fun than with Dad.

He had no comeback for her. "Ouch," was all he said with a little tone of hurt in it.

She punched him lightly in the arm. "I'm just messing, you know."

"I know. After all, I do realize what a real physical specimen I am."

"No doubt – and a legend in your own mind."

Jeremy glanced at her. She was still smiling. It was still just playful banter, and it was all good.

"OK, I'm going to stop talking now before I dig myself into a deeper hole."

"Discretion is the better part of valor."

"It just dawned on me that I've just committed myself to go to church with the female version of Don Rickles. Whatever was I thinking?"

Maria's response took him by surprise. She playfully stuck her tongue out at him and peeled off to her locker. *She must be familiar with Don Rickles. Even her tongue was perfect!* He contemplated replacing the eleven with a twelve as he started fiddling with his padlock.

He felt a sudden pain in his stomach. *Oh great, Maria is causing more physical weirdness in my body. Wait, those are just hunger pangs. I'm just plain old hungry. No, not hungry. Famished. And it's so long until lunch.* Throughout study hall visions of pancakes drowned in maple syrup danced through his head. Another humorous vision flitted by of his dad cutting a figure eight on ice which instantaneously melted underneath him.

English class gave Jeremy a chance to look at Maria for fifty-five uninterrupted minutes, but without much chance for conversation, and her girlfriends monopolized her at lunch. He had to wait for science class to pick up the thread again. She beat him to her desk again and was busy reading the book on dating methods when he interrupted her.

"So, we need to get some details ironed out. Am I going to pick you up, or are we meeting at the church?"

"I don't know. Any of the options will work. I'll need to talk to my mom about it. So if you pick me up, you'll be picking her up as well."

"No problem. I do have a back and front seat in my car."

"What a novel concept!"

"And what about my offer to help you unpack?"

"You're really serious about that?"

"You bet."

"Well, I'll ask her about that too."

"Sounds like a plan!" The bell sounded.

Maria whispered quickly as Mr. Bogue started his presentation, "Sounds like a bell to me."

## Chapter 8

### The War of the Words

His dad taught class again that night so Jeremy was on his own. He dined on leftover lasagna while watching the Thursday night college football game. When he finished eating, he continued to watch while he did his homework. He had just turned off the TV when he heard a car enter the driveway.

*I have to tell Dad about church. Or do I? No sense trying to hide it. Dad thinks I'm making a mistake, but it feels so perfectly right.*

Jeremy opened the front door just as Paul was about to make his entrance.

"So Sleeping Beauty is awake tonight."

Jeremy held up two fingers behind his head. His dad's face contorted in a look of puzzlement. "What's up with the peace sign?"

"That's not the peace sign, Dad. I didn't have paper handy so I'm scoring your joke with my fingers."

Paul gave a mock laugh and put one finger behind his own head. "Right back at ya!"

"Is that your IQ or how many friends you had before your dog died?"

"In addition to being the score for your feeble attempt at a joke, it's also how many kids I have with grandiose delusions of being able to compete head to head with their old man on the battlefield of wit."

"Oh pahlease. I consider myself a gentleman, and I never step on the battlefield with an unarmed opponent."

"You're not expecting to get originality points with that tired old joke are you?"

By this time Jeremy figured out that this conversation was going in a circular direction. Tomorrow was a big game, and he needed to get some sleep. He held back the urge to deliver a comeback and extended his arm to his dad for their traditional evening greeting.

"I could go for some strawberry shortcake about now, if you didn't eat it all that is."

"Now that's an offer I can't refuse, Dad."

The two entered the kitchen and with finely tuned division of

labor prepared their nighttime snack. Jeremy pulled out food from the fridge, while Paul rummaged through the cupboards for eating utensils.

They sat down and attacked their cake instead of each other. Jeremy broke the silence. "I made my decision today, Dad."

His father's arm stopped halfway to his mouth. "And?"

"I'm going to church on Sunday."

A mixed look of pain and anger crossed his dad's face. The wedge of cake halfway to its destination fell back on the plate. He got up from his chair and without a word retreated into his bedroom.

Jeremy sat there in a minor state of shock. *Am I getting the famous 'silent treatment' from my own dad? Maybe Dad didn't trust himself to speak under the influence of anger. That could be it. Perhaps he started counting to ten and was still mad and went into the bedroom to take off his shoes and socks so he could continue counting to twenty.*

Jeremy had to mentally slap himself in the face. *How can I be trying to find humor in this situation?* Despite the self rebuke, he did make a mental note to save that zinger for a more appropriate moment in the future.

He tried to convict himself of being the bad guy in this situation, but he just couldn't find any evidence that he was doing anything wrong. *Dad's the one acting like a kid. Perhaps he's holding his breath until he turns blue. I'm not being disobedient. Dad told me it was my choice?*

JD was ready to go to bed, and his dad still hadn't emerged from his bedroom. Jeremy wasn't sure what to do. He walked to the door and yelled through. "Good night, Dad. Love you." Nothing but silence. Sadly he maneuvered his way up the stairs to his bedroom.

\* \* \*

The next morning when he awoke, the first thing on his mind wasn't Maria or football. *What will happen in the next episode of this soap opera with my father?* He carefully removed his home football jersey from a hanger and pulled it on.

He always felt different when he walked around the halls in his jersey. It was hard not to get a little puffed up with pride when almost everyone in school was yelling out encouragement to him when he walked by. Jeremy could only imagine what he would be like if his father hadn't taught him the virtue of humility. *I could be*

*another Brian Witt right now.*

He was finished getting ready for school, and it was now time for some breakfast and perhaps an encounter with the wannabe comedian turned into a sphinx.

Despite last night's episode, his father was still on his usual schedule. *Will he hide behind his newspaper this morning?*

"Hey number thirteen, what's your number?"

The comedian had returned. Normally this kind of comment would have caused Jeremy to groan, but today it was just good to see his dad was back to his old self. Junior decided to play along. The Dr. Pepper commercial popped into his head. "Twenty-three."

Paul laughed. "By the way, would you like to go to Olive Garden after the game tonight?"

"Does a bear—"

"Nuff said."

It was traditional for the two of them to do something special after a game. Tonight they would rehash the action over pasta and salad and scrumptious bread. It would be carbo reload time. *Maybe we can even reload some of that father-son closeness which seems to have been lost during the last few days.*

As the youngster prepared his breakfast, he wondered if his father was going to mention the incident from last night. He wasn't about to bring up the topic. *We need some kind of closure on the matter.* The food on Jeremy's plate disappeared, but no conversation concerning the night before appeared.

They exchanged their normal departure hug, and JD started the drive to school. The excitement for the game that night was starting to build. He didn't have butterflies in his stomach yet, but he figured the caterpillars were weaving cocoons right now, making way for the butterflies that would follow. The thought of having Maria at the game added an extra dimension to the feelings pulsating through him.

Jeremy couldn't help feeling like a celebrity as he went through an otherwise normal day at school. Everyone wanted to be buddy-buddy with the quarterback. In a way it pleased him, but in other ways it was irritating. He wondered how the real celebrities handled that distraction. He could certainly understand why some of them would shy away from the public. Due to the intense demands on his time, he never really got a chance to talk to Maria until the last period.

He almost threw his books on his desk and plopped his body into the seat. And then he turned to face Maria. She got in the first salvo.



"My, don't you look nice in a uniform!"

"I bet you say that to all the boys."

"Only the ones on the football team."

"So you *are* coming to the game tonight, right?"

"If you're coming to church on Sunday, I'll be there tonight."

*It's too bad she doesn't date. I could be going to Olive Garden with her tonight instead of Dad.* "And what about after church on Sunday? What did your mom—" His question was interrupted by the bell. The answer would have to wait for fifty-five minutes.

The subject of particles of matter now took center stage, but Jeremy couldn't help thinking more about the particles that mattered as he took one last look at Maria's face before focusing on the exponentially less attractive face of Mr. Bogue.

*Focus! Focus! Focus! I might not be worthy of an athletic scholarship so I better maximize my chance of getting an academic one. And that involves listening to Mr. Bogue's rumbling lecture instead of my own rambling thoughts.*

When the bell rang to indicate that the weekend had officially begun, Jeremy turned around immediately and finished his question.

"Mom says if you really want to help us unpack, there are several things that would be a bit of trouble for us weak females. One of the biggest jobs will be storing some big boxes up in the rafters of the garage. So – here's the plan. We found out that the church parking lot gets full, so the church provides buses from the Washington Court parking lot. Are you familiar with that area?" Jeremy nodded. "So you meet us there at ten past eleven. Does that work for you?"

"Perfect!"

"Cool. Now I better get home and get some unpacking done before the game. Oh, I almost forgot. Just in case something comes up and you can't meet us there, here's my phone number."

Jeremy took the paper from her hands. "All right. I'll see you at the game?"

"I don't know about that."

Jeremy's face dropped. "But you said you were going."

"Oh, I'm going, but that doesn't mean you'll see me. After all, there will be thousands of other adoring fans in the stands. I'm sure I'll see you out on the field. Bye."

He watched her very pleasant figure, adorned in yet a different dress today, grow smaller in the distance until she disappeared from his sight. *OK, time to get my "game face" on.* White River was coming to town. Then he looked down at the

piece of paper Maria had handed him. *Wow. She gave me her phone number!* He had it memorized before he reached the gym.

\* \* \*

The football coach at Sumner had brought a new tradition to the program. Instead of having the kids disperse to their homes before a home game, the team gathered together for a pre-game meeting and dinner. After all the festivities were over, the boys entered the locker room to dress.

"Hey, JD, what's the story on you and the Masterson babe?" inquired one of the guys from across the room.

"Yeah, Dillon. Give us the lowdown. Have you gotten to first base with her yet?"

"Or maybe hit a homerun?"

Jeremy looked up in surprise. He heard Witt's voice but couldn't make out what he said. The guys around him laughed heartily. JD wasn't sure what was said, but he had a couple of guesses about the content, and neither one made him a happy camper. He had no desire to discuss Maria in front of the poster children for testosterone. "I think we better concentrate on the Hornets."

"You mean instead of the 'hornies'?"

Jeremy was getting a little hot under the shoulder pads. He decided the best course of action was to just shut up. Unfortunately that didn't deter the comedians.

The team was dressed when another graphic remark floated his way, Jeremy's face turned three shades of red, and he abandoned the silent approach. He marched right up to the offender. The locker room grew quiet in expectation of fireworks as JD looked the other boy right in the eye. He looked around the room and found everyone watching him. *I'm on center stage.*

He looked back at the wise guy and then yelled, "Are you ready for some football?" The silence erupted into an emotional lava flow, culminating in the creation of a huddled mass of human jumping beans reaching their hands to the middle to connect to each other. With fifty-five voices becoming one, they chanted, "The team that won't be beat can't be beat. Go Spartans."

## Chapter 9

### Game Time

Jeremy and the other captains led the parade of uniformed players though the exit and into the nearby stadium for their warm-up. Jeremy glanced up from time to time to scan the home section of the bleachers. No sign of Maria. The crowd filtered in slowly as the team worked on pre-game drills.

The Spartans won the coin toss. Jeremy had one more chance to survey the crowd before his action started. Still no Maria sighting.

The first half didn't go well. The Spartans trailed 14-0 when they returned to the lockers for halftime. As the team passed through the stadium entrance on the way, Jeremy took another peek around. *No Maria. Did she stand me up?*

The coach wasn't in a good mood, and the team received the venting of his wrath. They were glad to escape the locker room and make their way out onto the field for the second half. Jeremy had given up on Maria. He didn't even look to the side as they prepared to go through the gate onto the field.

He heard his name called. That wasn't unusual, but this voice penetrated the fog of his mind like the beacon from a lighthouse. He turned to face the direction the music had come from, and this time he was rewarded for his efforts.

Maria stood pressed again the fence. "Good luck!"

With Maria to spur him on, Jeremy played an excellent second half and led the Spartans to a 21-17 victory.

After a quick shower, Jeremy exited to the street. His mind was on Maria. She had made it clear she wasn't in a position to be anything more than a friend. *Why am I putting myself through this mental torture when hope seems so minimal?*

The clouds that often blocked the sky in Western Washington were conspicuous by their absence. The moon and a few stars were visible. He remembered a night in Montana where he had seen the sky without the artificial lights of man to block the starlight. *Wouldn't it be great to share a sight like that with Maria?* JD realized that he was very hungry, and then remembered he had a date with his dad. He pulled himself out of his sky gazing mode and shifted from the moon to Saturn as he jumped in his LS and motored back home.

\* \* \*

His father greeted him heartily. "Great game, son!"

"Thanks. Well, great second half anyway."

"That's true. I guess you just had to get settled down."

"Yeah." *Seeing Maria perhaps had something to do with me settling down.*

"Let's go get some chow. I'm starving."

"Me too, Dad. I could eat a horse."

"In that case, we'll have to find another restaurant. Olive Garden doesn't have horsemeat."

"I get to drive – your car!"

"Fine. You deserve a reward for a hard fought victory tonight. Just don't hit anything with it."

"Stop worrying so much. I'm a great driver."

"That's what all teenagers think. I wish they had an American Idol driving contest so we could get some hard-core judges telling drivers what they really think."

"Awesome idea. I'd win hands down."

"Yeah, right. More like 'Hands up and step away from that car. Anything you say can and will be used again you—'"

"In a court of basketball. OK, enough bad jokes. I'd hate to see a perfectly good appetite spoiled by nausea at this stage of the evening. Let's hit the road and talk about nothing but football."

Olive Garden was jammed full as usual, even at this late hour. The two hungry males had to cool their jets on a bench in the lobby waiting to win the lottery of an open table.

After what seemed like a three-day wait, the Dillons were summoned to follow a waitress. Jeremy was just about to sit down when he noticed someone waving at him across the room. It was Maria. Unfortunately, she and her mother were sitting at a table for two, so a suggestion that they sit together was out of the question. Jeremy didn't know exactly what to do. Finally, he just waved back and sat down.

"Who's that?"

Jeremy could barely contain the excitement in his voice. "Did you see her? That's the one I was telling you about! And her mother. What do you think?"

"Quite pretty. Very nice in fact." His head kept nodding up and down. "And the daughter isn't bad either."

"Dad! Quit with the bobble-head doll imitation." The opportunity to chastise his father even more was stymied by the

arrival of another waitress wanting to take their drink orders. Jeremy opted for raspberry lemonade. His dad went with a cola. "You know that stuff isn't good for you."

"What stuff?"

"Soda. It's bad for your teeth. The sugar in it is outrageous. Need I mention caffeine? And if it's diet, the artificial sweetener is likely to be downright dangerous."

"Have you become a card-carrying member of the diet police? I've been drinking that stuff my whole life, and I'm still around."

"Around like a doughnut."

"Come off it. I bet I can still fit into the clothes that I was wearing twenty or maybe twenty-five—"

"Minutes ago."

"Would you quit finishing my sentences? Whatever happened to good old-fashioned respect for elders?"

"Well if advanced age is the criteria for respect, I guess you have earned a bunch of it."

This time his father changed the subject. "Aren't you going to go over and say hi?"

"I don't know. I was thinking maybe she should come over here."

"Ah, yes, the old playing hard to get trick."

"Maybe. A guy has to keep a bit of dignity, don't you think? I mean it's embarrassing to throw yourself at someone and have them reject you."

"Faint heart never won fair lady."

"That's pretty deep philosophy, Dad. Did you read that on the back of a cereal box?"

"Fortune cookie at the Chinese buffet down the street."

Jeremy rolled his eyes and turned far enough so he could check out Maria's table. They already had their food. It might be rude of him to approach them while they were eating, so he stayed put, despite the fact that he would much rather be conversing with Maria than with his father.

He'd heard all of his dad's jokes over the past umpteen years. There wasn't much original material left, like his dad's hair. It was definitely gray, noticeably starting to recede, and a ring of bare spot had appeared on the top. Was his dad going to be bald? How can a man look at himself in the mirror if he doesn't have hair? *Maybe I should do my senior paper on baldness.*

"Anyway, Dad, back to the original topic, I've been studying how to optimize my health, stamina, and athletic performance."

"And so now you're qualified to preach to me on the topic."

Jeremy was let off the hook by the waitress returning with their drinks. He took a long tall swallow of lemonade.

They placed their orders for food and the waitress left them alone again. Now he didn't even have a menu to hide behind in an attempt to ignore his dad. Maybe he should blurt out some Spanish at him the next time he went on the attack. It seemed that lately the attacks by his father were similar to those of a bug. They really weren't dangerous at all, but got irritating when the insect kept persisting in fly-by bombing runs.

"Getting back to this health craze you've decided to pursue, I guess I better not make strawberry shortcake available anymore. I'm sure that's not optimal fuel for a lean and mean machine like yourself."

"Dad, I said I was studying the topic. I didn't say I was going to get fanatical about it. To paraphrase an old expression, into every life a little junk food must fall. You know you can break the rules once in a while if you eat well the rest of the time."

"Yeah. Well maybe I'm a contrary. Maybe I'll break the rules and eat healthy food once in a while and—"

"I got the picture, Dad. End of sermon. You're old enough to figure out how to take care of yourself. If you don't want to live long enough to see your grandkids—"

"Oh. Are you planning on having children?"

"Not tonight. But someday, if I find the right mother for those kids, yeah, I'll have some." He turned and took another peek at Maria. "I was thinking maybe I'd have twins one year and triplets the next year – all boys and they could make up their own basketball team. Can't you just see the confusion on the opponents' faces now? They'd be known as the Dillon gang. They steal the ball all over the place and shoot up the joint, see?" Jeremy pronounced the last sentence in his best Humphrey Bogart imitation.

"OK. Whatever. Just don't expect me to baby-sit those little gangstas."

Their salads and bread arrived and they dug in with gusto, leaving the conversation in their wake. Jeremy had just taken a big bite of bread when he felt a light tap on his shoulder. He whirled around and found Maria standing there.

"Great game, Jeremy!"

He was unable to respond without talking with his mouth full. He wasn't about to risk shooting a wad of food particles out of his mouth to fall to Earth he knew not where, potentially smack dab in Maria's face.

She had the presence of mind to turn away toward his dad and let him chew and swallow in peace. "You must be Jeremy's dad?"

"Darn. I was hoping I'd pass for his brother."

"Well, I already knew Jeremy doesn't have a brother, or perhaps I would have made that mistake. I'm Maria Masterson."

"Sure, I remember your great-grandfather, Bat Masterson."

By this time Jeremy was able to talk. "Dad! Can you confine the bad jokes to family conversations? I'm sure Maria hears that joke way too often."

"Not really. There aren't many people who know who Bat Masterson was. I'm kind of surprised you do, Jeremy."

"My dad's a collector of the past: old music, old TV shows and movies. We have a collection of the Masterson series from the fifties."

"Interesting. Well, I better run. My mom's waiting for me up front. I kept my end of the bargain, so I'll see you Sunday morning."

"I'm there, or I'm square." *Actually I'm there or I'm crazy!*

"Cool. See you then. Good night, Mr. Dillon. It was a pleasure to meet you." She made a very slight curtsy and faded away into the hustle and bustle of the lobby.

"I can see why you've gone ga-ga over her. She's very nicely put together, and seems like a very nice young lady."

"Your powers of perception are growing exponentially."

"Just a word of caution. Be a bit careful. A beautiful woman like that can twist you around her finger, and you won't even feel you're being bent out of shape."

Jeremy didn't know what to say to that. He was able to come up with the thought that Maria wasn't that kind of woman. *Wait, is she a woman or a girl? At what point does a girl become a woman? And at what point does a boy become a man?*

Their pasta arrived and relieved Jeremy of the need to come up with any answers. He and his father were both all business, and the task at hand was getting food transported from their plates to their stomachs. Their conversation was minimal during the feeding frenzy.

They were just about to leave when a group of teens passed their table. "Hey, Dillon. Hanging out with all your friends again, I see." The entourage, a mixture of boys and girls, laughed.

Jeremy recognized the voice. Without even looking he knew it was Brian Witt and merely glanced at him. *No sense paying any more attention to that clown than he's worth.* He looked over at his

dad, who was looking at him with a question mark in his eyes as the still laughing group walked on by. Jeremy held up a cupped hand.

"Oh?" his father inquired.

"No, that's a zero, which is Witt's IQ adjusted for inflation."

The two finished their meal and departed. On the way home Paul suggested Jeremy spend more time with people his own age. Jeremy started to protest until he remembered that Maria was his age.



## Chapter 10

### Get Me To the Church On Time

Sunday morning arrived after Saturday's full day of fishing and football. Jeremy was disoriented when his alarm went off. The knowledge he was going to be with Maria in a couple of hours jump-started his heart and cleared the fog in his brain.

*I forgot to ask Maria what people wear to church. Should I wear a suit? I'll look pretty silly dressed in a suit if everyone showed up in jeans or shorts. On the other hand, if I under-dress, I'll feel like some kind of bum.* He decided to take the middle road with a nice white shirt, colorful sweater vest, and a pair of Dockers.

Even though he took a lot of time grooming, he found himself ready to go an hour before he was due to arrive at the designated parking lot. He calculated that he had time to do some math homework. The hour passed, and Jeremy started out on his great adventure.

Jeremy landed the Saturn in the designated parking lot. He glanced in the mirror to make sure his hair was still immaculate and then checked for egg on his face. There was no yellow on his skin but he saw yellow in the rear-view mirror as the bumblebee car pulled in behind him. His heart skipped a beat. *No going back now.*

They were out of the car before he could arrive to play the gentleman. Maria, wearing a white dress today, was visually stunning. She introduced Jeremy to her mother, who looked like an older version of Maria. A bus pulled in, and the two teens and Maria's mother boarded.

Maria and her mother sat on one side of the bus and Jeremy sat on the other. Jeremy tried to politely chitchat, but his mind was somewhat distracted by his thoughts concerning what lay ahead. *Is there going to be some weird stuff going on? Will I feel like a porcupine in a balloon factory?*

The bus pulled to a stop in front of a building that Jeremy had gone past a thousand times but hadn't paid much attention to. The newcomers walked through the glass doors and followed the crowd into a large auditorium.

Maria's mother led them down to the middle of the sanctuary, and they sat down. Jeremy looked around. There was a big stage

with musical instruments set up. Nobody was up there. He glanced at the people around him. To his surprise he saw several people that he knew. A couple of kids waved at him. Another came over and shook his hand. It seemed just like a concert at school so far.

Jeremy relaxed a little and turned to focus his attention on the reason for his visit here. Their conversation was interrupted a few times as people came up to greet them and shake their hands. What was up with this handshaking business? It was like the politicians at a parade during an election year.

Mrs. Masterson leaned over and said, "I understand you have limited experience with churches."

"That's an understatement. I've never been in a church before."

"Not even for a funeral or a wedding?"

"Never been to one of those except for a couple of weddings that were held outdoors." His hosts stared at him with a look of disbelief. "I have a feeling that my dad was trying to keep me away from churches so we never went to anything like that."

Their conversation was interrupted by the appearance of people on the stage. They took up places behind instruments and microphones and started playing. Everyone stood up.

Jeremy followed the words that were being sung on the big screen. He could hear Maria's voice next to him. She had a beautiful set of pipes, in more ways than one. Jeremy loved to sing, but he wasn't about to try it here. They were singing that they belonged to Jesus.

Jeremy had heard the name Jesus pronounced on many occasions. He thought back to when he was very young and the kids around him started using new words. He found out from his dad that there were certain words in life that were not nice to say. He had learned another new word that day – profanity. He had learned how common people used such language in place of true communication. When he asked his father about the specific words, he mentioned this "Jesus Christ" phrase that he had heard on the playground. His dad had explained that Jesus Christ was a legendary figure, like the Lone Ranger or Robin Hood or Santa Claus, who helped the poor.

Jeremy had promised at that time that he wouldn't use those words and for the most part had kept that promise. Being exposed to it day in and day out had allowed some of them to get etched in his memory banks, and at times he had blurted out one of the forbidden ones without thinking.

Here he was surrounded by people singing to Jesus. He had never heard anyone singing to the Lone Ranger or Robin Hood, but on the other hand, he had heard people singing to Santa Claus so maybe this wasn't so weird. But definitely no one proclaimed that they belong to Santa Claus.

The singing ended and the musicians departed the stage while another man came up to the front. He was a distinguished-looking gentleman. To Jeremy's combined joy and horror, he heard the man say, "Take the hand of the person next to you and let's pray."

Maria's right hand came out immediately and took his left hand. He was halfway to heaven. Then he looked to his right where a big hulking man was holding out his hand to Jeremy. *This is too weird. I don't want to hold hands with Paul Bunyan.* He glanced at the man's bearded face. He had a big smile that took Jeremy a bit off guard.

*If I don't consent to hold hands with this guy, it will probably hurt his feelings. And Maria will maybe be ashamed of me.* He tentatively reached out and clasped the big mitt, which swallowed his hand.

He didn't know what to do. Maria had her eyes closed; she had never looked so beautiful. Her mother had her eyes closed. A girl in the row ahead of him whom he knew from school had her eyes closed, and she had never looked so good either. *It's like these women are radiating something. I guess the correct procedure for this praying thing is to shut my eyes.* He got his shut just in time to hear the pastor say, "Amen."

A different man came up on the stage and asked them to pray for the offering. This time there was no handholding. After the prayer, some guys passed bags down each row and collected money. *Dad said that churches were always asking for money.* Maria's mom dropped some bills in just before it came to Jeremy. He passed it over to the lumberjack.

The distinguished-looking man came out again and began to talk. His sermon was entitled "Who is My Neighbor?". He proceeded to speak for the next half-hour about love and the expression of that love to those around us. Jeremy had to admit that he was funny yet serious, polished yet low-key, lofty but down to earth. This was kind of like being in school – but no homework or tests. And he talked about love, one of Jeremy's favorite topics.

Every chance he got, he looked over at Maria and shared a smile or chuckle at something that was said. He remembered an expression: "A good experience shared with another is twice the

pleasure – a sorrow shared is half the burden." He was sharing something good today with Maria so the pleasure was doubled. *I hope she feels the same way.*

The service ended with another song. The whole thing was over in exactly one hour. It hadn't seemed long, weird or dangerous at all.

Jeremy's party made their way out the back door and weaved their way through the crowd to get back to where the bus left them. They climbed in.

"So, what did you think of the service, Mom?" asked Maria.

"I liked it. This seems like a good church. The pastor was an excellent speaker. What did you think, Jeremy?"

"Um. I don't know. I don't have anything to compare it to."

"I'm sorry. That was a dumb question."

"No problem. How do I learn more about Jesus?"

"Jeremy. I have the perfect teacher for you. I have a video you can borrow that tells the whole story of Jesus from beginning to end," Maria said.

"I'd prefer to watch it with you."

She thought for a moment. "Maybe we'll get all the unpacking done, and we can watch it some evening this week."

"Works for me!"

When the bus arrived back at the lot where their cars were waiting, Maria's mother asked, "Where shall we eat lunch?"

"Do you guys like Jack in the Box?" Jeremy asked.

"Don't know. We didn't have those in South Dakota."

"I'll introduce you to something new. Everyone has to try a Jumbo Jack at some point in their life!"

"Let's do it."

The trio climbed into the shiny yellow vehicle and navigated back to the fast-food restaurant. They enjoyed a tasty lunch and some good conversation. Jeremy was getting more and more comfortable around both Maria and her mom. He found himself talking to Mrs. Masterson just as much as he did to her daughter. Today he had a little taste of knowing what it would have been like to have a mother.

## Chapter 11

### The Unveiling

Jeremy, Maria and Mrs. Masterson finished lunch and drove to the Masterson house in Bonney Lake to unpack some more things. Jeremy calculated it was only four miles from his house. It was a nice home but messy due to the boxes lying everywhere. The first thing Maria did was change her clothes. The stunning white dress was exchanged for a pair of scruffy jeans and a T-shirt. Jeremy decided she still looked awesome even in work clothes.

It was Jeremy's turn to change into something more appropriate for kicking around in a dusty garage. As he was emerging from the bathroom, Maria inserted a CD into a player. The sounds of the first song were as familiar to him as a Jumbo Jack.

"The Carpenters!" he exclaimed.

"You're familiar with the Carpenters?"

"Are you kidding? I love Karen Carpenter."

"No way!"

"Yeah, way! My dad has almost every CD of all the top artists from the late sixties to the mid-seventies. I grew up listening to golden oldies all the time."

"Check this out." She led JD over to a shelf where he was able to see that Maria's family also possessed a sizeable collection of oldies. He started perusing their film collection and discovered they had several movies in common as well. "This is fun stuff. We'll get back to this topic sometime, but we'd better get cracking on the unpacking."

"Gosh, Maria, you're a poet and don't even know it."

"And you have an amazingly intuitive grasp of the obvious."

"What can I say? Flaunt it if you got it."

"Oh, brother. When you go on an ego trip, you have to take enough food for a week. Let's go attack the garage."

"That reminds me. You were going to tell me why you don't quote-unquote *date*."

"And so I shall – while we unpack! Follow me."

"To the ends of the Earth. To infinity – and beyond!"

"Remember, Preppie, you're not supposed to get hung up on

me!"

"Preppie? I've heard that before. I know that word."

"It's from a movie called—"

It came to Jeremy just in time. "*Love Story* starring...uh...Ali MacGraw and Ryan O'Neal."

"You're full of surprises, aren't you? Let me guess. You have that movie at home too?"

"Bingo! Why are you calling *me* 'Preppie'?"

"In the movie Ali tells Ryan not to get hung up on her. But he doesn't pay attention. I have this distinct feeling that you're not heeding my advice."

"What makes you think that?"

"Phrases like you just used. Follow me to infinity and beyond. And the way you look at me."

"What? How do I look at you?"

"It's hard to explain. The eyes have their own way of speaking. For example when Brian Witt looks at me, it reminds me of a wild animal salivating over a piece of meat just outside its reach. With you, it's totally different. You have a light of compassion, of caring, something intangible, but I feel it. And it scares me. I don't want to bring any pain to those eyes. Do you understand?"

He was busted, betrayed by his own eyes. "I understand the part about not wanting to hurt someone. The two parts I don't understand are why are you trying to push me away with one hand and pull me towards you with the other?"

"OK, the time has come to explain the first answer. The second answer isn't so clear. Let me say I just feel that you're a very special person, and I want to be close to you. Call it woman's intuition if you want. I just have this feeling that you and I were destined to be together for a purpose."

"But not the purpose of a romantic relationship?"

"Not right now. Let me tell you why I'm not available for a romantic relationship. Then you'll know the rest of the story."

"OK, Paula Harvey. Let me have it with both barrels. Please tell me who or what my competition is."

"You're going to think I'm wacko, perhaps, but everybody is entitled to their own opinion. The story started almost two years ago. My father, who was a jock like you and a very healthy and active man, got cancer. I'll spare you all the gory details, but he reached the point where he wasn't able to work or do anything active. Being a 'physical specimen' yourself, you can imagine how he was climbing the walls, figuratively.

"Dad needed something to get his mind off his illness and something to occupy his time. He started reading a lot and ran across a book about a topic that fascinated him and motivated him to dig deeper into it. He felt that God was leading him down this path for a reason, and he was being obedient by following. He bought several books and consumed them all when he had the strength. Without a doubt, he was convinced that God wanted him to battle on his behalf.

"He got very excited about the situation and felt he was a soldier for the Lord, despite his handicap which was growing worse and, according to the doctors, was probably going to be fatal. He and I spent a lot of time speaking about God and about his project. He couldn't understand why God would lead him to this fight and then take him out of the battle before he could really have any impact. He arrived at the conclusion there was only one explanation. He was just the first runner in a relay with his job to complete the first lap and then hand off the baton to the next runner."

"And who is the next runner in the race? Wait, did he pass the baton to you?"

"By George, I think he's got it."

"Well I have that part. You're supposed to take up his battle for him."

"Yes. I promised him before he died that his work wouldn't be in vain."

"Why couldn't your mom be the person he chose?"

"Because she's going to have to work hard now to support the family. She won't have time, and this war will require a major time commitment. I was the logical choice. He shared with me all of his vision and some of his knowledge. It was too much for me to absorb immediately, so I have to do the same study that he did. He provided the legwork for me as to what to study. New materials are going to be available that I'll have to discover on my own. The real battle will probably begin in college. I have this year to get battle-ready."

"So you're going to devote your life to fulfilling your father's vision? And there is no room in that vision for a boyfriend."

"That's the conclusion I arrived at. I take this responsibility seriously and I don't want to get sidetracked and potentially derailed. Does that make sense?"

"Kind of. But couldn't a boyfriend be a helper, a fellow soldier? I don't see where one excludes the other."

"Maybe you're right, but the chances of finding someone who I

love romantically, and who wants to devote his life to this fight are hovering between slim and none. I'm afraid I have to choose one or the other, and I'm choosing to fulfill my father's wishes at this point."

"Well, I admire your courage and your loyalty to your father, but don't you have the right to some happiness of your own? Was your father being selfish in asking you to do this?"

"I never looked at it that way. It isn't just my earthly father I'm ultimately representing. It is my Heavenly Father that I battle for." She looked down at the ground. "But I can't expect you to understand that kind of reasoning since you were never introduced to your Heavenly Father. What I'm saying has to be total nonsense to you."

"You're right to a certain extent, but like the language of the eyes and your intuition. I feel something of importance here. I'm trusting that if you feel strongly about this, there must be something of substance to what you believe. I'm not going to rush to judgment in deciding you're wacko. Innocent until proven guilty. I just need some evidence now to prove to me that my faith in you is justified."

"Fair enough. Funny you should use that word, faith. That's the X factor in this whole mix."

"OK. So the picture is getting clearer now. You haven't explained exactly what you're going to be fighting against. Who is the opponent? Maybe I can be of assistance." *Whoever is an enemy of Maria's is my enemy too.*

Maria hesitated. "You're going to have to trust me on this one. When you learn more about the situation, hopefully, you'll be able to see who the real opponent is. In the interim, let me say that the immediate battle is with the theory of evolution."

He felt the blood drain out of his face.

"Jeremy, are you all right?"

"I'm not sure." He sat down on a stool. Now the scene in Mr. Bogue's classroom on Maria's first day made sense. She had been firing the first shot in her war. He regained his equilibrium, but he was still emotionally very dizzy inside.

"What's the matter, Jeremy?"

"Maria. There is one thing about me I haven't told you. It's not like I was trying to hide it from you, it just wasn't relevant information. There is so much we still don't know about each other that we have to just discover things as we go."

"Jeremy, you're rambling. What's your point? What did you not tell me that makes you look like Casper the friendly ghost?"



"Maria, my father is a biology professor. He teaches evolution at Pierce College. I was raised on evolution. In fact my father's vision is that I follow in his footsteps."

"Oh, Bubba. I don't know what to say, Jeremy."

"You think I do? Did you ever see that movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*?"

"It was my dad's favorite. We watched it every Christmas."

"Remember that scene where they're walking home from the dance in their borrowed clothes after they fell in the swimming pool?"

"You mean the part where he steps on her robe, and it comes off, and she hides in the bushes?"

"That's the one. Remember what George Bailey said at that point?"

She thought for a moment and then tried to do a Jimmy Stewart imitation. "It's a very interesting situation we've got here."

"Isn't that a good way to sum up what you and I have?"

The two sat in silence for a couple of minutes. Jeremy finally spoke. "Your father was like a magnet pulling you toward him. My father is like a magnet pulling me toward him. And now you're like a magnet pulling me toward you and away from my father. I'm being pulled in two directions. At least you're being pulled in just one."

"Yeah, right. Just cause I've chosen to do what my father asked of me doesn't mean I'm not pulled in other directions. It just means that I'm trying to be strong enough to overcome those other pulls. You might not believe this, but I've turned down numerous offers for dates, both in South Dakota and already here in the few days we've been here. I want to put a big button on my purse that says "Not Available". But one thing I want you to understand is my father was being pulled also by God, and that same pull is on my life. Oh, Jeremy, there is so much I want to tell you about God and his son Jesus. I want you to understand exactly where I'm coming from. But now you probably won't want to understand."

"Why not?"

"We just found out that our lifetime goals are basically diametrically opposed. You're probably going to want to stay as far away from me as possible."

"Not so fast. I never said the goal of teaching evolution was etched in concrete. Actually, that's my father's vision. I didn't even say that I promised him that I would. You seem to think that I'm on the other team in this thing. Maybe I haven't chosen teams yet!

Maybe I didn't even know there were teams. As Number Five, the robot in *Short Circuit* said, 'Input...need input.' It's my desire know everything that drives you to do what you do and be what you are. I want to understand your religion. Please make me understand why your father thought it was important enough for you to battle evolution. OK?"

She stared at Jeremy in astonishment. Jeremy saw something new enter her eyes. He wasn't sure what it was, but he liked it. "You're on. Tuesday night, movie at my house. I'll start out introducing you to someone very special to me."

"It's a date!"

Maria gave a little laugh, shook her head and wagged her finger at him.

"All right, have it your way. It's a plan!" She nodded. "All right, let's get serious about this work now."

Jeremy watched her work while he did his own. *There is something special about this girl that goes way beyond her attractive appearance.*

By five thirty Jeremy had done all that he could do to help. The rest was definitely woman's work. It was time for Maria to drive him back to his car.

"Promise me one thing, Jeremy," she requested as they strolled through the driveway together.

"Anything in the world!"

"That's a very dangerous statement, you know. It looks like I'll have to go back to calling you "Preppie"."

"Oh, OK. Let me rephrase that." His voice changed to simulate someone quoting Shakespeare. "Fair madam, please divulge to me the desire of your heart so that I might have the knowledge I need to make a wise decision in either granting or denying your request for a promise."

She threw back her head and laughed. "Oh, wanna play that game huh?" Her voice changed to match. "Just a simple desire, brave knight. Please do not make sport and merry at my lack of driving skills. I haven't yet grown accustomed to maneuvering yon yellow chariot in this barbaric land named Washington."

"No problem. I'll just close my eyes. Since my eyes are already closed, I could say a prayer for a safe journey."

"I'm not *that* bad!"

They got in the car and started down the hill. "Jeremy, there's one thing maybe I could have you help me with."

"You got it. Or is that too Preppie still? How about, What's in it for me, Toots?"

"Toots? Nothing in it for you. I just had this idea that I was going to attempt to pull off. I need some kids at school to help but I just don't know who the right people are. It was my hope that you could provide some names."

"Piece of cake. Names, I can handle. Now what kind of help do you want?"

"I want some smart kids who are not afraid of hard work. They need to be good students of science but not sold on evolutionary thought. I want to study the evolution scene together and figure out what I can do about fighting this theory while I'm here in high school. Maybe I don't have to wait until college. I thought we could all do our senior papers on different aspects of the general theory of evolution, aka molecules to man, goo to you, monkey to man evolution. We can pull all the research together to find out if we've enough evidence to pursue this with the educational system. I need to determine whether I have to do this alone or if I have some allies."

*Senior paper material. This could solve my dilemma of making a choice and get me more brownie points with Maria. What would Dad think? Of course what Dad doesn't know won't hurt him. If he asks what I'm writing on, I can just say 'science'. But what if he wants to read the paper?* "That's all you want from me?"

"Yep."

"I'll make a list and give it to you tomorrow."

"Perfect. Thanks a million!"

"I'm thinking this one is only worth about half a million. You must be a big tipper!"

"Cute. Don't forget to report that income to the IRS."

Maria navigated the car into the parking lot. Jeremy turned and looked her in the eye. "Thank you so much for a wonderful day!"

"Thank you so much for accompanying us to church and helping get our house in order."

"Glad I could help. I'm available any time you need some more assistance."

"Be careful what you wish for. Now, you better get out and let me get my mother's car home before she has a stroke worrying about her vehicle, and maybe me too."

"I can take a hint. See you tomorrow."

"I hope so. You owe me one list of names, Preppie."

He smiled and shut the door. He didn't mind being called Preppie. *After all, Ryan O'Neal did win the girl's heart in the end, despite the warning not to get hung up on her.* He watched a

streak of yellow go down the street and disappear from view. *I already miss her. Being in love has to fall into that category, the best of times and the worst of times.*

Jeremy's father was just settling in to watch Sunday night football when the prodigal son returned home. "Quite a long church service. I was thinking perhaps you had become a missionary and were on your way to Africa."

"Without my Adidas?"

"Oh, silly me. I should have known you wouldn't leave home without your Adidas."

"I guess I forgot to tell you that I was going to help Maria and her mom unpack some of their things."

"You seem to be forgetting lots of things lately. They say that love is blind, but is it also deaf, dumb, and forgetful as well?"

"Huh?"

"My point exactly! By the way, there's a PBS special on evolution showing tonight. Maybe you want to watch that instead of the football game?"

Jeremy whirled around. *Dad doesn't look suspicious.* "No thanks, Dad. I need my football fix for today." He exited the room in order to get some food and avoid talking about evolution.

When Jeremy returned his dad started a game of twenty questions. "So how did the church thing go?"

"It was interesting. Different."

"So which church did you go to?"

"Calvary Community."

"Oh, yeah. I know some people who go to that church."

"Me too. I saw several kids and parents of friends from school there."

"Planning on going back?"

"I hadn't thought about it." *Will Maria ask me to go with her again? If not, should I ask her to go with them?* After this movie Tuesday night he would know more of what was going on. He could sense his father was feeling him out. He decided to become the "prober" instead of the "probee". "Did you want to come along next time?"

His dad almost choked on the beverage he had in his mouth. Jeremy wasn't sure if he had provoked anger, humor or fear. *It's hard to interpret emotional responses when the other party is coughing so hard.* When the hacking ceased, Jeremy threw a piece of advice toward his elder. "It works better if you don't get it in your lungs!"

"Boy genius speaks again. As far as me going to church, I'm

afraid I get my fairy tale fix from watching the Cinderellas of the NFL on Sunday."

"And Scooby Doo on Saturdays?"

"There is no truth to the rumor I'm a closet admirer of Scooby Doo! Besides, that's not a fairy tale, it's a reality show."

"Whatever, Dad." The conversation went downhill from there.

Although Jeremy watched the game, his heart wasn't in it. Football seemed to have slid down his life's priority chart. He periodically wrote something into a notebook and sometimes scratched it out afterwards. He completed Maria's list with his own name at the top.

Julie Chang, Bill (Hacker) Kaufman, Ronnie Johnson, and Luke SkyWolf were the names that survived the editing. They were all very bright kids. Kaufman was a computer guru. Johnson, one of the few black students in the school, was the leading mathematician. Chang was first in the annual chemistry competition the previous year. Skywolf was an interesting wildcard. He was a Native American who had impressed Jeremy with his knowledge of nature.

After surveying his list, he decided that perhaps he should have a B team too, just in case. He added some names below those that he had previously scratched out. He was now done with Maria's request. *More brownie points coming up.* He glanced at his watch. *I've been away from Maria for two hours. It'll be almost twelve more before I get chance to see her again. That's just too long.*

## Chapter 12

### Getting to Know You

On Monday morning, Jeremy got to school early and hovered near the spot where Maria's mother normally dropped her off. Waiting for people wasn't on his top ten list of things to do, but he was making an exception in this case. *Why do I feel like a loiterer? No sense wasting time.* He opened up *A Tale of Two Cities* and started rereading the pages he was supposed to have read for class.

The words had basically gone in one eye and out the other when he read them earlier. It was hard to get interested in an imaginary life back in 1775 when his real life here in 2006 was just getting revved up. Finally, his patience was rewarded, and the yellow car pulled up by the curb. He hurried over to the car as Maria exited.

"Stalking me are you, Preppie?"

"Don't flatter yourself. I was just out here working on my suntan. I mistook your yellow car for the ice cream truck."

"What's the difference between an elephant and a banana?"

*Where did that come from?* "I haven't got a clue."

"Remind me not to send *you* to the supermarket."

"Ahh! Remind me not to say anything that might trigger a bad joke."

Maria's face reformed into a pout. "Ouch. Looks like you took your vicious pills this morning."

*Maybe I was a little harsh. I need to compensate for my clumsy comeback.* "Looks like you forgot to take your ugly pills. You're just as beautiful as ever."

"You know, Preppie, brown nosing just doesn't become you."

"That wasn't brown nosing. I was just trying to, uh—"

"Repair the damage?"

Jeremy squinted up into the sky. "Are you always this feisty in the morning?"

"Just to you. I store up all my zingers and unload them on poor little you. And that's a twenty-four by seven job, not just a morning thing."

"Oh, boy. How did we get off on this tangent? Maybe we should start over. Hi. My name is Jeremy Dillon."

"If we start over, do I lose the memories of the last seven

days?"

*No way I want to lose those memories. It's time to change subjects.* "I have something for you."

"Oh, yeah! Flowers? Candy? A knife for my back?"

"None of the above, and you *wound* me with the suggestion that I might be a backstabber." He pulled the list out of his pocket. "There's your list of names, delivered as promised. Now, can you tell me what are you going to do with it?"

"I want to see if these kids are interested in my proposal. One problem is that I don't know any of these people."

"You have friends in high places you know," Jeremy said.

"Yeah, I know. We had some friends back in South Dakota who lived on the twelfth floor of an apartment building."

"I was talking about *me*."

"I knew that. It is your favorite subject."

"No way. I'd rather talk about you any day, but you start calling me "Preppie" when I do. Anyway, I figured you'd need my help with this one. I have a class with every one of them. Maybe I can be of further assistance here."

"Is there a home football game this week?"

Jeremy had to think for a minute. He had almost forgotten about football. "Yep."

"Perfect. I could hold a meeting at halftime. It will only take ten minutes to explain this to them, I think. So if you could just introduce me to them, I can find out if they're even interested enough to meet with me. That would be great!"

"I like great. Let's go wander the halls now. We can probably run into some of them before first period."

They started toward the school entrance. The idea machine in Jeremy's head was running at full speed. "In case we don't encounter some of the people on the list, I could just deliver your message to them, but they might not know who you are. Of course, there's a good chance they do know who you are, since you stick out a giant nose ring in your dresses and skirts. I'll just tell them to meet you by the concession stand at halftime."

"That sounds like it might work."

\* \* \*

By Tuesday afternoon everyone on the list had agreed to meet with Maria. Between her wardrobe and the sensation she caused by challenging Mr. Bogue, her reputation had preceded her, and everyone knew who she was. Of course rumors of a possible romantic relationship with the quarterback of the football

team hadn't been slow in spreading throughout the student body. To Jeremy that was just wishful thinking, but he felt a bit of happiness in thinking that it was very flattering for him to have his name linked with Maria's.

Tuesday night after football practice, Jeremy took special pains combing his hair. Normally he would just watch TV and do his homework on a Tuesday night, but this was movie night at Maria's. So the special care that he took when people would see him was applied tonight. He went home, had a quick bite to eat, grabbed a couple bags of microwave popcorn and started writing a note indicating that he was at Maria's.

Normally he would have told his father in the morning that he was going somewhere. He didn't want his father asking a bunch of questions. How was he going to tell him that he was going to find out more about Jesus? Another trite expression entered his mind for this situation. It was better to just let sleeping dogs lie. He finished his note and hurried out to the car. He didn't want to make Maria wait for him. And he didn't want to find out if his dad's bite was worse than his bark.

Maria greeted him with a big smile when she answered the summons of the doorbell. He handed her the popcorn. "Is this the 21<sup>st</sup> century equivalent of flowers?"

"Oh, did you want flowers?" He reached down and faked picking a flower from the bed in front of their house.

"I see you shop at Economy Flowers. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. I'll start the movie for you and go put the popcorn in. I've seen this movie about ten times so I can miss the beginning – especially the credits."

She hit the play button on the remote and made her exit. *Jesus of Nazareth* was the title of the movie. Normally Jeremy carried on a running conversation during a movie when there were no people around him who had paid big money to listen to the actors and not to him. Tonight he sensed Maria wanted him focused on the film and not on his own wit. When the movie finished, Maria turned the TV off and turned to Jeremy. "Any questions?"

"It's a fascinating story, but I don't understand the significance of all this. You say he is the son of God, but that doesn't mean anything to me. It is like the movie about the son of Santa Claus I watched last year. I don't know how to explain this. It's like I came in during the middle of a movie and after watching ten minutes of it I'm trying to figure out what the first half of the movie was about."



Maria gasped. "Of course. I did start you right in the middle of the story. I guess you need the beginning to understand the ending. That was pretty dumb of me. Hang on just a second." She disappeared into another room and then soon reappeared carrying a book.

"What's that?"

"This is called a Bible."

"I've heard of that. My dad told me it was full of propaganda."

"And you took his word for it?"

"Well, yeah. He is my father. Why would he lie to me about something like this?"

"That's a very good question, Jeremy, one that you're going to come face to face with if you keep up a search for truth."

He was quiet. *Is truth important? Is it more important than comfort? More important than security? More important than a relationship, even the most wonderful relationship in my life? He looked at Maria. On the other hand, there was a wonderful new relationship that might hinge upon that truth. It's one worth pursuing.* "So, tell me about the Bible."

"First I think we need to start in the beginning. And that's Genesis. Let's read it together." She sat right next to him so they could both see the page. *This is definitely a comfy position.* He saw immediately that she was speaking literally. The first words were "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

"So where did God come from?"

"Excellent question, Jeremy. He always existed. He is an external being without beginning or end."

"I can't understand that concept. Everything begins and ends."

"In our world you're right. And really nobody can understand the concept. It is beyond our comprehension at this point in time. When I get to Heaven, I'll be able to understand. In the meantime, look at this ring." She pulled a birthstone ring from her right hand. "Tell me where the ring starts and ends." He couldn't.

They carried on an animated conversation for an hour. She explained to him about Heaven and hell and spoke more of Adam and Eve, whom they had read about in the beginning, and explained where the Bible came from.

Maria's mother came in and suggested that she needed to get to bed. Jeremy looked up at the clock and was shocked to find it was ten p.m. already. There were so many questions he hadn't had time to ask yet. Maria walked Jeremy to the door. He didn't want to leave, but he knew he had to. "To be continued?" he asked.

"Definitely. By the way, if you want to go to church with us again on Sunday, you're more than welcome."

"OK. I'd like that."

"I'm glad. Good night."

"*Buenos noches*, Maria."

"*Bonne nuit*, Jeremy." She gave him one of those smiles that he so loved before she closed the door.

*How many smiles per gallon am I getting, or maybe better said, how many gallons per smile? I'm sure I could go to the moon on just a few of them.*

His dad had already retired when he got back home. *This is a good thing. I'm in no mood to deal with Dad's questions and jokes tonight.* He went to his room and collapsed on his bed. His teeth needed brushing, but he wasn't about to get up now. His enamel would just have to survive the onslaught of bacteria for this evening. He was asleep before he had to further rationalize his failure to clean his teeth.

## Chapter 13

### Another Discovery

Jeremy had been thinking a lot about the movie and discussion with Maria from Tuesday night. On Thursday night after football practice he went to his father's bedroom. He opened the drawer where his mother's possessions were kept and found exactly what he hoped would be among the items she had treasured, a thick black book.

He looked fondly at the other items in the drawer and then closed it. His mother's Bible went with him to his room. He leafed through it in curiosity. His mother had highlighted in pink and yellow the passages which seemed to be worthy of standing out. His eyes skimmed through some of the colored sections, so he could discover what his mom thought was important.

*The depth of contents of this book are giving me a drowning sensation. Probably I'm still in the shallow end of the pool. I need a lifeguard, and I know the perfect candidate.* He descended the stairs, reached for the telephone and with trembling fingers dialed the number Maria had given him.

A female voice answered, causing his heart to flutter. "Maria?"  
"Hello, Preppie."

"That's Mr. Preppie to you! Actually, Maria, I was hoping we could dispense with the usual banter tonight because I have some serious questions."

"Oh. Sorry."

"No need to be sorry. I just need a lifeguard right now, and you've been appointed."

"I hope I'm up to the task. What's the problem?"

"Not really a problem. I'm drowning in information you might say. I found my mother's Bible and I started reading it, and I'm getting lost."

"Oh. That's nice, Jeremy. Not the part about you getting lost, but the fact that you have your own Bible you can study."

Jeremy and Maria proceeded to speak for the next hour on the questions that had formed in Jeremy's mind. The answers sometimes caused new questions to be formulated. He was still seeking knowledge when Maria's mother told her she needed to wrap it up.

"Jeremy, do you want to do another movie session on Sunday

after church? I have a couple more that I think will help you. "

"Sure. That would be wonderful. Good night." He put the phone back on the hook just as his father entered the room.

"Who were you talking to?"

"Maria."

"I should have known. Lovey dovey stuff?"

"No! Remember. I'm just her friend. She was helping me with...uh...homework."

"She was helping Mr. Genius? She must be a bright gal!"

"Yes, she is, Dad. I'm going to bed now. Love you."

"Love you too. Good night."

Paul Dillon watched Jeremy begin the ascent up the stairs. He could sense that the chemistry between them had changed quite drastically in the last two weeks. And he knew the catalyst making the change. He had always known that someday Jeremy would grow up and take his own path through life. It was ironic that right now it looked like his son was walking down the exact same path he himself had taken years ago. He heaved a big sigh and went to prepare for his own encounter with an empty bed.

\* \* \*

The next morning Jeremy realized how much his life had changed. He put on a T-shirt and was headed down the stairs to breakfast when he remembered he needed to wear his football jersey today. *Funny how last week's game was so important, and this week's game is like a duty. I am certainly not fired up. I wish I could be at the halftime discussion between Maria and the kids on her list. I don't know what her beef is with evolution, but my curiosity is crying out to be satisfied.*

Maria wasn't a crackpot, but he certainly wasn't going to jump to conclusions in either direction as far as the merit of her mission. The cool thing was that she wasn't trying to cram her ideas down people's throats. She just suggested that they all explore the evidence together and see what verdict they would arrive at. *There couldn't be any harm in that, could there?* Anyway he had only talked to Maria a little bit about her plans. He was hoping to find out exactly what went on tonight and find out more information about the plan. After all, he was planning on being on the team if she would let him.

Jeremy's morning reminded him of some pumpkin bread he had tried to make once. He forgot to put in the sugar. It looked just the same as the stuff his dad made, but the taste was pure blah.

Today looked just like a regular game day, but inside he had the blahs. He didn't see Maria all morning until English class and didn't get to talk to her until lunch. When they were saying goodbye after lunch, Maria mentioned the game. "Win one for the Gipper."

The idea that she could possibly care about the outcome of their game tonight gave him back some of his enthusiasm. He didn't want to let her down.

They got one more chance to talk before the game at science class. Jeremy inquired about the status of the powwow for that evening. Maria was more excited about her scheduled event than Jeremy had been that morning about his. Her enthusiasm was infectious. He remembered something she had told him. According to Emerson, "Nothing great was ever accomplished without enthusiasm." The word 'enthusiasm' comes from Latin, meaning 'God within'. *If God is responsible for the cheerfulness that bubbles out of Maria, he should get an A for his efforts.*

Jeremy entered the gym for the pre-game ritual. The Spartans raised their warrior-like mentality to a fever pitch and used that spirit to build a lead at halftime. As they jogged by the concession stand on their way to the locker room, Jeremy saw Maria and a couple of the invitees to her meeting. Again he wished he were part of that discussion.

The Spartans held on for another victory, and Jeremy did his usual thinking under the stinging needles of the hot shower. He just realized his dad has said nothing about going out to eat. *I don't have any plans. What am I going to do tonight? I wonder what Maria is doing.* It seemed only right that a football player should be with his girl after a game. *But she's not my girl – yet.*

*Is it too late to call her tonight?* Mrs. Masterson was a nurse. She sometimes worked the graveyard shift. She might be sleeping right now. He didn't want to take the chance of waking her. No sense withdrawing any of the brownie points he had deposited in his Maria account.

He didn't like the idea of Maria being all alone in the house with her mother at work. *Good thing they live in a low crime area. I'd be going nutzoo worrying about Maria's safety if she lived in Tacoma.*

His thoughts turned to his dad. The term generation gap didn't apply to him and his father. Maybe it was because Jeremy was content living in the gentler past of his father's youth. Maybe it was a science thing. Perhaps his dad had exerted a gravitational pull on him which had kept Jeremy in orbit around him. There were

other pulls on Jeremy now that were threatening to cause his paternal orbit to decay. *Is that totally a bad thing? If I am to be my own man, will I not have to create my own gravitational force and become the puller rather than the pullee?*

Instead of making the habitual trek back to his home, Jeremy aimed his car in the direction of Maria's house. He didn't know what he was going to do, but he just felt like going by. Maybe he would stop. It was a moot point, however. There were no lights on in the house, and the car was gone. She and her mother were maybe out bonding again.

A vision of his father sitting at home waiting for him entered his head. *Even though I'm just a kid, I've been exerting a pull for many years. My dad is orbiting me just as much as I orbit him.* His realized that his father needed him. He whipped a U-turn and swung by Maria's one more time on the way to his own home. Perhaps tonight, instead of talking football, the Dillon men should discuss more important issues.

*It's time Dad got a life apart from me. I bet he worries about my safety as much as I worry about Maria's. And he's been doing it for seventeen years. Parenting can't be easy, especially when there's only one. It's not fair to pull away from Dad after all he's done, but don't I have my own life to live? And Dad has his own life. He needs to find something new to give it some zest when I'm gone. Maybe Dad should try falling in love again. It certainly makes life more interesting.*

When Jeremy got home, the first thing he did was call Maria. An answering machine picked up the call. "Hi, Maria, this is Jeremy. Give me a call anytime tomorrow. I want to know how things went tonight, and I want to discuss how I might fit into your strategy. Good night. Lo—" He stopped just in time. He was so used to telling his dad good night and love you that the words just started coming out automatically. *How am I going to cover this up?* "Lo...Lopsided victory tonight. Hope you weren't bored! Bye."

