

Spirit Warrior Fighting the Realms of Darkness

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Christian Spiritual Inspirational

Preview

It was dark and quiet in the house when Rena awoke. Three enormous golden angels stood at the foot of her bed. Dressed in white, each carried a sword in a breast band around their shining bodies. The angel in the middle communicated from his mind to hers. The angel in the middle communicated with Rena from his mind, speaking no words aloud, or moving his mouth, yet she completely understood every word.

Seasons begin in Australia

Spring: 1st September

Summer: 1st December

Autumn: 1st March

Winter: 1st June

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Prologue

Some people don't believe in the devil or demons. I believe in both. We live in a physical world with the spirit realm around us. We are a body (our physical earthly outward appearance). A soul (our personality, the WHO we are) and a spirit (the part of us created in God's image to live forever.)

I have had many unexplained spiritual experiences, and I constructed this fictional story because of these.

I pray it makes you aware of the battle in the invisible to steal people away from their eternal life in Heaven. I also pray that you, the reader - are not one of them.

Crystal Mary Lindsey

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Ephesians 6:12 KJV

I dedicate this book.

To my four granddaughters

Kirra Leigh Freedom

Jessica Kim Elizabeth

Sharn Crystal Star

Serenity Grace Journey

"The Lords Treasures"

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: 1922

Chapter 2: Angelic Guides

Chapter 3: A New Home and Knowledge

Chapter 4: Divulging Some of Her Spiritual Insight

Chapter 5: Visiting the Spiritual Reality of Evil

**Chapter 6: Reminiscing About the Past and Healing
Rex**

Chapter 7: Saving a Child from Prostitution

Chapter 8: Sickening Evil Intent

Chapter 9: Dana's Angel Heart of Mercy

Chapter 10: NOT - Deceived by Evil Spirits

Chapter 11: Aiden's Attitude Confuses Rena

Chapter 12: A Huge Surprise

Chapter 13: Aware of Lurking Wickedness

Chapter 14: Denouncing the Spirit of Fear

Chapter 15: On Guard against Danger

Chapter 16: Many Surprises

Chapter 17: Good news

Chapter 18: Miracles and Blessings

Chapter 19: Love is in the Air.

Chapter 20: Revealing the Angels

Chapter 21: No Prayer Goes Unanswered,

Chapter 22: Much Happiness

Chapter 23: Sad Goodbyes and a Cantankerous Spirit

Chapter 24: Surprises

Chapter 25: Forever to Remain

Books by the Author

About the Author

Chapter 1

1922

On a dreary September night, dark and stormy, with flashes of lightning illuminating through gaps in her heavy bedroom curtains, Rena Charles lay huddled in her bed. Would it be safe to escape from this house tonight? She'd planned it carefully for days, all but the wild weather.

Her packed bag sat in the trunk of her grandmother's automobile, hidden away in the shed out back of the house. Tears came into Rena's eyes, remembering the love they'd shared on every occasion, and now there was to be no more of those happy times. In her illustration of words, her grandmother would have said she had gone to glory to reunite with the love of her life, Evan.

Even though she was only sixteen at the time of her granddad's death, Grandma Annie insisted Rena learn to drive their motorcar.

"You just never know what the future will bring Rena, and in an emergency, it's wise to know as much as you can." Grandma's blue eyes twinkled as she spoke those words; and, of course, she always knew best.

Rena smiled, remembering how fast she'd driven over the furrowed ruts on Grandma's land when first taking control of the wheel. They laughed each time they bounced up and down on the springy seats. She learned to operate that large car and to navigate it well under Grandma's sometimes hilarious instructions.

Since Grandma Annie's death last week and the funeral today, Rena kept the fact that she could drive a secret from her mother and stepfather. Few people owned a motorcar, and even fewer understood how to operate one. Not even her stepfather Colin knew how, so they'd arrived back home by a Pioneer touring bus.

"Be as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove in everything you do and say," Grandma always advised her. "And I mean that, Rena, especially when dealing with your mother," she emphasized seriously.

Rena wasn't quite sure why she hadn't told her mother about the automobile in the shed or that she could drive. Yet now she understood the wisdom of her grandmother's words. To protect Rena from Shirley's self-seeking exploitation, her grandmother spoke those words.

The last time Rena's mother Shirley visited, Rena was very young, likely around seven years old. Shirley hadn't remained long, only coming to whine for money. After receiving five pounds, she gave her mother a nasty look and flounced from the house. There were no words of goodbye or a kiss of endearment. No thank you for the money, no kiss to her child, nothing except her retreating figure.

Rena remembered staring after her with stunned hurt. She recalled her grandmother looking at her sadly before opening her arms wide as she welcomed the little girl into her embrace.

"It's a good thing that granddad wasn't at home today; he'd have taken his belt to her. He always told me I spoiled her. I see can now how right he was."

When grandfather fell off the roof three years later and died, Shirley hadn't come to the funeral. A telegram arrived, with the wording brief and to the point. "We never got along in life, so why should I waste my time and money on his death?"

Grandma stared at that piece of paper for ages before tearing it up and throwing it into the fire. "Come on little lady," she reached for Rena's hand. "We have a funeral to go to, and we want Granddad to have a wonderful sendoff, don't we?"

A circuit preacher spoke at the graveside, and the many who traveled miles to show respect sang hymns before walking over to the little community hall and the food prepared by the town ladies. Everyone loved Grandma Annie for her caring nature and generous spirit. She was the town healer with her herbs and ointments that treated everything, from headaches to food poisoning.

Her granddaughter felt incredibly proud to be her student learning those talents.

Grandma never talked about having faith - she felt it was something one kept to themselves. A lovely picture of Jesus on the sitting room wall said it all with the words beneath. 'Come unto me all who are laden and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.'

Another beautiful picture of Jesus with little children gathered around him hung on Rena's bedroom wall as a reminder that she was never alone. The inscription on that one read. 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.' These were strange words to Rena. However, she felt it disrespectful to ask their meaning, so she never did.

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With the storm raging overhead, it was hard to hear if the two, her mother Shirley and stepdad Colin, were now in bed. Since the burial and reading of the will that day, they had spent their time drinking themselves into a stupor. Music played on the radiogram with drunken

laughter, as if it was party time. They showed no display or remorse for the deceased family member.

When learning her daughter inherited all her mother's possessions, there were plenty of mean remarks directed about her deceased mother. What did Shirley expect? She'd deserted Rena and left her for her parents to rear soon after the birth. Her grandmother even named the little one Serenity Grace Charles. Serenity was an unusual name and one her grandmother read in a sweet story.

Granddad thought it was too fancy to get his tongue around and shortened it to Rena, which stuck. No one else at the country school had her name, which was unique to her.

No! Her mother, Shirley, was a person who only cared about herself. She didn't even show up when her parents learned about her brother, David, being killed in the war at Gallipoli in Turkey, leaving them to mourn his death alone. Rena's memory floated back to that time. Her grandfather almost suffered a heart attack from the

shock, and her grandmother cried so much, and then barely spoke for months.

Many memories lived stored in Rena's head, some beautiful and others dreadful, yet she supposed now, at nineteen years of age, that it was just life. It was always best to leave the bad where they belonged, in the past.

Rena's mind returned to the present, and out of her reminiscing when the light shining under her bedroom door went out. She held her breath, hoping there'd be no repeat of last night when HE her stepfather, wandered into her room. Thankfully, Rex, her big German shepherd, began sleeping on the floor nearby. He was likely fearful she'd disappear as Grandma had. Being an excellent guard dog, he growled, making Colin retreat out of her room while swearing under his breath.

Animals sensed evil people, and Rex didn't like the two new noisy visitors who were invading his domain.

With the light turned off, Rena watched her door, pretending to be asleep. The knob turned silently, and

the door slowly opened. She knew Colin couldn't see her eyes peeping through slightly open lids, yet she watched his hazy body sneaking on tiptoes into her room.

Where was Rex? At the thought of his name, the dog growled and pounced, throwing Colin off balance and onto his back on the floor.

Rena sat up in bed. "What are you doing here, Colin?" she spoke aloud, pretending to have jumped awake with the noise.

"Nothing," he mumbled, "got mixed up with the rooms." He was rubbing his arm where Rex had grabbed him. "Lucky that mutt didn't cause damage, or I'd bury him tomorrow. "Slurred words of warning spoken as he turned and retreated out of her room.

Rena got his message loud and clear. It wasn't safe for either Rex or her in this house. Since she wasn't twenty-one, she couldn't evict them. But she could disappear, and so could her pet. How long was she to wait? She

guessed two hours should do it; by then, both unwanted visitors would be snoring loudly.

All of her life Rena had seen into the spirit world. It wasn't something that happened at will; it just happened at unknown moments. But never frightened her, as Grandma once explained that it was a gift that some received from God. She named it the Discernment of Spirits, saying that Rena was very special to possess it.

"Never waste such a treasure, Rena, and don't try to turn it into something to your advantage. When you are older, we will talk more about this." Yet their talk never eventuated because Grandma left and went to heaven before it could.

Chapter 2

Angelic Guides

Now, Rena pondered about seeing the unworldly spiritual sight of Colin's presence entering her room. His thick body shone in the dark with a fierce red light, while his face betrayed the truly vile, vindictive person he was. Rena had sensed that he was an evil man, and seeing his foul spirit proved to her she was right. He was not someone she wanted anywhere near her.

Much later, with the drumming down of heavy rain, Rena crept out of bed. Fully dressed beneath the covers, her pillows got stuffed beneath them, resembling a figure in steadfast asleep.

Those lovely pictures of Jesus were going with her, and so was her bodyguard, Rex. Wearing boots, a raincoat, and taking her umbrella, she was ready to leave. She let herself carefully out of the back door.

Thankful now for the continuous sound of the rain, she opened the old shed door to expose the automobile. Settling herself and Rex and all else inside, she drove out, running back to close and bolt the door after her. By daylight, she would be long gone, and the rain would have washed away any evidence of how.

Grandma left her well provided for, as a healer with herbs and saving carefully over the years; she showed Rena the hiding place of her money – for if ever it was needed.

"I just feel I need to do this for you, my sweet girl." Grandma led the way to the rear of the automobile shed. An old tub Granddad once used to grow his tobacco was the hiding place. Reaching between the shed and tub, she pulled out a rusty old tin.

"Your grandfather and I have kept this here for years; it's our emergency money. We have never taken much from it, and with my herb business doing so well, there is a nice nest egg if ever it's needed for a rainy day."

As though it was yesterday, Rena could see Grandma's firm tanned hand opening the tin and lifting out a pile of paper money in her mind. Rena couldn't believe her eyes; indeed, there were hundreds of pounds, all in five, ten, and twenty-pound notes.

"Why are you showing me this, Grandma? Why do I need to know?"

Grandma smiled knowingly and considered before answering. "Life can be strange, Rena, and I want you to know that, if need be, this is yours." Closing the tin and returning it to its hiding place, her grandmother hugged her close, standing silently and contemplating without a word. Then, taking hold of Rena's hand, she began walking back to the house.

"Now... let's have a nice cup of tea and some of that rhubarb pie."

Rena almost felt her grandma's presence as she collected the box before heading off in the rain that night. Knowing it unsafe to keep money in one place, she'd carefully separated the bundle into three before

leaving. She put some in her underwear, some in a secret pocket inside her corset, and the rest in a broken part of Rex's seat.

Unlike her grandparents, Rena believed in the safety of banks and knew most of this was for a deposit when she arrived at her destination.

Her mind lingered on all she had heard and read about Kalgoorlie's bustling outback gold town. It was a long way off, but where she felt led to be.

"What do you think, Rex?" she spoke out loud now. "Will we make it?"

The rain never slowed for a moment. Trying to see and keep on track soon became hazardous. The wheels slid all over the road as solid dirt disappeared into muddy sludge

Miles from the tarred highway, Rena finally gave in to her tears. Would the motorcar get bogged and stranded on this lonely road? No one with sense ever drive dirt roads in weather like this, and here she was in the dark with no way to navigate safely.

"Help me, please help me," she cried. To whom she did not know. Perhaps it was to Jesus from the pictures and the same one who loved her in Sunday school.

Would he hear? With tears running down her face, she drove at a crawl, feeling alone and fearful.

A flash of what she thought was lightning lit up her vehicle and the road in front. With quick reflexes, her foot automatically pressed the brake.

Illuminated by light and staring at her through the windscreen stood an enormous angel. Rena felt no fear at the stunning sight.

To no longer be alone on this deserted road, and with this colossal angel in front of her vehicle, Rena felt safer. She noticed two other angels standing on either side of her motor. "Thank you, Jesus."

Rena's heart calmed its rapid beat as the feeling of protection penetrated. She calmly understood, continuing to drive.

The miles passed with the front angel lighting up the road well ahead with his guidance. On either side of the vehicle, those other angels held her motor car steady on the slippery surface.

With a heartfelt sigh of relief - the solid bitumen road came into view. Rena smiled, knowing she could safely continue on her way. With this knowledge, it was no surprise to see her angels fade from view. She felt they still accompanied her, but now as invisible spirits she no longer needed to physically see.

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With relief, after four days on the road and sleeping in strange hotels, Rena finally drove into the gold town of Kalgoorlie.

It was a surprise to see flocks of people in this developed municipality, and it was more fantastic than she had imagined.

Where she came from, everyone wore working clothes, yet seen here many women dressed in the latest fashion, displaying beautiful hats and gowns. The

gentlemen accompanying them wore suits. It was a strange mixture of working-class men carrying heavy loads and others jostling horse-drawn wagons while the rich paraded in their finery.

Some of the latest fancy automobiles lined the street with the occasional horse or buggy. Some people turned to look at her drive-by, but mostly they kept busy with their concerns. Mothers pushed prams along the path in front of shops; and women strolled with umbrellas against the blistering sun.

Rena felt tired, hungry, and dirty. She wanted to eat and get into a hot bath, and Rex needed food. Parking outside the Grand Hotel and leaving the motor windows down for Rex, she walked along the footpath and into the hotel reception.

Many people vainly crowded the entry, attempting to get service. A man with a bushy mustache loudly announced there were no more vacancies for the night. Voices rose in angry annoyance. Many had waited for ages before hearing the bad news. Rena was

unprepared to learn that she, too, would be bed-less.

"What will I do now?"

One little lady standing to the side and watching everyone approached Rena to speak in a low voice. "I have a room to rent at my home if you are looking for accommodation. I only like to take in single respectable ladies. You are by yourself, aren't you, Miss?"

"Yes, I am, but I have a dog. Would he be welcome as well?"

This lady thought for a moment. "I don't have my little dog any longer. If you take care of him, I suppose it will be fine. The name is Baker, Mrs. Eunice Baker. I'm a widow, and that's why I only want a single lady sharing with me."

Rena looked into kind eyes, taking in Mrs. Baker's appearance. She wore a white blouse buttoned to the throat with a cameo brooch nestled in frilly white lace. Her navy skirt was clean, yet faded. A small hat perched on her head of white hair was also navy, with a little bird

sitting on top. Rena almost laughed, as it looked comical.

The lady stood patiently, waiting for an answer. Rena quickly made up her mind; she felt she could look for something else tomorrow if it weren't suitable.

"Thank you, Mrs. Baker. I will accept your offer. Will there be just the two of us, plus Rex?"

"Rex?" the lady stiffened.

"Rex is my dog," Rena explained, "and I am Rena Grace Charles, starving and tired after a long journey." She confessed, "I'm simply dying for a hot cup of tea. Is there somewhere to find that around here?"

"Of course, my dear, there's a little tea shop just a few doors up. Let's both go. I could do with some refreshments myself."

Seated waiting for their tea and sandwiches, Mrs. Baker informed Rena about the cost of her lodgings with meals.

"I may not always prepare a meal, but you can cook for yourself when I'm not at home. There will be plenty of food to choose from, as my cupboards are never bare."

There was much to talk about, with Mrs. Baker filling her in on the town news. After finishing the refreshments, Rena gathered one sandwich to give Rex, then followed her new landlady outside.

"This is my buggy Rena, and where is your motor?" She looked around, her eyes searching.

"It's that green one a few down." Rena nodded her head in the direction. "I can follow slowly behind you if that's okay?"

Without an answer, only a nod, Mrs. Baker walked quickly off, so Rena assumed it was.

Chapter 3

A New Home and Knowledge

Waking up in the morning after a good night's sleep, Rena languished in the comfortable bed. After the delicious stew last night with leftovers for Rex, she decided she would stay for a while. A lot needed doing, and having a pleasant home base would help.

Looking around the bedroom from the large window with frilly curtains, the flowery wallpaper, and the full-length stand-up mirror, she felt she couldn't get better. Her window looked out on an extensive field with a cow and horse munching grass. It was a peaceful scene and one she knew she'd never be weary of seeing.

Something fluttered across her vision; what did she see? Like her image of the angels the other night! Had she been hallucinating from tiredness? Oh well! She shook her head with closed eyes. Opening them, she looked again but saw nothing and laughed at herself. *'Grandma always said I had a vivid imagination!'*

Standing dressed in front of the full-length mirror, Rena marveled as it was something she'd always wanted, yet had never owned. She noted her long golden hair and large green eyes fringed with naturally dark lashes. These came inherited from Granddad Evan. High cheekbones and full lips with good teeth were her mother's contributions. Her height of five feet four was also from her mother. Rena certainly hoped her nature wasn't similar, because her mother was a selfish person.

