

The image is a vertical composition. The top portion shows a group of about seven people in silhouette, walking away from the viewer down a long, brightly lit tunnel. The walls of the tunnel are textured and appear to have some light-colored residue or graffiti. The bottom portion shows a dark silhouette of a human head in profile, facing right. Inside the head, a bright, glowing, pinkish-white cloud-like shape represents the brain. The background behind the head is a dark, swirling, ethereal pattern. The word 'SALLY' is centered in the middle of the image, overlapping both the tunnel and the head.

SALLY

SCOTT CHRISTOPHER SHUMAN

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Introduction

Hours passed and Sally was only halfway through the questions. She hadn't been able to answer any of the questions outright. She knew they would require some hard-nose investigating, as well as some forceful petitioning. The questions were brilliant actually. She had to remind herself not to disrespect these questions by trying to answer them too prematurely, or even too emotionally. As she continued to jot down notes, other questions, questions other than the ones she was working on, began to make their way into her mind.

At first, she did her best to try to make these questions go away, but they wouldn't disperse. They seemed captivating, full of promise, like grains of sand about to become pearls. She had no problem with pearls, but not now she thought. Now she would need to force herself to concentrate on the questions at hand. Twenty minutes passed before Sally put her pen down, stood up, and stretched. As soon as she began stretching, some of the earlier questions, the ones she tried to ignore, surfaced. She needed to cast these thoughts aside so that they would not interrupt her current reasoning. She walked over to the window, and trying to place her mind elsewhere, stared out into the night sky.

The moon was hard to miss. It was a crystal clear night. Hindering her view of the stars were a few straggling branches that made their way over from the neighbor's yard. It was awesome, she thought, staring at the same stars that people on the other side of the world stare at. Annoyed by the branches, Sally took a step to her left to try to get an unobstructed view. She then casually looked to the East, past the vacant lot beside her house and up through the hills. She then wondered if behind those hills lay the answers to the questions she had held so dear. She looked up at the stars, and then out past the night. Some of the stars, she imagined, were glimmering as if without a care. And then she had a thought.

* * *

The last nine weeks had sent Sally into a mental and emotional tailspin. The last two of those nine weeks she had spent overseas, in France, an invitee to one of the most prestigious intelligence agencies in the world. It was a trial run for Sally so that she could get her feet wet and explore whether this was truly the right direction for her life. Everyone she was close to thought this would be a great opportunity, but Sally had her doubts.

She was now back home, in her room, comfortable around her surroundings. But she couldn't lie to herself; the incentives and questions that lingered in her mind haunted her. It wasn't so much what she had experienced in France as it was what she thought was possible. The agency discovered that Sally possessed a certain thought pattern, a declaring vision that could stop any rational thinker dead in his tracks. It was also because Sally desired to excel that she would actually torment herself in an effort to become that rational thinker. She knew deep down that the situations she saw and the people she met were a composite lifestyle of what she had been created for, but at the same time, she was unsure of how to settle down into this dissimilar lifestyle.

Back at home in Vermont things were easier. She had a simple life living with her mother and attending a private Christian College. Happy people, familiar arrangements, and a solid place to grow helped her feel at ease. Sally was smart, in fact, too smart. When she was seven years old, she had passed the middle school boards to become the youngest high school freshman in the country. It lasted about two hours. After jeers and chuckles from her classmates, many twice her age, Sally decided it was time to go back to her peers and even, if need be, play dumb.

Growing up, Sally adopted a quiet disposition and an authentic personality that gave the impression of integrity; qualities that also made her extremely easy to get along with. When Sally did finally graduate from high school, she didn't pick a popular Ivy League school

or even a sun-drenched California school to attend; instead, she chose Gladdale, a local church school in Harmonyville, Vermont. Sally's deepest desire was to become an elementary school teacher. She wanted to watch happiness bloom all around her. But an internal gifting and a nagging fear told her that this modest dream would never become reality.

PART 1

Getting Nervous

Chapter 1

Nine weeks earlier...

Sally held up her hand so she could see her nails clearly against the glimmer coming through the morning window. No, Sally thought, not too pleasant, not too pleasant at all. The purple nail polish would have done better. Oh well, I'll just have to find the right shoes.

Heading over to the closet, she heard the doorbell ring.

"Come in Clair."

Clair came over early to carpool. It was a routine they participated in at least once a week, as long as their schedules permitted. Doing this for over a year had created an almost sister-like bond between them.

"Hurry up, we're going to be late!"

"Clair, don't rush me," Sally shouted, "If you rush me, I'm going to forget something."

"That might be a good thing, Sally-girl."

Clair knew of Sally's single-mindedness, her obsessive habit of trying to align everything. Clair, in a loving way, would sometimes give her a hard time about it.

"What's that supposed to mean, 'that might be a good thing?'"

Finally making her way through the upstairs hallway and into Sally's bedroom, Clair replies in a slight yet authoritative tone, "It means Sally-girl, that you're more tightly wound than Bruce Springsteen's guitar."

Sally gushes, "What, I am not."

"Come on, you double check and single check and triple check just to make sure you've done all your checking."

She exhales, "I'm not that bad."

"Sally," Clair approaches her calmly, "You're the worst person I know. But that's what makes you so adorable."

"Is that what it does Clair, makes me adorable?"

"Yeah, and smart too. Maybe I should start double checking and..."

Sally laughs as she grabs Clair's arm and dashes out the bedroom door. It was Friday morning, and they both needed to be in class early today. It was actually funny the way Clair and Sally got along, and there was much more to it than that. They had known each other for only a year, but by the way they acted together, you would have thought that they had known each other their entire lives. They had an intuition, a sixth sense about each other that made them inseparable from the start. Clair just so happened to be an out-of-state transfer student from Arizona State University. She came to Gladdale as a junior, and was now headed into her senior year. A professor had actually arranged that Sally, a freshman, and Clair, a junior, meet. This meeting, which seemed both logical and realistic at the time, turned out to be divine.

Although Sally was greatly gifted, she needed a mature friend as well as a social outlet besides school. Clair simply needed Christian development. When students saw that Clair, a popular transfer student, was willing to make time and energy for Sally, they believed it spoke volumes about her character. Sally was thankful for all the time she and Clair were able to spend together.

Clair was different from the other people Sally had meet; she was confident, sure of herself. She had not come from a Christian home, and her ways, including her frame of mind, seemed a bit hysterical to Sally. But Sally was absolutely drawn to Clair, whom she considered a real and original person. If Clair said something, she meant it, and she never hid anything from anybody. She was the real deal, and sometimes this personality trait intimidated and even frightened some of the students at Gladdale. Sally saw it as raw character, and she didn't fight it; she went with it.

Once on campus, Sally and Clair would go their separate ways: Clair to her class and Sally to hers.

They would meet up later for lunch if their schedules permitted. The afternoon would be for class, relaxation, or study at the library. This was their daily Gladdale routine before meeting up again for the drive home.

Sally offered Clair a quick goodbye and made her way to her first class, Christian Thought with Dr. Tom Hutchinson. It turned out that Clair's fears were accurate: all of Sally's double-checking had indeed made her late, and as she approached her classroom, she could hear the discussion zealously underway.

"One moment," Dr. Hutchinson puts up his hand, "...one moment, what are you trying to say, Mr. Garret?"

"Only that Paul was one hundred percent right. Mark was going to slow Paul and Barnabas down and this would have hindered the Gospel and consequently the work of God."

"Yes," Dr. Hutchinson agrees, "...this is obvious from the scripture in Acts 15, but you are forgetting about Acts 4 verse 36. Barnabas was an encourager, and he felt it his duty to lift up and encourage his fellow brethren rather than dismiss them for past failures."

"But at what price?" Neaven interrupted.

"Are you referring to the price of the Gospel?" Dr. Hutchinson interjects.

"Exactly," Neaven affirms.

Dr. Hutchinson continues, "The only price to be paid here was the cost that Paul counted? Would it have been wiser for Paul to ignore the past and to wholeheartedly accept Mark into his ministry when he knew Mark had been inconsistent in the past, or was Paul wiser to cast Mark off as a quote 'casualty of war' and be determined to allow Mark to learn his lessons the hard way? Even Paul in his writings to the Corinthians warned how we should be merciful and patient with the weak brothers so as not to damage their weak conscience. Was Paul ignoring his own advice? This entire situation is intensely interesting, but unfortunately, the Bible offers no further revelation regarding Paul's choice, accept to help us understand that Mark eventually became

useful to Paul, but once again, was this a result of Barnabas' encouragement or the result of Paul's allowing Mark to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling?" He shakes his head as he addresses the classroom with unwavering eyes, "I'm afraid we'll never know."

Neaven looked up as if he weren't satisfied with the close of the argument, but he wasn't about to rebut it. Dr. Hutchinson had thoroughly earned his respect regarding ventured opinions. Although currently teaching at a private Christian College, he had the political pull and a résumé that would impress anybody.

He received his undergraduate degree from Harvard, and then went on to receive two master's degrees, in theology and applied theology. Both of these he earned at the University of Oxford. He then returned to Harvard for his doctorate in theology. What's more, between receiving his master's degrees and his PhD, he was able to publish two of his four thought-provoking books, including the enormously popular *The Fundamentals of Christian Thought*.

Owing to the success of this book, doors opened for Dr. Hutchinson. He traveled the world ministering to both political and religious leaders on the fundamentals of Christian thought as well as on its value to a secure sociological and national economical structure. Throughout his ministering tour of duty, which lasted some thirty years, Dr. Hutchinson found the time to teach at more than five different universities; Gladdale being his most recent.

Dr. Hutchinson had particular beliefs, one of them being that a strong nation would be the result of a nation committed to the Christian train of thought. Dr. Hutchinson was successful because his method was to instruct in relation to what existed within the leaders already, and not in relation to what didn't exist. He looked for a common ground to work with, a common ground that would offer the leaders a place to begin and would eventually become a focal point for the leaders' relationship with truth to bloom. Nations were affected because Dr. Hutchinson understood it was the motivations of the heart, and not necessarily the wisdom of the mind,

that truth would counter. Dr. Hutchinson sought to challenge those motivations in an effort to establish a working model so that the leaders could see their own progress as well as their own need for the truth to become established in their lives. He became enormously successful, and the peace and contentment that followed his work were invariably noticed.

Some questioned why Dr. Hutchinson, with his experience and fortitude, would choose a small university like Gladdale. Some said he was just a fool for Vermont; others guessed he chose Gladdale so he could quietly bury himself in personal Bible study before meeting the one he had taught and studied all of his life. It was poetic, but it was reasonable that a man who had influenced and challenged so many lives would now seek to spend the rest of his days encouraging young people to worship not only the God of their minds but more important, the God of their hearts.

"The most important thing to remember," Dr. Hutchinson continued, "about the New Testament and about the Gospels is that seldom is there a failure or a deliberate mistake." Finding Neaven's eyes, he went on, "The ones that are obvious stand out and cannot be ignored, and the ones for us to dissect and learn from will consequently be intermingled with our faith so there becomes no 'price' to pay. God doesn't want us paying prices, He wants us learning and growing closer to Him. The sooner you understand this aspect of God, the sooner you will learn of the faith walk instead of the self walk."

It didn't have to be emphasized because the words were powerful. Dr. Hutchinson's delivery was indeed authoritative but never meant to scar or control his listeners, only to instruct them. Sally sat motionless. As far as she was concerned, it didn't matter what Dr. Hutchinson had attained or what his past was, it wasn't possible for a man to speak those words without being very personal with the one of whom he spoke. Dr. Hutchinson was not only a brilliant and learned man, he was also authentic and wise within his learning. Sally constantly wondered what she would learn from future conversations with this man.

"Students," Dr. Hutchinson's voice echoed as he placed his glasses on his desk, "I want you to gradually refresh yourselves with both the missions and intensions of Paul and Silas as they departed from Antioch. Now that the Jerusalem council had determined leniency and grace through the Jerusalem decree, what do you believe these prophets' mindsets were as they entered a mission field full of religious proselytes? I expect some challenging and scriptural questions regarding Paul's wrestling with his own religious past as well as how Paul's wrestling would translate into some burdensome ministering. Remember students, we don't learn anything by letting other people think for us; let us do the thinking ourselves. Class dismissed."

Most of the students immediately jumped from their seats, but Sally and a few others remained seated for a few moments. They wanted the spirit of Dr. Hutchinson's words to sink in. They wanted to get everything out of his words, allowing the words to veer in and out of the uninterested and into the consciousness of the interested. As she sat, she felt not only an overwhelming sense of peace but also a feeling of surrender; it was as if Dr. Hutchinson's words were okay because they could be trusted. In a world full of unsympathetic and unreasonable voices, these words were piercing yet comforting.

These moments after the discussions were like sweet desserts served only to those open enough to receive them. It was dessert time for Sally and a few others, and they weren't going to move until they got every last morsel.

"Sally ... Sally!"

Sally's train of thought was shattered.

"Sally!"

"Yeah!" Sally shouts back as she makes eye contact with Neaven.

Neaven was looking deeply at Sally as though he might have to attempt CPR, "Let's go, I'm hungry."

"Ok, give me a minute."

"Wow..." Sally exhaled as she took her things and placed them into her backpack, "Can you believe the

strength in Dr. Hutchinson's last argument? It was so, so ..."

"Directed right toward me," Neaven completed. "Yeah, Sally, I can believe it." Neaven then looked in both directions before speaking in a hushed tone.

"Sally, we all know Dr. Hutchinson is a great professor and a noble mind, but you must remember he wouldn't have much respect for us as students if we didn't challenge or question certain viewpoints, even if those viewpoints are his own."

Sally had heard it all before, and too many times from Neaven himself. "But how exactly should we challenge, Neaven?" She implores as she stands up, heading for the door.

"With authority," Neaven says reassuring himself, "based on fundamental reason."

As the two stride toward the food court, Sally remarks, "But I don't totally agree with you, Neaven."

"What don't you totally agree with?"

"About how you question," Sally says turning toward him. "You are right, Neaven, it is our job as students to challenge all the professors and faculty with our viewpoints, but it is also our job to know when and when not to challenge them. If we challenge them in the wrong situations, then we are questioning them with the wrong spirit, and then it doesn't matter that we are involved in Christian Thought discussion courses; we will be out of place."

Neaven, challenged by Sally's rebuke, counters, "Is that why you never say anything in class, Sally; you just haven't sensed your perfect timing?"

Sally turns away from Neaven. "Don't be a jerk, I know when to keep my mouth shut, and I also know when to open it, and you need to learn when to shut it."

"Well, right now I'm going to open it ... I'll take two cheeseburgers with an order of fries and an extra large chocolate milkshake." Then turning toward Sally, "And what would her Royal Highness like?"

Sally, absorbing Neaven's sarcasm, unleashes it back, "Well, since you're buying, I'll take a number 4; hold the onions."

Neaven smiles toward the attendant, "She'll have a number 4; make extremely sure you hold the onions."

The two take their trays and head outside toward the recreational eating area. The surroundings are beautiful. The young autumn winds are blowing through the trees, allowing a mild sunshine to peek through the transparent leaves. The wind is a bit chilled at the moment, but not so cold as to warrant a heavy jacket or overcoat. Students are playing Frisbee, and many are just relaxing on the forest-style lawn. The tables, more than a hundred, gently invite the students to sit and lounge at their leisure.

The food court and its playfulness is adjacent to the library and its seriousness. While some students are inside, studying and cramming for their next exam, others are outside, eating and enjoying themselves in the autumnal sunshine.

"Let's sit over here," Neaven suggests. "The outside area of the court is nicer than the inside area."

"I agree," Sally replies.

The two set down their trays on a concrete table that is as weather beaten as it is inviting. Sally purposely takes the inside of the table, making sure all the excitement of the food court is at her back. Neaven happily approaches the outside of the table and before sitting down, eyeballs a few of the passers by, sucking some of the excitement into his spirit. Refreshed by his surroundings, he sits down and pleasantly thanks God for their food. They both began to eat.

"Sally, don't get me wrong," Neaven introduces the conversation again. "I respect you greatly, you just have something deep about you that draws people in and makes them interested in what you have to say. It's just that I guess people can't always see or understand who or what you see, so it makes us guess about you. Don't get me wrong Sally, it's not like this issue keeps me up nights or anything."

Sally smirks.

Neaven continues, "But it's obvious to many of us who actually care about God's purposes, beyond a degree, I mean, that you have a special calling."

Sally looks at Neaven trying to understand exactly what he is trying to say.

"And we just sometimes wonder if you are too delicate or shy about your gifts. Doesn't the Bible say to stir up your gifts?"

Sally looks at Neaven, waiting for him to finish his observation.

"Just like today, in Dr. Hutchinson's class, you are the only person who could've held a candle to his wisdom or insight. He is almost challenging all of us to rise to his level. If you are the closest to his level, then why do you just stay silent?" Neaven, moving his face and torso farther from Sally, as if he had violated her space, continues. "Sally, don't think I take this personally, I really don't care if Dr. Hutchinson puts me in my place. As far as I'm concerned, I'll have my time as the student and then as the teacher as well; but Sally, you're short-changing yourself."

Sally turns her face away, and Neaven notices she looks a bit conflicted. He goes on, "I mean, you have one of the greatest theological professors in the world ready to spar with you, and you don't even step into the ring. Don't you know how strong you can get; don't you know how strong all of us can get?"

Sally is now listening, realistically.

"Just tell me how you feel, and I will accept it, I don't want to judge you, Sally; I just want to understand you."

Sally takes a few deep breaths as she sips her soda one last time. She knows Neaven has just made some sense, and she is humble enough to realize any imperfections either he or others have seen in her. She speaks the truth, "Neaven, you're sweet. You willing to have this conversation with me means that you care about me, so I do appreciate your questions. I also realize this discussion is not for your benefit or for the benefit of the other classmates. I actually think you enjoy Dr. Hutchinson putting you in your place." They both laugh. Sally continues, "Regarding why I don't 'spar' with Dr. Hutchinson, I don't know. I can tell you this. The Bible is clear that a woman is not to have the authority over a man or to have a teaching role separate

from her own home. Sometimes in class I just don't know what my role is. Am I a student in a submissive place to learn, or am I a student in a place to challenge the authority and integrity of the instructors who are teaching me?"

"But Sally," Neaven interrupts, "you have the gifts, you have the insight."

"Gifts I don't fully understand. Neaven, it's not only the gifts that are important but also the way we use them. I just don't know how to use my gifts without being in a position of authority over someone. It's hard, but right now that is my major impasse."

"So," Neaven reasons, "you're basically saying that if you were a man it wouldn't be a problem?"

Sally counters, "I am saying that if I were a man I wouldn't have to wrestle with this issue. Of course there would still be questions and problems, and there would still be a lot to learn, but this hindrance would not be burdensome to me. Yes, right now the major thing holding me back is that I am a woman."

The two sit for a moment. Even the air itself seemed to have taken a break. It wasn't easy for either of them to have this kind of conversation. Neaven didn't like to peer into Sally, and Sally didn't like to ask herself questions she didn't have the answers to. Sally took a bite of her hamburger as though she were agitated. Neaven noticed.

"Sally."

Sally didn't want to hear it.

Neaven fought past it, "I know what we should do. We should talk to Dr. Hutchinson about this."

Sally set her eyes upon Neaven, emptying her frustration.

Neaven continued cautiously, feeling Sally's spirit, "I know that you may not be turned on to this idea right now because of your state of mind, but I think that I can see this thing from the outside looking in."

Sally looks at him softer.

"We go to Dr. Hutchinson, and we basically explain your situation to him. If you want, you can bring support, whoever you want, just to help you out, but I

really believe that God will use this situation to give you insight into what you should do."

Sally was holding back but looking a bit more hopeful.

"Sally, you have been wrestling with this issue for quite some time. You basically don't know what to do. Let's allow God to work through others, including Dr. Hutchinson, to bring you closer to where you need to be."

Sally took a deep breath.

"I know that this is just the beginning," Neaven went on, "and that this might take some time, but I think we can both come to the common ground that something needs to change, and maybe God provided an excellent professor like Dr. Hutchinson because he knew of a 19-year-old girl who would one day desperately need this kind of assistance."

Sally smiles at his charm.

"And maybe, just maybe it was God's plan all along to have Dr. Hutchinson intercede, to help you figure out how to use your gifts most effectively for His glory."

Sally was surprised to admit it, but Neaven was making a lot of sense. All of her life she had a special biblical talent for understanding the Bible's wisdom and insight. Was it now merely a coincidence that one of the greatest theological thinkers just happened to be living and teaching in her home state of Vermont, and that he was her professor in one of the most sophisticated and intellectually challenging university courses she had ever taken?

Sally didn't think so. She was tickled pink as she thought on Neaven's faith; God was doing something. He was working behind the scenes to establish His perfect will and to bring about a perfect wisdom. Neaven noticed that his words had affected Sally. Sally looked up at Neaven as if it was time to leave. As the two left the table, the wind began to swirl at their backs.

Chapter 2

He enjoyed feeding the birds. It was the part of the day when he didn't have to worry about anyone trying to invade his persona or trying to defuse his role as a prominent professor. Birds just wanted seed, and lots of it. As Dr. Hutchinson stood over his balcony and gazed into the distance, he could watch the River West flow from her banks and disintegrate into the Lake Townshend recreational dam area. The view was immaculate. Dr. Hutchinson enjoyed spending as much time as he could absorbing this view as well as the scenery that lie just beyond his balcony window. This was his place of solace, his place of rest. Save any prayer that he might have participated in during the day, this balcony was the next closest thing to paradise.

After a long day of work, preparing materials, teaching, and then following up with course work, Dr. Hutchinson would anticipate this view from the back of his home. Oh, there was always plenty of work for him to focus on, but he usually desired a break, a relaxing break from the stress that followed a long, tedious day at the university. He had no wife now; she had died twenty-seven years earlier leaving two children, both of whom are now married with careers and families of their own, who visited only on scattered weekends or holidays. Dr. Hutchinson was a private man, and his children seemed to have adopted their father's habit of seeking solace from detachment.

As the birds continued to come and go gently, Dr. Hutchinson reminded himself that they indeed had nowhere to go and no place to return. He found freedom in their life's invitation, to live as they lived, so carelessly, so impossible. But he thought to himself, how would he do it, having no place to go and no place to return, where would he go if he had only himself to touch.

He searched inward, as though he desired the birds' freedom but not their life. It was his life, a life of responsibility, a life of accountability, to be lived unto others, for their benefit, and never for his own,

that he had chosen to live. This was his rational, and this was his system. The balcony where he stood came to represent nature's seamless beauty, but reminded him of life's overwhelming obligation: that in order to touch others, you always have to come home. Home meant responsibility and home meant the heart. Dr. Hutchinson would truly never fly as freely as a bird, but a bird would never fly as freely as he lived. To sacrifice made him free. As he contemplated this, he opened the balcony door and wandered into his office. He noticed the flashing light on his phone. There were messages. He sat down and listened to the first:

You have two messages. First message sent today at 8:30 a.m., line: (802) 656-3496 ...

"Hi Tom, it's Carol. I'm calling ..."

Dr. Hutchinson presses the button choosing to skip this message. He had already spoken to Carol earlier in the day regarding the party she was throwing in honor of her son returning home from the war. As he presses the button, he smiles, being reminded of Carol's delight in her son's returning home safely.

Second message sent today at 4:41 p.m., line: Governmental access line R-R-R-1-4-4-1-3-R-7 ...

"Tom, it's Cross. I wanted to touch base with you and discuss a few things. First, I wanted to remind you of the regional summit meeting for the Counselors Across America Campaign. Remember we talked briefly regarding this. There are a few people you'll need to meet there. Emillie has their contact information. The second issue, Tom, is a private matter. I am going to call you tonight at 8:00 p.m. your time. This conversation needs to be secure so I'm going to call you on the O-PECK line. If there are any problems, let me know; if not, I will try you then."

You have no new messages. Press one to cancel ...

Dr. Hutchinson cancels both messages. It was a nice system. His voice mail automatically receives all messages from both his home line and from his secure cell line.

Dr. Hutchinson holds his head up as he looks at his watch; it's 5:21 p.m. He has about two-and-a-half hours until the secure O-PECK call. The O-PECK line is a

highly secured governmental access line of communication. Its signal is fed directly to a personal computer via satellite transmission. Externally, its signal is impenetrable, and internally, upon receiving transmission, the user must submit to an online retinal scan, which is then processed through a highly secured governmental database. This system ensures that only the intended receiver has access to any specific O-PECK call. Only high-ranking officials and a handful of others have the security clearance that allows them to participate in O-PECK communication.

As Dr. Hutchinson sat contemplating Cross's message, he wondered about their planned conversation. He hadn't had an O-PECK conversation in over six months, an unusually long time for him. While he was on his "tour of duty" establishing relationships and ministering to both foreign and domestic diplomats, he received O-PECK calls weekly. Now that he is a permanent figure at Gladdale University, he receives the calls only from time to time, and mostly in regard to observations or information that the government had overlooked. But Cross's call seemed different. Dr. Hutchinson got the feeling that a call was about to take place in which he was neither the focus nor the intended recipient of its presumed outcome. As he pondered his thoughts, he began to wrestle within his spirit, producing an overwhelming sense of burden. This feeling, familiar to him, meant two things. It was time to pray and then surrender.

"Yes boo-boo, yes, I am coming down for Thanksgiving ... Yes, I already told you that!" Clair rolls her eyes in frustration.

"Jack, you need to chill out. I told you all this before, it's not like I'm springing it on you, you know the differences we have now ..."

"No Jack, no, I don't understand this, especially when you don't explain it to me." Clair switches the phone to the other ear as she stands up to pace the floor.

"Jack, you need to be clearer about what you are saying because right now you are sounding either insecure or immature or both." Clair lifts her hands in frustration.

"Yes Jack, I know that ..."

"Yes, ... Jack ... I know it has been hard on you, I know I am the one who left ... Yes Jack it is hard for me too ..."

There's a knock on the door. Clair walks to it and looks through the peek hole; it's Sally. Clair opens the door and positions her head awkwardly in front of her body so Sally can see she is talking on the phone. Clair makes serious eye contact, speaking all the words she needs to speak. Noticing Clair's frustration, Sally calmly finds her way onto the corner couch over near the window. Clair continues her conversation.

"So what's going to fix it, Jack; do you want me to drop out and transfer back to Arizona just to be with you?"

"Jack, I know you miss me, and I miss you, too, but I just don't know what to say to you. I like it here, Jack, not because your not here but because this is where I feel I should be. Nothing can really change that. We have to make the best of this situation." Clair shakes her head in obvious frustration. "Jack ..." turning to make her next argument more private, "Right now you have both football and school to worry about, and I have school and the immediate direction of my life to worry about. Just because we don't see each other every day doesn't mean we're not together ..."

"So what does that mean Jack?" Clair glances over at Sally with an impossible look on her face.

"I don't know, Jack, what do you want me to say?"

"Fine."

"Ok."

"All right, Jack."

"All right Jack!" Sally snickers because of Clair's tone. She sounds like she's talking to a two-month-old puppy.

"Jack ...," Clair takes a moment to catch her breath and then exhales, trying to bring peace to the situation. "I promise you I will call you later." She then pauses,

showing genuineness. "Jack ..., I am going to call you later, but I just want you to know something right now." Clair resolves this within herself. "I don't know what to do or say to you right now, but I want you to know that, whatever we decide in the future, that it will be what's best for both of us, ok?" Jack rambles on, for what seems to be a few minutes, before Clair politely ends their conversation.

"I love you, too, sweetheart."

Clair turns to Sally, almost as if by hearing the latter end of their conversation, Sally has made herself an unwelcome intruder.

Sally just sits silently on the couch, pretending she has taken an interest in something hanging on the wall. Although Sally's last desire right now is to beat around the bush, she is too discerning to interfere with Clair's emotions outright. She decides to humbly offer some support.

"Clair ..., is there anything I can do?"

Clair takes a deep breath before she answers, "Not right now Sally-girl, I don't want to talk about it."

Sally takes a chance. "Is Jack upset because of the distance between you two?"

"Yes," Clair responds quietly yet sharply.

"Would you like to talk about it?" Sally again presses softly, fully realizing that Clair is a unique blend of cockiness and realism sprinkled with a pinch of sensitivity. Basically, Sally reasons, Clair is not afraid to admit that she's wrong or even that she needs some help, but this honesty usually needs to come straight from her, without any outside pressing.

Clair responds, "I want answers, Sally, but I'm not too sure I want to talk about it right now."

Sally smiles understandably. She knows exactly how Clair feels due to her current dilemma, as a woman in Dr. Hutchinson's class.

"Well," Sally decides to take a humorous approach, "we can go stuff our faces so we can't talk"

Sally smiles at Clair longer than her humor called for, and then she remarks, "But then, the both of us will have dilemmas in our lives for which we don't have the answers." Clair, assimilating Sally's last comment, looks

up at Sally with questions lingering in her eyes. Then, in an effort to be bigger than her current circumstances, she asks in a half daze, "What problems are you having right now, Sally-girl?"

Sally, eager to talk of her plight, says straightforwardly, "Neaven told me today that I was doing myself and the whole class a disservice by not getting involved in the class discussions." Clair pays attention; she's already familiar with this predicament. "It's Dr. Hutchinson's Christian Thought class ..." Sally continues, "So this is no small problem, and I'm afraid that means there is no simple answer."

Clair peers at Sally, almost as if the mechanical parts in her brain have begun to move. Then, half smirking but full of spirit, she emits in a defeated tone, "Chinese or Italian?"

They drove into the restaurant parking lot. It just so happened that Sally was not in the mood for either Italian or Chinese, so she chose a Mexican restaurant she frequented. As they neared the door of the restaurant, Clair sensed that Sally had a lot going on in her mind. She was uncommonly distracted, and Clair knew that whatever Sally decided to do in order to resolve this situation, it was going to be a test for her. Clair's curiosity was peaking. Sally was clever, but in this situation, she was on the inside looking out, which was an emotional place for her. This was never a comfortable position for anyone to be in, even someone as discerning as Sally.

As Clair pondered Sally's possible state of mind, she noticed that her own problems with Jack seemed to fade into the background. This brought her contentment. She realized that her current situation with Sally was much more important than any problems she was currently having with Jack. As Clair opened the door, she settled it in her heart that she would be there for Sally tonight, unselfishly. A sense of peace and quiet accompanied her resolve.

As they approached the main hallway of the restaurant, a tall, strong-willed waitress approached them with menus in hand. She looked Italian, but because of her sturdy look coupled with her jet-black hair, not to mention her slender yet shapely facial structure, she could also easily pass for any Latino or Indian heritage.

"How many with you ladies?" the waitress asked in a coyly tone.

"Only two tonight," Sally answered but then added, "Can we please be seated in the southern section, one of the private booths, perhaps?"

"Certainly," the waitress obliged, seemingly impressed with her own resolve. The waitress then grabbed a few extra menus and turned toward Sally and Clair for the second time.

"Please follow me."

As they walked toward the back of the restaurant, it seemed to Clair as though the customers themselves had become the leftovers from the late lunch crowd and were now entangled within the morbid atmosphere of their Aztec-style surroundings. Funny, Clair thought to herself, perhaps this atmosphere is exactly why Sally wanted to come here, to become lost in it.

"How's this?" The waitress questioned with genuine concern.

The table itself was not in the corner, but it was valuably secluded. The nearest window was clear across the room; an artificial cactus placed distinctly in front of an ornamentally drawn crescent moon camouflaged it. The closest lamp was about ten paces away and to the right. This table was most likely reserved for testosterone-driven students or even newlyweds who couldn't keep their hands off each other. But for Sally and Clair's purposes, the table would do nicely.

"This is perfect, thank you," Sally acknowledged as they neared the table.

Clair eased back, allowing Sally to sit down first. As soon as Sally sat down, Clair took the seat directly opposite her. The waitress handed Clair a menu and then turning toward Sally, opened her menu and placed it directly into her hands.

"Are you ready to start with some drinks or an appetizer, perhaps?"

"I'll have a coke for now," Clair replied.

"I'll take a coke too."

"I'll be back in a few minutes to take your dinner orders."

"Thank you," both replied.

Walking away, the waitress neared the opening of the back room. Then, placing the extra menus into an empty crevice bored through a brick pillar, she fastened her eyes straight ahead and exited the room in an adroit fashion. Clair, a bit taken aback with the surroundings not to mention Sally's inwardness, decides to make conversation. "The food looks like it would be good here."

"The food is good here," Sally replies meekly. "I come here a lot by myself. It's kind of like my own private Idaho. It's where I go when I just want to veg out and forget about everything."

"Sally," Clair questions, "What do you know about Mexican food, you're from Vermont?"

"I know," Sally hastens, not allowing herself to descend back into her quiet inner clamor. "But I do know it tastes a lot better than most of the Mexican restaurants around here."

Clair is concerned. She has spent enough time with Sally to know that tonight's attitude is atypical. Clair slowly glanced at the menu, allowing the pause between them to deepen.

Five minutes later, the waitress was back ready to take their orders. Sally ordered the enchilada plate, and Clair the fajitas. As the waitress left, Clair resolved that it was time to impose some sort of will upon the situation. Then, before she could articulate her thoughts, Sally's friendship suddenly vaulted into the front of her mind. Clair realized the inevitable; that for any real work to get done tonight, their faith would need to be deepened.

"Sally."

Sally glances up from her self-induced daze. "I think we should focus on the issue of you and Dr. Hutchinson tonight. To be honest with you, Sally," Clair

stops momentarily to show Sally she means business, "Jack and I will probably work this one out. I'm going to trust that the problem with Jack is really only existing in Arizona," Clair shrugs her shoulders, implying it's mostly Jack's problem, "and that the only thing I can do about it is to have patience and believe that everything is going to be all right."

Sally looks at Clair, thankful for her friendship.

"Sally," Clair continues, "I need to know what is going on with you personally." Sally looks at Clair, wondering how serious she's going to get; Clair's tone sometimes gets a bit motherly. "You need to let me know, Sally, so I can help you."

Sally begins to squirm, as if she's being cornered. "Sally," Clair emphasizes again as she notices Sally's uneasiness, "I'm serious. As far as I'm concerned, if we have to stay here all night, then we will ..." Clair then points over at the moon on the window, "even if we have to wait for that phony crescent moon to go down."

Sally laughs, and it breaks the tension. Clair, still looking at Sally intently, is thankful for the break in spirit, but she wants more.

As Clair watches Sally wrestle, she can't help wondering if the issues she was having earlier with Jack might have in some way been a precursor for her helping Sally tonight. As she ponders this, she is humbled by the prospect. She readies herself to a place of honest submission. As she continues to linger within her own meditation, Sally begins to vent her frustrations.

"Oh, Clair," Sally moans as she exhales what seems to be nineteen years of pent-up emotion. "It's just ..."

"What Sally?"

"It's just ..."

Clair is waiting.

"It's just ... It's just ... I don't know what to do."

Sally continues to look disturbed. Clair looks at Sally unwaveringly, knowing that she, even when she does have the answers, usually won't speak of them. But Clair also notices that Sally's attitude is different. Sally really did seem lost, as if she was on the inside trying to see out. Clair, prompted by the spirit, felt a tug of shame, and it brought something to her remembrance.

It was actually something Sally had taught her when they had first become friends. It was about judging others. In their conversation, Sally helped her understand that true love for one another believes all things. As Clair remembered the advice, she realized that if she indeed had true love for Sally, she would believe whatever was coming out of her mouth, even if Sally wasn't seeing clearly enough to say what she should be saying. True love, Clair thought, would not judge Sally for the intentions or motivations of her heart; true love would listen patiently with the hope of finding some common ground to work on. It was ironic that Clair now heeded this advice in order to help the person who had offered it in the first place.

As Clair sat there looking at Sally, memories began to fill her mind -- memories of a freshman girl who confidently and wholeheartedly counseled a junior transfer student in both the ways and disciplines of God, memories of a girl who not only possessed the backbone to befriend a former Arizona state cheerleader turned Jesus freak, but a Jesus freak who was and still is dating one of the hottest college football prospects in sports today. In short, Sally was not an easily shaken girl. While all the other students at Gladdale, including some of the professors, were intimidated, Sally came full boar, single-handedly making sure Clair felt welcome and secure. Sally made a deep impression right from the start, and Clair even held on to the notion that God had specifically brought Sally into her life as an influential part of her early Christian development. And now, now as Clair peered across the table, she saw this same confident and fearless girl folding under the stress and pressure of the inner-workings of God in her life.

Clair cautioned herself before she spoke her next few words. "What don't you know Sally?" She asked it as a humble prod.

Sally repeated herself almost as if she had never even said it before, "I just don't know, Clair. I have never been this confused or doubtful. I am only thankful that I can talk to you because I really need a shoulder right now, and you have been like an older sister to me."

Clair smiles, mostly inwardly.

Sally continues, "You may not have all the spiritual answers, but I know you love me and you are also wise in areas I'm not."

This was true, and Clair knew it. When it came to spiritual issues, such as the Bible and God's inner-workings, Sally was pure genius. Everybody knew this. But when it came to situations that were seemingly out of her control, Sally was prone to falter. Clair had seen a bit of this when Sally had struggled with family issues. But this current situation was consuming Sally, not like the family issues. The family issues revealed a person who could not always deal with the uncertainty of not having the answers, but those questions didn't overburden her. The questions Sally was now facing needed an answer. Sally was now being forced to make a choice, a leap of faith if you will, without reason or God's intervention backing the decision.

Sally continues, almost misty-eyed, "Neaven said some good things. If he hadn't made some sort of sense regarding Dr. Hutchinson, then I would've just ignored him, but he did ..." Sally emphasized the end of her comment, as if she couldn't control having done so, and then finished, "... and now I just can't ignore it."

Clair knew what she needed to say to Sally, but it wasn't time. Clair knew Sally was being challenged but also knew Sally was not ready to hear that. She leaned back, allowing Sally some time to express more of her repressed emotions.

Sally wiped back her hair and cleaned her eye's. She continued, "And to be honest with you, after Neaven finished talking, I actually felt pretty good." She paused to look up, almost as if some miracle had happened, before continuing with frank sarcasm. "Almost like some things were actually going to get done in my life... But now, I am just..." She paused, not wanting to show any vulnerability "I'm just..." Sally looked up, to see how Clair would judge the word that she had been holding back all night, "scared."

Clair smiled, without any judgment. She reached over and took Sally's hand into hers, beginning to rub it, as any sister would.

Sally breaks down.

"Clair, I'm afraid to be vulnerable." Clair smiles.

Sally goes on, talking faster than before but with as much frustration as ever. "Clair I usually have the answers, I usually know what to do. I usually just pray and then see things the way I see them and then move. But this is different. I can't control this situation. I feel like this situation is flooring me. I feel like something, anything, can come along right now and just ..." Sally stops dead in her tracks, hesitating to blink, her eyes then concede to her fears, "beat me."

Clair is not smiling anymore. She is happy for Sally, but this was a deep issue. She squeezes Sally's hand as she speaks, "Sally, ... I am sorry you are going through this. I know you, Sally, and I know that this is going to be challenging for you. There are two things I see in this situation."

Sally peps up a bit, wanting to hear anything at this point. Clair continues, "Number one, be thankful that this is happening, because once you get over this hump, you will recognize it and never have to be afraid of it ever again."

That made sense, Sally thought. Sally nodded her head and then looked down in an attempt to spiritually scoop up the information. She then thought to herself again, this situation was trying her. Clair was right. She would have to face it, and after she faced it once, she would never have to be afraid of ever facing it again. She became more thankful; her problem seemed to shrink a bit.

Clair noticed that Sally had received some strength from her first observation, then, praying deeply within herself, she said, "And the second thing Sally is ... that once you do beat this thing Sally-girl ..." Clair pauses, allowing Sally to force a smile, "you will have begun a new journey into an unknown." Sally tries to receive exactly what Clair is trying to say. "And here's the thing about this unknown, Sally. This unknown is going to throw you into a new world, a new world where you can grow and be more fruitful and conquer bigger and better challenges."

Sally looks at once confused and inspired.

"Sally, ..." Clair continues with a faith so private it can't be touched; her eyes beam as she says her next few words. "You're getting promoted, Sally, and you are going to go to a new place and to a new level that you could neither comprehend nor even understand before now."

Sally is dumbfounded by Clair's words; they are so powerful yet obvious, she finds herself longing to hear more. Clair continues, "God has strengthened you and has given you gifts, and you have been faithful within those gifts, Sally, but now it's time for you to step into the unknown and to allow God to guide you and to become your sole source of strength and support." Clair then pauses, being prompted by her inner spirit. "Sally, ..."

"Yes?" Sally mutters.

"Do you trust God?"

Sally is shaken at first. She stops to take some time to discipline her answer. If Clair had asked her this question two weeks ago, her answer would have been a resounding yes, but now, now she thought, she didn't know how to answer. Despite her tangled emotions and overwhelming fears, she still had faith bellowing down within her belly. She spoke to Clair's reason.

"Clair, ... I do trust God, but right now I can't stand in that trust. Regarding this issue, I don't know how I will react, but if it's any consolation, I do believe you are speaking the truth." Sally pauses to comprehend, and she continues, "I guess I am going to have to get to that place where I am not afraid to fail, and if I do happen to fail, then I will have the inner confidence that everything is still going to be all right." Clair listens, but readies herself for a final encouraging word. Sally finishes, "I just can't say for sure right now; I guess I'm just too emotional."

"Sally, ..." Clair says confidently, "once you take the first step, the second step will be easier. Your first step is to talk with Dr. Hutchinson. Once you get that ball rolling, then you can take on the next one, and then the next."

Sally understands, but she still wishes she had more control.

"This is not about control Sally," Clair utters, almost supernaturally.

Sally almost swallows her tongue, wondering how on earth Clair could have known exactly what she was thinking at that exact moment.

Clair continues, "This is about obeying by faith, and it's about surrender, Sally. God doesn't need you smart, Sally, he needs you obedient. It is clear from the Bible that God wants faith. Right now you have incredible wisdom and insight; you have a gift, Sally, that is unbelievable, but along with that gift, God wants you totally relying upon Him, and this is exactly why He is allowing this loss of control in your life, so you can learn to trust in Him first, and then to trust in your gift second."

Sally receives Clair's insight.

"I believe, Sally, ..." Clair continues in faith, "that once you have demonstrated to God that you can fully trust in Him and solely rely upon Him, that, at that point, He will open some doors for you that you cannot receive or even comprehend right now. When He does this, Sally, you will exercise yourself in ways that you have never known before. But first, you must surrender yourself to fully relying upon Him."

Sally pulls her hand away from Clair; she doesn't need to hear any more. Clair relaxes herself because she senses that Sally has taken everything in. After a moment, Sally voices her concerns.

"This is not going the way I thought it would, Clair. It's good and bad. Good because I think you are exactly right about what you say, but bad because I am going to be seriously challenged by Dr. Hutchinson. I don't like to be vulnerable, Clair, not with you, not with anyone. But I realize that this is God's will, and this is the only way that I will move forward." Sally turns her head, obviously in frustration. She then settles herself and looks back at Clair. "I'm not ready to say anything else, Clair, I hope you understand I'm not trying to be rude, I just want to forget about it for now." She peers at Clair for a reaction, hoping her plea found a place. "Let's just try to enjoy the rest of this night, and try and talk about anything else but this."

Clair understands. She nods her head with concern, acknowledging Sally's frustration. "No problem, Sally."

There is a pause.

"Sally, ..." Clair edges forward, making the distinction of intimacy, "you are the sweetest girl I know ... and I think everything is going to be just fine. It might not be easy for you right now, but everything is going to be all right."

Sally accepts Clair's encouraging words; she understands that as a friend, Clair is also in a place of susceptible emotion, and so she allows Clair to finish. "Sally," Clair exhales, "I can see this thing from the outside looking in, and trust me when I say that it is going to be truly awesome. God is going to grow you, and He is going to strengthen you, and after that, you are going to give Him much glory."

Sally beams at this remark. It has always been her deepest desire to give God much glory. If this struggle will eventually put her into a position to give God much glory, then she's got something worth fighting for.

Sally offers her sentiments in an appreciative yet weary tone. "Thank you, Clair. I don't know what I would have done without you tonight; truly, you are a God-send."

"Sally, you don't have to thank me. You have done so much for me in the past, it's the least I could do."

As Clair finishes her words, there is a stillness in the restaurant, as if God Himself has stopped in to place an order. Then, after a few more moments, the waitress arrives with their food.

The food looks delicious, Clair thought, but immediately wishes she had ordered Sally's enchiladas instead.

"Sally! You can't tell me that your enchiladas look better than my fajitas?"

"Why not?" Sally questions, wearing a smile.

Clair then speaks out of the side of her mouth, "Because, Sally-girl, everybody knows that fajitas are way better than enchiladas!"

Sally casually looks down at her plate as Clair looks on. She then looks up, "It must be a Vermont thing."

Having finished praying for more than an hour now, Dr. Hutchinson was listening to soothing music and relaxing quietly in his study. It was 7:53 p.m., seven minutes before the intended O-PECK conversation. His laptop was powered on, and he was awaiting the satellite transmission.

He decides to take a stroll in order to get his thoughts into motion. As he passes by the volumes of books arranged on the various bookshelves lining the study, he lifts up a few ornaments. He is checking to see if the housecleaner has been diligent in keeping the room as clean as many of the motivations that the various books in the room claim to instigate. She's done a good job. He stops himself, glancing at a picture that is set between a bookend and a case shelving. It's a picture of Cross and him. They went to Harvard together. It was only when Dr. Hutchinson returned for his doctorate degree from the School of Divinity, Cross being an assistant professor at that time, that they strengthened the bonds that had existed almost ten years earlier.

They were members of the Harvard graduating class of 1960. Following graduation, Dr. Hutchinson decided to go overseas to Oxford while Cross decided to stay in Massachusetts to receive his master's in Theological Studies. Both were exceptionally gifted learners, but while Dr. Hutchinson sought to refine his theological ideals at Oxford, Cross decided to try his hand at teaching and public speaking and debate. Their ties remained tight, mostly because they had an incredible amount of respect for each other. But besides their obvious similarities, they were both incredibly intent on making a difference in the world, well, almost. As Cross liked to put it, "Tom was intent with making a difference in the world, whereas I was intent with making an impact on the world." Cross was the more aggressive, and Tom, the more resigned.

EEEEEEEEEE00000000UUUUGGGGGGGGG ...
 EEEEEEEEEEE00000000UUUUGGGGGGGGG ...
 EEEEEEEEEEE00000000UUUUGGGGGGGGG ...

No matter how many times he heard the O-PECK signal, he could never get used to it; it sounded like a broken phone's ring and bomb siren's wail. Nevertheless, it was effective in breaking the concentration and allowing one to focus only on the importance of the call. Tom jumped to his chair and lowered the volume on his speakers.

He typed in his password in order to initiate the online retinal scan. The online computer instructions began:

Retinal scan now in progress, please focus clearly on the image and do not turn your head to the right or left for ten seconds.

Dr. Hutchinson focuses on a triangle image directly behind the laser retinal scanner. The retinal scan does not come through the computer screen via the Internet; it comes through a device mounted atop the computer. Its data is first received and then transmitted through the Internet database in order to verify identity. The actual O-PECK conversation will be transmitted via satellite, but the preliminary retinal scan and the identification verification process are initiated and secured through the online database.

The online verification process gives further instructions:

Verified. Receiver. Dr. Tom Hutchinson:

O-PECK Security Clearance A-E-D-9-O-0-9-2-R-9.

Verified. Source. Cross Lutherant:

O-PECK Security Clearance B-B-O-7-L-8-3-5-S-9.

Transmission will be recorded under the rights and privileges of the United States Government uplink provisions act.

Governmental Access Code. W-R-A-2-U-7-8-8-E-0.

Satellite Transmission to commence in fifteen seconds.

The feed becomes fully approved. This process begins the virtually impenetrable satellite transmission. Tom flips on his camera so Cross will have a face to put to the voice once the upload is complete. He can see his own face glimmering off the camera's lens.

Cross suddenly appears on Tom's computer screen.

"Tom," Cross opens up the conversation, "I'm glad you could make it. You're looking well as usual."

"It's not the weather," Tom interjects. "It's been uncommonly cold here."

Tom could tell by Cross's greeting and demeanor that it was going to be business as usual. He decides to cut short the chitchat, "So to what do I owe this honor?"

Cross concedes, getting to the root of the matter.

"It's The Cell, Tom; there's a problem."

Tom cuts in, "What's the problem?"

"Mark Auberon died two days ago, Tom."

There is a pause. Tom's face goes flat. He is astonished. "I'm sorry."

Cross continues within the drama of the situation. "They found him lying on his couch. Apparently, he died quietly in his sleep."

Tom barely heard those last words; he was still absorbing the impact of the first ones.

"Tom," Cross continues, "I don't need to tell you how valuable Mark was to ensuring The Cell had accurate as well as invaluable biblical perspective; he was your man."

Tom looked up as though Cross didn't even need to say it. Cross continued, "And I know that you anchored your hopes on the premise that The Cell would not only be influenced, but also partially shaped, by Mark's wisdom, because of who he was and because of the witness he projected." Cross paused and then continued with more seriousness, "Simply put, Tom, we both know that with Mark now gone, there's a definite void."

"I know," Tom concurs.

"And we need to act fast. Now I know how important all of this is to you, so I did not delay in contacting you."

"I thank you for that, Cross." Awakening himself, Tom says, "We need to get his replacement in there now. I'm sure even now that most of the Candidates, and even some of the Primary Cell Members, are jockeying for that tenth seat, a position they believe they can fill or they believe someone of their like mind could fill."

"Exactly, Tom. I've talked, even with Dr Thiery ..." Tom looks up fearful, but Cross shakes his head as

he continues, quieting Tom's fears. "When I heard that Mark had died, I immediately wanted to get the go ahead to contact you as well as to establish a sense of urgency regarding an effective replacement. I believe I have been successful in watering down the Members' efforts to quickly initiate one of the seasoned Candidates."

Tom looks up with reserve, duty beaming behind his eyes.

"We're on top of this, Tom. The reason I called you is because we need a recommendation for a replacement. I waited two days to contact you because I wanted to come to you with more than just words and zealousness. I come to you now with full assurance that whomever you recommend, that he will be much sought after and recommended by this group. So please, Tom, allow yourself to share in my certainty."

Tom smiles, quietly thankful for the wisdom and discernment of Cross's decision.

Cross continues, "Not to mention the fact that had I contacted you directly after Mark's death, then there would have been a chance that your recommendation would have been rushed, not based on sound reason, and not based on your understanding of the work we've done in the last couple of days."

Tom nods in agreement.

"This way," Cross continues, "you are able to make a choice knowing that your efforts will not be in vain, but that both seriousness and diligence have gone before you, to comfort you in any recommendations you might make."

"I was led to pray before this conversation, Cross," Tom adds, matter of fact.

"Then Tom ..." Cross pauses, "you certainly realize how critical this decision is, besides any possible repercussions. There's something looming behind this decision, Tom, I can feel it."

Tom answers him after a moment. "Your decision to establish everything before you contacted me was as merciful as it was wise. You were right in your assessment. Had you contacted me prematurely, then not only would you have gotten a fair amount of emotion out

of me, but the entire situation would have left me burdened and puzzled."

Cross nods in agreement.

Tom continues, "Now wisdom can establish itself, even before either one of us has the chance to act on behalf of our emotions."

"Precisely." Cross concurs.

There is a pause. Both Tom and Cross seem to be soaking up the spirit of the exchange. Finally, Tom leans back, lifting his head upward as if to say he's getting directions from heaven itself, "So you're asking me to make my recommendation for Mark's replacement."

"We need some names Tom, and fast."

"I have two," Tom doesn't even stop to second-guess himself, "the first is Dr. Etienne Beauvais of the Université du Havre," Cross quickly interrupts, "Dr. Beauvais is an excellent choice, even some of the Primary Cell Members might have heard of him." Tom then continues in his resolve, "My second recommendation is Bodhi Dalry of the Moody Bible Institute. He's currently a student in their graduate program."

Cross makes a small twitch, almost as if he didn't understand what he just heard. "Tom, did you just say a student, or something to that effect?"

"Yes, Cross, I did. He's a graduate student in their Masters of Divinity program. Last May, at the Apologetics Conference in Memphis, he presented one of the most discerning and accurate arguments I have ever heard regarding the differences between the calling of the apostle and the calling of the prophet."

Cross still hasn't conceded, and the look he's wearing on his face bears witness to that fact.

Tom pounces on Cross's expression, "Look Cross, those are my guys."

"Fine ..." Cross relents, throwing back his shoulders in quiet surrender, "but, Tom, you know the drill, both of these men will be thrown headlong unto the arsenal of The Cell's psychological, intellectual, as well as spiritual scrutiny; and that's even if they make it that far."

"I remember, Cross."

"Tom, give me a moment here." Cross pauses to establish his seriousness. "I am fully comfortable with Dr. Etienne Beauvais, but this other ..."

"Bodhi Dalry." Tom repeats the name with disdainful clarity.

"Yes, this Bodhi Dalry, is he really ready, I mean, is he even mature enough for this kind of appointment?"

"We'll find out, he is whom I believe the Lord is directing me to recommend. In fact, when I met him at the conference, I felt a strong kinship, for something possibly in the future. I just didn't know it would be under these circumstances."

Cross listens.

"I really believe this is the will of the Lord. So please, Cross, don't question it; just obey."

"Fine." Cross relents a second time, putting up his hands as if in surrender. "I'll make the arrangements for Bodhi to come to France."

Tom smiles inwardly, knowing that Cross's concerns for Bodhi are reasonably valid.

Cross continues, "Dr. Beauvias is already here in France, so we will be in touch with him shortly. But you know the regimen Tom ..." Cross reminds him sternly, being the chief executive director of The Cell, "if either of these men come back limping as a result of this informal, dare I say, extremely off-the-records trial run ..."

Tom nods his head, already understanding what Cross is about to say.

"... then it will not be either one of our jobs to lick their wounds. This is an absolutely 'at your own risk' invitation. Those in the intelligence profession who speak rashly or unwisely regarding The Cell after their appointment or dismissal only end up shooting themselves in the foot."

Tom attempts to ease Cross's preoccupations, "I'm sure you will brief them and debrief them appropriately. You've never had any problems with bitterness or resentment from Cell dropouts or flunkies in the past; take a look at me."

"Yeah, I'm looking at you, and I can't believe it. Some kid!"

"He might surprise you; he's pretty smart."

"I'm smart Tom, but I'm not in The Cell."

"Give him a shot, Cross."

"He's got it!"

Chapter 3

The night was veiled. The mist had a lot to do with it. It was soft and it tumbled down the East Mountains clogging Sally's vision just as intensely as her present circumstances were clogging her judgment. She weathered though; taking consolation in the fact that Clair had offered her some good insight as well as a shoulder to lean on, she was thankful for that. But of the other issues, the questions she would ask Dr. Hutchinson and where she would go with those questions, those answers eluded her.

As she continued her drive home, she remembered what Clair had said earlier. Sally would not control the situation, but the situation would control her. This fact being confirmed, she gave it into God's hands. If she were truly the vessel God had called her to be, then she could just let go. If Dr. Hutchinson saw nothing, then it was nothing she did right and it was nothing she did wrong; it was just the way it was. She resolved to talk with Dr. Hutchinson tomorrow after class if circumstances permitted. She would speak from her heart, and she would hide nothing. Whatever happened would be the result of God's will, completely out of her hands; whether she would rise or fall, it would be in His hands. Sally relented from her self-induced reasoning and focused on the drive home.

Cross Lutherant was ever so diligent to ensure not only the consistency and professionalism of his own work, but also the work of those with whom he surrounded himself. As chief executive director for The Cell, he had plenty of responsibility and, quite frankly, he was happy to bear its burden. Cross prided himself on his compulsive responsibility, but it usually meant he possessed little patience for other people's irrational habits or inconsistencies. This fact was never so obvious as it was in the case of Dr. Etienne Beauvais.

Although a well-respected theologian and social psychological expert, Dr. Beauvais's reputation for dreadful mood swings as well as his indifference to constructed societal thinking was notorious, and both its effects were beginning to show on Cross. The good doctor had kept Cross waiting in his office for over forty-five minutes while he discussed issues of proper heating and insulation for the new laboratory facilities at the college. When Dr. Beauvais did finally emerge from his office, he found Cross red faced and upset, obviously the result of the doctor's lack of respect for good timekeeping. This became evident when Cross, turning with his coat, threw it behind his back and beckoned the rude doctor to follow him outside. Dr. Beauvais, himself an expert at evaluating mood swings, took no thought save to follow Cross through the doors.

As the two made their way toward the street, the driver opened the rear door of the car allowing both to enter at their own leisure. The two were seated comfortably in the back of a fully equip Mercedes Stretch Limousine BINZ. This kind of transport was likened to a secret-service limousine, with perhaps a few extra extremities. Designed specifically for Cell group members, the car was fully furnished for both member services and executives alike. Its convenient satellite-ready laptops made for easy reading as well as preparatory research. Its communication modules were designed with remarkable capability. Externally, the car boasted bulletproof glass, fully tinted windows, dynamic front and rear suspension; it was even waterproof, able to float on any surface. The car came standard with all the necessities any professional service car would need. It was an office on wheels, designed and engineered for The Cell's purposes specifically. Dr. Beauvais looked around comfortably at his surroundings. Cross took notice and beckoned the driver to proceed east down Rue Reaumur (**Street**).

As he was preparing to leave his study and home, Dr. Hutchinson laid aside his coffee mug and grabbed his

folders and briefcase. It was now morning, and the day that lie ahead spoke of things much more tangible than that of the conversation he had had last night with Cross. There were too many questions, too many concerns over Mark's death; but he also knew that all that could have been done had been done. All he could do now was wait.

He decided to take a stroll outside before his drive to the college. He had sensed yesterday, even before the O-PECK call, that something premeditated or even predestined was going to occur, even something he had no power over. Whatever was happening, he thought, its realness and presence he could feel but could not discern with his controlling mind. He believed it concerned The Cell, or even his participation in it. He was confident he had made the right choice regarding the two recommendations he made last night, but he also understood that it usually took more than one phone call to remedy a God-ordained situation like this one. The burden, the one he had yesterday afternoon before the O-PECK call, was too real, too mysterious. Something in this Cell situation was eluding him, and whatever it was, he was powerless over it.

Neaven is busy talking with friends getting ready to make his way toward Dr. Hutchinson's class when he spots Sally.

"Sally, wait up!"

Out of breath, Neaven turns the corner and grabs Sally's shoulder, almost touching it with a sense of desperation.

"Where are you going Sally; the class is the other way?"

"I'm going to class," Sally answers, "but I wanted to walk around."

"The other way?" Neaven's eyes question. "The other way takes like fifteen more minutes, Sally; you'll be late."

"That's ok," Sally announces as she continues walking, "I don't really want to be in class today anyway; I just needed to speak with Dr. Hutchinson."

Neaven checks himself, "Speak with Dr. Hutchinson?" He halts Sally in the middle of the outer hallway. Sally consents as she turns his way.

"Sally what do you mean, talk to Dr. Hutchinson; what are you going to talk to him about?"

"About what we discussed, me opening my mouth for a change."

"Sally ...," Neaven fights to find the right words, "That's great, it really is, but don't you think this might be a little rushed, I mean, maybe this is caught up in your emotions right now and you should wait a few days."

"I'm tired of waiting, Neaven. That's all I've done, waited." Sally looks down and then stares confidently into Neaven's eyes. "Neaven, if there really is something I need to share, then whether or not I wait, it makes no difference. The question is can I approach Dr. Hutchinson with the right spirit today, and yes, I believe I can. Besides, something in my heart is telling me not to wait."

"Something in your heart? Come on Sally, what's that supposed to mean, something in your heart?"

"What's that supposed to mean!?" Sally mimics Neaven, "What it's supposed to mean is that the same thing that compelled you to run me down right now and the same thing that compelled you to corner me in the lunch area is the same thing that is compelling me to talk with Dr. Hutchinson today."

Neaven's look immediately changes.

"Look, Neaven." Sally takes a moment, understanding Neaven is her friend and support. "I don't have all the answers, and I do appreciate our conversation because I mostly agree with you, but just give me the space I need on this one."

Neaven wrestles to understand.

Sally then gives him one more reason. "Neaven, if I don't do this now, then I might never do it."

There is silence between them both. Sally was persuasive, but Neaven was still concerned.

Neaven breaks the silence. "Just promise me one thing, Sally."

"What's that Neaven?" Sally shields herself.

Neaven smirks, "With the same attitude you just used on me, make sure to use that attitude in Dr. Hutchinson's office."

Sally smiles with a bit of relief. She holds up her two fingers, "Scouts honor."

Neaven gets close, "Scouts honor?" He repeats it slowly, almost as if in repeating it, he were kissing her softly on the lips.

Sally shies away, barely batting her eyes once.

They then stare at each other for a moment. Neaven then glances at his watch. "Sally, I have to go; I'm going to be late for class" He turns to go but leaves with one final remark. "Unlike you, I can't just bat my eyes and make everything all right. See you later."

"Good-bye, Neaven." Sally smiles coyly.

The Mercedes pulls up to the rear of the back entrance. Since Dr. Beauvias was so inconsiderate during their introduction, Cross has made up his mind that he would return the favor. The back entrance of The Cell Compound was reserved for the loading and unloading of supplies and was also used as a makeshift entrance for various maintenance crews. Cross, in his bitterness, felt the back door honor would do Dr. Beauvias justice.

Cross exited the car and then turned to allow Dr. Beauvias to exit. A military guard stationed at the back entrance checked Cross's and Dr. Beauvias's identification and then proceeded to pull up Dr. Beauvias information on his computerized memorandum. He noticed that Dr. Beauvias has been granted third-floor access. Third-floor access was the highest security clearance within The Cell Compound.

"Follow me, please." Another military guard appears from the right and begins to escort Cross and Dr. Beauvias through the first door and then down a long hallway. It was commonly known that the security at The Cell Compound was unlike anything ever devised. The

reason was simple. The Cell was an internationally run NATO alliance organisation; therefore, it received state-of-the-art security and military service input not only from its twenty-six member countries, but also from its peace treaty affiliates. The mere thought of challenging The Cell's security structure, whether internally or externally, would prove unsuccessful.

As Dr. Beauvias begins to near the opening of the narrow hallway leading to the matrix of the first level, the anticipation on his face becomes evident.

Cross interrupts Beauvias's thoughts, "This is the first floor of The Cell. This floor is reserved for assistants, historians, technicians, analysts, engineers, language experts, as well as low-level decision makers. We won't be spending much time on this floor since Dr. Thiery has requested to brief you personally." Cross turns to Dr. Beauvias very seriously. "I'm sure you will find conversation with Dr. Thiery to be quite interesting."

Dr. Beauvias turns to Cross almost as if he sensed a spirit of challenge or even deception in Cross's voice. Cross innocently looks away as he carries on conversation. As they draw near to the main elevator, they make their way into a rear corner. The elevator is actually embedded in the corner of The Cell Compound. The elevator is diamond shaped and darkly tinted. A military guard uses his key code and is immediately granted access for the third level.

Dr. Beauvias asks hastily, "We will not be visiting the second floor?"

"No," Cross affirms as he motions for Dr. Beauvias to enter the elevator.

"May I ask why?"

"Sure," Cross answers frankly, "because your access is for the third level and not the second. For this reason, there's no need for you to visit the second level."

"Why, what is on the second level?"

Cross looks back at Dr. Beauvias with some resentment. Cross knew that The Cell Compound and its element of secrecy was the topic of much debate and discussion for many of the scientists and intellectuals

who dreamed of possibly one day studying here, but this did not change the fact that he continuously grew weary of having to deal with what he believed to be petty inquiries from such visitors.

Cross turned and stopped the military guard from entering the elevator. He then fully turned to Dr. Beauvias in order to answer his question in a resounding way. "The second level is home to Cell members who have not been granted Primary access; these members are called Candidates. Candidates function much like the Primary members do. They discuss, study, and have full access to all the same intelligence as the Primary members. The major difference is that they don't have any decision-making authority. They are almost like the third string in college football who get the team ready during practice but never participate in any of the games that count."

"So they help them study, but they don't take the test?" Dr. Beauvias remarks with a boyhood charm.

"Precisely," Cross affirms. "But now we go to the third level, to be among those who do get to play in the big game."

Dr. Beauvias interjects, "Those who get to take the test?"

"Yes, yes, those who get to take the test." Cross rolls his eyes nearly pushing Dr. Beauvias through the elevator threshold. The military guard, using his key code, directs the elevator to its third level.

Sally waits patiently outside the classroom while all the students file out one by one. She decided against going to class. Instead, she walked around the campus, trying to align her thoughts and emotions with the same sense of duty she felt deep down inside. Neaven noticed Sally as he exited the classroom, but he kept moving, knowing Sally had important business to attend to. He did smile though, bidding her good luck. She received his smile but then turned aside to look inside the classroom. She noticed there were still two students lingering behind. They were not talking to Dr. Hutchinson though; they were

back at their seats talking about something or another. Dr. Hutchinson was up in front alone, pen in hand, reading over some notes. Sally approached his desk.

She came right out with it. "Dr. Hutchinson, can I have a word with you please?"

Dr. Hutchinson looked up from his desk and noticed Sally at attention.

"We can talk, but why weren't you in class today?"

"That's actually why I wanted to talk to you."

Sally looks serious, and Dr. Hutchinson notices.

"Let's go back to my office."

The two students notice that Dr. Hutchinson was packing up, so they headed for the door. Sally patiently waited as Dr. Hutchinson scooted back his chair and proceeded to turn off his reading light. The two headed for the door, Dr. Hutchinson locking it behind him.

His office was about 300 meters away. As they walked, Sally got the impression that Dr. Hutchinson was going to be patient, and that he actually didn't want to press the matter. She didn't mind walking in silence though; she had a lot on her mind and she didn't want to say the wrong thing. A coarse wind was blowing beneath the ridge where they walked. Above, students walked across an overpass that served as a bridge. Sally wished she were more like the students walking above her, just taking their time, on their way to class. Their responsibilities seemed nil and all of their answers a lot less distant. Deep down she knew that their lives were easier than hers; she just knew it.

By the time they had reached his office, Sally was not so keen on talking. Some of the 300-meter distance had stripped her of her resolve. But deep down inside, she knew she needed to get somewhere at this point, and right now, Dr. Hutchinson was her only hope. Dr. Hutchinson opened the door and turned on the lights. He scooted out a chair for Sally, who, as she sat down, put her backpack on her lap, crossing her arms over it. She weighed down deep into her chair.

Dr. Hutchinson took his time settling down into his place. He took off his coat and hung it neatly on the coat rack. He then put a few items to rest on his desk and put his briefcase under the desk to shelter it from

unsuspecting legs. Turning on the light, he opened the case that held his reading glasses before finally sitting down. He inserted his glasses inside their case, and as he did, politely asked Sally what this conversation would be in regard to.

"I need to talk to you about a gift that I believe I possess but that I don't fully understand."

Wow, Sally thought, that was easy. She actually couldn't believe how clearly and unhindered she had spoken those words.

Dr. Hutchinson immediately questioned, "What gift would that be?"

Sally tenses up. She senses Dr. Hutchinson's challenge. She decides to again answer him plainly. "The gift actually has to do with questions or arguments I believe I hold and actually comprehend but that I don't particularly feel comfortable voicing."

"What kind of arguments?"

Sally was perturbed. She knew of Dr. Hutchinson's credibility and how respected he was, but as far as she was concerned, at this point, he was almost egging her on. Sally knew that in the past she could have easily put him in his place on several occasions. Sally took a deep breath, calming her nerves, and remembered her purpose for being there.

"Well, in class ..." Sally begins. Dr. Hutchinson takes some time, looking up to take Sally more seriously. "... In class when the other students were discussing and you were either judging or involved in the discussions, I never do say much."

"Ok," Dr. Hutchinson counters, trying to understand.

"And I basically feel that I have certain wisdom that is overlooked, I mean ...," she quickly catches herself, "... I mean that I have wisdom that isn't voiced."

Dr. Hutchinson takes a serious look at Sally and then eases back in his chair. He then leans forward, causing his chair to creak distinctly. "Sally are you saying that when the class is having a discussion that the wisdom you possess is far superior to that which is being discussed?"

"That's what I'm saying."

Dr. Hutchinson eases back in his chair one more time but this time tilts his chair away from her and toward the wall. He looked as though he were pondering a few things, and Sally knew it wasn't her time to speak.

Dr. Hutchinson was actually remembering the first time he visited Gladdale, when he had heard rumors of a girl who blew the charts off the wall when it came to not only academic performance, but also intellectual thinking. This girl could not only learn and remember statistics, equations, and evaluations, but more important, she could originate thought. She was regarded as a philosopher and even an inventor of conceptual ideas. Simply put, the thoughts she had weren't thought before.

Dr. Hutchinson then tilted his eyes toward Sally, almost meeting hers. Sally's eyes stared back at him almost doe eyed.

Dr. Hutchinson then remembered how this same girl, spring semester, happened to apply for a spot in his Christian Thought discussion course series. He approved her request, based on her freshman year performance, straight A's, as well as the overwhelming recommendations from her former professors. This same girl had been in his class for over seven weeks now, never once initiating or even defining herself as a Christian mind to be reckoned with; and now, even now, this same girl was sitting across from his desk and was telling him that she was indeed everything that he had heard her to be, but that he had never plainly seen himself.

"Sally," he turns to face Sally, easing his chair down from its heightened position, "whether or not you have superior wisdom is not an issue we can discuss today. You say you have it, and if you say you have it, I am inclined to believe you. But since I have never witnessed it personally, I can't speak regarding it."

Sally accepts his logic but with an emotion attached to it, "But Dr. Hutchinson, I'm not really interested in whether or not you believe that I have this wisdom, only that you accept that I am having a struggle."

Sally feels she has made her point cleanly, but then Dr. Hutchinson opens his mouth.

"Sally, how can I fully and consciously support your claim that you have a struggle regarding a superior wisdom when I am not even fully aware of, nor have I ever witnessed, any superior wisdom existing?"

Sally doesn't know what to say. Dr. Hutchinson's words were piercing; they struck her heart. Sally humbles herself and inwardly prays for what she needs to say in order for her to hear what she needs to hear. Dr. Hutchinson speaks again.

"Sally. Please don't misunderstand me. I do believe you are struggling. What I am trying to emphasize, Sally, is that if I don't clearly understand that with which you are struggling, then I would be lying to myself if I said I could accurately or honestly support you regarding it."

Sally looks up with gentle acceptance.

Dr. Hutchinson continues, "You look at me and say 'there's something here that I am struggling with, and it is hard for me, please help me,' But I cannot honestly help you until I have witnessed and am conscious of what you are struggling with, not because I don't want to, but because I can't. Do you understand what I am trying to say?"

"I do understand," Sally says matter of fact.

"Let me put it another way, Sally. If I were to try and give you instruction right now, today, regarding your situation, I might say a few things that would make sense, and you might agree with me. But I would end up saying a lot of inaccurate things; a lot of things that on the surface might look good and even necessary, but deep down would only add confusion and dissimulation." Sally follows his train of thought. Dr. Hutchinson continues, "The most important thing for me, for me specifically, Sally," Dr. Hutchinson pauses to add emphasis, "is to focus on and understand not that you are struggling with a supposed gift, although right now, for you, emotionally, that seems so important; wisdom teaches that the most important thing for me to understand right now is, unequivocally, the gift with which you are struggling."

He puts his hand up to enforce clarity, "Once I truly understand this Sally, then I will have all the

ammunition I need in order to help you accurately, because, Sally, I do believe your struggle. Sally ...," he continues, "... your struggle is something I will never truly need to understand, because I already believe it. But I don't believe the gift, and it's not because I don't want to or because it's not there, it's because I've never witnessed it that I might understand it. In order for me to fully believe the gift you possess, Sally, I need to have the chance to consciously understand it. Do you understand?"

"You're basically saying that me telling you that I am struggling with my gift is an emotion that doesn't require proof, and since it doesn't require any proof, then there's no need to understand it. But the gift I possess requires proof, and in order for you to have that proof, the gift needs to be made manifest. Once the gift is made manifest, it gives you the opportunity to evaluate it, and once you have evaluated it, then you're in a position to understand it. And ..." she says it with a smile as Dr. Hutchinson looks on with bewilderment, "... once you understand it, then you're in a position to help me because your belief is now consciously real, being based on your understanding of it and not on any of your assumptions."

"Exactly." Dr. Hutchinson applauds in his heart, grace bearing witness that he is pleased.

"I get it." Sally spouts off, almost like a good-humored kid who's just been caught playing a practical joke.

"All this time I hid and actually held back my wisdom. But the only true way that anyone will ever be able to understand me or even help me is if I first help them by manifesting my wisdom. It's weird."

"What?"

"It's weird, but all this time I thought I was doing myself and everyone else a favor by shutting up, but it seems as though all the while I was just confusing everybody." She pauses. "You, me, others. There's just confusion. Nobody understands. But I guess that's kind of poetic though."

"What's poetic?" Dr. Hutchinson inquires.

"Well," Sally continues, "it makes perfect sense that no one would ever fully understand what I hid."

Dr. Hutchinson absorbs Sally's comment. He has never had the chance to really get to know Sally, and he's hopeful that today's conversation will change all of that.

Sally grips her backpack tightly, as if responsibility is taking precedence over feeling. As she stands up, Sally doesn't yet know what will come of all this, but as she begins to exit the room, she's inspired to find out. She turns to Dr. Hutchinson.

"Thank you, Dr. Hutchinson ..." for your time and for your kind words." She then checks herself slowly, "It's weird, but your blunt honesty was actually not that hard to take."

Dr. Hutchinson rings with certainty. "I'm happy to help you, Sally. I truly don't believe that this matter should have remained unattended to. Now that you've done the preliminary work, it should make it easier to concede to doing the investigative work."

Sally smiles. She understands exactly what he means, but actually has no desire to go into any of that today.

"I'll see you in class, Dr. Hutchinson." Sally begins to leave but then stops herself short. She turns around, "Dr. Hutchinson?"

"Yes, Sally?"

"I want to say what's right, without saying too much of what's wrong. All I'm trying to say is that, by faith, what happened here today was really, really important." Sally pauses, trying to frame her words. Dr. Hutchinson looks on as she continues. "As long as I do my part in the future, then I think that things will go according to plan" Sally's eyes then unconsciously corner themselves as if she's moved herself into some sort of stalemate. She then breaks away and says what she feels she needs to say anyway. "... Or that things will work out the way they're supposed to work out according to Heaven."

Dr. Hutchinson understands Sally's vulnerability at the moment, so he is cautious about saying anything that might alarm or frighten her.

"A day at a time, Sally, a day at a time; and you did good today."

His comments were as merciful as they were timely. They were the perfect words to end the conversation. Sally absorbed his words, then, both smiling and thankful, she left the peaceful atmosphere of the office encouraged.

Dr. Hutchinson watched the door close and then took a moment for himself. He thought about the reality of what had been spoken, both realistically and prophetically. He understood Sally would need assistance, and he was projecting and countering any possible role he might have with regard to that process. Dr. Hutchinson wasn't worrying about the situation. He was comforting himself in his evaluation of it and reassuring himself regarding his understanding of what he believed might be necessary. In a nutshell, he knew he couldn't control the situation, but he found comfort in knowing he could prepare himself for any potential pitfalls or circumstances.

Breaking away from his thoughts, he looks at his Rolodex. He finds the number to an old friend, a former professor who is now on the administrative staff at the Moody Bible Institute. He dials the number.

"Hello, Dr. Marcus here."

Dr. Hutchinson picks up his receiver, "Hello Phil, it's Tom Hutchinson."

"Tom, how are you?"

"I'm doing fine ...;" he speaks with a sense of urgency, "how about you, Phil?"

"I'm well, Tom; the summer was nice with Jan in the Netherlands. Her mother is quite a little spitfire if you want to know the truth."

Tom interjects, "Oh, is she now?"

"Yes, she still explains to me, actually to the exact detail, how every issue in my marriage should be handled. I'll tell you what, Tom, if that woman wasn't so far away, I'd introduce you!"

"I think I'll pass; one barn-burner in this lifetime is all I can handle."

"What can I do for you, Tom?"

"Phil, I need Bodhi Dalry's number; do you have it."

"Of course, my secretary has it. Give me a moment."

Phil jumps on the intercom to beckon his secretary's assistance; Tom passes time by doing jump rope with his telephone cord, exercising all old thoughts and emotions about his ex-wife out of his mind.

Phil jumps back on the phone. "I have it, here it is, (312) 329-4001." He pauses, "Do you mind if I ask what this is in regard to Tom, if you don't mind me asking?"

"No problem, I wanted to talk to him about some theories I heard him discuss at the Memphis conference."

"Oh, yes. Did you hear his discourse, Tom? Word was it was astounding."

"Yes I heard it, and yes, it was impressive. I wanted to get a little more insight as to his point of view, but more privately of course."

"I understand Tom." Phil takes some liberty, "It's amazing, some of that 'New Wine' that is being poured on the younger generation these days."

Tom concurs, "It is impressive, Phil, and I want to know just how deep this Bodhi Dalry can go."

"Well," Phil speaks from experience, but also pride, "he can go pretty deep, Tom, but I'm sure that is something you would like to find out for yourself. Give him a call, Tom. In fact, would you like me to call him and let him know you are trying to get ahold of him?"

"That won't be necessary, Phil, I spoke with him briefly after the conference so I don't think my calling him will be unexpected."

"Of course," Dr. Marcus relents.

In an attempt to not make Dr. Marcus feel unappreciated, Dr. Hutchinson mercifully cuts the conversation short.

"Thanks a lot for getting me the number, Phil. I'm actually looking to get ahold of Bodhi before my next class"

"Say no more, Tom, I'll let you go."

"Thank you again, Phil, for your help, and let Janice know I said hello."

"We'll do, Tom. Make it a good day."

"Thanks Phil. Take care."

Dr. Hutchinson hangs up the receiver and puts his fingers to his lips. He's weighing the seriousness on his next call. He wouldn't have minded sharing information regarding The Cell or Bodhi Dalry's potential participation in it, but the line he was using was not secure. But this next call would be.

He reaches and grabs his secure cell. The line is indeed a secure line, but compared to an O-PECK call, the cell is not foolproof. He would rather use an O-PECK line, but O-PECK calls require governmental clearance from both parties, and Bodhi doesn't have O-PECK governmental clearance.

He dials Bodhi's number.

"Hello," a hurried voice answers.

Hearing his voice, Dr. Hutchinson shifts in his seat. He reminds himself of the seriousness of the moment.

"Hello, am I speaking to Bodhi Dalry?"

"Yes, this is Bodhi. And with whom am I speaking?"

Bodhi, this is Dr. Tom Hutchinson from Gladdale. Do you remember me?

There is a pause along with heavy breathing. Of course, I remember you Dr. Hutchinson; happy to hear from you. I'm actually riding my bike right now, can I call you back?"

"Well, actually my number would not register in your cell; it's a restricted number. I'm calling you from a secure line."

Bodhi begins to slow down his peddling. He asks his question with seriousness. "What's this regarding, Dr. Hutchinson?"

"You're not in trouble or anything like that Bodhi, so don't jump to conclusions."

Bodhi has now fully stopped riding. He is catching his breath slowly, unlatching his riding shoes and letting himself ease off his bike. He looks around, almost as if he's wondering if the people around him might be listening to his conversation.

"How can I help you, Dr. Hutchinson?"

Dr. Hutchinson cautions, "Bodhi trust me when I tell you this is the last way I wanted to contact you. Has a man named Cross Lutherant contacted you yet?" Bodhi's eyelids straighten and he looks slightly apprehensive. "I actually got a call from him this morning; it was on my voice mail, but I had no idea what he wanted. He said he would try me back, but he left no number for me to return a phone call. What's this all about, anyway?"

"Cross is my friend, Bodhi, and his phone call was about a recommendation I happened to make regarding a potential position you might be able to fill. In short, Bodhi, I have recommended you.

"What kind of position?"

"I am going to let Cross explain all that to you. I wanted to contact you so you wouldn't worry ... I wanted you to know for certain that I had indeed recommended you and that Cross was indeed my friend. I didn't want him approaching you to startle you."

"Ok," Bodhi exhales a bit, "how shall I contact him?"

"That is mostly why I am calling you. Since he was not able to get ahold of you the first time around, he might try again today." He then adds realistically, "But he might send some people to your class or to your work."

"To my class or work?" Bodhi is tested; his patience is reacting to the uneasiness of the situation. "What is this about?"

Dr. Hutchinson rolls his eyes, trying to remind himself that all this is new to Bodhi. He licks his lips as he tries to find the right words. "Bodhi, please, take a moment and relax."

Bodhi turns a few times, almost as if he were trying to free himself from some kind of invisible cage. He then lifts his eyes to the sky and back down again, trying to settle his nerves. He finds it in himself to be calm.

"All right, Dr. Hutchinson, I'm cool."

Dr. Hutchinson, seeking to end the conversation informingly, says, "This matter is important, Bodhi, and right now, it is based on a time table. If the time

table were not so critical, then I probably would've flown down there personally and introduced you to Cross." Bodhi takes the information, almost like a bullied kid. Dr. Hutchinson continues in his resolve. "Since I cannot do this, you need to allow Cross to get ahold of you any way he can. Do you understand, Bodhi?"

"Yeah," Bodhi answers on command.

"Bodhi," Dr. Hutchinson continues, "the sooner you can talk to Cross, the sooner you will know what this is all about. Let him contact you, and don't fight any part of this process. And don't be afraid to decline the offer, because there will be no hard feelings either way."

"What's all this about, Dr. Hutchinson?" Bodhi asks still again.

Dr. Hutchinson smiles slightly. "It's a good thing, Bodhi, but just like you probably already know, most good things aren't easily understood or appreciated. The information you are asking me is on a need-to-know basis, and right now, I am not permitted to brief you on its subject. Just know that I am the one who recommended you for this, and that the recommendation came as a result of hours of intercessory prayer by both myself and others."

Bodhi is a bit humbled; his eyes glass over almost as if some clear sheet of appreciation has coated his soul.

"Bodhi," Dr. Hutchinson continues, "I was impressed with you in Memphis, but trust me when I say that this possible appointment is the result of something much more. Whether or not you will fill the position has yet to be determined, but I do know the chance you have been given to fill it has come from Heaven."

"I understand," Bodhi responds. "So should I just wait for Cross to contact me again?"

"Exactly, just go about your day. Relax, because I'm confident that he will get ahold of you before nightfall."

Bodhi tilts his head down and scrapes the surface of the asphalt with his riding shoe. Dr. Hutchinson answers the silence, "Trust me Bodhi, you'll know shortly what all this is about."

"Ok," Bodhi responds, then jolting himself to come alive, "Doctor, thank you for your recommendation. I appreciate your confidence and consideration."

Dr. Hutchinson nods his head. "Don't mention it, Bodhi, just be yourself, and allow the Lord to lead you. If this is truly for you, then it will happen."

"Will I hear back from you, Doctor?"

"Not likely, Bodhi, at least not regarding this appointment. I just wanted you informed so when Cross gets in touch with you, you will already have some sort of foundation."

"Understood. So I'll wait for him to call."

"He will call, Bodhi ..." Dr. Hutchinson winds down, "... soon ..." Bodhi strengthens himself, the direct result of the genuineness in Dr. Hutchinson's voice. "Good luck, son."

"Thank you, sir."

Chapter 4

The walls were veiled with the art and decor of the world's finest painters and sculptors. Dr. Beavauis had already found his way through most of the third floor of The Cell Compound. Cross was directly behind him, and at his right, a military guard. They were nearing Dr. Aloysius Thiery's office, The Cell's lead administrator and founder. It was Dr. Thiery who was solely responsible for the in's and out's of The Cell's daily protocol. Whereas Cross mainly looked over The Cell's duties in relation to administration, Dr. Thiery was the brains and brawn behind The Cell itself.

Dr. Thiery asked to personally brief Dr. Beavauis, which was beyond the normal applicant procedure. Usually, the applicant would go through a series of tests and evaluations, possibly even meeting some of the Candidates and Primary Members before they would sit down to meet Dr. Thiery. But right now the need for an accurate evaluation of applicants was critical. So Cross, adhering to Dr. Thiery's request, sought to bring Dr. Beavauis directly to his threshold. The military guard knocked on the door. The dense sound the door made emphasized its heaviness and stability, mirroring the man seated behind it.

"Come in," Dr. Thiery spoke in French.

The guard opened the door, and at first glance, Dr. Beavauis noticed a robust and purposeful desk to his right. Then, before he had time to react, the man seated behind the desk offered him a warm reception. He wasted no time, immediately standing up and walking around his desk in order to meet Dr. Beavauis. He took his hand, shaking it firmly. The door then closed, and both Cross and the military guard made their way back toward the floor's main entrance.

"Hey Bodhi," Mark turned the corner, holding himself close to the door jam as he did, "some guys are here to see you."

"Ok, Mark, thanks." Bodhi apprehensively puts down his pen. He stands up and walks to the door. Two gentlemen, dressed in black suits, were standing there. They looked like agents of some sort. He approached them cautiously and respectfully.

"May I help you, gentlemen?"

"Yes," one of them voices, "are you Mr. Bodhi Dalry?"

"I am."

"Would you mind coming with us?"

It was more of a request than it was a question.

Bodhi prods himself, "Ok. Do I need to get my stuff?"

"That would be a good idea."

Bodhi returns to the office. He begins to grab scattered belongings, including his phone from off his bike. Mark has followed him in.

Bodhi speaks as he continues gathering his belongings, "Mark, this is what I told you about. I'll be gone for the rest of the night."

"We've got the restaurant under control, Bodhi. Just take care of yourself." Mark then says, overreaching his bounds, "Do you want me to go with you?"

"No," Bodhi turns quickly to look at him, "Dr. Hutchinson said everything was cool. I'll let you know as soon as I know."

"All right."

The two clasp hands, and Mark gives Bodhi a firm hug. Bodhi smiles as he backs away and heads out the door. As he begins to approach the men, one of them grabs him by the elbow and gently leads him out the restaurant. The other follows closely, informing someone on his cell that they're bringing him in.

They walk outside and then get in a Lincoln Towncar. The two men seat themselves almost as if they were men who have caught their prey. The driver then turns on the ignition, pulls the car away from the curb, and heads toward downtown Chicago.

The atmosphere in the room was dim even though the lights seemed to be working perfectly. Bodhi has been sitting in what looks to be an interrogation room for over an hour now. A soda can and two packages of cupcakes are in front of him, untouched.

The drive from work was short, less than fifteen minutes. The men had taken him directly to a Police Station, the fourth floor to be exact. He actually didn't think the fourth floor was a police station, although the first three certainly were. The men did not identify themselves, which he thought strange. Did they know about Dr. Hutchinson's informing phone call earlier? If they didn't, he thought, then their actions were certainly inconsiderate. Bodhi shifted in his seat, trying to ignore any animosity while at the same time remaining thankful he had gotten a phone call in the first place. The door opened and he quit fidgeting. One of the two men stepped inside.

The man didn't even look up.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, I had to get instructions myself." He grabs a chair and turns it around, sitting down. He scoots it closer to the table.

"That's alright."

"Ok ..." The man exhales like a slow leaking balloon. "We need you to read this file and then to acknowledge its requests."

Bodhi stops him short. "Do you mind if I ask who you guys are?"

"We're CIA."

Bodhi steadies himself. "Is all this regarding a CIA position?"

"Not exactly, kid," the agent offers firmly before refocusing on the task at hand. "You'll understand fully when you read the contents of this file." He holds up a file and then sets it back down. "And then watch a virtual tour via this small computer." Bodhi notices that the computer seems to have a small 10-inch LCD screen but without any Internet or Ethernet capabilities."

The man then places both the file and the computer back inside a box that he had brought in with him.

"Ok," Bodhi says, "but is the virtual tour through a link? I don't see a connection or a wireless card?"

The agent lifts up the computer and turns it over. He taps on the bottom of it. "No Internet, kid, the virtual tour is right on its hard drive."

"Oh," Bodhi utters

"Now ..." The agent takes the file back out of the box and hands it to Bodhi. The file is stamped CONFIDENTIAL on the front. The agent then leans back and begins to open up the computer, saying as he does, "It will only take about ten minutes for you to read the file and another ten to watch the tour." Then looking at his watch, he says, "I'll be back in roughly thirty minutes to see where we're at."

"All right." Bodhi begins, opening the file and watching as the agent presses a button to turn on the computer. The computer screen shows a dialog box that reads, "Start virtual tour now." He doesn't think he'll mess it up.

"Good to go?" the agent questions as he stands up and turns the chair around in order to push it back under the table.

Bodhi barely looks up. "Yeah, I'm good." He then extends the agent some courtesy before he leaves the room, "Thank you sir."

The agent turns around, "You're welcome; see you in thirty."

Bodhi opens the file and begins to view its contents. The agent, seeing that Bodhi has begun, closes the door and locks it behind him.

The telephone is ringing, and Cross is rushing down the hallway toward his office. It is almost 11 p.m. in France, and he has just been informed that Bodhi Dalry is in a position to either accept or reject the invitation. As he reaches his office, he looks down on the call pad to see the calls primary extension and prefix. The call

is from Dr. Thiery down the hall. Cross picks up the phone.

"Yes sir."

"Mr. Lutherant, could you please come to my office and personally escort Dr. Beauvias out of the compound."

"Yes, I'll be right there." Both of their offices were on the third floor, so it would be no trouble for him to hurry to Dr. Thiery's office. He turned off his light and headed out the door. When he reached Dr. Thiery's main hallway, he noticed that a military guard was standing next to Dr. Thiery with Dr. Beauvias to his right. Cross quickly straightened his tie before approaching.

As soon as he approaches, Dr. Thiery pulls Dr. Beauvias's hand toward his and thanks him for coming. Dr. Beauvias replies with a bowed head but doesn't say much; his mood is apparent. When Dr. Beauvias notices Cross approaching, he immediately begins to walk in his direction. Cross looks to Dr. Thiery for direction. Dr. Thiery nods, indicating he needs Cross to escort Dr. Beauvias out.

Dr. Thiery makes his way back into his study while all three approach the elevator. Once they reach the back entrance of The Cell Compound, Dr. Beauvias slowly turns to Cross but doesn't face him directly. He speaks in French.

"I want to say I appreciate the offer and the attention I have received today. It has long been a dream of mine to be a part of what you are doing here, but I'm afraid that Dr. Thiery, although brilliant, does not care to see the genius in what I do."

Cross understood him immediately. Although he had seen many applicants come and go, and although he didn't care for Dr. Beauvias personally, he knew that Dr. Beauvias was considered an intellectual genius. So considering such, he was privately interested to find out why he was dismissed so quickly.

Cross kindly showed the doctor to his transportation. Dr. Beauvias humbly entered the Mercedes, and the driver shut the door behind him. The driver then drove Dr. Beauvias away.

Cross was unsure whether or not he should inquire about Dr. Beauvias's removal. As he made his way back to the third floor, he decided to knock on Dr. Thiery's door.

"Come in Cross."

Cross entered the office. "Sir, Dr. Beauvias was just escorted out of the Compound and will arrive shortly at his guest housing. Then, tomorrow morning, he will be driven back to Paris. Will you need anything else this evening, sir?"

"No," but I do know why you are here. You are eager to find out why Dr. Beauvias has been dismissed so quickly."

"If you don't mind, sir."

"Here." Dr. Thiery throws a DVD, and Cross catches it in mid-air, "I was afraid that my decision regarding Dr. Beauvias would be a swift one, so I taped our conversation so as to ensure my integrity would remain intact."

"Please sir," Cross cuts him short, "no one would dare question your integrity, most certainly not me."

Dr. Thiery is listening but has yet to lift his head. He speaks from that position. "I am afraid that we are now living in a day and age where we need to be wiser than we are trusting. I am confident that once you see that DVD, you will fully understand my reasons for his dismissal."

"Yes sir, just to let you know sir, all of the other concerns are being attended to. And I'm happy to inform you that we should know by tonight whether or not Bodhi Dalry is willing to accept our invitation."

"That's good news."

"Yes, sir, it is good news. I will let you know as soon as I hear myself."

Cross notices Dr. Thiery has nothing more to say, so he ends the exchange abruptly. "Good night, sir."

"Good night, Mr. Lutherant."

Cross exits the office. He is glad to have the DVD. He can now evaluate the exact reason Dr. Beauvias was dismissed so quickly. This way, when he informs Dr. Hutchinson of the matter, he can do so more systematically.

Still, Cross pondered, it was interesting the way things were working out. The most likely replacement for Mark Auberon had already been dismissed, and the other applicant, Bodhi Dalry, was on the other side of the Atlantic yet to make up his mind. Things certainly looked uncontrolled and unforeseen at this point. Cross opened his office door and sat down at his desk. He glanced at his monitor; the decision had not yet come from Chicago. He placed the DVD into his player. It was nearing midnight, but he was curious to study the contents of the conversation. He put his earphones on and rested back into his chair.

The wind blowing outside was bustling. The branches from the Plate trees climbed up the walls trying to make their way into The Compound. They touched the windows lightly, even scratching against them. Every time the wind blew the branches knocked, almost as if the trees were trying to invite themselves into the warmth and inner-magic of the Compound's ambiance.

Bodhi has now eaten most of the cupcakes and finished his soda. He has read the confidential file twice and finished watching the virtual tour. He doesn't know what to think at this point. According to the file, the proposed invitation could take two days or as long as two weeks. Bodhi leans back to consider his thoughts. He struggles over whether or not his professors, or even his boss for that matter, would understand or approve of his sudden departure. He continues to grasp, energetically. The opportunity itself is amazing, but more realistically, it is so quick, so premature. He's torn, torn over what is realistic or even compelling. As he digresses, the agent walks through the door.

"Good," the agent closes the door behind him, "seems like we've got things moving along." He eyes the half-eaten cupcake and crushed soda can. "Know where you're at?"

"Not really." His head is tilted back. "I just don't know how to make a decision right now."

The agent grabs his chair and turns it around again, just like a coach who was about to give a pep talk. He then takes the file in one hand and rather manhandles it.

"Do you mind if I give you a bit of advice, kid?"

"Sure." Bodhi rights his head and readies himself to attention. He takes a moment to discern the man's transparency.

The agent continues, "When I picked you up, I really didn't know what this was about." He gives Bodhi a sinister look. "A lot of the information we receive is on a need-to-know basis." The agent leans back a little. "Just so you understand, my partner over there, in the other room, doesn't even know what's in this file, or what's on this computer." He picks up the computer as if it were a piece of scrap metal. Bodhi listens, half sedated, half with his head tilted.

The agent continues, "Just to be honest with you, kid, any opinion I'd give you tonight would be straight from the hip, I'm not involved from the right or from the left."