He hung up the phone. *Dodged a bullet there. Wouldn't Maria have freaked out over that choice of words? And her mom might hear the message too. Good thing I can think fast on my feet – when they aren't in my mouth.*

At that point Jeremy found his father and the two spent the rest of the evening eating and chatting. The younger Dillon did in fact bring up the subjects he had been thinking about. He could see his dad was a little bummed by such talk, but in a way he was relieved to get to talk about some of the worries that he had. It was a very unusual conversation for them, but it helped them

bond together in a different way. They finally parted company, and Jeremy grabbed his mother's Bible and began to read. He woke up a couple of hours later and realized the light was on and the heavy book was lying on his chest.

\* \* \*

In the fall, Jeremy's Saturday schedule was very consistent. He watched college football from seven a.m. to ten p.m. Today was no exception. Jeremy used to think he was in Heaven the year before when he was able to kick back, eat, and watch football. This year he seemed to want more out of life. Watching football was great, but he was antsy for the phone to summon him to a higher place of joy. He had to wait until halftime of the first game before he heard the music he was waiting for.

Jeremy picked up the phone with gusto. "Hello. Dillon residence." He waited for the angelic voice to greet him.

"Hi, this is Skip down at Jack's Windshield Repair. We have a special today on fixing cracked windshields and chips and—"

Jeremy hated to be impolite to people. He knew they were just out to make a buck like the next guy. He let the handset fall back onto the cradle and went back to watching his football game with a combination of disgust and disappointment.

He had to wait for another hour before another call arrived. His adrenaline glands kicked into high gear. The beautiful voice on the other end said, "Hi, this is Angel Golightly from Home Loan Mortgage. We are running a special rate of six percent for refinancing of your home."

This person sounded so much like Maria, but people do have similar voices. He was confused and didn't know what to say.

Jeremy was about to decline the big opportunity when the voice said, "What's the matter, Preppie? Holding out for a better percentage?"

"You turkey!"

"I resemble that remark."

"You got that right! So, tell me already, how did your foundational meeting of the Get Egg on Bogue's Face Club go?"

"Jeremy, that's not very nice."

"Neither is Mr. Bogue."

"You know there is a movie where one of the characters, a rabbit, says something bad about someone else and his mother scolds him. She says "What did I tell you about that?" And he says—"

"If you can't say something nice, don't say nuthin' at all." *Not a bad Thumper imitation if I do say so myself.*

"I should have known you have that one on the tip of your tongue. I suppose you have that movie too?"

"Yeah, we have the whole Disney collection. Bambi was one of my early favorites. When I got older, it couldn't compete with the new movies with the girls in them – like *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Little Mermaid*–"

"Thanks for sharing that little tidbit with me. To answer your question, everyone seemed a little hesitant at first. They warmed up to the idea as I continued to talk, and by the time their questions were answered, they all accepted a nomination to the team."

"Great! So where do I fit in?"

"Jeremy, are you sure you want to fit in? After all, your father is a teacher of evolution. You're probably going to damage your relationship with him if you do something like this."

"Well, for starters, I don't even know what the 'this' is that you're talking about. I know for sure that I need to do a senior paper. If I can help you at the same time, wonderful. And I'll get this thing done early, so I don't have to sweat the deadline. If I find out that you're barking up the wrong tree, I'll pull my dogs out of the hunt. And if I find that you have something valid, my dad will just have to deal with the possibility that he and some other people are wrong about their theories. Of course there is a remote possibility that you're judging something you are not qualified to. That stuff happens every day. Do you know how many armchair coaches there are who are convinced that they know how to run a football team better than the professional coaches?"

"I don't even have a clue."

"Lots. But sometimes some of them have valid points, even if they are just amateurs. I want to see some of your points before I judge."

"OK. As long as you're looking just at the points and not the curves."

*Curves? What is she talking – oh, curves.* "I'll be a good boy."

"Going to step out of character, huh?"

"I'm going to step out of my shoes and bang them on the table, if you don't quit assaulting my spotless reputation."

"Ooooooohh. Spotless, huh? Sounds like a commercial for a new kitchen cleanser."

"So are you going to give me a serious answer, or do you wish to continue competing with my father for comedian of the



year?"

"Question? Did you ask me a question?"

Jeremy decided to use his ultimate weapon. He started singing into the phone. "How do you solve a problem like Maria?"

"OK. OK. I surrender. Just no more singing, please! The answer to your question is, how would you like to be my co-chairman of the committee? We'll organize everything. I just have this hazy idea right now, but I was thinking we could divide up and write about different aspects of evolution so we can cover a lot of ground with a minimum of repetition. The big problem is having everyone agree to choose a different tangent. Some might be more difficult than others, for example a paper on DNA versus a paper on the effect of Darwinism on society. Something along those lines. Are you with me?"

"I wish I was – with you that is!"

"Preppie!" she intoned in a mock chastising manner. "Let me rephrase my question in a way that you can't make use of double entendre."

"What? Do you wanna speak English?"

"Oh, pardon my French. Double entendre is an expression that can be translated as a double meaning or double understanding – in English we call it a pun."

"Ah, yes. Attila the pun. Considered by some to be the lowliest form of humor. My dad uses them a lot. Now, you were going to rephrase your question using words that I can't possibly twist around in a devious fashion."

"Right. OK, my question is," she spat the last part out in a staccato monotone, "Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"About what?"

"Aaahhh! You're incorrigible!"

"First you use words with more than one meaning, and now you use ten-dollar words. How's a guy supposed to carry on a meaningful conversation with you?"

"I'm sorry. You were just singing a song to me from the movie where I learned that word. I assumed that you knew what is meant."

"My dad taught me not to make assumptions. He said, and I paraphrase a little to clean it up, "assumptions make jack asses out of you and me." He taught me to make sure of my facts."

"My bad. I've established the fact you don't know the meaning of incorrigible so...."

"Hold on! Actually I do know the meaning. I was just trying to support your illusion that your vocabulary and intelligence surpass

mine – and to be funny back. I'm afraid I inherited some bad joke genes from my dad."

"You *are* incorrigible!"

"OK, enough with the compliments. Can we get back to main thread of this conversation?"

"Main thread? I thought there were enough main threads going here to weave a carpet."

"Just don't try flying away on your carpet. And also don't quit your day job to become a stand-up comedian. Now I suggest a truce, a cease-fire. We could go around in circles like this all day and it might be fun – but I thought we had some serious work to accomplish here."

"You're absolutely right, for a change. Even a blind squirrel finds a nut once – Oops. I did it again. Sorry. OK. Truce is on for the rest of our telephone call. But I warn you, as soon as we hang up, I reload my cannons."

"I've been sufficiently warned, and I tremble in my boots. So maybe tomorrow we can come up with a battle plan for the senior papers?" Jeremy said.

"Hmm. Tomorrow was going to be movie day. If we watch two movies it will take up most of the afternoon. We'll want to leave some discussion time as well. Actually, tonight would be good for me. I'm not doing anything special. If you can break away and come over?"

"Tonight! Let me think about it for a while."

"OK."

"That's long enough! What time do I show up on your doorstep?"

"Let's see. My mom doesn't get home until about seven thirty. Let's make it seven forty-five."

"What's your mom got to do with it?"

"I can't let you come over when she isn't home, so we have to wait until she gets off work."

"Oh. Is that your policy or hers?"

"Both. It's not that I don't trust you, Jeremy. A girl just can't be too careful."

"I understand." *She doesn't trust me.*

"I'm glad. Now I better get off the phone and get some of my chores done around here so I'm ready for your visit tonight. Bring a notebook and pen, and we'll see what two creative minds can put together."

Jeremy was going to ask if Maria's mother was going to be the second creative mind along with his own, but he remembered

they had a truce. "See you at seven forty-five."

"Thanks for the warning."

She hung up before he could complain about her being a truce breaker. He replaced the handset. *I'll get her back the next time she wants to duel.*

## Chapter 14

### Taking Care of Business

Jeremy almost found football boring that day. He was just passing time until 7:45 p.m. when he would be with Maria, and life would start again. She hadn't even been on his radar until two weeks ago, and already he only felt half alive when he wasn't with her or talking to her. *I've got it really bad. Now I know what the term "lovesick" means.* Jeremy had no desire to go see a doctor and have the problem eradicated.

His dad had been in and out during the day. They barely spoke until evening when they ate their supper together in front of a college football game.

"Hey, Jeremy, want to go fishing tomorrow morning?"

"Sorry, Dad. I'm going to church in the morning."

The eyebrows went up again. "Going back for seconds, huh? Glutton for punishment?"

Jeremy didn't dignify his question with an answer. He chewed pizza instead.

"OK, how about tomorrow afternoon?"

Jeremy swallowed. "Sorry again. I'll be over at Maria's watching movies."

His dad winced. "OK. No fishing then. How'd you like to go out to a movie tonight?"

"I'd really like to Dad, but I'm going over to Maria's house tonight."

"Tonight? Another movie?"

"No we're...ah...planning our senior papers tonight." *Sheesh. I almost told Dad what we are going to do. I certainly don't need him blowing a gasket. He could even have a stroke or heart attack over something like this. I'm going to have to be really careful about the way I handle this situation.*

"Really? I figured you'd wait until the last minute. Probably get up early the morning that it was due to finish it."

"Not this time, Dad."

"Well, if that change is Maria's doing, I do have one thing to thank her for."

Jeremy looked at his dad. *Does he see Maria as competition? Is he jealous?*

"OK. One last try. How about tomorrow night for a movie?"

Can you fit me into your busy social schedule, or do you have to confirm with your social director?"

"Tomorrow night will work, Dad. What do you want to see?"

"I don't know. There are a couple of good ones out there. Let's flip a coin."

"Ah, yes, the scientific approach!"

The rest of the evening seemed to pass very slowly as Jeremy kept looking up at the clock to see if it was time to leave for Maria's yet. The time finally did arrive, and so did Jeremy, a few minutes later, on Maria's doorstep. He rang the doorbell, and Maria opened the door almost immediately.

"Come on in, Einstein."

"Einstein, huh? Did I get a promotion? Last time I checked my status was closer to Ace Ventura."

"Just keep yourself in line, or you'll get busted down to Jethro Bodine."

Jeremy laughed out loud. "I see the cannons are loaded and firing."

"And there's plenty more where that came from so watch your step. Now come on in and sit down. We have lots to get done tonight. This is like the official launch of my dad's dream."

Jeremy let his big body drop onto the couch. Maria took a seat in the easy chair across from it. "So what exactly is our goal here?" he asked.

Maria twisted her lip in thought. "That's kind of the problem here, Jeremy. I don't know exactly what the goal is yet. Let me explain precisely where I am with this idea at this point in time. I'm sure the idea will evolve as we go."

"All I know for sure is that my father was very disturbed by the teaching of evolution in the schools. He did lots of study and got to know quite a bit about the topic. But he didn't know what to do about the problem, and then he became too weak to even study and then he was gone." She took a minute to compose herself. Jeremy felt like going over to the chair and giving her a big hug. "I'm not even sure if I can tell you the biggest part of the story."

"Why not?"

"Cause you're not going to understand. You're going to think my dad was demented because of his illness. You're going to think I'm crazy to carry on in his place."

"I'm not going to think you're crazy. I know better than that."

"I'm not so sure. It almost sounds crazy to me," she said.

"Why don't you trust me?"

"I guess I have to. Without this aspect, I doubt I'd have any

cause to start this fight, at least my part of the fight. This battle is already going on all over the world. It just isn't publicized much."

Jeremy's eyebrows went up. She had his full attention as she continued. "OK. How do I begin? I guess the biggest problem is your newness to the concept of God." She paused and seemed to grope for words. "As we talked about before, in the beginning God created Earth and life. Well before that time the Bible says he also created some other beings called angels. One of those angels got too big for his britches and wanted some power. It was like a Heavenly civil war. One third of the angels sided with this revolutionist angel." She grabbed her notebook and read from it. 'Revelation 12:9 "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."

Jeremy blinked a couple of times. He had this mental picture of Charles Darwin's face and Flip Wilson's voice saying "The devil made me do it." He finally ventured to ask a question. "Why were those rebellious angels cast out into the earth?"

"I have no answer to that question."

Jeremy sensed some doubt in Maria's eyes. "And you're saying you believe evolution is a conspiracy planned by the devil?"

"I knew it would sound crazy to you."

Jeremy did some quick thinking. He didn't know why he did it, but he wrote the word "God" and "Devil" in his notebook. He looked at them. He saw "God" and "Devil", but it was almost like a second set of eyes was seeing "good" and "evil". He sat up straight. "Maria, did you ever notice that the words God and devil are only one letter removed from good and evil?"

"Yeah, so, what's your point?"

"It's kind of wild. The other day I was just thinking about how the dominant theme of the world seems to be the struggle between good and evil, and now you tell me this, and crazy as it sounds, it does make some sense. I mean, how do you account for all the evil in the world? Man's inhumanity to man? War going on constantly? Crime running rampant?"

A look of relief showed on Maria's face. It was like the sun had come out and the rain clouds were dispersed. "So you're not going to call for the guys in the white suits carrying designer jackets with the funny sleeves going in the wrong direction?"

"Only if you suggest I have the IQ of Jethro Bodine."

"I shall never doubt your intelligence again! Getting back to

the topic at hand, I think we can break good and evil down into smaller components." She paused, letting her statement sink in so Jeremy could absorb the rest. "God equals good, but the Bible also says that God is love, so God equals good equals love versus Devil equals evil equals...."

Jeremy finished for her. "Hate or maybe hatred."

"Exactly. So God is the author of goodness and love, and he tries to spread the same, and the devil is the author of evil and hatred and he tries to spread that. The two are always in conflict."

"So where do humans fit into this picture?"

"Right back to creation. God created man in order to give him pleasure. Man can only give him pleasure if he loves God and loves what God loves – which is his creation, including fellow humans. That's why the two great commandments that Jesus gave were love God and love your neighbor. If you follow those rules, everything else is just details. Satan doesn't want people to love God, and so he does whatever he can to persuade them not to."

"How can he force us to do things? Does he just talk to us? Can he impact events? Can he—"

"Hold on, Jeremy. I don't know what the answers are here. I'm almost as much in the dark as you are on this subject. We really don't know that much about him except that he's a deceiver. He specializes in deception."

"Well in that case it sounds like he doesn't have any power. It's like in football. When we have the power to run over people, we don't bother running plays of misdirection, aka deception. We just run right at them and dare them to stop us. When we don't have the power to do that, we have to try to deceive the defense so they take themselves out of the play."

"How do you deceive the defense on the football field?"

"Well one example is where I make it look like I put the football into the stomach of a running back, and he keeps his arms wrapped up like he has the ball, then he runs into the line. I hide the ball behind me and then I might throw or run it myself. The deception only works for a short time until the defense sees that the running back doesn't have the ball. The hope is that it will be too late for them to do anything at that point."

"My gosh, Jeremy. This is the kind of stuff that my dad was talking about. How some people are deceiving others in the name of science by proclaiming a theory which in essence denies the existence of God. It is pretty hard to love a God if you don't think he exists, don't you think?"

"End of game before the first kickoff. But, Maria, I have to ask you an important question."

"OK, shoot."

"Am I good?"

"As opposed to evil?"

"Yeah. In your opinion, am I on the side of love or hate?"

"Jeremy. You seem to be a man of love, despite the fact that you don't know God. Let me read something from the Bible for you that will let you see the difference between light and darkness. 'This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.'"

Jeremy blinked at her again. A couple of things stood out to him in that passage. 'Disobedient to parents'. He put a bookmark on that one and moved to the next one. "Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." "Maria. Is this instructing you to stay away from people like me who haven't...uh...I don't know how to say it, honored God or accepted God?"

Maria finally answered, "I don't know, Jeremy. Some things in there indicate that might be true. But you don't fit into most of those other categories. I mean, like despisers of those that are good. If you were evil and you considered me good because I do honor and love God and honor his commandments which direct us how to be good, then logic would dictate that you would despise me. I don't see that at all."

"I hope not. It's just exactly the opposite. I think you're the most wonderful person I've ever met."

Maria ignored his compliment, though it didn't seem to go unnoticed. She had more important concerns on her mind. "Another thing, Jeremy, is that Jesus walked among the sinners. He said that the healthy don't need a doctor, but rather the sick do. He came to call those who were sinners to repentance, not the ones who already lived a righteous life. I have to admit this, Jeremy, I've known boys who were Christians who lived less according to God's commandments than you do. From what I see, you're living in a way that God wants you to, even though you don't know him, yet."



"I'm just living like my father taught me to live." He stopped as that sank in. How ironic. His father had been teaching him to live a Godly lifestyle but totally left God out of their lives. "But my dad doesn't believe in God. Well, at least that's what he told me. But he did at one time. He gave it up when my mother died."

"Looks like your mother's influence is still present."

*Mother's influence? Could her prayers have sheltered me? Can she exert some kind of influence from Heaven? Maybe Dad made some type of promise to Mom on her deathbed that he would raise me the right way.* He was feeling faint all of sudden.

"Jeremy, you don't look so good."

"I don't feel so good either."

"I have a request that might seem strange to you. Can I pray with you right now?"

She was right. That was weird. What did he have to lose? "OK, go for it."

She put both of her hands in his. She bowed her head. He followed her lead. "Dear Heavenly Father. I come to you and plead with you to touch Jeremy right now. Clear up the confusion in his head. Help him to just feel your love for him. Please keep Satan from having any influence over him. Help him to discover the truth – especially whatever truths he needs to know about his own life. Lead him and guide him and help him to learn your will for his life. In Jesus name I pray. Amen."

She ended the prayer but both stood there for a moment in silence. It was incredible to Jeremy. The reverence around him was so thick he could almost get out the proverbial knife and hack off a slice. He had this feeling of peace that he couldn't explain. It was almost like he had discovered a new emotion in his body, one which he could feel but couldn't pin down with a description. It was so unreal. Maria talked to God just like he was right there in the living room with her and just like someone talks to someone whom they trust completely.

Finally, Maria looked up and into his eyes. "Are you OK?"

"Much better. Thank you."

"Don't thank me. I didn't do anything."

He wasn't going to argue, but he still felt she had done something. *Maybe this is one of those placebo effects.*

Maria sat back down. "So where were we?"

"We were talking about Satan and deception if I remember it correctly."

"You're right. So, let's reason together. If God does exist, then Satan also exists. Right?"

"Hold on. Not necessarily. Your logic breaks down unless you make one other stipulation."

"What's that?"

"That the God who created the Earth is the same God who we find in the Bible."

"That's true, Jeremy." She frowned.

"But for now let's stipulate they're the same. Now what?"

"Does it not stand to reason that Satan would do anything in his power to wipe out the knowledge of God and the acceptance of his blueprint?"

"Yeah. One's perspective is very critical in this situation. If Satan and God do exist, they are definitely at war. And in that case, anything goes. All's fair in love and war. Satan would no doubt be a prolific propaganda machine."

"The father of all lies and liars."

"OK, so let's say that those facts are all established. Now what is the connection with Satan and evolution?" Jeremy asked.

"First thing you have to understand, Jeremy, is that there are two basic theories of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin. One is the special theory of evolution. This theory states that new races and species arise by agency of non-directed mutations and natural selection. The second is referred to as the General theory of evolution and basically states that this special theory applies universally, meaning that every creature on Earth is descended from a common ancestor. The result of that universal application would be that all living creatures descended from the exact same source. Many scientists say that source itself was the result of inanimate matter becoming living matter through a set of coincidences. Darwin didn't really write that that had to be the case, but he did propose that life perhaps formed out of a nice pond of primordial soup. Darwinism isn't dogmatic about the origin of life, just the origin of all species, including man.

"The first kind of evolution is scientific. I mean we actually have evidence for that theory, examples of that kind of thing happening in nature. That one isn't the issue at hand. Somehow life got started with a one-celled creature and from that one form of life all living things have descended, including Homo sapiens.

"That theory directly contradicts the Bible, which says God created Earth and the creatures in it. In reality, the theory allows God to be retired, dispensed with as irrelevant because he didn't create man and is a deadbeat and absentee father. The religion of atheism is allowed to rise up from the ashes of all other religions because the origin of life has been explained by science. God has

been voted off the island since all he does is encumber us with unrealistic demands to be obedient and loving."

"OK. The picture is starting to come into focus. We've two basic views of the world. If God exists and he created the world, the evolutionists are totally wrong. And if he doesn't exist?"

"Not so simple. There are three options here. Perhaps the story of Genesis isn't accurate but was just a paraphrasing. Maybe God created life but not instantly. Perhaps he created the first living cell and in that cell the power to alter life and thus evolve. In that situation both God and evolution are true. But Genesis cannot be."

"This is confusing."

"You're right. And if God doesn't exist, what difference does anything make? What I do know is that my dad was convinced that human evolution has no scientific validity. It is a big made-up story which is protected by the scientific establishment to keep the myth going. If there is no God of the Bible, then there has to be a third possibility. Something or someone other than the God of the Bible created us. Life can't originate from nothing."

"What about the Big Bang theory?"

"Which says?"

"A small amount of matter exploded, hence the bang part, and created the universe."

"Ever gaze at the stars?"

"Of course."

"Do you know how many stars there are in the universe?"

"Not exactly. I'm sure they find more all the time because of advancements in equipment."

"Well, let's put it this way. If every person on Earth received an equal number of stars, everyone would get over a trillion each. We don't even have a clue concerning non-luminous bodies like planets."

"You're kidding?"

"I wouldn't do that. Most of them are bigger, lots bigger, than the Earth. And according to the Big Bang, the entire universe came from a *small* amount of matter that was condensed. I'd like to know *that* compression algorithm when I go to pack my suitcase. I'd be able to fit the contents of the state of Washington into my lipstick container. But let's play along and say that there was a Big Bang. There is still one great big giant rub here."

"What's that?"

"Where did the original condensed matter come from? Can anything come from nothing?"

Jeremy sat there in silence. "That's beyond comprehension. We can hardly grasp the concept of nothing. How do you explain "nothing"?"

"I agree. I guess the closest concept we understand is zero."

"I hope you know my head is spinning. This stuff is mind-boggling."

"Yeah. I know. That's why most people don't think about things like this. Most of them either believe it or they don't. Not many know or even care to do the research. And you also have to remember that the Big Bang theory doesn't explain life, just the inanimate matter in the universe."

"Gotcha. So where did God come from?"

"Also beyond our comprehension because he is an *eternal* being – always has been and always will be. Our puny little minds, even yours, Einstein, are too small to grasp that concept. We can say it very easily, and we can believe it with a little more difficulty, but to explain it is beyond us. Do you remember the ring analogy from our discussion the other night?"

"Oh, yeah. I forgot. I'm a slow learner. Speaking of Einstein, was he a believer?"

"That's an excellent question. I don't know the answer to that."

Jeremy pointed to a computer over in the corner. "Is that hooked up to the Internet?"

"Yep."

"Cool! Wanna go surfing with me? It won't be a date, and you don't have to wear a bikini." Maria laughed. *Man, how I love that sound. God, don't let anything bad happen to Maria to extinguish that laughter.*

"Do you want to drive?" Maria inquired.

"Sure. You can be a backseat driver."

Jeremy clicked on the browser icon and entered the Google link. Within two seconds they were gazing at a screen that told them there were forty-one million matches with just the criteria of "Einstein". Jeremy turned to Maria. "Maybe we should refine the search *a little* more. I have to be leaving here by ten p.m., which gives us one hour, and I'm not sure we can look through forty-one million pages in that amount of time."

"What, no confidence in yourself?"

"I got lots of confidence in me. I just don't think the browser can load the pages fast enough."

"You're lucky we're on cable and not a dialup!"

"You got that right. Let's add the word "God" to the search and see how many hits we get. Ahh, down to only one point four

million."

They looked at the first page of the results. Maria pointed to one, "Try that one that says Einstein – quotes on God, religion, and theology. Let's find out what the most famous scientist in history had to say."

The first things they saw were several pictures of Einstein. "Talk about your bad hair days," Maria said.

Jeremy involuntarily reached up to his own hair to make his wasn't like a herd of cats going off in 360 different directions. He was safe. "Look at that early picture. His hair was perfect. What happened?"

"Maybe his success went to his head?"

"Looks more like about a hundred volts of alternating current to me." They read through the quotes.

Maria said, "He talks about God, but it doesn't appear he was a believer in the same God as me. It appears he believes in a creator but not in a God who answers prayer. Let's look at another one."

Jeremy hit the back button and returned to the search list. This time he chose one that read "Einstein and God". This one provided more information than just quotes and comments about the quotes. In reading through it they discovered that Einstein was raised Jewish but gave up Judaism when a teenager. "This is kind of strange. He talks about God all the time here, but he refused to get involved in religion because he rejected authority. He says right here he didn't believe in a personal God."

Maria pointed to a place on the screen. "It says Einstein didn't understand evil. Interesting after what we discussed tonight. It says that he rejected the idea of a personal God because of all the suffering and evil he found in the world. He couldn't reconcile that with the order of the universe itself. What he couldn't grasp was the simple logic that in order for humans to choose either evil or good, evil had to exist. I think even Jethro Bodine could pick up on that one."

"You're right. That's pretty elementary logic. If only good existed, there would be no choices to make. No way to screw up. No contest. It would be like a football game where one of the teams didn't show up. There could be no game." Jeremy became lost in thought while Maria continued to read. "Maria, did you ever consider that maybe God created us for his entertainment? That we are his television and the struggle between good and evil make up the plot of every story on the screen?"

"I'm afraid I'd have to label that theory a little far out there, but

there may be truth in it. I don't think that just the evil versus good struggle comprises the whole plot. Man has to struggle against sickness, death, failure, rejection, things that are not exactly the product of evil. But they do allow us to rise up to overcome them. I think courage and determination and giving love despite not getting it are part of what God loves to watch among his creatures."

Just then Maria's mother called her from the kitchen. "Be back in a minute, Jeremy."

He browsed to yet another article about Einstein. Quickly he wrote into his notebook the quote on the screen concerning first love. This quote caught Jeremy's attention because he suddenly realized that his feeling for Maria was a first-time experience for him. He had been attracted to a few girls before, but he had never reached a point where he considered himself in love, until now.

*Oops! Maria was coming back. Hide the evidence!* He hit the back button quickly to change pages. *Imagine, Einstein lost his head over a female too. How does science explain what I'm going through right now?*

"Jeremy, we have to hurry. It is almost curfew time."

"There are too many loose ends to tie this thing up nicely tonight. I say we leave Einstein behind and press forward. We can always come back to him later if we want to. I'm not sure if he helps or hurts your cause."

"Me either. This is what scares me a little. We've done a little bit of research, and it seems like there is such a vast amount of information. We'll get lost if we try to wade through too much of it. How do we condense this study down to a manageable level and still provide enough information to be considered thorough? And I keep talking like you've already decided to make this fight yours. That's far from a forgone conclusion."

"Man, I don't know exactly what to say about that right now, Maria. I feel like I do after Thanksgiving dinner when I get so stuffed I can't even think about eating ever again. I just need some time to let some digestion occur. Sometimes that's true of information as well. It's necessary that I analyze what we've talked about and see where I am. This has been a fascinating journey for me. I've thought things that never passed through my brain before. I've felt things I've never experienced before. But I'm in no position to, in good conscience, offer you a promise right now. I really feel that I want to be a part of this, but I need a little time to think about everything."

"I wouldn't want you making a decision without thought. That

usually makes for a bad decision."

"So, let me restate to you what I think you were saying so we know we're on the same page. OK?" She nodded. "You think the teaching of evolution in our schools is promoting atheism, and that isn't right. Atheism is a religion and since other religions are excluded from the school, atheism should be too."

Maria shook her head. "Not exactly. I'm afraid the mention of religion is going to turn off a lot of people. The battle can't be over atheism but rather over the teaching of untruths in science that encourage atheism. The teaching of theories with no proof as scientific fact."

"So this would be a science versus science debate. Fight facts with facts to prove that evolution can't be true."

"I'm not sure that can be done, Jeremy, since evolution is just a historical theory. I can't prove that God created the world, or that he even exists. And scientists can't prove he doesn't exist, especially by claiming that life *could* have originated by a bunch of chemical accidents over a long period of time. I think all we have to do is to argue the point that there is nothing scientific about the theory itself. We need to establish that not only do scientific facts not prove the theory; they even refute it, even if they can't disprove it. I believe the term reasonable doubt might apply here."

"That's a pretty ambitious agenda."

"I'm fully aware of that. My dad seemed to think there was a pretty good case for the defense. I aim to find out how strong it is. It would be nice to have you on the team, Jeremy, but I will certainly understand if you decline the opportunity."

*What am I going to do? What's the right thing to do? What about that feeling I experienced earlier when Maria prayed. What was that? I can't feel it anymore. Was that just imagination?* Jeremy's thoughts were interrupted when Maria's mother entered the living room to deliver the message that the curfew time had arrived. He grabbed his notebook and pen. "I didn't write much down tonight."

"Me neither."

"We barely scratched the surface of this thing I'm afraid. I'll bring my notebook again tomorrow. Maybe we'll get time to actually write something down."

"Oh, wait. I almost forgot." She ran quickly into her room and reappeared as suddenly as she left. "I have a special book for you that might help in reaching a decision." She handed him a soft cover book. He took it without even a glance at the cover. "See you tomorrow. Drive safely."

"Was I a good boy tonight?"

"You were a perfect gentleman. I'll have to retire that "Preppie" nickname if you keep this up."

"Good night, Maria. I'll be thinking about everything."

"OK. Sweet dreams!"

*I'll give you just one guess who I'll be dreaming of. That will ensure that they're sweet indeed.*



## Chapter 15

### Digging for Truth

On the way home Jeremy weighed the pros and cons of joining Maria in her adventure.

*Pros: I'd spend lots of time with Maria, get my senior paper done early, spend quality time with Maria, learn lots of new stuff about God and religion and even science, and also would be hanging out with Maria.*

*Cons: I'd probably alienate my father, could possibly make a fool of myself, I might tick off my father, might waste a lot of my time, and have I mentioned that I might antagonize my dad? The score is tied, making it a tossup.*

*The most important factor has to be the evidence.* He flipped his dome light on and looked at the book Maria had given him. *Darwin on Trial. Glad I looked at this before I went in the house. I don't want Dad seeing this one. He might be on me like white on rice.*

He turned his light off and thought of his dilemma. Maria was exerting a major gravitational pull on him, but that certainly didn't mean she was right. Would he swim upstream against the current of truth just to be with a girl like Maria?

A line from *Huckleberry Finn* came back to him. You can't live a lie. He didn't want to try. Before he'd even be in a position to think about marriage, he was either going to have to convince Maria that she was wrong or the evidence would have to convince him that she was right. *Whoa. Thinking of getting hitched and I haven't even had one date yet. I'm out of control.*

When he entered the house, where his dad was watching TV, he made sure the book was tucked inside his notebook. Jeremy said his usual good night and went up to his bedroom. After brushing his teeth, he climbed into bed with *Darwin on Trial*.

He noticed that someone had highlighted this book in pink – just like his mother's Bible. He looked at the inside cover. It contained handwriting in pen that read "Lance Masterson". Obviously this book belonged to Maria's father. *A year ago, Lance was perhaps reading this same book and now he is lying in the ground in South Dakota.*

Death was such a strange concept. It had barely touched him directly except for the death of his mother. He was young and

strong and felt like he could live forever, but he knew better. *What would it be like to be dead? No football. No sunrises. No music that makes me sing. No wit wars with Dad. No invigorating aromas from the oven. No Maria! I don't want to foul out of this game of life.*

*Maria's God offers the chance of eternal life. That means I'd never die. What does the world of science, coupled with the theory of evolution, offer me? If Maria isn't exaggerating the issue, all they have to offer is death – absolute and final.*

*If I was dead, I couldn't even remember my life. It would be like I never lived. So what difference would it make if I had a good life or a bad life or was a good person or a bad person? What would matter at all? No matter how smart or how handsome or how talented or how rich I am, I'm going to die. But is there an encore in an afterlife? Is this world just a rehearsal for better things to come? Is death merely another form of graduation?*

Death was the ultimate equal opportunity employer. It was more certain than taxes. There were loopholes for taxes. If there were no loopholes provided by the world of science, how could people believe claims that God didn't exist unless the evidence was absolutely overwhelming?

Maria's religion was maybe hard to believe, but what if Maria's father was right, and evolution turned out to be just as hard to believe? *If you have to choose between two potential ideas, neither of which has absolute proof, wouldn't it make sense to choose the one that offers the most benefits?*

Jeremy's thoughts drifted to his mother. *If there is a Heaven, I'm sure she's there. I wouldn't want to disappoint her and not make it myself.* And he wouldn't want to miss the chance to meet her and talk with her about everything he had always wanted to share. *I need to dig into this evidence and come out with my own convictions.* He grabbed a yellow highlighter. *Let the quest for truth begin!*

By the time he was ready to turn off the light, he had read enough that his interest level was definitely high. Phillip Johnson was a good author. Jeremy was coasting through the book without any problem understanding anything.

One item he highlighted noted that Charles Darwin didn't complete a science degree. He was a graduate of a divinity program to train ministers. *How ironic is that? If Maria's theory of Satan deceiving mankind is accurate, then Darwin must have been the devil's missing weak link that sold himself out hook, line, and sinker. If there is a hell, then Mr. Darwin must have a special*

*chair very near the fireplace.*

Jeremy read beyond his normal bedtime. Reluctantly, he put the book aside and turned out the light. *I don't want to fall asleep at church or at Maria's house tomorrow. And then there was the movie with Dad. I've got a full day planned.*

\* \* \*

The alarm never went off the next morning because Jeremy woke up early. *I'm wide-awake. I might as well get back to Darwin.* He picked up where he left off. It was clear to see why Maria's father had marked up this book in so many places, and why he thought so highly of it.

It was necessary that he hear the other side of the story to find out if Johnson was telling the truth. *Just because a man has a story to tell, and he is good at telling it, that doesn't prove his story isn't comprised of convincing propaganda with no basis in truth, or containing partial truth. An intelligent person has to look at both sides now.*

He couldn't put the book down. This was absolutely fascinating. Maria's father's conviction that evolutionists had hijacked science was becoming a clear possibility. *How ironic is that? The supposed seekers of truth and knowledge suppressing truth and knowledge in the name of science.*

He ran across a quote that caused him to stop in his tracks. Some guy named Richard Dawkins had said, "It is absolutely safe to say that if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid or insane (or wicked, but I'd rather not consider that)."

Jeremy had trouble believing that people who questioned this evolution theory were considered idiots or insane and the science world blackballed anyone who didn't play according to Hoyle, Fred Hoyle that is, the man who is sometimes credited with inventing the term "Big Bang", as opposed to the Hoyle who wrote the rule book on card games.

*Speaking of cards, could a poker analogy be used to describe the theory of evolution? Was it possible that people who promoted evolution had a deuce and a three in the hole but were bidding like they had a pair of aces? Was it just a bluff? It is certainly worth exploring. It's incredible how much information I've sucked up in the last twelve hours.*

*How am I going to retain all of this? I can just go back into the book and read the highlighted passages when I need to find a*

*quote or fact. That method is pretty inefficient. It would be nice to store their information on the computer for quick search access. How about a computer program?*

*"Their" information? I'm considering myself a member of the team already. It appears my decision has been made. I'm going to explore this to whatever end it leads.* He thought of his dad and also of that passage from the Bible that talked about the latter days when children were disobedient to their parents.

*A horrible thought struck him. What if Dad told me I can't be a part of Maria's research team, or even worse, that I can't see Maria? What would I do?*

He glanced at the clock. He would have to continue his interior monologue in the shower. It was almost time to leave for church. He hid the Darwin book to prevent his father from finding it and jumped in the shower.

Jeremy drove to Maria's house. Today he would be the chauffeur and take them to the bus stop. He didn't want to be late so he let the needle of his speedometer climb a little higher than the law allowed. He was looking forward to giving Maria the good news that he wanted be dealt in to their little card game. It was time to find out what their hole cards were and calculate their chances of holding a winning hand. Jeremy had a sneaking suspicion that they were attempting to put out a forest fire with a squirt gun. Hopefully none of them, especially Maria, got burned. He pulled up in Maria's driveway exactly on time, relieved that no police officer had intervened on his way to delay his arrival, lighten his wallet, and sully his perfect driving record.

Maria and her mother opened the door and exited to the sidewalk before Jeremy even turned his car off. He rolled down his window and heard Maria's mother direct her to sit in front with Jeremy. He left the car running in park and jumped out. He only had time for one gallant action. He had to make a quick choice. He opted to go for age before beauty and opened the rear door for Mrs. Masterson. As an afterthought he held up one finger towards Maria.

Mrs. Masterson was pleased. "Why thank you, Jeremy. What a perfect gentleman!"

There was that phrase again. He had heard it from the lips of both of these females in the last two days. *They both couldn't be wrong, could they?* He glanced up to see if Maria had understood his cryptic sign language. She was standing there with a question mark written in the wrinkles of her forehead.

"Don't move one muscle," he commanded.

He ran over to the passenger side of the car, gently removed Maria's hand from the door handle and opened the door for her. When she was safely seated, he gently closed the door. Before the door was shut, he did notice a look that passed between mother and daughter.

As he navigated around the car back to his own door, he could hear the sound of the brownie point cash register going "kaching kaching". *Life is good*. He looked around him at a perfect azure sky, Mt Rainier in the distance, and the leaves of trees all around them which were starting to sport their new fall colors.

He felt like breaking into song with a rousing rendition of *June is Busting Out All Over* for some reason. He determined that really wasn't appropriate for September, and besides, he might mortify his guests. He jumped into the car and threw it into reverse.

"Forget something?" Maria asked.

*Oh no! What did I forget?* He glanced quickly in the rear-view mirror. His hair was flawless, no egg or crumbs on his face. He looked over at the questioner with a blank look in his eyes that pleaded for a clue.

"Your seat belt. Click it or ticket. One hundred and eleven dollars."

"OK. I knew that." He buckled his security belt, feeling a little Jethro Bodinish.

He got them to the bus stop without a problem, and they boarded the bus. It was almost full, and Mrs. Masterson ended up sitting far back of the kids. Jeremy was glad about that. He wanted to talk to Maria alone. "Does your mother know about your promise to your dad and your project?"

"Yeah."

"And she's OK with it?"

"Very much so. She knows how important this was to my dad. She said she wished she could be of more assistance, but with the new job and stuff she doesn't have a lot of time. She did set aside some money for research materials."

"Cool. I just didn't know if I should mention anything in front of her. I guess maybe I'm getting used to sneaking round corners with my situation at home. I used to tell my dad everything, and now it seems I'm hiding almost everything from him. Oh, my gosh!"

"What?"

"I forgot to even say goodbye this morning. I was in such a hurry to get to your house that I ran right out of the house without even thinking about him. All I could think of was the possibility of

messing up the day for you and your mother." *And thus ultimately me.*

"A little lazy this morning? Did I keep you up too late last night, and you had to sleep in till the last minute?"

"Not even close, Princess. I'd like you to know that I was up before the birds and finished the book you gave me last night."

"You're kidding, Jeremy! I didn't think you would even have started yet."

"How did *you* like the book?"

"To be perfectly honest, Mr. Speed Reader, I haven't read it all yet. My dad said it was perhaps the most influential of the books he had read. I was planning to read it all, but so far I've just browsed sections. I thought I'd give it to you first."

"So the highlighting *was* your dad's work?"

"Exactly."

"Well, this is interesting. I might know more about the topic you're dedicated to than you. You have to read the whole thing because it was great! I'll bring it back tomorrow. Do you have more books for me?"

"Yes. I have a few more books and a list of the books that my dad was going to buy. He didn't get involved with this study until shortly before he got really weak and after that sometimes delirious. So he didn't have a chance to get into it as deeply as he wanted."

"It was nice of him to leave the seeds of knowledge. I suggest that we go down to the public library tomorrow night and see what we can find from your dad's wish list."

"But if they're library books, we can't highlight them."

"We can. They just wouldn't like it, and they'd probably have us doing hard labor for twenty to thirty years. I have another plan. We need a computer program, one that lets us input the data we want for this research and then allows us to quickly search to find the information again. We would need to all have access to it, so it will have to be on a website since we don't have all of our computers networked together."

"That's a stroke of genius! But who do we get to do that work? My dad taught me a little about programming, but I wasn't thrilled with it, and he gave up trying."

"Hacker is our man."

"Hacker?"

"Bill Kaufman is his real name. He's already on the team! We just need him to build this website for us before he does any research on his own."

"I just noticed you're using *we* and *us*. Is there something that you haven't told me?"

"I was waiting for you to pick up on that."

"Sometimes a few words of direct English come in really handy in communicating an idea instead of hints. You know, something simple like "I do"."

Jeremy stared at her. Her face reddened as she realized the potential double entendre she had set up for Jeremy.

"I meant something like "I will do it" or "I'm on the team" or "I'm with you"."

"All of the above. And I do," Jeremy answered.

She cocked her elbow to let him have it. "OK, Preppie. You asked for it." Her playful motion stopped halfway to his ribcage. By that time the bus had arrived.

Church was different for Jeremy today. He had one service under his belt and felt like he had a clue what was going on. Buoyed by his good spirits, he was overflowing with confidence. He even initiated handshakes with other people instead of accepting others' hands reluctantly when they were offered.

The songs were all different this week. Maria didn't seem to know most of them, but she apparently knew one very well. She sang with all her heart as she raised her hand toward the ceiling. *I got to ask what's up with this hand raising stuff.*

The pastor came out again and prayed. Much to Jeremy's disappointment, he didn't ask everyone to join hands. Then he asked them to greet people around them. Jeremy did that heartily. Before sitting down, he reached his hand out to Maria. If the pastor wasn't going to help him, he had to do it himself. He wanted to kiss the hand, but that was a bit extreme so he just shook it very gently and looked her right in the eyes.

When he sat down, his mind flashed back to his locker almost two weeks ago, and how he had averted eye contact with her. Now he was looking right into those beautiful brownies on an almost regular basis and almost seeing right into her soul.

The collection bags came around. The pastor's message came around again. Jeremy noticed that lots of people, including Maria, had Bibles with them and would quickly look up a passage when the pastor mentioned it.

He was able to look over her shoulder as she held the book out between them. Maybe he should bring his mother's Bible next time? Then he thought again. If he did that, Maria wouldn't be sharing hers with him. They had to almost lean into each other to read from the same book. *Why would I spoil my enjoyment?*

*Sharing a Bible is a very nice thing to do.*

After the service they made their way through the throng again. "I don't believe it!" Jeremy said.

"You don't believe what?"

"There's Hacker over there. He goes to church here too apparently. Do we have a minute?"

"Sure. Besides I see some girls I know from school. I want to introduce Mom to them. We'll meet you over by the bus stop in five minutes?"

"Perfect." He bolted in the direction of the computer guru.

Hacker was with his parents so Jeremy used his real name.

"Bill. What's up?"

"Hey, JD."

Jeremy was still in handshake mode and stuck his throwing hand out to greet the boy he was addressing. "Boy, have I got an opportunity for you!"

"Let me guess. This is somehow related to Maria Masterson."

"Good guess. We need a website with data access so we can store information and retrieve it quickly. Can you create one for us?"

"So this wouldn't be a public site? Just one for our group to use?"

"You got it."

"No problem."

"Cool. We probably have to pay to get a web host, don't we?"

"We're in luck there too. My cousin and I have a site that we're leasing. We can just use it for now. If we ever have to move off of there, I know there are some out there we can get for about \$5 bucks a month."

"Super!"

"So what did you have in mind for data?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what pieces of information do you want? For example a typical database for a business has a customer list in it that stores the name, address, phone number etcetera."

"Gotcha. I hadn't really thought about that. Let me get back to you on that. Can I send you an email with that info?"

"No problem." Bill, being the stereotypical computer geek, had a pen in his shirt pocket. He pulled it out and wrote down his email address on part of the bulletin from the church service and handed it to Jeremy.

"Thanks, Hacker. Catch you later." Jeremy walked outside and found Maria. "Been waiting long?"



"Nope. Barely got out here. Perfect timing."

"Ahh. Matches my perfect hair."

"Yeah, and your perfect humility!"

After returning to the parking lot, they climbed into Jeremy's car. "May I treat you ladies to lunch?"

They looked at each other. Mrs. Masterson answered, "That's extremely nice of you Jeremy, but you don't have to do that."

"I know I don't have to. But I'd like to. It won't be something fancy so don't worry that I'm going to have to float a loan to pay for it." He snuck a glance at Maria. "However, I do know an Angel in the mortgage brokering business in case I'm a little short." Maria made a funny face at him.

The specialty of the restaurant Jeremy took them to was customized burritos with the customers choosing the kind of tortilla, meat, beans, rice, and sauces they wanted. Jeremy went first. He got pork on spinach tortilla.

"Is one enough to satisfy that big hunger of yours, especially after no breakfast today?" Maria inquired.

"Yeah. These things are huge. You might not be able to eat all of one."

"Mom and I can share one in that case."

"Whatever you want. I can buy you each one, but if you don't want that much...."

The women ended up choosing to share a shredded beef on tomato tortilla. The threesome walked down the line as the waitress built their burritos on the fly. They found a table, and Jeremy did the honors of carving the burrito for Maria and her mother to share.

During their leisurely lunch, one of the girls from school came in. She greeted Jeremy. He waved her over and introduced her to Maria. When the new acquaintance went back to the counter to place her order, Jeremy said, "Chelsea is a whiz bang artist. You can't believe the stuff that she does. She does cartoons for the school paper sometimes."

"Ready. Hmm. That's a talent that we might be able to make use of at some point in the future. How well do you know her? Do you think she would be sympathetic to our cause?"

"I went to elementary school with her. I guess I really knew her better when we were little kids, but I know she has a reputation of being a Jesus freak." Maria and her mother exchanged glances. "Did I say something wrong?"

"Jesus freak? Perhaps not exactly a complimentary term."

"Right. What term should I have used?"

"Well, maybe a phrase like "Christian" or "believer" would work."

"OK. Sorry about that." He suddenly thought of *Love Story*. He could still picture Jennie saying to Preppie, "Love means you never have to say you're sorry." What would he give to have Maria say that to him? It didn't happen, at least this time, though she partly fulfilled his desire.

"No need to be sorry, Jeremy. You weren't trying to be malicious. You just didn't know better."

Actually he did know better. He knew it was term used derogatorily at school. *I can let Maria think I'm innocent or I can tell the truth*. He chose the latter course. "No, Maria. I did know better. It slipped out."

"Well in that case, I forgive you."

He ate in silence. *The kids would probably call Maria a Jesus freak too. How would I handle that? I might fly off the handle and go ballistic*. He had a feeling Maria wouldn't like him losing control.

When they had finished eating, they piled in the car again. Maria asked, "Mind if I turn on the radio?"

"Go for it. Did you have a particular station in mind?"

"Yeah. I do. KCMS 105.3 FM." Jeremy hit the seek button until he found the frequency she had requested. A blast of music came through. And then these words elevated themselves above the music:

"I don't really care if they label me a Jesus freak. There ain't no disguising the truth."

*Am I getting guilt tripped here? What if I decide to become a believer of Jesus? Will that make me a Jesus freak too? Will I be the target of contempt of some of the kids? Will I go from hero to zero?*

The song ended and another one began just before they reached Maria's house. Just as he turned off the car, Jeremy picked out the words. "You gotta count the cost if you wanna be a believer. You gotta know that the price is the one you can afford."

*What does this all mean? I thought salvation was a free gift you got by raising your hand. Now this song indicates there's a price involved. Maybe this religion stuff is coming down too fast. Maybe I need to slow down and think more*. He looked over at Maria, who was oblivious to his mental tug of war. *It looks like it will cost me something no matter which way I go. How long can I safely straddle the fence?*

## Chapter 16

### A Day at the Movies

When the threesome entered the Masterson home, Jeremy made himself comfortable in his usual place on the couch, and Maria started the movie. It was simply called *The Bible*. It started, "In the Beginning."

He watched the story of the world from the Book of Genesis unfold from the creation of the Earth, the creation of Adam and later Eve, the disobedience in the garden, the slaying of Abel, the building of the ark and the great flood that ensued, the scattering of men at the tower of Babel, and finally to the story of Abraham and Isaac. The last story had the most effect on him. He couldn't help but picture him and his father in that situation.

When the movie ended, Maria removed it from the VCR. "Comments? Questions?"

"I have to admit that there are some things in there that are pretty hard to believe."

"Such as?"

"The Adam and Eve thing with the serpent. So the eating of this fruit is the event that caused a separation between God and man?"

"Yep."

"Seems like such a minor offense. Besides, Eve was the one who did it. Why does Adam get the rap? And God is supposed to be all knowing, omni something."

"Omniscient. Yes."

"Then he knew when he created Adam and Eve that they were going to disobey him."

"That makes sense."

"And that means he knew that man was going to become so wicked that he would destroy them with a flood – before the fact?"

"I guess so."

"Then why would God get angry and repent of making man? He would have known in advance that he was going to repent so he wouldn't have made man – if I understand the meaning of repent correctly."

"That's a difficult question to answer."

"Which means you don't have an answer?"

"Jeremy, please don't think that I have all the answers. I don't,

and I don't think anyone else does either."

"And what about Cain? He was driven away but there was no mention of his wife going with him. Where did his wife come from if his family was the only one in existence?"

"One thing you have to realize, Jeremy is that the Bible doesn't give all the details. I guess common sense dictates that his wife chose to go with him even though she hadn't herself been driven out. It just doesn't mention that detail."

"Since Adam and Eve were the only people on Earth and their sons had wives that would mean that the sons had to marry their sisters?"

"Not much else available was there?"

"That's pretty weird. And after the flood the same situation would have existed. Noah's grandkids would have had to marry their sisters or first cousins."

"Another astute observation."

"So I thought when close family members had children, that those kids had problems, like mental retardation, physical defects, etcetera. That's why it is against the law to marry your close relatives."

"That's true today. Dad found this organization called Answers In Genesis. They have a ton of information on their website at [www.answersingenesis.org](http://www.answersingenesis.org) about God and evolution. Their answer to that question deals with gene research. The genes back in their day were pure. They have been changed through the ages via mutations so now this presents a problem."

"I'm sorry that I have to ask this question, Maria, but I gotta know. You don't have any trouble believing that all of what we saw in this movie is literally true? I mean like, how did Noah get kangaroos? Actually how did he get all the wild animals to just walk into the ark and stay cooped up there for seven months? And why did the carnivores not eat the others on the ark, and especially after they walked off the ark? The death of one animal when there are only two alive would spell the end of a species."

"I'd be lying if I said I don't have some reservations about some things I read, Jeremy. There is a lot of stuff in the Old Testament I have some difficulty with. Some people want to just take what they accept from the Bible, Old and New Testament, and consider the rest to be poetical or allegorical or just someone's opinions. Trouble is, if you do that, who is to decide what God's portion of the word is and what man's is? Everyone would believe what they want to believe. There would be no absolute authority."

"Is that totally a bad thing?" Jeremy asked.

"Well, for example, let's use football. Suppose a team fumbles the ball and the referee says the defense recovered. If the offense doesn't accept the referee's authority, both teams have their offense out on the field both trying to snap it. Or a visiting team scores and the scorekeepers don't accept the authority of the referees and they don't count the touchdown on the scoreboard. I don't know. Maybe those are not good examples, but I'm just trying to show you that chaos exists when there is no authority."

"That makes sense. That's a pretty good football analogy by the way, for a female. Now I have to ask you another tough question."

"I'm ready. I can see I have to always be ready for your inquisitive mind."

"Do you accept the Bible as the absolute word of God – one hundred percent truth and without error?"

"First of all I don't accept the Bible as one hundred percent *of* the truth. I think God has put truth in many places besides the Bible. It is just one source of truth. As far as being without error, or inerrant as the official word involved, I struggle with that. I see things that appear to be contradictions to me. Not that I want to, but I can't help it. But I have to ask the question, is that a problem with the Bible or with me?"

"So how do you deal with the doubts?"

"In one passage of scripture, Jesus says search the scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life. What that says to me is that eternal life comes from Jesus – not from the Bible. The Bible is a witness of Jesus, and it isn't to be worshipped any more than a man or statue. In other words, my faith isn't in the Bible but in Jesus."

"But without the Bible, you wouldn't even have a record of Jesus."

"That's true. This is so hard to explain. I'm not saying we don't need it. I'm saying that it is only temporarily relevant. The Bible won't be in Heaven. It is only useful here on Earth to help us find God."

"One thing I'm struggling with here is Jesus having to die on the cross because Eve ate the forbidden fruit. I just don't get this. A loving God throws his kids out of the house the first time they do something wrong and holds it against all of their descendants. I mean, God makes the rules, right? Why did he make a rule that his only begotten son had to die?"

"As I said before, I don't have all the answers. This is another

example."

Jeremy felt maybe he was putting too much pressure on Maria. *We can review this topic at a later date if we need to.* "So what is the second movie about?"

"It's a special love story about the Romans and the early Christians. It's called *The Robe*, referring to the robe that Jesus wore before his crucifixion."

"Sounds more entertaining than the first one. More action, perhaps? How about we table our current discussion for a later date and watch this one?"

"Well. If action is what you want, then I'm glad to tell you there is plenty of that. Has that big burrito worn off yet? How about some popcorn and some cookies?"

"Hey. You know they say the way to a man's heart is through his stomach."

"That's coming dangerously close to a Preppie style remark."

"Does that mean I don't get any popcorn?"

Maria laughed and disappeared into the kitchen.

Jeremy was relieved. It seemed like things were back to normal right now. All those questions they had discussed, and those that they hadn't discussed yet, seemed to present a barrier between them. He didn't like that at all. Unfortunately, they also seemed to present a barrier between Jeremy and this God that Maria was trying to introduce him to. Jeremy had read about some glaring weaknesses in the theory of molecule to man evolution in the book he had read. He also saw weakness in the literal interpretation of the Bible as he had seen it portrayed today. He knew Maria was determined to find out the truth about evolution. *Is she prepared to go to the same lengths with her religion?*

The second movie was much more entertaining. It was definitely fiction though it did portray the real-life treatment that Christians suffered at the hands of the Romans. And it was a love story. Jeremy was always a sucker for that genre.

This one ended with the beautiful woman choosing to die with her beloved, who had been sentenced to death by the emperor for the crime of becoming a Christian. Jeremy again couldn't help but put himself in the shoes of the character in the movie. In his real-life situation, Maria was the Christian and he was merely tagging along in her wake. What if she was sentenced to die for her faith? Would he do what the girl in the film did?

The ending brought goose bumps and a shiver down his spine. He looked over at Maria. She was wiping away tears even though she had seen this movie before. He looked at the clock. /

*almost forgot I have a movie date with my dad. It's time to leave, but I don't want to.*

He was just about to reach the door when Maria remembered something. She ran into her bedroom and came back with two items. One was a book and the other was a CD. "I burned you a CD with some of my favorite Christian music on it."

"Thanks. I'll bring your other book to school tomorrow so you can get going on it. By the way, how's your knee doing?"

"It's not bad, but I've quit the cross-country team. I need to spend my time on our project. I've been dawdling long enough. Time to shift into high gear."

Jeremy said his painful goodbye and went back to his car. He almost wished football wasn't interfering with his participation in this project. He couldn't quit, even if he wanted to. It would kill his dad. Well, maybe kill was too strong, but he would be heartbroken.

After he was out on the street and heading homeward, he remembered the CD Maria had given him. *Her favorites. That means she loves these songs and she gave them to me. That's pretty special.* He popped it into his CD player. The first song was somewhat rock-like in nature. He didn't pick up on the words of the verse, but again the chorus struck home.

*Because you first loved me, Jesus*

*You will always be my first love.*

Maria was his first love. But apparently, if she loved this song as she said she did, Jeremy could never be her first love. That wasn't on list of the ten things Jeremy wanted to hear most.

While walking to the house, Jeremy remembered that he needed to come up with a list of requirements for the computer program they needed for their research. He should do that before he went to bed. But now he would be running off again to another movie. It was going to be a really long day. Was there any way he could get out of this commitment?

His dad was sitting on the couch when Jeremy walked in. "Nice you could drop in." His tone was frosty, something Jeremy couldn't remember ever experiencing.

"I'm sorry I forgot to say goodbye this morning. I was running late."

"Yeah. Goodbye and good morning and good afternoon. Well, I'm going to say good night now."

"Good night? You going to bed already?"

"No, I'm going to a movie. Since you were incommunicado all day today, I got myself a date for tonight. If you're not going to be

around, I need to find someone else to hang with."

*A real live date? With a woman?* His dad had never dated since Jeremy was old enough to understand dating. He suspected he had never been out with a woman since he married Jeremy's mother. "Well, that's great, Dad. You need to get out more and spend time with other people. I've heard your jokes so often they're getting stale. You need to find a new audience for your comic skills."

"So you're not bummed I'm not taking you to the movies tonight?"

"Actually, I'm pretty tired, Dad, so I'm not bummed at all. And I have some more homework to do."

"OK. I'll see you tomorrow. I'll be home late tonight."

"Good night, Dad. Love you!"

Paul repeated the words back, but they sounded lame to Jeremy, like a robot or a parrot or something, just repeating words. *I'm not feeling the love.*

Jeremy stared at the door, which had just slammed shut. *Dang.* His dad's anger went quite a bit deeper than he had thought. *Maybe he found the Darwin on Trial book.* Jeremy ran up to his bedroom. The hiding place where he had stashed it seemed to be undisturbed. *That must not be it.*

*Maybe he's upset because he's poured his whole life into me, and now it looks like I'm deserting him. Sheesh, if he is this mad now, if he finds out about my anti-evolution research, he's going to blow his cork.*

He remembered the book Maria gave him which had been left sitting on his car seat. It was time to retrieve it. *Good thing I've got my own car. The gig would have been up.*

On his way back to the house, he examined the cover of the book. It was called *In Six Days*. The subtitle was *Why 50 Scientists Believe in Creation*.