Having brought only two dresses with her that looked out of date for this town, Rena slipped the dark blue over her head. It would have to do, and she'd see about buying a few new things. Mrs. Baker could advise her where to find the best shops.

Noise from the kitchen told her it was time for breakfast, so hurriedly making the bed, she and Rex wandered from her room. Her landlady placed two heaped plates containing eggs, sausage, and fried potatoes onto the table as a clock chimed eight. Turning her head, Mrs. Baker smiled a welcome as she placed the teapot down within reach of them both.

"Did you sleep well?" The kind lady scrutinized Rena's face for weariness.

"Yes, I did, thank you. After that refreshing long soak in the bath, it was so peaceful! I had to pull myself out of the water before I nodded off. My grandma once told me that people had drowned by falling asleep in the tub. Remembering that was a shock, so I needed to get out and hurry off to bed. I don't recall falling asleep. But a noisy crow woke me up this morning." She laughed, adding, "I opened my eyes and wondered where I was."

"Well, my son Aiden will be pleased if you like your room. He gets full credit for how it looks, so I'm glad you like it. He papered the walls instead of painting them."

"Oh, yes, I love the room! But I thought it would be just us two ladies living here. So, you have a son?"

Eunice Baker stirred milk and sugar into her hot tea.

"Aiden comes home for a few days every two weeks. Otherwise, he lives out at the huge mine on the other side of town." She sipped her tea before replacing her cup on the saucer.

"It was his idea for me to have a lady room-boarder, saying it would be a pleasant companion. He also suggested finding one from the people who tried to get a room at the hotel." She smiled. "That's how I found and picked you; I could tell you are genuine."

Rena felt pleased to have given a good first impression, and she hugged the knowledge to herself. She might take her landlady into her confidence and divulge some about her background, but not yet. Not until she got her bearings and felt comfortable about sharing. There was no hurry, and since this town was to be her permanent home, there was all the time in the world.

Helping to clear up and wash the dishes, Rena inquired about where to buy some new clothes. She needed dresses, shoes, trousers, work boots, and a shirt to wear in the garden while tending to her herbs. For dresses, Mrs. Baker suggested she visit the lady two doors down.

"She is a dressmaker and a good one; then, you won't see someone else wearing the same outfit as yourself."

She eyed Rena all over. "You have a lovely figure and could wear any color with your hair. Yes, go see Mavis Brown and look over her patterns. She'll show you some of her work and inform you of the length of material needed for each style."

When Rena finished cleaning up, she took the suggestion and, leaving Rex at her new home, walked the distance to the dressmaker. On the picket fence, a sign erected read 'Dressmaking by Design (to accentuate your figure) - Mavis E. Brown.'

A lady sweeping her front porch looked up at Rena and smiled a welcome. Her stylist frock with its drop waist hung to calf-length, not that shorter style, that was fast becoming popular. It was the same nut-brown as her hair. Rena could see straight away that this lady knew her trade well.

As she insisted on being called, Mavis was a bubbly personality who would draw people to her like a moth to a flame. Rena took to her instantly as the two introduced each other. A large sunny front room awaited her, with framed photos adorning the walls.

The pictures were otherworldly, catching Rena's attention and drawing her in for a closer look.

"Ah, those were my growing years and learning days," Mavis seemed delighted that she noticed. "Let me give you a quick tour."

Mavis pointed to each picture in turn, "This is where I developed a love of sewing in the couturiers of Paris. Ah Paree` the city of love, full of excitement, delightful food, fun, dancing, arts, and fashion." Her exuberance was catching as Rena looked at what the photo lenses captured. Models dressed in elegant gowns, flapper dresses just above the knees, gorgeous beaded accessories, and hairstyles looked wild and different. Rena stood staring – flabbergasted at the elaborate sight.

"Look at this; it's my favorite." Mavis pulled Rena across the room to the most prominent photo of all. "Do you know who this is?" At the shake of Rena's head, Mavis' hand went to her open mouth in surprise.

"You do not know, Madame Coco Chanel? Why she is the perfect designer of all time? People all over Europe wear her fashions.

With her short bob haircut, Rena looked at this modern woman in the frame. Subconsciously, her hand touched her own long tresses -, wondering....

"Oh no, my dear, don't even think of cutting your hair, even though I am sure it would suit you. Your beautiful hair is your shining glory and suits you just as it is. Be a standout in the crowd, lovely girl, not just another face."

Rena loved Mavis's persuasive manner of getting her opinion across without making her feel naïve and old-fashioned.

"Why did you leave Paris, Mavis? You seem to have been happy there. What caused you to leave?"

Mavis' face expressed sadness for the first time since their meeting. "It's a long story. One day I might tell you, but for now, let's talk about what you want me to make for you."

• • • •

Rena felt as if she walked on air when walking back to her new dwelling. Life looked up and her confidence was increasing tenfold after being in the presence of such an enthusiastic, vibrant personality.

Mrs. Baker looked up from her embroidery as Rena walked through the front door.

"Your advice about seeing Mavis was correct. I have picked four designs, two town dresses and two for special occasions. My _ that lady is brilliant!"

Mrs. Baker gave a hearty laugh. "That she is. "We certainly feel blessed to have her in our town, and living so close is a bonus," Mrs. Baker said, giving a hearty laugh. Rex looked up at the two women from his position on the floor and then relaxed his head down again. He was a typical male, Rena thought to herself. As with all men, he seemed bored with their feminine chatter.

• • • •

By the end of her second week, Rena was becoming familiar with the area and the people. She had discovered the Apothecary in town and must have concerned the owner by standing and staring at all of his medicinal bottles. As he approached her, she swiveled and walked away, knowing he would disagree with her by practicing and taking away any of his customers.

During the night, disturbing dreams often woke her from sleep. Rex would rise from his floor blanket and stand looking in an area of the room, wagging his tail as though welcoming a friendly visitor. Rena saw nothing and wondered what it was. These strange happenings were disturbing. Perhaps going to church would shed light on what the phenomenon might be, because admittedly it seemed nothing from the physical world.

Rena wasn't too sure about the strength of her faith, never having committed herself as others spoke of doing. What did they achieve exactly? Rena was in the dark about such talk and felt too self-conscious to inquire about what it all meant.

The church she attended each week with Mrs. Baker, who she now called Eunice, announced they were to have a study on, 'Why Jesus!'

It was to run one evening a week for four weeks. The Pastor made it sound fascinating, especially when he said that questions on that night would be welcome. Rena knew who would likely ask the most _ her! She was bursting for knowledge about God's Word and Jesus, plus the spiritual unknown.

Chapter 4

Divulging Some of Her Spiritual Insight

Rena went and purchased a Holy Bible _ A Revised Version of the King James, which possessed the modern-day language. To her, it was much easier to read and understand than some she had looked at in church. She felt she was never alone when reading and often looked up and around the room because of her feelings of being watched.

Then she read Proverbs 15:3, "The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good." So, she knew she was right and was continually kept within sight of God's presence.

John 4:24 declared, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

That was something to think about - especially as she knew she was also a spirit, clothed in a body for only a short time while on earth. She closed her eyes and prayed. "Lord, there is much to understand, which makes me wonder. I know I am a spirit, just as you are,

and I am created in your image. Please help me live in the celestial, so that I am close to you, and also use me for your glory. Amen."

That night at the dinner table, Rena confided in Eunice and began telling her about some of her spiritual experiences since childhood.

"I used to be afraid of these things. However, my grandma, being clever, reassured me I was gifted and advised me not to be fearful. Even so, I sometimes kept a lamp burning on a black night, "she laughed self consciously

Eunice listened with an attentive ear. Finally, she spoke.

"I have never had such experiences, but I have heard of others who have, God says, to wait upon him, and he will renew our strength. Since he said this, he will do it. Yes, he uses people in different ways and gives each of us different special gifts!"

Rena nodded, "well, whatever he wants. I am ready." No sooner were the words out of her mouth than a tremendous shining light lit up the room. Rex stood up,

wagging his tail. Eunice was stunned and stared with her mouth open and one hand over her heart. A great sense of security filled the room with an aura of profound love. Rena took a deep breath, exhilarated by her newfound strength. The light was plainly visible for a short time. Then it disappeared and faded back to nothing.

"Oh, my word Rena, is that what you were speaking about?" Eunice's eyes were huge as she looked at the younger woman.

"Yes, Eunice, and more because I have also seen angels." Rena was glad to share with her new believing friend and for Eunice to have witnessed the ethereal experience.

It was almost eight o'clock when they finally got up to wash their dishes.

A loud knock sounded at the front door; before it swung open to reveal a tall man walk in. He eyed Rena standing at the sink with soap studs up both arms, before reaching out to hug Eunice.

"How's the best mother in the world?" he kissed the top of her head. "And is this your new lodger? He turned with hand outstretched to shake Rena's.

She quickly wiped herself free from the water and shook his, nodding. "I'm Rena." She looked shyly into his incredible eyes before turning back to his mother.

"Eunice, I'll finish here; there's not much to do. You catch up with your son. "

"I won't say no, dear." She turned to her son with a question look. "Aiden, how about I make you a cup of something, whatever you want, and a piece of Rena's strawberry tart?"

"Sounds great; I think I'd like coffee. It's good to be home. I'll be here for five days this time, so I can get some jobs done for you."

Rena retired to her bedroom earlier than usual to give them time alone. The fresh breeze coming through her bedroom window soon had her drift off to sleep.

It was dark and quiet in the house when something awoke Rena. Three mighty golden angels stood at the foot of her bed. Dressed in white, each carried a sword in a breast band around their shining bodies. The angel in the middle communicated from his mind to hers. Rena understood every word, even though the angel in the middle didn't speak aloud or move his mouth.

"My name is Avigdor; it means the Lord's Protector. These two with me are my helpers, Akim and Ariel." He looked from one spirit form to the other, acknowledging their presence.

"I am the leader and will do most of the communicating. Father God has sent us to instruct you on your work for him. We will go everywhere with you, helping and teaching you to overcome all encountered evil."

They spoke every word to her in the heavenly language, not English, yet she understood. She also remembered hearing somewhere that demons did not know this language, so it was an extra strength against them.

"Come," Avigdor motioned to her to stand. "We'll take you on a journey to our world tonight, the one beyond this one. It will be a unique experience from what you know, and you will behold the places of good and evil. There is no fear because the holy armor of God is your protection."

As he spoke, a breastplate materialized to cover her chest, and a thick belt appeared around her waist. As he spoke, a helmet materialized on her head and golden boots adorned her feet. Through the air spun a sword that secured itself into her hand. Able to see her image in the full-length mirror, she now glowed like an angel.

Could that be her? Yes! It was honestly her, the one created in God's spiritual image and one that her human eyes usually couldn't see.

"Take your shield to guard you against the flaming darts. Be ever mindful if attacked." Avigdor handed her the shield; it was enormous, big enough to cover her yet light in weight, and not cumbersome. As she held it, she could see straight through. Yet when Avigdor held it, it made him invisible.

Of course! She pondered - like her armor, this was spiritual and more powerful than any earthly covering or weapon.

In the time since her heavenly visitor's appearance, Rex remained sleeping. Glancing down at him resting peacefully, Rena wondered why he didn't wake up. He was a guard dog and liked to be a part of everything.

With authority, the speaker commanded. "He is to sleep and remain here."

The angels raised their arms to spiral upwards, through the roof and into the open star-filled sky. Astonishingly, Rena found she could fly along beside them.

Out of the earth's firmament covering and into the opulent atmospheric omission, she soon disappeared, leaving land far behind. Rena propelled faster than light up into an ambiance of strange sights, on into the distance that continued forever. It all seemed inconceivable, traveling in unison, with stars flashing, and yet - when looking to the horizon; it was still endless.

No words could adequately express what she saw or felt - it was puzzling, beyond rational thinking.

They traveled until the hum of music surrounded them. The sound became louder as a golden metropolis suspended majestically and floating on a sea of nothingness came into view.

Avigdor looked over at her and pointed.

His thought talk was reaching audibly, "this is our first destination, the Lord's Kingdom."

Giant pearls sat as gates in the longwall they approached.

Instead of entering by one gateway, they continued into the realm by flying over the high, wide, entire wall.

Colors more brilliant and abundant than anything seen on earth captured her awareness. The buildings constructed in different styles and sizes were plentiful, shining like golden glass in the bright yet sunless realm.

"There is no sun?" she questioned her leader, puzzled.
"Neither moon," he answered. "The light of the Lord radiates everywhere here and it is all that's needed."

He watched her as they flew down to land on a golden street. Rena breathed in the perfume of brilliantly colored flowers, growing as far as the eye could see.

Animals that she had never thought could be friends were wandering together. A lion, tiger, buffalo, and some goats, meandering down to drink from a river flowing like gold.

Peace flowed, filling Rena's being with unsurpassable love. This was heaven was an eternal home, never left because it portrayed perfection in every detail.

"This is Paradise, the third Heaven, where our God lives." Her angel announced.

"Will I see him?" Rena hoped so.

"No, you will only see him after your earthly life ends and you return for eternity."

Avigdor touched her arm, "we are to go. You need to see the dark cavern, the place where evil resides. Unless you see it yourself, you will never understand the horror awaiting those who would deny the Lord."

As they arose and flew away from the Lord's Kingdom incredibly, it took no time to travel down into the earth's depths. Darkness surrounded like a shroud so that nothing was visible. Shrill screams of torment sounded, filling the air. This place echoed a warning of unimaginable horror. Rena's throat gagged, wanting to vomit from the putrid smell. Where were they, and why was vision restrained? Avigdor waved his arm - setting a glow of light radiating all around. Then, Rena became aware of Akim on the opposite side of her to Avigdor, with Ariel guarding her back, shielding her for protection.

Chapter 5

Visiting the Spiritual Reality of Evil

A red-hot smoldering arm reached out, almost touching as its heat radiated. Terror rose within Rena's chest. Where was the rest of the body? She wondered.

Next, she saw the most horrific sight ever, a head and torso floating in the air. Its flesh burned and falling apart like overcooked meat, eyes staring from a distorted skull and the mouth open in a silent scream of anguish.

At first, this thing looked at her with soulful eyes, mouthing, "help me." Shock hit Rena! The mouth changed to a cruel leer. Mocking streams of blasphemy gushed forth, revealing brown, decayed teeth. The smell of rotting meat and smoke invaded her nostrils.

The horror of this place, the darkness, smell, and terrible awareness of loss, hopelessness, desolation, and disgust was not where she wanted to be.

Closing her eyes, she willed herself away, and on opening them, she and her companions were returning to the earth.

"Why don't people understand they must change their evil ways, Avigdor? They are told about being separated from God, yet won't believe or change. It's a horrible, repulsive place to be."

"They choose to live their brief lives on earth, lying, stealing, hurting others, fornicating, committing adultery, and every other evil under the sun. They choose to live their brief lives on earth, lying, stealing, hurting others, fornicating, committing adultery, and every other evil under the sun. It is Satan's deceit to own them."

His face shadowed sadness. "You will see many aspects of evil, yet you will also be able to do much good and turn people around for the better."

"I don't like that place, Avigdor!"

"Yes, I understand, but now you know the consequence for those who choose evil over good. It is a valuable

lesson because you will fight the good fight to help the lost with more determination."

On reaching back into Rena's bedroom, Avigdor touched her forehead with his hand. "I have now sealed you as a warrior, and you will be ready when called to intervene." You are never alone as we will always be close - whether or not you can see us."

He smiled at her, looking at Rex, who was still sleeping. Then, in the same way, these angelic beings came. They now vanished from sight.

• • • •

Should Rena speak to Eunice about this experience? After all, it was less convincing than seeing the supernatural light she witnessed. From talking to the ladies in their church, Rena wasn't sure if Eunice would believe in going into spiritual warfare against the demons of darkness. Perhaps it is best to say nothing for now and just wait to see.

She slept well, feeling peaceful and waking refreshed with Rex's wet nose on her cheek. He whimpered, walking to her closed door and back again.

"You want to go outside, don't you, boy? I'm sorry, I'll take you now before I get dressed. Come on." Collecting her dressing gown off the peg, she wrapped it around before shoving her feet into slippers and heading out.

With long, undressed hair hanging down to her waist, Rena walked to the back door to let Rex out.

Sighting Rena roaming back to her bedroom, Eunice motioned for her to enter the kitchen.

"I've just made a fresh pot of tea. How about having one with me before I make breakfast, and Aiden comes looking for food?"

"Oh goodness, I forgot about there being a man around the house. I'll dress and come back." Rena turned to hurry off to the sanctity of her room.

"Oh no, you don't!" Eunice took hold of her arm. "He is just my son, and he has seen me looking disheveled plenty of times so that he won't mind you." She pulled out a chair and waited for Rena to sit before placing a cup in front of her.

"So, what are your plans for today, Rena?"