Bodhi believes him. From what he read in the file, The Cell was internationally run and governed, so the CIA would simply be doing The Cell's busy work here in America. If Cross had gotten ahold of him through the first phone call, this man might never have been called.

"I believe you. You're just doing your job. And your job tonight happened to be to pick me up for The Cell."

"Exactly. Before I read that file," he taps on the cover, "I never knew of The Cell or its purpose, and to my knowledge, I have never done any work for them in the past."

Bodhi looks away from the agent and toward the table. "What should I do?"

The agent looks straight at him. "My advice to you is, if you ain't tied back, then go for it." Bodhi looks up at the agent with a questioning look in his eyes. He wants to hear more. The agent obliges. "This is not a job offer, kid; it's a chance to make the cut, and you have nothing to lose right now, so unless you're tied up, go for it."

The advice was welcomed. It was honest and seemed to be coming from an accurate place. But still, Bodhi thought, it was awkward that a government agent would be this upfront and personal. Bodhi then looked at him with doubt in his eyes.

The agent noticed. "I know this is informal," the agent cracks wisely, "me, an agent, giving you advice; but I feel for guys like you. I see similar circumstances like this all the time. Remember, kid, I work for the CIA. I see it all. Sometimes choices are easy, and sometimes, they're hard. I'm used to seeing things and identifying with them. You're young, and haven't really experienced some things, but I read your file. I guess a lot of people are impressed with you; you're bright." Bodhi straightens himself again to listen; he wants to give the agent his full attention. "All I can say is that in this situation, you have nothing to lose, and everything to gain." The agent gets more personal. "Don't you think it was hard for me to make a choice to be a CIA agent, the pressures, the risks? But I didn't shy away from it because of those things. I took all of it in stride." The agent wipes his nose, almost assuring himself before his next comment, "Simply put, kid, unless you have a wife and kids stopping you, this is a green light."

When the agent first began offering his opinion, Bodhi wanted to take it in stride, just listen really. But now he couldn't deny the truth of it; the agent's advice was dead on. The agent possessed both experience and character; not to mention the confidence emanating off him was piercing right through his tender double-mindedness. Bodhi just sat there, slumped over, humbled by the whole situation.

The agent then became curious, "So what do you think, kid?"

"I think I'm going," Bodhi offers as he looks his way; then he adds, "But I'm still scared, and extremely apprehensive about certain things."

"You'll get over those." Again, the agent's certainty was unflinching. "When I married my wife, I had those same fears and apprehensions, but over time, they disappeared; it'll happen the same with you."

Bodhi held out his hand, "Thanks a lot; you helped me today." The agent half-smiled and extended his arm, taking Bodhi's hand firmly. Bodhi then continued as he shook the agent's hand, "And I do think you're right; this is the choice I need to make, even though I can't quite see it."

The agent nodded his head as he drew his hand back, "You'll be all right, kid. It's a difficult position they put you in, to make a choice like that; that's why I probably felt for you. I saw the difficulty in it, and I thought, with my experience, maybe I can help some."

"You helped a lot. What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't give it, but it's Cooper, Agent Manuel Cooper of the United States Central Intelligence Agency."

"Well, Agent Cooper, I thank you." Bodhi begins to clean up, picking up his soda can and his half-eaten food. "You did your good deed for the day."

"I did two," Agent Cooper quips, pointing directly at the trash in Bodhi's hands. "I'm the one who gave you those snacks; we don't have to do that kind of stuff you know."

Bodhi smiles at his genuineness. "Thank you; I actually was hungry, didn't have a chance to eat."

Agent Cooper nods, "Don't mention it, kid, now we go to step two."

"What's step two?"

"Step two is to get you on a plane to France, and my orders are critical. That means they wanted you there yesterday."

"Ok," Bodhi resolves, "I just need to call my roommate, my boss, and my advising professor, just to get my schedules taken care of." A sense of worry rises up on Bodhi's face. "What about money?"

"Travel will be provided for you, and you won't need any money once you're in France. They will pick you up at the airport, and you will stay with them at their Compound."

"Ok. Can I have my phone so I can make those calls now?"

"Use this phone." Agent Cooper retrieves a cell phone. "This line is secure, so until you're fully debriefed, only use this phone, got it?"

Bodhi takes the phone, "All right." Bodhi then begins to dial his advising professor, and Agent Cooper exits the room in order to contact France with the news.

Cross is still up, and it's almost 2 a.m. He is watching the meeting between Dr. Beauvias and Dr. Thiery. The two are discussing an article Dr. Beauvias wrote called "The Psychoanalysis of the Christian Regimen." Dr. Beauvias is doing his best to defend his article, trying to help Dr. Thiery see the article's accuracy as well as its importance. Dr. Thiery is not arguing the article's importance simply its vagueness. Cross receives an alert on his computer informing him that word has come from Chicago. He stops the DVD in order to focus on the message fully. The alert message comes: Bodhi Dalry has accepted the offer and will be landing at the Aeroport International Strasbourg at approximately 1:40 p.m. Paris time, twelve hours from now. This is good news. Cross leans back and eases himself into submission. By this evening, he will have some indication of exactly who Bodhi Dalry is, and even more important, he'll have a better understanding if Bodhi Dalry will fit into the complex framework of The Cell's alliance.

Holding on tightly to the Towncar's door handles, Bodhi points a jagged finger straight ahead. "The apartment is over there, to the left." Bodhi points at a two-story complex hidden behind two oak trees. "You can drop me off in the front, and I'll be out in five minutes."

Agent Cooper maneuvers the car toward the lawn and in between a fire hydrant and the alley they just came through. He pulls the car to a stop. "Hurry up, kid; you got less than five minutes."

Bodhi jumps out of the car and runs to his apartment. He doesn't even use a key; he does something

with the door, and it pops open. He turns around to see Agent Cooper eyeing him before he closes the door behind him. The other agent has gone home, relieved of duty; it was now only Agent Cooper and himself.

Told to pack for two weeks, Bodhi makes short work of packing the necessities and clothing he would need. He grabs his shave cream, razor, toothbrush, toothpaste, and other toiletries. He puts them into a small carrying bag. He then checks if his passport is inside his busted-up suitcase; it is. He throws the toiletries inside the suitcase. He then stacks the suitcase with jeans, sweaters, long-sleeve shirts and pants, and a few t-shirts for undershirts. He runs to his sock drawer and loads up on black-and-white socks, then underwear, mostly briefs. He stops to think.

He grabs some notes that he has hidden under his bed, along with a worn-out Bible. He has all of his other study materials in his backpack. Running to the fridge, he grabs an energy drink and some protein bars; he thinks he's ready to go. He opens the door and finds the Lincoln parked even closer than before, on the lawn to be exact. Agent Cooper, standing outside, waiting for him, immediately walks toward Bodhi and grabs his suitcase.

"I'll take that, kid, jump in." Bodhi gets in the front seat. Agent Cooper, noticing the condition of the suitcase, places it into the hollow of the trunk. He then slams the trunk behind it, and checks it. He takes out his keys and hops back into the driver's seat. "We've got to get moving."

Bodhi looks over at him. Agent Cooper turns on the siren and spins his wheels; the tires skid on the pavement. The car then heads back up through the alley. Bodhi is astonished, not believing the apparent seriousness of all this.

Before Bodhi even has time to think, Agent Cooper is giving him even more instructions, "We'll be at O'Hare International in about twenty minutes; you'll board a Boeing business jet heading for the Aeroport International in Strasbourg, France. I assume The Compound is not too far from there.

"Do you know where The Compound is?"

"No I don't," Agent Cooper readily admits. "All I know is where your flight takes off from, where your flight is landing, and that you'd better be on it."

Bodhi smiles. Agent Cooper's seriousness is a bit comic. The car continues to head west down the throughway. Bodhi takes advantage of the time; he leans back, watching the cars pass by. He then thinks to himself, this happened so fast; it's so unrealistic. He wonders what he'll need to do to prepare, to convince the people at The Cell that he is qualified to stay there and study. He doesn't want the position if it's not really meant for him, but he doesn't want to just fail either. He will just be real, just be himself. Being himself has gotten him this far, so it might just get him all the way. Agent Cooper breaks the silence. He is talking on his phone, and the conversation seems to be regarding the flight. Bodhi listens in.

"Yeah, we're just getting off the ramp now; it'll be about five minutes ... That's fine ... Yes, runway 27R; we'll be there shortly." Agent Cooper closes his phone, turning to look in Bodhi's direction. Bodhi stares blankly back at him. Bodhi ponders, once Agent Cooper is out of the picture, perhaps there'll be no more easy answers. Agent Cooper notices his concerns.

"Don't worry, kid, they're not getting you over there just to make your life difficult." He offers him a firm wink. "This is an opportunity."

"Yeah ...," Bodhi voices sarcastically, "but an opportunity involving the CIA jerking me from my job, into a police station, and then rushing me to my apartment ... all in the middle of the night."

He eyes Agent Cooper, hoping he hasn't offended him. He hasn't. Bodhi then continues, "And if that weren't enough, I really don't even know who any of these people are."

"Relax, kid, we're here."

They pull up to runway 27R. A huge jet is being deiced in the background.

"Is that what I'm flying in?" Bodhi asks as he sizes up the dimensions of the jet.

"Yeah, unless there's a smaller plane behind it." They both exit the vehicle, and Agent Cooper turns to face Bodhi squarely, "And guess what, kid?"

"What?" Bodhi questions, fear rising behind his eyes.

"It seems as though you're the only one on it." He slams his door and proceeds to walk around the car. Bodhi's left standing alone.

The jet was huge. At least 100 feet long, it had to have a huge amount of cabin space, perhaps two stories of it. Bodhi is mesmerized and points. "I'm going to be the only person on that?"

Agent Cooper, about to open the truck, turns to answer, "We'll, there are four flight personnel and two military personnel. But yeah, you're the only passenger."

"How many people does that thing seat, a hundred?"

"No," Agent Cooper laughs to himself, "it's a business jet, you dummy; it seats anywhere from ten to twenty-two people." Agent Cooper pops the truck and takes out Bodhi's suitcase and backpack; he then continues to talk. "It's got a boardroom, stateroom, office, full bathroom, everything you'll need."

"Yeah," Bodhi turns around, now with his back to the jet, "everything I'll need." He simply cannot believe the enormity of the situation, just this morning he was an ordinary grad student knee deep in both classwork and a full-time job. He repeats Agent Cooper's words slowly to himself, "everything I'll need."

Agent Cooper carries Bodhi's suitcase and backpack to the attendants and the two military personnel who have approached the car. Agent Cooper then pulls out his ID and shows it to the military personnel. He shows them Bodhi's passport. He then shakes hands with both of the military personnel as they grab the luggage. Agent Cooper walks away as the two military personnel stand at attention. He approaches Bodhi.

"All right, kid, this is the end of the road for me. Those people will take care of you." He takes out a card and hands it to him. "Here's my card; I have not been instructed to do this, but if you need some help or

something, then give me a call." He smiles, reassuring Bodhi.

Bodhi takes the card and puts it in his wallet. "Thank you, Agent Cooper ..." he grabs his hand, "you've been a great help, and I'm sure I'll be all right."

Agent Cooper winks, "That's the spirit, kid, you'll be all right." Agent Cooper pulls his hand away and makes his way to his side of the Lincoln. He jumps in, and without looking up, he starts the car and drives away.

Bodhi just stands there, watching as the Lincoln evaporates into the distant Chicago night. He turns toward the plane, about 35 feet away. The military personnel watch Bodhi, almost waiting for what he'll do next. Bodhi takes a deep breath, understanding that if he doesn't walk toward the plane soon, he might begin to worry the guards. He forces himself to walk toward the plane, and as he does, he prays a prayer of protection. The military personnel open the staircase to him. They offer him no looks, not even a stern smile of intimidation. Bodhi climbs the stairs, and as he enters the jet, he is astonished. "You must be joking me."

The first thing he encounters, once having made his way through the crew's cabin, is an exquisitely decorated lounge with a fully equipped recreational area behind it. The lounge itself boasted a complete bar, sofa-styled leather chairs, and a surround-sound entertainment system. The furniture and equipment are state of the art.

Walking further, he enters a corporate-size conference area. The large wood table seemed to be made of dark oak or mahogany and was incredibly smooth to the touch. He couldn't believe he was still on a plane. Panels covering the windows made the cabin look like an actual room.

Further back was a passenger levorotary and directly behind that, a private office and stateroom. The office was covered with red carpet and had The Cell's seal and crest imprinted on the front of the desk. A desktop computer and laptop were on the main desk, and a printer/fax/copier on the side desk. The desk was the same dark wood as the table in the conference room. A

picture of the president of the United States hung on the wall. There was also a beautiful crimson U-shaped sofa bed off to the right.

Behind the office was a stateroom with a queen-size bed. The bed looked plush and comfortable; the bed's outer frame, again made of the same dark wood, was complemented by the bed stand. Opposite the bed, an entertainment and television system was neatly fitted into the plane's cabin hull.

Bodhi was impressed. He then slowly and twistingly made his way back to the lounge where a stewardess and both military personnel were talking. "Do you mind if I ask you a question?" he addresses all three crew members.

"Sure," one of the military personnel answered, his accent a heavy Austrian growl.

"I read that The Cell was an internationally supported organisation?"

"That's correct," the other military personnel offered.

"So I'm confused. Why is there a picture of the president of the United States in the plane's stateroom?" Bodhi pointed toward the stateroom he just exited. "Isn't that bias?"

The military personnel look at each other as if they were confused; then one of them sarcastically states, "Well, aren't you from America, and aren't we in America now?"

"Yes." Trying to discern their personalities, Bodhi continues, "So you're saying that if I were Russian, then there would be a picture of the president of ..."

"Vladimir Putin on the wall," the second military personnel answered.

Bodhi is a bit taken aback by his unflinching directness. He decides to take it a step further, "so basically whatever country your guest is from, then that's the leader you put up on the wall."

"Yes," the same military personnel affirms again, "we have pictures of all the countries' leaders, kings, and presidents below ..." he points down, toward the carpet, "in the jet's baggage/storage compartment." He looks to the other military guard, as if he were asking

for permission to give Bodhi more information; he gets it. "Whenever we go to a certain country, or whenever we transport a certain individual, we simply change the picture so as to not disrespect the individual whom we are transporting."

Bodhi concedes, almost saving face at this point. "So you guys really do have pictures of all the leaders down below?"

"Yes we do; it would be rather rude to go to Russia and see the leader of another country hanging on the wall, wouldn't it?"

"I guess it would be rude," Bodhi replies.

The other military guard, trying to bring resolution to the situation, states, "Yes, It would be strange for you to understand, I'm sure, not having witnessed or seen The Cell's function or purpose for yourself. But once you learn to understand what The Cell is about, your understanding will become complete."

Bodhi looks up hesitantly, even with a bit of shame. "I bet you're right, I didn't mean to cause any stir, it was just my curiosity getting the better of me; please don't give it a second thought."

The first military guard affirms, "It's all taken care of, Mr. Dalry; we will be taking off shortly. The stewardess's name is Ana. She will make sure you are attended to during the flight. Now if you don't have any other questions, we will retire to the crew's quarters. If you have need of us, please inform Ana as to your requests."

"That's great," Bodhi utters without thinking. "Thank you for your help."

"You're welcome, Mr. Dalry, and please, enjoy the rest of your flight."

The two military personnel turn to retire to the crew's quarters. As they walk away, Bodhi asks one last question. "Sirs, may I take a nap in the stateroom if I get tired? It's kind of been a long day."

One guard turns while the other keeps going, "Of course you may; the stateroom is for our guests. He speaks again, "You know, your president just slept in that bed, not more than a week ago."

"My president?" Bodhi is startled. "You mean, The President?"

"Yes, we brought him back less than a week ago, and he slept the duration of the flight in that stateroom."

Bodhi couldn't believe it. The president of the United States, on this plane, this very same plane, he just couldn't believe what he heard. He lifted his head and set his eyes on the guard one last time. "I thought when our president traveled, he always used Air Force One?"

The guard took a step forward, but with only one foot, almost as if his subconscious were moving him. He then spoke in a seasoned tone, a tone reminiscent of Agent Cooper's, "Not if he doesn't want people to know where he's going he doesn't."

The guard then gave Bodhi a high-eyed, fatherly look, complementing the certainty with which he spoke. Bodhi received the stare; he didn't fight it, he just accepted it. He watched as the guard calmly exited the cabin. He sat down in one of the lounge chairs and began to buckle up; he leaned back, relaxing in the chair's comfort. The flight wouldn't be that long he thought, maybe only six hours. He began watching Ana prepare for the takeoff. She was a slender little thing and when she moved, she almost seemed to glide along the carpet. It was soothing just watching her, and it was slowly putting Bodhi to sleep.

Chapter 5

"Hurry up, Sally, you slow poke! This hiking trail is a three-and-a-half-mile loop. We have to get moving." Clair was vehement about nearing the top of the mountain long before the afternoon settled, but Sally's thought process was slowing down, and interfering with, Clair's plans.

It had been almost two weeks since her office discussion with Dr. Hutchinson, and thinking about the repercussions of that conversation still marked her memory.

"I'm coming, Clair!" Sally shouted, digging her boots forcibly into the mountain's parched surface.

Sally indeed has had classes with Dr. Hutchinson since their discussion, but she has yet to break free from the ice that has long formed in the shape of pride and vulnerability. She understands what she needs to do, but she's hamstrung and unable to do it. She has spent time in prayer, talking to God and letting Him know that she is fully aware of her part, yet not fully aware of His. She's waiting for the right opportunity, and more important, for the right spiritual timing.

Sally bows her head and puts her hands on her knees, catching her breath in order to pace herself. But this waiting she is forced to endure is creating a vacuum of doubt, a vacuum that is slowly stealing her joy and inner confidence. She holds her head up again as Clair shouts out.

"Sally, you get an 'F' in hiking!" Clair turns around and heaves a dirt clod in Sally's direction. "I don't think it's that hard to walk up a hill." Clair shakes her head, almost as if she were embarrassed by Sally's aloofness.

Sally giggles under her breath. She knows Clair is joking, but Clair has this way of making her jokes seem so serious. Sally digs in deep and decides to run up the hill to mess with Clair, "Now I know why Jack misses you soooooo ... much Clair!"

"Yeah, why's that, Sally-girl?" Clair turns and winks, not believing Sally can make it up the hill in one stride.

Sally finally reaches her, "Because you're just so irresistible, Clair." Sally jumps right onto Clair's back, making them both unbalanced, but Clair's up to the challenge. She straightens her body and grabs Sally's legs, and once she's got a good hold, she begins to forge her way up the hill. The others, Neaven and his friends, begin to laugh and cheer as Clair carries Sally up the mountain.

"If this is what I have to do to get you up this stupid mountain, Sally-girl, then so be it." Then, after fifteen or so more steps, she politely drops Sally off her back. Neaven and the others catch up slowly, and everybody decides to take a breather. They scatter, allowing some time to view the beautiful Townshend State Forest below. The view from Bald Mountain was beautiful, so fantastic in fact that simply imagining the daily activities and chores of the Townshend residents below was hardly possible.

Sally decided to take some extra time for herself. She walked over to the side of an underpass and leaned against the opening of a ridge. Tomorrow, she thought to herself, she would again have class with Dr. Hutchinson, and this fact had been foremost on her mind. She continued to look down on the community and world below her. Clair noticed Sally's preoccupation and slowly made her way over toward her. She leaned up against the ridge, but mostly up against Sally herself.

"Can you make it right, Sally-girl?" her tone was both challenging and sympathetic at the same time.

"Can I make what right, Clair?" Sally counters.

"Everything you see down there, Sally. The world, its people, all their questions, and all their problems; can you make it right?"

"Who ever could?"

Clair then counters, "Then why do you try, Sally?"

Sally doesn't even look up. She is tired of everyone else around her making so much sense when she is the one dealing with the burden of this ordeal. At this point, she doesn't even care if everyone else around her

happens to be right; she just wants some peace for herself.

"Sally," Clair maintains humbly, "I'm sorry to prod; I'm just trying to help." Sally turns to look at Clair. "I just see this thing totally differently. You don't have to fix all their problems," she motions toward the residents below; "you just have to find your place."

Sally bites her lip, knowing she is doing the best she can. Clair presses on, "Trust me, Sally, when you find your place, everything else will be effortless, and all these people that you care so much about, they'll get the help they need."

Clair's statements made a lot of sense. Sally didn't have to fix all these people's problems, or even try to observe them; she just needed to find her place. Then, when in that place, she could allow God to use her to minister to all these same people.

Clair expounds, "This thing is not about you fixing people's problems, Sally; it's about you finding your place, and once that happens, everything you tried to fix will eventually fall into that place."

"So what you're saying is that all I need to focus on is where I belong and nothing else."

"That's exactly what I'm saying, Sally. Let God use Dr. Hutchinson to mold you into who He wants you to be, and once that happens, you'll see that all the other concerns weren't even yours to begin with."

"Clair," Sally exhales wearily, "I have spent two weeks in Dr. Hutchinson's class since our last talk, and nothing has even changed, nothing has happened."

Clair reassures herself, "Can I ask you a question, Sally-girl?"

Sally nods her head, and Clair continues. "In the last two weeks, if there had been an opportunity in Dr. Hutchinson's class for you to stir up your gift, would you have clammed up, or would you have gone for it?"

"I would have gone for it."

"I believe you, Sally. So, you not speaking in Dr. Hutchinson's class has actually nothing to do with your efforts, but has everything to do with the fact that the right opportunity has not yet presented itself."

"That's true," Sally says with a sense of encouragement.

Clair presses on, "So Sally, I ask you. No, I order you. Quit beating yourself up." Clair vents these words as she lovingly manhandles Sally by her shoulders. "Your heart is right, Sally-girl; it simply hasn't happened yet because it's not your time." The two make eye contact, and Clair realizes her words have affected Sally. She offers Sally a final squeeze and then rushes off to meet with the others.

Sally just stood there, thinking to herself again. Clair was right, she thought, so right. She had actually subconsciously known, and even wrestled with, what Clair had just said. But somehow Clair's saying it now put the nail in the coffin of her self-doubt. The right timing hadn't presented itself yet; and when it finally did, Sally thought, she would not hesitate but would take her chance, regardless of her vulnerability and regardless of her fears. She held onto this extra resolve, putting it away deep into her heart's pocket. It would become the fuel she would need tomorrow, to forge ahead during Dr. Hutchinson's classroom session.

"Yes, Emilie, I doubt he is doing that!" Dr. Hutchinson joked assertively. "I've known him far too long for that to register!" He again laughs, obviously in camaraderie with the person on the other line.

"Yes ... yes, I have that information."

"I will talk to him later myself, regarding that issue ... Yes, Emilie, yes, ... that is not for you to worry about."

As Dr. Hutchinson continues to talk, the mature respect he has for the person on the other end of the line is made obvious. Their relationship seems considered, even established.

He answers her again. "I will deal with them myself, and if I need any kind of information regarding what you are asking, I will contact Cross myself. ... Yes. ... I don't foresee that as a problem, Emilie, I really don't."

The conversation, long but important, was about the Regional Summit meeting for the Counselors Across America Campaign, which, in actuality, was an alias for a private meeting concerning The Cell and America's diplomatic policy. Dr. Hutchinson had been called to observe on this one, but not to be involved directly. Cross Lutherant, who became a stand-in representative for America concerning The Cell's activities, would be the meeting's officiator.

The main reason Cross elected to include Dr. Hutchinson was that Dr. Hutchinson's afterthoughts always proved invaluable, not to mention his U.S. diplomacy being a respected commodity. Everyone, from the president on down, seemed to breathe a little easier when Dr. Tom Hutchinson was around, especially when matters concerned The Cell.

"I will let him know, Emilie. Good-bye." He hung up the phone and leaned back on his couch. The conversation had served its purpose; he now had the information he needed. He will be ready to speak with Cross about the meeting scheduled to take place less than three-and-a-half weeks from now.

The meeting is, even on the surface, important. It pertains to America's future involvement with The Cell but also will highlight The Cell's observation of America with regard to its overall practices. Simply put, during the meeting, America will decide to either strengthen or loosen its bond with The Cell, and after that decision is made, The Cell will brief America on how its decision will likely impact The Cell's overall plan of alignment with regard to the other Member countries. The meeting will bring together most of America's diplomats as well as a few of America's neighboring countries NATO foreign representatives.

The involvement of foreign representatives during such meetings is simple. A country's involvement in The Cell is not based merely on its participation; involvement also relies on the evaluations and recommendations of a foreign oversight committee. This process ensures all Member countries will remain honest and keep their protocols up to scale; it also builds camaraderie and allows for flexibility among the

countries. It was The Cell's original administrator, Dr. Aloysius Thiery, who encouraged direct foreign oversight. It has proved to be an effective tool, especially with regard to national meetings. The process promotes trust and accountability, which in turn, promotes openness and transparency.

In years past, foreign countries would have national meetings and subsequently join up for international summit meetings, during which each country would discuss its plans. This process proved fatal because after many of the countries' national meetings, the overall consensus was that there was no alignment, either domestically or diplomatically. This demonstrated that each country's private effort resulted only in the aborted efforts of The Cell's international pursuit. The result was that a lot of countries backed away from The Cell's aligning purpose, and not because The Cell hadn't done its job, but because of the political unrest that arose even before the countries had given themselves the chance to qualify for The Cell's overall objective.

But the regulated foreign oversight committee put a stop to all that. Now, when a national meeting was held, diplomatic representatives from other countries would be in attendance. Diplomats now had the authority to watch over and, at most, humbly voice their concerns regarding other Member countries' national meetings. The foreign diplomats' purpose was not to be heard, but to witness the meetings and to hold the Member country accountable for its professionalism and protocol. The Cell had found that by simply allowing foreign diplomats to take part in and witness Member countries' national meetings, the end result was a more concise, less obscured objective. Furthermore, it was Dr. Aloysius Thiery who proposed this course of action. This is only one of the reasons he is considered The Cell's unquestionable leader and everyman. Glancing at his notes, Dr. Hutchinson is interested in speaking with Cross about some of America's proposed objectives and purposes for this meeting, but he would not think of contacting him simply for that. He rarely, if ever, contacted The Cell; if The Cell needs him, he will be called upon.

He was currently still waiting to hear back from Cross regarding the appointment of Dr. Etienne Beauvais and Bodhi Dalry. It had been almost two weeks since he spoke to Bodhi last, and since that time, he had not yet heard anything regarding either of them. Not that two weeks was an abnormally long time, he thought; sometimes it could take up to a month. But this usually involved the applicant's being selected only to return to his environment in order to make a more informed choice. Anyway, he had no idea what had come of the situation, and as he thought to himself, he again realized that there was nothing he could do regarding its outcome.

As he continued to relax, his thoughts drifted to another subject, Sally. He thought about the conversation they had had in his office and how, since then, nothing had really happened. He was wise enough to understand that Sally was young and that maybe all this wasn't as serious as she had made it out to be. As he thought more about this, he wondered if there was anything he could do to ensure Sally was being ministered to effectively. If Sally indeed wanted to expose her gift, what could he do to make that happen? What could be done for this girl? He asked himself.

He put his hand on his cup of tea and then arose from the couch, taking his tea with him. He turned off the light in his study as he made his way to the kitchen. Finding next week's lesson plan scattered over the kitchen table, he took a look at his notes. To get this girl speaking, he thought, he would have to come up with a good plan.

He reaches for his phone and dials the number of another faculty member, Dr. John McBride.

Dr. McBride was a fellow theologian and a respected thought-provoker. His teaching tactics were considered brilliant because of his ability to get the best out of his students. When Dr. Hutchinson first came to Gladdale, he requested Dr. McBride's advice regarding techniques for younger students. He had no problem teaching the younger students, but challenging them to be their best was another story. The receiver rings, and a young lady picks up on the other line.

"Hello."

"Hello, this is Dr. Tom Hutchinson. Is Dr. McBride available?"

"Yeah, just a second. Dad!" Dr. Hutchinson listens as the girl screams for her father. There is a movement on the phone and then a greeting, "Hello?"

"Yes, John; it's Tom Hutchinson."

"Oh, hello, Tom."

"I hope I'm not disturbing you John."

"Oh no, not at all. I was just reading some papers. What can I do for you?"

"Well, it's in regard to Sally Travis, John. I know she was your student in your Exegesis of the book of Acts course and I was wondering if you could offer some help?"

There was a slight pause. "Sure Tom, lets talk about it."

"Great, well here's the situation John ..."

As Tom opens up, both men begin to relax and settle into the conversation.

"Right now she's in my Christian Thought discussion course, and to be honest with you, John, I hardly know the girl. Mostly because she doesn't involve herself in any of the classroom discussions."

Dr. McBride nods his head, empathizing with his concerns.

"She comes into my office about two weeks ago and tells me that she is afraid to speak in class due to some gift she believes she possesses. John, I am calling you because I want to make sure I am doing everything I can in order to help this girl understand her dilemma."

Tom exhales, turning his head about 60 degrees to the right in order to radiate his frustration away from the phone. John McBride speaks.

"Tom, I want to first say that I am pleased you have called me. It's a big thing to admit you don't fully understand Sally's situation, but it's an even bigger thing that you care enough to even call me in the first place. Some teachers wouldn't have given Sally a second thought."

"That's true, John," Tom affirms, shrugging off any nobility on his part, "But right now I'm trying to figure out ways of getting her out of her shell, but I don't

want to make any false assumptions. That is why I contacted you."

"Let me tell you a little bit of what I understand regarding Sally. Hold on one second." John is sitting in the living room, and a door separates the living room from the kitchen. He closes the door and returns to his seat.

"Tom, Sally is an exceptional girl. Let me be straight with you. The only reason she is not talking much or demonstrating her gift is because she has closed herself off."

Tom interrupts, "Why does she do that?"

"I'm about to take my best stab at it Tom," he hushes.

"Sally was in my class, Tom, and she was brilliant. But she was never so brilliant that she demanded attention to herself or even distracted from the attention others received. When she had a paper due or if there happened to be an essay test question, she would be brilliant, but only to an extent. What I am trying to say, Tom, is that when it came to my class, and subsequently other professors' classes, she never clearly wanted to control or even impose herself on any of the discussions in such a way that she would be seen as the one possessing all the answers."

Tom cuts in, "I understand, John, but she spoke in your class, as well as other professors' classes, but she won't speak in mine."

Dr. McBride smiles, waiting for Tom to finish. "I fully understand that Tom, and that is why I think my answer might surprise you ... You are a man who is respected all over the world. I mean, when you first came to Gladdale, I almost asked for your autograph!"

Tom laughs aloud.

"I'm serious Tom, I almost did ... I'm glad I didn't."

Tom again laughs, even louder this time.

"But I almost did. The moral of the story, Tom, is that you, in obvious ways, are respected more than the rest of us. This is the way Sally sees it, Tom. If she were to open her mouth in one of our classes, and just so happened to get the better of us, then you know what,

Tom, big deal, she is a gifted student. But Tom, think about this, if she were to open her mouth in your class ... and just so happened to put the great Tom Hutchinson in his place, then Tom, that would automatically stir all sorts of talk and backlash. And considering Sally's past actions in my classroom as well as in others', I can tell you squarely that Sally is neither desirous nor comfortable with such talk."

Tom jumps in, "So basically you think Sally won't talk in my class because she doesn't trust herself enough to keep her wisdom moderate."

"It makes sense, Tom. Like I said before, Sally was always brilliant, in all of her classes actually. But she never crossed the line to make herself superior, either in my classroom or with any of the other professors."

"So why can't Sally just be moderately brilliant in my class like she was in yours; why does she have to clam up altogether?"

"Maybe because your assumptions about her are right, Tom; she doesn't trust herself enough. Consider my reasoning for a moment. Sally, just like all of us, is a fallen sinner. Just because she has a gift doesn't mean there aren't some serious issues surrounding that gift. Maybe the temptation of having a highly respected university professor is too big for her and because of that she just clams up altogether to avoid the thought of drawing attention to herself, and possibly drawing attention to what's pent up inside her. Think of it, Tom; let's just say Sally spoke up and humbled you in that classroom. That would immediately establish her on another level altogether. Maybe she doesn't trust herself enough under those circumstances. Maybe the allurements of what's pent up inside her will overrule her desire to remain humble."

"I see your point," Tom humbly concedes. He knew the truth in what John said. Pent-up emotions usually go hand and hand with such gifts and abilities, because people simply didn't understand how to exercise them correctly.

John breaks Tom's thought process, "Do you see Tom, even though

Sally is currently moderate and passive regarding her gift doesn't mean she is controlling it perfectly or wisely. Maybe hiding the gift has simply made it well up inside her, and now, because the gift was never channeled properly, it's ready to erupt all over someone, maybe even you Tom?"

"I see your point."

"We are all sinners, Tom, saved by grace, and maybe Sally, in doing what she has done, has actually done herself a huge disservice. I'm sure she tried to do it for the right reasons, Tom, to hide her gift; but now, because she's getting older and because she can't hide it anymore, she might have some serious issues regarding exactly how to handle it."

"I understand what you are saying, John, but don't you think that some of what you're saying is a little extreme?"

John didn't know it, but Tom was testing him. Tom wanted to get to the bottom of this, so he sought to see how emphatically John actually believed his own words regarding Sally.

"Tom, consider this, people make incredible vows to the Lord, and a lot of times, after those vows are completed or after the vows have run their course, the people are different. They are more prideful and a lot less humble or willing to communicate or to even be teachable by man. Sally has done a similar thing. By keeping this gift inside and by not sharing it with others or even working it out, she has put herself in a difficult place. Maybe, Tom, when she comes out of this place, she will resonate with the same pride and stubbornness that becomes evident in people who put themselves under laws or vows."

Dr. Hutchinson agreed with John; what he said made sense. He himself had seen the results of what the Bible called willworship, and its repercussions were exactly as John had explained. He also agreed that Sally keeping this gift inside her was again similar to a person making vows or putting themselves under a curse. Its repercussions would expose the same kind of pride and would resonate the same kind of stubbornness and

independence of mind, perhaps even separating the person from the Spirit of God.

"So where does that leave us, John?"

"There's hope. Let me explain. Many of the people who make these vows, even when the pride does surface, it does not entirely affect their ministry in God. God still uses them, Tom, as prophets, as vessels, in various ministries where not being teachable by man is not the main concern. Also, it is possible, though rare, for someone to actually make these same kinds of vows and still come out on the other side both teachable and submissive. But again, this is a rare occurrence."

Tom agrees with almost everything Dr. McBride has said thus far. Even Paul the apostle made vows, and he remained incredibly attentive to the Spirit of God. But Sally was no Paul; she was nineteen and could be easily provoked.

"You can be sure of this, Tom, if and when Sally comes out of her shell, if there aren't many fireworks, you can be sure that her heart has been tested before God. But if she does come out, and the fireworks are blazing, then just know that your job is to at most buffet and simply let God become accountable for Sally. If the fireworks happen, Tom, then it is not your concern anymore because it's now a heart issue for God alone to deal with. Be the good witness, but allow God to do the spiritual surgery on her."

"So you really think all of this is going to happen, fireworks and manifestation?"

"I'm afraid so, Tom; it's human nature. You can't hold your breath for thirty seconds and then not exhale violently. Sally can't keep all this trapped inside her and then just tiptoe through the tulips; repercussions will happen ... Just do yourself a favor, Tom; expect at least some small fireworks on this one. You'll know where Sally is at just by observing. If Sally's coming-out party happens to only be a few kids lighting off some firecrackers, then everything should be fine, but if it happens to look like the Grand Finale at Disneyland's New Year's Eve Bash, then, we'll know that some spiritual work needs to be done."

"Makes sense, John," Dr. Hutchinson slowly concedes. "But how do I get her to come out? At this point, that's what really needs to happen."

"I will give you this advice. Just have your normal class discussions, but make sure you eye Sally during those discussions. See if anything hits her periodically, and if you see that something does, stay on that point and do all you can to get class feedback on that subject. That might bring her out."

"I actually was planning on doing something similar to that."

"Exactly, get her involved, and try and discern where she might fit into the discussion. I think if you do that, then she'll speak up." John pauses, then asks, "Didn't you say she told you that she wanted to speak up anyway?"

"Yes, but that was two weeks ago."

"I would just do what we talked about; I think it will work."

"I appreciate your point of view, John. By the way, where did you get that insight regarding the vows? That was some clever stuff."

"I actually have a missionary friend in Indonesia. He told me that when a lot of the villagers first find Christ, they want to make vows to Him. The people were formally pagans, so vows are nothing new to them. But he told me that by observing these men, especially the ones who made the vows, that they tended to end up more distant and possess a more self-proving character. But the interesting part, Tom, is that God was still incredibly evident in their lives, only that their gifts, which tended to be strong and unique, would usually only minister to people spiritually. These people became interpreters of dreams, intercessors, and prophets, sometimes incredibly skilled in certain areas or trades. God didn't use them as pastors or teachers, to consciously teach people, but instead used them subconsciously, to spiritually minister to the people's spiritual minds. Sometimes ministers would not even know that they were being used. My missionary friend said it was beautiful to watch. Now sometimes these people would become prone to frailties, but they would also become

like Elijahs. People who were foreign and different because of their unique personalities but who, nevertheless, loved God in a very personal and private way. Tom, God used these people very personally and very passionately in other people's lives."

"That's amazing," Tom utters. "I agree, it's not wise to make vows, but it does create a unique character that God holds onto and uses beautifully."

"Exactly, and this might prove true with Sally in very much the same way; we will have to see."

"We'll have to see, John." He repeats it, hoping that in repeating it, it will come true.

"Oh, quickly, one last thing, Tom."

"What's that, John?"

"I feel lead to say this, in spite of everything we've considered, God knows Sally's heart the best."

"Yes, John, what do you have to say?"

"I think you being her teacher is a blessing, and I believe if any teacher has the ability to help Sally pull through this, it's you, Tom."

"Or you, John," Tom adds politely.

"Well, I thank you for that little vote of confidence, but I had my chance Tom ... I had her for a full year and nothing happened. But now she's with you, and it will happen with you Tom." He said the last part seriously, with authority. "If I were to guess, Tom, there will not be many fireworks. But there will be backlash, and let me explain why. Sally's gift is too special, too strong, and it is impossible not to have repercussions when a gift is that strong."

Tom, weary of existing in the "what-if" world, questions again, "So what do you think might happen"

John comes alive again, "When the gift comes out, the fireworks will be minimal, because I do believe Sally has a solid relationship with God, but because the gift is so special, it will be heavy for all of us, but especially for Sally."

Tom contemplates John's words. But he is hesitant to give Sally too much credit because he has seen too much during his lifetime. He cannot take Sally as seriously as everyone else seems to.

John continues, "I think when it first comes out, Tom, it might be a relief, but then, when it really starts making its way out, the repercussions of the gift might prove dominant. The gift is going to speak to many people, and for that reason, simply dealing with the gift is going to prove an overwhelming burden."

"So you're basically saying that Sally is going to handle the gift and its outing fine, but because the gift is so strong, the repercussions in the long run will be unavoidable."

"Exactly, Tom, the gift is just too real."

"John, do you mind if I say something?"

"Shoot, Tom."

"How can you seriously believe that, how can you believe that this girl is so important?"

"The same way I can believe that God's callings are without repentance, and that there are various gifts in the church, mostly the gifts of discernment, and the gifts of faith and wisdom. You know the verses, Tom ..."

"Yes, I know, but how can you believe that God gave these gifts to a nineteen-year-old girl?"

"I believe He gave them to a seven-year-old girl Tom, because that's the age at which Sally showed herself to possess such gifts."

Tom marked those words. He remembered when he had first heard them. He had just come to Gladdale, and as he thought back, he remembered his exact thoughts regarding them, simply illogical.

"Look, Tom," John swallows, allowing himself time to structure his words correctly. "I want to know just as badly as you do. So tell you what ...,"

"What?" Tom forfeits.

"I believe Sally is going to be ok; I also believe in the gift. So maybe this is what you should do. Make her talk, Tom; make her." John says this seriously, almost in a fatherly way. "If she ends up talking, and the gift becomes evident, then we will have the answers we need. But if you try your best to make her talk, and she doesn't ... then you will need to pin her to the wall."

Tom takes a moment. He knows that the best way to honor a grape is sometimes just to step on it. Sally is

indeed a precious girl, a straight-A student, and a delight to all around. But maybe John is right, maybe this issue needs to be scared out of her, actually pulled out of her. He holds onto John's advice.

"I'm listening, John, go on."

"You pin her to the wall, Tom. This will do one of two things. It will either force her to break free, thus exposing her gift, or she will simply stay hung, knowing that she alone has made the choice to abandon the defense of her gift."

"You want me to put her between a rock and a hard place."

"Exactly. If you do this, she will have no place to go. If she doesn't choose to break free, she will never be able to live with herself."

"Pretty drastic, John," Tom acknowledges.

"Maybe, but I'll tell you what, I've taught for over twenty years, and I've never received a phone call like this one."

"And I've never made one."

John reinforces his resolve, "This needs to be dealt with, Tom. I believe all the faculty would agree with me on this one. The Bible is clear; sometimes the rod of correction needs to be enforced upon those for whom we are to give an account. She's your student, Tom; she's your responsibility."

"Her gift is of God, but what is blocking that gift isn't."

"Precisely, Tom," John emphatically nods his head, "you're not disciplining the gift; you're disciplining the ignorance that is holding back that gift, simply Sally's youth and pride. I know you will use good discernment, knowing that Sally's ignorance is mostly unintentional, mostly unseen."

"Of course, I would never scar her, John, but I do agree that this situation needs to be dealt with." Tom determines what he will say next; John waits to listen.

"I will push her, John."

"Perfect; then I think we have our answer."

"I think we do."

PART II

The Invite

Chapter 6

Beep, Beep, Beep...

The microwave sounded. Sally's routine of a muffin and orange juice was now waiting for her this warm Monday morning. The birds outside seemed almost intoxicated by the aroma of hopefulness filling the air. Sally, though, was in a cryptic mood: neither stubborn nor detached but more ambiguous, as if some deep sleep inside her told her something unknown was about to happen.

Her mother had poured her some orange juice and put her muffin in the microwave, but she was gone now, having already left for work. As Sally made her way down the stairs, the aroma of the blueberry muffin met her. She measured each step, consciously trying to avoid any thoughts of Dr. Hutchinson or his class. The class would be her first of the day, and she wasn't looking forward to it.

She reached the microwave and grabbed the muffin, putting the warm plate in the sink. She took a small bite, it was delicious. With muffin in hand she made her way towards the hallway. Once there she began to pace. Sally always paced when she got nervous.

Dr. Hutchinson was in his car driving down the main university road and about to pull into his regular parking spot. He noticed it was a dismal day. Most of the trees still supported their leaves, the essence of fall having not yet enveloped their will.

As he pulled into his spot, he felt a tug in his stomach, and he knew where it was coming from. He had had enough of trying to work out and surround himself with Sally's emotional issue. Sally this, Sally that; gift, gift, gift. It was all he could think about. The truth was he had grown impatient. Although a structured man, educated at Ivy League schools, chiseled through his ministry efforts for The Cell, and then polished through

years of foreign diplomacy, this issue was proving to be wearisome. Why couldn't Sally just open up her mouth and talk, he thought to himself, like normal people do. He shook his head trying to remain merciful.

He checked his watch; he had a half-hour before his scheduled class. He decided to wait in his car for a moment, to allow his attitude to ease into submission. He thought about his wife though. He began to think about the issues they had as a couple so many years ago; how it was his level-mindedness that often became the peacemaker and resolution to their conflicts, conflicts that arose mostly as the result of her illness.

He loved her dearly. Simply remembering the commotion of those past memories, however, often became leverage enough to isolate her from his mind. Still, she kept returning to his thoughts. Why was she in his mind like this, he wondered; why was her image and her pain resonating throughout his being? He felt he might have understood why. It was because of Sally, he thought; it had to be because of Sally.

But wait, he reasoned, there was more. It was actually Sally's issue, not necessarily Sally herself. Sally's issue was becoming some kind of catalyst that created drifting thoughts about his wife. Oh well, he thought lackadaisically, Sally's issue simply presented itself; he had done nothing to induce its paradox.

His wife and he had divorced long ago; shortly after that, she was found dead, apparently the result of an accidental overdose of medications. He never blamed himself. He had spent twenty years by her side and knew he could do nothing to help her, nothing to prevent the tragedy. She was beautiful; her gifts of art and music often became the spectacle of his mind. Maybe that's why he was struggling so much with Sally right now, he reasoned.

He indeed loved his wife, but mostly because of the beautiful gifts she possessed, and right now, Sally's situation was presenting itself under the same banner, in the same arena. They were different, but in the end, they were much the same. He was feeling tense and began to get upset; the tension in his body gave way to the bustling of his veins. He was upset with God. It

normally didn't happen, but when it did, it was real and painful. He didn't need this, nor did he ask for any of this. But here it was, presenting itself, almost like a stubborn crow that, because of his great loyalty, will block out the beauty of the sun.

He didn't know what to do or what to say to Sally. He bowed his head and began to weep.

The classroom was dry, almost as if the moisture in the wood decided to be absent that day. The students were all talking, unaware of the paradox that existed around them. Neaven was there; he was talking with some friends, and waiting for Sally to arrive so he could bug her over something or other. The lecture board at the front of the room was wiped dry except for a small heading in the upper right-hand corner informing the students of the date and topic of discussion:

"Discussion: The Book of Matthew vs. The Book of Mark."

Dr. Hutchinson walked into the classroom. He placed his briefcase on his desk and took off his coat. The students remained standing and talking. Dr. Hutchinson was early, so they made good on their few remaining moments of freedom. Dr. Hutchinson placed his coat on the back of his chair and slowly began to roll up his sleeves. He took a look at the lecture board, grabbed an eraser, and erased the topic of discussion; it was the first time he had ever done something like that. Sally walked in.

"Ok, class if you will be seated, we can begin." His tone was edgy, as if he had recently had dental work done.

The students began to sit down. Neaven made a face toward Sally signifying she was lucky Dr. Hutchinson began class early, and that he had indeed planned to bug her. Sally smiled back and then looked at Dr. Hutchinson. He looked tired, she thought, worn out and emaciated.

Dr. Hutchinson began, "As you can see class, I have erased the topic for discussion. There is a reason. I

want to address this class in a different manner today." He was direct and certain. "I want all of you to simply allow your little minds to speak this morning. Give me what you've got. I am basically giving you all a chance to present your best arguments, and consequently, your best solutions."

A student hesitantly raises his hand; Dr. Hutchinson motions for the student to speak. "So basically we're to come up with the topics of discussion, and then we are all to discuss them?"

"That's correct ... but I want your best stuff. Something you wrote perhaps or even a research paper that you did awhile back that you believe is accurate." He continues, pacing around the front of the classroom, "It could also be a topic that you discussed at church, or something that stimulated you on the radio, or on the television, something that challenged you."

After Dr. Hutchinson spoke these words, he quieted himself down, giving the students ample chance to absorb his words. He then exercised what seemed to be all of his weight into his next powerful statement, "I want these twenty minds or so to offer up some good topics and solutions so that we, as a class, can thoroughly discuss them."

A student plainly speaks out, "Does it have to be from the Bible?" the class laughs in precession.

"That would be nice Mr. Brady ... since this is a Christian discussion course. Would you like to be the first to introduce a topic, Mr. Brady?"

The students quiet down. Dr. Hutchinson can dish it out just as well as he receives it, and he is in no mood.

"No, Dr. Hutchinson," Mr. Brady answers timidly, "perhaps another student."

"Perhaps," Dr. Hutchinson concedes. "Perhaps one of your fellow students would like to assist you in introducing a worthy topic of discussion?" He walks away from that side of the classroom, having done his damage. "Are there any volunteers, or should I just start choosing?" He says this as he nears the opposite side of the classroom, the side where Sally happens to be sitting.

The students are intimidated, not because they don't have topics, but because Dr. Hutchinson has never done this before. No one wants to voluntarily sacrifice himself. Besides, Dr. Hutchinson is probably testing them, and no one wants to offer some flimsy discussion topic. Any topic introduced would have to prove powerful, even provoking.

Dr. Hutchinson looks around; there are no takers. He turns, placing his back to his students, hoping that in doing so one of them would conjure up the faith and resilience to press a topic. No one did. He doesn't want to get emotional in front of his students, so he tries plan B.

"Ok." He turns around quickly, extinguishing his frustration the moment he does. "I was afraid something like this might happen, so I decided to come up with some topics myself. I believe these topics will be both interesting and validating for this classroom. I would like to first discuss what qualities make a good leader, and I want to compare and contrast two leaders specifically, Gandhi and Hitler."

The students' eyes widen. The topic is good, interesting. A student raises her hand.

"That is a great topic Dr. Hutchinson; can I start?"

"Please do, Christy."

"Well, Hitler was a brutal man; he was totally different from Gandhi. Gandhi was a peacemaker, whereas Hitler was basically a warmonger."

"That's true, so who led more effectively? Make sure to defend your argument." He addressed this question to the entire class.

Another student speaks out, "I guess you can say that Gandhi did. He worked through peace and I think because of that the world will always see him as a great leader."

"Exactly," another student voices, "Hitler used people, and Gandhi was there for the people. That's the main difference. Hitler didn't really care about anyone except his agenda, but Gandhi on the other hand, was willing to suffer and die for his agenda, and to suffer for what he believed to be the cause of the people."

Dr. Hutchinson intervenes, playing the Devil's advocate, "But Hitler died, too, he died and suffered with his people just like Gandhi did."

He continued to challenge his students so they would briskly defend their arguments. "It is true Hitler might have been viewed by the world at large as a sadistic killer, but it can also be argued that in his mind he was simply leading his people to what he believed to be their utopia. Let me ask you another question: how did these two men's strategies of leadership differ, and what, if anything, made one's strategy better than the other?"

The classroom became silent. This question was more specific and would require more thoughtful answers.

The students took turns looking around, wondering if anyone was going to take a stab at it. None seemed interested; actually, most had their heads down in quiet surrender. Dr. Hutchinson looked out at the class; he was about to speak, but before he did, he turned to look in Sally's direction. She was getting ready to speak. Sally raised her hand.

"Yes, Sally." Dr. Hutchinson spoke in a monotone voice, his emotions clearly compressed to the point where they had all become familiar with one another.

Sally began to speak, but then suddenly grabbed her throat. It seemed as though her throat tensed up, and the constriction actually forced her to swallow hard. She simply couldn't speak. She quickly put her hand up implying she would need more time. After a moment, she cleared her throat, and having regained her composure, she began to address the class.

"Hitler, ruled the people by fear; Gandhi, by love. It is always better to rule a people by love. This is because people will never respect a person whom they fear. They might follow the person, the way a child would follow the orders of a bully, but they will never honor the person with the dignity and respect that only comes through the witness of self-sacrifice, the witness of love."

Dr. Hutchinson listened vigorously. Sally's words were powerful, and it was obvious she was addressing the source of the question consciously.

Sally continued, "This is why many of Gandhi's followers were willing to sacrifice their bodies and even their lives for the cause, because they respected their leader's tactics. Hitler's men, on the other hand, walked into battle out of fear but also out of confusion. Many of the soldiers' assignments and consequent deaths were motivated by that fear. Fear drove them, and fear controlled them."

Sally elaborated even more, "If you were to go to Hitler's men right now, today, and ask them if they respected their leader, many of them would say that they did not, and if they knew then what they know now, they would have never followed him into battle. But, on the other hand, if you were to ask Gandhi's followers right now, today, if they respected their leader, then their answer would be that they not only respected him greatly, but that if they had to do it all over again, they would not think twice, but would again sacrifice their lives for the cause."

Sally was done speaking for the moment. She felt she had made her point distinctly. Dr. Hutchinson paced the room, but a little slower this time, almost as if some of his spirit had dispersed.

"That's a good answer, Sally, very good in fact. He then pauses to add distinction, "The only question I would like to ask is this ..."

Sally straightens herself; at this point, she's ready for any questions Dr. Hutchinson might ask.

Dr. Hutchinson continues, "Both Hitler and Gandhi were martyred, meaning they both suffered and died for their cause. So ... although I do agree with what you have said, especially with regard to the respect and love issue, how can you defend this fact, that both Hitler and Gandhi indeed suffered along with their people?"

"Your facts," Sally immediately contradicts, "are not totally accurate, sir."

"Not totally accurate?" Dr. Hutchinson almost playfully challenges. "In what respect, Sally?"

"In respect to your assumption and then in respect to your consequent question regarding that assumption; it's just not accurate, sir."

The tension went up a notch, but only the students felt it. Both Sally and Dr. Hutchinson had been waiting for this moment; for them, this was just game time. Sally then respectfully finishes her comment, "I can explain Dr. Hutchinson, if you will permit me."

Dr. Hutchinson looks at Sally, knowing full well her burdensome situation has taken its toll on both of them. He also remembered what Dr. John McBride had said, that there might be some fireworks, so he decided to play it safe and give Sally as much room as she needed. He gently spoke in her direction, "You are permitted, Sally."

"Thank you, sir. Hitler was not martyred; he was judged, mostly by himself. The Bible clearly says if you live by the sword then you will die by the sword. Hitler's violent decision to take on the world eventually resulted in a direct and consequent reaction, his death. Gandhi, on the other hand, didn't live by the sword, neither did he decide to take on the British by force, yet he did die by the sword. Gandhi did nothing violent to bring about his violent death, because of this fact, it can be said that he was a martyr. But in Hitler's case, he simply became a casualty of war."

Dr. Hutchinson butts in, "So you wouldn't consider Hitler, in any way, shape, or form, to possess the characteristics or qualities of an effective leader?"

"No, I wouldn't. He was an example of what not to do. He started a brutal war, a selfish one at that, and then ended up dying for that war. Hitler was not a martyr, he actually martyred people; Gandhi martyred no one. You can't martyr people and then turn around and become a martyr yourself. That's ridiculous."

Dr. Hutchinson, knowing Sally was emotional in her last statement, leads her back to the question at hand. "So there is nothing good that you see in Hitler, nothing at all?"

"I am not going to say that Hitler wasn't charismatic, or that he wasn't very persuasive, or that he wasn't intelligent. He possessed all of these characteristics. But this is my argument regarding Hitler disqualifying himself as a good leader."

Dr. Hutchinson crosses his arms as Sally finishes her discourse.

"As soon as you take these beneficial qualities or characteristics, and you put them under a certain header, whether it be selfishness, greed, war, annihilation, or even the end of the world, then these same beneficial qualities become infected; they become tainted. As soon as Hitler took all these positive qualities and gave them over to an evil passion, he ceased to become a good leader.

"It's not how you start a race, Dr. Hutchinson, it's how you finish. If Hitler started out on solid ground, then he didn't finish on solid ground, because his positive qualities had been given over to lustfulness. The end result was that he disqualified himself from the race, the race of being a respected leader."

Sally sat there, continuing to look at Dr. Hutchinson but not possessing an ounce of desire to look at the other students. She was waiting for any other questions Dr. Hutchinson might have, but there weren't any.

Dr. Hutchinson allowed himself to slip away from his authoritarian position, touching his two lips gently with his middle two fingers as he quietly took a stroll across his classroom. He actually hadn't done this in a while, strode across the classroom, but Sally's comments had got him thinking. He was being patient, not wanting to ruin the moment with premature talking.

He thought to himself. Sally's answers were good, reasonable and insightful; but how good would they remain? How good would they continue to be if he upped the stakes? He decided to forge ahead.

"That was a good discussion, Sally, very good in fact. I think most of the class would agree with your observations. But I want to go in another direction now, and I want to talk about Hitler some more."

He paused again, allowing the class to take the full brunt of his disputatious spirit. He looked over at Sally. The rest of the class was simply following suit; they couldn't exactly put their fingers on what was going

on between Sally and Dr. Hutchinson, but they didn't need to: the issue was big enough to grasp subconsciously.

Neaven stared at Sally, silently praying in his heart that everything would go as it should, but with minimal casualties to both Sally and Dr. Hutchinson. He knew this opportunity could scar both of them, so he prayed for resolution and clarity.

Sally crossed her legs; her feet tensed up almost as if a ballerina were getting ready to dance through her. Dr. Hutchinson remained firm but relaxed, he had seated himself on his desk, arms crossed and staring directly at Sally. He normally would never take on this kind of spirit with regard to his students, but in this case, his spirit was only directed toward Sally. It was for her own good he reasoned; this girl needed to break one way or the other.

"Sally ..."

Sally looked up, waiting for his question.

"Hitler, as you clearly stated, a man condemned by God, but ..." He lifts his voice and eyebrows, suggesting a critical way of thinking. "A man, quite possibly, used of God?"

"Used of God, how?" another student asks. Dr. Hutchinson, a bit annoyed owing to his current focus on Sally, turns his shoulders a bit toward the student and suggests innocently enough, "Yes, used of God perhaps."

Sally opens her mouth immediately, almost interrupting Dr. Hutchinson's last train of thought. "I can answer your question, Dr. Hutchinson."

Dr. Hutchinson, pleased, offers Sally the floor.

"It's going to be a little long, but I will try and keep it focused."

"Go ahead, Sally; we have plenty of time."

Sally begins, "There is reference, from the Bible. I remember reading this text awhile back and wrestling with its concept, wrestling with its origin of design. Now that you mention Hitler, and him possibly being used as an instrument of God, I must admit, the revelation is made more complete.

"In the text, God, through the prophet Jehu, pronounced judgment on the House of Baasha, including all that pertained to it. He basically pronounced and

prophesied that it would be destroyed. In the course of time, Baasha passed away, but his son Elah began to reign instead. Remember, God had not only pronounced judgment on Baasha, but on his entire house, son included. Two years after Elah took over his father's throne, his captain, Zimri, conspired against him and killed him.

"The Bible also states that as Zimri began to reign, he continued to destroy all of the house of Baasha, even to his friends, thus fulfilling the prophecy which God had spoken through Jehu the prophet against the house of Baasha. But there is another interesting concept, in reference to the issue of Hitler being used of God: God had never ordered Zimri to smite his master, not like he ordered Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat to smite his master's house, the lineage of Ahab.²

"What this means is that Zimri did not conspire against his master because God had ordained it, but simply because he was greedy and wanted the throne for himself. Jehu's situation was the exact opposite, where God had ordered Jehu to obey, conspire against, and then kill his master's house. So what we can derive from this example in scripture is that even though Zimri conspired against and killed his master, and in doing so fulfilled God's prophecy, that he did it solely on his own, separate from the direction of God.

"Now, one might argue, 'Well if the action was out of the direction of God, then how could the action have been prophesied and consequently allowed by God?' This is why: God prophesies what is going to happen, not necessarily what he desires to happen.

"In Baasha's case, God did indeed desire that his entire house be judged, but he didn't want Zimri to sin against him in fulfilling that desire. So what is the answer then? The answer is that God knew that Zimri had it in his heart to eventually conspire against and then kill his master, so God, not only knowing all things, but also fully allowing man to operate within the will that has been granted him, simply allowed nature to take its course.

"He didn't stop it, basically, and in doing so he allowed Zimri's bad choice to perfectly fit into his overall plan regarding the house of Baasha, which was its

eventual destruction. Had Zimri not had it in his heart to conspire against and then kill his master, then maybe God would have raised up a Jehu to do the work under command, or even done it himself, using pestilence, but since God already had a man willing to do the work, and in doing that work the heart of that man would eventually become exposed, he simply allowed nature to take its course. Now, I said that prophecy reveals what is going to happen, not necessarily what God desires to happen. Let me clarify this ...

"God initially pronounced judgment on the House of Baasha and prophesied that it would be destroyed. Let me, by the permission of God, expound on this. God could have easily said this:

'Look Baasha, you have upset me and you have made bad choices. In doing this, you have made Israel sin. For this reason, Baasha, I am going to allow judgment to come upon you. Your house is going to be destroyed. Now Baasha, this is what is going to happen. After you die, when your son Elah takes your throne, a man named Zimri will conspire against him and kill him. After Zimri kills your son Elah, he is going to continue to kill all the people associated with your house, including your son's friends. Understand something Baasha, I am not going to stop this, because I am personally upset that you have sinned against me. I am going to permit Zirmi's rage against your house, and I will do nothing to stop it, because you have sinned against me. Now, this same Zirmi, who will conspire against and destroy all of your house, he will not be blameless. I will judge him, too. Seven days after he takes the throne, he will die, because of the sins he has committed.'

"Basically, Dr. Hutchinson, God, more or less, prophesied a man's proposed actions, only that those same actions just so happened to perfectly fit into his overall plan. Now, there is one more fact I would like to include in this segment, just to make this particular argument more accurate.

"Baasha, one generation earlier, when he happened to take Jeroboam's throne, actually conspired against Jeroboam in the same manner in which Zimri would eventually conspire against him. Baasha's act of

conspiracy, just like Zimri's, was also a fulfillment of prophecy. God stated³ that Baasha would be judged because of his conspiracy against Jeroboam, a conspiracy that exactly mimicked Zimri's future conspiracy against him. Baasha basically got a dose of his own medicine."

Sally pauses before continuing in her resolve, "So let's take a look at this one more time. God told Jeroboam through prophecy that his house would be destroyed; it eventually happened when Baasha, totally separate from the direction of the Lord, conspired against and slew Jeroboam's son and his entire house. Then, a generation later, God told Baasha through prophecy that his house would be destroyed; it eventually happened when Zimri, totally separate from the direction of the Lord, conspired against and slew Baasha's son and his entire house.

"The two situations are exactly alike. They happened back to back with regard to Israel's monarch history. The only difference is with regard to the second conspirator. Zimri never received any prophecy pronouncing his eventual destruction; his destruction happened totally separate from prophecy. This was most likely due to the fact that his kingdom was never established; he died alone, roughly seven days after he took the throne.

"I have laid all of this groundwork for one simple reason. It is entirely possible, which I have just proved biblically, for God to use a man but at the same time not directly associate Himself with that man's choices. In this regard, it is entirely possible that God could have inadvertently used Hitler's brutal actions during World War II much in the same way that he used Baasha's and Zimri's brutal actions back in the days of Israel's monarch period.⁴

"Now, it is true that Baasha's and Zimri's prophesied actions aligned themselves with God's desire, and I wanted to make it very clear that I am not implying that it was God's desire that Hitler would massacre all those people, but in order to make this argument accurate, there must have existed within God's desire some sort of plausible outcome or goal to Hitler's actions in order for Him to allow Hitler to go on his

rampage, that is, if in fact, God was indeed using Hitler as his vessel of dishonor. So then, the question becomes, what could have been that plausible outcome?"

Sally takes a breath and realigns herself. She begins again, "Before I start my discourse, I want to again say that I am not stating a personal opinion here. I am simply defending the passages of scripture I quoted in relation to Dr. Hutchinson's imposed question. Now, that being said, with regard to Dr. Hutchinson's initial question of God quite possibly using Hitler's actions to bring about a desired goal or plausible outcome, then please, without any further hesitation or offense, allow me to present my reasoning.

"I have read works, considered by the men who wrote them to be prophetic, stating that the actions of Hitler upon the Jews during World War II were prophesied well over two thousand years earlier in the Bible.⁵ Now the works written by these men are intense, even passionate. They state that during the Holocaust the Jews were forced to wear the Star of David on their arms, and they imply that the Star of David signified the Lord's intervention during that time; prophetically identifying Jesus Christ Himself, who is clearly considered the Star of David by those who worship Him.⁶

"There are also scriptures that imply Jesus Himself was the attending Angel leading the Children of Israel through the wilderness after their deliverance from Egypt,⁷ and that they were delivered simply because 'He knew their sorrows.'⁸ These writers further imply that it was this same banner that stood with them in Auschwitz; the Jews themselves would have to take the suffering but that Jesus Christ Himself was with them, an Angel over them."

Dr. Hutchinson cuts in, "So, Sally, why would God allow the Jews to suffer; why allow the Holocaust at all?"

"There are assumptions. The Bible clearly shows that it is within our suffering that we take time to understand who God is. If God indeed wanted to get ahold of the Jews during that time, then He wasn't going to just ring a bell. None of us initially come running

after God; it usually takes a shaking in our heart, even a consequence."

Dr. Hutchinson presses, "So you believe, at that time, God wanted to get ahold of the Jews' hearts so he allowed this shaking to put them in a place so he could commune with their hearts. Let me ask you a question: why was God interested in communing with their hearts at this specific time?"

"Because God greatly wanted to bless the Jews; this is verified all throughout the scriptures. I will answer your question, Dr. Hutchinson; it actually takes me directly to what I am arguing to be, quite possibly, God's final goal or even his plausible outcome in allowing, not wanting but allowing, Hitler to persecute His people.

"It could be argued that the reason God allowed Hitler to persecute His people at this specific time is simply because God wanted to grant His people their homeland. This could be considered God's final goal, but His plausible outcome could be this, that in order for God to grant His people their homeland, His people would have to be in a suitable position in order to receive that homeland."

Dr. Hutchinson coyly asks, "And what suitable position would that have been, Sally?"

"That suitable position would have been humility. Look, even now God continues to allow Palestine occupation in an effort to keep His people humble and teachable. If God had just handed the Jews that land fifty years ago totally separate from a holocaust and totally separate from any Palestine resistance, then the Jews would have remained totally unreachable by God. They would have existed in their pride and would have continually gotten themselves into enormous trouble, just like they did back in the Old Testament times.

"If you notice, most of the punishment the Jews had to endure during the Old Testament times was directly related to their ease of life and their pride, which resulted in rebellion. Had God allowed the Jews to occupy their homeland fifty years ago without ever having to endure any hardship, whether it be through Palestine resistance or through the Holocaust, then trust me when I

say that the Jews would have continually rebelled against God and would have set themselves up for a disaster that might have been far worse than any Holocaust. You don't give a child a gun just to play with it. Had God given His people their homeland fifty years ago, totally separate from any kind of teachable suffering, then trust me when I say they might have ended up shooting themselves in the head.

"God wanted to bless His people, not curse them, and just like during Old Testament times, the Jews through Moses had to endure suffering and testing in order to receive their promised land, and once they received it, they still had to continually fight in order to possess it. Exactly mimicking today's situation between the Jews and the Palestine resistance. Fifty years ago, Dr. Hutchinson, the Jews had to endure hardship and suffering to reach their promised land, and when they did it, they did it with the Star of David sown onto their arms, to the Jews, signifying their heritage, but prophetically speaking, signifying the true Star of David, who just happens to be Jesus Christ."⁶

There is silence in the classroom; the students are in a state of awe. Some of them had heard Sally speak before, but none to this extreme. Neaven nodded his head slowly, accepting Sally's statements. He was probably closer to Sally than anyone else in the room; he knew the arguments Dr. Hutchinson had impressed upon her were hard and controversial, but this was exactly why he picked them in the first place, to test Sally's character and resolve.

Dr. Hutchinson eased back on the desk and then returned forward to the same position. There was almost a fog in the room, partially because of what was said, but mostly regarding the overall issue.

"Impressive, impressive." Dr. Hutchinson is quick to give Sally credit for her genius and accomplishment. He then offers, good humoredly, "Is this what you do in your spare time, work out ideologies in your head?"

"Mostly," Sally answers back matter-of-factly.

Dr. Hutchinson is taken aback by her serious tone. He loosens things up a bit. "When do you find time to eat, Sally?"

"I eat a muffin in the morning, Dr. Hutchinson."

The class begins to laugh. Sally was probably kidding, but because of the way she said it, she sounded as if she were putting her faith into eating that muffin.

"That must be some muffin, Sally," Dr. Hutchinson pokes fun.

"I like muffins, Dr. Hutchinson," Sally defends.

"And I don't care if they're high in fat." The class erupts in laughter again, which Sally ignores. "I just can't think if I eat something boring.

Dr. Hutchinson laughs innocently. "Sally."

"Yes?" Her tone becomes certain. She could tell by his voice that he was going to get a bit more serious.

"All that you have said today could be considered controversial, but like you said, you were simply defending a topic, a topic I happened to bring up. I know Sally that this topic wasn't easy for you to address, and neither do I believe that you had any internal desire to address it."

"I didn't."

"I know." He turns around and attends to some business near his work area. The class knows that when this happens, they will usually have about three minutes to chatter. They take advantage.

A few seated next to Sally console her, rubbing her shoulder and offering her polite smiles. Many of them write things down; some just stare. Dr. Hutchinson watches as he sits down. He has to be honest; he is intrigued.

He thought again. In all of his years in the U.S. government, observing, studying, and then choosing people for specific tasks, he had never been as impressed with any candidate as he was with Sally right now. What had happened today was nothing short of dynamic. It was almost as if Sally had been prepared, having already known the discussion topic. Her line of reasoning was concise, trimmed, but yet at the same time, incredibly thought provoking and stimulating. It lacked nothing actually. Dr. Hutchinson waited a few more moments; the class needed to settle down a bit. Neaven had actually made his way over to Sally to bug her; his effort was

cute but laughable. The rest of the students turn their attention back toward Dr. Hutchinson.

"Ok class," Dr. Hutchinson addresses, but in doing so decides to throw another test in Sally's direction, "next time we will continue with this same discussion style. In much the same way Sally has defended the topic of Hitler quite possibly being used as the left hand of God ..."

Sally's eyes immediately pop up as she opens her mouth, "Not the left hand, Dr. Hutchinson ..."

Dr. Hutchinson thinks to himself, she doesn't miss a beat. He lumbers in her direction, almost acting. "Excuse me, Sally, did you say, not the left?"

Sally had shouted out her comment; she actually didn't mean to sound so direct. She offers her reasoning. "I'm sorry to interrupt, Dr. Hutchinson, but I heard you say that Hitler might have possibly been used as the left hand of God, and I just spoke up without thinking."

The class giggled lightly.

"Yes, Sally, the left hand of God," Dr. Hutchinson prodded. He then pressed, "Why, Sally, is there another hand he would use?"

"The right one, Dr. Hutchinson."

Dr. Hutchinson acquiesces, "Oh yes, the right one, well, let's leave that for another day. I think the students will start falling over soon if we don't allow them to dismiss for lunch."

Neaven shouts out in agreement. Dr. Hutchinson motions in Sally's direction, "Feel free to see me after class."

Sally nods. Neaven again quickly moves toward Sally's desk.

"Congratulations, Sally," he says it brightly. "You did a great job." His intentions are mostly honorable, partly selfish.

"Thanks, Neaven, you were a great help to me."

"Don't mention it, Sally. Hey, you want to go celebrate? I'm buyin."

"No, Neaven, maybe some other time. I need to see Dr. Hutchinson right now." Sally looks over in Dr.

Hutchinson's direction. "I think he wants to talk to me, so I'll see you later, ok?"

"All right, I'll see you later or something then." He pats his backpack and walks away backward without turning around.

Sally senses Neaven's disappointment. "I'll see you later, Neaven!"

Sally looks over to Dr. Hutchinson, who is writing something down. Several students are still in the classroom, so Sally decides to sit and wait. Dr. Hutchinson then looks up at Sally and motions for her to come to his desk. Sally gets up, and as she approaches, Dr. Hutchinson decides it would be best to allow Sally leeway. To approach her too intrusively would prove disrespectful, but to approach her too liberally might puff her up. He decides to play stupid, yet protectively.

"Please sit down." He pulls a chair out from under the side of his desk. Sally drops her backpack to the ground and sits down, folding her hands neatly on her lap.

Dr. Hutchinson finishes up with his paperwork and closes his folder; he then puts his pen down and gives Sally his full attention.

He begins, "Sally, that was remarkable. I have to be honest with you: I didn't really know how radical your gift was until now. Make no mistake about it, I did leave myself open, but at the same time, I am a man who has seen a lot and experienced a lot." He eyes her. "I wasn't going to just give a fistful of credit to a nineteen-year-old girl who was rumored to be some sort of intellectual giant. You understand?"

She nodded. She didn't think Dr. Hutchinson needed to explain himself; she thought he made all this clear in his office the other day, but she kept quiet, welcoming his explanation. Dr. Hutchinson continued, "I am glad you understand because Sally, I want to talk about what happened today." He puts one hand up, as if he were measuring the validity of the situation. "Do you mind if I ask you how you were able to defend that topic so accurately and so vividly without any notes or any preparation?"

"I don't mind, Dr. Hutchinson. It's basically who I am. I just happen to spend a lot of time studying and working things out in my mind. I do it all the time."

"How easy is it for you to do this, Sally? Just speak your mind."

Sally takes a moment, "Well, let me use an example. If you were to, let's say, present me with one hundred problems, like the way you did today, I would be confident that I could answer roughly seventy-five of them in the same manner in which I did today."

"Seventy-five? That's a high percentage. What would be the result of the other twenty-five?"

"Well," Sally validates herself, "about ten or fifteen I could answer reasonably well, but not decisively; the others I would probably be vague over, but ..." She pauses, trying to be honest but also trying not to be overconfident or prideful.

"But what, Sally?" Dr. Hutchinson prods. He wants to show Sally he doesn't care about any pleasantries right now; he wants to get to the bottom of this.

He repeats it again, "But what, Sally?"

"But ... even though I could only answer these problems vaguely, if I were given a chance to study, evaluate, and wrestle over these problems, it would only be a matter of time before I figured them out."

Dr. Hutchinson leans back, "How much time, Sally?"

"Anywhere between a few hours and six months probably," she says matter-of-factly. "There are only one or two problems that I have seriously committed myself to that I have yet to figure out, Dr. Hutchinson; all the other problems I have basically worked out in my head."

"Sally, let me ask you a question." Dr. Hutchinson moves closer to Sally, trying to personally get closer to her explanation. He believes he already knows the answers, but in doing this, he wants to get inside of Sally's head with regards to her answers. He continues, "The problems you haven't yet worked out, how long have you been wrestling with them specifically, and also explain to me how you are able to work these things out the way you do."

"Well," Sally begins, "to answer the first part of your question, I have been wrestling with one specific problem for over five years now, but this is not the norm."

"What do you mean not the norm?"

"This problem is different, Dr. Hutchinson; it's just not time yet." Dr. Hutchinson leans closer to her as she continues. "The reason I have yet to figure it out is not because I haven't wrestled with it, but because of certain variables, mostly that sufficient time has not yet elapsed thus creating enough workable mystery in order that I might fully figure it out."

Dr. Hutchinson, his hand to his lips, eyes Sally to continue.

"This being understood, Dr. Hutchinson, I will attempt to answer the second part of your question, mainly how I am able to work these problems out. Usually, if I can't figure something out, I get to a point where I see an inconsistency with my wrestling tactics. And as soon as I do, I simply change my tactics. Sooner or later, I am able to solve the problem.

"The particular problem that has eluded me for five years does not continue to elude me because I haven't changed my tactics, or because I haven't spent my time on the wrestling mat. This particular problem hasn't been solved simply because the problem possesses certain moves that I have yet to master."

"That's interesting; the problem has moves you don't have, so it eludes you?"

"Well, most problems possess arguments, but sooner or later the arguments within that problem will become manifest, or I will grow in the mystery of Christ and learn moves that the arguments within that problem can't counter, simply because they are indeed opinionated arguments, and I, simply by abiding in the knowledge of the mystery of Christ, will eventually possess solutions, solutions, which by nature, automatically counter opinionated arguments.

"But understand this, that all arguments within problems contain flaws, or else the problems would cease to be problems; they'd be solutions. And flaws, by

nature, eventually become susceptible to knowledge or facts.

"As soon as this process is at work, Dr. Hutchinson, then it will only be a matter of time until I securely abide within the knowledge of the mystery of Christ to the extent that I will be able to pin those weak arguments, and thus the problems, to the ground."

"Interesting. Interesting," Dr. Hutchinson speaks as he waves his hand. "And you mastering moves would mean?"

Sally doesn't miss a beat. "Getting more honest with myself, growing within the revelation of the mystery of Christ, basically me seeing more. Becoming more sanctified. This gets me stronger, quicker, even better balanced and basically, in intellectual terms, wiser so that I might see."

"And you mentioned the actual arguments within a problem getting sloppy. How does this happen?"

"Remember when I talked about variables, Dr. Hutchinson?"

"Yes, but feel free to explain again."

She does so. "Variables become the instigators allowing the arguments within problems to become exposed. Two common variables are time and revelation. Time obviously just happens, and revelations come, sometimes even separate from a decisive wrestle.

"Both of these variables will expose the bias arguments and opinions within problems. This in turn allows the problems to be defeated by the correct counsel or knowledge. Basically, even if someone were not to wrestle well, if they were to wait and wait and wait, any inaccurate arguments within problems, no matter how big or small, will eventually become exposed.

"The arguments will be discounted through time, but also through situations; even though others continue to create even more arguments thus tainting the problem even more. Do you understand, Dr. Hutchinson?"

"Yes I do. Basically, you're saying that arguments within problems, whatever they might be, will eventually in some way, shape, or form become exposed thus making the problems vulnerable or susceptible to some of the moves or knowledge you have learned.

"If this ever happens, you won't need to learn any additional moves to pin those problems; you will simply use the exposures of the weak arguments to your advantage, perhaps even waiting for the overall problem to become clearer; or you might decide to use what is currently in your arsenal to quickly pin the problem into submission."

"Exactly," Sally affirms, "sometimes problems just work themselves out; it's very common."

"Can I ask you another question, Sally?"

"Sure."

"Ok," Dr. Hutchinson leans back and opens up his hands, "Considering your gift, do you think you will have to wait on this one problem, or do you think you will grow in knowledge and defeat this problem whether or not it eventually becomes exposed through time?"

"I believe ... that unless God grants me incredible mercy in this particular situation (Ephesians 3:2), that there will be no way for me to beat this situation simply by my wrestling. This particular situation is a mystery, Dr. Hutchinson, not a problem. There is a difference.

"Now, because of this difference, I have chosen to take on this mystery, but not because I believed I could solve it easily, but because there was room for me to wrestle.

"There are some wrestles I won't accept, Dr. Hutchinson, although I do believe they will be required of me later. I simply don't choose to wrestle them at this time. To answer your question, this particular mystery will be broken down over time, and once this happens, I will strengthen myself within the mystery."

"So this is a mystery you're wrestling with, not a problem?" Dr. Hutchinson questions.

"Yes, not necessarily a problem because man hasn't had ample chance to put his opinion into it yet.

"It's a concept derived directly from the Bible, and it has not yet been introduced to man that he might taint it or induce it into a problem through his ignorance. It's a pure mystery, Dr. Hutchinson, so it's totally untainted but it's also totally slippery. You have to understand, Dr. Hutchinson, every mystery or question from heaven is first pure, but then man starts

to wrestle with it, adding his own opinions and arguments into it; it then becomes a problem."

"I see," Dr. Hutchinson smiles slightly. "Will you eventually get this mystery solved?"

"Yeah," Sally asserts. "I'll get it, eventually. I wouldn't have made room for it if I didn't believe I could get it. I will eventually possess its mystery, but I knew beforehand that this particular mystery would take a lot of time."

"How much time do you think it will take, Sally?"

"Fifteen years," Sally responds casually.

Dr. Hutchinson looks at her seriously. "That's twenty years you'll be wrestling with it." He has an exasperated look on his face. "That's a long time."

"I know, but I don't really spend much time with it. I have a certain way of working things out, and a lot of times I receive good knowledge or insight into a mystery simply by wrestling with another. It's almost like ricocheting, you know, killing two birds with one stone.

"I decide to work on a mystery in which I already possess dutiful knowledge. I then ricochet myself spiritually to receive fragments of knowledge from stubborn mysteries that have been eluding me. It's like tennis practice. Focus on the shots you're hitting well, and the shots you're hitting poorly will usually just fall into place. It's a mind game, Dr. Hutchinson.

"A lot of times I will choose to wrestle with mysteries that are ripe, that I am just about to pin. I do this so my mind will be confident. Then, once in this spirit of faith, I will basically ricochet off the one mystery and bounce against the mystery that has been eluding me."

"And that works?" He already knew the answer but he wanted to hear her say it anyway.

"It does work," Sally insists. "The spirit world is in a way just like the natural world. I use many of the same methods and tactics.

"With regard to the mysteries that are eluding me, I usually won't just decide to take them on single-handedly, or I won't try to focus on them in order to defeat them. Instead, I will make myself strong in a

certain mystery or problem in which I already possess good faith, or in a mystery where my knowledge is more complete. Then, once in this place and comfortable, I will work spiritually to bring into alignment the other mysteries that are eluding me.

"I will then spiritually slow these mysteries down, to counter them. Once I sense this process at work, then I won't even focus on the eluding mystery any more. Instead, I will choose to spiritually chip away at the mystery sporadically, but all the while I am really consciously dismantling the other mysteries that I am in complete control over. It's almost like eavesdropping Dr. Hutchinson, but in a spiritual sense.

"I basically let this process happen over and over again, for a while, maybe even for weeks, until such time that I sense in my spirit that this particular mystery has lost some of its spiritual edge, has lost its spiritual hiding place, and has thus become more workable.

"At this point, according to the discernment and faith within me, I might choose to take on the mystery by itself, consciously, totally separate from any spiritual pass. If I am able to do this, then the wrestling will commence; if not, then the mystery and myself will go back to the spiritual drawing board. Until such time I believe the mystery has become more workable, more convenient."

"Sally, let me digress for a second."

"Sure."

"You fully explained the concepts of the problems and arguments, but there is still one thing I would like you to clarify."

"What's that, Dr. Hutchinson?" Her eyes question in wonder, like saucers that reflect the light.

"Well," Dr. Hutchinson continues, "you keep repeating the concept of knowledge, as well as the revelation of the mystery."

"Yes," Sally interrupts, trying to follow his reasoning.

"Let me ask you a question; how do you work out a revelation? Isn't a mystery a question and the revelation simply its answer?"

Sally understands his question. She speaks slowly yet with certainty. "Your right, Dr. Hutchinson, but there is something in between. The revelation is indeed an answer but with regard to the actual mystery, it is not my answer; it is God's answer for me to personally work out.

"Let me explain. It's like this. You're a teacher, right? Every day you present questions to the students that you most likely have the answers to, isn't that correct?"

"That's correct, Sally."

"But even though you ask the questions and possess the answers to those questions, that doesn't mean you can just shout them out and expect everyone in the classroom to walk away understanding them?"

"A lot of math teachers have the answers to the math problems that they ask their students, but that doesn't change the fact that a lot of the math students will walk out of those classrooms without fully understanding those answers, or even grasping the concepts of the questions that were asked of them.

"It's the same with the revelation of God. God, in His infinite wisdom, reveals to us the mystery of Christ within His answer or within His revelation for us. Now His revelation is for us, but here's the difference, Dr. Hutchinson. His revelation for us is perfectly understood by Him, but not understood by any of us. Just like the math student/teacher relationship, we need to take what is given to us and then, through both study and wrestling, learn those answers for ourselves."

Dr. Hutchinson's face loosened; it was obvious he was delighted in her explanation.

"Until this effectively happens, Dr. Hutchinson, the teacher's answers or even God's revelations to us are simply answers they themselves happen to fully understand. Until we wrestle over those answers ourselves, Dr. Hutchinson, our understanding will be unfruitful within their understanding.

"Let me give you another example. Jesus himself spoke and taught in parables. His answers for the people and consequently the explanations of those parables remained hidden, simply that we might figure them out in

an effort to make His answers our very own. God's revelation to us works in the exact same way.

"It's almost like God's revelation or answer to us is a puzzle that just so happens to still be inside its box. Now the puzzle is complete, all the pieces are present and nothing is lacking, but in order to understand the puzzle's meaning, we need to put the puzzle together ourselves.

"In the same way, God's revelation for us is complete, and it is perfect, lacking nothing, but in order for us to grow within the spiritual process and even within our own faith, God will hide or conceal things from us in order that we might work them out. Just like Jesus' parables, His answers for us will not be easily received by us. But then again, if you think about it, neither will a complex math answer be easily received or even fully understood with regard to its initial question.

"Imagine Albert Einstein, Dr. Hutchinson. If he were here right now, and he started explaining his theory of relativity, I think both of us would be having a hard time."

Dr. Hutchinson smiles. Sally continues with a smile of her own. "Now understand, Dr. Hutchinson, here is Albert Einstein, he has all the right questions, and he has all the right answers, nothing is lacking, but even though he would be able to perfectly present his answers and questions to us, that doesn't mean we would easily understand him. God, Dr. Hutchinson, does in fact give us His answers through revelations, but we will still need to greatly work these revelations out in order to fully understand what He is trying to say to us."

"That's remarkable, Sally." Dr. Hutchinson nods his head, desiring to show Sally only what he wants her to see, but impressed nonetheless. He then continues in a relaxed tone. "The way you explained it is remarkable. But let me ask you a one last question because I think I did cut you short."

Sally looks at Dr. Hutchinson innocently enough.

He continues, "With regard to what you were saying earlier, specifically involving the wrestling or the

processes you go through, is there anything else you wanted to say?"

Sally thinks for a moment before looking up and speaking. "Well, with regard to how I was able to work out some past problems, how I mentioned the process of ricocheting or deliberately battling in the spirit."

Sally bends back a little, showing she is somewhat uncomfortable explaining this issue. She then rights herself and continues.

"This particular strategy, Dr. Hutchinson, is best reserved for stubborn problems that happen to possess many arguments, the direct result of people wrestling with them for so many years. By now, Dr. Hutchinson, these mysteries or questions have turned into problems, and they are now very opinionated, even blinding sometimes.

"Problems like these are among the hardest to work out because they possess so many different voices." Sally looks down and up, encouraging herself in the truth. "In this situation, I will usually choose to ignore both the problems and arguments altogether, choosing rather to go straight to the source of the mystery, and to counter the mystery at its most innocent stage. When I do this, Dr. Hutchinson, I am usually able to work out these mysteries in either weeks or months.

"But in the case of the five-year mystery I was referring to, if I were to implement an overconfident method, it would simply grieve the Holy Spirit, and I would make a huge mess of everything."

"How so?" Dr. Hutchinson questions.

"Because this particular mystery was not offered to me so that I might take hold of it and bring it to its knees; it's probably going to do that to me. I also didn't accept it because I thought I would be able to control it easily. I believe this mystery came because God wants me complete, and because he wants me discerning. If I could solve every mystery or problem that came my way, then I would grow in pride. Sometimes we need something beyond us, Dr. Hutchinson, just to keep us honest, just to keep us watchful."

Dr. Hutchinson nodded his head; he agreed with her reasoning.

"Even if I tried to work this mystery out the way I work out the others, then God would tap me on the shoulder and wonder if I had simply lost my mind. He knows that I know that this particular mystery cannot be uncovered by any of the methods that I possess. So he offered me this mystery, to keep me watchful and to keep me humble."

Sally pauses, looking upon Dr. Hutchinson with honest eyes, then finishes. "Now my job is simply to wait; the situation will present itself. Whenever I think about this particular mystery, I just say in my mind, I will wait, and when I do, I have total peace. But when I get prideful and think to myself, wait a second, Sally, you figure out lots of things, you can do this one, too. Then, I simply see this mystery presented, and I see this mystery so unchartered, so untapped. It's a wild beast of a mystery, Dr. Hutchinson, so I step back, and I understand my place."

Dr. Hutchinson allowed Sally's words to slowly come to a close. He enjoyed listening to her, but for now, he knew the conversation needed to be quieted. He looked on Sally, her abilities and gifts were now manifest. The shyness and confusion that seemed to plague her had evaporated into an aura of faith and Godly grace.

So Sally's gifts were true, but things were now different, because her gifts were now manifest. Dr. Hutchinson sat, staring, and looking upon a girl who seemed to possess all the answers except for one. What she would do with those answers?

Sally was a beautiful room that no one wanted to enter. She was ornately appointed. Her thoughts flowing like the finest draperies. Dr. Hutchinson saw her, sitting there, and sorrow enveloped him. He knew one thing. She was different, and for that reason, she would always be misunderstood.

Here and now, he made a choice to love her. And he would continue to love her by trying to understand her, and never judging her by his opinionated mind. Sally abruptly cleared her throat, breaking the long silence.

"Dr. Hutchinson," Sally reminded him, "you initially asked me to come up so we could discuss the concept of judgment. The right and left hand of God?"

Dr. Hutchinson was surprised; he had forgotten. He answered her, "Yes, Sally, but don't you think we should wait for another time?"

"Well, yes, that's what I wanted to talk about. I actually wrote a paper; it discusses the concepts we briefly hit upon involving the right and left hand of God. If you want, I could just give you the paper and then we wouldn't have to waste any more class time."

"Sally," Dr. Hutchinson is taken back, "do you think we wasted time here today? This is exactly what my class is designed to do."

Sally remains cautious. "I don't mind talking, Dr. Hutchinson, and I do appreciate you giving me the freedom to talk, but with regard to this specific topic, I think it would be more appropriate for you to read the paper separate from a class discussion."

"Ok," Dr. Hutchinson acquiesces, obviously wanting Sally to remain open to another speaking opportunity. He then continues on a soft note, "Just drop off the paper, in my office, as soon as you get a chance. I will read it first thing."

Sally nods her head, beginning to stand up. Dr. Hutchinson humbly salutes her by rising to his feet. It is a polite gesture, and Sally notices. "I will drop it by."

She turns to walk away, but then stops herself and turns around. "Dr. Hutchinson, I really appreciate all you have done for me; your words and your patience have been incredible, really."

Dr. Hutchinson, in spite of his appreciation for her words, remains humble. "Sally, just take care of yourself." He then motions toward her again, "I do appreciate your thankfulness, but I want you to take your time, and to be honest with yourself, and then ..." He slowly smiles, trying to build up the anticipation regarding what he will say next. Sally looks at him, wondering what he's up to. He blinks, igniting the charm behind his eyes, "... give me all you got."

Sally laughs. His manner was patient and mature, but funny. He was doing a great job, the way he was ministering to her. She wanted to add something more.

"Dr. Hutchinson," a sense of spirit beamed behind her words, "I have been praying for this for a long time, and now that this valve has finally opened, I just can't wait for everything to come rushing out." She checks herself, trying not to become too vulnerable, "Just please, Dr. Hutchinson, continue to be patient with me, because I am definitely new at this, sharing so openly like this I mean."

He confirms with a gleam in his eye, "I will be patient with you, Sally; don't worry." He stood up and slid his chair under the desk; he then continues purposefully, "Just make sure that when we do this again, that you involve yourself."

Sally nods, and Dr. Hutchinson continues, "Don't be afraid because we all care for you in this classroom."

"I know, Dr Hutchinson," Sally offers politely and confidently as she begins to walk away. "I know."

As she made her way out of the classroom, Dr. Hutchinson continued to look upon her. He saw her exit and disappear. He took a moment, and then casually looked at Sally's empty chair. He offered God a small prayer from his heart, thanking Him for His involvement and thanking Him that Sally's fireworks were minimal. He then thought and reasoned to himself. It seemed as though Dr. John McBride was right: Sally was on even footing with God.

He picked up his notes and folders, tapping them on the counter in order to organize them so he could place them neatly inside his briefcase. He let his mind drift away, wondering how hard he should push Sally during the next few classroom sessions. He didn't know if he should let things settle a bit or if he should press her now, and in doing so, bring the best out of her while she was so willing. He had no answer; his only answer would be to pray.

He would refuse to lean on his own understanding. He would act as he felt led by the Spirit, even if that meant going beyond the norm of what seemed polite or even considerate. He knew in the past that sometimes he ended up in the wrong place simply because he followed what his heart thought was right, even though the Spirit had prompted him otherwise. The best solution would be to

pray, to pray and to wait so that he would be in the best position to see and do what was right.

He lifted his briefcase, walking slowly toward the door as he observed all the empty desks. Right now, these desks reminded him of a conscious thought void of what was really necessary, void of what was really important. There would be another day, he thought. A day in which there would be a new discussion, and on that day the discussion would offer what was truly important, truly necessary. He turned off the lights and closed the door. He left the classroom alone, by itself, empty.

But open.

Chapter 7

The land was France, and the city, Strasbourg. The Cell Compound lay just west of the city over near the region of Moselle, just next to the Alsace province. Here, both the Vosges Mountains and the scenic river Rhine cradled the local inhabitants' vineyards and mountain hideaways.

The region, though in France, rested close to the Swiss and German borders. Strasbourg itself was best known for being home to the Council of Europe, as well as the European Parliament and the European Court of Human Rights. The city's welcoming banner, "The Crossroads of Europe," bears witness to this fact.

The dynamics and affluence of The Cell Compound simply accented Strasbourg's already famed reputation. The Cell's administrators decided to lay ground just outside Strasbourg in the late sixties, after legislation was passed through NATO giving The Cell its own by-laws, by-laws that would be strictly reinforced by a NATO-regulated foreign policy.

The Compound's completion in 1972 marked a new era in peacekeeping. The Cell was the first internationally funded peace treaty organisation affiliate that based its strategies solely on study and investigation, not merely on governmental policy. Of course, the origination of The Cell in no way abolished NATO's governmental role or policies; in fact, it firmly established them.

The Cell was not created simply to by-pass or undercut NATO's foreign role. The Cell's duty was to assist NATO by existing in a separate state, to operate in an atmosphere void of compromise. Existing in this separate state would ensure that The Cell's purpose would remain consistent, avoiding any unnecessary burdens and deterrents. Basically, because of this seclusion, The Cell's unbiased opinion became the providential mind of NATO.

The Cell itself was partly made up of selected individuals who would analyze, deconstruct, and evaluate everything from high-security situations, blacklisted people, policies, civil unrests, government coos as well

as dissension from rulers, both foreign and domestic. The Cell's decisions had the power and authority of NATO backing them, because both were constrained under the same regulations and policies.

One of the main reasons The Cell had risen to such great heights in recent years, even being considered by governments and organizations separate from NATO, was its track record. It was impeccable. The Cell's track record, its success at peacekeeping, eventually promoted the organisation to an accredited status; it was esteemed by countries, governments, businesses, and organizations alike.

Even more tantalizing, The Cell, after a time, had the reputation of an organisation with both meaningful purpose and integrity. It was an organisation that would use all its resources to search out and then configure the best probable outcome for all. Those who were aware of the intimate activities of The Cell likened its efforts to some kind of superhero figure. The Cell would work tirelessly, around the clock, to ensure that people and their differences were correctly being attended to. This reputation became The Cell's banner and pride, and this banner hung itself in the province of Alsace.

There had been a beautiful silence among the three for over fifteen minutes now, and Dante's observation, although most probably correct, wasn't appreciated.

"So sir, everything is running smoothly, the group is acquiescing well, and I believe everything is running smoothly ever since Mark's departure." He pauses, hoping for encouragement but then continues. "Wouldn't you agree, sir?"

Dr. Thiery then spoke out of the side of his mouth, watching the path as he did. "Yes, Dante, the group is doing very well."

Dr. Thiery glances at Cross and quietly looks upon Dante. "Dante, have you seen to it that group G from the candidate program is basing their findings on their actual perceived scrutiny of the facts and not necessarily on the facts themselves." He turns to hit

Cross on the arm. "It seems as though geniuses never want to think for themselves; they always want the facts to think for them."