Maria had explained the problem with the difference between micro and macroevolution very well. He kept running into references to the fact people could make all kinds of statements about microevolution and have their audience interpret it to mean all aspects of the evolution theory, including the fact that they were not a monkey's uncle, but rather the monkey was their uncle.

Jeremy started working on a design for their research database. He jotted down a few ideas in his notebook as he thought about how much he missed Maria. He got a brainstorm. *I really should consult Maria about this information. After all, it's her gig, and I don't want to trespass on her turf, so I need to call her to*



*ensure we get the optimal results. This had to be as plausible an excuse that any guy ever had for calling a girl.* He dialed her number.

A female answered, "Joe's pool hall. Who in the hall do you want?"

Oops! "I'm sorry. I dialed the wrong number."

"Are you sure, Preppie?"

"You, turkey! This is the last time you fool me, and I guarantee it."

"What good is caller ID if you can't get some fun out of it? So what's up? You spent all day with me, and now you're calling already. Am I going to have to remind you not to get hung up on me?"

"I think you just did. Anyway, all joking aside, I wanted to get your feedback on our database application. Can you spare a few moments of your precious time for poor little ole me?"

"If you can spare me the melodrama."

His voice went monotone, "OK. No melodrama. No drama at all. Just the facts ma'am. Here's what I have so far. We want to capture people information, names, degrees, job titles, books written, discoveries made, etcetera. We need to store terminology so we can learn all the buzzwords and what they mean. What else?"

"How about events?"

"That's a good one. I got it down."

"How about articles – whether in magazines or on the web or newspapers?"

"Good idea, but we can't store magazine articles in our database. We have to have an electronic format of the info."

"True. So we find an electronic version on line. Maybe in PDF format. And if we run across a paper copy of something we really want, we can always scan it and create our own document."

"OK. I knew there was a reason I called you." *Besides wanting to talk to you.* "How about individual quotations that are not part of an article? You know, stuff like 'early to bed early to rise.'"

"That'd be good too. So we're covering everybody, what they wrote, what they said, where they worked, what school they went to, what alphabet soup they have behind their name...."

"Are there any skeletons in their closet?"

"Are you speaking literally or figuratively?"

"I guess I was speaking comically. OK. So I think we have a handle on what info to store. Let me run it by Hacker. We can always modify this later. It might evolve along the way. Pun

intended by the way."

"I'm not sure I'd try to take credit for that one. But I guess when you get down to the bottom of a barrel, you don't have much choice."

"Barrel of monkeys?"

"That does it. I'm officially plugging my ears now. I thought our constitution banned cruel and unusual punishment. Are we done here? I was in the middle of doing my hair."

"OK. I'll let you get back to your work of creation. Just make sure it doesn't come out like Einstein's, you know, the Big Bang theory."

"And I thought the *Gong Show* was extinct. I'm hanging up now. If you want to keep on telling those bad jokes after I'm gone, I can assure you, the chances of getting a laugh will be about equal. Say good night, Dickie."

"Good night, Dickie."

The phone clicked in his ear. He had blown his chance for a serious goodbye. He had shown his knowledge of old television was just as broad as hers. *What a strange coincidence that two 21<sup>st</sup> century teenagers so steeped in the middle 20<sup>th</sup> century ended up in the same geographic location. We might be the only two on the planet.*

## Chapter 17

### The Bookworms

Jeremy woke up the next morning and immediately realized it was his two week anniversary of knowing Maria. *Life is certainly full right now. What would it have been like if Maria had never moved here?* He didn't want to even imagine that.

He got ready a little early so he could spend a little time with his father at the breakfast table. He still enjoyed his father's company, even if his father had the opinion that Jeremy had outgrown him. His dad was at his usual spot with his usual newspaper when Jeremy arrived. *Oh, I need to checkout the newspaper to find out who won the football games yesterday.* He hadn't watched a single minute of one game yesterday and hadn't even missed it, but now he was curious who the winners were. *Man how my life has changed.* "Morning, Dad."

"Buenos Días."

"So how did the date go last night?"

"It was fine during the movie when the actors did the talking. After the movie, I had to listen to her talk. You ever wonder how blonde jokes originated?"

"That bad, huh? Didn't you know that before last night?"

"Well, it was kind of a blind date."

"Did you have to take her seeing-eye dog into the theater with you?"

His dad raised three fingers over his head. Jeremy wasn't totally offended. That was a higher score than the South Dakota judge had given him.

"It was the sister of a friend of mine. He thought we'd made a good couple. Couple of what I don't know."

"The Odd Couple perhaps. Which one of you was Felix?"

"I'd forgotten what a pain in the neck dating can be. OK, can we move off that painful subject now before that pain moves downward?"

"Can I have the sports section?"

"Here. I finished it already. Seahawks won a close one yesterday, in case you still care. You've been a bit negligent in your football watching lately. Or were you and Maria watching the game together yesterday?"

"No. We were watching movies."

"Chick flicks?"

"Um." *Think fast!* "More along the lines of historical."

His dad's eyebrows went up. "I'm just about ready to call the police and report that my son has been murdered and an imposter is sitting in my kitchen."

"Oh, come on, Dad. I'm just growing up. I'm getting mature. When I was a child I spoke as a child and thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away the things of a child."

The eyebrows went up higher still. "That sounds like something from the Bible?"

"Maybe so. I heard Maria say it."

"Figures! So you got anything going on tonight?"

"Maria and I are going to the library to find some research material."

"Seems like that schedule of yours is getting too full to include your old man in it."

"That's not true. You just need to give more notice than twelve hours."

"And you still say that you and Maria are just friends."

"Dad, I'd love to take our relationship up to the next level, but she isn't ready now and may never be."

"Then why don't you ditch her? Aren't you just wasting your time?"

"I don't think so, Dad. In two weeks, Maria has become closer to me than any friend I've ever had."

"OK, it's your life."

"I'm glad you see it that way 'cause I'm a hundred percent in agreement with you on this one." Jeremy poured himself cereal, and both of them focused on reading their respective sections of the newspaper.

\* \* \*

Jeremy picked Maria up at home after dinner. He took her to the Puyallup library. It was much bigger than Sumner's, and Maria had never seen it. She was duly impressed until they perused the section of books on evolution. "I don't understand it. This library is huge. They have a bunch of books on the side of evolution but almost zippo from the opposition. We aren't given any of that evidence against evolution in school. And the libraries don't, or perhaps won't, carry those books on their shelves. How in the world is anyone supposed to have a chance to know the truth?"

"Maybe you can complain to the librarian later. Let's check out

Amazon.com. I know you can buy used stuff off their website. Maybe we can find some bargains."

They found an empty computer and browsed to Amazon. Maria searched for a couple of the books on her list. The used versions were considerably cheaper than new ones. She could use the money her mother set aside and buy what they needed. Jeremy popped her bubble a little bit when he revealed that each book had a shipping charge of \$3.49. The books themselves were sometimes cheaper than the shipping.

"Let's go home. My mom can use her credit card and we can place our order. We should be able to get these books in a few days, and then we can get cracking. I think we should have a meeting of the minds and divvy up responsibilities so we make sure that we don't have duplication of effort."

"Good idea. With the wealth of topics here, it'll be hard to cover everything."

"I'd say our chances of covering everything are slim to none. We'll just do the best we can."

They made the slow journey out of the library back to the parking lot. "Maria, I'm still a bit hazy about what our goal is here. Exactly what did you promise your dad?"

"It's cloudy to me too right now. He simply asked me to study, and when the time was right, God would show me what to do. I promised him I'd seek until I found. I don't know what the end of this journey is."

"So is this little team you've organized just helping you pack your suitcases for the trip? Or maybe helping you build a foundation?"

"That's an excellent way of looking at it. It's like a house raising party of sorts to help a new neighbor. I have a few ideas about what the future might hold. Maybe I'll become a doctor. Maybe a research scientist. I just have to find out how God wants me use this information."

"And there is no room for a man on that trip?"

"Not right now. When I accomplish what needs to be done, then I'll be more than happy to spend the best years of my life with the man who will make them the best years."

"Even if that man is helping you in the fight to fulfill your dream?"

"You're scaring me now, Preppie. And what guarantee do I have he wouldn't bail on me when the going got tough?"

"Good point. There aren't many guarantees in life, are there? Sometimes we have to go out on a limb. Maybe the best fruits are

always out on that limb."

"Or maybe fruitcakes!"

They were both silent for a moment. "Jeremy, I'm really enjoying spending time with you, but I need for you to understand. I can't do this if you're going to put pressure on me to be more than just your friend all the time. It's almost like you're a kid asking his parent the same question over and over until the parent gets tired of fighting and finally says yes. I can't afford to be expending energy to keep you at bay. Can you understand?"

Jeremy was stunned by the change in the tone of the conversation and was still for a moment. He could feel Maria's eyes upon him, but he couldn't bring himself to look up. "I see. I'm just a pest. Maybe like a pesky puppy that won't stop jumping in your lap. And I'm not really much of a catch in the first place."

Maria flung her hands into the air. "Jeremy, that isn't it at all! You're a super guy! Actually, you seem to have almost everything I want in a companion. You're polite and attractive and smart and compassionate. Two years ago I'd have been more than happy to have worn your letter jacket and been known as "Jeremy's girl", but the problem is that I'm not a girl anymore. My dad's sickness and death have aged me. I don't know when I'll be ready for a romantic relationship. I can't and won't ask you to hang around until that day. If you did, it would speak volumes for your love, but for right now what I want is a brother-sister relationship. That doesn't mean we can't love each other, but it means we love each other in a different way. And if I ever reach the point where I'm ready to make it more than that, you'll be the first person to know."

Jeremy was on pins and needles inside. On one hand he was elated that she found him an eligible candidate but crushed on the other hand by the knowledge that she really was hell-bent on some kind of mission that was more important to her than finding the love of her life. *Will it be less painful to jerk away now like a band-aid being ripped off? Or do I stay close to her with the daily reminders that I'm just a friend and maybe never will be more than that eating at me? In that event the band-aid would be slowly peeled off, pulling hairs with it as it came.* It wouldn't be very noble for Jeremy to detour Maria from her mission for his own selfish pleasure. He didn't want her to regret anything. *So if I'm really a man, even if Maria switched from pushing me away to pulling me toward her, I'd have to decline the offer, for her sake. This looks like a story with no happy ending for me.*

He didn't know what to say. He did, however, realize that this girl had just poured her heart out to him, and she needed some

kind of verbal feedback. "So you think I'm attractive, huh?"

"With hair that even Einstein could admire."

"OK. So what do you want me to do? Where do we go from here? How do I just ditch these feelings that I have?"

"Not an easy question to answer. You're going to have to find most of your own answers I'm afraid. And Jeremy, I don't want you to lose your feelings, I just want you to re-channel them. I enjoy having your esteem and appreciation and yes, your love, if you would go to that extreme. So it's not your feelings I want you to ditch, it is just your ambitions."

Jeremy was lost in thought again. A song from one of his dad's old albums came into his mind. *Ain't this a peculiar situation. We love us but we don't make love. Time to change subjects!* "So, Maria, did you get some reading in *Darwin on Trial* done after school today?"

"Sure did. I got the first two chapters done. I'll have it read in no time. I see that between my dad and you, all the important stuff is already highlighted."

"Yeah. I'm afraid I'm going to have to run down to the Dollar Store and get some more highlighters. I have a feeling I'm going to be using lots of color in the near future."

\* \* \*

They returned to Maria's house where they soon placed an order for over a hundred dollars worth of books.

While they were online, Jeremy had a brainstorm. "Maria, maybe there are some other organizations, besides that Genesis group, which have blazed the trail and perhaps paved the way for what we are trying to accomplish. Maybe we shouldn't be trying to invent the wheel here but rather put the wheel onto a Ferrari. Maybe they can help us somehow."

"Wonderful idea. But how do we find them?"

"The power of the Internet. You just have to learn how to harness that power." They hit the Google homepage again. After a few minutes of searching they had found two such organizations and indications that even more existed.

"Jeremy, check this out. This one is in Seattle!"

"Hey, it is." The Discovery Institute was the name of the organization. It was involved in various scientific and political pursuits. One of their missions seemed to involve evolution. After surveying the links on the homepage the two discovered an events page. "Look at this! These three dudes have just written

books about Darwinism and they're having a book release party. Hey, this one looks familiar, Dr. Jonathan Wells. I've seen that name before."

"Duh. We just ordered one of his books, *Icons of Evolution*. And we already have *What Darwin Didn't Know* by Geoffrey Simmons."

"Oh, yeah. That's it. That party would be a cool thing to go to."

"Maybe. It certainly is an option. That's far enough down the road that we can decide later whether it fits into our plans or not."

"Oh, wait. It's on a weeknight at four thirty. I'll have football practice then. You'll have to go without me. And speaking of going, I'd better. It's getting late, and unlike some people I know, I need some beauty sleep."

"They walked to the door while maintaining their silence. See you tomorrow," Jeremy said before ducking through the open portal.

"Not if I see you first!"

Jeremy shook his head as he returned to his car. He was a lot more comfortable dealing with the funny and feisty Maria than the serious side of her.



## **Chapter 18**

### **They Used to Call Him Mr. Touchdown**

The rest of the school week was uneventful. Maria had been busy befriending the kids who seemed to need a friend. She had suggested that Jeremy give it a shot. There were lots of guys who would feel blessed to have the quarterback of the football team pay a little bit of attention to them. He decided he might as well try it.

It actually felt pretty good. He could see the expressions on faces change from long and sad ones to smiling ones. Funny how cheering someone else up seemed to pick up his own spirits as well. Jeremy was still feeling the pain of his failure to win Maria's heart, but his normal enthusiasm was returning. After all, what girl would want to be with him if he was a sourpuss, a sore loser? It was time to adjust his stinking thinking right now.

\* \* \*

The Spartans had an away game on Friday. Maria and a couple of girlfriends decided to meet the bus when it returned to welcome the team home. They stood near the front door greeting players as they got off. The bus emptied out, but Jeremy hadn't appeared. The bus driver was just about to close the door when one of the girls asked him, "Do you know where Jeremy Dillon is?"

"Not on the bus. He got hurt tonight. The ambulance took him to the hospital in the third quarter."

"Oh no! Was it serious?" Maria asked.

"Looked like it. They took him away on a gurney."

Maria was so upset that her friends had to help her back to the car. They said a prayer for Jeremy. "I wish I knew where he was so I could go visit him – if he's allowed visitors."

Julie, one of her friends, put her hand on Maria's shoulder. "He may not even be in the hospital anymore. They take those injured guys in sometimes just for precautionary measures. He might be home already."

Maria was close to crying. "I don't know if I'll be able to sleep tonight if I don't know that he's OK. Maybe we could drive by his house?"

"No problem. Give me directions how to get there, and we're

on our way."

The girls were silent on route to Jeremy's house. When they approached the driveway, they could see that there was a light on and both cars were in the driveway. At least Mr. Dillon was home.

The other two girls waited in the car while Maria gingerly made her way up the sidewalk and knocked lightly on the door. The door opened, and Jeremy's father stood there with a face of flint. Instead of inviting Maria into the house, he stepped out of the house and closed the door.

Maria had trouble bringing her eyes up to meet his. "I just heard that Jeremy was injured in the game tonight and I wanted to know if he was OK."

"This is a typical bad-news-good-news situation. He is OK, but he's done with football for the year. He has a broken collarbone and suffered a mild concussion."

"Oh, thank God."

"That Jeremy is unable to play football?"

"Oh, no, that's not what I meant. I'm just relieved that he isn't, you know, hurt worse. Is he still in the hospital?"

"No. He's upstairs sleeping right now. I'm glad you came over though. I wanted to have a little chat with you."

"With me?"

"I'd really appreciate it if you would stay away from Jeremy. I don't think you're good for him right now. He's losing his focus on sports, and the relationship he has with me has been severely strained. You've got the boy so confused right now he's close to converting to Christianity, just because he thinks he's in love with you. I hope you wouldn't want him doing that just to please you. I'd think that you would want him committing to God and not to you?"

"Well, yeah. I mean, I see your point."

"Good. Then you won't have any problem fulfilling my request. And also, I'd really appreciate it if you didn't mention this little conversation to Jeremy. Things could get real messy around here if that ever happened. You wouldn't want to cause the breakup of a father and his only son, would you?"

"Of course not. Good night." Maria stumbled away from the confrontation and returned to the car. "Can you take me home, now?"

"Sure."

The tears Maria had been fighting back earlier now flowed freely.

\* \* \*

Jeremy awoke the next morning with a major headache. He started to get out of bed on the customary left side and then became aware of something on his left shoulder. What the heck? He looked down and saw a sling. Then he remembered the night before and the visit to the hospital.

Jeremy had been unconscious for a short time, giving the coaches quite a scare, but he didn't remember that part. His mind had cleared up in stages with the early events seeming like a dream to him. Vaguely, he remembered waking up and having the coaches hold up fingers and ask him how many. He remembered much about the trip to the hospital. And he remembered the events in the hospital pretty clearly. His dad arrived shortly after Jeremy had gone into the emergency room. After the doctor had placed Jeremy's arm in a sling and arrived at the conclusion that Jeremy was able to go home, he was taken out to his dad's car in a wheelchair and the two had driven home. He was now reliving the conversation as he remembered the doctor saying he might be back to normal in about a month, but there was no more football for this season. It should be healed in time for basketball season.

Jeremy remembered joking with his dad on the way home. He had asked whether this was one of Shakespeare's slings of outrageous fortune. His dad didn't laugh. His dad's sense of humor had been noticeably absent lately.

A month ago Jeremy would have been torn up by news that his high school football career was over. This morning, in surveying his feelings, he discovered that he was handling it just fine. He could see that there were some advantages. *I'll be able to spend time with Maria instead of going to practice after school. And I'll be free to visit the Discovery Institute for the book release party. Dad will be going through a tougher time dealing with it than me.* He gingerly climbed out of bed on the right side, using his good arm to help him, and he picked his way carefully down the stairs.

"What are you doing up? You need to take care of yourself. Or maybe I should say, I need to take care of you, for a while. Why don't you go back to bed, and I'll bring some breakfast up if you're hungry?"

"Jeepers, Dad. I just broke my collarbone. I'm not an invalid."

"Don't forget the concussion."

"It was a minor one, Dad. I know of guys who get a concussion one week and are playing football again the next

week. I just need some Tylenol or something. I want some good food too. And I don't need to eat it in bed. I'll sit on the couch and read or watch football. OK?"

*I almost said OK, Mom!* He had seen the overprotective syndrome in the movies and had heard his buddies talking about their moms trying to figuratively suffocate them, but Jeremy had no idea what it was like to receive any mothering, much less over-mothering. He guessed it must be something like what he was feeling now with his father trying to baby him.

Jeremy wanted to read Maria's book while he watched football. *I can't let Dad see it. What I need is a camouflaged cover. That seems to be a bit on the dishonest side. Perhaps reading in my bedroom is just as dishonest. Maybe I should just tell Dad and ditch the spy-like behavior. I certainly don't want to do that today. My headache is big enough already.*

From time to time he glanced at the clock to see if it was late enough to call Maria. He knew her mother went to work early today and he was in no danger of waking her up. When the time arrived, he was prepared for whatever Maria was going to say when she saw he was calling. *I didn't fall off a turnip truck, although I feel like I did right now. What funny thing would she say? Maybe she'd answer the phone with "Is Joe there".*

When Maria picked up the phone, she simply said, "Hello," in a very unenthusiastic manner.

Jeremy was thrown off balance already. He had been ready for everything except indifference. She repeated her hello again without any more sign that she was pleased Jeremy had called. "Hi, this is Jeremy." *That's a brilliant opening. She knows who it is!*

"Oh, hi, Jeremy." The enthusiasm level was a little higher.

"I got hurt a little bit in the football game last night."

"So how are you doing?"

"Not bad, considering. I suffered a minor concussion and a broken clavicle, medical jargon for collarbone. I have a little bit of pain, and it's a pain in the rear end to only have one arm available right now. I'll be back to normal in just a few weeks."

"That's good."

"But no more football."

"Yeah. That's what I – suspected."

"So are we on for church tomorrow?"

"Church? Don't you think you better take it easy?"

"I'm not going to let a little injury put me on the shelf."

"Well, actually, I was thinking, maybe, it's a good idea if we don't hang out together. I know it pains you that I just want to be

friends and you want more. And it hurts me to inflict pain on you...so...maybe...."

Jeremy felt like he'd been kicked in the stomach by a mule. This hurt worse than his broken clavicle. "So why this sudden decision? You didn't show any evidence of being on the verge of this breakup yesterday."

"Well, something came up last night to make me think about it."

"What about the project?"

"I don't know, Jeremy. I doubt you still want to do it, under these circumstances."

He had desires to salvage some male pride but his respect and feelings for Maria tempered them, so he was only a little bit sarcastic in his reply. "Maybe you're right. And maybe you're wrong. I guess this one will be my decision, huh?"

"Yes, it is. Well, Jeremy, I gotta go. Glad to hear you're OK."

Jeremy didn't answer. After about thirty seconds of silence, Maria hung up. *Did this really just happen or am I having a nightmare?* He moved his left arm and pain surged through him. *This is definitely not a dream.* He went up the stairs to his bed and lay down. Thoughts plagued him as he stared at the ceiling. *I can stand losing football as long as Maria is there, but to lose both of them in twenty-four hours is too much for even the strongest boy on Earth.*

When he awoke, Jeremy lay on the bed thinking some more. It didn't make him feel any better. 'Ignorance is bliss' he had heard more than once in his life. Being smart was sometimes a curse because the brain tends to kick into overdrive and suffer from paralysis of analysis.

Jeremy thought of some of the kids he knew at school. Some had no athletic talent, had no scholastic talent, were not attractive, and some even had handicaps. What gave them the motivation to keep on keeping on? He was down in the dumps because he had been temporarily deprived of some of the things that brought him joy.

But he still had lots of hope for the future. He would recover from his injury. Basketball and baseball were waiting in the wings for his participation. He was still on track to be an honors graduate. Another girl could come along any day, just like Maria did, and change his life from night to day. He was being a little premature in having this pity party.

He remembered he wanted to check out the website at [AnswersInGenesis.org](http://AnswersInGenesis.org). He browsed to that link and was busy

reading about evolution when his dad's footsteps coming up the stairs alerted him to danger. He clicked the back button, taking him to a science page just in time.

"What ya reading, son?"

"Just doing a little science research."

"That's good, Jeremy! I like it!"

*I seriously doubt that.*

## Chapter 19

### Flying Solo

The next day Jeremy woke up and immediately thought of church. This would be the first time in three weeks he hadn't been at church. Would he miss it? Or would it be Maria he was missing?

Maybe his reasoning was out of line. Just because Maria wasn't going with him, that didn't mean that he couldn't go by himself. His first shower since his injury would be necessary. The injured teen would have to do that tomorrow before school so this was a good time to figure out how to do it with one good arm.

He carefully removed the sling from his shoulder. He winced a couple times from the pain. Removing his shirt was the next ordeal. Coaxing his pajama bottoms and underwear off wasn't as painful as his shirt but was a slow-moving process.

Everything went fine until he got out of the shower. He now realized how important a second arm was in the process of removing the water from his body. He'd have to let his back drip-dry. Putting a clean shirt on was a bit of an adventure. The real challenge came when he tried to put the sling back on. He found he wasn't able to do it himself. Finally, he gave up and carried the sling downstairs with him. *Hopefully Dad is up.*

"Morning, Jeremy. Where do you think you're going?"

"Church."

"Oh, no you don't. You're not going to be driving today."

"Why? My headache is gone. And last time I was there, church was a non-contact sport, except for the handshakes."

"You need to learn to drive with one hand first."

"I hate to pop your bubble, Dad, but that's how I usually drive."

"That makes me feel real warm and cuddly inside. The answer is still no!"

"Fine! I'll walk. Can you help me put this sling on?"

His dad came over and did his best doctor imitation.

"Thanks!"

"So were you planning on meeting Maria at church this morning?"

"No. She doesn't think it's a good idea to hang out with me anymore."

Jeremy noticed some type of reaction from his father to that statement. He was studying the body language to try to figure out what was going through his dad's mind. It seemed he had just gone from tension to relief in a heartbeat.

"Son, I don't think it's a good idea for you to walk to church either."

"Fine. You can give me a ride then."

"Yeah, right. I've been telling you directly and indirectly that I don't want you going to church – so why would I give you a ride?"

"Because that's what *good* dads do."

"So if I don't give you a ride to church, then I'm a bad dad? Is that what you're saying?"

"That's not what I said."

"No, but you're inferring that."

"No, Dad. You're inferring that. You mean, I'm implying it."

"Whatever. I'm a science teacher not an English teacher. What difference did it make? You knew what I meant."

"I'd probably understand what you meant from your body language if you just grunted. However, I don't think you should avoid the use of precise language."

"Holy crap. You sound like I'm the kid, and you're the dad. You forget I'm the one with the master's degree and you're the one still working on the high school diploma."

"Does that mean when I get my PhD, I can lord it over you because you only have a master's?"

"By the time you get a PhD, you can lord it over me because you'll still have all your teeth and hair."

"Sorry to tell you this, Dad, but I already can do that," Jeremy said, running his hand over his dad's balding spot.

"Did you know that growing hair on your knuckles was the second sign of old age?"

Jeremy looked down at his hand. He was clean. "So what's the first sign?"

"Looking for hair on your knuckles." Paul let out a belly laugh and retreated from the field of battle while he had a slight advantage.

Jeremy almost yelled at the departing back of his father. "So are you giving me a ride to church or not?"

"If you want to go that badly, I guess you can walk. Just don't fall down."

"OK. I won't chew gum on the way."

Jeremy left the house early to make sure he wasn't late for the 9:30 service. It was about a mile from his house. It was good to



get out and enjoy some fresh air and sunshine. The rainy season wasn't far away so he needed to take advantage of the nice weather while he could.

When he reached the church, he didn't feel like going into the sanctuary alone. He stood out in the lobby hoping that somebody he knew was there. He wasn't disappointed. A couple of guys, one he had played with on the basketball team, came by. Jeremy waved at them, and they altered their course to stop by and talk.

"How's the body?" his basketball buddy asked.

"I'll live. It was healthy enough for me to walk over here without a problem. Hopefully I'll be a hundred percent healed in time for basketball."

"That would be good. By the way, are you waiting for someone?"

"Not really."

"If you want to sit with us, you're more than welcome."

"Cool. I'd like that."

The three boys went into the worship hall and found a seat.

"So, Jeremy, when did you start coming here?"

"About three weeks ago."

"Hey, you should visit our youth group. We have a great youth pastor here. About a hundred kids show up on Tuesday nights. It's called Revolution, and it's a blast."

"Sounds like something I'd like to try. What time?"

"Six thirty. If you can't drive yet, I could pick you up."

"Hopefully, by then I'll be permitted to drive. If not, I'll take you up on the offer."

They engaged in mostly sports talk until the band appeared on the stage. Jeremy sat through his first church meeting without Maria. Afterward he had a desire to stay in the lobby and wait for the next service so he could see her. However, he decided that he'd only be causing himself pain. He accepted a ride home from his buddy.

He spent most of the rest of the afternoon and evening reading. When he finished the book *In Six Days*, he understood that evolution was definitely under fire from within the scientific community itself.

## Chapter 20

### The Cat Gets Out of the Bag

The next day Jeremy went through the shower and sling routine again. *It will be nice when life is back to normal.* Jeremy's dad had given him permission to drive to school. He couldn't help but think his father had withheld driving privileges from him the day before just to prevent him from going to church. He concealed Maria's book and strolled casually through the front door.

He finally got a chance to give it back in science class. When Maria arrived, Jeremy held the book out to her without saying a word. She took it, looked at it and then looked at Jeremy. "So you decided not to pursue the research project?"

"Not yet. I finished this book yesterday. I was hoping to get another one."

Her eyes brightened for a moment but then went back to the state they had been in. "You're in luck. Part of our order arrived on Saturday. I'll bring one in tomorrow. No wait, I think you should read *What Darwin Didn't Know* first."

"Whatever you want." Jeremy searched Maria's eyes to try to understand what was going through her head. He saw pain and pathos and concern. He didn't see anything that indicated she was dropping him like a bad habit because she didn't want to be around him. *So why did she push me away?*

After class was over, he was hoping they would talk more. Maria pushed right past him and hurried down the hallway. Jeremy was totally confused by her behavior. And now he had to endure the first football practice as an invalid. *Or do I? Sitting on the sidelines and watching would make me feel like a spare tire. The coach would appreciate my support. Would my teammates care one way or another? It would hurt to watch someone else playing quarterback. And besides, I'm hot on the trail of something that seems a lot more important than hanging around the team.*

His mind was made up. Tomorrow, he'd tell the coach about his decision to quit the team. He avoided the practice field and headed his car back to the house where he resumed his research.

Using the Internet Jeremy continued to study the arguments against evolution that were coming from different directions. He could see that Maria's father had compiled a very good list of books on the topic. He continued to be puzzled by the statements

made by proponents of evolution that the people arguing against it were stupid. I just read about fifty people with lots of alphabet soup behind their name, including PhD, who refuse to accept Darwin's theory. *How does a stupid person get a PhD? Their writing was very logical and very eloquent. No lack of intelligence there.* He pondered the concept of stupidity.

Forrest Gump came to mind. *Stupid is as stupid does. Exactly what did that mean?* Forrest wasn't an Einstein in that movie, but Jeremy always felt there was some significance in that quote that somehow put stupidity in a new light. He googled the phrase on the Internet and found someone else had asked the question for him already. The answer given was: "It means that an intelligent person who does stupid things is still stupid. You are what you do." *So people with a PhD can be stupid according to that definition.*

*So which PhD's were the stupid ones here? If the people arguing against evolution are not stupid, is it possible that those calling them idiots are really the mentally deficient parties?* Jeremy didn't have any answers in that arena, at least not yet anyway, but he did realize that it wasn't very nice to go around calling people stupid. *Wasn't it wiser to present arguments that were factual instead of attacking the person who held an opposite opinion? Seems like an impartial searcher who didn't know which argument to accept was going to use the lack of civility as the tiebreaker and side with the person who hadn't been impolite. At least that's how I look at it, but I'm not like everybody else, so perhaps that's not a good barometer.*

Tuesday came, and as promised, Maria brought Jeremy another book. This was by a doctor named Geoffrey Simmons and named *What Darwin Didn't Know*. He and Maria didn't say much to each other. When the bell rang, she hurried off again. Jeremy noticed that Mr. Bogue gave him a funny look when he walked by. Jeremy didn't figure out what that was all about until he was halfway to his locker. *Mr. Bogue must have seen the book I'm carrying.*

*Oh, well, no big deal, unless Mr. Bogue calls Dad. I wouldn't be surprised if that happened. Maybe I better talk to Dad first so I don't get blindsided.* Jeremy went home and dove immediately into the new book. He found it fascinating from the very beginning. It was written by a physician and explained the wonders of the human body. Jeremy was so engrossed in it that he almost forgot about the youth group meeting. He inserted his bookmark, closed the book and hid it. His thoughts dwelled on Maria and how

she was treating him as he drove to church. Luckily he had the diversion of the research he was doing.

Jeremy was amazed at the number of kids who showed up for this function. The church sanctuary had been reconfigured to be more informal, and kids were hanging out everywhere. Loud music was playing. Some kids were playing foosball and others card games. When the clock hit 6:30, a band came out on stage just like on Sunday morning, except this band was all kids. They played some high-energy worship music.

A young man who had the same level of energy as the band came and asked everyone to greet their neighbors. After that he delivered a message, and the service was over. Social hour seemed to resume. Jeremy had just said goodbye to some of his buddies and was strolling a bit aimlessly through the lobby when he heard his name. He turned around and saw a couple of girls from his school. "Hi, Julie. Hi, Lori."

"How are you doing with the injury and everything?" Julie asked.

"The injury isn't too bad. It's not the biggest pain that I'm dealing with right now."

"What do you mean?"

"It's personal. You know, boy-girl stuff."

"You mean like boy as in Jeremy and girl as in Maria?"

"How did you know that?"

"Well, we were with her Friday night when she went over to your house."

"WHAT! Maria was at my house on Friday?"

"Yeah. We heard you'd been injured, and she wanted to find out if you were OK."

"So why didn't *she* tell me that?"

"Maybe we shouldn't tell you this, but I think it has something to do with your father."

"My father? I don't get it. Where does my father fit into this drama?"

"When Maria knocked on the door, your father answered and came outside. I rolled down the window to get some fresh air. We only heard part of the conversation, but he told her that you were OK. Then he had a real serious chat with her, and Maria came back to the car ready to cry. One thing I heard was him telling Maria not to say anything to you."

"About what?"

"Sorry, we didn't hear that part. And we weren't about to hit Maria with questions with the way she was feeling. She was pretty

messed up – emotionally speaking."

"OK. Thanks for the information. I gotta run."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going over to Maria's and get this thing out in the open."

"Well, please don't tell her that I told you, OK?"

"I'll try, but no guarantees."

"OK. Good luck. For your sake and mine."

His pace picked up speed as he exited the lobby. He was sure he exceeded the speed limit on the way to the Masterson household. The only thing that made sense was that Jeremy's dad had told her to drop him. Why else would she make such a hasty decision, especially in light of the fact she had come to see him on Friday night. *I'm going to get the scoop straight from the horse's mouth. No more grapevine stuff. Maybe if I act like I know the whole story, she'll reveal to me exactly what happened.*

As quickly as he could with his injured body, Jeremy got out of the car and strode to the door. He knocked hard enough to make his fingers smart just a little bit. Maria opened the door, and her mouth dropped open.

"I know your mom's not here, and I can't come in, so would you please get a jacket and walk with me for a few minutes?"

"Jeremy, I thought I explained to you—"

"About what my father said to you on Friday night? As a matter of fact, no, you didn't!" He could see by her eyes that she was terrified. "But I think now is the perfect time to tell me about why you let him give you orders. And maybe you can explain why you didn't tell me a thing about it and let me suffer instead."

"OK. Wait a second, and I'll be right back." She came back wearing a white jacket that made her look like two million bucks.

"So what kind of blackmail did my dad use to keep you silent?"

"He said that if I told you, you would be terribly upset at him and things would be very messy. He said you and he would both be hurt. I didn't want to be responsible for you losing the relationship with your father, which has been so precious your whole life. You've only known me for three weeks. You can certainly get along a lot better without me than you can without him."

"But that isn't the issue. The point is I shouldn't have to decide between you. For him to go behind my back and tell you to not see me anymore is way out of line."

"Maybe so, Jeremy, but he is your father. You need to honor him."

"Honor him! I'd like to honor him with a knuckle sandwich!" He realized his voice was loud. No sense letting everybody in town know about his anger. Maria had confirmed his suspicion. His father was trying to keep them apart.

"Oh, no, please, Jeremy. No violence!"

"I said I'd like to. I didn't say I was going to. But I'm definitely going to be in his face tonight and let him know that I'm hacked off – big time."

"He's going to be upset with me."

"For what? You didn't tell me. Did he think I'd never find out?"

"How does one know what another person is thinking?"

"Good point. Obviously, he thought he could get away with this trampling all over my turf, or he wouldn't have done it. How ironic. He is so afraid of losing me that he did the one thing that could push me away forever."

Maria started to weep. Jeremy, despite his anger toward his father, softened immediately. Despite the fact he had no invitation, he gathered her into his arms and held her as close to him as his sling would allow. She didn't try to pull away. His face was close enough to hers that one of her tears landed on his cheek. His immediate instinct was to wipe it off, but then it dawned on him he'd have to let go of Maria to free up a hand. *Why would I wipe away the precious drop of liquid emotion she has shared with me? I should be vowing to never wash my face again.*

She gently pulled back from him, and he reluctantly released her. "I'm OK now." He noticed that she was shivering.

"Come on, I'm taking you home." They turned around and made the return journey. Jeremy wanted so badly to hold her hand, but he resisted the urge. "Is there anything else you want to tell me?"

She acted like she was going to say something but just shook her head. They walked mostly in silence back to Maria's door. Jeremy was starting to feel a little embarrassed for being such a hothead in her presence and also for taking such a bold liberty by hugging her. But she hadn't protested. She didn't call him Preppie. *Maybe she enjoyed the hug as much I did. No, that was unlikely. That hug was the most perfect minute of my life.*

Jeremy drove slowly homeward. His father could be coming home any minute now and the real drama for the evening would just be getting started. Or maybe he should think of it as the main bout.

Now that the soothing presence of Maria was no longer with him, he wasn't able to reign in the anger which was building again.

He could understand how his father could try to separate him from a girl who was a bad influence, one who would likely lead him down the wrong path. However, Maria represented everything that was good. She would inspire him to be better than he ever dreamed. *Why would Dad try to stop that?*

He started weighing the alternatives. *Am I ready to move out on my own?* Perhaps mentally, emotionally, physically he was ready. Financially, he didn't have a prayer. He needed his father without a doubt. But he knew his father needed him in other ways. *This is so crazy. Can Dad not understand that Maria wouldn't pull me away but would give me even more love to share with him?*

## Chapter 21

### The Showdown

His father hadn't returned home when Jeremy pulled into the driveway. He went upstairs, got the book he was reading and returned to the couch. No sense in hiding it now. Everything was coming out in the open tonight. When he heard a car pull up into the driveway, he closed the book. *This is it. The bell for round one is about to sound.*

Paul walked in and immediately saw Jeremy sitting on the couch. He approached with a smile on his face. The smile dissolved when he noticed the book in Jeremy's hands. "What's this you're reading?"

Jeremy jumped off the couch to go toe to toe with his father. "Don't worry about *What Darwin Didn't Know* – for now. First we discuss what Jeremy didn't know. I want you to know that I'm madder than I've ever been in my whole life. I'm trying not to forget that you have thrown everything you have into raising me. I'm attempting to think that you were just trying to give me the best possible life. Hopefully that is the case, Dad, but it was a totally misguided act on your part. How dare you go behind my back and try to end the most wonderful thing I've ever experienced in my life? How dare you guilt trip Maria into being your unwilling accomplice?"

"But, Jeremy, I—"

"*No hay peros que valga!*"

"If you're going to swear at me, at least do it in English."

"I wasn't swearing. That phrase means there are no buts that are worth anything! So I don't want to hear any ifs, ands or buts. I just want the facts, sir. And an apology would be a nice thing to hear as well."

"Hold on a minute, tiger. Don't get too big for your britches."

"Don't worry about that, Dad. But please do understand that I'm already too big for your britches. You know that I've followed you faithfully like a little puppy dog for about eighteen years. I came to love your ideas, your music, your books, your viewpoints, everything. You were my model for a man. I had temptations at times to go against what you taught me, but I didn't. I believed in you. I thought you had it all together. And now you do this to me. And I don't know what to believe anymore."



"Jeremy, before you start trying on judicial gowns, just do one thing I've taught you since you were a young boy. Put yourself in my moccasins and walk a mile with me."

"Dad, I think I've walked a thousand miles in your moccasins over the years, and now I find that they're giving me blisters. Maybe you should try walking in mine for a change!"

"She was taking you right down the path I've been trying to keep you out of your whole life! I had to stop you before you went too far."

"Why were you trying to keep me out of that path? I've seen nothing but goodness and beauty and hope and joy on that path. What is your problem with that? You taught me some good things – a form of Godliness, but you denied the power thereof. It seems like you have explicitly raised me with Christian values but totally left the Christianity out. In seeing what my mother found precious, I think perhaps she made you promise something in regards to raising me."

His father's face went pale. "How in the world could you have known that?"

"So it is true?"

"Yes. Your mother knew she was going to die. She kept pestering me to promise to raise you right. I didn't want her agonizing over that worry. I promised I wouldn't fail her. After she died, I guess I modified the promise slightly since I had kicked God out of my life. I needed to fulfill the spirit of the promise even if I couldn't fulfill the letter. I wanted to see you grow up to be a good man, just as she requested."

"But without God. This is the way I'm starting to look at it, Dad. You can't spell good without including the letters G-O-D in it. If man attains goodness all on his own, won't it lead to the same pride that he gets because he is a better athlete or a better musician or smarter or better looking? Is this just another way to excel in life and win the competition?"

"Where are you getting all those ideas?"

"FYI, Dad, I've been digging into this little subject of truth for a while now. I've run across a zillion different ideas and opinions and arguments and questions. Now I'd like to find some answers, some that stand up to the test of time and honest scrutiny."

"Such as what you find in that book?" His tone was dripping with sarcasm.

"Maybe, Dad. Maybe. The jury is still out on that one. Actually on every subject. I'm examining everything in my life to find out what needs to go in the trash and what stays. You kicked God out

of your life because Mom died. I suppose you blamed God, and thus you kicked him out because he wronged you. I'm able to relate to that perfectly. You tried to remove the woman I love from my life – willingly. You supposed God took Mom on purpose. And if he did, do you suppose it was punishment for you – for me? You did do it to me on purpose. How am I supposed to forgive you for that?"

"Are you saying you're going to kick me out of your life?"

"I'm not saying that, Dad. I'm saying that the temptation to do so is strong."

"You'd actually wipe out eighteen years of my dedication and sacrifice and love for one minute of mistaken conversation?"

"No, Dad. Not if it ends there. But if you don't back off, you might leave me no choice. I can forgive one such episode, but if you do it again, I don't know what I'll do. I just hope you get it! Now I'm going to bed to get a little study in before I have to sleep, or maybe before I settle down enough so I can sleep." He brandished the book he was carrying. "By the way, I'm writing my senior paper on the weaknesses of Darwinism. And also I'm studying the Bible. So now you're caught up on my current activities, and I hope I'm totally caught up on yours!" With that last statement, Jeremy headed for the stairs.

"Good night, Jeremy." The normal "I love you" was conspicuously absent. Jeremy mumbled back a good night and was gone.

\* \* \*

Paul stood there for a moment accessing the damage. He hadn't received a shock to his system like this in almost eighteen years. He didn't want to lose his son, but he also didn't want to lose control of his household. How could he get back the reign of authority which it seemed Jeremy had just stolen right out of his hands? *I could have put my foot down, but Jeremy is right. I have been interfering where I didn't belong, and I had no right in pulling rank tonight.*

*Maybe things will smooth over. It's a wonder what a good night's sleep will do for a person's attitude. Maybe Jeremy will be apologizing to me over breakfast. But there is that little detail of Jeremy wishing to receive an apology. Probably the kid won't be giving an apology until he receives one from the prodigal father.*

The embattled parent let out a big sigh. *Why couldn't Maria's mother have landed a job in Florida instead of Washington? It's*

*ironic how a decision made by her and the people that employed her is threatening to tear my family apart. And what is the scoop on this senior paper on weaknesses of Darwinism? It will be an awfully short composition.*

\* \* \*

Meanwhile in bed that night, Jeremy uttered his first prayer. It wasn't much in the way of prayers. The words of an old Styx song had run through his head while he was brushing his teeth.

*Take me tonight to the river and wash my illusions away  
Give me the strength and the courage to believe that I'll get  
there someday.*

"God, if you're up there, please show me the way."

## Chapter 22

### There's Got To Be a Morning After

When Mr. Dillon came out to have his breakfast the next morning, he noticed that there was evidence that Jeremy had already been there and eaten. That evidence might point to a late snack. When Jeremy failed to show up at the table, he was convinced that he had been right in the first place. Was Jeremy trying to avoid him or was he just unable to sleep and got up early? He heard footsteps on the stairs and then the front door slam. *I'm not going to get any answers from Jeremy this morning; he obviously isn't even going to greet the old man. Looks like the cold war has begun. Do I need to draw up a battle plan or a letter of surrender?*

\* \* \*

Jeremy was totally out in the open now in regard to his research. It felt good. He took Maria's book to school and was reading it in study hall and at lunch. It was absolutely fascinating. He thought he knew quite a bit about the human anatomy, but this book took him places he had never been before. The human body had to be most marvelous piece of engineering on the entire Earth and maybe in the universe. The complexity of the entire organism made it seem that Darwin's theory of mutations and natural selection was woefully inadequate to account for the beauty, complexity and the perfection of the human machine. The biggest problem he would have with his senior paper was paring down the wealth of material to not exceed the maximum number of pages.

Science class was something to look forward to again, now that his next-door neighbor was on speaking terms with him again. Maria smiled at him when she stepped by him on the way to her seat. Jeremy turned around and smiled back. "So, how are you doing, Maria?"

"I'm fine. I was wondering how you were doing? Did you talk to your dad?"

"Yeah. I read him the riot act. And I told him about our project, well kind of. I mentioned I was doing my senior paper on the weaknesses of Darwinism."

"How did he respond to that?"

"He was so shook up from the first part of the conversation that he didn't react at all. I guess it's like after a bowling ball falls on your head, a baseball falling on your foot doesn't seem to be a big deal."

"So did you guys hug and make up?"

"Not hardly. He's on probation as far as I'm concerned."

"That doesn't sound good. I think we need to talk."

"I can't think of anything in the world I'd rather do." He smiled again and turned around as the bell was ringing.

On the way out of the room after class was over, Mr. Bogue again gave Jeremy a funny look. "Into reading fairy tales are you, Mr. Dillon?"

"Not yet. I'll get into those tonight when I pop open my science book. I'm discovering a whole new meaning to the phrase 'science fiction'." He looked over at Maria, who had been walking beside him. Her eyes were as big as saucers. He winked at her.

"You might consider keeping jokes like that to yourself, young man. After all, the joke might end up being on you."

*And the yoke might end up being on you – or your house.*

When they got into the hallway, Maria stopped him. "If I didn't know better, I'd say you were enjoying being a bit rebellious."

"Actually, it was kind of fun."

"I don't like it."

"He started it. I just finished it."

She sighed. "I know it might be hard for you to understand at this point, but your attitude in standing up to people is very important. You need to be soft spoken, patient, and wise in offering your opinions on something. You can't just yell at them, insult their intelligence and then say neener neener."

"And why not? You're trying to take all the fun out of it."

"Jeremy, you play football for fun. You play basketball for fun. You don't attack a person's beliefs and convictions for fun. You have to learn how to disagree without being disagreeable."

"But I've seen how some of these people operate that we might be dealing with. They don't follow those rules at all."

"You know there were three things I heard more than anything growing up. One was don't eat yellow snow. Another was don't stick your tongue on a frozen object, unless it could be purchased from an ice cream truck. Finally, two wrongs don't make a right."

"That's funny. Our parents must have used the same *Parenting for Dummies* textbook or something. My dad has quoted that one enough to make me carry a barf bag in my back pocket."

"Well, it's said frequently because it's true. If everybody lived by the "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" rule, we would all be running around blind and drinking soup out of a straw."

"OK, OK. I'll try to keep a civil tongue in my head. Speaking of tongues, did you know...." He launched into a lecture on what he had been reading about the human body as they walked back to their lockers.

\* \* \*

As Jeremy drove toward home he reflected on how easily Maria had cooled his jets. We might owe our civilization to women who were able to domesticate males in such a fashion. The 21<sup>st</sup> century seemed to be in a little trouble in this area. Most females, instead of training the men to be more civilized, were trying to outdo them with their own wildness. *At this rate, how long will it take society to re-enter the dark ages?*

On his way home he noticed a little bookshop in the middle of the block named "A Good Book". *I've never been in there. Maybe I could scare up some cheap books of my own. I got a twenty in my wallet. Of course I probably shouldn't spend that because there is no guarantee Dad will be giving me allowance in the next few weeks or months.* He stopped and went in anyway – just to look.

His search efforts didn't go unrewarded. He found a beat-up book named *Summer of the Gods*. It was on sale for only two dollars. He couldn't pass up a bargain like that. Soon afterward he found a paperback called *Finding Darwin's God, A Scientists Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution*. This was exactly what the doctor ordered and the prescription was only five dollars for this used version. He was just about ready to leave when he found a beat-up paperback entitled *Bones of Contention: A Creationist Assessment of Human Fossils*. *Jackpot!*

With the change from his twenty and his three new possessions, Jeremy headed back to his research room. Learning was definitely more fun when there was a use for it, unlike most classroom routines where they memorized, regurgitated and forgot the subject matter. He was actually absorbing much of this stuff, and hopefully it was going into his long-term memory.

It was quiet on the home front. There appeared to be an uneasy truce after last night's firefight, and things had settled into a war of the trenches. As long as everyone kept their head down, there would be no casualties.

Jeremy finished the Geoffrey Simmons book just before he

turned in for the night. Reading it had been a joy. He had learned a lot of science in addition to learning how Darwinism contained scientific weaknesses.

\* \* \*

On Thursday Jeremy had to spend his study hall time reading *A Tale of Two Cities*. He had been less than enthusiastic about putting his new research on hold to catch up with his reading in this musty old book. But today, a love story was beginning to develop. Now here was something that Jeremy could relate to. With his newfound interest in the story, things made more sense than they had before.

He ran into Hacker in the hallway between periods. "How's the website coming?"

"Pretty good. I plan on having it ready for you guys to test this weekend. I'll send you an email with the link."

"Very cool! Thanks, Hacker. This is going to be an awesome tool!"

That afternoon in science class, Jeremy shared with Maria the news about their website and also another idea he had. "I think we need to have a meeting of the minds in the near future and discuss where we're at right now, and where we want to go with it. Oh, and by the way, don't forget my new book tomorrow." He put the Simmons book on her desk.

"My gosh. You don't mess around once you get started. You're going so fast I can't keep up."

"Well, you might look at this as being my sport for this season, now that I'm injured. My competitive juices are all flowing into my research."

"In that case, I'm glad we're on the same team. Now in regard to that meeting, I'll see if my mom will let us have it at my house on a Sunday afternoon."

"Perfect! The sooner the better for me, but some of you might want to get out of the starting blocks first."

"And you're already halfway around the track. It's kind of embarrassing. This was my project, but you've become the main catalyst."

"I have to tell you this, Maria. I'm starting to get your dad's vision."

Her eyes were sparkling, and they held his until the bell rang, forcing him to break contact. For some strange reason he had an urge to find some poetry about eyes. *What's up with that?* He had

never liked poetry before. Besides, he was hot on another trail and didn't want to be distracted.

He was starting to become a bit resentful of school itself. Except for the opportunity to see Maria, the whole day seemed like an interruption to his real studies. *Ironic. School is preventing me from learning.*

Things were still tense and cold on the home front. He had his own little corner of the house, and his dad had the rest. The only natural crossing of their orbits now was in the kitchen, since Jeremy had no desire to use the television. They said just enough to acknowledge each other's presence, but neither made a conciliatory move. He knew he was suffering a little bit from the separation. He suspected his father was also, but he hid his pain very well. *This must be what guys on TV like Dr. Phil call a dysfunctional family.*



## Chapter 23

### The Wedge

On Friday Jeremy was barely bothered by the fact that all the guys on the football team were decked out in their game jerseys, and he wore a T-shirt. He was already mentally attached to another team.

After science Jeremy strolled to his locker with Maria.

"We on for church this Sunday?" asked Jeremy.

"I don't know."

"You don't know? Well if you don't know, who does?"

"I'm torn. I would love you there with me, but on the other hand...."

"What do you mean?"

"What I'm trying to say is I want you there for my sake, but I don't want you there for your sake."

"Talk about riddles, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. Can you state that in plainer language, perhaps in Swahili?"

"Have you ever had an idea that you couldn't nail down? You had this feeling you just couldn't put into words?"

"Been there. Done that. What you said actually does make some sense. You would benefit from my presence, but I'd benefit from my absence. You can't figure out which one is more important to you – fulfilling your own need or having me fulfill mine."

"You got it. I can always count on you to understand."

"Whoa, not so fast. Before you get carried away, I understand your words. I don't comprehend the reasoning. Why would it be more beneficial for me not to be with you at church?"

"Now you're putting me on the spot. This is just such a complex situation. I don't know exactly how to say it to you. It just seems better to not say anything because I might mess it up by explaining it. Can you just trust me on this one?"

Jeremy looked into Maria's pleading eyes. He surrendered. "OK. Total trust. You no doubt have a good reason for what you're *not* saying. Answer me one question. Does my father have anything to do with this?"

"Well, sort of. Your dad did say something to me that made me do a lot of thinking. He was maybe wrong in what he was doing, but right in what he was saying, if that makes any sense."

"Not right now. But give me some time, and I'll figure out what I need to thank him for this time."

"You be nice to him!"

"Why?"

"Because he's your father. You only get one earthly father in life, and you need to love and respect him."

"Even if he isn't lovable and respectable?"

"You wouldn't have spoken like that a month ago."

"There are a lot of things I wouldn't have done a month ago, but that was then and—"

"This is now. Yeah, I know. But I also know that there is nothing in the world like a relationship with your father, and you don't want to mess it up permanently. Believe me."

"Another trust me on this?"

"You got it!"

"I hope you appreciate all this trust I'm putting in you."

"Please, don't doubt that for a moment."

"All right, is this the end of the pep talk?"

"I'm officially down off my soapbox now. Or was that the pedestal that you put me on?"

"Or maybe it was your tree house, because obviously now you're out of your tree!"

"I think this is where the bus stops and I get off. If I'm going to get mud all over my face, it better come in an expensive tube and promise miraculous results for my skin."

"Now I'm a mud slinger. There is absolutely no truth to the rumor that I'm an apprentice politician."

"Lucky us!"

"By the way, did you bring me a book today?"

"It's in my locker. Come on, Einstein." The two strolled to Maria's locker from which she extracted a paperback book entitled *Evolution, A Theory in Crisis*.

"Maybe I could start it tomorrow – which means – we could go see a movie tonight?"

She gave him a mock mean look.

Jeremy tried to spin himself out of trouble. "Well, not like a 'date movie', you know, more like a 'friend movie'."

"It's really hard to talk with that big athletic foot inside your mouth, isn't it? Anyway, I'm way behind you on this research, and I intend on doing some catching up. I'm going home to get my nose to the grindstone."

"It would be a shame if you ground off that cute little nose of yours."

"I'll try to be careful. After all, I'm just a little attached to that nose myself."

"And vice versa."

"And I'm now officially on my way home! Bye." She vanished around the corner.

Jeremy opened his own locker and looked inside. He stood there staring at nothing in particular. Maybe it was time to officially give up hope that Maria would ever come around. *Maybe if I took someone else out to arouse her jealousy, things would change. That doesn't seem honorable. That would be playing head games. Maria doesn't deserve that, and I'm above those tactics. I'll just suck it up and throw myself a hundred percent into our project.*

## Chapter 24

### Research Rabbit

Jeremy's Friday night and most of Saturday were consumed by research. On Saturday evening he got an email from Hacker saying the website was ready. He finished the Michael Denton book before he went to sleep. Things were falling into place.

When we entered the bathroom to brush his teeth, his eyes caught a bright color on the sink countertop. It was a book entitled *Not In Our Classrooms*. The subtitle was *Why Intelligent Design is Wrong for Our Schools*. *Where did this come from?* The light was already on in the room, but now a little light went on in Jeremy's head. *Dad! He is trying to fight fire with fire.* Jeremy carried the book back with him into the bedroom.

Sunday morning came, and Jeremy prepared for church. He'd go to the same service Maria attended today. He would be cool. He wasn't going to be the one to initiate a conversation. While he was showering, he had some time to think about what Maria had said Friday afternoon. *What could Dad have said that would cause Maria to think I'm better off going to church without her?*

The intimidation factor was gone. Jeremy and his dad had already had the big blowup, so the blackmail factor was gone too. What else was left? He had actually reached the point of toweling off when he figured it out. His dad must have told her about his conversion to Christianity and how he had slid right off the bandwagon after his wife died. He probably said something like Jeremy would never devote his life to a fairy tale without her influence. Or maybe that after she dumped him, Jeremy would be in the same position his father had been in, having faith in a woman but not faith in God, and when the woman was gone, God went with her.

That had to be it. Maria was just idealistic enough to do something like this. The solution was for him to find that faith on his own, apart from Maria's influence. At that point one more roadblock to a relationship with her would be removed.

Maria couldn't seriously consider him if he wasn't her equal in this area. So all he had to do was raise his hand at Church this morning when they asked for people to give their hearts to Jesus, and it would be a done deal. It was evident now that Maria was absolutely right. If he did this for her sake or for his sake so he

could win her heart, he was doing it for the wrong reasons, and it wouldn't stand the test of time. He remembered that section in Matthew about a guy planting seeds. Some fell on stony ground and some fell on thorny ground, and some fell on good ground. The seeds that landed on the poorer ground didn't do very well. What did that passage say exactly? Suddenly it became important for Jeremy to understand this story. He grabbed his mother's Bible, found the verses and read.

"Matthew 13:20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that hears the word, and anon with joy receives it;

"Matthew 13:21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but endures for a while: for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by he is offended."

This described his father perfectly. He had no root in himself and so he lasted for a while – until the tribulation of the death of his wife came along. Jeremy didn't want that to happen to him. If this Jesus Christ were really the son of God, then he certainly wouldn't want to be a lukewarm follower. He would want to do it right and be the good soil that bore fruit. He certainly didn't know and understand enough of whom and what he would be committing to. That wasn't a decision that should be made in an emotional spur of the moment. A decision like this should be a life changing one, and he wasn't going to make that decision until he was ready to change his life accordingly. He wondered what had gone through his dad's head after he had supposedly taken the plunge. Did he feel like he was living a lie?

It was too bad the two of them were not communicating well. Perhaps this would have been a good thing to discuss with him. *I know Dad doesn't want me walking down this path. Is that because there's something wrong with this path or because there's something wrong with Dad? If the problem is in Dad's court, it would be pretty dumb to get advice from him.*

Jeremy visited the kitchen and found his dad already eating. Dad looked him over. "All dressed up to watch football?"

"No football for me today."

"Let me guess, you're going to church with Maria."

"Sorry to inform you that you only score a fifty percent on this quiz. I'm going to church but not with Maria."

His father raised his eyebrows. "I don't get it. Why are you going if she isn't going with you?"

"Jeez, Dad, the last time I checked, people went to church to honor God, not a person, even one as wonderful as Maria."