Before Rena could answer, Aiden entered and took a seat, pouring himself a strong cup of tea before looking up at her. When he did, his look turned into a stare as he took in the fresh glow of her skin, the crowning glory of her hair, and those beautiful, dark-fringed green eyes. Last, his gaze rested on her full lips, wondering how it would feel to kiss them.

Rena was fully aware of the electrical tension between them, but if Eunice was, she didn't show it. Instead, she asked. "Did you sleep well, Aiden? I didn't hear you tossing in your bed, so you must have." She smiled adoringly at him, seeing her boy, not the man he'd become.

Finishing her tea, Rena got up. "Thank you, Eunice. I enjoyed that; I'll get dressed and tidy my room, if you don't mind." She carried her cup to the sink while Aiden's eyes followed her every move. His mother nodded in agreement, beginning to make their breakfast.

When Rena reappeared, she dressed in pants, a shirt, and boots. "I am thinking of buying my own home," she addressed mother and son. "Do you know of any for sale? It doesn't have to be new or wonderful, but I need a yard to grow my herbs, and I'm keen to get started."

"Oh, I will not lose you so soon when I am enjoying your company." Eunice looked perplexed. Rena suddenly felt her new friends' despair, yet she needed to do as taught by her grandmother. To help people as a herbalist, plus to give her an income.

"I have plenty of land here for you to begin a garden and at no extra rent," Eunice broke into her thought. "We would love it, wouldn't we, Aiden," she looked at him for support. "Why I could help and learn from you, Rena," she eagerly awaited.

"There's more to it than that, Eunice," Rena sat down at the table to explain while mother and son began to lay out the food.

After saying grace, Rena ate slowly while contemplating what to say, and she knew it was best to be straightforward.

"I appreciate your offer, really, I do, but I will need room to dry my herbs, prepare them, store them in bottles and jars on shelves, and serve customers. There is no extra room here inside." She glanced up at Eunice, unsure what effect her words would have.

Aiden spoke, surprising her with what sounded like a splendid solution.

"I think I know exactly how to help you." He looked at his mother. "Dad's big old shed on the end of the back verandah has stood vacant ever since he went, mother!"

Eunice's eyes sparkled. "Of course. Why didn't I think of that? It's just perfect. There are long benches and shelves, plus a lot of room to move around. All it needs is a cleanup and a coat of paint." Her enthusiasm bubbled over, seeing in her mind's eye that she'd come to life again and be able to help.

"Settle down, Mother," Aiden took control. "It's not for us to coerce Rena into something she might not be happy about."

The smile faded from his mother's face. "Think about it, Rena; I don't like the thought of you living alone in this boisterous town even though you have Rex." She placed her hand reassuringly over Rena's, the one that rested on the table. "Let's eat our meal."

Rena ate while in deep thought and silent prayer. *'What do you think, Lord? I feel it is a good idea, and I'd have company and a helper. Lord, I put it to you by throwing out the fleece on this request. If you want it to be, then Aiden will ask me for an answer to it before tonight. Thank you, Lord, for your love and care, amen.'*

Feeling lighter, Rena visited the Hardware Merchant to see what stock of jars they carried. She'd left her grandmothers behind for her safety, so she'd need at least two dozen, plus small pots to place salve in and paper bags to sell small quantities of herbs. She got excited.

Many people stared as Rena climbed out of her automobile in what they likely considered men's clothing. With head held high and ignoring their astonished looks, Rena marched into the store.

It was huge and carried everything from building material to gardening tools and kitchen equipment in a uniquely designed section. While smiling, Rena could see a woman's touch at work in the setting, which caught her eye, displaying everything in the correct order.

"Hello, may I be of service," a rosy-cheeked middle-aged woman approached with a set of scales in her hands.

"I'd forgotten I'd need small weighing scales," Rena answered. "Do you have smaller ones than those?"

"Of course, dear, every miner needs scales, and in a mining town, we must have them available. Come to the counter, and I'll show you the two types we carry."

She came back displaying two, a Salter and a Columbia scale. Rena fancied the green tin salter with its removable pan resting on top.

"My favorite also," the woman beamed. "My name is Gwen, by the way, and yours is?" she queried.

"Hello, Gwen. It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Rena, short for Serenity, and I'm relatively new in town."

"What an unusual name. I am pleased to meet you, Rena, and would you or your husband be mining for gold?"

"I have no husband and there is no mining, Gwen. I am a herbalist-healer, and I plan to set up a business in your town."

Gwen beamed. "So, you're here to give our old Mr. Smith the chemist a run for his money, hey?" She laughed again. "He's a penny-pinching old skinflint and over-charges on everything, but he's all we've got. I think if you are good, your business will thrive."

Chapter 6

Reminiscing and Healing Rex

Rena suspected Gwen to be a town gossip, so she needed to be careful with her information. Changing the subject, she requested her other needs. Gwen prodded her occasionally, trying to learn more, but Rena remained evasive. Finalizing her purchases, it was a relief to escape from the other woman's scrutiny. Leading the way to her vehicle, she opened the trunk for the two store laborers to load in her new prized possessions.

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Sunday morning arrived with the screeching of white cockatoos flying overhead. The sun shone brightly through Rena's window, hopefully ushering in a perfect day. Rex lay undisturbed, and Rena rejoiced in her acceptance of the back shed offer. She reflected on Aiden approaching her while sitting outside the evening before.

"So, what do you think, Rena? Will you stay on here and keep mother company?" She smiled before answering. "I put in a request to God that if I stayed, you would ask me this question by tonight. So, it seems I am Aiden if you are happy for me to do so."

Aiden had little to say except, "Well, we can get to fixing up the room you need on Monday if you like. I'm sure it won't take long to make it viable."

Rena smiled while thinking of this and couldn't be happier. Belonging to God meant knowing he never slept and always had her best interests at heart.

"Come on, Rex, time to go see what the day's about."

Her pet didn't seem interested but rested his head back down on his bed. "What's the matter, boy?" His nose was hot instead of fresh and wet.

"I believe you have a sick tummy. Come on, stand up." She wanted to see if he fell or whether his legs cooperated with what she asked, and they did.

"You are very fortunate, Rex, because Eunice has a large Aloe Vera plant outside. You won't like the taste, but it will make you go to the bathroom and fix your pain."

Dressing with haste, Rena collected a knife from the kitchen. She was back squashing the Aloe stiff leaves on the kitchen workbench when Eunice entered— she explained what she was doing and why she continued until there was enough juice. Rena had to be careful to give just enough, but not too much. Mixing some honey in also, she took it outside to give to her pet.

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The church service was stimulating, with a new pastor preaching a different sermon about anointing the sick with oil and praying for healing. "Healing depends on God," he informed. "Some heal immediately, while with others, it may take time, and some don't get healed. But remember, it is all in God's hands, as he knows best."

Pastor Greg then told of a woman who pleaded with God repeatedly for her teenage son's healing. "Yes, he received healing."

Pastor spoke again after a pause, "but that young man became a murderer." He stopped and regarded the people listening. "So, do you think it was for the best of God to heal that boy?" Everyone shook their heads. NO! "I believe you are all right," he finished his sermon.

The last hymn, ' Be Thou My Vision,' imparted a solid message to Rena as she sang.

These words advised her to surrender control to God.

Today was a church lunch-sharing day. Held once a month, it was Rena's first. Together, she and Eunice prepared food yesterday. A platter of sliced corned beef, deviled eggs, and little savory lentil cakes. Nine large tomatoes, with a sharp knife, got included for slicing. Everyone brought tin plates and cutlery with a couple of extras in case of visitors.

Rena enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere; it was her first experience of enjoying fellowship with church folks. There was plenty of laughter all around. A visitor named Dana Levi joined their table with three young girls. These girls were shy and unsure of what to do. The

women quickly put them at ease, giving each one a plate and insisting they fill them. Rena loved seeing the surprise on their faces. She was sure these girls weren't used to kindness.

That afternoon at home, Eunice told Rena about Dana and how this lady was helping the girls. "We didn't talk for long," Eunice explained. "Dana was in the restroom at the same time as I was. She is a widow with no children, and her husband worked in the large mine pit. She is also very well off, and since finding the Lord, she says it is her gift to give young women a chance in life.

The girls are foster ones she has felt to take in; all the girls have suffered trauma." Both Eunice and Rena were sad for a time, as they considered these implications.

"Perhaps if my business does well, I could take a girl or a couple of them as my apprentice. That way, they would earn some money and feel worthy."

Eunice hugged her. "I was wondering what we could do to help. Mavis is very busy and there are only two and a half months until Christmas. She told me the other day

that she doesn't know how she will get all her work done, even with that new treadle sewing machine. I intend to ask if one girl could help with the hand sewing."

Rex was still not his usual self, and because the weather permitted, Rena felt it was wise to let him remain outdoors.

Otherwise, he might have an accident her bedroom. Sitting on the back step, she talked this over with him. Not that he understood, but it made her feel better. "You should be all well to come inside again tomorrow night, my big boy," she finished with a hug.

"Bravo," Aiden clapped as he spoke. "I think you are doing the wise thing for tonight, and I believe he would rather be out here in the fresh, cool air."

He sat down on the step beside her. "So, we will get to work on your shed tomorrow. You don't need to do much inside, but I'm sure you are getting eager to see it."

Rena gave a tired smile with a nod of her head. "Yes, I am, and I want to decide on the paint color to use. Something light and bright, I think, as the room doesn't get much sun. Having it in a shady spot will benefit the herbs."

She sat looking out on the yard behind the shed, considering where she'd plant her garden. There would be plenty of digging and a fence to erect around it. She didn't want some stray animals scratching at her hard work or the birds having a feed.

Aiden asked a surprising question. "How old are you, Rena?"

"Why?"

"Well, it's good to know as much as you can about someone in case of an emergency."

"Well, I turn twenty in a few weeks. My grandparents brought me up from infancy. My granddad passed away when I was sixteen, and my grandma not so long ago."

Her head was down as she murmured, and Aiden needed to listen hard to catch what she said. Rena didn't enjoy talking about it.

"My mother never wanted me," she added as an afterthought, I don't know why except she is a selfish person." She stopped then and looked sideways. Was he shocked?

"She came home when my grandmother died to see what she'd get, but grandma left everything to me. I can return and claim it when I turn twenty-one."

"I'm so sorry for intruding into your personal life, Rena, and this information is safe with me. It won't go any further."

Somehow, Rena knew she could trust him. She was glad to have this gift of insight, as it had helped her knowledge many times.

"Well," she stood up, "I'm off to bed. Sleep well, Aiden. Goodnight Rex," she called as she walked across the verandah to enter the house.

"Goodnight Rena," she heard Aiden's deep-voiced, soft reply.

Rena thought about Aiden before falling asleep. He seemed nice, but there was just something that puzzled her about him. Now, what was it?? She thought about his thick, dark, wavy hair, tanned skin, and light gray eyes. He was a very handsome man, tall and confident in his walk. Perhaps that was because of his work position as a boss in the Big Pit. He spoke positively and with authority. His mother thought the world of him, so why did she have this feeling of apprehension? Shrugging off her train of thought, Rena - rolled over in bed and soon fell asleep.

Chapter 7

Saving a Child from Prostitution

A sense of something awoke her three nights later. Rex was standing on his feet, whining at what appeared to be a ghostly figure. Slowly, this materialized into the ugliest creature, leering at her while drooling green saliva. Instantly, she knew this to be a spirit of lust. Pointing at it with her finger, she demanded it return to where it came from. The creature only smirked, drawing closer, yet Rena felt strong and had no fear.

"Arise!" a familiar voice spoke in her ear. Quickly she got out of bed, and as she did, the complete armor of God covered her from the helmet of salvation to the Sword of the Lord.

"He is an evil spirit; your training begins right now. Take your sword and pierce his heart - that is how you triumph over him - and all such as him!"

As Rena advanced toward the demon, it retreated. Her mind shouted a rebuke at him, "the weapons of my warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, now be gone, in Jesus' name." She thrust her sword straight into his heart, and with a long, ear-splitting scream, he shot upwards and away. Never dead, but away from her.

"Oh, my," Rena gave a weak laugh, "that felt strange."

"As you get used to it, you won't think so," Avigdor voiced his understanding. "Now we have another evil spirit we want you to handle. A sweet child is distressed and prepared for torment; she needs a caring woman's touch. Are you ready?"

"Lead the way," Rena readied herself. "Stay Rex, go back to sleep."

"The place we go to is unpleasant," Avigdor informed her, "and neither is your job tonight."

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With nothing more said, they flew quickly off to approach and hover over a strange pink house, with the word Bordello painted in brown over the roof.

A little girl of perhaps twelve sat on a low stone fence at the front while a burly-looking man spoke to a scantily dressed woman at the door. The two argued over money. He wanted more than she was prepared to give.

"You pay me right, you hear? She's worth every penny. She is young, pure, and beautiful to match; you won't find many like her around here."

"Shut up, Bill Clancy. I'm the Madam in charge, and the one who makes the rules, so you'll take the offer or leave. Suit yourself. It's no skin off my back!"

"You know I need the money, or it'd be a no-go, now, hand the cash over!"

The girl on the fence cried, realizing her father was selling her as he'd threatened many times.

Rena felt instant anger. How could this father possibly sell his child? There was no way that little girl was going to this den of iniquity.

Rena descended to sit beside the little girl. Placing an arm around her shoulders, Rena allowed the child to see her.

"Hello, my name is Serenity, "she used her full name.
"What's yours?"

In awe, the girl stopped crying, wiping her nose and mouth on her dirty blouse sleeve.

"Viola, and my surname is Laws," she hiccupped. "Are you _ are you an angel?"

"No sweet thing, I'm not _ I am what is known as a Spirit Warrior, and I am also your friend.

"My_ friend? How is that?"

"Viola, you are precious to God, and he loves you, so I have been sent to help with this problem."

"How can you do that? My father doesn't want me. He has never wanted me, and now my mother is dead; he says I am a liability."

"You could never be a liability, Viola. Why even your name is sweet and pretty, just like you are, now you stay here, don't go anywhere. I will talk to that lady, and then, I am taking you away from this place."

As she finished speaking, Viola's father, money in hand, walked off without a backward glance at his daughter. With him out of the way, the Bordello madam lounged against the doorpost, staring at the child.

Finally, she spoke. "Well, what are you waiting for, the red carpet? Come here to me."

Viola looked up, yet didn't speak or move. The night seemed suddenly still of sounds, no night birds, crickets, or cicadas -all remained quiet while the earth seemingly held its breath.

Rena made herself visible to the obnoxious woman; by standing directly in front of her. The effect stunned the other, just as Rena expected. Madam looked about to

collapse from shock as Rena spoke. "Where are your manners? - that is no way to speak to a terrified child?"

Madam's face turned pale, "are you a ghost of someone I've known?"

Rena laughed, "Ghosts are demons in disguise, and I'm not evil. But you must turn away your wicked ways before it's too late."

"What do you mean, too late? Am I going to die?" Her hands rose to rest over her heart while holding her breath in anticipation of the answer.

"Everyone dies. No one can escape that. You may go tomorrow or next year, only God knows, but if you die in sin, you will spend eternity in the most dreadful place. It is your choice." Rena spoke softly yet potently, and her warning grew in effect when the three angels materialized beside her.

"I will, I will." Breathlessly the madam ran back inside the Bordello, calling her girls to tell them all she'd seen and heard.

• • • •

Rina knew a place that would welcome and make Viola happy. She informed Avigdor of this as they strolled to where Viola silently waited. The child wondered if she was dreaming.

Rena addressed her, "No, this is not a dream, Viola," she startled the child with her knowledge. "I am going to take you to a safe place, somewhere you will be happy and make new friends. Do you trust me?"

Viola, still speechless, nodded, with a look of gladness crossing her features.

"Okay then, I want you to close your eyes and not open them again until I tell you. Will you do that for me?" Again, trustfully, Viola just nodded and tightly screwed up her eyes.

Picking Viola up in his muscular arms, Avigdor flew off with Rena leading the way and going to Dana's place, the haven of safety and acceptance.

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Rena saw nothing more of Viola until Sunday of the next week, but she had thought of the girl often.

After leaving her on Dana's front doorstep and ringing the bell with instructions on what to say, Rena left when hearing Dana's footsteps.

She smiled at the recollection of soaring into the night sky and watching the greeting scene below. After Viola received a loving welcome into the house and the door shut, Rena headed home.

Rex lifted his head as she entered her room. Quickly shedding her armor, she bent down to pat his head and ruffle his ears before climbing into bed with a yawn.

Before rising after a dreamless sleep the following day, Rena talked to her Lord and Savior. Thanking him for his many provisions and for trusting her with those he was called into his kingdom. "I love you, Lord, and thank you _ for loving me."

• • • •

It was with great joy that Rena witnessed the transformation of Viola in church as Dana entered with her troop. Viola wore a pretty yellow dress with a

matching ribbon surrounding her shining hair. Best of all was the young girl's radiant look. There was no risk of Viola recognizing her. Because, as Avigdor had explained, not only was her appearance different, but her voice was as well. "When Viola receives the Holy Spirit into her life, she will then gain her spiritual understanding and knowledge to know you," he explained.