Dante smiles, understanding Dr. Thiery's focus on deconstruction rather than on basic fact analysis. "Yes, Doctor, I took care of that myself. The Primary Members will indeed need tangible angles to work with, and those tangible angles will not simply arise from the facts themselves. If that were the case ... then we wouldn't need candidates working downstairs; we would just need computers."

Dr. Thiery, a bit moody, is impressed with Dante's quick wit. "That is true, Dante, very true." He cuts his remark short, and Dante notices. Dante politely excuses himself, understanding Dr. Thiery and Cross probably need to talk.

"I must be going, sirs, I have studies to attend to on the third level quadrant, so if you will permit me, Doctor"

"I will seek you there if I have need of you Dante. Good morning." Dr. Thiery makes his remarks firmly yet politely.

"Good morning, sir," Dante looks toward Dr. Thiery and bows his head. He then looks toward Cross and, speaking respectfully, does the same. "Good day, Mr. Lutherant."

Stepping away, Dante disappears through the morning fog.

The fog that Dante brushed through was slowly lifting, and as it did, the beauty and ingenuity of The Cell's Compound was revealed.

The morning dew still remained though; settling off the hills located directly northwest of the Compound. The dew rested itself lightly upon the cement. The three sets of footprints could be seen as far back as the side entrance. Dr. Aloysius Thiery, Cross Lutherant, and Dante De Forest had all gone on their morning routine, routine only if none of them had been a prisoner of the late night. They had walked just southwest of the Compound, over near the picturesque hills. The beauty of the hills complemented both the splendor and architecture of the Primary Members' accommodations.

These accommodations were extraordinary to say the least. They just so happened to be castles, specifically built and designed for the Primary Members. These castles also lodged certain key administrators, including Cross Lutherant, but they also housed world leaders and foreign diplomats.

Dante De Forest lived in an accommodation directly next to Dr. Thiery. Dante had become his protégé, sometimes even resembling the son he never had. No doubt, the two had lots in common, and both were originally from France.

Dante had grown up in Paris where his Father, Arnou De Forest, lead a team of top-notch French physicists at the Institute for Astrophysics of Paris. Arnou worked incredibly hard, so hard in fact that his habit of study and alienation seemed to have worn off on his son. At the tender age of 15, Dante and his father had a falling out, leaving Dante rebelliously open to enrolling at MIT, the prestigious technical institution in America.

Once there, as MIT's youngest student, he proved himself incredibly, mostly in the area of physics. And much like his father, he seemed to excel in the area of astrophysics. He continued to work hard, receiving his undergrad degree in physics and then moving on to astrophysics, and heading toward his doctorate in astronomy.

His efforts at MIT were intercepted though. About halfway through his doctorate, he was approached by two organizations, NASA and The Cell. It didn't take long for Dante to make up his mind. Five hours after having lunch with Dr. Thiery, he was on a plane headed back to Europe. That was over thirteen years ago, and he never looked back since.

Cross moves ahead, noticing the hills and evaluating the slope of their structure. He had to admit to himself, he liked being here. The Cell Compound offered all the luxuries of France with hints of Germany and gleanings of Switzerland. The atmosphere's mind was culturally formulated. Yet in spite of this, Cross deeply missed the simplicity and consistency of America.

Dr. Thiery spoke. "So ..., the meeting in America is a few weeks away. What are some of your thoughts?"

Cross didn't miss a beat. "You know America, sir; you can tell what she's going to do before she does it."

Glancing slowly over at Cross, Dr. Thiery giggles slightly. "To be honest with you, sir," Cross continues, "I don't foresee anything drastic happening in America; I believe the meeting will go off without a hitch."

"Agreed," Dr. Thiery lightheartedly affirms. "I don't think we will have any trouble with the Americans this year; our successes involving their foreign policies have been quite commendable."

"They have been, sir. This meeting should not only further ensure America's acquiescence to the purposes of The Cell, but should also rally their support to seek peaceful resolutions with the NATO alliance countries as well as with the Partnership for Peace countries that have not yet decided if they want to fully align themselves with NATO's agenda."

"Yes," Dr. Thiery agrees, not wanting to add anything.

"But there is one issue I would like to discuss with you, sir."

"Is this relating to Mark's replacement?"

"It shouldn't be a problem at the meeting, sir. Even if some of the American diplomats know of Mark's death, they don't have any authority regarding it. Because Mark, although a Primary Member, was out of the loop with regard to American relations, as are all the Primary Members with respect to their native governments."

"Understood," Dr. Thiery adds, "because Mark was a Primary Member he had restrictions in dealing with the American diplomats as well as with American relations. So, for this reason, he was, as you say, out of the loop."

"So they might ask a few questions, but it's not likely they will attempt to push for an American replacement."

"No," Dr. Thiery says it with certainty, "the Americans will simply seek to cover the subject. Beyond that, I can't see how they would want to concern themselves with the tedious ins and outs of our interfraternal organisation."

Cross smiles at Dr. Thiery's last comment. He had actually never thought of it that way. But Dr. Thiery was right; in some ways, The Cell was exactly like a big fraternity. Everyone knew each other's habits. Everyone was forced to put up with those habits for what they saw to be a greater good. And everyone lived together, ate together; they were rarely apart. But they weren't exactly like a big fraternity, Cross thought to himself, more like a mutated science club.

"Sir," Cross still holds onto some of his doubts, "but what if the Americans make comments concerning Mark's replacement?" He defends his reasoning, "Mark was an American, so it's possible they might push for an American replacement."

"They'll have no grounds," Dr. Thiery confidently affirms. "Under article 7A of our NATO written by-laws, The Cell reserves the right to induct and to even correlate with any willing participant who is yielding to pursue our mission and focus, which is peace. Beyond this," Dr. Thiery emphatically claims, "we can induct an elephant in The Cell, and it would make no difference."

"Yes, sir, but these are politicians, with politicians' thoughts first; they have their agendas."

Dr. Thiery firmly concludes his position. "If the Americans push the subject, to seek to make Mark's replacement American, then I will handle the matter myself."

That was all Cross needed to hear. Dr. Thiery's willingness to intercede would be all the ammunition he would need to stand down the American politicians. Dr. Thiery was not only considered to be the quiet authority of The Cell, he also possessed the presence, authority, and respect of a world leader, even being respected by the same. When it came to a situation where his direct intervention was called upon, nobody, not even leaders, would challenge him.

As Cross continued to walk, Dr. Thiery's certainty leading the way, he humbly petitioned Dr. Thiery's attention one last time.

"Sir, I would request a little consideration"

Dr. Thiery turns, "With regard to what, Mr. Lutherant?"

"With regard to Mark's replacement, sir."

"Didn't we just discuss that?"

"Yes, sir. But with regard to Dr. Tom Hutchinson."

Dr. Thiery pauses, trying to understand what Cross is trying to say. He then takes a stab at it. "Have you told him the vision, Mr. Lutherant?"

"No, sir, I haven't. I have not talked to him for two weeks. He doesn't even know that Dr. Beavius and Mr. Dalry have been dismissed."

Dr. Thiery continues to walk, opening himself up to Cross's frame of mind. "I'm listening, Mr. Lutherant."

Cross takes advantage of the situation. "Don't get me wrong, sir, Tom will not take any of this personally; he respects you greatly." Cross pauses, making sure he is speaking in the right spirit; he then continues. "But I do believe, considering our current situation and because we involved him directly, that he will seek to do all that is in his power to resolve this issue. Now ... he will not go outside the regulations imposed on an ex-Cell Member, that I assure you, but I do believe that because we have included him, sir, that we have indeed opened up the door for concern in his heart."

"I understand your assessment, Mr. Lutherant. I made the choice to consider Dr. Tom Hutchinson because I implicitly trust his character, and I truly believe that if we are to find a good candidate according to the vision, that Dr. Tom Hutchinson is our best man."

"Exactly," Cross affirms vehemently, "I fully agree with you, sir ..."

Dr. Thiery interrupts, "And I also agree that we brought him in, so I understand your concerns."

A sense of appreciation eclipses Cross's face, but Dr. Thiery doesn't notice. Whenever talk about the vision surfaces, Cross is happy to get at least a foothold. The reason for this was simple. Cross was not in full agreement with Dr. Thiery's vision, but he did agree that the vision needed to be implemented so that it could be discarded. Cross was quietly hoping that, once the vision was in place and running, the frailties of the vision would begin to surface. But the only way this could happen was for the vision to become complete.

Dr. Thiery then spoke with steady caution. "What exactly are you asking of me, Mr. Lutherant?"

"Tom will already be at the meeting; that was going to happen anyway, but my request to you is this. Permit me to tell him about your vision, sir. Permit me so we can move forward on this thing with the direct allegiance of Tom's understanding."

Dr. Thiery put his hand to his chin and looked down for a moment. He slowed down and turned to face Cross. He begins his discourse.

"I believe my goal and my vision for Mark's replacement is a valid one, being harshly considered and even reconsidered by myself personally. I suppose if I were doubtful on sharing my vision with Dr. Tom Hutchinson, then that would only prove my insecurities regarding the vision."

Cross smirks as he holds his head high, not allowing Dr. Thiery to see. His self-observation made perfect sense.

Dr. Thiery continues. "Share what we discussed with Tom." He then cautions, "But I pray you do so wisely, Mr. Lutherant; no need to say too much."

"No need, sir," Cross affirms. "As you know sir, Tom and I are good friends. I don't foresee any opposition from him. I actually believe this will greatly help the process."

"Very well, Mr. Lutherant, you have my permission to speak with Dr. Tom Hutchinson regarding the vision we discussed." Dr. Thiery pauses again, and in doing he gets Cross's full attention. "Of course, you will keep me informed?"

"Of course, sir," Cross answers, doubting why Dr. Thiery had bothered to ask. "If Dr. Hutchinson can help with the vision, then fine; if he cannot, then the vision will be fulfilled elsewhere, and Tom will be fine with that."

"Very well. How is Tom doing, anyway? Is he enjoying the teaching in Vermont?"

Cross recollects. "I think so, sir. But you know, Tom, sir; he could probably enjoy just about anything."

"Yes"

There is a pause.

"I do know Tom."

"Go, Go, Sally! Do it, do it!" Clair pressed till Sally was convinced. "If you don't do it, Sally, you'll lose your turn."

Sally was frightened. She had seen the game played before, but she had never participated. The game was called Pimpin' Columbus, and the objective was to simply pimp Columbus.

Here are the rules. A group of people, usually a fraternity, sorority, or a club, would gather by the bronze statue of Christopher Columbus located in the main hall next to the library. A team would then request from passersby, borrowing from them articles of clothing. With these articles, they would dress old Christopher Columbus to their liking, and in doing so, pimp him.

Then, after Christopher was fully attired, the team would take a picture and submit the picture to the campus activities office for judging. The winner would be declared at the end of the semester.

Currently, Chris was sporting a leather vest, a pair of overalls, taken, owing largely to Clair's persuasion, from an unsuspecting onlooker, and a bright red scarf. The team was now looking for an elaborate hat or even a mitt to place on Chris's right hand, thus finishing him off.

Sally was frozen at the moment. "I don't know what to ask for Clair?" Worry was evident on her face. "What if they say no?"

"Then go on to the next person, Sally." Clair encouraged her. "But if you don't ask, they can't say no."

Sally dropped her guard and went over to a young man seated right next to the statue.

"Can I borrow your hat?" She asked in a dull tone.
"No."

The man was closed off to her plea. He obviously knew the game and didn't want his hat to go anywhere but on his head. Sally turned in defeat, and Clair and the others giggled.

Sally began to stroll around, but mostly with her eyes. She saw a girl sporting mitts. "Um, can I borrow your right mitt, please?" she asked very comfortably, almost as if she presupposed the girl was going to say yes. She then added, "I don't need the left mitt because Chris' left hand is attached to his hip."

"No, I'm sorry," the girl pleasantly responded, "I don't have the time; I have to go to class right now." The girl rushed off, and Sally shouted as she did, "What's the big deal, it'll be here when you get back." She throws her hands up in defeat. She slowly makes her way over to her team.

"Just give it one more try, Sally-girl," Clair advised, "then you'll be out."

There was a pause.

"Three strikes, you know."

She knew, so she let her eyes wander again; then, at that exact moment, she noticed a student walking by smoking a cigarette. She allows her sense of humor to roam. She approaches the man and asks, "Can I please have your cigarette?"

"Sure." The man is pleased to offer it. Clair and the team watch in dismay. Sally takes the cigarette and smiles toward the others. She then makes her way over to the statue and clears a dry path on Chris' lips. She bends the filter slightly to match the contour and then inserts the cigarette into his mouth; it's a perfect fit. She steps back and exclaims, "Ta-da."

Chris was taking a smoke break. The other students roared with laughter, and the team's leader decided a picture was definitely in order.

There he was, a bright red scarf, a leather vest, smoking a cigarette, and wearing overalls. It looked like the Fonz went farming. The team was giving high-fives; they liked their chances. It wasn't easy to dress Christopher in under thirty minutes; the team's efforts were graciously applauded by both onlookers and passersby alike.

A man walks over. "Can I get my overalls back?"

"You don't have to," Clair remarks, always possessing the appropriate manner at the appropriate time.

"Oh? What do you mean?"

"You don't need to get them back now. Their actually doing fine and won't be needing you for the remainder of the day, but if you feel so inclined, then by all means, they are your overalls." She then pauses as she looks down. "But if you want my personal opinion, I think you look very cute in your red-and-white striped boxers."

He smiles. "Hey, you want to go out?"

Sally and Clair giggle as they walk away. Clair waves goodbye and makes obvious the ring on her finger. He grins.

"That guy was cute." Sally half jokes.

Clair gets feisty, "Oh, you wanna go back?" She starts to turn around, dragging Sally back in that direction.

"Nooooooo." Sally yanks her back. "I was just kidding."

Clair gives Sally the eye, keeping her honest. Sally changes the subject.

"How on earth did I ever decide to do that," she turns toward Clair, "with the cigarette?"

"Because you're like that Sally-girl, spontaneous and geennuiinne." She says it slowly, with a French accent.

Sally shuts up and swipes Clair's arm. It was simply fate that brought them together. By themselves, separate, they were just too different to become friends. It was definitely fate.

Sally, though very pretty and commanding in her own right, could not hold a candle to Clair socially; but then again, who could? Clair was indeed a rare find, and her strengths were obvious and even overwhelming. She had wit, confidence, a down-to-earth level-headedness. She was beautiful, athletic, and even possessed a rare personality that was forceful but did not challenge. And even with all these strong character traits, with God now commanding her life, she had become, most of all, humble.

People, mostly men, of course, flocked to her. This happened not only at the college, but outside the campus as well. Every time she and Sally went off campus, men, mostly professionals, would approach her in

droves. They would hand her their cards, in the hope that she would call them, but she never did.

Sally, still in the same frame of mind, decided to take a chance. "Clair, how's Jack doing?"

She knew this question might muffle Clair's spirit, but the issue was important, and it affected Clair continuously.

"He is ok, Sally," Clair responds almost dutiful. She then hesitantly looks in Sally's eyes. "He called me last night. Their football schedule isn't going to bring them close to campus this year, so I might not see him until Christmas.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Clair." Sally offers her condolences, somewhat sorry she brought it up.

Clair bounces back, "But you know what Sally-girl?"

"What?" A smile forms on Sally's lips.

"I think I figured something out. I used to think I was just stronger than Jack, but now I don't believe that. I believe that I just care for him more." She shrugs her shoulders. "Either that or I am more secure in my liking him."

Sally listens, not wanting to interrupt.

"Right now, Jack is the one who has the big issue about us being apart. I have no problem because I know my heart and I know that I want to end up with him. Maybe ..." Clair searches her heart as she tries to understand her own reasoning, "... Jack is doubting where I simply don't because he really doesn't know exactly how he feels about me. Maybe the reason he questions so much is because deep down inside, he doesn't know how much he likes me."

She pauses again.

"If he knew, Sally, deep down, that he liked me as much as I know I like him, then wouldn't he just chill out and be secure in that? Maybe the reason he can't chill is because he just doesn't like me, or maybe he doesn't know exactly how much he likes me."

"I get your point, Clair. Do you mind if I say something?"

"No, I don't mind," Clair says sheepishly.

"I do see your point. If Jack happened to be insecure regarding how much you like him, then this would cause frustration; but you don't think that is the case?"

"No I don't," Clair affirms. "I know that Jack knows exactly how much I like him."

"Good," Sally comments, "so we both agree that Jack knows you like him. So knowing this, he should be secure in knowing that you will wait for him." Clair nods her head, not wanting to add anything. "This could only mean, Clair, that Jack is either insecure with his feelings for you or there is something else."

"That's what I am trying to say, Sally-girl; there is nothing else."

"Well not so fast. Perhaps Jack doesn't know how much he likes you because he is liking you from the standpoint that you moved away from him. I mean, it's basic but you leaving Jack might not affect how he believes you like him, but Clair, if you left him, then maybe he believes the desire you have to make up your own mind is greater than any desire you could have for him."

"So you're saying that Jack knows that I like him, but Jack also knows that I like to make up my own mind, even if that means leaving him in Arizona?"

"Exactly. There is no doubt regarding the fact that Jack believes you like him; we both agree on this. But the question becomes does Jack believe you like your own choices more than you like him?"

Clair looks at Sally awestruck. "That makes sense, Sally."

Sally jumps in. "You have to remember, Clair, the last thing Jack remembers is that you left. He knows you like him, but when you left, you also showed him that you like to make difficult choices for yourself, even when those same difficult choices appear to make you look selfish."

"I think Jack is worried, Clair, because he sees a girl he loves very much and he sees this girl make difficult choices easily, and it scares him." Sally touches Clair's arm, offering support but also trying to reason with her. "Clair, think about this. If you can uproot yourself from Arizona and then plant yourself in Vermont without a second's thought, then what is Jack

supposed to think? For all he knows, you can call him one day and tell him it's over, that you truly do love him but that your yearning and desire to fulfill God's purpose in your life takes precedence over all that love."

Clair's eyes are searching. Searching for a place they can't find, even a place that doesn't exist.

Sally then continues lovingly. "I truly believe, Clair, that what worries Jack the most is that part of him is just waiting for that phone call to happen, and this thought makes him incredibly insecure."

"Do you really believe that, Sally? Do you really believe what you're saying?"

"Clair, I'm being honest with you. If I were in Jack's position, I would probably be worried too."

"Clair, you made an incredibly hard decision to leave Arizona and come here, under the scrutiny of your family, under the scrutiny of your peers and fellow classmates, and even, when you arrived here, under the scrutiny of doubting Christians. You did this all without second-guessing yourself; you were totally single-minded in everything you did."

"Jack sees this very clearly, and it scares him. He thinks to himself, 'even if this girl loves me, if while in Vermont, she sees that we're just not meant to be, then it's over. That girl is going to break up with me in a second.' Clair, it's your single-mindedness that Jack sees, and it scares him, and for good reason, it took you away from him."

"What should I do?" Clair half pleads.

"What do you want to do, Clair?"

"I don't want to lose him, Sally. I really don't want to lose him." Clair stops herself, catching her breath as well as her thoughts. "But things are not good Sally, I mean, we argue all the time." She throws her hands up.

Clair then fully turns to Sally and stops her dead in her tracks. "Sally, do you really believe, I mean, really believe that Jack's frustration is coming from a constant worry that I might walk away from him even though he knows I love him?"

"I do Clair, if Jack really didn't love you, he would've already walked away."

It was hard for Clair to hear, but she knew Sally was right. She was caught, but she didn't want to admit it. Her single-mindedness, and mostly her being blind to that single-mindedness, was the root cause of all Jack's pain.

Seriousness in her eyes, Clair looks at Sally. "I think I need a time-out Sally; I will need to think all this out." She pauses and shakes her head. "Will you pray for me, Sally?"

"Of course I will, Clair." She grabs Clair's arm and holds it firmly. "I will definitely pray for you. Over the next few days pray what is in your heart, and God will open and close the right doors."

Clair doesn't answer but nods her head. She then continues to walk, exhaling deeply. "Sally, you're a Godsend."

Sally thinks to herself. The conversation could have gone a thousand times worse. She was thankful for the peaceful resolve. Clair had a look on her face of an older sister who just got reminded of a lesson she forgot. Clair then charismatically took back her reigns with a quick one-two punch.

"So, Sally-girl, what's this I hear about you and Neaven?"

Sally opened her mouth briefly, and then gave Clair a quick smile. "There's nothing between us; we talk a bit that's it."

"Sally." Clair motions, as if she's heard it all before.

"No, I'm serious, Clair; he's never even made a move."

Clair lights up. "Do you want him to make a move, Sally?"

Sally begins to blush. Clair giggles and softly pinches her. Sally's had just about enough, so she pinches back, hard.

"Ouch!" Clair childishly backs away and points her finger. "Now I know there's something between you and Neaven because if there wasn't, I couldn't've gotten under your skin the way I did."

Sally comes in, haphazardly, "I'm not even thinking about all that Clair; I just pinched you because you pinched me."

"You sure?"

"As far as I know, Clair. I'll let you know if anything changes, all right?"

Clair sees Sally is insecure about Neaven so she backs off.

She throws up her hands. "All right, all right, Sally; that's all for now. But ..." Clair's tone gets sly, "I really don't think that's all if you catch my drift, Sally-girl."

Sally shakes her head as Clair laughs devilishly. Sally notices that Clair seems confident, almost like she's playing some sort of wrongfully possessed cupid. "Well, only time will tell, Clair." She offers her a quaint smile.

"Sally, ..." Clair's face changes as she walks closer toward her, "you know the only reason I press you so is because I loooovvvve you so." Clair grabs Sally by the neck like a football player would grab a teammate who just scored a touchdown. "If I had it my way, no one would have you, no, not no one; you would be mine, all mine." They continued walking through the quad, through its dense halls. Sally then put her arm around Clair's shoulder, steadying their pace.

It was Thursday morning and Dr. Hutchinson was warming himself up with a cup of tea. He scarcely slept last night because he was tossing and turning, questioning himself over Sally's classroom discussion.

After Sally had left, he stopped by Dr. John McBride's office to let him know how everything had gone. John was thankful, relieved that Sally's exposure and the repercussions of that exposure were minimal, although he continued to hold on to the notion that Sally was prone to confusion, which could lead to exhibitions of pride and resentment.

He cautioned Tom to continue his watch, and to keep him informed if anything untoward occurred. Tom promised to do so.

Later that day, Sally dropped off her paper, titled, "Mocking God's Mercy." Sally had actually written the paper over two years before, but never showed it to anyone.

No sooner did he receive the paper that he began to read it, his thoughts, astonishing. The content of the argument was piercing. The paper actually never mentioned anything regarding God's judgment in correlation to his right or left hand, but it did prove in fact that God's judgment absolutely triumphed over His mercy. The paper's alignment demonstrated that, by default, God's judgment would triumph or would equal his right hand and that His mercy would submit or would equal His left. Sally's paper undoubtedly proved this, and the clarity with which it defined this was striking.

Dr. Hutchinson took a sip of his tea, and glanced at Sally's paper again. Her paper was still on the kitchen table, where he had left it the night before. This issue with Sally, he thought to himself, was continually forcing him into an atmosphere where he didn't care to venture. And if, by accident, he happened to find himself in this place, he tried to sneak out without leaving any opinionated footprints behind.

The problem was that Sally's situation could not be controlled or even prepared for. It was simply a burden. Alive to achieve the purpose for which God had created it; but what that purpose was exactly, Dr. Hutchinson didn't care to presuppose.

His secure cell phone rang. The phone was in the other room, so he quickly got up and answered it. The phone would ring at least ten times before it would consequently record the message onto his voicemail. He picked the phone up on about the sixth ring.

"Hello, Dr. Hutchinson here."

"Tom! It's Cross."

"Hello, Cross." Dr. Hutchinson takes a deep breath and sighs in some relief. "It's great to finally hear your voice; I was wondering how everything went? How's Bodhi and Dr. Beauvais?"

"That's precisely why I'm calling Tom; we need to talk as soon as possible. Is later on today or tonight good for you?"

Tom, about to say yes, didn't. Something deep in his spirit checked him.

"Cross, can you hold on for a minute?"

"Sure."

Tom walked over near the kitchen. Whatever checked him he wasn't conscious of. He would actually love to have this conversation today, right now in fact. What possibly checked him, and why? He prayed quickly to himself:

Lord, what are you saying to me, do you want me to talk to Cross later, for what reason? Please Lord, help me now; I can't wait on this situation, it is incredibly important.

Tom's eyes shot up to a calendar hanging on his wall. Friday, the very next day, was circled in red. He knows he did not circle it. Perhaps the maid circled it, perhaps even a houseguest? He didn't know, but the date was obvious, it was Friday, tomorrow actually. He prayed again:

Lord, is Friday the day you want? I don't want to lean on my own understanding so I need your help. I will suggest Friday to Cross, and if he has a problem with Friday, then I will consent to talking with him today, but if Friday is fine with him, then we will wait until tomorrow night.

Tom reaches up and puts the phone to his ear; he takes his thumb off the mute button.

"Cross?"

"Yes, Tom?"

"Is tomorrow night ok for you? I have a solid opening tomorrow night, Friday."

There is a pause, "Tomorrow night will be fine Tom ..."

Tom rolled his eyes, not believing Cross accepted the later date. Cross then continued.

"Tom, I will call you at 6:00 p.m. your time, using the O-PECK line."

"That's fine. Is everything all right, Cross? I actually thought I would hear from you sooner."

"I wanted to contact you sooner, Tom, but I needed clearance. I didn't want to lead you on and then not have the authority to let you in."

"I understand." Tom, having fully submitted to the rules and regulations of The Cell in the past, identified clearly with this. "We will talk tomorrow then. I look forward to our conversation."

"It will be a good one, Tom. Have a good day, and I will speak with you tomorrow evening."

"Tomorrow night then, Cross. Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Tom."

Tom hangs up the phone. He takes a deep breath; the phone call was a serious relief. He had been wondering how The Cell situation was going because the Sally situation was currently driving him up the wall. He was begging for some kind of stability right now. With the Sally issue now creeping forward and The Cell issue beginning to align itself, things were now looking on the up and up.

He walked over to the kitchen table and instead of grabbing Sally's paper, he grabbed a pear. He took a bite. If he were a betting man, he would put his odds on Bodhi Dalry over Dr. Beauvais. Dr. Beauvias was a brilliant man, no doubt, but knowing how The Cell operated and knowing the spirit under which both names were suggested, Dr. Hutchinson believed there would be more interest in the younger, more applicable generation.

It was just something, he thought, something in his heart that told him The Cell was looking for something different, something out of the ordinary. In fact, he suspected that phone call tomorrow night would be some kind of congratulations: that Bodhi Dalry had indeed passed the tests and had been chosen to replace Mark in the Primary Cell seat. Wouldn't that be something, he thought, especially after Cross vehemently questioned Bodhi's candidacy.

This was sweet, he thought, so sweet. The Lord's unimaginable direction was turning out to be so sweet. He finished his pear and headed for the shower.

Sally was just finishing her French fries. Clair and a few others were hanging around the lunch area, just killing time. It's been an uneventful day so far, nothing too weighty except for the word that has gotten around regarding Sally's performance in Dr. Hutchinson's class.

Clair had actually brought it up earlier, but Sally downplayed it, giving Clair the impression that discussing it wasn't actually foremost on her mind. Clair didn't press, knowing that Sally would talk about it when she felt comfortable. But right now, Clair thought to herself, the only thing that felt comfortable to Sally were eating those fries.

"Sally!" Clair approaches, "you gonna take time to breathe in-between those French fries?"

Sally is biting and chewing and swallowing so consistently that it doesn't seem she has time to breathe.

"Not with French fries," Sally admits. "I have a system."

"What's that?"

"Well," Sally goes on, "I eat with my mouth open and I breathe through my nose; that way, I don't have to stop."

Clair makes a sarcastic facial gesture. "You're brilliant, Sally, simply brilliant. Can you teach me how to do that, Sally-girl, can you?"

Sally stops eating her fries, just long enough to offer some sarcastic words of her own. "Well, I could teach you, but that doesn't mean that you would learn, Clair-girl"

"You can't even say it right, Sally-girl ... it's not Clair-girl; it's Sally-girl."

Clair, as she says this, is about five inches from Sally's face. The other students quickly notice, wondering if the two are about to have an all-out brawl. Sally, continuing to eat her French fries, wonders why

Clair has gotten so close. Clair speaks slowly, almost serenading Sally in the process.

"Saallllyyy-girrl, I have something to tell you." Her voice rings, and when it does, there is a small break in her spirit.

Sally sees Clair is serious, and it's a good thing, too. Clair gets like this either when she's happy or when something has just gone right. Sally drops her French fry in preparation for the news.

"What?"

Clair then looks intensely, not even flinching. Then, suddenly, Clair's eyes shoot over Sally's right shoulder. She notices someone approaching.

A boy's voice rings out, "Sally, can I talk to you privately for a second?"

Clair looks over Sally's shoulder, and Sally can see that Clair is smiling at the boy. Clair then looks Sally directly in the eyes, "We'll talk later, Sally-girl." Clair moves away, offering her seat to the boy, who sits down.

Sally can't believe it; it's Neaven. She didn't recognize his voice, which is usually so certain and confident. But now it sounded wounded, even questioning.

Sally takes the initiative, "What can I do for you, Neaven?"

Neaven immediately gets upset, and it shows.

"What can I do for you, Neaven?" he says mockingly.

Sally is taken back. She's a bit offended but also curious. What was going on with Neaven? Was it about Dr. Hutchinson's class? Neaven continued in a humbled manner, not giving Sally a chance to respond.

"I'm sorry, Sally," There was a pause. "I am just a little anxious and frustrated right now, and when you said that the way you did, it sounded so impersonal, so ...," he reaches for the word, "... standoffish."

"I'm sorry, Neaven," Sally's offers politely.

"Sally, are you my friend?"

"Yes, Neaven, I'm your friend."

"Ok ...," Neaven takes some mental inventory, "... then because we're friends, you would want to help me, right?" He says the last part in a doubtful manner.

Sally is slightly put off. "Of course I would want to help you, Neaven."

"Ok, Sally." Neaven leans back and looks Sally directly in the eyes. "Then tell me how you feel about me, and be completely honest Sally, no games, just tell me right now."

Sally turns her head a little, rather like a dog does when it doesn't quite grasp its surroundings. Neaven notices Sally's reaction. "I'm serious, Sally. I need to get to the bottom of this, right now."

Sally thinks she is getting the visual picture now. She is seeing Neaven in a new light. He looks despairing. She openly makes light of the subject.

"Neaven, is this about you and me, together?"

Neaven bursts out, "Yes Sally, that's exactly what this is about."

Sally shakes her head, "That's not fair, Neaven."

"What's not fair, Sally?"

His voice raises when he notices that Sally's facial expression hasn't changed. "What do you want from me, Sally? Do you expect me to grab some club, hit you over the head with it, and then drag you into some cave?" Sally's lips curl; she didn't mean ridicule.

Neaven continues, but he lowers his voice. "Sally, where I come from, we treat people with respect. And that's all I've ever treated you with, respect, respect, respect." He continues, trying to find a common place of reason. "I know I might have sent mixed signals in the past, and that made things hard, but I'm here to set the record straight, Sally, and to let you know how I feel."

Sally positions herself, listening completely. Sally has always liked Neaven, but she has not known how to feel about him either. In the year they've known each other, Neaven has never taken any kind of leap of faith, and that has always bothered her. Neaven then continued, realizing Sally was listening.

"In these last six or so weeks, since the semester began, things have been different. My emotions are surfacing, Sally, and I am realizing that I feel different about you."

"How?" Sally questions, allowing her emotions to leak out.

"I want to see you, Sally." He looks into her eyes, there's passion behind them. "I want to get to know you better."

Sally smiles inside but doesn't permit Neaven to see. She wants to hear it all, and she's afraid if she allows Neaven to see her emotions right now, she'll stop him dead in his tracks.

Neaven breaks free from his pride. "I am here to ask you out, Sally."

Sally crosses her legs; his words sounded so perfect. Neaven continues, "I want the chance to take you out, Sally. And I want to spend time with you, more than just friendship time."

Neaven then grabs Sally's hand, almost in an effort to try and sense Sally's feelings, but also in an effort to get a response. Sally pulls her hand away but then immediately places it on top of his. She stares into his eyes.

"Neaven, I feel the same way about you. At first, when we met, I was attracted to you Neaven ... But then, for the longest time, you were so sweet to me as a friend, but just as a friend, Neaven."

Neaven pauses on Sally's last thought, hoping she won't add another footnote to it. Sally continues, "But I can't lie to you, Neaven. The entire time, I continued to have feelings for you, and even now, I still have those same feelings for you."

There is relief in Neaven's eyes, and both of them could feel it. Neaven looked down as he spoke. "Sally, you have no idea how happy I am to hear you say those words. I have been praying and asking God to help me with this. I knew I could have messed all this up by waiting so long, but ... trust me, Sally, when I say it was never on purpose."

Sally nodded her head, understanding.

"I just couldn't line up my actions with my emotions."

Sally smiled; she liked the way he said it. She looked up. He was cute, real cute actually, mostly in a Nebraska-farm-boy type of way. That's where he was from actually, Nebraska. His jet-black hair gave thick accent to his dark, clamoring eyes. He stood out, but not

simply because of his good looks. He had a thick Midwestern drawl that offered confidence and certainty; people were drawn to him.

Sally always liked Neaven. He probably could have asked out twenty different girls today, and any one of them would have said yes. He was very likable, down to earth and sincere, very easy to be with. She was happy to be holding his hands, and thankful that he finally took the chance.

"Sally." Neaven broke the silence. "Do you want to go out tomorrow night? There's a fair, and I'd like to take you."

Sally wanted to go to that fair.

"I know about that fair, Neaven, and I would love to go with you."

"Yes!"

Neaven makes a fist and tucks it under the table, almost like he's just sided his colt. Sally smiles; it was a cute outburst.

"I really wanted to go with you Sally. I really did."

She could tell. Neaven had the look of a boy in a chocolate factory. It was actually the same look he would get right before he was about to eat.

"Neaven, do you want me to get you something to eat? It's lunch time."

"Oh, yeah, yeah." His attention was slowly turned away. Sally laughed. Neaven could eat seven times a day, and then he was still hungry. It was funny the way food could so quickly turn away his attention.

Neaven remarked, "I'm gett'in the food, Sally. Do you want something?"

Sally smiled, "No, Neaven, I just had some fries."

"Ok, Sally, I'll be right back, right back." He left his backpack and wandered off, half-dazed and jogging toward the food court. Sally watched him jog. She looked at his backpack sitting there on the table. His backpack was cute, too.

Neaven was cute, his backpack was cute, and if he happened to come back here with the ugliest food imaginable, even that would be cute. Everything was cute right now.

Sally put her hand over her right ear, comprehending; she leaned on it. Everything was going well right now. Dr. Hutchinson, Neaven, Clair; well, she didn't know about Clair, but she knew it was good. Everything was so perfect.

She wondered, sensing in her spirit and trying to discern if any stumbling blocks lay ahead, trying to sense, trying to see. Part of her wanted to know, but part of her didn't. If she discerned too hard, she might find something bad or unruly. If she didn't discern at all, then something might eventually creep up, something that could have been avoided had she initially discerned it.

Oh well, Sally thought. Live in the moment, live in the now. Neaven came back with three cheeseburgers and a soda. He plopped everything down on the table. Sally couldn't believe it; she started to laugh as she spoke.

"Neaven, I said I wasn't hungry."

"These are for me."

Sally laughed again. "You sure three is enough? I could get you a few more?"

Neaven took his first bite. With a mouthful of cheeseburger, he said, "No, this should be good."

Sally knew Neaven liked to eat, but this was some kind of display.

Neaven continued, "Man, all that sweating sure makes a man hungry, and I was sweating you, Sally, I was totally sweating you." He takes another huge bite.

"I believe you." She continues to laugh, watching him as he drinks his soda. He takes a break only to ask a question.

"How about I pick you up at six tomorrow night?" He takes another bite.

"Six sounds fine, Neaven."

He chews, "Ok, dress warm. We might go on some of those rides."

"All right," Sally affirmed, "I'll bring something." She continued to watch Neaven as he ate. He looked back at her with wonder in his eyes.

After a moment, he spoke, almost out of place. "You're special Sally, you know that, right?"

Sally was wondering exactly where Neaven's comment was coming from. "What do you mean, Neaven?"

Neaven half-winked at Sally, giving her confident assurance. "I'll be honest with you, Sally, if you had turned me down today, I would have been mad, but that wouldn't've changed the truth. You're still a special girl, real special actually."

"What do you mean?" Sally asked, partly out of curiosity and partly wanting to feel good about herself.

"You just are. You always have been; you're just different. Smart, funny, pretty, a good girl, really. I don't think you could hurt someone even if you tried."

Sally bowed her head on hearing that; she knew it wasn't true.

"I'm serious, Sally. I think that's the major reason it took me so long to ask you out."

"Why?"

"Because you're so special, and ..., in some way I never felt I could live up to you, or that I could handle you actually."

Neaven was being transparent, genuine. "Handle me, how?" Sally's curiosity was peaking.

Neaven took another bite of his cheeseburger. He then showed Sally he was going to answer her but that he needed to swallow his food. He took a gulp of his soda. He then arranged his cheeseburger in his hands and kind of shook his head.

"I don't know, Sally; it's just like something, almost like you're an alien ..., but in a good way."

Sally's face churns, "An alien?"

"No, but in a good way, like ET or something." Neaven nods his head up and down, content with his comparison. Sally looks deeply at Neaven, as if she wants some kind of clarity. Neaven notices.

"I don't know, Sally?" Neaven justifies himself, trying to get as clear as he can. "I don't know how to explain it, but trust me, it's there."

"Must be," Sally reasons, not content but also realizing she's not going to get the answer she's looking for.

Neaven tries to help her, completely separate from any prompting. "It's like me asking you out today. I

talked with a few guys, and they all said the same thing."

Sally was curious but also cautious, "What did they say?"

"Well," he rubs his hands together, "they all agree that you're a super girl, and really hot, too."

Sally looks at Neaven, wanting him to tell her everything.

"But they all brought up how smart you are, and how God might have a certain purpose for you. And that fact intimidated them about you."

"Because I'm smart, because God might use me, that intimidated them?" Sally said this almost condescendingly.

"Yeahh, ... and because of that fact any guy in your life may never have the control he desires, because your so deep with God."

Sally couldn't believe it; she just couldn't believe it. It was just now coming back to bite her. The same conversation she had with Clair regarding Jack was being thrown back into her face.

If Clair had man problems due to her relationship with God, then how much more would she, considered to be one of the most spiritually gifted people on campus, not have those same exact man problems? It was funny, but the wisdom made sense.

Sally's facial expression couldn't hide it. She was slowly smiling as she understood the implications of Neaven's words.

"You gett'in it, Sally?"

Sally began to force her head up and down, almost like it was being tugged from behind her. She then spoke plainly, "Yeahh, I get it, Neaven ... You still want to go out?"

"Shoot, yea, I wanna go out, Sally."

Sally smiled. Neaven had a special way of acting stupid and charming you all at the same time. He continued with some spirit.

"Sally, ain't nothing keeping me away from you tomorrow night. Not God, not wisdom, not calling, not anything. If my car breaks down, I'm running to your house."

"Good," Sally holds her integrity, "because just to set the record straight, Neaven, I do understand your reasoning. But trust me when I say that I am not that cut and dry. When it comes to making my choices, I have my relationship with God, and that relationship is based on choices."

Neaven holds up his head, conveying that he has struggled over this situation, too. "I believe you, Sally, but trust me, I was still intimidated."

"That's fine," Sally brushes it off, "but let's be fully honest with each other." Sally draws closer to him, showing him she means business. He doesn't mind. "We'll let each other know what's on our minds; that way, no surprises."

"No surprises," he repeats it.

He grabs Sally's hands and speaks directly from his heart. "I can't wait to be with you tomorrow night, Sally. I've waited a year for this."

"I've waited, too, Neaven." She then softly strokes his hands, looking at him with all reason vacant from her eyes. "I've waited, too."

Chapter 8

Tap-tap-tap... Tap-tap-tap... Tap-tap-tap.

The quintessential beat coming from the iPod could be heard by those seated near Henryk but not by those seated clear across the room. Henryk was listening to his favorite rock group, Pantera, as was his custom before offering his synopsis regarding The Cell's current course of action.

All The Cell's Primary Members, including Dr. Thiery, were about to enter the conference room where currently the Romanian secretary of state, as well as key members of Romanian Foreign Affairs Ministry Department had been seated. Alongside them were Nationalists from Romania's old communist regime. There had been attempts by the Nationalists to overthrow the power and authority of the current democratic multipartite parliament and its free press ideology, but this, according to the Romanian prime minister, had to stop.

The Romanian government beckoned The Cell's intervention in this matter. The Cell was further persuaded by NATO due mostly to the fact that Romania was currently only a Partnership for Peace country, and NATO sought to recruit their democracy into full partnership. Because of The Cell's overwhelming reputation for fairness, the Nationalists agreed to consider The Cell's evaluation. This current arrangement was far more promising than any of the other recourses of action that the Nationalists had taken in the past, so everyone remained hopeful. Had The Cell not agreed to involve itself in this particular matter, the Nationalists most probably would not be negotiating at all.

Some were surprised by the Nationalists' desire to sit down and communicate with The Cell, but the Nationalists merely pointed out that they believed strongly in their political views and felt they had nothing to hide. Overall, the Nationalists were considered much less popular in Romania because they

usually settled matters through violence rather than negotiation.

Cross Lutherant passed through the lounge area where the Primary Members were seated. As he passed, he saw to it that he did not disturb any of the Members meditation. He headed for Dr. Thiery's office and knocked on the door.

"Who is it?"

"It's Cross, sir."

A military guard opened the door from the inside, letting Cross enter at his own will. He walked up to the nearest chair and took a seat. Dr. Thiery looked up from his work just long enough to observe, "Mr. Lutherant, I didn't intend to see you here this morning."

Cross brushes his pant leg. "I wasn't planning on coming, sir, but I won't be long. I just wanted to tell you I got a hold of Tom Hutchinson, and we will speak tonight."

"Yes, like we discussed."

"Yes ..., like we discussed." Cross wonders if his choice to visit this morning was a wise one. He continues hesitantly, "I just wanted to know if you have any final instructions before we spoke."

Dr. Thiery doesn't even look up; he believes Cross is struggling with something, so he gets right to the point.

"Mr. Lutherant?"

"Yes, sir."

"I agreed with you when you said we should tell Tom Hutchinson the heart of the matter; it was your idea"

"Yes sir, I know," Cross interjects.

"So what is all this, Mr. Lutherant ...?" He looks up at Cross. "Butterflies before the big game?"

Cross puts his head down, wondering if Dr. Thiery's observation is exposing some kind of doubt within him, even fear. The only reason he decided to see Dr. Thiery this morning was that in the past he had been successful in persuading him, but now he was wondering if he had gone too far.

Dr. Thiery looks up, measuring Cross.

"Sir, when you first told me of your vision for Mark's replacement, I believed it was a rational and valid vision.

"But ever since that day, I have slowly been getting closer to the opinion, the opinion that I want to share with you right now." Cross holds his breath and lets it out. "Sir, The Cell is stronger now than it has ever been. We are sought after by any and all who have even the smallest desire for peace."

Dr. Thiery looks back down at his work, not seeming to pay anymore attention to Cross, who finishes anyway. "I am just questioning whether or not your vision is best suited for the overall success of The Cell at this present time."

Dr. Thiery continues to write, making a few final notes. He then closes his file and proceeds to lean back, and as he does, he looks Cross right in the eyes.

"Mr. Lutherant, I do believe that you understand my position. Am I correct in my assumption?"

"Yes sir, you are correct."

"And you do believe that my vision regarding Mark's replacement is both rational and valid, correct?"

"Yes, sir, I do, and that is actually what frightens me."

"Yes ..., I know." Dr. Thiery continues with frank sarcasm. "I understand your fears, Mr. Lutherant; the problem is you are viewing this situation from an administrative angle and not from a purposeful unbiased angle."

"Excuse me, sir," Cross defends himself meekly.

"Currently, you are seeing this change as a choice that might potentially hurt The Cell in the short term, and this Cross, frightens you."

Cross didn't like what Dr. Thiery said, but he was right.

"And you are also fearful of The Cell's popularity becoming impacted, and quite possibly our organisation being viewed as problematic, even distasteful."

"That's true, sir," Cross admits. "I don't want to see The Cell going downhill when it doesn't need to."

"I understand, Mr. Lutherant ..., " he pauses and looks Cross directly in the eyes, "but sometimes in order to go forward, you have to take a few steps back."

Cross looked at Dr. Thiery. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. Right now, The Cell was probably the most respected organisation in the world, and it was possible that Dr. Thiery's vision for Mark's replacement could affect all that.

"I fully realize that my vision might throw a perpetual monkey wrench into our seemingly flawless agenda, but I do believe this is the choice we need to make in order to ensure The Cell's future stability and position as a concurrent global impact team."

Cross looks at Dr. Thiery blankly; he still doesn't fully understand his reasoning.

Dr. Thiery notices Cross's blank stare, so he meets him there, undoubting and unashamed. "The reason you can't grasp this vision, Cross, is because you are viewing the vision with the wrong set of eyes. If you were truly viewing this vision correctly, in terms of the future success of The Cell, then you would be in full agreement with me, as you were before you started reasoning all of this too much."

He pauses briefly, allowing his words to sink in. "Now that you have had time to think, and your mind has subsequently gotten the better of you, you are fearful. Fearful because my vision for The Cell is risky and it might cost The Cell some shattered opinions among all our conspicuous admirers out there.

"The truth is, Mr. Lutherant, I don't as much give a damn about our squeaky clean record as I do that the future integrity of The Cell remains intact. The truth Mr. Luthernat, I will not be around forever, and while I am around I intend to make sure that this Cell is in its proper working order, that it might fully exist separate from any guidance or intellect on my part."

There is a pause.

"I truly believe that the completion of this vision will ensure that, and I dare say that you briefly had a grasp of that vision, that is, before you allowed yourself to be conned into thinking that status and

popularity are more important to a working venture than usefulness and integrity."

He blinks, putting an exclamation point on his vehemence, "Now please, either leave this office or help me understand your reasoning in all this."

Cross was offended, but he knew he had been put in his place. Dr. Thiery was right. Everything was very true, but his tone and frankness were not appreciated. Cross strengthens his legs against the floor to vent his frustration. He then addresses Dr. Thiery as honestly as he can.

"Sir, if I have offended you, I am sorry. I should not have pressed upon you this morning with all of my doubts."

Dr. Thiery listens, waiting for Cross to make his point.

"Everything you said is true, sir, and I am sorry I viewed this situation with the wrong mindset. I admit I was selfish not focusing on the clarity of your vision."

Dr. Thiery crosses his hands, warming up a bit, beckoning Cross to continue.

"Please excuse my adolescence. I was thinking more like a businessman than as a member of The Cell, whose focus should be on the greater good of all mankind, and not on vain self-preservation or promotion. I actually do agree with you, sir..." Cross looks directly at him. "It's just that your vision scares the life out of me, because that vision might actually take us to a place that makes us vulnerable, that makes us inefficient and weak."

Dr. Thiery waits a moment, he then speaks honestly, "Cross, if my vision does come to fulfillment, then this is going to be a tough time for all of us. I fully agree with your concerns regarding that impact, but let me be honest with you." He shifts forward, leaning on his desk, "I fully disagree with your fears that this vision is not worth the risk. I believe it is not only worth the risk, but that the risk becomes crucial to the future success of The Cell."

Cross understands what Dr. Thiery is trying to say; he nods, bearing witness that he understands. Then he speaks. "Again, sir, I do understand you. I just need to

deal with my fears in a more appropriate way. This is obviously a trying time for all of us, and I want to do everything in my power to make sure things end up the way they should."

"You want to do everything in your power to make sure things align themselves the way they should?"

Cross, wondering if Dr. Thiery is mocking him, answers, "Yes, of course, I do."

"Let me repeat myself again, Mr. Lutherant," he was mocking him, "do you want to do everything in your power to make sure things align themselves the way they should?"

"Yes, I do," Cross answers in a surrendered tone.

"Then stay out of the way, Mr. Lutherant, especially with regard to this vision." Dr. Thiery gets very serious, almost protective. "You have your job, Mr. Lutherant, but the vision of The Cell and its burden lie on me. Understand me when I say I have wrestled with this vision from all angles and with all points being considered This vision is our best shot."

Again Dr. Thiery was right. This was the equivalent of a sergeant who ordered his troops into battle and the troops responded that they didn't want to go simply because they were afraid of getting shot. Dr. Thiery clearly saw the battle ahead, and as much as he didn't want to admit it, there was no way of going around it. Dr. Thiery looked at Cross, wondering if his proclamation found its place.

Cross spoke with dedication, "I will do my job. These fears will not get in the way because I do trust your judgment. Please forgive my selfishness and my lack of control."

Dr. Thiery nods his head. "Mr. Lutherant, you are as vital to this organisation as any of its members, including myself. Not only will I not give this morning's conversation a second thought, but I look forward to hearing about any progress you might make with Dr. Tom Hutchinson this evening." He stares at Cross, making sure Cross understands his words were genuine. "Now, if you don't have any other pressing matters, please take the liberty of enjoying yourself for the

remainder of the day ... that is, until tonight's meeting of course."

Cross was taken with his gesture. "Certainty, sir, I actually do have some matters to attend to, but as soon as I'm finished, I will take you up on your offer."

"Good," Dr. Thiery says with certainty. "Then if you'll excuse me, Mr. Lutherant, I believe they're waiting for me down the hall." Dr. Thiery begins to stand up.

Cross follows his lead and the military guard opens the door. As Dr. Thiery nears the door, he grabs Cross by the shoulder and whispers something into his ear. He whispers what seems to be at least two or three sentences. When he's done, Cross smiles and glances back to show his appreciation. Dr. Thiery simply nods and proceeds toward the conference room.

All the other Primary Members have entered. They are waiting for Dr. Thiery. Cross watches as he enters the room and then he heads toward his office. He enters and closes the door behind him. On the dry-erase board, there is an errand that is circled in red: "talk with Dr. Thiery today." He grabs an eraser and erases the board. As he does so, a look of contentment appears on his face.

The students file slowly into the classroom. After Monday's class discussion, no one wants to miss today's lecture. Dr. Hutchinson had come early, seating himself quietly near the right side of his desk. Sally decided to come early, too. She wanted to settle in, fully aware of the likelihood she would be called upon today. Neaven approached her and tapped her on her shoulder.

"Hey Sally, you ready for tonight?"

"Yeahh," Sally responded, "I really can't wait." Her voice echoed of excitement.

"Yeahh," Neaven relaxes, trying to play it cool, "I heard the fair's great this year. Some of the guys went last night, and they had a great time."

"Yeahh," Sally answers with anticipation, "what'd they say?"

"They said it was not disappointing at all, a lot of rides and games and fun stuff to do. Pretty good food, too."

Sally laughs, "Yeah, I'll bet that's important."

"Well, food's always important, but not as important as being with you."

Sally's countenance changes. Neaven finishes, "I'm really looking forward to tonight."

Sally is taken. "Me too, Neaven." She looks down and blushes a bit, considering how personal Neaven has become.

"Ok, I'll see you later." He rubs her shoulder and rushes off to his seat.

Sally repeats in her heart Neaven's sentiments as he makes his way back to his seat.

It takes a few more moments until all the students find their seats. It gives Sally time to think. She thinks about Clair, and how Clair had not returned her phone call from the previous night. That wasn't like Clair at all, especially since Clair had told her that she had some pretty important news. Oh well, Sally thought to herself, it probably wasn't any big deal. She would probably see Clair later today, anyway. She would ask her then.

"Ok, class," Dr. Hutchinson begins, "I hope you're ready to go?"

Sally straightens up in her seat. She pays attention, anticipating how much she should involve herself.

Dr. Hutchinson continues as he rises up from his seat. "Monday's session was very interesting to say the least ... Sally offering us all ample wisdom and clarification both to chew on and quite possibly digest."

Dr. Hutchinson looks in Sally's direction. "We can only hope that today's conversation will consist of much of the same ... with a different topic of course."

Dr. Hutchinson touches his fingers to his lips and he begins to pace. He's thinking again, and this could mean only one thing: that he himself would choose the topic. The students waited as Dr. Hutchinson paced back and forth. Sally didn't automatically assume that he would call upon her, although she thought it likely. Dr.

Hutchinson turned his hips toward the lecture board, and the momentum he created carried his waist and upper body forward. He grabbed a dry-erase marker and wrote one word directly in the center of the board:

MIRACLES

He didn't even turn around. He waited for a few moments with his back turned against the class, allowing the excitement and anticipation to build. He set down the marker and turned toward the classroom, beginning his discussion.

"Miracles ... miracles ..." He paused, trying to add dimension to the mind.

"What does the Bible have to say about miracles ...? What doesn't the Bible have to say about them?" He looked over at the other students to perceive their readiness. He approached their readiness realistically, "Pro's and con's, perhaps ...?" He paused, trying to entice them, trying to feed them his desire. "What could we quite possibly learn today, in this classroom, regarding miracles?"

Neaven boldly begins the discussion. "Well, miracles were done in both the New Testament and in the Old Testament. This shows that God's usage of miracles pretty much remained consistent."

The rest of the classroom eyes Dr. Hutchinson, wondering if he will agree with Neaven's observation.

"That's true, Neaven, miracles occurred in both the Old and New Testament." He pauses for consideration's sake, and then continues, "But what can this fact teach us? Elaborate even more, Neaven, or anyone for that matter." He waves toward the class.

"It just shows that God was consistent overall; miracles are not always consistent but the God who allows those miracles is."

"Yes, ... yes." Dr. Hutchinson comes alive, desiring to hear more. "And God performing those miracles stayed consistent to what end?"

"Well," Neaven reluctantly continues, "to the end that we might understand and believe in Him." Neaven confidently continues, "He needed a witness, and miracles

became that witness. The usage of miracles was consistent in order to promote a consistent God." Neaven finished his comments, not really knowing where else to go from there.

"Ok, yes. I see your point, Neaven. But what about the miracles themselves, what did they promote in relation to man, excluding God's witness, seeing that it was God witnessing to man for man's benefit?"

Dr. Hutchinson waits awhile, allowing the students a chance to speak. He leans on his desk and offers a bit more insight.

"Class, what Neaven has said is interesting. That God offered a consistent witness of Himself to man, and in doing so that He helped man see Him for who He is, consistent; but ..." he pauses, "still, something eludes us. Ask yourselves this question. Besides God's witness to man for God what was God's witness to man for man?" He emphasized the last words, making sure the students fully understood his reasoning.

Another student sheepishly spoke up. "The witness of God through miracles was, in itself, for man, so what man directly got out of those miracles was, in essence, the witness of God unto himself, so this witness is what became for man." There was silence because the comment was being reasoned.

"Yes ..., yes ..." Dr. Hutchinson spoke slowly, analyzing the observation. He then spoke with certainty. "The witness of the miracle for man itself did in fact bear witness of God so that man could have the witness of God, but ..." He pauses to elicit more consideration and then continues, "Is that particular view of the witness of miracles by God to man, in itself, all that becomes applicable with relation to what man fully needs to become through the witness of those miracles themselves?"

He pauses again, allowing the students to react to his comment. "If the witness of miracles from God was perfect unto man, and man could fully receive this witness and completely abide in it, and in doing so fully understand God, then what else is there?"

The students are quiet; they have nothing to say.

Dr. Hutchinson takes a moment. He is curious why some of the more confident students are not taking a

chance. He actually doesn't believe this particular train of thought is all that challenging. He returns to his first position. Leaning against his desk, he stares at the students. He is just about to speak when Sally opens her mouth.

"Man's sin."

Dr. Hutchinson stops himself. He actually has to keep himself from smiling in front of the class. Her timing was too much, almost like a kid throwing a spitball from the back of the classroom.

"Sally," Dr. Hutchinson quivers, "did you say man's sin?"

"Yes, I did."

"Would you like to elaborate on this train of thought?"

"Not really."

There is booing and jeering from the class; even Neaven joins in on it. Dr. Hutchinson watches the students and allows it to go on, reasoning that it will probably help her to open up. Sally just kind of smiles, looking for a student who isn't making a face at her. The students soon quiet down, and Dr. Hutchinson looks steadily at her. She takes a moment, looking right back at him.

"Ok," she consents. "What direction would you like to go in?"

There are a few jeers and claps. Neaven smiles and winks in Sally's direction.

Dr. Hutchinson motions toward the students and quiets them down. Sally takes everything in with simplicity. She then elaborates.

"Well, I believe I understand your point, Dr. Hutchinson, but just to be on the safe side, let me explain my reasoning." Sally looks down before she continues to speak.

"You are basically implying that the witness of God's miracles does indeed personify Him as consistent, and that this witness can be, and in all fairness usually is, fully accepted and received by man, yet in all this, there is still something more ..."

Dr. Hutchinson peers at Sally, waiting for the conclusion of her thought. Sally continues, "Basically,

Dr. Hutchinson, all that has been discussed here today could be deemed correct, but that still doesn't address one aspect in relation to God's purpose for miracles, that man simply accepting the witness of God through these miracles, even fully unto himself, does not in any way, shape, or form help man address his sin problem."

Dr. Hutchinson remains silent, not wanting to say a word. It was almost as if Sally had been reading his mind. The point Sally just made was the exact direction he was trying to take the conversation.

Sally continues in her resolve. "God's witness is true, and that witness to man does serve its purpose, but the purpose of miracles is far more than onefold."

He questions, "What do you mean, 'onefold'?"

Sally shifts in her seat, kind of moving and reasoning Dr. Hutchinson with her eyes. "If God's purpose through miracles were only onefold, then by Him simply bearing witness of Himself through miracles, and then by the people receiving that witness, then this would in fact fulfill the purpose of miracles."

She pauses, allowing the class to consider her reasoning. "But like you said before, that still leaves something else, mostly man's sin. So that must mean miracles themselves serve a far greater purpose than to simply demonstrate God's consistency or even His faithful witness among the people.

"The miracles themselves can actually serve as a lesson for the people, not so they can refer back to God, but so they can refer back to themselves, that they might examine their own sinfulness."

Dr. Hutchinson makes quick light of the subject. "That's true, Sally. A lot of people view the miracles of God as a witness unto Himself but that's not their primary purpose. Miracles are to show us ourselves, that we might observe and examine ourselves and understand why the miracle happened in the first place."

A student questions, prompted by Dr. Hutchinson's answer but also trying to fully understand, "So God does a miracle, not so much that we will look at the miracle and then stare into heaven with reverent awe, but that we will see the miracle and then look at ourselves and

consider perhaps why the miracle came, perhaps even because of our own sinfulness?"

"Precisely," Dr. Hutchinson answers. "Miracles in a small part serve as a witness unto a Holy God, but in a large part miracles serve as fuel for our own self-chastening, with respect to that Holy God."

There is a pause from the student. "Oh, I understand."

The other students also seem to understand the statement. They nod their heads, wondering if anyone became lost in the translation.

"Is anyone still vague on the concept? Anyone?" Dr Hutchinson asks.

One person raises her hand.

"Did you understand?"

"Yes," the student replied, "but I need to see it clearer. For instance, let's say a miracle were to happen right now, today. What would be your reasoning for why it happened?"

Dr. Hutchinson smiled. "That is a great question."

"Class?" Dr. Hutchinson offers with a slight grin on his face, "Would anyone like to answer that question?"

All the students immediately looked to Sally. Dr. Hutchinson paced again.

The students saw that he wasn't going to answer this one, and he didn't have to because the question hadn't even come from him. This was his moment, the moment he had been waiting for. The class was right where he wanted them, hook, line and sinker. They were currently in the middle of a complex question, and he wasn't even the instigator.

"Class," he led on, loudly, "your fellow classmate needs some help." He paced toward the girl, as if she were some little doe needing attention. "Aren't any of you going to take a chance to help your classmate understand?"

There were no takers. It was a hard question to answer, and then it would become even harder to justify. Who on earth could explain exactly why God did a miracle, and then what His justification was in doing so?

As far as the class was concerned, a miracle simply meant a lot of ooh's and ahh's. Attempting to answer

this question without solid footing could prove disastrous.

"Class ...," Dr. Hutchinson continues on his empathetic rampage, "I'm afraid if we can't find a suitable answer, then we're all going to have to go home tonight and do some hard-nose investigating."

"What!" Neaven shouts out, igniting a class response.

"Yes," Dr. Hutchinson answers boldly in his direction. "If this question is not answered by the time this class period is over, then you will all have a written assignment for this weekend ... And guess what the topic will be?"

At this point, the entire class, every single person, was looking directly at Sally. Dr. Hutchinson didn't look in her direction. That would be like eyeing a wide receiver right after you gave him a concussion. Sally was stuck, and she knew it.

If she forced herself to try to answer this question, an inaccurate answer would reveal ignorance, thus humbling her. If she didn't attempt to answer the question at all, then she would have to accept the fact that she didn't possess the means by which to answer the question, thus humbling her. Sally was pinned against the wall. There was only one way Sally could get out of this situation still holding on to her integrity. She had to take a chance, and when she took that chance, she had to nail it.

"Ok, class ...," Dr. Hutchinson builds a little more momentum, "looks like I'll be the only one going to the fair tonight."

Neaven's eyeballs nearly come out of his sockets. He almost has to put his hand over his mouth just to stop himself from speaking. Sally can feel the entire class staring at her. As far as she's concerned, she'll write the paper, and she'll even help Neaven write his, but on Saturday, after their date.

Dr. Hutchinson takes his time; he really doesn't want to assign the paper. He is doing all this to test Sally. He has already decided that if Sally fails to speak up, then he will allow the class to break into

small groups in order to complete the assignment together.

This gamble was for Sally's sake, and he didn't want the entire class paying for that gamble. He continued to walk slowly toward the front of the room, and then to his left, opposite from where Sally was seated.

The students were mostly looking down. A few were looking at other students, and a few remained staring in Sally's direction. The girl who asked the initial question sat there, looking innocent, trying to understand the concept of what she had asked.

Sally was a little frustrated with the girl, but had an impulse to look in her direction anyway. As she began looking at the girl, she felt conviction in her heart. Something was happening inside her. She suddenly saw this girl uninformed, questioning.

Sally was not seeing a girl who asked a difficult question causing problems, she was seeing her as vulnerable. As she continued to look at her, she thought about the decision she needed to make, whether or not to speak.

She questioned within herself, what was keeping her from speaking? Was it pride, resentment? Why would she keep quiet even if she knew the answer to the question?

She reasoned again. Here was this girl, merely asking this question for all the right reasons, and here she was, possessing the wisdom in order to comfort her.

Sally felt a sense of purpose rise up within her. She quickly checked her spirit. She would not be answering this question to show off or to try and position herself as somebody special. She would answer this question for the question's sake, and for the girl's sake.

"Dr. Hutchinson."

Dr. Hutchinson turned around, "Yes, Sally?"

"I would like to answer the question, but not to eliminate the assignment, but to help the person who asked the question in the first place, because she desires an answer."

Neaven howls out, "Who cares why you answer it; just answer it!" Half the class rings out in laughter;

the other half align themselves with the sense of purpose that rose up in Sally.

"Very well, Sally, go ahead and address the student who asked the question."

"Thank you."

Sally begins to turn her seat slightly toward the girl. The girl was sitting over to the left, so Sally moved her desk in order to make proper eye contact. The girl was receptive, turning her desk also, so she could see Sally clearer.

Dr. Hutchinson is amazed at what he saw. He was about to assign the paper not believing Sally would accept the challenge. Now that he has seen in what spirit Sally has accepted the challenge, he's ready to go over there and take a seat next to them.

Sally, having fully prepared herself to address the girl, begins her discourse.

"What we need to remember when it comes to the miracles of God is that their purpose is usually twofold. One, to witness to a people who have been sanctified and who are now a consecrated and believing people; and two, to witness to an uncertain or unbelieving people who, in fact, have been prepared. I will begin with the believing people and conclude with the unbelieving."

Sally checks herself, organizing her thoughts. The class allows her some time; understanding her readiness isn't automatic. She collects herself and addresses the girl.

"When it comes to a consecrated people, that is, a believing people or a people set apart by God, the witness of the miracles themselves is more for the Glory of God than for any kind of witness back unto the people.

"For example, in the case of Pharaoh in the Old Testament, God separated His people through four hundred and thirty years of slavery. Because of this slavery, as well as Israel's reliance upon God, they became a consecrated people, qualifying themselves for miracles for two specific reasons. Number one, they had suffered bitterness four hundred and thirty years, and two, because God himself said He now had respect unto His people.

"The Israelites, in God's eyes, now personified a consecrated people. This is because their suffering and reliance upon Him actually gave Him the permissions to show Himself strong on His own behalf. When God showed Himself through His ten plagues, he wasn't necessarily doing it for the witness unto His people, because their suffering and consequent reliance upon Him had become their heart witness. The ten plagues actually became a witness back unto Himself, and for His enemy Pharaoh to see and understand that He indeed was Lord and God.1

"Now, it is clear that even though God primarily used the ten plagues as a witness back unto Himself, that He still purposed these miracles to do a work in the hearts of the children of Israel. By doing this, He showed that even though the miracles were a primary sign unto Himself, that He still intended the miracles to bear some kind of heart witness within the Israelites.2

"This, as Neaven and some of the others fittingly pointed out, satisfies the notion that God, through miracles, gives a witness unto the people so that He might appear unto the people as possessing certain characteristics; whether mercy, consistency, or even anger, it makes no difference, so long as the people are receiving the exact spirit of the exact witness God is trying to portray.

"This becomes clear when we notice that as the children of Israel made their way into the desert, that they continued to struggle with both sin and unbelief. At this time, the children of Israel were still considered righteous and consecrated due mostly to two things. Number one, God's mercy through His Word to Abram, and that Word signifying that Israel would always be His people; and number two, Moses' merciful intercession, itself acting as a distinct part of His Word.

"Because of these two factors, God's miracles were still consistent among His people, but they had, in fact, taken on a new meaning. The miracles at this time were not offered so much as a witness back unto Himself as they were to encourage His people.

"The Bible clearly says that the way of the people was hard, and that they were discouraged.3 So,

understanding this, we can clearly see that among a consecrated believing people the witness of miracles is mostly for the witness of God back unto Himself, but that miracles also become the witness of God's mercy on a consecrated people who just so happen to turn out of the way of righteousness, due mostly to discouragement and unbelief.

"God, willing to have mercy on such a people because of their consecrated walk, will willingly manifest His miracles because He understands a consecrated faith walk causes struggles. Because of this fact, He offers abundant mercy on a people's doubts or frustrations during such a walk.⁴ Now, an unbelieving yet prepared people, on the other hand, receive an altogether different kind of witness. We also need to understand that because the witness is different, so are God's desires concerning that witness.

"If God were willing to show Himself among an unbelieving yet prepared people, the first desire God would have toward the people would be repentance. The Bible bears witness to this when Jesus Christ Himself rebuked the cities where he had preached and done many miracles. The reason he rebuked them is because none of them had repented.⁵

"Jesus Christ further said that it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment than it would be for those cities. This is because Sodom and Gomorrah never had any real witness of righteousness, but the cities where Jesus Christ preached had, and chose not to repent.

"When God willingly shows Himself through signs and wonders among a people who have not specifically been separated or even consecrated unto any kind of belief, then you can bet your last penny that those people will be warned incredibly to repent.

"Understand if God decided that a particular people were not ready to repent, then He would have mercy on them and would not allow any signs or wonders to be done among them. This action becomes God honoring, God holding back His miracles; and He'll do it if he doesn't believe a people are ready to repent or if they haven't been adequately prepared.

"But understand this, once God allows miracles to happen, then you can be sure that those same miracles, as well as His righteous witness, will testify against them on the Day of Judgment."

Dr. Hutchinson listens; opening himself up to Sally's targeted discourse. Her current depth is respectable, but it is the angle in which she is approaching from that depth that is gaining his attention. He waits to see how strongly she'll finish.

"Understand this example. When God shows himself through miracles among a people who do not believe, then God has received no initial faith deposit. During the four hundred and thirty years that the children of Israel were slaves in Egypt, God received countless prayers and supplications.

"Night and day, God received faith cries from people who were isolated within their bondage. These prayers of faith became God's pleasant aroma, but they also became the people's deposit into God's solemn vault or desire for faith.

"Then, when God finally did decide to show himself strong through miracles, He simply repaid His children for the years of dedicated tears they had shown Him. This situation could also be likened to the book of Acts in the New Testament, and even more specifically, the day of Pentecost ... the build up of the children of Israel in Egypt and the build up of the Church in Jerusalem; their cries for help, their desire for miracles and deliverance, their lamenting and their suffering, it all eventually prompted God to move. Now this does not mean that the people somehow earned the right to miracles; this would be a miscommunication of the act of grace. But their cries and prayers and their waiting did eventually become the vehicle which prompted God to move on their behalf."

Sally shifts in her seat. She faithfully moves her spirit forward. The class readies themselves again.

"If God reveals Himself, or manifests Himself, or even ..." She emphasizes her next point using her fingers as signals or quotation marks, "... poetically gets naked, in front of an unbelieving people through some kind of miracle or manifestation ..."

The class laughs over Sally's last comment. Sally doesn't allow the students' reactions to faze her, she continues steadfast, "then God has done so without any initial deposit of faith. Trust me when I say that if God sparingly does this, He desires to have something in return."

Sally's inner persona is leaking out. She is becoming passionate, almost as if something were manifesting itself through her.

"You need to understand that because of the miracle, God Himself has just "gotten naked" in front of the people. And He is going to desire a lot more than just a few gawks. This, not to mention the fact that when He allows His manifestation totally separate from any initial faith deposit, that He, in doing this, abandons His right to delight Himself in our faith.

"So when this does happen, His manifestation totally separate from any kind of initial faith deposit, then it is respectable that He would desire that we return the favor. But how, you might ask, do we return this favor? Well ..., when God allows something like this to happen, He is basically giving us all a loan of Himself, that we, through both repentance and relationship, should repay Him."

She pauses for emphasis sake, allowing the class to fully understand her position. "God is letting us borrow who He is, and it doesn't even cost us a thing. But as soon as His loan comes to us, He desires that we strengthen ourselves within that loan and wholeheartedly offer Him something back."

Dr. Hutchinson stands there, impressed. At this point, Sally is really impressing him. She introduces all the relevant topics, and then addresses each topic in a concise and poetic manner. She doesn't add emphasis to points that don't call for it, and she doesn't abandon points that might cause speculation.

Dr. Hutchinson digs deep spiritually; he does this in order to reserve the right for judgment, but only because he desires to intercede on Sally's behalf.

Sally finishes her discourse, addressing the girl personally. "So to answer your question fully, 'What if a miracle were to happen right now, today. What would be

the reasoning for why that miracle happened?' My answer is this; it depends on the state of the people who are receiving that miracle.

"If the people believe and are consecrated within that belief, then the miracle might solely be for the witness of God unto Himself, simply for His Glory ...," Sally looks around, "... for Him to triumph in it.

"If the people were consecrated unto belief but happened to need mercy, whether they were straying in their faith or had become dependent on His intercession, then the miracle could manifest itself based on the fact that the people were first consecrated, but that now, they needed encouragement from the God who tenderly loved them.

"Now, if the miracle were to happen among a people who had not been separated or even consecrated unto belief, but had been prepared, then this could only mean one thing ..." Sally looks down briefly "... that God has determined that the people are indeed in a position to receive the miracle and because of this fact, he will offer the miracle and then desire repentance."

Someone has a question. "But the people during Jesus' day were actually separated and consecrated; they had been baptized by John the Baptist and were waiting for their Messiah. So don't these people closely relate to the children of Israel in the desert, rather than to a people who have been prepared yet don't believe?"

There is a silent echo in the classroom. The question seemed to find its place, reverberating among the classroom walls. Dr. Hutchinson glanced at the student who asked the question and then motioned toward Sally.

"You are right, in part." Sally pauses, seeking to offer validity to her proposed disagreement. "I will fully give credibility to John the Baptist's ministry with respect to his preparing the people for belief, but regarding the people waiting for their messiah?" Sally pauses, adding a slight look to her face. "I personally don't believe that their waiting is a strong enough argument for either separation or sanctified belief."

She takes an encouraging note, "But I will address John the Baptist's ministry with regard to the

preparation for Jesus Christ's ministry." She gazes, actually out the corner of her eye. When she does, she singles out a portion of her knowledge within the revelation of the mystery of Christ and she spiritually, even rather aggressively, addresses the class.

"John the Baptist was the forerunner to Jesus Christ. John's purpose was not to create belief within the people but to be a witness unto the truth and to defeat ignorant council.⁶ In doing thus, he effectively prepared the people to believe ..., but John in no way, shape, or form actually sanctified the people unto belief; he merely opened them up, that they might believe."

Sally folds her hands tighter, tapping her palms on the top of the desk. She continues staunchly, "Now, when Jesus did finally arrive, because of John the Baptist's preparation ministry, the people were in a position where God could effectively show miracles.⁷ Before John's ministry, God, showing miracles, could not have realistically desired repentance because among the people there simply did not exist enough truth or even a strong enough foundation for repentance.

"The Bible even bears witness to this when it says that John did no miracle.⁸ He was considered the greatest prophet who ever lived even though he never wrought one sign or wonder. This is because he stood for the truth which becomes a far greater witness."

The girl who asked the question initially was following Sally's train of thought. The rest of the class seemed to be struggling to understand. Sally notices and offers a bit more insight in view of the class's apparent uncertainty.

"One thing you need to remember is that John's ministry opened up the people to believe. Just like the Bible says, John the Baptist made the paths straight. But in making those paths straight, he simply gave Jesus Christ an easier road to pave unto belief. In essence, John's work meant that Jesus Christ wouldn't have so many opinions to deal with among the people."

She pauses for a moment, allowing the students to understand her remarks. "Truly, John the Baptist in no way sanctified the people unto belief; he merely opened

them up, prepared them if you will, so that the people might be in a position for true belief to reveal itself unto them."9

The class kind of jolts in their seats; Sally's last statement was profound, almost like it hit somewhere, but they didn't know where to look. Sally continued, this time looking directly at the student who asked the question.

"So I don't agree with you. John the Baptist's ministry did not sanctify the people unto belief, and I do not believe that the people were a believing people when Jesus Christ showed up on the scene. I do believe that John the Baptist's ministry prepared the people; it prepared them for the ministry of miracles for which God would desire repentance. Also for the prepared work for which the Lord Jesus Christ had been anointed, which was to effectively minister unto the people's openness in order that true belief might reveal itself unto them."

Sally finished speaking and silence enveloped the classroom; the students embraced the silence. There was no moving or talking about; there was not even a notion to speak a word. Dr. Hutchinson had heard enough, a while back actually. He spoke to defuse the tension.

"Thank you, Sally." He stood up. "Please students, I want all of you to take out your Bibles, right now."

The students begin taking out their Bibles. Dr. Hutchinson waits until they have them squarely open on their desks.

"Please," he continues humbly, "turn to the book of Deuteronomy, and begin reading." He glances at his watch. "We have about twenty-five minutes left, and I want you reading for the remainder of that time."

One by one, the students begin to turn their pages. None of the students contested with Dr. Hutchinson or even offered him a blank stare. For the last hour and a half the spirit in the classroom had been vocal, but now there was need for quiet humility. It was time for the classroom to get small, very small in fact. Smaller than any notion, smaller than any thought, and smaller than any attitude trying to creep its way in. All the students were reading, and as they continued to read, the sweet spirit of peace enshrouded them.

Dr. Hutchinson scurried behind his desk. As he pulled out his chair to sit down, the back leg dug into the floor making a violent noise. Some of the students looked up; some didn't. He proceeded to sit down, scooting himself under his desk. He opened his Bible. As he began to thumb through the pages, he glanced at Sally.

There she was, reading, but flipping through the pages almost as if she were checking the references of her mind. She looked very particular, like she was devouring the Bible, intensely investigating it, even dissecting it. Dr. Hutchinson watched her, quietly observing to himself. Who was this girl? He wondered. Where on earth did she come from? From where did she get this knowledge, this striking wisdom? He reasoned this to himself, but then relented. Succumbing to an easier train of thought: humor. At least she'd make a good aide.

Neaven found himself measuring the long bushes leading up to Sally's narrow doorway. A reminder of the heaviness and density of the situation. There he was, dressed up and holding flowers, approaching the door he had approached many times before. He was nervous to say the least, hoping Sally wouldn't see the fear lying dormant behind his eyes. As he made his final approach, he took a deep breath and made a quick gut check. He rang the doorbell, checking his lips to make sure there wasn't any leftover Chap Stick. He heard some footsteps.

As the door opened, he could feel the warmth of the house rushing from his feet up to his cheeks. The light of the doorway invited him in, and there, standing right beside that light, was Sally, dressed in blue.

She looked abnormally comfortable standing in the doorway that evening. His eyes began to wander, even though he had reminded them not to. But there she was, so sure, so radiant, so inviting. Sally reached out and took the flowers, not even offering Neaven the chance to give them.

Dr. Hutchinson was pacing in his living room, knowing the O-PECK call was moments away. He humbled himself in an effort to seek any last guidance from the Holy Spirit:

Lord, this is about you. Your purposes, please Lord, guide me and allow me to say and accept your will tonight.

He kept pacing, reminding himself that his thoughts were not his own and that God would be faithful to guide him with continual certainty. The O-PECK signal sounded.

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EEEEEEEEEOOOOOOOOUUUUGGGGGGGGG ...
EEEEEEEEEOOOOOOOOUUUUGGGGGGGGG ...
EEEEEEEEEOOOOOOOOUUUUGGGGGGGGG ...
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He quickly ran to his computer and began the retinal scan procedure. The online computer instructions began.

The online verification process gives further instructions:

Verified. Receiver. Dr. Tom Hutchinson:
O-PECK Security Clearance A-E-D-9-O-0-9-2-R-9.

Verified. Source. Cross Lutherant:
O-PECK Security Clearance R-B-O-7-L-8-3-5-S-9.

Transmission being recorded under the rights and privileges of the United States government uplink provisions act.

Governmental Access Code. W-R-A-2-U-7-8-8-E-0.

Satellite Transmission to commence in fifteen seconds.

Tom is eager. He rights himself in his seat and waits for the transmission to begin. He has already purposed in his heart to allow Cross to control the conversation, defaulting himself to his delegation. He knew Cross's particular situation was probably just as hard as his, so he wanted to show Cross that he clearly understood this. As the verification process neared completion, Dr. Hutchinson began to rest his hands calmly on his desk.

"Did you want to get something to eat or just wait until we get to the fair?" Neaven's question was direct, as when it came to food, it usually was.

Sally laughs, breaking the silence and the awkwardness of the situation, "Why, are you hungry, Neaven?"

"Well," Neaven begins to defend himself, "I could eat anytime really; I was more concerned about you actually."

Sally believes him, in part. "Let's wait until we get there, Neaven. I might want to get some popcorn and stuff."

Neaven opens up a bit. "Yeahh ..., hey I meant to ask you. Are there any rides you want to go on specifically?"

"Yeah," Sally spouts out without hesitation, "the Ferris wheel."

Neaven's eyes get big, "Yeah, I was wondering about that. Some Ferris wheel's are opened and some are closed," he turned to look at her, "which do you like?"

"The open ones I think. They're more dangerous and exciting."

"Oh, really? That's interesting." He then puts his hand on his chin. "I myself like the closed one's; they're usually nicer and since it's cold tonight, it might make for a more comfortable ride."

Sally doesn't think he was necessarily thinking about the ride. She responds playfully, "Well, I guess we'll just have to find out."

"Yeah," Neaven laughs and relaxes a bit. "We'll just have to see."

"Tom, I am glad we are getting the chance to talk again, a lot has gone on since our last conversation."

Dr. Hutchinson nods his head, allowing Cross to fully speak his mind.

"I am going to get right to the point, Tom. Dr. Etienne Beauvais and Bodhi Dalry have already been dismissed."

Cross's comment sends a shockwave through Tom. He grabs his right knee and steadies himself. Cross notices that Tom is shaken, so he pauses to allow him to regain his composure. After a while, Tom eyes the computer, indicating he wishes Cross to continue.

"I know this was not the news you were hoping to hear, Tom. I do believe that you had your hopes on Mr. Dalry." He pauses slightly. "All I can say is that I am authorized to offer you some consolation regarding Dr. Thiery's decision with regard to both Dr. Beauvais and Mr. Dalry."

"What kind of consolation?"

Cross nods his head. "Tom, we're friends, aren't we?"

"Of course, why do you even ask?"

"Because I want you to understand that I went out of my way, Tom, and mostly with regard to this conversation." Cross pauses again, hoping to add validity to his statement. "Hopefully, after tonight you will understand exactly what I mean."

"I don't doubt it, Cross; just tell me what you're talking about."

"I'm about to."

Cross readies himself, seeing that Tom is eager to listen. He then approaches the screen in an auspicious manner. "Tom, even before our last conversation, Dr. Thiery asked me to personally contact you regarding Mark's replacement. He believed your involvement would lead us directly to that replacement."

"I understand that," he interrupts abruptly, "you made that clear in our first conversation."

"Yes," Cross rebukes, "but I didn't say why."

Tom thinks to himself, and responds, "No, you didn't. Perhaps I didn't think that was important."

Cross gets even closer to his computer screen. "If you only knew, Tom. If you only knew ..."

Laughter is filling the air. The smell of freshly cut hay, cotton-candy, and popcorn lingers. Sally and Neaven are walking down the makeshift road, trying to find the shortest lines and the most accessible routes through the fair. They have decided to go on the Ferris wheel last; it is near the back and is the fair's brightest attraction. They have seen many friends and familiar faces so far. The evening was turning out to be luminous with anticipation.

"Sally, I'm going to run to the bathroom real quick."

"Ok, I'll be right next to this booth."

"You sure you'll be all right? I'll be right back."

"I'll be fine, Neaven. We'll eat after you get back."

Neaven counters, "Ok, Sally, as long as you're hungry," as he disappears into the school of people.

Sally takes a moment and looks around. She simply can't believe it. She's on a date with Neaven. She's on a date with Neaven, and they're at the fair together. In a million years, she didn't think they would ever get past that first stepping stone, friendship.

She was excited to learn what lie ahead beyond her visual distance; beyond the uncertainty of her current questions. She softly approached the booth and took her wallet out of her purse. It was a bottle booth, where you tried to land the hard oval rings on the tops of the clear soda bottles. It cost one dollar for three rings. She paid the man two dollars.

Bam, the first throw came off the bottle ricocheting across the tint.

Second throw, not even close.

Third throw; tucked in between two bottles; maybe she'd get something for that.

Fourth throw, again, off the bottle's head.

Neaven comes up behind her. He grabs her shoulder and caresses the two remaining rings from her hands. He walks casually beside her as he eyes his targets.

First throw. Swish, right on top of the bottle.

Sally screams in excitement. Neaven gives her a wink.

Second throw. Swish, even cleaner than the first.

Jaws drop, including the man running the booth.

The man hobbles toward the counter. "You can have anything second from the top on down." He then groans as he hits the stuffed animals with his stick. "Anything except the Panda bears."

Sally is bright eyed. She points to a gray alligator fourth from the top. The man removes the alligator from its side wall trapping and hands it over. Sally embraces it immediately.

"What are you going to call it?" Neaven questions as they walk away.

"How about Swish." Sally says it playfully as she looks Neaven's way.

"No, too obvious." He thinks to himself. "How about Lavender."

"Lavender? Why? Because his tongue is lavender?"

"Yeah," Neaven points it out, "you see how big that thing is; it's bigger than the whole body."

"Ok," Sally acquiesces, "his name will be Lavender."

"Her name will be Lavender," Neaven imposes.

"Her?"

"Yeah." Neaven thinks to himself again. "A girl alligator for Sally. You definitely need a girl alligator."

"Why?"

Neaven raises his shoulders and keeps walking, confident about the decision.

Sally agrees. "Ok, Neaven," she looks at him, his face glowing from the touch of the moonlight, "Lavender it is. Her name will be Lavender."

"I'm listening, Cross. Exactly why was I personally chosen to consider Mark's replacement?"

"Because of your past, Tom." Cross offers it directly, not even giving Tom the chance to guess.

Tom holds something in. He fully understands what Cross is implying about his past, but he can't quite grasp exactly why this should have any bearing on Mark's replacement.

"What exactly does my past have to do with Mark's replacement?"

Cross smirks confidently. "That is precisely why I have called you, Tom."

Tom braces himself, knowing that this conversation could turn out to be a double-edged sword. His past, though incredibly established and respected, is also partially tainted.

"I'm ready."

Cross reads his friend, and begins. "Tom, first I want to say that you shouldn't be concerned. Your past is why Dr. Thiery chose you in the first place, but not with regard to any judgment, but with regard to the mystery surrounding it."

"Yes, I'm listening," Dr. Hutchinson follows.

"I am going to get right to the point. Dr. Thiery's vision for Mark's replacement is not what you would normally expect."

"Why not?"

"Because he is actually looking for someone just like you, Tom."

Tom's reaction to Cross's last statement is priceless. He doesn't even move. For at least five seconds, it seems as though time has stopped and not even thoughts are thinking. Tom simply could not believe what he just heard.

"Cross!" Tom opens up, "Are you joking with me?"

"I am not joking, Tom. That is why Dr. Thiery chose you, even from the get-go. He believed you could lead us to a like-minded individual, someone like yourself, so The Cell could recruit them directly."

Tom is taking it all in but doesn't know where to put it. He just can't believe Dr. Thiery is looking for someone just like him, considering his past involvement in The Cell and the problems that arose.

"And you nearly hit the nail right on the head with Bodhi Dalry. Dr. Thiery was incredibly impressed with that young man. We're actually keeping his file warm."

"You're keeping his file warm?" Tom questions, knowing that a warm file meant that the person would be reconsidered within two to five years from the initial dismissal.

"Yes, The Cell is going to be looking out for that young man in the years to come. Dr. Thiery actually believes Mr. Dalry will most certainly become at least a candidate if he so chooses, if not a Primary Member some day."

Tom is comforted by Cross's words; at least all the effort with Bodhi wasn't in vain. "And what about Dr. Beauvais?"

Cross leans back, not wanting to get into the heart of that matter. "Like I said, Tom, Dr. Thiery has a certain vision for Mark's replacement, and frankly, Dr. Beauvais did not fit that vision."

"So was his recruitment real at all?" Tom probes.

"Of course, Tom," Cross defends, "we brought him in. But what you need to realize is that Dr. Thiery already had a certain type of replacement in mind. When Dr. Beauvais came in as a recruit to the Primary Seat, it was simply a matter of time until he would be dismissed."

"Why was he dismissed specifically?"

Cross reluctantly answers, "Because of his lack of ability to receive criticism. You do remember, Tom, how important it is for The Cell members to associate with one another? Dr. Thiery saw in Dr. Beauvais a challenge and a resentment, especially when it came to cold arguing. He did not think his spirit would be appropriate toward the group, so he dismissed him."

"Well, that's fine, but he didn't want to be considered as a candidate?"

"I doubt it, Tom. Dr. Beauvais is an important man; in his case, the seclusion of being a candidate would not warrant him neglecting his other important works."

"I see. I still have a question, Cross. Why when I first offered Dr. Beauvais and Bodhi Dalry did you fight over Bodhi and agree easily over Dr. Beauvais?"

"Well ... you didn't know about the vision, so I needed to test you a bit over Bodhi, just for common sense reasons. And with regard to Dr. Beauvais, well, let's just say that part of me was hoping that he might make it in."

"Against Dr. Thiery's desire?"

"Tom, you need to understand the complexity of this vision. I am actually a bit afraid, with the prospect of

it going forward. If Dr. Beauvais did happen to slip into Mark's seat then this vision might have been avoided."

"Cross, what exactly is this vision?"

"You ready, Tom?"

"No, Neaven, no, no, no"

Neaven was stronger than Sally, so she knew she wasn't going to win; she was hoping he would acquiesce to her plea.

"Sally!" Neaven urged as he finally wrestled her hotdog away from her. "If you're only going to make fun of me, then I'm going to have to eat this one, too."

One down, one to go, Sally thought. She couldn't help nagging and prodding him about his eating, so when Neaven finally brought the food to the table, he seemed insistent on making good on her prodding.

"Ok, Neaven. I'm sorry. I'm sorry." Thoughts of Neaven swallowing this hotdog plagued her mind.

"You're sure, Sally?" Neaven questions as Sally's hotdog nears his lips for the triumphal entry.

"Yes, Neaven, I'm sure," Sally giggles. "I won't joke unless it's proper, ok?"

Neaven lowers the hotdog. "No problem." He eyes the food. "You still want your hotdog?"

Sally holds out her hands and rolls her eyes. "Yes!"

Neaven doesn't put the hotdog in her hands; he leans over and feeds it to her slowly. Sally takes a small bite and pulls back and chews. She looks at Neaven as she does. Neaven hasn't moved; he stays very close to her, implying he is going to feed her until she's through. Sally takes another bite, and then another. She laughs; the hotdog is almost gone, but the moment was nice. As she takes the last bite of the hotdog, she pulls back and crosses her arms. She stares at Neaven. He also pulls back, waiting for Sally to finish chewing.

Sally opens her mouth and herself. "How are you feeling tonight, Neaven?"

"Honestly?"

"Yeah, honestly."

"I would like to be sitting even closer to you than this."

It was cold outside, but Neaven's comment just heated things up. There was spirit in what he said, and Sally just kind of swallowed something that wasn't even there. She looked at Neaven again.

He speaks and carelessly looks away as he does. "Everything's so beautiful tonight."

Sally liked the way that sounded, and he was right, there was something electric about tonight. Neaven continued, "You look really nice tonight, Sally."

She blushes a bit, and turns her head so Neaven can't see. Neaven speaks directly into Sally's turned ear, "Don't be embarrassed, Sally."

"I'm not," Sally returns, her pride defending itself a bit. "It's just that it's all so perfect, Neaven, amazing really." Sally begins to laugh, knowing Neaven would loosen up after he ate.

Suddenly, a voice reverberates from around the corner, "There's my Sally-girrrrrlllllll."

Sally knew that voice, and Clair welcomed her glare. A really cute guy was next to her.

Sally jumps up and hugs Clair, who returns the hug. They then distance themselves. Clair makes the proper introductions. "Sally and Neaven, this is my boyfriend, Jack."

There is a pause, after which Neaven stands up and grabs Jack's shoulder as he shakes his hand; it was a Nebraska farm boy greeting.

"Hi Jack," Sally says. Jack approaches Sally and hugs her deeply. He whispers into her ear, "Thank you, Sally."

Sally didn't quite know how to take the greeting. So, "you're welcome Jack?" was all that came out.

She stared at Clair. Jack took a step back and acknowledged Sally with his eyes. He then offered his reason why.

"Because of you, Sally, Clair and I patched things up. I decided to fly out here first thing yesterday morning." He offers this information without any hesitation, almost as if they had long known each other.

"Sally, your conversation with Clair about our situation was right on the money, and all I can say is that I am thankful for your help."

Sally is still a bit shocked but tries to align herself with Jack's appreciation. "Jack, it's no problem; Clair helps me all the time." Clair can tell Sally is a bit nervous, so she walks over and hugs her.

"Oh Sally-girl, Sally-girl, Sally-girl." Clair holds Sally in a motherly way. She then turns to Neaven. "You're taking care of her, right?" She says it in a forceful way. Neaven points his head sideways with some pride. "Of course; she's worth it."

"Clair?" Sally beckons. She pins her feet to the ground as she turns Clair, heading for some privacy. As she does this, Jack and Neaven begin a polite conversation of their own.

"Is this what you wanted to tell me yesterday?"

"No, Sally, I actually wanted to talk about bird migration."

There it was again, Clair's wry sense of humor. "Of course this was the news I had for you, Sally." She offers slyly, "But then the Neaven train stopped all that!"

Sally giggles and turns, "I'm surprised, Clair, but what about his schedule?"

"You mean football? They're actually off this weekend, no game. He told his coach he was coming and he would be back on Monday; the coach wasn't happy but he went anyway."

"Wow!"

"Yeah, no joke. To leave the team the way he did, but I guess he had to make his point."

Clair turns to look at Jack. "And I'm glad he did because I think our relationship is worth it."

"It is!" Sally offers, restating the obvious. Clair smiles in agreement.

"But Sally-girl ..." Clair drags Sally away, even deeper into seclusion, "what about you and Neaven? Is he getting fresh or anything?" Clair sizes up Neaven with her eyes.

Sally has a humorous smile on her face. "It's sweet so far." She then turns to look in Neaven's direction. "But I think it's just a matter of time actually."

"Really?" Clair gets excited. "You ready Sally-girl?"

"I think so," Sally turns sarcastically, "I've been practicing on some stuffed animals at home; I think I'll manage."

Clair turns around. "Well, why'd you bring one with you?" She points toward Lavender sitting on the table. "Don't tell me your frenchin' that thing." Sally begins to laugh hysterically, "You'd need a mouth the size of Godzilla."

"Nooooo," Sally finally squeaks, "Lavenders' a she, and I'm not frenchin' with Lavender. Neaven won her for me tonight."

Clair takes a moment, just to be amusing. "I was gonna say, Sally-girl, that'd be some good kissin." Clair then justifies herself with a sarcastic smile, "Hey, wanna go on the bumper cars, boys against girls?"

"Let's do it."

Clair grabs Sally and rushes back to the table.

"We're gone boys; if you want, we'll be at the bumper cars, boys versus girls." Clair grabs Lavender and rushes away with Sally; Sally turns and smiles toward Neaven.

"She always like that, Jack?" Neaven asks frankly.

Jack answers with a smile, "Yeah, but mostly when she's happy." They follow the girls to the bumper cars.

Cross eggs Tom on as he continues. "Tom, Dr. Thiery's vision for Mark's replacement is that the replacement would not so much be of conventional thought, but would be more of an agitator."

Tom steadies himself. He begins to see where all this is going.

"At first, Tom, Dr. Thiery didn't want me to share this vision with you, but I persuaded him to allow me."

"Why?"

"Because I wanted to get things moving, Tom. I figured if you understood the vision, then you might be able to help us more accurately. Bodhi was perfect, but Dr. Thiery didn't think he was seasoned enough; he felt he needed a bit more development. You know, to work out the kinks."

"Cross," Dr. Hutchinson gets a bit more comfortable in his seat, "please elaborate on this agitator issue, and show me how my past measures up." Dr. Hutchinson actually knew the second part, regarding his place as an agitator in the past, but to be clear, he wanted to have it reviewed in its entirety.