Jeremy's dad performed a classical roll of the eyes. "What do you know about God? "

"Nothing, thanks to you – until a month ago. I'm making up for lost time, however. By the way, I read where Richard Dawkins thinks that passing religious traditions on to your children is a form of child abuse. You'd be considered a model parent by Mr. Dawkins."

"By the way, Richard Dawkins doesn't speak for all evolutionists. A lot of scientists would like to see him chill out. And also for your information, just take a look at you. Your morals are equal to any kid I ever met. I'd like to take a little of the credit for teaching you the difference between right and wrong."

His dad was right. He felt he should apologize but couldn't bring himself to do it.

"So, tell me, Jeremy, how do you find time for learning about God when you're wasting all your time on this Darwin wild goose chase?"

"Ironically, Darwin seems to be helping me find the God that he left behind. He and all his supporters who don't even try to conceal that their passion for evolution comes as a result of their ability to eliminate God from their lives. Sometimes wise people take a look not just at what people are saying, but at what motivates them to say it. I'm actually finding all kinds of evidence for God by reading about science."

"Are you going to believe everything you hear some religious idiot say?"

"Of course not. Just like I'm not going to believe everything that some science teacher tells me or some book writer claims. I want proof of the truth."

"And how are you going to tell truth from fiction?"

"That's something we all have to deal with, isn't it? There's enough information in the world to drown the whole planet, and we have to sort through it to find out what is worth keeping. That's why it's important that all arguments have the right to be heard."

"What are you referring to?"

"I'm referring to the censorship tactics that I see evolutionists using. They're trying to absolutely shut out the voice of anyone who might criticize their pet theories. If evolutionists are really secure in their belief of evolution with a capital "E", why do they seem so keen to stifle all discussion on the matter? It'd be like having a football game where the visiting team isn't allowed on the field. They have to stand on the sideline and suffer the taunts from the home team and fans rubbing in the fact that they're getting

their butts kicked."

"You have to understand that the religious world has practiced censorship for centuries. Maybe turnabout is fair play."

"As a man I once considered wise said to me, 'Two wrongs don't make a right.'"

"Your football analogy breaks down. Science isn't a sport where you have to allow fair competition. It's about finding truth."

"I used to believe that too, Dad. Now I see scientists picking and choosing what truth is based on their own personal agendas. That's not searching for truth. That's making it up. Saying something is true doesn't make it the truth."

"Good observation. If you will accept a few words from your old man as being valid, sometimes it's pretty hard to decide what the truth is. And sometimes you have to choose between two things that seem to be true but are contradictory. And one last thing, make sure you listen to both sides of an argument before you bring in a verdict."

"Is that why you put that book in my bathroom?"

"For starters. It's nice to see you enthusiastic about something, but before you sign up for the crusades, I figured you should know a bit more about the battlefield. One of the trite little sayings that we have in English sums it up very well. Look before you leap, because you never know what kind of doo doo you're going to land in. *Comprende?*"

"*Comprendo perfectamente.* Now I need to leap into my car, or I'll be late for church. *Adiós!*"

Jeremy was lost in thought the entire trip to the church. It was a good thing it wasn't far away because his concentration was definitely not on the road. He hung out by the inside door again. His friends hooked up with him, and they remained there to talk. Jeremy was stalling in case Maria showed up. He wasn't disappointed. The sight of her gave him that familiar warming of the heart.

She saw him just before she reached the door, but her stride never wavered. She said, "Good morning, Jeremy," and kept right on walking. He literally tore his eyes away from her and looked over at his friends. They were still watching Maria's perfect figure sashaying through the door.

*What would it be like to be married to a beautiful woman, one who captures everyone's attention with her beauty? Would I have to worry constantly about her running off with another man?* He was convinced that this was a girl who would be loyal to her husband, something that seemed to be rare in society today. *And*

*how much responsibility could Charles Darwin bear for that and other breakdowns in society.* According to what he was reading it was considerable, but was that truth or just a smear tactic for attacking an enemy?

Sitting through the sermon, JD's mind wandered. *Christianity isn't a hobby but rather a way of life. Is this the life I want? How long do I have to make up my mind?*

After the service, Jeremy bid his friends a hasty goodbye and headed for the exit as fast as he could maneuver through the crowd. He had a strong desire to get back to his car and back home without seeing Maria again. He succeeded.

When Jeremy got home from church, he grabbed the book *Finding Darwin's God* and got started. It didn't take him long to figure out that this book was a pro-evolution book, not what he had anticipated when he bought it. As his father had said, he needed to look at both sides of the argument. So far he hadn't paid much attention to arguments from those supporting evolution, mainly because he hadn't seen any realistic attempts at refuting the anti-evolution arguments, just attempts to discredit the credentials and credibility of those presenting the arguments against Darwin. He had seen statements that said evolution was true; the fossil record provided ample evidence, and the personal attack comments about idiots, morons, and clowns. Surely somewhere there had to be somebody who presented some potential facts which might be relevant.

He found that Kenneth Miller was a skillful writer who kept his interest – but he was certainly saying some things that wouldn't contribute to Maria's cause. The further he went in the book, the thornier the issues seemed to be. When he got to a part where Phillip Johnson was mentioned, Jeremy's attention was heightened. When arguments made by Johnson were cut down by Miller, Jeremy felt some deflation. Phillip was the one who had gotten him pumped up about this whole topic. He was the one who introduced him to the meat of this controversy.

If Johnson was in error, then perhaps the whole thing was a lost cause. He was starting to get a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. *What if I discover that Mr. Masterson's dream is a dead end? How can I break that news to Maria? Would I just resign from the team and not say anything and let her walk down the path to who knows what? Or would I try to convince her that her dad was wrong and she should give it up?* He didn't even want to consider going there. He was pretty sure that the best course to a girl's heart was not telling her that her father was wacko.



He dove back into the book, but he had to wade through some technical stuff that bogged him down a little. Some things he saw appeared to be weaknesses in the arguments. The main thing of interest was that this author kept talking about God and his belief in God.

Miller argued that a person didn't have to choose to believe in religion or evolution but could have both. JD found that to be somewhat of a novel position compared to other evolutionists that he had seen quoted. Maybe Maria's battle didn't have to take on evolution itself. Perhaps all they had to fight was the aspect of it that denied that God existed. Funny, he wasn't even sure himself that God existed, and here he was making plans on how to defend that idea. He wanted to believe. The talk of eternal life in a place called Heaven offered hope for the future. It was the love that he felt for Maria that made him start thinking of wanting to live forever. Another funny thing was that a recurring theme in evolution appeared to be survival. Wouldn't finding eternal life be the ultimate in survival?

When he finished the book around nine p.m., Jeremy's emotions were in neutral. He didn't know whether to go backward or forward or stay parked. He had ideas of a game plan for this project before this book, but those ideas seemed to be negated by information he had been spoon-fed by Kenneth Miller. Being unsure was definitely not a good feeling.

Jeremy couldn't help but wonder how many people found that indecision was such a burden that they were simply never able to move out of it. And on the other hand, how many people had chosen one fork or the other in the road and gone down that path all the way, simply because they couldn't stand being indecisive. Jeremy felt empty due to his position right now. To leap before he looked wouldn't make good sense. Before embarking down the road of choice, he needed more information. He was reserving the right to mark the trail so if he had to retrace his steps in the future, he could return to the crossroads and take the other trail.

The problem in this situation was there were more than two trails to choose from. *I wonder if primal scream therapy really works. I feel like belting out a good Tarzan imitation right now. I'd freak Dad out if I did vocalize my inner conflicts in that manner.* He checked the clock. The Sunday night football game would be about over right now and Dad was probably watching it. A couple of weeks ago, Jeremy would have been at his side. Now that aspect of his life seemed like the distant past.

He thought of the sermon at church that morning. *Perhaps I*

*need to do more to patch things up with Dad and get things back to normal. Or can they never return to where they were? He found that it was hard to approach his father. I'm in the right. Why should I apologize? Wouldn't that kind of reaction only send Dad the signal that he doesn't need to be a responsible parent? Wouldn't that just reinforce wrong behavior? Maybe I need to be a responsible child and train up my father in the way that he should go?*

As he was attempting to go to sleep, Jeremy tried to get all of his thoughts into some kind of structured arrangement. What were the main areas of the Miller book which presented the main challenge to debating evolution? First of all was his portrayal of the fossil record. Miller's comments contradicted the anti-evolution writers who had been adamant that there was a serious lack of fossil evidence for the theory of a common ancestor for all life. Which was the true story? Another theory Miller attacked was the age of the Earth. According to the Bible the Earth was only about 6000 years old and the scientists had established the date at 4.5 billion years. That was a huge discrepancy.

Miller had provided lots of technical information on the dating methods that were in use. Other literature Jeremy had encountered railed against those methods as being unreliable, but Miller was very persuasive in arguing that those methods were very dependable. Someone had to be in error. The answers in these two key areas seemed very vital. But the most important area seemed to be in the world of genes.

Miller demonstrated how genes had mutated in bacteria in just thirteen generations without any help from the scientists performing the experiments. That seemed like strong evidence, but how in the world would genes themselves ever develop through chance? Man could mess with genes and cause mutations, but scientists couldn't manufacture a genome from scratch. How could mutations occur if there were no genes to mutate? And after mutating, the bacteria were still bacteria. There was still that other question that nobody had an answer for. Where did matter and life come from in the first place?

Miller claimed that the missing link fossils existed. However, scientists had misinterpreted fossils before, such as in the case of Piltdown man and Nebraska man. How many of those transitional fossils that Miller listed were legit? This whole affair was like a whodunit mystery. To Miller, evolution was the butler.

*I need a book like Maria's on dating. My book on fossils needs to be put at the top of the priority list too. The wheels were*

churning again, and his insides felt much better. Just before he fell asleep, he formulated a practical joke in a way. He would plant that Miller book in his dad's bathroom. One good turn of the pages deserved another. His dad should read about a man who believed in God and Charles Darwin. Perhaps the theory of evolution didn't by itself rule out the possibility of God. It was only portrayed that way by some of the people who spoke for evolution, like Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris. Jeremy wasn't so sure. The quotes he had seen made it seem like most scientists hailed Charles Darwin as the man who killed religion. He thought of that Mark Twain quote about the news of his death being greatly exaggerated. *Looks like the same is true of religion.*

## Chapter 25

### Dad Strikes Back

In the morning, Jeremy spent time surfing the net. He found a news story about a lady in Minnesota who had created a website dealing with evolution and put up two \$10,000 billboards to advertise it. Obviously Maria wasn't the only one involved in a personal battle for this intellectual and spiritual turf.

When he got a chance to talk to Maria at lunch, he was trying very hard to be low key. There would be no accusations of Preppie behavior today. He told her about his latest book and research.

"I got some good news too, Jeremy. Mom approved a meeting at our house for next weekend."

"Cool. By the way, I'd love to read your book on dating methods."

"Really? Social life a little slow right now?"

"If slow is a synonym for nonexistent, you hit the head right on the nail."

"And the nail right on the head too."

"Yeah. What she said."

"Why is your social life nonexistent?" Maria asked.

"Maybe it is because the only girl I want to date isn't interested."

"Anyone I know?"

"You resemble that remark."

"That wasn't a remark. That was a question."

"One you already knew the answer to!"

Their exchange was cut off by the bell.

\* \* \*

After school, Jeremy drove over to another bookstore. He spent an hour browsing through the stacks of books. As he surveyed the vast assortment of writings, he thought about the authors. They had spent so much of their life poured into sculpting their words in just the right way to create something worthy of being published. And in most cases their works would end up in garage sales, thrift stores, secondhand bookstores, and maybe the recycling bin. *Is there any human effort on earth that truly*

*endures forever?*

Eternity. Of all the promises made in the name of science, entertainment, etc, none of them promised anything forever, except death. *The only place I'm hearing of something good being forever is at church. Why did Dad walk away from a message that he could live forever? If he really loved Mom, how could he abandon the hope of seeing her again?*

*What will my dad's destiny be?* If there was a heaven, there must be a flip side to that coin called hell. It seemed like in eternity you either got the penthouse or the outhouse. There was no middle ground.

He thought about what he had read of Charles Darwin, who had rejected his Christian roots because his father and brother were non-believers and would go to hell. By denying God and Heaven he doomed all of mankind to the same fate, nothingness. *Is that a word? I should google that to find out. I should read more about Darwin's loss of faith while I'm surfing. Why did Charles abandon the message of life to bring the message of death instead?*

Jeremy decided he had glanced through every corner of the bookshop without finding anything on the subject of evolution. He returned to his car.

When Jeremy got home, he went immediately to his computer and browsed to Google. He typed in 'nothingness' and hit the search button. There were tons of matches. He saw one containing quotes about nothingness. He chose to go to that link and read:

"Nothing is more dreadful in life than the profound thought that death may only greet you with eternal nothingness."

"God had brought me to my knees and made me acknowledge my own nothingness, and out of that knowledge I had been reborn. I was no longer the center of my life and therefore I could see God in everything."

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever: its loveliness increases; it will never pass into nothingness."

*That last quote describes Maria. She will never pass into nothingness. And it seems it also describes love, my love. It will never pass into nothingness! Love is a burning ember that can never be extinguished.* Jeremy felt a pleasant burning in his chest and a feeling of joy that seemed indescribable. Never had he had

such a feeling on the sports field. *What is this, some kind of spiritual communication?*

Jeremy basked in the warmth of his experience until it dissipated a few seconds later. *Weird!* He resumed surfing. Next he found the Wikipedia page on Charles Darwin. He found that Darwin's break from religion occurred after his ten-year-old daughter died. It was ironic that death had also caused Jeremy's dad to abandon his faith. *Death should be something that causes people to look for God, not cast him out. If people go to Heaven when they die, then why would a parent despair when a child dies and give up hope that they could ever see them again? And wouldn't they be in a better place than if they still were alive?*

Jeremy didn't know much about Heaven, but he knew that people were always looking for a beautiful place to go for vacation, such as Hawaii or the Bahamas. If spending a few days in a beautiful place was so great, wouldn't eternity in a place even more beautiful be something that would give people some incentive to make sure they had a good relationship with the eternal travel agent?

Jeremy spent the rest of the evening reading the book *Not In Our Classrooms*. It was actually a collection of essays by different authors. The second essay bugged him somehow. The author kept using the religion argument to defend evolution, indicating that because the courts had ruled against people seeking to fight evolution, that the scientific arguments against evolution were thus invalid. He indicated that the anti-evolution arguments had long ago been debunked. He too indicated that the fossil evidence was very complete, even between large groups such as reptile to mammal. That was totally contradictory to what Jeremy had read before.

*Argghh. Who is telling the truth? How do I get to the bottom of this whole complicated topic?* The author's mention of court decisions led Jeremy to his computer, where he started to surf for articles dealing with this topic. He read the amendment to the constitution which supposedly was the basis for such decisions.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

*Hmm. It says that religion can't be established by Congress. Exactly how is religion defined?* He knew that there was a religion called Christianity and one called Islam and one called Judaism and then there was Buddhism and Hinduism and some more 'isms'. Obviously it wasn't good that one religion be established as the church of the government and be able to restrain people who

wanted to follow a different religion. *But the constitution didn't say that God had to be kept out. Curious that American money says "In God We Trust" on it and a person testifying in court would swear to tell the truth so help them God, but that same neutral creator shouldn't be mentioned as a possible creator of the world in science classrooms.*

This book railed against intelligent design as a religious conspiracy, or Trojan horse. *What a tangled web this whole issue was. I have a feeling that we are in way over our heads. Is there any way we can offer anything new to this conflict? Seems like there are enough players on the field already, maybe too many. Actually, I don't know exactly what Maria has in mind. Maybe our group will just be cheerleaders and not take the field at all. Maybe the extent of our work is just to write our senior papers.*

Jeremy thought of Maria's determination. *Not bloody likely. She is probably wanting to dive right into the deep end of the gene pool wars. Will I follow? Will I need a lifejacket?* He put his computer to sleep and then lay down to do the same. *Is there any way to apply the KISS principle in this matter?*

\* \* \*

When Jeremy went into his bathroom on Tuesday morning, he found another book lying there. It was called *Science and Creationism, A View from the National Academy of Sciences*. Dad was at it again. Incredibly this book only had twenty-five pages. Lots of space was taken up by pictures. *This has to be some kind of joke. I have several long books disputing the truth of the entire evolution package, and NAS rebuts it all in twenty-five pages.* He took the booklet with him to school and read the whole thing in study hall. He still couldn't believe that these people thought they could convince people about the truth of something by making statements like "we have lots of evidence".

People ought to be a little skeptical and want to see that evidence. Funny, when people bought a new car they kicked the tires and test drove it and did their homework to figure out if this was the right car for them. How many of them took the salesman's word that this was the best car without checking out the facts? Apparently when choosing what to believe about life, people might not be that ambitious or picky. Every time he started reading some of these arguments to support evolution, he got this vision of a magician doing sleight of hand tricks that oohed and awed the audiences. But there seemed to be no substance to the feats.

Smoke and mirrors. That was what he was seeing. Promises to show evidence that man came from apes and then finding that evidence consisted of some finches on a faraway island having larger sized beaks than some of the others. No wonder there was so much opposition to allowing people to question evolution. If that happened, people might be finding out that the emperor was running around buck-naked after all.

\* \* \*

On Tuesday evening Jeremy went to the youth group meeting at church. He had done enough studying for a while. He needed a break in the routine.

Before the youth group meeting started, Jeremy ran into the youth pastor in the lobby.

"JD. What's up?" They bumped fists together. "I heard a little rumor that you're involved in the study of evolution." Jeremy nodded, wondering how news traveled so fast. "I have something here you might be interested in." He held up a book called *Uncommon Dissent*, subtitled *Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing*. "I just finished it and found it's pretty cool. If you'd like to borrow it, you're more than welcome."

"Sure. That'd be awesome. Books are pretty expensive and the libraries don't seem to carry anything we need."

"My, isn't that surprising! NOT! Well, I gotta run, but take your time and get it back to me when you can."

\* \* \*

The high-energy music and the spirit of the kids around him made Jeremy want to share what they had. He didn't know the songs, but they made him want to almost dance. That was pretty strange because he was not a dancer. He felt like a kid who didn't know how to swim at a pool party. All the kids are splashing and diving and having a great time, and he was just sticking his foot in the cold water and wondering what the big deal about a swimming pool was. He would never really know what they were feeling until he made the decision to believe in Jesus Christ as the son of God and everything that went along with that belief. That was a bit premature because he was still trying to determine if he believed in God. *How does someone arrive at a belief in something he can't see, hear, touch, taste or smell?*



## Chapter 26

### Civil War

Jeremy strolled to his car and drove home slowly. He was having one of those prolonged moments where he literally ached to see Maria. *Maybe I'll call her when I get home.* His foot pressed down harder on the accelerator after that thought. The Saturn pulled in the driveway almost the same instant that his dad returned from teaching his evening class. Jeremy hurried to get into the house before his father got there.

*I don't feel like exchanging small talk right now with Dad. I want to chat with Maria.* Unfortunately, his dad called his name before the door shut. Jeremy chose not to be totally rude and turned around. His dad was hurrying up the driveway.

"What's up, Dad?"

"Nothing much. I just thought we could spend a few minutes together tonight."

"For what?"

"Jeremy. I can't take this much longer. This is killing me."

"I don't know what to say, Dad. But for starters, let's go in the house where it's warm." Jeremy led the way to the living room.

"So where were you tonight, son?"

"Church. Youth group."

"What? Sunday isn't enough for you?"

"It's different, Dad. Tuesday night is just for kids. Variety is the spice of life, you know."

"Speaking of variety – did you read any from those books I left for you?"

"In the throne room? Maybe you should install a book rack in there."

"Don't change the subject on me! I guess that means you didn't even open them up?"

"*Au contraire, mon pere.* Not only did I open them up, I finished them."

"Really! And what did you think about them?"

"OK, if I can sum them up in one word, lame."

"Lame? Lame? Where did you get off? Was your brain impacted by that football injury?"

"I'd say I'm thinking more clearly now than I ever have."

"So how do you explain such clear thinking leading to a one word indictment of the work of some of the greatest people in science today?"

"Einstein."

"Einstein? Are you confined to one-word sentences this evening? Is this compelling evidence that you're in full control of your faculties?"

"I figured you'd understand without me wasting breath. Einstein said science without religion is lame."

"Ahhh. That's right, but he finished that statement with 'religion without science is blind.'"

"Yes, he did. But what is science, Dad? The lame part hinges on the definition of science. If you really want to know what I think, sit down. I'll grab the books, and tell you what I find lame."

"OK. Go for it."

Jeremy strode to the staircase and ascended quickly. He returned just as his dad re-entered the room with a cup of coffee. He held up the book from the National Academy of Science. "This is a very impressive book."

His dad smiled, "Then why is it lame?"

"Look at this beautiful glossy cover and at all the cool color illustrations in here. Very professionally done."

"Are you being sarcastic?"

"Oh no, I think it is wonderfully done. It is brief, to the point, and very matter of fact about the concept that evolution has all the answers and no more candidates need apply. But they also contradict themselves in that regard."

"What are you talking about?"

"Let me read a few passages. 'Explanations that cannot be based on empirical evidence are *not* part of science.'"

"So what's your point? I fail to see anything but truth in that statement."

"No problem there, with that one statement. But then they launch into a beautiful display of propaganda indicating that science has solved the mysteries of life and has explained them very nicely with the theory of random mutations guided by the blind and deaf guide dog named Natural Selection, who also can't smell or taste."

"So are you going to get to a point here? It is approaching my bedtime."

"My point, Dad, is what empirical evidence does the world of science have up their sleeve that allows them to test and repeat the origin of life? Or what test do they have to prove that a one-

celled bacteria figured out a way to become an organism with trillions of cells and an onboard computer to direct muscles and various marvelous sensory devices?"

"But--"

"They don't even have a way to prove how the first cell was developed. They have lots of ideas on how it *might* have happened, but none of these ideas can be falsified because they can't be tested. They lay down the rule on what science is and how science works, but then they break their own rules in dogmatically pawning off *potential* solutions as real evidence."

"But those ideas have come from men at the top of their profession. Sometimes testing isn't an option, so theory by experts becomes the best form of empirical evidence that we have."

"That's a crock! Best can be a relative term. It could be like trying to figure out which one of the Three Stooges was the smartest. What difference does it make since they're all stooges?"

"Are you inferring, I mean implying, that scientists are stooges?"

Jeremy threw his hands in the air. "No, no, no. I'm just saying that if you have three stupid theories which are not provable, and thus not disprovable either, considering one of them as the *absolute truth* because it is better than the other two is moronic. Science doesn't grade on the curve, Dad. It has to either come up with proof or just an honest answer that we don't know yet. There is no dishonor in not knowing something, especially something as important as what we are dealing with here. But there is dishonor in taking advantage of people's trust to sell them a bill of goods. And then to attack those who won't swallow the story and brand them as morons or lunatics goes beyond dishonest."

"Who says that evolution is an established fact?"

"How about this? 'Many scientific explanations have been so thoroughly tested and confirmed that they are held with great confidence. The theory of evolution is one of those well-established explanations.'"

"Depends on what you mean by evolution."

"Yes, it does, doesn't it? So the scientists trumpet the fact that they have established that fruit flies can grow a worthless second set of wings with no muscles attached. And finches in the Galapagos Islands can have beaks that are bigger or smaller than other finches around them. So while they're on a roll, they include an origin of life explanation which falls under the same name, *evolution*. So, someone who isn't paying close attention is convinced that they really should cut up their fire insurance cards

sold to them by the religious world and throw them in the trash along with their Bibles and other worthless items. This book makes big claims and then shows a little bit of proof how evolution with a small "e" occurred and is accepted by all of the world. They don't offer any proof of the rest of the story, or evolution with a capital "E".

"So obviously you're not going to nominate this book for a Pulitzer."

"More likely a howitzer."

"OK, what about the other book? Surely, you have to find some common sense in what they're saying here. I mean you can't just let a bunch of religious fanatics come in and run the educational system and teach their *theories* to all the poor innocent students."

"Oh, come on, Dad. No one in their right mind is advocating that students be taught that we have empirical evidence of God and of his creation of the universe. God theories are in the same boat with other theories about the origin of life. Nobody has any real proof that everyone can accept without some doubt. So we have two different competing belief systems which can't meet the definition of science – but one is accepted as science because that belief system is introduced by scientists. Sounds to me like having foxes guard the chicken house. I mean these guys are paranoid about someone even teaching that there *might* be intelligent design, which could perhaps involve aliens from outer space or something. Not only must evolution be accepted as truth, it must be forced upon the students."

"So you want to see intelligent design taught in the classroom?"

"I don't see how you teach design. Seems to me like a two-sentence lesson. Somebody or something may have designed life. We don't know who or how. End of lesson. No one is claiming in the ID movement, at least that I'm aware of, that they have any inside information. It's just the fact that when you find something like a watch that involves intelligence to create, you suspect that there is a watchmaker."

"That tired, worn out analogy."

"Maybe it gets used a lot because it's very appropriate for making a point. You know one thing that I just don't understand at all?"

"OK. I'm on the edge of my seat to find out something that has Mr. Know-It-All bewildered."

"My common sense says that if I was on an airplane, and we

found out it was going to crash, people would freak out. But then if someone had a theory that people could survive by donning a parachute and jumping out before the crash, people would have hope, at least some. If someone had the opinion that the parachutes were faulty and wouldn't open, how would he break the news to these people? Don't you think he might either not tell them at all or at least break the news very gently and compassionately?"

"Sounds plausible to me."

"Then why do the evolutionists crow about the fact that there is no escape from death – that the parachutes of the religious world are not going to open and neener neener. They sing high and low "Ding Dong the god is dead". Anybody who doesn't accept their message is an idiot. There is something about their bedside manner that leaves a lot to be desired."

"Is that the impression you get? You know there are lots of evolutionists who are religious people."

"That's what I keep hearing. But I don't know what a *religious* person really is. So I guess we just take their word for it that they're religious, huh? And if a guy is a pastor that means he has to be religious, even if he does write a foreword to a book which clamors to keep even the mention of God out of schools? I know that science has done some amazing things, but to invent a pastor who defends the prohibition of mentioning that life might not be an accident is perhaps their crowning achievement."

"My, my, my. Now you're an expert on science and religion. You have the knowledge to pass judgment on men and women who have advanced degrees, and who have spent their lifetime in the pursuit of knowledge in their specialty. And you, after reading just a couple of inflammatory books by rabble-rousers, are now equipped to help them see the errors of their ways. Give me a break!"

"Arm or a leg?"

"Ooooooh. I see all that pacifism they teach you at church is rubbing off on you. NOT! Or maybe the church you go to preaches an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

"You know, Dad, speaking of teeth. Isn't it remarkable how this blind and unintelligent process of evolution would lead men to evolve this wonderful set of teeth with an extremely hard covering over them to protect them from bacteria? And when a person turns their mouth open and up just right, those teeth can bring the brightness of midday into the dark heart of a man."

"Oh, now you *have* hit rock bottom. Church, anti-evolutionism,

and now this. You're starting to talk like a frigging poet. Whatever happened to the son I raised?"

"I don't know, Dad. Maybe I just grew up or just got smart. Perhaps you can trade me in for a new model."

"Yeah. Maybe I'd get lucky this time. By the way, before I forget, I ran into Mr. Bogue."

"Has the insurance company completed the damage estimate yet?"

"He says you've been hanging out with the wrong books and the wrong people. He said you're flirting with scholastic mediocrity, in addition to your other flirting." As he uttered the last phrase, Mr. Dillon put a fake cigar up to his mouth in a Groucho Marx imitation.

"Does that mean I have to go directly to jail, don't pass go and don't get to collect my two hundred bucks?"

"Keep being a funny guy. But if you're not careful, the joke is going to be on you someday."

"And if Mr. Bogue isn't careful, the yolk might be on him someday."

"Are you threatening Mr. Bogue?"

"No, Dad. I'm just trying to remove that scowl from your face. Lighten up, would you? I'm just trying to be punny. Whatever happened to that father with the sense of humor who raised me?"

"That guy with the sense of humor wasn't worrying that his son was going to make him the laughingstock of the town. In fact, that man's son brought him great respect in the community and was a source of pride."

"Ahh. Now we're getting down to the fear factor. Don't worry, Dad. Just because I'm no longer that puppet whose strings you have been pulling for so many years, doesn't mean I'm going to disgrace you."

"Puppets don't have strings. You're referring to a marionette."

"Whatever. Just be aware that 'I've got no strings on me.'" The last part he sang in his best imitation of Pinocchio.

"You don't seem to think too highly of the job I've done raising you. Think about it, Buster. If I hadn't raised you to be honest and caring and loving and decent, do you think you'd even have a shot at winning the heart of Miss Perfect?"

"Oh, I see. You should get all the credit for how I came out?"

"Make up your mind, junior. You can't have it both ways. Either I pulled all of the strings and made you what you are – or I didn't control you and thus you have yourself to thank for being such a great guy. But you can't say I pulled your strings, and you

get the credit."

"I'm getting a headache talking about this, and besides, it's bedtime. I'm gonna pull the plug on this delightful conversation right now." He handed his dad the books he had brought down. "Here you go. Thanks for the inspiration. Now I know more what the competition is saying and doing. Very enlightening. Good night."

Paul watched his son walk away from him. "Good night, Jeremy. Love you."

Jeremy felt a stab of pain go through him. *How many times have I heard that phrase in my lifetime?* And now his father waited for the response. He didn't feel the love right now. Was it OK to express love that wasn't felt? He didn't have time to think about it. He was on the spot. Either he responded in kind, or he hurt his dad's feelings. He decided to deliver what was expected, although he did it in a monotone voice without any evidence of expressing true sentiment. "Yeah, love you too."

Now the stab was delivered to the father. A lukewarm response in the fashion that it was delivered was just as bad as none at all. He was losing his son and had no clue how to prevent it from happening. The distraught parent stood there for a moment and mulled over his options. Nothing stood out as a *can't-miss* solution. Something white on the end table next to the couch caught his eye. It was a book titled *Bones of Contention*. Jeremy must have left it lying here.

His first impulse was to hurl the book across the room. He controlled his angry impulse. His next thought was to sneak a peak at the contents. It was impossible to not be curious about what kind of crap Jeremy was being spoon-fed. This might be worth a laugh or two. Since Jeremy was off to bed, there would be time to dive into it and put it back in the morning before Jeremy came downstairs. In fact, just to be safe, he could read it on the couch until Jeremy went to sleep. He plopped down and started to read about skeletons that weren't in the closet.

## Chapter 27

### Hanging with the Intellectuals

That Friday night the Spartans played another football game without Jeremy's presence. He was anxious to finish the book *Uncommon Dissent*, which turned out to be another collection of essays, edited by William Demski, one of the leaders of the intelligent design movement. Demski invented a system, called Specified Complexity, for analyzing objects to determine whether they were designed or not.

The major argument of the design people was simple. If something found in the world defied the odds of being shaped by nature, then it must have been designed. Mount Rushmore was a frequent example. How many people would buy the theory that the faces of four popular US presidents were created on a mountain via the process of erosion? Jeremy couldn't even figure out how a man could create something like that. To think that the wind and rain could perform the task would be absolutely ridiculous. When compared with even a single living cell, Mount Rushmore was like a drawing of a four-year-old with no art talent compared to a work by a master painter. Yet science could totally deny the possibility of a designer simply by saying that such an entity is outside the realm of science thus not eligible to be included in the process of seeking answers to life. *Go figure!*

On Wednesday and Thursday Jeremy had finished the first four essays. Tonight he had read the next two already. He looked at the clock and decided he had time to read the next essay, which was by James Barham. It didn't take him long to get absorbed in this piece. The author was raised in Christianity, became a devout and militaristic atheist and evolutionist, and then lost faith in Darwinism. This was a fascinating story of a young man's journey to find truth and himself, something Jeremy could relate to.

He stopped and pondered the following statement: "Above all, the Darwinist sees himself as a hero, someone who is brave enough to confront the terrible truth about the human condition that others cannot bear to face." *Is this true of all Darwinists or just the ones who don't believe in God? For people like Richard Dawkins the gospel of evolution was the death sentence for the human race. Ironical that the theory of survival of the fittest brought*



*people to believe that there was no ultimate survival.*

Jeremy soon found another passage that caused him to halt and apply his reasoning skills. "I came to understand that the world is what it is, and that reality cannot be merely wished away. For human beings, the world of purpose and value is the essence of our existence." JD saw clearly that human beings are more than just a combination of carbon and hydrogen and oxygen and whatever else makes up the physical body.

The issue about purpose wouldn't leave his mind. *Imagine football where there is no score kept. That would be a pretty stupid game. There are probably some guys who would enjoy playing just so they could hit people. That seemed to be their main interest in the game of football anyway, but even they jumped on the 'purpose of winning' bandwagon. Some evolutionists are trying to reduce man to a pile of chemicals and chemical reactions, removing all purpose to life, other than the internal instinct provided by evolution to survive and reproduce.* Sighing heavily, he continued the essay. He highlighted a passage reading, 'scientists whose purpose is to prove that there is no purpose are a very interesting subject for study.'

*All this study is getting dry. I need to have some outside stimulation to make this stuff stick better. I wonder what Maria is doing. Maybe she needs a break too.* He dialed her number. *How would she answer this time?*

"Shouldn't you be studying, Preppie?"

"Hold on, Princess. I *am* studying. I wanted to bounce thoughts off you and see if they make sense."

"OK. Nothing but business, though, so no more of that 'Princess' talk. What's going on in that Einstein head of yours?"

"Purpose, don't leave home without it."

"What? Are you doing spin-offs on TV commercials?"

"I've been reading about how evolutionists claim there is no purpose to life, but then they reveal the purpose of their life is to tell us we have no purpose in ours. I swear we've gone from the Iron Age to the Irony Age."

"Looks like."

"I had a vision of *Jeopardy*, the TV game. It was the Final Jeopardy round and the music was playing as the contestants were trying to come up with the winning question. But there weren't just three of them. Every person who ever lived on the Earth was playing. The answer was "Created the Universe and all life in it." The contestants had to wager everything they had, but they could discuss the possible answers with others. Is this

weird?"

"Not really. Sounds like reality. We all have to come up that final question. Our answer determines whether we win or not. Sounds like a good analogy to me."

"So if the atheists are right, what's their prize?"

"Almost the same thing they get if they're wrong."

"That's the way I see it too. Why do they want to win so badly then?"

"I told you before, Jeremy. Only one thing makes sense to me."

"Back to the devil made them do it again?"

"Not made them. Talked them into it."

"But what about the people who embrace and fight for evolution that believe in God? Where do they fit into this picture? Will God be mad at them for believing in evolution?"

"I don't know, Jeremy."

"And what if God used some form of evolution in his creation? What if the final step of evolution was to become like him? Would he be mad at people for not accepting that fact?"

"I don't see that at all. His goal is to have us love him and obey him, and thus love our fellow man since we were commanded to do that."

"I have another vision as well. I see this mouse placed near a maze. There is just the slightest odor of cheese but not enough to allow the mouse to zero in on it or even know for sure that there is cheese there. The mouse can decide there is no cheese or that he isn't hungry. The only other thing to do is begin the journey and deal with all the dead ends that come along, backtrack and take a new path until the cheese is found. Maria, I feel like I'm the mouse and God is the cheese."

"The big cheese, in fact!"

"Do I have to run this maze alone? Can you come with me? Did you have to run the same maze, or did you have another one?"

"Down boy! One question at a time works better. No. Yes. Yes, and no."

"And then when I was thinking of the maze, I remembered *Star Wars* and the scene where Luke is trying to destroy the Death Star. He couldn't use his senses. He had to use 'the force'. He had to quit thinking about it and go with a gut instinct. Or maybe that wasn't an instinct but simply him putting his thoughts aside for higher thoughts to enter in from some other source. Is that what we have to do to find God?"

"I remember telling you that you can't find God using your intellect alone."

"That's true. And there's the dark side of the force, Darth Vader. Was *Star Wars* an allegorical representation of the war between God and Satan?"

"I've wondered the same thing, Jeremy. The devil was an angel who rebelled. Darth Vader was a Jedi knight who went bad. The parallels are there. As far as the author's intent, I have no clue."

"Maybe Charles Darwin is like Darth Vader. He went over to the dark side, and now we're faced with knocking the death star of evolution out of commission."

"Have you been drinking lots of caffeine today? You are wired!"

"I know, but I haven't had any. I've just been exploding with ideas. They were getting backed up, making me dizzy and preventing new ideas from coming along. I feel better now, Dr. Masterson."

"Glad I could be of assistance. Speaking of help, my mom needs some right now. I'm going to have to go. Good night, Einstein."

"Good night, Princess."

*All right, now I'm ready for some real study!* Jeremy read until it was time to go to sleep. Sleep wasn't coming easily tonight. *How do I turn off my brain intentionally? Why is it that the hardest time to go to sleep is when I'm trying to? Maybe if I tried to go to sleep in English class, I'd be able to stay awake.*

Thoughts of the upcoming battle dominated his brainwaves. The fact that evolution was being force-fed to high school students was a real burr under Jeremy's saddle. Maria's cause appeared to be very just. Jeremy let his thoughts dwell on Maria. Sleep finally claimed him, but dreams of the intellectual battle in which he was engaged pierced even his sleep.

\* \* \*

Jeremy awoke on Saturday while it was still dark out. He was wide-awake, again. He lay there thinking until he realized he was famished. His stomach led the rest of his body down to the kitchen. Jeremy noticed a very faint light coming through the windows on the east side. The sun was just coming up and some clouds were hanging around the eastern horizon. Sunlight was poking through the holes. The thing that grabbed Jeremy's

attention was the color. Various hues of orange and pink were being reflected by the clouds. It was totally awesome and compelling. He went outside to get a better look at it. Mount Rainier was even more beautiful than usual. Clouds played around the top, making the mountain look like an inverted ice-cream cone wearing some type of orange headgear.

Some of the orange color actually splashed onto the snow. The thought of eating yellow snow entered his head. *Is it OK to eat orange snow?* He watched for a few moments as the colors changed due to the movement of the clouds and the fact that the Earth rotated a little more causing the sun to move further away from the horizon. The word beautiful couldn't be stifled. It was so amazing. How did the evolutionist explain a sunrise? Perhaps they could explain the coloration etc., but how did they explain the fact that humans found beauty in the sunrise? Probably some mumbo jumbo about chemical reactions in the cerebrum caused by the interaction of color with brainwaves.

And what about the chill that went up his back when he heard the *Star Spangled Banner*? More chemical reaction no doubt. So why did he not have the same chemical reaction to hearing other music? A segment of a poem that Maria had shared with him once echoed in his mind – "for poems were made by fools like me but only God can make a tree." And maybe sunrises were in God's repertoire as well because no artist ever drew as dazzling a scene as Jeremy was witnessing now. *How does evolution explain that people can see in color at all?*

Jeremy looked around at the houses in the neighborhood. How many people were enjoying this sunrise? How many were still in the sack, totally oblivious to the inspiring light show that he was observing? What a waste. Jeremy had a sudden impulse to run up and down the street, Paul Revere style, yelling "wake up and see what you're missing." *How many times have I missed out on a show like this because I was sleeping? And if people miss things because they are literally sleeping, is it probably not true that they are missing things in life because they are figuratively sleeping?*

*It is a well-known fact we only use about ten percent of our brain. Maybe we're only living about ten percent of our life as well with opportunities like this being missed. I feel more alive right now than I can remember. I want to stop time and hold this moment in my hands.* But his wish was fruitless. To Jeremy's dismay, the color show was soon over. The feeling of awe that he had this morning was one he didn't want to release. In a way it

was like what he felt when he saw Maria. He wished she could have been at his side to witness this spectacular sight. Maybe he wouldn't be able to hold all of that awe, but it would be fun trying.

Jeremy's stomach reminded him why he had gone downstairs in the first place. He returned to the house and hunted up some breakfast. As he reached up to grab some cereal off the shelf, he got a whiff of his armpit. *I need a shower. Another proof that I'm alive. I stink, therefore I am. I'm a comedic philosopher. Or am I a philosophical comedian?*

The inspiration of the sunrise made him feel he could be or do anything he wanted. And what he wanted right now was to get back on the search for truth. He finished eating quickly, returned to his bedroom, and grabbed *Uncommon Dissent*. Four more essays to go. He set and fulfilled the goal of reading until he was done.

It was time to reload his carbs. Jeremy wasn't sure how many carbs he was burning up by reading, but thinking of it in such terms made him feel like an academic athlete competing in an iron man contest. Jeremy noticed his dad outside also reading a book. Jeremy didn't bother to go out and greet him. The cold war was still on. He went back to his computer and to begin work on his paper.

First he grabbed the book which would be his primary source of information, *What Darwin Didn't Know*, which Maria had lent to him again. He would need to find some additional sources as well, but this book would provide most of his ammunition. He opened up his word processor and typed "The Human Body and Evolution." He stared at it for a minute. *That's a lame title. He needed something catchier, jazzier. How about "The Marvelous and Magnificent Machine called Man?" This is much better.* He tabbed down a couple of lines and starting typing again until he had:

Outline

Introduction

Sight – Jeepers Creepers, where'd you get those peepers?

Hearing – Play it again, Sam

Smell – Using your Common Scents

Touch – I feel the Earth move under my feet

Taste – This taste bud's for you.

Speech – Talk ain't cheap, hombre.

Skeleton - What's in your closet?

Circulatory System – What goes around comes around

Digestive System – Once around the tract  
Respiratory System – You take my breath away  
Immune System – Antibody home?  
Skin – Scar Wars  
Reproduction – Which came first the chicken sperm or the egg?  
Conclusion  
Bibliography/References

It felt good to get something in black and white. He'd had these ideas flying around in the head for days and it was a relief to get them expressed in writing. He had begun the process. No doubt the rest of it wouldn't come so easily.

Jeremy began the introduction but was still struggling with the exact wording when his digestive system complained of being neglected. He hated to break right now, but a teenage boy can't ignore the complaints of his stomach for long. JD inhaled his food again and returned immediately to his computer. *I'm a man on a mission.* By the time he went to bed that night, he had the introduction done and had a good start on the section on the human eye.

\* \* \*

JD didn't go to church the next morning. He knew there were lots of believers who didn't go every week, so why should he feel guilty if he missed a service? He did though and even felt a little guilty about not getting up at sunrise to see the dawning of a new day. He pushed the guilt aside and did some more work in the morning. After lunch he would have the pleasure of sitting in Maria's living room once again. He didn't feel any guilt there.

## Chapter 28

### The Plan

When Jeremy arrived at Maria's on Sunday for the big meeting, he was last member of the team to show up. Maria answered the summons of the doorbell almost immediately. He was rewarded with one of her dazzling smiles. *Nice way to start out the official business. Hopefully that smile will still be there at the end of our discussion.* She led Jeremy into the living room, which triggered memories of his precious few previous visits to this home. He couldn't help but notice Maria was wearing a nice pair of denims. *That's what I call a pair of dominant jeans!*

JD forced his eyes to move off the designer genes wearing dominant jeans and surveyed the room. There was one easy chair and one hard folding chair left vacant. Maria pointed to the easy chair. Jeremy shook his head and sat down in the uncomfortable folding chair next to it. *No way am I going to subject Maria to this hard seat. I'll suffer in satisfaction knowing that I spared Maria every pain in the butt that I feel.*

Maria took the floor. "OK, Let's get started. We have all been doing some exploratory research into the matter of evolution, and now it's time to share what we're learning. Jeremy has been doing the most research so take it away, Einstein."

*Funny! At least she didn't call me Preppie.* "The thing that has really grabbed my attention is that there seems to be a war being fought. A war of ideas, a war of words, war of passion, yet a war without violence, at least so far." Jeremy looked around the room. He had their attention. "What I've uncovered is that this war isn't new. It has been raging since Charles Darwin first published *The Origin of Species*. It seems to be fought in spurts where there are periods of seeming inactivity, and then something causes it to flare back up again. Right now we seem to be in the middle of one of the intense flare-ups, and I don't see cease-fires in the foreseeable future. There have been court decisions and debates and competing websites and a ton of books written on both sides of the controversy.

"The biggest item of contention is the claim that man evolved from ape-like creatures which trace their ancestry all the way back to an original one-celled creature. The most controversial aspect could be the approach scientists have arrived at for defining

science."

"What do you mean?" Hacker asked.

"He's talking about naturalism or what is sometimes referred to as materialism, right, Jeremy?" Julie asked.

"Exactly."

"That doesn't help me. What do those terms mean?"

Jeremy rubbed the back of his neck. "'Naturalism', as employed by science, assumes that we can observe nothing outside of nature, and thus we have to base all conclusions about life on things observed within natural events. Something might exist outside of nature, thus the word supernatural, but science doesn't deal with that topic since it is interested only in nature and natural explanations. Religion is left to deal with the supernatural."

"I don't get it. So why is that the most controversial aspect?"

"Science is saying that God or any other external force which could have been involved in creating life is outside of their realm and isn't a consideration for them," Maria said. "They say basically there is a separation of church and science. Then on the other hand, the courts are saying we must have a separation of church and state, and so religious arguments against this boxing out of God in the realm of science are not allowed in schools."

Julie said, "The crazy thing is that eighty some years ago it was against the law to teach evolution. Now it is against the law in some places to even teach that human beings might have been created by a superior being, without even mentioning God because a 'superior being' could be construed as being God."

Hacker scratched his head. "So you're saying that scientists aren't looking for reality, but rather are looking for the best explanation within nature. Thus, using logic, any reality outside of the natural word will be outside of the understanding of science."

Julie grinned. "You might be slow sometimes, Hacker, but when you get there, you get there!"

Hacker took a mock bow. "Gee, thanks. This is crazy though. I thought science was totally impartial and only sought for truth, no matter where the search took it."

Jeremy nodded. "Join the crowd. I have to admit I was pretty shocked when I discovered what was being passed off as hard evidence of the origin of mankind. And I'm more shocked by the way the scientific community has chosen to eliminate any dissenting views."

Maria said, "They call creationism or even just intelligent design bad science because it crashes their little party rule which only allows natural explanations and empirical evidence. But



believing that inanimate matter could change into living matter and then somehow gain the ability to reproduce itself is totally natural. And then for an organism of one cell to evolve without any intelligence or planning or design into a creature which has landed spaceships on the moon is good science just because it's the best explanation that scientists can arrive at within the strict confines of the natural world."

Julie said, "The way I understand it, science holds nothing to be true. Something is only accepted as the best explanation until something comes along to disprove it and provide a better explanation. So if someone does provide a bogus theory, it will be self-corrected by scientists later down the road."

"As long as the better theory isn't a supernatural one," Hacker said.

Luke saved his arm. "Hold on a second. We have to keep one thing straight. First we have to define evolution. There are certain aspects to evolution that science is able to observe and document. That's the way science should work."

Jeremy nodded again. "That's an excellent point. If science confined itself to changes in a species caused by mutations, we wouldn't be sitting here right now. Nobody is disputing those occurrences. But they lump the whole package together as evolution – and only provide the hardcore evidence for the adaptive changes, sometimes referred to as "microevolution". So they can make the sweeping statement that "no scientist doubts evolution" and people think that all scientists support the molecules to man version."

"I like the term microbe to microbiologist," Julie said. They all laughed.

"What do we do with this knowledge?" Maria asked. "We've discussed doing senior papers on various aspects of this subject. But do we go beyond that?"

"You want to go further? Like, how much further?" Julie asked.

"Definitely, I'm going to take it further myself. I just don't know if anyone here will want to go with me. One goal is to start a science club for high schoolers. I want to provide a way for kids to learn about science without the constraints of the naturalistic philosophy," Maria said.

"So it would be an anti-evolution discussion platform."

"Not exactly. I've chosen the name SST – Scientists Seeking Truth. The platform will be total freedom to discuss anything about science. We won't be putting on the same filters they're trying to

use in the classroom. We will be looking for the truth – not just a natural explanation. It seems to me that we can't rely on our government for protection. Everything will depend on elected officials who can be voted out of office. More importantly are federal judges who are not elected. We'll always be at the mercy of those decision makers in the school setting."

Jeremy said. "I think that's a good strategy. What about college students?"

Maria beamed at him. "Next year I'll be in college, and I'll organize something then."

"I just have to ask this question. Is that all you're planning?" Julie asked.

Maria smiled. "Well, I was toying with the idea of going to the school board to present a case for some type of disclaimer for science classes."

Julie grimaced. "Oh, boy. That was what I was afraid of. Face-to-face confrontation. The outcome probably wouldn't be favorable."

Maria looked around the room. "Jeremy, your thoughts?"

"Julie's right. Probably not favorable but also not impossible. The decision of the judge in the Dover case doesn't have a direct impact in our area. Of course it depends on the scope of your request. What did you have in mind?"

"I just want to make sure that kids are taught about the naturalistic methodology. They need to understand exactly what science is – according to the scientists' definition. That way they know that science has not proven that God does not exist, and they haven't proved that he did not create mankind. He simply isn't one of the options allowed."

"That seems pretty harmless," Ronnie said. "Basically, teachers would just have to explain up front what rules scientists play by. Surely no one can object to that."

"You'd be surprised. I don't see any inclination to give an inch on this topic. I'm afraid making a challenge like this could have some negative repercussions on our image in the community," Jeremy said.

"That's an understatement. We might as well get out the paint set and draw a big bull's eye on our chest," Julie said.

"On the other hand, we could be looked up to by others," Ronnie said.

"Yeah, heroes or zeros," Luke said.

Maria's face showed anxiety. "I should have thought about this. I don't have much to lose since I'm a newbie here in Sumner,

but you guys have reputations and relationships to worry about. I'm sorry I asked you to take this step."

Silence reigned for a moment until Jeremy broke it. "To be or not to be. That's the question. I know not what path other men might take, but for me, give me liberty in science or give me death."

Julie giggled. "Is that from William Henry or Patrick Shakespeare?"

Hacker joined in the fun. "Look! Up in the sky! It's a bird. It's a plane. It's Super ScienceMan on his way to rescue science."

Maria said, "In a way science does seem to need a rescue. Seems like evolution has hijacked real science and is keeping it hostage – and the guards used to keep the hostage from escaping are the very people who should be protesting the loudest, some of the scientists themselves."

"That's a pretty rash statement. How do you justify that position?" Luke asked.

Maria looked a little flustered. Jeremy jumped in to rescue her. "Let me read something to you from my notes. This is a quote from a guy named Richard Lewontin: 'It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.'"

"That's exactly what I think people need to understand, especially kids who are being spoon-fed theories that have been arrived at due to the lack of a better alternative, caused by this ruling out of the supernatural," Maria said.

"So you're going to attempt to save science from the scientists?" Julie asked.

Maria said, "That's one way of looking at it. But also we are trying to save some scientists from the tyranny of their comrades. How many scientists question evolution but have too much to lose to venture their opinions? Lots of people can't afford to lose their job, and worse yet, get blackballed within the world of science so they can't find another job as a scientist. There is a case right now of a guy at the Smithsonian who simply let an article be published suggesting that intelligent design might be a better explanation for the origins of life. He didn't even write it or support it, just let it be

published. He is battling to save his career as we speak. And this isn't a unique case."

"I suspect that there are lots of scientists out there who would be glad to have that academic freedom back they once enjoyed," Jeremy said. "I think they're ripe for a revolt but are afraid to start anything themselves. However, if a chink can be developed in the armor of the ruling elite where they won't have the power to put an end to another scientist's career, I bet the dissenters will be coming out of the woodwork and the closet, which could lead to a total meltdown of the scientific establishment's support for macroevolution. Just like the crumbling of the Soviet Union."

"Like a tiny snowball rolled down the mountain," Luke said.

"And us bunch of high school kids are going to start that snowball rolling?" Julie asked.

"Sounds pretty crazy, doesn't it? And the children shall lead them," Ronnie said.

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," Luke said.

Hacker became theatrical again. "I can see the headlines – high school seekers for truth uncover dastardly conspiracy plot by scientists to control the world, Sciencegate, or maybe Darwingate or even Evolutiongate."

"Or how about Monkeygate?" Ronnie asked.

Jeremy smiled. "Let's try not to get carried away here. We're not starting the snowball. It is already moving down the hill. People like Phillip Johnson, Jonathan Wells, and Michael Bebe have blazed a trail for us in this generation, and others blazed the trail for them in the past. We're just doing what we can to help. I'm not sure what our role will be, but maybe it can be an important one. After all, the youth of today will be the scientists of tomorrow."

"And the reporters," Hacker said.

"Good point," Jeremy said. "The media plays a big role in this process. It might be safe to say that no way would the stronghold of evolution have been established without the support of the press. The newspapers seem to take great pleasure in reporting each new discovery which might *finally* prove evolution, *again*."

"But reporters are restricted by the people that own the newspapers or TV stations. And those people are driven by their advertisers. Is it in the interest of the media to promote a fight for scientific accountability?"

Jeremy nodded. "Another excellent question. I think truth is always in the interest of the media – but they may not see it that way. I'm afraid we need to be prepared to face a hostile press if

we decide to push this thing into the public eye."

"I repeat myself. This all sounds pretty crazy," Ronnie said.

Julie threw her arms in the air. "I'm like totally freaked out. This sounds like a story from the *Enquirer*. I have trouble believing this myself. How are we going to get others to believe it?"

Maria cleared her throat. "My goal isn't to personally change beliefs but to make sure the facts get exposed so people can do the research and change their own beliefs if necessary. We can't be in the mode of shaping people's opinions, just enabling them to make intelligent choices."

"You realize that most kids are not going to give a rip about this cause," Julie said. "Most of them are more concerned about whether Miller Lite tastes great or is less filling than they are about important issues."

Maria nodded. "Unfortunately that seems to be a fact of life. So after talking about all this, I don't think I can ask any of you to join me in this venture."

Jeremy stood up. "You're right. You shouldn't ask us to join you." He stopped and looked over at Maria, who was as somber as he had ever seen her. "We need to ask you if you'll allow us to participate." Maria's smile broke out again.

Luke said something that wasn't intelligible to them as he made a gesture of putting on war paint.

"Did you say something like 'today is a good day to die?'" asked Hacker.

Luke grinned. "Figuratively, what I said was – Oh what the H E double toothpicks."

Hacker laughed. "Make that two of us. You can count me in."

Ronnie raised his hand with three fingers uplifted. "Me three!"

Julie looked around the room. She and Jeremy looked at each other. Finally, she let out a laugh. "Oh, what the heck. Reputations are overrated anyway. I'd probably kick myself for the rest of my life if I missed this adventure."

Only Jeremy hadn't committed himself to the cause. All eyes were upon him. He started out slowly. "Really, I'm the only one here who isn't considering this fight for a religious reason. And my dad is a science teacher and a well-respected person in the community. The chances of us having any success in the legal system appear to be similar to the Mariners' chances of ever making it to the World Series and playing against the Chicago Cubs."

There was some disappointment on their faces. *I bet they think I'm bailing on them.* "But I have to admit I'm pretty mad at

what I see going on. I don't want to fight against science. I want to stand up for real science so that my dad's profession doesn't go the way of the legal profession, cannon fodder for the standup comedians."

"Seems to me that the majority of the jokes in the discussion on evolution are targeting the anti-evolution crowd," Ronnie said.

Maria gestured her agreement. "That's true right now. They're using humor to attack their detractors because they don't have hard evidence. If you can make fun of the person presenting the dissenting opinion, the people who might judge the evidence to be lacking might not even take a look at the actual facts. If somebody wants to be a whistleblower, you just have to disarm them by causing people to doubt their believability."

Julie laughed. "The big problem is that there *are* wacko people out there who believe some of the weirdest stuff you ever heard. Conspiracy theories are so common people just yawn when another one comes up."

"So, Jeremy, it sounds like you're going to pass on this adventure?" Ronnie asked.

"I didn't say that. I was just saying that this looks like a no-win situation, a lost cause you might say. But as a quote from one of my favorite movies says 'the only causes worth fighting for are the lost causes.'"

"That would be from *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*?"

Jeremy looked up in surprise. *Maria did it again.* He felt the area of his heart warming up. *Must be the proverbial cockles of the heart. I could have loved this girl even if she wasn't so pretty.* "Right you are, again. I've always rooted for the underdogs in the sporting world. Seems kind of natural to take the side of the underdogs in this fight to allow a competing argument for evolution to be presented to the world. If you let me be on the team, I'll be the token jock and non-Christian on the squad."

Maria said, "We have a few minutes left. Let's talk game plan. Here is my initial blueprint. We don't take the argument to court unless absolutely necessary. We confine this to a request for the school board to require the teaching of science to include an upfront definition of what science is. The first obstacle is gaining an audience with the school board to present a proposal. I envision a mock courtroom atmosphere where the judge and jury are comprised of the school board and other school officials. Our team will present our evidence and an opposing side can present their arguments against the action. Does anyone have a problem with that idea?"

After a moment of silence, Jeremy said. "No one is speaking up, so it appears we are all in one accord. If that's not big enough, we'll all get in one stretch limo."

While waiting for the groans to subside, Jeremy fought off a grin. "So we now have a goal. I propose we make sure we have the most efficient division of labor to help us reach the goal. I know Hacker wanted to study the similarity of the brain with a computer. I've jotted down other areas I think need to be covered: Fossils, microbiology, genes and DNA, cells, mathematical probability concerning the ability of natural selection and random mutations to produce life as we know it in addition to the math of dating methods. Also I think we need to have someone knowledgeable about the history of evolution and social and legal effects of it. And finally I think we need to present a paper on the complexity of the human body and the overwhelming evidence, in my opinion, that such a creature would need to have a designer."

Luke raised his hand. "I'd love to do the fossil research."

Jeremy gave a thumbs-up signal and wrote Luke's name down next to fossils on his list.

Julie waved her whole arm. "I've been reading quite a bit about genes and DNA. I'd love to take on that task."