WOW, that took Rena's breath away. The HOLY Spirit was so powerful and exciting that she couldn't fathom why people refused to have faith and receive that spiritual power. However, everyone had a choice to believe or not, and the more of the Bible Rena learned, the more convinced of how close to people God was. She decided never to stop learning about him because, as the Lord Jesus said, we are to worship him in Spirit and Truth. She liked that. So why would anyone turn their backs on him when he gave them all a choice to include in his family?

She now understood that the devil and his fallen angels rejoiced in imprisoning these ignorant souls. Satan's

actions left these people no choice; those who lived for daily enjoyment, money, work, or pleasure were lost—forever destined to join him after death.

Chapter 8

Sickening Evil Intent

Tears rolled down Rena's face as she remembered the flames and horror of hell, the screams of torture, wailing, and the unforgettable stench of burning flesh, suffering eternally. "Wake up, world," she spoke aloud, "wake up, I say - before it's too late!"

• • • •

Every few nights, the angels summoned Rena to protect a woman or fight a demon possessing her. She always explained that their mental illness was not their fault but an evil possession.

It was now that Olivia came back to mind. In her thirties, she lived in the most deprived part of town. Her three little ones were her jewels, as she called them. Her husband was a decent man when not drinking. But when he did, the alcohol demon took charge, taking his

wage and then having him thrash his wife while blaming her for what he called - his bad luck.

Shabbily dressed as were her children, yet all were clean and well kept, with hair brushed and clothes patched. The Salvation Army visited weekly with a few provisions. Besides this, Olivia looked ten years older than her age resulting from her oppression. Gone was the bubbly, happy girl who once fell in love with her Teddy. Replaced was this thin, stooped person who felt she deserved nothing better.

Rena often called to visit this family in spirit form, and since Eunice's fruit trees flourished, Rena commonly filled an old flour sack with plenty to leave at Olivia's front door. She didn't waste either the fruit or the bag. Unpicking the cotton bag and then dyeing the material, it made articles of clothing to supply the children.

Four weeks after Aiden finished her herbal room, Rena finally had it ready for business. Various herbs purchased from church ladies hung out to quickly dry, with the warming weather. Jars of ointment sat on the bench, labeled and prepared for sale.

Grandma's recipe book of ailments - signs and symptoms also sat ready in case Rena couldn't fix a problem. She felt content, and she knew that Grandma would have been proud.

Tea tree oil, the potent liquid to cure sepsis and infection, sat on the bench in small bottles. On one of her many spiritual adventures, she discovered a grove of these trees to supply her needs five miles from home. The next day, she swooped on them, carrying two large baskets to collect the leaves. It was a treat discovery, as they'd keep her supplied forever. Once steeped in hot water and left to cool for days, Rena would carefully strain and bottle the liquid. Poison written on a name label depicted danger. She would always explain to the person requiring it the need to keep it away from children. If taken orally, tea tree oil could be deadly because of its potency.

Aiden returned home for only one week after working five in a row. He looked tired and drawn, but after sleeping in for the first couple of days and with his mother's good cooking, he soon perked up. Rena could

feel his eyes following her whenever he was in her proximity.

One morning, she found him in her shop looking around at her set-up. Since Rena always kept the room locked when not there, she explained to him about not forgetting to secure it and return the key to the kitchen. "Some of these can be harmful in the wrong hands," she motioned her hand towards her products.

He looked attentively at her during this time, and when she'd finished talking, he kept her nearby by securing her with his magnetic eyes. Rena felt almost hypnotized as his gaze held onto hers. Before she dragged her eyes away, his hand reached up to caress her cheek, then moved it around to the back of her neck, pulling her closer. His lips lowered to capture hers in a gentle, sweet kiss. As he drew back, she felt spellbound, transfixed. It was her first kiss, and she was unsure what she was supposed to do.

With a wink of his eye, he turned while reminding her, "Breakfast is likely ready, Rena. Mother will call us

anytime, so let's beat her to it." He walked swiftly away, leaving her to lock the door.

During breakfast, Aiden acted as if nothing unusual had happened between them. Rena wondered about this because if he were sincere, he surely would have treated her as someone special, so his behavior was bewildering.

After hopping into bed one night, Rena received a summons.

"A young woman is prepared to undergo significant injury and disposal; we must hurry," advised Avigdor. On the flight out of town to a deserted mine, Rena asked her guardian why she went on these expeditions; surely, the angels could handle it better without her.

"Women feel reassured when another female is present. They need comfort that only another woman can supply in desperate situations."

Rena couldn't argue with this reasonable explanation because she'd feel similar in the same circumstances.

Landing beside number nine's open mine shaft, all was quiet. Motor lights shone coming along the winding road in their direction.

It's best if they don't see us until they arrive. Otherwise, we will ruin the surprise."

"What are they going to do, Avigdor?" Rena became invisible as she spoke."

"You will soon see their evil plan," he replied sternly.

The motor car stopped, and a tall, thin man of Asian appearance climbed from behind the wheel. Walking around to the back door and opening it, he dragged out a young woman. With her hands tied behind her back, it was easy to see the terrified look on her tear-stained face. An older woman alighted with a piece of cane in her hand, with which she struck the younger woman around her bare legs.

Cringing and crying, the younger tried to get out of her reach while the man opened the trunk and withdrew a gas can. He approached the young woman with a fierce

look of satisfaction while speaking in an unknown language that Rena couldn't understand.

Rena had seen enough and became visible while walking between the victim and her tormentor. She stood with feet planted apart and arms folded, staring into the face of evil intent. At first, he looked stunned and looked over towards the older woman, who screamed nasty words and ran back to the vehicle. She jumped inside locking the doors.

As Rena watched as the man became a demon. His thin body thickened out, covered with muscles and short bristly hair, his face became grotesque, and a long-forked tongue flickered from his mouth. Supposing Rena to be alone, horrendous laughter burst forth from his open mouth of rotting teeth. Raising the gas can above his head, he intended throwing it. Before he could, Akim secured and pinned both of his arms. Avigdor walked around in front of him to rebuke the demon.

Rena found her voice, trying not to show her trembling as she spoke out the word of God.

"It is written, man shall not eat of bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Father." She withdrew her sword, walking toward the demon while speaking God's word aloud in rebuke. "For the weapons of my warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

She pierced his heart and watched as he fell to the ground, fizzing up in brown froth before melting away.

Rena declared, "It's finished!" while turning to the young woman as she spoke. The screeching from the locked motor car continued in a rising crescendo.

Falling into Rena's arms, the woman gasped at her. "He was my husband, and she is my mother-in-law. They planned to set me on fire and throw me down the mine shaft, knowing I'd be gone forever."

"Why would they do such a terrible thing?" Rena questioned while untying the woman's hands.

"He did it to his first wife to keep her dowry; now, he wanted to do the same with me." She lifted her head, looking sadly at Rena. "I have been without food for days, and tonight she beat me while he gloated about what they were going to do."

It was implausible to Rena that anyone could be this cruel. "What is your name?" Rena held her close. "Mine is Serenity."

"I am Rani, my name means queen in Hindi, but I have been a slave instead," she cried long mournful sobs.

Rena continued to hold the girl, who was about her age. "I will take you somewhere happy and safe to live, Rani. Come, let's go!"

Rena held Rani's hand and led her to her golden angels. "I want you to meet Avigdor, Ariel, and Akim. They are God's messengers who brought me with them to help you. Tonight, we will take you to a house where we will wash, feed, and put you to bed. We will take you to a special home tomorrow, where you will meet the woman who will be your surrogate mother.

Rena smiled, shining with kindness, and showing Rani she was now safe. Before being told to keep her eyes closed, Rani thanked them all.

Chapter 9

Dana's Angel Heart of Mercy

Taking their injured patient to Rena's home and seating her in the kitchen, the angels kept her company while Rena disappeared to shed her armor and change back to her natural self.

The angels left on Rena's return. There was no problem with Eunice awakening and asking questions; she was a sound sleeper.

A kettle of hot water always remained on the stove. Making Rani a hot tea, she cut a piece of apple pie for her to eat. The young woman watched her with puzzled eyes. So Rena introduced herself as if they'd just met.

"My name is Rena, and you are to eat and drink, and then we will give you a quick wash and put you to bed. It's a large bed so both of us have plenty of room."

Rani said nothing, just looking around the room while taking her fill of the offering. Rena doubted this poor girl had felt much love for a long time.

• • • •

The following day, careful not to awaken the other from sleep, Rena silently slipped from her bed, dressing quickly. After letting Rex out to the backyard, she went straight to speak with Eunice, thankful that Aiden had returned to camp.

"We have a visitor, Eunice; she is still asleep in my bed. I'm sure you will understand." Rena continued to fill her friend in about the night before, leaving out her involvement. The story brought tears to Eunice's eyes.

"Bringing her here was the right decision, Rena."

"Indeed, it was Eunice. I want to make her a cup of tea and then let her have a bath and wash her hair. After that, I'll put salve on her wounds from all the beatings, then she can eat her breakfast." Rena was making the tea as she spoke. "I'll give her some of my clothes to wear. You wouldn't have a scarf I could use as a belt for her, would you? I am likely two sizes larger than her thin frame now."

"What color?" Eunice's eyes shone. "I have all of my mother's scarves, which are a waste, because I'm not a scarf person."

With a laugh, Rena hugged her. "I will give her my pretty pale pink dress with the flowers all over; it will look lovely with her dark hair."

"Pink it is then," Eunice took off to collect the scarf."

Rani sat up on the bed, gazing around the room with awe, when Rena entered the room carrying a cup of tea.

"For me? You are so kind, thank you." She settled herself better against the pillows to take the cup from Rena's hands.

After a few sips, she asked while Rena sat at the end of the bed. "Why are you so kind to me? Do you know me?"

"Not really," safely Rena replied. "But I'm sure we will become good friends."

Her words brought comfort to the Indian girl as they issued the assurance of a future closeness.

Rani gave a shy smile. "Since coming to this country, I have not had one friend or experienced any kindness. It's hard to understand that you and those spirit people last night care and have helped me." Rena considered how to answer.

"God is a God of love, Rani. He sees all and knows all. You are his child, and He has seen your pain and understands your heart's desire."

"Which God is that, my new friend? There are many in my Hindu faith, and if I am special to one who has rescued me, then I would like to serve him."

Rena smiled, relieving the girl of her now empty cup.

"The God I worship is the God who created the Heavens and the Earth. He is the one true God. He is not a statue, but a spirit who can be everywhere simultaneously. His helpers were the angels he sent to liberate you last night."

Rani's face took on a look of wonderment. "Well, he is the only God I know who can perform such a miracle."

"Yes, he is." Rena agreed. "Now, I will run a bath for you to soak in before breakfast."

"I can run a bath for myself," Rani protested. "It will be a delight to have a soak."

Rena led the way to the bathroom, opening the door to usher Rani inside. "Okay, there you go then, and half full, although there is plenty of water, I don't want you falling asleep again."

Leaving Rani, Rena returned to her room to collect the items of clothing needed. She added her slippers as they looked the right size and then took them to the girl.

"These are your clothes. Please don't remain too long as your body is weak, and I don't want you to faint."

"I understand," Rani nodded with a smile, "About fifteen minutes, and thank you."

• • • •

An hour later, Rani walked with Rena out to the motorcar. She felt like a new person, all clean with her

hair braided. Relishing the sunshine kissing her face, she held her head up to its glow.

They were going to her new home, a place Rena explained girls like her lived and girls who would befriend and share with her.

Rani wondered about her mother-in-law on the drive. How could a person become hateful like that? Turning in her seat, Rani put the question to her new friend. Rena took a little time to answer while praying under her breath for God to give her wisdom.

"In this beautiful world that God created, he always wanted perfection, but he had an enemy, one who was once the most beautiful angel in Heaven. God threw that enemy out of Heaven because he provoked a fight among the angels. He had become prideful and wanted to rule over the God who created him."

Feeling perhaps the information given may be overwhelming, Rena glanced at Rani. "Is what I have said too hard for you to understand, Rani?"

"I don't think so, as there are always those who wish to lord it over others. But where is this evil angel?"

"Well, his name is Satan, often called the devil. God cast him down to earth. He roams around, looking for weak-hearted people that he can make his own. His demons enter that person and live inside them when he finds them."

Rani nodded. "So, when that person dies, the demons come out of them, like with my husband. But I didn't see them go anywhere."

"They are spirits, Rani, and unless you have spiritual eyes, you can't see them."

"Do you have spiritual eyes, Rena?"

Rena confessed, "Yes, I do. However, I don't know everything; I only know what God permits me to know." She smiled over at Rani. "I believe that as you develop a closer relationship with the Lord, you will also have spiritual eyes, Rani."

"I hope so." Rani sat forward in her seat as Rena turned the motor car into Dana's driveway and ambled to a stop. "Is anyone at home?" The words no sooner left her mouth than teenage girls of various ages wandered out of the front door with Dana behind.

All displayed interest in the new occupant by crowding around the motor with welcome smiles. One plucked a flower from the garden and offered it to Rani through the window.

"Come on, girls, stand back." Opening the vehicle door, Dana greeted the young woman with a hug as soon as her feet touched the ground. "You're in safe hands now, Rani, isn't it?"

She introduced everyone as Rena alighted from the driver's seat.

"So, Dana, _ Eunice got you on the telephone? I was afraid she might miss you."

"Well, I have made it a rule to wait until nine o'clock on the days we need to go out, but there are usually a couple of girls left at home." She looked around as she

spoke, "We have two guard dogs you can see watching us."

Both were obedient cattle dogs, and Rena knew they would allow a stranger to enter the property. However, that person would be detained, guarded, and not allowed to escape unless the owner allowed them to go.

"How come I didn't notice dogs last time I was here, Dana?" she questioned.

"Need you ask?" Dana laughed. "Because I was here, once they get used to you, they are wary yet more trustful unless someone breaks that trust." Rena felt better knowing this, and there was also a telephone to call for help.

"So, Rena," Dana stretched her arm toward the house in an invitation. "You are coming in for a cup of tea with us, and you'll be able to see where Rani will sleep. Our Viola has been waiting for the company. Haven't you, dear?"

Chapter 10

NOT - Deceived by Evil Spirits

Without a word, Viola reached out and took Rani's hand with a shy smile. "After morning tea, I'll show you to our room. You'll love it here. We are often busy, but we all share the load."

Rani looked towards Rena. "Will I see you again?"

"Of course. You might be an excellent student to learn about my herbs."

"Really," Rani's face glowed, "I think I would."

Dana took control. "First, you settle into your new home, and we'll get you some clothes and personal items, helping you to be independent."

Rena enjoyed an hour with everyone, eating a chocolate cake made by Lizzy, one girl who liked to cook. Tilly and Agnes prepared and served hot tea. Everyone laughed a great deal and talked all at once, then hugged Rena when she got up to leave.

Rani held onto her for a long time, then drew back with tears falling.

"Thank you for your care and kindness. I only wish to thank that lady angel and the other angels who came to my rescue." She looked into Rena's eyes as if to question her.

"I'm sure that those spiritual beings will know how you feel. But remember, angels are messengers sent from God; they are not for worship. So, pray to God, and thank him!"

• • • •

Dana came forward to hold Rani's hand. "I'll help you understand more of this, Rani; all's well."

Rena hopped into her vehicle, and with a wave, drove off. She felt pretty drained, but it was nothing that the Lord couldn't fix.

"You know all, Lord," she spoke aloud while driving. "You say that your yolk is easy, and your burden is light, so I give all this over to you so that my soul may rest."

Rena's mind wandered then to gaze upon the lovely rolling hills. By the time she reached back at Eunice's place, she felt calmer and rested in her soul.

• • • •

Life proceeded as if it should in the physical world with Rena's herbs growing well, the drying process successful, and finally, the people who heard useful reports, came to see her about their ailments.

She kept up with her business in the hours she was open for visits and her time growing more herbs. She kept strictly to a schedule, knowing from her grandmother that if not, people took advantage of coming whenever they felt like it.

Rani proved to be an excellent helper and a diligent learner. She and Tilly were the girls who became the most involved in learning herbalism. They arrived on time twice a week in a horse-drawn cart and spent four hours processing and learning. After the first month, Rena explained, that now they were trained, they would

each receive a small wage, with this increasing over time.

Rena's twentieth birthday came and went with little ado. Now, it was only five weeks until Christmas. Eunice became the new choir leader, recruiting everyone she could persuade to sing carols, even hooking Mavis in, although she didn't attend church. Rena smiled when listening to Eunice's way of making people feel so important that they couldn't possibly suggest a substitute.

Aiden had become even more distant, and she couldn't fathom why. He was friendly and polite, yet that was all.

Observing him at the breakfast table one morning while praying in the spirit, an angel materialized behind him with a sword drawn. The protection given by his guardian resulted in Aiden speaking politely. A gruesome, sly-looking demon occasionally poked Aiden with a long, twisted, clawed finger, causing agitation.

Rena spoke through her mind, commanding the demon to go in the Lord's name; she did this three times before

he whizzed away in a cloud of blue smoke. Aiden's angel stood guard, following behind his assignment as Aiden got up and walked away from the table. Why was that demon heckling Aiden and was that why Aiden was changing?