Cross, not feeling he needs to go into specifics, honors Tom's request.

"Well, the reason Dr. Beauvais was dismissed so quickly was because he is not an agitator at all. He might have challenged the wisdom or reasoning of The Cell, but he would not have brought the agitation factor that Dr. Thiery believes The Cell needs at this present time."

"Needs?" Dr. Hutchinson questions.

"Yes ...," Cross repeats himself, "... needs. You need to understand, Tom, that although your past record with The Cell is sometimes viewed as problematic and suspect, you were the one who tested the limits of The Cell most effectively."

Tom knew this was true, but it was still nice to hear. "Yes, but to the detriment or to the advantage of The Cell?"

"That's what I'm trying to say, Tom. In the past, Dr. Thiery as well as others believed that your actions were detrimental to The Cell's progress; you yourself know that. But ...," Cross pauses, giving Tom a chance to fully receive his words, "... now, in hindsight, it seems as though Dr. Thiery believes that your agitation, although disturbing and disruptive, quite possibly could have added dimensions to The Cell that it now currently lacks."

Cross observes that Tom is trying to understand. He makes it even clearer. "Basically Tom, Dr. Thiery, for reasons he cannot explain, believes that your past involvement with The Cell was not as detrimental as

everyone previously thought, and that perhaps your focus, but even more specifically your agitating, could have prospered and challenged The Cell in some beneficial way."

"So they don't fully accept my actions in the past, but they are now prone to trying to understand them?"

"Exactly, Tom. Dr. Thiery is going on a hunch. The agitator he is looking for is like you, but not you, per se."

Tom thinks for a moment. "But why exactly does he want The Cell agitated?"

"That's the million-dollar question, Tom," Cross admits frankly. "But I believe I have the million-dollar answer. Let me tell you a little story."

Cross humbles himself, and his face shows it. Tom doesn't know what to think, but puts himself into some kind of spirit to receive.

"In America, Tom, there was this restaurant owner on the West Coast who was very impressed with the texture and the firmness of a fish he tasted in New York City. Now I can't remember the exact kind of fish, but that's not important; let's say it was trout. Now Tom, this owner was willing to fly those trout all the way across America just to serve those fish in his restaurant.

"The catch, Tom, was that the fish had to be transported alive, in order to keep the firmness, and this presented the dilemma. The transporters tried many times but with all failed attempts. They would transport the trout in cold water, but this made the trout's meat too mushy and soft. They tried different tanks and different combinations of seawater, more salt, less salt, but nothing worked; the trout's meat remained mushy. Now ..., the owner said the only reason he was going through the trouble of transporting the fish was because of the meat's firmness, and if the fish's meat couldn't be kept firm in flight, then there was no reason for him to buy it."

Tom continued to listen with interest, trying to discern the outcome.

"Well, Tom, finally, right before the restaurant owner was about to give up, one of the transporters had an idea. He suggested that they throw in a couple of

catfish, which was the trout's natural predator and agitator, just to keep the trout honest in flight, so that the trout would continue to keep on their guard, swimming around the tank not allowing themselves to get too stagnate."

Cross peered up with a smile. "It worked, Tom. Because of the agitation, when the trout finally arrived on the West Coast, the meat was firm, just as it was in New York City." Tom fully understood; it made perfect sense. "All the trout needed was a bit of agitation, just to keep them honest in flight."

Tom soaked up the story; its meaning was sweet. He understood the story's significance with regard to his past trials at The Cell. As he continued to think, he looked up at Cross and noticed that he was waiting for some kind of response.

"So what you're saying is that Dr. Thiery believes The Cell's Primary Members are stagnant right now and what they need is an agitator to keep them honest?" Cross smiles. "Something like that, Tom, and you probably use to be that catfish."

"Yeah, well, I'm too old to swim."

Cross smiles.

"So what do you want from me now?"

Cross looks at him blankly. "What do you think we want, Tom? Anything! A name! A place to look! Anything."

"What will Dr. Thiery do if you can't find an agitator?"

"Honestly?"

"Honestly."

"He won't move without one. He is dead set on this idea, Tom, and I'm half-inclined to invite you back right now just so The Cell can have some kind of agitation."

"Can I have until the conference?"

"Two weeks from now? I think things can hold off for that long." He pauses. "Let me pry a bit, Tom. Do you have any names right now?"

"None I can speak of surely. I will need to pray and then do some consulting, but to be frank with you, Cross, now that I understand the vision, it will make things a lot easier."

"Tom, separate from my current impatience, there is no rush on this. Now we do need a replacement as soon as possible, but none of us expect you to pull some kind of rabbit out of your hat. And Tom, just so you know, from what I understand, there are only three people who now know about this vision. You, me, and Dr. Thiery."

"Dante doesn't know?"

"Dante doesn't know, Tom. This is how critical this is, how deep it runs. We are going right back to the conception of The Cell on this one, and we are shaking things up from its foundation."

"No wonder you were so concerned" Tom looks at Cross mercifully. "... And Dr. Thiery is absolutely sure of this?"

"Absolutely, he believes this decision will ensure the integrity of The Cell for years to come, long after he's gone."

"It'll certainly liven things up a bit." He was a bit amused by all of this.

"Tom, all joking aside, The Cell needs this, the public needs this, Dr. Thiery needs this, and quite possibly, Tom, even you need this."

Tom sucks up some of his pride, feeling justified by the conversation in its entirety. Then, remembering the duty that has spoken on countless occasions, he offers Cross the response this particular situation deserves. "Cross, I will do all that I can to help Dr. Thiery with his vision, not to mention you and The Cell in general. I have always believed in The Cell, Cross, you know that, even when The Cell did not fully believe in me. I intend to offer this particular situation my full attention. Both you and Dr. Thiery should rest easy; I will do all that is in my power to help you find the proper recruit to fulfill your vision."

"We expected nothing less from you Tom. Even Dr. Thiery himself told me last week that your integrity has never been in question. All of us know that you will help us in any way that you can. You Tom, also rest easy, knowing that we understand this."

"Thank you Cross, I will."

Cross nods his head respectfully and leans back, ready to adjourn their relayed conversation.

"I will see you at the summit meeting, Tom, and please, if you have any questions, feel free to contact me directly over the next two weeks."

"I will, but I think we can wait until the conference. There we will be able to talk face to face."

"I'm looking forward to it Tom. Now if there's nothing else, I will see you in two weeks time."

"In two weeks, Cross. Good night."

"Good night, Tom."

They turn off their connections in unison.

"Oh, that was fun, really fun."

"Next time we'll do couples," Neaven offers. He motions toward Jack, "I don't think the girls faired to well."

"We did just fine. Didn't we Sally-girl?"

"Actually they kicked our butts," Sally says.

Neaven adds, "A little advice Clair, it's not so wise to make a three-point turn in a bumper car rink."

Clair shouts out, "It wasn't a three-point turn, Neaven; it was a u-turn, and you ...," she points at him, "... came out of nowhere and cut me off in order to set me up for Jack's ..." she grabs Jack by his coat, shaking him, "... brutal frontal assault."

Jack responds, "I'm surprised your car was still intact after that hit; you actually looked like one of those crash dummy people rattling around inside their cage."

"I don't know why you're so proud and boasting, Jack; it only means you will need to be the one working to massage the kinks out tonight." Clair turns and grabs Jack and kisses him forcibly on the lips. Sally tries not to watch, but Clair's intimacy with Jack was shocking. It almost made her jealous, seeing Clair in this different light. Neaven pushes for a separation after the couples embrace.

"Looks like you guys could use some time alone together. You mind if Sally and I excuse ourselves for the rest of the evening?"

Jack responds quickly, "No, we don't mind at all. Clair and I actually have a lot of catching up to do, and we're taking Sally out tomorrow night for dinner anyway."

"Dinner?" Sally questions.

"Dinner," Clair responds quickly. "Jack is leaving Sunday night, and tomorrow night is the only time we can do it. We wanted to take you out for dinner."

"Yeah, ok. But don't the two of you want to be alone tomorrow night?"

"No." Clair turns. "Sally I want you to have the opportunity to get to know Jack a little better, other than tonight of course, so we had it planned out all along to spend tomorrow night with you."

Sally blushes, "I would love to; thanks for your offer."

Jack reiterates his appreciation. "It would be our pleasure to treat you tomorrow night, Sally; we will have a great time. Enjoy the rest of your evening with Neaven, and we'll see you tomorrow, ok?"

"Ok."

Clair grabs Sally for a hug, and Neaven and Jack shake hands.

"Hey, Jack," Neaven questions, "Do you think I can have your autograph?"

"Sure."

Neaven takes out the flyer for the fair, and Jack begins to sign it.

"He's already been asked like ten times since he's been here," Clair beams.

"It's not as bad as at home in Arizona," Jack offers realistically.

"Why, how bad is it out there?" Neaven asks.

"I have to leave early, for whatever I do, because people stop me all the time. On an average outing to the store or movies, I'll sign anywhere between ten and fifty autographs and have pictures and conversations with at least ten other people; it's those darn picture phones." Jack shakes his head with amusement.

Neaven's a bit surprised. "How much time does that usually take?"

"Sometimes fifteen minutes up to a half-hour, but I'm use to it." Jack shrugs it off. Sally is impressed.

"Well," Neaven offers gracefully, "with your arm and strength you better get used to at least an hour because when you make it to the big time, they'll come from all over."

"Yeah." Clair nods her head in a humbled response.

"Well," Jack offers, "what will be will be."

Sally looks at the two of them. It was weird, seeing them so close together. She and Clair had spent so much time together, just the two of them, and now she saw Clair fully devoting herself to someone else. Sally was happy Neaven was there; she could feel jealousy creeping in.

Neaven takes the autograph after Jack is finished. "I really appreciate it, boss; have a safe trip back."

"Yeah, thanks. It was nice meeting you, too, Neaven." He then turns to address Sally, "And I will see you again tomorrow night."

"Ok."

"You know," Jack politely offers as he and Clair make their way off, "you're a lot like Clair explained to me."

"How's that?" Sally questions, never fully knowing what is going on in Clair's head.

"That your quiet, but that your quiet with resolve. I see that in you, and that's what Clair said about you."

Clair looked in Sally's direction, offering her a loving smile before they headed off in the opposite direction. Sally watched as they walked away; they made a great couple, complete. Neaven interrupted Sally's aloofness.

"Sally, do you see what I see?"

Sally looked over to where Neaven was pointing; the Ferris wheel was in full view and was only a few attractions away. Sally smiled brightly.

"Let's go."

The computer was now turned off, and Dr. Hutchinson was on his knees. He didn't stay there long; he rose up and began to pace, questioning in his mind the resolve of his spirit:

Lord, you alone know all things. What is your vision? I understand Dr. Thiery's vision and I also understand their intensions, but Lord, what are you willing to do?

Dr. Hutchinson continued to pace, allowing the fever of his spirit to entrap itself within his circular course. He was having trouble letting go. Even if his particular train of thought was not the Lord's will, he felt himself continually urging and pressing for the connection he believed needed to be made. "The Cell," he thought to himself, "the O-PECK, the agitator ... the agitator." He repeated all these words within his heart:

Lord, what is it that you want me to see?

The overall vision was astounding really. The idea of bringing in somebody who could quite possibly shake The Cell to its very core was not only unrealistic but plausibly impossible. You don't just stumble across someone who possesses the abilities to stand among the intellect of The Cell and then wave a magic wand to ensure that the person will deal with all situations reasonably. The most difficult thing about finding someone to fit into The Cell's demographic was not simply the person's gifts or abilities, but usually the persons overall aptitude to both adapt and become responsible within their gifts.

Brilliant man after brilliant man was turned down because they did not possess the right attitude or even the right spirit to associate themselves within the core group of The Cell. Dr. Hutchinson became certain that if God were willing to honor this type of vision, that the logistics themselves would have to come directly from Him. This was not just going to happen because of mere vision or effort. Dr. Thiery was hoping for a miracle, and it was now Dr. Hutchinson's duty to pray for one. Again, he thought, if this thing happened, it would have to be the result of God's direct intervention.

He walked over to his kitchen table, grabbing a piece of fruit and then putting it down as abruptly as he had taken it. It was impossible he thought. If Bodhi couldn't make the cut, then who could? Bodhi had

discernment and knowledge beyond anyone he had witnessed recently, except for perhaps Sally. But not even he could cut it. Who on earth could he quite possibly recommend in two weeks time that could become the agitator The Cell needed? Sally began to stand out in his mind, but he quickly shrugged off the notion. Sally came to his mind again, and he shrugged her off again. Again, Sally came to his mind, and this time he entertained the thought.

For thirty seconds, Dr. Hutchinson didn't move. He was deep inside both the mind of his spirit and the mind of God. He was analyzing and reasoning with regard to Sally, with regard to a woman. "Sally, Sally, Sally," he kept reiterating to himself. He finally came out with a rebuke to himself and to the spirit within earshot:

No, Lord, for two reasons why; she's too young and she's a woman; there has never been a woman Primary Cell Member, not ever.

He straightens his eyes deeply, feeling as though he has just justified himself. Sally pops back up again, within his mind's eye. Again he breaks:

No, Lord, it will be thrown right back in my face the very moment I introduce it.

Again silence. And again silence. Dr. Hutchinson continues to struggle with the notion. The evidence begins to speak for itself. Sally, except for the fact that she was only nineteen, was probably more qualified than Bodhi or anyone else for that matter. In all the classroom discussions, Sally had never once missed a beat. No matter what test came her way and no matter what situation presented itself, Sally performed flawlessly. Dr. Hutchison had difficulty ignoring all the promptings from his inner spirit. And they kept coming:

Lean not on your own understanding, Tom.

Acknowledge the Lord in all your ways, and He will direct your paths.

He stood there, understanding the message clearly. If he tried to control this situation, he would only end up frustrating the plan of God; and God's plan would

prevail anyway. But if he listened to the Holy Spirit and obeyed by faith, then even if he didn't agree or understand, he would be blameless; justified in knowing he didn't choose this specific course of action but simply obeyed God's will. He thought on this, and as he did, he went down to his knees to intercede on his own behalf.

Neaven makes his way to the window. "I'll take two tickets, please."

The cashier takes Neaven's money and makes change. Neaven jogs back to Sally. Sally is looking up, way up. The Ferris wheel was gigantic, and colorful.

"Ready, Sally?" Neaven questions as he puts his hand on the small of Sally's back, urging her forward. Sally acquiesces and walks with Neaven's leading.

"It's a closed Ferris wheel," Sally mentions. "Isn't that what you wanted?"

"Yeah," Neaven looks up in delight. Amazed at the height of the monstrosity. "I'm glad it's closed because it's really high up there."

"Are you afraid of heights?" Sally questions.

"Not really, but still, when your up that high, who can think about anything else?"

Sally smiles. She loves heights. Growing up in Vermont, she had plenty of experience. The mountain hideaways and experiences were one thrill after another.

"Maybe if we're lucky we'll get on during the next turn," Neaven says, interrupting Sally's reminiscing.

"There's no rush." Sally turns to look at Neaven long after he has looked away.

Neaven, receiving the spirit of Sally's words, turns to face her.

There she was, staring gently and openly at him. He continued to look at her for a good while, not thinking or realizing that he was actually staring intently. He wanted to kiss her, but something told him not to. He wanted to ignore that urge but fear crept back in.

"Sally, where's Lavender?"

She calmly took the alligator from around her back and popped it up in Neaven's face playfully. She had been holding Lavender behind her back all along.

"She's right here, Neaven." She said it in a hushed response.

"There she is," Neaven repeated, looking at Lavender and then back again at Sally; a curiosity held his gaze. He was hoping he didn't look as awkward as he felt; that would be disastrous.

"She can sit on both of our laps." Sally's suggestion relaxed Neaven. He quickly grabbed Lavender with the same desire he had to grab Sally. Sally let go without a fight.

He held the stuffed animal in his arms, and he looked at Sally with intrigue behind his eyes. He wanted to tell her how he felt about her, but the time was not right, and the situation was not right. This situation didn't call for words; it called for action, and meaningful action at that. He would have to show Sally how he felt about her, and certainly it was not time for that.

The line began to move, and Sally and Neaven followed.

"I think we'll make it. It looks like there's still a lot of room."

"I think we'll make it, too." Neaven agreed.

As the man counted a handful of tickets, Sally and Neaven neared the front of the line. She pushed excitedly against Neaven's back.

"Go, Go, Go." Neaven could tell she really wanted to be on that ride. As he turned around to smile, Sally put her arms around his waist, and she held on tight. Neaven covered Sally's arms with his arms.

"How many?" The man muttered.

"Two," Neaven answered as he pulled Sally around his back.

The man looked at Sally. "You two are the last ones on. Tickets?"

Neaven handed the man the tickets, and they both ran to the last empty booth near the backside of the wheel. They buckled themselves in, allowing the

attendants to close the booth. Sally set Lavender squarely on both their laps.

"You ready?" Neaven asked as he looked at Sally, stealing a quick glance of her lips.

Sally didn't say a word; she just turned his way and bit the bottom of her lip. Neaven happily took it as a good omen. The man controlling the ride gave a thumbs up and then shouted for the riders to hold on. With enthusiasm filling the air, he set the wheel in motion.

The reality of the situation began to pound harder and harder, surpassing even the reverberations within his chest. Dr. Hutchinson realistically knew what he needed to do, but he was powerless to do it. Every angle was currently being perfectly rationalized within his mind, but at the end of each argument was the simple reality that Sally had been strategically and purposefully placed within the middle of all this.

There still remained some questionable concerns: her age, her gender, her willingness, and even, quite possibly, her ability. But all these doubts were overwhelmed by the mere fact that all other avenues had thoroughly been exhausted and what still remained was this current notion of Sally. Dr. Hutchinson bowed again in prayer:

Lord, if you want me to propose Sally to Cross and The Cell, then you need to help me. I am willing to take a chance for Your Glory, but I need some direction; some defining clarity or semblance that will help me arrive to a place where I can professionally and practically recommend her to the group.

As he bowed even deeper, he lay surrendered on the rug, directly beneath the kitchen table. He was going through the arguments, the contradictions. He analyzed the possibilities of himself backing Sally, and then failing. He entertained the visualization of Sally coming alive academically before The Cell just as she had done during the classroom discussions. He went back and

forth through all scenarios, best case, worst case; and he felt no more complete than the last prayer he had spoken. He prayed again:

Lord, what do you want me to do? Say,
"Hello Cell, this is Sally, my student.
She is a brilliant girl, really, please
give her a chance to become part of the
most prestigious and respected
investigational think tank this world
has ever known.

Somehow he couldn't perceive how well that one would fly. He petitioned again:

Lord, this is my problem. How on earth
can I convince The Cell to at least be
open to Sally? Lord, you know that
being open is half the battle. If I
can get the Primary Members to open up
to Sally, then she has a fighting
chance; but if they are not willing to
be open, then we are all wasting our
time. Basically, no matter how
accurate or even intelligent Sally is,
if The Cell is not open to her gifts,
then everything we do for her will be
in vain.

He grabbed hold of every argument he was able to muster, both for and against Sally. He was playing both sides of the fence on this one. As he continued to wrestle and intermingle with this questioning process, he made his way into a groove of clarity for both sides.

Like any well-seasoned debater knew, arguments need to be argued from both sides. Then, accordingly, the debater would need to allow the evidence to make the decisions themselves. As he pondered thus, he ventilated through his spirit's breath and tried to accumulate the response that would set his rationale free. He didn't want to fight this issue; he wanted to make sure the process had been clearly observed, even contended with.

He wrapped his hands around the carpet. He seemed like a cat that had just ascended from his morning nap. Then he noticed something. Entrapped between the table's

leg and the chair beside it were some papers. He reached toward the sheets and drew them close to his chest.

He took a look at what he was holding. It was Sally's paper, the one she had given him two days ago. He had forgotten all about it. He left it on the kitchen table after reading it on Wednesday night. It must have fallen from the table. He took a second look at the paper. He then placed it by his side as he tried to clarify his thoughts once again:

Lord, please help me. Sally is gifted, but what can I offer the group that will actually help her get her foot in the door?

He embraced himself, trying to comfort his mind, even himself. He thought positively, trying to make more sense than all the doubts that were filling his mind. He petitioned the Lord once again:

Lord, if you really want Sally recommended, then you are just going to have to help me recommend her. I am sorry but I am not willing to just call up Cross and tell him about Sally. I need something more, much more actually. If you can't help me, then I can't take the chance.

A peace and resolve overwhelmed him, so much peace that he rolled over and relaxed himself by putting his hands on his chest. He eased himself into transcended time. The Lord, faithful to help him, enveloped his singular vision.

He thought back on his own life, his own times, when the Lord had opened doors he couldn't perceive and allowed him to become more than he ever thought he could be. He remembered the genius, the sincerity of God moving and working powerfully to establish him and to bring him right before his defining moments. That's all he actually wanted for Sally, just the right chance, the right opportunity.

He remembered when he was a student, having trouble with his master's thesis. His professor at the time actually stayed awake all evening helping him iron out and manifest the right concepts in order to begin the

thesis. His professor's help, without a doubt, was the hand of God on his life. He then remembered the first time he was invited as a diplomat, to speak regarding the importance of a strong Christian nation. Interestingly enough, the book written, *The Fundamentals Of Christian Thought*, which was conceived from his master's thesis, opened up many doors, including *The Cell's*. That professor's help began this journey and stood as a reminder, a beacon, for him to follow. He had seen God's hand at work many times during his lifetime. His life was never wanting from a lack of God's intercession, God's mercy and grace remained evident and faithful.

He lifted himself off the floor and righted himself. He allowed the flow of blood to eventually make its way back down to the recesses of his spine and movable parts. He picked up Sally's paper and slowly began to pace.

The ride started off slow, but its potential seemed to remain heavenward. The wheel had already gone around three times, and Sally and Neaven were making their way to what they believed to be their last revolution. Sally glanced over at Neaven as he gazed his eyes on the hills and mountains of Vermont. She had to remind herself squarely that he had come from Nebraska.

The air was cold, but it could not be directly felt. It was powerful enough though to make its way through the weather-beaten plastic shield, penetrating and then surrounding the cabin. As the wind hit swirl after swirl, it left behind a chilled fog and then simply howled as it escaped through the miss-manufactured edges of the cabin. Sally put her finger there for a moment, trying to keep out the cold.

Neaven was prompted to speak. "Sally, thanks for coming tonight." Sally looked up only to see Neaven staring awkwardly at her. "I was hoping that you would come with me, and it's turned out to be a very special night I think."

Sally allowed herself to soak into Neaven's words. Though awkward, they slid off his lips in a relaxed way.

"Yes, Neaven, it has been a very special night I think." She then paused, in order to add emphasis. "And I was not only happy that you finally invited me out, but that it's going so well, too."

She watched almost in a fearful delight as Neaven meekly reached toward her hand but then decided to grab it firmly. Sally didn't move a muscle.

"I think you're an awesome girl Sally; I've always thought so, and you have always made it easy on me to be your friend. I have to admit, I think I kind of made things hard on us by stalling, but you make everything so simple, so cut and dry."

"Kind of a control thing I think really!" Sally offered as she slightly turned away.

Neaven continued, "I know that in some ways we're different, Sally, I mean, we are pretty different actually." He pauses to look into her eyes, to get an understanding or an acknowledgment. "But I know that I don't want to psychoanalyze this too much, Sally; I just want to go with it."

He reaches over toward Sally, and as he does, Sally turns to say something; she stops Neaven dead in his tracks. Neaven holds himself still and peers into Sally's eyes.

"Neaven, there is no other guy that I would rather be with right now than with you. You're right, things haven't always been so easy or obvious with us, but we would both be lying to ourselves if we said there wasn't some kind of connection, I mean, we are attracted to each other, Neaven."

Neaven nodded. Sally's words were a blessing; they were heartfelt and sincere.

"Neaven, I don't know where this is going, but I agree with you, let's not think too much about it. Let's be honest with how we feel and be real; we're here because we like each other." Sally's eyes say the rest.

Their lighted cabin mirrored the moon, and the incandescence of the surrounding stars made the sky beautiful and brilliant. Neaven reached toward Sally and gently put her head upon his shoulder. He felt the presence of peace. Their cabin seemed to lay still at the peak of the wheel's final rotation.

The paper was in his hands, and he was holding it firmly. As he continued to do so, a flood of memories filled his mind. Contractual, noteworthy, prepared, readiness, established, immovable, conceived, notion, notion, notion ... notion, notion, notion.

He moved quickly; that was it. That was it. Notion, notion, notion. He flew into a half-stride as he soaked up Sally's paper into the fruit of his being, into the solace of his hand. That's it. The paper. It would be the paper. Not this paper, but a different paper, one she had yet to write. It would not be a discussion at all. He thought again, transcending even time. All his life, he had found a solace in writing and in making human his ideas and words on paper. It would be no different with Sally, no different at all. He put his mind on Sally, and he visualized his thoughts.

Sally was an incredible presenter; her presentations in the classroom were flawless. But a written argument would not only solidify her gifts for all to see and possess, but would establish them without her needing to participate in any kind of discussion. Allowing her to write a paper would not only be a good warm-up for her, but it would actually give The Cell a chance to be introduced to her gifts privately, in a not so much, "in your face," kind of way. He drew close to his faith as he dropped to his knees to beseech the Lord once again:

Lord, I know you want faith, but here's the thing. I fully receive and bear witness to Sally getting a chance at The Cell. I don't want to stand in your way. I have an idea Lord. I will assign a paper; I will work it all out. If the paper Sally writes is not convincing or is weak in any way, then I will take that as an indication that Sally is not your desire for The Cell. If the paper is powerful, then I will move in faith and introduce it to The

Cell. Please Lord, I feel strongly about this, please bear witness.

He kept himself quiet; at this point, all he really had to go on was his faith, and what God had already done. He reviewed it all in his mind: Sally, in her presentations, in her wisdom, in her arguments, in her rationale, in her accuracy, in direct correlation with The Cell needing a replacement, needing an agitator, needing a Christian witness, needing someone new, and needing it now.

Dr. Hutchinson is on his knees; his forehead has touched the floor many times this evening. He would assign the paper, and after it was written, he would fully know if Sally was right for The Cell. He remained low, trying to embrace the spirit that brought the clarity in the first place, that actually brought the spiritually manufactured perfection that he only felt in glimpses. The Cell, Sally, replacement, agitator, fill-in-the-gaps, fill-in-the-gaps.

It was just too amazing. God was wonderful, he thought, God was indeed wonderful. He was doing something so intimate and private, something so profound and graceful that no mind or desire could infringe upon its inner workings. This was God's perfect state of grace, and it seemed obvious that it became God's desire that he would personally possess the wisdom as well as the intimate workings of His acute plan. Yes, he would eventually fully align himself with God's overall plan and workings. Dr. Hutchinson was deeply thankful for the intimacy of the spirit, and for the prayers; his spiritual communion with God at times being more than he could bear really. He rose from the rug; the imprint of his head left its mark. He walked away, but not alone; something else was with him. It was God's will; God's will was with him, the absolute embrace and presence of God's will was with him.

Neaven couldn't stop looking at Sally, and his emotions paid the price. He reached around and turned Sally toward him, and she acquiesced to his leading. He put

his hands gently on her cheeks and slowly lifted her face to his. He then kissed her softly, passionately on the lips, for longer than just a moment. The silence was numbing, and the force entrapped their spirit within the cabin. Neaven slowly reached toward Sally's back and with a gentle pull, he serenaded Sally's body toward his. Sally reached around Neaven's body and held him firmly and tightly. Their kiss continued, and it lasted. Their embrace was one year's worth of emotion harnessed into one solitary moment. They kissed, and they kissed.

Chapter 9

The reflection of sunlight creeps in through the corner of the window and pierces Sally's sleep. The alarm wasn't meant to go off for another ten minutes, but now that she was awake, it wasn't that much of a bother.

It was Monday morning, and the weekend's events were as exhausting as they were entertaining. Sally's date with Neaven Friday night, her dinner and date with Jack and Clair Saturday night, and yesterday's proceedings at Church all were depleting. She needed a good rest, and she got it with eleven hours of calm sleep.

She unfolded the covers, layering them off her as she stood allowing her nightgown to drape toward the floor. She picked up Lavender. "Neaven," she thought, "Neaven." She laid Lavender on her dresser table. She walked to the mirror and looked at her reflection as she pondered over last week's exaltations in Dr. Hutchinson's class. Twice God had allowed her to speak with singular clarity, twice He had honored her in the place of man. Why? Why? The answers eluded her, but she was not feeding off her conscious right now, she was feeding off her faith, mostly due to Dr. Hutchinson's resolve. It was his conversation that opened her up to speak, and it was his influence that turned her from ashamed and uncertain to vulnerable yet inspired. She still didn't understand the big picture, but she did understand it was not time to understand; it was time to obey by faith and allow the answers to manifest themselves. "Sometimes we have to forge ahead without the answers," Sally thought; "sometimes we have to make difficult choices without all the evidence plainly before our eyes."

She moved to the bathroom and turned on the shower. Today was Monday. Dr. Hutchinson's class was today, Wednesday and Friday. Last week's classes were events; feeling worn out, she hoped today's class would not be so eventful.

She went back into her room and took off her nightgown. She then wrapped a towel around her body. I

want everything that God has for me, she thought slowly, as she tied the towel tightly around her, but I want it under the conditions of my faith, "the faith I have put forth in you, Lord." She reasoned this with herself, and opened up even further. "I want you to do what you surely must, but I want your will to revolve around the choices I have made for myself, not simply what You desire."

She believed deep down that God understood her, and that He would assign her a comfortable place in which to wield her ministry. She continued, "But for now please, Lord, let it be a bit more comfortable. If I do have to wield my ministry, please let it be in You and not in front of a classroom; this I ask of You, Lord. Lord, I desire Your will for my life, but two manifestations in one week, this is too much; I need some breathing room. Please Lord, hear my prayer and my supplication. Let me wield it in You." She bowed her head then allowed everything to unravel inside her. She didn't want an answer now, she just wanted an answer. The last thing she wanted was to manifest in Dr. Hutchinson's classroom today, or for the rest of the week for that matter. She just wanted to be left alone, she and her books and her gifts, all alone.

"Class, like the few previous classroom sessions, today's session will be unique and different."

Sally covers her face, not knowing exactly what that meant but not wanting to find out either.

"As you all know, we have a midterm in three weeks, and I know most of you are not eagerly looking forward to it."

"We're not," a student zealously agreed.

"Well, I think I may have a proposition for you."

Oh no. Sally thought to herself, he's going to make me do something just to cancel the midterm; no, I won't &*%#@. Just as Sally began to rise up in anger, Dr. Hutchinson revealed his plan.

"Class, it is going to be your assignment to write a paper."

Sally held on to her heart; she was really getting anxious at this point. She thought for sure this was another effort to get her to speak or to rise up in faith, but she resolved to listen and to remain calm.

"I know it is not in the syllabus, a paper, but listen to my proposal. Write this paper, and if you do well, you can keep this grade instead of the midterm."

Many in the class shout ooh's and uhh's. This sounded like a fortunate opportunity.

"If you do poorly on the paper, then forget about the grade and focus on your midterm."

A student raises her hand. "Dr. Hutchinson, what if we do well on the paper, do we even need to take the midterm?"

"That is up to you. If you get a B on the paper and you don't want an A, then keep the B and skip the midterm."

Another student asks, "Can we just not write the paper and fail it and then just plan on taking the midterm anyway?"

The class laughs at the student's imagination. "You know you're pretty subtle for a class of Christians." The class barely pays attention; they're still laughing. Dr. Hutchinson continues in the same breath, "No, I am assigning the paper, and you must write it in order to qualify for the midterm; if you refuse to write the paper, you fail both."

"When's the paper due exactly?" Sally asks in a surrendered tone.

Dr. Hutchinson hesitates to look her way, but then does so. "Next Friday; you have twelve days."

There are a few more uhh's from the class, before someone remarks, "That's kind of short notice; our midterm is in three weeks. So you intend to have us write a paper and then study for a midterm all in three weeks time." The rest of the class jeers, backing the student's plea. Dr. Hutchinson quiets the classroom with his hand, "Please class, I understand your concerns, have I ever been unruly or unfair?"

"No," a few shout.

"Then I won't be unfair now, please ..." Dr. Hutchinson settles himself on the edge of his desk and

reasons with the classroom. "... Students, you have twelve days to write a paper on a topic you yourself will choose. I have no topic for you; I want you to come up with it. Just like in our class discussion last Monday, I wanted you to formulate the topic, of course, you didn't, so I chose Hitler and Gandhi, remember? This time you will need to do so, but you will have two weeks and all the classroom time in which to do it."

"Classroom time, what do you mean?" A student questions.

"For the next two weeks, we will have no class time ..."

The students shout gleefully, as Dr. Hutchinson continues, "But for three of those days you will need to account for yourself in the library's log, signing in to signify that you were there to work on your paper. Counting today's class period, there are six class periods between now and next Friday. I am only asking you to account for three of them. Class, you have all that time to write your paper, I believe in doing this, I am being fair with regard to your course workload."

"It's fair," one student shouts. "Do you want references, and what about the length?"

Dr. Hutchinson's eyes get intense, much like an eagle's does before striking its prey. "Class, this is your paper. I am not going to assign length or anything else. Convince me; make your paper as convincing as possible. If you can convince me in one page, then do it. If you need four pages, then do it. And if you need one hundred pages, then that is what you need. I want the best you have to offer; the most convincing paper you can muster. Just understand you need to be able to defend it. When I read your papers, the first thing I will look for is whether or not you can account for the papers' validity. Have you addressed the point to its fullest, have you analyzed the point to its furthest possible outcome?" Dr. Hutchinson pauses and then resumes.

"If I am satisfied that you have challenged yourself at your own level, then expect a good grade. But if I ask a few questions and you have various holes throughout, then this is not good. Let me give you an

example, I would rather sail in a slow humbled ship that is complete than in a big exalted ship with holes underneath." The class laughs, understanding his reasoning. Dr. Hutchinson continues, "I want this paper complete, I don't care about the topic or anything else; I want it consistent and dependable."

The consensus is that if the students do well, they can skip the midterm and can use that time for other class work. The class is in spiritual unison, because Dr. Hutchinson has cancelled the remaining six class periods; this has become a win-win situation for everyone.

"A few things, class. This is a private assignment, no helping out." He eyes the class in a serious manner. Then continues, "I am serious, class, if you have one or two innocent questions, then that is one thing, but if I find out you have helped each other out on this one, then I will fail all those involved. Understand?"

"Yes," the class en masse responds.

"Good. Secondly, you will not turn in your papers to me; you will drop them off in my office during office hours between three and four o'clock on Friday afternoon. We will commence class that following Monday. Are there any questions?" Dr. Hutchinson looks around, trying to discern the faces of his students. "Very well, if there is nothing more, class dismissed. If you do need anything, you have my number and email and my office hours are written clearly on my door."

The class begins to file out, joining in conversation as they do so. Neaven scurries over to Sally, but Dr. Hutchinson thwarts their talking when he says, "Sally, can I please see you for a moment?"

Sally looks up at Neaven motioning with her eyes that he should wait for her. Neaven nods and exits the classroom to wait outside. Sally approaches Dr. Hutchinson.

"Sally, please sit down."

Sally hesitates, "Dr. Hutchinson, I normally would, but I am in kind of a hurry today."

Dr. Hutchinson looks up from his seated position, "You would normally still be in class for over an hour and forty minutes." Sally turns to stare at where Neaven

would be if the wall were invisible, she then turns to face Dr. Hutchinson. Dr. Hutchinson speaks again, "I'm sorry Sally. I don't mean to be rude, but please, sit down."

His voice is authoritative and chiseled, and she can't argue, no matter how frantic or frustrated she is over getting any deeper into her gifts or her manifestations. Dr. Hutchinson leans back and starts the conversation.

"Look Sally, I can imagine last week was hard, and I don't intend to press you any further; that is not my desire here today. I just wanted to caution you regarding this paper." He pauses for emphasis sake. "Sally, take this paper very seriously."

"What do you mean?" Sally asks innocently enough.

"Sally," Dr. Hutchinson continues, "God knows, the last thing I want to do is put any additional pressure on you, trust me on that, but this is important, and you need to give me your best on this one."

Sally looks at Dr. Hutchinson, trying to psychoanalyze his motivation and trying to understand his reasoning, she remains steady and still.

"Sally, do me and yourself a favor, pray to God on this one. Pray to God and let Him communicate how important this is. If He has ever used me with regard to your complexities, Sally, if He has ever used me with regard to this growing process in you, and if He has ever used me to encourage you and uplift you, then trust me when I say He is using me to communicate this to you right now." He gets a bit closer to her, bringing his commitment and his belief with him. "Don't just play games with this one, Sally, give me your absolute best; don't even hold back one ounce. Make it count Sally, for yourself and for your purposes in God."

"God could really make it count for Himself, if He wanted to," Sally offers rebelliously, her impatience and bitterness motivating her.

Dr. Hutchinson gets angry with her. "Only if you forced Him to Sally Travis," her prideful comments setting him off, "only if you forced Him to." Then pointing a glaring finger in Sally's direction, he says,

"You have a lot of learning to do Sally Travis; trust me when I say you have a lot of learning to do."

He turns away, leaving Sally a bit humbled. He is justified, justified in knowing that even within her God-given gifts, she has a lot of maturing to do. The discernment into the personality of God comes only one way, through precious time, something Sally lacks.

Sally sat there, not wanting to move and feeling sorry for herself. Dr. Hutchinson put his things together. Sally has something to say, and she says it loudly.

"Fine, so you have all this to say, fine." Dr. Hutchinson is startled by how upset Sally is. "Say whatever you want to say, I'll do it, fine, I'll do whatever." She glares at Dr. Hutchinson, not angrily, but in a spoiled and impatient manner. Dr. Hutchinson picks up on it immediately. Neaven has come halfway into the classroom. Dr. Hutchinson sees him and immediately stares him back. Neaven jumps back and out the doorway almost as if Dr. Hutchinson suddenly manifested into a two-thousand-pound bull. Dr. Hutchinson draws near to Sally's emotions.

"Sally. I am sorry. I can only be so lenient with you. Trust me when I say I wish I could have all the right words for you. I wish I could say all the right things to make it all go away, but ..." He pauses, hoping that mercy will override his impulse toward realism; then continuing, "but Sally, trust me when I say the Bible doesn't say in vain 'to whom much is given, much is required.' You have a special gift, and no matter how good a teacher or mentor I want to be to you, there are some areas in which I will need to be vague, and there will be nothing I can do about it." Sally looks up, understanding and appreciating the spirit of his words. "This is hard for all of us, Sally, and I promise you I will do my best and try to be more patient and understanding with you. I agree I was a little heavy and I am sorry."

"Ok," Sally peeps out. Her emotions are getting the better of her; she's not sure what she feels.

"Sally, you have these next two weeks in which you will not have to worry about this classroom or its

discussions." Sally starts to smile, remembering her prayer to God earlier in the morning and understanding this was a direct answer to that prayer, and it just so happened to be coming through Dr. Hutchinson. "You won't have to worry about proving yourself or trying to hit the nail on its head. All you have to do is be by yourself, be by yourself and write the best paper you know how to write, for God and for yourself and then let the chips fall where they may."

Sally couldn't argue with it; it was exactly what she had asked for. She didn't want to be bothered, and she wanted to be left alone with God and her gifts; the paper was going to do just that. She sat there, totally humbled by how God was operating in her life; He hadn't given her a total release, no paper and no class would have done that. Of course, that was unrealistic; this was the best she could hope for. It was realistically a blessing from above.

Sally looked up at Dr. Hutchinson with a different resolve in her eyes, appreciation for God's provision. "Dr. Hutchinson, ..." Dr. Hutchinson looked up from gathering his things, and Sally then continued. "I am sorry for being rude; I sometimes am selfish and immature. And I do understand your words, and agree with them even though they do challenge me." She pauses to organize her thoughts. "I am going to pray to God regarding this paper, but I will tell you this, I feel better already." Dr. Hutchinson smiles, almost as if he has received the release that Sally is feeling. "I want to do the best I can for God, and it has been completely shown to me that His grace is showing itself powerfully in my life even as we speak." Sally gets up, organizing her backpack around her shoulders. "Just know, Dr. Hutchinson, that I will take this paper very seriously, and that I am intent on showing, with God's direction of course, what God is capable of doing in and through me."

Dr. Hutchinson looks at Sally. Ever since Friday night, he wanted to know with certainty that Sally would give him her best regarding this paper, but he needed to be appeased with the fact that both chance and faith would still have its role to play, and he knew he had no power over these. He nodded, signifying his resolution.

"Thank you, Dr Hutchinson, you really deserve the best I or God have to offer you." With this, Sally turned and exited.

What Sally said was powerful. Dr. Hutchinson couldn't put his finger on it, but his faith told him that Sally's last comment was not only heartfelt but also prophetic. Somehow, in some way, he would indeed receive the best that Sally and God had to offer him. He allowed himself to settle on this last comment as Sally disappeared around the corner. He went back to collecting his things from off his desk. It would be the last time he would be in the classroom until after he had returned from the Summit meeting, until after he had read Sally's paper. Everything would be different by that time. Everything would be different.

There was anticipation in the air that could be grasped, but only by someone who possessed the ability to understand its flight. Books and papers were laying all over the dark oak table, spread out, almost like the feathers of a dove falling to the ground after a midair accident. Notes were spread out, past lessons were spread out, investigations were spread out. Sally had her laptop on and was currently searching through files regarding the sanctification of man, the actual process.

She was going to write the paper powerfully she decided, and she was going to write it now. It was Thursday, and she had spent most of last night in prayer regarding the paper's importance. Although she felt no clear direction from God Himself, she came to the conclusion that writing this paper well might be the only way to get the perpetual "questionable gift" monkey off her back. This was the only way she reasoned it; if Dr. Hutchinson wanted a good paper, she was going to give it to him, plain and simple.

She had spent all morning at the library, and she planned to spend at least one more day there, or at least until she felt she had something tangible enough to begin. She already had the topic formulated; the topic was actually born from a paper she had written over two

years earlier called "The Jesus Files." She felt challenged to use the same train of thought, but to take the paper in an entirely different direction.

Sally studied, minute by minute, hour by hour. Time passed her by as she soaked up information from the texts, papers, scriptures, and Internet sites. Whenever she had written a paper in the past, or even worked out a revelation for that matter, she would become consumed with it. That didn't mean she would stay in one place and read all the information until she was done, but that she would simply wrestle with its concept until she felt a reasonable break, until there was some sort of give within the revelation itself. She already had the concept, so she didn't think the actual wrestle would take more than a few days. She took a moment for herself, glancing at the books that hid the desk: books on the brain, books on psychology, books on evolution, and many more. For at least two more hours she studied and wrestled at the desk. And she continued wrestling long after she left the library, and into the night.

It was very early the next day. The library opened at five o'clock, and Sally was waiting there before the doors opened. She had decided to come to the library before her first class so that no other thoughts would interfere with the ones she went to bed with last night. She had a good release the night before, and she wanted to continue to wrestle with it first thing.

As a result of the release, she now had the full concept for the direction of the paper, but there still remained some questions. How she would write it exactly? How she would approach the reader? How she would reason its wisdom separate from the information or knowledge? This was not a clear-cut discussion, where you present your thoughts in an oratory manner; this paper was going to be more personal, more accountable even. Sometimes a paper would turn into a poem or even a poem into a paper; sometimes a paper wouldn't even be written, it would just remain a concept, the mind retaining it until its usefulness became apparent. This was Sally's current

dilemma; she knew this specific train of thought was going to be a paper, but what kind of paper would it be? For what kind of audience? And for what specific purpose? She continued to wrestle with this as she made her way to her first class of the day.

With dinner in her hand, she made her way back to the library. She had just left her last class of the day and was anticipating a good four to five hours of knocking off the final edges; but she wouldn't need that long. As fast as you can say the word butterfly, the final notion came to her.

It would be different, yes! It would be very different from all her previous papers. Sally shifted in her seat. She took up a pen and started jotting down some notes. The paper would be much more direct and to the reader, and it would be less Biblical, yes, it had to be less Biblical. For whatever reason, for whatever notion that existed out there totally separate from her own reason, for whatever concept that hadn't even yet been conceived in her conscious, she would write this paper to the public, not solely to a Christian audience.

This inspiration came to her while she was pondering over a concept that she received while reading a book on the human brain. In looking at the brain as a whole, it became clear to Sally that the paper's concept related to everyone, not just to Christians at large. Before, when she had planned on writing this paper directly to the intellectual and to the Christian thinker, she didn't believe the average person could benefit from its wisdom. But what changed this train of thought was that although the paper was going to be incredibly challenging and intellectual, its central message would be applicable to all.

Fully understanding this, Sally realized the paper should at least, in concept, be directed to all. Sally readied herself so that she could effectively build the remaining direction of the paper. She gathered up her notes and left for home to begin the paper's first draft.

It was 11:05 p.m. Sally had been roughing out the first few pages. She didn't think she needed to get so specific so early but sometimes this happened, just routine for her to clarify and seemingly justify herself so early in the paper. She was making her way through the first concept. Every paper she would write seemed to have a mind of its own. Sally was just the vehicle, but the words and the anointing of the words were the actual power. She was the bottle, but the words were the liquid inside that someone would desire to drink. This paper's effort was not being frustrated at all, and as she wrote, she reminded herself that she was thankful for that. It wasn't always the case.

Every once in a while, Sally would get hogtied or bogged down in mid-flight, she would get frustrated and become impatient with the process. When this happened, the paper would still get written of course, but usually most of the important concepts would simply be singled out and then consciously presented rather than being arranged by the Spirit. Normally, when Sally would write, she would have all the concepts worked out beforehand, nicely situated into her Spirit, and as a result, these concepts would come alive totally separate from her trying to introduce them. They seemed to poetically find their own way onto the pages. Sometimes she needed to back off in order to have the Spirit's presence; sometimes she needed to let go in order to hang on.

It happened to be Friday night, and she had exactly one week to complete the paper. She only had one other midterm to study for, but that was a full week after she needed to turn this paper in. She believed that she could get an A on this paper so she wouldn't have to fuss with a midterm in Dr. Hutchinson's class. That was the plan. She was going to allow herself all this weekend and then Monday and Tuesday to complete the paper; she wanted to finish it long before Friday. She had a habit of always making sure to complete the assignments early if she could. Not to mention the fact that sometimes the editing process was longer than the writing process. She

wanted the paper done by Monday at the latest; that way she could have all of Monday, Tuesday, and some of Wednesday to edit it. If things worked out as planned, the first draft would be done by tomorrow night, allowing even Sunday for editing. She worked through the night to ensure this.

It was the next morning. Sally rose about 9 a.m. and made her way downstairs for her prized muffin. Today, it happened to be apple cinnamon, and it tasted good in her mouth. She turned in at about 4:30 this morning. It wasn't her habit, but every once in a while Sally could endure little sleep; she decided that under the circumstances, it was worth the gamble. If need be, she thought to herself as she made her way to the kitchen table, she would take a nap later in the day. She sat down and thought slowly to herself. She was able to get through the first concept of the paper completely, leaving only the second concept and the justification. The second concept related closely to the earlier paper that inspired this paper, so she felt she would be able to handle it easily. She would continue with the paper at about three o'clock, after her gym session with Clair, lunch, and a phone call with Neaven. She didn't know if she would take a break at dinnertime or if she would work straight through. If the paper was flowing nicely, she thought, she would work straight through.

The one thing Sally kept careful to watch was her ideas and concepts, and these were growing rapidly and escalating in her mind. When it came to revelation, and more important, the knowledge and eventual wisdom within that revelation, it was always safer to get those things on paper, and quickly. Some revelations were like freshly baked cookies, whereas at other times, revelations were like matured wine. Some revelations were powerful immediately, whereas others took time to age and mature. But one thing was always consistent when it came to revelation, if you didn't write it down, you could lose it, and who really cared about wine anyway,

Sally thought to herself, the revelation could always age on paper.

As Sally continued to think, she realized it was always safer to have half-truths that became workable on paper than it was to have no truths that had been forgotten. As was her style, she wrote it all down quickly, so she would have something to work with during the editing process. But she believed in the revelation; she believed in it deeply as she did the knowledge and wisdom that accompanied it.

She picked up her napkin and threw it away. She made her way upstairs to grab her gym bag and coat. As she headed up the stairs, she felt confident and comfortable, as if she knew it was going to be a long day, a very long day in fact, but that there was going to be some glory in it.

At 4:05 p.m., Sally is grinding away on her computer. Her midmorning break was nice, but now it was time to consolidate her thoughts. Everything was stacking up nicely; she had her intended vision for the second half and was working intently. As she worked, she realized that her ending had not been formulated as accurately and concisely as she had hoped, but she leaned on the fact that her endings were almost never premeditated. For now she would rest comfortably knowing that the paper was flowing nicely.

At 6:35 p.m., Sally has just finished her dinner along with most of the second concept of her two-concept paper. It has written itself nicely. The thoughts seemed to come effortlessly, and Sally just allowed the words to flow. Part of the concept did in fact veer in a slightly different direction than she had intended. But the knowledge, subliminally worked out within her, allowed her to understand the revelation in a different light; it was clearer overall and more radiant.

As she took a drink of her soda, she felt she needed to work more concise, more arranged. The final aspect of the second concept was aligning itself properly, and it was an important aspect at that, the justification. She didn't want to leave the two concepts open to chance; if possible she wanted to tie them together as nicely as possible. There was a danger in this though: she could become too pushy, too vocal in the explanation; this was always a temptation when expounding on the revelation of God. But she had trust in the Holy Spirit, that His guidance would allow her to say the right words, at the right time, and in the right manner. She trusted in this and allowed herself to let go.

Her formulated ending to the second concept was numbing, and it should numb the reader as well. It didn't hit her that hard though, having already worked out that concept earlier in the paper she had written two years ago. It was almost like hearing a joke for the second time around; the joke still made sense but it had lost some of its impact, some of its originality. Knowledge worked out within a revelation worked in much the same way. But the second concept was now complete, and what was left? The justification and arrangement. But how though, Sally wondered, how?

Sally decided she would not take a break after all; she decided against watching TV or going out also. She would finish the paper now. She wasn't clear on the exact Spirit of the justification though, so she paced back and forth in her bedroom working out the revelation time and time again. As she did this, she prayed, deep in her Spirit, for the release that needed to come in order for the Spirit of the justification to become manifest, so that the paper would not be for her own good but for the good of others. She already understood and believed in the paper herself, so for her to write it within her own Spirit would be futile. She needed to get outside herself, where the concept was open and where the actual healing needed to occur. To do this, she needed to allow herself to exist outside the interpretation; she needed to give what she had taken back to God.

She paced, and continued to do so until all of her reason and justification were gone. She had peace

though, knowing that the revelation was there and that it would come to her when it was ready, but more accurately, when she was ready. This effort could not be rushed though. It took an experienced mind to conform to and understand a revelation that was coming back from the Spirit of God rather than from one's own impatient Spirit. She knew she needed to fully let go in order to allow the revelation to come back Godly, and she knew she couldn't just let go and then fester within herself a workable opinion, no, this would absolutely dilute the Spirit of the overall message.

The most important virtue in the revelation process became patience, but if a vessel was not sanctified within the revelation, then patience really had nothing to do with it, the answer would simply become lost in the translation. Sally was sanctified within the revelation though, so the only thing that mattered now was that she remain patient and submissive; beyond this, she felt confident she would recognize whether or not the rebound of the revelation was from the Mind of the Spirit, or from the Spirit of her own mind.

She struggled because she had her own ideas. She petitioned this way and that way, but nothing was really closing in, nothing was becoming complete. The doors were already open for her to roam and Sally knew this, but the wise thing for her to do now was to allow the source to find her and then for her to close the doors. She was working it leniently, and then she was working it hard. She became encouraged not to petition as much because this revelation seemed different from many of the others she had wrestled with in the past, and no doubt, its purpose was less Biblical.

If it were more Biblical, she thought, she would have already forced her own weight on the issue, having a more consecrated and faithful confidence in this area. In doing so, she would have probably gotten to the bottom of things. But this concept was different, newer, so Sally couldn't impose her own spiritual will. She needed to allow the Spirit of the message to invade her, to invade an open vessel who was making herself subject to the Spirit of God for the Spirit of man. She knew the

revelations singular vision would come; it would most definitely come.

Upstairs, downstairs, upstairs, downstairs, upstairs, downstairs. Sally was all over the place for the next two and a half hours. She did turn the TV on, though, watching a small snippet of an interview of some actor. She was getting bored, and she knew that there was no set system when it came to abiding in the Spirit of God. When you were waiting for a revelation, you were waiting for a revelation. She figured that the rest and relaxation would ease her impatience but she also sensed that the Spirit was urging her to give Him a little more room, so she happily gave it up.

But halfway through the interview, part of the revelation came, and Sally, almost like a great white shark perking up when it smelt blood, sensed it clearly. She knew it; her opponent ignorance was wounded. Sally also knew that in the spiritual world, a wounded opponent was a defeated opponent. As soon as the initial break of the revelation came, Sally knew it was just a matter of time until the rest fell out. She calmly watched a few more minutes of the interview and then turned off the TV. Before this night would end, Sally thought, the first draft would be complete.

Everything was breaking and the formation of the paper was becoming complete. She couldn't believe it though. It was soft, not very intense. She was letting go, letting the Spirit flow because she knew that if she got in the way, she would be a grievance, and quite possibly ruin the message. She allowed the justification of the concepts to flow out; she didn't try to second-guess herself or try to think solely within the confines of her own understanding.

As she wrote the final few paragraphs, she implored the Spirit to help her understand why the justification was so basic, why it was so plain. Usually there would be a sharp or merging knowledge within the justification to tie everything together in a poetic or intelligent fashion, but the current justification was like saying, "Ok. Thanks and good night." It was plain-Jane, miles

away from being in your face. She again besought the Spirit to help her understand, and because she wasn't doubting in her request or even trying to wrestle away control, but because she was completely blameless, the Spirit honored her request.

This is what the Spirit said. The papers message spoke for itself; the reason the justification didn't need to be powerful was because there didn't need to be any justification. The concepts themselves did the job; to explain anything beyond this, the Spirit helped her understand, would have been overkill.

The Spirit encouraged Sally to faithfully believe that never before had she written a paper in which the points themselves were so strong that they didn't need any kind of justification. This paper needed no viable conclusion, the strength of the points themselves became the conclusion.

She left off the last paragraph in a subtle daze. Changes would have to come, but she believed they would be few and far between. The paper was done, and she had three full days to edit it. She had actually finished it so early that she would turn it in a few days prior to its due date, which is what she wanted to do. Maybe this would allow Dr. Hutchinson some extra time in reviewing it. She performed a quick spell and grammar check and printed two copies. She put the copies in her folder and placed the folder into her backpack.

She took a last drink of her soda and shut her computer down. It was 10:30 p.m. She was happy but wasn't really surprised. She could usually tell how things were going to formulate according to how the Spirit would prompt her. All along she had anticipated that she would finish the paper during or just after the weekend. Stage one and two were now complete; the full wrestle and the first draft were done, but one stage still remained. The editing process was a unique one. Sometimes the entire paper could change. She left herself open to this possibility as she cleared the debris from her bed. Then, after she made a clear place to lay her head, she got ready and quietly went to sleep.

It was Sunday afternoon, about 2:30 p.m. Sally spent much of the morning and part of the afternoon with her Church group. She was now home at her desk and thinking intensely about the paper. She had it up on her computer, but wasn't doing much besides staring at the screen. She actually had taken a copy with her to Church in order to look it over, but her heart was far from it. She knew that both her Spirit and mind had to be ready in order for her to put the finishing touches on the paper.

Sally sat there, slowly reading the paragraphs and awestruck that for the most part, they were so plain and simple. She believed overall that the paper was powerful, but when reviewed according to a cerebral and deducting mind, the paper seemed to lose some of its edge. The final thought was on Sally's faith. Was she going to believe in the simplicity and overall Spirit-driven concept of the paper or was she going to tweak the paper so that it would possess more of a reason that could entrap the mind? Currently, she was having trouble believing that less was more, and she didn't understand why. But God was strongly leading her to allow the paper to rest where it did, and to make only the changes He wanted her to make.

Sally felt urged to add some more examples and even possibly to go in a different direction, especially with regard to the ending. But the Spirit again cautioned within Sally's desire, prompting that her intervention would become a soft wind threatening the illumination and light of the story. Sally purposed not to fight this battle now; if it was indeed God's will to keep this paper as it was, then it would stay the trial of the next three days. Sally would not give in; she would continue to press her thoughts.

She took out some scratch paper and began to make some notes according to the changes she wanted to see. She left the paper in translation, but she was filling in the gaps and making necessary notes in case she did happen to change the paper later. The paper was good, Sally thought, but she could make it better. She continued to make notes, and as she did, she took out the material and thoughts she had already accumulated. She

was going over everything in her mind, trying to deduct whether or not this was a good idea, or if that was a bad idea.

She wanted to veer in a particular direction toward the end, and this question was challenging her most. She just couldn't see how God wouldn't want this kind of direction; the direction would not only add dimension to the paper, but it would also make the paper more solid and poignant, even adding a few different points of view. As her pen drenched the soft 24-lb. paper, she jotted down note after note concerning the direction she hoped the paper would eventually take. The ideas were good, Sally thought, and they would add validity and appeal to the paper.

She took a rest after a few hours of note taking, she was now on the outside of the paper. She reread the paper many times from the outside, and was quietly surprised to notice again that the paper was simple yet authentic. Believing and then consequently working on the notes had actually brought her away from the paper, now, returning to the paper, she was reminded of the paper's overall simplicity. Still, she believed the new points would make the paper stronger, but because she was now seeing the paper from the outside looking in, she had to admit that the paper was strikingly genuine. The paper was simple yet persuasive; she decided to sleep on it.

She awoke to a loud alarm clock buzzing in her ear. There was some kind of tractor driving down the road, and it was extremely loud. She jumped up out of bed and checked the window; the tractor seemed almost as big as some of the houses; she figured it was a demolition tractor. She glanced at her clock, 8:30 a.m. She didn't need to be at school until at least 1:00 p.m., but considering she was up early, she wanted to get a jump on the paper. She got herself ready and after a quick bite, headed off to school.

She went to the main study area of the library where it was dark and open. Sally would usually go

upstairs to study where there were smaller rooms with small cubicles, but she wasn't staying for long. After her regular class schedule, she would be back to do most of the remaining work. She reintroduced herself to the concept of the paper and its wrestle. She took out the paper and the extra notes. After sleeping on it, she didn't have any clearer insight into the paper; she only knew that she had two days left, and then the paper needed to be turned in.

Dr. Hutchinson actually gave the class until Friday to turn in their papers, but since Sally had already purposed to finish it by Wednesday, she intended to make good on that. She was also hoping that Dr. Hutchinson might be able to read it early and let her know what he thought; she focused as she thought on this. She spread out the notes across the table and analyzed them all together. She made a separate sheet of paper with the pro's and con's of adding additional information to the paper. She added up the point total for the pro's for and the con's against, and the pro's against and the con's for.

Sally would sometimes make this kind of list when she was struggling to understand what choices needed to be made in her life. She knew that the Spirit of God was always involved in process, and because of this, her continual wrestling and observation became part of her conscience justification. She continued to discern her answers, for and against. At the end of the list, she added everything up and tallied up the numbers. It came out to 53 to 50 in favor of leaving the paper as is. Sally put this off to the side and continued to review her notes.

The notes were strong, Sally thought. If this had not been a particular situation in which Dr. Hutchinson had specifically come up to her and prompted her to be alert, then she would have just gone ahead and made the changes. She also doubted if the Spirit would have been leading her so intimately had this not been the case. She knew that the exaltations in Dr. Hutchinson's class were no accident, and that there was special emphasis on this paper; that is probably why the Spirit was checking her so hard. But she didn't mind; in the past, the

Spirit had used similar tactics, through everyday circumstances actually. The fact that the Spirit was so strong meant a special kind of privilege, it meant that something was most likely at stake.

Sally knew that the Spirit would not always go out of His way over a prolonged period of time just to make a point. The Spirit had been prompting ever since she had started the paper. A humble attitude regarding the Spirit's leading was necessary, and in submitting, Sally would ensure the Spirit's guidance. But still, in spite of all this, came the desire to do what she wanted to do. "Why make the paper less good?" Sally kept thinking to herself.

She would go to class early. She was getting nowhere currently. She would come back later and try to pin down all the rebellious thoughts ricocheting inside her head.

It was close to 7:30 pm, and she had already been in the library for over an hour. She had made some subtle changes to the paper but none of the changes she actually desired. She had spent some time reading the Bible and going over some of the principles that lead her to write "The Jesus Files," the original paper that inspired this one. Reading those verses only helped her see the strength of meaning within the concepts. They were powerful, indeed, and whether or not they needed further expounding became a matter of opinion. She was just about to lay her head down on the desk when she heard a voice.

"You've been studying awfully hard, dear." The voice spoke softly as it made its way toward Sally; Sally lifted up her head and turned around, surprised.

The voice spoke again, "I have seen you here almost every day for the last seven days; you must be studying for something very important."

Sally recognized the woman; she was one of the librarians, a polite though mysterious woman. Sally met the woman with frank conversation.

"Yes, but not a test, an assignment ..." Sally quickly glanced at the paper sitting on the desk and then pushed it away with her eyes. "It's a paper actually."

"Oh, a paper," the librarian spoke, almost testing Sally's frankness. She then drew near and looked over Sally's shoulder, lovingly, "How's it coming along?"

"Well ...," Sally stops short, making sure she chose her words carefully. "... It's pretty much done, I guess. ...I don't know, I just, I don't know."

The woman drew closer, and put her hand on Sally's shoulder. As soon as her hand touched Sally's shoulder, a quick vibration brought a settling peace. Then, ignoring Sally's mesmerizing stare, the librarian looked away as if nothing had happened.

Sally didn't know what to think.

"Seems you wrote it once dear," the librarian said matter of fact.

Sally didn't understand what the librarian meant. Of course she had wrote it once. What did she mean by that remark?

"What do you mean?" Sally then implored.

The librarian takes a moment before she responds. "You wrote it once, dear." She pauses, and asks, "And if you were to try to write it again?" She looks away, almost as if she's bearing with Sally, "What then?"

Sally thought to herself, what was this crazy woman talking about? "If I wrote it once," Sally thought. She looked up at the librarian, who was looking over her shoulder, staring at the paper. The librarian then said it again.

"You wrote it once, dear. What would you do again?"

"What would I do again?" Sally repeated the phrase, trying to evoke some sort of understanding.

"Yes," the librarian finally said, turning to look directly at Sally. "You wrote it once, dear, and now it's complete." She glances toward the paper, "But now you are seeking to change something that has already been created." She looks down at Sally, and Sally feels herself begin to open up even though she doesn't want to. The librarian continues, "But if it had never been

created in the first place, would you seek to change or simply create?"

Her words were spooky. Sally, in a puzzled way, understood what she was trying to imply, but still wasn't sure if she was hitting upon the same meaning entirely. She questioned in a humbled tone.

"Excuse me, are you implying that the only reason I am wrestling with this paper now is because it's already been created, and now, because it's created, I'm taking it for granted." The librarian peers honestly into Sally, not taking her eyes away from her. Sally then finishes, "Perhaps if the paper didn't exist, I wouldn't be seeking to implement a change, but would simply be content to create what I have already created."

"Just food for thought, dear." The librarian spoke these words as she tapped Sally's shoulder and walked away.

Sally sat, bewildered. The librarian was right, she thought, incredibly right in fact. She was second-guessing herself. The paper was already finished, and while she wrote it, it was flawless and flowing. She was taking for granted what had come so easily; she was trying to make hers again what was already hers from heaven. She looked at the notes one more time; they were good, but they were hers, after the fact, after the paper had been written. She then wondered if she actually needed the notes. She decided to save them, but for now they didn't have their place. As Sally pondered, she knew this was the decision she needed to make; she knew this undeniably. And as she realized this, she turned to watch the mysterious librarian make her way through the shadows.

Sally had written many papers in the past, thirty-three to be exact. Almost all of them required intensive editing, as well as intensive analysis. But only occasionally during the editing process would a paper's entire focal point change. Usually the only changes she made focused on accuracy or possibly on worked-out knowledge or on wisdom within the revelation of the mystery itself.

But as Sally wrote this particular paper, she knew in the back of her mind that this was one of those papers

that would not require additional knowledge or insight, just initial faith as well as a response to that initial faith. There would of course be editing, but not with regard to the overall concept of the paper. The paper was done, and it needed to be edited simply for evaluation but not for concept. Sally folded up her work and placed it into her bag. She would finish editing the paper tomorrow at her house.

* * *

It was now Tuesday morning, and the remnants of the paper lingered in her mind. Last night was one of those nights when half of you slept and the other half of you stayed awake worrying about something or another, but in Sally's case it wasn't worry, but hopeful speculation.

She was anticipating finishing her paper today, and she felt good. Dr. Hutchinson had warned that he wanted her best, and as far as she was concerned, he was getting it. As she pondered on her course of struggle regarding the paper, she could faintly see that the paper was indeed special and alluring in its own right. Almost like a three-course meal that wasn't extravagant but was still hearty enough to settle the stomach and palate. The paper could have been fancier, she thought again, but wisdom says that even two-or-three room banquet buffets tend to make you feel overwhelmed and dizzy.

She got up and turned on her computer. She had no desire to get ready for school yet. She was in one of those moods where she felt like doing some creative work in her pajamas. Everything was a mess, but that was okay; it meant there was nothing really worth worrying about. As the computer took its time booting up, she didn't feel like she had to move a muscle, either physically or spiritually. She would simply wait for the paper to surface and would proofread and edit it. She didn't need to be at school until a bit before lunchtime, so time was not a factor. She opened up the paper's file and began editing.

She brought to her memory the basic changes she wanted to make, the regular editing changes that were structural and not concept driven. She made the changes

quickly. She saw a few grammatical mistakes, and she quickly double-checked those as well. She also noticed some editing she needed to make with regard to quotations and format changes; she made them. She then went back mentally and reread the paper as a whole; it was good. She double-checked again to make sure nothing was missing or eluding her; everything seemed in order. As she read the paper a fourth time, she saw it would be better to make certain topics boldfaced and simply underline others; she made these changes.

The paper was coming together nicely. She read it a fifth time, and a sixth, and even a seventh. It was good she thought, sweet and to the point. She knew if she kept on reading it, she would end up so close to the paper that she would make herself absolutely blind to anything she might need to see, almost like holding a book too close to your face, the words become a blur. She printed the paper, making two copies.

She then went through the bibliography, making sure all the references and works cited were accurate and in order. She took out her stapler and stapled each copy of the paper. She put one in her folder, for her own reference, and one she placed in a blue trapper, to hand in to Dr. Hutchinson. It was done. She would go to his office tomorrow and turn in her paper during his office hours, between three and four o'clock.

Sally was relieved. She had written it step by step. Through the paper's initial process and conception, to researching the paper, to making sure she was getting the right direction from the Spirit, to abiding within that direction, and then finally resolving the paper as a whole by faith. The process was overwhelming but complete. The funny thing, Sally thought to herself, was that this paper was really written a long time ago. Only the conception was new; most of the knowledge with regard to the revelation came straight from her old paper "The Jesus Files." Sally knew God had a plan all along.

Sally shut down her computer; she had a long day ahead of her. She had two classes and then more studying to do in the evening. But all she could think about right now was the paper, and how Dr. Hutchinson would

react to its overall concept. She was interested in his opinion as well as what he thought regarding its spiritual direction. The paper was different, not like the two discourses Dr. Hutchinson had listened to in the previous classroom sessions. Those discussions were cut and dried, not much to add or even take away. This concept was different; you could build a house of opinion right in the middle of this one.

And this was causing Sally to feel some internal curiosity and doubt. This paper had the potential to cause quite a stir; its topic and its focus were general and alluring, and it had the potential to touch every single person who read it. Sally thought about this as she lingered around her room in an effort to walk away from any doubt. Whereas her previous classroom discussions would result in a serious high-five, only to then walk around and revel within its atmosphere; this paper was more like a serious sit-down, but a sit-down that had the potential to become so heavy that afterward you wouldn't know if you would even be able to stand. This paper wasn't a party; it was an event, an event that held the likelihood of introducing life-changing concepts directly into people's lives.

Dr. Hutchinson, sitting at his desk, is trying to find the right wording to some conversation notes for this weekend's Summit meeting. He's having a hard time staying focused. These notes, or actually the train of thought arising from these notes, are critical in case he is called upon to defend the Cell. He hasn't had to speak in public regarding the Cell for quite some time, and he's hoping he won't have to do so now. There is a gentle knock on the door.

"Come in," Dr. Hutchinson yells though he doesn't immediately look up to see who enters.

"Can I see you right now, Dr. Hutchinson?" Sally is peering through the door, hinting her desire.

Dr. Hutchinson is surprised. "Yes, come in, Sally." The surprised look shows on his face.

"Thank you."

As Dr. Hutchinson begins to wonder why Sally has come, and as Sally maneuvers her way through his office, he says a quick prayer to humble himself before the Lord. As he finishes, Sally makes her way quietly into the chair. She opens up her backpack, all without looking up.

"Dr. Hutchinson I'm here because I want to turn in my paper." Sally says this in a positive manner as she stares down at her backpack. "I decided to turn in the paper early because I figured it was important, and I didn't want it bundled up with all the other students papers."

Sally then affirms realistically, "This way you can have some private time to read it with a fully objective mind before you need to read and analyze other student's thoughts."

Dr. Hutchinson is shocked, but he tries not to let Sally notice his expression. "That's great Sally, but are you sure you can't use the extra few days? You still have until Friday to turn in the paper, and it could mean the difference between taking the midterm or not."

Sally shifts in her seat looking down but then looks at him. "No, I actually finished the paper two days ago, but then I still had to wrestle with a few things in order to completely finish it."

Dr. Hutchinson follows Sally as she shifts both mentally and physically in her seat. "I wrestled, but then I realized that the paper God intended me to write was already done, so I brought it here, to turn it in to you." Sally senses some hesitation from Dr. Hutchinson so she clears the air. "Will you read it?"

Dr. Hutchinson breaks from his doubtful posture. "Yes, Sally. I'm sorry; I am just a little surprised that you're done so early, you kind of caught me off guard." Dr. Hutchinson puts his pen down. He was actually holding himself back. He wanted to tell Sally more regarding everything that was currently going on, but he knew it wasn't the right time. He then continued, "Let's see it."

Sally fully pulled out the paper from her backpack and from its blue trapper and handed it to him. It felt light as he took it in his hands, maybe ten pages, he

guessed. He opened the paper, as Sally quickly made a comment.

"I knew you kind of wanted something special in this paper, but I need to tell you truthfully, Dr. Hutchinson, I wrote what I felt God directed me to write."

Dr. Hutchinson places the paper on his desk waiting till later to examine it. Sally continues. "I could have written five or six other papers that I personally thought would have been more practical or impacting."

"Why didn't you?" Dr. Hutchinson asked, not in a questioning manner but just trying to understand where she is coming from.

"Because, like you said, you wanted the best I had to offer. I believed I could have written papers with the kind of insight I thought was more important, but this turned out to be the insight I believed God thought was important."

Dr. Hutchinson leaned back, absorbing Sally's words. Sally continued. "I knew this paper was important, so I didn't fight God with my overall reason. I just trusted Him to guide me in the right direction." She pauses for emphasis and then points to the paper. "I believe this paper is the right direction."

Dr. Hutchinson wonders if Sally is trying to cop out or make excuses for herself. He doesn't actually believe this, but if this paper turned out to be weak, then the discussion they were having now might be setting him up for that disappointment. He decides to pry further.

"Sally, why did you settle on this paper exactly? I know you felt God lead you, but what were your reasons in the beginning, and how do you feel about it right now?"

Sally takes a moment. She knows Dr. Hutchinson is testing her because he hadn't yet read the paper. She decides to be frank. "I am not trying to make excuses; the paper is powerful, but it's just not what I would have chosen." Dr Hutchinson is a bit taken by Sally's frankness, but he takes it in stride, since he was the one who opened the door. "This paper was actually born of another paper I wrote a few years back titled "The

Jesus Files." That is why I was taken aback in the beginning, simply because its concept was really just a hack on something I had already written."

Dr. Hutchinson listens intently, focusing on Sally's every character and movement. Sally continues again. "But there is something intently different about this paper; it's funny, but it's geared more toward nonbelievers, but with a powerful drive toward intellect and Biblical truth."

Dr. Hutchinson's mouth almost dropped open when he heard this. This was actually more than he wanted to hear at the moment. The Cell might in fact be a bit bored reading a Christian-driven paper. Though the paper might be true, its focus might not interest them. But to have the paper geared for the thinker but yet at the same time be powerful and convincing, this was the perfect recipe for a unique and powerful introduction to The Cell.

"While I was writing it, the whole time, I was saying to myself 'boring Sally, boring.' But God knows what needs to be written, and for what purpose."

Dr. Hutchinson interjects, "What do you mean by boring?"

"It's just that some of the topics I could have chosen for this paper might have been more attractive; people might have been hungrier to read some of the other topics I had in mind. This paper is interesting, but ..." She pauses trying to find the right words, but she can't. "... I don't know; it's just different."

"So how do you feel now?" Dr. Hutchinson questions, wanting to conclude Sally's thought cycle.

"To be honest, Dr. Hutchinson, I am a bit scared."
"Scared?"

"Yes," Sally repeats, but this time with a look in her eye, "scared."

Dr. Hutchinson looks at Sally for a moment. She settles within herself to give Dr. Hutchinson her reason. "It's like a double-edged sword, Dr. Hutchinson. Part of me is happy that I listened to God; the paper is done and it is powerful. But on the other hand, it is the exact opposite of what I would have written had I had no direct leading from the Spirit, and that makes me a bit scared."

She pauses. Dr. Hutchinson quietly listens as Sally offers her justification; she concludes. "Had I written the paper under my header, regarding what I thought was necessary, then I might have had an impressive paper, but it wouldn't have been the paper God had planned for me. I believe this is the paper God had planned for me; when I believe, I'm fine, but when I doubt, I'm scared."

Sally then says, in an incredibly heartwarming fashion, "So will you read the stupid thing so I can know if I'm crazy or not!"

Dr. Hutchinson smiles brightly. Sally did indeed have an adorable personality. It was her frankness blended with a bit of certainty and then mingled with vulnerability. She made you want to help her, in any way you could.

"Sally, I will read your paper, first thing, but I can't respond until after the weekend. Do you see these notes?" Dr. Hutchinson lifts up the notes he was working on before Sally entered the room.

"These notes are for an important conference I am going to this weekend. I can't respond to your paper until after the conference, until at least Sunday or Monday."

Sally is looking down presently; she checks herself and reminds herself that just because she turned in her paper early, doesn't give her the right to expect an early response. She continued reasoning this as she raised her head to look at Dr. Hutchinson. Had she turned the paper in on time, then Dr. Hutchinson's response would have come at the end of the weekend anyway, so this was actually on par with what was acceptable or reasonable, given the current situation anyway. She digs deep and surfaces her feelings.

"Okay, I don't want to put this pressure on you, I am just a bit anxious that's all. Just promise me you'll read it first thing and respond to me when you have time, I put my email address and phone number in the paper."

Dr. Hutchinson opened up the paper and saw the sticker; he closed it without another glance. "I will read it first thing, Sally, be sure of that, and I will

read it before the others, so that my focus isn't biased."

"I appreciate it, Dr. Hutchinson."

"No problem, Sally," Dr. Hutchinson offers as Sally lifts her backpack and prepares to leave.

Dr. Hutchinson is then prompted by the Spirit to say something. "Sally, ..."

"Yes," Sally turns around, right before she opens the door.

"Relax, Sally, I wouldn't want to be in your shoes right now, because you know what you're personally going through." Dr. Hutchinson then flexes his body, though it is really his inner Spirit that is coming through; he then speaks in a genuine manner. "But Sally, just understand, from the outside looking in, you're doing great." Sally's face lights up. "Trust me, Sally, not even God Himself could ask for anything more from you right now."

Sally smiles surely. She wants to fully believe him, and even though she doesn't, his words are appreciated. Dr. Hutchinson finishes, "I know it's hard on you right now, Sally, to believe, but if you're patient, you'll have your answer soon enough, you'll know where you stand."

Sally opens the door to the office but doesn't take her eyes off Dr. Hutchinson. "I believe you, Dr. Hutchinson, but that's what really scares me the most."

As Sally left the office, Dr. Hutchinson fell to his knees:

Lord, I need your strength now, right now. Please help me because this is all too heavy for me. I know this is your will, but now you are going to need to empower me in order to fulfill it.

After about five minutes on the floor pleading and petitioning, he rose and took his place alongside his desk and alongside Sally's paper. He couldn't believe what had just happened. From Sally's perspective, she

was just turning in her paper, but from his perspective, Sally turning in her paper early was an answer to a fleece he had placed before the Lord.

He had required from the Lord that if it was indeed His will to introduce Sally's paper to The Cell at the Summit meeting, then he would have access to the paper before he left for the meeting on Thursday night. This was impossible, since he set the due date for the paper the day after he was to leave for the Summit meeting, the papers' due date being Friday afternoon. He did this on purpose, to test the Lord's desired will for Sally's life. If God really did desire for Sally's paper to be introduced at the meeting, then He would need to perform to ensure that happening, which He did. The fleece had been answered, and Dr. Hutchinson was humbled.

If Sally had turned in the paper at the appointed time, after he had already left for the meeting, then he still would have introduced the paper to The Cell, that was, if the paper proved to be acceptable according to his initial desire that the paper be powerful and weighty. But by doing this, her chances wouldn't have been as good as they were now, which is why he set the fleece in the first place, for fairness sake. Had he assigned the paper early simply so he could have taken the paper with him to the conference, then part of him would have felt as though he were creating the whole situation, and in doing this he would have created doubt and condemnation within himself. But by setting the fleece, he proved that the Lord overwhelmingly intended this opportunity for Sally, and now he could simply acquiesce to the Lord's intended desire.

Timing was everything, Dr. Hutchinson thought to himself, and sad to say, so was image. He reasoned this within himself, of what could have been had the fleece not been answered. If another candidate was found, between now and the time it would have taken to eventually get Sally's paper into the hands of The Cell, then Sally might have been out. If waiting too long simply soured The Cell on their previous desire of having an "agitator," then Sally might have been out. And lastly, if by waiting too long, and in doing so killing the possibility of creating a powerful representation of

Sally's work, then this might have destroyed the atmosphere of anticipation and acceptance, hence Sally might have been out once again.

In a nutshell, introducing Sally's paper to The Cell in any other way other than at the Summit meeting probably would've lessened her chances of getting any kind of response. But by having this paper in hand right now, as he went to the Summit meeting, and then being able to powerfully recommend Sally in person, this was Sally's best shot of getting an invitation to The Cell. And now she was going to get that opportunity, thanks to God's omen from Heaven.

He put the paper in his brief case; he purposed to read the paper when he got home that evening. He was anxious to see whether or not the paper would be worthy. If it was not, then he would not be able to recommend Sally, that was the original fleece he had placed before the Lord, and there were no exceptions. If the paper wasn't strong enough, Sally was out.

Chapter 10

The midnight hour was fast approaching when Sally pulled up into Clair's driveway. Clair shared a small home with two other Gladdale students, one was asleep, one was studying. As Clair heard Sally's car pull up the driveway, she turned on the porch light greeting her, and then on meeting Sally, they embraced.

Sally had called Clair and said she needed to talk. It was concerning the paper she had written for Dr. Hutchinson's class, some issues were popping up in her head. Clair was more than willing to oblige her, telling her to come over tonight. As the two approached the doorway, Clair felt the pressure building up within Sally.

"Sally, sit down. I'm going to make some coffee."

Sally nodded. Clair put on a pot and jiggled around the kitchen for a while. When she finally reentered the living room, she sat down right next to Sally. She then laid a pillow between her legs and then crossed them over casually. Sally put her hand to her forehead and blankly stared at Clair. There were no words for a few moments, then Sally opened up her mouth.

"Clair, I appreciate you taking the time tonight. I know that I can be a nuisance sometimes."

Clair just gives Sally a ridiculous look in order to urge her on. Clair knows that Sally has come for a reason, and she wants Sally to get to that reason.

"It's about the paper, Clair. It's just something about it."

Clair speaks. Her tone intensity mimics Sally's. "What about the paper, Sally?"

Sally then repositions herself as though her answer is going to demand a greater support structure. "Not necessarily the paper itself, Clair, but the fact I wrote it. I am struggling because I think this paper was assigned and written for a reason."

"What do you mean?" Clair urges carefully, she doesn't want to get herself involved or assume too much.

"I just feel like this paper was assigned for another reason besides the classroom, that's all. I have a feeling that writing this paper had almost nothing to do with Dr. Hutchinson's class, but was some sort of test." Sally rests after she says this, she takes a break and looks down, and then, after a moment, she looks up again in order to resurface her point. "Don't get me wrong, Clair, I am proud of what I wrote, it's just that there is some internal feeling or doubt within me that makes me wonder or feel uncertain, almost like I have no control right now."

Clair held herself, she knew Sally's focus was along the lines of what they had already discussed, how God was going to take the control out of Sally's life so that He could uniquely bless her. Sally then continued again. "I just want to believe that everything is going to be all right."

The coffee's smell began to fill the air. With a look, Clair left to check on the coffee. After a moment, she came back with two steaming mugs. She handed one to Sally and set the other down next to where she had been seated. She sat back down, resolving to address Sally's concerns warmly.

"Sally, I think we can work through this." She looks at Sally in a quiet but intense manner. "Remember what we discussed earlier Sally, in the restaurant?"

Sally nods her head. "Sally, all this needs to happen, but I want you to focus on something for a second."

Sally sets herself up to listen to Clair's appeal. Clair has tender reason behind her eyes. "Sally, you came to me a few weeks back and you were uncertain of so many things." Sally swallows to accept Clair's remark. "And look at what has happened since then; you not only spoke up in Dr. Hutchinson's class and revealed your gift, but you did it twice, Sally-girl."

Clair has a look on her face like an unbelievable miracle has happened, she then finishes. "And from what I heard, you blew their socks off, Sally-girl." Clair smiles with an auspicious tone, prompting Sally to smile as well. Clair then encourages gently, "So isn't it

encouraging to know that things are working out and going forward, Sally?"

Sally doesn't even think before she speaks. "Yes, your right Clair." She then stops herself, not wanting to sound too disrespectful. She then continues seriously, "Five weeks ago, I had no idea how I was ever going to reveal what was inside of me. Clair, I have struggled with this gift for so long and I never dreamed it would be this easy or even this convenient to expose it." Sally pauses again to rethink her words. "God has done so many miracles, Clair, miracles I didn't even ask for or even understand." Clair nods her head as she takes a sip of her coffee. "And Clair, it's not so much that I have a problem with losing control, because like you said, God has been faithful, but this whole paper thing, I think something is happening behind the scenes that I don't know about, it's like some weird X-files or something."

Clair takes a few moments, trying to think of the right words. "Sally, I agree with you. I would be anxious, too. I mean, here, Dr. Hutchinson up and assigns this paper, and he does it in such a way that he directly challenges you. Then, to top it off, he actually comes to you privately and tells you to give this paper your best effort because it was very important. Sounds fishy to me, Sally-girl." She then sets her coffee mug down and repositions herself; her hand replaces the coffee mug for Sally's knee. "But here's the thing, Sally-girl; I think you need to focus on this. Didn't God show up miraculously and help you write this paper?"

Sally answers in a monotone. "Yes."

"And weren't you able to finish it in a very timely manner, allowing you to hand it in quickly so it's weight wouldn't be on your shoulders?"

"Yes."

"And Sally," Clair gets a bit vehement, "besides the actual worry that exists right now, isn't this paper done, I mean, over and done with regarding your part in it?"

"Pretty much."

"So now, Sally, no matter what is moving behind the scenes, realistically, the only thing you can control right now is yourself."

"Right," Sally agrees.

Clair moves closer in an effort to comfort Sally. "Then, Sally, you need to let go. Trust me, Sally-girl, I am on the outside looking in, and you need to be very thankful right now. In five weeks, you went from not knowing your purpose to being in the position of making an impact on probably one of the most influential Christian's alive today, Dr. Hutchinson."

Sally looks up with uncertainty, but Clair continues steadfast. "Sally, I know it's hard to trust, and to let go, but you have to because you can't see what God is doing right now." Clair's words are ringing with certainty. "And the most important thing to remember is that God probably doesn't want you to know, Sally, most likely because you would try and get in the way."

Sally smiles understanding this truth. She then acquiesces a bit to Clair's certainty with a final plea. "I came here tonight, Clair, because you have been such a help to me. I really don't know what I would have done without you. I was really hoping that Dr. Hutchison would have read my paper so that I could know at least something, but your right, God has taken care of everything so far. I'm just anxious because I want the control again."

Clair smiles at Sally's frankness and honesty, "Good, Sally, good. I am glad you are seeing it for what it is, and I do appreciate any thankfulness toward me, but just hear me out for a second."

Sally offers Clair her full attention, as Clair continues. "Just remember this, Sally-girl, that God is taking away control for an important reason. Let Him do it, Sally, let Him." Clair then continues, with faith resounding behind her eyes. "I know that because things happened so quickly in the last five weeks that things will continue to happen quickly. Just focus on one thing, Sally-girl; make sure that you appreciate God not only through prayer but also with thanksgiving. Just like the scripture says, with prayer and supplication and thanksgiving." Clair pauses to allow the stream of

thought to penetrate Sally. "I appreciate you for thanking me, but you really need to thank God for what He is doing right now because quite frankly Sally, it's awesome. Thank Him, Sally, thank Him; and by thanking Him it will help you to appreciate all that He is doing in your life rather than dwelling on it."

What Clair said made a lot of sense, Sally thought. Some people have to wait five, ten, even fifteen years for an answer to prayer; she only had to wait five weeks. Since the time she and Clair spoke regarding this issue, until now, God had done miracle after miracle after miracle in order to align everything, finally leading up to this moment. He was working quickly and powerfully, and His grace was evident in every corner of her life, with Dr. Hutchinson, with Clair, with the manifestation of her gifts, even with Neaven. Clair was right, Sally thought, for her to do anything right now other than praise Him would be a mistake.

"Clair, do you mind spending some time with me in prayer? I want to get some things off my chest, and it would be nice if you would pray with me."

Clair smiled, "Of course, just go ahead and start praying and we'll let the Spirit lead, and Sally," Clair stops briefly to brush the hair behind Sally's ears, "I want you to know something. I love you very much, even as a sister, and to be honest with you, it almost scares me when I think of what God might possibly do through you."

Sally speaks without a reference, or even a thought. "It scares me too Clair, every single day."

They both bowed their heads, and Sally began quietly asking the Holy Spirit to guide her and comfort her as she prayed. She began to give thanks for everything that was currently in her life, Clair, the paper, Dr. Hutchinson, Neaven, even all her worries, and as she did, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, began to fill their hearts and minds.

It was an unsightly morning in France. It was 3:30 a.m., and Cross and his ever prominent secretary Emillie were

preparing to leave for the Summit meeting in Washington D.C. He was gathering his personal plans in accordance with the agenda that had been calculated. Everything was firmly in place. He looked on his desk and saw a hand written note, it was from Dr. Thiery:

Cross,

Please feel free to exercise yourself in America, as much as you need. If you are so inclined, take an extra few days for yourself, relax, and come back refreshed. As for the summit, there shouldn't be any problems as we've discussed. If you require my assistance, please don't hesitate to call. I will certainly back any and all your efforts. Enjoy your homeland, Cross, my friend.

It was signed and dated at the bottom. The letter was kind, and appreciated. With all that was going on right now, it was nice to have genuine concern from the one whom you were trying to please. He folded the letter and put it in his desk. Emillie spoke.

"Mr. Lutherant, are we ready?"

"Yes." He spoke in a back-throat tone, almost second-guessing himself. "When will Tom Hutchinson's flight be arriving in Washington?"

Emillie didn't need to check the records. She remembered making the reservations herself. "He will arrive at the Ronald Reagan National airport tonight at 8:31."

"Great. What time do we arrive?"

"We haven't sent a departure time yet, sir." She pauses, "Would you like me to notify the Aeroport International Strasbourg for the time we will be departing?"

Cross breaks his inward thought process, "No, that's fine, we'll wait until we arrive."

"Very well, sir, I will beckon personnel to begin loading our luggage. Will there be anything else you will be needing, sir?"

"No, that's all." Cross turns and then quickly turns again in order to address Emillie one more time. "Oh and Emillie."

"Yes, sir?"

"Thank you for helping me this morning. I appreciate it."

Emillie smiles, "Your fully welcome, sir." She turns around and walks away, out through the double doors. Cross sits down, and as he does, he seems to empty himself at his desk. This will be a big weekend, he thought to himself. With everything going on and with the prospect of Tom and him being together face to face, anything was possible. He hadn't talked with Tom in almost two weeks, and he had no idea how everything was coming along with his search for Mark's replacement. But one thing he knew, if Tom had found someone, he wouldn't have called; he would wait until this weekend to share it.

Cross sat there, overtaken by the moment and the realization of what might become of The Cell. The weight was heavy, and it was lowering him to a place of either surrender or total denial. He hated the situation he was in, but he also hated the thought of becoming what he detested the most, a hypocrite and a liar. He loved The Cell; he loved it deeply, but he wouldn't corrupt himself over his desire for what he wanted The Cell to be, rather than for what The Cell needed to become. He had to place everything in fate's hands, and he needed to accept this situation along with any of the weight that came with it. He got up and took his personal briefcase; he exited the office and walked down the hall.

Dr. Hutchinson is on his balcony, watching the birds feed. He arrived home late last night after having dinner with some colleagues; he hadn't yet had a chance to read Sally's paper. Although incredibly interested in it's content, he assured himself that if this was indeed

God's will, then it would be manifest, and that it would be manifest on a rested mind and on an empty stomach. Now that both variables presented themselves, he felt inclined to sit down and read her paper.

He walked over to the kitchen table where the paper was lying face down; he sat down and turned to the first page. As he made his way through the introduction, he was pleased; he liked the introduction a lot. He took a piece of fruit from the bowl that was seated on the kitchen table; he began to eat as he read. With each turning page, he became more aware of the paper's impact; it was powerful and it was moving him.

He got up, and started to pace the floor as he thought. He was not even halfway done with the paper but was already getting the spirit of it. The paper was not difficult to understand; it was direct and to the point. But before he purposed to sit down and continue reading, he wanted to see the paper through the eyes of those who would eventually be reading it, through Cross's eyes and Dr. Thiery's eyes. As he begot this frame of mind, he sat down and began to read again.

A few things were standing out to him. The paper was concept driven; and it was surrounded by two central concepts that were both powerful and definitive. The first concept complemented the second, and the second established the first. Also, as he read, he felt himself justified by the paper. The paper was so simple to read, like a deck of cards placed on a table and then all turned right side up, so you knew exactly what you were seeing; there were no jokers around.

He made his way to the heart of the second concept. Good, he thought, very good. Now he understood what Sally was trying to get across in their office conversation yesterday; the paper was indeed different. During the classroom discussions, Sally had a certain method, almost prophetic in nature, but this method also hinted on the prophetic, but it was also more centralized in its character, almost like more of a process had begotten this work. The paper was much more mind and less heart; it was more reason and less belief. He made his way through the second concept. Blameless.

There were a few more pages before the conclusion that simply verified what was assumed during the first concept. This information actually tied the concepts together nicely, taking out some of the variables that any reader might assume with regard to either concept. He leaned back before concluding the paper, thinking out loud so he could continue in the right frame of mind. He read the paper's conclusion; it was effortless.

He got up and paced again, allowing the paper's spirit to fully ease into his. There was something allowed in this paper; its concepts were striking. He fully understood what Sally meant when she said it was different and not flashy. This was true. But one thing the paper did do was speak plainly, and when it spoke, it spoke loudly.

He could see why Sally was fighting it, especially considering she was holding its content for a number of years. He could see why she believed the paper's wisdom was plain or stale within her; it was the type of wisdom that could seep into you and then become a part of you, without you really knowing it actually. This wisdom would change you, change the way you saw things or even understood things. After a while, Sally quite possibly could have seen it as a part of her, rather than a manifestation that could quite possibly have come through her. Sally was this paper, and this is why writing it had no impact on her, almost like looking at yourself in the mirror and then being awestruck.

As he fed his thoughts, he paced around the kitchen, convinced that the paper was not only logical, but realistically unarguable. The simplicity of the paper left no wrinkles to iron out; it left no footholds to hold on to and it left no bruises to sink your teeth into. The simplicity of the paper was its strength. You couldn't argue this paper because it didn't give you a place from which to argue it. The concepts themselves were flawless, and they were also genius, deeply thought out and original.

If this were not enough, the concepts also complemented each other and tied together so well that it became hard to ignore one without casting down the other. If you weren't going to believe one concept or rationale,

then by default you had to refuse the paper as a whole. And this is why the paper was so striking, because it made too much sense to utterly ignore or disregard altogether. The paper had to be accepted and received in its entirety, or else you had to falsify the entire thing and say it was rubbish, but this was impossible because of the impact of the paper overall.

As Dr. Hutchinson thought about this, he was empowered by his spirit, he was energized in his heart and in his mind. This paper was a truth that had been worked out and manifested through the Spirit and now existed on paper, that people might be able to read it. It was very discerning and convincing on all fronts, and Sally was certainly right when she mentioned that the paper was directed toward unbelievers just as much as it was toward believers. Anyone could read this and not feel threatened or preached to; it was a simple truth that surrounded itself with meaning and kind analogies. It was a poem with logical steps, and it was a song without intermittent meaning. This paper was genuine, and it was truly flawless in its desire to offer itself to the reader.

There was no guessing whether or not this paper was right for The Cell. The paper was perfect for The Cell. According to what Dr. Thiery desired in finding someone who could stir things up, this paper, if given the chance, could stir up anyone. It would do more than that actually; it would do much more than that.

Dr. Hutchinson went over to his copying machine and began to make copies. He wanted to give Cross two copies, one for himself and one to take directly to Dr. Thiery upon his return to France. They both needed to read this paper. As he stood, he thought about Sally. He thought about her fortunate turn of events. This was going to be a shockwave in her world. If The Cell even considered speaking to or interviewing her, then how would he tell her? How would he tell Sally that all this was going on right under her nose?

As he thought more upon this, the Spirit calmed him. He felt the calm as he reminded himself that if Sally did indeed end up in The Cell, then it was God's making, not his own; therefore, it became God's

responsibility to ease everything over; it became God's responsibility to help this nineteen-year-old girl understand that this was His will for her life.