Jeremy wrote her name down. Before he was done writing, Ronnie said, "Mathematics is my strong suit. I guess that area would be a natural for me."

"OK, Got you down Ron. Only two topics left. Maria, I'll let you choose what you want."

"I know you've been studying the human body. I'll let you take that area, and I'll do the historical and social research. Of course there is going to be some overlap in what all of us learn."

"So what's the time frame for this?" Julie asked.

Maria frowned. "Well, I guess that might depend on the school board and how soon we can meet with them. I'd like to say January some time. The key is we need to have the work done. It wouldn't make sense to have an audience with them and not be ready. He who fails to prepare, prepares to fail."

Jeremy bit his finger. "I think we need to have our part done by the end of the year. That gives us about three months. Is that a realistic goal?"

"Hard to say how far we have to drill down since we don't know how deep the information is," Ronnie said.

Maria smiled and looked around the room. "I think we have enough direction to get started. I think we want to touch base again in a couple of weeks to see how we're doing and figure out

a realistic timeframe at that point. So thanks for coming, everybody, and on your way out the door please enter your email address on this roster. I'll send a message to everyone with the entire list."

All of them left except Jeremy. "Hey, Maria, since you're a fan of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, I suppose the idea for a newsletter comes from the movie."

"I guess so."

"You remember what happened to the newspapers that the Boy Rangers put out?"

"Yeah, the henchmen of the bad guys destroyed them."

"Bingo. That was because they were dangerous to the "get rich scheme" of the bad guys. You know, if we become dangerous to someone, we might get squelched too."

"I've thought about that, Jeremy. Unfortunately, there isn't a lot we can do about that circumstance – except try to be smart about it. Wise as serpents and harmless as doves is the expression the Bible uses."

"Well we can certainly try to be wise as serpents, and we can behave as harmless as doves, but I'm afraid that the content of our material is going to be construed as dangerous to the status quo and the people who support it. That will bring on conflict."

"There's another expression: "if you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen"."

"Did that come from the Bible, too?"

Maria laughed.

*I love that laugh. Too bad we are engaged in something so serious. I'd prefer to devote my time producing that beautiful sound.* "So am I to assume that you have your heat shields available?"

She laughed again. "By the way, I wanted to talk to you before you left." His eyes widened. "I'd like you to be my co-spokesmen at the hearing."

"If we get one."

"Yes. I met a lawyer at church. He is going to give me advice on how to proceed. I'd like you to go with me to the next school board meeting to deliver our proposal."

"I'm honored you asked me. I'll do whatever you need."

"Thanks, Jeremy. I really appreciate your help." She held out her hand.

Jeremy took it carefully and shook it gently. He wanted to lift it to his lips, but he knew that wouldn't go over well. "See you tomorrow," he said.



"*Vaya con Dios, amigo.*"

Jeremy took a few steps toward his car and then looked back. She was still standing there watching him. *Maybe she's checking out my recessive jeans.* He sucked in his stomach and resumed his walk, trying to remain ramrod straight.

Jeremy thought about her Spanish parting phrase. *I'm her amigo. That sounds nice. Novio sounds even better though.*

When he arrived home, he found his dad sitting on the couch. *Why did Dad have a look like the cat that ate the canary?* Jeremy noticed the book sitting on the end table where he had left it. He needed to get as much read of that book tonight as he could. It had to be finished this week so he could give it to Luke. He grabbed the book on the way by. He noticed his dad's scowl deepen. *What's up with that?*

## Chapter 29

### The "Bored" Of Education

The next morning, Jeremy checked his email. He had a message from Maria containing the list of everyone's email addresses. A personal message was included.

"Dear Jeremy, The school board is meeting in two weeks. I tried to contact Chelsea, the cartoonist you introduced me to. She has moved out of town. Is there someone else at the school who can draw quality cartoons? Maria."

Frowning, Jeremy let out a groan, got up, and paced around his bedroom. An internal tug of war raged within him. He did know of one, but he didn't feel like telling Maria. It was highly desirable to come up with a third possibility, but he couldn't think of anyone. *Possibly I could be selfish and just say that I don't know anyone. Of course she could and probably would find out from someone else. I might as well be a reluctant hero and share the information.*

JD hit the reply button and typed slowly – the temperature of his blood seemed to rise at every keystroke. "Brian Witt is a pretty good cartoonist." He hit the send button, and then stared at his screen. Finally, he pushed himself away from the computer. *I got work to do. Besides Witt won't get to first base with her. What is there to worry about?*

He grabbed the book on fossils and waded in again. *Dem dry bones are fascinating stuff.* He almost let time slip away from him. He glanced up at the clock and saw he needed to hit the shower ASAP. When he went to remove his sling, he noticed he didn't feel any pain. He moved his arm around carefully and experienced no pain at all. The doctor had said that when the pain was gone, the sling could be abandoned. *This is cause for celebration. It's amazing how much easier life is with two arms instead of one.*

The left and right symmetry of the body dominated his thoughts as he lathered the soap over himself. It sure was convenient that man had two legs, two arms and two hands. How would random mutations cause a pair of arms to grow with all the goodies they would need to give humans the ability to do a large percentage of the things they did? He had read all about all the

complicated systems that comprise a human body and come to appreciate them even more as a result, but some of the less complicated things were pretty special too. His left arm would never be taken for granted again.

\* \* \*

The next two weeks went by in a blur. Jeremy alternated between writing his paper, studying other aspects about the evolution debate and entering data into their database. In addition, he had to keep up his homework.

The night of the school board meeting arrived. Jeremy had arranged with Maria to pick her up. He wanted to joke with her about being the only boy in the history of mankind to take a girl to a school board meeting as a date. He didn't want to ruffle her feathers, even in the attempt to be funny, so he kept the humor to himself. Despite the fact this wasn't a date, Jeremy walked up the sidewalk to get Maria.

"Jeremy, before we leave, can we pray?"

*What? Would a prayer session be accompanied by hand holding? That would be good. Regardless, I can't say no to Maria.* "Sure."

She did reach out her hands to him and they bowed their heads. "Father in Heaven, we come before you this evening and ask for your blessing on our efforts tonight. Please open the hearts and minds of the school board to be receptive to our proposal and help us keep the conflict to the minimum amount possible. Let your will be done in this matter. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen."

Jeremy echoed the amen as he had heard done at church.

"Thanks, Jeremy."

*Wow! I get to hold her hands and she thanks me? I'd have given my left arm to do that anyway. Wait a second. If I gave up my left arm to hold hands with her, I'd only have one hand to hold.*

Jeremy wished he could have worn headphones for the rest of the trip to the school. Maria told him about the work Brian Witt was doing with the cartoon ideas she had. She was very excited about it. Jeremy could think of a few things he would rather hear, such as fingernails going across a chalkboard.

*Who am I to squelch Maria's enthusiasm? I'm just jealous because I'm not the one provoking that enthusiasm.* He did take solace in the fact that he was the one taking her to the school board meeting. *Perhaps she gushes concerning my contributions*

to the team when she talks to Brian. That would frost his buns. Jeremy decided to enjoy her spirit, even if he could not enjoy her words.

The school board meeting started at six p.m. and was scheduled to adjourn at eight. This could be a long evening. JD brought a book to read to avoid wasting two hours.

Maria led Jeremy to a seat next to a gray-haired gentleman. "Jeremy, I want you to meet Rod Wellington. He's a lawyer."

"Retired lawyer. Glad to meet you, Jeremy. I've seen you play ball on numerous occasions."

"Rod will do the legal work for us if we need to pursue this via a courtroom. Since he's retired, he's looking for a way to serve God, and he figures this would be a marvelous way to do that."

At that point, the meeting was called to order. Jeremy soon found himself opening his book and filtering out the background voices. Before turning his attention to his reading, he thought of a cartoon he had once seen with a big spanking stick labeled the "Board of Education". And then there was the joke about students being the "Bored of Education". *My book will prevent me from being the "Bored of the Board of Education".*

It was almost eight p.m. before a call was made for audience comments. Maria immediately stood up. Jeremy realized this was their moment, and he stood and laid his book on the chair. They marched to the table where the school board was seated. Rod was right behind them. Jeremy could see raised eyebrows and other quizzical looks on the faces of the people they were about to address. Things had been pretty boring up till now, even for the school board. He had a feeling that was all going to change quickly.

When the three stood side by side in front of the board, Maria introduced them. They all seemed to know who Jeremy was and most seemed to know who Rod was.

"First of all I want to apologize for bringing some unpleasantness to your meeting, but I'm afraid it can't be helped. We're here to lodge a complaint about the way science is being taught. We believe that the scientific establishment has created a situation which leads to a misunderstanding about the role of science in establishing reality."

Jeremy had his eyes focused on the school board members as Maria spoke. He could see most of them stiffen up and their eyes change shape or roll. She definitely had their attention.

"And what is the substance of your complaint?" asked the president of the school board. "As you are accompanied by Mr.

Wellington, it seems that you're pursuing this complaint through legal channels."

"No, that isn't our desire. We don't wish to take up your valuable time at this late hour and begin a discussion that really needs more time and perhaps representation from the opposing opinion. My plan for settling this issue is all spelled out in this proposal." She handed a copy of her work to each of the five members. Curiosity was written all over their faces.

"We are simply requesting at this time that you read our request and decide whether or not to enact the suggestion for a disclaimer we have made. If you don't wish to do that, we ask that you allow us to present our arguments in the format prescribed in place of court action."

"And what if we deny you the request?"

"If you decide that you won't honor either of our requests, then Mr. Wellington has agreed to file the necessary paperwork to begin legal proceedings. Hopefully it won't come to that. It isn't our desire to cause the school district to spend vast sums of money to defend itself. We also don't wish to cause major waves to the educational process. We believe our request is quite straightforward and beneficial. That's all we ask of you this evening. Thank you very much for your time." Maria turned and walked briskly back to her seat, and the rest of her party followed suit.

The school board members were all reading their copy of Maria's proposal when the president asked if there were any other members of the audience who would like to say anything. After no one spoke up, the president moved that the meeting adjourn. That movement was seconded, and the meeting broke up. Jeremy and Maria walked out into the cool evening air. "I think that went rather well. What did you think, Jeremy?"

"Yeah, sure. I mean, they didn't like yell at you or make fun of you or anything." *Yeah, they were so freaking shocked by what happened they didn't have time to think of any type of response. What was going through their heads?*

When they arrived at Maria's house, Jeremy jumped out of the car and scooted around to Maria's side of the vehicle. He opened her door and placed his umbrella in a position that allowed her to exit without getting wet. They walked up to the door under the protection of the umbrella together.

It was still raining when Jeremy got home.

## **Chapter 30**

### **The Inundation**

The rain was still falling when Jeremy drove to the school in the morning and home again in the afternoon. The next day was even worse. On the third day the skies burst open. Flood watches were in effect for all rivers in western Washington. Jeremy was a little nervous. Their house was about a mile from the Puyallup River, which rarely flooded. But Jeremy had never seen it rain like this before. By the time the last school bell rang on Thursday, ten inches of rain had been recorded in the last twenty-four hours, a new rainfall record.

Just before the bell rang, Jeremy looked anxiously through the window. Rain was the topic of conversation as Maria and Jeremy walked together through the hall after science class. Jeremy was trying to convince Maria that the rainy season didn't usually bring a monsoon like this. Someone walked up to them and handed Jeremy a piece of paper. He and Maria read it together. It was a call for volunteers to fill sandbags in Orting.

"I want to help, Jeremy. Will you take me?"

This wasn't Jeremy's idea of the perfect date, but since he couldn't get a real one with Maria, this would be good. "Sure."

JD drove Maria to her house, where she changed into grubbies. He had some in the trunk, so he also changed. They then drove the ten miles from Maria's house to Orting.

Immediately upon arrival, the two teens were directed to a truck where they were given burlap bags and a shovel and pointed in the direction of a huge sand pile. Jeremy shoveled while Maria held the bag open. He worked as quickly as he could.

An hour later they filled their last bag, and Maria ran to get more. As the man at the truck was handing the bags to her, they got a good look at each other's face. It was the school board president.

"Don't I know you from somewhere?" he asked.

"Well, "know" is maybe a little strong, but our paths have crossed in the very recent past." His face was still blank after that explanation. Finally, Maria gave him a huge clue. "School board meeting on—"

"Ahhh. Yes, indeed. The little gal who doesn't think too highly about the way science is being taught. Do you live over here?"

"No. I live in Bonney Lake."

"And you came all the way over here to fill sandbags? I'm impressed."

"Just trying to be a good neighbor."

"Indeed."

"Well, I better get back to the sand pile. Thanks for the bags."

Maria returned to the sand pile. "Jeremy, you'll never guess who handed me these bags?"

"Mr. Bogue?"

"Nice try. The president of the school board."

"Great! He's going to think you're stalking him! That was my next guess."

"Yeah, right! On both accounts."

"So did he say anything about your proposal?"

"Not a single word. I wasn't about to bring it up."

The two continued to fill bags for another hour. It was almost dark now and they were both near exhaustion. Jeremy hadn't eaten in almost six hours.

"Jeremy, should we stick around and help some more?"

"I don't know about you, but I gotta shovel some food into my gullet before I shovel any more sand."

Maria laughed. "And here I thought you were different from all other teenage boys."

Jeremy felt complimented. "You can call me anything you want except late for lunch!"

"So, where do we get food?"

"I'm broke."

"I didn't bring any money with me either."

"Well that pretty much eliminates the possibility of getting something to eat here in Orting. We could go back to my house and grab a bite. And then come back here if you want?"

When the Saturn reached Alderton, Jeremy ran into a roadblock. A highway patrolman explained that the road was closed up ahead where the river ran under it.

"But how do I get home?" Jeremy asked.

"Where do you live, son?"

"Straight ahead, just before you get to highway 410."

"In that case you don't need to worry about a route home. That whole neighborhood has been evacuated."

Evacuated! His head swirled around. What was he going to do? He glanced over at his copilot. First thing he needed to do was get Maria up the hill where she'd be safe. Then he'd worry about himself. Luckily the road that ran into Alderton was a back

road to Bonney Lake. Jeremy made the required turn, and they started up the hill.

When they arrived at Maria's house, he was at a loss for what he was going to do. The rain was still coming down in sheets. His neighborhood was closed so he couldn't even get back there to get some money or clean clothes. He couldn't even contact his dad. A voice message left on their home machine wouldn't be heard until they got back into their house.

"Let's go talk to my mom and tell her about your situation." They went in the house and told the story to Mrs. Masterson.

"You're more than welcome to spend the night at our house tonight," she said.

"I wonder what my dad is going to do. I have no clue where he is. I told him it was time he joined the 21<sup>st</sup> century and got a cell phone, but he's too stubborn and old-fashioned. Maybe this will teach him a lesson."

"I'm sure he knows how to take care of himself. He'll probably be worried about you though."

Jeremy hadn't communicated very much with his father for the last few weeks, but he realized he would probably be worrying anyway. *Oh, well, there's nothing I can do about it.*

"Why don't you two kids go watch the news and find out what's going on, and I'll get some dinner started?"

Jeremy's ear's perked up. She had said the magic word.

They followed her suggestion. Maria grabbed a bag of carrot sticks on the way. She and Jeremy munched on them as they watched news stories from all over the area. The evacuation of Jeremy's neighborhood was mentioned. A shot of the sandbag brigade in Orting made the news, too. A blurb that the river had gone over its banks and flooded part of Orting was one of the big stories. A helicopter rescue had been necessary for some people just a few miles from where the kids had been working.

Jeremy and Maria had seen all of the flood news they wanted, including the fact that their school was closed the next day, by the time Mrs. Masterson called them to the table. Jeremy let out a low whistle when he saw the spread. "Holy cow, Mrs. Masterson, you didn't have to prepare a feast on my account."

"It's nice to have someone else to cook for besides Maria and myself. It wasn't any trouble at all."

Maria directed Jeremy to the chair he should occupy. He was just about to dig in when he noticed Maria and her mother watching him. Maria grinned and he blushed. She held out one of her hands to him and the other to her mother. Jeremy was trained



in this drill. *This has to be the prayingest family in the world.*

He reached out on each side of him to envelope a female hand in his own. Maria gave thanks for the food and asked for a blessing upon their bodies from the eating of the same. They dropped hands. Jeremy waited for one of them to take a bite first before he proceeded. Then he carefully finished off two platefuls of Mrs. M's handiwork. *What would it be like to eat like this every night? Of course if I had dinners like this all the time, it wouldn't be special anymore. Funny how a person needs to be deprived to really enjoy something. How do rich people find any real enjoyment?*

After everyone was done with the main course, Mrs. M brought out a big piece of cake for Jeremy and a smaller piece for herself and Maria. "Think you can handle this one, big guy?" she asked, her eyes smiling.

"I don't think that'll be a problem at all!"

"So, will you be OK on the couch tonight, Jeremy?"

"Another non-problem. It will be just like camping out, only easier."

"Just don't start a campfire in the living room, please."

Jeremy grinned but with his mouth full of cake didn't come back with a rejoinder.

"So, Maria tells me you don't have any family in this area?"

"No. My dad was an only child. His parents both died when I was a little tyke. My dad has some elderly aunts and uncles down in California, but we don't have much contact with them. I guess I come from a very dysfunctional family, to use the modern buzzword. My mom's family was from the East Coast. For some reason we haven't had any contact with them for a long time. I don't know what the story is there, but I'm guessing my dad had some kind of fight with them and never made up. He seems to specialize in holding a grudge."

"Jeremy, that's not a very nice thing to say."

"Maria!" Mrs. Masterson scolded.

"Oh, it's OK. Maria's right, but it still seems like the truth."

"Seems to me Junior inherited that talent."

"What! Who me? I don't hold a grudge."

"So then how come your father and you still haven't made up?"

"Because he hasn't apologized to me yet. I'm not still mad at him or anything. All he has to do is to admit he was wrong and say he's sorry, and it's all over."

Mrs. Masterson apparently didn't like the direction the

conversation was headed. "Maybe we could talk about something more pleasant? Why don't you kids tell me about your work on the senior papers?"

Jeremy was off the hook, for now. Maria's mother was soon up to speed on the progress the kids had made on their project. She seemed impressed with how much Jeremy had accomplished. She suggested that the two kids go back into the living room and watch TV while she cleaned the kitchen.

"Why don't you let me help clean the kitchen?" JD asked. "You did all the work of getting the meal ready. Why don't you go watch TV, and Maria and I will handle this chore?" He looked over at Maria. She seemed quite amazed. He looked back at Mrs. Masterson, who also had a look of surprise. *It was unbelievable how much impact just a little courtesy can have. Looks like the brownie point count is going up.*

"OK. If you insist. I'll go get blankets for your couch-bed."

Maria smiled at Jeremy. "OK, buster, you better not have volunteered me for this job unless you really plan on helping."

"You doubt my sincerity? Why don't you just sit down and tell me where everything goes, and I'll do it all myself."

"Oh, no you don't. This is a team effort. The sooner we get this done, the sooner we can do some research together. I've been wanting to bounce some ideas off you."

"Just make sure they're soft ideas."

The two kitchen police volunteers had the kitchen sparkling in a short time. They then went to the computer and starting surfing. Maria had an article she wanted Jeremy to read. She browsed to the page she wanted and then excused herself for a moment. Jeremy waded into the content. *Maria is right. This article is utterly fascinating!*

It was a scientific article that claimed that the human body probably had a death program that caused it to shut itself down at a certain age. Certain DNA cells kept getting shorter and shorter as they divided until they reached a point where they couldn't divide anymore. Some researchers had done some work with mice to slow down that shortening process. They had enabled mice, which normally had a life span of two years, to live for five years. *Was it possible that if they could shut down the death program, people wouldn't die of old age? That isn't going to help somebody who gets run over by a truck.* The article wasn't sure that they would be able to break the 120-year barrier, but they could make people's lives much more enjoyable while they were alive. Jeremy hadn't been aware of an age limit. Maria returned in

the meantime. "This is unbelievable. Did you know that man has a life expectancy barrier of 120 years?"

"Funny you should ask." She grabbed her Bible off the shelf and opened it up to Genesis. The verse underneath her finger she was using as a pointer said: "My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years."

Jeremy was stunned. *This is the section of the Bible about Noah, way back toward the beginning. This was written like four thousand years ago.* He probed Maria's knowledge. "How did they know about this barrier? I didn't know about it."

"Look above a couple of verses. It talks about how Noah was five hundred years old when God talked to him. All of those guys in the early part of the Bible lived for several hundred years. If you read beyond this verse, you'll see Noah lived for 950 years. Within a couple of generations that number had gone down quite a bit. Abraham only lived to 175 and his wife to 127. I'm not quite sure where the 120 years fits into this section. These guys were definitely living more than 120, but there it proclaims in black and white that the maximum life expectancy of man will be 120 years."

"The article says that one woman lived to be 122. I wonder if her birth records were off and she was really 120?"

"I don't know, Jeremy. Maybe."

"So how come those first guys got to live so long?"

"The Answers in Genesis people talk about mutations in the genome. Perhaps those mutations also caused the life expectancy to drop."

"Can you imagine living 950 years? If I was born 950 years ago, I'd have been here almost half of the time since Christ. I could have played polo with Marco Polo, played football against the real Vikings, had an apple fight with Sir Isaac Newton, and crossed spears with Shakespeare. That boggles my imagination." They were silent for a moment. Jeremy could hear the rain still beating on the roof. "Funny that we're reading about Noah tonight. If this keeps up for another thirty-seven days, we'll need an ark too."

"Yeah. This situation almost lets you know what it must have felt like for the people who weren't on the ark. They had been making fun of Noah for years, and then in a flash they realized that he was speaking the truth and they were doomed. In a way, Jesus is the new ark, promised to carry all of us through the doom to come. And still people mock and scoff. The Bible says there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth in hell. I have a feeling there will

be a lot of wailing at people who led other people astray. I'm sure lots of people will be blaming their substandard housing in eternity on other people."

*Richard Dawkins is going to be in deep doo-doo if God is not a delusion. Can an eternal being punch another one out? Dawkins might be an eternal punching bag, getting cuffed by all the other residents of their ghetto inhabited by people who listened to him and Darwin instead of Matthew and Jesus.*

The two spent the evening researching and chatting. The time to retire for the evening came way too soon in Jeremy's eyes. Just before she said good night for the evening Maria went to the bookshelf and pulled out a book.

"Jeremy, I waited to give you this one until you were ready because this one contains some very heavy material. It might seem like foolishness to you, but I think it's time for you to be exposed to it. If you can accept what's in it, you'll understand who and what we're fighting against."

He took the book from her. It was entitled *The Long War Against God*. "I have a book at home for you. It will come in handy perhaps preparing for our rendezvous with the school board. It's all about the Scopes monkey trial."

"Sounds interesting. Well, I better get to bed. Good night, Jeremy."

"Good night, Maria. Pleasant dreams." *Can I be lucky enough to have her dreams feature me as the star? Well, I can dream, can't I?*

Jeremy pondered all of the things that he and Maria had discussed as he lay on the couch listening to the rain hammer on the shingles. *This eternal life thing seemed to be the most important aspect to our existence. Why are so many people just blowing it off as superstition? This whole thing called life is a miracle in itself. Why would the fact that life went on forever be any more difficult to believe than the fact that life ever started in the first place?*

\* \* \*

When Jeremy awoke the next morning, he noticed that the noise of droplets splattering the roof was absent. He was sure his hair was a big mess. And he didn't have his toothbrush or anything. A vision of a fire-breathing dragon filled his imagination. He had a brainstorm and reached into his jeans pocket and pulled out some gum. *Thank heavens for Wrigley's*. These personal

worries nearly drowned out the facts that he didn't know where his father was and didn't know what the fate of his home was.

Jeremy took a look at some of the pictures and other memorabilia in the room. He discovered an old piece of paper that was taped together. It was entitled The Bulldog Compact and contained a list of signatures. He was trying to figure out what it was when Maria came down the stairs.

"Good morning, sunshine. May I ask what this document is?"

"That's a long story, Jeremy, about my father. Someday I'll tell it to you."

"OK." *Is she not going to make fun of me for my bad hair day? She doesn't even seem to notice.* She turned the TV set on and they watched some more stories of the flood. The good news was that some rivers had crested during the night and the water level in was falling now, including the Puyallup. The best news was that Jeremy's neighborhood had been reopened. He wasn't homeless anymore. He didn't waste any time making his exit. The last thing he said before he left was, "Tell your mother thank you for me."

The first thing he noticed when he got in the car was his image in the mirror. His hair rivaled the picture of Einstein. It was remarkable that Maria didn't come up with a new nickname for him today, Alfalfa.

Jeremy wasn't sure what to expect when he got home. He could see his father's car in the driveway before he reached the house. He'd now find out where his father spent the night and how worried he'd been about Jeremy's safety.

His dad was just getting ready to leave when Jeremy entered the house. "Where did you spend the night?" both of them asked simultaneously.

Jeremy laughed. "I'll go first. I was over at Maria's."

"Big surprise there. I was slumming it big time. I slept in my office at the school. And now I have to go back there and earn my pay. See ya later."

*Doesn't seem that Dad lost any sleep worrying about me.*

The first thing he had to do was quell the raging fire of hunger. He thought about last night as he ate. If the rain hadn't ceased, he would be having breakfast at Maria's right now. That would have been wonderful, but only if he had been able to take a shower, change into some fresh clothes and make sure his hair was under control.

Love was the subject of his thoughts when he realized that people couldn't always look or act or smell their best. *Love has to be strong enough so that those things don't matter. People who*

*are dating always show their best side to each other. After they get married, they find out that they married someone who isn't perfect. No wonder fifty percent of marriages break up. I won't be one of those on the wrong side of the fifty. Before I marry, my wife will know all of my faults, including the fact that my perfect hair ain't always so perfect. It is important to keep oneself groomed, but there has to be some kickback time. Just trying to be your best would probably wear a person out.*

His thoughts returned to his father. Maria and Jeremy had spoken a lot last night. She had talked about the fatherhood of God. She had told him how important it was to draw near to him and that when we do so, he draws near to us. God is always there, but we need to take the step of faith and trust and reach out to him. She also mentioned that the reason God had created families was so that his creatures could experience the role of being a parent, the same way that God was a parent. As we longed for our children to love us and obey us, we would understand how God felt.

That was a foreign concept to Jeremy. But he could relate to that through his role as a son. He wasn't sure how women fit into that picture. *How does a woman relate to God if he's male?* He realized that train of thought was destined to be derailed so he switched tracks. How did his role as an earthly son stack up with his role as a Heavenly son? What qualities did his father have that would possibly match those of God?

Jeremy hadn't seen evidence of it lately, but his father had loved him passionately. That almost seemed like ancient history now. Did his father love him less? Probably not. What was different? What had changed the chemistry of their relationship? Maria had given him insight into the answer last night, even though he didn't want to hear it. It was because he had stopped reaching out to his father. His dad was still there for him – but he had to draw near to him with trust and obedience and forgiveness.

Jeremy didn't have school today, freeing him to put the pedal to the metal on his paper. He worked diligently all day, stopping only for biological breaks and to answer the phone at eight p.m. "Hello."

"Hi, Jeremy. Maria here. You'll never guess who called me."

"Here we go again with the impossible guessing game. OK, let me guess, the president of the school board."

"I was wrong. You did guess."

"Are you kidding? He really called?"

"Yeah. He said they had a special school board meeting to

discuss our proposal."

"And?"

"They're not going to accept the disclaimer, but by a vote of three to two, they did agree to allow us to present an argument for the disclaimer in the format we laid out."

"Wow. Wow! We're going to battle then."

"Yes, if you wish to use that terminology. Funny thing is the president said that he cast the deciding vote in our favor because of our efforts on the sandbag line in Orting."

"Double Wow! So when is this going down?"

"Saturday, December 9<sup>th</sup> at eight a.m."

"That only gives us about two months to get ready."

"Exactly. So I better get back to work. I just wanted you to know right away."

"Thanks for thinking of me."

"Welcome. Bye, Jeremy."

"Goodbye."

*It was really going to happen. Back to work to get ready!*  
When JD was ready for bed, his dad still hadn't come home.

\* \* \*

Saturday and Sunday provided Jeremy with lots of time to progress even further on his paper. He was going to finish in time for basketball. He had intentions of talking to his dad, but the right opportunity just never seemed to present itself.

## Chapter 31

### The Threats

On Monday Jeremy was strolling down the hall when one of his friends flashed by. "I just heard the news, dude. You got some big ones! Good luck."

*What news? Good luck for what?* JD was still scratching his head when another kid walked by and said, "What are you, one of those freaking creationists?"

*What the heck's going on here?* One of the self-christened Nerd Herd members stopped by to chat with him. "I hear you're taking on the school board?"

*Ahh. That's what they're talking about.* "Well, we're not really taking *them* on. What we are taking on is the way science is presented."

"You mean you're going to fight to have the teaching of evolution prohibited or argue to allow creationism or maybe intelligent design to be taught alongside evolution? Or maybe just to teach that evolution is a controversy? I don't think you're going to have much luck doing any of those things. Every place those issues have come up, they got squashed by the courts."

"Yeah, I know. We're just asking for a disclaimer."

"Oh. I see. Even that technique has failed. Are you planning on having the student body support you?"

"I haven't really thought about that. That would be cool, but I don't think it's a necessary ingredient for this recipe."

"That's good because I doubt you're going to get much support. The majority of the kids probably don't give a rip one way or another, and the rest are gonna split right down the middle, maybe, based on religious influence."

"You seem to know quite a bit about this topic."

"Yeah. And I personally think it's a free country, and you can hunt if you want to, but you're barking up the wrong tree. And by the way, some people are not going to be as tolerant as I am. They may be downright rude." He walked away.

*Tell me something I don't know. I wonder if they're any Richard Dawkins wannabes in my school. If so, it's going to take a Herculean effort to prevent letting my testosterone do the talking for me.*

Other people made comments during the day, but the two



most memorable ones came from the teaching staff. His PE teacher pulled him aside during class while the rest of the kids ran laps around the gym. "So Jeremy, you want to play some basketball for me this year, right?"

"You bet, coach. The collarbone is basically as good as new. I just need to get back into playing shape."

"Well, the deal is, son, if you're going to make waves with the school board and administration, your chance to play might be severely threatened."

Jeremy was in shock. "They can't keep me from going out for basketball just because I'm standing up for an unpopular cause."

"You're right. But I can make sure that your playing time is virtually nil. Do you get my drift?"

"Loud and clear."

Jeremy got the message, but he was still having trouble believing this conversation actually took place. He couldn't wait to discuss it with Maria. The troubled youth was unable to communicate with her until lunch. "You wouldn't believe what happened to me today," Maria said.

"Actually, after what happened to me, I think I'd believe just about anything."

"You're kidding? What happened?"

"No, you go first. Mine isn't that big a deal."

"OK. I was approached by Mrs. Swanson, the teacher who is the coach of the cheerleaders. She said that one of the girls has gotten pregnant and has to be replaced. They would like me to be the new cheerleader."

"That's cool!"

"I'm not done yet."

"Sorry!"

"She said that there was one little rub. They said, whoever 'they' is, that I'd need to drop this little school board request if I wanted to join the team."

"Déjà vu all over again."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm sorry. Are you done now?" She nodded. "OK, what I mean is that basically the same thing happened to me."

"They said you could be the new cheerleader?"

Jeremy did something he had wanted to do for a long time. He stuck out his tongue at her. He was no longer afraid of alienating her by being less than Joe Serious. She threw back her head and laughed.

"Actually, they said I didn't have big enough pompoms, so

they passed me by for cheerleader." She shook her head. "Not buying that one, huh? OK, truth is that the basketball coach said I wouldn't be playing if I don't drop out of the politically incorrect scene."

"What? Oh my gosh! Jeremy, I can't ask you to give up basketball on my account."

"Haven't we gone through this conversation in the past?"

"Not exactly. Your basketball career wasn't at stake the last time we talked about this."

"It's not like I have a career in basketball. I'm not even sure I'd be a starter this year."

"But you do want to play?"

"Well, sure, I want to play but...."

"But what?"

"But I don't like the terms of surrender. Are you going to become a cheerleader?"

"No way in...well, you know where! I'm not selling out my dad's dream for vanity."

"And neither am I."

"But it isn't your father's vision."

"No. Far from it. But it has become my vision. Obviously there's more than just smoke here. Your dad detected a fire raging that everyone seems to want to ignore. I really can't believe this is happening. I just know that I want to be part of trying to stop it."

"Jeremy, one of the things you have going for you is your status as an athlete. If you give that up, will that minimize the influence you can have?"

"Maybe. But I think that it is more important that I just be a nobody with the truth than a mini celebrity with a bunch of hype and lies."

The two stood looking into each other's eyes. *Maria has never looked prettier. Shouldn't this be the part in the movie where I kiss her? But we're not in a movie; we're in the school lunchroom. We might be out of the hearing of everyone else, but we're in plain view of hundreds of kids. And Maria would probably slug me.*

Jeremy left the lunchroom to use the bathroom. When he returned, he found Maria in a conversation with Stevie Knight, another member of the Nerd Herd. This seemed to be mostly a one-sided conversation with Stevie talking and Maria listening.

"I suppose you still think the Earth is flat?" Stevie asked.

"Of course not. I was six years old when—"

"And I suppose you think the sun rotates around the Earth?"

"No. I—"

"Then when are you going to get a clue and figure out that evolution is just as true as those other facts that were proven long ago? Once again science corrects the errors introduced by religion."

"Stevie, I don't think—"

"I noticed."

Stevie hadn't noticed that Jeremy was standing beside him. He was startled when Jeremy spoke to him. "I'm not sure what is going on here, Stevie, but I suggest you chill out and show some respect for Maria. She's a very sweet girl, but she just might lose her temper and kick – your – butt!"

Now Stevie was doing some thinking. He began to make his withdrawal, but turned back for one last comment. "You know that brute force is no proof of truth. Might does not make right!" He scurried to the other side of the lunchroom.

"Are you OK?" Jeremy inquired.

"Fine. I don't think I needed any protection here, Sir Lancelot, but thanks for the concern."

"So what's the burr under his saddle?"

"He is upset about our scheduled presentation with the school board."

"He'll get over it. Stevie's a pretty good kid, all things considered." The bell rang ending the lunch period, and the two teenagers said goodbye.

The second shock to Jeremy's system came after science class. He and Maria were walking out of class when Mr. Bogue said, "I'd like to talk to you, Mr. Dillon – alone."

Jeremy looked over at Maria.

"I'll wait for you outside," she said.

When everyone had cleared the room, Mr. Bogue pulled the door shut and walked back to his desk where Jeremy was waiting. "I suppose you know what I want to talk to you about?"

"Let me guess. It's time for the science teacher's ball again, and you were wondering if I wanted to buy a pair of tickets?"

"I think the timing of your humor, not to mention the content, leaves a lot to be desired."

"Oh. Let me try again. If I don't burn my anti-evolution card, you're not going to let me play on the science team."

"You're getting close. But the humor still is out of place. So what is it you think you're going to prove?"

"I don't know. I haven't decided yet how far to press this. Ultimately I may prove that Charles Darwin was the most masterful con artist in world history."

"Are you trying to jerk my chain?"

"Oh, no, sir. You asked what I was going to prove. I suggested a possibility. But in retrospect, I think I'm giving Darwin way too much credit, just as everyone has else done for a hundred and fifty years."

"I don't know what the source of your grandiose delusions is, but let me bring you back down to earth for a newsflash. Jeremy Dillon is in danger of getting a C or worse in this class."

"I've gotten an A on every graded assignment so far this semester."

"That'll change in a big hurry."

"You can't get away with this!"

"Why not? Who you going to tell? Your reputation will be up in smoke due to your newly found aversion to evolution. You won't have any creditability. It will be your word against mine – a flaky kid who wants to self-destruct versus a highly respected educator."

"And if I wise up and be a good little boy, then all is well?"

"Ding Ding Ding. We have a winner!"

"Did you have this discussion with Maria?"

"What for? She's a lost cause. I'm only giving you a chance because I think you can still be straightened out, and because I like your father."

"Will you let me think about it for a while?"

"Sure."

"OK. That's too long. There are a lot of ways I could more adequately express this – but I'll be polite. Thanks, but no thanks." He started to walk away.

"Bad choice!"

Jeremy turned around. "Oh. I guess I should have ordered an omelet. I hear it is the *house* specialty." He was on his way to join Maria and didn't get to enjoy the fireworks display that exploded on Mr. Bogue's face.

Jeremy explained what transpired behind the closed door as he escorted Maria down the hall.

She said, "Just look at all the trouble I've gotten you into. I bet you wish I'd never moved here."

"Listen, I'm going to say this once, and once only, so remember it forever. You are the best thing that ever happened to me, and I thank my lucky stars that you moved here."

"Wow! That's very flattering, Mr. Dillon, and I bow in honor of your compliment, but just one little correction. There are no such things as lucky stars. You might try thanking God instead."

"OK. If that's what you want, you got it. I thank God that you moved here!" It felt good saying it. He felt like saying it again as loud as he could.

When Maria reached her locker, it was evident that someone had left a little token of their appreciation. *On this day from hell what else could happen?* Maria ripped the paper, which was held by scotch tape, from the locker and unfolded it. Jeremy read over her shoulder.

"Be careful, bitch. I know where you live, and if you stay on this course, you might evolve into a corpse." It was signed "DOT Defender of Truth".

Jeremy was about ready to explode. He looked around to see if he could detect who had left the threatening note. Not a clue. Could they take this threat seriously or was it just a prank or another attempt to control their protest? It seemed to Jeremy that they had to consider it a legitimate threat. Should they turn this over to the police?

Maria was slightly stressed. "I think I'm going to miss my bus!"

"Don't worry about that. After this note, I want to take you home myself. Is your mother home?"

"No. She won't be home until after five."

"OK. Let's go to the library and hang out until then. We can do some online research there."

They gathered up the books they needed to take home and proceeded to the library. Jeremy was amazed at how calm Maria was through this ordeal. Most girls would have been freaking out. He was halfway there himself. She was acting as if nothing had happened.

"How can you be so calm about this? You were more worried about missing the bus."

"There is a lot of danger in the world, but being afraid all the time isn't good. We need to be cautious and diligent, but we don't have to worry! There's a difference. I just put it in God's hands. I ask for his protection, and I do my part by being observant."

"Well perhaps you can increase your vigilance right now. OK?"

"If it makes you feel better, then I'll try."

"Thank you." The two were silent for a moment, each lost in their own thoughts. Jeremy broke the silence. "What I'd like to know is how everybody knew about this showdown we're going to have."

"I've thought about that too. My guess is that somebody on the school board told somebody, who told somebody and the

snowball became super-sized as it came down the hill."

"Yeah. It could be that a member of the school board has a student in school, and the kid found out about it. Could it also be possible that the information was given out expressly as a way of generating some peer pressure against us?"

"That isn't outside the realm of possibility. There were two dissenting votes. There may be somebody on the school board who's already tilted to the side of evolution. It's possible that they're trying to undermine our efforts."

At the library the two surfed some evolution websites and found some interesting commentary. The war of words raged quite openly on the Internet. Many of the posters didn't pull any punches. It was amazing how courageous people can be when they type an inflammatory message anonymously and fire it off into cyberspace. They can say all sorts of discourteous things without worrying about picking up their teeth fragments from the floor with a broom and a dustpan. The anti-evolution advocates were better behaved for the most part, but there were enough jerks on both sides to fan a tiny spark into a forest fire.

The unbelievable thing to Jeremy was the variety of opinions that he encountered. The most interesting reading that Jeremy ran across was in the reviews of books. It was pretty predictable that an anti-evolution book was going to get a score of one from the evolutionist crowd and a five from the anti-evolution crowd, and an evolutionary book would get just the opposite ranking. It was pretty clear that peoples' opinions were based very much on their belief system. It was also clear that there was not a great deal of tolerance for differing opinions. And Maria and he were throwing themselves right into the middle of this fray.

At five p.m. the surfers climbed back into Jeremy's car and motored up the hill to Maria's house. Jeremy went in with Maria to be present when she showed the note to her mother. Mrs. Masterson was visibly shaken, but she kept herself under control.

"Did you guys show this to school authorities?"

The two kids shook their heads.

"We need to at least do that much. They might want to involve the police. The fact that sticks out like a sore thumb is that this person taped this on to your locker in the middle of the day. Someone could have seen him or her do it. I'll communicate with the principal's office or maybe even the superintendent's office."

When the matter seemed to be well in hand, Jeremy remarked he should be going. Maria offered to walk him back to the car. Now that was an offer he couldn't refuse.

When they reached the auto, Jeremy did something that surprised even himself. "Maria, before we go, could I pray with you?"

She looked up with eyes as big as quarters. *This should be an offer she can't refuse.* Jeremy held his hands out to her. She slipped her hands into his. Jeremy bowed his head and closed his eyes. He didn't know what to say since he had never really prayed before, but he did know that he wanted to say something.

"Dear God. I'm not sure you exist or if you do, whether you listen to people like me. I just ask for you to protect this precious girl. Keep her safe from all harm. She loves you. Please be her bodyguard around the clock. Amen."

Jeremy kept his head bowed for a few seconds after the "amen". His first public prayer was completed. *It's certainly different praying yourself than just listening to someone else do it.* He felt something strange in his body, but he couldn't describe it. When he looked up, he noticed that Maria had a special light in her eyes.

"Thank you, Jeremy. That was beautiful. You were wonderful."

*What can I do for an encore?* The only thing seemed to be to drive off into the sunset and leave her there thinking he was wonderful. No sense doing or saying something stupid to spoil that idea.

## **Chapter 32**

### **All Flights Cancelled**

Tuesday was a repeat of Monday in regard to comments from fellow students about the upcoming school board hearing. Jeremy figured it couldn't be long before his father found out about it. Was there any way to avoid a conflict? The prospects seemed slim to none.

On Wednesday the comments were few and far between. By Thursday it was old news, and no one was talking about it. The subject had gone dormant but would probably rise up again when the hearing arrived. On Thursday, after school, Jeremy took Maria out looking at automobiles at the local car dealers.

Jeremy's dad was sitting on the couch reading a science book when JD returned from his car-seeking adventure with Maria. Here was Jeremy's chance to reconcile with his parent and to gently break the news of his recent activity. The trouble was that he never got the chance to begin. Mr. Dillon leapt off the couch when he saw his son and began the conversation in a less than reconciling tone.

"Have you gone off the deep end? Is your marble bag completely empty? Is your elevator only making it up halfway?"

Jeremy blinked a couple of times. "Would you repeat the questions?"

"Don't get smart with me! I've put up with your bull for long enough! It was bad enough that you're going to church and reading anti-evolutionary material, but you couldn't stop there, could you? You just had to go public with it and embarrass me and tarnish the family name. Well, you're not going to go through with it, and I don't want you seeing that Masterson girl anymore either! And, by the way, you're grounded!"

"Grounded!" Jeremy was already in shock due to his father's attack. The G word didn't do anything to alleviate his symptoms. He had never been grounded in his whole life. "For how long?"

"For as long as it takes to straighten you out. Did you think I was never going to find out? Luckily I ran into Paul Bogue and he told me what you were up to."

Jeremy did some quick thinking and decided on a course of action. "Dad, you're way too emotional for us to be discussing this right now. I'm going up to my room, and I'll give you my feedback



when you cool off."

"Well, I wouldn't be postponing this just because you want to, but I have to get back to school for a class so you'll have your wish. But I guarantee you, my anger isn't going away."

Mr. Dillon noticed the book in Jeremy's hand. He reached to take it saying, "You won't be needing this." He got his hands on it, but it didn't leave Jeremy's hands. The boy's unbreakable clasp sent a clear message. The man's strength was exceeded by that of his son. He released his grip on the book.

Jeremy gave his dad one last look in the eye and then proceeded to ascend the stairs. *Monday was the day from hell. This must be the sequel.* He stopped at the bottom of the stairs and threw a comment over his shoulder. "By the way, just to give you some more to chew on, I won't be playing basketball this year." He continued up the stairs before his dad could respond. *I might as well let Dad hear this news now so there will be no sequel to his anger attack.*

The troubled youth sat on his bed and tried to think out a solution to this dilemma. What were his options? He could obey his father and give up everything he had worked for in the last month and Maria's friendship. Out of the question. What were the *real* alternatives? He could just disobey his father. Jeremy pondered authority. He had been in contact with authority his whole life. His dad, babysitters, teachers, referees in sports. Then there were the police and judicial bodies. Jeremy hadn't personally been involved there. It seemed that all of them except the sports officials in some way relied on the capability of physical domination to maintain the authority.

Jeremy realized that his father no longer had that power over him. Any authority that he wielded over Jeremy would have to be granted by the son. And the biggest factor was that Jeremy was celebrating his eighteenth birthday on Saturday. He would be an adult then and capable of being on his own without his father's interference. That was an extreme step and adulthood wasn't a card that Jeremy wished to play. But it was in his hand, and if he had to play it to save the game, he'd throw it on the table.

His thoughts descended deeper into the whole nature of authority. How many wars had been fought over it? How many people had given their lives to fight for the right to be free from someone else's authority? Remembered conversations with Maria came back to him, involving stories of the relationship of Jesus with his Father. An idea worked his way into his consciousness. The act of becoming a Christian seemed to be an act of

surrendering one's freedom to accept the authority of God, the Heavenly Father. It suddenly became clear to Jeremy that a rejection of God and a chance for eternal life could basically be a fight against authority. It was the ultimate form of teenage rebellion.

So what should he do in a situation like this? Was it not right to submit to his father? One of the Ten Commandments he had recently been introduced to addressed that topic. Honor thy father and thy mother. What was he going to do? If he followed the path he was on, he couldn't honor his father, but would he be honoring his mother? And more importantly, which course of action would honor his Heavenly Father if the adoption papers were signed?

In normal situations honoring one's earthly father would be a way to honor the Heavenly Father as well. But in Jeremy's situation that distinction wasn't clear. If Maria was doing God's work, then for Jeremy to abandon that work because of his father's command could be going against God's will. Would his father's authority only be valid if it lined up with God's authority? That seemed to be the case to Jeremy.

So it seemed he had to rebel against his father to avoid rebelling against God. This might mean his having to leave the home he had lived in all of his life and trying to make it in a tough world that he wasn't really ready for. This was just too overwhelming for him. His thought processing circuits were becoming overloaded. *When is a circuit breaker going to pop?*

*What if I have to leave? Where can I go?* He had a little money saved up, but that would vanish in a flash. Jeremy might have to drop out of school in order to make enough to make it on his own. Living at Maria's house seemed out of the question. Being there for one night was one thing, but moving in was totally different. He was sure that Maria's mother wouldn't go for that plan. *Who else was there? What about Hacker? He's an only child too, and his parents are pretty well off. They have a pretty big house not far from school and church. He and I are pretty good buddies. The possibility is worth exploring. I must have some kind of plan when I tell Dad I'm not going to abandon Maria and her mission.*

*Enough time wasted. Now, it was time to start reading the book that Maria said was full of heavy things and Dad tried to pull away from me. Maybe Dad couldn't take it because it was too heavy for him.*

He finished the first chapter, which contained a lot of material he had already read in other places. *Nothing here to get excited*

*about.* He dug into chapter two. *What?* Some scientist named Sir Arthur Keith stated that Adolph Hitler was an evolutionist who consciously sought to make the practices of Germany conform to the theory of evolution.

Jeremy rubbed his eyes to make sure he was reading this correctly. He wasn't mistaken. He shook his head. *How could anyone admire someone like Hitler for murdering people because he considered them unfit and thus in need of being eliminated from existence?* No doubt he just wanted to give natural selection a little help in eliminating the misfits. Look at all the time it would take for nature to kill off six million Jews and the millions of other people who died as a result of the genetic purge.

Obviously evolutionary thought had gotten out of control. Evolution was taught as a blind, purposeless process which favored those strong enough to survive and those that developed mutations which gave them an advantage in the race for survival. If man and his politics and his bloodthirsty ways got involved, wouldn't the role of natural selection be basically controlled by people and thus ultimately by the thoughts of people? From what Jeremy had read of Darwin, he had the opinion Charles was a gentleman. Having the deaths of so many people blamed on his theory of the survival of the fittest would probably make him roll over in his grave.

A new passage caused Jeremy to halt in disbelief. Some people actually claimed that religion evolved in mankind. Natural selection favored it because it favored group fitness. But now religion was not only no longer needed, had become a negative influence in society, and needed to be eliminated. He wanted to scream. *How freaking dumb can some of these "intelligent" people be? What gene got mutated to spawn off the delusion of God?* He had seen evolution referred to as a Swiss army knife theory, but this was ridiculous.

*Some of these people talk about mutations as if they were caused by desires and needs.* This was totally counter to Darwin's theory. Jeremy got a brainstorm. He could create his own "just so story" about mutations and natural selection. It would be funny and might be good ammunition someday. He typed it up as he composed.

One day a landlocked animal (probably a dinosaur according to many scientists) looks up at the clouds and says, "I wish I could fly." Or more scientifically, "It would certainly increase my chances of survival if I had the capacity

to avoid predators and cover wide ranges of territory in search of food by propelling my body through the air."

So he attempts to flap his front legs and soar off into the blue. But alas his legs (or arms) don't do squat. He gets another idea and tries to jump off the garage. Luckily for him, his neck isn't broken and the desire to fly isn't lost in the crash that ensues.

At this point our frustrated but still ambitious dinosaur sits down and says to himself, "What I need is a pair of wings which take advantage of the laws of aerodynamics." Unfortunately, no body parts stores are available. Thus our creature is out of luck because he has already inherited all the traits he is going to get.

His desires are so strong that they allow him to generate a mutation in his offspring that causes the front legs to change slightly. And not only do the offspring of his offspring keep that change, but add another small change to the limb through their desire, which has been passed on by word of mouth from the original wing wisher. And so our story goes as each generation hangs onto the changes of the previous and adds on for themselves. And one day the scales that once covered the surface of that worthless for flying leg are replaced by feathers which bear remarkable traits of not only aerodynamic functionality but also have self-cleaning and insulation capability. In addition the muscles attached to the limb are changed to give the strength for flight, and the bones are lightened to assist in the process of defeating gravity.

And so without flying lessons or even a crash helmet, the great-great-great to the thousandth power grandson of the original wannabe flier flaps his wings and is soon doing graceful figure eights in the sky while snapping up insects. Oh, hold on – does he have to wait for an insect to desire wings first? Hmmm, which came first, the flying insect or the flying bird? In any case, our newly formed bird species is showing off for all of his cousins and their cousins who didn't develop wings. And soon all of them are dead from envy because they can't fly. Or perhaps what caused the extinction of the non-flying variety was that the fliers got all the women of the old tribe since they were so stylish with those new wings and the old breed just died out due to not being able to keep up with the flying Joneses.

Jeremy stopped his story there. It was amazing what people would believe. Of course in the real world of evolution, desire and intelligence had no part. It was all just blind luck that allowed those wings to develop slowly – even though they would have been a liability to survival during their formation. Oh yeah, Jeremy remembered that the bird couldn't have flown with a land animal's respiratory system anyway. So another wonderful mutational advantage needed to be added to the package before it was ready for flight. *No big deal. We'll just tack a few additional millions of years onto the process and, no doubt, it would have happened.*

Jeremy had read about a book written by an evolutionist called *Why People Believe Weird Things*. Of course anti-evolutionary thoughts were on his list of the weird things and not ideas like dinosaurs developing wings and avian lungs and a bear or wolf-like creature walking into the ocean and becoming a whale. It appeared that the author, who was endorsing skepticism, had decided that skepticism should be applied to everything except science.

The thing that baffled Jeremy was that people could study the complexity of feathers and wings and then arrive at the conclusion that such perfection was obtained through undirected mutations. Man actually studied birds to learn how to build airplanes. *Isn't it ironic that man had to use as a pattern for his own flying machine, a design that's considered not to be a design.* Just another lucky throw of the mutation dice that happened to get preserved by natural selection.

Darwinism just didn't make any sense if you got down to the detail level. Jeremy had a new thought. Maybe the people who were saying these crazy things like religion was a product of evolution were dumb like a fox. It was the intelligence level of the people who were listening to these arguments that was the critical component. The people claiming religion was an evolved trait could be simply using a wily method to sway the minds and hearts of others. The statements perhaps were just rolled out of a well-oiled propaganda machine, similar to the one developed by communism.

It was time for him to sleep. He felt like praying, which was kind of strange. He really didn't know how. He had done all right in praying with Maria. That was just a plea for help. Most people don't analyze the content of their distress cries when an emergency arises. This wasn't a crisis-type prayer. He just felt like talking to God. He stumbled into a start.

"Oh, God. I'm not sure exactly how to do this. Maria tells me that you love me, so I guess if that's the case, you'll cut me a little slack for my ignorance. I don't even know if I can call you "Father" or not. I don't know exactly what it takes to be your son. Things are not going so well right now with my earthly father. I was hoping maybe you could be of some assistance in that area, at least to show me what I need to do. I thank you for bringing Maria into my life, and I ask now that you walk with her always and keep her safe from harm."

Jeremy paused. He didn't know what else to say. Finally, he threw in an "amen" and lifted his head again. He had that funny warmth inside of him again. *What's that all about?*

*Talking to God was like talking to Dad back in the good old days. Trouble is I can't look into God's eyes or see his smile or hear his laugh. I can't even hear him answer questions or provide advice.* Maria had said that God spoke to her in a small quiet voice which wasn't even audible. Jeremy wasn't sure how you could hear an inaudible sound, but who was he to argue with Maria? Maybe you had to get to know God better before he opened up. Jeremy was still thinking about that when he drifted off to sleep.

## Chapter 33

### Boys Running to Become Men

Jeremy woke up on Friday and remembered it was his last day of being a boy. Tomorrow he would wake up as a man, at least in the eyes of American law. At what point does a boy really become a man? Was there an event that had to happen? Was it some knowledge that had to be acquired? Perhaps there was a ritual that had to be performed?

He remembered something he ran across in his mother's Bible, highlighted of course. Maria had taught him this also. "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." *Is that what I'm doing now? Is basketball a childish thing that I put away in order to take care of more manly business? Maybe I've already become a man.*

He thought about the book he was reading, school, and his grounding. School today would be counterproductive. His perfect attendance at Sumner High School was about to come to an end. He was going to stay home and finish the book and do some planning in case he was going to have to move out. *Maybe I should practice saying "Would you like fries with that".*

Jeremy was in the middle of reading when his father poked his head into the room. "You're going to be late for school."

Jeremy was tempted to say he couldn't go because he was grounded. There was nothing to be gained by throwing some gasoline on the fire. "Not feeling good today." It wasn't a lie. He wasn't sick, but he certainly wasn't feeling good.

"Why didn't you tell me? I have to call the school to report your absence."

"Sorry. I didn't know." Jeremy tried to remember the last time he had missed school. It was back in the sixth grade.

"OK. I gotta go. I'll expect to finish our conversation from last night when I get home this evening."

Jeremy didn't respond. After a few seconds, his father just closed the door. *What am I going to say to my dad tonight? I have all day and part of the evening to figure that out.* He went back to his reading.

Jeremy looked at the clock more than once during the day. Once he caught himself thinking, *right now I'd be in English class*

*with Maria. The one bummer about not being at school today was that he wasn't getting to see her. Oh no. I forgot about the note on Maria's locker! What was I thinking about? I was so selfish in thinking about my own problems that I forgot hers. I should be there to protect her.*

Of course, whoever threatened her was probably just trying to convince her to back off the anti-evolution kick. They were not going to do anything immediately, if at all. They'd give her time to sweat it. The more dangerous time would come in the weeks ahead as December 9<sup>th</sup> drew nearer. Besides, she would probably be as safe at school as she was anywhere. That wasn't a very comforting thought, however, considering the recent history of American schools. It was too late now to be anxious about it. Worry doesn't pay the bills or get senior papers done.

The last few chapters were heavy hitters, as Maria promised. Jeremy was frequently stopping to mark a passage. He remembered hearing somewhere that highlighting everything basically defeated the purpose of highlighting. He tried to limit his colored markings just to important passages, but it seemed that almost everything was important. One notable passage brought him some relief. The author suggested that Jesus would judge some men according to the laws that were written in their hearts and conscience. That was an idea he could grab hold of. That meant people who had never heard of Jesus or saw a Bible would still have a chance of eternal life. This made sense to him. If God created us, would he not write the laws within our hearts?

Jeremy looked at that word "conscience". *Separate the syllables and what do I have – con and science. How appropriate.* He had been thinking about con men and evolution since he began digging into the subject. At first he thought that scientists were conning the world, but with further study he began understanding that the scientists were the ones being conned. They just didn't realize it. And they were just the blind leading the blind, perhaps down the road to destruction.

Before his dad arrived, Jeremy had finished *The Long War Against God*. His understanding of the war he was in was much clearer. It turned out that Charles Darwin certainly wasn't the originator of the theory of evolution. It had been around for over two thousand years. Why Darwin got so much credit for the theory was a little puzzling to Jeremy. Apparently it was the concept of natural selection which cemented Darwin's place in history.

Jeremy tried to understand the big picture. He and Maria had discussed this topic briefly. Way back when God decided to create



man, he was probably bored. Realistically, if he was all-powerful and all-knowing and didn't have to work, eat, etcetera, to survive, what would he do to enjoy eternity? What do humans do to liven up their existence? They buy a puppy or some tropical fish or something. God went way beyond that. He created an entire universe and a myriad of living creatures within it.

He invented physical and biological laws to hold the whole thing in place. Obviously microevolution was part of the plan for making this world even more interesting, not just for God but for the creatures he created in his own image. Did that mean that God looked like a human? Which one? Humans come in all shapes and sizes and looks. Actually he remembered reading something in the Bible about seeing God as he really was. That would suggest maybe that God doesn't look like a man. Perhaps man's spirit could be visible. Perhaps it was the spirit which resembled God?