Rena prayed for him before clearing the table. Eunice bustled around, preparing a pie to take to the lady's group later that morning. "Just leave those dishes, dear," she spoke, "go tend your herbs. I know you have many orders to fill for those people going camping for vacations." She turned back to rolling the pastry on a floured board. "Oh, Rena, I'm making an extra pie so that you and Aiden won't miss out on getting some." She smiled her sweet, knowing smile. Rena nodded and smiled back, whistling to Rex as she went out.

• • • •

An exhausted Rena fell into bed after a hot bath that night. Just about to close her eyes, she thought she saw her grandfather, Evan, standing at the side of her bed. Closing her eyes and shaking her head before looking again, he was still there! OR was he? She stared,

knowing that once in Heaven, no one could or wanted to return to earth. Yet he smiled, holding his arms out wide with the invitation for her to come to him.

"Open my spiritual eyes, Lord, that I may see," Rena prayed. Looking into the eyes, she knew this was a clever hoax of deception. Her grandfather's eyes had held tender compassion, where these were hard and cold. She suspected a demon who was trying to trick her, knowing this she needed the Lord's help.

As Rena thought about her spiritual sword, it whizzed across the room and settled into her outstretched hand.

"I command you, evil spirit, to reveal yourself to me immediately," she spoke with a deadly calm while pointing her weapon towards him. Her grandfather's shape swiftly transformed into a gruesome, leering demon, just as she suspected. Lips drew back from rotten teeth and saliva dripping while its eyes flashed red fire. This beast was a conjuring spirit that often-fooled humans into believing that someone they loved visited from the other side. Well, he wouldn't trick her.

With righteous anger, Rena leaped from her bed, running towards him, sword pointed straight at his evil heart. "Return to the abyss from whence you came right now in the name of the Lord," she pierced him through.

He sizzled, spitting sparks towards her, not wanting to retreat but losing the battle. The Lord's name was the key to obedience, and Rena watched the demon fade from her sight.

"Well - that was distressing." Her heart still thumped from an adrenalin rush.

"You did exceedingly well, Spirit Warrior, princess of the highest God. "So be encouraged," Avigdor said, materializing. "You were on your guard even though worn out from the day. So, sleep restfully now until your next battle."

Lying back down on her bed with her head sinking like a stone into the pillow, Rena closed her eyes, feeling herself drift to the land of safety.

Two days later, Aiden came home for a week. He was friendly yet kept a boundary between himself and Rena.

"Well, Mr. Aiden, if that's the way you want it, there are plenty of other fish in the sea, and I feel like I'm having a break from working, so I'll go out with my new friends. I will not wait for you until I'm old and wrinkled."

She was going to the movies to see 'The Man from Snowy River.' It would be her first movie, with a man from the church, Grant Horton, taking her. Making the best of a night out, Rena chose one of her new dresses. She had reluctantly allowed Mavis to design a dark green flapper dress for her. With a dropped waist, it reached just above her knees - a silk petticoat showed beneath the dress beading. Otherwise covered with sequins, it displayed her curves to perfection. She left her hair hanging long with a green beaded headband around her head to match the dress. She wore a pair of t-strap platform shoes paired to finish her ensemble. Dabbing a little perfume on, she touched her cheeks and lips with rouge.

Checking herself in the mirror, Rena wasn't sure if she looked presentable. She felt strange with the shorter hem and hoped the other girls had dressed in a similar

style. Mavis assured her that many women her age were ordering these dresses.

Dithering while unsure whether to change into her other best dress, she was called by Eunice, saying Grant was waiting. With one last look in the mirror and holding her head high, Rena walked out to greet him.

Grant acted as the chivalrous suitor by giving a bow and kissing her hand with a mischievous smile and wink. He knew Rena liked Aiden, but he wanted her to feel special. Rena stood on tiptoes to kiss his cheek just as Aiden entered.

Looking at them both up and down, especially staring at Rena's bare legs, Aiden grumbled, "Where are you two going?"

'How dare he. Who did he think he was?' Before Grant could explain, Rena gave Aiden some cheek. She'd read some penny-dreadful love stories and knew just how to answer.

"Well, that's for us to know and for you to wonder, isn't it?"

Eunice looked bewildered as Aiden scowled. She likely couldn't remember where Rena said the church singles were going.

Laughing up at Grant, Rena took him by the arm and waltzed him out of the door.

Chapter 11

Aiden's Attitude Confuses Rena

The silent movie was delightful, with a lady at the front sitting close to the screen playing the piano to the story's mood. The best scenes were the horse riding down the mountainsides. It was incredible that the rider could remain in the saddle without an accident.

Everyone drove to Dana's home later to close off a perfect night with a late supper. Rani, Tilly, and Agnes were with the group, all excited and talking non-stop about how thrilling the movie was. Rani, having put on some much-needed weight, looked beautiful in a gold-colored dress and shoes, similar to the outfit that Rena wore. One of the young men, Ben, paid her attention. Rani glowed, and Rena couldn't help but wonder if this might be the start of a budding romance.

It was almost midnight when the motorcar with four still in it pulled up at Eunice's. The house was in darkness, so they waited until Rena was safely inside before driving off. Turning the hall light on, Rena took off her

shoes for a quiet entry. Then a manly voice came from the darkened sitting room as she passed.

"So, Cinderella is home, is she?" came Aiden's sarcastic voice.

"Oh, I didn't think you knew any romantic stories," Rena quipped and kept walking.

He got up and came after her, grabbing her arm and twirling her around to face him.

Pulling her close against him, he kissed her roughly, and then with a groan, it softened into a gentle lingering one. His eyes looked glazed when raising his head and looking down at her.

"So, I get it; you wanted to make me jealous little one, didn't you?" He waited for an answer, which Rena felt too astounded to give.

"Tell me, did my mother put you up to this? She is always trying to get me married off."

Rena backed away with a frown. Is that what he thought?

"No, mister love-me-do. Your mother did not put me up to anything. I wanted to have a night out, and I did. The rest is none of your business!" She fumed.

Swinging on her heel - Rena ran to her bedroom, slamming the door and sliding the bolt.

A gentle knock sounded, with Aiden talking from the other side. "If you think I'm going to fall all over you and ask for your hand, you've got another thing coming. And _ I will pick a wife when the time comes; no one will coerce me into doing anything - understand!"

She heard him stomp up the hall to his room. "Well, Rex, what do you think brought that on? I'm too tired to deal with this; I wonder what tomorrow will bring?"

Rex seemed to grin and then got up to go to the door. "Okay, come on, fella, but be quiet because I don't want to stir Aiden's rooster feathers again."

• • • •

She was unconcerned when Aiden disappeared the following day, and Eunice didn't even know where he was. The pair sat and ate breakfast in partial silence.

"I don't know what the matter is with Aiden. He has never acted rudely to a guest before?" Looking down at her toast before lifting her cup of tea to drink, Rena could sense Eunice was on the verge of tears.

"Maybe he is having work problems," Rena volunteered. "Would you like us to pray about it?" She laid her hand on top of her friend.

Eunice managed a weak smile. "That would be nice. Whatever did I do without you, Rena?"

"You probably danced the Charleston with no one to see you," Rena winked, breaking the ice and setting them both into fits of giggles. Eunice blushed at the thought of doing that prerogative dance.

Aiden didn't return, and both ladies were too busy to lose sleep over him.

"He's acted like this since on and off since childhood," Eunice confided. "We both suffered from his father's outbursts of anger, and Aiden doesn't want to be like him."

Knowing this gave Rena a better understanding, yet she felt there was more to it than that.

Time rushed past, and two weeks before Christmas, Rena finally had all her orders finished and collected by happy clients. With a tired sigh of relief, she entered the kitchen with Rani and Tilly at Eunice's call for afternoon tea. Not only a hot cup of tea, but lovely scones with jam and cream.

A Christmas-wrapped gift sat beside two plates where Rena had asked Eunice to place them. Rani and Tilly picked them up, surprised. "Can we open them now?" Rani's eyes shone.

"Yes, please do." Rena and Eunice looked knowingly at each other.

Both received a beautiful bottle with a small hose and ball at the end for spraying perfume.

Rani's was golden amber and Tilly's blue, according to their favorite colors. Rani received lavender perfume and Tilly a rose scent.

"I remembered how you both looked longingly at the ones I sold, so now you have your own, and - you know how to make more perfume when it's finished."

"Now open your cards." Eunice enjoyed surprises.

Handmade by Eunice with miniature paintings of a bush Christmas, she wrote 'Happy Christmas' inside in case the girls wanted to frame them.

In the card, besides the good wishes from Rena and Eunice was a five-pound note that caused each young woman to gasp. It was a lot of money, more than they ever had before.

"You both might like to buy something special with this or open a bank account and watch it grow. Rena delighted in their expressed happiness as she and Eunice received repeated hugs before they all ate the delicious food.

"Are we in Heaven?" Tilly questioned. "I have never received love, acceptance, and support like this."

"These scones taste like manna from heaven, too." Rani likened them to what she had learned in the Bible. "God's love shines on us all the time,"

Rena was to drive the girls' home today, as Dana was busy. They handed the girls a small, wrapped gift for Dana, along with four cards for their housemates. Dana would receive some perfume and the other girls two pounds each.

"Hugging Rena when they arrived back at their home, Rani looked her in the eyes before leaning forward and whispering in her ear. "Sometimes, we meet an angel in disguise."

Rena knew what she meant and hugged her with a laugh, "keep the secret!"

"Yes, I will!"

• • • •

A day later, while resting outside in the shade, a phone call came for Rena. She had occasionally contacted her

grandmother's lawyer. This time he rang to tell her mother and stepfather had left.

"They have gone for good and won't be back, Rena."

"Thank you, Mr. Withers. We can't talk on this party line, but I know that you'll send me a letter soon."

"I understand completely, my dear," he rang off.

• • • •

When the letter arrived, Rena was on the way back to her beginnings. Eunice took it badly, with her leaving before Christmas. They sat and talked it over thoroughly with a final understanding that Rena could not leave her grandmother's house sitting empty.

"I am unsure when I will be back, Eunice. Rani is my age and old enough to be out on her own, so until I return, she can manage the business with double her wage and stay in my room to keep you company. That's if you both agree." Rena remembered how Eunice's mind raced while trying to figure things out.

"You must take Rena's board money out of the business, write it in the books, and then bank the rest."

• • • •

Driving along with Rex hanging over the window and watching the sights, Rena felt very different about this return trip.

Her mind wandered to Aiden, wondering how he was and if she would see him again.

"We never know how life can change in an instant, Rex." Her boy wisely looked at her as if he understood.

At night, Rena returned Rex's food to him outside in the motor car because the hotel didn't allow him inside. He was the best guard she could hope to have, and no one would get the chance to remove her wheels or steal the whole motorcar.

Feeling exhausted on the third night, her enormous hotel bed looked inviting. The significant part of opening the window was seeing her vehicle directly

underneath, with a streetlamp that shone on it all night long.

Rena needed an early morning to arrive home by the afternoon. Her maximum speed limit was eighteen miles per hour, although she knew her motorcar could go much faster. She hoped to get up to twenty because she still had about 130 miles to go.

Chapter 12

A Huge Surprise

The day began at dawn in the Outback with plenty to do before the sun rose high in the heavens. In the middle of the day, it was better to spend a few hours indoors than out. So, people ate their midday meal, took a nap, or attended jobs undercover.

Rena got her and Rex a substantial breakfast and then filled the canvas water bag carried on the front of the car to keep it fresh. A paper bag with a supply of biscuits would prevent the pangs of hunger along the way.

At three o'clock and driving beside the Darling River, Rena watched a paddle steamer tying up at the Wilcannia WARF. It sounded its whistle proudly to announce the arrival. Rena smiled, realizing this was one thing she missed at her old home, the sound of familiarity.

She felt sleepy, yet there was no time to waste if she wanted to see Mr. Withers _ get the house key and buy

the food supplies. Unlike Kalgoorlie, the people had more to do than stand and stare as she drove past.

Mr. Withers's office sat between the sandstone courthouse and the police station. Hoping he wasn't with a client, Rena parked the car and ran inside. She was dying for a cup of tea and would have it immediately after she finished.

His office door was closed, which spoke of him being busy. His muffled voice floated through into the outer office, stopping and then starting without the sound of any other person talking. By this, Rena assumed he was on the telephone, and sure enough, he soon came rushing out, only to stop at the sight of Rena's familiar face.

"So, you are here, that's very good," he walked over to grasp her hand in his. "You are looking splendid, Rena."

"Thank you, Mr. Withers. Do you have time to speak with me?"

"Always, my dear, but twenty minutes only." Taking his fob watch out of his pocket, he flipped it open and

studied the time. "Make that fifteen," he ushered her into his office.

Rena was prepared to hear about the house's destruction. However, the lawyer said he visited a couple of days after her leaving.

"I went with Constable Herron and made them sign a paper that any damage would be their responsibility. They were none too happy to hear that."

Looking through papers, he withdrew the one they had signed to show her. "Also, knowing you would be back in a few days, I sent a cleaner in to get the house ready and clean for you."

Rena couldn't thank him enough. "Your grandparents had a respected reputation in this town, and you, Rena, have that as well." You deserve a fair go."

Mr. Wither's walked to his safe and withdrew an envelope. "Your grandmother held Life Insurance, so there is a nice sum of money here that's yours, and I suggest you deposit it for safety."

Rena couldn't believe the amount written on the check; it was a small fortune. She read out her name and then the amount of twenty thousand pounds. Her mouth dropped open in shock! "I haven't paid your bill yet, Sir. What do I owe you?" She remembered.

"Nothing at all, my dear. Get along and deposit that money, and I hope you buy some new furnishings. I'll drop in and visit with you next week."

He shook her hand and ushered her outside _ then locked his front door, waving her off as he walked away in the opposite direction.

It was a relief for Rena to open an account and deposit that check. She would make the house look more presentable and buy the suggested furniture, and she still felt shocked by all the money she inherited.

Thinking on this and still a few miles beyond the town, she noted a truck pulled over on the side of the road.

Perhaps someone had run out of fuel or broken down. Slowing to a stop and getting out with Rex, she found it to be neither. Instead, it was a man bending over

something in the grass. Immediately, Rena knew he was up to no good. *'Oh, I didn't think to bring my armor.'*

Just the thought had her quickly clad, and when the man turned around and saw her, he yelled as though seeing a ghost, ran to his truck, and drove quickly off.

"Let's see Rex," Rena walked over with her armor removed as she did.

"Oh, my goodness," she couldn't believe what she saw. A woman badly bashed, and bleeding lay unconscious in a dirty dress. "Avigdor, I need your help!" Rena called.

"I'm here," came the immediate response. Then, picking the woman up in his powerful arms, he carried and placed her on the back seat of Rena's motor car.

"Thank you, Avigdor; I'll take her straight to the hospital."

"No need and not safe for her to be left. She has no internal injuries or broken bones and will heal better remaining with you. "

Rena knew by now not to question, so she cranked her automobile and drove home.

The woman was unconscious as the angel gently laid her on Grandma Annie's bed.

"I will keep her asleep while you wash her and tend her wounds."

Rena felt somewhat like a nurse. After warming water on the stove and collecting salve from her grandmother's stock and a clean nightgown, Rena sponged the woman as much as possible, applied the balm, and then dressed her. Rena threw all of her clothing and old shoes into the kitchen stove to burn.

On finishing -Avigdor reappeared. "Please don't wake her up yet," Rena explained further. "I need to phone the police first, and hopefully, they will come tonight."

With the phone being a party line and knowing many ears listened, Rena told the officer it was a matter of urgency, and he needed to come as soon as possible.

"We'll be there, young lady. See you within the next hour," the constable rang off.

Avigdor had the woman waking up from oblivion.

"Water," she moaned. "I need a drink." Rena rushed to get it and then returned, holding her up to her mouth for a few sips. Her angel was nowhere in sight, but Rena still felt his presence.

"You are safe now," Rena gently explained. "Can you tell me your name?"

"It's Carol Ferguson," she gasped. "He won't find me here, will he?" Her face held terror.

"If he comes to this house, he'll get more of a shock than he did before." Rena sat down on the bed beside Carol and took hold of her hand. "All you need to do is eat, rest and get well. Now close your eyes, and I'll make you a nice hot cup of tea."

Thankfully, the cupboards and ice chest were well stocked. A fresh chicken in the fridge went straight into a pot with water and vegetables. This would be a

nourishing meal for them both. Hopefully, the smell would entice Carol to eat - if she felt otherwise.

When a knock came at the front door, Rena opened it to a very handsome police officer. She had imagined Constable Herron coming, who she heard was chubby and older. This man was likely in his late twenties and certainly not overweight.

"Constable Herron?" she questioned.

"No, Mam, I'm Sergeant Glenn Talbot; Constable Herron mainly remains at the office. Now, what's the urgent problem?"

Rena filled him in as he took notes on a small pad.

"So, you say you found a young lady all beaten up on the side of the road and witnessed the perpetrator? Did you get his vehicle number plate at all?" He was eyeing Rena as if unsure whether to believe her.

"No, I didn't, Sergeant, but his truck was green and had the word Bushel's on the side. As to the lady, I washed her and dressed her in nightwear, and when she woke

up, I found out her name is Carol Ferguson."