The copying was done, and he put the copies together in a folder, placing the folder near his carry-on luggage. He took a look at his watch; it was 11:30 a.m. He needed to be at the airport by about 3:30 p.m. and he had yet to pack. He glanced back at the folder one more time; it somehow stayed connected to him. He silenced his mind, mostly in an effort to break himself away, and once he had done so, he entered into his bedroom and began to gather his things.

It was 7:51 Washington D.C. time, and Cross and Emillie were already booked into their suites at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel. The hotel was exquisite, a perfect blend for the businessperson who depended on luxury and accommodation. Tom would be arriving shortly, and would be staying in one of the suites down the hall. Cross made his way to his briefcase and started unpacking; he wanted to prepare his notes for tomorrow's meeting.

Friday would be the Summit meeting. There, the diplomats, both foreign and domestic, would gather to hear The Cell's progress as well as America's expectations for the coming year. After this forum, the diplomats would have permission to ask questions or to formulate proposals according to what they deemed important. Cross's job was to break down the progress The Cell had made with regard to America the previous year as well as to share The Cell's collective thinking with regard to where they believed America was heading in the coming year. It was almost a showboat opportunity for The Cell to congressionally brag about their progress; these meetings usually went off without a hitch.

Saturday would then be reserved for question-and-answer sessions. This was usually a time for diplomats to contribute more personally to the cause, or more accurately, for them to contribute more personally to their own causes regarding The Cell. During this time a

lot of foreign diplomats would vie for jockeying rights for their own countries, but these attempts would always prove futile owing to The Cell's strict adherence to neutrality. This private conference session, as well as the initial Summit meeting, would be held in the Cannon House Office Building, The Caucus Room, on Capitol Hill. After the question-and-answer session on Saturday would come a reception Saturday night. This reception would be held in the elegant Grand Ballroom of the Mandarin Oriental Hotel. The reception would then conclude the Summit meeting's events for the weekend.

Cross is fervently jotting some notes on a folder that he has by his desk. He then picks up the phone and dials Emillie's number.

"Hello."

"Emillie, it's Cross." He holds the phone closer to his ear and brushes aside his door almost in an attempt to feel if anyone is around. "When Tom Hutchinson calls tell him I can't see him tonight, that I will speak to him after the Summit meeting tomorrow."

There is a pause on the line before Emillie speaks again. "Certainly, sir, when he arrives I will let him know."

"Thank you, Emillie." Cross motions to hang up the phone.

"Sir," Emillie remarks, making very sure to check herself, "Is there anything else, sir?"

"No, Emillie, that will be all, I'll see you tomorrow morning. Good night."

Cross hangs up the phone. He then grabs a glass of water and drinks it all. Emillie is still holding the phone. She doesn't know what to think. Cross and Tom are best friends. This certainly is a rude welcome for a friend you haven't seen in over a year. She wonders what she'll tell Tom when he calls from the lobby. She sets the phone down.

The water is gone, but Cross is still holding the glass, he sits down and puts his hand behind his neck as he lies back. He begins to convulse in his spirit; it's really unavoidable at this point, but there isn't any energy to let out his internal frustrations. He doesn't want to let go needlessly, but he also doesn't want to

hold on to these kinds of thoughts either. It's torturous to have this kind of pressure; it's torturous to have the answers and to have to ask so many questions. He'd rather have one question with one answer than a thousand questions with a thousand answers. He wanted to see Tom, but he didn't want to see him like this. He was a wreck, and Tom would read it all over him. He would see Tom after the Summit meeting, after a bit of the pressure wore off. Tonight would be for sleep. He set his alarm for 2:30 a.m.; he would ready himself in the morning. He tucked himself in and turned off the light.

Tom's plane arrived at 8:19, a bit ahead of schedule. There was a driver waiting for him at the gate, a portly African-American gentleman with instructions from The Cell. He took Tom's luggage, and they both headed toward the entrance of the gate.

As the car drove off, Tom looked around and made himself familiar with the sights and sounds of Washington. He had spent a great deal of time here while he was a diplomat. Washington, D.C. was a unique place, having traveled all over the world, he knew these sounds the best, and they uniquely called his name. After a scenic drive the car pulled up to the Mandarin Oriental Hotel. Tom stepped out and looked around; the air was just fantastic, alive and busy with intention. He thanked the gentleman for the ride, and exited the car, taking his own luggage with him.

The walls of the hotel draped themselves with Mediterranean décor. The chiseled and broken marble allowed the atmosphere both to shine and to invite. The decorative waterfalls and tapestries caught the eye while the room's skywide ceiling and superlative arch-dome glimmered. The atmosphere was breathtaking. His hard footsteps sounded his arrival as he neared the front desk. A receptionist with a warm smile greeted him.

"May I help you, sir?"

"Yes. My name is Dr. Tom Hutchinson, and I believe I have a room reserved."

"One moment, please." The receptionist checked her computer and scrolled down. She stopped scrolling and picked up the phone.

"Yes," the receptionist speaks directly into the phone, "a Dr. Tom Hutchinson is ready to check in." There is a pause. "Okay, I'll let him know. Thank you." She hangs up the telephone.

"Dr. Hutchinson, Mrs. Emillie Victorica is going to come down to escort you to your room personally; here are your two keys." She hands him his keys. "Will you be needing someone to show you around your hotel suite?"

"No, that will be fine." Tom takes the keys and places one into his wallet and the other into his pocket. He turns around and waits for Emillie to come down. After about five minutes, he sees her approaching. They embrace.

"Emillie, you look great."

"Oh, not so bad for an old woman." Emillie retorts pulling herself away to look at Tom.

Emillie wasn't old at all, Tom thought, just matured and now wise owing to the seriousness of her work. Emillie speaks again. "How was the flight, Tom? Everything okay?"

"Great," he replied. "Emillie, where's Cross?"

"I believe he's turned in for the night." Emillie states this directly, making the situation seem less odd.

"Oh really, all ready?" Tom asks. They walk toward the elevator and enter.

"Yes," Emillie affirms. She pushes the eighth-floor button and the elevator begins to move. There is a mild silence as the elevator moves upward, before it reaches the eighth floor, Emillie speaks again.

"Don't busy yourself with anything tonight, Tom. Just get a good night's sleep and you'll speak with Cross tomorrow." It sounded almost like a command, Tom thought rationally. The elevator doors opened, and Emillie stepped out motioning for Tom to follow her. Tom was a bit discontent at this point. He knew that Cross had the Summit meeting tomorrow, but these Summit meetings were usually quite ordinary. In the past, he and Cross had spent many such nights staying up late even carousing around town under the exact same circumstances, and even

with important meetings to boot. Cross's turning in early and not welcoming him was either weird or just downright rude. He wanted to say something, but he knew this would be a direct insult to Emillie. He felt such bickering would be out of his character. He opened his door, and Emillie handed him a card.

"Here is your itinerary, Tom; it has all your stops and appointments. I took the liberty of scheduling dinner for the two of you tomorrow evening at a restaurant here in the hotel, the CityZen. You will have plenty of time to catch up tomorrow evening after the Summit." She smiled at him, encouraging him, "Tom, it is great seeing you." She pats him on the side as she gives him a kiss on the cheek. "I look forward to having a nice chat with you sometime before the weekend's end, okay."

"Certainly, Emillie, good night. I will see you in the morning."

"Good night, Tom." Emillie turns around and walks away. Tom watches her as she disappears around the hallway, her perfume still hanging in the air. He grabs his luggage and steps into his suite, a diplomat suite to be exact. He sets all his luggage down. He is still bothered by the fact that Cross did not welcome him personally. He felt it very awkward, yet, at the same time, he sensed that he shouldn't fret over it. He had a pleasant desire to talk with Cross tonight about Sally, but by the way everything was handled, he could tell that it just wasn't meant to be. He decided to wake up tomorrow morning and run through his itinerary. He would certainly see Cross soon enough. He took out his toothbrush and nightgear and headed into the bathroom. He shut the door and made ready for bed.

Chapter 11

The Summit meeting was underway. Diplomatic representatives from Hungary, the Czech Republic, the U.K. and Canada were all present and in attendance. The primary speaker for America, Dr. Carl Rehinsheart, directed his questions, torpedoing them toward America's goal of unity not oversight. These questions struck at the heart of what The Cell and America were jointly trying to do with regard to America's overall reputation.

"Yes, Mr. Lutherant," Dr. Rehinsheart said, "but what does that have to do with the matter at hand; strictly, how does The Cell intend to persuade the NATO members, including the Partnership for Peace countries, that America is not acting as the world police, but simply justifying itself as its conscience?"

Cross waited for Dr. Rehinsheart to finish. He had heard it all before. Dr. Rehinsheart continued. "We need the nations to know that America doesn't intend, nor do we desire to have rule over any of the other nations, but that we will hold other nations accountable for injustices against humanity."

There is a small roar from the diplomats seated behind him. Many clap to support their congressional leader and speaker. Cross looks up and sees Tom seated squarely behind the diplomats. Tom gives Cross a nod in greeting.

"Dr. Rehinsheart," Cross responds, "The Cell does indeed understand America's dilemma. We are intending to refocus our efforts in order to stabilize the reputation of America as a whole. When NATO members or PFP members come to The Cell to seek direction, it is always foremost on our mind to assure them that any American participation or involvement will not strictly be unilateral in its desire to remedy any situation." He pauses to assure the committee as a whole. "I need you to understand that The Cell, in focusing on the needs of one, focuses on the needs of all. We don't make decisions for one country just to create unbalance for

the others; everything is balanced according to the prospective and foregoing consequences."

Dr. Rehinsheart still isn't satisfied. "So how can we be sure that America's reputation, especially with regard to foreign relations, is foremost on The Cell's agenda?" Dr. Rehinsheart sits down.

Cross looks at Tom again and then immediately back toward Dr. Rehinsheart before he speaks. "America has always been a heightened participant with regard to The Cell and its overall purposes toward humanity. No other nation has typified the kind of allegiance and sworn duty when it comes to interceding for the other nations. Whether it be through monies, charities, goods and services, weaponry, or even American lives, America has consistently proved itself diligent and loyal all across the globe. We at The Cell have repeatedly backed America, as well as the many decisions America has made regarding its neighboring countries.

"At times, we have advised America according to our intelligence, especially with regard to a certain course of action, and America has usually complied. In short," Cross continues, "America has thoroughly proved itself decisive with regard to its consistency and integrity in the past, and the only thing that will speak of that now will be its continued support and allegiance to The Cell's efforts today." Cross stares at Dr. Rehinsheart, who looks down and shuffles his notes. It was poetry really, Tom thought, Cross didn't even have to be that good in order to defend The Cell, but he was that good. A light went on signaling that it was time for a break. The meeting was adjourned until one o'clock.

Cross walked straight to Tom who was still stirred by the excitement of the previous minutes.

"You're looking rather well, Tom." He grabbed Tom's right elbow and shook his hand aggressively yet honorably.

"And you're as compelling as ever, Cross." He motions over toward Dr. Rehinsheart. "I wouldn't want to be on your short list!"

Cross smirks, "That wasn't planned, more instinctual if anything really, besides," he turns to briefly look in Dr. Rehinsheart's way, "he's a jerk."

"He is," Tom affirms.

They stare at each other for a moment; no words were really necessary. Tom finally unloads the heaviness, "I'm looking forward to dinner tonight; we have a lot we need to talk about."

"Do we?" Cross hints playfully.

"Yes, we do."

Cross nods his head monotonously, and as he does, he takes an overview of the room at large. Tom senses Cross's spirit.

"But we'll get to all that later." Tom pats Cross on the back and begins to walk away. Cross stops Tom and turns in his direction.

"Tom, I know it's important." Tom is surprised. "We'll talk tonight, I promise." Tom nods his head in quiet respect and walks away. Cross goes back to the main platform and quietly sits down.

Tom is sitting in his hotel room. He decided to leave the meeting halfway through in order to fully prepare for tonight's conversation with Cross. His earlier itinerary spoke of few appointments. His job was a simple one actually, crowd control, smoothing things over to avoid any potential hazards or stumbling blocks. Although he was not directly linked to The Cell with regard to their formal decisions, his name was greatly respected in association with The Cell's activities. Many times, diplomats, even foreign leaders, would be comforted by hearing just a few words coming from Tom's mouth. Tom Hutchinson's voice meant something, and it wasn't always political red tape or even signatures on documents that were important to these foreign diplomats; sometimes what became important was simply the right words from the right man, and many times Tom Hutchinson became that man.

Tom enjoyed this service; he could continue to help people and comfort them, and he also got to see the results directly. At the end of the day, it was a good deal; he was almost like The Cell's informal retired spokesman. As he turned over these thoughts, he grabbed Sally's file from the dresser.

This file had all of Sally's information; government data, school records, special testing results, medical history, personal history. This was just in case Cross and The Cell wanted to go further with Sally. Tom thought about Cross. He thought about his demeanor during the day, about his attitude and even his introspective rancor. Cross was acting differently from normal, but there was something else today, something lingering within. Tom started thinking more deeply, and as he did, he braced himself for his conclusion: Cross was scared. That was it, Cross was spooked.

He thought about the way he snapped at Dr. Rehinsheart. This was not like Cross; Cross rarely snapped, especially in political arenas. There must be a reason for this. Also last night, Cross would not see him; this was very odd, even awkward. And today, when he saw Cross at the Summit, Cross was almost standoffish, even protective to the point of being scared. He then remembered when he had the O-PECK conversation with Cross regarding Mark's replacement; he remembered that Cross wasn't keen on Dr. Thiery's vision, even admitting it. Maybe this was the source of his uncertainty.

Tom thought about all this further. Quite possibly, Cross now saw himself face to face with a potential problem, and he was simply trying to avoid too much conversation or contact with that potential problem. Maybe Cross even believed that by avoiding the problem he could control or suppress it. One thing was certain: this situation was delicate.

Tom then thought about the spiritual implications or uncertainties. He could now see why he didn't meet with Cross last night: he might have met Cross with the wrong spirit, and in doing so, might have challenged the entire situation; and Cross, being vulnerable, might have snapped at his approach. He could now see why things were stalled in general. Dr. Hutchinson himself needed to understand the full importance of the conversation that would take place regarding Sally, and how the conversation needed to be administered mercifully, considering Cross's fears and vulnerability.

This is why the Lord stopped the conversation last night; introducing Sally's paper would have been a

perpetual pie in Cross's face, and although he couldn't see it at the time, because of his zeal for Sally's paper, it might have broken Cross and destroyed the work the Lord was trying to accomplish. The paper would need to be introduced delicately to Cross. God knew this all along, so He stalled everything for the right opportunity, the opportunity that would obviously come tonight. He got down on his knees and prayed for guidance and submission; he wanted the Mind of the Lord, he wanted the Mind of the Lord for the conversation he would have with Cross tonight.

The CityZen restaurant was packed on this arcane Friday evening. The restaurant was a spectacle. Its high ceilings and earth, wind, and fire rotations made the tone of the room leap out and dance before you. The restaurant's bar was artistic and exquisite, boasting a thirty-foot backdrop of dense flames enticing all the patrons. As Tom walked by the bar, he noticed its large selection of single-malt whiskies and rare cognacs. The pale-wood tables were smooth, all adorningly back-dropped with robust burgundy cylinderlike pillows. The room was a bungalow meant for a king; embellished with ornaments and illuminated with fixtures and candles throughout. Tom noticed that Cross was seated squarely in the middle of the room. He walked toward him. Cross rose, and they embraced.

"Fancy place," Tom offered.

"Yeah," Cross mentioned in a quieter tone, "I heard the food was good here."

"Good, I'm starved."

They both sit down. Tom tries to relax as he takes a look around, soaking up some of the environment and noticing its patrons.

"What's in the file?" Cross asks as he points to what Tom is holding.

"It's nothing for now." Tom offers, "Let's enjoy the evening, and we'll get to that later."

"Fine," Cross relents as he leans back. Tom noticed that Cross didn't really want to drop it. The waitress comes over and sets down two drinks.

"These are on the house, gentlemen, please enjoy!" She smiles politely. "I'll be back to take your orders in about fifteen minutes, okay?" She nods as she walks away.

"Looks like whiskey," Tom guesses, as he picks his up.

"Probably the best they've got." Cross lifts up his glass and makes a small toast. "To two old buddies just trying to make their way." Tom repeats the toast. "To two old buddies just trying to make their way." With the chime of their glasses, the whiskey goes down, smooth.

Dinner plates cover the table. The essence of the quality of their dinner, seafood and meat, lavish the surface. Tom began with Clams Casina and finished with Nova Scotia lobster. Cross had the lobster bisque to start and then finished with the 16-ounce filet mignon.

"So, Tom, what is in that file anyway?" Cross pointed over to the file and tapped it twice.

"This, Cross, is what we need to discuss tonight."

Cross straightened himself up and then focused as he made himself ready.

"Cross, The Cell came to me, before we go on, I need you to understand this."

Cross interrupts, "Yes, Tom, we did come to you; that is not even an issue." He wipes his forehead in light frustration.

Tom then interrupts, "But I need you to understand the severity of this truth, because what I am about to say right now is going to border on that severity."

"Understood." Cross then leans back and turns Tom's way more abruptly.

"When The Cell first came to me, I was overwhelmed with the prospect of helping you find a replacement for Mark. As far as I was concerned, my job would be to intercede and at most pray for a replacement, but as far as actually finding the replacement, I was a bit taken back by this."

Cross simply listens as Tom continues. "I then clearly saw that you were indeed seeking my recommendation, my recommendation for his replacement. I then recommended Dr. Etienne Beauvais and Bodhi Dalry." Cross nods his head. "As it was, these two were not fit for the vacant seat, due mostly to the fact that Dr. Thierry had a specific vision regarding Mark's replacement, a vision that you withheld from me until our second conversation." Cross nods his head again, fully aware of the statement's truthfulness. "So this left me with the perspective of a man who knew what The Cell was after, but, for all intents and purposes, was powerless to do anything about it."

"Powerless how?" Cross reasons.

"Please, Cross." Tom takes some authority, authority due to a man who has struggled over half a lifetime with regard to The Cell. "How difficult is it to find an adequate replacement for a Cell Primary Member seat, let alone a Primary Member who can agitate and then take on the brunt of that agitation? Quite frankly, I not only doubted whether I would be able to find a replacement, but whether a replacement could ever be found at all."

"And now?" Cross challenges, trying to press Tom to the point.

"Now?" Tom opens up, but trying not to challenge back. "Now?" Tom again pauses, trying to find the right words. "Now, Cross, all I can say is that you and everyone else involved in The Cell need to get ready."

"For what?" Cross says it in a challenging tone; he was being a bit difficult.

Tom then holds up the file in surrender and in faith. "Let's just say I found your man, or should I say, your woman."

Cross's eyes get about as big as his dinner plate. "What!"

Tom is taken aback by Cross's reaction. He asks for the Lord's strength, and it comes.

"I'm not going to argue with you Cross, The Cell came to me, to me, and asked me to recommend a replacement." Cross just looks at Tom, waiting to hear what he has to say. Tom picks up both the file and the

folder and then distinctly bounces them in front of Cross, pointing at them directly.

"There's my recommendation for Mark's replacement."

Cross didn't say anything at first; he just looked at the file. He fingers the file nonchalantly but does not bother to open it.

"The file contains her personal history; I thought you might like to read up on her after ..."

Cross interrupts, "After what, Tom?"

Tom holds himself back, even with prayer his spirit can suffer only so much. He swallows and speaks again. "After you read what's inside the folder." Tom forces a smile in a polite though demanding way.

Cross dismisses her file and picks up the folder instead. He opens it up and glances at the first page. "What's this, a thesis?"

"It's a paper. A paper she wrote, and it's a paper I need you to read." Cross looks up. "This is all I'm asking from you." Tom makes it even clearer. "I'm making this easy for all of us, Cross, you, me, The Cell. Read the paper, if you don't think it's good or if you're not impressed with its content, then toss it, and I'll accept your decision, no interviews and no discussions."

Cross looks down at the paper. "So if the paper's no good, we don't even have to look at her?"

"You got it. If you're not impressed with the paper, then she's out."

Cross gets a bit curious. "Who is she, Tom?"

Tom kind of swallows again, not wanting to answer the question. He then says sheepishly, "She's my student."

"She's your student!" Cross says it loudly, and a few of the patrons turn and glance at their table.

Tom hushes him with his hand. "Yes, Cross, she's my student." He says it as if he himself can't believe it. He then continues reasonably. "But please, just consider the paper; whether or not she's my student should have nothing to do with it. If the paper's good, then it's good; and if it's not, then it's not."

Cross hasn't taken his eyes off Tom. He takes a deep breath and exhales distinctly in the folders

direction. He then adds, "There are no women Primary members, Tom, nor have there ever been."

"I know," Tom concedes.

"And now you think it will be that easy, to just throw one in there?" Cross unleashes this sarcastically.

Tom meets Cross's concerns directly. "Honestly, Cross, the way I see it," he then settles himself within his faith and within all the spiritual confidence that has gotten him thus far, "you've got no choice. You guys are the ones who want an agitator, and I'm telling you, Cross," he points to the folder for a third time, "this one's got agitation written all over her."

"How so?" Cross asks, a bit with his lips but a lot with his eyes.

Tom meets him. "Read the paper, Cross, and it will become very clear for you." Tom leans back settled, and Cross taps the folder with his fingers before speaking. "Tom, I trust you as a friend and as a compatriot." He says this without any sarcasm, but with the truth and acknowledgment of a professional. "I'll read the paper tomorrow, and I do promise you, Tom, you'll get exactly what I see."

"That's all I ask, Cross." Tom returns with a smile.

The candles located directly next to the two of them lowered as the lights shinning off in the distance became dim. Washington was preparing to sleep; even the moment itself seemed to be slipping away into eternity.

The keystrokes echoing off Henryk's keyboard were both fast paced and accurate. Henryk's claim to fame, with regard to The Cell anyway, was that he was a programmer; a computer code genius offering The Cell an unusual talent often reserved for only the hierarchy of the computer industry. Henryk was offered a Primary position due to his unbelievable gift for discerning and then radically defining a sequence of events.

As a Candidate, Henryk could take any situation, usually confrontational in nature, and then draw an incredibly accurate outline regarding the importance of

one occurrence with regard to the sequence of the next, and so on. As a Candidate, his outlines were so useful to The Cell's Primary Members that he was eventually promoted to a Primary candidacy, which he then received. His outlines would eventually prove to be quintessential road maps, even treasure maps, for the rest of The Cell to follow and work through. Henryk was a unique addition to The Cell, an addition that Dr. Thiery and Dante were graciously thankful for.

"Are you still fiddling with that code, Henryk? Isn't it time for our review and analysis of the Horesburg Trials?"

Henryk, not looking up from his computer screen, shouted out, "Work, work, work. This is more entertaining anyway." Henryk then looked up to offer Dante a glimpse of his misplaced enthusiasm. "This will actually be the third game I have completed since I have been imprisoned here at this prestigious and even paranormal compound." Henryk says the latter part in an offbeat and auspicious manner.

Dante, knowing Henryk is challenging, rebuts, "You can leave any time you would like, Henryk. I hear the hockey is pretty good in Poland right now; it might do you some good."

"Rubbish," Henryk barks as he makes his few final taps on his keyboard and then closes the lid. "I'll make another two million dollars for this game as well, and I'll buy more than just a hockey team." Dante looks up, patiently waiting for Henryk's final response. Henryk smirks, "I'll buy a formula-one racing car, too."

"Okay, Henryk."

Dante knew that many of The Cell members, including some of the Candidates, continued to perform some of the same jobs and tasks they performed while in the outside world. Henryk wasn't joking; he had successfully architected three titles, two for consoles and one for the PC. The code could of course be ported, but Henryk took great pride in having a vision, and then creating a code, for either one or the other. Henryk grabbed a folder and dropped it in front of Dante as he made his way out.

"I couldn't sleep last night, so I went over the trials myself." He continued to walk away after he dropped the folder. "Let me know what you think; I'll be in my study." Henryk opened the door and left Dante to himself.

Dante opened the folder and began reading the trials. He saw Henryk's outline and set it aside; it wouldn't do him much good to read the outline without first introducing himself to the circumstances surrounding the trials. Henryk was a weird one, Dante thought, a genius, but very weird. As Dante thoroughly lost himself in the paper, he began to notice a pattern; there was a distinct pattern in sequence, even before the trials began, consistently, one after one, here, and here again, and here again. Yes, Dante thought to himself, yes, he could see a distinct pattern forming. He continued reading, trying to impress upon himself any and all aspects of the truth.

Whereas Henryk's strength was simply to conceive an outline, Dante's strength, besides his unusual consistency, was his blunt use of oversight and perspective. Blunt because his oversight possessed authority and strength because he was usually right. It was almost as if Dante had a gift to see things from an outer-space perspective. He could see a situation and effortlessly give you the bird's eye view of clarity and distinction. He had perspective, and because he had oversight, he had clarity.

But there was more with regard to Dante. The other Cell members greatly respected Dante because of his regal gifts as well as his humility. He had the type of personality where he could do something incredibly genius and then somehow make you feel as if you had done it, too. He wasn't a headline grabber; he, of course, wanted to get work done, but he always made sure he was genuine and humble regarding his methods.

The other Cell members felt comfortable around Dante, safe and at ease to work with him. He was probably the most gifted of The Cell members, hand picked by Dr. Thiery personally. He was also the obvious successor to Dr. Thiery, not in writing, of course, but anyone who had eyes could see it. He possessed

administrative gifts as well as the ability to intellectually compete with any of the issues that made their way into The Cell's walls, and he also had authority; authority to put his foot down at the right times and in the right situations, making sure to always keep the peace.

"That's it," Dante shouted. He didn't say it loudly, just with clarity and assuredly. This was his confident affirmation; he believed he had seen the problem. He wasn't even half way done with the trials. Dante would usually never disrespect any situation by not thoroughly reading all the way through the course of events, but since he had Henryk's outline handy, he felt inclined to challenge his assumptions already. It was affirmative. Henryk's outline just so happened to run parallel with his assumptions. What he had seen Henryk had also clearly seen. That must have been why Henryk simply slapped down the folder so blatantly and then left the room, Dante thought. This issue wasn't delicate; it was literal, a no brainer.

He continued to read, though. His notes would have to be precise and accurate with regard to all aspects of the trials, so he needed to finish. It was uncommon for a situation such as this one to make it all the way to the Primary Members. Usually obvious answers such as these are taken care of on the second level; the Candidates have the authority to distinctly challenge any situation they feel they clearly understand. The Candidates should have gotten this one, Dante thought to himself. After he and Henryk would presumably make their successful presentation regarding this analysis to Dr. Thiery, Dante made up his mind that he would personally go down to the second level and speak with the Candidates responsible for these trials.

He desired to help them, merely try and encourage them to evaluate better, so that they would learn to become more effective Candidates. This was precisely why Dante was so well liked; in doing this, the Candidates would learn a valuable lesson and everybody would be the better for it. Dante was the type of guy who would go downstairs and help in the kitchen and then afterwards sit down with all the cooks and have dinner. No level

was too low, and no task too menial for him to include himself in. As he read, he continued to align himself with Henryk's outline, making the proper notes. He would worry about a second write and editing when he got back to his room. Tonight, the final analysis regarding the Horesburg Trials would be ready for Dr. Thiery's eyes.

It's Saturday afternoon in Washington, D.C., and The Caucus Room is filled to capacity. Yesterday's proceedings went off without a hitch, but this was the time for delegate and diplomat smooth talk, and Dr. Hutchinson would be of great use to The Cell at today's proceedings.

Cross had actually done a great job downplaying issues of hostility, brutality, secularism, unaccountability, as well as varied neutrality at yesterday's Summit. America knew they were at the receiving end of many of the other countries' criticism, and Cross simply dispelled many of those countries' reasons for concern. The primary speaker for America, Dr. Carl Rehinsheart, had actually approached Cross after the Summit meeting and assured him that America would continue to support The Cell's efforts, believing that The Cell's desire for neutrality and peacekeeping was established and understood. Dr. Rehinsheart also agreed to honor, and even amend if need be, all the previous arrangements America had made with regard to The Cell for the upcoming year. This pleased Cross because this gesture was the exact assurance Dr. Thiery was looking for.

As Tom continued to speak with delegate after delegate, diplomat after diplomat, he thought upon the overbearing issue that clouded his mind: Sally and the paper. He understood there was not much he could do at the present time; the ball was not in his court anymore, but still, the issue continued to press him. As two delegates conversed directly in front of him, he heard a familiar and humble tone behind him.

"Who is she, Tom?"

Cross's tone of voice caught his attention, almost as if a siren had just gone off. He glanced slowly.

Cross asked plainly again. "Tom, who is she?" His voice was more surrendered this time, and Tom turned around to address him. Cross himself was standing soundly, but Tom noticed that his spirit had changed since last night.

"Did you read the file?" Tom questioned.

Cross turned his head, trying to hold in his frustration, "A nineteen year old girl whose favorite morning snack is muffins and likes to workout at the gym?" He stares plainly into Tom's eyes, then adds a little more cynicism, "preferably the Stair-Master."

Tom smiles. Cross always did have a healthy sense of humor.

"I'm not joking, Tom." Cross's impatience is becoming apparent. "Who is she?"

A few of the diplomats turn around, trying to understand the fuss. Tom notices and quickly escorts Cross to the lounge area.

"Cross," Tom begins, "I want to clarify so please understand this and try to relax."

"I'll relax when I understand, Tom," Cross adds in a serious tone.

"Very well," Tom submits. "You know she is my student."

Cross interrupts quickly, "That's what the file says, but who is she? What nineteen year old college student could write that?"

"Cross ...," Tom tries to settle him down with a gentle hand brush, but Cross continues with another excitable remark. "Tom, please, for the Love of God, help me understand all this."

Tom took a moment. He knew the pressure was mounting on Cross, but according to what Dr. Thiery wanted in Mark's replacement, something like Sally was bound to happen, and Cross needed to accept this.

"Cross," Tom said in a manner firm of loyal friendship, "let me ask you a question. What if Dr. Etienne Beauvais had written that paper, what then?"

Cross didn't say anything, so Tom added in a realistic tone, "You would have to accept it, because the

paper is true and would be saying the same thing. The paper's truth is what's overwhelming, Cross; it really doesn't matter how it got here."

Tom's last statement hit Cross, and he eased up, but still desired answers. Cross then fired back, "Okay, Tom, I did read the paper, and I am shocked, but I'm not about to recommend Dr. Etienne Beauvais to The Cell, I'm about to recommend ... this Sally person." He says the last part in an unnerving way.

Tom stopped himself for a moment. He looked on Cross with astonishment. "You are actually going to recommend Sally?"

Cross couldn't hold himself back. He shouts, "What can I do, Tom? The paper is striking, and I just can't walk away from this!"

Tom takes a moment, realizing that Cross's frustration is valid, so he relaxes himself further in an effort to stabilize their emotions. "Cross, there is not much I can say with regard to Sally; you yourself understand the Lord's reasoning and justification." Cross moves in his spirit, understanding, but still hesitant. Tom continues, "This is the applicant, Cross, and the paper, just as you very well know, proves this."

Cross took a moment, mostly because he had nothing to say. He finally brought about a simple confession. "Tom, I believe in what I read, but I am just shaky about introducing to Dr. Thiery someone I don't even yet understand."

"It's not your job to understand, Cross." Tom ushers this, without skipping a beat; he then concludes, "Just to move forward with what you have." Tom's words were accurate. Cross took their meaning and backed off.

Tom saw that Cross had relented, so he continued to press the issue. "If you did happen to recommend her Cross, how would you do it?"

Cross visualizes what he needs to say, but then looks into the eyes of his trusted friend. "Besides my apparent apprehension, that is what I am here to talk to you about." He eyes Tom again, allowing Tom to fully see his hesitation; he then continues. "It's three o'clock right now. I'm supposed to call Dr. Thiery at five o'clock, to let him know how the Summit went."

Tom follows Cross's every word.

Cross then continues. "I have already decided to tell him about Sally tonight, and to fax him the paper right after our conversation." Cross then peers at Tom deeply, anxious to get the responsibility of this decision off his back. "Dr. Thiery needs to read this for himself, and then become the decision maker."

Tom stares dumbfounded. He can't believe how quickly everything was moving along. He believed in Sally, he really did, but he never thought all this would happen so quickly and effortlessly. Cross then continued, aligning himself with Tom's mesmerizing stare. "The Reception starts tonight at 7:00 p.m. I will make sure to be there before 8:30 p.m. because that's when I have to give my speech, but I will try and wait for a response from Dr. Thiery."

"So you'll know tonight?" Tom questions cautiously.

"Presumably," Cross adds, "I'm going to fax the paper, he'll probably read it immediately." He pauses to add emphasis. "But I can't be certain that he'll respond immediately."

Tom listens, trying to weigh every single angle. Cross then continues. "But if he does, it should be before 7:00 or 8:00 p.m., so I should have the answer at the reception."

"How are you going to handle it exactly?" Tom questions. Cross stares back at him. This whole process was difficult on him and has taken its toll; he simply had no more energy for questions right now.

"I thought about that too, Tom," Cross plainly states, with submissive eyes. "I was planning on just giving him the paper; if he said yes, then I would tell him about Sally afterward, and if he said no, then there would be no need." Tom listened, waiting for Cross's justification and reasoning. Cross then continued. "But then I understood that I didn't want him to say yes and then have to explain everything to him, this would be testing the matter, or actually dealing with it immaturely." Cross continued, confident yet fully surrendered. "I did not create this situation, Tom, so I have no reason to defend it. I will tell him everything, and what he decides, he decides."

What Cross said made sense. The matter was solid. Tom then thought to himself. Even if Sally was denied entrance into The Cell, then everything was still airtight; it was just an airtight no.

"Thank you, Cross. I know this isn't easy for you."

"It's not," Cross exclaims, "but it's my job, and I need to start acting more like a professional." Tom smiles inwardly, knowing it's not easy to represent humility when dealing with your accountable profession. "I need to quit trying to be The Cell's everything and just let matters represent themselves." Cross stops for a moment, looking at Tom with the same eyes that looked upon him forty years earlier. "I need to let go, Tom, and to trust, because I can't control something that's more important and bigger than I am, and right now I think The Cell and the changes it's going through are really bigger than any one of us."

Words had never been spoken so true. Cross was obviously humbled, and there was a certain surrender in his voice, a surrender that no doubt Sally's paper had much to do with. He continued looking at Tom, not trying to understand the situation but trying to allow the situation to help him understand. He had one more voice within him.

"Tom," he said slowly but with certainty, "I don't know who this girl is, and I don't know where she comes from, but I only pray she learns to harness whatever it is she's holding." Cross was very serious, and Tom understood; actually, such words flowed freely when it came to matters surrounding Sally. Cross then continued, cautiously, "Tom, just a bit of advice."

"Certainly." Tom pepped up in his spirit; he could fully diagnose the guidance of the Holy Spirit as well as a man's struggle within it. Right now, Cross was in a humbled position, and was ripe to be used of the Lord. Cross spoke assertively, "This girl is your student, correct?"

Tom just nods his head, not daring to utter a word. Cross continues, a fire begins to rise up behind his eyes. "This girl was put under your protection for a reason, Tom; don't be careless or timid regarding that

reason. As a friend, from the outside looking in, I'll tell you this, Tom. Whatever you do, make sure you do it in the full faith and in the testimony of what God has personally done in you."

Tom knew what this meant. This was confirmation of the prayer he had uttered when he heard Sally's second discourse, after he realized her gift wasn't a fluke. God was indeed calling him to oversee Sally's progress; God was calling him to be accountable for her. Regarding the second aspect of Cross's words, about the faith he would need and his personal testimony, he had been wrestling over this issue for a while now.

If Sally was indeed accepted into The Cell, then he would need all the faith of his past and all the strength of the present in order to convince Sally that this was indeed God's will for her life. It would not be easy to convince a girl who was timid and uncertain regarding her gifts that God was calling her to exercise them in front of the most powerful international intelligence agency in the world. Getting Sally to accept this calling would be more of a miracle than getting her accepted into The Cell in the first place, and it seemed as though this burden would fall upon him alone.

Tom then spoke in faith. "Just fax the paper to Dr. Thierry Cross; I'll worry about Sally or anything else with regard to the matter you just spoke of."

Cross nodded his head. There was no competition in his conversation; Cross was afraid for Tom at this point. He offered a few more words just as a friend. "Tom, just two more quick things. I need to see a few people and then I need to head back to the hotel." Tom nodded, eager to hear what Cross had to say, "I am serious about everything I said, Tom. You know this girl, and handling her is not going to be easy. But I need to say this, Tom. I think she is under your guidance for a reason, because if there is anyone in the world that can tame and correct this girl, it's you Tom."

Tom was taken back. He appreciated the words, but he was still surprised, surprised to see how well Cross was bouncing back from the initial shock of Sally. Cross continued, "Tom, I've known you for over forty years, and you were born to minister to a girl like this. You have

a certain spirit about you. A spirit that could speak to a woman in a harsh and realistic way but at the same time still minister to her."

Tom looked on Cross, trying to get the full meaning of everything he was saying. Cross went on, "You're very secure, Tom, and that's what makes your motivations unquestionable. This girl will listen to you and will not be able to lash back at you because you have nothing in you to grab hold of."¹

Tom received Cross's discourse. He understood and appreciated his encouragement, but yet he still doubted his potential effect on Sally. "Don't worry, Tom, if any man can do this, it's you." He said it with an unwavering smile, showing his true character.

Cross might have been a driven and hard man, but he was an honest and fair man. Cross took his hand from Tom's shoulder and quietly walked away. Tom stood there for a moment, trying to allow the impact of the situation to unleash itself from his mind and get closer to his spirit. He didn't want to think too deeply about any of this right now. He believed what Cross had said, but he also knew a hard road lie ahead. But there was one good note on top of all this: this conversation possibly meant that Sally would be accepted into The Cell.

It's 11:05 p.m. in France and Dr. Thiery is studying at his desk. He's working on The Horesburg Trials, the trials that Dante and Henryk completed earlier. He is just now in the process of agreeing with their analysis, but is further studying to familiarize himself with all the relevant issues of the case. But this is not the major reason he is working so late; he is also waiting for Cross's call. The call pertaining to the Summit meeting; he is eager to learn of its events.

As he continues to read, he slowly picks up a wine glass by the stem. As the wine reaches his lips, it motions the stillness of the room. He takes a healthy sip and swishes it briefly in his mouth; he swallows and pours another. He is just about to set the bottle down when the telephone rings.

"Hello."

"Hello, sir, it's Cross." There is a momentary pause. "Are you free right now?" The words are a bit forced.

"Yes, Cross, I've been expecting your call." He takes off his glasses and speaks directly into the phone. "Tell me about two things, Cross; first, are you well rested in America, and secondly, were the Summit events successful?"

Cross holds his head down in a humble state. Dr. Thiery's commenting on his welfare strikes a chord. "Sir, my health is good; thank you for asking. Being in America has done me a bit of good, I think."

"Good, I'm glad to hear it," Dr. Thiery interrupts. "Do you feel you will need some more time there, perhaps staying a bit longer?"

Cross remains silent for a moment, he considers the question. With the constant pressure of The Cell and the new pressure from Sally, he feels that now is the last time for a hiatus; he strengthens himself in order to remind himself of his active administrative role within The Cell. "Sir, I thank you for considering me, and I wish to discuss that at a later time but for now I would like to discuss some very important news, actually pressing news, sir."

Dr. Thiery nods his head, respecting Cross's focus and understanding the other news must be urgent. "Very well, Cross, what is on your mind?"

Cross stands up and walks around his room, allowing the words to flow freely. "Well, sir, first the Summit went off without a hitch, the meeting yesterday as well as the gathering today were both productive and reassuring." Dr. Thiery delights in the news. Cross continues. "Dr. Rehinsheart promised America's continued support for both The Cell as well as for its purposes for the upcoming year."

"Good," Dr. Thiery says abruptly. He says it in a finalizing way, indicating that unless there were other outstanding issues regarding the Summit, then this information was all he needed to hear. Cross gets his point.

"Yes sir, this is indeed good news." Cross vocalizes within his surfaced emotions, but at the heart of Cross's emotions were the issues of Sally and the replacement for The Cell. He moves his focus in order to address these. "Sir, let us move on to more pressing matters."

"What other pressing matters?" Dr. Thiery questions frankly.

There was some indecisiveness in his voice, as if he and Cross were not yet on the same page. Cross tries to resolve this. "Sir, as you know Tom Hutchinson is here in Washington, and he has once again done a terrific job for The Cell."

Dr. Thiery shakes his head as he grabs his red pen again, almost as if he wonders why people feel the need to justify Tom Hutchinson every time they speak regarding him. Dr. Thiery speaks in a calm yet rational manner. "I don't doubt it, Mr. Lutherant." He leans back in his chair and straightens his shoulders back. "Tom Hutchinson has always proven himself useful when situations present themselves."

"Yes sir, he has." Cross pauses again, not knowing exactly how to say it; he is nervous. He then comes out with it. "Dr. Thiery, Tom has found a replacement for Mark Auberon; in fact, I think he's pretty much found the agitator you're looking for." Cross puts his hand on his face; he can't believe what he just said.

There is a pause on the other end of the line. Cross simply waits patiently. Dr. Thiery moves forward in his chair.

"A replacement?" Dr. Thiery answers.

"Yes, sir, a replacement that closely resembles your vision, sir."

There is another pause; both men are settling into the spirit of the conversation. But this is actually difficult for both men. Difficult for Cross because of the intense pressure over the realization that The Cell might eventually become everything he has worked against and never wanted The Cell to be. Difficult for Dr. Thiery because the realization of this vision would eventually lead him into the same challenging predicament in which he found himself nearly twenty-five years

earlier, when he made the incredibly difficult decision to dismiss Tom Hutchinson from The Cell. Both men waited a bit longer. Cross then spoke again.

"Sir, I assure you that I would not have spoken tonight, regarding this situation, unless I felt it was duly urgent and in appropriate taste." Dr. Thiery still said nothing, but Cross knew that Dr. Thiery's silence was not a bad thing, just sometimes the way he worked things out. "No one knows what lies ahead, sir, but I believe we need to go forward on this immediately."

Dr. Thiery again remained quiet. Although he was the one who originally formulated the vision regarding Mark's replacement and although he was desirous to see The Cell undergo the changes he believed needed to occur, the prospect of the replacement now potentially existing somewhere rather than inside his head was impacting him. Dr. Thiery considered the matter again: This recommendation from Tom Hutchinson wasn't like the recommendation he made for Bodhi or Dr. Beauvais. When Tom made those recommendations, he hadn't been told regarding the vision, and for this reason, neither candidate was taken very seriously.

But now, now this recommendation was altogether different. Tom Hutchinson was now recommending a replacement fully knowing and understanding the entirety of the vision. And even more difficult for Dr. Thiery to accept, Tom wasn't the kind of man who would just shout out a name if need be. If Tom was indeed recommending someone for Mark's replacement, and doing it within the full construct of the vision, then he undeniably believed that this person would fit the overall criteria regarding the vision, or else he would not make the recommendation at all. Dr. Thiery took a deep breath and allowed the words to find their way to the surface.

"This is good news, Cross." His words were a bit forced but genuine, as if somewhere in his spirit he was accepting that this is what he needed to hear but was still having trouble hearing it. "Have you met the gentleman? Do we know him?"

Cross is really starting to pace now; he doesn't know how to answer Dr. Thiery's question so he meets him

halfway. "Sir, I have not met the potential replacement yet, but sir, I am holding in my hand a paper that this person wrote." Dr. Thiery's eyes spark up a bit. "A paper which greatly influenced me to agree with Tom's recommendation as well as call you regarding that recommendation."

"A paper?"

"Yes, sir, a paper." This time Cross says it with authority and precedence, and again, "a paper I believe you should read for yourself, as soon as possible, sir."

Dr. Thiery inquires realistically, "He doesn't know about The Cell, does he?"

Again Cross holds his tongue. "No sir, this person doesn't ..." Dr. Thiery cuts off Cross in mid-sentence. "Mr. Lutherant, why do you insist on referring to this person as 'this person'?"

Cross pauses, almost rebuking himself for trying to manipulate his words with probably one of the most brilliant people on the face of the earth. Cross finally finds himself and speaks humbly and freely. "Sir, I am holding in my hand a paper that you need to read, regardless of anything said beyond this point, please assure me, sir, that you'll both consider reading this paper as well as take this recommendation seriously."

Dr. Thiery holds himself back for a moment. He then speaks plainly. "Cross, it seems to me that you might be sold on 'this person' already." He doesn't say these words disrespectfully, but there is a twinge of aggression in his voice. "Mr. Lutherant, to what do I owe this honor, that you would now be backing a potential recommendation who might actually end up striking against the very core of everything you have worked for, not to mention the fact that this vision is something you have been fearing for quite some time?"

Cross fully understood Dr. Thiery's reasoning, but he actually had it reversed. "Sir, I know your desire to see this vision happen; I am not backing this person for my sake, sir, but for yours."

"For mine?" Dr. Thiery questions.

"Yes, sir, I'm backing her for your benefit. I have read this paper, sir, and everything in me says that there is something here, something very important, but

there is an obstacle sir, and one I pray you don't focus on lest you lose sight of what you sought to gain."

Dr. Thiery states in a very direct manner, "You said 'her,' Mr. Lutherant."

Cross lifts up his shoulders in defeat. "Sir, that is the obstacle I am referring to, this person is actually a she."

There is a pause. Dr. Thiery then asks a frank question. "And Tom Hutchinson recommended her?"

Cross feels a tinge of strain in his spirit speaking to him. He speaks in spite of it. "Sir, she is actually one of his students at the college where he teaches."

Dr. Thiery puts his hand to his mouth and rubs his chin. He almost said something, but he knew he would have regretted it. He shakes his head and speaks. "Cross, I am not finding this amusing at all, are we playing games here, that you would take this kind of recommendation seriously?"

Cross holds himself back; he is trying in every degree to keep quiet regarding the actual power and influence of Sally's paper. He knows that at first mention, he, too, immediately dismissed Sally as a nonconsideration because she was Tom's student, but now, after reading the paper, there was no more spirit in him to justify that kind of reasoning. Dr. Thiery had to read this paper, he thought to himself, he had to read it for himself.

Cross finally speaks out. "Sir, you have every right to feel the way you do; I felt similarly." Cross then pauses in order to allow Dr. Thiery to absorb his offered vindication that justified his reasoning. "Sir, I have in my hand the paper, and I'm telling you that you need to read this." Dr. Thiery suffers Cross's emotionalism; he actually doesn't say a word, but at the same time Cross can feel him silently considering the matter. Cross then presses. "I can fax you the paper in five minutes; you can then make your decision based on the facts, sir, and not on any assumptions."

There is another pause. Cross waits as he silences himself for the answer.

Dr. Thiery speaks up rather quickly. "And you want me to read the paper tonight, right now?" Surprisingly, he says this in a light and delicate manner, almost as if part of him is looking to be told to read the paper.

"Sir, that would be ideal. The paper is not long, you would finish it within the hour if I fax it to you right now."

There is a slight pause and then clarity from Dr. Thiery. "Under the circumstances, Cross, I am going to agree to read the paper tonight." Cross can't believe it; he makes a fist of confidence as a look of exasperation glides off his face. Dr. Thiery then continues. "Fax the paper right now, and I will consult back with you within the hour regarding its contents or whether or not this woman is even ready for the opportunity to an appointment with The Cell."

There is a deep pause because neither man can actually believe what has just happened; the timing, the spirit, and the availability of the matter were amazing. Cross is the first to break out of the conceived pause. "Sir, I'm faxing it right now."

He walks over to the fax machine located in the office of his suite. He places the sheets of the paper into the ADF. "I'm sending it to your office right now, sir."

"Very well, Cross. I'll stay online with you until my fax picks up your transmission."

He begins dialing the number to Dr. Thiery's personal office fax located in his office in France.

011 33 388 59 02 63-

Cross presses Fax/Start to begin the transmission.

The fax in Cross's hotel office begins sucking up the pages and transmits them four thousand miles across the Atlantic. Dr. Thiery's office fax immediately makes its signature tone indicating that the proper connection has been made. Dr. Thiery watches the Fax/Start light signal on his fax machine.

"The connection has been made. I will return call after I have finished reading the paper."

"Ok, sir. Thank you, sir."

Dr. Thiery takes the first page out of his fax placing it face down on his desk. He then answers Cross

back. "No, Cross," then pausing for a moment to bethink his words, he gestures back, "Thank you."

He hangs up the phone, setting it back on its cradle. Cross hangs up his phone and falls back into a chair next to his desk. He puts his fingers into the corners of his eyes, trying to manipulate any residual pressure that is too stubborn to leave. He has no idea how all this went so smoothly. He takes another deep breath and looks at his watch; it's 5:20 p.m. He doesn't need to be upstairs until about 7:30 p.m. He decides to wait for Dr. Thiery's call before he gets ready for the reception. The call should come within the hour.

The pages are still coming out of Dr. Thiery's fax. Another, and again another. Dr. Thiery sips his wine and laughs within himself privately. If Cross only knew how ready he actually was to read this paper tonight. Actually, when the paper was first mentioned, he found it difficult not to climb through the phone lines in order to read it. He was like a kid in a candy store. He had been waiting, and he was ready for this challenge.

Dr. Thiery's initial realization of this vision two years ago, finding an agitator for The Cell, was literally like being struck down by a car at 120 mph. The idea was not easy for him to swallow. To invite into The Cell someone who might throw a perpetual monkey wrench into its inner workings seemed inconceivable. But the idea struck him, and controlled his thought process, not wanting to go away.

After two years of long debate, including plenty of excuses why he might abandon his thinking, he simply found himself exhausted with the prospect of continually having to ignore its prompting. Then, when Mark's sudden death opened up a seat in the Primary Members slot, this nagging yet resilient vision seemed the only direction possible. And now, now the fact that this agitator might actually be a woman, well, Dr. Thiery thought to himself as he pushed a few of the sheets to the side, what more could be done to you once you've been hit by a car at 120

mph? If this agitator happened to be a woman, then she happened to be a woman; numbness had no opinion.

He took the remaining sheets from the fax and put them in order. He straightened the pages and set them squarely on his desk. He picked up his red pen with which he used to instruct all the papers that came to him, with which he used to prove all of the ideas that came into his presence. He then picked up his reading glasses and placed them on his face, he cleared his throat before taking another sip of his wine.

He glanced at the paper's first page, introducing himself to its format. He would read the paper and then call Cross to let him know exactly what he thought regarding this recommendation. He picked up the paper and began reading.

Sally Travis
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Dr. Hutchinson
Christian Thought 251

The Glial Theory and The Esther Prophecy

Psalms 111:10, Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge:

Job 28:28

...Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;

The above assertions are derived directly from the Bible. Anyone who believes in the Bible will accept them unconditionally. But what of those who do not believe in the Bible? Can there be any reasonable clarification regarding these verses for the people who do not believe? I believe there can be. In this paper I will attempt to prove that the fear of the Lord is the true source of wisdom. This will be done through an exploration of common sense logic, Biblical principles as well as scientific observations. My intent in this paper is to prove not only the validity of these suppositions, but to demonstrate if these suppositions are accepted according to progressive enlightenment that they become the only way for one to achieve the deepest level of understanding associated with such wisdom.

Common Sense Logic

The 10% Theory

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There is a theory that we as humans use roughly 10% of our brains. Science has proved this theory false. Below are some of their arguments:

- If we didn't use those areas of our brains then those unused areas would most likely deteriorate and the number of neurons would decrease (Bard, Bard 196).
- Brain imaging research has shown that most of the brain is working at any given time. Virtually every function is spread across multiple areas of the brain, so reading, writing, or speaking activates several regions of the brain. The parts of the brain that are not used in those particular activities will inevitably be involved in other mental and physical functions during the course of any given day (Bard, Bard 196).
- We know that damage to any part of the brain causes some impairment. Sometimes even a tiny lesion, if it interrupts important neural pathways within the brain, may produce severe deficits (Bard, Bard 196).
- Recent studies with PET Scanning have shown that different parts of the brain are working harder during certain circumstances, such as solving a mathematical problem, but other parts remain active simultaneously in controlling vital functions (Bard, Bard 196).

The Glial Theory

All of the arguments above are intelligent and make a strong case that we as humans do indeed use 100% of our brains. But there is one question these, as well as other arguments, leave

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unanswered. It doesn't show if we as humans use the whole of our brains 100% effectively. We might be using all of our brain but we might be using the whole at a menial rate. For instance, someone who has a mental retardation might walk, pick up things, talk and use every function of their body correctly. But it is obvious that this same person, because of their retardation, will not use the whole of their body as effectively as someone who has no retardation. So in understanding this example, it might also be probable that we as human beings quite possibly use 100% of our brains but that we use 100% of our brains in a weak or inefficient way. This is a theory I call "The Glial Theory." This theory states that we as humans do indeed use 100% of our brains but that we are only utilizing about 10% of our brain's full potential.

Now if the Glial theory is accurate then the question becomes, "How can we learn to raise the effectiveness of our brain?" We need to go from the ineffective 10% to an effective 85% or 100%. How do we accomplish this? How can we quite possibly study or discipline our brains so that we will be able to use 100% of our brains effectively?

I am about to show that the only way to accomplish this is by adhering to the previously stated suppositions. The fear of the Lord is indeed the beginning of wisdom.

It does not matter how much studying or reading or disciplining you do in order to effectively use 100% of your brain, if you do not use the fear of the Lord to begin the wisdom process then you will only be strengthening your current 10% surface. It's like having a well of water that goes 100 feet deep. Until you begin to fear the Lord and start the truth process, you will only be able to go about 10 feet deep. Now it does not matter what kind of study you do: biology, chemistry, politics, math or

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languages, you will only be able to achieve the ability to psychoanalyze and understand at that 10-foot level. Now, because of your consistent training at this level you will understand the 10-foot level in an astounding way, but all your efforts of human study will only help you sharply understand this 10-foot level, but never any deeper.

Another example is a great house with many rooms. One door leads to two doors, two doors leads to three and so on all the way to 100 doors. Your ability to open one door which leads to two and then eventually to 10 doors will be possible with your conventional human study. You will also understand these doors and rooms in a way that will be both deep and intellectual. In these rooms, because of your study, you will have an insight and perspective that few in your field have ever accomplished. This is because you have stretched the limit of these rooms through study and research. But your study will only help you achieve understanding at the place where you are now, which is at the 10% level or at door #10.

No matter how much you study and no matter how much you discipline yourself you will never be able to open up the doors behind door #10 in order to get to door #100. You might be asking yourself, "Well, if I continue to study then why can't I open up the doors behind door #10 until I get to door #100?" Because the doors behind door #10 are not opened through study; they are only opened through truth. And the only way to get to the truth is through the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom.

Some of us realize that we stop ourselves from going forward in life or even within our own understanding when we begin to lie to ourselves or even accept certain lies as truths. Basically when we do this we limit ourselves. We stop ourselves

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from seeing beyond a certain point because our lies eventually stop us dead in our tracks. But this means that the opposite of this must be true, that the acceptance of truths will give us the vision and ability to move forward. This explanation is the surface of the wisdom process. Once we do decide to take on the habitual attitude of accepting the truth, then we give ourselves the ability to go beyond that 10% level.

It is the fear of the Lord, and not study, that allows us to do this. This is why the Bible says the fear of the Lord, and not the study of anything, is the beginning of wisdom. Once someone decides to fear the Lord then that someone will learn to accept the truth. Then, to live before God, who has the cleansing power to take a person deep within himself, begins the truth process. It is impossible to effectively open up to the truth without God engineering the process. It is like the space shuttle that is reentering the earth's atmosphere. If the shuttle does not reenter the right way then the space shuttle will burn up. A space shuttle can in fact reenter the earth's atmosphere but it must do so wisely. You to can achieve truth and ultimate wisdom in your life, but again, it must be done wisely. The fear of the Lord becomes the beginning of that truth process and wisdom. So how exactly do you achieve truth in your life and go to the depths of human understanding? You fear the Lord.

Biblical Principles

The Esther Prophecy ***Job 28:28***

...Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

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Job, a man recorded in the Bible, was righteous because he shunned evil. Job was not sinless but he was considered righteous because of his walk and honesty with God. Job underwent The Esther Prophecy that I am about to outline. When you make a covenant with God to fear Him and to accept truth in your life then God will begin a process in your life that will not only cleanse you from secret faults (Psalm 19:12), but will also begin a train of thought within you that could lead you to the depths of human understanding.

Like I mentioned before, most of us cannot get past the 10% effectiveness level because we won't accept certain truths. But once our relationship with God begins through the fear of the Lord, then God will slowly and lovingly begin to show us our sinfulness.

This has to be done slowly so we don't get "burnt up" like I mentioned before. The reason for this is simple. We are entrapped in our sins. The Bible calls these entrapments strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). These strongholds are areas in us that are totally captivated by sin. These are areas in our brain that are literally closed off to us because of lies and ignorance. This brings us directly to The Glial Theory; remember? Where 100% of our brain is working but only at a menial rate, these stronghold areas are the reason why.

These stronghold areas need to be opened up through both confession and repentance so they can be spiritually and understandably cleansed. This process allows these areas to be used effectively. The truth that is now gained through this process will eventually become ammunition for someone as they go deeper into their next stronghold area. As this process is repeated consistently the stronghold areas will break and the person will be releasing and opening up their brains

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effectiveness. Through a habitual confession process the person will now be gaining the ability to use 25%, 50% even 100% of their brains overall potential. This is because the fear of the Lord has created a solid enough foundation in order for The Esther Prophecy to establish itself. Now that The Esther Prophecy is established it will actually create a teachable submission within the person and open up the person to accept more truths. Because the person now abides in the truth the person can see deeper into themselves, deeper into God and deeper into life's circumstances. This creates incredible growth, not only spiritually but also emotionally and intellectually. The fear of the Lord is indeed the beginning of the wisdom process but The Esther Prophecy becomes the method of that process.

You might be saying, "Well, it sounds so easy and basic?" It is (Romans 10:8, Acts 17:27). But two details are usually overlooked. Number one, it is unbearable and even sometimes torturous to become brutally honest with yourself. In order to cleanse yourself from most of these stronghold areas, you will need to unconditionally accept certain truths that you simply won't want to accept. Furthermore, it becomes especially hard when you have been rotating yourself within this process for so long that you eventually get caught up in some of the more deep-rooted stronghold areas. These areas not only confuse you, but also have the tendency to frustrate and even discourage you.

The second detail that is overlooked is the sheer number of stronghold areas within us. Most people, in the beginning of this process, would think that they were using about 70% of their brains effectively and that they only had about 30% of stronghold areas slowing them down. This is totally inaccurate. It is far more overwhelming than this. Our stronghold areas encompass us. This is why I initially stated in The Glial Theory

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that we are roughly using only about 10% of our brains effectiveness. It is because we are so overwhelmingly sinful, dominated by our strongholds. We have a lot more lies in us than we have truths. About a 10% truth to 90% lie ratio I imagine. Some might argue that someone who was brought up in a stable home might be using more of their brain effectively. I disagree. It doesn't matter who you are or where you come from, we are all fallen sinners. Our nature is fallen. So whether you were brought up in a stable home or you were a deeply troubled orphan, until you make a conscious choice in your heart to fear the Lord and begin the wisdom/truth process, then your brain will be existing roughly in the 10% effectiveness level.

So a summary of The Esther Prophecy is the act of fearing the Lord which opens up a person to accepting the truth. This in turn begins a faith process allowing the person to remove the stronghold/lie areas within themselves through both confession and repentance. Once this is done effectively, then these same areas are now cleansed in truth so they become useful for the establishment of wisdom. Once these areas are fully sanctified, then they will become part of the brains overall percentage of effectiveness.

Scientific Evaluations

You might be wondering why I have called it The Glial Theory. This is why. The Glial cell makes up 90% of the cells in the human brain. Scientists also admit not knowing the cells major function. The Glial cell is a great mystery, a mystery that just so happens to make up roughly 90% of the brain's cell capacity. Since my theory states that we are not using roughly 90% of our

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brains potential, I thought it poetic to combine this mystery. Next, I have listed documentation on the Glial cell:

- The brain is the only tissue in the body where we don't know the function of the major cell type. Glia make up approximately 90 percent of the cells in the human brain, and yet researchers have assigned mainly passive functions to them (Spector).
- Studies on the brains of Einstein and Lenin as well as general thought have shown that having a greater density of neurons in the cortex or of having a greater number of Glial cells per neuron is thought to elevate thinking of conceptual skills (Bard, Bard 195).
- Once dismissed as mere padding, cells known as glia may be essential for the correct wiring of the brain. In the presence of glia or the glial factor, nerve cells made more connections among themselves... the glial factor made the transmitting nerve cell release its chemical messengers more readily in response to an electrical signal (Spector).

Brain Imaging

A brain image is basically a blueprint or x-ray of the brain. Besides the more popular CAT scans, there are two different and more effective brain imaging techniques: PET and FMRI. This is how each work:

PET – (position emission tomography).

When a brain region is active, blood flow to the region increases. Brain tissue requires oxygen to keep functioning; greater blood flow allows for local increase in oxygen and glucose levels

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necessary for maintaining the neurons. It is these increases in oxygen or glucose that are most often measured in the image. This is accomplished in PET scanning by giving subjects radioactively labeled oxygen or glucose, presenting a stimulus or asking the subject to perform a task, and determining where hikes in radioactivity are happening (Dowling 156).

Basically if the PET scan shows a red color then this signifies greater glucose or oxygen levels to that specific part of the brain. The scientist will then know that this part of the brain is more active. If the PET scan shows blue then this will mean less glucose or oxygen levels are present thus signifying that this part of the brain is less active. Scientists used the PET technology to falsify the 10% theory. This technology assisted in determining that we as humans do indeed use 100% of our brains.

FMRI – (functional magnetic resonance imaging).

This is a more recently developed technique. Although this technique is much like the PET scan, the FMRI is different in that it measures the increase of the blood flow directly. For this reason, it does not require the injection of any substances into the subjects (Dowling 156).

Both of these techniques are accurate when looking at responses from the brain. If The Esther Prophecy is correct, then scientifically it is possible that these two methods could analyze if someone had actually attained the level of effectively using 100% of their brain. Again, even if the Prophecy were true, science itself might never be able to establish the Prophecy's validity one way or the other, but if it could, these two methods would be a good start.

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So, scientifically, what methods could we employ if we decided to prove or falsify The Esther Prophecy? There are two. The first method would be one of the two brain scans, either the PET or FMRI. Remember this quote:

- Recent studies with PET scanning have shown that different parts of the brain are working harder during certain circumstances, such as solving a mathematical problem, but other parts remain active simultaneously in controlling vital functions (Bard, Bard 196).

If the Prophecy were correct and if someone got to the point of using the whole of their brain 100% effectively, then perhaps the PET scan would show an abundance of red beyond the norm and the scientist would observe this reading as abnormal. Beyond this explanation, there simply exist too many other variables to assume any scientific certainty.

The second method would be to perform an autopsy. Remember this quote:

- Studies on the brains of Einstein and Lenin as well as general thought have shown that having a greater density of neurons in the cortex or of having a greater number of Glial cells per neuron is thought to elevate thinking of conceptual skills (Bard, Bard 195).

A doctor or scientist would analyze the number of Glial cells per neuron as well as the possibility of a greater density of neurons in the cortex. If either of these was abnormal, as was the case with Einstein and Lenin, then perhaps this would give occasion for the defense of the Prophecy. Again, we cannot draw

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any absolutes regarding any potential findings, but such findings might offer us the incentive to dig deeper.

Conclusion

So what can we say? What is the conclusion of the matter?

Ecclesiastes 12:13

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

I think it poetic that the words spoken in the previous passage came from the wisest man this world will ever know (1 Kings 3:12). Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes which means "Preacher." In this book he preaches about trying to live life for all sorts of different reasons, money, power, sex, evil. At the end, he comes to the conclusion that to fear God and keep His commandments is the final purpose of man. Both The Gial Theory and The Esther Prophecy are based on the fact that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10). After this is established, then the process of effectual wisdom is within grasp through The Esther Prophecy.

In this paper I have attempted to meet the scientist with science, the thinker with thought, the arguer with argument and the intellectual with intellect. It is up to the reader to decide whether he will accept these words for what they say, or dismiss them for what he wants them to be. But one thing is for certain...

Romans 3:4

...Let God be true, but every man a liar;

He sets the last sheet of paper down on his desk and then accents the experience with a healthy sip of his Chateau Clinet. Throughout the entire paper, he hadn't once used his red pen; he placed the pen beside the paper along with the glasses that had been extended off his face. The contour of his mind had slightly tilted, but the implications of this effect, not even his trained mind could notice. He took a deep breath but then smiled deeply within himself; he had a feeling his search was over. Sally would possibly become the unique addition The Cell was looking for.

He picked up the phone and then, using the fast reference dial-pad to locate Cross's number, dialed it. Cross's phone rang three times before he picked it up. Cross made sure to check the display screen assuring that it was indeed Dr. Thiery who was calling.

"Hello," Cross answered. He grabbed a piece of furniture to steady himself and his nerves.

"Cross," his voice was plain and authoritative, "it's Dr. Thiery calling you back."

"Yes, sir."

There was then a long pause before Dr. Thiery spoke his next three words, and these three words were the only words Cross needed to hear.

"She's hot, Cross."

PART III

The Babylonian Cell

Chapter 12

The atmosphere outside the plane's mid-cargo passenger window was thin and unreceptive, but within the actual confines of the airplane, and even more approximately seated directly on Dr. Hutchinson's unfolded tray table, was the validity and leniency of The Cell's open invitation just waiting to stare Sally right in the face.

After the initial news regarding Sally's official invitation at the Summit's reception, Cross thoroughly briefed Dr. Hutchinson on the special instructions Dr. Thiery gave him involving Sally's invitation. Because of the special circumstances surrounding it, Dr. Hutchinson had been appointed by The Cell to brief Sally personally, something Dr. Hutchinson had never done before but in this case felt obligated to do. The Cell was leaving it up to him to make their case, to convince Sally that The Cell was right for her and that she was right for The Cell. Tom possessed the confidential file that he and Cross had worked out as well as some information regarding The Cell's practices, including its vast profile with regard to foreign policies.

But before Tom left Washington, Cross had received special instructions specifically from Dr. Thiery regarding the kind of invitation Sally should receive. Actually, the Sunday after the Summit was meant to be a time for Dr. Hutchinson and Cross to relax and spend some time away from their work, something both had hoped to do, but it actually turned out to be an in-depth gathering of information; both men collecting and comparing detailed information, so as not to scare Sally off.

Tom and Cross, understanding each other as well as the intimate workings of The Cell, worked on formulating a good presentation that would become custom made for Sally alone. The Cell wasn't trying to control Sally or even inappropriately influence her beyond her means, but because Sally was a woman and because of her age, both men felt that a detail-oriented approach would be easier for her to swallow, not so mysterious or intimidating.

They wanted to hand Sally The Cell and all that pertained to it on a silver platter, fully explaining everything from its daily activities all the way to intimate details regarding the Primary Members themselves. This kind of information was not the norm when it came to introducing an invitee to The Cell, but Dr. Thiery was thoroughly impressed with Sally, and intended to get a second look.

She would be invited for a two-week stay; the invitation would be effective immediately. Her introduction to The Cell would be unique in that she wasn't being checked out with the intention of being dismissed. Because of the validity of her paper, Sally had warranted a "hot" access rather than the popular "formal" access, meaning that the invitee had full access and was seriously being considered for the seat. A "cold" access meant that the invitee's formal or hot access had been revoked; the invitee would be dismissed from The Cell's activities altogether. A "warm" access meant that the invitee would be dismissed but would be dismissed under the pretense that there would be follow-ups to the initial dismissal. The invitee's file would be reviewed in three to five years, mostly likely with regard to a Candidate status, but not with regard to a Primary Member status.

Although Sally was immediately granted a "hot" access, she would still need to prove to The Cell, and mostly to herself, that she could handle the pressure and workload of a Primary Member seat. The fact that Sally was only nineteen years old made her overall appointment and candidacy vulnerable to speculation. Sally would need to prove herself within the confines of The Cell's Compound, and if she could do this effectively, then there would be no reason for her dismissal. Dr. Hutchinson knew the "hot" access favor was essentially a miracle from God, and that it virtually took all the pressure off Sally with regard to her needing to prove herself. This favor would make the invite more peaceable for Sally; it would make everything acquiesce to a formality rather than to a direct challenge to Sally's persona and character.

As Dr. Hutchinson continued to review some of the notes and information regarding The Cell and its recent

escapades, he thought about the discussion he would need to have with Sally, and more accurately, the proper timing. It was Monday, and his classes had been cancelled because he was just now flying out of Washington, D.C. This meant he would not see Sally until class on Wednesday. He also remembered Sally's interest in his view and analysis of her paper. He decided he would call her; he would call her as soon as he touched ground to let her know of the situation. He would not tell her anything regarding The Cell's invitation, of course, but he would let her know that there was an urgent need for the two of them to talk.

He would also let her know that her paper was brilliant and that she had indeed received an A for her midterm exam. But there were still two things he needed to do before he would be able to sit down with Sally and let her know about The Cell, and these two things would take a little bit of time.

The hallway was filled with students. Some were laughing, and others had a look of frustration on their face. Neaven was there, and he seemed happier than anyone standing around. Sally had a look of exasperation on her face.

"No class today, Sally. Dr. H is still out of town," Neaven beamed.

That was the worst news Sally could hear. She had spent the entire weekend trying to ignore the fact that she would have to wait until Monday morning until she could hear an answer from Dr. Hutchinson, and now it was Monday morning and that answer was flying somewhere over Newark. Sally tried to hold back her frustration.

"Does it say when class will meet again?" Sally inquired.

"It doesn't say," Neaven happily admitted. "I guess it just wasn't meant to be Sally."

He approaches Sally and innocently grabs her on the shoulder, turning her around and leading her away from the hall of students.

Neaven then speaks characteristic of Neaven, "It was just meant to be that the two of us would have an early morning together, and that we would replace all of this student emotion and exchange it for carefree irresponsible jargon."

Sally couldn't look at Neaven right now. She liked being with him, but right now she just wasn't in the mood for any of his antics, even if the antics did happen to be funny and timely. Neaven kept them coming.

"Sally, I'm noticing that your shoulders are a bit tense and hypersensitive, would you like me to introduce you to my ancient flex-orient massage technique?"

Sally can't hold it back any longer. "Neaven, if you don't shut up, I'm going to flex-orient your mouth with my fist."

Neaven breaks away from Sally and begins to laugh, loudly at first but then quietly. Sally gives him an intimidating stare so he will keep his distance.

Neaven and Clair understood fully what Sally was going through. She had explained it to both of them. They knew that she was waiting for the answer regarding her paper; especially sense she had an inward hunch that the paper was more than just some pop-midterm. Now that this answer had been delayed, Sally's frustrations were even greater. Neaven decided to quiet down and tried to do the proper thing.

"Ok, Sally, you win."

Sally looks for consolation immediately from Neaven. She then speaks, "Neaven, it's just that I want to know."

Neaven shakes his head understandably.

"I need to know if there is something in that paper besides me, or whatever I could have put there. I need to know if that paper strikes a chord in someone else's heart besides just my own."

"I know, Sally; we all know that," Neaven comforts.

"I really believe what you guys said to me, that if I had some special gift that Dr. Hutchinson would see it and he would let me know. I somehow believe that this paper, including whatever happened during the course of me writing this paper, is going to give me the answers that I have been trying to understand for so long. And

no matter what happens in my life, Neaven, one thing is sure to always happen first. Wait. Wait. Wait."

She says the last three words bitterly, almost like they are a nuisance that seem to cover her like a shroud. She looks at Neaven with defeat in her eyes. "I just don't know what to do."

Neaven hugs Sally tightly as they walk down the hall; nothing else fills his mind, he just wants to be alone with Sally right now.

"We have the next two hours free, Sally, Why don't we just walk for a while? It's nice out today."

Sally looks up briefly and notices the clouds in the sky; the clouds were pretty and big. She then thinks to herself that the walking would probably do her some good.

"Yeah, I'd like that."

She then looks at Neaven quickly, trying not to get his attention but just to see him. He's not noticing her. They walk for a while, and eventually, Sally's calm overcomes her shattered nerves. They take the road outside of campus, alongside a hill and out to a nearby valley. There is a stream nearby; passersby can see the fish and witness the waterfowl scurrying for food. The smell of the evergreen moss and mineralized clay fill the air as they lie stagnate and muddy the banks of the stream. Going near the stream would require proper attire, but just the opportunity of walking alongside it in order to allow your mind to refresh itself is reason enough to escape the industrial dimensions of the university's surroundings. The day breaks through the clouds, and Sally and Neaven seem to break with it.

The wind howling consistently against the windows reminded him of the repetitiveness and frantiness with which he scribbled these notes some twenty-five years earlier. Accumulated and prepared for a book that was never written, these notes were now covering the table and consuming Dr. Hutchinson's mind. He never wanted to go back to these notes, but under the circumstances, he had no choice. He was reviewing these notes for Sally;

he was reviewing them for the conversation he would be forced to have with her regarding her potential calling into The Cell.

There were a few reasons why he never wrote this book. The first reason was these notes actually existed from his spotted past as a successful yet arguable intellectual thinker. When he first scribbled these notes, he was in the process of being dismissed from The Cell, and within this turmoil, and within what some considered to be a very unjustified ruling, he made use of all his nervous energy to both freely and faithfully investigate some of the more probing questions that were lingering in the back of his mind. These were daring questions, and the places and environments these questions eventually put him in were unbearable at best. For this uncomfortable reason, he continuously questioned these notes, not necessarily their accuracy, but his motives or intentions for investigating them.

These notes also never became a book because of his wife's passing. Her passing actually made him dig even deeper for a time, but after the grieving time had expired, he was forced to refocus all his time and energy on more productive and rewarding pursuits, pursuits that offered him a greater sense of accomplishment.

The last reason that he never wrote the book was that the existence of these notes were directly linked to the overall reason he was asked to leave The Cell in the first place, mainly because of his persistence not being coupled with maturity. It was these unsanctified emotions that actually compiled these notes. He always knew there was a chance that these thoughts were too radical. For this reason, he justified himself in working on them and perfecting them, but at the same time, because of the accusations against him, he didn't have the stomach to stand behind them at the time. For this reason he perfected them, and then he put them away.

But in an ironic twist, his dismissal was also most of the reason why The Cell still called upon him. Some even said Dr. Thiery's decision to excuse Tom for this unchecked maturity was rash, more of a trial-and-error experiment by Dr. Thiery than it was a logical and professional decision. The Cell, at this time, was still

young and learning within its own process. Tom's dismissal happened to be the first of its kind. Dr. Thiery even admitted that he might have been too hasty in dismissing Tom, but nevertheless, he refused to invite him back.

But Tom flourished outside The Cell, anyway, due mostly to his reputation and the notoriety of his books, and he eventually grew content with this place. He also had an unshakable faith, believing his confines were the unavoidable will of God. So it was ironic that a young organisation would make a young decision to dismiss a young man who was also young within his gifts, only to then call upon him years later because of his matured usefulness to The Cell and its overall purposes. And there were firm conclusions drawn from this experience; besides Dr. Thiery himself, Dr. Tom Hutchinson was currently the most respected Cell member to date, international leaders loved him, and credited him with many of their resolved conflicts constantly lifting up his ability to keep the peace.

Dr. Hutchinson took out a journal and referenced it with something he was investigating within his notes. He pondered the implications of the information inside his head. As he pondered this, he glanced at the confidential files that were meant for Sally's eyes alone. He felt a conviction come over him; the conviction was noticeable, not to mention, distracting. He walked over to the counter where Sally's original paper lay untouched. This was the paper Sally handed in last week containing her email address and phone number.

Dr. Hutchinson looked out the window and stared at the trees. He pondered when he should contact Sally. He had made a promise to himself to call Sally as soon as he landed, which he didn't, but at the time he simply felt the timing wasn't right. But he had been doing his homework. He had already talked with all of Sally's professors but one, and told them that Sally might need to be excused from classes for the next few weeks. None had a problem with that, although they were curious why she would be excused. He eased their curiosity by explaining to them that her opportunity was similar to the opportunity he had within the U.S. government. They

were pleased for Sally, but did not ask any more questions realizing they would not have them answered. Only one professor remained, and Dr. Hutchinson would contact him first thing in the morning.

But all this simply cleared the way for his last obstacle: his need to be spiritually confident with regard to his notes as well as within his own spiritual direction when talking with Sally. Every time he thought about it, he wondered if he should have pulled out these notes three weeks ago, but for some reason or another, he never did. One nagging question still remained, now that both the notes and opportunity were in his hands: how long would he need to study in order to be ready for the conversation? One day, two days, a week? He thought about seeing Sally in class, hiding this information from her and going on with class as usual. He thought about it, but it didn't seem right. He thought about telling her bits and pieces, and seeing how she swallowed it. No, this would prove fatal; Sally was too hungry right now, and this information, although unbelievable, was tightly knit.

He continued to think. What would be the pro's and con's? He continued for about thirty minutes, eventually seating himself on the couch. His mind was in between his knees, literally, and he had the appearance of a man who was praying but he actually wasn't; he was just thinking. One thing stood out. Within all of his struggles and within all of his efforts and within all of his questions, he was certain that God was listening. The dire consequences of waiting too long could strangulate things to the point of a crawl, but jumping forward with too much emotion and haste might hamstring the entire process. Finally, after quietly waiting and thinking for a moment, a revelation came to him. How had God worked in the past? Ever since this thing began, how quickly had God moved things, established things, and then unraveled things? The answer: very quickly indeed. This was not the norm with God, but sometimes, when situations called for it, and when God's grace was obviously present, God would work quickly in order to establish his purposes. This was certainly true in Sally's case. God had worked wondrously and fervently.

If he was going to move, he had to move now. He looked at the table. He thought to himself, those notes had been hidden for twenty-five years; they had waited long enough.

He picked up the phone and dialed Sally's number. Sally picked up immediately.

"Hello."

"Sally, it's Dr. Hutchinson."

Sally contorts at the sound of his voice; she had been upset and then comforted regarding Dr. Hutchinson. Hearing his voice made it all jump back into her face, "yes."

"Sally, I'm sorry that I was not in class today. It was simply not possible for me to be there this morning."

Sally sits down in her chair. "That's fine, Dr. Hutchinson. I do appreciate you calling me now."

There is a slight pause because Dr. Hutchinson feels some self-doubt; he then checks himself and forges ahead. "Sally, I read your paper and it is amazing to say the least." Without giving Sally a chance to respond, he then says, "Sally we need to talk."

His words were so frank and calmly authoritative that Sally was immediately persuaded; she felt a certain sense in her spirit. "Yes, I can talk."

"Sally, this is important; it needs to happen soon."

Sally questions; she seems to understand, but the urgency of this need still presses her. "How about tomorrow?"

"Perfect. Morning, afternoon or night?" Dr. Hutchinson stands up and paces.

"It would have to be either in the morning or at night; I have class all afternoon."

Dr. Hutchinson thinks to himself; he is about to say the morning but then suddenly stops himself. He remembered he needed to talk with Sally's last professor tomorrow morning, but this conversation, either way, was not going to be a deal-breaker. This left only the evening, but it would require the entire evening.

"Sally, if we talk tomorrow night, could you set aside the entire night?"

Sally thinks to herself. What could be this demanding or influential that it would require a four-to five-hour conversation? She wanted to ask but didn't. "I can be there by 6 p.m. and stay as late as I need to; your class is the first class I have the next day."

Dr. Hutchinson smiles, partly because of Sally's willingness but mostly because of her spunk. She was jokingly implying that the presumable lateness of the conversation tomorrow night might possibly disqualify her from attending his class the next morning. "Okay, Sally, tomorrow night. Do you remember how to get to my house?"

"I have the address from the welcoming dinner you held for the students at the beginning of the semester."

"Good Sally. Don't worry about bringing anything either. I'll have something to eat." Dr. Hutchinson then receives a perceived thought, and believes it is credible and influential. He speaks it in faith. "Also, if you want to bring your Bible, then that is okay, but don't bring anything else, any notes you might have, I don't want anything to distract us."

His statement seemed to come out of the blue, but she didn't fight it. "Sure, Dr. Hutchinson. Can I ask what this is all about?"

"Can you wait one day, Sally?" He doesn't say it challengingly, but in such a way to make Sally understand that the timing just isn't proper.

"I can wait Dr. Hutchinson, but on one condition."

Dr. Hutchinson summons again the prayer he uttered regarding the authority he requested on account of Sally's calling, because of his direct God-given place within it.

"I need you to tell me if this has anything to do with my paper. And if so, is it a good thing, an acceptable thing for me?"

Sally wasn't trying to pry; she was trying to give her conscience some rest. Dr. Hutchinson knew she struggled over her gift, and that this paper existed within that gift. Whatever he was going to do right now, even this conversation, involved that gift, and probably more specifically, the direct placement of that gift. He understood that Sally just wanted to know if things were

finally going to pan out for her, if she would get the closure she had been looking for.

Dr. Hutchinson speaks from his heart and from the anticipation of his forethought. "Sally, it does involve your paper, and if you are willing to accept it, the finalization of your struggle."

Sally thought about it for a moment. What did that mean, if I was willing to accept it? What did that mean?

Dr. Hutchinson finishes his thoughts. "Sally, I'll see you tomorrow night."

Sally is still thinking, but she is not content with it. She cannot ask him to elaborate now; she can only rest in faith. "Okay, Dr. Hutchinson, tomorrow night then." She is just about to say goodbye when she says something else instead. "Oh, and Dr. Hutchinson, thank you for calling me; I appreciate it."

He smiles. "No problem Sally, and you're welcome. Now try and get some sleep."

"Okay. Goodnight, Dr. Hutchinson."

"Goodnight, Sally."

Sally hangs up the phone and goes into the other room. She doesn't know how to feel about the news. The phone call and its news were both exhilarating and exhausting. She decides to roam the kitchen and snack on whatever's in sight. She wonders what the conversation's topic might be; she questions what kind of resolve might possibly come from the talk tomorrow night. She doesn't know; all she does know is that it is going to happen, and she is going to do everything within her power to ensure that no matter what happens, she is in the right place and in the right spirit to receive and understand what she needs to receive. She takes a handful of food and goes upstairs to her bedroom.

Dr. Hutchinson is still sitting on the couch, pleased with Sally's willingness. Others might have pressed him for more information, but Sally didn't. The conversation would happen tomorrow night, and everything else would be placed into God's capable hands.

What he said with regard to Sally's readiness to receive in order to bring the closure she was looking for was accurate. Dr. Hutchinson had done all he could: The Cell, the promptings, the prayers, the intercession, the

discipleship time with Sally personally, the classroom sessions, the conversations with fellow professors, the meetings and conversations with Cross, the notes from twenty-five years earlier. Closure to all this was not going to be stamped on Sally's back. If Sally really wanted closure to all of this, she was going to have to fight for it; there was no other way.

But he then thought again. If he truly did his job properly, and if the Grace of God was more powerful than it had ever been with regard to the two of them talking, then he believed things could go well. But if on the other hand, things got paranoid, and if doubt and indifference began to deteriorate the warmth of both of their God-gifted faith, then things could get uneasy, even stagnate. He reasoned it would be crucial for Sally to be both willing and open in order that she might fully accept what he was going to introduce by faith. But it also became his job to present the information skillfully and spiritually, and just how effectively this presentation would be made might mean the difference between Sally accepting The Cell's invitation, or her quite possibly walking away from it.

It was nearing evening when Sally stepped in her car and closed the door behind her. The sun set at her back as she drove east toward Dr. Hutchinson's river-front property. It was not a long drive, so Sally decided against taking out her radio. She would instead use the fifteen or twenty minutes to reflect on what was important, and possibly pray regarding the conversation she would have with Dr. Hutchinson.

She talked with Clair this morning, touching base with her and updating her on the situation. Clair was delighted to hear the news. She was actually a bit spooked because of the way everything was working out; it was almost exactly the way she had explained it. When Clair had initially told her that she needed to go to Dr. Hutchinson and talk with him, she had no idea things would bloom this far this fast.

Clair and Neaven were right, though. Dr. Hutchinson was indeed helping her with her passivity regarding her gifts. Clair was also right in believing God would use Dr. Hutchinson to speak to her intimately regarding her gifts and that his presence in her life could quite possibly bring her the closure she desired. Clair also mentioned to her that God was going to allow this process to usher her into a new position because God wanted to "promote her," but again, this would only happen when she learned the crucial lesson of resting and relying solely upon God. It seemed as though all Clair's words were coming true.

Clair's happiness and delight for Sally radiated genuinely. She heard the news and offered to do anything she could, to either help or comfort. Sally immediately took her up on the offer and began explaining to Clair her internal fears. Telling her of the conversation the night before and even more specifically expressing her doubts over the anticipated conversation. Clair listened, feeling that even though Sally was indeed experiencing fears and doubts, it was only because she was right at the door that was beginning to open for her. Clair had offered polite conversation this morning, and when Sally finally left her side, she could only hope that she would feel the same way once she left Dr. Hutchinson this evening, with the same spirit and with the same certainty.

She turned left on Oak Knoll Drive preparing to go northeastward toward the heightened hills. The West River was situated between these hills and caressed the side embankments of the eclipsed forest. She drove mechanically, allowing her unconscious to feel out the same road she had taken three months earlier. She was about five minutes from the house when she instinctively, though spiritually, began pleading within her spirit:

Lord. I know this is not all new to you. Lord, I only pray that my faith will be pleasing in your sight. Please, Lord, please keep me from presumptuous sins, and shelter me from my secret faults; bringing all of my former wrestles to my remembrance.

Lord ... I know that in this situation, if I remain quiet, then if what Dr. Hutchinson has to say to me is valid, then it would have been a good thing for me to remain humble and quiet. And Lord, if I stay quiet, and if what Dr. Hutchinson has to say is not for me, then I will have a clean conscience and good integrity, knowing that I stayed humble and quiet, but that his words just weren't for me. So Lord, in Your strength Lord, I intend to remain quiet unless I am asked to speak. I do all this by Your permission Lord, and I do this in faith, giving Dr. Hutchinson all the room he needs in order to speak to me without my doubting distraction. Lord, honor Your servant Dr. Hutchinson tonight. Speak through him and allow me to exercise my right as a Christian and as your vessel of honor Lord. Let me abide in You and in my calling by the same faith which You entrusted unto me Lord, and let me do it in the full assurance and confidence that You have given me as Your daughter and as Your friend Lord. I do all of this in the Glorious name of your Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Sally quickly grabbed a Kleenex from her purse and wiped her eyes, her tears, bearing witness to the only consistency within her. She was confident though. She had learned that the greatest victories usually came with the most strenuous struggles. She would rather be real and weeping than try to hold everything back and pretend things were all right.

Ever since she was young, her soul consistently bore witness to the discontentment of relating to this overgrown struggle, and as far as she was concerned, if it was not okay for her to be emotional and shaky today, then when would it ever be?

As she pulled into the driveway, she noticed his car sticking halfway out the side garage. She parked. She cleaned herself up a bit before she opened her car door, looking in the mirror and making sure everything was all right. She looked at her watch; it was a little before 6 p.m. She glanced at the trees surrounding his property; they were pretty, but seemed to have fewer leaves than many of the other trees around. Many of the leaves were spiraling on the ground, the result of the circular wind.

She opened her car door and put her left foot on the ground, the leaves crackled as soon as she put her sole on the ground. She then proceeded to put both feet down and then crackled her way to her feet. She closed the car door and threw her purse behind her as she headed for the door. There was a doorbell, but Sally decided to knock instead. She lightly knocked on the door's oak. She heard a rumble and then a latch, and the door opened. Dr. Hutchinson was standing in the doorway; he had an odd look on his face. He was wearing a sweat suit, and looked like someone who couldn't decide whether or not they wanted to go for a jog. Sally felt inclined to let him know that he probably didn't have a choice.

Chapter 13

The two surrounded themselves in small talk as they neared the dining and kitchen area. Dr. Hutchinson had a meal waiting: sandwiches, coleslaw, potato salad, and fruit salad. He made the meal cold on purpose; the conversation Sally and he would be having tonight would not suffer their enjoying a hot, relaxing meal.

Some files were within range, but Sally tried not to notice. She didn't see the paper she had turned into Dr. Hutchinson, but she still tried not to look. Dr. Hutchinson requested that Sally make herself comfortable at the table while he finished things up in the kitchen. Sally sat down folding her hands on her lap.

The music in the background was instrumental and influential, not forced but relaxing and hopeful. The mood of the house was mysterious; it wasn't going to show you what it was about, but it wasn't going to try and fool you either, it was just going to remain honestly unexplained. The room's lighting was sharp and focused, but not immensely bright; it was enough to allow you to see but not so much that it blinded you. Dr. Hutchinson came out of the kitchen and proceeded to pull a chair out from under the table; he sat down and scooted himself in. After a quick smile in Sally's direction, he blessed the food and beckoned Sally to partake.

The room was quiet as they began eating. Neither talked for what seemed to be quite a few moments. It was fine though; the food was good and neither really wanted to say anything. It seemed as though both were finding their bearings; Sally purposed not to instigate conversation and Dr. Hutchinson, knowing that Sally understood that the conversation was inevitable, felt comfortable just letting it happen. There was no pressure because nothing, neither silence nor delay, was going to stop tonight's events. They continued eating for a few more moments, before Dr. Hutchinson noticed Sally's spirit. She seemed to be bowing in herself, and it was noticeable. Dr. Hutchinson knew in his heart

that it was just a matter of moments before he would begin. He then bowed himself and began the conversation.

"Sally," he took a napkin and wiped his face, "thank you for coming over, I realize you're probably curious regarding this talk that I felt obligated to press upon you tonight. Sally, why do you think you're here tonight?"

Sally tried to swallow her food. "I don't know," she said sheepishly. "You said something about my paper."

Dr. Hutchinson forked his potato salad and nodded his head downward slowly. He asked it in another way. "Yes, Sally, but what about the paper, anything deeper perhaps?"

Sally didn't know what to say. She wanted to spill her heart, but she didn't have the faith. Dr. Hutchinson helped her out a bit.

"Sally, you have a gift and a calling from God; that is why you are here tonight."

Sally nodded her head quickly but shadily, the response to his own question was misplaced to her. In the beginning, she had actually approached Dr. Hutchinson because of the struggles she was having within her gift, and now he was elaborating on this subject as if it had never even been brought up before. Dr. Hutchinson then looked upon Sally, and Sally looked upon Dr. Hutchinson. Sally also remembered that in that conversation, Dr. Hutchinson spiritually put her in her place, most every time she opened her mouth, and she didn't want that to happen again. She bowed herself and spiritually opened herself up to what Dr. Hutchinson had to say.

"Sally, your paper was astounding. It cut to the core of everything that was important and refused to venture into realms where it was not invited."

Sally pondered Dr. Hutchinson's comment. It was interesting. Especially with regard to his saying the paper didn't venture into other realms. This was interesting because she remembered she actually tried to do this, and the Holy Spirit wouldn't allow her, prompting her every time, and even finally mercifully using that librarian to spiritually bring her into subjection. Sally's attention span just got a little bit

wider; she nodded her head indicating she understood his observation.

"Sally, what I saw in your paper was a convincing indication of what I have not only believed, but also what I have been partly fearing all along." He paused, not fully confident in his own understanding of the implications of his next few words; he then continued in faith. "That your calling was prophetic, in nature, and that this calling also warranted your decisiveness within that nature."

His words came out more tangled than they went in. Sally had always believed that she had some sort of prophetic significance; her ability and wisdom were just too accurate, too insightful. Dr. Hutchinson then read in Sally's eyes that she was not shocked by this statement, and her acquired faith made it easier for him to continue.

"Sally." He paused as he looked down, setting his understanding and his emotions behind him. "I believe God wants to use you as a prophetess."

Sally put her head down. She had heard his words clearly, and in a few ways, she was relieved. She was comforted in knowing that someone else believed in her gifts beside herself, and she was also comforted in the fact that a respected, highly influential man believed in her. But then the doubts came, mostly with regard to a woman teaching and usurping authority over a man; these doubts had always paralyzed her, even haunted her. But then the comfort came again.

Sally knew biblically that God had called women in the past as prophetesses, and that women in the New Testament also had prophetic gifts. The Bible also made confirmation after confirmation that God was the same today, yesterday, and forever, and that He does not ever change. If all this were true, then the God who called women to be prophetesses in the Old Testament could also call them to be prophetesses in the New Testament. But these were assumptions of faith speaking, not actually faith itself speaking. Dr. Hutchinson noticed Sally's wrestling.

"Sally, please let me know what's troubling you."

Sally hesitated, but then, slowly drew her eyes on who she believed to be the only man in the world who could help her right now.

"Dr. Hutchinson, I don't have words. I believe everything that you are saying, but at the same time, I fear everything you are saying. How can I be a prophetess when a woman cannot usurp authority over a man, and how can I be a prophetess when a woman cannot teach?"

Dr. Hutchinson smiled, but not disrespectfully. He rose up calmly and went over to the desk near the wall; he picked up some files one by one, distinctly placing one of the files on top. He turned around and headed back toward the table, then placed the files on the table and sat back down. He opened the top file slowly, taking out the contents one by one and spreading them all over the table's surface. There was a lot of writing on these pages; scribbling and frantic etchings were all over the papers surface. He glanced at Sally, and continued to place piece by piece calmly on the surface of the table. Sally waited for him to finish.

"Sally, do you see all these notes?"

"Yes, Dr. Hutchinson."

"These were notes to a book I was going to write, after I finished, *The Fundamentals of Christian Thought*."

Sally looked at the notes; for her, the notes took on a greater meaning. Dr. Hutchinson's book, *The Fundamentals of Christian Thought*, was perhaps the greatest Christian book ever to be written. People read the book and were changed instantly; the thoughts were original and mind opening; the books premise challenged you but also encouraged and comforted you at the same time. If these notes did indeed come after that book, then they must have been distinctly different, equally powerful even. Sally's curiosity was peaked.

"What are the notes about?"

Dr. Hutchinson took a breath as he looked Sally's direction. His answer was abbreviated but very certain. "Honestly, Sally, they're about you."

Sally's face tweaked a bit; she couldn't imagine how notes written twenty-five years ago could have been about her. "How are they about me, Dr. Hutchinson?"

Dr. Hutchinson begins gathering up the papers slowly, clearing off the table. He then answers her question. "They're not about you specifically, Sally, but the information they contain address all the fears you have just placed before me. And the reason I say they're about you Sally, is because I never particularly understood why I wrote them in the first place, that is," he looks at her directly, "until I met you."

"I worked these notes out for a reason, Sally, and I never fully understood why, but now, now I understand that you are that reason." He pauses, taking some time to continue and gather the notes together. "These notes were never meant to become a book, Sally; they were meant to minister to you specifically."