Anyway, it would seem that maybe God created man for his entertainment. Instead of watching soap operas on TV, God watches them in real life. And sometimes he seems to even make it interactive life, and he steps in to fix things, but not very often. Obviously he wasn't a totally hands-on type of creator. In fact he seemed to play hide and seek with the creatures that he designed. Was that part of the entertainment? Were we all playing some kind of cosmic game? Maybe it was the Creation Superbowl. Instead of the Seahawks versus the Steelers, it was the good guys versus the bad guys.

Every day God tunes in to watch how the game is going. He wants the good guys to win, but he can't help out really or the good guys wouldn't win, he would. And since he's invincible, what fun would that be? He ties his own hands in order to make the game more interesting. And wouldn't one of the things that interested God involve watching man unfold the mysteries that he surrounded his creatures with? It seems that scientists should be very close to God. They get to uncover his marvels all the time as part of their profession. Too bad most of them fail to understand that fact.

It was time to shift gears and leave his research behind for a while to consider his immediate future. Jeremy knew the showdown was at hand. There was no way he was going to step away from the path he had started down. Just walking away from the evolution revolution would have been hard. Giving up Maria's friendship, and still hopefully more in the future, was too much to ask.

*So what does my future hold? Even if I move in with Hacker and finish high school, where do I go from there? I won't be able to go to college. I'll have to work.* He had a real logistics problem here. If he gave up Maria, he would never have her. If he gave up his father's support, he wouldn't be able to support her adequately, if he should ever manage to win her heart.

Maybe he could make it as a pro baseball player. It was common knowledge that minor league players weren't paid very well. Was he good enough to go to the majors? Chances were not good. There were thirty teams with twenty-five active guys on each team for a grand total of 750 players in the whole world who got the privilege of donning a major league uniform at one time. It used to be that a player only had to compete with Americans, but now the players were coming from all over the world. The competition was getting tougher.

Maybe he'd join the armed services. He could make more money than he would pushing fries and he'd get some benefits and college tuition reimbursement. Maybe he could still go to college. But he'd be a world away from Maria and probably end up in Iraq.

It looked like he was in a lose/lose situation. There didn't appear to be any paths for him to choose with a happy ending. He thought of an email that Maria had sent him the other day. It had the cartoon of a little guy in a rowboat on the ocean. The caption read, "Help me, Lord. The ocean is so big and my boat is so small." Jeremy knew exactly how he felt. "Help me, God. If you're really up there, and you really care, help me find my way out of this mess."

*Speaking of email, I haven't read mine yet today.* He did that now and discovered another email from Maria. She wondered where he was today and if he was OK. She also said she was the proud owner of a 1999 Taurus. *At least someone was having some happy moments.* He looked at the clock. *Dad is normally home by now on a Friday.*

*I really don't feel like talking to Dad tonight. I'm freaking exhausted. I need to renew my strength for the fight and perhaps flight ahead of me. Heaven only knows where I'll be sleeping in the near future.* He hung a little sign on his doorknob that read 'Sleeping! Please do not disturb!' and closed his door. His weary body succumbed to sleep minutes later.

## Chapter 34

### The Prodigal

Despite having gone to sleep so early, Jeremy slept until the light of day peeked through his drapes. Today was his eighteenth birthday. Without thinking about it, he had postponed the fight with his dad until it was man versus man instead of man versus boy. He gathered his thoughts about him and reluctantly made his way down the stairs to where his future awaited.

His dad was sitting at his normal spot in the kitchen reading his paper. The normal part of his day was about to change. "Well, Dad, I guess it's time to have that serious talk."

Dad flung the newspaper onto the table. "OK, what did you come up with?"

"First of all, I don't want you getting the idea that I'm an ungrateful son. I realize I never could have gotten where I am today without your help and your support and your encouragement. I know this is your house and you make the rules here. I've reached a position where I can't abide by the rules you're trying to impose on me in regard to Maria and my research activity. I realize that I can't stay here and accept your hospitality without accepting your authority as well. So it seems to be pretty obvious that I'll have to move out."

"Move out! Where are you gonna go? Who's going to support you? How are you ever going to make something of yourself? Are you gonna flip burgers all your life? You'll never be able to afford college on your own."

"Maybe I'll join the army and get college benefits."

Mr. Dillon tightened up immediately. "Army! You'd go into the army? And go to Iraq and dodge bullets? You're engaged in some mighty stinking thinking, son."

"Maybe. I could accuse you of the same thing for imposing your will upon me in matters that really shouldn't come between us. How would you have liked it if someone tried to stop you from seeing Mom?"

"That's not a very good analogy. I was thirty-three years old and your mother was twenty-five. We were adults and already living on our own. That's apples to oranges thinking."

"Whatever. I guess you have the right to make whatever rules you want, and as an eighteen-year-old, I have the right to take a

hike."

"Well, if you're leaving, I guess hiking is literally what you'll be doing then because the car stays here. It's in my name, and you couldn't afford insurance anyway."

"Fine!" Jeremy's volume was elevated beyond the norm. He started to walk away.

"Wait just a second, mister! Why are you doing this to me?"

"I'm not doing it to you, Dad. You might say you're doing it to yourself."

"Yeah, whatever, if I'm allowed to use teenage slang. Go on! I don't need you! You're the big man now! Go do your thing. When you've figured out that you have made a big mistake, you can try crawling back to me. I might take you back, and then again I might not."

"I don't plan on doing any crawling – ever."

"Easy to say now. Get out in the world for a few days with nothing to eat but humble pie and see if your attitude gets adjusted any."

Jeremy escaped to his room. *I never thought about not being able to keep the car. I'll worry about that later. Right now I need to figure out where I'm going to live. Why couldn't we have some family members close by?* After surveying his room, the decision was made to not take anything with him now except his backpack with his research materials. He wanted to make sure his dad didn't have a book burning party in his absence.

He only had one option in mind right now. He'd pay a call on Hacker and his family. He might have a chance there. If not, he wasn't sure what he'd do. The picture of the rowboat came into his mind as he closed and locked the door on his way out. His dad would probably want the key back when he got his things. Jeremy felt numb inside, but by the time he was halfway to the Kaufman house, the exertion of walking was making him feel better. *If laughter is the best medicine, perhaps exercise is the second best.*

It was still pretty early in the morning. Jeremy hadn't thought about that logistical problem. He certainly didn't want to wake somebody to ask them to take in a beggar. *What was he going to do to kill time? Hey. Jack in the Box is just up the street. Just for jollies I can walk up there and check to see if they're hiring.*

He'd have to scrape the bottom of the barrel in regard to employment. His standing as a athlete and an A student was probably not going to help him much in the job market, though it certainly would be better than if he was an unknown C student.

His heart soared when he saw the "Help Wanted" sign in the window of the restaurant. Maybe God was smiling down on him. Of course, maybe God wouldn't have wanted him to leave home. Perhaps God didn't exist, and he was wasting his time thinking about help from above.

He opened the door of the fast-food restaurant and walked inside. A girl with a Spanish accent asked him if she could help him. "I'd like to apply for a job." She handed him an application form. "Gracias," he told her.

"You're welcome."

Jeremy took the application to a booth and started filling in the blanks on the form. When he got down to the previous experience section, he suddenly felt inadequate. There was nothing he could do about it. Everybody has to start with a blank experience page at their first job.

He took the filled application up to the counter. The same girl greeted him. "Hi, is there any chance the manager is here?"

"Yes, he is."

"Can you please ask him if I could speak with him?"

"One second, please."

"*Esta bien.*" She left the counter. A middle-aged man came back with her. Jeremy didn't wait for him to speak, "Hi, I'm—"

"Jeremy Dillon," finished the balding man. "I've watched you play!"

"Which sport?"

"Baseball. And basketball. And football. So what's up?" He noticed the application form in Jeremy's hand. "Are you looking for a job?"

"Yeah. I mean yes, sir."

"Sir? Call me Dave, Dave Tuttle." He reached his hand out and shook Jeremy's. "Come on over here and sit down, and we'll talk about it." Jeremy followed him, scarcely believing that he was so lucky. He had talked to kids who had tried to find jobs and they said it wasn't easy. It looked like he might score on his first shot.

"So how many hours were you looking for? We have to work around your basketball schedule, right?"

Now Jeremy was really shocked. It sounded like he was being hired on the spot. Looked like he owed this opportunity to his sports career, which now might be over. "No, sir, I mean Dave. I'm not playing basketball this year."

Dave's eyebrows shot up and question marks appeared in his eyes.

"It's kind of a long story. I hadn't really thought about an exact

number of hours. Probably around sixteen or something. Maybe just weekends."

"OK. That sounds like it would work. When can you start?"

"Whenever you're ready."

"Today's Saturday, and we're short-handed. Somebody just called in sick and we're not able to locate a replacement right now. I was filling in, but I've got more important things to do. I can give you some quick training on the easy stuff and turn you loose. A guy who can figure out Coach K's offense can certainly figure out how to flip burgers and run a cash register."

The words of Jeremy's father concerning burgers rang in his ears. "OK. I need to take care of some personal business first. I could be back in maybe an hour or so."

"Perfect. We don't get busy until later anyway. We don't do much breakfast business. But the parade will begin hot and heavy by eleven so we'll need to get you some training before the rush."

"Gotcha."

"And I've got some more paperwork for you to fill in when you get back."

"No problem. Thanks, Dave!"

"My pleasure, son. I'm looking forward to working with you."

Jeremy grabbed his backpack and went outside. Perhaps Hacker's family was up by now. By the time he got to their house it would be nine. He needed to be back at the restaurant no later than ten. That didn't leave much time for talking. He was just a stone's throw from their house when the Kaufman family drove by. Hacker waved from the back seat. *Another stroke of luck finding them awake.* He sped up the pace to make sure he reached their yard before they entered the house.

Hacker was just getting out when Jeremy came up the driveway. "Hey, JD. What's up?"

"Well you know that little talk we had about my family situation. The you-know-what hit the fan."

"Ouch. OK." By that time, Mr. and Mrs. Kaufman exited their vehicle and came over to greet Jeremy. "Mom and Dad, Jeremy needs to talk to you guys about something pretty serious if you don't mind." They exchanged looks and the smiles dissolved from their faces.

"Sure. Come on in, Jeremy."

They all went in and sat down in the living room. Jeremy didn't say anything immediately. He didn't know quite how to approach the topic.

Mr. Kaufman broke the silence. "So what did you need to talk

about, Jeremy?"

"Well, Mr. Kaufman, I'm in a bit of a bind. I don't know who else to turn to." He paused for a minute and then continued. "My father made some demands on me that I just can't obey. I have to find a new place to live."

The look between the Kaufman parents spoke volumes. Jeremy suddenly felt like a panhandler. The big difference was that a panhandler exited a benefactor's life once the handout was received. In this case he was asking to stay. "You know, I think I've made a mistake. This really isn't your problem. I shouldn't have come." He stood up to leave.

Mr. Kaufman stopped him in his tracks. "Jeremy, please sit down. We're flattered that you trust us enough to come here. Does this have anything to do with your anti-evolution campaign?"

"Yeah. And church. And...other things."

"I see. How old are you, Jeremy?"

"I just turned eighteen today."

"Happy Birthday. So you're not technically running away from home. And we do believe in your cause. However, we wouldn't want to encourage you to be separated from your father."

"It's too late. I'm already separated."

"In that case." He looked over at his wife. She nodded her head.

"Well, Jeremy. Bill is an only child and always wanted a sibling. We had a foreign exchange student here one year, and he had a blast having a temporary brother. He was asking the other day if we could have another foreign exchange student. I guess maybe you'd work just as well, don't you?"

"Well, I don't know what to say. I'm blown away, I guess."

"Then just say yes."

"OK. Yes. But first all I want to say something. I'm not a freeloader. I can help with the housework and the yard work. And I'll pay rent."

"Bill never mentioned that you had a job."

"Actually I only accepted a job about thirty minutes ago so Bill didn't know himself."

Mrs. Kaufman spoke up for the first time. "There is an empty bedroom in the basement and a bathroom right across from it. To tell you the truth, I've felt kind of guilty having so much living space just wasted. How does twenty dollars a week sound?"

"Twenty dollars a week? That sounds too good to be true. That isn't enough."

"OK, my final offer is twenty-five dollars. You make your own

bed, clean your own room, and you can help Bill out with his chores around the house. Take it or leave it?"

"You drive a hard bargain. I...well...I...of course, I'll take it."

Mr. Kaufman reentered the conversation. "I notice you're on foot. I assume your dad isn't letting you take the car?"

"You assume correctly."

"OK. Well, I'd like to talk to your dad anyway about this to make sure there are no hard feelings or thoughts that we are harboring a fugitive here. Why don't I drive you home, and you can grab your things and put them in the car while we men discuss the situation?"

"OK by me. I need to be back at Jack in the Box by ten a.m. though. That gives us about forty-five minutes to get everything done."

"Well, what are we waiting for then? Bill can help you carry stuff to speed up the process, right, son?"

"No problem. I'll be glad to help my new brother out!"

The trip went as scheduled. The only big item he had to haul was his computer, which his dad had given him permission to take. And Hacker had already wired the spare bedroom with a network connection so Jeremy would be able to plug into the Internet in his bedroom, just like at home. Jeremy was more than happy when Mr. Kaufman dropped him off in the Jack in the Box parking lot right at 9:55 a.m.

By the time Jeremy had filled out the required paperwork, it was a little after ten. Dave gave him a shirt and a cap to wear. He was officially an employee of Jack in the Box, his first job. What was he going to tell Maria he wondered as he changed shirts in the restroom?

He got some training on how to work the cash register and take orders, and then Dave told him that he would pretend to be a customer. He walked around to and the customer side and walked up to the counter. Full of confidence and charm, Jeremy handled his order like a budding pro. He fumbled a little bit with the computer they used for entering the orders, but this was definitely not rocket science. When Dave came around the counter after the rehearsal, Jeremy asked, "How do you know I'll be able to make accurate change?"

"I called one of my employees about a schedule change. I happened to mention your name. She said you were a straight A student. If you can ace Algebra and Geometry etc., I think you'll do just fine counting money. The new cash registers that tell you how much money to give back make it a no-brainer. In my first job



I had to do the math in my head."

"Ain't technology great?"

"Yes, it is. When it works. And speaking of work, it's time for you to do it for real. I'll be in the back if you have any problems or questions."

"OK. Thanks again, Dave."

"Don't thank me, son. I think you're going to be a welcome addition to our team. I guess the basketball coach's loss is my gain. By the way, I've penciled you in to work every Saturday and Sunday morning. All of these kids complain about having to get up early on their weekends. I hope you don't mind."

"The early bird gets the worm."

"I like your attitude, kid!"

Jeremy was left alone to handle one line all by himself. He was extremely friendly for his first few customers. He could see that this intensity could be hard to keep up. It was like being in a ball game. You had to bring your A game the whole time. He had just waited on a large man who ordered four sandwiches. Jeremy had an idea that he was going to eat them all himself. His mind was dwelling on that thought as the man stepped aside to let the next customer order. Jeremy started to speak before his eyes returned to the person ordering, "Can I help—" He stopped right in the middle of his sentence. He wasn't going to have to tell Maria about his new job.

"Jeremy, were you keeping this job a secret?"

"Maria, no, I just applied this morning at eight thirty, and by ten I was working here."

"Well, you can tell me all the gory details later. What time do you get off, handsome?"

"Funny. Seven p.m."

"If you want to talk about it then, I'm available."

"I'd love to, but you'll have to pick me up. That's part of the story."

Her eyebrows went up. "Sounds like we have lots to talk about. Now, I better order. It wouldn't be very cool to get you fired on the first day of your first job. Can I have two jumbo jacks and a large curly fry and two waters to go?"

"Coming right up, ma'am. Your order is number ninety-eight. Thanks for eating at Jack in the Box." He winked at her.

As Jeremy prepared for the next customer in line, he couldn't help thinking how much he was looking forward to getting off work his first day of his first job. This day was going lots better than he had anticipated. He had been born on this day eighteen years

ago. Today, perhaps, he was starting a totally new life.

## Chapter 35

### Your House is My House

Jeremy settled into his new life with the Kaufman family. He dropped an email to his dad telling him all was well. There was no response yet. He got an email from Maria reminding him about the book signing party in Seattle at the Discovery Institute. Her mom was going to drive. They had room for three others. Since his football practice days were over, he was free to go. He quickly got Hacker's approval of the plan, and Jeremy emailed Maria telling her that they were reserving two of the three spots.

It was certainly strange having a substitute brother and mother. Jeremy was so used to being alone and doing his own thing that he had to get used to thinking about others. Luckily, he didn't have to share a bathroom and worry about scheduling a shower. Mrs. Kaufman was a great cook. Life was good, but he still felt pain when he thought of his father. *How could their lives have gone in such opposite directions so fast?*

On Tuesday night Mr. Kaufman brought home a video for the kids to watch. It was from something called *The Truth Project*, and had been put out by a group called Focus on the Family. Jeremy had never heard of them but Hacker said they were "big time". The setting was a classroom and the subject was evolution. Jeremy saw the research that he had been doing unfold in front of his eyes. Two people from the Discovery Institute were featured in commentaries from the outside. One was Jonathan Wells, whom they would see on Thursday. Jeremy was getting pumped up about that trip. The other guy was Stephen Meyer. Much of the material was information he had already uncovered from other sources, but the big screen presented it in a way that made it seem even more powerful. Also there were some new things that he wasn't aware of that he jotted down in his notebook. The movie was impressive and helped convince Jeremy they were on the right track.

\* \* \*

On Thursday afternoon Maria, Jeremy, Hacker and Ronnie waited on the sidewalk in front of the school. Mrs. Masterson picked them up at three p.m. for the trip to Seattle. They were all

jazzed. The Discovery Institute appeared to be on the front line in the skirmish between Darwinian theory and intelligent design. They would get to see and hear three authors today, two of whom Jeremy had read. Maria said they still had some money left to buy some more books in case they got a chance. Jeremy brought some money too just in case. He would soon get a paycheck so he felt he might possibly buy one book.

The trip was a bit of an adventure. Jeremy and the other two guys were scrunched into the back seat, and Maria was riding shotgun. Neither of the two women knew Seattle at all. The boys had grown up in Sumner but hadn't been to Seattle enough to make them skilled navigators. They were able to be of some assistance. A map from MapsonUs.com was their main guide. They arrived in downtown Seattle without incident and then began the chore of finding a parking place.

They finally found a nearby lot, which charged three dollars per hour.

Maria couldn't believe it. "We had parking meters back in South Dakota which cost a dime for an hour."

Mrs. Masterson said, "Well, Dorothy, looks like we're not in South Dakota anymore."

They all piled out of the car and maneuvered their way through the crowded sidewalks to their destination. It was a large building, by Sumner standards, but not a real skyscraper to Seattle natives. They found a directory inside that informed them that the eighth floor was the home of the Discovery Institute. Even an elevator ride was a big deal for some of the kids. After a long search, they found the office they were seeking.

An empty desk greeted them when they entered. A couple of empty chairs stood guard beside the door. There wasn't a human in sight. The little group, which almost filled the small lobby, was busy looking around when a young lady arrived on the scene. "Are you here for the book release party?"

They all answered in the affirmative.

"Follow me please." They followed the young lady to a table. "Here are the name tags. Please find yours and put it on. When you're all set, just go into the room to the left and make yourself comfortable."

Several of them offered their thanks, and she disappeared down the hall.

Jeremy led the group into the conference room where the event would be held. It wasn't very big, holding eighty folding chairs.

They took seats in the front row, and Jeremy managed to sit next to Maria. The visitors talked quietly among themselves for a few minutes. People began to trickle in until the room was almost full.

One of the speakers came in and tested his microphone. Jeremy recognized him. It was Jonathan Wells, author of *Icons of Evolution*. He had a new book out named *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Darwinism and Intelligent Design*.

Dr. Geoffrey Simmons soon followed. His new book was called *Billions of Missing Links*. If it was as good as *What Darwin Didn't Know*, Jeremy wanted this one. The third speaker was John West. His book was called *Darwin's Conservatives, the Misguided Quest*. All three had working microphones now, and the time for the party had arrived.

Each spoke for ten to fifteen minutes. Afterward the floor was opened up for questions from the audience. When the question and answer session adjourned, some people from the audience approached the authors and struck up conversations with them. Jeremy saw that John West wasn't engaged yet, so he started a conversation with him.

They had a nice little chat until Jeremy noticed that people were standing behind him in line, some holding copies of West's new book. Jeremy thanked him and located his group just outside the conference room. They were snacking on punch and cake, but Jeremy wasn't interested in food. The twenty-dollar bill was burning a hole in his pocket.

He went over to Maria's side. "I'm going to buy one of the books."

"Then I'm coming with you. Let's do it."

Jeremy went straight for the Simmons book. He handed the cashier at the sales table his twenty. Maria bought the other two.

"Should we get them signed?" Maria asked.

"Sure. It would be cool to get an autographed copy."

They joined the lines inside. By the time all the signatures were obtained, the crowd had dispersed. Jeremy got a chance to talk to Dr. Simmons for a few moments as well. He explained how he and his friends were writing their senior papers on various facets of the evolution argument. Dr. Simmons reached into his pocket and pulled out a card with his email address on it. "If you have any questions for your research, send me an email."

"Gosh, thanks!"

Jeremy was walking back to join the group when he saw a familiar face. This was a guy he had seen in *The Truth Project* on

Tuesday, Dr. Stephen Meyer. Jeremy didn't hesitate. He walked right up and introduced himself. Dr. Meyer was just as nice as everyone else had been. He asked Jeremy where he was from, and Jeremy explained the purpose of his group's visit. Dr. Meyer insisted on meeting the rest of the group, so Jeremy did the honors.

Mrs. Masterson indicated it was time to leave, so the group filed back into the elevator and made the downward journey to the sidewalk. Jeremy noticed the contrast between the office they had just left and the streets and sidewalks of Seattle. It had seemed so peaceful and orderly up there. Out here it bordered on chaos.

It was no easy drive getting home. It was now rush-hour traffic and lots of people were heading home to all points south from their jobs in Seattle. Jeremy was glad he wasn't behind the wheel. Being squeezed into heavy, stop and go traffic drove him nuts.

"This was fun, Mom. Maybe you can drive us to the Answers in Genesis Creation Museum when it opens up in May next year."

"Sure. Where's it located?"

"Near Cincinnati."

"Is that near Sumner?"

"No, Mom. That's near Ohio." The boys in the back seat cracked up.

Maria's hair hung down over her seat and in easy range of Jeremy's hands. Thoughts of pulling or stroking that silky wave were hard to put out of his head. He had to put something else into his brain.

He opened up his new book, *Billions of Missing Links*, and started reading. He was hooked on it from the first page. The early chapters convinced him he was going to learn as much about the animal kingdom as the earlier book by Simmons had taught him about the human body. Maria was almost forgotten, and the boyish urges to pull hair were lost in the fascinating study of cockroaches and bacteria and giraffes.

"Did you know a baby giraffe can run fifty-two miles per hour one hour after birth?" He paused every few pages to share other findings with his friends. They were all fighting over who would get to read it after Jeremy finished.

## Chapter 36

### Stop In the Name of Love

Maria, Jeremy, and Hacker sat in Maria's living room watching a movie called *The Poseidon Adventure*. When the movie finished, Maria turned off the TV and turned to face her guests.

"Well, gentlemen, I'd love to sit here and discuss this film, but I need to get dinner ready for my mom." The threesome piled into the Maria's Taurus.

They were starting their descent down Eli Hill when Maria uttered, "Holy crap!"

Jeremy whirled in amazement. He had never heard her say something that crude. "What's the matter?"

"The brakes aren't working!"

Jeremy looked at the brake pedal. Maria was pumping it, but they were building up speed and bearing down on a vehicle right now. Jeremy saw that the lane to their left was open. "You can get over in the left lane right now."

Maria steered as directed. They were safe, for the moment, but there was a curve coming up. They didn't want to take that at high speed.

Jeremy could feel the adrenaline pumping through his body. He couldn't remember ever being this scared before. *What is going through Maria's head?* The speedometer read almost seventy. The speed limit for the curve was supposed to be forty-five. And more bad news ahead. Cars filled both lanes. It looked like they'd hit the curve just before they reached the other cars.

Hacker said, "Maybe if you honk your horn, people will get out of the way."

Jeremy snapped at him, "They'd probably just flip her off."

"I have a trick, but I must be careful using it at seventy miles an hour, or we may have a different problem." She put her hand on the parking brake.

"The parking brake?" Jeremy asked incredulously. *That was for when you were already stopped. They were far from stopped.* She pressed the release catch and moved the brake slowly downward. Within a short time, they felt a drag on the car and it began to slow. They were just coming up to the curve. Maria had to let go of the parking brake and use two hands to negotiate the sharp curve.

They all held their breath as they went into and back out of the bend in the highway. There was no time to celebrate the successful navigation of that first challenge. They were going straight into the back end of one or both of the cars ahead of them. Maria grabbed the parking brake one more time and applied more pressure. They were inching up towards the other car's bumper. Hopefully the car ahead didn't brake for tailgaters. There were about twenty-four inches from the bumper when their speeds equalized. The hill was leveling out. A few more seconds and the other cars were pulling away from them. Maria switched back into the right lane.

When the combination of the parking brake and the hill giving way to flat terrain had allowed them to get down to thirty miles per hour, they were drawing the ire of lots of motorists who had to go around them. They were going slowly enough to take their exit.

When they were off the freeway, Maria pulled in next to the curb and jerked the brake one last time. They all now realized what a close call this had been.

"How did you ever think to use the parking brake?" Jeremy asked.

"In the old days this was called an emergency brake. My dad showed me this trick when he was teaching me to drive."

"Thank Heavens he passed this little tidbit to the next generation," said Hacker. "He saved the next generation for all three of us."

Jeremy was in agreement. "Definitely. What I wanna know is why the brakes failed so suddenly. You just bought this car not long ago. Certainly the brakes weren't – Oh, my gosh!"

"What?" Maria inquired.

"Do you suppose someone tampered with the brakes? Have you gotten any more warning notes?"

"Just one. A couple of days ago I found one on my windshield."

"And you didn't tell me?"

"I didn't want to worry you."

"Sheesh!" Hacker joined the conversation. "I'm thinking we should report this to the police."

Jeremy wasn't in agreement this time. "But what if the brakes failed naturally. We'd look pretty dumb going to the cops for something like that. I say we need to have a repair guy examine them and tell us if they were tampered with or not."

"I want my mom to be involved in this one. What time is it?"

"Five thirty."



"She'll be off work in thirty minutes. If I can call her, she can pick me up and we can figure out what to do with this beast."

Hacker said. "Why don't we walk over to my house and you can call her from there. It is only about a seven-minute walk."

"Works for me. Let's go."

The three hiked to Hacker's house. Maria's mother came and got her a short time later. In the interim the trio had discussed how close they had come to evolving into Heavenly beings. They were even getting a little sense of humor back so they could laugh at their near misfortune.

Maria refused to have Jeremy accompany them. She assured him that she and her mother could handle it. He watched the bumblebee car motor away from them. Jeremy realized that this was the closest he had ever come to finding out if God really existed. He wondered about the reaction of atheists when they died suddenly like in a car wreck if God was real. One minute they were driving down the highway laughing and singing and boom, they were face to face with the angel of death, or maybe God himself.

If God created this world, he was no doubt proud of his work. He would have gone to elaborate lengths to create all the different life forms that we have on the planet. Things like a whale and a hummingbird, a peacock and a pheasant, a chipmunk and a giraffe, a rose and a redwood. And then there were the mountains and the ocean, the sky and stars. That was a pretty impressive piece of work. God would probably be one irritated dude when he faced somebody who gave credit for all that work to laws of nature, which God also must have created.

It was obvious from the world around them that somebody had created it all. *There almost has to be a God. But is it the God from the Bible? And what does he want from me? How do I get a ticket to Heaven?*

All of a sudden Jeremy felt like praying. "God in Heaven, I thank you for letting us live today. Please show me the way to know you like Maria knows you. Amen." That funny feeling of peace was back.

\* \* \*

Jeremy worried for twenty-four hours about the brake situation. The next night, he called Maria. "Did you hear anything about your car, yet?"

"They said that there was no evidence of human tampering

with the brakes."

"Wow. That's a relief."

"I told you not to worry so much."

They chitchatted for a few minutes and went back to their projects. It was easier for Jeremy to concentrate now he knew no one had tried to kill Maria, not yet anyway.

## Chapter 37

### The Game Plan

Jeremy settled into a routine for the next couple of weeks. School, homework, and research during the week gave way to work on Saturdays and Sundays. The biggest regret was the lack of time to read as much as he wanted. He was able to attend church on Saturday nights with the Kaufman family. They made him feel like a son and not a tenant. It was great having Hacker close by to bounce ideas off of and to teach him more about computers.

Maria and Jeremy decided that the team needed to meet again. Due to Jeremy's work schedule, they chose a Friday night. When everyone had arrived for their seven p.m. rendezvous, Maria stood up and addressed the group. "Our goal here is to share whatever you think is meaningful in regard to your research and discuss strategy for making our pitch to the school board. Hacker, would you start us off?"

"I've been reading a book called *In the Beginning Was Information*. The main thrust of the book is that life couldn't be possible without the information needed to create and sustain it. Where did the information come from? When did it arrive? The author shows that the idea that the information would develop through evolution is totally unrealistic. Now listen to this folks – scientists say that the universe is made up of energy and matter. This guy says that that information is outside of matter and energy. It is a fundamental entity just like energy and matter. And he also claims that the will of mankind is a fundamental entity, one that's capable of creating information/communication according to the desires of that will. This is a very radical theory, but it makes sense. It will be interesting to see where this goes in the future.

"Before I give up the floor, I want to tell you guys what happened to me. The other day some of the guys in the computer club got on my case about this project. They were calling me a dummy for not accepting evolution. Armed with my new knowledge, I told them all about the language of DNA and the inbuilt computer program in living organisms to perpetuate life itself. I walked them through an imaginative scenario of a computer program being created through a chance combining of characters. And then that program had to run without an operating

system such as Windows. They acknowledged that was ludicrous. I told them about Bill Gates's quote that DNA uses a more complex program than Microsoft has ever written. A lot of them are seeing evolution in a new light. They had been at a higher level looking at already existing complex creatures changing slightly. When I got them down at a foundational level, and they started thinking about how all of the information could arise from nothingness, they realized that it couldn't happen. When I told them how much information is stored in one cell, I blew them away. Not all of them gave up their arguments for evolution, but obviously I have them thinking, and they stopped calling me a dummy."

Maria bestowed one of her beaming smiles upon Hacker. "Thanks. That's encouraging. Once they start thinking for themselves, the lack of evidence here is going to be discovered. Ronnie, what have you got for us?"

"I've been delving into the dating methods that scientists use to tell us how old things are. First of all, trying to date something from the distant past is quite a challenge. There are no birth certificates for living things – no made in year x stamped on living or non-living things. Scientists had to come up with a way to determine how old something was based on its chemical properties. The first widely accepted technique seems to be carbon 14 dating. It was established that a living organism has the same proportion of carbon 14 to carbon 12 while it is living because it constantly refreshes carbon 14, which is lost at a steady rate. But when death occurs, carbon 14 no longer accumulates in the body and thus the level gets less and less and will at some point be basically nonexistent. The carbon 12 isn't lost and thus acts as the measuring point of how much carbon 14 should be present. Every 5730 years the remaining amount is divided in half. This rate is known as a half life. For example, in about 5730 years half of the carbon 14 would be left. In 11,460 years, half of the remaining half, or 25%, would be left. Then 12.5% and 6.25%, etcetera, until only a trace of carbon 14 remains after about nine half lives. That means that carbon dating has a limitation of between 45,000 and 60,000 years depending on which expert you're listening to."

"Is that a bulletproof process?" Jeremy asked.

Ronnie scrambled through his notes and found what he needed to answer the question.

"This comes from the University of California, Santa Barbara – 'Finally, although radiocarbon dating is the most common and

widely used chronometric technique in archaeology today, it isn't infallible. In general, single dates shouldn't be trusted. Whenever possible multiple samples should be collected and dated from associated strata. The trend of the samples will provide a ballpark estimate of the actual date of deposition.'

"Notice the word 'estimates'. Obviously the best way to establish that this process works without question is to have a bunch of twenty to 50,000-year-old test items lying around that you knew were that old and then verifying that you got the correct results. We don't have that luxury. So the results are based on some assumptions which might not necessarily be true. And there are variables involved.

"We aren't sure what the carbon 14 levels were like in the past. Animals that eat plants with a low carbon 14 proportion wouldn't have as much C14 and would be dated as older than they really are."

"Obviously if the planet Earth has been dated as being 4.5 billion years old, carbon 14 wasn't used to arrive at that age," Julie said.

"Yeah. There are several other dating methods that have a much longer half life. These methods also involve radioactive substances and the half life decay. Perhaps the most commonly used one there is potassium and argon. This can be used for igneous rocks but not for sedimentary rocks, where most fossils are found. So if a fossil is found in that type of rock, the researchers need to find some igneous rock close by and date that to get their estimate."

"Are any of these alternative dating methods bulletproof?"

"Depends on who you believe. One site I read about indicated the dating methods showed the top of the Grand Canyon was older than the bottom part by about 300 million years. They also claimed they had taken five rock samples from a fifteen-pound block of dacite from high on the lava dome down at Mt. St. Helens and sent it in for testing. Apparently they have testing centers that will date things for a charge. The interesting thing is that they ask how old the customer thinks it should be. Anyway this new igneous rock created from cooled lava when St. Helens blew her top shouldn't have registered on their radiometric charts because it was only ten years old. The ages of their sample ranged from .35 million years to 2.8 million years."

"So what's your opinion of the dating methods?" Maria asked.

"I do know that one of the principal arguments for the Darwin theory was that evolution required lots of time to allow all of the

gradual changes that were required to occur to allow such a drastic development. If the dating methods are not accurate, then the number of 4.5 billion years might not be the amount of time available for life to spontaneously arise from a puddle of pre-biotic soup and progress to the point of modern man.

"If those dating methods are wrong, how far off are they? How much time was really available to allow natural selection to work its non-supernatural magic? There are just too many arguments out there over what is true for me to know for sure. One thing I've seen that bothers me though is that dates seem to be etched in pencil. Ages of things are being changed with quite a bit of regularity. If the dating methods were reliable, why would they change once they were measured? Also in conjunction with fossils, the dates that get accepted seem to be the ones that fit in with desired time frame for that fossil. If a missing link fossil falls in the wrong time frame, that date might be altered to place the fossil in the correct chronological order to make it a candidate to be a link. I can't testify to this practice myself. I'm only reading these accounts and giving secondhand evidence. My gut feeling though tells me this. I'm going to be a lot more prepared to believe that a person can accurately determine that something is 4.5 billion years old when a scientist can predict the weather two days from now accurately. My reason tells me that before I could comfortably accept the dates provided by science at the current time, I'd have to establish for sure that the allegations of selective dating were totally false."

Julie put a chunk of bubblegum into her mouth. "The dating methods may be flawed, but are they flawed enough that the Earth could really only be about 10,000 years old? That's a crucial issue. If that could ever be proven, ToE, Theory of Evolution, would go up in smoke."

"Duh! So do we need to bring up the young Earth versus old Earth argument?" Hacker asked.

"Good question. We have two competing sides that are both standing against evolution, but they have a big foundational difference between them," Maria said.

"But we also have the intelligent design group which isn't based on any religious affiliation. They don't need to claim either is true. Most of them probably don't believe in a young Earth," Ronnie said.

"Do we?" Jeremy asked. Everyone looked around. *Is this a point of division among us?*

Ronnie answered first. "My church believes that the days of

Genesis are not actually twenty-four-hour days. A day to God can be a thousand years and vice versa."

"My church teaches that God created everything in six literal twenty-four-hour days. Ever wonder why we have a seven-day week?" Julie asked.

Jeremy had to admit, that question had never crossed his mind in his entire life.

Luke was first with the answer. "It was patterned after God's week of creation. And on the seventh day he rested."

"Has the world always had a seven-day week?" Jeremy asked.

"I don't know about ancient times, but in modern times some anti-God groups like the communists tried five and ten-day weeks. They gave up on them and went back to the normal seven days," Julie said.

Maria said, "I don't know which to believe. I've never really thought it mattered one way or another. Hacker, what does our church teach on this subject."

"I've been going to church there since I was little kid, and I've never heard anyone even speak about it."

"Most creationists consider this not only an important matter but a crucial matter. The argument they use is that if God created animals that left fossils behind before Adam was created, there would have already been death in the world when Adam and Eve sinned. If death wasn't introduced by sin, then why would Jesus need to come to Earth to die to redeem us from sin and death? The whole Christian message becomes suspect," Luke said.

"Maybe Adam only brought death of human life," Hacker said. "Or maybe God created the animals outside of the Garden of Eden so there was death outside the garden but not in it, I also have another crazy idea. Satan got kicked out of Heaven and ended up on the Earth. He knew what God's plans for creation were, maybe? Could the devil have been trying to create life down here himself? Could the old fossils have been from creatures created by Satan and subject to death whereas God's creatures didn't die until Adam sinned?"

"You're right. It is crazy. On what do you base that way-out theory?" Julie asked.

"I'm not saying I believe it. I'm just offering an alternative. Could the presence of harmful viruses and bacteria be compliments of Lucifer?"

Jeremy's head was spinning. *That makes some sense. That could take God off the hook for creating all those hideous things in*

*nature such as vultures, sharks, and mosquitoes, etcetera.*

Maria held up her arms. "We're getting sidetracked here. We need to get back on topic. So I think we have to ask the question: How much evidence against the dating methods do we have? If it is sufficient, then we go with it. If not, we jettison the topic. Does anyone feel comfortable with pressing the argument that the dating methods are out of date, pardon the pun?" Nobody responded. "OK, strike radiometric dating from our presentation, though, Ronnie, you can certainly keep it in your paper. OK. Luke."

"I'm finding the area of fossils is a real catfight. The people arguing against evolution are saying there are no transitional fossils. The evolutionists are saying there are. It turns out that almost all of the fossils that have been found are not from the vertebrate world. I found some very damaging quotes from leading paleontologists which had me excited, but then I found arguments that such quotes are taken out of context or misquoted. I keep finding both sides accusing the other side of lying. I don't know who or what to believe.

"Collin Patterson, a leading paleontologist, supposedly said this, '...You say that I should at least show a photo of the fossil from which each type of organism was derived. I will lay it on the line – there isn't one such fossil for which one could make a watertight argument.' But then Patterson wrote a letter to the evolutionist committee saying he didn't know what he said, and it was an informal meeting where ideas were just being exchanged. He didn't realize a creationist was taping his words and he asked to have it not made public. What's the truth?"

"The way I see it is that the anti's don't have to prove there are no fossils. The evolutionists have to provide fossils and prove that they're transitional. The problem I see is that many of the fossils are comprised of just a few bones or sometimes only one. From that scanty evidence, artists draw pictures based on their concept of what they want the fossil to be. It is almost like the artist's conception becomes the real deal instead of the fossil remains. The Nebraska man example is choice. And then there are some outright frauds. It seems to me that lots of wishful thinking goes on in the search for fossils. And that's my story and I'm sticking to it, at least until I read the next book."

Maria frowned. "Thanks, Luke. I'm a little troubled by the claims of lying. Possibly there are some people out there who stretch the truth on both sides. Maybe I'm naïve, but it seems that both sides of this question are following what they believe."



Julie popped a bubble with her gum. "What bugs me is that there seems to be a lot of derogatory language directed at the other side as well with terms like "idiot" and "moron" used frequently. For the most part it seems that the majority of the people on both sides are extremely intelligent people. How the two sides can arrive at a situation where both sides say that the other has no leg to stand on is the amazing thing here. I do see evidence that could be explained in evolutionary terms. All life is composed of cells. There are many similarities in the structures of life. A common ancestor would account for that. On the other hand, a creator who uses the same building blocks to create different specimens of life would account for that similarity too."

"So shall we include the fossil evidence in our presentation or not?" Maria asked.

Jeremy opened his mouth first. "I think that the fossil record is extremely important to the whole theory. Darwin observed beaks changing on finches and theorized that there was a progression of development. Since we haven't seen the evidence of that in the 150 years since Darwin wrote his book, and understandably so if things evolve over millions of years, the fossil record was needed to show the progression. Does it show an orderly pattern of succession from one-celled creatures up to man? It has to, or ToE is built on quicksand."

Ronnie nodded vigorously. "Here the dating methods come into play. When fossils are found, the dates assigned to them are crucial in establishing succession. For example if they found a fossil of man that was dated two billion years ago, things would be rather murky. You can't have the letter Z found near the middle of the alphabet, right, Luke?"

"The time frame for the appearance of man is like 200,000 years ago. So if that ballpark date is accurate, then man was a late arrival on the planet Earth and evolution looks to be a viable explanation. Why else was man delayed if he didn't require predecessors? Did he suddenly spring out of nowhere long after the animals showed up? The story of Genesis says that God created all of the cattle and creeping things of the Earth on the same day. How can we explain that those animals were here so much earlier in light of creation?"

Julie whistled quietly. "Wow! That kind of puts it into black and white as far as the Bible is concerned. Either the dates are wacky and the story of Genesis is literally true, or the story of Genesis has to go out the window. If Genesis goes out the window, how reliable is the rest of the Bible?"

"She's right," Hacker said. "If God created the plants on day three and the days were millions of years in our time, then on the fifth day created the marine animals, we'd see the separation of time that's being reported. But how do we explain the animals created on day six with Adam?"

Jeremy cleared his throat. "I'm not familiar with the Bible but just using logic and math, if a God day equals, let us say 500 million Earth years, that means there are basically 500 million years from the beginning of the day until the end of the day. So if something was created first thing in the day and something was created towards the end of the day, in our measure of time they would have been created about 500 million years apart whereas in God's timeframe it was the same day."

Hacker said, "By George, you're right. That would explain a time differential. How do you establish how long a day was for God?"

Brian Witt spoke up for the first time. "You can't do it." Nobody disagreed.

"Are there any other possibilities to explain life?" asked Maria.

Brian nodded. "Could life have evolved with God's direction? Maybe he built everything that was needed for life into the first cell and that was all he created. The rest of creation gradually developed from the blueprints he built into that first cell, or perhaps a multitude of first cells."

Jeremy would have loved to argue with Witt, but his words sparked a positive idea. "You know how we have those time release capsules that you take, and the medicine is just activated gradually so you get relief over a period of time. What if God incorporated time release somehow into the original life and so things developed on a prearranged time scale? It would have been like a symphony playing. First the flutes start the song and then the clarinets come in. The trumpets and bassoons follow. Does this make any sense?"

Maria said. "And man was the featured soloist who comes in at the end of the song. That sounds pretty poetic. God could have done it that way. Of course that still jeopardizes the validity of the Bible and the redeeming death of Christ."

Hacker smacked the side of his head with one hand. "Holy cow. I can see why the young Earth creationists, known as YEC's, cling to their belief in the six twenty-four-hour days of creation. Things get a little messy outside of those parameters."

Maria held up four fingers. "So we have four alternatives for the development of life. #1, God directly created everything in six

literal days; #2, There is no God and evolution explains all; #3, God directly created everything but spaced things out; and #4, God created original life, in one or many forms, and built evolutionary capability into that life and thus evolution really did happen through an inbuilt process. Have I captured those accurately?"

Luke scratched the back of his head, "Perhaps a variation of #4 would be that God didn't build the evolutionary capability into his life forms but tweaked them himself miraculously to make the saltations or jumps that Gould describes in his punk eek theory."

Julie raised her eyebrows. "Punk eek?"

"That's short for punctuated equilibrium. The theory that most of the time things stay the same, fancy term for stasis. Then a quick change, at least quick compared to Darwin's theory, and back to a stage of stasis again."

"So do we keep the fossil record in our presentation?" Maria asked. "If you want to do that, raise your hand."

Jeremy raised his hand immediately. Julie was next. Luke elevated his. Maria said, "That makes three votes so far and I'm going to vote yes on this one so that makes a majority. Jeremy, it's your turn."

"I've been studying the amazing human body. We have from ten to seventy-five *trillion* cells in our body. All these cells have a duty to do and they all work together for the good of the whole body. Can you imagine if your cells were like human beings? A general strike would mean death. Turf wars between cells would shut us down. Just having a traffic jam problem because of the crowd of cells in the body would bring us down.

"If you take some cells from the heart and put them in a dish, they try to beat. If you take some skin cells and put them in a dish, they try to come together to form skin. Every single thing about the human body seems to be designed. Our muscles are perfectly matched so we have a set that pushes and another set that pulls. The skeleton is taken for granted, but it provides the framework that makes the whole thing possible. The skull is designed perfectly to protect the brain, though it doesn't hold up very well against cement, so I advise you all to keep wearing your bicycle helmets.

"The senses are absolutely astounding. The eye not only sees and relays images to the brain at a extremely rapid pace, but it has a built-in protection system starting at the location, eyelids, eyelashes, and different kinds of tears to keep the eye lubricated and free of bacteria.

"By the way, it is amazing how many cells we have in our body, but yet there are ten times that many bacteria cells found on the body and inside of us. Some bacteria are beneficial to our digestion process and are welcome visitors. Others cause us to get sick, and some will even kill. All of the different systems that comprise the body are fantastic, and the way they interact with the brain is absolutely amazing. The brain in itself is a marvel. Our heart makes the energizer bunny look like a lazy bum. I could spend all evening praising the human anatomy. The thought that it could have evolved through gradual mutations is absolutely ludicrous.

"In addition to all of the physical marvels, the intellectual and creative wonders of gifted people defy explanation. People like Mozart, who wrote classical music at the age of five, are famous. A more modern and close by example is a little girl from Post Falls, Idaho who at the age of seven was creating world-class paintings. Akiane Kramarik is now twelve and has been recognized as one of the top twenty visual artists in the world. In addition to painting she's a poet and has had two books published. Some others that were not so famous are the savants, people with damaged brains who did extraordinary things. The Rain Man is a good example. Another is a guy named Blind Tom; at the age of six he could listen to a song and then play the whole thing from memory. He played at the White House when he was eleven. His speaking vocabulary consisted of one hundred words, about the equivalent of a normal three-year-old. Leslie Lemke suffered from blindness, cerebral palsy, and retardation yet played concerts where he played songs he never practiced and sang in foreign languages. He was fifteen when he learned to walk. At sixteen his adoptive mother found him playing a symphony that he had heard on TV that night. The human brain defies explanation, but evolutionists explain it as a lucky, accidental development. As Porky Pig would say, 'That's all folks!'"

Maria's enthusiasm showed she was impressed. "Great job, Jeremy. The thing that struck me was the way the cells all work together to form the body under the direction of the head, and they don't argue about which cell is going to be in the feet and which are going to be in the hands. Did anyone pick up on that? What does that sound like?"

Everyone was silent for a moment. Julie said, "The body of Christ?"

"Exactly. For Jeremy's sake, the body refers to the church. Christ is the head and we make up the body. We are not

supposed to worry about where we get placed and what our duty is, so there shouldn't be any striving or jealousy. Things don't always work out that way because our flesh is so hard to eliminate from the equation. We are supposed to follow the example of the human body where every part works together for the common good of all."

"Sounds like sermon material to me," Hacker said.

"I second that motion. Brian, can you show us what you've put together?"

Brian stood up and pulled out some pictures. He held one up. "I'd like you to know I wasn't responsible for the content of these cartoons. Maria was the author. I was just the artist. We were a team to produce these."

Jeremy didn't like the sound of that at all. *I wonder if Maria does.*

Brian held the first drawing up so everyone could see. It was a series of three drawings. In all of them sat a man in the chair who looked like Santa Claus but whose nametag said Random Mutations. In the first picture a bat sat in the lap of the elderly gentleman. In a line behind them stood a lobster, the Tin Man, and the Scarecrow from the Wizard of Oz. The caption read, "I want sonar capability so I can hunt in the dark." The second drawing showed the lobster in the lap of the man of gifts. The caption read, "I'd like a set of eyes that will be copied by NASA to create x-ray telescopes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century." In the third, the Scarecrow was standing at the gentleman's side and says, "If I only had a brain."

"Awesome, dude. That's really good!" Ronnie said.

"Really!" Julie said.

Brian smiled and pulled out another one. This one showed a jet airplane with the name 'Science' on it. Inside a man with a gun and a name label that read 'Evolution' was talking to the pilot saying, "Turn this plane around. We're going to Havana."

A third drawing revealed another Wizard of Oz theme. The wizard, labeled "Evolution", stood behind the curtain and was being revealed as Toto, with the label of "Intelligent Design", pulls the curtain aside. The wizard is saying his famous line "Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain."

A fourth showed a man in court with a copy of *The Origin of Species* held out to him by a court official named "Science". The caption read, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you Charles Darwin?"

The last one featured the Tin Man again. He was ordering

from an employee at 'McDarwins'. The caption read, "I'd like a heart, please, and six pints of blood." The employee, who looked like Charles Darwin responded, "Would you like arteries and veins and capillaries with that?"

"That's all I have. I don't really know much about this subject. Maria told me what to draw. I'm just an artist coming to the rescue of a damsel in distress." Brian sat down.

*Distress. You're going to understand the word distress if I ever get a chance to—* Jeremy stopped his thoughts there. Everyone was clapping for Brian's work. He decided he better not look ungrateful. *It really was some cool stuff.*

Maria took the floor again. "We'll be putting these cartoons in a newsletter that we'll pass out shortly before the hearing. A condensation of arguments we're presenting will be included as well. That should help people understand what we're trying to do. So I want each of you to submit a blurb from your material no later than November 15. Julie."

Julie stood up. "I'm doing my research on DNA. Everyone hears about it all the time, but most people don't know exactly what it is. I sure didn't until this project. And I'm afraid that after researching this for weeks, I still don't know a very large percentage of all the known facts on DNA. To use the old expression, this is a deep subject for such a shallow mind. I'll try my best to present something meaningful here that doesn't go over people's heads. Hopefully my information is accurate.

"DNA is a nucleic acid. Those acids are found in all living cells and viruses. By the way, man has created some nucleic acids artificially. DNA contains the genetic instructions for the development and functioning of living organisms. All living things contain DNA genomes. A possible exception is a group of viruses that have RNA genomes, but viruses are not normally considered living organisms. The main role of DNA in the cell is the long-term storage of information. The genome is often compared to a set of blueprints, since it contains the instructions to construct other components of the cell such as proteins and RNA molecules. The DNA segments that carry this genetic information are called genes, but other DNA sequences have structural purposes, or are involved in regulating the expression of genetic information.

"We all hear the word genes used a lot. We are what we are as a result of our genes. Your eyes and hair get their color from your genes. The size of your body parts, how tall you are, etcetera, are all determined by your genes, though damage to those genes can alter the outcome, especially during the

development of the fetus. A good example of this was the use of a drug called thalidomide that ironically was used to reduce morning sickness in pregnant women. One of the effects of this drug was a condition where arms on a baby came out like flippers on a seal. Other mutations resulted as well. Thalidomide was outlawed in 1961, though scientists are still working with it to harness medicinal value. I'm not here to talk about thalidomide, but I might mention that this is a perfect example of why medical science requires much testing.

"There are lots of scientific terms associated with DNA. Genome is one I used earlier. The genome is all the genes together as a unit. It might be similar to a football team. The team is the genome, and the players are the genes. Some players throw the football, some catch it, some block, and so on. Genes have their own function, but they interact with other genes for the whole effect. DNA is comprised of what is known as base pairs and the different genes. It is estimated that humans have three billion base pairs and around 25,000 genes. Ironically the organism with the most base pairs is an amoeba.

"You might say DNA is like a copy machine that makes its own ink and paper and does the actual copying in addition to providing the information which is being copied. The amount of that information is staggering. Every DNA molecule of the E coli bacterium would fill the entire set of the Encyclopedia Britannica. It is in the copying of this information that Darwinism enters the picture. If a mistake is made in making the copy, a mutation can arise. That mutation might be neutral and not cause any change, or it might be a harmful mutation that causes a problem for the organism. Sometimes it could be a beneficial change, helping an organism to survive. The latter seem to be pretty rare, which is one of the base arguments of anti-evolution spokesmen. Harmful mutations in theory would be subject to removal via natural selection if the creature becomes unable to survive his environment as a result of the loss of genetic information from that mutation. That part is pretty simple. If a rabbit develops a mutation that slows down his running, his chances of evading predators long enough to produce more rabbits with the same slowdown gene are pretty slim. However, natural selection can't eliminate this harmful mutation just because it isn't advantageous to the rabbit. If the rabbit can continue to survive, then the unfavorable mutation might also. This might be thought of as 'devolution', where the animal actually goes backwards as far as development is concerned.

"One of the activities of modern scientists, basically for the purpose of proving evolution, is comparing the genome sequence of one species with another. For example, the human has been compared with the chimpanzee, since we are supposed to be related. The percentage of similarities was once quoted at 99% but has been adjusted downward to 96% right now. Of course that might sound like they're almost identical but 4% of three billion base pairs still leaves 120 million differences. So they're very similar but still very different. But I'm not sure how those numbers are used. Is the percentage referring to the 25,000 genes themselves or the base pairs? I'll have to research that some more. I did see one guy quoted as saying that identical genes in one organism behaves differently in another. For example the mouse and fruit fly have the same gene for producing eyes. If you take a mouse gene and replace the fruit fly gene, the insect develops a normal fruit fly eye. That really muddies the water. That would indicate something outside the gene is impacting results.

"One interesting side note, researchers think they have found the gene responsible for speech. Chimps seem to have a deficiency in this gene area similar to a family of humans who had a speech problem. Maybe in the future they'll modify the chimpanzee genes so they can tell us what they really think."

Ronnie stood up and stretched. "That's pretty scary. It sounds like humans are poised at the edge of being able to create Frankenstein. Just take a living cell and tweak the genome and plug the altered cell into an egg without a nucleus and let little Frankie grow."

"This does seem to open the door to lots of questionable activities," Luke said. "What limits should be placed on scientists? Would it be possible that a run-amok experiment could create something that destroyed the human race or perhaps took over the planet?"

"Sounds like a science-fiction book come to life," Jeremy said. *What would people do to genetically alter their children to make them better athletes?*

Julie shook her head vehemently. "I bet God put some kind of barrier up to stop this from happening so it might look like scientists can produce a human from existing cells, like they clone sheep and mice today, but when they try, they meet with failure."

Brian jumped in to argue. "But what if he didn't? What if they clone a human? Would it be made in the image of God? Would it have a soul?"



Maria held up her hand like a crosswalk patrol mom. "This is a very interesting topic. We could discuss this for days. We only have minutes left so we need to move on. I've been reading a book called *Summer of the Gods* by Edward Larson, a book that won him the Pulitzer Prize for history. The story deals with the Scopes Monkey trial of 1925 in Dayton, Tennessee. This is a historical account of what happened as opposed to the misleading dramatic report of this in a play and movie called *Inherit the Wind*. The writers were not kind to those who stood against evolution. William Jennings Bryan was one of the people representing the prosecution of a young man, a PE teacher who substituted in science class. Scopes volunteered to challenge a law against the teaching of evolution in Tennessee.

"The big news was the fight between Bryan, who was an outspoken opponent of evolution and a devout Christian, against Clarence Darrow, who had fought against religion for much of his career. It was a highly publicized trial, despite the fact that the crime was a misdemeanor. The press, even back in 1925, was mostly on the side of evolution. The ACLU was involved, but they were somewhat stymied by the presence of Darrow. They tried to get rid of him, but could not. In the end it came down to a duel between the two elderly opponents.

"One of the features of the controversy was that they had a bunch of pastors on both sides. There were pastors preaching out in the pulpits all over America either for or against the law to prohibit the teaching of evolution. The ACLU had supposedly gotten into the mix to promote academic freedom. People who believed in evolution were a distinct minority back then. Universities were at the foreground of the fight for academic freedom. They thought they should be able to teach whatever they wanted. High schools were different because they were under the authority of the local government which was under the authority of the state government. Scopes was found guilty and fined \$100. Later in the appeal, which the defense wanted to lose so they could take it to the Supreme Court, the state Supreme Court threw out the conviction. So there was no clear-cut winner and loser at the trial, despite stories that Darrow made Bryan look like a fool because he believed in the miracles of the Bible. I've developed a tremendous respect for that man. Ironically he died five days after the trial. Some people thought this was the end of the evolution-creationist war. They had no clue what the future held. Since Phillip Johnson wrote *Darwin on Trial* in 1991, the war has flared up all over the globe. We are part of that movement to return the

scientific method to science. This war has been going on since fifteen minutes after *The Origin of Species* was published. I don't see this ever reverting back to a cold war. So I really think this conflict is going to continue until Christ comes back.

"Another topic I've been researching is the peer reviewed papers of scientists. In order to be anybody in the world of science, you have to publish your findings. A panel of peers review and recommend a paper for publishing or turn their thumbs down. The interesting development in this arena is that intelligent design arguments are not considered scientific because the ideas brought forth by those groups are not testable. Thus editors won't accept those articles for publishing. And then the knock on these groups is that they're not really good scientists because they don't publish peer reviewed material. Talk about your catch 22's. Even people who are writing evolutionist type of material who believe in God have to sneak under the radar with their faith. Otherwise they might be rejected on that basis and not on the quality of their work. It's reached the point now that lots of the scientists don't even submit their work anymore because they know it will be rejected. Everywhere I look I see pressure brought onto people who don't hold with the party line. PBS aired a TV Show the other night that was friendly to intelligent design. They got a ton of protests. I'm afraid we seem to be bucking the establishment. And the ironic thing is now the ACLU is fighting against those people who speak out for academic freedom in asking that a competitor to NDT, Neo Darwinism Theory, be allowed in the high school classroom. Even at the university level, it isn't safe to question Darwin. I read about a Chinese scientist who came to America and gave a speech. He made some remarks about Darwinism that were less than supportive. The audience went stone cold. He asked his host about it afterwards. When told the cause he remarked, "That's funny. Over in China we can criticize Darwin but not the government. In America you can criticize the government but not Darwin." Friends, that's where we have arrived in 2006 AD. Even that terminology is being replaced with CE and BCE – Common Era and Before Common Era."