"Really," the officer replied with a raised eyebrow.

"Look, come with me, and I'll introduce you to Carol. I wanted you to witness her cuts and bruises before they heal. She has been through a terrifying ordeal but will be safe here as I have a big guard dog."

Rex, resting on the floor in Carol's room, got up and eyed the officer as soon as he entered behind his mistress.

Sergeant Talbot laughed, "I see what you mean, and he looks like an excellent protector."

Sitting on a chair Rena had placed at the side of the bed, the officer spoke gently to Carol.

"Looks as if someone gave you a bad time; can you give me a name?"

Carol looked terrified. "He'll kill me for sure if I tell on him."

"By the looks of you, I'd say he meant to kill you this time, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, he did, but he'll make sure of it when he knows I've talked. Nothing will stop him."

"Oh yes, it will. If I arrest him and lock him up for assault and attempted murder, they will incarcerate him for a long time. So wouldn't you feel safer then?"

"Would he face imprisonment?" How can I prove what he did to me?"

Rena stepped forward. "I witnessed him bent over, punching something on the ground, and then discovered it was you. He started for me when I yelled at him, but thought better of it. Rex is a big deterrent, especially for a coward like that." She didn't include that the sight of her glowing body scared him off.

Chapter 13

Aware of Lurking Wickedness

"Now Carol, if I may use your Christian name, you can see we have a substantial witness, so who was this person?"

Carol looked at Rena, and with a nod from her new friend, she spoke.

"I thought he was my husband. We were married last year at the courthouse; he was good to me at first. Then yesterday a letter came for him, and I accidentally opened it, thinking it was for me." She cried.

"I would not admit I opened it, but as we drove into town, he saw it sticking out of my pocket. He grabbed and read it, then yelled at me."

Rena handed Carol a handkerchief to wipe the tears away and blow her nose. "What was in that letter? Carol?"

"It was from his actual wife telling him she knew he'd committed bigamy." Then he stopped the truck and pulled me out onto the side of the road.

He yelled, "there won't be any bigamy when the letter snoopers are dead, and no one will know on this lonely road who the murderer was because I'll be long gone." She cried harder while remembering the terrifying trauma.

"He was horrible. I did not know that he was married when I met him. On the letter, I saw from the postmark that his wife lives in Sydney."

Carol gave a hiccup, looking a pathetic figure with her black eye and messed hair. The enormous bed made her look small and vulnerable.

"Thank you, Carol," the sergeant rose, it's a good thing you are here in this house, and we'll keep quiet about the fact. If he were to look for you, he'd probably wait until nightfall, then search the patient beds - at the hospital. We'll keep a lookout for him."

On the way out, Rena received thanks from the Sergeant who stated he would return once they apprehended Darrel Ferguson. "I don't want him to follow me and discover where Carol is." He sniffed the air. "That chicken smells good. Phone us immediately if you see his truck come into your driveway."

Rena assured him she would. Then, after seeing him out of the front door, she bolted it, no chances taken. With Rex there to guard and to know the angels wouldn't be far away, Rena felt they were safe.

Carol insisted on getting up and eating at the table, and Rena pulled down all the blinds, making sure all windows and doors were secure before serving their meal. Later, they sat and listened to the Amateur Hour on the radio. Some acts sounded good, while others were terrible. Pain reflected on Carol's face, yet she seemed to enjoy Rena's company without complaint.

Rex lay on the floor, and Rena knew he would need to go to the bathroom, but didn't want him running off to chase a rabbit and disappear. Tying a rope to his collar and the other end to the verandah post, Rena sat on the

step waiting as her dog sniffed around, deciding where to go. As if he knew, he was back by her side within minutes, and she took him inside again with a sigh of relief.

The radio closed at ten o'clock, with Rena and Carol looking at each other, not wanting to retire. "So, Carol, do you have any folks?"

"I have a very nice aunt, but she is in a nursing home." With eyes downcast, Carol looked a picture of dejection.

"Otherwise, my father went missing overseas in the war, and my mother ended up in an insane asylum from grieving for him." She shook her head with disbelief. "And now this? What next Rena? How much hurt can one person take?"

Rena felt touched by the Holy Spirit to share the suffering Jesus went through for humanity. "He did it because of his love for us, Carol."

Carol responded. "I have always thought that church would be boring, Rena, but to be truthful, I have never really understood what it was teaching. Now that I hear

this, I understand why people could be devoted to a man who lived his life for others and then sacrificed himself for everyone.”

Rena smiled, nodding. "The greatest part, Carol, is that Jesus rose from the grave to show us we can also be like him and have eternal life. Of all the faith leaders throughout history, Jesus is the only one to lie down his life and the only one to be witnessed rising to heaven in bodily form."

Rena stopped talking; she didn't want Carol to be inundated with too much information so as not to remember it.

Carol didn't ask questions, she only said, "I feel tired, and my headaches. Can we all sleep in the one room, do you think Rena? I'd feel better with you and Rex near me?"

So, they decided, and Rena went to her room to dress in her nightwear.

A pair of kookaburras disturbed their sleep at 5 am. Being summer, it was already daylight outside.

As she did last night, Rena got up to let Rex outside on the rope again. Nothing seemed unusual or out of place, but she locked the door once Rex was back inside before returning to have more sleep beside Carol.

The next time they woke up was just after eight, with a loud pounding on the front door. Rex got up and went with Rena, but she looked out the window before opening it. Mrs. Walker, a lady in her sixties and an old church friend of her grandmother, stood there.

Calling through the door to say that she'd be back in a minute, Rena rushed to advise Carol not to make a noise, and then after throwing off her nightwear and putting on a dress, she ran back to open the front door.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Walker; I was asleep when you knocked."

"Goodness girl, why on earth are you still in bed at this hour?"

"I had trouble sleeping; it's not the same here without Granny."

"I'm sorry, dear, of course, it isn't. I understand. Now, do you need anything from town? I won't come in and just wanted to ask you."

"Mrs. Walker, could you bring me back a paint color chart from the hardware? I want to think about brightening this house up."

"Well, if you need to hire someone for the outside job, remember, my Clary likes to paint."

Rena assured her he could have the job after New Year, but with the summer heat, he would need to start early and finish at midday.

"I know that girl; I'm not silly! Well, after New Year, then. Yes, the house will look good with a spot of paint."

She said goodbye, informing her she'd leave the paint chart on the front verandah. "I'll need to go home to make Clary his lunch, you know."

When the front door closed behind the visitor, Carol stuck her head out of the bedroom. "Can I go to the bathroom now?"

"Sure," Rena laughed. "Thank God we have the water closet inside; it took heavy rain for over a week before Granny gave in to have one in the house."

"It's a wonderful luxury; I have only known a thunderbox away from the back of the house. Anyhow, I'm off there now."

"I'll put the kettle on, Carol."

After a couple of cups of tea, Carol took a soak in the bath while Rena looked for something for her to wear. It would have to be one of Rena's dresses until they could go out and buy what was needed, and that wouldn't happen while that manic of a husband was still loose.

Sitting over breakfast, Rena asked Carol if she would like to live with her permanently. Because Rena was looking at her egg and toast, she missed Carol's initial stunned expression. When she finally looked up from her food, Carol looked bewildered.

"You know nothing about me, Rena. I could be a drunkard or a horrible person in some other way. Now I am wounded, so you can't make any assumptions about

my personality." Tears flooded her eyes at the thought of someone caring. "I'm just nothing. - How could anyone, especially Jesus, care about me?"

Rena felt her hurt. She knew how the pain felt, even if it was different. "How old are you, Carol?" she changed the line of talk.

"I am eighteen, Rena, and I know I look older; I feel a terrible mess. My life is a disaster, and I don't know which way to turn, what to do, or how to do it."

Rena noticed a look of enlightenment spread across Carol's face. "Rena, I have some belongings back out in the bush where I lived with Darrel, and I must confess that we were squatting in a deserted house out there." She looked ashamed and cried again.

Rena's hand covered hers. "I also confess, Carol, that my life has had many hurts, but our growth can't stop because of that. Otherwise, we fall into the devil's hands and become all the bad things we think we are." "But Rena, look at you. Your life is all together."

"Only because I stepped out of the mud and into the sunshine, Carol, just like you can decide to do. What were you thinking of before, when your eyes lit up?"

"Awe, it was probably a silly thought. I wished I could go back to that bush house and collect my things. They weren't much, but they were mine."

I believe it would be safer to wait until your husband is found. Nothing is as important as your life."

Carol gave a weak smile while wiping her eyes. "How did you get so clever, Rena? You're not much older than I am?"

"I had an intelligent and wonderful grandmother," came the quick reply. "Now Carol, you best rest. You need to heal. If you like to read, you are more than welcome to choose a book from my grannies many. My favorite among them is a book called "In His Steps. Now, hurry off to bed; I have work to do."

Chapter 14

Denouncing the Spirit of Fear

It was only a week away from Christmas, and Rena went into town. She needed groceries and had worked out the paint colors for two bedrooms; how to buy them was the problem. With no news of Darrel Ferguson, they must be careful, and he might even remember Rena's vehicle.

Pondering this issue, Carol asked. "Can't I come with you? I know it hasn't been long, but I feel shut in."

"You know, that might be an excellent solution. We can take a pillow for you to lie down on the back seat and rest awhile in the town, and Rex can sit on the front seat to protect you."

Both women looked happy about this arrangement. "And" continued Rena on consideration, "I can park in front of the Police Station and walk to where I have to go."

"But what about carrying heavy things like the paint?" Carol questioned.

"Choosing it takes the longest, so I'll do that, then the grocery shopping, and we can stop by on our way home and have it all put into my motor's trunk."

"It's not fair for you to pay for me, Rena. I'll be glad when I can work to pay you back."

Rena replied, telling the other to dress, and they'd be off. "Don't forget to get your pillow," she called after retreating to the car.

Carol sat up, looking through the open window on the drive, then settling back down out of sight on reaching the outskirts of the town.

Rena parked in front of the Police Station and ran inside to see the Sergeant. Thankfully, he was in his office having morning tea when Constable Herron ushered her in.

Glen Talbot rose from his seat to pull out a chair for her. "So, what can I do for you, Miss. Charles?"

"I don't suppose anyone has heard or seen anything of Darrel Ferguson?"

"No, we have been monitoring the hospital, but there's been nothing unusual. How is Miss. Carol?"

"Carol is healing well in her body, but it will take longer with her mind. She has nightmares."

"I can understand she would," he offered.

"I have parked my motor car on the street right out from that window," she pointed. "Carol is lying down in the back seat."

Glen got up, walked to the street, and saw that she was well hidden, with her protector defending her. I'll open this window and keep an ear out in case of trouble."

"Thank you. That's why I came in. Actually, well, I'll get going and do my shopping." Standing, Rena shook his hand.

"To let you know when we leave, I'll honk the horn instead of bothering you again."

"That's fine, Miss. Charles" were his only words as he saw her out.

Rex looked over at her as she walked past the car, before nestling down for a nap.

Rena went for the paint first, choosing a full golden yellow for the darker room and a soft mauve gray for the two hotter rooms. Next, Rena picked up brushes and a ladder with cleaning aides, paid for them, and left them for collection.

Next was a dress shop, and she purchased a couple more house dresses for herself. Then, for Carol, four pretty dresses, one best dress, two cardigans, nightwear, underwear, and two pairs of shoes. One pair were for at home and the other for best. Seeing some pretty hats, she purchased two, one each, for attending church. Hopefully, that would be soon.

After getting a lot of groceries and some Christmas decorations, Rena walked back to retrieve her vehicle.

'If Granny could see me now, she would smile.'

Nothing looked out of the ordinary with the motorcar as Rena climbed back behind the steering wheel. "How are you, Carol? I tried to be quick?"

"I'm fine, thanks, Rena. I could hear people talking as they passed by, and the Steamer blew its whistle. Rex has been good - he is very patient,"

Rena patted her boy on the head. "Yes, you are a good boy, aren't you, Rex? And I have some lovely bones for you to chew on when we get home."

Both women felt tired when arriving at the house to unpack and put all the shopping inside. "The weather and this moist heat drain our energy."

Rena put the kettle on to boil while Carol sat at the table cutting slices of bread for sandwiches.

"Look at these lovely tomatoes Carol," They were huge, and Rena purchased six, knowing they would make quick work of them. "Cheese and tomato with onion are simply delicious."

With lunch over and the door locked, they lay on the bed with Rex on his usual floor. All fell asleep, and Carol hadn't seen her new articles of clothing yet, so Rena would enjoy her delight over them once rested.

A loud booming knock at the front door woke both ladies with a start. "God has not given us a SPIRIT of FEAR," said Rena. "I rebuke you spirit in the name of Jesus. Now flee," she commanded.

Carol looked at her as if she were crazy. "Don't worry, Carol, I am of a right mind, but demons want us to be afraid, and we will not be!"

"Shhh," Rena then reminded while getting up to answer the persistent banging. Closing the bedroom door behind her, Rena and her guard walked to the door. Peeping through the window, she could see the back of a man's head wearing an old hat. His truck informed Rena who he was - so she opened the door.

"My goodness, Clary, what is all that clatter?"

"What do you mean? I knocked on the back door, even tried it to see if it was open. Where's that fancy motor

of your grandmother? She used to park it under that roof around the back!"

"Now, Clary, I don't need your lectures. The car is locked in the shed, so people won't know if I'm here or not. A lady alone can't be too careful. Now, what can I do for you?"

"Well," he took his hat off and scratched his head. "The missus said you want your house painted after New Year, so I thought I'd give you an estimate for it."

"That's good of you, Clary. So what do you think?"

"Rena, I thought about six pounds a week of labor for a friend like you, and you buy the paint. Does that sound fair? I'd start at six in the morning and finish at twelve. That's about five and a half hours because I'd need half an hour for morning tea." He looked from her and to the ground and back again.

Rena would not quibble over money; she knew times were tough on the farmer. "I'd say that's reasonable, Clary, and the heat will have it dry quickly." She looked

up at the sky. There is no sight of rain, so I'd say if it stays like this, you will have it done in a week."

"Ah, it needs a good clean and undercoat before the main paint job. I'd say more like two weeks." He looked at her - unsure of whether she could afford that. Rena looked him in the eye, knowing whatever she said would likely get relayed back to his wife, which meant telling the whole town her business.

"My grandmother taught me her herb trade well, Clary, so I am here to treat ailments as she did. I'll make out fine."

"Miss. Rena, could I get something from you to help me sleep? I have trouble at night."

"Sure, just walk around the back, and I'll be there shortly." Rena hurried through the house to the back after re-locking the front door. She opened the back one for Clary to enter - instructing Rex to lie on the floor outside Carol's room.

"Come in, Clary; you know the way." He walked behind her into the back room, filled with dried hanging herbs.

Breaking off a few of four different kinds, she placed them in a little brown bag and handed it over.

"There you go. Now you know how to steep them in a cup of hot water for half an hour before drinking. Mix the herbs well and only use a dessert spoon full in the drink.

You will sleep like a baby."

"Your grandmother always charged two shillings and sixpence.

Is it still the same?"

"No, Clary, it's on me just this once, and I'll see you in the New Year, if not before."

"You're just like your grandmother. Thank you, Miss. Rena, good day and God Bless."

Chapter 15

On Guard against Danger

Rena sighed with relief that he was gone; she felt jumpy and didn't know why; perhaps it was from being awoken from a deep sleep. She would be glad when the apprehension regarding Darrel was over.

Rex ran out into the yard to the bathroom, and leaving the back door open, Rena went to put the kettle on to boil. A hot cup of chamomile tea would calm her nerves.

Carol wandered out, looking sleepy and disheveled. "I suppose we needed to wake up; it's almost four o'clock, and the time has flown today."

Rena placed a hot teapot on the table, gathering sugar and cups before sitting down. "Well, our life isn't boring, is it? And when Clary and his wife announce my herbs are for sale, we will have a constant stream of customers."

Carol did the honors of pouring the tea, handing it over in a cup with a saucer to her benefactor. "You just said

we, Rena. So does that mean I will be here with you?"

"I hope so, my dear. Then I can teach you all about the herbs, how to give what, and the need to be careful with some of them."

"Surely herbs can't be dangerous, can they?"

It is necessary to handle certain herbs, such as Bella Donna and the Kava Kava root, with care. You will need to write the information as I teach you and keep the book handy for reference. The room with our herbs must never be left unlocked." Taking care was valuable information, and Carol needed to be aware of that. Observing her as she spoke, Rena felt convinced she would be a caring student.

"That's enough of serious matters. Come into the sitting room with me, and we'll have some fun."

Rena picked up and carried the giant paper bag with the new articles for Carol, waiting for her to sit before giving her the bag.

"Now I want no arguments, Carol; these are for you as your first month's salary, okay?"

Carol stared at her. "Okay," she replied with surprise.

The dresses in light floral shades all helped to accentuate Carol's auburn hair and dark brown eyes.

"These are lovely, Rena, but where will I wear them?"

"Every day, my sweet, a business lady, must keep up appearances. Now have a look at the one wrapped in tissue."