Sally again takes a look at all the notes. She watches Dr. Hutchinson continue to gather them one by one. "So all of those are about me?"

Dr. Hutchinson smiles. "Well ..., on the surface Sally." He brings them all together and places them neatly on the top of the file. "But according to what I have in my hands, once you understand what these notes have to do with you, then you will understand what these notes have to do with everybody else."

She kind of understood what he was saying; he was basically saying that the notes would specifically help her, but then she would in turn help many people. She folded her arms and drew closer to the table; she tried not to be too anxious, but she wanted to hear more.

Dr. Hutchinson noticed Sally's resolve; he looked upon her almost like a father would look upon a daughter.

"Sally, I want you to listen right now, I am going to explain to you how I believe a woman can indeed be a prophetess, and how a prophetess call is not to teach or usurp authority over a man."

Sally's eyes get huge; she simply could not believe that Dr. Hutchinson claimed to have these answers. She gave herself a quick time out before she realized what she was getting herself into. She had always believed that there were answers but didn't understand how to formulate them. Most of the wrestling she would do came to her, and only occasionally would she persist or request a specific wrestle. The reason she didn't

outright try to take on the matters Dr. Hutchinson was referring to was that she always made sure to have a clean conscience when it came to the wrestling in her life; she was afraid that if she were to choose unwisely, too many accusations could come against her spiritually, and even physically, especially the result of a woman trying to figure out such matters as these.

A woman seeking to find these answers on her own could easily be accused of having a hidden agenda, of trying to force something that wasn't even there. If these answers were going to ever exist on a conscious spiritual level, then they would need to come from a man. A woman seeking to find these answers would look as though she were trying to seek her own glory, as though she were trying to establish herself for her own purposes. For this reason, she decided to never request this wrestle. Sally never wanted to feel as though she were seeking to exalt herself, she never wanted to feel as though she were trying to throw herself her own birthday party.

Dr. Hutchinson noticed Sally questioning herself inwardly and decided to cut it short. "Sally."

Sally jolted, then looked up. She was prodded but in a necessary way. "Yes," she responded sheepishly.

"Would you like to know these answers?"

Sally nodded her head up and down, awaiting the news that would possibly and hopefully bring peace and understanding to her struggles.

"First off, Sally, try to ask a question only if you need to. I should be able to notice if you want to say something, and if I do, I will ask you, okay?"

"Okay." Sally had purposed to do this already, and now that she understood the topic, she wasn't going to dare butt in. But inwardly, she confessed she was frightened by the idea that Dr. Hutchinson's train of thought might become flimsy, but still, she meant to save any questions for later. She nodded her head definitively, indicating she was ready to listen. Dr. Hutchinson continued.

"Sally, the verses you are referring to, verses that a woman should not teach or usurp authority over a

man,¹ these are the commanding questions right now. I will start with these."

Dr. Hutchinson relaxes himself in his chair, allowing the faith and struggle of the last twenty-five years to take over and speak. "The simple truth, Sally, is that a prophet, whether a man or a woman, doesn't command authority or teach."

He said these first words in such a way that the mere utterance of them should have been enough for Sally to go on, but then he elaborated even more. 'The term "to usurp authority,' Sally, draws the picture that one is an illegal overseer, a person in a position of power or control or absolute authority over others without rightful consent. A prophet never holds this office; actually, a prophet never has authority over anyone, except his own ministry in God."

His words were striking; they made sense to her without much elaboration, but he intended elaboration. "When a prophet speaks, the words are the authority, and nothing more. If a prophet were to enter into the congregation and then speak a word of prophecy, then the words that the prophet spoke, and only the words, would be the people's authority."

Sally hears the words and eyes Dr. Hutchinson with the intention of fully understanding.

"And you might ask, then who is the congregation accountable to, if the prophet indeed has no authority?"

Dr. Hutchinson shifts in his seat; the mere shift seemed to give him more confidence. "Two things, Sally: first, their own faith, the people are accountable to their own God-given faith. If they walk away from this faith, then God will require it of them, their heart bearing witness to their conscience.

Secondly, God has set a pastor over the Church, they are accountable to the pastor. This is how it works. A prophet arrives at a Church and speaks and the Word of God testifies against them. The people then receive the Word of God and the authority of that Word. The people then let the prophet go in peace. The prophet never holds any authority over the people, and because of that, the prophet will never be accountable for them. Once the prophet leaves, the pastor is obligated to take

the message or Word that was given, and if need be, teach on the Word or elaborate on it.

This now takes us to our next question. A prophet teaching. A prophet is not wise to teach, if a prophet really wants to be successful as a prophet, then the prophet will simply prophesy, and leave the teaching to the pastors and the teachers. There are many reasons behind this, but the main reason is because a prophet is giving to the congregation what has been revealed to them or even what has been worked out within the revelation of God, thus, it becomes not teaching, but revelation.

When Paul the apostle says that a woman should not teach, he was in no way, shape, or form saying that she should not stand within her gifts and prophesy; he was simply saying that she should have no formal position in order that people might rely upon her. Notice after Paul says this, he elaborates on the fact that the woman is easier to deceive; he is hinting on the fact that if a woman is indeed placed in a position of authority or is even accountable over people, then, because she can be easily deceived, the people will now possibly become deceived as well. Paul is trying to say that women should never be placed in a position of power within the Church. The reason is simple: she will eventually become deceived, and then she might quite possibly take everyone down with her.

"A prophet or prophetess never hold a position of power among the people; they never have a position of authority; they never have a continuous status in a Church that members or congregations would rely upon them thus making them accountable. A prophet is raised up to speak and to work out the revelation of God, and then to offer it righteously to the people, but never to be in any authority over the people. Hence, a prophet does not hold authority, they reveal, and then they leave."

Sally tries to visualize Dr. Hutchinson's words, but the concepts are new to her, so she is unable to draw many firm images.

"Apostles in the Bible have gifts that allow them to both prophesy as well as command authority, because an apostle is a glorified prophet, glorified in God so that the Church might be edified. An apostle is basically a

prophet who can both prophesy and command authority over man. God has given the apostle these permissions as well as the gifts, but understand Sally, it is an incredibly dying process for an apostle to have authority over the entire Church, much like a pastor has the authority over his own congregation. The prophets actually have it easy in that they only have power within God to prophesy. Apostles have that same power to prophesy but also have additional power with regard to man, to correct and to command authority.

This makes the apostles' job harder because they are responsible for both the congregations as well as for their prophetic gifts, whereas the prophets are only responsible for their prophetic gifts. When a prophet speaks, whether or not the congregations believe and accept, this is not the prophet's problem, the prophet has done his duty; at that point the prophet can leave and be blameless. On the other hand, if an apostle prophesies, and the congregations fight it, then God will require that the apostle does everything in his power to ensure that the prophesy sticks, meaning that the apostle will most likely have to become an example through a crucifixion process.

Now you might ask, Sally, why doesn't God require that of the prophet? Because that would create accountability in the prophet, and that is a whole different ball of wax. For an apostle to become accountable for the Church, separate from their task of ministering the Word of God, is about 95 percent of the pain the apostle will endure during his lifetime, not to mention the fact that this accountable spirit has to be worked into the apostle over years and years, thus creating obedient submission.

It's like the difference between a high school degree and a doctorate degree. Would you trust someone with a high school degree to perform open-heart surgery on you? I don't think so, and God doesn't require a prophet to do open heart surgery on the Church; only the apostle needs that kind of burden. The prophet's job is to faithfully abide in God, to work out revelations within the mystery of Christ, and to abide within the Spirit of Christ in order that Christ might be formed in

the prophet. They are not to be accountable, and they are not to have congregations relying upon them."

Sally was a bit spooked by these words. She had never heard anything like them, and she was partly afraid, but she remained attentive and open.

"The teaching I have explained briefly, Sally, but basically, a prophet never has to teach. A prophet can choose to teach, but I have found that this is not necessary when all the ministries are effectively working within their appropriate environments. A teaching role immediately speaks of accountability, and consequently people asking questions. This makes people rely on teachers. A teacher's position is also a permanent one, and within this position, a teacher is exalted and respected with regard to a certain authority they possess. A woman cannot have such a position of authority Sally, because, as Paul said, women are easier to deceive.

"So for all these reasons, a prophet does not teach or usurp authority, so, according to this wisdom, if you accept it, a woman, by accepting her role as a prophetess, has not violated either of these permissions. Paul himself even wrote that a woman prophesying needed to cover her head,² thus establishing a woman's God-given permission to prophesy. The Bible, at different times and in different situations, makes mention of women who were either called upon as prophetess, or who exercised themselves within their God-given gift to prophesy."³

Sally was reminded by Dr. Hutchinson's words, she knew of such verses and stories, but these were actually the stories that haunted her. Haunted her because she knew somewhere deep within herself that all of what Dr. Hutchinson spoke of was possible, but at the same time, seemed to always have trouble finding the faith.

"This Biblical proof cannot be denied, so, yes, Sally, there must be some kind of wisdom that helps us understand how a woman can receive her calling as a prophetess by faith, and, at the same time, never deviate from the Bible's teachings." Dr. Hutchinson pauses for emphasis. "I believe I have given you some of that wisdom, Sally.

"Here is an interesting concept. Can a woman exercise her gifts as a prophetess in a Church? Paul the apostle said that a woman should not speak in Church,⁴ and when he said this, he said it with regard to his explanation of the spiritual gifts, prophesy being foremost within his explanation. I believe I have some insight into this question, too. Remember when John the Baptist baptized Jesus, and John said to Jesus, 'I think you should be doing this to me.' What did Jesus say?"

Sally merely looks at Dr. Hutchinson, knowing the answer but meekly remaining quiet.

Dr. Hutchinson goes forward, wide-eyed. "Jesus said, 'suffer that this needs to be done for now, in order to fulfill all righteousness.' Sally, Jesus was basically saying that although John was seemingly right, that this baptism really wasn't accurate according to what could be perceived, in essence that man baptizing God was ridiculous, yet, because both were currently on earth, and because John had already been fully established and accepted by the people, this baptism became the first witness to the people that began Jesus Christ's ministry on earth. The baptism, as well as God the Father's voice from heaven, were done for the people's sake. The witness of the baptism was done to fulfill all righteousness, because it was righteous that God the Father would not begin Jesus Christ's ministry on earth by creating any confusion or doubt among the people.

"And this is precisely why women are not to speak in Churches, for unbelievers' sake. The Bible even bears witness to this when it speaks regarding the signs and then the servings of those signs to believers and unbelievers within the Church environment.⁵ Paul cautions us that we should understand the way unbelievers view our ceremonies and rituals and we should be wise accordingly, and in doing so, fulfilling all righteousness.⁶ Truth is not the sole method for helping people Sally; it also becomes the mercy within that truth that helps people. Take medicine, for example. Medicine, Sally, is there to help people, just like the truth is there to help people. But what happens if you

administer medicine the wrong way? People can die, Sally."

Sally turns a bit, as if shying away from the idea of death, and then turns back in an effort to receive.

"What if you give someone a cream for a deadly rash and instead of telling the person to apply the cream directly on the rash, you tell the person to swallow it?"

Sally smirks at the example. Dr. Hutchinson notices the smirk and capitalizes on it. He looks at her deeply again.

"Bad things will happen, Sally. It's the same with the truth. If you take the truth and administer it the wrong way, bad things can happen. You need to use the truth sparingly, in mercy, always with the right kind of witness. So, Sally, what conclusions can we draw from this?"

He looks at Sally deeply again, trying to make sure her heart is bearing witness to his words. "Even if there is a woman prophetess, and even if she is ordained of God, and even if collectively the truth is indeed on her side, then she will not in any way, shape, or form be fulfilling **all** righteousness if she decides to say within herself, 'I am a woman prophetess and I am called of God and possess the truth and even if unbelievers don't understand, then they will just have to get with the program.' I'll tell you what will happen, Sally; unbelievers will be walking right out of Church.

"Perhaps Sally, all their life, these unbelievers regarded women speaking in any kind of formal ceremony as something risqué or improper, and a woman prophetess justifying herself and saying that the truth was on her side would at this point be existing outside of grace, and it would become a shame to her, just as Paul the apostle says.⁷ So it is clear that although a woman has the gift, and although the Lord has called her, and although she has the ability to exercise her gift, that she must do so within the proper orders of the Church." Dr. Hutchinson gets blunt, "a woman cannot speak in Church Sally, for unbeliever's sake, for conscience' sake regarding the negative consequences it might have on weak or double-minded Christians,⁸ and because all things need to be suffered in order to fulfill **all** righteousness."

Sally was a bit breathless at this point. Dr. Hutchinson noticed that Sally was taking in his words, so he leaned back and allowed her to receive the wisdom. Sally then thought to herself, Dr. Hutchinson's words made so much sense. A woman couldn't prophesy in a Church not because a woman couldn't, but because people wouldn't understand. It was not that God had anything against women, it was God allowing all things to be suffered for mankind's sake. If it were entirely possible for all of mankind to receive from a woman prophesying in a Church, then reasonably there would be no reason to stop it; it was simply the way things needed to be. There was no agenda, it was simply pure logic.

Breaking Sally's thought process, Dr. Hutchinson continues. "One last thing I would like to mention with regard to a woman's prophetic calling, just so you understand. Ask yourself this question, Why would God give the weaker vessel, the woman,⁹ a prophetic calling and then put more constraints on their ministry? It's a good question. I believe I have the answer for this. It says in the book of Proverbs that it is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honor of kings is to search it out. Ask yourself a question, Sally, how hard is it to figure out these things we are talking about?"

Sally shouts out a firm, "Hard!"

"Exactly," Dr. Hutchinson repeats, "hard. It is strenuous for us to deal with all these difficult questions, Sally; take a look at these notes." He points to the notes again. "These notes were born not only of diligent faith but also through searching and travailing, but guess what, it has become my honor. Within all of these hard questions, there is a diligent search, but then within that diligent search, there is much honor."

Dr. Hutchinson turns to Sally, and strengthening his resolve, makes way to connect with Sally on an even deeper level. "God establishes and glorifies many such wrestles, as you yourself understand, Sally, and it is our honor when we search and understand. In this way, I am helping you Sally. I am a man, and I have helped you understand this wisdom. I have given you the ammunition so you can move in faith, but now, Sally, I have also grown in the process."

Dr. Hutchinson relaxes himself, justified in his explanation. "It's like a team of police officers. One man and one woman. Now the woman who chooses this lifestyle will be incredibly challenging herself; she knows she is not as strong as the men out there committing crimes, and she is susceptible to a lot of the criminals who would want to hurt her. This is like a woman becoming a prophetess. She is making her life harder than it needs to be; she is taking upon herself constraints that will wear her down, antagonize her, and give her much unrest. But what do you notice with women police officers, Sally? Their expectation is not as high as men's.

"A woman prophetess, who has more constraints, also has fewer expectations. When she fails, she will also have more mercy coming her way. When a woman police officer is overpowered, she will not be grilled by her male partner because the male partner understands the situation. A two-hundred-and-fifty-pound man is usually going to overpower a one-hundred-and-thirty-five-pound woman. But here is the glory, Sally. As the man continues to work together with the woman in order to ensure that they are still doing the best job possible, there is much mercy in learning as well as much honor in learning, and eventually, growth. In a nutshell, Sally, when this exercise is happening, whether a male police officer is helping a woman police officer, having mercy on her, or a male prophet, or even the Church for that matter, helping a woman prophetess, having mercy on her, there is much honor in this process. This is the process that God exalts, Sally, and this process does more work than you could ever imagine.¹⁰

"One other aspect of this wrestle is the fact that this kind of wrestle makes us susceptible to weakness, which prompts God to move quickly on our behalf. This is why I truly believe that God has worked so quickly with us, Sally; whenever people step out in susceptible faith, God is going to move differently, and since our faith is susceptible and is being greatly exercised within what we believe to be a Godly process in your life, then we are not testing Him by trusting in Him.

"This means that a Church that accepts the responsibility of dealing with a woman prophetess according to an incredible wrestle and according to a diligent search will indeed be burdening themselves, but their faith will also prompt God to work quickly and powerfully on their behalf. And remember, Sally, this is simply because, according to faith, God is honoring His initial call. You might ask, 'is it worth it, the tradeoff?' People might say, if we cast out the woman prophetess, then we don't have to worry about the wrestles and we also don't need to concern ourselves with things potentially getting broken. This is true, but this also nips God in the bud, and the Church ends up short-changing itself. God did not offer us fights that we might walk away from them; He wants us to learn to grow within the fights."

He changes his tone and moves even closer to Sally. "Do you have any idea how much growth will happen if the Church decides to involve themselves within this wrestle? I believe it will be mind-altering, Sally. I truly believe God would honor this kind of faith in a special way, and it would offer Him the chance to justify Himself as well as the eventual work that could get done. This is something that we cannot even perceive right now, even something that could go way beyond the boundaries of women in prophecy."

Imagine eventually tackling some of the even harder issues of theology like sanctification, the orders within the different ministries, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The acceptance of this wrestle could be just the beginning. What if, as soon as we start fighting this battle, we come to learn that we have strengthened ourselves for the next? We can't walk away from this wisdom; it will come back to haunt us. Just like your paper said, one door eventually opens up the next door, and so on. The Church needs to wrestle, Sally, and as far as I am concerned, it doesn't even so much matter what specific issue the Church begins with, we just need to get on the mat, and the way I see it, woman in prophecy is just as good an issue as any."

"Dr. Hutchinson, I have a question," Sally ventures. "When I write a paper, something inside me

tells me it's okay, but I doubt anyway, because I feel as though I am teaching through the papers I write. Now I fully understand what you just explained, but can you clarify how what I do, when I work out a revelation and then place it on paper, that this process is prophecy and not teaching at all? I feel that I have had a place in it and for that reason, what's on paper could not realistically be anything else but partly my teaching?"

"That is a good question, Sally. Here is what I have been able to work out so far. When God speaks directly through a man¹¹ or woman,¹² then this is obviously prophecy; the Lord, through the Holy Ghost, inspires His vessel and then His grace overshadows the situation and the word of God comes forth. I do not believe you have ever experienced this type of prophecy, have you, Sally?"

"No, I don't think so."

"There is another type of prophecy, one that is more in tune with the wrestling you explained to me the first time you prophesied in my classroom. This type of prophecy comes from a particular wrestle, Sally, certain knowledge worked out by a person with regard to the mystery of Christ that is revealed to the person by the Holy Spirit.¹³ This Sally, is what you do in your papers, and it is not teaching at all; it's revealed prophecy."

Sally looks frustrated. Dr. Hutchinson sees it and tries to relax her questioning look. He continues after a moment. "Let me explain. God has given the prophets gifts, mostly faith Sally, and with this faith a prophet abides in the Word of God according to the revelation of God, and then the mystery is made manifest. Now, once this mystery is made manifest, the prophet has something to work with, a direct revelation into the mystery of Christ. The prophet will wrestle with this mystery, harness it according to faith, harness it according to belief, single-mindedness, discernment and relationship. Once this is done effectively, knowledge arises from this mystery, knowledge that the prophet now possess that is not a mystery. Now, the prophet will apply this knowledge, or information, to his or her own life, allow this knowledge to work itself through life experience,

then; the wisdom that arises from these life experiences eventually becomes sanctifying.

"These wrestles, Sally, these bouts of knowledge and experiences and manifestations of wisdom, eventually produced the epistles of the New Testament. If you clearly read Paul's book of Ephesians, he lets us know that he received knowledge from the mystery, you see Sally, the mystery itself is not the knowledge at all, and it cannot be applied. The mystery needed to be worked out in order to manifest that knowledge. If you read chapter three, you understand that Paul at first had only a limited understanding within the mystery, that is why he said he 'wrote in a few words before,' but now, at the time he is writing the book of Ephesians, he asks the people to read and understand that he now has significant knowledge within that mystery.

"He is basically saying, in the beginning, when the mystery was revealed, I wrote in few words because my knowledge was limited, but now, now that I have had time to learn and understand and wrestle, I have significant knowledge to impart to you. And Sally, what was the significant knowledge that he imparted?"

Sally just stares.

"It was the letter to the Ephesians, Sally, that, as you know, eventually became the Book of Ephesians in the Bible. Any minister would consider the book of Ephesians prophecy, and it was worked out through a process, and that process you know and understand because you did it with your paper. Considering how this process is not teaching, as I said before, the gifts of faith and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit consecrate the prophet. For this reason, the work that manifests through this process is consecrated according to the calling. If the teacher uses his gifts to work out a biblical teaching, then the teaching becomes consecrated, and if a prophet uses his or her gifts to work out a prophecy, then the prophecy becomes consecrated. According to the gifts and the permissions given to the called, any works arising from those gifts and permissions become consecrated by the calling and faith. Let me give you an example."

Dr. Hutchinson again moves closer to Sally, trying to help her visualize the process. "When you work out a

paper, you are abiding in the revelation of the mystery of Christ. You then use your God-given gift of faith and your own resolve to wrestle and work out the knowledge. This knowledge, through a process, eventually becomes wisdom, and then it becomes manifest on paper. Every single step of this process is a prophetic step, Sally, so what is revealed in the end is not teaching at all; it is revealed prophecy, even though it has been worked out. A prophet's gifts are consecrated, as are all ministers' gifts, so what comes from those gifts becomes consecrated within the actual usage of those gifts. Since a prophet's gifts are prophetic in nature, then what's worked out through this process remains prophetic.

"Take a look at it this way, Sally. A person has a dream; this is equal to the revelation revealed to the prophet, and the actual dream given to the person, becomes the mystery given to the prophet. Now, the person tries to figure out the dream, or the prophet, the mystery. Let's say they are successful. They get the interpretation; this becomes equivalent to the prophet's knowledge. In a nutshell, this is the process; it is not at all difficult to understand. The dream arriving to a person and a prophet's revelation coming are the same. The actual dream the person receives and the mystery of Christ the prophet receives are the same. The prophet working out knowledge within that mystery and the person interpreting their own dream are succumbing to the same process.

"Once they both figure it out, they have their knowledge or their interpretation. They then apply this knowledge to their lives, and what is learned becomes wisdom. What a prophet does is no different from the average person trying to interpret his or her own dream; the only difference is that the mystery of Christ is consecrated for the benefit of the Church and for the truth that God ordained revealed to this world. Basically, the mystery is not for personal use or for private interpretation; its purpose is larger, Sally; it is destined for the salvation of the world."

Sally has to pray as Dr. Hutchinson continues; his words are frightening. She knows the power of God, but

she has no knowledge of the power that is coming through Dr. Hutchinson presently.

Dr. Hutchinson continues in his mercy and meekness. "This is not new, Sally. In the Bible, at many times, God was within the searching's and struggles of ordained people. Daniel researched according to what time he believed God would turn away Judah's captivity.¹⁴ God helped Daniel study. Paul, in his second epistle, requested that Timothy bring both the books as well as the parchments. Also, in the Book of Revelation, God urges anyone who has understanding to count the number of the beast. God also emphasizes this process calls for wisdom. Here, God is challenging anyone to study and count the number; this would involve a prophetic process that unmistakably God Himself would be involved in. In short, Sally, God has always been involved in the study. Many prophecies have come about through study, as well as through personal experiences, manifestations of faith, deliverances, heartaches, testimonies, and much more. We know that if God chooses, He can single out a person and then speak through them.

"If God can speak through a donkey,¹⁵ He can surely speak through someone created in His own image. But this, speaking miraculously through a person, is not the norm for God; this almost borderlines on the miracle wisdom you were explaining in the classroom. It is almost testing God expecting Him to speak miraculously through a person. If a particular situation arises, God is not grieved to express Himself in this manner,¹⁶ but make no mistake about it, God did not empower His Church with gifts for them to sit around and wait for Him to perform some kind of empowering work. The living Church has this ability, and God follows, and then honors, such ability."

Sally was taken with the wisdom. She tried to reason a few concepts in her mind and was prompted not to; she then asked a question. "Dr. Hutchinson, where would women prophesy if they were not to prophesy in the Church?"

That was a good question, Dr. Hutchinson thought to himself; it was a question he had sporadically asked

himself many times over the last twenty-five years. He believed he had an answer.

"Sally, if you take a look at women being used by the Spirit of God, a few things stand out. First off, examples in the Bible show that a woman prophetess was already established among the people before she was called upon and that she was, in fact, specifically called upon by the people but didn't go to the people.

"Sally, at many times men prophets would be sent to kings, peoples, foreign rulers and even to the Israelite priest's themselves. These prophets would proclaim the Word of God and then leave. From the examples we have in the scriptures, this was not the case with women. When it came to the women prophetess, they were approached, but never sent. Take a look at these scriptures." He holds out a Bible and opens the marked pages. He shows her Judges 4:4-5, 2 Kings 22:14, and Luke 2:36-37. "Sally, take a look at all three of these verses that speak of a woman prophetess."

Sally draws closer and looks at the verses. Dr. Hutchinson elaborates.

"Sally, can you see? Not only were Deborah, Huldah, and Anna all approached, but look specifically at what all three verses also have in common."

Sally again looked, but she couldn't see. "What?"

"It specifically says that all three women dwelt. With Deborah and Huldah, the text actually uses the word dwelt, implying that the prophetess was a fixture there, and that others would seek her there specifically. With Anna, it says that she departed not from the temple night or day; in essence, she dwelt there. The temple is where she could be found night or day. What I am trying to highlight Sally is that all three of these women prophetesses existed in the exact same situation; they became established in the place where they dwelt. The Bible specifically points this out, Sally, even using parenthesis in the case of Huldah, parenthesis usually implying information that wasn't seemingly necessary, except for the fact that God wanted to include it."

Dr. Hutchinson puts the Bible down and opens his arms wide. "This is huge, Sally; it literally helps us understand how a woman is expected to handle her

ministry; by dwelling and letting others approach her. Sally, this is essential for us to focus on. I believe, regarding the calling of God on your life, it will be critical for God to establish you first, and then, after He has done this, for people to approach you."

Sally thought for a moment; what Dr. Hutchinson was saying was interesting. She tried to think what this would mean to her specifically.

"Sally," Dr. Hutchinson continued with his pleasant resolve, "even men prophets would be used in a mightier way if they would succumb to the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit by allowing more people to come to them. Some might argue that a prophet must abide in faith, meaning that they must rally up the work themselves. This might be true to an extent, but Jesus says that a prophet is worthy of his wages. If a prophet is established by God and is consistent, then he can have the same kind of impact Jesus had, who rarely ever approached individuals, but usually allowed individuals to approach him. My line of reasoning is this. First, it keeps the prophet humble and reliant upon God. This allows God to open the right doors and there becomes no accusation or condemnation for conscience sake. The second reason is even more important. When people usually approach a prophet, it is because they are needy, even hungry and wanting. Such people will receive easily, and the hunger within them allows God to work through the prophet more powerfully and effectively. Basically, Sally, it is not only wise and even necessary for a woman prophetess to wait upon the Lord, but it also becomes wise for a man prophet to do the same."

Sally shook her head. It was astonishing.

"But regarding where a woman can prophesy, we know that a Church is off limits because of unbelievers' sake. So where does a woman prophetess prophesy?"

Sally shrugs her shoulders; she isn't about to talk now. Dr. Hutchinson smiles at her childlike submission and curiosity.

"Everywhere else, Sally. Anywhere a Church is not gathered and where a message is not being spoken and where unbelievers are not consciously being readied for the salvation of their souls, a woman would have the

permissions to prophesy. That is, as long as she is invited." Dr. Hutchinson then elaborates even more, passion reverberating behind his eyes. "Books, internet, prayer meetings, gatherings, special invites," he looks at Sally before he makes mention of the next few. "And in the secular world, gatherings, meetings, seekers, special invites, and even assemblies of other religions."

Sally is frank with the next question. "Dr. Hutchinson, if a woman cannot prophesy in Church because of unbelievers' sake, then how can she go into the secular world and prophesy unto those same unbelievers?"

"For two reasons, Sally. Because she is invited, the group or people knowing what they are asking for, specifically beckoning a woman to come to them. And because the gift of God is for them. The only reason a woman cannot prophesy in Church is because an unbeliever will attend a Church with a curious eye regarding the activities of the Church; Sally, nothing about this world should be to pressing or questionable to them that they might accuse. But, on the other hand, if the same unbelievers beckon a woman to their gathering or to their meeting, then they have opened this door themselves. With this permission, the woman prophetess can go in peace."

"So," Sally questions, "the only real reason a woman cannot prophesy in Church is so she can stop an unbeliever's leverage to accuse, so an unbeliever won't feel justified in believing that God is unfair?"

Dr. Hutchinson smiles over Sally's reasoning, "pretty much, Sally. Try and also imagine it this way. Let's say a group of unbelievers walk into a Church and they see a woman sitting down they knew to be a prophetess. Now, what if the leader of that group said to the man preaching or prophesying, 'Hey, we want to hear that woman, that prophetess, speak!' Now, because the unbelievers were open, this reasonably would annul the fact that a woman cannot prophesy in Church. Now, it would be proper that the man speaking would explain to the unbelievers that although they desired the woman to speak, yet because of the ways of God, it could not be allowed. But you understand the concept, being that the

unbelievers permission or openness will open the doors for the woman to be blameless.

"This same prophetess could rightly approach the unbelievers after the meeting and yield, perhaps to minister unto them at a respectable juncture. A meeting could then be called, and the woman prophetess could prophesy. Now one might say, that's kind of stupid; why would you have those unbelievers go through all the trouble of inviting the woman prophetess somewhere else just to keep some stupid rule, they want to receive from the woman; let them receive. What must be understood first and foremost is that the ways of God must remain uncompromised. Now, it seems unreasonable, but so is the example; it is not likely that unbelievers would walk into a Church and request that a woman speak, but I used this example to illustrate something. It's not that a woman prophetess cannot minister to unbelievers, it's just that women cannot be established in a Church setting in order to do that ministering.

"I truly believe that a prophetess's greatest ministry would be to minister to unbelievers who were open to a greater truth. They don't even need to be open to the gospel necessarily. The only thing that matters is that the people desire to receive and are open to what the prophetess has to say. As long as this is in order, a woman prophetess is not only blameless, but she also has the power of God backing her."

It was unbelievable. The words, all the instruction, and all the good faith, it was like a second meal. She devoured the words with her faith and then established them inside her heart; they were necessary to her now, now that she had them, she had no idea how she did without. She wanted to ask one last question, but it was lingering in her mind, she didn't know what to say, but she said it anyway, "Dr. Hutchinson ...," her voice, so demanding and prompt that it shook Dr. Hutchinson. He set down his tea. "Yes, Sally?" Sally then cuffed her shorts with her hands. "I have read in the Old Testament that there were women prophetesses, and after Jesus Christ, women with the gift of prophecy, but I have never read anything regarding woman prophetesses after Jesus Christ?"

Dr. Hutchinson interrupts, "You are wondering if you might simply be a woman with the gift of prophecy rather than a woman prophetess, right?"

"Exactly." Sally didn't even flinch; the question, as well as the desire for an answer remained at the core of her being.

"Sally, just like in the case between a prophet and an apostle, there is an obvious difference between a prophetess and a woman simply with the gift of prophecy, and in both cases Sally, the Bible never fully explains those differences. Even now, if you were to go to a hundred pastors and ask them the difference between an apostle and a prophet, they would probably have a hundred different answers for you. The Bible does clearly state in the Old Testament that there were women prophetesses, and in the New Testament, women who did prophesy. Here is the issue we need to wrestle with Sally. The Bible doesn't clearly tell us in the New Testament that a woman *can* be a prophetess, but at the same time, the Bible also in the New Testament doesn't say that a woman *can not* be."

He looks Sally in the eye, wondering if she's understanding. She is, but it's obvious she still wants a lot more, so Dr. Hutchinson offers it. "The thing is, Sally, it is a faith area for the Church. If I were to say that you had a prophetic gift, and that this gift was just the spirit of prophecy, but added nothing further, you might ask, "Well, am I a prophetess?" Here's the thing, I couldn't say no. There is no scripture in the Bible that says a woman in today's time cannot be a prophetess, nothing at all. So the question to myself becomes, if I have no legitimate grounds to say you cannot be a prophetess, then where is my justification?"

"God did anoint women in the Old Testament to be prophetess, and God is the same today, yesterday, and forever. So this made me own up to the fact that if I indeed had no legitimate grounds to judge that a woman could only possess the gift of prophecy, then I would not be justified in my assessment.

"But here's the kicker, Sally, you exercise yourself prophetically. The way you abide in the mystery of Christ, work out knowledge within that mystery and

then eventually write down your wrestles. This is not the gift of prophecy; this is a prophetic exercise, Sally, a process actually.¹⁷

"Someone who possesses the gift of prophecy manifests prophecy as a gift, an imparted gift, but not an exercise. A pastor might have the gift of prophecy, but his calling or exercise is that he is a pastor. He will manifest the gift simply by grace and faith. A prophet, on the other hand, has a prophetic calling or exercise. This is a process to be continuously worked out within the calling. This is a work process, Sally, and it becomes totally different than manifest prophecy. Whereas the pastor has the calling to exercise himself as a pastor, within a pastor's process, the prophet has the calling to exercise himself as a prophet, within a prophet's process. You don't so much manifest prophecy by grace as you do exercise yourself prophetically. I do believe you will eventually manifest through the spirit of prophecy, but for now, God has you exercising yourself specifically within your prophetic calling."

"Why?" Sally asks.

Dr. Hutchinson is a bit taken with her desire to understand, but he answers her question, "Probably because He wants you more sanctified, the work you do in the spirit, writing the papers, and working out prophecy is a sanctifying process to say the least. God is training you up through this process. The other reason is simpler yet just as important. Had God manifested His Spirit within you while you were growing up, you would have gathered much attention. People would be certain you had the gift of prophecy, and this would have taken a lot of the wrestle away from you.

"At this point you wouldn't have needed faith so much; people would have been speaking this faith into you. That's not what God wanted. This way, God has been able to have His time alone with you. He has grown you, Sally. Through the prophetic process you have learned Him, understood Him, and learned why you should obey Him by faith. Had God manifested His Spirit through you long ago, then you would've become soft within your prophetic calling, maybe not even exercising yourself at all.

"In short, by God holding back and then by Him giving you gleanings, He has forced you to learn how to plant yourself and then how to harvest yourself. God didn't just put a crop inside of you and then spring it up. He has made a farmer out of you Sally."

Sally looks at him, understanding his illustrations.

"Now that you can farm, Sally, and can be trusted within that exercise, God will have no problem inserting and even raising up prophetic utterances within you, now that He has taught you to rely upon Him and become faithful within the prophetic process."

Sally was dumbfounded his words were so true. Had God prophetically spoken through her long ago, she would have never exercised herself the way she did. Sally thought to herself, God backing off made her hungry and efficient; God backing off made her who she was today. Dr. Hutchinson was just looking at Sally, humbly yet forcefully. Sally was still trying to take everything in. Clair was right Sally thought, God was raising her up to become more humble and to rely solely upon Him; It was so obvious, but she never saw it.

Dr. Hutchinson interrupts Sally's thought process. "But getting back to your question, Sally, I meekly call you a prophetess because I see this process at work in you. If the gift of prophecy were to simply manifest through you, and I were to sit you down afterwards and talk to you regarding it, and if you were to have no discernment within the process, then I would assume that you were not a prophetess at all, but that God had offered the spirit of prophecy simply for the edification of the Church. But Sally, this is not the case with you; if anything, it's the exact opposite. God doesn't so much prophetically speak through you as He has given you prophetic tools, for you to work out and exercise yourself therein. An example of some of these prophetic tools would be faith, discernment, perception, abiding, understanding, separation, burden, self-control, reliance, single-mindedness ... and the list goes on and on.

"Simply put, Sally, if you only possessed the gift of prophecy, then you couldn't have written this paper."

He takes out her paper, "The Glial Theory and The Esther Prophecy," and sets it on the table. "Only a prophet could have written this paper; someone with only the spirit of prophecy probably couldn't even think it."

Sally looks directly at Dr. Hutchinson, trying to stay humble. Dr. Hutchinson then finishes his train of thought.

"Sally, prophets who thoroughly exercise themselves within the Revelation of God, especially the way you do, eventually become the most enlightened and intelligent people in the world. These people are wrestling with the Mind of God. What do you think happens when someone spends time with, dissects, challenges and then even wrestles with, the Mind of God? This is what happens: that person eventually becomes similar to what they are wrestling. This is why your paper is so reaching, Sally, because it hits upon, even explains to the core, exactly how prophets become so wise. The process is true Sally, and your reasoning, fully correct."

Sally takes a second for herself; she understood Dr. Hutchinson's words because she knew that her abilities had increased and even changed ever since she had been faithfully exercising herself within the Spirit of God. She felt herself improving within all of her gifts; her discernment was getting stronger, her perception was becoming clearer, her understanding was more fruitful, and her resolve was more accompanied, all by His grace, of course. She thought upon Paul the apostle, and how that his wisdom was undeniable. To sit down and have a conversation with him would have been like sitting down and having a conversation with one of the most intelligent people in the world. You need only to read his epistles to acknowledge this.

Dr. Hutchinson, as he waited on Sally, slowly picked up another file and set it between them both. He unties the red string binding the file and slowly begins to open it. Sally's attention turns immediately to the file. Dr. Hutchinson begins to speak.

"Sally ...," he turns to her and lifts up his eyes, almost as though he is summoning direction from above. "We now begin part two of our discussion."

Sally just looks at him. She can't believe what she just heard. The two of them had just spent the last two and a half hours going over the calling of a prophetess and why he believed that she had such a calling on her life, and now, now they were going to just nonchalantly begin part two. Wow, Sally began to think to herself; what was part two going to entail, mysteries of the catacombs?

"Sally ...," he pauses as he pulls the first page out of the file, "... the thing is ...," he pauses again, not fully knowing how to introduce the conversation, he then continues with the blunt truth, "... you've already been invited."

Sally goes numb. Every ounce of blood, all at once, just rushes through her veins and right into her heart. She starts to hyperventilate. Dr. Hutchinson notices and jumps up and into the kitchen; he grabs a paper bag, runs over to her, and places the bag to her mouth.

"Breathe slowly, Sally, breathe."

Sally is taking her time; she turns away from the file in an effort not to think too much. It was just too much, too much to soon. She simply can't believe this is happening. She was struck by Dr. Hutchinson's words because she knew exactly what they meant. As she continued to breathe, she sat there motionless, resting within the implications. Part of her was angry because she knew that Dr. Hutchinson had asked her to write that paper for another reason besides just class, and now that he had all these files, she knew it had to be more than just his opinion. But she was also realistic. Dr. Hutchinson had done so much to help her, done so much to help her have clarity. How ungrateful would it be for her to jump down his throat with accusations? As she slowly began to breathe calmly she decided to wait, to wait and to hear him out; if she felt like yelling at him afterwards, then she would consider it her dessert.

"I'm okay, I'm okay." Sally turned and motioned him away with her hand. She set the bag down and took a sip of her drink. She looked into Dr. Hutchinson's eyes; his eyes were reserved, not too judgmental and not too impatient; he was probably doing something spiritual, she

thought. Dr. Hutchinson sat down slowly and immediately apologized.

"Sally, I'm so sorry; I really didn't know how else to bring it up." She looked at him, but tried not to look too deep. Dr. Hutchinson then continued. "There are a million different reasons I chose the course of action I did, my only defense is that everything has worked until now."

She couldn't really argue with that.

"Please, Sally, hear me out; then afterwards, you can yell at me all you want."

Sally smirked and looked away; he was in the spirit.

Dr. Hutchinson gets passionate, "Sally, I am holding in my hand detailed information regarding one of the most prestigious intelligence agencies in the world."

He pauses to allow Sally to clearly understand; Sally doesn't even bat an eyelash. "I was actually once a part of this agency, and remain a confidant and an advisor. My friend, Cross Lutherant, is the executive director of this agency, and he just so happened to be the second person to read your paper."

Sally nods her head, implying she is following him. "But in this specific situation, by reading your paper, he was simply acting as the middle man; the paper was always meant for someone else."

Dr. Hutchinson grabs a piece of paper that is near to him and places it squarely in front of her; he taps on it twice "His name is Dr. Aloysius Thiery, and he is the lead administrator of The Cell; he is actually The Cell's founder.

"Sally, let me give you some background before we speak regarding matters concerning you." He begins, taking his eyes away from the paper and into a realm of remembrance, "Dr. Thiery was born in France, and has lived there all his life. He graduated with a doctorate in Astrophysics at the Universite' de Paris VII (Sorbonne) but also studied Theology at the Institut Catholique de Paris at the Universite' de Paris IV (Sorbonne)." Dr. Hutchinson then pauses, looking squarely at Sally, "But then things get less routine."

Sally wonders what that could mean.

"After receiving his doctorate, he went to work for the French government. It wasn't so odd that he was working for the government, as it was what he specifically did for the government.

"The French government had recruited him to perform intelligence work relating to space travel, astrophysics to be exact. And he did, for two and a half years. He worked with stolen intelligence, mostly from America and Russia. This was intensive work, but during this time he was able to learn a few things about himself. He learned he was very good at doing investigative work, specifically at countering other people's mistakes and assumptions, and he was good at asking the right questions, thus, yielding for himself good answers. This time also taught him that he didn't care about investigating other people's work in order to find flaws in their work, but he just wanted to do his job well and advance space travel."

He draws closer to Sally in order to help her understand clearly. "Sally, the realization that he didn't want to investigate others in order to disrespect their work gave him the internal reassurance that his attitude toward his work was right. He wasn't in it to shame anyone; he was in it because it was his job and his country had asked him to do it."

Dr. Hutchinson eases back, feeling confident he has made his point; he then continues. "Lastly, this time also established him as a brilliant young scientist who had both the ability and dedication to do what was called of him, but it left one flaw."

"What?" Sally interrupted.

"After spending two and a half years doing intelligence work, the inevitable happened. He lost his appetite for astrophysics. But Sally, he didn't so much lose his appetite for astrophysics as he caught something else."

Sally becomes curious.

"He became sold on intelligence work; he was successful at it, and he knew it. He had experienced first hand what a government could do with the right kind of information and with the right kinds of motives. I guess you could also assume that he had witnessed power

up close and he believed he could make a solid difference. So, with one foot in the door he purposed to firmly establish himself in the French intelligence world. Two years after this realization he became assistant to the deputy director of the Intelligence Directorate division of the French's SDECE (Service de Documentation Exterieur et de Contre-Espionage).

"At this position, he excelled, not only technically but also administratively. After proving himself, the director firmly established him as his right-hand man, his go-to guy if you will, and he took Dr. Thiery under his wing. Now what you need to understand, Sally, is that the Intelligence Directorate division was the French Intelligence division that dealt directly with NATO. At the time, NATO had no intelligence agency; they would simply access intelligence directly from their member countries agencies, and in France's case, the SDECE. Sally, guess who eventually became responsible for dealing with NATO in the event that NATO requested French Intelligence?"

"Dr. Thiery."

"Bingo," Dr. Hutchinson affirmed. "And not only did Dr. Thiery thoroughly brief NATO regarding any and all intelligence requests, but he also became instrumental within the process, establishing meetings, setting up committees, whatever NATO needed at the time. He took the realm. Dr. Thiery not only gave NATO intelligence, but more importantly, he established an intelligence relationship with NATO. Even the NATO French Permanent Representative took an incredible liking to Dr. Thiery, seeing his industrious work and acknowledging him thoroughly. So, Dr. Thiery was not only established within the French intelligence community, but now he also had his other foot firmly established within NATO's stagnate intelligence community.

"But like I said before, Sally, at the time, NATO had no intelligence agency to speak of. The U.S. had the CIA, France had the SDECE, but NATO didn't have their own go-to agency. Dr. Thiery sought to change all that. With the support of NATO members and allegiances, he began instituting policies within NATO's political arena; he wrote up proposals with the signatures and the backing

of many of the other countries' representatives, and he took deep political action with regard to the obvious void within NATO's intelligence community. This man, by himself, convinced NATO that they needed their own intelligence agency, totally separate from any future involvement with any other member countries intelligence agency.

"And NATO bought it. At the time, NATO was basically a strategic war machine, relying both on diplomacy and intimidation. Dr. Thiery had a theory and a vision that was going to change all that. He helped NATO see that instead of focusing on intelligence, which is basically information, and then on military might, which is basically intimidation, that they should focus on the in-between."

Sally asks, "What do you mean, 'the in-between'?"

"Dr. Thiery helped NATO see that information was good, and that war efforts were sometimes necessary, but that wisdom derived from the study of the intelligence itself would become a much better way. He convinced NATO that their was way too much emphasis on knowing what was going to happen or on knowing what existed currently and then simply acting on it militarily; there was simply not enough in-between. Dr. Thiery helped NATO see that since they were indeed a peaceful treaty organisation, that part of their future intelligence agency's efforts should focus on trying to resolve conflicts before they start, not necessarily on information and then intimidation. This was the perfect plan for NATO, Sally, to have an intelligence agency that was not only effective, but personified all that NATO stood for, a desire for peace that would be brought about peaceably, not simply through war efforts. NATO loved his vision Sally, but not all of it.

"Dr. Thiery's first vision of the NATO intelligence agency was for two separate entities. First, a conglomerate multimember allied intelligence agency that would gather information and become the administrative and military aspect of the vision. This entity would consist of the personnel, analysts, scientists, engineers, programmers, historians, military, and any other specialists, basically your everyday intelligence

department. This entity would be responsible for churning and compiling intelligence information and handing it over to the second entity. This second entity was to be Dr. Thiery's responsibility.

"This second entity was to be a multilevel think tank. A multilevel think tank comprised of the most elite and established thinkers of all the allied countries."

There is a hush, like all the questions Sally had been struggling with just evaporated. She blinked a few times and then looked up easily at Dr. Hutchinson. After he saw she was ready, he continued. "The think tank would consist of two separate divisions, the Primary Members and the Candidate Members. There would only be ten Primary Members; these were the main players who had the decision-making authority. The Candidate Members would be much like the Primary Members, but they had no decision-making authority, mostly doing analysis and perception drills with the intelligence they were given, and sometimes drawing their own conclusions. NATO was absolutely sold on this vision, but there was one catch; they wanted Dr. Thiery to head up everything.

"He couldn't believe it; he had just become responsible for creating and then instituting one of the farthest reaching intelligence agencies the world had ever known. It of course took him time to formulate and to organize, and then to find the proper staffing in order to usher in the changes. But in what seemed to be no time at all, The Cell was up and running on a skeleton crew slowly establishing itself within the eyes of NATO, and not to mention, the world at large.

"Then, in 1967, just three years after NATO agreed on his proposal, ground broke just outside of Strasbourg, France, for The Cell's new home; it would be called The Compound. At the time, The Cell was still young, but by the time The Compound was completely finished in 1970, The Cell had become a legitimate force within the intelligence community. Dr. Thiery pet-named it "The Babylonian Cell," and I was invited to join in 1972."

Sally paused for a moment. There it was, she thought. This was probably most of the reason why Dr. Hutchinson's past was so mysterious, so secretive. He

had been involved in this "Cell," he had been involved since the beginning. Dr. Hutchinson took notice of Sally's pause and stopped there. He then took the file that was resting on the table and placed it squarely in front of her, but Sally took it off his hands even before he was able to set it down.

"It's your invite." Dr. Hutchinson eyed Sally in an attempt to discern her emotions. "It's information on The Cell; it's the information you'll need in order to help you make your choice." Dr. Hutchinson then watched as Sally opened up the file and then closed it, almost as quickly as she had opened it. She set the file down and rubbed her forehead. Dr. Hutchinson took notice and decided to relent just a bit. He backed his chair away from the table and stood up, beginning to clear the dishes, offering Sally ample time to think and to relax; he exited the room and made for the kitchen.

He stayed in the kitchen for a while, performing menial tasks he could have easily reserved for later. When he reentered, Sally had the file open, already knee-deep in the information, papers turned over, pictures spread out. She was relaxed, and Dr. Hutchinson noticed. He approached the table softly and turned his chair; he sat down easily mimicking Sally's relaxed gaze. Sally looked at him squarely.

"It's not what you think, Dr. Hutchinson," Sally began. "I appreciate all that you've done. I am just trying to understand how I have a choice here." She motions with her hand toward the evidence and then looks up. "Truly, Dr. Hutchinson," she continues, "the way I see it, I can't walk away from this."

Dr. Hutchinson accepted Sally's relaxed aggression; he felt inclined not to say a word. Sally continued, "This is not a choice for me Dr. Hutchinson; it's prepared, it's even finished. If I walk away from this, then I might as well walk away from my own faith."

Dr. Hutchinson understood Sally's reasoning; he came back, but with a prayer resounding under his lips. "Is it that bad of a thing to walk away from Sally?" In an attempt to make an observational note. "I'm mean, isn't this an honor?"

Sally kept turning the pages slowly, trying to make emotions her words. She closed the file, and started grabbing the loose pages that she had spread all across the table. "It's not the point." She took the remaining notes and placed them back into the file and set the file aside. "My answer is yes, Dr. Hutchinson; I'll go to France, but there are still some things I'll need to work out before I go."

Dr. Hutchinson was surprised but was also momentarily elated. "But if everything you just said tonight is accurate, and I believe it is, Dr. Hutchinson, then that means God has a prophetic calling on my life, just as I have always suspected but could never prove or understand." Sally pauses, and then with a stern yet appreciative look on her face continues, "I want you to know I am incredibly grateful for all you have done, even in my confusion right now, I have an overwhelming sense of gratitude that my words could not explain. All I can say right now is thank you, Dr. Hutchinson."

Dr. Hutchinson nods his head, feeling vindicated. He understood Sally's dilemma, and how she felt. How do you say no to this? Sally is in one of those situations where you personally have no control but at the same time, feel incredibly obligated to offer yourself anyway. The two sit there momentarily.

"Dr. Hutchinson, can I please say something?"

Dr. Hutchinson's eyes look up. "Sure, Sally, anything you want."

Sally settles herself, purposing to make herself clear. "Dr. Hutchinson, I have a feeling in my heart right now, and it is not something that I can put my finger on, but I know this feeling, Dr. Hutchinson."

Dr. Hutchinson bore witness to Sally's statement, knowing that sometimes the Lord did indeed have something for a prophet but would not fully reveal it, but only gently lay it upon their spirits. He nodded his head, showing he understood. Sally continued with a knowing and certain look. "Dr. Hutchinson, there's something here, but I won't know until later, but my instincts tell me that you shouldn't put all your eggs into one basket on this one."

"What do you mean Sally?"

Sally shook her head, trying to clarify again, "This is going to happen, Dr. Hutchinson, just don't assume the outcome." Sally paused, allowing Dr. Hutchinson to come into alignment with her. "God has the outcome, Dr. Hutchinson, and it hasn't been revealed yet."

Dr. Hutchinson thinks over Sally's words, he can't sense anything. Sally immediately speaks again.

"And you won't be able to sense it Dr. Hutchinson, because it's my burden, God won't give you any responsibility here, because it's my test, and so are the qualifications."

Dr. Hutchinson fully understood what this meant. Whatever God was hiding right now and whatever he was going to do, Sally herself would have to bear the burden of it. He understood what she meant, he understood the message clearly; his job was over.

He looked at the woman who would walk headlong through The Cell's doors and do the Lord's work. He clinched his fists together and exhaled from his heart, everything God had started he had finished, he thought. This was Sally's burden, and she would have to bear it alone. He continued within his resolve. "I am going to intercede for you, Sally, every day and every night you are in France, I will pray for the Lord's will and for your safe keeping." He then bowed within himself, no fight, no resistance.

"I will covet your prayers, Dr. Hutchinson." Sally stated with blunt certainty, realizing that his intercession had been obvious. "Dr. Hutchinson, when I walk through those doors in France, you and I walk through together."

Dr. Hutchinson drank the spirit of what Sally said, it touched his heart deeply. The amount of emotion dwelling inside his heart at this moment could not be measured. To think, a man who was the prophetic voice for The Cell over thirty years ago was now counseling, according to the will of the Lord, the next generation of that prophetic voice. It was poetic, but all too overpowering. Sally sensed her last statement shook Dr. Hutchinson. She began putting on her sweater, the one

that was draped over the back of her chair. Dr. Hutchinson waited.

"Sally, if there are any problems or questions, from anyone in your family, please have them call me direct. Do not show that file to anyone Sally, no one."

Sally nods, understanding his vehemence.

"There won't be any problems, Dr. Hutchinson. It's just two weeks," Sally points to the file as she stands up, "And if I am accepted, The Cell is going to give me one month to think it over, so I'm going to come home, anyway." Sally then looks at Dr. Hutchinson squarely in the eyes. "I am just going to tell everybody that it's a tryout, so they'll have no need to worry."

"You think that's a good idea."

Sally buttons her sweater, and then looks up at Dr. Hutchinson. "No, even if I do get accepted, they shouldn't have to deal with it until after."

Her words made sense, Dr. Hutchinson thought; it was just with all the work he had done, and with all of God's inner-workings, he thought she was basically a shoe-in, so why hide it?

Sally then finished. "If it comes down to me needing to make a decision, then I would rather make that decision around my family, and around my friends, ...and around you, Dr. Hutchinson."

Dr. Hutchinson smiled, realizing Sally's focus and vision.

Sally went on, and in the same spirit. "If I say something now, Dr. Hutchinson, then I won't be able to give them the specifics they'll need about The Cell. But if I am accepted, then at that time I will be able to be a bit more specific with them, that way, the decision will become all of ours, and not just my own."

"Very smart, Sally, very smart," Dr. Hutchinson then thought to himself.

Sally then gave him one last morsel to chew on. "Well, that's the thing, Dr. Hutchinson, you've done your part, and now the burden is on me. So as you very well know..." Sally looked upon him with a strong resolve, "...the heart that comes from this thing, will come through me."

This was true, Dr. Hutchinson thought to himself. This was exactly how the Lord purposed it, and how He planned it, and how He spoke.¹⁸

Chapter 14

The afternoon air was dense and husky. As it entered Sally's lungs, it exhaled a peace and tranquility resounding from the weight that had just been lifted off her shoulders. One of her hands lay silently on her lap while the other clinched the soft and warm hand of her friend Clair. She had taken Neaven and Clair aside this Wednesday afternoon in order to tell them the news, that she had been invited to France and that she would be leaving tomorrow afternoon. Clair couldn't hold back her emotion, hugging and holding Sally continuously. Neaven said nothing.

After minutes of silence, Clair spoke out. "Sally, I am so proud of you. This is like a movie or something; I am so scared and happy for you all at the same time." Clair grabbed Sally again, shaking her almost as if proving to see if she will be durable enough to hold up. Clair continued, "Sally, I don't think I should give you advice, but all I can say is that you'll do great. There's a reason for this."

Neaven looked up and then momentarily at Sally, but he then looked away and into the air. Sally felt a bit of hurt in her heart. Clair continued, "Sally, is Dr. Hutchinson going with you?"

Neaven looked at Sally again. "No. I am going alone."

Clair nodded her head, wanting to ask more questions but understanding that she couldn't. Sally had already explained to both of them that she couldn't say much now, but that when she got back in two weeks she would talk with them at length.

"Remember that I am just going for two weeks." Sally then looked at Neaven, trying to get a response. "There's a good chance that they won't even want me."

Neaven bursts out, "Come on!" He then stood up, emphasizing his point. "They may not want me?" He mimics Sally in an effort to get attention. "Of course they're going to want you, Sally; everybody wants you, but you're impossible." With that, Neaven walks away. Sally stands

to go after him, but Clair sits her down. Sally starts to cry.

"Oh, Sally-girl," Clair empathizes as she takes Sally's head and puts it on her shoulder gently. Sally puts her hands on Clair's arm, squeezing them to release her pain and frustration. "I knew, I knew from the very moment I was told about The Cell that Neaven would be mad. I knew." Trying to hold back her tears, her face pressed against Clair's shoulder, she says, "I don't want to lose him Clair; I really don't want to lose him over this."

Clair takes her hand and strokes Sally's hair, trying to take away the pain with every touch of her hand. She allows Sally to vent all of her emotion, pressing her head down upon her shoulder to the point where she seems to be pressing all of the emotion out of Sally. Sally continues to cry, taking some time to vent from her heart and from her spirit.

"Sally-girl, don't worry. You'll be back in two weeks. God did not bring you and Neaven together after one year just to break you apart; don't worry, He has a plan." Clair continues to caress Sally's head, moving down to her ear and then to her chin, then, lifting up Sally's head, she says in a very certain way, "Sally, you have to believe."

Sally looked down and away, taking her face away from Clair's. She then straightened herself, arching her shoulders back, and trying to take away the strain that was caused by overextending her body for too long. Clair had taken a Kleenex out of her purse and was handing it to her. Sally, taking it gratefully, wipes her face.

"I understand how he feels, Clair; I feel the same way right now. God did just bring us together, and now I am going off to France, and the number-one thing on my mind is if I will ever be with Neaven again." Sally looked at Clair seriously. "It's going to confuse me, Clair, and it's going to distract me."

"Or, ..." Clair instructs, "it's going to humble you, Sally, keeping you humble and keeping you consistently open." Sally looked up, almost as if God had just entered the room. "Sally, you can see this just as good as I can, you're just distracted by your emotion right

now. This situation with Neaven is probably just what the Lord wanted in order to keep you teachable while you're at The Cell." Clair finished with certainty, "Now, because of this, you'll be humble the entire time, praying to Him because of the uneasiness of the situation."

Sally knew Clair was right. This was undoubtedly one of the methods the Lord would use to humble His servants', uncertainty. Again she thought. This situation with Neaven would keep her alert, would keep her prayerful and broken, and would keep her open to the voice of the Lord. Had she gone to France separate from this struggle, then perhaps she would have become distracted, not reliant upon the Lord. Clair was right, Sally thought, God's fingerprints were all over this.

"I'll go with it, Clair," Sally pepped up, trying to find her Godly resolve. "But I don't care how Godly ordained this situation is in my life right now, I want you to keep Neaven on the straight and narrow, got it!" Sally's eyes said it all; she wasn't joking. "Keep him happy, Clair, promise me that," Sally then turned away, a tear welling up, "because I'm starting to fall in love with that jerk."

Clair's face opened up. Sally had turned away to cry again, so Clair couldn't fully see her face but she didn't need to, from Sally's reaction she was not exaggerating; she really was falling for Neaven.

"Sally," Clair began, slowly at first but then with her faith resounding, "I understand Sally; don't worry about Neaven." Then, touching Sally's shoulder, she drew close to Sally in an attempt to comfort her further. "I'll help him realize."

Sally continued to cry, putting her hand over her eyes and folding herself right into Clair's embrace. For the moment, Clair was taken with Sally's intense emotion, but then she remembered, all the questions and all the concerns that Sally had been wrestling with over the past months. This was probably the result of nineteen years of emotion welling up inside of her. Neaven and The Cell just became the door that opened up all that emotion. Clair continued to hold Sally, holding her until all the

emotion found it's way out. Clair assured her again, "Sally, I'll help him, I promise."

Sally looked at Clair, and by this time, Clair had a few tears of her own, Sally looked a bit relieved, "Thank you, Clair. I appreciate you more than words can say. You are a God-send."

"Don't worry about it, Sally-girl; that's what I'm here for."

Sally began a forced smile, but then Clair made it real. "You know, Sally-girl, you'll have to give me his hamburger money." Sally then started to laugh, simply trying to envision Neaven scarfing down all those hamburgers. She then added, and in a more protective tone, "Actually Clair, he likes cheeseburgers."

"Oh, is that so? Well then, we'll just have to make them cheeseburgers."

Sally comes back, "Yeah, you'll have to Clair." She puts her head down and speaks in a serious tone, "You'll have to, in order to make him happy."

Clair nods her head, fully understanding Sally's resolve. She then repeats Sally's words in an effort to align herself. "You got it, Sally-girl, in order to make him happy."

The note Sally left on the kitchen table earlier this morning was now folded and in her mother's hands, making its way upstairs and into the master bedroom. Sally and her mother had just finished talking, and her mother was now retiring to a more comfortable place, a place where she could be alone.

Sally had entered into the house about thirty minutes after her mother had gotten home from work, and about twenty minutes after she had read the note that Sally had left. The note had instructed her mother that the two needed to talk urgently, that the conversation was regarding a decision she had made and also pertained to the gifts she had possessed ever since childhood. Her mother didn't even begin to argue with Sally; her husband and Sally's father had been a minister, and she saw the writing on the wall ever since Sally was young, having

long given Sally over into the capable Hands of God. After they had talked regarding the decision Sally had made, the two prayed, at length, and the accompanied resolve that reverberated around the house could only bear witness to the Holy Ghost's leading that a consecrated woman had indeed been called and sanctified for Godly service. Her mother was proud of her actually, and knew that whatever came about with regard to this decision would be inspired and accompanied by God's Spirit. Sally was pleased the conversation had gone so well; she fully believed that her mother would understand but was still thankful for the support and for the ease of the situation.

Sally sat at the kitchen table, wanting to make some dinner but too emotionally exhausted and hypersensitive to eat. She would be leaving tomorrow, after an early lunch with Neaven and Clair. Dr. Hutchinson would be driving her to the airport.

Her flight would leave for France at about 3 p.m., and she wanted to leave right after she had a chance to say goodbye to Neaven. She still had to pack, and that is what she was planning on doing just as soon as she left the kitchen table. But something was keeping her there. There was a pull in her heart to read The Cell's confidential file and to spend some time with the Lord while she read it. Sally checked her spirit because she was planning on doing all this tomorrow on the plane, while she had more time to just sit there and wait, but the Spirit's prompting was persistent right now, and she became hard pressed to ignore it.

She went over to her backpack and took out the file. She began glancing at the notes, the notes that Dr. Hutchinson and Cross had compiled for her. Dr. Hutchinson had fully explained to her his relationship with Cross, as well as his former relationship with Dr. Thiery. As she read the notes, she began beseeching the Lord for His guidance, and the Lord began speaking.

Dante's footsteps calmly yet surely made their way down the hall as word spread that a new invitee would be

arriving, and an invitee that showed a lot more promise than either Bodhi Dalry or Dr. Etienne Beauvais. This invitee was different, they were told. This invitee had been granted "hot" access, a privilege usually only authorized under extreme circumstances. Dante was wondering, under exactly what kind of extreme circumstances had this privilege been warranted.

"Sir, may I have a word with you?"

Dr. Thiery looked up from his desk, a plate of food resting nearby. His eyes meandered toward Dante's. "Yes, Dante, please come in and sit down."

"Thank you, sir."

"What's on your mind, Dante?"

"Sir, I wanted to ask you ..." Dante paused, crossing his legs, "... why the sudden prompting to include a tenth Primary Member?" Dr. Thiery looked up, eyeing Dante's concerns considerably. Dante then continued in his openness. "The team is performing flawlessly, and we just dismissed two invitee's not more than five weeks ago."

Dr. Thiery was a bit taken aback; Dante's question was a bit direct, perhaps even accusatory. Dante just sat there, looking fully confident that his question had been a valid one, and it had been, Dr. Thiery thought again, considering that he didn't fully understand the vision or his situation prompting the decision.

"Dante," Dr. Thiery began, unfolding his cashmere cloth and then setting his glasses therein, "Your speculation, while notable, is not accurate with regard to the pressing matters concerning The Cell's overall objective, which is not flawless inner-workings, but outward structure and peace. Right now, we do indeed need a tenth member, and we need to continue pressing until that tenth member is found."

"I understand, sir," Dante forged ahead, "but may I add that six years ago, before Hans and Henryrk were invited to join, that we didn't interview either one of them for over five months, fully dependent and reliant upon the observations and integrity of the current eight members."

"I understand, Dante," Dr. Thiery interrupts, knowing Dante is right but still reluctant to explain his reasoning. Dante presses again. "Everything was running

smoothly, sir, and it didn't hinge on the neglect of the outside; internally, there were no allowances for petty considerations or unreasonable objectives; the eight of us did a wonderful job during that time." Dr. Thiery nodded. "I just believe, sir, that this matter does not call for haste, and that all of us would be better served if we could evaluate the situation in a timely fashion, based on a permitted patient response, and not on rash protocol or nervousness."

Dr. Thiery took a brief moment and laid his head back, but not too far. He then glanced forward and looked Dante straight in the eyes. "Is that what you see here, Dante, haste and nervousness?"

Dante leans back in submission, not attempting to press the matter disrespectfully. Dr. Thiery notices Dante's acquiescence and then looks away.

Dante waits, sitting there, trying to hold his position but also understanding that this is obviously a touchy situation. Dr. Thiery speaks, "Dante, you are fully right in everything you say," he eyes Dante as a father would a son, "except for one part."

Dante looks straight ahead, not desiring to challenge but trying to understand. "It is neither haste nor nervousness that has brought about this decision. Rather, a situation presented itself instigating collective thought, this was then finalized by a decision to take a calculated risk."

Dante turns his head slightly, like a dog would if it were trying to understand. "What situation, sir?"

Dr. Thiery paused. He was actually hoping that Dante wouldn't ask that question because his answer would need to include the vision, but he realized that trying to hide something from Dante was like trying to outwit a fox. He attempts to calm Dante's concerns while trying not to expose too much. "Dante, as I stated before, all of your concerns are seemingly valid, regarding past invitees and considerations. I must admit, we are moving forward quite rapidly. But regarding this situation, ..."

"What situation, sir?" Dante interrupts even before he realizes his rude behavior. A small fire then kindles behind Dr. Thiery's eyes. "A situation, Dante, that will

be revealed in its proper time, and not before." He eyes Dante even harder. "And not before you're ready."

Dante looked down, mostly in shame, understanding that there must be a valid reason but also understanding that it was not his place to pry. He kept his head down awhile out of respect for his mentor. He then looked up, requesting a question in an attempt to clarify matters in his own head. "Sir, may I be permitted?"

Dr. Thiery again eyes Dante, the son he never had, and then permits him. Dante opens his mouth with sufficient nervousness. "Sir, then without you needing to divulge any more information, there is something isn't there, sir, specifically, I mean, and that's the instigator behind all this haste?"

Dr. Thiery half-smiles, and then he relents. "Dante, there is something, and trust me son, you will know when the time is right, and then you will fully understand."

Dante is taken with Dr. Thiery's last words, and he knew he had no reason to doubt them. He again looked upon Dr. Thiery, a sense of purpose began to resound behind his dark eyes. "Sir, is there anything I could do, to make this process easier?" Dante's first desire was to make himself available.

Dr. Thiery leans back, to receive his statement, he then nods his head and motions toward Dante. "Yes, Dante, actually there is." Dante perks up. "Tell the others of this matter we have discussed, help them understand there is no shame in it, only that all will be revealed in its proper time."

Dante acknowledges firmly, "It will be done."

"Make sure they understand, Dante." He was very serious.

"Certainly, sir. Is there anything else?"

Dr. Thiery finishes eyeing Dante, understanding his resolve has served its purpose. "Yes." He then pauses, a bit uncertain at his next immediate direction. He then speaks before fully looking up. "This young lady, Dante, has been granted "hot" access. And I dare say that you yourself, as well as the others, should take her very seriously, considering such."

Dante didn't know what to think at this point; he was floored by all the surroundings of this dilemma. There had never been a woman Primary Member admitted to The Cell. Dr. Thiery finished. "Dante, have I made myself fully clear?"

Dante has no feeling but surrenders within his professionalism. "Understood, sir." Dante then quickly settles himself again. "I will be happy to assist. Please, sir, permit me any of the information pertaining to this young lady and I will see to it that everything is taken care of."

Dr. Thiery begins to be pleased with Dante's consoled spirit, but he then cautions further. "Mr. Lutherant will be responsible for this young lady; all I ask is that you show yourself within your responsibility. I know that you will do all you can to make her feel comfortable and welcome, seeing that you yourself were in a similar situation thirteen years ago, when you were a novice here."

His last comment was humbling, and Dante was taken by it. "Sir, I will caution the others that this young lady's personal welfare, as well as her emotional state, should remain foremost on their minds."

"Very well," Dr. Thiery surrendered, accepting Dante's acquiescence.

Dante then allowed for a pause. Considering the conversation, he fully understood not to question, but still he thought, how on earth was this young lady going to assist with things pertaining to The Cell? Dr. Thiery sensed Dante's doubt but said nothing. Dante then looked up, and allowed himself some leverage within the conversation and plight.

"Sir, I will certainly help this invitee feel welcome." Dr. Thiery saw that Dante was serious, but then saw something behind it. Dante continued. "I will assist in any way possible; only please permit me, sir, to reserve my own opinion regarding this invitee. I will be professional, welcoming this young lady, but I also intend on being professional regarding all the other objectives of my sworn duty, which is to remain loyal to The Cell and to its committed purposes toward truth and resolved conflict, and not merely to chaperone ..." Dante

then eye's his mentor, wondering if his statements are making an impact. He then finishes. "...Pleasantries and such."

His point was well taken. Once again, Dante was making perfectly good sense considering his limited perspective. Dr. Thiery thought upon this. He then opened up reasonably. "Dante, you have all the rights of a Primary Member; see to it yourself that you treat this situation accordingly. I am simply asking you a favor by your own permission, and I dare say, that it is an honorable favor at that." Dr. Thiery nodded as he spoke his last words, trying to accompany Dante's resolve. Dante then replied, "Everything will be taken care of, sir; you have my word."

Dr. Thiery looked at Dante for a moment, inspired by his professionalism and wit, and then, after a moment, he concluded the meeting. "Then, Dante, feel free to go downstairs and enjoy a meal. I will send you the information pertaining to this invitee shortly."

Dante asked one last question as he began to stand up. "Sir, when will she be arriving?"

Dr. Thiery didn't even look up. He simply opened up his cashmere cloth in order to retrieve his glasses. He then grabbed his fork and speared a piece of ham. "Tomorrow morning, Dante; she will be arriving tomorrow morning."

Dante tapped his fingers on his chair as he rose up to exit the room. "Then I had better get to work."

Dr. Thiery, having not fully swallowed the ham that was still making its way down his throat, looked up, only to see Dante exiting his office. He was an exceptional find, this Dante was. He didn't care how smart or helpful Sally was, no person could ever fill Dante's shoes, a man who has served faithfully for over thirteen years, and who has never asked for anything, not even the respect he so rightly deserves.

Dr. Thiery took a deep breath, contemplating his decision. It was a wise move to tell Dante early on about Sally, and to align them under the same banner. He then thought again, when Sally would prove genius, and she would prove genius, it might result in hitting Dante the wrong way. As far as he was concerned, this

consideration was as much for Dante's emotional state as it was for Sally's. Sally would definitely make an impact, and as professional and humble as Dante was, it would still affect him. But now, he thought, by aligning Dante under the same empathetic muse of genius, he might learn to appreciate her, respect her even, so that some of the challenge between the two might become defused.

Yes, Dr. Thiery thought to himself, there might be some fireworks on this one, but some good observation and a wise choice might take a lot of the spark out of that flame, in order for the wheels to turn, in order for the purposes of The Cell to move forward. The Cell wasn't, as Dr. Thiery thought to himself, some cerebral free-for-all; it was a joined purpose, for a group of people to be inter-joined and aligned for a specific purpose, and that purpose wasn't to selfishly promote one's self, but to become part of a team, a team gathered together for the common good of all mankind.

The back booth where they were all seated was piled high with dishes. Lunch was a refreshing time, but the extreme sense of destiny and hopefulness was without a doubt the center of attention right now. Sally and Neaven were sitting beside each other; Clair was sitting opposite with two mutual friends. They had just spent the last two hours reminiscing, and Dr. Hutchinson just called to inform Sally he was waiting for her outside. It was now time to say goodbye.

"You call us, Sally-girl." Clair urged, "As soon as you're able, you let us know so we won't worry." Her tone was motherly.

"I will." Sally stood up to hug Clair, but Clair rushed up to meet her. They embraced for a moment, and after a gentle nudge, Clair pulled away, looking Sally directly in the eye. She nodded and bowed away. Sally hugged the other friends, thanking them for their support and apologizing to them that she had to remain so vague.

After one more look toward Clair, Sally took Neaven's hand and slowly lead him away. Outside she could see Dr. Hutchinson's car parked close to Neaven's,

and she needed to take her suitcase out of Neaven's car. Neaven took the initiative, opening up his trunk and taking out the suitcase as well as Sally's backpack. He opened up the backpack, taking out Lavender and pointing her in Sally's direction. Sally giggled when she saw. He then turned Lavender toward him and gave the stuffed animal a gentle kiss on the side of the mouth. Sally watched. He then took Sally by the arms and pulled her close to him. His eyes said more than his body did.

"Sally, I am so proud of you. You know I want you to do great; we're all pulling for you." Sally looked down, and Neaven nudged her back up. "I'm sorry for what I said yesterday; you know I care about you, and I just hate the thought of losing you, especially now."

Sally had no words. She just looked back at Neaven with the same set of eyes that were staring at her. "Now go, Sally, go and make us all proud."

Neaven didn't even have the chance to kiss her. Sally reached forward and held Neaven by the back of his neck and drew him toward her; she then kissed him softly. She pulled him again toward her and kissed him again, longer and more passionate than the first. Neaven pulled away and put his forehead on Sally's.

"I'll be back," Sally uttered, in a half-mesmerized state, the sorrow evident in her voice.

"I know." Neaven kissed Sally on the forehead and gave her a hug; he repeated it again, "I know."

The two separate, and as they approached Dr. Hutchinson's car, Neaven, holding Sally's things, popped open the truck. Neaven then placed Sally's things inside, gently placing Lavender back inside the backpack and then closing the trunk lid firmly. Sally and Neaven then walked toward the side door,

"Call me when you get there."

Sally started to open the door and turned around as she did. "I will. I'll miss you deeply Neaven." Sally offered a half content smile in his direction and then reached down into the car and closed the door behind her.

"Goodbye, Sally," Neaven uttered as he watched Sally shift in the passenger seat waiting to be shuttled off to the airport. He then broke away, making his way back to the restaurant so he could rejoin the others.

The road was a bit narrow heading up to Rutland Country. They had been traveling for about forty-five minutes and were ten miles from the Rutland State Airport. Neither had spoken much along the way. Sally was trying to do her best to erase Neaven and the sadness from her mind, but it only made her think about it even more. Dr. Hutchinson had remained quiet, much to Sally's dismay. She did not want to introduce a conversation; she felt that if she were lucky, then all this would be over before she knew it.

Then Dr. Hutchinson spoke. "Sally, are you feeling okay?"

Sally turned to look at her professor. "Yes, I'm all right." Sally stopped mid-sentence and thought for a moment. "I was just ..."

"Thinking?" Dr. Hutchinson quietly assumed, with a gentle smile on his face. He continues, "Sally, I'm sorry to have to reintroduce these thoughts to you, but I need you to understand that you have friends, not only here, but also in France."

Sally nodded her head, remembering what Dr. Hutchinson had told her earlier. He then continued. "Cross Lutherant has been my friend for well over half my lifetime, and he possesses the dignity and gentlemanly respect to be straight with you and to do the job I would be doing were I to personally escort you there. You'll be all right Sally. To be honest with you, if anything, I'll probably need the consolation."

Sally knew what he meant. He was like a coach who, after preparing his players, had the same desire to go in there and participate with them.

"I would love to be there, Sally, just to have a chance to see the work that God is going to do through you." Dr. Hutchinson then put his hand on the steering wheel forcibly, as if he were trying to exercise himself through the car's momentum.

"I know, Dr. Hutchinson," Sally voiced back, "but you're the reason I'm going. And God would not hide

anything from you, Dr. Hutchinson, not toward you directly, and not through me personally."

They were kind words, Dr. Hutchinson thought, and they spoke of that spirit, that spirit that would be heading off to France in order to deliver God's poignant message to The Cell. "Dr. Hutchinson, don't be overly concerned, God has already begun to speak to me regarding The Cell. All I know right now is that God has something to say to them, and for one reason or another, He really wants to speak it through me."

Dr. Hutchinson became curious. "What do you mean?"

Sally acquiesced. "Well, when God started speaking to me, He really pressed upon me not to doubt that He had indeed called me. And after that, I simply asked why, why had he specifically called me? He told me not to worry, He told me His plan was perfect and that I was right in the center of it."

"The center of it, you say?" Dr. Hutchinson vaguely repeated Sally's last words.

"Yeah, He basically helped me see that He had called me to do this, and that if I had said no, that I would have rebelled against Him."

Dr. Hutchinson looked over at Sally, not even believing what Sally had just said. Sally noticed his eyes, and continued. "I'm not joking, Dr. Hutchinson. After we talked that night, my doubt and uncertainty told me I had to go, and that it would actually go against my faith to say no, but after God came upon me, it was different.

"I now didn't see it from the perspective that I probably, most likely, did have to do this, because it seemed right. I now saw that a lot had been prepared, and that by not going I would have offended all involved, me, you, The Cell, and mostly God. It was a weird feeling, weird but good, because now I really do believe that I have to go. If someone tried to stop me right now, I would actually be afraid for myself and would probably push them out of the way." Sally raised an eyebrow and looked toward Dr. Hutchinson. "I believe I have to do this, Dr. Hutchinson, and not only because you helped me see it, but because God has revealed it to me personally."

Everything Sally said right now was perfect. The way everything was aligning itself was perfect.

The car pulled up the dirt highway, directly beside the Rutland State Airport. Dr. Hutchinson could see the airliner in the distance, so he pulled alongside a fence. He dialed his cell phone and began talking to the pilot. He was instructed to continue heading north until he saw a side entrance with a military guard in attendance. After about two hundred feet, he found the entrance. The military guard immediately opened up the gate, waving Dr. Hutchinson in. He drove his car through and headed toward the airliner. As he drove, he could see some attendants circling the plane, checking compartments and smoothing things over. He turned to look at Sally, who sat still but with her eyes wide open. He drove up alongside the plane. He stopped the car and turned to look again. "Are you ready, Sally?"

"Yes." Sally opened her car door, and Dr. Hutchinson followed suit, opening the trunk. One of the attendants rushed over and took the suitcase from Dr. Hutchinson's hands. Dr. Hutchinson then took out Sally's backpack, the same backpack she had toted to class for that last two months, and handed it to her. Military personnel walked over and asked for their passports, specifically asking Dr. Hutchinson for his clearance codes. After verifying them through their database, they proceeded, nodding first to Sally, and then to Dr. Hutchinson. Dr. Hutchinson then took a long last look at Sally,

"They'll take care of you from here." He looked at Sally quietly yet confidently. "You'd better go."

Sally nodded, but then took Dr. Hutchinson in her arms and hugged him. Dr. Hutchinson put his hand on Sally's head. "It'll be ok, Sally, don't you worry." Sally pulled away; a tear running down her face. Dr. Hutchinson braced her shoulders. "You were born for this, Sally." Sally nodded again, trying to summon the strength. Dr. Hutchinson encouraged again, and this time, with a comforting smile. "You'll do great."

"I will," Sally shouted back, as the plane's engines kicked into high gear. "I'll be all right." Dr. Hutchinson let his hands fully run down the lengths of

Sally's arms and then he turned to walk away. As soon as he did, Sally turned to enter the plane. As she walked up the stairs, one of the military personnel acknowledged her, and then one of the attendants grabbed her backpack, making her way up the stairs. Sally followed. As soon as she reached the top of the staircase, she turned around to look back at Dr. Hutchinson. He had already driven off, far away from the plane as well as from Sally's view. Sally then turned around and entered the plane's cabin. As soon as she made it a few footsteps into the cabin's lounge, she let out a transparent yet vocal: "Wow, nice plane."

It's 11:30 p.m. France time and Cross Lutherant has just left the boardroom where he and Dr. Thiery had their final meeting regarding Sally's arrival. Dr. Thiery usually didn't involve himself in the tedious task of arrivals and departures, but given the circumstances, he was more than willing to oblige. Dante entered.

"Sir, may I have a word?"

"Yes, Dante," Dr. Thiery acknowledged him, even without looking up. "Thank you, sir; this will only take a moment. I was able to instruct all the members regarding the invitee's arrival; they have been fully prepped and are available and at your service sir."

"Good." Dr. Thiery motioned, but with an inner desire to ask Dante to elaborate. He sensed Dante wasn't going to volunteer it. "So, how did the team take the news?" Dr. Thiery asked unashamedly, understanding that sometimes vulnerability was a foremost characteristic of good leadership. Dante then elaborated. "They were just as confused as I was, sir."

"Touché," Dr. Thiery thought to himself. He had never asked Dante to accept or even receive this information easily, but to simply receive it. He would be lying to himself if he thought any of this would be easy to swallow. If he were in the exact same position, he would probably feel the same way. Dante almost sensed Dr. Thiery's inner-contemplations.

"Is there anything else you would like me to do, sir?"

Dr. Thiery broke away from his thoughts. "No, Dante, that will be quite all right. That will be all for now, thank you." He looked Dante in the eye, to solidify all reason. Dante relented and then began to turn around. "Very well then; I will see you in the morning, sir."

"Oh and Dante ...,"

"Yes, sir?"

"She's on the plane now, and she'll be arriving shortly."

"Then we shall see both of you in the morning, sir; everything has been arranged." With that, Dante turned around again and headed out the door. Dr. Thiery went back to his notes, hoping, and trying to believe that the vision he was holding onto would be right for the team, and would be right for all involved.

Sally is relaxing, listening to music on her laptop and looking at a magazine. This plane was awesome, she thought. It must have a copy of every single magazine in print. She turned its pages like a giddy schoolgirl. She had already been on the plane for over four and a half hours now, and she hadn't eaten yet, even though she had been asked at least four times.

Everything was comfortable, she thought, everything except the pinch and gnawing in her stomach. She closed the magazine and took out her earpiece. She laid them both beside her. She hadn't thought of Neaven once since she had been on the plane. Perhaps the intensity of the moment and the realness of her surroundings were taking precedence. She didn't mind though, she would see Neaven soon enough, and it would be under better circumstances.

She looked down at her backpack, sticking out the side was the file containing all the information she had been given regarding The Cell. She had read it many times, and many times the Lord had personally helped her understand the validity of the situation. Also in the backpack were the other notes she had compiled, the notes

regarding the initial information she left out of her paper. She had studied everything, studied in an effort to understand.

She picked up the file and placed it squarely in front of her. Conviction was coming over her and it was noticeable. Why was the Lord continuing to doing this, she questioned, why was the Lord prompting her over and over and over again to align herself with the contents of this file. She put the file on her lap and began to pray. The clarity she then received was the same as it had been before; although the clarity was so singular she almost always remembered to forget it. The purpose was not the file itself, but the obedience. God could have been telling her to grab a cold glass of water. It really didn't matter. As long as she was doing exactly what her faith was prompting her to do, she would receive from God. The file was not the all-important aspect right now; her belief and obedience was, and right now this file was all she had to hold onto regarding The Cell.

She opened it up and took hold of its contents; she placed the first few pages calmly aside. She wanted to get to the middle, where the personal information on all the individual Primary Members was located. She found the pages and set everything else aside.

These pages were important; they listed the detailed information on each and every Primary Member. These pages were clearly written and easy to follow. She placed the pages in order and purposed to go over them one more time, to review each and every member before she would actually have the chance to look each one of them in the eye. These pages were intimidating, Sally thought, but the Lord had indeed called her. If God had not specifically called her to do this, then she wouldn't dare walk into a room with any of these men. Their qualifications, their achievements, were gripping, compelling. No, she thought, this was the Lord's work, and the Lord's doing, and it would be up to Him to do the work, and it would be up to Him to speak to these members.

Think Tank Primary Members : Identification and Classification
Sally Travis*** For your eyes only

Name: Dante De Forest

Seat: 3

Country: France

DOB: 1-21-72

Years of Service (Primary Member): 13

Education: BS, physics (1990) Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT, (USA)

Recruitment: Recruited at the age of 20 by Dr. Aloysius Thiery personally. Only (2ND of 3) men who have ever been invited directly into Primary member status.

Strengths: Dante has incredible use of oversight and perspective. He literally has the ability to see things from an outer space perspective. He possesses patient observation skills as well as distinction skills. His use of authority and oversight has separated him from the others, especially with regard to successful decision-making. He is a leader, utilizing incredible people skills as well as constructive cohesion skills which build camaraderie. Dante is consistent on all fronts, but excels in two areas specifically; In the area of keen observation as well as in the area of management with regard to people and situations.

Name: Dr. Saunders Fedor

Seat: 2

Country: Greece

DOB: 8-19-42

Years of Service (Primary Member): 20

Education: History of Philosophy (1962) at the University of Pisa (Italy)

Doctorate: Ancient History and Classical Philology (1967) at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa (Italy)

Recruitment: Spent five years as a candidate, was accepted as a candidate due to his impeccable record as a Philologist. Excelled in his candidacy and was promoted to Primary status after 5 years.

Strengths: Literary skills. Proofreading and observing documentation admitted into The Cell. Was nicknamed "The Pivot Man," due to his ability to find errors within assumed conclusions and then "Pivoting" in a certain direction. He is a decipherer; when he finds something wrong, especially within a text, he will not only find the error but can also "pivot" to the right conclusion.

Name: Dr. Hans Ottokar

Seat: 8

Country: Germany

DOB: 7-27-26

Years of Service (Primary Member): 6

Education: B.Sc. Chemistry (1950) The Free University of Berlin (Germany)

Doctorate: Organic Chemistry (1955) The University of Basel (Switzerland)

Recruitment: Was a friend and confidant to Dr. Thiery before Dr. Thiery personally invited him. Only the (3rd of 3) men who have ever been invited directly into Primary Member status.

Strengths: Brings seasoned experience, life experience as well as conformity. Not too much goes over his head. Only says something when he believes it is warranted, and it usually is. Has strong presence as well as mental character, can hold his own with any military officer or politician who stands in his presence; this might be due to the fact that he won the Nobel Prize for his work in Molecular Chemistry.

Name: Dr. Petro Zacarias

Seat: 5

Country: Portugal

DOB: 12-11-54

Years of Service (Primary Member): 8

Education: BA, PPP (Psychology, Philosophy, Physiology) (1976) the University of Lisbon (Portugal)

Doctorate: Psychiatry (1980) the University of Coimbra (Portugal)

Recruitment: He and his identical twin brother, Vidal, were recruited in 1993 as Candidates after their work in P.I.T.

(Psychoanalytical Isolation Therapy) was well documented in both journals and studies around the world.

Strengths: Along with his brother, Vidal, introduced P.I.T. to the psychiatry and psychology community. Not that the procedure could easily be mimicked. Although Petro and Vidal are identical twins, it had been scientifically proven that while Vidal uses the left side of his brain more readily, Petro uses his right. As a result of these findings, and along with their heavily funded research, the two created a method of psychoanalysis utilizing Petro's right side of the brain and Vidal's left. The results were astonishing. This was due to the fact that while Petro was psychoanalyzing the right side of a person's train of thought, Vidal was psychoanalyzing the left. This intensive psychotherapy left their patients inner character and persona wide open. And since Petro and Vidal were identical twins, they had a knack for intercepting and then conforming to each other's thought patterns in order to simultaneously yet mercifully bring their patients to a point of submission. Their methods were ruled genius by the scientific community and their overall results, astounding. Petro and Vidal continue to use this method on willing participants under The Cell's guidelines. They were invited into a (probationary-one-year) Primary status, the result of two seats opening up simultaneously. Dr. Thiery had his doubts regarding the twin's limited abilities within The Cell's primary purpose and structure, but these doubts were quickly eradicated. Petro and Vidal not only excelled using their P.I.T. Therapy on willing participants, but they also proved secure and genius in other areas of participation, including investigative research and analysis.

Name: Dr. Vidal Zacarias

Seat: 6

Country: Portugal

DOB: 12-12-54

Years of Service (Primary Member): 8

Education: BA, PPP (Psychology, Philosophy, Physiology) (1976) the University of Lisbon (Portugal)

Doctorate: Psychiatry (1980) the University of Coimbra (Portugal)

Recruitment: (See Above)

Strengths: (See Above)

Name: Markus Berg

Seat: 4

Country: Norway

DOB: 2-28-48

Years of Service (Primary Member): 10

Education: N/A

Recruitment: Was recruited as a candidate in 1992, and he excelled within his candidacy. Spent 4 years with Kontrollutvalget for overvakings – og sikkerhetstjenesten (Norwegian Intelligence). He was promoted to Primary status after only 3 years.

Strengths: Snake in the grass. Ex-criminal who spent 4 years as a special analyst helping banks, organizations, conglomerates and even special parties to find breaches within their companies logic, systems, intelligence structure as well as overall employee structure. The Norwegian Government, who arrested him in the first place, eventually smartened up and hired him on as their personal informant/special analyst; once there, he proved himself beautifully. He initially received an invitation to The Cell due to his unique ability to read situations including any circumstances or people surrounding those situations. He is a reader; he can read any situation and tell you what is specifically wrong or what is

obviously out of place. He is the instinctual perceiver for The Cell. He brings street smarts coupled with intense professionalism. He is the kind of guy who can not only make an accusation, but more importantly, he can make an accusation stick.

Name: Henryrk Florian

Seat: 9

Country: Poland

DOB: 3-06-68

Years of Service (Primary Member): 6

Education: N/A

Recruitment: Recruited as candidate at the age of 25. Obtained entrance to The Cell by way of his father, a candidate member who died in 1999. Remained a candidate for 6 years before being invited to a Primary seat.

Strengths: Henryrk is a programmer, in mind, in numbers and in the dissection of a sequence of events. He has the unique ability to construct through identification, to radically identify and then to define a sequence of events; almost like seeing four moves ahead on a chessboard. He is able to do this by constructing an outline regarding the sequential significance of one event in relation to the next, and so on; this is in terms of actual events. By doing this, Henryrk is able to successfully deconstruct these events in order that he may find the actual motivations behind the events. Even as a candidate, the Primary Members found Henryrk's outlines incredibly profitable. The other members have judged Henryrk, pound for pound, probably the most gifted problem solver in the world.

Name: Michael York

Seat: 7

Country: UK

DOB: 7-14-68

Years of Service (Primary Member): 7

Education: BA, Jurisprudence (1989) the University of Oxford (UK)

Masters: Master of Letters, MLitt (1992) Oxford Law (UK)

Recruitment: Recruited as a candidate at the age of 26. Spent 4 years as a candidate until he was promoted to a Primary Member seat.

Strengths: While at Oxford, he founded and funded an investigational Think Tank called "Fusion." Fusion's focus was to quarantine and intermingle information that considered the psychological as well as the sociological implications of the Law's overall effect. In this area, Michael established himself thoroughly, but mostly within the areas of perception, thought analysis as well as industrious leading. Invited as a candidate, Michael was not only urged, but was also expected to demonstrate these same quality leadership skills in relation to pressing discussions, indifference within discussions as well as psychoanalytical discussions; he did this consistently. As a Primary Member, he is The Cell's vocalist and presser, but he is not its leader. If a situation gets tight or redundant, Michael is expected to take control, and to reestablish focus. He brings order and conformity to the meetings. By doing this, Michael is able to take the stress and pressure off the other Primary Members as well as the member who is currently running the meeting.

Name: Dr. Aloysius Thiery

Seat: 1

Country: France

DOB: 4-28-30

Years of Service (Primary Member): 41

Education: Physics (1951) the Universite' de Paris VII, Sorbonne (France)

Theology (1952) the Institut Catholique de Paris at the Universite' de Paris IV, Sorbonne (France)

Doctorate: Astrophysics (1956) the Universite' de Paris VII, Sorbonne (France)

Recruitment: N/A

Strengths: He is The Cell's absolute leader, its founder and its champion. Because he founded The Cell, he is also thoroughly intimate within all The Cell's protocols and functions. In most situations, he chooses to take the back seat, securely allowing other members, including Candidates, to establish themselves and learn within their new ethical choices and work. Much like Hans, he will usually only speak if he feels something needs to be said. His talents and gifts closely relate to those of Dante's, specifically with regard to heightened perception and leadership, but his most qualified skill is a skill Dante lacks. This is the ingenious ability to ask the right questions, at the right time, and in the right situations. Dr. Thiery can listen for hours, or even days, then simply ask a series of questions that will absolutely strike to the core of the inconsistency or problem. If someone tries to hide something from Dr. Thiery, there become only two options for that individual: either to own up to their manner or to bear the burden of his perception. Nothing gets by him, nothing; and because of this, he is probably the number-one reason why many of the countries and groups decide to shy away from The Cell's purposes.

She heard a signal, signifying the plane was approaching Strasbourg airspace. At exactly the same time, one of the attendants came into the cabin and informed Sally that she would have to prepare for the landing. After alerting her, the attendant abruptly left. There Sally sat, waiting and wondering. She took the notes she was holding and placed them back into the file. She then placed the file near her backpack. There was absolutely nothing she could do for now, she reminded herself as she sat there, feeling the plane's decent. This was the Lord's doing, she thought, and it would become His burden and responsibility. She then steadied herself and rested her head on the chair's back.

Cross was standing outside in the cold. The Aeroport International Strasbourg was about a forty minute drive from The Compound, so as soon as Sally landed, her jet lag and weariness would be ministered to. Cross exhaled deeply as he watched the plane maneuver into its proper docking position. He looked at his watch; it was 3:11 a.m. France time. He had been waiting to see what Sally would look like, waiting to see what his first impression would be of her. After the attendants secured the landing, Sally exited the airplane. She was a petite person, petite but sturdy and firm. Her body moved eloquently, and when it did, it knew what it was doing. She came down the steps and approached the Mercedes. Cross just stood there with his hands folded, her first test he thought.

"Hi, I'm Sally."

She came at him unashamed.

Cross extended his hand, "Hello, Miss Travis; I'm Cross Lutheran, Tom's friend. Please ..." he motions his hand toward the Mercedes as the driver opens the side door, "... make yourself comfortable."

"Thank you." Sally immediately leaps into the Mercedes and focuses on her surroundings.

"We will be arriving shortly," Cross concludes as he closes her door.

Sally couldn't believe it, the car, the plane, everything was so luxurious. The car had at least two computers, from what she could make out, a flat television screen in the upper left corner, dark oak

paneling throughout and tinted windows all around. There were also small drawers and cabinets up and down the right side panel; they most likely were holding more than just the average limo cargo, Sally noticed a few of them had sturdy locks. She couldn't quit staring at her amazing surroundings. It was so unique, she thought; everything was almost too incredible to believe.

Sally sat back in an attempt to relax herself. She then began considering as time allowed due to Cross's focus on other duties. She couldn't believe that she was in this position. Who was she, she asked herself, a nineteen-year-old girl, to be in this position? She grabbed hold of her backpack in order to remember who she was, and in order to reinforce her emotions according to her current situation. She tried to remain calm as she reminded herself over and over again: you were invited Sally, they invited you.

Sally turned her attention elsewhere. The scenery was amazing. The land was elegant yet rugged. Medieval watchtowers, waterways, half-timbered houses, wineries, all up close and all far away. It was almost like she was on some kind of tour that she didn't know about. As she peered deep into the wineries, she noticed the shadows from the grape leaves and from the bushels of clustered grapes that seemed to drape themselves over the glow of the lights. Things were spread out, Sally noticed, but the environment gave the impression that even though things were spread out, they were still the same. Cross rolled down the window.