Julie took out her gum and tucked it into the empty wrapper. "In other words it sounds like the world is doing the best it can to wipe the knowledge of God and Jesus from the face of the Earth. And along with it any resistance to Darwinism."

Jeremy nodded. "I've been reading about how evolution was embraced by Hitler, Lenin, Karl Marx, and Joseph Stalin. The evolutionists dismiss that idea since those guys are not on many

people's Christmas list."

Luke brushed some hairs out of his eyes. "I don't think those dudes are going to be altar boys in the church of Charles."

"I also read the book about the Scopes trial," Jeremy said. "One thing that amazed me was the fact that the Ku Klux Klan jumped in on the side of the anti-evolutionists in the 1920's. That's so ironic since racism, which they specialize in, was one of the knocks on Darwin's writings. Another interesting thing is that the Mason Dixon Line came into play again in the battle over evolution. The south supported anti-evolution and the north fought it. This struggle was also played up as a class conflict between the sophisticated cosmopolitan people versus the hayseed rednecks from the rural areas."

Maria nodded. "Of course, much of the south is referred to as the 'Bible Belt'. It seemed that in that era the lines were drawn between conservative religious people and those who were liberal in their beliefs and the agnostic/atheist group. That hasn't changed a lot today. There are more people outside the realm of religion who are noticing the lack of evidence for Darwinism. Kurt Vonnegut, author of a number of books, has been outspoken in his thoughts on evolution. I have one of his quotes here: 'They say, you know, about evolution, it surely happened because their fossil record shows that. But look, my body and your body are miracles of design. Scientists are pretending they have the answer as how we got this way when natural selection couldn't possibly have produced such machines.'"

Luke took a headband out of his pocket and put it on. "Going back to Hitler and Germany, it would have been hard to be a Christian there at that time. One of the brightest stars in the kingdom, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was one of the leaders. He tried to fight against the Nazi machine and in the end was executed just three weeks before the liberation of Berlin. I can't help but wonder if this evolutionary zeal we are witnessing is the tip of the iceberg which is going to usher in the tribulation."

"What do you mean?" Jeremy asked.

"The Bible talks about the great tribulation which will befall mankind," Luke said.

Hacker nodded violently. "The mark of the beast, 666, and whoever doesn't have the mark shall not buy or sell and whoever takes that mark will be cut off from Christ. I think the mark is going to be a bar code or maybe even an RFID device. When you go to buy groceries or something, your ID will have to be scanned."

"What's RFID?" Julie asked.

"Radio Frequency ID. A built in transmitter signals the identification number to any device that can read it. A barcode requires close proximity. An RFID device can be read from a ways away. The 666 might refer to a number having six digits dash six digits dash and six more digits."

Jeremy was stunned. "Are you saying that people will be forced to choose between Christianity and starving to death?"

Brian seemed familiar with that topic. "Perhaps they can use the black market to buy what they need to live on, for a while anyway. I'd guess that laws on black marketing of goods would include death penalties to persuade people not to participate in such activities."

"Any chance we could get back to a less depressing subject?" Julie asked.

Maria signaled a time-out. "Julie's right. We shouldn't dwell on morbid things, but we do need to be aware that Christians are killed all over the world every year for their faith. We are very fortunate in America to be able to worship in freedom. We can't take that privilege for granted. In becoming a Christian we die to self. And we have to be ready to physically die if need be. It's not pleasant to think about, but it is a present reality. With the world going the way it is and the prophecies of the tribulation, we might very well face this prospect right here in the good old USA."

Jeremy was shocked by the talk of people dying for their religion. Why should anyone kill someone because they wanted to believe in Jesus? It would be like people being killed because they were Washington State Cougar or Washington Husky followers.

"OK, moving back into our main topic, I had a question about pastors and other Christians who not only believe in evolution but stand up for it. What's up with that?"

Maria nodded. "Excellent question, Julie. I've been seeking an answer for that one myself. Any comments?"

Ronnie sat down. "I see so many evolutionists out to destroy religion, and then I see these pastors stand up and argue for evolution. It doesn't make any sense. If God didn't use evolution to do his creating for him, these people have some pretty big explaining on judgment day. I can see where maybe they believe in evolution, but where is the reason to fight for it against believers?"

Luke retied a shoe. "It's like they're straddling both sides of the fence. We all know what happens if you're doing that and your foot slips."

Jeremy stood up and got some relief from his aching rear-end.

"I see the evolutionists using the church people as their buffer against the creationist/intelligent design attack. I found a seminar on the Internet with some of the leading scientists. They were discussing how to do away with religion. Evolutionists may put up with the religious fringe in their group for now, but if they ever destroy the anti-evolutionist movement, I think they will turn to their allies and start convincing them they need to renounce their religion or else."

"Probably what Hitler would have done with the Japanese if the Germans had successfully defeated the Allies in World War Two," said Ronnie.

Julie sighed. "We're right back into the depressing stuff. Is there anything about this project that's lighthearted and fun?"

Everyone was silent. Brian Witt punctured the quiet. "Julie, if you want fun and lighthearted, I suggest maybe you join the choir or something."

Jeremy wasn't going to let that go without a challenge. "I think Julie has a point. Even if we are going to war, that doesn't mean we can't be loving and upbeat and even humorous. Maybe we can overcome our opponents by loving them." He wasn't upset by Witt's look of scorn.

Maria flashed him a giant smile. "It should always be our goal to love people but the thing that makes Christians different is that we are supposed to love our enemies."

Julie looked up at the ceiling. "Arggggh! Enough talk of war. Let's talk about something I see happening in regard to intelligent design. The proponents of that philosophy say that life is too complex to have developed through Darwinism. The evolutionists say you can't prove a designer-creator so you are not scientific. And since you're not scientific, we won't listen to your arguments against Darwinism until you have your own scientific theory to replace it. And scientific means that it must be observable and testable by humans."

Ronnie nodded. "Unless evolution itself is the subject. In that case it is accepted despite not being testable because some facets of evolution have been observed."

Luke showed his disgust as he spoke. "And those who won't accept those truths are lower than the bottom man on the totem pole."

Maria looked at her watch. "I'm going to get some snacks now, and we'll wrap this up as we eat." Julie volunteered to help. They returned shortly with sodas, popcorn and pretzels.

As they were munching, Maria threw out this question. "Has

anybody read anything really interesting lately that would pertain to this topic but has not been part of our discussion today?"

"We just finished reading *A Tale of Two Cities* in Lit class," said Jeremy. "It was a beautiful story of life told by Charles Dickens of England and published in 1859. In another part of England in 1859 Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, a book of death. I found it very interesting that these two books had so many similarities and yet diametrically opposed messages." Jeremy looked at Maria, who was beaming. She had been right. It was a great book.

"Wow. I didn't realize they came out in the same year. Was God perhaps sending out a rebuttal to Darwin's work?" Julie asked.

"He does work in strange ways," Ronnie said. "By the way, I found a video on the internet called *The Privileged Planet*. It is awesome. This video shows how Earth is unique among all the known heavenly bodies. All of the things necessary for life are found here, and it seems our home planet is placed in a perfect position to see the rest of the universe."

Hacker cleared his throat. "I've been harboring this crazy idea inside as I hear about fossil research. You know how God plays hard to get sometimes. He seems to make it challenging for men to find him in this world. Maybe he planted bogus fossils as false clues to mess with intellectuals' minds."

Luke grinned. "I read that some Christians attribute fake fossils to Satan. Evolutionists find that pretty entertaining."

Maria stood up. "Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the evidence of things not seen. God seems to put a high premium on faith. Obviously, he has to stay back away from his creation or faith wouldn't be possible. If he answered every single prayer, then the evidence of prayer would be testable and his intrusions into our lives would be impossible to overlook.

"Laying intellectual traps doesn't seem like a thing God would do. The part about Satan manufacturing evidence is new to me. That opens up a whole new discussion. Bottom line, I don't think we can bring Satan into a presentation for the public. People have a hard enough time with the concept of God. Throw Satan into the mix, and we're setting ourselves up to look like fools and psychos, even though personally I think he's certainly involved in putting blinders on men's eyes and sowing deceit. That isn't something we can observe and test, and thus isn't scientific nor a rebuttal to scientific theories."

Ronnie held up one finger. "It's funny because I had similar

thoughts when I was studying radiometric dating. Did God cause lots of things to appear older than they really are? Would he be upset with us for accepting an old Earth? Is that a lack of faith on our part? Another thought, when God created Adam he was a full-grown mature man. Could he have created a mature universe as well?"

"Wow! Good question," Maria said. "And now we've run out of time. Thanks again for coming, and keep up the good work."

## Chapter 38

### Witless in Seattle

Jeremy was walking down the hallway of the school. He saw Maria ahead of him. She saw him and was smiling that old familiar smile. Jeremy accelerated his pace to reach her side, but his movements didn't seem to quicken. He longed to be next to her. She held her arms out to him. He was almost there.

From the corner of his eye he saw Brian Witt standing nearby. He was looking intently at Maria. Now her attention went to Brian and the arms no longer stretched out in welcoming fashion. Then another body attracted Jeremy's focus. A student with a gun was standing in the hallway. Students scattered, leaving only Maria and Brian holding their ground.

The gunman aimed his weapon at Maria and yelled, "I told you not to mess with evolution."

Jeremy screamed "No!" He ran to throw himself between the gun and Maria. These words went through his head as he tried to leap. *"Tis a far far better thing I do here than I have ever done before. I am the resurrection and the life. He who believeth in me though he were dead, yet will he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me will never die."*

From the other side Brian Witt also threw himself into the path of the gunman. An explosion roared in Jeremy's ears.

Jeremy bolted out of his prone position. "Maria! Are you OK?" *Oh my gosh!* The limp figure below him wasn't Maria, but rather his pillow. *I've been having a freaking nightmare. Thank goodness.*

*How in the world did Brian Witt get into my dream? And what were those words going through my head? Wait, those were from A Tale of Two Cities. One of her wannabe lovers was going to die to protect Maria's life. But which would have taken the bullet meant for Maria? Which one was Sydney Carton and which was Charles Darnay?*

He lay down again and tried to go back to sleep. Perhaps he would be luckier this time and have a pleasant dream. *The scary part is that a version of my dream could come true. There are way too many people getting into school with guns and opening fire.* He was involved in trying to figure out how that could be stopped when sleep rescued him from his dilemma of solving the world's



problems.

In the morning, Jeremy sought Maria to share the dream with her. He wanted to get her feedback and to make sure she was OK. She was very quiet when he relayed his story. JD had been afraid she might laugh at him, but there was no amusement evident at all. In fact, Maria seemed to be bothered by it.

"Jeremy, I'm going to tell you something, but you have to make me a promise first."

He was intrigued. "OK, what's the promise?"

"Promise me you won't do anything. Not one thing. If you do, I'm going to be very upset."

"All right. I promise."

"Brian isn't on the team anymore."

"I had to promise not to do anything because Brian was no longer with us. I don't get it. Wait, did he do something to you. Did he—"

"Down, boy! I'll tell the story at my own pace, please. Friday night after the meeting broke up, Brian came back. He said he had left some drawing pencils in the house. I let him come in to look. Instead of looking for pencils he started looking for my lips, with his. I—"

"That dirty—"

"Jeremy. You promised!" The sternness in her voice cooled his jets immediately.

She had his attention and continued. "I'm OK. He honored my request that he leave the house immediately. He started telling me how much he had loved me ever since that first day in the lunchroom. I wasn't buying it, and he left. That's all there is to the story. But I want to make sure you don't do something stupid. I know you'd try to defend my honor and maybe that's admirable, but this is a done deal. I just thought you should know."

"What about the cartoons?"

"He left them at my house. I've already got them scanned and stored on my computer. Everything is cool. I just hope you are."

"Well, I'd be lying if I said that I'm cool because I'm feeling the heat under my collar right now, but my word stands. I hope you realize how hard it is for me to rein in my feelings here."

"I have a clue, Jeremy. Believe me. I know that sometimes it's easier for a man to fight than to restrain himself."

Jeremy couldn't argue with that statement. He decided it was time for a new subject. "You realize that there are only three weeks until the school board hearing?"

"I know. Time is flying. So much to do and so little time to do

it. Speaking of the clock, it's time I get going to pick up the newsletters. We need to pass them out ASAP! See you later."

## Chapter 39

### The Hearing

Jeremy waited nervously outside of the school gym. The last three weeks had flown by, and the day of the hearing had arrived. Spectators were beginning to gather. Apparently the newsletters had generated some interest. The event had been scheduled for the school gym, just in case a large audience wanted to come out to hear the proceedings. That seemed to be a wise choice. There were several people here already, and it was still early.

He paced back and forth. Maria and her mother arrived after he had already worn a double-digit percentage of shoe leather from the bottoms of his penny loafers. "It's about time, counselor! Good morning, Mrs. M."

Mrs. Masterson went to find a seat. Jeremy and Maria searched for their teammates. The plan was to gather for a pre-game chalk talk. One by one they came until all except Julie were present.

"Now that everybody is here, I have an announcement," Maria said. "Julie's parents won't let her participate."

The excitement of the group seemed to visibly diminish.

"What are we going to do about her presentation?" Hacker asked.

"We'll be OK. You'll be surprised how well we have it covered. Let's go find a place we can be alone."

They found an empty, unlocked room. Everyone filed in and formed a little circle. "OK, guys. We did a lot of work for this. I want to tell you how much I appreciate your contributions. Even if we lose, we are all winners. We have taken the path less traveled made famous by Robert Frost. We've found that path isn't as wide and not as free of obstacles and has frequently gone uphill, just to mention a few of the challenges. We've endured the scorn of our fellow classmates, faculty, and sometimes even our own families to follow our hearts and our conscience. Jeremy, would you like to say a few words?"

"We need to relax and just be our normal, bubbly and caring selves. An important part of our testimony is how we say what we say. We need confidence without cockiness. Also it is vital to have self-control and even compassion for those who oppose us."

"Good point, Jeremy. We are ambassadors of Christ. Our

behavior needs to be above reproach. We need to have love even for those who might be our enemies. We have to remember that without God having come into our lives, we might be on the other side of the fence right now. Even if they deny the God who made them, our opponents are still made in the likeness of God the same as we are. OK, let's pray and go out there and fight the good fight.

"Our Father in Heaven, creator of all things. Look down with favor this morning as we carry your standard into battle. Please fill us with the love you have for these people and help us to see with your eyes and not our natural eyes. Help us to say and do the things you want us to. Your will be done in the proceedings and in the outcome. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen."

Everyone echoed the amen.

"One last thing before we go. I found out Mr. Bogue arranged for an attorney, Roger Slade, from the ACLU, and a retired science teacher, Samuel Plunkett, from the National Education of Science Teachers to lead the charge for those who will oppose us."

"The ACLU? We haven't got a chance," Ronnie moaned.

"Well, there is a little good news with the bad news. They sent a rookie attorney just out of college. And the science teacher is a retiree who is donating his time to the cause. My source says neither of them is the sharpest knife in the drawer. Actually I'm surprised they supplied anyone for this challenge. They can't be extremely afraid of a bunch of high school kids. I half expected Mr. Bogue to recruit some of his students to represent his side. Actually three students will sit with them, but they have no active role in the proceeding. So forewarned is forearmed and as a result of this knowledge, I have a little trick up my sleeve."

"What is it?" Luke asked.

"You'll all find out in a few minutes. We gotta go."

Jeremy and Maria led the group into the gym. Three tables of different sizes had been set up on the gym floor with two sets of a half dozen folding chairs facing them. Maria led her group to the set of chairs on the right, and they sat down. In front of them at the biggest table on the left, the jury was seated. That panel was comprised of the five school board members and two teachers from the high school. The small table on the right with one chair was empty. This is where the witnesses would sit. On the table in front of the chair was an overhead projector connected to three screens, two for the audience and one for the people on the gym floor.

Another table was placed in the middle. One chair behind it was occupied by the superintendent of schools, Mr. Walsh. He was the judge, though in this non-trial situation, he was more like a referee in a boxing contest. He was there to keep order and run the show.

On his right sat another teacher from the school. Her job was to keep the time. Each side had two hours for questions and answers to their questions. When they reached two hours, they would be told that their time was exhausted and would have to sit down without finishing the sentence. They didn't have much time, so both sides had to use their words and their questions wisely.

The bleachers on one side were almost filled. At eight a.m. the superintendent asked for quiet. The crowd hushed. "Miss Masterson. You may present your opening argument."

Maria stood up and went to the microphone. Jeremy watched her for a while and then switched his attention to the competition. He wanted to watch their reaction to Maria's words. They looked pretty confident at this point. Jeremy snuck a peek at the jury. For the most part they acted bored. The majority showed an expression and body language that seemed to say, "You might have gotten me here, but that doesn't mean I have to be interested." It could be their minds were made up already.

"Thank you, Mr. Walsh. Four score and a year ago our forefathers brought forth onto this continent a new war. The battlefield was Dayton, Tennessee. The combatants were supporters and opponents of evolution. That battle has spawned theatrical plays, books and movies. The fight was over whether teaching of evolution should be allowed in the public schools. Today we meet on a much smaller battlefield with much less attention to discuss similar issues that were raised at the Monkey Trial. Over the course of eighty years the political landscape has been altered greatly. In 1925 organizations such as the ACLU fought to establish academic freedom to allow controversial ideas such as the theories of evolution, socialism, and communism to be taught to American students. In 2006 the ACLU is still fighting, not for academic freedom but rather for the prevention of freedom to question a theory that tries to make monkeys out of all of us. Our purpose here today is to show that scientists have removed the search for truth from the equation of life in their evangelical efforts to convince the world that mankind arose from a series of non-directed mutations of a one-celled organism.

"Our goal is simply to expose the fallacies of that equation so that proper steps can be taken to educate people concerning the

scientific method and the scientific process. This will equip and empower people to make intelligent decisions of their own concerning life, based on all of the evidence. We are not here to prove evolution is bad science. We are unable to *disprove* the theory of molecules to man evolution, just as scientists are unable to *prove* it.

"We are unable to *prove* that humans were designed by a higher being, but also the scientists are unable to *disprove* the design theory. We stipulate that microevolution is a proven fact. There are observable changes within species. So please be aware whenever we use the term evolution today, we are talking about Darwin's General Theory of Evolution, also known as macroevolution, the descent of humans and all other life forms from a common ancestor. Our presentation today will focus on what we believe to be obvious weaknesses of that theory."

Maria calmly walked back to her seat. She had shaken up no one in the enemy camp. As for the school board, Maria's opening remarks hadn't seemed to reach out and grab any of them. Their attention seemed to be focused on their coffee mugs. They were probably thinking more in terms of Starbucks than *Star Wars*.

Mr. Slade, the lawyer from the ACLU strode to the microphone. "Miss Masterson is correct in one thing. The landscape has greatly changed since the Scopes trial. The points that she and her choir will present today will no doubt be the same lame and tired arguments that have been presented in courtrooms around the nation in the last few years. In those arenas the arguments were provided by skilled lawyers and scientists, but the results were basically the same everywhere. The dignity of science was upheld. Now, since the professionals have failed, it seems it's time for the amateur hour. The child crusades have begun. It is our purpose to gently put these well meaning but deluded children in their place as we prove that all of their concerns about the practices of teaching science are totally unfounded." He returned to his seat.

Mr. Walsh said, "Miss Masterson, you can proceed with your witnesses."

Maria returned to the microphone. "I'd like to call Mr. Plunkett from the National Education of Science Teachers."

Now Jeremy was seeing a reaction. She had caught them totally off guard by calling their own resident scientist. Even the school board members seemed to have a rise in their curiosity level.

Maria started the questioning, "Mr. Plunkett, you have flown

the NEST and landed in Sumner to educate us about real science. Is that true?"

"And to see that you and your friends don't cause any harm."

There was some laughter in the audience. There were a couple of grins on the faces of the jury members.

"And you hold a master's degree in Zoology. Correct?"

"Yes, I do."

"Which makes you qualified to speak on matters of science?"

"I hope so."

"What I want to understand is exactly what we mean by this word 'science'. I have in front of me a booklet from the National Academy of Sciences, which I bet you're familiar with. Would you please listen to this explanation and see if this definition accurately portrays the definition of science?"

"You win the bet concerning NAS. I'm listening."

"Science is a particular way of knowing about the world. In science, explanations are limited to those based on observations and experiments that can be substantiated by other scientists. Explanations that cannot be based on empirical evidence are not part of science.' How does that sound so far?"

"Right on the money."

"Now let me further define the word 'empirical' as referring to something that's observable by the senses and can be produced by experiment or testing. Is that correct?"

"That's the way I understand the word."

"So science relies on testability and repeatability, correct?"

"Yes."

"So, for example, in the field of chemistry if you add two chemicals together in the same proportions under the same atmospheric pressure and same temperature, you should always get the same, observable result. You can change the temperature or the pressure or the proportions to determine if any of those changes will cause a different result. The environment is closely controlled and testing is precise. Is that a good example of the scientific method?"

"I believe you've captured the essence there."

"Good. Now I want to make sure I understand a key component of science, methodological naturalism. Are you familiar with this term?"

"Of course."

"So let me run this definition by you for your approval. 'Methodological naturalism is the practice of scientists to exclude anything that can't be observed in the world of nature. Naturalism

insists that all phenomena and hypotheses can be studied by the scientific method and therefore anything considered supernatural is either nonexistent, unknowable, or not inherently different from natural phenomena or hypotheses." Will you agree to that definition?"

"No problem."

"Just to make sure that everyone is on the same page, let me read something written by a federal judge in defining science. "While supernatural explanations may be important and have merit, they are not part of science. This self-imposed convention of science, which limits inquiry to testable, natural explanations about the natural world, is referred to by philosophers as "methodological naturalism" and is sometimes known as the scientific method. Methodological naturalism is a "ground rule" of science today which requires scientists to seek explanations in the world around us based upon what we can observe, test, replicate, and verify." Do you recognize that passage?"

"As a matter of fact I do. Judge Jones was the author of the Dover Decision. I believe that this is one of the finest arguments that has been—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Plunkett, but you're on my dime and my time here. Please just answer the questions. OK?"

Mr. Plunkett's face reddened, and he squirmed in his chair.

"There is one more facet of science that I wish to bring up, self-correction. Let me read from the NAS booklet again. "Progress in science consists of the development of better explanations for the causes of natural phenomena. Scientists can never be sure that a given explanation is complete and final. Some of the hypotheses advanced by scientists turn out to be incorrect when tested by further observations or experiments. Yet many scientific explanations have been so thoroughly tested and confirmed that they are held with great confidence. The theory of evolution is one of these well established explanations." So, Mr. Plunkett, this would seem to indicate that scientists sometimes come to wrong conclusions – even using the scientific method. Is that true?"

"I guess this is perhaps the reverse corollary to even a blind squirrel finds a nut once in a while. Even a brilliant scientist fails to detect error once in a while."

"For example at one point in time the world was considered flat and the sun revolved around the Earth not just by blind nuts who were squirrelly but by scientists. Correct?"

"That's true."



"So can we all rest safely secure that if science messes up, someone will come along to clean up the mess later?"

"That's why we use the term 'self-correcting'."

"Let me bring up another classic example – microbes. There was a scientist by the name of Louis Pasteur who claimed that disease was caused by invisible organisms. Mr. Plunkett, can you inform us what kind of reception Pasteur's ideas received?"

"Sure. They thought he was crazy."

"And who could blame them? After all these germs, as they were called, were not in the range of human vision. The only evidence for them was that people got sick. Would invisible germs that can't be detected by man be considered natural and within the realm of science or supernatural?"

"Obviously they did exist, thus they were part of nature. It just took the invention of the microscope to allow men to see the invisible."

"Now let me ask another dumb question. Intelligent design is a theory that disputes Darwinism. It contends that life is too complex to have been an accident. So obviously Judge Jones was ruling that ID is outside the realm of science because the designer can't be seen or heard or smelled or touched. Is that an accurate statement?"

"That's about the size of it."

"Just humor me here for a second. Suppose you were walking in the woods one day and found an object lying on the ground. That object had a sharp pointed end composed of rock attached to a long narrow wooden shaft which had feathers attached to the other end. Would you even consider that somehow the wood had arrived at that shape and somehow got connected to the stone at the end and the feathers fell out of the sky adhering to the wood in that particular arrangement?"

"Of course not. I'm well aware of the existence of arrows."

"Pretend you're familiar with wood, etcetera, but you had never heard of an arrow. In that situation would you consider it part of nature or something designed by a being with intelligence?"

"You seem to have a quiver full of questions. Since I was familiar with the materials comprising the object, I'd recognize that they wouldn't come together in this state naturally."

"So let's look at our world. For example let's look at a human brain. We know that the computer and computer networks have a striking similarity to the human brain. We have memory, mathematical function, language function, reasoning function all

found in different places in the brain. I'm using my brain right now to ask this question, and you will be using your brain, I hope, to answer it. Does it appear to you that the brain could have been designed?"

"No doubt the brain is a marvelous organ. One scientist stated it this way: 'the living results of natural selection overwhelmingly impress us with the appearance of design.'"

"And that would be Richard Dawkins."

"Yes, it is."

"Would you argue that the brain can't be considered as having been designed because there is nothing or no one in nature that could have designed it?"

"That might be a fair assessment."

"What if there was a designer there, but we just couldn't see that designer?"

"That's outside of science according to the definition you just read a minute ago."

"Excuse me, Mr. Plunkett but you just said a minute ago that invisible microbes were part of nature, even though we couldn't see them. Are you changing your story?"

"No. I stand by those words."

"Then can't the same logic be applied to a designer, which may be right there, but just invisible? What if we just haven't found the right tool to detect the designer yet?"

"I guess the Phantom of the Design will just have to stay outside of nature until that magical tool you refer to arrives."

"Mr. Plunkett, have you seen the wind?"

"Of course! Just look at the trees."

"No, I asked if you had seen the wind. When you see trees blowing you see the effects of the wind, not the wind itself. How about gravity? Have you ever seen gravity?"

"Playing by the rules of your game, I've seen only the effects of gravity."

"But you would never argue that either of those two phenomena doesn't really exist, right?"

"Never."

"But if you look around you and see signs everywhere of design, could you argue that you could see the effects of a designer even though you couldn't see the designer?"

"Not unless Alzheimer's kicks in."

"But if no scientist has the idea of a Louis Pasteur that the invisible can become visible, then how will we develop a tool to see the designer to allow you to overcome the bias you have in

rejecting design?"

"I guess some brilliant creationist scientist – oops, I just used an oxymoron. Someone like you will have to come along and do it."

"Maybe you're right. The blind squirrel theory might apply. I have no further questions for this witness."

The superintendent turned to Mr. Slade. "Any questions for this witness?"

"No questions."

"Mr. Plunkett, you may step down."

Maria returned to the mike as Mr. Plunkett returned to his chair. He looked at Maria with a funny expression. Jeremy figured he was still wondering if Maria's last comment about the blind squirrel was referring to herself or to him.

"I'd like to call Bill Kaufman."

Hacker briskly walked to the stand.

"Could you tell me, Mr. Kaufman what the similarities between a computer and a human brain are?"

"Sure. Let's start with input devices. Almost everyone who uses a computer uses a keyboard of some type and probably a mouse. Both of those are electronic sensing devices. When you move the mouse around, the computer is able to track the location of the mouse in relation to a starting point. When you click a button, the computer receives a message and figures out what action is attached to that click. When you type into a keyboard, an electronic signal is sent from the keyboard to the computer and from the computer to the monitor, causing that keystroke to appear on the screen. There are other input devices as well, but those are the most common. They correspond to input devices used by the human brain to get information from the world around us. Our most used input device is probably our eyes. Everything we see is sent as an image to our brain via nerves. We use our ears to pick up sounds and those are relayed to the brain for processing. Smells ditto. Tastes ditto. And finally there's our sense of touch. Very small nerve endings in our skin and at the base of every hair capture the slightest sensation and pass it to the central processing unit, aka the brain, for processing. Our brain not only monitors all the input from these channels, but at the same time stores data in its short and long-term memory banks and internal databases and monitors and directs the functioning of most of the rest of the body. The nervous system even has a spam filter to prevent the brain from getting overloaded. Unlike a computer, the brain monitors the energy level and can increase the amount of

energy being produced like a self-charging battery."

"So the brain is a very complex device?"

"Very! It has lot of similar functions to a computer, but the brain makes a computer look like an abacus in comparison. Someone stated that just one neuron is more complex than the most advanced supercomputer. Let's take a look at DNA, which is like a computer program. The functionality of a computer is directed by instructions written in the chips, in the input and output devices, in the CPU, and in memory. When broken down completely, we are dealing with just a combination of zeros and ones. In combination those on and off switches create words, and the words create statements etc., which tell the computer what to do. In DNA, the instructions are composed of four letters which correspond to amino acids A,C,G, and T. So all the words of our genetic makeup are composed of just those four letters. To give you an idea of the storage capacity of DNA, which uses its built-in program to reproduce itself in addition to other things, a teaspoon could hold all the instructions necessary to hold the blueprints for every single species that has ever lived on the Earth. In addition, that remaining space in the teaspoon would hold all the information from all of the books that have ever been written. It staggers the imagination. Another source I read indicates that one pencil dot of DNA would hold a thousand books, each containing a thousand pages."

"So do you think the human brain could have evolved?"

"I can only offer a layboy's opinion, which is mostly made up of logic and common sense. The human brain is still a mystery. Despite our vast knowledge, the amount we still don't understand is enormous. Captain Kirk said 'Space, the final frontier'. I'm convinced that the space between our ears is that final frontier. It just seems illogical something so unbelievable could be created by any process known to man, much less via a process of random mutations. Where did the original information come from? Mutations are usually neutral or detrimental, causing a loss of information. And this is all just referring to the brain itself. How could the brain have gotten plugged in to all of the circuits running throughout the body? Our neural network makes the Internet look like the work of a five-year-old with a tinker toy set.

"Let's speak about mutations. Richard Dawkins was involved in creating a computer program simulating how natural selection could account for the mutation of information and instructions into new information and instructions. He chose a sentence from Shakespeare and in a very short time the computer came up with

the exact sentence that Dawkins had chosen simply by going through all of the letters in the alphabet one at a time. The problem is the guy that programmed this didn't follow the rules of natural selection, which are defined by Dawkins himself thus: 'Natural selection, the unconscious, automatic, blind yet essentially non-random process that Darwin discovered, has no purpose in mind. If it can be said to play the role of watchmaker in nature, it is the *blind* watchmaker.'

"So natural selection doesn't know the future, doesn't know the past, doesn't understand the present – because natural selection isn't even a thing and cannot possess intelligence. Dawkins took the following sentence from Shakespeare: "Methinks it is like a weasel". He knew what the sentence was. The program was made aware of what the sentence was. Already the experiment is invalid because there was a known destination. So the program randomly came up with a character. That character was compared again to the letter that was needed for that position in the sentence. For example the first letter, M. Say the computer dice were thrown and a W came up. A comparison statement in the program would decide that wasn't a match and throw the dice again. It might come up C. and then F and finally down the line (thousands of tries could occur in a few milliseconds) an M comes up. The program compares and says Ah hah. Got this one. It stores that value as the correct answer and moves to the e in M-e. The same process occurs until an e is found. The process continues until the rest of the sentence is produced. It might have taken a few million instructions to accomplish that, but it would still only take a few minutes or less with a computer. We already know the problem – natural selection doesn't know the future and thus wouldn't know the desired outcome. When a W came up for the first letter, there was nothing to cause it to be rejected. And if an M came up, nothing would cause it to be retained. Natural selection only has one sentence – the death sentence. If a W mutation is created, the question becomes: will that organism survive the mutation? Will the mutation be passed? And in the future will that mutation allow this mutant to continue to survive and perhaps excel at survival as a result of the mutation? So here we have a blind process trying to help a mutating organism, which itself has no intelligent direction, arrive at an unknown destination. Do the words science fiction apply? This whole exercise with the computer was pure smoke and mirrors. And by the way, with a real computer program, if a mutation occurred in a program, even the change of one character

is likely to cause the program to throw an error."

"Thank you, Bill. No further questions."

"Mr. Slade?"

"No questions, Your Honor."

Maria said, "I call Luke Skywolf to the stand." Luke settled into the witness chair. "Luke, you have been doing some study of paleontology. Could you explain the connection between fossils and the theory of evolution?"

"Evolution is a theory of science that involves the past. There is no way that a scientist can simulate the evolution of an amphibian into a reptile or a reptile into a mammal in the laboratory. The exact environmental factors can only be conjectured. The most common way for scientists to read the history of animal life is through the remains of animals left behind. The first problem with fossils is that a very small percentage of skeletal remains are ever fossilized. The majority are destroyed or eaten. Often, when there is preservation, only a small percentage of the skeleton is preserved intact. Scientists only get to deal with a representative body of evidence instead of the whole enchilada. The majority of all known fossils are small marine animals. Those are not particularly useful for illustrating how men evolved from lower creatures. The fossils that are the most sought after are the ones known as 'transitional fossils.' The term 'missing links' might be used here. Darwin himself stated that if his theory of a gradual change in organisms is accurate, that there would be an abundance of transitional fossils showing the progression of the creature through the changes. Those in-between fossils were not known back in 1859. According to some of the books I read, they are still not available today. However, the evolutionist material that I read was adamant that those fossils do exist. One of the most important quotes came from Stephen Jay Gould, one of the leading evolutionists of the era. He said that the absence of fossils was the trade secret of paleontology."

Jeremy was looking at the opposition during that last remark. He saw that this one got a rise from them. It looked like Luke was going to receive some cross-examination on this point.

"This quote seems to be taken somewhat out of context. Gould certainly wouldn't be trying to undermine evolution. He was trying to make a point about Darwin's theory of gradualism, which says that evolution had to progress in baby steps and couldn't have jumps in the process. Gould was using the lack of fossils as evidence that evolution didn't always progress slowly. He was one of the people who came out with a revision of Darwinism called

Punctuated Equilibrium. That theory stated things would remain the same for a period of time and then a quick change would occur that wouldn't be captured in the fossil record, thus explaining the gap.

"We have two different sides telling different stories. For example there was a period of time known as the Cambrian era. Apparently many fossils appeared suddenly in that era without any prior examples in the fossil record. That phenomenon is known as the Cambrian Explosion. The anti-evolutionists consider this a major piece of evidence, but evolutionists shrug it off as no big deal. What I see happening here is that people come into the dispute with a belief, and then they find all the evidence they can that supports their belief and ignore all the evidence that does not. This presents a serious challenge to the search for truth."

"So the picture of the fossil evidence is a little cloudy. What about the fossil record of the primates? Can that clear any of the fog?" asked Maria.

"There is an interesting thing about fossils which may be human or apelike. When these treasures are unearthed, the person who finds them sometimes keeps them. They may have plaster casts made of the fossils for other people to look at. A fierce debate occurs over a discovery of fossils which might fit into the evolution of man category. For example, Neanderthals have been moved around from one category to another. Critics of evolution say that the Neanderthals were modern humans who suffered from rickets which caused some deformation of their bodies. They were in the Homo sapien group for a while but have been demoted since to a subhuman group. Again, here we have a debate over how these findings should be classified. The thing that bothered me is that the scientists were a bit less than honest in some cases. There was so much pressure to produce results and so much glory in finding the missing links that some people resorted to trickery. Some outright documented cases of dishonesty make it hard for me to accept any of these fossils as genuine between apes and modern man. The first of those little blots on the scientific record was named Piltdown man. Forty years after they were hailed as a missing link candidate, the jawbone associated with this man was discovered to be from an orangutan. Experts still don't know who perpetrated that hoax.

"Then there was Nebraska man. This fossil consisted of just one tooth. From this one small piece of evidence artists drew pictures of this specimen and his mate." At this point the picture Luke was referring to appeared on the big screen. "The evidence

of this find was even presented at the Scopes trial. Then someone unearthed the rest of the fossil. It turned out to be a wild pig. So we have a single tooth becoming a missing link important enough to be presented as evidence in a court of law. I think everyone can see what's wrong with this picture.

"Then there was a fossil from China called BambiRaptor which proved to be another fake. The absence of a central clearinghouse for fossils makes a reconciliation of claims somewhat problematic. Another problem I saw was that artists draw what they want to see and not what the evidence shows. If this is a common practice, then the evidence presented to the general public is based on imagination and not fact because most museums and books etcetera show artist representation of the creatures involved and not the fossils themselves. The fact that there was so much deception in earlier fossils makes a guy wonder how much other manufactured evidence exists. Another thing I question is that when a fossil is found, the scientists might claim this represents a whole new species of hominid because it is different than any others found. I wonder what the verdict would be if paleontologists discovered the fossil remains of Shaquille O'Neal and Danny DeVito in the same location. Would these be classified as a new species with an adult and a child represented, or would each be identified as a new species, or would they be correctly identified as just two human beings that were different? That would be an interesting scenario, but I don't think Shaq and Danny will show much interest in volunteering to find out."

"So, Luke, after your study would you argue that the fossil record supports the theory that man is the descendant of a one-celled organism?" Maria asked.

"Let me quote a few other opinions. David B. Kitts, PhD (Zoology) is Head Curator of the Department of Geology at the Stoval Museum. In an evolutionary trade journal, he wrote: 'Despite the bright promise that paleontology provides a means of seeing evolution, it has presented some nasty difficulties for evolutionists, the most notorious of which is the presence of 'gaps' in the fossil record. Evolution requires intermediate forms between species and paleontology doesn't provide them.'

"N. Heribert Nilsson, a famous botanist, evolutionist and professor at Lund University in Sweden, wrote: 'My attempts to demonstrate evolution by an experiment carried on for more than forty years have completely failed... The fossil material is now so complete that it has been possible to construct new classes, and the lack of transitional series cannot be explained as being due to



scarcity of material. The deficiencies are real, they will never be filled.'

"This is from an article in Newsweek magazine: 'The missing link between man and apes, whose absence has comforted religious fundamentalists since the days of Darwin, is merely the most glamorous of a whole hierarchy of phantom creatures... The more scientists have searched for the transitional forms that lie between species, the more they have been frustrated.'

"There are lots of other quotes that I could have used. One thing I see a lot of is claims by evolutionists that they have been misquoted or taken out of context. I'm trying to leave those out. My personal opinion is that if the fossil record is the only evidence for Darwinism, it is on shaky ground."

"OK. Thank you, Luke."

"Mr. Slade?"

There was a quick conversation between the lawyer and the zoologist. After a minute, Mr. Slade replied. "No questions at this time."

Maria and Jeremy switched places. Jeremy's heart was pounding inside him as he spoke into the mike. "I'd like to call Ronnie Johnson."

Ronnie took a seat.

"Ronnie, I understand you've been doing research into mathematical probabilities?"

"Yes. Our world is defined by mathematics. The calculations of the universe are orderly and predictable. Albert Einstein said, 'The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible.' Einstein also said, 'I have deep faith that the principle of the universe will be beautiful and simple.' It has been pointed out that the equations that rule the universe are so simple they'd probably fit on one piece of paper.  $E=mc^2$  is the entire equation for the theory of relativity. One number of interest here is 10 to the 50<sup>th</sup> power. This is the point mathematicians have set for the beginning of impossibility.

"Let's look at some other numbers. If the oxygen content of the Earth was 4% higher, anything made of carbon, including humans, would be in danger of suffering spontaneous combustion. Slightly below 19.5% and human life would suffocate.

"Now let's look at the estimate of mathematicians and scientists for the number of electrons in the universe. The low-end figure is 10 to the 79<sup>th</sup> power for the known universe. The high-end figure is 10 to the 130<sup>th</sup> power for the observable universe. That's the number 10 followed by 130 more zeros. That's beyond the

realm of our numerical grasp. You can see why scientific notation is used. A guy would get writer's cramp jotting down the entire number. According to D. A. Bradbury, the probability of the chance formation of a hypothetical functional "simple" cell, given all the ingredients, is acknowledged to be worse than one in 10 to the 57800<sup>th</sup> power. This is a chance of one in a number with 57,800 zeros. It would take eleven full pages of magazine type to print this number. Compare that to the key equations that govern the universe. Also compare it to the number of the impossibility threshold.

"Fred Hoyle said that life arising by chance from matter would be equivalent to giving 10 to the 50<sup>th</sup> power blind men a rubix cube and having them all solve it.

"In another experiment a guy by the name of Harold Markowitz created mathematical models of broth comprised of living bacteria being superheated until they were all reduced to their elementary chemical elements. He calculated the chance of one bacterium reassembling from the individual components was 10 to the 100 billionth power. After checking out this study, Robert Shapiro wrote: 'The improbability involved in generating even one bacterium is so large that it reduces all considerations of time and space to nothingness. Given such odds, the time until the black holes evaporate and the space to the ends of the universe would make no difference at all. If we were to wait, we would truly be waiting for a miracle.'

"Francis Crick, one of the cofounders of DNA, said this: 'An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense, the origin of life appears at the moment to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions which would have had to have been satisfied to get it going.'

"A mathematician named I. L. Cohen, who was a member of the New York Academy of Sciences, wrote a book, *Darwin was Wrong – A Study in Probabilities*, in which he said, 'In a certain sense, the debate transcends the confrontation between evolutionists and creationists. We now have a debate within the scientific community itself; it is a confrontation between scientific objectivity and ingrained prejudice – between logic and emotion – between fact and fiction. In the final analysis, objective scientific logic has to prevail – no matter what the final result is – no matter how many time-honored idols have to be discarded in the process. After all, it isn't the duty of science to defend the theory of evolution, and stick by it to the bitter end – no matter what illogical and unsupported conclusions it offers. If in the process of

impartial scientific logic, they find that creation by outside super intelligence is the solution to our quandary, then let's cut the umbilical cord that tied us down to Darwin for such a long time. It is choking us and holding us back. Every single concept advanced by the theory of evolution is imaginary and it isn't supported by the scientifically established facts of microbiology, fossils, and mathematical probability concepts. Darwin was wrong. The theory of evolution may be the worst mistake made in science.'

"I now quote Fred Hoyle, the man who perhaps drummed up the phrase "Big Bang Theory". He said the chance of life generating itself from non-living matter was about like the chance of a tornado going through a junkyard and reassembling a Boeing jet. By the way Hoyle and Francis Crick believed that life arrived from outer space."

"So despite all of the mathematical evidence stacking up against evolution, is it still considered a foregone conclusion by much of the science community?" asked Jeremy.

"An evolutionist named George Wald said, 'When it comes to the origin of life, there are only two possibilities, creation or spontaneous generation. There is no third way. Spontaneous generation was disproved one hundred years ago, but that leads us to only one other conclusion, that of supernatural creation. We cannot accept that on philosophical grounds; therefore we choose to believe the impossible; that life arose spontaneously by chance.'

"How does an intelligent person argue against that type of logic?"

"Thank you, Ronnie. No further questions."

Mr. Slade yelled out, "No questions."

Maria joined Jeremy at the mike. Since Julie wasn't here, he would be their last witness. He was getting ready to move up to the witness chair when Maria said, "I have another witness after you to cover Julie's material so you won't have to. OK?"

"Gotcha." *Who in the world is her other witness?*

"I call Jeremy Dillon."

Jeremy made himself comfortable in the witness chair.

"Jeremy, you studied the human anatomy in your research. Can you share some of the insights you've gained?"

"The most outstanding thing I've learned is that the human body is an incredible machine. If we had a few days, I could talk in detail about the unbelievable aspects. The body consists of a number of what we call systems which are comprised of different organs that perform a certain function. Every part of the body has

a job to do to keep the machine going. Let's start with the most obvious.

"Our external body is the part that all of us are familiar with. Our skin, hair, eyes, teeth, mouth, nose, etcetera are all out in the open and there is no need for dissection to present evidence of their existence, and in some cases functionality.

"Our skin most resembles that of dolphins and whales and not that of monkeys. It's the first line of protection from a multitude of nasty organisms that would like to take up residence inside us. It helps keep us cool when it's hot and keep us warm when it's cold. We learn at an early age that our skin keeps our blood inside of us, which allows us to stay alive, and that the skin will repair itself when damaged.

"We have several openings in the skin, also known as orifices. For example, I'm using my mouth right now to deliver this presentation. Without the mouth, oral language would be impossible. Ingestion of food and imbibing of liquid would be impossible. The nose allows us to breathe, another requisite for life. Smelling doesn't seem to be a necessity for human life; however, the placement of the nose right above the mouth is a strategic advantage for eating. Not only is the taste of our food enhanced by smell, but our nose acts as a security system so if we are about to consume something that's spoiled, our nose will give us a warning before our taste buds come into play. If our nose was in the middle of our chest or on top of our head, we wouldn't have this advantage.

"The second most obvious part of the body is our muscular-skeletal system. The skeleton and the muscles give us body definition, along with fat deposits under our skin. The skeleton is the framework upon which everything else is hung. Without it, life as we know it wouldn't exist.

"Everyone knows what happens to us if the respiratory system shuts down or is unable to find the oxygen needed.

"A system many of us might not know by name is the endocrine system, the hormone factory. There are over forty hormones, which help regulate body processes. Without hormones involved in control of body sugar, growth, sexual activity etcetera, human life wouldn't be possible.

"After we use our mouths and the taken for granted teeth in them to grind the food that's also necessary to keep us alive, our digestive system comes into play.

"I won't say much about our eliminatory system. We all deal with that process every day, but we might not realize that without

it, we would perish due to the buildup of toxins and garbage.

"So, I've briefly mentioned several key components that make our lives possible. Now I want to go into more detail on one necessary system, the circulatory system. Before explaining how critical that system is, we need to understand the body from a cellular level. A cell is the basic component of life. Our bodies are made up of ten to seventy-five trillion cells. Billions of those cells die every day and are replaced by new ones. There are two hundred different types of cells in the body. These cells need to receive oxygen and nutrients and eliminate their waste products. The medium that provides such functionality is our blood, which itself is composed of special cells.

"The main player in this drama is the heart. It is a magnificent machine in its own right which pumps regularly day in and day out to keep our bodies alive. Without it pushing the blood out to all the distant parts of the body, cells would begin dying in a short time. The oxygen brought in by our lungs must be shared all over the body. The food which we digest, after being reduced to molecules, must be dispersed to feed all of the cells.

"The circulatory system is the UPS of the body. It delivers all of these packages of materials needed for the cell to continue life via arteries, arterioles, and capillaries. The cells absorb the contents from the capillaries and the bad stuff is diffused back into the blood which is routed back through the body via venules and veins. That bad stuff consists of waste materials that the cells need to get rid of such as carbon dioxide, urea and lactic acid. The blood is routed back to the heart to repeat this whole extremely complicated process. The bottom line is that all of this activity is necessary to sustain life.

"What does that have to do with evolution? Let's look at the definition that Charles Darwin provided – gradual mutations which give survival advantage to an organism, allowing it to survive where others perish. I have to question whether something like a circulatory system could evolve gradually. Let me draw your attention to a cartoon." A picture of the Tin Man stood in front of a picture of Charles Darwin wearing a hat similar to that worn by a McDonald's employee. "The Tin Man says, 'I'd like a heart please, and six pints of blood.' Mr. Darwin replies, 'Would you like arteries and veins and capillaries with that?'

"The point is that without vessels to carry the blood, the heart would be pretty worthless. Could pieces of a heart be gradually formed, even though there is no selective advantage to a useless contraption at this point? Or could an unbelievable pumping

device just pop into existence because an organism experienced a mutation to their genome structure? But just for grins, let's stipulate that a heart somehow appeared, whether out of the blue or by a gradual construction process. So now we have a pump, and we'll stipulate that there was already blood in the organism, but the question now becomes: how does the heart get the blood to the cells? So now we need to gradually or suddenly develop the vessels that the blood will travel in and have them arrive at just the right locations. And then the heart has to be hooked up to those vessels so it can pump that blood. And the heart has to get connected to the lungs so it can receive the oxygen breathed in. And the means to get the nutrients into the bloodstream and the waste products out has to be devised. Also the method for the cells to interact with the whole process has to occur. We have a major construction project by an organism which has no clue what is going on inside itself and doesn't have the intelligence to construct something like this even if it knew and had control over the process. So here is our dilemma for Darwinism. What are the brain cells and other cells doing for sustenance while this construction process is going on?

"Let's use an example. A new Tacoma Narrows Bridge is under construction. The old bridge is functional so people can still drive to where they need to go. When the new span is ready, traffic will be allowed on the new bridge and the construction process will be history. So for our evolving creature, if the process involved intelligence, an existing system of nourishment could be used until the heart system was in place and then a switchover made to the new system. But evolution doesn't involve intelligent direction of the process. By the very definition of evolution, this couldn't occur. So how does a creature go from one means of sustaining itself to another?

"Remember that it only takes four minutes without oxygen to the brain to sign the death warrant of a human. This system would have to be functioning perfectly from the ribbon cutting or this mutant creature won't live long enough to provide offspring that might correct the problem with their own mutations. Another little tidbit, which in itself could be a study, is the clotting property of blood. Too much clotting factor and an organism could perish from blood clots. Not enough and an organism bleeds to death from a superficial cut. And how did blood itself evolve? One staggering fact here. The human body has 60,000 miles of blood vessels. If you laid them out end to end, they would go around the Earth more than twice.

"Concerning the marvels of the human body, let me quote a couple of people who have a much better grasp than I:

"Bones, physiology, the nervous system – the body has thousands of consummate designs that elicit our wonder and admiration," from Randolph Nesse and George Williams.

"I could prove God statistically. Take the human body alone – the chance that all the functions of the individual would just happen is a statistical monstrosity," from George Gallup, famous for the Gallup Polls.

"Muscular contraction is one of the most wonderful phenomena of the biological kingdom. That a soft jelly should suddenly become hard, change its shape, and lift a thousand times its weight, and that it should be able to do so several times a second, is little short of miraculous. Undoubtedly, muscle is one of the most remarkable items in nature's curiosity shop," from the 1937 Nobel Prize winner.

"Leonardo da Vinci once said the human foot is a masterpiece of engineering and a work of art.

"Dr. Geoffrey Simmons wrote that pound for pound, bones are stronger than steel, yet they're much lighter for mobility purposes.

"Humans are not endowed with just one miraculous feature, close examination shows that basically all components of the body are technological wonders. Could they all just evolve and perform their awesome function in complete unity with one another?

"A human fetus's heart begins beating at three weeks, and blood is being circulated by that heart at the four-week mark. The development of a fetus is an amazing story. At conception the egg which will produce the embryo consists of one single cell which was a creation of the union of the egg and the sperm of the parents. That cell divides into a second cell. Those two into four, and so on. After six days the embryo is the size of a pinprick. Within a month there are 500 million cells present. In the third week the cells being produced are specialized so some cells are heart cells, some cells are liver cells, etcetera. They are all somehow sent to the correct location for their particular specialty. This whole process rivals the script from a science-fiction movie.

"Somehow all of the information on how to produce a human being is stored in that one original cell and somehow that information is dispersed to the rest of the cells. At some point in time 250,000 cells per minute are created and sent to the area of the brain where they belong. So we know how the human heart and all its attachments are formed during the embryo stage. But

how did the information needed to perform all of these acts of creation and the process of using that information to create all of these intricate and complex parts of the human body come about? Where did the blueprints of life originate?"

Jeremy looked directly into Maria's eyes. "One last thing, the human eye is an incredible seeing machine and the position and the complexity of protection of them all adds up to make them one of the most significant components to our bodies. I hear scientists attempt to explain how the eye could evolve gradually. I can only wonder how an eye could evolve the ability to look into another's eyes and see all the way into their soul. Albert Einstein once said, 'No, this trick won't work. How on Earth are you ever going to explain in terms of chemistry and physics so important a biological phenomenon as first love?'" Jeremy's eyes had remained locked with Maria's during this whole quotation. Maria was the one who broke the contact, but not immediately, when Jeremy finished speaking.

"So Jeremy, as a result of your research, what is your opinion about the possibility that human beings are descended from a common ancestor with squirrels, sharks, mosquitoes, apes, pelicans, cabbages and redwood trees?"

"Before I began investigating this subject, I was leaning heavily toward the side of believing that the theory of evolution explained our existence. After coming to an understanding of exactly what evolution offers in the way of creative powers and the complexity and wonder of the human being, my beliefs have been adjusted tremendously. We are looking at a living machine that science is still struggling to understand fully despite the efforts of some of the brightest people on the planet. To think this miracle machine could be the outcome of random mutations, whether gradual or punctuated, seems totally ludicrous to me. I've come to the opinion that the chance of man arising from a one-celled organism through mutations is about equal to the chance of me riding my bicycle to Hawaii."

"Thank you. No further questions." Jeremy swore she winked at him just as she turned around.

Mr. Slade was on his feet already and headed to the microphone. There was no need to ask if he had any questions.

"Very touching presentation, Jeremy. We're all thankful for the refresher course in Biology 101. In your last statement you indicated that the only way someone would believe in evolution is if they wanted to. Obviously you don't want to anymore. Could your opinion have been first clouded and then changed by your



romantic attachment to Ms. Masterson?"

Jeremy was totally paralyzed for a second. He finally got enough muscle control back to look over at Maria to see her reaction. Their eyes locked from a distance and the electricity flowed again. He was jolted back to consciousness.

"I'm afraid you're mistaken. There is no romantic attachment between myself and Miss Masterson. You really should avoid reading the National Enquirer while you're en route to another one of your heroic attempts—"

"Please confine yourself to answering the questions. You've already wasted enough of our time with your idle prattle. So there is no romantic attachment. Is it just purely biological then?"

"I'm sorry. You need to define your antecedents before I can understand the question sufficiently to provide an adequate answer. What do you mean by it? And while you're at it, what do you mean by biological?"

"OK. If you don't understand it when I beat around the bush, let me state it in precise terms that even you can understand. So you and Miss Masterson are simply involved in a sexual relationship, but there is no romance?"

Jeremy hesitated for a second weighing his words and then spoke with a slightly elevated force level. "Miss Masterson and I have had sex together as often as my fist has made contact with your jaw."

"Are you threatening me?"

"If you wish to read my answer as a threat, hey, it's a free country, but in reality I simply stated a fact. Since I have never seen you before you walked into this gym this morning, and everyone has been able to watch us since then, it's pretty safe to say that I have never punched you out. So in conjunction with your question in terms that even you can understand, Miss Masterson and I are both virgins and intend to stay that way until marriage to whomever we choose."

"Oh. I see. A member of the rare breed, pun intended." He looked at his team and exchanged grins with them. "So it seems that *maybe* I was barking up the wrong tree here. So you must be taking your stand on religious grounds?"

"You need to find another tree, Mr. Slade. I was raised in a godless home by a father that denied the existence of God. The verdict is still out on God's existence in my own mind, but I'm trying to get to the bottom of that question as well. The answer to my being on this witness stand isn't because I'm trying to impress a lovely lady and not because I'm trying to impress God, and

certainly not because I'm trying to bring joy to my father. I'm simply here to stand up for what I believe to be true. I think evolution has hijacked science and is attempting to do the same with society."

"I see. Altruistic are we?"

"As a matter of fact, I am."

"You know that's an evolved trait in human beings?"

"Actually I don't know that, but I do know evolutionists make that claim. The plastic theory strikes again."

"So, Dr. Dillon, tell me. What field is your PhD in? I'm sorry, I meant your master's degree. Scratch that, I mean your bachelor's. Oh, my. I forgot, you're still working on your high school diploma. So you think you with your lack of a diploma whatsoever, you are learned enough to pass judgment on the overwhelming majority of PhD recipients in the world?"

"I'm not passing judgment on those people. I realize lots of them have families to feed. They can't stand up and speak of their own skepticism, or they will be out on the streets and seeking a new career."

"That's your explanation of why 93% of the biologists in the National Academy of Sciences are atheists or agnostics? Because they're afraid to lose their jobs?"

"Oh, no. I don't believe that at all. I think that the percentage is 93% because they won't elect anyone to be a member unless they're atheists or agnostics. And by the way, a famous writer named Anatole France once said that if fifty million people believe a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing. Truth doesn't bow to majority rule."

"So you're an expert on truth?"

"I know enough to realize that no matter what you say and no matter what I say and no matter what 10,000 PhD's say – the truth itself doesn't change. People's perception of truth is always changing, but the underlying truth cannot be changed."

"So in your infinite wisdom, you would like to see intelligent design taught in your high school?"

"I never said that. Our goal here was simply to alert students to the fact that science has eliminated the possibility of design from their interpretation of the origins of life and that what is presented as facts are actually only the best explanations scientists can come up with from nature itself."

"Well, I believe we've heard enough from the world according to Jeremy Dillon. I'm going to go back to my seat and see if I brought my airlines barf bag with me. No further questions."

There was sprinkled laughter from the bleachers as Jeremy stepped down. Maria flashed him one of her most dazzling smiles. *I must have done OK.*

Mr. Walsh interrupted the proceedings. "I hope there is no one here who wants to question the biological urges that descend upon humans after sitting for almost two hours. We are going to recess for fifteen minutes so the participants of this discussion may exercise their eliminatory system if necessary."

As people began rising all over the gym, Jeremy turned to Maria. "Who's our next witness?"

"Sorry, Jeremy, I gotta run to the restroom, now!"

Jeremy decided he better take advantage of the break too and followed in her footsteps. He would catch her again before they resumed and find out who the mystery witness was. Maybe she was going to call another hostile witness. *Maybe it was Mr. Bogue. Wouldn't that be a kick! Why can't I do the questioning on him? Maria will be way too polite.*

## Chapter 40

### The Hearing Continues

Only a minute to go until the recess was over and Maria was nowhere to be found. The people at the front tables were in place. What would Jeremy do if she didn't show up? He only had a few seconds left to panic. Finally, he saw Maria making her way back and let out a big sigh. She went straight up to the microphone. Right on cue the superintendent asked for quiet.