The dress was a dusty pink lace in the dropped modern waist style and looked stunning when held up against her figure. Carol ran her hands lovingly over the material. "I have had nothing as beautiful as this in my whole life. Are you sure, Rena?"

"Very sure! Now try the shoes because I guessed you to be my size. See if they fit you?"

Both were a brown color and perfected while matching any dress. Rena got up and went to find the hat; it was the same color as the dress, ultimately offsetting the outfit.

"I need to buy a full-length mirror so that we can see ourselves. You'll have to believe me when I say that you

look picture-perfect. Except for your hair, how about I plait it and wrap it around your head in a coronet?"

"I'll have that for when we go out?" replied Carol. "But at home, I prefer a bun because it's easier."

Forgetting the problems and laughing together, they soon stopped when hearing Rex barking madly. It was not a welcome bark, but an angry one.

"Stay here, Carol, while I see what's happening. Lock the door, and if I'm not back in a little while, phone the police."

"You can't go out; if it's Darrel, he'll hurt you." Carol's face held horror at the thought of what he could do.

"No, he won't hurt me; I have a big dog, remember!" Rena rebuked the fear.

When Rena walked outside and saw what the barking was about, she acted quickly, speaking her armor into place, as she surveyed an enormous male kangaroo. He had a distressed Rex cornered at the back of the shed. Standing six feet tall, he knew to protect his herd of

females and baby Joey's against harm. Rena knew the Boomer could win in a fight, so Rex had no chance. She had seen Roo's lean back on their tail, using their clawed feet to disembowel their opponent.

Rex needed her support, and she hoped to give it without killing the Roo. "Avigdor, I need your help," Rena spoke through her mind.

"I am your helper," Ariel materialized. "Avigdor is in battle with the Prince of the Power of the Air. Look-see!" He pointed his sword skyward where an assembly of angles, gleaming gold, fought against evil black-winged creatures. The whole heavens looked a startling fiery red.

Rena couldn't think about this while her pet needed help.

"Help me save Rex, please, Ariel." She implored.

Flying swiftly towards the females, Ariel shooed them off, scattering them all into the bushland. Rena ran towards Rex and the boomer with her sword flashing brightly. Confused, the big male turned and leaped away, racing to find his separated family.

Rena kneeled beside Rex, noting a gash on his front leg, thankful it wasn't worse. With her armor now gone, she kneeled beside him, placing her arm around his neck to hug him close for comfort. He whimpered at first, burying his head in her lap, then looked dolefully into her face.

To take his mind off what happened, Rena pointed to the spiritual warfare far up overhead. "Look, Rex, look at how God loves and protects us, see?" He lifted his head and watched her as God's heavenly host hunted off the terrors of evil - that were retreating in a hurry.

Ariel arrived back beside Rena and Rex. Seeing Rex injured, he placed his hand over the bleeding gash, holding it there for a moment. When his hand withdrew, it revealed a healed dog.

"He needs to be whole," Ariel explained. "This is no time for him to require recuperation." Rena looked down at Rex, marveled at what she had just witnessed. Lifting her head to thank the angel, he had already vanished.

Five days before Christmas and both bedroom walls and ceiling were clean. Carol could help some now and did. Rena would begin painting one bedroom the next day.

Carol took care of cooking, tidying up, and watching Rex when he ventured to use the bathroom. She stood inside the kitchen door when he went out, but after his fright, Rex stayed close to home and returned immediately.

Christmas carols played softly on the radio as Carol spread tinsel and pretty ornaments around.

With the freedom only to paint, Rena attacked it with gusto. By one in the afternoon, the ceiling and one wall had their first coat as Carol appeared to announce that lunch was ready.

"I'm enjoying doing this." Rena looked tired yet happy. That yellow certainly makes a difference to brighten the room."

"I agree; it makes it look happy instead of dreary," Carol said. "But I hope we get to spend a happy Christmas without being stuck at home."

After a brief rest, Rena was back at work. By evening, the room looked fresh with its first coat of paint, and the next day would see it finished.

Standing back and surveying the full effect the following evening, Rena delighted in the difference. She decided to have a pretty colored carpet square on all the wooden bedroom floors and new curtains fitted throughout the house.

Since it was now three days before Christmas, it could wait until after the New Year.

Rena walked into the sitting room, where Carol sat singing along with a song on the radio. She smiled as Rena sat down beside her.

"Think Carol, where would Darrel have gone? Has he got any mates, or would he have gone to Melbourne or Sydney? Men like to be with the things and people they care about."

Carol turned to look at Rena - she was thinking. "He's got no friends around here that I'm aware of; all he did

every day was take care of his flower field. He loved those flowers and said they would make him rich."

"Really? So, what did these flowers look like, Carol?"

"Oh, they were strange, with a long, strong stem and a ball on top that broke into a pretty flower. I picked some once and put them in a bottle on the table, and Darrel went off his head and told me he'd bash my head in if I ever touched them again."

"Goodness, what a terrible thing to say. Tell me, Carol, do you think he might be back living in that house with his flowers?"

"I never thought of that, but come to think of it _ I believe he could be. No one ever came there because it's so isolated."

Chapter 16

Many Surprises

Rena got up; she was going to phone the police and hoped Glen Talbot was still at work.

The police station phone rang out, but Betty, the telephone operator, came on just as Rena prepared to hang up.

"I know where he is, Rena; he's at the Johnson House. Do you want me to try there for you?"

"Good idea, thank you, Betty!"

Rena was trying to think what to say to Glen, knowing Betty would be all ears to listen. Glen answered just a few minutes later, thanking Betty for her help.

"What can I do for you, Miss. Charles?"

"So sorry to bug you, Sergeant, but we have problems with the kangaroos. One large boomer has had a go at my dog, Rex."

"Can it wait until tomorrow?"

"No! I'm afraid not; please come soon."

With him saying he'd be there within half an hour, Rena felt they might finally catch the evasive Darrel.

Listening out for the Police vehicle, Rena didn't plan on a few other trucks rattling into her drive. Looking through the window, men with guns were everywhere, and soon someone banged on her back door. Carol dived into her bedroom while Rena went outside.

"Where are they, Rena? We've all come to your aid; now, which way did they go?" Tim O'Malley waved his gun in the air, eager to get going.

"What are you doing here? Tim, did Betty tell you?"

"She sure did, and the mates and I know more about Roo's than a city slicker police officer. Which way did they go, Rena?"

The best thing to get them out of the way was to send them on a wild goose chase, so she pointed in the

opposite direction to the one taken by the Kangaroos days before.

No sooner were they out of sight than Glen arrived, puzzled to see so many trucks in view.

"Tim O'Malley and his mates took it upon themselves to come here for a kangaroo hunt, but there's something more important than that." Rena put her finger to her lips for secrecy.

She closed the back door and walked away from the house before giving him her information.

"I've been talking with Carol. She told me Darrel is growing what she calls lots of flowers, but from her description, I'd call them opium poppies." She looked at him for a reaction.

"We felt someone around here was doing something like that, but didn't know where or who. So, it's likely that where the poppies are - is where we'll find our man."

"I'd say so," Rena responded. "Get Carol to draw you a mud map of how to get there, but please don't tell her about opium."

"I know better than that. I'm going to need help, and night is the best time. How long has it been since those blokes and Tim took off?"

"Humm, about ten minutes. Why?"

Glen walked quickly to his truck without answering her and tooted his motor horn twice. After waiting for a little while, he repeated it another twice.

"When the men come running back, keep them here until I come out to talk to them. It's still best if none of them know about our visitor yet."

With a solemn face, Glen went inside to speak to Carol and get her to help him know how to find the house.

Before the men were heard yelling - and coming into view, Glen was already back outside. Tim put his hand up to stop them as soon as he sighted Glen, thinking

they might be in trouble. Silently, the men walked to the law enforcer.

Glen knew what they were thinking, and he also knew they would be agreeable to help for not getting into trouble about taking the law into their own hands.

"Ok, fellows, gather round." He waited until they were all close before talking, as he didn't want his voice to travel.

"I will say nothing concerning this situation about chasing the 'Roo's because I know you all meant well."

Waiting to see their reaction, he noted the hung heads and shuffling of feet.

"Okay, how would you men feel about rounding up an opium grower?" They all looked at each other, stunned!

"What are you talking about, sergeant?" This question came from Tim.

"We have one here in our midst, hiding and growing dope illegally in the bush. He will give our town a bad

name if we don't bring him in. I know that none of you want that."

The men shook their heads; their town was as vital to them as their family.

"What can we do to help catch him, Sergeant?" A man named Neville stepped forward.

"Yes, what can we do?" the others yelled.

"Okay," began Glen. "Do you know of an old unused house near Timber Gully?"

"Sure," Tim answered. "Anyone who goes shooting around here knows where that is. Why?"

"Because that's where he lives and grows the stuff." Glen snorted.

"Blimey," they looked from one to the other.

Glen told them his plan, saying they should go immediately to catch him off guard. "All our vehicles will need to remain down the road when we get near

so that he can't hear us approach. Then we'll creep up on foot. Do you think you can be very quiet?"

"We're all hunters; we'll be as quiet as mice."

Rena turned away to smile, thinking of their previous roaring.

They allocated Tim to lead the way, with Glen behind him.

• • • •

The women decided it was best waiting to hear if Darrel got caught, and the problem was solved. Rena prayed for protection over Glen and the other men while Carol listened with closed eyes.

"You believe in God and prayers, don't you, Rena?" With an engrossed expression, Carol voiced her lack of understanding.

"I certainly do, Carol; God has his way of working the hardest situation out." She told Carol some of her spiritual experiences, keeping the fact of being a supernatural warrior to herself.

They lay side by side on the enormous bed, with Carol asking questions and Rena answering the best she could after praying in her mind for God's wisdom.

Finally, Carol declared she would like to go to the Christmas service with Rena, as she loved the Christmas carols played on the radio.

"Have you got a favorite carol, Rena?"

"They are all so beautiful that I'm not sure. But one I like to sing myself is the Jerusalem Hymn." "I have heard that, and it's beautiful.

"I think I like 'Oh Holy Night'. I get goosebumps every time I hear it. Does that ever happen to you, Rena?"

"With some hymns in church, it does. You know, Carol, your name represents Christmas, the holy time when we celebrate the birth of Jesus' birth. He was really born in March, when the Jews celebrate Nisan. That is the time lambs are born, and Jesus was the perfect lamb of God. But we celebrate Jesus' birth on the 25th of December and have for centuries."

Carol remained silent, probably mulling over what they talked about: Jesus.

As the clock struck nine-thirty, the telephone rang, surprising both women! Rena got out of bed and ran to answer. Was it Glen with the news already?

No! The voice on the other end was unexpectedly, Aiden.

"Hello, Rena. Why did you run away from me?" He laughed. "That doesn't sound right, does it?"

Without allowing her to speak, he continued. "I miss you; it's been lonely without your presence." Rena smiled to herself, deciding to tease.

"Why would you feel like that, Aiden? You were always angry with me?" Let him understand how rude his behavior was! Rena could imagine him scratching his head and wondering how to apologize.

"I'm an idiot; by trying to get away and stay a bachelor. I hurt your feelings by my stupid way of trying to deal with things. Can you forgive me?"

"Oh, I forgive you, BUT when people are forever unpleasant to you, it's best not to be near them."

Rena needed to turn her head away from the phone, afraid she'd burst out laughing. He needed a lesson; otherwise, he'd keep on hurting people.

"Look, you need a proper explanation, and there is no way the person listening to this call will hear it. Would you be happy if my mother and I were to come visit you for a few days at Christmas? We are both missing you." Rena counted to twenty before she answered.

"Well, _ if your mother wants to come, I'd love to see her, of course."

He ended the call with, "I suppose that's the best I can hope to hear. See you on Christmas Eve or day then." Hanging up the phone, Rena returned to bed, informing Carol of visitors expected in a couple of days. "We'll need to get more food in, so if we get good news tomorrow, we can both go into town and shop."

Knocking at the front door early the following day, both young women held their breaths. Looking at Carol

sitting drinking her tea Rena left the table, praying for the good news of a capture.

Chapter 17

Good news

Sergeant Talbot stood at the door with a broad smile. "We got him!"

With a screech, Rena threw herself into his arms, yelling for Carol - who came running.

She looked like a pretty picture in a pink dress with a pink ribbon tied around her dark hair.

"Come in, Glenn, and tell us about what happened. This is so exciting." Rena walked back to the kitchen.

"Just a moment," Glenn interrupted. "There is something I found which I believe may belong to Carol."

Bending to the side, he grabbed an old chest and placed it on the hallway floor.

Carol stared in disbelief. "Oh Glen, I'll love you forever. Yes, that is mine, and I never thought to see it again. Please bring it into the kitchen." Carol's eyes shone with happiness, not only from the reassurance that the

danger was over, but she also had her precious belongings back.

"Sit, Glenn, and we want to hear everything!" Rena poured his tea, pushing over the milk and sugar for him to help himself.

Glen recounted arriving on the road a good half mile from the house. "The men were quiet, much to my surprise. A couple of blokes stayed near the front door, one man watched a window, and three others went inside with me."

He stirred his tea, took a slice of toast, and bit into it before continuing. "The place reeked. It was shocking, with rotten food, urine, and alcohol. Darrel wasn't the cleanest person." He ate this toast and drank some tea. "We had no worries with him; he'd passed out drunk, face down on his bed. It was easy to tie his hands behind his back and hoist him to his feet."

Carol listened intently to every spoken word; she had a look of adoration for Glenn on her face. He was her hero. "So, he is now under lock and key, Glen."

"That he is Carol; he'll go before the magistrate tomorrow. We had two constables come up the river first thing this morning, and they're already at the old house gathering up those opium poppies as evidence against him."

"My goodness, Glenn, isn't opium prohibited?" Carol's naivety and outraged expression astounded the police sergeant.

Carol's answer confirmed she knew nothing about the illegal poppies. But he softened the predicament by informing her that they could harvest the illegal poppies and use them to make morphine for the sick. Her face glowed at hearing that.

"And there is more good news for you, Carol; the federal police had a reward for the individual who informed on that illegal crop, so I put your name down as the person. You will be one thousand pounds richer tomorrow."

Carol's hand flew to her chest. "Oh my goodness, I feel faint. It's hard to believe."

Glenn finished his tea and toast, standing to go. "Well, ladies, no more hiding. You are safe to go wherever you like now." He looked at Carol admiringly. "May I call to visit you as a friend, Carol?"

She gave him a smiling nod, unable to express her happiness to him for asking.

As Glenn's police vehicle drove off, Rena walked to the chest. "Well, will you keep me in suspense or show me your treasure chest contents?"

Carol giggled out loud and clapped her hands. "Come on, Rex; you're in on this as well." She included the big German shepherd while lifting the lid.

"There are mainly clothes, many I made myself, so to me they are special. Underneath them is wool because I love to crochet but never dared while Darrel could have destroyed my work." Carol carefully lifted articles of clothing from the chest, placing them on a chair. Then the skeins of different colored wool got taken out to show Rena.

"I love making pretty things, which help me earn money." Lifting these out, the bottom of the chest sat clear except for a tiny piece of ribbon. Looking at Rena first, Carol then pulled on it. A false bottom lifted, revealing a calico bag.

"For some reason, I knew not to tell Darrel about my savings. To some people, it's not much, but I have been saving this for a couple of years. I have thirty pounds in here, such a lot of money."

"Yes," Rena agreed, "you earned it, and it's good that Darrel didn't get to take it away from you." She cleared the dishes off the table.

"Let's hurry and go to town, Carol; we will buy some things to make Christmas special. And we should invite Sergeant Talbot to Christmas dinner."

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It was an exciting day for both as they wandered the street looking into shop windows and going inside to buy gifts. Then they splurged at a cafe for lunch. Many

of the town folk looked at Carol - knowing she looked familiar, yet unable to figure out who she was.

Carol loved being a mystery and kept smiling, which was new to her in this town.

When someone whispered in Rena's ear asking who her friend was, she answered them loudly, "Why, this is my new apprentice, of course."

The news set tongues wagging about whether to trust a stranger. Then, seeing Sergeant Talbot approach and greet both women, gave more fuel to the fire. How did he know her? Goodness, to be seen laughing and flirting with her, he undoubtedly would be quizzed about that.

Rena was aware of all the commotion and knew it took little for a small town to want to know everything about a newcomer.

Loaded with food, gifts, and wrappings, they drove home happily that afternoon.

Each woman wrapped gifts in the bedroom. Carol was happy and beside herself; she could never have imagined her life being this good a few months back.

Rena finished wrapping gifts and told Carol she was going for a walk. She wanted to pick some beautiful Christmas bush that made the festive season special. The tiny red bells on small shrub branches lit up a home.

Believing Avigdor to be close by, Rena questioned him about not helping capture Darrel.

"Yes, I am here, Spirit Warrior, and I heard your question. But if angels did all the work, what then would a man do?"

"But was there a possibility of them being harmed?"

"Many of those men have their guardian angel,"

"When will I be going to help again, Avigdor?"

"When the time comes, you will be prepared, as always, wearing your armor. It is for God only to command; we are his servants."