"The Compound is coming up on the right, but we will visit later on today; we would like you to first get settled into your accommodation."

"Okay," Sally acquiesced. She would be happy to get some rest. Cross continued, "Are you hungry, Miss Travis?"

"No," Sally answered as she noticed the huge compound vanishing far off and to the right. "If it's all right, I'll have something later."

"That's fine, Miss Travis." Cross then motions the driver over to a block of housing among the maple trees, where some of the larger accommodations were seated. The Mercedes pulled up alongside a middle accommodation and

then came to a stop near the front door. The driver hopped out and opened the trunk. Cross remained seated, fiddling with a handheld component. Sally noticed he was jotting down some notes. Sally then looked out the window, toward the accommodation. There were three military guards at the door and two approaching on the left side with dogs. The driver then opened Sally's door.

Sally looked up, slowly making her way out and handing the driver her backpack before she fully extended her body outside the Mercedes limousine. The driver shut the door and handed Sally's backpack to a military guard. Sally actually wanted the backpack back. Cross then opened his door and rose to meet Sally.

"Miss Travis," he began, "this is your residence for the next two weeks." He pointed to the castle directly behind him. "You have a telephone in your room, and it is a fully secure line. To make a call to the U.S., dial 00 then 1 then the city code and then the number. If you need any help, we will be happy to assist you." Sally just stood there holding herself, it was actually colder here than it was at the airport. "You have food in the icebox, and an entertainment system in the study area, computer, TV, stereo, anything you might need really. We also brought you a Stairmaster. I do believe you enjoy your exercise."

Sally was humbled, "You bought me a Stairmaster?"

"No, we simply borrowed one from the main exercise hall and then placed it in your accommodation. Will you be needing anything else tonight, Miss Travis?"

Sally was going to ask something but then decided not to; she really needed some sleep, "No, only that if I get some sleep, what time will you need me later on today?"

"Go ahead and get your sleep. When you wake up, press the red button on your phone, it will signal a secretary who will immediately call you back. She will then direct you to me. If you have need of anything during the course of your stay," Cross finishes, "please follow that process and we will take care of you promptly."

The ease of this place was refreshing, Sally thought. "Thank you. I'll be more attentive later on today, after I get some rest."

Cross let a smile leak through. "Don't worry, Miss Travis," he motioned as he walked away, "I think everyone is going to have a lot to live up to over the next couple of weeks, so all the pressure isn't on you."

He turned away from Sally and re-entered the cabin of the Mercedes. The car pulled away and headed back up the road. Sally just stood there, thinking. Deep down she knew what this was, almost like the stare down before the big game. This weary first meeting was almost inevitable, her first blind date with The Cell; the real meetings would come later. Even though everybody here seemed to be professional, there was still a lot of work to be done, and although she was thankful for Cross's words, she still felt an inevitable tussle lie down the road.

One of the military guards was waiting as she watched the car disappear into the distance. He was holding her backpack in his hands and her suitcase was by his side. As Sally made her way toward him, the military guard spoke. "It's a two story," he pointed toward her accommodation, "with a basement underneath. The bedroom is on the second floor." The military guard then grabbed Sally's suitcase and began to make his way toward the accommodation. "Let's get you situated."

Chapter 15

Sally stretched her legs and toes as far as she could, but she would still need at least four more feet of body span in order to reach the footing of the bed. The bed she slept in last night was the biggest bed she had ever seen; she could have slept sideways and it wouldn't have mattered. The night's rest was good though, and she felt refreshed. After being escorted in last night, she quickly sent some emails to her family and friends letting them know she had arrived. The night before her flight, she suffered a late night, so all the stress coupled with barely any sleep finally caught up with her. It was 3:30 p.m. France time, and she had slept for about eleven hours.

She hopped off the bed and walked around, and when she did, the castle introduced itself to her for the first time. The limewashed walls, decorated with red geometric patterns helped her understand why her feet were so cold upon the ground. Except for some lavishly thrown furs and some colorful rugs, the floor was a dark marble slab, unwelcoming to the feet but beautiful to the eyes.

She looked to the room's décor. Flemish tapestries acquired from Holland covered the walls and the sofas, and armchairs were upholstered in damask silk. The furniture was mainly Victorian, pine panels coming from Letheringham Abbey in Suffolk were carved with floral and fruit motifs.¹

Sally looked over near the entrance of the room, and there was an archway over the door. The word Solar was written above the arch, and directly above that, the ceiling was constructed of carved timbers that shadowed the essence of the castle, primitive yet purposeful. She walked toward the window. The window let in more light than any window she had ever seen before, perhaps because it stretched about eight feet tall and about ten feet wide; this was the only window in the room actually. She walked over near the side of the bed and pushed the red button on the phone, immediately the phone rang.

Sally picked it up, "Hello."

A voice on the other end spoke, "Hello, Miss Travis, may I direct your call?"

Sally made request, "Yes, please, Cross Lutherant."

"One moment, please," Sally heard a tone and then a pick up. Cross's voice greeted her, "Yes, Miss Travis, did you sleep well?"

Sally switched the phone to the other ear and sat down on the bed. "Yes, actually. I just got up and wanted to call."

"Yes," Cross seemed hurried, "I talked with Dr. Thiery this afternoon, and he is expecting to meet with you later this evening."

"Okay. What time do you want me to be ready?"

Cross looked at his watch. "Probably by six. We'll bring you to The Compound. Dr. Thiery will brief you then."

"Should I call at six or ...?" Cross interrupted as he seemed to catch his breath, "No, we'll have a car waiting."

"Okay, then, I'll see you at six then."

"Six o'clock, Miss Travis." Cross hung up the phone and placed the phone in his coat pocket. He made his way around the corner and into a room full of waiting people.

Sally hung up the phone. She got the distinct impression she was being courted off to the side, as if they didn't know what to do with her as of yet. Sally thought to herself, she had no itinerary, there were no instructions; perhaps she would be given instructions tonight, but then again, it was still awkward. Before she had come to France, she was given information, files, papers, transportation, anything she needed. And now she was here, a stones throw away from The Compound itself, and she seemed to be playing house, with a Stairmaster to boot. Just weird, Sally thought. "I know I just got here," Sally spoke out loud elevating her arms up, "but still, it's like I'm not even here yet." She then dropped her arms back down. She stood up, and began to pace, trying to ignore her present dissatisfaction. She then broke away into a calmer train of thought.

As refreshing as her night was, she thought, it was now time for a different kind of refreshment. Sally made

her way down the stairs and into the kitchen; it was located just left of the study. She had quickly noticed it the night before after she had finished sending her emails from the study. She turned on the light and made her way over to the fridge, but she didn't make it. About three paces ahead and to her left, on the middle counter, Sally noticed a plate full of French pastries. Éclairs, profiteroles, Paris-Brest, cream puffs, and Pain au chocolat. There were enough pastries to last her the week. She grabbed the first one that caught her eye, an éclair. She didn't even move for a while; she just stood there, eating. She had eaten almost the entire thing when she noticed a table near the corner. She grabbed a napkin and headed that way, but stopped at the fridge in order to grab some orange juice.

A series of newspapers were on the table: *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Brattleboro Reformer* from her hometown in Vermont. She was shocked to see the hometown paper. She picked it up, almost in amusement. She then finished the last bite of her éclair. She washed it down with her orange juice. She was still hungry, but decided to save room for dinner. She liked to talk over food; maybe the meeting would take place along with dinner. She looked at the clock. She had a little more than an hour and a half before they would pick her up, just enough time for a prayer, a workout, and then a nice warm shower. Sally threw away her trash and made her way up the rounded marble staircase, into her room and then into the presence of God.

She spent a few moments waiting for the military assistant to jot down some final notes, and then she was handed a badge and escorted down the hall and into an administrative holding area. Cross Lutheran was waiting, and he seemed to be finalizing all the details of her arrival. Sally looked at her watch as she waited; it was 6:30 p.m. Cross left the room and began discussing something with a few personnel in the hallway. Sally relaxed her shoulders and made herself more comfortable as she stood and waited.

The ride from her accommodation to The Compound took only a few minutes. The Compound was intimidating, half dug into the slope of a hill. The three-story complex was actually partly hidden under the soil, giving it an ingenious, yet effective, look.

The first thing she noticed as she approached The Compound was its color as well as the flags that surrounded it. From the outside, The Compound actually looked like an embassy. The flags crouched and lined the exterior of the building, almost giving the impression that their colors were trying to take flight in the midst of a storm. A storm because The Compound's color was a thundercloud smoky gray, almost daring all those who entered to try and match its intensity and vehemence. Be that as it may, though, as Sally walked through those doors, she did so with the same intensity and resolve that had forged them over thirty-five years ago.

Cross re-entered the room and caught Sally's attention. He spoke plainly. "We are going up to the third level now. We will be meeting with Dr. Thiery, but with only Dr. Thiery."

"Ok, I'm ready."

Cross turned on his heel and lead Sally through the administrative corridors and through a few hallways. The temperature in these halls was warmer, much warmer. After another right turn and after passing some more military personnel, Sally stood in front of a double elevator door. A key from a military aide opened the doors, and Cross and Sally followed him inside. Cross then turned to Sally, "This elevator is usually only used by the Primary Members. It's a back elevator that leads directly to the third level, but specifically to its private quarters."

The elevator door opened, and Sally looked around. As soon as she exited the elevator, she noticed there were no military personnel waiting to receive them. Cross was right, she thought, this was a secure area.

Cross took his keys and opened a door just left of the elevator; he beckoned Sally to come in. He placed his coat down and then placed his briefcase on top of his desk.

"This is my office, Miss Travis, and Dr. Thiery's is just down the hall." He pointed to the left. Sally looked in that direction and then eyed Cross once again. "You can call me Sally?" Cross eyed her back.

"Sally" He then took a moment as he half sat on the corner of his desk, trying to make himself more of Sally's height. "I am Tom's friend, and I am also your friend. Just be yourself tonight when you meet him; trust me when I say that your time will come, but that time won't be tonight."

Sally looked down and then nodded, understanding that he must have sensed some of her nervousness and tension. She was challenged right now, and she wanted to do a good job. Cross then finished. "Sally, the best advice I could give you right now would be to simply be yourself, and when the time comes, to let things fall where they may."

Sally felt some strength resound within her. "I understand, Mr. Lutherant." Sally then continued confidently, "Are we ready to go?"

"We're ready." Cross smiled.

They exited the office and proceeded left down the hallway. Dr. Thiery's door was the last door on the right. Cross knocked firmly, and he heard a voice, "Come in, please."

Cross opened the door, beckoning Sally to enter first. Sally was apprehensive, but then, placing her foot onto the carpet firmly, she lifted her head up and threw herself forward into the room. At first glance, the office looked like both a study and an executive suite. The shelves situated around the office made it look like a library, but all the furniture and equipment toward the interior made it look like a strategic and efficient workspace. Sally then looked to the desk, and upon the man who was sitting behind it.

Dr. Thiery was looking at Sally, and the expression on his face was one she had never before seen. It was a confused look, but a look intermingled within a realm of conscious certainty. As he sat there for a moment, saying nothing, Sally became nervous. She heard Cross close the door behind her, and she then felt his presence as he stood beside her. Dr. Thiery then looked to Cross.

"Is everything arranged for the preliminaries later next week?"

"Yes, sir," Cross confirmed, "the trials are on the agenda, and there will be no need for further hesitation; we have everything in place."

"Good." Dr. Thiery voiced as he looked down at his notes and then up again. "My name is Dr. Aloysius Thiery, my dear. Please, have a seat." He motioned toward a vacant seat over to the left of Sally. Sally sits down. Cross then picks up a chair that is by the opposite wall and brings it closer to where Sally is; he sets it beside her and sits down.

"Miss Travis, we are very pleased that you have come to us on such short notice." He then eyes her in an effort to see how maturely she took his comment; she didn't even flinch. "All of us here fully understand how intimidating and unusual all this must be for you, considering such." He looked upon her, assumingly implying her age and gender.

Sally just listened. She was smart enough to understand that such pleasantries usually meant that there was no real reason to be nervous.

"So we empathize with your situation, Miss Travis, and as educated men, we seek to make the best possible choices right now so that all involved might benefit from what we have to offer each other.

"Miss Travis, as you yourself know, the invitation was offered on short notice, and understanding this, we feel it is important to allow your presence to manifest itself in its proper timing." Dr. Thiery then stood up, and eyed Sally as he made his way across the room. "And as luck would have it, we ..." He stops himself and looks at Cross. "... The Cell, that is, are knee-deep in an attempt to resolve an issue that has been plaguing us for quite some time."

Dr. Thiery then moves a little closer to Sally. "I'm afraid, my dear, that there can be no hiatus of this current course of action, and that unfortunately, we cannot personally involve you in such matters presently."

Sally felt something deep within her chest pulsate as he spoke. "Were they going to dismiss me outright?" She wondered. "Did they fly me all the way out here just

to tell me they were to busy for me?" Sally's facial expression remained unchanged.

"For this reason," Dr. Thiery continued, "we have taken considerations into account and have formulated your itinerary in accordance with our current agenda.

"For the first week, you will not be involved in matters pertaining to the Primary Cell activities, but you will spend time with the candidates, to learn more of what we do here. Mr. Lutherant will see to that. You will be at the trials, Miss Travis, set for this coming Thursday, and you will have a chance to see exactly how we work here at The Compound." He then points a doubting eye straight in Sally's direction. "To see if you do indeed belong here."

Dr. Thiery then pauses, allowing everything to consolidate. Sally takes a deep breath. "Mr. Lutherant will give you the itinerary, so you will understand what will be required of you. You will eventually have a chance to meet the Primary Members, Miss Travis, in due time. They have much work to do right now in order to prepare themselves for the trials," he goes on, "but I assure you, Miss Travis, that they are all quite interested in meeting with you."

Sally didn't know exactly how to take that one.

"Something you might want to consider, Miss Travis." He goes back and sits down at his desk. "Everything at The Compound is reserved for a need-to-know basis; for this reason, some doors might be closed to you, but don't be discouraged. Also, many of the people you see do not have access to your information. For instance, the only people who have read your file and who have read your paper is myself, Cross, the nine Primary Members, and the Candidate Miss Sora Arpin who you will be meeting shortly." Dr. Thiery eyes Sally almost fatherly. "No one knows who you are, Miss Travis, and I urge you to keep it that way."

"I understand, sir."

Dr. Thiery nods his head and lets a pleasant smile leak out upon hearing Sally's voice for the first time. He then relaxes himself. "Mr. Lutherant will be your chaperone, and he will take care of you. If you have any

questions, please, do not hesitate to voice your concerns directly to him."

Dr. Thiery eyes Sally one more time. "We'll look forward to hearing of any progress you make during your first week here. I do trust that this will be quite an experience for you."

Sally nods slowly; this meeting was absolutely nothing the way she thought it would be. Dr. Thiery then settles back into his notes, leaving Cross and Sally there in the middle of the room alone. Cross then motions toward Sally that they should be making their way out. Sally stands and follows Cross, and as she does, she has the distinct desire to thank Dr. Thiery, but as soon as that desire rises within her, Cross grabs her arm, tugging on her to make her way out.

Cross closed the door behind them as they exited the room. They both continued down the long hall, making their way toward Cross's office. Cross seemed very focused and intense, and Sally noticed. She didn't know what to say as she followed him.

"He likes you." Cross mentions casually as he opens his door.

Sally wanted to call him on it, almost like you would call a friend who just made an immature gesture or some practical joke, but then she cautioned herself, remembering that this was not the school-grounds of her hometown Vermont. "How could you tell?"

"He smiled."

It was Saturday and Sally had not yet decided if she wanted to get out of bed this morning. With seemingly all of her resolve being sucked out of her during last night's meeting with Dr. Thiery, she couldn't quite place herself within the context or zone of The Cell's activities or agenda right now. Perhaps she had too many expectations, she thought. Before she had arrived, she expected to be thrown headlong into the elite of all The Cell had to offer. But now it seemed as though she would be formally paying her dues with the Candidates, the

gifted yet humbly quarantined second-level members of The Cell.

These Candidates were much like the Primary Members, intensely focused and professional to the core. As Cross had fully explained to her last evening, much like the Primary Members, the Candidates left all, choosing to live and study at The Cell, using their gifts for what they believed to be their destined purpose. Some would leave the Candidate position, because of its intense regimen coupled with its humbled status. At least the Primary Members got to make choices, meet important people, and influence the world by their decisions. Candidates saw themselves as constantly in the background, unnoticed, and even unacknowledged.

But some Candidates thrived on the idea that they might be assisting the Primary Members in any way they could, hoping that one day their input might make a distinction on all mankind. These Candidates saw their work as second to none with regard to its purpose as well as its cause and effect. In no other field, and in no other arena, could the human mind be both tested and groomed that it might one day be willing to offer all that it could give; this is how they reasoned. Candidates thrived on this belief, as well as on the fact that many of the Primary Members began their tenure as Candidates.

Sally was told that her contact, Sora Arpin, was an aspiring mathematician but was now known and respected as one of the world's foremost "mental calculators." She possesses the unique ability to multiply and factor large numbers in her head, but was recruited into The Cell because of her ability and willingness to modify the gifts she possessed into sequences dealing mostly with cause and effect relating to specific events. This was critical because The Cell had need of recruits that could fit into their purposed regimen, and although Sora's ability to calculate numbers was incredibly impressive, her usefulness to The Cell would revolve around her ability to take this mental projection and then learn to foster it into other arenas, just as Henryrk had learned to do. She was only the third woman recruit admitted into The Cell in the last fifteen years, and Sally was eager to meet her.

Sally had spent almost none of her time on the third level, only last night in Cross's and Dr. Thiery's offices. She had also spent minimal time on the first level, where the military personnel and administrators spent their time. Now, for the first time, she was standing on the second level, the level respected and praised for both its diligence and ambition, the Candidate level.

Actually, as Cross had thoroughly explained to her last night, the second level is where much of the activity went on with regard to The Compound. Much of the information that made its way through the first level would touch the second level before it made its way up to the third. There was not a situation that was readily handled on the third level that was not first diagnosed and treated on the second. Cross likened the Candidates almost to nurses who would prep the bodies before the surgery. Their role was actually critical to The Cell's inner-workings. In fact, when Dr. Thiery first began The Cell, he considered the second level more prominent than the third, only utilizing the third level when necessary. It has long been understood that roughly 75 percent of the intelligence and subsequent conclusions are worked out on the second level.

"Then why all the un-appreciation from The Candidates?" Sally questioned.

"Because," Cross explained to her, "even if the Candidates do figure out the intelligence, they still need to go through the third level in order to make it stick, almost like the nurse diagnosing the illness still needs a doctor to make it stick."

Made sense Sally thought to herself.

As Sally and Cross made their way through the corridor, they walked past a grouping of cubicles. One of the cubicles was hiding a dark-haired woman with a soft complexion, a lavender blouse accenting her skin.

Cross shouted abruptly, "Sora!"

Immediately, piercing wide eyes turned to meet both of them. Sora put her pencil down and stood up to greet them, but turned first to Sally.

Holding out her hand, "Hello, I'm Sora."

Sally took her hand, "Hi, I'm Sally."

Cross interjected. "Sora, I'm going to leave you alone just like we discussed. If you need anything, contact me and I will take care of it."

"Of course, Mr. Lutherant," Sora voiced, matter of factly, and all without taking her eyes off Sally. "I don't think we will have need of anything right now. Thank You."

"Very well then," turning toward Sally, "I'll leave the two of you alone. Have a nice day, Sally."

"Thank you, Mr. Lutherant," Sally offered. Cross then turned toward the elevator. Sally's eyes met Sora's.

Sora turned to her left and let out a squeaky cry. "Hey, come on, hey, come on." She waved her arm in a flagging motion, and then turned toward Sally again, almost star-struck.

Sally noticed to her right that two men were looking from their cubicles; one turned quickly, the other more casually.

Sora then voiced again, but a little quieter this time. "Come on, you knuckleheads, come meet Sally."

One of the men slowly made his way over, barely making eye contact and casually taking the seat right next to Sora. "This is Alek, Sally."

There was a mutual acknowledgment.

"He is also a mental calculator just like myself." She then turned to the cubical where one of the men was still hiding. "As is James over there, the bloke that is hiding right now." Sally looked over and saw a huge hand wave right above the cubicle." Sally called out, "Hi, James."

Sally then heard a muffled response, "Hello, Sally."

"We are all part of a special division within the Candidate program," Sora continued, "a division that works implicitly on problem solving.

"It's a lot like I was reading with regard to your gifts, Sally, except we are not originators of thought; we simply dissect the information given to us in an attempt to find the most accurate answers."

"Kind of like Heynrk," Sally then voiced cautiously.

Sora looked impressed. "Exactly like Heynrk," Alek responded. "Only he is far more superior at what he does." He then turns to Sora. "And far cockier, too." They both giggle quietly. Sally smiles and looks over to where James is seated. Sora notices. "James, get your butt over here right now." It sounded funny because her English accent resounded louder when she spoke seriously. Sally then heard a chair creek violently and then she saw a body manifest quickly, and when it did, it just seemed to keep getting bigger and bigger and bigger. James came over.

Sora makes the proper introduction. "Sally this is James, all 180 kg of him." Alek makes light, "That's about 400 pounds in American measurements, Sally."

"How are you doing, Sally?" James extends his hand.

"Fine." Sally makes the introduction as she grasps a hand that is probably twice the size of hers. James doesn't even bother to sit down; only his own chair will properly hold him.

"You might have heard of James" says Sora, "he's from your neck of the woods."

"America?"

"No," James quickly corrects her, "Canada."

Sally's eyes open up when she hears this. "Oh, my gosh, I think I have heard of you before."

Alek and Sora both smile as they watch Sally try and figure it out. Sally focuses as she questions James.

"About five years ago, there was information about a guy ..., a really big guy actually ... from Canada, who was an absolute genius at working out both science and math, but specifically at working out problems in his head, solving them incredibly. I also remember reading the article and how it boasted that this man was one of the standouts who actually had the ability to solve these equations outright, without utilizing much of his working memory. Instead, he was able to store numerical equivalents and efficient calculative strategies within his long-term memory, thus giving him quick access to the logic he had memorized, and this became the main reason why he was able to solve these problems so quickly."

Sally looked at Sora and then Alek, but Sora looked at James.

James nodded his head, and Sally went on. "I always wondered what happened to you?"

James made his comment calmly. "I remember that story. About six weeks after that news footage, I came here, for testing and evaluation. But they didn't think I would make it here, so I left." He rubbed his elbow like he didn't care, he then continued. "But then they invited me back a year later."

"Why didn't they think you would make it?"

"Because Sally," Sora interrupts, "A mental calculator's greatest usefulness here is to put their abilities in alignment with the overall purposes of The Cell, which is to figure out situations, and not necessarily numbers. It is only when people like us can learn to use our abilities for The Cell's overall purposes that they see us as fully purposeful. The reason they dismissed James is that, although he is probably the most gifted of the mental calculators, he also proved the most difficult in acquiescing to The Cell's purposes."

"That is why Henryrk is so important to The Cell," Alek adds, "He can exercise his gifts in any way that you'd like him to. If you want math from him, then you'll get math. If you want words from him, then you'll get words. If you want situations from him, then you'll get situations." He then looks at Sora. "And if you want his outlines ...," Sora finishes his thought, "Then you'll get the answer you're looking for."

Sally perceives everything. "So you guys are pretty much learning to do what Henryrk does, only that, as of yet, you are less proficient."

Sora and Alek smile together. Sora then responds to Sally, "I like this girl, Alek,... as of yet!"

"Good show, Sally; good show." Sora commented as Sally approached from behind her. Sally's disposition was getting more relaxed as she learned to sit on her horse. Sora continued. "Now come up alongside of me so as to not miss the next turn."

This was actually more important than it sounded. About thirty minutes ago Sally had been warned, but then she missed the turn anyway, ending up in muddy water that covered her riding boots. Sally turned her horse nearer to Sora.

"That's it, that's it Sally, do it firmly, so he knows who's boss." Sally did it firmly, and the horse acquiesced making its way up the ridge alongside of Sora.

"Great, you did it!" Sora's face beamed. "Up ahead is a great winery that we can let loose on."

"That you can let loose on," Sally stated sarcastically. "I'll watch."

Sora smiled.

The two had been horseback riding for the last half of the afternoon. Except for the great food and exercise that Sally had enjoyed ever since she arrived in France, this time with Sora was the highlight of her trip. As she watched Sora's horse trot ahead a few paces, her mind drifted to The Cell and its inner-workings. She was sure that The Cell couldn't see it right now, but the last thing she wanted to do was have some kind of vacation time. She had just left a boyfriend as well as an environment in which she was receiving great inspiration, not to mention the fact she was still confused regarding her gifts and purposes. As far as she was concerned, every second that was not focused on her purposes here was a wasted second.

Sora broke Sally's silence, "Sally, can I ask you a question?"

"Sure," Sally answers haphazardly as she looks down at her horse trying to understand his movements.

"I read your paper, Sally."

"I know."

Sora looked in Sally's direction, but then looked ahead again. She then began to open up, almost reminiscently. "Sally, I was born in Saudi Arabia, but my family moved to England when I was three. My dad excelled in the area of finance and my mom comforted us as a stable housewife. Sally, the gifts that I possess began to expose themselves when I was about seven, and since then they haven't stopped."

Sora then swallowed a bit, and turned in Sally's direction. "I've never seen gifts like yours before. They're unbelievable really, and I have never read anything like what I read in your paper. Most people, Sally, are smart, very smart actually, and they can explain things and help you understand them on all different levels, but with you Sally, its different, you do a lot more than just that."

Sally listens, trying not to interrupt but knowing what Sora is about to say even before she says it. "Sally, you bring in a train of thought that could never have been seen or comprehended, and you don't even give an explanation, Sally, you just bring it. I can give a good explanation of exactly what I mean. I can have the facts presented to me and then consequently align them. But you, Sally, you seem to come up with facts that aren't even there, and the way you introduce them, the facts explain themselves." Sora turns, not wanting to inflate Sally's ego too much, but then she turns right back in Sally's direction anyway. "I am floored by you, Sally, absolutely floored."

Sally was a bit humbled by what Sora said, but then she came right back at her, giving her the credit she deserved. "Trust me, Sora, I fully respect and appreciate what you just said. But what you and the others do, I wouldn't take it for granted. I understand the process that you guys are going through right now, how you are trying to alter your gifts." Sally then looks at Sora with resolve and respect. "Trust me when I say that your fight right now is probably even more difficult to manage than my own."

Sora received Sally's words graciously, and she accepted them as true. Sally then asked a question plainly.

"Sora, about Henryrk" Sora quickly interrupts her. "I can only be vague Sally."

Sally continues, "It's just that, are you trying to be like him?"

Sora thought for a second, and then smiled. "Not like him, Sally." Sora then nodded her head and smiled understandably. She then thought to herself, Sally should be due at least this much. "Let me tell you a bit

about Henryrk. He was practically born into The Cell. His father was a Candidate, and a wonderful one at that. He grew up, exposing the same gifts as his father, and The Cell took him on, but privately, until he came of age. Sally, this man was not only seemingly born for The Cell, but because he has been here since birth, he also has been intensively trained all his life for The Cell's purposes. Training that I lack. The three of us will probably never catch up with Henryrk; we're too set in our ways, but to be honest with you, right now, that is not my purpose."

Sally waited a moment giving Sora some time, and then asked, "What is your purpose?"

"I won't lie, Sally, at first my goal was to become the first woman Primary Member." Sora looks at Sally and laughs, then continues. "But about two years ago, I realized that if I could only be like Henryrk's dad, and just assist the Primary Members thoroughly, that I would find intense satisfaction in my efforts." Sora looks at Sally with calm eyes. "So I resolved myself in this, and every time I think about it, I'm satisfied."

Sally nodded her head, wanting to say something but then deciding against it. Sora speaks again, "Did you know that the three of us, Alek, James, and myself, work with Henryrk consistently at least once a week?"

Sally shakes her head no. "He drills us, and he finds our errors and tries to help us out. He is actually a warm chap once you get to know him." Then she turns fully toward Sally with a spirit that could probably knock her off her horse. "But then he's so damn good."

Sally smiles. "Then it must be difficult to work with him?" Sally's question was actually more of a comment, knowing that sometimes working with gifted individuals could be hard on your pride; she had learned this lesson with Dr. Hutchinson.

"Intensively sometimes, but then, it is almost always sufficed by working with Saunders. Dr. Fedor that is." Sally nods her head, knowing Saunders as the philologist. "He is a great man, and brilliant in his own right. I think he has been able to assist me more brilliantly than Henryrk."

Sally changes the subject, getting a little more personal. "How old are you Sora, if you don't mind my asking?"

"I'm twenty-seven, and I became a Candidate when I was only twenty."

"So we were both basically the same age when we came here."

"Basically." Sora smiles at the comparison, "but you've already made more of an impact I think."

Sora laughs, and Sally follows her laughter. After a moment they both quiet down, and Sora looks down, turning her attention to her horse. The two military men, about one-hundred feet behind, riding on horseback, could be heard when neither of them spoke. Sally decided to ask another quick question as she noticed that the winery was just up ahead. "What about Dr. Thiery, Sora?"

Sora then looked up as soon as Sally had asked her the question. Sora too noticed that the winery was up ahead, and she wanted to get her horse and herself ready for the stride. "What about him, Sally?"

Sally questioned, "I don't know, I just"

Sora didn't give Sally the time to answer; she could tell by the way Sally was speaking that she was intimidated. "Don't worry, Sally, love ..." Sora said as she whipped her horse and began to stride, "...his bark is bigger than his bite."

The chairs in the waiting room were a bit less comfortable than all the other chairs that Sally had sat in over the last four days, but that was probably for a reason. It was Monday morning currently, and Sally was preparing to enter the doctor's offices for her physicals and evaluations. She assumed the idea of allowing someone to get too comfortable in this waiting room would probably defeat the purpose. Sally had actually already been in this room, two days ago; the doctors drew blood and took her vitals so they could prepare for the tests they would administer today. The doctor then opened the door, inviting Sally in.

(8 Hours later)

She was everything they had expected her to be, the doctors explained to Dr. Thiery and Cross as they presented their findings after a day full of testing, and these were their results.

First, utilizing all the background information that was supplied to them, the doctors, even before Sally had arrived in France, had created a psychological profile based on records from her life. They looked at schooling records, patterns of the friends she kept, family traumas, including the loss of her father, special interests, hospitalizations, medications, boyfriends, what kinds of jobs she was prone to keep. They were also able to interview Dr. Hutchinson thoroughly, asking him regarding her persona, her character, including her wit and demeanor, how she handled specific situations and what her special tendencies were. Throughout all this analysis, the doctors were able to characterize Sally's personality down to specifics, mostly personal traits as well as the special talents she possessed. But this was only the beginning of the process.

The doctors then had to administer other tests in order to verify and establish the first findings. They used a series of tests to do this. And from these series of tests, they received what they believed to be essential facts pointing directly to both Sally's abilities as well as her character tendencies. Once these new findings were established, they hoped to be able to cross-reference them with their first assumptions to prove if both findings corporately complimented each other. Then, according to this process, they hoped to be able to draw up specific questions to prove Sally, in order to try and finalize exactly who this girl was. This was an outline of the process, and it, as well as their initial findings, were discussed thoroughly with Dr. Thiery and Cross.

The first series of tests were based on intelligence, procedures established specifically to prove both the mental strength and character.

Test 1 (Cognitive and Reasoning Test)

Test 2 (Figure Design Test)2

- Test 3 (Mental Performance Test, MPT)2
- Test 4 (Power-Scale Test)2
- Test 5 (Test of Inductive Reasoning, TRI)2
- Test 6 (Experimental Creative Thinking Test)2

These tests investigated everything from experimental creative thinking to logic. They also tested for perception, visualization, including short-term and long-term memory comprehension. These six tests were able to help the doctors classify and define Sally's cognitive abilities overall.

The second series of tests focused on Sally's mental health. These tests investigated mood disorders, patterns of fatigue, malnutrition, eating habits, including problems with addictions, as well as neurological analysis including magnetoencephalography.

The third series of tests included medical physical procedures. These procedures consisted of doctor's physicals, lab work, blood work, as well as EKG monitoring.

The last test was a lie detector test, otherwise known as the Polygraph test.

As soon as the doctors had thoroughly compiled all the data derived from these investigations, they were able to take their findings and thoroughly compare them with their first assumptions, the psychological profile they created utilizing all of her information. Finding similarities as well as differences, they were then able to focus on specifics and draw up questions in order to test Sally. And these were the results of their findings.

Although polygraph tests are not admissible, since most machines, as well as test administrators, can be fooled, The Cell still chooses to utilize these tests due to the confidence in their ability to perceive when someone is lying.

Even if the person cheats the test, The Cell reasons, a good administrator can consequently ask a series of questions that will rebut the person. It takes a trained eye and a plausible mind to do this, but the doctors, just like all the Candidates, have been thoroughly schooled in order to administer this process. Their findings revealed Sally was indeed telling the

truth. If any inconsistencies did surface, they were not manifested consciously.

Physically, Sally was in good shape. She was still growing so some tests would prove to be inconclusive, but all in all, she was judged in excellent physical health.

The neurological tests and the tests investigating compulsion toward addiction and mood swings were also inconclusive. This was due to the fact that the doctors had been specifically ordered by Dr. Thiery not to probe in these areas. Because of this, the doctors were only able to cover the basics, and thus, could not ask specific questions in order to finalize any of their findings.

Lastly, her intellectual tests were off the charts. Although they did not test her for IQ, because the tests they administered would not qualify her for IQ, these test results could be paralleled to the scores of one who had taken both the IQ tests as well as these tests. Accordingly, Sally was in the top 1 percent. But this, as the doctors cautioned, was only the beginning. What was astounding was that the emphasis of these findings would be placed elsewhere. According to the cognitive and memory tests administered, the doctor's found that Sally's ability through the use of observation as well as her memory cycles, were simply unmatched, especially with regards to utilizing her long-term memory. She was a perceiver, and according to her ability to intuitively perceive coupled with her ability to fully comprehend within her long-term memory, she became a decipher, a decipher who could press wisdom to its extreme. She wasn't, the doctors reasoned, one who could take knowledge and then figure something out; she was the type who could take the wisdom that was given her and then, according to the manifest gifts within her, either add or subtract from its principles in order to make that wisdom more plausible or accurate.

Just like the assumptions that had followed this girl all her life, the doctors ultimately concluded that Sally was indeed an originator or inventor of thought patterns. Inventing thought patterns that she might process the wisdom that she had been given more accurately. This girl's method was to figure out things

by first creating a process to figure them out. And this process was unique, in that she specifically, according to the wisdom that was given her, would create a train of thought or consciousness that would help her to decipher the best plausible answer. This girl possessed the answers to questions no one else had, not so much because she was smarter, but because she thought differently, and this was ultimately her genius. Her ability to create a specific pattern, or train of thought, in order to decipher wisdom set her apart. The doctors reasoned that it was just like a math equation that had been created to solve a math problem. Sally was an inventor or creator of such equations. If you gave this girl a problem, she wouldn't try to focus on the problem; instead, she would create a train of thought to decipher or break down the problem so that the problem would eventually manifest itself.

The doctors concluded their meeting, leaving their findings on the table as they escorted themselves out. Cross grabbed the files and then placed them in front of Dr. Thiery.

Cross then asks, without even looking over to see his response, "Are you surprised?"

"No. She obviously has the kind of mind for this work, but still" His reasoning lingered.

"But still what?"

Dr. Thiery looks over just quick enough to make eye contact; he then turns back around. "She hasn't owned up to the responsibilities of such a mind, and this lack of experience concerns me."

Cross noticed that he had said the last part almost as if he had already made up his mind. But Cross knew him better than that; he was simply thinking out loud, and Cross decided not to question. Cross grabbed the files and exited the room, leaving Dr. Thiery to his thoughts.

It had been a long day, Sally thought; all day long, testing and testing and more testing. She was relieved

to be coming home to her little castle, accented alongside the hills of Alsace.

"Goodnight," Sally voiced to her driver as she closed the door heading toward the threshold of the house. As she entered, the smell of cleaning agents could be noticed. She set her purse down on the table near the entrance and quickly made her way upstairs.

Walking into her bedroom, she noticed the light was left on, but she was sure she had remembered to shut it off before leaving this morning. The housekeepers must have left it on, she thought. As she continued to walk, she was cautious, but then, after a few steps, she noticed something on her bed. She drew closer to investigate. There was a handwritten note on the bed and an opera-styled mask beside it. The note had her name scribbled on the front and it read:

Happy Halloween Sally, or as we like to call it here in Europe, All Hallow's Eve. Enjoy the mask, my gift, and please don't refuse it. Show it to all your friends in America!! I hope all went well today. You can tell me about it tomorrow. Paris will be such fun. Bye.

Sora

Sally tucked away the note and mask and then made ready for bed.

A long day lie ahead. From the absolute onset of the drive this morning, Sally had the feeling that she would not so much enjoy the sights of Paris today but would allow her mind to linger and eventually focus on both the activities and influences of The Cell. The drive from The Compound to Paris had taken three and a half hours, and it had exhausted her.

"Don't worry, Sally," Sora voiced, breaking the silence, "You'll feel better once we get to Paris."

Sally looked at Sora who, at the moment, was surfing the Internet, logging on to the stores she was planning to visit today.

Sora jumped in again, "And don't worry, Sally, shopping's on me today." Sora held up her credit card and gave Sally a quick glance. "They treat Candidates very well... besides, my family's well off."

With that, Sora began laughing and enticed Sally to laugh along with her. It was the way she said it, Sally thought, as though she were on a mission to shop. Sally looked over and saw the glow in Sora's eyes as she surfed the web. She was looking for her daily bargains. Sally giggled; it was funny.

As the Mercedes continued down the A4 NANCY-METZ / SARREBRUCK / PARIS / HAGUENAU (Portions toll), Sally could see Paris looming in the background. She grabbed the handle on her door and pulled herself closer for a more dynamic view of the city. It looked like gold from this far away, Sally thought; part of her heart dropped as she sensed the overwhelming feeling of visiting Paris for the first time. She became giddy and amazed. She just couldn't believe what she was doing.

"Oh, Sally." Sora mentioned as she shut the screen on the laptop and pushed it and its tray back into its compartment. "I wanted to mention something to you before."

"Go ahead, Sora."

Sora nodded her head and began. "Sally, it's about your stand-up ... Let me offer you a hint of advice."

This was it, Sally thought to herself, the stand-up was the basic reason she was here. She had been anxious to bring it up and to ask Sora about it, but she understood it would've made her appear unprofessional. Sora began, "When I got here, Sally, over seven years ago, they gave me a stand-up."

Sally was surprised, and Sora noticed it. Sora then continued after Sally regained focus. "Sally, I know it's not proper to test Candidates, that the stand-up process is usually only reserved for securing a Primary Member seat, but they wanted to test me thoroughly. Since I was a woman, they wanted to see if they could break me."

"Did they?" Sally asked cautiously.

After taking a long pause, Sora addressed her, "They did break me, Sally. They broke me emotionally, and perhaps, even unnecessarily. After that, I thought I was gone for good; I thought they would never give me a second chance."

"They must have," Sally encouraged.

"They did. The reason I am talking to you about this right now is because I want you to be on your guard."

Sally listened. "When I had my stand-up, it was Dante who broke me, but now it is Henryrk who usually has those honors."

"Henryrk again," Sally thought to herself even without mumbling a word.

Sora continued. "Henryrk is the key, Sally. If you defuse him, then you've eventually given yourself the leverage you'll need."

"Defuse him how?" Sally questioned, she had never witnessed a stand-up and had no idea what to expect. She just knew that she would be vulnerable, and they wouldn't.

"I can't say for certain, Sally, but it will probably be Henryrk who digs the deepest on you, and if it happens to be one of the others, then you will know at that time, and it will be your job to defuse them instead."

"But you think it will be Henryrk?" Sally reasoned.

"Yes," Sora offered, "because Dr. Thiery usually just watches except for the presentation questions, and Dante long ago allowed Henryrk to take the reins."

Makes sense, Sally thought.

"Just understand, Sally, what is important is that you don't lose your resolve. Don't let them push you around." Sora becomes vehement. "And don't be afraid to put them in their place if you are forced to."

Sally questioned because she didn't know what to think. Was this sound advice or was Sora speaking from her own emotions? Sally tried to discern between the two.

"Sally," Sora continued getting very serious, "I'm telling you, the biggest regret that anyone has with

regard to stand-up is that they don't hold their position long enough; they allow the members to push them around. Be firm, Sally; don't let them do it."

Sally then asks a question outright. "But how can I, Sora; they are my superiors and unless they really blow it, I can't disrespect their current position."

Sora relented; she understood Sally's reasoning. She took a second and allowed Sally to understand that she was fully trying to hear what she had to say, but that it had already been considered. She then looked upon Sally meekly. "I understand your fears and concerns, but trust me when I say that you need to walk into that room with confidence, and with the belief that you belong there.

"I'm not talking about disrespect; you will understand your place in there, trust me." Sora pauses and looks away, as if the stand-up experience itself is unforgettable. "But, Sally, I caution you, no, I actually urge you, hold your own in there, and if you happen to get knocked down holding your own, then it was just meant to be."

"Sora, do you mind if I ask you a question?" Sora looks at Sally very securely, and with certainty resounding behind her eyes. "Did you hold your own in there?"

Sora smiles and then looks Sally squarely in the eyes. "Sally, I held my own, but I also broke. The only thing I did wrong was that I didn't hold my own for long enough. But trust me, Sally, I would have broken either way."

Sally understood. She then asked a final question. "So what makes you so sure that I can make it where you failed?"

Sora looks out over Paris and then to the driver. She says something in French, and the driver nods his head. Sora then looks Sally in the eyes. "I have never read anything before like I read in your paper. It's a double-edged sword really. Because your paper is so powerful, they are going to come at you that much harder, and to be honest with you, Sally, if your paper was toned down a bit, then they might have relented, allowing you to revel in it a bit."

Sally understood what she meant. Sora then went on. "But the thing is, if you hold your own, I think you possess the goods to defeat any of their questions or tactics, because I think your paper is too accurate Sally."

"So what you're saying Sora is that had the paper been weaker, then things would be easier for me now, but since the paper is strong, then they will be coming after me all the more?" Sally then eyes Sora, beckoning a response; Sora's facial expression signifies that she understands Sally is making perfect sense. Sally then continues, "So then, if I hold my own for long enough, then the paper's truth will simply speak for itself?"

Sora then comes forward, almost like a hawk will when it attempts to finish off its prey. "Exactly. If you hold your own, they can do nothing against your paper; but if you allow them to shake your confidence, then they won't even need to discount your paper, because your stand-up just discounted itself."

"So basically you're telling me to call their bluff."

"Exactly Sally. Because, Sally, you're holding a full house love, and none of their words are going to change that."

It made sense, Sally thought, if the truth was on her side, then the stand-up was just going to be The Cell blowing smoke at her. Sally decides to ask one more question. "What if they drill me on something other than the paper I wrote, on logic or wisdom totally separate from my paper?"

Sora then eyes Sally with both knowing and experienced eyes. She then offers her last comments with resounding clarity. "Sally, there are too many variables to consider; that's why they call it stand-up. You will know what to do, trust me, you will certainly know what to do ... Just make sure you do it."

Back at The Cell, Henryrk, Markus Berg, Dr. Thiery, Dr. Han's Ottokar, and the two twins Dr. Petro and Dr. Vidal Zacarias are sandwiched together having a meeting

regarding the trials this coming Thursday. Henryrk is heading up the proofs and investigative reports, and Markus has been chosen to interrogate the witness. Henryrk is briefing Markus currently, on the details that he and Dante had assimilated and that Dr. Thiery himself had approved. They are positioning themselves in order that they might break this witness hard, and fast, not allowing any room for his testimony to become vague and uncertain. Cross walks into the room.

"Sir, may I have a word?" He makes his request as soon as he walks in.

"Of course, Mr. Lutherant," Dr. Thiery speaks quietly.

"The witness has been detained and will be arriving on the morning of November 3rd. We will have representatives from both sides, and I have already made the proper accommodations if there is need."

"Very well," Dr. Thiery says, obviously wanting to get back to the work at hand. "Make sure there is plenty of security on hand. I want double security in the actual room where the interrogation will be taking place."

"It's done," Cross affirms. "In fact, Her majesty's Government has requested their own security."

"They may have it," Dr. Thiery responds immediately. "Is there anything else Mr. Lutherant?"

"Nothing else, sir," Cross acquiesces. "I just wanted to inform you that we have Mr. Ahrens detained and that he will be arriving on schedule, and that is all."

Dr. Thiery then changes his tone. "That is encouraging news, Mr. Lutherant." He then looks to the men beside him with a gesture of humor. "Looks like we had better keep on studying then, since we now have someone to interrogate."

Cross and Hans laugh the hardest of all. Henryrk doesn't even make an expression. The twins look amused, and Markus just looks like he wants to interrogate someone. Cross reads the language of the room, something he is accustomed to doing.

"I'd better go. Good luck, gentlemen." Cross then begins to make his way out of the room.

A few of the men offer him polite goodbyes, but Dr. Thierry reminds him that dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m. sharp and that Hans will be joining them. After receiving this news, Cross shuts the door and leaves the men to their preparation.

They had been shopping for the last three hours, and all the stores on the popular rue des France-Bourgeois Boulevard seemed to glimmer and glow with the coming of the early afternoon. Sally had allowed Sora to purchase her a new pair of boots and Sora had not done so bad herself, two bags in each hand. They decided to walk over to the two Mercedes parked side by side near the entrance of the alley.

"Sally," Sora hands the bags to the driver and to the two military personnel beside her, and then hands them Sally's bag as well, "let's go walking for a bit. I think I could use some fresh air. All that time inside with all that perfume and fabrics has made me a bit dizzy."

"What about the cars?" Sally questions as she motions toward the two Mercedes.

Sora shrugs her shoulders. "They'll probably stay here, but these two," she motions toward the two military personnel, "will be following us wherever we go." Sora then makes light. "Pity they couldn't pay for the clothes." After she has thoroughly checked herself with her hand-held mirror, Sora questions, "You ready?"

"Ready," Sally exclaims.

They begin to walk along the boulevard, noticing the various shops and cafés along the way. The date was November 1st, and it was All Saints Day in France. As they continued to walk southwest away from the boulevard, they could hear bells tolling from the Notre-Dame Cathedral. They had already made their way past the Place des Vosges, and they were planning on going over to the Ile de la Cité, the island that housed the Sainte-Chapelle and the famous Notre-Dame. As they walked, Sally mused over the city and its atmosphere.

The bridges, the scenic waterways, the cradles of masterpieces, all of the architecture including the commissions of the walkways, the surrounding parks and the rest areas. It was so unbelievable, Sally thought, inviting, beautiful and absolutely distinguished to the core. You didn't even need to go into these buildings in order to see the art; the buildings were an art unto themselves. To think, man and all his inspiration built up these towering cathedrals that looked more like mountains than they did churches. Sally was beside herself with awe as they walked on.

They made their way, past the Sainte-Chapelle and near the Notre-Dame. As they past the Palais de Justice, Sally noticed all the trees. The trees on the island were simply fabulous. Some were overgrown, allowing the leaves and branches to come down so close to you that they would hover over you, basically welcoming you to the island. Other trees were cut back and shaped, sculpted so that their figure would shadow the beauty and human touch of the scenery all around them. The feel of the city was magnificent, and the gentle breeze that lifted itself off the Seine allowed for just enough atmosphere in order to make one feel welcomed but yet at the same time, foreign.

As they approached the front of the Notre-Dame Cathedral, where the West Rose Window welcomed all its visitors, Sally looked to the left. A group of people were standing outside praying. She then looked to the right, where other people were holding rosaries and pictures and were talking among themselves. Sally stopped dead in her tracks, and she turned around in order to make sure she hadn't left Sora behind. Sora had fallen a little bit behind, and was currently talking with two little children and their mother. Sally turned toward the Cathedral again. So much prayer, she thought. How many people had come to this house not simply for ceremonies' sake, but for closeness' sake and for relationship's sake? How many people had spilled out their hearts in his house just like Hannah had done in the Old Testament, requiring a child from the Lord. So many, Sally thought, so many.

She was probably standing on the site where more prayers had been offered to God than in any other place in the world save Jerusalem. It was humbling, she thought, to know that in spite of all that was going on around her, that there were many people hungry and seeking and touching the Heart of God in ways that she never would, and in areas of their lives that she herself had never faced. How many people had been to this house to pray for children, of which she had none, for debt, for which she had none, for disease, for which she had none, for distress and poverty, for which she had none, for oppression, for which she had none, for injustices, for which she had none. Just comprehending all the different prayers that had been offered today that had not only not been from her, but that had been in areas which were foreign to her. She felt small right now, even menial in this place of prayer when she focused on life situations and struggles that were not her own. She couldn't believe it, she thought to herself as she looked down at her feet standing upon the concrete of this place. The last thing she expected to feel today was conviction, but that is exactly what she was feeling right now, conviction for burdens that were not even her own.

She dropped down to one knee, and put her hands on opposite sides of her body; just like a sprinter does when she gets herself ready to leap from the starting blocks. She then bowed her head in submission; just as a sprinter does when she gets herself ready to leap from the starting blocks. She then made her supplication unto God.

The shadows from the clouds overhead didn't encompass the church fully; only brief portions remained nearby, shadowing the waters beside, but allowing enough afternoon light to slowly leak through. Sally stayed down, until she felt compelled to request from God exactly what she had in her heart, and that He, by His permission, would travail in her place.

She began to rise up, elevating herself to her feet. She didn't look around; she was content to just put her head down and walk toward where she believed Sora to be. But as soon as she began turning, her eyes found

themselves wandering over to her left, where she had previously seen a group of people praying. Her eyes caught hold of an old woman who was holding the rosaries. She was turned away from the others, praying toward the church. Sally pondered for a second; perhaps this older woman needed some kind of help. She looked very old Sally thought, wrinkled, and even needy. As soon as Sally began to make her way toward the old woman, the woman suddenly turned in Sally's direction, and when she did, she stopped Sally dead in her tracks.

Sally didn't even know what to think, but before she had time to, the old woman smiled a smile so bright that it erupted her innermost being, almost like an angelic host was dancing inside of her. Sally stood there, stunned and speechless. The woman then eyed Sally again, and for much longer than a moment, and in such a way that the woman almost seemed to have dominion over her at that point. The woman then turned away, joyously, and continued to pray. Sally was caught; she broke away from the scene and walked quickly toward Sora. Sora was currently playing with her digital camera, fiddling with it.

"I was going to take a picture of you and that older woman ..." Sora said, as she continued to trifle with her camera." She then looked at Sally in a defeated manner, "But my camera wouldn't work."

Sally looked on, humbly. She then expressed openly, "Don't worry Sora," she turned to the older woman who continued to pray toward the church, "I don't think I'll forget it for a while."

Sora then looked at Sally, watching Sally eye the older woman and trying to sense exactly what she meant by her comment.

"Do you mind if we go?" Sally asked. "I think I'd better get some rest."

"Yes," Sora vocalizes as she quits fiddling with her camera, "It has been a long morning, and I think both of us could use some rest."

Sally is thankful for Sora's acquiescence. She then grabs Sora by the back of the arm and leads her away, back off the island and onto the streets of Paris.

Chapter 16

At the moment, it was quiet and serene at The Compound, but only a few hours earlier, the third floor of The Compound had been flooded and entangled with visitors as well as military personnel. After having spent the last two weeks investigating the things pertaining to the Horesburg Trials, it was now time to get on with it. Tomorrow would be the big day, the day when The Cell would have their first crack at these trials that had not only eluded the English government but that had also created quite a stir among the political community. It would also be the first time Sally would have the chance to see The Cell in action. Dr. Thiery wasn't too worried about the possible outcome; in the past, The Cell had looked impressive given even harsher circumstances.

Cross walked in; a group following him remained outside.

"Are they back, Mr. Lutherant?"

Cross answered him quickly. "Sir, they arrived back yesterday evening, and Sally is settled."

"Good," Dr. Thiery continued, "Now I want her here, in my office, tomorrow morning, 8:00 a.m. sharp so that you can brief her."

Cross was about to say something but didn't. Dr. Thiery continued, "I want her to understand the purpose of the trials."

"Sir, I hope you don't mind, but I already informed Sally that she needed to be at my office tomorrow morning, and that I would brief her there."

Dr. Thiery looked up, but then looked down as he continued to scribble something down. "That is fine, Mr. Lutherant, as long as she is briefed." He then pauses to look up. "So she can be ready when the trials begin at 9:00 a.m.?"

"Sir," Cross continued, "she will be briefed and informed of the proceedings well before 9:00."

Cross and Dr. Thiery eye each other knowingly. Tomorrow was a big day. For all intents and purposes, tomorrow would become their stand-up. If The Cell were

to fail tomorrow, or even if The Cell were to perform contemptibly, then this would give Sally occasion to dismiss The Cell's strength, having not fully seen them live up to their respected and acquired status. But, on the other hand, if The Cell were to perform flawlessly, and if they were able to bring clarity to these proceedings, and even truth, then this would establish them in Sally's eyes as a force to be reckoned with, and not only a force to be reckoned with, but a force to be respected and considered as well. They said this simultaneously to each other with their eyes, making sure each understood the importance of the situation. Cross spoke first.

"Everything will be taken care of sir."

Dr. Thiery looked up, resolved. His eyes offered an insight and confidence that others could see but only he himself could muster. "Very well, Mr. Lutherant."

Besides the nervousness as well as the assumptions that have plagued Sally's mind over the last few days, she has a sense of peace and resolve that accompanied her as she made her way into the interrogation hall for the day's proceedings. Today is the first time she will have the chance to see The Cell in action. The Horesburg Trials, having been fully explained to her this morning by Cross, should make for a good first showing.

The trials today highlight the plight of a man named Horesburg who had been taken to common law court due to allegations from the Inland Revenue Service. The charges against him were tax evasion, accusations relating mostly to illegal money arrangements both to and from offshore accounts. Horesburg, while not fully denying his own guilt, believes the sanctions against him are too strict, and while the courts might have found him guilty, they have no grounds to seize his land, his contracts, or his other franchise agreements for that matter.

While the Inland Revenue Service holds fast to their integrity, affirming Horesburg's evasions and penalties will amount in the millions, Horesburg believes

the heart of the matter stems from something deeper, a desire for the English Court to make stick accusations that he, but mostly his monies, have become the front man to the IRA's purposes for at least the past two decades. In order to get to the root of the matter, he affirms, The Cell needs to be deputized to not only referee, but also to play final judge and executioner, rather than the English courts. The Cell would have probably never been called to assist with this matter had the case not garnished the attention from policymakers on both ends. And while The Cell and its purposes remain mostly hidden to the outside world, it is commonly understood that during such proceedings the reputations and concerns of both sides, both the IRA and their Protestant Democratic Unionist Party rivals, will not only be clearly addressed, but will also be duly considered.

This having been fully explained to her by Cross, Sally understood the validity of the situation, the obvious political repercussions, but she still had questions about how The Cell had the power to usurp authority over the British government and their rulings. How could The Cell make their own charges, allegations, or rulings totally separate from the initial findings of the English courts? Her question was then fully explained to her.

Although any decision made by England's House of Lords is binding, based on the common law and precedents, under strict NATO regulations and negotiations The Cell possesses the authority to overturn any decision brought to their attention by permission of the Law Lords as well as the NATO-regulated oversight committee, but by doing this, they set no new precedence for the common law in England. This is a rare occurrence to say the least, but the Lords implicitly trust the integrity of the NATO-regulated guidelines set upon The Cell, and for this reason they have no qualms about releasing their authority, fully trusting that the oversight committee has judged well regarding their decision to include The Cell, and fully understanding how the eventual outcome might become beneficial for all mankind.

So, Sally understood, at least for now. But the difficult thing for her to comprehend was how The Cell

intended to argue the case. She was fully briefed regarding The Cell's preparations for today's proceedings, but she was not invited to any of those meetings. She was simply briefed regarding the information. In short, she had no idea what The Cell was planning on doing. What would happen today would become a learning experience, not to mention her first look at The Cell in action.

As she made her way down the aisle of the interrogation hall, she saw an empty seat. The seat was located in the second row near the front and had her name on it. She took her briefcase, given to her by Cross, and set it down beside the seat. She then picked up the envelope that had her name on it and sat down in the chair. She waited and watched as the others filed in through the doors.

After a few moments, two men walked in and found their seats immediately. They seated themselves right behind the main podium and in clear view of the man whom The Cell would be interrogating today. They must have been important, Sally thought. They both looked comfortable; the first, looked intensely clever and the second, absolutely prideful. They were both dressed in dark suits. Dr. Thiery made his way in, ushering a few men with him; he led the men gently down the aisle and showed them where they would be seated. The men followed him cautiously, and seemed to be either political or military. A few had on suits, and a few seemed decorated. Sally overheard someone seated next to her utter, "those men are from the IRA."

Sally looked again, realizing that indeed, their garb and their manner seemed stringent, almost relying upon ceremony but a ceremony adopted from their own resolve, and not from any country. Then, rather violently, about ten of Her Majesty's soldiers made their way in quickly behind the IRA, setting up at their posts and quickly falling into their formality. Then, another group followed behind the soldiers, and Sally knew who these men were. The Protestant rivals, the politicians and overseers of the Parliament of the United Kingdom and Her Majesty's Government. These men were more lavishly dressed. Cross had come in with them, and he quickly

moved ahead and seated them directly to the left, opposite their IRA rivals.

These were the two different teams, the IRA, who were for Mr. Horesburg, and the Protestants, who were against. Mr. Horesburg was not in the room, although, as Sally had been told earlier, he was at The Compound. A man then quickly made his way into the room and took his place behind the podium. He set his things down and placed his jacket and his briefcase on the chair next to him. This must be Markus Berg, Sally thought. Sally was told it would be he who would be doing the interrogation today. Sally then watched him closely; he seemed determined and stern. He grabbed a glass of water and took a drink. Then Dr. Thiery, after he had turned away from the men he had brought in with him, fully made his way back over near the two men wearing the dark suits. These two men must be Primary members, Sally thought, but who?

No one had turned to look in her direction the entire time. Sally then turned her attention back on the podium, back on Markus Berg. So Markus would head up this meeting, Sally thought; this made sense because Markus was The Cell's go-to man for interrogations and confessions.

A man was then quickly ushered into the room by military personnel and seated promptly in the main interrogation seat. It was then vocalized that this man's name was Mr. Conrad Ahrens, and that he was a director, responsible for investigations as well as delegations for the Inland Revenue Service. After he took an oath on the Bible, the interrogations began.

The room was tense and fiery. The energy level and overall attitude of the room bordered on frenzied nervousness. The facts that had surfaced over the last forty-five minutes were astounding, and the unfolding of those facts, brilliant.

As Markus had so vehemently presented, it seemed as though Dante De Forest and Henryrk Florian, the two men who were seated behind him, and who had been identified by name, had both found a repetitive glitch regarding the lead incident that eventually resulted in Horseburg's convictions. Even more important, they had both found

this glitch before they had been given Mr. Horesburg's private transcripts, transcripts in which he made allegations that Her Royal Majesty's Government had basically set him up.

The glitch had involved two key players; a bank teller named Eva Casanas and a real estate tycoon named Mcintosh Susser. The glitch became evident when information surfaced that made it obvious that Eva had been so closely associated with the transactions of Mr. Horesburg's funds, that she often knew what kind of transaction he was going to make even before he made it. The glitch was also further substantiated when it was revealed that Eva was the teller who had consistently been in charge and consequently assigned to Mr. Horesburg's monies, a rare thing in the banking industry, even in overseas banking.

Transactions and cash-outs were only awarded when she was working and in charge of his account; without her, nothing moved forward. After further investigation, it was also found that Eva had worked for Mr. Susser in times past, and that this information aligned itself with the fact that Mr. Horesburg insisted on countless occasions that she was indeed his liaison, set up by Mr. Susser himself. The odd thing was that the English courts never took Mr. Susser and Eva very seriously. The two never had any charges filed against them and except for minimal contact, they were excused without any consideration.

The English courts frankly never considered Mr. Horesburg's claims as relevant; they dismissed them, stating that Mr. Susser probably just gave him bad advice and that Eva was simply doing her job, being thoroughly responsible with his money, in light of her probably seeking a promotion. But, when Henryrk and Dante's assumptions ran even deeper, as Markus pointed out, it prompted The Cell to utilize their NATO-granted military might to do some hard-nose investigating.

Turns out only three years earlier that Mr. Susser was summoned to the Inland Revenue Service offices, and that he was released three hours later. There was no record of a charge being filed against him, nor any history that he was even there in their offices. But

then, only months later, he had succeeded in not only meeting, but in also convincing Mr. Horesburg to go forward with a proposed offshore endeavor, even offering his go-to gal Eva as a personal aide. In fact, it was Mr. Susser who approached Mr. Horesburg, and who rallied for both his trust and friendship. One last interesting point was that the Thursday morning three years ago, when Mr. Susser walked into the offices of the Inland Revenue Service, Eva had mysteriously disappeared from work, at least two days prior, and did not return until after five days. When her boss had asked her regarding the absence, she simply told him she had a family emergency, and that she couldn't elaborate.

Markus, with the integrity of The Cell backing him, was now making the accusation that Mr. Horesburg was deceived by Mr. Susser and Eva, and that this act, prompted and even promoted by the Inland Revenue Service, as well as English law enforcement, was entrapment. Markus also pungently pointed out that because the English law enticed Mr. Horesburg, that they did indeed entrap him, and in doing so, broke the three laws of entrapment:

* First, the idea for committing the crime came from law enforcement and not from the person accused of the crime.

This was proved.

* Second, law enforcement then persuaded or talked the person into committing the crime. Simply giving him the opportunity to commit the crime is not the same as persuading him to commit the crime.

Yes, their persuasion was obvious.

* Third, the person was not ready and willing to commit the crime before law enforcement spoke with him.

Yes, not this specific crime. Furthermore, the English court system proved that all roads leading to the other convictions stemmed from this incident.

The Cell's accusation was that although Mr. Horesburg was guilty, he had obviously been entrapped. The English law enforcement, using the persuasion of their undercover contacts Mr. Susser and Eva, persuaded Mr. Horesburg beyond his intention to commit this specific crime. The fact that neither Mr. Susser nor Eva

were called as a witness against Mr. Horesburg was compelling, proving that the English prosecutors had no desire to associate them in any way because including them would prove to risky. To associate them would mean that the English prosecutors might possibly have to give an account for why Mr. Susser and Eva were directly involved in the first place, and given the obvious evidence against them, it could eventually be speculated that their involvement stemmed from the fact that they were both guilty of the same crime months earlier, only at that time, they had cut a deal with the Inland Revenue Service, and in doing so, promised to deliver the man England really wanted, Mr. Horesburg. The whole situation, The Cell pressed, from start to finish, was instigated by law enforcement and was therefore illegal. What was overwhelming was that The Cell didn't even have to prove any of it; they could make their ruling at any time, based on the belief that their findings and investigations were accurate. But The Cell, for the sake of all involved, professionally sought to make their findings concrete, and sought to make everything stick thoroughly, and who better to accomplish this than their number-one interrogator and inquisitor, Markus Berg.

"You have no room here," Markus shouted as he made his way around the podium, making his full presence felt.

"Common sense, my good man, according to the facts presented here, bear witness to the fact that the English prosecutors, as well as English law enforcement, had something to hide with regard to Mr. Susser and Eva Casanas."

Mr. Ahrens sat there looking unconvinced. Markus then continued, hoping to call his bluff. "Don't you understand that this case was decided even before you walked into this room today? The clear-cut evidence that these two gentlemen ..." He turns and points directly in Dante's and Henryrk's direction "... found, implicates not only you, but all your conspirator friends as well ... actually, from the moment those transcripts were finally placed into their hands."

One of the men, either Dante or Henryrk because Sally didn't know, tapped his pencil loudly on his notebook, making a noise for all to hear; he then eyed

Mr. Ahrens quickly as if to say, "Come on, let's get on with it." It was a decisive eye, and it strikingly caught Mr. Ahrens's attention. Mr. Ahrens then paused for a moment, looking as though he were taking a mental consensus. He then realigned himself within his original position and tried to look strongly upon Markus, but he had been impacted.

Markus then continued. "Do I need to bring in Mr. Susser and Eva Casanas themselves, to testify to this court that yes, you, as well as MI5 and Scotland Yard enticed them to deceive Mr. Horesburg and that, in doing so, you would excuse them from any of their past fines or penalties involving their unscrupulous dealings with your agency?"

Mr. Ahrens doesn't flinch. "Bring them in; they can accuse all they want."

Markus's resolve heats up. "Are you meaning to tell me that you are considering playing this game?" He gets dangerously close to Mr. Ahrens, and then pulls back. "Are you really going to disrespect the integrity of this court, not to mention all the intelligent men seated here today, by trying to have us believe that you had no involvement in this matter?" He eyes Mr. Ahrens again. "No involvement at all?"

Mr. Ahrens just looks at Markus. Markus then continues, "I can bring in Mr. Susser and Eva Casanas right now," he says it with authority, "to tell all these people that you, MI5 agents as well as Scotland Yard (Special Branch) had private meetings in which you specifically gave them instructions on how they would not only deceive Mr. Horesburg, but how they would befriend him as well, and in doing so would save their own necks."

Markus goes on, calculating, "Don't you understand, Mr. Ahrens, in doing this, both Eva as well as Mr. Susser would be owning up to their own guilt, and how this admitted guilt might potentially damage both their reputations? Do you even think that Mr. Susser and Eva Casanas would be so careless as to fully subject themselves, as well as their integrity, just to lie to all of us here today? Do you think, Mr. Ahrens, they are just going to walk in here today, and make up some ridiculous story about law enforcement and entrapment

just because they need something to do?" There is quiet laughter in the hall. "Please, Mr. Ahrens, don't waste any more of this courts time; tell us the truth and bring resolution to this matter. Resolution it deserves because many people are caught up in the stink of it and I dare say, Mr. Ahrens ...," he says the last part approaching Mr. Ahrens churning face, "... that we will have resolution one way or the other."

Mr. Ahrens shuffles in his seat, and there was no doubt as to why. Markus was livid at this point, but was controlling himself respectfully. A few members of the English Parliament were eyeing Mr. Ahrens very seriously, awaiting his response. Markus went back to the podium and took a sip of his water in order to calm himself down. He then placed the glass of water down and didn't even bother to look up. He then made a calm statement, and when he made this statement, he made it so effortlessly that all you could hear in the interrogation room at that moment were the seven words that he uttered.

"We talked to your MI5 contacts yesterday."

Markus didn't say another word, and he didn't look up either. All who were seated in that room, and all who had a clear view of Mr. Ahrens, saw a very different persona manifest within him. He became scared, and whitened, and no amount of bluffing or acting could hide his emotions right now. Markus then made his way slowly toward Mr. Ahrens, speaking as he drew near. "They were quite reasonable chaps really, even going so far as explaining to us how they waited in your car ..."

"All right!" Mr. Ahrens shouted in what looked to be regretful submission, his eyes closing the moment he did. "All right," he repeated.

There was a break in the proceedings. Some of The Cell members, Dr. Thiery, Dante, and Henryrk all nodded knowingly. This man was guilty, they thought to themselves, and Markus didn't even need to prove it because the evidence proved it.

Sally looked over to Dr. Thiery, wondering of his thoughts. It was funny, Dr. Thiery thought to himself. Mr. Susser and Eva Casanas were probably thousands of miles away, nowhere near The Compound, but if they tried hard enough, they probably could have found a man to play

a makeshift MI5 agent for the afternoon. But Mr. Ahrens had broke, and that is all that was important. The truth had spoken for itself.

Markus then went back to his podium, extending his arms against the hard wood and just waiting for Mr. Ahrens' full confession. He had done his job; he had gotten a guilty man to confess to the truth. All he needed was the plain facts; everything else said today was just a smokescreen, his specialty actually.

Mr. Ahrens looked up, beckoning, almost as if he were asking if he needed to say anything further. Markus implied with his eyes that he'd better. Mr. Ahrens then spoke cautiously. "By permission of this court, I ask that I say no more under the grounds that it might incriminate me, and I ask that legal council be permitted me." The room took a shift, half of them curious, the other half appalled. Mr. Ahrens continued, "I would just like to say to this court that all the allegations and facts stated today speak of certain truths." At this, a member from the IRA stood up and began to shout. He was then quickly escorted out by military personnel standing by, the others were cautioned to remain seated. They did so because they wanted to hear the rest of Mr. Ahrens's discourse. "And I wish you to understand that I meant no harm, but that I refuse to say any more out of respect and oath to my superiors." At this point, one of the Protestant officials stood up and shouted, "What respect and what oath? You spit on England when you forced yourself to lie under oath." The official then sat down voluntarily, and no action was taken against him. Everybody in the room understood that his superior was rebuking him, and the occasion certainly called for it.

Markus then said, "We accept your request; those proceedings will take place on another day, and whether or not those proceedings will take place in this interrogation hall, well," he then eyes Her Majesty's officials, "that will be left up to the oversight committee."

Sally looked over at the members from the IRA, many of whom had stern looks pointed directly toward the Parliament officials. Frustration was evident on their faces; they were the faces of men who had been taken

advantage of. The looks on the faces of the English Parliament officials were much the same. It was obvious to everyone involved that these men had no affiliation with the admitted illegality here today. There was a rat loose in the house of England, and just how shallow or deep that rat roamed, well, no one knew exactly. But one thing was for certain: the homeowners were not directly responsible.

Military personnel then came in and took Mr. Ahrens away; leading him out the door before anyone else could take advantage of the situation. Sally remained seated. A few beside her stood up and walked out after Mr. Ahrens was escorted away. Sally was speechless; there was nothing she could say. From the conception of the study, to the organization of materials, to the interrogation here today, everything was flawless. What the English courts could not do in over one and a half years, The Cell did in under two weeks. She was impressed. She looked over at the proceedings. Markus was gathering up his things, and Dr. Thiery had met him briefly, patting him on his side. He then went over to address the men from the IRA. Sally watched as the Parliament officials made their way out; they still looked disgusted, a few of them with bowed heads. Sally then turned, looking toward Henryrk and Dante as the two watched everybody filing out. The clever-looking one got up first and left, leaving the prideful one seated alone. Sally kept staring at him, the prideful one, trying to watch him, trying to discern him. He then turned toward Sally, making eye contact with her. He then abruptly left.

Sally was now back in her room. It was in the middle of the afternoon, but she didn't feel like being around anybody right now. She had tried to eat, but she couldn't. She was full, not with food, but with the pride of The Cell and the residuals it left behind. She wanted to talk with God right now, but she couldn't do that either. She didn't know what to say to Him. There were no words to be spoken, only emotions right now, and these

emotions seemed to constrain her, holding her in, even defeating her.

The Lord, Sally thought as she paced the room searching for answers, through Dr. Hutchinson as well as others, had shown her countless times that she belonged here, and that this was her God-given place. But right now, this place was going to be her humbling, and it was going to be the breaking of a person who acted in haste and in the zealousness of God, toward their belief and toward their push for a miracle from Him.

The Cell was too powerful, Sally thought, just too powerful. She believed in her gifts, but realistically, she thought, she was just in over her head. She reviewed her discernment and what it had shown her today. The Cell didn't even have to try; almost like a football team who just ran the normal plays and afterwards always seemed to end up in the end zone. Their actions were effortless, but devastatingly successful and just oozing with confidence. Sally pondered as she walked, just The Cell's confidence alone could defeat her.

And considering the individual members, Dante and Henryrk, Dr. Thiery and Markus, not to mention all the others members, including Hans who had won a Noble Prize, what, Sally thought, was everybody thinking bringing me here? Sally petitioned,

"I just saw these people bring down a conspiracy that had eluded the English government for almost two years, and they did it in less than two weeks, without even breaking a sweat. And the prideful one, the one who looked at me, I don't even know if that was Dante or Henryrk, but give me a break, God, the guy didn't even break a sweat. He actually looked bored, like he had something better to do. What am I supposed to do here, God, get embarrassed, quit, become humiliated? What? This is all just too overwhelming. I was a fool to leave Vermont."

Sally kept pacing, the words she had just vocalized were just the tip of the iceberg, and even if she had the rest of the day to finish, she wouldn't even be able to breach the water's surface.

"I know that You want faith out of me, and that You want me to believe You even when I do not have spiritual sight or control. But this ..."

Sally points all around her.

"... this is almost to the point of testing Your Grace. I mean, come on God. I am like a shaken reed here, not knowing where to go or how to approach. I feel like I am being sent as a lamb to the slaughter, and The Cell back there is getting ready to feast on all my ignorance. I shouldn't have come, God, I should have written papers and just let The Cell read them casually, without me around. As far as I can tell Lord, when my stand-up happens, I'll be lucky to get out of it alive. They're going to pin me to the wall, probably make me look ten times more vulnerable than Sora. They're going to make an example out of me, Lord; they are going to mount me on their wall like a trophy, with my paper sticking out of my mouth, and over my head a sign will read: This is what happens to ignorant zealous youths who decide to test the Grace of God by throwing themselves headlong into The Cell's resolve. We stick them to our walls, and then we mount them, because they tested us, and because they thought their notions of belief and faith were more sanctified and purposeful than our study."

Sally kept walking, powerfully. She was turning and going faster with each turn. She didn't know what to think, so she tried not to think at all, but then, there

was one thought that was resounding within her, resounding louder than all actually, being thought over and over and over again in her mind. Call Cross, call him and let him know to have the stand-up tomorrow; let's get things going, Sally thought, let the chips fall where they may.

She ran over to the phone and pressed the red button. The phone rang a few seconds later.

"Hello. Can I speak to Cross Lutherant?"

The attendant transferred the call and Cross received it after a brief moment. "Hello, Sally."

"Mr. Lutherant," Sally encourages herself, "Mr. Lutherant, I need to talk to you right now, please."

Cross pulls away from the table and walks over toward the center of the room. Dr. Thiery notices the interruption. "What is it Sally? Is everything all right?"

Sally hesitates, "Well, not really, I actually want to talk to you about a few things, mostly why I'm here."

Cross immediately picks up on Sally's fears. "I'll be over in about ten minutes, Sally. Is that all right?"

Sally puts her hand on her forehead. "Yes, Mr. Lutherant, that would be perfect."

"I'll be right over." Cross hangs up and begins to walk out of the room. Dr. Thiery takes notice as he continues eating his lunch.

Sally makes her way down to the kitchen and looks out the window. She can see the Mercedes approaching. She walks over to the door and opens it. Cross comes in.

Sally thanks him as he enters the entrance hall. Sally then closes the door and offers him something to eat or drink.

"No," Cross affirms. He then points to the right. "But let's talk in the kitchen?"

The two walk into the kitchen. Cross finds two vacant seats near the dining area and offers one of them to Sally. Sally sits down. Cross then sits quietly in his seat and folds his legs.

"Sally, what can I do for you?"

Sally doesn't even hesitate, "I want it over, I mean today. Give me a break, Mr. Lutherant. I really think I'm in over my head."

Cross remains silent, allowing Sally to speak. "I mean, the trial today, is that how things work in this place; and is that how things are going to work for me?"

Cross chooses his words wisely. "Maybe, Sally, I can tell you two things as of yet. Number one. This is a chance for you, a chance for you either to pass or fail, and number two, yes, The Cell is almost always as successful as it was this morning." He then continues cautiously. "Sally, I don't want you to feel I am being too hard on you, just realistic."

"So The Cell is going to come after me, at the stand-up I mean?" She waits for a response. Cross, after looking down at his hands and pondering, responds.

"They will, Sally, because they are going to want to prove you there." He then continues more specifically. "Your paper shows your gifts, as well as your abilities, but your paper doesn't show everything, Sally, and they will probe you to look for that."

Sally comes unglued a bit. "So it's basically me against them; it's all of their pomp and strength against me?"

Cross thinks for a moment. "Sally, each and every Cell member, except for Dr. Thiery, went through this process." He then pauses again, allowing Sally to understand, her facial expression shows she does. "Even Dr. Thiery could be said to have gone through it, but with NATO, in the beginning, because he had to prove himself there. Sally, you are no different, and the process they went through will be the process that you go through."

"But my paper was different; it wasn't my achievements that got me here, but my impact, and because of that, I feel like their specially gunning for me right now."

Cross couldn't sugarcoat his answer. He knew to an extent that Sally was right in her assessment. He then goes deep, remembering his relationship with Dr. Tom Hutchinson and remembering the process that got Sally here. He looks on Sally softly.

"Sally, were you ever told why Dr. Tom Hutchinson was dismissed from The Cell?"

Sally looked on Cross, curious as to why he changed the subject. "No, not exactly."

Cross asks her again. "Were you ever told anything, Sally?"

Sally admits honestly, "I don't think I was."

Cross nods his head. "Well, maybe it's time you heard." Cross leans forward and then back into his chair. Sally moves her body closer in order to hear clearly.

"He was a prodigy, just like you Sally. I was his roommate at Harvard, and the two of us got along very well.

"We had lots in common Sally, gifts mostly. His, for the Bible and his leadership in teaching, and me, for my communication skills and delegation. Together, the two of us made a powerful team. But we went our separate ways after Harvard, rejoining again almost nine years later when he returned to receive his Doctorate there. Sally, he was invited to join The Cell almost from its conception. Except for Dr. Thiery, he was one of the early champions for The Cell. World leaders looked up to him, as being the second in command of The Cell. This position was given him due to his responsibly as well as his abilities.

"He made a huge impact here. Even convincing Dr. Thiery to offer me a position as a first-level administrator."

Sally looks surprised, and her eyes show it. Cross goes on, "That's right, Sally. I started on the first level; it took me almost ten years to work my way up to the second level, and then, after five years as a Candidate overseer, I was finally offered the position I have now."

Sally, enjoying the story asks, "So you have been here pretty much ever since the beginning?"

"Exactly, Sally, I have been here and have basically seen it all."

He then humbles himself within his frankness. "And I am partly the reason why Dr. Tom Hutchinson is still a quiet authority around here, separate from the fact that good things seem to follow the man around." Sally smiles

a bit, happy for the words but still wanting to hear more. "So what happened?"

"He burnt out. No one can explain it, not even Dr. Thiery or Tom himself, but he burnt out and when he did, he burnt out hard."

Sally sat there for a moment. Something penetrated her when he said those last words but she didn't want to think about it right now. She cautioned herself and then made eye contact signifying she was ready for him to continue. "For a while, Sally, Tom was on fire. With this issue or with that issue. He was opening up doors and was helping The Cell's purposes right and left. Just like you witnessed today. Clarity would come, and with Dr. Hutchinson, that kind of clarity seemed to just follow him around, and usually even without the help of others."

Sally listened without trying to think too deeply. Cross's eyes then became sorrowful.

"But then, Sally, it happened. He was studying enormously, every issue, every strand, every compliance, every notion. He wouldn't even eat; he wouldn't even sleep. Not even his wife could talk to him. But that wasn't the worst part."

Sally asks cautiously, "What was?"

Cross looked at her firmly, "That is why I am talking to you now, Sally. His professionalism waned. These things affected him emotionally, and he became a recluse, detached. For him, in his own mind, he said that he was receiving incredible revelation; he said that he was defining things, but from our viewpoint, he became a wrecking ball, hurtful to the purposes of The Cell, and hurtful even to himself.

"He was dismissed, Sally, dismissed due to his inability to work with others as well as for ignoring protocol. Other men replaced him. Now these men didn't possess his gifts or talents, but these men could align themselves to the inner-workings of The Cell, and to its disciplines and formalities, and this is what The Cell was after."

Cross wiped the tip of his shoe, concluding his discourse, and looking at Sally casually. "Tom went on

slowly after that, taking some time off. Eventually, Sally, as you know, he found his place."

"So you see in me what you saw in him, un-professionalism?" Sally said this without accusation, and Cross met her there.

"Sally," he eyed her knowingly, "I think this conversation is normal. If I were in your shoes, and I saw those trials, I would be frightened, too. I said what I said today because I wanted you to understand a base meaning here.

"Sally, if you are indeed right for The Cell, then I would urge you today to do everything you can for yourself." He puts his hand up, beckoning her to allow him to finish. "And if you are not right for The Cell, then it will be made manifest, but I caution you right now because I see a lot of Tom inside of you, and I want you to understand that gifts aren't everything, Sally, and that maybe this just isn't meant to be."

Sally sat there for a moment, thinking, "So what you are perhaps implying, or actually trying to help me understand, is that if Dr. Hutchinson couldn't cut it, then how could I, even if I do possess his gifts?"

Cross looks at Sally realistically, and meets her profoundly, "I am saying that the same things that stopped Tom can stop anybody, and probably mostly you, Sally, because you are so much like him, but then again, some would argue that Dante and Henryrk are of the same mold as both of you, and they do quite well here."

She thought about what Cross had said with regard to her failing like Dr. Tom Hutchinson, but she really wasn't concerned with that right now. Right now she wasn't afraid of herself stopping her; she was more afraid of The Cell stopping her.

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

"What caliber is Dr. Tom Hutchinson compared to the others, compared to all who have walked through those doors and compared to all who are here now?" Sally asked this question with pride beaming, knowing that the revelation Dr. Tom Hutchinson had presented to her was stellar, and also conscious of the impact both he and his books had made on the world.

Cross waits a moment before he answers. He considers his answer thoroughly. After a moment he looks at Sally with subdued eyes. "Only Dr. Thiery is able to hold a candle to him, Sally," and pauses, "and some would say he's barely able to do that."

"And what would you say?" Sally questions, putting him on the spot because she is eager to get an honest and transparent answer out of him. Cross has no trouble finding it.

"I am one of those some, Sally, I am one of those some."

Sally paused but then acquiesced with a smile, allowing her franticness to turn into frankness. "So how long does a professional girl have to wait for a stand-up around here?"

Cross smiles thinking to himself, this girl was something else. "I hope for The Cell's sake Sally that it's sooner rather than later, but honestly ..." Cross then hesitates and smiles, showing her that she has clearly made an impact on him, he then continues, "... that is Dr. Thiery's realm, I am just the administrative go-to guy."

Sally nods her head, accepting. Cross then decides to give her something to nibble on. "Sally, tomorrow you will be meeting again with Dr. Thiery as well as with some of the other Primary Members. I can be optimistic that some of your answers might possibly become finalized tomorrow."

"That would be great!"

Cross nods calmly. "Be ready for tomorrow. Nothing will be too probing, but it will be the first time that some of the others will be able to meet you. It won't be easy for you."

"I understand."

"They will inform you, Sally, telling you what to look for, so they can prepare you for your stand-up."

Sally just looks at Cross, humbled. Cross noticed her gaze and understood he probably needed to say something more.

"Don't worry; if you want my honest opinion, I think you have a good chance. You're smart to be cautious, but just remember what got you here, and what you're here for actually."

Those words struck her the hardest. She knew Cross had spiritual conversations with Dr. Hutchinson, so he was probably inadvertently implying her purpose. She bowed her head to think, and by the time she had raised it up again, Cross had already risen to his feet.

Sally added quickly as she stood up, "Thank you Mr. Lutherant," She looked in his direction as he began to walk away. "I realize you didn't have to do this."

Cross then turned around and met Sally straight on. "You're welcome, Sally. Get some rest and just know that in one way or another, we're all pulling for you." As he exited the accommodation, the sun shone brightly, reflecting off the Mercedes and directly into his eyes. He covered his eyes with his hands in order to make his way to the car's cabin. The driver opened the door and Cross got inside.

Cross then spoke to the driver in French, asking him to circle the city a few times. The driver understood his request; he had heard it many times this past week. As the Mercedes exited the premises of The Compound, Cross poured himself a tall glass of Scotch. He watched the beautiful maple trees as its leaves showered all around him. He then put his hand firmly on his forehead and thought thoughts twice as powerful as the Scotch he just drank,

"She's just like him ..."

The Mercedes neared the turn of a corner and then leveled off into a scenic straightaway.

"... She's just like him."

Sally had been waiting patiently outside the master entrance to The Chamber, as they liked to call it; its dark double doors staring directly back into her face. This is where her grilling would happen, she thought. These doors would open up to a room where both her resolve and character would be tested to its utmost. Cross had escorted her down the long hall almost an hour ago, and then casually entered himself. She had seen no one else come or go within the last fifty-five minutes. She heard a latch on the door click and then saw the door

open casually. Cross's body crept through the left door and approached Sally.

"Sally," he uttered quietly as he drew close with a hush.

"I need to tell you something before you enter because I don't want you to be alarmed. All of the Primary Members are present, except for one." Sally looked at him with careful eyes. "Don't worry, everything's still the same so there won't be any tests today. Just follow along and do what they say, all right?" Cross then understands by Sally's facial expressions that she is a bit confused. He tries to add clarity. "I am just telling you this now because I know you were only expecting a few members, so I don't want you to be alarmed when you view a full panel."

"I understand; you told me earlier it would be just a few, so it's a good thing that you are warning me now."

"Good." Cross motions for Sally to stand up. Sally does, and when she does, she wipes her pant legs with the palms of her hands. Cross looks at her, checking her clothing.

"You look very nice; it's a nice suit."

"Thank you. I hope it's proper for today."

Cross looks her over again, "It's perfect." Cross then turns toward the double doors and reaches for the handle. Sally looks down at her suit again, it was dark and flexible, comfortable. Cross opens the doors, and then steps aside to allow Sally to enter first.

As Sally does so, the first thing she notices is that the members were far back, sitting in a row, almost like a panel full of judges who were conversing among themselves. The scene eases her, and she feels more relaxed. She then hears the double doors shut behind her and notices that Cross is passing her, and beckoning her to follow him. Cross escorts her to the front, about twenty feet from the panel and directly in its center. Once he had positioned her thus, he says, "Stand right here Sally, and address the panel directly, okay?"

Sally nods and replies, "Okay." Cross squeezes her arm and makes eye contact. He then turns and walks over to his left, taking a seat behind a small private desk.

Sally then focuses on the only man she knew, the one seated near the center of the panel, Dr. Thiery.

There was a moment before anyone spoke, and it was Dr. Thiery who began.

"Miss Travis, thank you for coming. As you see here," he motions toward the other members as he strengthens the tone of his voice, "we are not all a mystery Miss Travis, but in its proper time, you will have your chance to meet all of the members personally. But before that, we need to go over the rules and regulations required upon an invitee who has been granted "hot" access, as you have Miss Travis."

Sally doesn't necessarily nod her head but more accurately nods her eyes. She is ready to listen to what The Cell demands of her, she's actually ready to get most of this over with.

"Miss Travis," Dr. Thiery exclaims, breaking the silence and Sally's thought process, "just so you understand, had you been a formal invitee, then the process would have been stringently different I believe." Dr. Thiery pauses, but not because he is offering Sally a chance to speak, he then continues within his resolve, "you might have never had the opportunity to even participate in any kind of stand-up, but would have been expected to participate in many other tests leading up to such a test, but ..." he then looks down nonchalantly, grabbing a paper that is seated in front of him and then holding it up, "... the validity of your paper and the revelation it offers has compelled me to grant you the kind of access that has allowed you to bypass all of those other tedious and agitating processes." He then pauses, and in doing so breaks her spirit as he continues, "processes that would have no doubt, not only irritated you, but could have quite possibly disqualified you in their course."

Sally remembered what Dr. Hutchinson had told her when she was still in Vermont, how this type of access into The Cell was basically a gift from God, and how she should be thankful for it, and now, she was being reminded of that fact. Dr. Thiery then continued, "So you see, Miss Travis, although your last week here has possibly been combative to your will, it has served its

purpose ..." he motions toward the panel, "... for The Cell, as well as for yourself."

Sally tries to keep her chin up, she was never good at receiving constructive criticism.

Dr. Thiery then eyed Sally for a moment, but noticed that she was not challenging him, so he relented.

He leaned back slowly. "Quickly, Miss Travis, we wanted to go over your stand-up, as we like to call it around here, which will be taking place November 7th, this coming Monday."

Sally then thought to herself, it was now Friday, so this was good, perfect actually. Dr. Thiery continued, "Your stand-up will take place here, in this room, and it will continue until things are decided or clarified, or resolved." Sally was surprised he stopped there, he probably could have kept elaborating. "I urge you to prepare yourself, Miss Travis; get plenty of sleep, plenty of rest."

Sally nodded, receiving her instructions but feeling vulnerable.

"Miss Travis, the stand-up is not necessarily a series of questions. We here at The Cell do not believe in that. We believe that substance is more beneficial than quantity, so there are just a few questions presented, but they will be precise and accurate questions.

"Now, Miss Travis, according to how you answer these presentation questions, we might feel inclined to ask you continuing questions, based upon the original presentation questions, but ..." he leans back securely, "... these other questions will always be consistent with the conversation's train of thought, which originated with the presentation questions. Do you understand this?"

"Yes." She said it loudly, not knowing how her voice would carry.

"Good. And another thing, the presentation questions are usually asked by myself personally, and I stress the word usually, Miss Travis. Nevertheless, if another Primary Member were to present a question, then it would become your job to defend your answer, addressing the member who asked the question in the first place." Dr. Thiery then eyes Sally, wondering if she'll

understand his next statement. "We do not like to have all of the members firing questions all at once Miss Travis, so for simplicity's sake, we will allow one or at the most two to ask the questions, and then we will allow one or at the most two to accuse."

Sally then asks a question as Dr. Thiery eyes her comprehension.

"May I please ask something?"

"Yes, go right ahead."

"So if that man over there," Sally points to the prideful one, "were to present a question," she then points over to the clever one, "then this gentleman right here would not be able to accuse?"

Dr Thiery follows her, "Precisely," he then points first to the prideful one in an effort to answer her question fully, "If Henryrk over there were to present the initial question," Dr. Thiery then points over to the clever one, "Then Dante over there would not be permitted to speak." Dr. Thiery looks over at Sally, making his final exclamation. "These are the rules by which we caution ourselves. If we here at The Cell believe a question to be good enough, then we will further allow only its presenter to become the accuser; otherwise by having others jump in, we will be saying that we have no confidence in our initial assessment or presentation."

Makes sense to me, Sally thought. Sally then thinks without using her eyes. So Henryrk was the prideful one and Dante the clever one. Finally, Sally thought, she knew two more of them. Dr. Thiery then clarifies even further. "Just to remind you, Miss Travis, there are times where we will allow two presenters, where simultaneously two Members happened to choose the same presentation question, and in this case, Miss Travis, we allow both members to present and we allow both members to accuse, this sometimes happens Miss Travis, but often times, does not."

Dr. Thiery and the others continue to eye Sally. Sally takes some liberty to look upon some of the other members at this time, trying to put facts to faces. She saw the one whom she believed to be Han's Ottokar, the brilliant chemist who won the Noble prize. He was the oldest gentleman, and was wearing what appeared to be

some kind of German wool jacket. He looked patient and at ease with himself. She then saw the two twins, Vidal and Petro beside him. She then looked over to the right; that must be Dr. Saunders Fedor, she thought, because he was too old to be Michael York, the attorney from England. His facial features rather resembled an eagle's; she didn't know if he made a good first impression. Dr. Thiery noticed Sally eyeing the members. He decided to cut it short.

"Miss Travis, I see that you are curious to meet some of the other members." He closes his eyes and nods his head. "You will have your chance."

Dr. Thiery looks over to Cross. "Mr. Lutherant," he shouts as he looks down and writes something.

"Yes sir."

"As we discussed, regarding tomorrow evening, please escort Miss Travis to my home where she will be meeting with the other members at a social gathering." He then looks over toward Sally. "Tomorrow night, Miss Travis, you will have the chance to meet all of these members." He turns his head toward the panel. "Including Mr. York ...," he pauses, peering deep into Sally as he does, "...who, by now, I am quite sure you know is not currently among us."

Sally kind of swallows, Dr. Thiery goes on, "You will have ample chance to make their acquaintance, Miss Travis, in order that you might fully prepare yourself for Monday's proceedings." Dr. Thiery then pauses and strengthens his shoulders a bit, trying to get to the heart of the matter. "Miss Travis, do not despise your age, or your position." He then leans back, ushering in a warmer spirit as well as closure. "You deserve to be here today, and all of us here will be expecting a good showing on Monday."

Sally took in his words, surprised, but then at the same time trying to be as honest with herself as possible. Dr. Thiery then finished his statement,

"You are being called to your first charge, and we will be demanding of you the initial obligations of your faith, as well as your service toward the same."

There was a pause, and Sally hadn't even noticed that she was standing there nodding her head. After she

came to the realization, she responded to Dr. Thiery's statement. "I'll be ready, Dr. Thiery."

Dr. Thiery, as well as some of the other members, nodded in unison. It became obvious to her that these men expected something genuine from her, something worthy. They had already read her paper, she thought, so they were not kidding themselves right now. They all knew what she was capable of, and they wanted it, even expected it, and with no excuses. This realization gave her a calm, as if it was now her duty to perform. If she didn't, she thought, she would just end up letting everybody down. She had to perform, she thought, it was exactly why she was here.

Sally had a resounding look in her eyes but she didn't allow any of the others to notice. She dropped her head a bit, and as soon as she did, Dr. Thiery began addressing the board in French. Cross then made his way over slowly. Sally looked up at him.

"It's time for us to go." Cross then turned to look at the panel. "They're beginning their proceedings regarding your stand-up, and we can't be here."

Sally looked at the panel. Cross spoke it again. "It's time for us to leave."

Sally turned and began to walk toward the doors but then turned aside to watch the panel. Dr. Thiery had stood up at this point, taking his place all the way to the right where a podium had been placed. He was addressing all the members from that position. Sally looked over toward Dante and Henryrk, both of whom were adjusting their seats and readying themselves for a serious discussion. I wish I could watch this, Sally thought, I wish I could witness their forum for just a moment.

Cross then pressed behind her and blocked her view. Sally turned around and made for the doors. Both of their steps became quieter nearing the door; the crimson red carpet seemed to inhale their every footstep. Cross then passed by Sally to open the doors, and as he did, Sally offered a long last look toward the panel, and she met Henryrk's eyes when she did. He was looking right at her, rather seriously in fact. Sally caught his

intentions and then turned away with them, taking them with her as she headed out the door.

It was mild yet breezy as the air rushed through the windows and across Sally's notes and laptop computer. The windows were situated just over to the left from where Sally was seated and high up, level to the ground outside but actually close to the ceiling inside. The library, where Sally was currently situated, was actually built about eight feet below ground level, positioned as a shrouded dwelling and obscured away from the castle's overall atmosphere.