Jeremy had his eyes on Mr. Bogue as Maria began speaking. He wanted to see this reaction. "I'd like to call my next witness, Mr. Paul," she hesitated before finishing, "Dillon."

To say Jeremy was stunned would have been a gross understatement. He was frozen in place. Only his eyes moved as he watched in total disbelief as the witness stand he had vacated about fifteen minutes before was occupied by his father.

Maria began her questioning, "Mr. Dillon, could you tell us what you do for a living?"

"I'm a teacher of biology at Pierce College."

"And how long have you been a biology teacher?"

"Thirty-four years."

Thoughts were running rampant through Jeremy's mind. *When did Maria arrange for Dad to testify? Why didn't anyone tell me? What did this all mean?*

"Mr. Dillon, could you please provide us with the description of the cell, which we have referred to as the main unit of life."

"Let me start by saying that the cell is so complex that I have only time to give you a small portion of the facts. Cells were discovered way back in the 1600's, but at the time that Charles Darwin formulated his theory, he had no clue what constituted life at a level beyond human vision. The microscopes of his era were incapable of delving into the microscopic world of the cell. The theory was that cells were just a blob of protoplasm. With the advent of improved magnification devices, allowing us to see the invisible, we discovered that the cell is the lowest form of life, and that instead of being simple, it is extremely complex. It is even more complex than the space shuttle, containing billions of compounds. A cell is basically a self-contained factory. A cell has a power plant, shipping and receiving ports, messengers, security guards, etcetera. The nucleus of the cell runs the show and

contains the famous twenty-three pairs of chromosomes, one each from the mother and the father. This is the area where the chemical words exist. Each cell has the power to make a copy of itself using the instructions contained within this DNA, which is most familiar to people from the crime stories on TV and in the newspapers. DNA in all human beings is quite similar but has enough differences in each person to be unique to each individual, except children born from the same egg, aka identical twins. So just like fingerprints, everyone has their own version. Amazingly it seems that cells contain the instructions to duplicate themselves and also contain the instructions to duplicate the individual. Experiments have been carried out where a skin cell is planted into an egg which has had the nucleus removed. That one skin cell can reproduce the entire organism. Living cells can only come from other living cells. Scientists are able to tweak the cell by injecting things into it to cause changes but they're unable to create a living cell from scratch.

"This poses a dilemma for evolutionary theory. If scientists who can study and unravel the mysteries of a cell can't create one, how could a bunch of amino acids combine by chance to form the proteins needed for life by chance, and how could they have come to life and sustain that life without having all of the sophisticated means of extracting the nutrients needed to keep that life going? That life had to provide garbage disposal to get rid of all the waste material caused by the first process, and then most difficult of all, develop the power to reproduce itself before it died. And then we have to ask the question, where did the information come from which gives the DNA the blueprints needed to construct a clone of itself? We have this little mystery to solve. Obviously we are here and are alive. Obviously we are surrounded by many other creatures that share life with us. Also we possess an intelligence that's unmatched in those other living things, although some of those living things possess functionality and instincts which humans don't. We know that all of these life forms share a common bond. They all are composed of cells, whether just one cell as in the case of bacteria or the blue whale which has approximately 100 quadrillion cells. Even plants are composed of cells, though their cells are different to other living things. There is a relationship of some kind between all life. Thus we arrive at the crux of the situation. We know that life didn't always exist on our home planet, so how did it originate? Basically there are only two possibilities. Either life somehow sprang up by itself or something or someone created it. Before that could

happen, the matter life is composed of had to exist. We can't get anything from nothing. Where did matter come from? Science has the commission of trying to establish the answer to that question. Unfortunately, they have decided one of the two possible answers isn't something they can discover through the scientific method so they must choose the other answer and then try to make all evidence of life around them fit into that theory. The seeming natural law that only live cells can produce other living cells seems to refute spontaneous generation.

"I want to add one quote concerning the idea of spontaneous generation or abiogenesis from Hubert Yockey, who holds a PhD in physics and is an information theorist, said, 'Although at the beginning, the paradigm was worth consideration, now the entire effort in the primeval soup paradigm is self-deception on the ideology of its champions. The history of science shows that a paradigm, once it has achieved the status of acceptance (and is incorporated in textbooks) and regardless of its failures, is declared invalid only when a new paradigm is available to replace it. Nevertheless, in order to make progress in science, it is necessary to clear the decks, so to speak, of failed paradigms. This must be done even if this leaves the decks entirely clear and no paradigms survive. It is a characteristic of the true believer in religion, philosophy and ideology that he must have a set of beliefs, come what may. Belief in a primeval soup on the grounds that no other paradigm is available is an example of the logical fallacy of the false alternative. In science it is a virtue to acknowledge ignorance. This has been universally the case in the history of science. There is no reason that this should be different in the research on the origin of life.'"

"So, it appears that you don't teach Darwin's theory of common descent of living things from a single ancestor?" Maria asked.

"Not true. It has been an integral part of the curriculum for the last seventeen years. I embraced it."

Maria nodded. "Then why would I call you to be my witness?"

"Because in the last couple of days I've resigned from the evolution cheerleading squad and burned my membership card in the common descent booster club."

Jeremy's mouth dropped open. *Holy guacamole. This is unbelievable.* He took a peek at Mr. Bogue's team to see how they liked this new turn of events. There was some obvious dismay in that circle. They had been geared to argue against a bunch of kids. But now it appeared that a ringer had been brought in and

they were not comfortable at all. *And that ringer is my dad.* A new emotion began to rise inside of him.

"So, Mr. Dillon, Can you explain this change of mind?"

"You might say I woke up and inhaled the scent of the coffee. It all started when my son left an anti-evolution book lying around the house. I picked it up and started reading it with the aim of having a few laughs and perhaps finding material I could use to convince him to abandon his folly."

"Did you get any such laughs?"

"Not in that book. I found myself unable to argue against the evidence. All I could do was argue against the concept based on my position of bias. Frankly, I was intrigued. When I finished that book, I picked up another one. In that book I discovered that the author was stating that some things I had been teaching over the years had been proven to be false evidence. I thought he had to be lying. I decided to launch a full-scale investigation, just as my son seemed to have done. Our goals seemed to be diametrically opposite. He was trying to find evidence that evolution was bad science with some truth to it, and I was trying to establish that evolution was truth with perhaps a little baggage."

"And it appears that now you consider that amount of baggage to be more than just a little?"

"My son didn't leave enough books lying around the house. I had to go out and get some of my own. I began to see a pattern of design emerging that I had never considered before. It is said that a man often only sees what he wants to see. I wanted to see evolution. But when I saw that life forms have such a variety of perfected functions, I had to ask myself how mutations and natural selection could account for that. Even in our world of intelligence, near perfection isn't a common occurrence. A top gymnast must spend countless hours of practice and have a coach giving expert direction to even approach a score of ten. How do so many creatures in nature have functionality that humans can't design, or in some cases even understand, by accident? After a month of persistent study, I finally arrived at a conclusion that the only way a person can accept the theory that man slowly developed through undirected mutations of the genome locked into place by natural selection is if they choose to. Just like accepting a religion requires a certain suspension of disbelief to overlook some potential fallacies in doctrine, it dawned on me that same element was needed to embrace Darwin's theory, an element I'd refer to as faith.

"We all choose to have faith in something. At the point we do

so, our baloney detectors might be turned off. If you question the thing you have faith in, you make your fellow believers uncomfortable, and you aren't doing much for your own comfort level either. A healthy skepticism is hard to embrace. You might overdose, or you might not have enough to have any tangible impact. Truth is such an elusive goal. I wish it were not true, but truth isn't something that can be arrived at without work and struggle and an overriding desire to not be content with half-truths. I turned off my baloney detector a long time ago to stifle my skepticism of what I wanted to embrace. Just recently I was convinced that skepticism in the right dosage is a healthy thing. I turned that baloney detector back on and the meter shot to the top. I argued with myself for a while that I couldn't fight against science. I love science and it's been my life. Then it dawned on me that I wouldn't be fighting against science but rather fighting *for* it."

"So was there some overwhelming statement of logic or fact from an anti-evolutionist that provoked your decision to jump off the evolution bandwagon?"

"There was a lot of evidence that I found which supported such a leap. But none of it prompted me to overcome my resistance. It took an evolutionist to do that. His name is PZ Myers, also a biology teacher. He said, 'I say, screw the polite words and careful rhetoric. It's time for scientists to break out the steel-toed boots and brass knuckles, and get out there and hammer on the lunatics and idiots. If you don't care enough for the truth to fight for it, then get out of the way.'

"And then in a prestigious science magazine they posted more of Mr. Myers's views: 'Please don't try to tell me that you object to the tone of our complaints. Our only problem is that we aren't martial enough, or vigorous enough, or loud enough, or angry enough. The only appropriate responses should involve some form of righteous fury, much butt-kicking, and the public firing and humiliation of some teachers, many school board members, and vast numbers of sleazy far-right politicians.'"

Jeremy looked over at the jury when his father mentioned school board members. Dismay was written all over their faces as they looked at each other. *Some hot buttons have been pushed.*

"It suddenly hit me like a ton of bricks what was going on. Science magazines publishing violent rhetoric. Scientists threatening to emulate Nazi storm troopers. Evidence propping up evolution that was clearly fabricated. For example, look at this chart." An image of embryos filled the screen. Many of the people



in the room seemed to be familiar with the picture from their response. "This book is the one I teach from today. It was discovered years ago that these drawings by Earnest Haeckel were creatively enhanced to make them appear more similar than they really are. Some use the word 'faked'. This was public knowledge, though I didn't realize it because the drawings were left in the book. Unfortunately, I've spent most of the last few years giving time to my students instead of keeping abreast of what is going on in the world of science. I don't regret making them my priority instead of my own knowledge, but that practice has left me at a bit of a disadvantage. All the headlines I ever saw trumpeted another evolution triumph or announced more insanity from the anti-evolution bunch. I quit reading those articles years ago because I had no desire to hear the arguments. So I was blindsided by a lack of knowledge. I'm sure at some point in time, a student in my class would have pointed out this fact to me, and I'd have made a fool out of myself defending the drawings. This type of intellectually ruthless stacking of the deck isn't the science I grew to love. Science was something wonderful, an escape from the crazy world of human foibles and idiosyncrasies and illogical behavior. It was a place where a man could find joy in discovering new things, new ideas and new truths. It was a sanctuary of order and reason. I realize now that the sanctuary has been violated. There is a turf war going on.

"I always believed that science was self-regulating and self-correcting. Evidence and facts would drive scientists to ensure that balance was maintained. I see now that I was living in a bubble. The dieting craze has apparently afflicted my discipline. For those who don't want the full truth we have science light and for those who claim that the theory of descent from a common ancestor is on a level of proof similar to gravity and the roundness of the Earth, we have fact-free science. The natural checks and balances of the system have been replaced by some kind of monster which rules with an iron fist. Step out of line and either through ostracism, ridicule, career derailment or some other form of coercion, the powers that be will handle the situation. When I was a kid, I loved to go to the beach and pick up rocks to find what was under them. It was thrilling to me. Now in the world of science, it's OK to pick up the rock and look under it as long as what I find under that rock agrees with the scientific establishment. They use labels like junk science and pseudo science to describe people who might question their doctrine. How can science be self-correcting if it tries to censor those who would

correct it? A man once said about evolution: 'In fact the a priori reasoning is so entirely satisfactory to me that if the facts won't fit in, why so much the worse for the facts'. That man was Charles Darwin's brother. It seems there are lots of people who share his opinion. To me, ignoring of facts in the name of science has to be categorized as some type of blasphemy.

"Truth isn't a medicine that can be force-fed to people. It is also not something that can be retained by simply preventing alternative ideas from being explored. Religion made the mistake of trying to defend their faith and their beliefs by censorship. Now science is trying to do the same. If somebody holds the truth, they shouldn't be afraid of any arguments.

"I understand the insecurity factor of scientists, especially when religion enters the picture. I'm sure the opinion is that what happened to Galileo will never be permitted to happen again. What I see developing, however, is a total imbalance in the opposite direction. Religion has had and has caused its share of problems over the years. But we have to separate religion from God. Religion is man's manifestation and interpretation of God. The Constitution forbids the passing of laws of Congress to establish religion – or to prevent it. There is no mention of separation of state and God. The phrase is separation of state and Church – and that phrase isn't found in the constitution. The judicial system has kicked God outside. Some scientists are doing their best to lock the door."

"Were there any other things about evolution that you were not aware of that you discovered in your search?" asked Maria.

"Oh yeah. A couple of unknown things hit home hard. For forty years this country had a eugenics program where people were forced to submit for sterilization based on their intellect, etcetera. Another was the talk of killing disabled children, which fortunately wasn't enacted as legislation. Let me read this little blurb: 'I believe when the defective child shall have reached the age of five years – and on the application of his guardians – that the case should be considered under law by a competent medical board; then it should be reviewed twice more at four-month intervals; then, if the board, acting, I repeat, on the applications of the guardians of the child, and after three examinations of a defective who has reached the age of five or more, should decide that that defective has no future or hope of one; then I believe it is a merciful and kindly thing to relieve that defective - often tortured and convulsed, grotesque and absurd, useless and foolish, and entirely undesirable - of the agony of living.'

"Let me read you some more. This is from Germany, a quote from one of Hitler's top henchman, Adolf Eichmann, when asked if he felt remorse for killing so many Jews. 'What do I have to confess? I've done nothing wrong. I've done only right. Both the churches in Germany, the Catholic and protestant believe in Theistic evolution. Both of them believe that God's method of creation was to wipe out the handicapped and wipe out the less fitted. And as the Jews are less fitted than our people, I've helped God in his methods. I've only catalyzed God's way of working. And when I meet God I will tell him so.'

"And what about his Fuehrer? We all know about the Holocaust, but I was unaware that Hitler exterminated over 273,000 people even before the Holocaust! The first to be killed were the aged, the infirm, the senile, the mentally retarded and defective children, including epileptics. Several World War I veterans, who had given an arm or leg in fighting for mother Germany, were exterminated as 'undesirable'. Even bed wetters and children with badly modeled ears were put to death – all part of the euthanasia project of Germany.

"I was blown away. I figured that Darwin had no clue and had no desire that his theory of natural selection would be misconstrued to include murder. I did some more research and found that maybe Mr. Charles had more blame than I thought. Here are a couple of quotes from his books:

""With savages, the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated; and those that survive commonly exhibit a vigorous state of health. We civilised men, on the other hand, do our utmost to check the process of elimination; we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed, and the sick; we institute poor-laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save the life of every one to the last moment. There is reason to believe that vaccination has preserved thousands, who from a weak constitution would formerly have succumbed to smallpox. Thus the weak members of civilised societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man. It is surprising how soon a want of care, or care wrongly directed, leads to the degeneration of a domestic race; but excepting in the case of man himself, hardly any one is so ignorant as to allow his worst animals to breed."

"Another one for you: 'some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage

racess." So what did Darwin mean by races? Well let's look at a biology textbook that was used for thirty years. This was the book that was actually used by John Scopes that led to the infamous Scopes monkey trial. This widely used high school textbook was written by Hunter and titled *A Civic Biology*. In the section on evolution under the subtitle "*The Races of Man*", it is stated that, 'at the present time there exists upon the earth five races or varieties of man, each very different from the other in instinct, social customs, and to an extent, in structure.' The five races were then ranked from inferior to superior as follows:

"There are the Ethiopian or Negro type, originating in Africa; the Malay or brown race, from the islands of the Pacific; the American Indian; the Mongolian or yellow race, including the natives of China, Japan and the Eskimos; and finally, the highest type of all, the Caucasians, represented by the civilized white inhabitants of Europe and America."

"The textbook states that the 'highest' race is the Caucasians, who are specifically 'higher' developed in terms of "instincts, social customs, and physical structure."

Jeremy looked over at the jurists again. The school board included one black and one Samoan. Obviously neither of them had ever heard of this facet of Darwin's teaching before. Their faces showed evidence they wouldn't be celebrating Darwin's Day in February.

"Germany played a big role in the development of evolution and most certainly in the area of the application of social Darwinism. In conjunction with the teaching of evolution and the Fuehrer, I have to cite this quotation of the mustached one: "Let me control the textbooks and I will control the state." I couldn't help comparing that with the attempts of NCSE and NAS and other organizations to control the content of the biology textbooks. Now I see organizations like these and Defend Science in action. There seems to be a big misunderstanding here. Science isn't under attack. The theory of being just another descendant in a long line of animals is what is under attack, and it appears justifiably so. If the world stands up to defend a theory that's not scientific in the name of science, then all order has fled from our civilization."

"Don't you think that removal of evolution from scientific thought would have a detrimental effect on science, setting us back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century?" asked Maria.

"From what I understand, the theory of evolution doesn't have a big role in the day to day work of scientists. Where in the

technological advancements was Sir Charles needed? Computers, cell phones, automobiles, and etcetera? Do medical researchers when they try to find a cure for cancer have to consider the theory of evolution before they proceed? Honestly, I don't see science faltering one bit. Perhaps it would be advantageous for science to not be tied to this doctrine. Obviously the philosophical sideshow of this controversy has diverted time, money and attention away from issues which are purely scientific in nature."

"So what do you see for the future in this arena?"

"Frankly, I'm a little scared. I have a vision of Darwingate. I see the specter of repression on the horizon that makes the situation today seem harmless in comparison. Will the PZ Myers storm troopers actually materialize? Will Eugenics come back into vogue? Richard Dawkins said those who don't accept evolution are either stupid, crazy or evil. If eugenics is applied like it was in the recent past to the feeble minded, disabled, and criminal, who else would be impacted. Could Dawkins's crazy pronouncement ever become common law? Thus you would either have to accept evolution or be sterilized or put to death under the eugenics law. I know it sounds crazy, but how many Germans do you think would have believed what would transpire in their country after Hitler came to power? I'm talking a worst-case scenario here.

"Science needs to be kept in its place. It is a tool of society and never should be in a position to control society. I may sound like an alarmist but freedom seems to be at risk here. Already in California it is against the law to dispute the theory of evolution in the classroom. Where is the ACLU when this type of freedom is taken away?" He looked over at Mr. Slade as he posed that question. "It appears that they pick and choose whose civil liberties they will use their time and money to defend. Maybe I'm blowing this out of proportion. In fact, I hope I am, but I'm afraid I'm not. Who is it going to hurt if we are a little vigilant about maintaining freedom here?"

"So what are your plans concerning your current teaching position? How do you reconcile your new thoughts with your current curriculum?"

"I honestly don't know. This whole thing has come down so recently that I haven't had much time to explore my options there. I obviously can't go on teaching that evolution is fact. I might have difficulty teaching it is even a good theory, at least in its current state. I might have to find a different career."

"I see. I understand you have an audio clip you wanted us to

hear?"

"Yes, I do."

Hacker arrived at the table where the electronic equipment was hooked up before Maria had finished her question. He had been waiting for this moment. He flipped the play switch, and Mr. Dillon's voice came over the loudspeakers. After a few seconds the listeners could determine that this was a conversation between Mr. Dillon, Mr. Plunkett and Mr. Slade. Mr. Dillon had introduced himself as a college biology professor. He asked them if they expected to have any problem beating back the challenge of the creationist creeps. They had laughed and then made some disparaging remarks. Finally, Mr. Slade said, "The only thing I'm worried about is the jury. You know what Mark Twain said about school boards. God created the idiot for practice and then he created the school board." The audience roared in laughter. The school board members didn't join in. The defense team looked like they wanted to crawl into a hole while at the same time looked like they were desirous of putting Mr. Dillon in one about six feet deep.

"Mr. Dillon. That wasn't very nice."

"I know, but I really thought our school board should know how highly our visitors think of them. By the way, Mark Twain made another comment applicable here, 'Our Heavenly Father created man because he was disappointed in the monkey.'"

"OK. Thank you, Mr. Twain and Mr. Dillon. That's all of my questions."

"Mr. Slade?"

The ACLU representative and his team were having an animated whispering session.

"Mr. Slade, did you want to question this witness?"

"One moment, Mr. Walsh, we're not sure yet if we do or not?"

"OK, but your clock is running as of now."

A couple of minutes elapsed on the timer before Mr. Slade addressed the chair. "We have decided not to question this witness."

Paul Dillon walked over to the chair where Jeremy sat. The team all moved down one chair in anticipation he would want to sit next to his son. Jeremy stood up as his father approached. They looked at each other for a moment, and then both reached out to embrace the other. The old words rang in his ear again and they had never sounded better. "Love you, son."

Jeremy felt a weight slide off his shoulders and tears fought to escape from his eyes. "Love you too, Dad." *Being separated from my father hadn't been fun. Now it feels like everything is OK.*

"That concludes our case," said Maria.

"OK. Mr. Slade. Would you like to call any witnesses?"

"Yes, sir. I'd like to call Maria Masterson to the stand."

Maria was a little surprised but with great poise marched up to the witness chair. Since they hadn't cross-examined Paul, it appeared that they thought she was the weak link in the chain.

"Rumor has it that you're going to be a science major in college and are going to start an anti-evolution group on campus. Is that true?"

"How did you know that?"

"We have our sources. We know everything that's going on. Are you a little worried about being discriminated against within a science program?"

"Not worried about it, but I know it is a distinct possibility. Eugenie Scott, director of the National Center for Science Education said that admitting a doctoral candidate with views at variance with what we consider standard science would require so much remedial instruction it wouldn't be worth her time. She said that wasn't religious discrimination but rather discrimination on the basis of science."

"Maria, could you tell us a little bit about your religious background."

"Wasp."

"What?"

"Wasp."

Mr. Slade's face reddened. He looked like he was going to get angry, but then he suddenly lightened up. "Oh, you were not speaking biologically. You meant WASP as in White Anglo Saxon Protestant."

"Gosh, Mr. Slade. You should have been a lawyer!"

"Maria, do you believe that the world was created in six literal twenty-four-hour days less than ten thousand years ago?"

"To tell you the truth—"

"Please do."

"I don't know if I do or not. I'm not ruling it out."

"You realize that there is abundant evidence that the Earth is old."

"I realize that there is lots of supposed evidence. My team and I studied dating methods and discovered that there are questions about the accuracy of the methods that have been employed."

"And where was that topic in your questioning?"

"We decided not to bring up those questions because in this particular area, science might actually have some evidence. We

decided that there were so many real issues, we couldn't afford to bring up one that was maybe iffy."

"You were trying to cover up that vulnerability?"

"Remember we only get two hours for our presentation. We can't bring up everything. Now if it turned out the dating methods are inaccurate and the world is much younger than the dating methods reveal, that would be a crushing blow to the theory of the slow crockpot of gradual mutations. Our argument doesn't depend on a young Earth because we are not here to prove that Genesis was a literal explanation of the origins of life."

"So you're here to prove that God exists?"

"Negative. You can't prove that God exists unless he decides to show himself. It's just like spontaneous generation of life. Scientists can't prove it either. Both believers and macro-evolutionists are in the same boat, having to accept what they believe by faith. The difference in the groups is that we admit that we walk by faith and not by sight."

"Oh, come on. Surely you see that scientists have evidence to back up their *faith*?"

"Please don't call me Shirley, and of course I see evidence for *microevolution*. But you can't accept that somebody can jump up and touch the moon just because they can dunk a basketball, and they say they can touch the moon."

"Do you believe in a literal flood that covered the entire Earth up to the tops of the mountains?"

"Yes."

"And you believe that Jonah was swallowed by a whale?"

"It's not like the Bible said that Jonah swallowed the whale. Do you question that a whale can swallow a man?"

"Let me remind you, Maria, that now you're on my dime and you already had your chance to ask the questions. Now please just answer mine, OK? I can believe that a whale can swallow a man, but the part I have trouble *swallowing* is that poor old Jonah didn't get digested after three days. And how about those guys cast into a fire and coming out without becoming toast? And Daniel down in the Lion's den? Do you believe all that stuff?"

"Why would I have difficulty believing those things? If God made the laws that make it hard for you to believe such things could happen, can he not suspend those laws whenever he wants? You know where God sleeps, don't you?"

"Probably the same place as an 800-pound gorilla. Any place he wants to, right?" He was rewarded with one of Maria's beaming smiles. "Now wait a minute! You're not supposed to be asking me



the questions. If you wish to talk so badly, why don't you tell us about your agenda to bring God into the classroom?"

"Why, Mr. Slade. I'm surprised. I thought even you knew that God was everywhere. I don't have to bring him in there. But if you're suggesting that I want religion taught in science class, you're way off base. I simply want kids to have a chance at knowing that science has not proven that life wasn't designed by a higher intelligence."

"Certainly you realize that the courts aren't going to back you in your efforts. They have already seen through the smokescreen put up by intelligent design to see that it is a Trojan horse being used to bring God into the classroom. They will dismantle that Trojan horse and use it for the homecoming bonfire."

"That seems to be the pattern."

"And that pattern isn't likely to change. You know, Maria. There is no conflict between evolution and religion. There are large numbers of evolution supporters who believe in God, some of them are even pastors."

"No conflict, huh? Maybe you better tell that to Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris and Steven Weinberg and PZ Myers and—"

"OK. You've made your point. But you must see that those people are not in the majority?"

"At this point in time anyway. If they ever do become the majority, this Earth will have tipped totally upside down."

"But Miss Masterson, you have to take into consideration that you Christians are always damning people like Richard Dawkins to hell. What do you expect from them?"

"Hold on a second. We don't—"

"I have no further questions or answers for this witness." Mr. Slade was on his way back to his chair before Maria closed her mouth.

Jeremy didn't know what to do. Luckily Maria gave him a sign that he should cross-examine. *I have to give her the chance to finish what she started to say.*

"You were about to say something about hell. Would you please continue?"

"What I was going to say to Mr. Slade is that we Christians don't and can't condemn anyone to hell. There may be people that issue a warning to others that they're in a fire zone, but no man has the power to condemn anyone to hell except himself or herself. The analogy that I'd use here is a car speeding down a road towards a river where the bridge is out. If someone tells them

that they're going to go for a midnight swim if they're not careful, would those people be condemning the occupants of the car to death? No. Just the opposite. They're giving them the chance to avoid death. And while I'm on the topic of hell, it has been conjectured a lot about what hell will be like. We all know the jokes about fire insurance. Many Christians have conjectured that just being absent from God would be hell. Some people think the flames are figurative speech. I've got my own idea. For some people hell will be a place of torment because they end up there because their high-powered brains refused to accept something that can be arrived at without being a member of MENSA. Their brains will be whirring nonstop as their teeth gnash at the same time out of the anger of knowing that multitudes of people they considered mental midgets discovered the truth, while they themselves walked right by it every day of their lives."

"Can you tell me why you think that so many people are willing to accept the idea that their life is a cosmic accident and has no intrinsic purpose?" asked Jeremy.

"Let me state this in terms readily understandable by both parents and children. Teenage rebellion. Lots of kids grow up thinking their father is a literal party pooper. All they see are the rules and the discipline. They don't see the love behind those things. Of course, in some families there is abuse, and the father doesn't have that love. So people refuse to be under the domination of another father, no matter how much he loves them. The easiest way to dismiss a father in that situation is to deny he exists. The easiest way to deny he exists is to find someone who'll offer up scientific evidence that he probably doesn't exist. Even Richard Dawkins doesn't rule out the existence of God totally. Evolution is the long sought after explanation which allowed mankind to run away from their father without fear and remorse. Thus this theory, wearing the cloak and name of science, has penetrated to the very core of our society and become the stealth religion which not only is allowed in the public schoolhouse but has been granted monopoly rights."

"What is the purpose of life?"

Maria looked down at her notebook. "For purpose of contrast, let me quote a leading evolutionist, William Provine. 'Let me summarize my views on what modern evolutionary biology tells us loud and clear – There are no gods, no purposes, no goal-directed forces of any kind. There is no life after death. When I die, I'm absolutely certain that I'm going to be dead. That's the end for me. There is no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning to

life, and no free will for humans, either.'

"How depressing can someone be? No wonder so many young people are taking their own lives. Why go through the hassle of life? Why struggle to survive? I shout to the heavens that he is wrong. We do have a purpose. And you can put this in terms even a young child can understand. Our life can be summed up in the analogy of a child's game – one probably every one here played – Hide and Seek. The goal of the game is simple – whoever is not 'it' hides and the person who is 'it' tries to find everybody. In this case everybody on Earth is 'it' and God is hiding. The creator could come to Earth on a daily basis and be a guest on Oprah or Dr. Phil or host his own show. He could ride in the Macy's parade every year. He could have manifested himself in a million ways so blatantly the hide and seek game would have been senseless. Albert Einstein once said that God is subtle, but not malicious. He hides and he waits for us to find him. He wants to be found, but he wants us to seek.

"And this game of hide and seek includes the elements of a scavenger hunt. He has placed clues to his hiding place all around us. The world of nature is chock full of them. Look at the cycle of waking and sleeping. Scientists don't know exactly why we sleep. Could it be a simulation of death and revival? The wonderful and intricate design of not just humans but also the plant and animal life around us all give testimony to their creator. Evolutionists come along and try to explain away the clues that God left for us to find him. They come up with a list of could haves, might haves, probably haves to overwhelmingly prove that their whistling in the wind is the symphony of truth. They follow the axiom 'when in doubt make it sound convincing'. Take a couple of cases from nature. How about the homing pigeon? God placed within us that same urge to find home. Some of us just choose to ignore the call. And my final example is the caterpillar. We all see the lowly caterpillar crawling along the sidewalks at a pace that makes you wonder how any of them survive at all. But survive they do and they weave themselves a cocoon and go into a death state. And then in the spring the tomb is opened and out comes a beautiful butterfly which has the capability of flying away from its bondage to the Earth. Is there any possibility that this is a creature sent to us by God to aid us in winning the game of hide and seek?

"Evolutionary science has stepped outside its realm to try to explain things that are not material in nature. Our free will and our emotions and logic and everything else along that line are explained as chemical reactions which have evolved because

they aided in survival. I say that's a crock of baloney. Our bodies are marvelous things, but they are not the purpose of life – they just support it. Our real life lies beyond those things that science can understand in material terms because they are not material. Music, art, and other creativity are all manifestations of that real life within us. They're all tangible intangibles which cry out for recognition. One last point: Evolutionary science has made it clear that this is a cold cruel world where only the fittest survive. There is no compassion in nature. How then do they explain love? If nature has no compassion, where did humans find this gift? It's extremely difficult to swallow the story that love is an illusion caused by our selfish genes wanting to be passed on to yet another generation. We all know how important gravity is to our existence. Without it there would be no life. Without love there would be no reason to exist. The Bible says that God is love. Look around and see the impact of love on the world. Is it possible that God has been here among us all these years just as invisible as gravity but even more vital to our existence?"

Jeremy sensed that Maria was done. Besides, their time was almost gone. He had seen the timer indicate that only ten minutes remained to them while Maria was answering this last question. "No further questions."

Mr. Slade returned to the mike. "As you can see from the last witness, this whole proceeding has clearly been shown to be religiously motivated. Thus, there is no need of us trying to further defend the sanctity of science by trying to refute ridiculous arguments which have no scientific merit. We rest our case."

"Very well, then. Miss Masterson, you can begin the closing arguments."

"Let me start my closing words by borrowing the wisdom of others who are much more qualified than I to speak on this matter. Winston Churchill said, 'Men occasionally stumble over the truth but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing has happened.'

"Leo Tolstoy, the famous author, said, 'Most men can seldom accept even the simplest and most obvious truth if it obliges them to admit the falsity of conclusions which they have delighted in explaining to colleagues, which they have proudly taught to others, and which they have woven thread by thread into the fabric of their lives.'

"Ernst Chain, Nobel Prize winner of 1945 in Medicine, said, 'To postulate that the development and survival of the fittest is entirely a consequence of chance mutations seems to me a

hypothesis based on no evidence and irreconcilable with the facts. These classical evolutionary theories are a gross oversimplification of an immense complex and intricate mass of facts and it amazes me that they're swallowed as uncritically and readily, and for such a long time, by so many scientists without a murmur of protest.'

"Paul Johnson said, 'The study of history is a powerful antidote to contemporary arrogance. It is humbling to discover how many of our glib assumptions, which seem to us novel and plausible, have been tested before, not once but many times and in innumerable guises; and discovered to be, at great human cost, wholly false.'

"Another famous person said, 'False facts are highly injurious to the progress of science, for they often endure long.' That man was Charles Darwin. If the theory that Darwin introduced to the world in 1859 was in error, then by his own words we see that science is being held back by evolutionary thought. Thus it is imperative that this issue be resolved – so that science can move forward.

"I think we have to ask ourselves what the purpose of education is. To get knowledge? Alfred Lord Tennyson said that knowledge comes but wisdom lingers. My father explained to me how much of his high school knowledge he had forgotten. He said what was important was learning how to think and how to research and how to determine truth. It seems the world of science is fighting tooth and claw to prevent any critical thinking about Darwin's theory to get a foot in the door.

"There is no empirical evidence that a one-celled creature sprang up from inanimate matter and then proceeded to evolve into a multi-celled creature which then evolved into a series of animals leading up to the crowing glory of evolution, Homo sapiens. Thus, this theory shouldn't be part of science. But let me read again from this booklet. We see how valid and relevant that disputed evidence is.

"'Progress in science consists of the development of better explanations for the causes of natural phenomena. Scientists can never be sure that a given explanation is complete and final. Some of the hypotheses advanced by scientists turn out to be incorrect when tested by further observations or experiments. Yet many scientific explanations have been so thoroughly tested and confirmed that they are held with great confidence. The theory of evolution is one of these well-established explanations.'

"So with one sweep of the pen, evolution is granted immunity

from challenge status among the scientific world because of the reliability of the testing done. I want to ask when an experiment confirmed that the human brain *could* evolve much less did evolve? Where was the experiment conducted where a lower life form was changed into a different form? Where was a cell created from inanimate matter? These and many other experiments and tests cannot be conducted or have been tried and failed. Arthur Keith, a leading evolutionist said this, 'Evolution is unproved and unprovable. We believe it only because the only alternative is special creation and that is unthinkable.'

"Francis Crick, one of cofounders of DNA, said, 'Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see wasn't designed, but rather evolved.' Is anyone seeing a pattern here? Does it take a rocket scientist to see that there is a discrepancy between what is being said by scientists and the propaganda machine? And more importantly the discrepancy between the scientific method and evidence involved? Does anyone see that Darwinism has indeed become a faith, something that has to be believed in and not a proven reality such as gravity? Of course, since the term 'evolution' can mean simply a bird with a bigger beak, they can state without dispute that evolution is true and let that definition carry out all the way to mankind by default. They use examples of the finch beaks and the bacteria mutations, but where do we see that a finch became a bat or a chicken or a chipmunk? Where do we hear about how a bacterium became an amoeba or a jellyfish? T. N. Tahmisian, a physicist from the Atomic Energy Commission, said "Scientists who go about teaching that evolution is a fact of life are great con men, and the story they are telling may be the greatest hoax ever."

"I could go on for days if we had time. We are not asking for much here. We have presented enough evidence to more than justify that request. Just tell the kids science class isn't an exercise in truth finding. It is, self-avowed, the exercise in finding a natural explanation for the world. Mr. Plunkett explained that very succinctly in the first testimony presented here today. We could have stopped right there and still had a good case. We have simply been laying all the cards on the table. By the very definition of the new scientific model, any evidence for God or any other designer would have to be discarded because it isn't in the realm of science. I'm only an eighteen-year-old naïve girl. To my mind there just seems to be something wrong and even dishonest about that approach. But at least let us have the honesty to acknowledge that the supernatural and all evidence thereof would

be outside the realm of science and that the facts being taught are the best explanations that scientists can find within that natural framework. That will give children the knowledge and the freedom to go shopping somewhere else for absolute truth – if they're in the market.

"Albert Einstein said that science without religion is lame, and religion without science is blind. It would be wonderful if the two parties could come back together as the team they should be.

"Then there are the words written by the incomparable William Shakespeare but quoted in that soul probing fashion by a famous philosopher, Grasshopper from the Kung Fu TV series. "Is not the truth, the truth?"

"The last thing that someone says often leaves the most vivid impression. I struggled hard to find the very best way to end. For the people who think that evolution and religion can coexist, digest this quote from Richard Bozarth, 'Atheism is science's natural ally. Atheism is the philosophy, both moral and ethical, most perfectly suited for a scientific civilization. If we work for the American Atheists today, atheism will be ready to fill the void of Christianity's demise when science and evolution triumph. Without a doubt humans and civilization are in sore need of the intellectual cleanness and mental health of atheism. Christianity has fought, still fights, and will fight science to the desperate end over evolution because evolution destroys utterly and finally the very reason Jesus' earthly life was supposedly made necessary. Destroy Adam and Eve and the original sin, and in the rubble you will find the sorry remains of the son of God. Take away the meaning of his death. If Jesus wasn't the redeemer who died for our sins, and this is what evolution means, then Christianity is nothing!"

"In case anyone had any questions why people of faith are standing up to fight this theory, I believe that quotation should make it crystal clear. Thank you."

Maria turned around and walked back to her chair.

A handful of kids stood up and begin to clap rhythmically. Others rose to join in until close to half of the audience was giving her a standing ovation. Mr. Slade walked up to the microphone and waited for the noise to subside.

"Ladies and gentlemen, girls and boys, what you have witnessed here is nothing new. Scenes like this have been played out in Dover, Pennsylvania, Kansas, Georgia and Louisiana. The same anti-evolution arguments have been recycled and trotted out like prize ponies. The result has been the same everywhere. In

Georgia they wanted to just put some stickers on the science books which read the following: 'This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully and critically considered.' That was ruled unconstitutional.

"In Dover the anti-evolution group wanted to declare this caveat: 'Because Darwin's theory is a theory, it is still being tested as new evidence is discovered. The Theory is not a fact. Gaps in the theory exist for which there is no evidence. A theory is defined as a well-tested explanation that unifies a broad range of observations.' This too was struck down by the judge. There is no legal precedent in the country for these religious challenges to be upheld.

"Again we could quote Kenneth Miller and Richard Dawkins and Steven Weinberg and other top scientists to prove how well Darwin's theory meets the full criteria of science to again refute the baseless arguments presented here today, but there is no sense wasting everyone's time. I'm sure the august body of the school board is wise enough to understand the implications of granting any special adjustments to the public education of students based on religious grounds. We trust this decision won't be a hard one to make, and although these children put up a valiant fight, they never had a legal leg to stand on. Thank you for your time."

The president of the school board approached the microphone. "The school board will be discussing this issue for no more than thirty minutes. At that time a vote will be taken, and we'll return with a decision. If you want to remain and hear our decision, you're more than welcome. Thank you for coming out and supporting Sumner education."

Jeremy tapped Maria on the shoulder. "I thought we were going to keep religion out of this."

Maria winced. "I was trying, but I just lost it. Those guys kept bringing it up and ticking me off. Sorry. I know I probably blew our case, but you know what, it felt good to say that stuff in public. I'm not ashamed of my God or my faith and maybe there was someone here today who needed to hear the comparison between eternal life and evolved life."

Jeremy sighed. "I'm glad it felt good for you. We'll know in a half hour how good it felt to the school board."



## Chapter 41

### The Decision

Jeremy turned to his father. "Dad, I'm so sorry. I—"

"Hold on, buster. I'm the one that needs to offer the apology. You were right, you know. If you hadn't stood your ground, well, I'd have stayed in the comfortable rut that I was in and never would have seen the light."

"But, Dad. I ignored your authority and—"

"Put a lid on it, Jeremy. You moved out of the house. You're only subject to my authority when you live under my roof. You're a man now, but I was hoping that you would consider moving back home again."

"And put myself under your authority again."

"I'm afraid so."

"Let me think about it for a while?"

"Sure."

"OK, that's long enough. If I can ride home with you and get my car, I'll go to Hacker's and get my stuff."

"But since we have our priorities in order, first we eat. OK?"

"I've done enough arguing for one day. I'll let you have your way on this one. Now I want to know how you and Maria worked this thing out on the witness stand. Why didn't you tell me?"

"What, you don't like surprises?"

"Yeah, but...gosh! What a surprise!"

"Maria and I got to know each other pretty well over the last couple of days. She really is worth fighting for."

Jeremy looked off to his other side before he answered. Maria was no longer there. "I know, Dad. She really is something. You know, we've got so much to catch up on."

"Yes we do. We'll get started as soon as this hearing is over. And for now, I need to go to the bathroom." He turned to his other side and said to Hacker, "Are your parents here?"

"Sure are." He pointed to a section of the bleachers.

"I see them. Thanks. I need to go thank them for being Jeremy's surrogate parents for the last few weeks. And thank you for being there for Jeremy when I was being such a jerk."

"No problem, Mr. D."

"Now if you gentlemen will excuse me, I have some unfinished business to attend to." He took about three steps away

from them and was halted by the imposing figure of Paul Bogue. "Hi, Paul."

Mr. Bogue didn't bother to greet him. "You just committed career suicide today, Mr. Benedict Arnold."

"Ready? You think I should start brushing up on my 'Would you like fries with that'? Benedict Arnold? So I'm a traitor?"

"That word works. A turncoat would be another good word."

"Wow. And what am I a traitor to, if you don't mind me asking?"

"To your profession. To science. To me."

"To you? You think because we have been friends for so many years that I have to think just like you do, or in this case – don't think? I don't consider myself a traitor to science but rather a whistleblower. As far as for my profession goes, I owe my students the truth, not what I want the truth to be or what I think the truth *might* be."

"A whistleblower? Don't flatter yourself."

"You think I'm blowing things out of proportion? Just stop to consider that most of the branches of science, if not all, are on the evolution bandwagon. They're putting the credibility of science on a perilous path. If the public on a broad scale ever finds out how flimsy the evidence is being accepted by scientists as the answer to life, and how that evidence is being dogmatically promoted, you might see a backlash of epic proportions. Society may never trust the scientific community again. You know how much scientists rely upon federal grants. The taxpayers might just insist that their money is spent more wisely than on websites for promoting evolution and science laboratories whose sole purpose is to provide real proof that evolution's a viable answer to all the questions. Emerson said, 'to thine own self be true.' I never really got it before. Now I understand exactly what he meant. I couldn't seal up my conscience and pretend I had never discovered this cancer inside of science. Even if it does mean professional suicide, I had to do it, for my own benefit and that of my son. And speaking of my son, if you try screwing with his grades because of his after school activities, you can safely assume I'm going to raise enough stink you'll think that hydrogen sulfide smells like a rose instead of rotten eggs."

Mr. Bogue reddened and stiffened at that last comment. "I can see that you have gone off the deep end. There is no point in discussing the topic with you. In fact there is no point discussing anything with you anymore."

"So that's the way the friendship ends, not with a bang but

with a whimper?" Mr. Bogue didn't answer but just walked away.

\* \* \*

Quite a few of the spectators had remained to hear the ruling by the school board. The concession stand was kept hopping since it was nearing the noon hour. Some hungry folks were still waiting in line when they heard a voice over the loudspeaker indicating that the school board had returned. Most abandoned their wish to stop the rumbling in their stomach and hurried back into the gym.

The school board president waited a minute for the crowd to settle down. Jeremy and the team settled back down into their seats.

"Thank you all for patiently waiting. We have voted and with only one dissenting vote have made our decision." He turned towards Maria. "We are not going to implement the disclaimer that you have requested." Maria's was braced for the decision. She took it stoically. The Dillon men looked at each other and shook their heads in dismay. The crowd started to buzz.

"Excuse me, if I might keep your attention for a little longer. I haven't finished yet. What we have voted to do is launch our own investigation of this matter." Another buzz went up. "You might say today was like a grand jury hearing. We have heard the evidence, and we think there is enough evidence to justify a further, careful investigation into the matter. We owe it to the students of this district to make sure that they're receiving the best education possible. If the allegations that science is pushing off on our children a bunch of half-baked theories prove to be true, we will take the necessary steps to adjust our curriculum. We realize that type of action will probably draw the attention and perhaps the mocking of the world to us, and no doubt we'll end up in a legal setting where a real judge will be presiding. We are prepared for that eventuality. Let me say one other thing here. We have done some preliminary study of these events around the country. In the Cobb County, Georgia case that Mr. Slade mentioned, we saw a judge rule that it was unconstitutional to put labels on books indicating that the contents needed to be carefully considered. Two thousand parents complained about the teaching of evolution as fact. Five parents complained about the labels. The judge's ruling was this:" He read from a notebook in front of him.

"By adopting this specific language, even if at the direction of counsel, the Cobb County School Board appears to have sided

with these religiously motivated individuals. The sticker sends a message that the school board agrees with the beliefs of Christian fundamentalists and creationists. The school board has effectively improperly entangled itself with religion by appearing to take a position. Therefore, the sticker must be removed from all of the textbooks into which it has been placed."

"Now let me quote from the constitution's first amendment on which the judge based this decision. 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.' First of all, a school board is not Congress. Second of all, what religion was being established in the case of warning stickers? And I have to ask the question if the judge is actually ignoring the second part of that statement about prohibiting the free exercise thereof. I've watched our judicial system make decisions that make me shudder. For example, the lady who was awarded a large amount of money from McDonald's because she spilled hot coffee in her lap and McDonald's hadn't expressly warned her that the coffee was hot and thus were negligible. The ruling of this judge seems to be another case of common sense being lost from our courts. If something is unconstitutional because people who profess religion want it, then will we be throwing out laws against stealing and killing and cheating people next?

"The question at stake for our school district isn't about religion. The question we need to answer is whether evolution is science or science fiction. In regard to court decisions, we'll handle that when we come to it. We used to having smoking and non-smoking sections in the restaurants. Perhaps the best way to handle this situation is to have evolution and evolution-free classes. So starting second semester we'll offer both. Parents can choose which flavor of biology they want their kids exposed to. I'm sure that will satisfy the parents of those who don't agree with Mr. Darwin. Whether that will appease the supporters of evolution remains to be seen.

"And one last comment for Mr. Slade. We're well aware that the ACLU will be right in the middle of the fray if this goes to court, as they always seem to be. I just suggest that next time they send in their A team. Also I have a quotation from Mark Twain for you. "Lawyers are like other people – fools on the average; but it is easier for an ass to succeed in that trade than any other.""

The crowd roared their appreciation at this shot. The speaker had to wait for the noise to die down to continue. "I'd advise you parents and students to do your own research on this topic. This

meeting is history."

The gymnasium interrupted into a hundred conversations. Jeremy was stunned. Had they won? Their goal wasn't met, but it seemed the outcome was better than they asked for. He didn't know which way to turn, to Maria's side or his father's. He glanced down at Maria. She appeared to be praying. He turned to his father. The two stood up and performed their family armshake. "Love you, Jeremy."

"Love you too, Dad!" Now it did seem like he had been victorious.

His father said, "There's somebody I want to talk to. I'll be right back."

Jeremy high-fived the other guys on the team as they prepared to make their exits.

Maria was waiting for him. She reached out for a hug, and he obliged her.

"Why didn't we think of that?" asked Maria. "It was brilliant."

"You mean the two flavors of biology decision?"

"Exactly. By the way, you did a great job out there, Preppie."

"Ditto. You were the star of the show. Hey, why you calling me Preppie? I didn't step out of line, did I? You asked for the hug."

She laughed. "No, you didn't. Maybe I just miss calling you that. Maybe I wish you would step out of line."

"What are you saying?"

"You're a bright boy. Figure it out for yourself. You're getting pretty good at that."

Jeremy stared at her for a minute. Her eyes were smiling as much as her mouth. "I don't know. It almost sounds like you're encouraging me to ask you for a date."

"Well, if it looks like a duck, and it sounds like a duck." They were both silent. Jeremy's thoughts were running wild. Finally, Maria ended all his doubts about her meaning. She quacked, and they both dissolved into laughter.

"Oh no. Oh no!" Jeremy seemed to be close to panic.

"What? Don't tell me you changed your mind, and you don't like me anymore."

"Far from it, but we still have a little problem. You don't date non-believers."

The smile eroded from her face into a pensive look. "I figure, Jeremy, that you're already a believer. You just haven't totally surrendered yet."

"Maybe. But until I do, you have to know that I've decided to research Christianity the same way that I've researched evolution.

We uncovered some things about science that need to be corrected. In my brief introduction to religion, I see some things that maybe fall into that same category. I can't live by sweeping things under the carpet and pretending I don't see them. I have to know for sure. And until that time, I don't want to give you false hopes."

"OK. I understand. I have full confidence that you will find the right answers."

"Would you be willing to search with me, knowing I might throw some negative light on some of your sacred cows, so to speak?"

"I think I could do that. Just one word of warning, sometimes you can't find truth with your mind or your senses. Sometimes God's Spirit communicates with our spirit."

"Now those are the kind of things that I need to explore and hopefully to experience. But I can't ask you to put your social life on hold waiting for me."

"You don't have to ask. I'm waiting already."

"Wow. Speaking of waiting, my dad is waiting for me to go to lunch with him."

"I know. In fact, we'll be there too."

"We?"

"My mother and I. You see your dad and my mom have also been talking over the last couple of days. He has asked us to join you guys at the Olive Garden. Let's go."

They grabbed all of their belongings and headed towards the bleachers where Maria knew her mother was sitting.

They ran into Mr. Plunkett and Mr. Slade.

Mr. Slade started the conversation. "You know this isn't over yet. You might, and I accent the word "might", have won this skirmish, but you're going to lose the war."

"Of course I know it isn't over. But I think you're in left field as far as the war is concerned. The side that has the truth is the winner no matter what the outcome of the battle is. And I already know where the truth lies. Hope you enjoyed your stay in Sumner. God bless." She turned and walked away.

They didn't reach the bleachers before they were interrupted again. This time it was Stevie Knight, one of the students who had sat on the sidelines with Mr. Bogue and his representatives. "Maria, wait a second. I need to say something."

She and Jeremy halted. "Sure."

"Maria, I don't know quite how to say this. I did a bad thing."

"Stevie, just because you stood up for what you believed in

doesn't make it a bad thing."

"I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the note on your locker and windshield."

Jeremy suddenly began paying more attention.

"I was the one who did that. I'm so sorry. I just kind of lost it. Science has been my retreat from the world of bullies and you were threatening my sanctuary. I had no desire to hurt you, but I just wanted to make sure you didn't mess things up."

Jeremy was getting ready to let Stevie have a big piece of his mind and maybe his fist, when Maria stopped him in his tracks. She gave Stevie a big hug and said, "Oh, Stevie, I forgive you."

Stevie was definitely embarrassed, first by his confession and now by a hug from the girl he'd tried to intimidate.

"I did a lot of thinking out there today. I see that you talk about facts, most of the time, whereas our side seems to attack the people and religion and to shy away from the evidence. There's something the matter with that picture. I definitely will be doing more research into this matter."

"That's all we can ask people to do, Stevie. We all have to make these kinds of decisions for ourselves. It really is nice to base those decisions on facts and not on secondhand opinions from those around us. "

"I'll let you guys go. Thanks for being so understanding."

"Bye, Stevie."

Maria and Jeremy continued their journey. "How can you forgive him so easily?"

"Jeremy, it seems in this search we are going to do for religious truth, the first thing you need to get a handle on is forgiveness. It is the glue that holds Christianity together."

Their conversation was interrupted again by a swarm of classmates who came up en masse to congratulate them. It was amazing how many people were still in the gym carrying on animated conversations, probably about the outcome of the proceedings. Jeremy felt someone pull on his arm. He turned around figuring to see another congratulatory schoolmate. He was wrong. It was the basketball coach.

"Fine performance out there today, Jeremy."

"Ready, Coach. Did I shoot a good percentage?"

"Very good. Anyway, you remember the conversation we had before the season?"

"How could I forget it?"

"Well, I'm asking you to right now. I was getting some pressure to lean on you from some of the higher-ups, if you know

what I mean. I have a feeling after the school board decision just a minute ago, that pressure is going to be nonexistent. I was hoping you'd join us. We still have a lot of the season left."

"Gosh! I don't know. This is just so sudden. I'll need to think about it."

"No problem. I'm not going anywhere. Just let me know what you come up with. And no matter what you decide, I think you made a gutsy decision to fight for what you thought was right. If I'd had your guts, I never would have had that discussion with you earlier because I'd have told certain people what they could do with their manipulative influence."

"Well, to tell you the truth, it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. I don't think I could have pulled off all the research and work and basketball too."

"I'm not quite so sorry then. Well, it appears that your research is over so perhaps you can fit us into your busy schedule."

"I'll give it some serious consideration, Coach. Thanks for the opportunity."

Jeremy rescued Maria from her group of admirers and then started their journey to the bleachers again. "I saw you talking to the basketball coach. What did he have to say?"

"You'll never guess."

"He wants you back on the team?"

"Never say never. You got it."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I wanted to find out what you thought before I decided."

"Ready? You're putting a lot of trust in me, Preppie."

"Yes, I guess I do put a lot of trust in you."

"I'm not sure I want that responsibility. My gut reaction is to say go where your heart leads you."

"As opposed to my stomach? Let's get out to Olive Garden. I could eat a—"

"Horse."

"Ehhhhh. Wrong! Thanks for playing, Miss finish my sentences."

"You mean Miss finish your clichés."

"Whatever. What I was going to say, before I was rudely interrupted, is I could eat an elephant."

"I hope they take the tusks off first."

Mr. Dillon and Mrs. Masterson apparently had spotted the kids coming towards them and met them halfway. Mrs. Masterson



gave Maria her keys. "Here you go, kiddo. Why don't you and Jeremy meet us out there?" She and Jeremy's dad walked away, carrying on an animated conversation.

Jeremy stared after them. He couldn't help but wonder if his dad had made some comment about how hungry he was, and Mrs. M. had finished his cliché for him. It was impossible not to think about his dad and Maria's mom getting seriously attached. *How weird would that be? Maria would be my stepsister if those two got married. That would no doubt kill any relationship between Maria and me. How could I be in love with my sister?*

"Well, Preppie. Were you daydreaming about the tusks?"

"I was just thinking, well, never mind."

"Ahh. He doesn't want to talk about it. Must be thinking about how bizarre it is for our parents to be interested in each other."

"How did you know that?"

"What do you suppose I've been thinking about?"

"Yeah. I guess it is just as weird for you as it is for me, except you've known about it for a little while. I just found out."

"Don't worry about anything serious developing soon. My mother is still in mourning and won't be ready for a romantic relationship for a while. She does need a friend though. Hey, let's get out of here. My appetite is reaching Herculean proportions. However, I'm trying to watch my figure so I'll pass on the elephant today." Maria took off walking at a brisk pace, and Jeremy had to run to catch up.

"Hey, Maria. I've gotta know one thing."

"And that is?"

"Is this the end of your crusade against Darwinism at Sumner High? Will the next chapter wait until college?"

"There are still a couple of things I want to accomplish before college. I want to start up a high school group of SST. And I'm networking with my friends to start similar groups in their high schools. I figure that we can establish chapters all across the country. Then these people will be ready to start a chapter at their college when they get there."

"You've got everything all planned out."

"Not everything. A saying I really like goes "work as though everything depends on you and pray as if everything depends on God.""

"You realize this could be a lifetime battle?"

"It could be. I'm mentally geared for the possibility."

"Well I better fasten my seat belt then."

"Why?"

"Cause you aren't going anywhere without me."

"I'm sorry to have to contradict you, Preppie, but that won't be the case. I'm going to go into the women's restroom right now, and if you know what's good for you, I'll be going alone."

Jeremy stood in the lobby and looked back on this magical day, which seemed to have begun so long ago. It was unbelievable. He got his father back and was moving home. His team had perhaps won a far larger concession than they had asked for. He had a chance to get back on the basketball team. And most important of all, the girl he loved had finally consented to date him. This must be what they refer to a red-letter day. He was still mulling over how lucky he was when Maria appeared at his side.

"Penny for your thoughts, oh man of deep meditation."

"Life. What funny twists and turns and surprises it has."

"Yeah. It certainly does that. A few months ago I was desolated about my father. Today I'm so happy I can barely remember the pain of that experience."

"I know exactly what you mean."

"But it could twist again tomorrow the other way. I don't know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future."

"And that brings back the painful reminder that I still haven't figured that out yet."

"I have no worries in that arena, Jeremy. The man who seeks the Lord with an open heart and mind will find him."

Jeremy sighed. "I hope you're right. The search commences right now. Oh, man!"

"What's the matter?"

"I just remembered my job. I work every Sunday. I'm going to have to quit so I can take you to church!"

"It's a date!"

Jeremy held up two fingers from each hand. "I'm sorry, Maria. I don't quote-unquote *date*."

They looked at each other for a second and then both dissolved into laughter. Maria recovered first. "How about we lighten up a little. We've been doing too much serious thinking lately. Let's chill out and be more kid-like, at least for a couple of hours. Race you to the car."

She sprinted away. Jeremy caught up with her before she reached the car, but slowed to match her pace. They arrived together, both gasping due to the shortness of breath made worse by their laughter. After recovering the twosome climbed into the vehicle. Maria flipped on the CD and turned up the volume as she

pointed her car toward their destination. As the catchy music began, she reached over and messed up Jeremy's hair.

"I've wanted to do that for a *long* time!" As the lyrics started she began singing along loudly, drowning out Jeremy's protests of the drive by hair fluffing. Finally, he quit whining and sang along.

*"All the colors of the rainbow*

*All the voices of the wind*

*Every dream that reaches out*

*That reaches out to find where love begins.*

*Every word of every story*

*Every star in every sky*

*Every corner of creation lives to testify.*

*For as long as I shall live*

*I will testify to love.*

*I'll be a witness in the silences when words are not enough.*

*With every breath I take*

*I will give thanks to God above.*

*For as long as I shall live I will testify to love."*