The library was lively in itself, fully paneled in cedar wood and inlaid with ebony. In the center of the room was an oak table with legs carved into lion's paw feet. There was also a writing desk with scalloped edges seated right beside Sally's makeshift exercise corner, where her Stairmaster had been placed. The white marble Italian fireplace, with its neo-classical decoration, gave the room a welcoming feeling. Right now, Sally was thankful as she sat in the room allowing her body and mind to rest. She had actually settled in this room after she had gotten back from the meeting and just after she had spent sufficient time in prayer. She was now getting ready to review her old notes, the notes that the Lord would not allow her to include within her paper, "The Glial Theory and Esther Prophecy."

Sally looked at her watch and noticed it was 4:30 p.m. Sora had already called wanting to hear any news from this morning. Sally had explained that her stand-up would be on Monday the 7th and that she now had the weekend to prepare. Sally also told her about tomorrow night's dinner party with Dr. Thiery and the Primary Members. Sora cautioned her to remain polite but to always be on her guard. Sally had a few questions for Sora.

"Sora, you had told me that Dante was the one who had battered you in the stand-up, and that now he suffices himself to allow Henryrk to do such bidding."

"Yes," Sora affirmed.

"But Sora, it was explained to me today that the members who were responsible for presenting the questions then became the only ones allowed to accuse."

"Yes, that's true, too," Sora replied.

"Then how is Dante able to suffice himself to allow Henryrk to accuse regarding a question, since the same person who asks the question initially must then accuse?"

"I understand your question Sally," Sora responded, "Let me explain it to you. You're right, the member who asks the question must press the matter. So I wasn't implying that Dante would ask the question and then Henryrk would press the matter. I was implying that Dante usually suffices himself to take the back seat, even within the study process, as do almost all the members."

"Really?"

"Yes, really, Sally. Although the stand-up is critical regarding an invitee's future status, some of the members tend not to associate themselves with it, basically not asking any questions. They will all study, Sally, and brainstorm, regarding potential questions and to finalize a good position, but usually the final questions are reserved for a select few."

"Who?" Sally questioned.

"Like I told you, Henryrk, Dr. Thiery; Michael is popular sometimes. But Sally, what you need to understand is that The Cell's preparations are not like some charismatic free-for-all where every member is jockeying for the best question. They do study together, evaluate each other's notes, discuss each other's strategies, all with the intent to solidify a strong resolve or reasoning among themselves; then, after all of this, they will compile group questions, but usually just a few. From here, Sally, usually Henryrk or Michael will stand out and ask a pressing question. The other members will then just suffice themselves, because at this point they are all really in the same state of mind anyway, since they have all studied it corporately."

"So, basically, all of the members study and then formulate group questions, and then, at the end of the study session, the standouts usually ask the final questions?"

"Precisely, Sally. This is how it is done, and Dante is content to just stand aside, usually allowing Henryrk to jockey himself within that last position."

"I see," Sally continues. "So the questions are roughly from a group assessment, and are not necessarily personal?"

Sora stops her. "Wait Sally," immediately seeing where all this is going; she then cautions, "Sometimes, Sally, it actually is a bit personal." Sally holds herself still, wanting to understand the process. "Sometimes, after all of the debate and study, a member will come out of nowhere and present a question, not one that was purposely hidden, of course, but one that contours with the discussion, and is insightful. When this happens, Sally, the question is usually powerful, and is usually asked."

"Who usually comes up with these questions?"

"Usually those who have the greatest insight, Dante ..." Sora then paused and Sally understood why; it must have been a personal question Dante had asked her. Sora then continued, "... Dr. Thiery and Henryrk are usually in the mix, too."

"Will I know the difference?"

Sora brings understanding, "Yes. This is how you will know, Sally. Dr. Thiery will almost always ask the presentation questions; then allow the actual person who asked the question during group study to accuse. But if the question is a personal one, you can be sure that that member himself will be asking the presentation question."

Sally then remembered how Dr. Thiery earlier this morning had said something regarding the possibility of someone else asking the presentation questions other than himself, and that this was sometimes prone to happen. Now she fully understood under what pretenses this would occur. She would know if any question was personal. If any Primary Member, besides Dr. Thiery, was permitted to ask the presentation question, then it was a personal question, deriving from them alone. Sally now understood the stand-up process more completely, now that it had been fully explained to her by Sora.

Sally knew the risks of over thinking situations over which she had no control. That is why the first

thing she did when she got off the phone with Sora was to spend as much time in prayer as possible. She was talking with the Lord, trying to get a balance of what she should study, how she should study and to what degree she should study. She knew of the faith training of her past, the way she would exercise herself repetitively asking herself spiritual questions over and over and over again in her mind. She wanted to let go, really, and to allow the Lord to be strong on her behalf, but she also wanted to do her part, and to do it fully without any partiality or without any regret. The Lord had given her a peace that followed her into her studies.

She organized her notes into piles again. She would continue to study for about three more hours before being picked up and driven over to Sora's house for dinner. She would then come back to this library, and spend most of the night studying, as well as tomorrow, but not only study, but to pray and petition and plead with the Lord. Asking Him for any favor and believing Him for any intercession, any kind of governing of herself over to the belief that His plan and specific will in this situation was going to be more appropriate than hers.

"What kinds of rugs are these?" Sally asked, as she and Cross made their way through the long corridor and under the oak ceilings of the castle.

"Norwegian," Cross answered back, taking hold of Sally's arm more firmly and raising it up closer against his own. Cross, having been chosen to be Sally's chaperone this evening, was escorting Sally arm in arm, down the hall and through the threshold of the castle's main entrance.

As Sally entered into the main standing room, she noticed the tapestries that were hung like banners all across the oval shaped room. The nineteenth-century decorations with oak panels featured eighteenth-century Gobelins tapestries depicting Neptune, Ceres, Venus, Cupid and Juno. The tapestries collection also included some sophisticated French tastes; collections of Beauvias

tapestries were also found. Many of these tapestries were resting far away from the guests, but some were hanging not more than an arm's length away. Sally then took notice of the staircase. The staircase, with its contour banister rail made of oak was built right within the threshold of the archway. It rounded about one corner and then leveled out through the next. The staircase then came back up around again near the rear and then made its way up through the ceiling impacting the next floor. It was simply magnificent to look at. The colors of the room were a cream beige but also looked to be smudged with a rustic oak. The hewed walls and timbers aligning themselves gave the impression that Dr. Thiery was paying homage to France's late medieval periods as well as early modern France. The French renaissance was also well represented by the marble fireplace dating back from 1521. It featured extremely colorful tiles with artistic motifs that could clearly be seen in detail.

Sally drew her eyes back to the castle walls; the tall mirrors in gilded frames reflected the decoration of the overhangs, making the room luminous and unabbreviated. This sight forced her to look up, and when she did, she saw the most inspiring and probably the most beautiful sight she could imagine. Way up, above the lights and far above the second and third floors, a skylight gave way to the heavens. That's right, Sally thought to herself, Dr. Thiery's first love was the stars.

As Sally took her time looking all around, she noticed that someone was approaching her. The person walked toward her and took her hand.

"Good evening, Miss Travis," the man barely kissed her hand. "You look very lovely this evening." The man then stepped back and turned to Cross. "Hello, Mr. Lutherant."

Cross answered the man quickly. "Hello, Dante," Cross then turned slowly toward Sally and made the proper introductions. "Sally, this is Dante De Forest, the third seat at The Cell and one of the most highly esteemed minds that we have here."

Sally was motionless for a moment; her stomach had more authority at this point than did her resilience. She allowed herself to swallow and courteously bowed her head. "It's nice to finally meet you, Mr. De Forest; I've read some about you."

Dante nodded and looked at Sally even deeper, but not in a challenging way. "That is a beautiful outfit, Miss Travis, Paris?"

"Yes." She then pauses, wondering if she should tell them the story. "Sora Arpin bought me the boots ... but then ... bought me the dress without me knowing it."

"Ah yes, Sora. She has good taste." They pause.

There are about forty-five people in the room, plus at least six waiters dishing out both food and drinks.

"Sally, you see over there and to the right? That is Dr. Ottokar on the left taking with Dr. Fedor on the right."

Sally looked them both over; she had guessed right yesterday. Dante then went on, pointing a little closer to where they were standing. "Those two are obviously the twins, Petro and Vidal Zacarias." Sally smiled, although they looked very much alike, they did wear their hair differently. Dante continued. "Markus you know, and he is talking to Michael York, who just flew in this afternoon."

"Where did he fly in from?" Sally asked this without even knowing she actually had.

Dante looked to Cross and then back to Sally. "I'm sorry, that's classified." Sally immediately put her hand up. "I wasn't thinking; just my nervousness."

"Excused." Dante voices without even giving it a second thought. He then looked to her right, "And over there is Henryrk."

Sally glanced to her right. He was standing next to a painting of a chivalrous knight, almost like by standing next to it, he was unconsciously comparing himself to it. He was talking to a woman, who looked more like a Swiss supermodel than a date. Dante then spoke again, noticing Sally was staring.

"Miss Travis, I am usually not one to mix business with pleasure but in reading your paper, I was prepared to ask myself how on earth a nineteen-year-old girl was

able to elaborate and then justify herself so cleanly, and so translucently regarding the topics she had discussed."

Sally actually felt Dante's question, and the part that stuck out in her mind was the last part. Cross then smiled a bit, watching Sally prepare to answer Dante's question.

"Regarding the topics I discussed, they substantiate themselves, but my purpose in writing them was simply to identify them in order to clarify the results. The results are what moved you, Mr. De Forest, but simply my identification with the results is what I believe startled you."

She hears a voice behind her. "Not to mention any kind of authority that might have voiced those results."

Sally turned around, almost in full circle, Henryrk was looking directly at her. Henryrk then went on, "What you defined was already defined because it was a truth, but the mere fact you were able to identify with it is what became startlinging."

Sally then hears Dante's voice behind her. "That you could see it actually." Dante was looking at her, eyeing her as if he knew the answer all along. "That you could see so clearly what was obviously the truth but that no one else could see."

Behind her again. "Until you said it, of course."

Sally became tired of turning around back and forth so, using her arm, she moved Cross back a few paces and then took a few steps back herself, putting herself in a better position.

"Okay." Sally puts her hands up voicing her thoughts. She then points her head down in order to rethink her words and then, after a moment, she looks up and addresses both men. "Since both of you are on the same page, let me say you're both right. My ability is to clarify what is already there, so the there already being there really has nothing to do with me."

Henryrk reiterates his focus once again, "Except that you see *the there*."

Sally's tired of hearing it. She eyes him purposely. "I ask the right questions."

Henryrk then challenges her back. "Do you now?"

At that point, Dr. Thiery approached and took Sally away, pulling her away by her shoulder and into the other room.

"Miss Travis, please, come and make yourself comfortable." Dr. Thiery actually hadn't even noticed the conversation. Cross followed behind them. Sally turned to look back at Dante and Henryrk; Henryrk was already gone, and Dante was just standing there, hands in his pockets and smiling a genuine smile. Sally then looked into Dante's eyes to see if there was anything deeper. There wasn't, so she brushed it off as intimidation of some sort. Dr. Thiery then lead the way, over to some of the other members and introducing polite conversation before dinner.

At the noise of the bell chiming, dinner was served. Cross began to escort Sally through the castle to the dining room area. As she passed by a hall, she was forced to slow down because of the people up ahead. She stared down the hall and noticed a room, it was unlike any other room she had seen in the castle. The room looked almost like a large china cabinet. The vaulted ceiling overhangs were reminiscent of some of the medieval buildings she had seen in France. The ceilings were covered with decorated stucco-work and medallions with portraits. Oak panels with neo-classical details were on the walls and the carpet showed the green and blue Forbes tartan. The extremities of the castle took her, and to what lengths Dr. Thiery had personally gone in order to ensure its validity and scarceness amazed her.

The room leading into the dining area boasted a large mahogany table full of fruits and desserts. On the walls, there were a series of wallpapers abbreviated by a crimson damask silk coming from Antwerp. As Sally made her way into the dinning room, the first thing she noticed was the brightness of the room. The late period Regency-styled chandelier that illuminated the room was accented by a rayed medallion mounted on the ceiling. This grouping allowed the chandelier to shine fully

within its glory. Sally also noticed the gilded stucco-work along the ceiling as well as the candelabras which added both dimension and light to the outer corners.

The food, looking more like art covered the table entirely. There were dips, soufflés, quiches, meats, and seafoods on display. Sally didn't know where to look first. Hans, who was seated next to her, began to name the dishes aloud.

"This is called soufflé an Fromage, it is a cheese soufflé. Over there is Gratinee de Coquille St. Jacques, a scallop dish with mushrooms. This is a chicken dish, Emince de Volaille sauce Roquefort- Pommes de terre sautees, and beside it is a Rabbit pate, Pate de Lapin." Sally makes a face; she could pass on that one. Hans then continues where he left off. "And over there is my favorite, Avocat et Oeufs a la Mousse de Crabe, avocado and eggs with crab mousse. And for dessert Profiteroles au Chocolat, Gratin de Fruits rouges and Mousse au Chocolat."

Hans looks over at Sally, almost as if he's asking her if he would make a good waiter, Sally nods her head indicating that he would.

"So which would you prefer?"

Sally looks all across the table, trying to find the dish that scares her the least. She points directly ahead. "I'll take that chicken dish, with a little of the cheese soufflé, please." Hans looks at her as he grabs a plate. "Excellent choice, excellent." He offers her first a hardy helping of the chicken and then accents it with a healthy helping of the soufflé. Sally takes the plate from his hands and thanks him.

After she had set her food on the table and after the others began tending to themselves, Sally took a moment and pondered her situation. There she was, smack dab in the middle of The Cell super highway. It was funny though, she thought, feeling moderately out of place right now made her realize how at home she felt with study; study was where she felt more comfortable, more secure. She then thought again, the episode earlier involving Henryrk and Dante was not remotely as hard to swallow as this dinner conversation would be, where she

had nothing to say, and no easy way out. Where's Sora when you need her, Sally thought.

Hans then spoke, interrupting Sally's thoughts. "You know, this food is not so bad once you get used to it." Hans moves closer to Sally in an effort to get more personal, and Sally welcomes it. "When I was first offered delicacies such as these, I refrained, settling for my meat and potatoes instead." He then turns to Michael and laughs. "But time has a funny way of accenting the palate." He then takes a deep bite of his rabbit pate.

"You mean, acquired taste." Sally paused, trying to ignore what she just saw.

Hans then thought for a moment as he chewed. "Yes, that's it, an acquired taste. You'll learn to appreciate an acquired taste in time, my dear."

Sally turned to look at the other guests, and was reminded of a conversation they were having earlier, one that was actually cut short due to the ringing of the dinner bell. She comes full circle with it. "Sir, I meant to mention earlier, that I am actually honored. To have won the Noble prize, it must have been like a dream come true."

Hans was half eating a scallop at the time, and Michael decided to answer in his place. "Sally," Sally paused, noticing that Michael had used her first name outright, Michael then went on, "Ask him what he won it for?"

Sally turned in Hans's direction. "What did you win it for?"

Hans proceeds to open his mouth, but this time, with almost all his food gone, "Molecular medicine."

Sally looks to Michael to clarify; Michael obliges. "Click chemistry actually, Sally. The good doctor here found a molecular process that turns illnesses against itself so that the illness will basically pick away at its own poison."¹

"Interesting," Sally then commented without thinking.

"Yes, Sally," Michael continued, "very interesting indeed." Michael then smirks as he draws closer to both of them; he then elaborates, "Almost like a rat loose in

your house that, instead of eating up all your goodies, turns around and begins to feast on its own feces."

"Hah," Hans slurs as he considers Michael's example. Sally turns to Hans and then to Michael again. Sally is humbled as she speaks aloud, "So much achievement in this room, so much distinction."

Michael takes a sip of his coffee and considers Sally's preoccupations for the moment. He then notices that she is discerning everything around her, and he doesn't want to be rude regarding her insecurities and frailties right now. He then makes light.

"So, Sally, how was Paris?"

Sally smiles. "Paris was great; I went with Sora." Sally pauses, wondering if she should ask her next question. "Do you know Sora?"

"Of course, Sally," Michael responds with a sense of professionalism. "We know and work with almost all the candidates, almost regularly in fact, and plus," Michael adds, "Sora is a rare find."

"Yeah, she's great." Sally scoots her chair back to show herself. "She bought me this dress."

"Very elegant." Hans compliments. Michael's compliment is much the same. "Very elegant indeed, did she pick it out?"

"She must've because she bought it without me knowing."

"A surprise," Hans remarks.

"Yeah," Sally repeats, "a surprise."

Michael then watches Sally as she begins to eat her food, and he decides to eat some of his own, but watches her as he does. Sally overheard a conversation to her left; the two women are speaking loudly,

"Oh, you should see the castle in early spring. The property is bursting with lilies, irises and tulips, and in the summer months we see the daisies and violas flourish. The landscape is simply magnificent."

Sally listened as the two continued talking about the forthcoming beauty, and Sally believed every word. Everything about this place was borderline unbelievable, almost as if it were from some kind of movie. And she expected such, but still, she thought, you can't prepare for this type of reception, or for this type of

exaltation, it's just incomprehensible. Michael noticed that Sally's eyes were going to and fro, he assumed she was sizing up her situation. Sally continued to ponder as she watched the room.

But even given the beauty of this environment, she thought, as well as the obvious genius in this room, she still couldn't help noticing that there was an overall break in the room. Some kind of resounding spirit that spoke of intrusion, and that spoke of bewilderment. It was funny, she thought, she was fully welcome in this place, but at the same time, she was greatly misunderstood. She was a mystery to them, actually, and this added heaviness, and this added contention. Michael watched Sally as her eyes continued to wander. He noticed they would frequently wander in Henryrk's direction. He introduced a conversation,

"So, I saw you talking with Henryrk earlier." Michael said without hesitation. Hans butted in, "Being interrogated, I believe would be a more accurate description of the occurrence."

Sally smiled at Hans's support. Michael then continued, "Sally, your paper was reaching, so don't be surprised if some things get a bit demanding for you."

Hans nods his head slowly as he swallows his food. Michael then continues. "Your presentation in the paper was flawless, but you'll need to be that good on Monday."

Sally places her fork down; she thinks she just lost some of her appetite. She then thought to herself as she noticed Michael and Hans continue with their dinner. Just being in the same room with all these Cell Members, but more specifically with Henryrk and Dante, was enough to make her skin crawl.

Michael then continued where he had left off, "I just caution you Sally, I believe you are smart enough to take Monday very seriously, and to do your part."

Sally let herself go a bit, and actually felt obligated to do so. "Why, because The Cell is gunning for me?"

Michael looks at Hans, and then back over to Sally; he then chooses his words carefully. "Sally, we already know you're a rare find, but let me tell you something." He gets closer, trying to make himself heard. "What

keeps people out of The Cell is not that their not gifted, but that they don't use common sense coupled with their gifts."

Hans nods his head as he eyes Sally. "True." Turning back he repeats it, "true."

"Sally," I know the last thing you want to hear right now is that you need to prepare, or that you need to take this more seriously, but trust me Sally," he turns to look at the other members, "everything I see here tonight tells me you better be extra sure to dot all your I's and cross all your T's on this one."

Sally looks over at Hans for some approval; she gets it. It was actually easy for her to listen to Michael because, when he spoke, his accent sounded so much like Sora's. Michael continued. "You don't want to be unprepared Sally, especially considering Henryrk's attitude right now."

Sally wanted to say something, but settled herself. Henryrk this, Henryrk that, she thought. Who is this Henryrk anyway, the god of all wisdom and perceived thought?

Sally picked up her fork and threw back her hair. "So I guess Henryrk is unstoppable then." She said it realistically, no challenge, and with no desire to hear back.

Michael noticed that although Sally didn't challenge, that she still possessed a considerable amount of opinion regarding Henryrk. Michael decided to meet her there.

"Sally." Michael says her name casually, and when he did, Sally remembered that it was he who had first used her name so casually. She thought this a good omen.

"Yes." Sally responds, looking up but still not wanting to hear what he has to say.

Michael continued when he noticed that he had her full attention, but before he did, he looked in Hans's direction in order to induce some backup resolve. "Henryrk is taking this very seriously, and what you need to remember is that you're the one with the pressure on you. What this means is that Henryrk doesn't even have to prove you wrong, he just has to confuse you, or make you doubt yourself, or make you appear nervous so you look

vulnerable." He then pauses for emphasis sake, and continues, "Sally, it is much easier to criticize than it is to create. You have created your paper, and to criticize that paper or to reflect the illusion of question or inaccuracy regarding that paper is not as tough to do."

Sally steps in, "In other words, you're saying that I'm fighting from a defeated position."

Michael nods his head. "The fact that you are the target of this stand-up makes you injured already, and then adding to that fact the fact that we don't even have to prove you wrong, just make your arguments or wisdom look contemptible." He peers deep into her eyes. "We are really holding all the cards here."

Sally didn't like the way that sounded, but Michael continued, not noticing that he had partly offended her. "Just like a defense attorney, Sally. All a defense attorney needs to do is to convince a jury that a reasonable doubt still exists, and even if the prosecutor happens to be correct, then the illusion that the defense attorney creates can actually win them the case."

"Be an expert prosecutor, Sally, shut down the defense by making your case so strong that you virtually leave them with no illusion." Michael cautions with his eyes, slowly looking over at Henryrk, "because if you don't ..."

Sally interrupts, "Henryrk will find a way in, creating doubt?"

Michael nods his head. "Precisely."

She still didn't like the conversation, but all that Michael said made sense. Still, she wondered about his purpose. She decided to ask a question. "Won't Henryrk mind if you're talking to me right now, giving me this advice?"

Michael looks over at Hans, and both shake their heads simultaneously. Michael then goes on. "I don't think so, Sally; Henryrk usually only thinks one way, according to what he is planning on doing." Michael then gets realistic, mostly with a facial expression. "I think he believes that if he does his part, then it won't matter what the other person does."

"I need to say this. I read your profiles, all of yours." She looks over to Hans and then motions over toward Dr. Fedor and the twins. "And I know what they all said." Michael waits for her to finish. "And I never saw Henryrk as an absolute stand out or even someone who should be considered above the rest."

Michael looked over at Hans but then quickly looked back to Sally, this time, not needing any extra resolve from Hans, "Sally, if a difficult question were asked right now, and if they were to give the assignment of this difficult question to one hundred of the top thinkers living today, and if those one hundred individuals were to put their heads together and were to come up with their thesis, then afterwards Sally, they should hand the thesis over to Henryrk, so he could proofread it for them."

There was no joke among either Hans or Michael; the moment became just as serious as the declaration. Sally then gasped to herself, to hear one brilliant individual lift up another so easily, so persuasively; it was so uncommon. Michael then broke her silence, "Don't kid yourself, Sally; he is pure genius," Michael nodded his head slowly as he continued, "not to mention the fact he grew up here, expounding on his abilities and stretching himself to every limit; it was almost like a game to him. Michael then paused, slowing himself down. "Sally, I say this for the right reasons. If you were to do poorly on Monday, then I would have regretted the fact that I did not caution you earlier." he stares plainly at her, "Sally, I am doing this for your good."

His words were genuine, and so she understood. Henryrk was pure genius, and this pure genius was pointed straight at her. She looked down at her food, trying to digest all that had been said. She understood the explanation of the illusion they could create, and how The Cell didn't have to prove her wrong, but only to test her thoroughly, so that she would cave in. But regardless, she thought, she believed she still understood a few things that they might have overlooked.

"Michael," Sally inquired.

Michael, who had now turned his attention elsewhere, gave Sally reception. Sally then continued,

"thank you, I will take Monday very seriously, I assure you, but I am afraid that all I have to offer is what I came here with."

Hans turned his attention considering Sally's reply; he then looked to Michael. Michael listened intently as Sally continued, "If I get broken, then I get broken, but it will not be the result of me being unprepared, but simply the way it needed to be."

Michael just nodded his head, but didn't say anything. Hans said something. "Look at those rose petals over there." He pointed toward the center of the table, "and in the dinner vase." He then exclaimed knowingly, "I wonder if those roses would have ever opened if they knew that one day they might lose some of their petals?"

Michael continued to eat his food, and Sally stared at the roses. The petals, some on the table, some in the dinner vase, but most still attached to the stems, became the center of attention. Sally then thought for a moment, and as she did, she made her declaration. "I think they would have opened."

The time is 11:00 p.m. and Sally is back in the library of her accommodation. She left Dr. Thiery's party over an hour ago, and she was now confronting both the reason and justification that had been plaguing her all night. Although she had been in full view at the dinner party this evening, most of her still wasn't. She was studying. In fact, even as she sat among the elite of The Cell Members she was working out in her head a special train of thought that the Lord had breathed into her only two days previous. It was regarding what Cross had explained to her about Dr. Hutchinson's assumed burnout, and the wisdom was becoming clearer.

Tomorrow was Sunday, she thought, and it would become the last day for her to prepare before she would be asked to prove herself before what was considered to be the most elite group of thinkers on the planet. Sally had all her notes in place, and she was pacing currently, trying to review them from memory. She wanted to know

all their angles, all their thoughts, all their assumptions. She was trying to assume what the individual members would ask, only to continually revert back to the notes she believed to be the focus of God. She had long given up on trying to believe that she could actually beat or outsmart The Cell; she just wanted to get through without embarrassing herself. Even getting through with some confidence in tact would be nice. Sally sat down as she looked at the notes one more time; they were good, she thought, but only good according to the focus she had allowed herself to rest upon. "I just hope their questions center around this type of focus, Lord." She then repeated it. "I just hope their questions center around this type of focus."

It wasn't a jog so she could exercise really, but more of a jog/walk so she could drill into her mind the things she wanted to remember and mostly the things she wanted to forget. The afternoon clouds seemed almost rubbery as they lifted themselves over the Alsace province and southward toward the Alps of France. Sally was motivating herself to move right now so she wouldn't think too much, but also to stimulate endorphins and adrenaline so she could make it strongly through the rest of the night.

She had fallen asleep at 3:00 a.m. and then slept in until about 1:00 p.m. It was now 4:30 p.m. Sunday, and her stand-up was scheduled for tomorrow morning. She was trying to brace herself right now, complementing herself with the strongest possible frame of mind she could muster. Sadly enough though, Sally thought, image was sometimes everything, and she always felt better and more confident when she could get in a workout. In fact, after praying and meditating, the first thing she did when she woke up this afternoon was to work out on the Stairmaster for over thirty minutes, only to follow it up with this jog/walk. It all helped clear her head, so she could have some clarity regarding what was pressing on her mind.

She remembered the issues that Sora and the others spoke into her: not to be timid, not to be influenced. As Michael had said, it is easier to criticize than it is to create. She would have to remain solid, she thought to herself. She was indeed fighting from a defeated position so why give them the opportunity to see any more defeat; only consent when you have to, she reminded herself, and hold your own.

She remembered the question process; that if any member beside Dr. Thiery asked a presentation question, that the question was indeed a personal question deriving from the person asking. So if all the questions came from Dr. Thiery, she thought, then none of the questions were personal, unless a personal question came from Dr. Thiery directly, but this was unlikely. If Dante, Henryrk, or even Michael asked the presentation question, then that meant the question was a personal question coming from one of them. It was good that she understood this; it would help her analyze her surroundings during the proceedings.

The last thing that stuck out in her mind was Hans's final query at the end of their dinner conversation.

"Would the rose open if it knew it might lose some of its petals?"

She thought on this, but then she realized, she had actually answered the question outright. But when she answered it, she had answered it correctly. If the rose remained closed, then it would indeed remain protected, but it would also defeat its purpose. A rose is created to open, and to become beautiful for man and insects. On the other hand, if the rose opened up, then it would indeed make itself vulnerable, but it would now do so within the understanding that it was fully abiding within its purpose, and within its proper order, and because of this, the rose's beauty and purpose would become a blessing for all to see and appreciate.

Sally then thought again, applying it to her life. If she remained closed, then she would not be made a fool of, but at the same time, she would never allow anyone to appreciate the beauty of what was inside of her. On the other hand, if she opened up, she might pay the price,

weathering the storm of The Cell's onslaught, but at the same time, her beauty would become manifest, and it might be just enough beauty to place her on display.

Hans's example was perfect. His example showed her that she really had no choice. If she remained closed, then she might as well not have come. She had to open up, but Hans was simply reminding her that it was realistic for her to lose some petals when she did, and that she shouldn't allow the fear of that to deter her in any way. That was it, she thought to herself, she would become the open rose for the entire Cell to see, and if she happened to get stung, then she got stung, but it was worth the risk because it was why she was here.

She was encouraged right now. All the advice given her was striking her just as hard as the wisdom resounding inside her head. It was almost as if the placement of the wisdom didn't even matter anymore, it was her approach to that wisdom that mattered, and it became her resolve that mattered the most. If she possessed the right attitude, then everything else would fall into place. She had done her homework, the studying, the perceiving, the sanctification, the wrestling, the praying, the petitioning, the allegiance.

Now it seemed as though the only thing that mattered was the belief, and that belief was being added onto her moment by moment, second by second, as she perceived how God had so graciously revealed to her who she needed to be right now. The spirit she would possess now would become the spirit she would need tomorrow morning. When she would walk into The Chamber room. And she would possess that spirit now, she thought, she would possess that spirit even now.

She rounded a turn and then leveled off into the sunset. The sun was going down to her left, and it was trying to hide behind a hillside passageway. Sally wanted to run after it and just lift it back up, just for a little while longer, but she wouldn't. She would let the sun go down, she would let the sun fade away until it became just a drizzle, until only a sliver of it remained, and then, she thought, then the sun would be gone. And then ...

She would wrestle with it tomorrow.

Chapter 17

The mood was tense as Sally arose; as usual, she had walked down the stairs only to be greeted by a plateful of pastries waiting to be devoured. She would usually eat only one, but today, she thought, today, she would have both a cream puff and an éclair.

She did have trouble sleeping last night, but then, after a while, she was able to doze off. It wasn't so much that she was thinking about the stand-up as she was just plain thinking. She had been consumed by so many things in these last couple of months: The Cell, her potential calling, Neaven, and even her own feelings totally separate from everything. She didn't quite know how to put it all into perspective, so she fell asleep.

As she took a bite out of her second pastry, she saw the Mercedes approaching. The Mercedes drove up the driveway and then turned around facing the road. The door opened and Cross filed out. He straightened out his suit as he made his way toward the castle's entrance. Sally, already having her briefcase ready near the door, put down her pastry ...

She was thoroughly briefed on the way to The Compound. Everything would be just as it was explained to her. She would enter the exact same room she entered three days ago, and she would address the members of the panel with regard to the questions she was asked. She was cautioned by Cross to only ask questions if need be, or if she didn't quite understand the question or pretense. Everything had been prepared, he explained, and the Members had already established themselves, making themselves ready in The Chamber room.

Sally continued to follow Cross through the administrative corridors and through a few remaining halls. Sally noticed the temperature again; it was warmer, much warmer actually. After another right turn and after passing a few more military personnel, Sally

again stood in front of the double door elevator. A military aide unlocked the doors, and Cross and Sally made their way inside.

They arrived on the third level with no one there to greet them. Cross immediately turned right and escorted Sally down the hallway. As they made their way past the public study area, Sally noticed the dim that was lowering itself within the actual confines of the room; she hadn't noticed this before. The invitation it offered was arcane, and as she peered deeper, she didn't want to disappoint.

Cross put both his hands on the handles and opened the doors. The rush of the odor of the room caught Sally's nostrils as soon as she entered. A distinguished smell, she thought, distinguished and untainted. Cross stood aside, allowing Sally to make her way through the doors first and into the presence of the panel. She had remembered where she needed to stop, and she stopped in that exact place. Cross, holding Sally's briefcase, approached the left side of her and drew near his desk. He then placed the briefcase beside his desk and seated himself gently in his chair.

The panel was holding fast, waiting for Dr. Thiery to begin the proceedings. As they waited, Sally eyed the panel, looking from right to left. She saw the two twins first, who were looking detached yet serious. Next to them was Dr. Fedor, who was staring down making some notes. Dante was to his immediate right, and Dr. Thiery was to Dante's immediate right. Next to Dr. Thiery was Michael York, and beside him, Hans. Both were staring back at her, wondering if the conversation they had with her on Saturday night made some kind of impact. Then, next to Hans, was the intimidation factor, Markus Berg, and even more intimidating, seated directly to Markus's right, to the very right, even exclaiming it by situating himself as though he were some kind of paranormal gap, was the one whom Sally feared, the one whom she had been cautioned about time and time again regarding his expertise and his pure genius, who held no mercy but made exclamations simply because he was able to and who took delight simply because that delight was offered him, Henryk Florian.

They were all staring at Sally. There was competition and there was readiness. They wanted a showdown, in fact, and Sally had shown herself to be an incredibly worthy opponent with regard to the wisdom she had compiled in her paper.

"Miss Travis," Dr. Thiery began, "we are honored to have you with us this morning. I believe I speak for all seated here when I tell you that simply having you here among us, to participate in this forum and in this arena, is not only a delight, but also an honor."

At this, everybody on the panel, including Cross Lutherant, begin to applaud. Sally is immediately humbled. As she listens to each one of their hands complement each other, she is reminded of both the esteem and achievement in this room. As she looked around, she could see pictures on the walls. Pictures of past members whose achievements left legacies for all to follow. This was a very serious place, she thought, and behind all the competition and all the pride was a resounding purpose to communicate wisely and accurately with regard to your fellow man.

The applause ceased, and Sally regained focus, turning her attention away from the walls and back toward the panel.

Dr. Thiery then proceeded. "Miss Travis, today the panel will be proving you with regard to two questions. These two questions will challenge the wisdom of your paper, "The Glial Theory and Esther Prophecy."

Sally's spirit almost descended within her, but it was a release. She had prepared herself to answer any questions that might have come her way, but since the questions asked would pertain directly to her paper, she could let her guard down a little bit, at least for now.

"Now, the first question will personally be presented by seat number 9, Henryrk Florian." Dr. Thiery looked seriously upon Sally. "Are you ready, my dear?"

Sally looked at Henryrk quickly and then back to Dr. Thiery. "Yes, sir, I am ready." Dr. Thiery nodded. "You may proceed, Mr. Florian."

At that, Henryrk took off his glasses and set them on the table; they made a noise when placed there. He then put his thumb and index finger in the crux of his

nose, massaging somewhere near his forehead. He then picked up a piece of paper and ruffled it with one hand, shaping it into the posture he desired. He then looked up at Sally. Sally just stood there, knowing that since Henryrk was presenting the question, it was personal. The question had not surfaced solely through group study, but was mostly the result of Henryrk's personal study. Sally listened closely as Henryrk presented his question.

"I need to ask you a question," he began haphazardly, almost implying he was burdened simply to ask it. Sally recognized his attitude as prideful manifesting itself due to insecurity. Henryrk then continued, "After I read your paper, I felt inclined to read the Bible in its entirety, to ensure you were accurate within all your assessments, and I found it very interesting, but more specifically, poignant. Here is my question. Your paper speaks of a process, The Esther Prophecy is a process wherein the participant, with the obvious involvement of God, will begin to open up him or herself to the possibility of other truths, and in doing so will effectively rid him or herself of these stronghold areas. So the Prophecy speaks of a process, is that correct?"

Sally answers, "That is correct."

"Very well, here is my question. In the Bible, God granted a man named Solomon wisdom, wisdom that had never been contested in times past and could never be contested again. But ..." he pauses, adding emphasis, "... this wisdom of Solomon's was granted, Miss Travis, totally excluding any kind of process that Solomon himself would need to endure, and thus, totally eradicating any responsibility on his part. If you believe in your Esther Prophecy, and if you believe your Prophecy speaks of truths, mainly that a process is necessary, then how do you account that such wisdom, which was actually greater than yours or anyone else's in this room, was granted simply by a petition, and not by any kind of process of which your paper speaks."

Sally heard the question fully; it was actually difficult to miss. She put her head down and allowed it to remain there for a time, forcing herself to consider before she could answer Henryrk's question. But as she

gathered herself to address Henryrk personally, she thought it very interesting. She thought it...

Very interesting.

"Sir, I understand your question fully. With regard to the process I outlined and with regard to the petition that Solomon made, there is a variance, please, allow me to address this variance."

Michael noticed there was a certainty in her voice, actually all who had spoken in depth with Sally recognized immediately that this was indeed a different Sally from whom they had seen, and from whom she had shown herself to be. A maturity seemed to leap through her, and a persuasive voice resounded within her.

"The process I outlined is true and is profitable with regard to the sanctification of man, where a man learns exactly who God wants him to be and then that same man strives to become that man. This process speaks of relationship, which is essential. This process, in fact, allows a person to not only have the opportunity to reach to the depths of human understanding, but more importantly, it teaches the person why they ever should."1 Henryrk immediately interrupts, "Solomon knew that he should. That is why he asked for the understanding in the first place?"

Sally put her hand up. "Yes, on the surface he understood this, but please, allow me to address these questions later." She lowered her hand and pleaded with her eyes. "Please, by your permission, allow me to build a foundation so that we can rest all of our other questions upon that foundation." Henryrk relented, beckoning Sally to continue with the wave of his hand.

"Thank you. Now, with regard to the process I outlined, the process is true and necessary. Now, it is also true that God, because He is a God of miracles, has the ability to bypass any process He deems necessary. For instance, when He allowed Solomon to achieve incredible wisdom totally separate from any kind of sanctification process, this action, by the permission of God, was indeed a miracle. So, the one does not discount the other. Allow me to digress for a moment.

"If there were a terrorist on the loose right now, and all of the nations had come together in order to come

up with a plan to subdue this terrorist, do you think it would be wise for all the nations to lay down their plan or process and simply say, 'Well, maybe the terrorist will die of natural causes, maybe we shouldn't go through this process of catching him.' That would be unwise. The point being, we cannot sit back and wait for God to do some miracle on our behalf; it becomes our action through this process that God will indeed honor, and even though it is totally possible to arrive at a different conclusion, in testing thus, we might end up paying more prices than we care to bear." Something resounds within Sally, "But to get back to your question more fully, yes, a miracle is possible, but just like I have briefly explained, we shouldn't rely upon it."

Henryrk's voice echoes with authority. "Address exactly how the occurrence of the miracle doesn't discount the process." The other members understand Henryrk simply wants Sally to get back to the heart of the matter; they press behind Henryrk.

Sally notices and answers him. "Because Mr. Florian, the process is still needed in order for a person to arrive at a position of integrity. Wisdom freely offered without the integrity process leads to harsh leadership, and The Esther Prophecy not only offers someone the ability to reach deep, it also works into them the integrity to stay patient and loving as they continue that reach."

Sally pauses, hoping she has made some kind of dent on their consciousness; all seem interested. "I am going to explain to you right now how God, by offering Solomon understanding totally separate from any kind of sanctification process, was teaching him a lesson of grace, and in doing so, basically offering him the opportunity to fail.

"But we must always remember, that God offered Solomon ample grace during his lifetime, and that it was indeed Solomon who asked for the understanding in the first place."

Sally, noticing she has the panel's attention, continues. "In the Bible, we see exactly what kind of ruler Solomon eventually became as a result of the wisdom being handed to him, rather than by him earning it

through a sanctification process. It is interesting to note that the reason Solomon desired understanding in the first place was so he could become a good ruler for the people, and this is probably why ample grace was offered him, but as you will see, he did not achieve his desire. Second Chronicles chapter 10 shows us that the people cried out against Rehoboam, Solomon's son, and said, 'your father made our yoke grievous, now ease the grievous yoke that your father made us to bear, for the yoke he put on us was heavy, and we will serve thee.'"

Sally turned her head with certainty across the panel, looking each member in the eye as she continued to speak. "This example in scripture exemplifies how Solomon eventually turned into a harsh ruler, abusing the people by putting grievous yokes upon them,² and by treating them unjustly,³ even comparable to Pharaoh's actions toward God's people in Egypt. This type of mindset usually characterizes someone who has been granted his position easily, not needing to prove himself through the trials of life, the Esther process actually becoming one of those trials, that they might become humbled by it. God's example with Solomon, when you search the scriptures deeper, to simply grant someone abilities totally separate from their direct involvement within any kind of sanctification process, was an example of what not to do.⁴ Solomon became a harsh king, as well as an unsuccessful servant to God.

"His wisdom did not help him. Solomon's father, King David, on the other hand, was one who had the testimony of a man who endured the trials of life, even being destitute in the wilderness for a season. This wilderness season replaced the Esther process, and if you have eyes to see, was actually an Esther process in its own right, with regard to his communion with God. David, because he went through this suffering season, learned to understand and appreciate integrity and character, which eventually made him a great ruler. He did not have Solomon's wisdom, but he had five times the integrity of Solomon. Knowledge is having the information, wisdom is knowing what to do with that information, but integrity is actually doing it. Where Solomon knew what to do, but didn't do it, David knew what to do, and did it. This

became the major difference between the two. Integrity and not wisdom. So as you see, it is integrity, and not wisdom, that makes a ruler great. And the Esther process allows one to reach to the depths of human understanding, and during this process the person remains in constant communion with God so that integrity can be built and so accountability can be learned and appreciated.

"So to answer your question fully, the miracle that God allowed with regard to Solomon did in fact create godly understanding within him, but that understanding lacked character because it lacked process. And the process of which I spoke, the sanctification and integrity process of The Esther Prophecy, which actually builds within a person not only Godly understanding but also character and accountability, becomes a more precise method of leadership and example. This process then results in wisdom and integrity being offered to the people through the witness of that person's life."

There was a silence in the room. Henryrk was just staring at Sally, who at present was holding her own, standing up straight but offering no gaze.

"I understand your explanation," Henryrk finally said, "you have satisfied my curiosity." He then looked away from Sally and toward Dr. Thiery, but then immediately back toward Sally. "You have explained sufficiently that one process does not discount the other, and that each process is its own entity." He pauses, "They're individual, and should be treated as such."

Sally nodded her head, indicating Henryrk perfectly understood the overall meaning here, and that, although his question was a good one, it could not discount the relevance or even the necessity of the overall process that she had discussed earlier in her paper. That although a miracle was feasible, such a miracle would again prove fatal for all involved.

Henryrk then turns his attention toward the panel and specifically toward Dr. Thiery again. "The question has been answered, and I accept its authority. I have no further questions for Miss Travis."

Michael looked at Sally as if he was seeing her for the first time. It was amazing, he thought, she had done

it again, just like in her paper. She was able to pinpoint the exact train of thought and then bring clarity. He had never before seen Henryrk defused so quickly and so easily. Sally's answer was exacting, and that answer abhorred itself of sloppiness, and it refused to venture into areas of questionability that it might remain vague. Sally embraced the heart of the matter and then questioned it there, no fanfare and no need for ego.

Dr. Thiery shuffled his notes. Henryrk was leaning back, taking some time to think and just eyeing the situation, seemingly accepting what he just heard. Dante looked like he was getting ready for some kind of event. Dr. Thiery looked straight ahead.

"Congratulations, Miss Travis, that was quite remarkable." He turns to look at the panel and then at Cross. "I think that all of us were able to receive the spirit of your message. It was both punctual and explicit within its reasoning, and I do say that I enjoyed listening to you speak, my dear; you are very bright."

Sally smiled, and then offered her due, "Thank you, sir."

Sally then took a moment to think about Henryrk, waiting for Dr. Thiery to align his thoughts. She understood that although defusing Henryrk was an honor in itself, it was not so much an honor at present. God had actually prompted her to wrestle with that exact question even before she was able to write "The Glial Theory and Esther Prophecy," or else, those same questions would have stopped her dead in her tracks. It was unfortunate, Sally thought, that Henryrk was presumably forced to ask her questions relating to the Bible; this was to Henryrk's disadvantage and to her advantage.

But she believed that the next question would not be as easy. She believed that since the question would derive from the group's overall wrestle, that the question would prove more mature and focused, and would thus rally to the core of what she sought to do with "The Glial Theory and Esther Prophecy."

Dr. Thiery prepared himself to speak. "Miss Travis, this next question will be presented by myself, but you will need to address both myself as well as Mr. De

Forest." He motions toward his left. "We have both assimilated the same presentation question so it will now become your job to convince both of us since both of us will have the right to accuse and to ask questions."

Sally understood. This meant that the question was not personal, but that Dante and Dr. Thiery had simply asked the same question in group study.

"I'm ready."

"Good. Miss Travis, in reading your paper, the group was overwhelmed with a single concept, mainly, God within this process, or actually, how God worked within this process. Our question to you is this. You outlined that it would be possible for one who feared the Lord to undergo this process and to attain or achieve a vast amount of understanding or wisdom, but that if someone did not fear the Lord, that this someone could quite possibly "Burn up" within this process ... assumingly defeating the purpose I presume?"

Sally nods her head, indicating his assessments are correct. Dr. Thiery continues. "Our question to you is this. Explain to us, according to your paper, and according to your current train of thought within these proceedings, the steps and the processes of the one who is successful within The Esther Prophecy as well as the one who is not successful within The Esther Prophecy. Please, Miss Travis, within your justifications, reveal the inner-workings of God in relation to both participants, with regard to the one who is successful, as well as with regard to the one who is not."

Sally heard the question. She looked to Cross and then to Dr. Thiery and made a request. "May I please have a moment to frame my answer? I need to think of the exact order that will best suit my explanation as well as your understanding within it."

"You may have as long as you need," Dr. Thiery returns.

Sally looks down and compasses all the answers in her head. She has the answers, but the most difficult part right now was the order in which she felt the question needed to be answered in order to limit their retaliatory questions. She took a deep breath and began her discourse.

"I would like to address the question fully, but I will do so not in parts, but within the construct of my understanding. Since you seek to understand God's inner-workings as well as His purposes within this actual process, I feel it necessary to construct my answer in relation to relationship, not simply formulation; that way, I hope to reveal to you the heart of God in the matter."

The panel was intent to hear. Michael nodded his head and Sally noticed as soon as he did. She looked directly to him as she began her discourse.

"The fear of the Lord being the focal point of the beginning of wisdom is a truth put forth by the inspired Word of God. Some may look at these suppositions as challenges, but when you view them with spiritual eyes, you understand they are cautioning, mostly instructional. In other words, they weren't put there as a goal, but as a reminder, of how things work, and of the reality of the situation. So please, understand that these verses speak nothing of challenge or vain achievement, but mostly instruction and admonition for the reader. With that in mind, let's go on to further enlightenment.

"I also want to caution, right from the beginning, that my focal point, with regard to the supposition I put forth in my paper regarding Jesus Christ Himself being the true source of all wisdom and understanding, that this focal point did not originate with me, nor did it originate from my in-depth Bible study. But even Harvard, from their conception, believed this. Harvard's founding mission statement is as follows:

Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed, to consider well, that the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life; John 17:3... And therefore to lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning.

"As you can see, Harvard, as well as many other universities, such as Oxford, Yale, Brown, Columbia, Princeton and Dartmouth; all of these universities, echoed the same sentiments with regard to their purposes

and founding beliefs. All believed that Biblical instruction, involving a relationship where the fear of the Lord was present, became vital in order to achieve sound knowledge and learning.

"I wanted to include this information so you wouldn't think my focal point was biased based on my own study, but that this focal point has long been considered by many, to be the crux of all sound learning. But again, with this understood, let's go on to further enlightenment.

"I want to outline two different men who have sought truth as well as the understanding that accompanies that truth. The first, sought to attain truth separate from any kind of deity, but more specifically, Jesus Christ Himself. This person's name is Theodore Kaczynski."

Many of the men stare plainly at Sally. Hans asks a question. "Who, my dear?"

Sally is about to answer when Henryrk answers it for her, "Ted Kaczynski," he shouts, as he looks back at Sally, "the American Unabomber."

The panel is entrapped for a moment. Sally notices, so she allows them time to come around to her line of thinking. Dr. Thiery notices, "Go on, Miss Travis."

Sally repositions herself. "Thank you, sir. Mr. Kaczynski was a man who sought truth but did so without the loving guidance and fellowship of Jesus Christ. For this reason, he was able to attain a certain amount of truth, but ultimately, because he sought that truth without fully admonishing the Lord, and in doing so not allowing the Lord to engineer the truth process, he ultimately 'burnt up' within his own struggles and passions."

The men peer deeper into Sally, and she receives their every attention. "Had he acknowledged the Lord fully, the Lord would have buffeted the process, teaching him which direction to go and how to treat such direction. But understand this, much of the process that needed to be done would have been done within the heart of Mr. Kaczynski himself. About 90 percent of the wisdom/truth process is sanctification within the heart

of the individual, so the individual will be able to hold what is ultimately revealed, and hold it with a heart of compassion, love, and forgiveness. Mr. Kaczynski saw many truths, but did not possess the forgiving heart to hold such truths, and to remain fully nonjudgmental and compassionate.

"Probably, in many areas, Mr. Kaczynski was right. But he was absolutely wrong to judge, and that is why the Lord chooses not to take many down the wisdom path, because they have not made a choice to hold a forgiving heart. Had Mr. Kaczynski sought God during this process, to fear Him, the Lord would have cautioned him deeply to retain a heart of forgiveness within the truth process, and to not judge, and the Lord would have proved him and sustained him there, creating a window, so that the continual knowledge of the truth would not have burned him up. It was the unforgiveness in Mr. Kaczynski's heart, and not the actual knowledge of any truth, that lead to his tragic end. The knowledge simply gave occasion for his heart to manifest. To become upset, to become impatient within the process, with what he learned and with what was revealed to him. It was indeed the knowledge that prompted his anger and rage, but remember, all who undergo the truth process will have such feelings, because all who go through the process are fallen sinners by nature. But for those who receive God and accept His forgiveness, they have the unique witness in their hearts that mercy should always triumph over judgment, and that compassion should always abase rage. Remembering that, once, they were the same as the others, not enlightened by the truth and not enlightened through a diligent search."

Dante asks a question. "So, you are saying that Mr. Kaczynski was indeed one who forwent the Esther process, but that he did so without actually acknowledging God?"

Sally pauses, acknowledging Dante's train of thought. She then speaks plainly, "Well, he went through a truth process. The Lord loves all whom He created, definitely Mr. Kaczynski included. I would be assuming at this point, so if you will permit my assumptions ..."

Dante holds up his hand and exclaims, "They are permitted."

Sally nods. "He did not go through the Esther Prophecy per se because God was not engineering the process fully, but was God engineering the process at all? I believe He was actually. When someone seeks the truth, God is in this search. Now, God knew what kind of choices Mr. Kaczynski would eventually make, so I am sure he tried to buffet the process continually, setting up barriers and constraints, but if Mr. Kaczynski proved stubborn, hardheaded, well then, now the heart is made manifest through this process, meaning Mr. Kaczynski would be allowed to make his own choices, but then answer to God for those choices."

Dante makes clarification. "So what you're saying is that God saw Mr. Kaczynski's search, and because he was seeking the truth, God sought to accompany this process, but when Mr. Kaczynski proved stubborn, God simply allowed nature to take its course."

Sally nods slowly. "Exactly, God has given Mr. Kaczynski as well as all of us, a will to choose, and God, after cautioning Mr. Kaczynski many times, would have simply allowed Mr. Kaczynski to exercise that will to choose."

Dante then adds, "And he paid the price for that will didn't he, Miss Travis."

"I'm sure he was cautioned, Mr. De Forest."

Dante holds himself back, knowing Sally had answered his question. He then moves himself forward again. "And what of the other example, the successful participant?"

Sally needs more faith than wisdom for this next answer. She glances at Cross and then back at Dr. Thiery before she begins. "By the permissions granted to me within these proceedings and within this Chamber room, I ask the leniency as well as the permission, not to deviate from your question, but to answer the question more fully, according to my understanding."

Dr. Thiery gets adamant, a side Sally had not seen before. "Miss Travis, we are not in the custom of allowing stand-up candidates to dictate to us these proceedings; now if you will answer the question, good, but if not, then not."

Sally is humbled, but implores once again according to the permission of God within her, and when she does, all in attendance understand there is a serious break in her spirit. "Sirs, there is no disrespect, but If you will permit me ..." Sally then pauses, not even herself knowing how to answer. She then closes her eyes and answers in the only voice she possesses. "... I can't answer your question, sir, because it's an inaccurate question."

The entire panel takes a moment. Some look to Dr. Thiery, and he returns their stares, as if he were asking them whether he is the brunt of some kind of joke.

"Please explain yourself Miss Travis," Dr. Thiery finally rebuts.

Sally exhales deeply. "Sir, the first part of your question was accurate, but the second part, sir, an example of one who has been successful within The Esther Prophecy, this question is inaccurate because none are successful within The Esther Prophecy."

The entire panel takes a moment. Many put their fingers to their lips, trying to ingest what Sally has just said; others wanted to know exactly what she meant. Sally offers it to them. "Sirs, I can give you an example of one who now, after much loss, is seemingly successful within The Esther Prophecy, but only after variances and tragedies. Furthermore, I am hoping that by my introducing and then explaining these variances and tragedies that I am able to help you come into the Graces of God more fully."

Dr. Thiery relents. "You may proceed, Miss Travis."

Sally is relieved, but doesn't show it. She opens her mouth, wide. "My example is Dr. Tom Hutchinson." A few of the members talk among themselves. Dr. Thiery glances at Cross and then eyes Sally steadfast. Sally looks at Cross who is staring right back at her. Sally then begins her discourse, "Upon Dr. Hutchinson's arrival here at The Cell over thirty years ago, he had been one who had undergone the truth process by leaps and bounds. He had already written his book, *The Fundamentals of Christian Thought*, which became a Godly marker for both politicians and world leaders around the globe. His

relationship with God was solid, and it hinged upon the fact that he fully understood that it was God Himself who engineered his wisdom/truth process, and who had actually consecrated him for service. Knowing all this, Dr. Hutchinson accepted your invitation.

"While he was here, he continued within The Esther Prophecy process, opening up more rooms of thought and allowing himself to become more open to the truth, the truth that reveals itself when conscious involvement is attained through deep-rooted study and repentance. For a while, he was able to make great strides in this place, even blowing open some doors with regards to ignorance and scrutiny. But then ..." Sally pauses, looking up confidently, "... the inevitable happened:" All the panel is waiting, she then continues in her certainty, "he burnt up, too."

Dante turns to Dr. Thiery and Sally notices. She pauses in an effort to allow him to understand. He turns back to Sally and questions, "But Miss Travis, Dr. Hutchinson feared the Lord, so please explain how he could have burned up within the process?"

Sally answers firmly. "Just because someone fears the Lord doesn't mean they can't get ahead of the Spirit, or make mistakes, or get sloppy, or get tired or stubborn. All of these things can happen, and more often than not, they usually do. What you must remember is that God becomes the engineer within the Esther process, but that doesn't mean that we will always listen to Him fully. If one who fears the Lord strays from the path, or even gets sloppy, then just because they fear the Lord doesn't mean they will be immune; they are going to get burnt too."

The panel is affected by Sally's certainty and is eager to hear more. "God's Grace within the actual process is to help the individual to stay on the path; this Grace becomes the Lord's revelation to the person, and this revelation becomes the person's admonishment. But understand, when ignored, it then becomes time for the chastening so that lessons can be learned and so that righteousness can be established. Just like Mr. Kaczynski got burned, Dr. Hutchinson got burned, only to a smaller degree. But as you well know, it was enough of

a degree to tarnish his name and to keep him from this place, and to keep his abilities and gifts at bay, but God prospered them."

Dr. Thiery becomes curious. "How so?"

"After he left here, the tragedy of his wife passing, the struggles of trying to find where he belonged, these became instrumental in God's sanctification process in his life." Sally looked up lovingly at Dr. Thiery. "It was the right decision you made thirty years ago to excuse Dr. Hutchinson, although the residuals of that decision might not be as excusable."

Dr. Thiery understood immediately what Sally meant by her comment, to excuse him was proper, but the way it happened and the personal decisions made afterward were not so honoring. Sally proceeds within Dr. Thiery's understanding. "He was burning himself up and The Cell in the process, and it was the direct result of him not heeding the voice of the Lord, not listening to what was being required of him. He was simply too immature and too zealous within his own understanding. Almost like one of those inevitable mistakes that we all make in life, like falling off a bike for the first time; but God sought to use it because He wanted a full maturity out of Dr. Hutchinson, and that maturity would come later, much later in fact, after He allowed the invitation thirty-three years earlier to be accepted so prematurely."

Dante then asks a question. "So God allowed Dr. Hutchinson to accept The Cell's invitation thirty-three years ago even though He knew he would fail; that seems odd."

Sally remained confident, "God had a greater purpose. God knew that Dr. Hutchinson would eventually become consumed within the revelation as well as within his responsibility within that revelation. Dr. Hutchinson was simply too spiritually advanced for his maturity level. He would have failed anywhere I think, but at least God honored him here, at this elite think tank, so that when he failed, he at least had the satisfaction of failing among the best, and even prospering among the same. But understand the revelation he possessed was of great depth, and to possess that kind

of depth, and then to be thrown headlong where you can possibly do the most good, but at the same time quite possibly cause the most harm, it was all simply too overwhelming."

Dante asks again, "Please clarify, Miss Travis, why would God call him here if He knew he would fail?"

"For a few reasons actually. First, because he had a specific plan that involved the rest of his life, and a failure here was simply a precursor to the rest of that life. Secondly, he needed to show Dr. Hutchinson what was inside of him, and had Dr. Hutchinson not failed here, God would have had to reveal this failure somewhere else, perhaps making his experience even more painful. Thirdly, it wasn't assumed that he was going to fail; he had the ability to pass, but God, knowing all things, knew that he wouldn't, so He used this failure perfectly within His overall plan for his life.⁵

"Please explain to us exactly how he failed?"

Dante asks.

"Because of the revelation, or the actual wisdom he would possess because of the Esther process, I believe he simply put too much pressure on himself, to have all the right answers for all the right people at all the right times. He simply couldn't shut it off. At the time, he was exercising himself on a conscious level of truth that many here will never attain, and basically, because of that, he was more burdened than most. He felt indebted to this fact, and for this reason, he pushed himself even harder, over the edge I believe.

"I can tell you specifically that much of the wisdom that eventually got me here, which is a miracle in itself, came from the wrestles that Dr. Hutchinson had thirty years ago in this place. So it was not even so much that he failed, but more like he fell, because although he was gifted, and although he was exercising himself on a higher plane thus making himself more vulnerable, he simply couldn't fortify his position there, so he drifted away."

Dr. Thiery then asks, "And now, he's a success?"

"Well, he's interesting; let's put it that way... " She smiles, allowing the panel to get the blunt of her observation. "I would have to say, in my assessment,

that he is a success. The simple fact that his guidance got me here, and the fact that he has absolutely brought out the best in me, leads me to believe that God is able to honor this man in any way possible. I need to tell you that I am privileged just to know him, and I shudder to think what kind of difference this man could make on this world if he were given the chance."

Dr. Thiery puts his head down, thinking to himself. According to everything that he ever saw in Tom, not to mention the fact that Tom's impact on The Cell over the last fifteen years had been quite commendable even given his limited role, and according to everything that Sally was revealing right now, he simply could not find any grounds with which to argue with her; she was right. If Dr. Hutchinson now possessed the character to persuade Sally to come here, and if his direct influence became the main reason why this girl's inspiration resounded so, then he couldn't deny it, Dr. Tom Hutchinson must have become a man who had attained within the process of which Sally spoke. After considering this, for longer than a moment, he detached himself from his inner persona and asked the question he didn't want to ask. "So, I have a question for you, Miss Travis. And, Miss Travis, this question actually strays from the presentation question, so if you will permit me?"

Sally permits him, "Please."

"Thank you. According to all you have said here today, Miss Travis, and according to what we now understand as truths, what, Miss Travis, is to convince us that you will succeed where Dr. Hutchinson failed ... or fell rather?" He keeps going within his assessment. "As you poignantly pointed out, Miss Travis, within these proceedings actually, Dr. Hutchinson burnt up because of his lack of maturity, and because the revelation he possessed was astounding; the two mixed together becoming more than he could bear. So my question to you is this. According to the revelation within you, and according to the exaltation this panel is about to offer you, will you continue in this strength, that we have all witnessed here today, or will you rather push yourself ignorantly, as he did, and destroy yourself in the process?"

Sally first turns to Cross and then back to the panel, and, lastly, to Dr. Thiery. "You're a wise man, Dr. Thiery, very wise in fact," she stops herself, choosing her words carefully, "I only pray you are as understanding as you are wise."

She looks down before she answers again, purposely, to consider what she is about to say. She then looks up, "I will destroy myself, Dr. Thiery ..." Her answer possesses a sense of acceptance, and she continues in it. "... And I will end up just like him."

The panel is stunned for a moment. Dr. Thiery allows Sally's words to hit him, to the extent that his eyes begin to water. Cross puts his fingers to his forehead and shakes his head knowingly; he knew her answer even before she gave it.

Sally then makes light. "Yesterday, as I was walking and jogging along the walkway, I didn't want the day to end. I then noticed the sun going down, and I was distinctly able to see the sun going down through the hillside passageways.

"It was almost as if the sun were trying to hide from me, and I wanted to run up to it, and lift it up, so I could keep it risen." She put her head down, mumbling her next words. "So I could control what I wanted so dear."

There was a pause, and the panel kept eyeing her. She spoke in hope, "but as I continued to walk, Dr. Thiery, I realized something, that tomorrow, tomorrow that same sun would rise again, and I wouldn't even have to force it up; it would rise in its own time, totally separate from my influence, and totally separate from any desire in me to want to control it.

"My sun will rise, Dr. Thiery, maybe not today, and maybe not tomorrow, but someday, when the time is right, and when I don't care for the influence, there it will be, shining, and resounding in a place where I couldn't see it, and celebrating in a place where I couldn't control it."

She then paused as a tear made its way down her cheek. She wiped the tear away and continued, "... and I will wait for that sun, Dr. Thiery. I will wait for that sun because it will come."

The room was soft with her influence. No one needed to say anything, and no one needed to ask any more questions. Sally had declined her seat, and she had declined it even before the panel had the chance to offer it. Dr. Thiery then stood up, making a distinction, and making his presence felt.

"I think I speak for us all when I say that today's proceedings were both informing as well as eye-opening, and that the lessons learned here today have come from a source that I dare say not many here could attempt to find nor even comprehend for that matter." He looks to Sally distinctly. "You have offered us revelation that is beyond us, and within its context and experience, a striking sense, elegant to the core." He then turns to the panel, "I dare say that anyone on this panel would be hard pressed not to offer you both congratulations as well as acclamation at this time." With that Dr. Thiery thunderously claps his hands, and Cross and some of the others shoot to their feet.

Sally looks on, watching the members stand one by one, saluting her, congratulating her. Sally immediately remembers all of Dr. Hutchinson's efforts in getting her into this room, so besides a momentary release, she receives their applause on his behalf. Then, suddenly, all the remaining panel members make it to their feet. Henryrk moves in closer to Markus as he claps his hands, bowing his head and smiling in unison with the others. Some have tears in their eyes, including Cross and Hans; others, such as Michael and Dante, are still looking upon her deeply. There is adoration in their eyes, but also a mystery, almost like childhood discontentment, as if they were still trying to understand what was being taken away from them. Sally continued, receiving the panel's applause; and as she did, she smiled, because she could feel the Spirit, resting upon her shoulders and trickling down her arms, making His presence felt.

Chapter 18

Tom was despondent as he waited for the news. He never liked it when his impulses were too impatient, but he felt justified right now. He had been cautioned by Cross yesterday that Sally's stand-up would be taking place early this morning, and that he would call him early this morning regarding any news. He had been waiting for over an hour, and had still heard nothing.

As he continued to wait, he placed his mind elsewhere, trying to pass the time. While Sally was in France he had continued to pray and intercede for her. Making his presence felt, and offering up his due petition for her safekeeping and for God's purposes throughout the process. He believed all would go well, according to the will of God, but still, he thought, he was hoping that Sally would be able to make an impact, hoping that her gifts would not only impact The Cell, but also have a chance to impact the world at large. He heard an unpleasant noise, but that unpleasant noise had never sounded so good.

EEEEEEEEEOOOOOOOUUUUGGGGGGGGG...

EEEEEEEEEOOOOOOOUUUUGGGGGGGGG...

EEEEEEEEEOOOOOOOUUUUGGGGGGGGG...

He lifted himself from his seat and ran over to meet the O-PECK signal. As he zealously sat down in his chair, he lifted his head so the retinal scanning device could meet his eye. He then flipped on his camera and, after a few moments, the upload was complete. Cross was staring directly back at him, and he looked spent from a long days work. Dr. Hutchinson just waited for Cross to introduce any conversation, and he did.

"Tom," he looks up repositioning himself, "glad we were able to connect, I have some news."

Tom was ready to hear it. "I assumed you did."

Cross then looked out of both corners of his eyes before he spoke, almost simultaneously, "It's very interesting Tom."

Tom didn't like that statement. "What do you mean, Cross?"

"Tom," Cross holds himself back before he fully begins. "Everything is good, just know that up front."

Tom relaxes himself. "So what's the news, Cross?"

Before anything else is said Cross fittingly points out, "She could pass for your daughter, Tom."

Tom smiles at the comparison, Cross then continues, "Tom, it was literally like you were speaking through her."

Tom smiles wide again; he then nods his head, offering justification. "I know."

"Tom, we have a lot to talk about, a lot in fact, but first, someone would like to say hello."

Tom doesn't know what to think. It's usually not proper to allow others to speak on an allotted O-PECK call, and when he peers deeper, he can't believe who sits down in front of the computer screen. It had been nearly thirty years since he had seen him face to face; he looked different, good, but different.

"Hello, Tom." Dr. Thiery's eyes sparkled as he addressed the informal computer screen. "How are things in Vermont?"

Tom rebuts promptly, "Probably not as exciting as they are in France."

Dr. Thiery chuckles. "Yes, yes, Tom." He turns to smile at Cross and then refocuses on the computer screen. "You always did have a healthy sense of humor." Dr. Thiery then swallows, getting serious, almost like an emotion is coming over him that he needs to force himself to subdue. Tom notices the emotion. "Sir, are you all right?"

"Oh, yes," Dr. Thiery waves his hand, "I'm fine Tom, just fine." He then takes some time, resting his hand softly near the keyboard. He continues, "I have an urgency to discuss some details, some interesting details that involve you."

For twenty minutes, they discussed Sally's performance, the gifts she possessed, her stand-up, and, even more specifically, the fact that his name had been brought up on more than one occasion.

Dr. Hutchinson then says, "So Sally's coming home, and you ..." Tom pauses, and Dr. Thiery interrupts him, "Fully respect her decision and ask for leniency regarding her potential future within The Cell's organisation."

Tom takes a moment, but then questions, "So why don't you just keep her file warm?"

Dr. Thiery looks to his right, possibly eyeing Cross or whoever else is sitting in the room. He then stares back at the computer screen. "That has already been done, but what we are requesting regarding Sally's future invitation is more abbreviated, more pressing."

Tom tries to understand. "So basically you want Sally on call, to come to France and assist with matters pertaining to The Cell if those matters happen to call for her specific gifts?"

"Precisely, she is too special and too rare of a find to simply hold off for the next five years. Now Tom ..." he gets very catty, "... I fully respect her decision. But really, Tom, this girl will be able to handle sporadic visits over the next couple of years, not to mention the fact that these same sporadic visits will offer us the occasion to groom her for future service within our organisation. It's really a win-win situation for everyone I believe."

Tom agrees inwardly but is also intrigued. "So what did she say regarding these sporadic visits?"

Dr. Thiery looked upon Tom respectfully. "We dared not ask her until we spoke with you personally, Tom."

Tom was jolted by the comment because the courtesy wasn't necessary. Dr. Thiery then continued, "We fully respect your relationship with the young Miss Travis, and we would not dare infringe upon it." He then paused again, attempting to bring more clarity. "If you say no, Tom, then we relent, and we will see Sally in five years."

Dr. Hutchinson had his own opinion, and fortunately, it aligned with both the answer Dr. Thiery wanted to hear as well as with God's will in the matter.

"I will certainly caution Sally regarding your proposition; please, do not make mention of it to her. I will also prompt her to consider your proposition

thoroughly, believing that it would indeed become a win-win situation for all." He then continued within his certainty, "I will also personally consider the invitation you have extended to me, and will give word to you later this week, after I've had ample chance to review and consider it myself."

Dr. Thiery yielded upon Tom's resignation. "That's fine, Tom, that is all we could ask."

Dr. Hutchinson is not showing it, but he's beside himself right now, not understanding how all this could of happened in two weeks time. It was totally unseen to him.

"Oh, and Tom ..."

Tom breaks away from his inwardness; he refocuses on the computer screen.

"It was good to see you again, Tom, and to hear from you. Now, Tom, know that this invitation is for certain. A good man knows when he's beat." Dr. Thiery then smiles, giving Tom an occasion to speak.

"I never had any doubt that the invite wasn't certain, sir. Everything that you arrange usually is."

Dr. Thiery received his complement in good graces, he then gave permission to end the conversation, "So we'll be hearing from you then Tom?"

"You will, Tom answered back, "as soon as I hear myself. Thank you for the call."

"You're welcome Tom, good bye."

"Good bye."

Dr. Thiery bows his head and the computer informed Tom that the signal has been terminated. Dr. Hutchinson leans back and puts his hands on his face, rubbing his face up and down, trying to create enough friction to keep his thought process awake. "So they want me back at The Cell," he thought slowly to himself, "I couldn't see that coming in a thousand years."

He lifted himself off his seat and went over to his desk. He saw the files stacked one atop another, the files that harbored Sally's information. He couldn't believe it, he thought; well actually, he thought to himself again, making his way back toward his computer as he did, he actually could believe it.

Sally had brought such clarity in France, not only to the panel's stand-up questions, but also to the issues of his personal burnout and failure. It made sense, he thought. He knew that he was working too hard while he was at The Cell over thirty years ago, but he also thought his circumstances had much more to do with it than did his miscommunication with God. But Sally was right: it was a relationship choice. A relationship choice that became a relationship failure, but a choice for him to learn from, that he might someday yield. But even now, he thought, God had prospered him, God had prospered him even until now.¹

He picked up the phone and dialed Neaven's number.

People were standing, gathered all around on the third level quadrant of The Compound. They were standing near the public study area, filing into the nearby offices and into the meeting rooms. A party was going on in honor of The Cell, in honor of the excellent work they had done with regard to The Horesburg Trials. Many were in attendance, all the Primary Members as well as analysts and affiliates who had contributed to the work. Dr. Thiery had invited Sora to join, so Sally could have some time with her before she left. Sora simply couldn't believe Sally had turned down the appointment.

"You're crazy, woman." Sora smiled as she peered into Sally, "What kind of woman would turn down that seat?"

Sally takes a few steps back, "Well, you did say you wanted to be the first woman Primary Member, so I felt inclined to refuse the seat, so that it would be available to you."

Sora has a sour look on her face. "Hogwash, I haven't got a pig's chance in heaven of getting in that seat." She then looks at Sally. "And you turned it down."

Sally smiles meekly; there was nothing she could do. "It just wasn't right; there is only so much someone can do."

"All right, Sally, all right." Sora finally relents, "No need to explain to me; I'm just pulling your leg, your just ... strange."

"No, trust me Sora, you're a lot stranger than me."

Sora laughs and points at her, but then draws her finger back when she notices someone is approaching. She reaches toward Sally's glass, hurrying her statement. "I'll get you some more punch. Remember Sally, it's the gravity of love that keeps us up."

Sally smiles as Sora makes her way to the beverage counter. As Sally watches, she feels the presence of someone standing beside her. She turns to see Dante De Forest peering at her.

"Miss Travis ..." he voices, as soon as their eyes meet.

Sally interrupts him, "Please, call me Sally."

Dante looks upon her. "Sally, you, as well as your gifts, will be sorely missed." He continues and doesn't offer her permission to speak. "I just wanted you to know personally, that I had my doubts regarding you."

The comment is taken in stride, because Sally had her doubts regarding this place as well. Dante continues as Sally thinks. "You were exceptional, and that is not just praise; that's fact." He then took her hand. "We will be seeing you again, very soon I am sure." With that, Dante kissed her hand, offering it back to her. Then, making his way forward, he strode down the hall exiting through the doors.

Sally watched him momentarily, but then turned her attention toward the other guests. She could see a lot of the members sitting down, Henryrk, Hans, Michael, Markus. All were sitting together and making conversation. She wanted to go over and talk to them, but felt intimidated.

A hand rested on her shoulder.

"They would love to have a word with you, my dear." Dr. Thiery's voice resounded with his noticeable charm. He then lowered himself in an attempt to whisper directly near her ear, "They're probably just as shy as you."

Sally smiled at his comment; Dr. Thiery just had a way of saying things right. He then pulled his head away

respectfully, taking her by the arm. "Let's go over and join the conversation."

Sally took his arm and the two made their way over toward the group. This singular moment, this single point and time, became defining because right now she was more at home with The Cell than she had ever been. And she was leaving.

Leaving the sights of both the hills and the accommodations, not to mention the beautiful yet somber Compound, was enough to make Sally want to change her mind. She had grown to like this place, France, and in a large way, it seemed almost as though she belonged here. Yet, the entanglement of her circumstances had suffocated the narrow and emotional view of her belief. She was leaving France, in what seemed to be the same Mercedes that had picked her up two weeks ago. Cross was seated in the same place he had been seated when he met her, and when he had ushered her into this new world. Cross put down his work to address Sally.

"Sally?"

Sally responded by taking out her earpiece. Cross continued, "Your flight will be landing at approximately 1:15 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. Tom will be picking you up. He has been given instructions to debrief you, so any final questions should be reserved for him."

Sally nodded her head, understanding appreciatively. "Thank you."

Cross looked at Sally with maturity behind his eyes. "You're welcome, Sally."

Sally didn't know how to say it, but she had to say it, anyway. Ever since she had declined her seat, she almost felt as though some kind of invisible door had closed; that although it was still obvious that The Cell respected her gifts and her abilities, that somehow they weren't taking her seriously anymore.

"Sir."

Cross looked up and eyed Sally.

"I was just wondering, are people mad because I said no?"

Cross couldn't believe her question at first, but then, remembering her age, understood her fears.

"Sally," he took off his reading glasses and crossed his legs as he did, "we are not displeased at all; in fact, it is quite the opposite. We are quite pleased." Sally took his words in stride. Although she felt she had made the right decision to turn down the seat, right now she wasn't so pleased with herself. Cross continued. "Sally, remember when I told you about Tom's burnout?"

"Of course."

Cross then looks upon Sally, almost fatherly, "Do you also remember what I said in addition to Tom's burnout?"

Sally couldn't remember, she tried to think, but Cross reminded her. "I told you that I saw a lot of Tom inside of you, and that Tom's experience had taught me many things, mostly that gifts weren't everything, and that maybe this opportunity just wasn't right for you."

Sally's jaw opened; she couldn't believe that she had forgotten that particle. She then looked toward Cross, it was one of those times when you feel like a fool for forgetting something so important. Cross received her gaze and made note. "So Sally ..., " he put his glasses back on, "... your decision was not a surprise to all of us."

Sally spoke in-depth, but mostly to herself, "I can't believe I forgot that," but then responded, "No disrespect, Mr. Lutherant, but I think God helped me to forget."

Cross responds, "What do you mean, Sally?"

"Well, what you gave me was so true, that in order for me to fully see it, it had to be revealed to me separately, spiritually. So ..., " Sally looked at Cross, wondering if he was receiving her words, "... when the Lord prompted me to focus on Dr. Hutchinson's situation, I became side tracked, and forgot what you said. That's the only way I would've been able to learn it for myself."

Cross then asked her a specific question. "So why didn't the Lord just use my words to speak directly to you?"

Sally was not thinking about the negativity of the situation anymore. This new train of thought had inspired her, and she was aligning herself with its understanding. "Because of the situation I was in. I was involved within a prophetic wrestle at the time, not to mention the fact I needed to address The Cell within a certain amount of faith. So it became almost off limits for me to receive separate from the Spirit at that time, because everything I had to receive I had to receive in faith. Not to mention the fact that I was so high strung at that point that I probably would've forgotten it or even tried to reason it away." She paused for a moment, allowing Cross to catch up. "God needed to take me aside personally, and if I were to hang on to what you had said, and at the same time tried to talk to God about it, then it would have become me talking to God rather than Him revealing to me. So, in essence, holding that knowledge within my reasoning would've actually gotten in the way."

Cross is dumbfounded. "Is that how quickly God helps you to understand things, Sally ..." he spoke with a certain amount of awe, "... at the drop of a hat?"

"Sometimes," Sally resonates, "especially when our time is up." Sally looked out the window; the Mercedes was approaching the runway. She could see the plane in the distance, and she turned to look at Cross.

"Sir, thank you so much. She gets up to hug him. Cross embraces her, rubbing her shoulder as he receives her hug. "Sir, you have no idea how much you helped me, just knowing you were Dr. Hutchinson's friend was one of the reasons that I agreed to come."

Cross receives her thanks and gently holds her away, then, looking in her eyes, he speaks to her heart. "Sally, you are a rare find. Trust me when I say that you will always be welcome here in France, and that you have found yourself a home."

Sally hugs him one more time, and Cross again receives the hug. Sally then feels the car come to a stop and she hears the side door open. She breaks away because she understands it's time to go, she begins to organize her things. She makes her way out the door. Cross has already filed out and is standing outside

waiting. Sally took out her passport and handed it to the military personnel. Cross was standing to the right, reviewing the log and flipping through its pages. He handed the log back after he had thoroughly checked it. The military personnel took the log from his hands and then proceeded to carry Sally's backpack and luggage toward the plane. Sally then watched as Cross came near to her one more time.

"Now, Sally, Tom will debrief you when you get back, and you shouldn't have any questions." He escorted her forward as he spoke to her, and a different military personnel then approached. Cross continued, "You will have all the information you'll need, so please, don't worry about a thing and enjoy the trip back."

With that, Cross turned around and made his way back to the Mercedes. Sally turned to watch him leave. The military personnel then spoke to Sally as she turned her face toward his. "We're ready to depart, Miss Travis; your things are already on board." Sally turned again, but this time, only to see the Mercedes drive away. She continued to watch as the car faded away into the distance.

She climbed the flight of stairs into the plane, entering the cabin's lounge. She took her seat. Her last discussion with Cross was too spooky interesting to think about now, so she allowed it to drift away into the back of her mind. She knew that everything ended up the way it was supposed to, so she tried not to second-guess herself. If she had stayed, she would have ended up failing everybody, God, The Cell, Dr. Hutchinson, NATO, and mostly herself. It just wasn't her time, she thought as she leaned back, it just wasn't her time.

She took a look at all the magazines staring her right in the face. They were directly opposite her and within arm's reach. She couldn't believe it; she jumped up even before having the chance to buckle up. That guy looks just like Neaven. She grabbed the magazine, its glossy cover reflected in her hands. She couldn't believe it, the magazine was some kind of cowboy rodeo magazine, but the funny thing was that the guy on the cover looked almost exactly like Neaven. She leaned back

in her chair thinking to herself for a moment. Neaven, she thought again...

You never looked so good.

The plane touched down at 1:15 p.m. EST. Sally was now back in Vermont, and it felt good. She exited the plane and walked down the stairs; she had her backpack over her shoulder and the rodeo magazine firmly in her hands. Before the plane had touched down, the flight attendant had given her permission to take the magazine. She couldn't wait to show Neaven; he'd probably throw it away. She came down the staircase, and as she did, Dr. Hutchinson came her way. He greeted her with a warm welcoming hug.

"Welcome home, Sally," He looked on her with his eyes doing most of the speaking. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm a bit tired, but beside that, I'm fine."

Sally then remembered her manners. "How are you?"

Dr. Hutchinson smiled. "I'm fine, Sally; let's get you home."

He took her backpack off her shoulder. Two military personnel came alongside with her luggage and passport. They handed Sally her passport, and one of them proceeded to take Sally's luggage to the trunk of the car. The other handed Dr. Hutchinson a log that he promptly signed. As the two personnel left, Dr. Hutchinson pointed back to the car, "I thought you might like some company."

Sally peered, looking past the two front seats and toward the back. There they were, Clair and Neaven, seated in the back seat and pointing directly at her. Sally screamed. She ran over in haste and opened Neaven's door. Then, jumping in, she kissed him. She grabbed Clair's neck and hugged her. Dr. Hutchinson smiled as he walked over toward his side of the car.

"So I guess it's going to be a long trip home?"

Dr. Hutchinson rolled up to the corner, parking beside the lawn of Sally's house. Sally was seated in the middle, against Clair but her legs had found their way onto Neaven's lap. The rodeo magazine was on the ground, in pieces, and Clair and Sally were laughing.

Dr. Hutchinson spoke, "Clair and Neaven, let me have a moment with Sally."

Both looked at each other and consented. Neaven filed out first, climbing across Sally and then pushing Clair out her side door. He then closed the door and began to unload Sally's things from the trunk. Dr. Hutchinson then shut the car off and turned to meet Sally face to face. "It's Wednesday, Sally, and as you know, I have to debrief you personally."

Sally nodded her head, understanding his responsibility as well as the protocol. "I'm going to give you today and tomorrow to relax, with your friends, and to settle. But I want you at my office Friday afternoon, after my regular office hours."

"Don't come to class on Friday because it might cause a disturbance. It will be better for you to come back to class on Monday." Dr. Hutchinson eyed her. "Any questions, Sally?"

Sally smiled. "Nope."

Dr. Hutchinson turned back around. "Ok, see you then."

Sally responded, "See you Friday, Dr. Hutchinson." She opened the door and exited the car. Neaven and Clair were standing against a tree, waiting for the two to finish. Sally walked over toward them as Dr. Hutchinson drove away. Sally and Clair immediately eyed each other. Clair spoke first. "Important stuff, Sally-girl?"

Sally looked her in the eye as she continued to approach. "He just wants me to come in on Friday, just to square things out."

"What?" Neaven comes in, timely, and both girls offer him their attention. He then continues as he stares directly at Sally. "You going to Mars next?"

Sally lets one go, right into his solar plexus. Neaven pretends it hurts more than it does. Clair reacts, "Hey, speaking of stomach, it's food time." She turns to Sally, "your mom's been cookin' all day."

"Hey Neaven," Sally turns toward him playfully, "food Neaven, food!"

She starts laughing, but Neaven gets the last laugh. "Remember Sally," he then points to her dramatically, "what happened last time you poked fun at me?" He pauses to make his next statement more profound, "You went hungry."

Clair tries to understand the camaraderie. Sally whispers into her ear, "The last time I gave him a hard time about his food, he ended up eating both of ours."

Neaven then catches up to them, fast, "And since now you're both in on it, seems like I'll be the only one eating here today."

Sally laughs. Clair's look is more realistic. "Yeah right."

Neaven falls back as they all enter Sally's home. The aroma of fresh baked ham with corn chowder and cornbread greet them.

Sally is walking down the hall. As she makes her way through the quad, she crosses the lawn to enter the south building. She is on her way to Dr. Hutchinson's office for her scheduled meeting; she is hurrying because she doesn't want to be late.

The last two days have been unexcitable. Nothing much except for just eating and sleeping, two things she had neglected while she was in France. Neaven had made his presence felt distinctly, mostly yesterday afternoon in fact. It was clear that he missed her. He vocalized it many times and even bought her a soft necklace with a locket. She loved it. It glimmered as she walked across the campus. She approached Dr. Hutchinson's door.

She knocked three times and then opened it when she noticed the door was already ajar.

"Come in," Dr. Hutchinson answered.

His words resounded off the door and made their way into Sally's ears. She entered and paused before she took another step. A bit of drama arose within her heart.

"Dr. Hutchinson, I just want to say, even before I go any further, that you have been a God-send to me."

Dr. Hutchinson received her words. He turned his chair and contemplated, trying to fully understand the message she was trying to convey. Sally continued as she slowly approached the chair. "About two months ago, I entered this room and stood in the same place that I am standing in right now." She then made her presence felt with her eyes, "I didn't have a clue as to how God wanted to use me, and I battled almost every day to try and understand what He wanted from me." She pauses, getting a little softer and allowing him in. "All I can say for certain right now Dr. Hutchinson is that you are truly the reason why I have such clarity. Two months ago I was scared to death to be in this office, but now, now I feel more comfortable in this office than anywhere else in the world."

Her words resounded so, and he could have echoed her sentiments. The first time Sally walked into his office, he didn't so much feel afraid, as he did constricted. She put him in an awkward place, where he felt anxious, so he fully understood what she meant. He thanked her as he asked her to sit down. He then began the conversation politely.

"How was your time with your friends, once you got back?"

Sally cracked, "It was great." Her smile brightened with every word. "I needed to rest; I didn't get much rest in France, but everyone has been patient with me, especially you, so it's been good."

Dr. Hutchinson nodded, fully understanding. He then began debriefing, "I have already talked to Cross and to Dr. Thiery in depth about what happened." He then eyed her like he already knew. "About the stand-up and about how my name popped up more than once." He then wrestled with his words, shifting forward. "And about how you brought clarity."

He then stopped, but looked away. He waited for longer than a moment. "Sally, I am to debrief you, but first, in order to remain professional, I need to tell you that I owe you a debt of gratitude."

Sally interrupts him, "You owe me nothing."

Dr. Hutchinson tries to break in, but Sally's eyes command him to relent. She continues. "Dr. Hutchinson, although I am not fully aware of the weight behind what happened in France, I need to tell you that I do understand what happened on my level, and you owe me nothing."

Dr. Hutchinson absorbed what Sally said, she continued again, "It was due you, probably overdue actually, and the fact that it came through me is substantiated by the fact that you were probably the major reason I was there in the first place."

Dr. Hutchinson continued to eye Sally but most of his spirit had softened at this point. Sally finished, "And Dr. Hutchinson, when they clapped in the end, I need to tell you that I accepted their applause on your behalf."

Dr. Hutchinson put his fingers together, then tapped them against one another like he was trying to measure the validity of the situation. He spoke from his heart. "Sally, you don't know the impact of what you did, and I do believe that you fully understand what happened, nevertheless." He looked at Sally with a stare she didn't possess. "I need to thank you regardless, and to help you see that only God could have inspired you to do what you did in France, but that the rest needed to come from your heart, and from your soul."

Sally did understand. When Cross had first mentioned Dr. Hutchinson's premature departure from The Cell, she distinctly remembered that she had dealt with the wrestle quite well, and that she had done a mature job actually. Perhaps, she thought, had she coveted The Cell's position too much for herself, then she would have never received that blessed train of thought, the train of thought that eventually brought the clarity to set Dr. Hutchinson free. She accepted his gratitude,

"I accept your thanks, Dr. Hutchinson."

Dr. Hutchinson wasn't finished. "They've invited me back, Sally."

Sally just sat there, not knowing what to say. She couldn't believe what she just heard. She tried to think about it, but even when she did, she still couldn't believe what she just heard.

"It goes deep, Sally, but basically, The Cell was looking for an agitator, or someone who could stir the ten-man think-tank pot so that issues or people wouldn't get stagnate. Well Sally ... " he then looks at her frankly, "... we presumed that agitator was you.

"But when you declined the seat, because you understood you weren't ready, we then understood it wasn't you." Sally just shakes her head, perceiving what God had planned all along. "So now The Cell was left with a vision for an agitator but with no agitator. So they talked about it, and they voted, and they agreed to offer me a six-month seat, probationary of course, for the tenth seat on the Primary Member list."

Sally just shook her head, and Dr. Hutchinson rationalized. "So I guess they believe I'm better now." He then smiles honestly, as if he doesn't know if that's true or not, and continues, "Well, I guess they believe I'm the best agitator they got."

Sally jumps in, "Whatever gave them that idea?"

"I don't know," Dr. Hutchinson smiles again and turns his head, "and I'm going to try and not think about it for awhile; I'm just going to get back to them at the end of the semester."

Sally knew that her probing questions would not be appreciated, so she decided not to ask them.

"That's great, Dr. Hutchinson, there is really nothing I can add except to say you deserve it."

"Thank you, Sally." He moves his weight in closer, as he possesses a different train of thought. "But Sally, about you." Sally then nods slowly, wondering herself.

"Sally, we don't need to venture too much into this, but I do want to mention two things specifically. Number one, you made the right choice. It was right for you to turn down the seat because your worst fears might have become realized." He eyes her with experience. "Number two, you still are who you are, and being young doesn't change that." He then pauses, giving her time to think it over. "Your time will come, Sally, but that time will arrive with wisdom and with sound counsel."

Sally nods her head.

"Sally, I need to ask you a question. How would you feel about sporadically going back to France, to kind of be on call, to assist The Cell with certain matters?" Dr. Hutchinson leaves it there; he then looks to Sally for a response.

Sally looks at him firmly. "I will go back, Dr. Hutchinson."

Dr. Hutchinson is thankful, but he doesn't let it show. "Dr. Hutchinson, when I left The Cell, I actually felt like I was making a mistake, but then, after I thought about it again, I believed these thoughts were just my emotions getting the better of me." Sally then paused for realness sake, "But then as I thought about it more, I felt I deeply understood that it was more than just emotion; it was duty actually. That I could actually make a difference there, and help both people and situations. That is the main reason I have been detached ever since I left France. Because I don't want to believe that the answer I gave was real, because I don't want to think about the possibility that, I might have walked away from where I really needed to be.

"I know, Dr. Hutchinson, I know that in some way shape or form I am supposed to be doing what I did back in France, but how to do that I do not know. But I humble myself before you, Dr. Hutchinson, because you are the reason I believe now. You breathed faith into me that I didn't have, the Words of God. I need you to help me so that I can end up where I'm supposed to, and so I can offer God the most glory that I am able to offer Him."

He was proud of Sally. To hear those mature words coming out of her mouth made all the efforts and struggles worthwhile. The fruits of his faith coming forth through Sally, sweet to the taste. Dr. Hutchinson bowed his head and returned it to its first position. He looked toward Sally, "Will you go back, Sally?" he asked again, just for clarity.

"I will," she resounded, a certainty ringing in her voice. Dr. Hutchinson continued. "I will inform them; they will work through me with regard to any of your appointments or acceptances." He then cautions her.

"Sally, nothing goes forward without first coming through me, understood?"

"Understood," Sally responds. There was no spirit in Sally to argue this. She wanted to glorify God, not herself, and she trusted that Dr. Hutchinson's decisions would be God fearing and accurately ordained. Sally continued,

"I was actually going to ask you if you would double as my spiritual guardian and counselor, to basically help me to make the right decisions, so that I don't mess everything up."

Dr. Hutchinson smiled. Sally then continued. "That's what you said about the women prophetesses in the Bible, that they dwelled, and waited for the work to come to them. That's what I want to do, but I want to wait behind you, behind your wisdom, because I feel safer with you in front of me, because I believe in your vision, and I trust your judgment."

"As long as you have that kind of attitude," Dr. Hutchinson affirmed, "then you will go forward with a clean conscience, and in doing this, you will give your gifts the best chance they will ever have at speaking wisdom and prophecy into peoples lives."

Sally nodded her head, and a smile made its way on to her face. Dr. Hutchinson just sat there, looking at this youthful girl who in just three short months, has turned his world upside down. He could have never seen it coming, even with Sally's gifts. When he first met her, he simply didn't want to witness to a nineteen-year-old girl spouting off. But what a surprise she turned out to be; instead of spouting off, she cleansed, and instead of spraying, she considered. Who would have thought that the struggles of this girl would eventually become the struggles to set him free. Dr. Hutchinson turned his head, and noticed that Sally was staring right at him.

"What?" Dr. Hutchinson asked.

"Nothing."

Dr. Hutchinson lifted himself up off his chair a bit, he then said it again. "What?"

Sally then smiled brightly. "Who would have ever thought that the struggles of some guy over thirty years ago would eventually become the answers to set me free?"

Dr. Hutchinson smiled. "Who would have ever thought."

Sally pulled her car near the side entrance of her house and parked on the street. She knew that if she parked in the driveway that the wind blowing from the east would cover her car with dust; there was an empty lot to the right of her house that was filled with dirt and debris. She slid over and grabbed her backpack as she exited the car.

Before leaving Dr. Hutchinson's office, he had given her some materials to investigate and study. They had nothing to do with The Cell or any kind of test; they were personal studies, from him actually, and he wanted Sally's mind and reason regarding what she saw. Sally made her way to the front of the house. He had told her not to consume herself with the studies, but she promised him she would get right on them. She didn't have a lot of studying to do right now anyway, so she decided to take some time to get back into the swing of things. As she opened her door, she heard the tone of her mother's voice ringing from the kitchen.

"Sally, honey, Clair said she'd be over at about 8:00 p.m., and that she would bring the movies and the popcorn."

"Ok, mom," Sally responded. She then paused as she made her way up the stairs. "Mom, I'm going to do some studying in my room until she comes; if Heaven calls, tell him I'll call him back around 8:00."

"Sure thing, hun."

Sally continues up the stairs and into her room. She sets down her backpack and wastes no time. She promptly takes out the questions that Dr. Hutchinson had given her. She makes her way over to her desk. Lavender just so happened to be hanging out right on top of her computer, eyeing her every move. Sally decided she would take Lavender downstairs when Clair arrived with the

movies. She then sat down and allowed her attention to focus on the questions, and as she read, she began to make some notes.

Hours passed and Sally was only halfway through the questions. She hadn't been able to answer any of the questions outright. She knew they would require some hard-nose investigating, as well as some forceful petitioning. The questions were brilliant actually. She had to remind herself not to disrespect these questions by trying to answer them too prematurely, or even too emotionally. As she continued to jot down notes, other questions, questions other than the ones she was working on, began to make their way into her mind.

At first, she did her best to try to make these questions go away, but they wouldn't disperse. They seemed captivating, full of promise, like grains of sand about to become pearls. She had no problem with pearls, but not now she thought. Now she would need to force herself to concentrate on the questions at hand. Twenty minutes passed before Sally put her pen down, stood up, and stretched. As soon as she began stretching, some of the earlier questions, the ones she tried to ignore, surfaced. She needed to cast these thoughts aside so that they would not interrupt her current reasoning. She walked over to the window, and trying to place her mind elsewhere, stared out into the night sky.

The moon was hard to miss. It was a crystal clear night. Hindering her view of the stars were a few straggling branches that made their way over from the neighbor's yard. It was awesome, she thought, staring at the same stars that people on the other side of the world stare at. Annoyed by the branches, Sally took a step to her left to try to get an unobstructed view. She then casually looked to the East, past the vacant lot beside her house and up through the hills. She then wondered if behind those hills lay the answers to the questions she had held so dear. She looked up at the stars, and then out past the night. Some of the stars, she imagined, were glimmering as if without a care. And then she had a thought.

I wonder what the weather's like in France?

THE END

(If you enjoyed Sally, please pass it on)

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Chapter 13

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Chapter 15

1. See Appendix, Reference # 2
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Chapter 16

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Chapter 17

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K. Barry Sharpless: "For his work on chirally catalysed oxidation reactions.

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