Since he finished speaking, Avigdor disappeared as fast as he'd come.

"Well, Rex, I pray there will be a happy Christmas for us all."

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Glen arrived first on Christmas Day, spruced up with his curls slicked down, wearing a suit and carrying two parcels. Carol brought him into the kitchen for a punch drink and the traditional fruit cake she and Rena made together.

After handing the women a gift each, Glen withdrew an envelope from his pocket and gave it to Carol. "There's your reward."

Looking inside at the money, Carol hardly believed it to be hers.

"Please put it away safely," Rena advised. "And you might like to bring Glen's gifts on the way back."

"No!" he wanted to dismiss the idea of receiving a gift.

"God tells us it's more blessed to give than to receive, so you must allow us to be blessed as well," Rena insisted. Glen couldn't disagree with that.

"Come into the sitting room, you two," Carol called. "Let's open them in comfort."

It felt more Christmassy in there. "You open your one first, Carol," Glen wanted to see her response.

It was a lovely gold watch; tears sprang into Carol's eyes. "This is too good for me, Glen."

"Nothing is too good for you. Now, Rena, it's your turn."

Hers was a plain gold bangle. "I've always wanted one of these. Thank you so much, Glen."

Carol and Rena handed over his gifts. He received a gold tie clip from Carol, which he put straight on. From Rena, it was a new wallet. "You must have noticed how shabby the old one was," he laughed, "what's left of it, that is."

"We are having a cold lunch," Carol informed. "We cooked everything yesterday, so we don't have to work today." Rena got up as they talked, remembering her big bone for Rex.

"Now you think about staying close to the house, Rex, because we don't want that kangaroo chasing you again."

That's another job for Clary, she thought. He can build a high fence to keep those kangaroos away.

Chapter 18

Miracles and Blessings

Hearing an approaching motor car and peeping from the window, Aiden and Eunice had arrived. Rena ran into the bedroom to see how she looked before welcoming them.

Eunice ran with open arms when she caught sight of Rena, and Rena raced to meet her. With a long hug and a laugh, they separated.

"Now it's my turn." Aiden pulled her tenderly into his arms with a long, passionate kiss. There was no mistaking the meaning behind that.

Glen and Carol emerged to be introduced and helped carry bags and parcels inside.

"What on earth is all of this, Eunice? So much? Are you staying a month?" Rena couldn't believe her eyes.

Eunice began giving the orders on where to put what. "Where am I sleeping? These bags can go in there?"

As a guest, she got the newly painted room. Rena and Carol had Rena's old one, and the back bedroom was clean and ready for Aiden.

"Be careful of that gift, young man," Eunice chastised.

"That's a special gift for our Rena."

"Goodness, what can it be?"

"First, we need a cool drink, young lady,"

Aiden got shown to his bedroom; then everyone returned to the sitting room with Carol carrying a tray bearing full glasses of ginger beer. Rena handed them around.

"Oh, that feels better," Eunice slipped her shoes off before having a long sip of her drink. "Now Rena, this gift to you is a trivial thing. Not important but still special, and you may open it."

Eunice loved propriety, so Rena opened the gift slowly and with a purpose.

It was unique, and Rena adored it. It was a table lamp with hanging beads all around the glass cover. "This is beautiful, Eunice; I am truly dumbfounded."

The gift giver smiled her appreciation.

Rena went to her room and brought her gifts for the new arrivals. Knowing Eunice used her mother's old hairbrush, Rena had bought her a brush, comb, and hand mirror set.

"This will look wonderful on my dressing table. Thank you, Rena."

Next was for Aiden, who shook the box before unwrapping it, teasing to guess before — opening it. He found a leather case with the Eveready single edge flip top razor.

"This is great, Rena. I have often thought to buy one of these but never have." He beamed.

"I'd like us to take a walk after lunch so I can give you my gift."

"Okay, Aiden, I will - now you rest here while Carol and

I set the table."

"I'll come and help," Glen offered.

Rena did most of the work with Carol and Glen clowning around, although Glen did carved the goose.

The meal was typically cold for the warm Australian summer day — meat, potato salad, asparagus, tomatoes, cucumbers, beetroot, and pickled onions. Rena dribbled olive oil over the vegetables just before calling Eunice and Aiden to the table. Carol's bread, all sliced and buttered, sat in the middle.

Rex had a bowl on the floor with potato salad and meat, which he wasted no time gobbling. After finishing, he lay down on the cold floor while Rena recounted the story of him being hurt by a giant male kangaroo.

"Poor Rex," sympathized Eunice, looking at him. "Well, hopefully, he'll return to Kalgoorlie, and when you do, Rex, you will have a mate to keep you company."

"A mate, did you hear that, Rex? And who might that mate be?" Rena questioned with interest.

So Eunice told them the entire story about this sick dog wandering their street, malnourished and looking for something to eat. Rani said she knew how it felt to be hungry and unloved.

"My heart also cried for it, so we brought it in and fed it straight away. We kept it outside in the backyard for the first week until Rani could give her a good bath." Eunice smiled with satisfaction. "That dog adores Rani and woe-betide anyone who tries to harm her mistress."

"She's a German Shepherd like Rex," Aiden added. "And they named her Belle."

"That's a nice easy name, and if she is a great dog like Rex, then you have a prize."

Carol added, "I want a German shepherd as well. It's nice to have a big dog around for protection."

"Well, I know one who has pups, so I'll put your name down," Glen offered. "Do you want a boy or a girl?"

"Doesn't worry me," Carol smiled at him, "You pick it, and I'll name it."

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Aiden stood up, eager to be alone with Rena. "It's our time now, Rena. Let's go. He carried nothing in his hands, making Rena wonder what he had for her. Gripping her small hand in his big one, they walked out of the back door to behind the car shed.

"Ah, alone at last." Aiden pulled her to him and kissed her soundly. Rena enjoyed it and pulled him back for more. "You make my head spin, girl."

He looked down at her with love shining in his eyes. "Do you know the agony I've been through, wondering if you'd met someone else?"

"It's only been a couple of weeks, and I've met plenty of people, Aiden; so, what?"

"Well, as long as I haven't got competition, I don't mind, but come, let's sit on this log together."

He brought a ring box out of his pocket, so Rena felt she knew what he would ask.

"Will you be mine, my sweet girl? Will you marry me?"

Opening the box, Rena saw the most beautiful ring ever, a diamond with smaller ones all around.

She would not tease him this time. She knew Aiden had her heart, and she had his.

"I will, Aiden," she watched him slide the ring onto her finger, looking at it in wonder.

Aiden knew he had to swallow his pride. He needed to admit why his attitude to her in the past was not fair.

"Rena, my sweet, I owe you an explanation for why I spoke angrily about getting married." He ran his fingers through his hair and hoped she would understand what he had to say.

"My father was a poor excuse as a husband and father; he made our life miserable. I have had no confidence in myself to take that position, and I do not know what to do in a relationship or how to do it. But going to church with mom these past couple of weeks and then talking with Pastor has helped me understand by following the

example of Father God. I know that his word will show me the way."

Rena nodded, trying to understand this complicated man from his point of view. "There is just one other problem, Rena, which I hope you won't see as such. I am concerned about leaving my mother alone to marry and live elsewhere."

"I think we should pray about it, Aiden, and then wait on the Lord for his direction. I find he is very good at working life out."

Aiden slipped his arm around Rena's waist, drawing her close. He bowed his head and prayed for God to bless them all. He also said it was to be God's Will- not theirs - in all the decisions they needed to make.

Rena kept her eyes closed for a while after he had finished. She breathed in the fresh air with a sense of genuine peace.

Rena was sitting in that quiet spot, with only her beloved and the whispering trees around them. She sent up a prayer of worship to her Lord.

Aiden's head came close to hers as he tenderly kissed her cheek before turning her head towards him with his hand and claiming her lips with ardor.

"It's no good us being out here alone like this, you know," he whispered in her ear. "We best get back and share our news with the others."

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Total silence met the newly engaged as they entered the house. Rena looked at Aiden, wondering where everyone was. The kitchen sparkled all cleaned up.

"Perhaps they are out the front," Aiden offered. "Let's see."

Walking past the sitting room, they heard, "Congratulations" called out then hands were shook with hugs exchanged.

"Mother!" Aiden looked stern.

Eunice had the grace to look bashful, knowing that Rena would say yes. How could she not?"

"Well, no breaking the news to anyone else, thank you!"

Aiden instructed. "We would like to do that ourselves and together."

"We can do that at church tonight, Aiden. What a special day to get engaged. It couldn't be more perfect."

Rena did a little whirl, holding her ring hand up to admire it again. "It was the perfect surprise from the perfect man."

Chapter 19

Love is in the Air.

Both women dressed to attend church, wearing their new best frocks and hats. A proud Glen escorted Carol into the building, while Aiden escorted Rena and his mother, one on each arm.

The spirit of peace and love drifted with each welcome and introduction. Rena smiled, noting the presence of her angels that no one else could see.

Everything came together perfectly with the carol singing and later when everyone gathered in the church hall for refreshments. Rena and Carol supplied dozens of little savory tarts cooked the day before as their contribution.

"I never knew the church and the folk attending could be this gracious," Carol whispered to her. Rena smiled knowingly.

Aiden approached a thin, shabby-dressed man on the outskirts of the group for fellowship. Shaking his hand

and introducing himself, Aiden learned the man was a widower looking for work.

Going by the name of Barney Wells, he said he was a jack of all trades, but especially good with fixing machinery.

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"Well, this is your day then, my man," Aiden patted him on the back. "If you will return to Kalgoorlie with my mother and me in a couple of days, you'll have a job at the mines."

Barney then told Aiden that he had met the pastor at the dock the previous day and that the pastor had invited him to visit over Christmas.

"I have never been a regular church attendee, and Pastor prayed with me last night to get a job even though he knew of none going. Your offer has given me a stronger faith in God as I am on my last pound."

Eunice wandered over and got introduced by Aiden. She learned Barney would travel back with them to work.

His mother gave her usual cheerful reply that he was welcome to do so.

Barney eyed Eunice off with a twinkle in his eye. She was an attractive lady with her brown eyes and white hair, neatly dressed in an apricot dress specially made to bring out her best attributes. Eunice was aware of his attraction towards her and, given some decent food and a haircut, could see him as the gentleman she believed him to be.

Nothing got lost on Rena, who looked on from a distance. *Well, God, are you already at work? Eunice deserves to be happy, and if this man turns out to be decent, it could work well.*

Strangely, the angels hadn't summoned Rena to help them. In her bedroom alone the following day, and thinking about this, Avigdor appeared.

"You are having a sabbatical, a time of rest, as many other things here have needed your full attention. Once your visitors return home, you will be called on if needed. For now, well done with Carol."

Rena didn't have time to ask questions before he was gone again. Carol came into the bedroom, looking around in confusion. "I thought I heard a man's voice?" "Perhaps you did, Carol," was her only reply.

Aiden and Rena both felt mutual love. Rena said nothing about being a spiritual warrior to her man, as he might not understand. Some things were best kept to oneself until it was fitting to share.

Little did she suspect God was also using Aiden for the good of many. Helping Barney with work was one step in a ministry he'd have helping men.

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Aiden and Eunice remained another two days before heading off on their three-day journey. The pastor brought Barney, at the time arranged, to depart with them.

Aiden's kiss was long and lingering. He didn't want to leave her, but the time would come when they'd be together forever, and at least they could communicate

over the phone even though there was always someone listening.

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New Year 1923 began and went with little fuss. Glen came to the house as usual and stayed to see the New Year. Aiden phoned Rena just before midnight and remained there until well after the clock struck.

"Just making sure you're not kissing someone else," He joked. He told her his mother was out at church with Barney to celebrate and that their relationship seemed steady. "Just good friends, I think."

Ben, the young man from church, continued to see Rani and took her to meet his parents. It sounded like that was becoming serious. Aiden and Rena spoke until one in the morning before hanging up. Hopefully, next New Year, they would be together.

The following Sunday at church, Rena and Carol met a young woman. Rena vaguely remembered her being at the Christmas celebrations.

Melody Parson informed them of being employed as a nanny by a farming family who didn't attend church. She seemed pleasant and wanted to befriend the two.

They invited Melody home for lunch, and she followed them back in her automobile. At the house and preparing a salad with cold meat, Rena heard Avigdor warn. "Be careful of this woman; she is not to be trusted."

Carol sat in the sitting room, chatting with their guest. Glen was on duty but would have his hour lunch break with them.

Rena and her angel spoke mind talk, so they were safe to converse.

"Why is that Avigdor? She seems nice, and I have not had a bad feeling about her.?"

"She is a project Rena, not a vessel yet for demons, but she will be if she keeps doing wrong."

Glen drove in, so Rena hurried to put the last of the meal on the table.

"What am I to do? There must be a purpose for her being here today."

"There is Rena; she wants to find out all about you so she can blackmail you for money. She has done this before. Once she has your trust, then she's got you. This afternoon you'll be alone with her. Tell her you have visited heaven and hell and how real they are. We will give her the bait."

"Alright, I know you know best. This lady may need a scare to learn she's dealing with more than she realizes."

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After lunch, Glen invited Carol to his work so that they could go for a drive after he finished at four o'clock.

Melody helped with cleaning up and asked so many questions that, in the end, Rena asked her why she wanted to know.

"No reason," Melody gave a friendly smile. "Just interested, that's all."

Rena began asking her questions about her faith and how much she understood about heaven and hell.

"I don't know whether I believe there are such places, she answered.

"There is, my dear, and if you saw them, it would make you very sure that hell was not a place you ever wanted to be."

Melody laughed aloud, "Oh, come on, Rena, how can you be so sure?"

Now was the time to set this person straight.

"Let's sit in the lounge, and I'll tell you about my experience."

Before explaining hell's terror, she told Melody about her angels' and heaven's beauty. Melody quietly listened, but then mocked her new friend.

"You tell quite a story. You should be a writer, and Rena, if anyone were to know this about you, they'd think you crazy."

"So, Melody, will you tell everyone to ruin my credibility?"

"Now, why would you say or even think that about me, Rena?"

"Because my angel has told me all about you and your wicked ways of blackmailing people, that's why!"

Melody's hand flew to cover her mouth in shock. "So, what else has your angel told you?"

Avigdor filled Rena in more, telling of Melody's growing up in a poverty-stricken family with drunken parents.

"You had no love growing up, and your parents drank away the money, leaving you, your brother, and two sisters with little to eat."

"How do you know all this?" tears came to Melody's eyes.

"Nothing gets hidden from God. He sees all, and he knows all." Rena placed her arm around Melody's shoulder. "God loves you, Melody, and he can see you

heading for more hurt if you keep going the way you are."

"Are you sure that God doesn't hate me? Why would he let you know about me?"

"Because he sees I can forgive you and be your friend. He knows my heart as well as yours. I have also had a lot of hurts, but I choose to do right and not wrong."

"Can you help me, Rena? I don't like hurting people, but I've done it to get ahead. "

"The right way to get ahead is by being honest, doing your best, and working. And that's the only way."

Rena was thinking. So, she asked Avigdor if there was some way she could help Melody.

"Take her on as your apprentice," came the answer.
"Carol will marry Glen and move away to another post. But Melody's future is here."

Chapter 20

Revealing the Angels

"Do you like your job, Melody?"

"No, not at all. The people I work for are unpleasant, and they take back most of my wage in food and lodgings so that I work for practically nothing."

"Shall I tell you what God wants for you?"

Melody showed her surprise, "Yes, please do."

"I am to take you on as my apprentice, which means you would live here and earn a good wage."

"When were you told this, Rena?"

"Just now, my angel Avigdor delivers the messages. Would you like to see him?"

As Rena said this, Avigdor materialized, standing tall and golden like a beautiful statue.

Melody almost screamed with fright. "Has he been here all the time?"

"Of course. How do you think I knew everything about you? There are another two as well."

Akim and Ariel came into sight, with the three of them filling the room with peace, love, and beautiful perfume.

Melody was beyond speech, coughing as if something got swallowed down the wrong way. When she could get over her shock and speak, she announced giving her notice to leave her job and could start in a week if Rena was willing for her to begin then.

"That will be fine, Melody. So, do you believe in what I told you?"

"How could I not!"

"And will you change your ways for the better?"

"I will try."

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The week passed quickly with Rena flat-out painting and then hanging new curtains in the other two bedrooms. She also worked out the right way of adding an

extension of three rooms to the house. There could be two long rooms, one to accommodate eight beds and the other as a large dining room. A new verandah would run along the back of the house with a place at the end to serve as the herb shop.

People were already phoning and asking for help with different ailments. Rena explained the shop would be open on the 10th of January, as she had much to prepare.

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Melody settled in well; she was an eager student, learning quickly because she was interested in the art of natural healing.

Rena's grandmother's herb garden had not fared well, with the kangaroos often entering the yard and eating many plants. The first job set for Clary was an extremely high fence around the perimeter to keep them at bay. Thankfully, Rena had well-dried stock available, from Chamomile to Valerian root.

Melody felt fascinated and proud to pursue a valued career in a respected field. Her room and food were free, and she began earning two pounds weekly, which would increase with sales. The change in her attitude and character was phenomenal. She often sang while working with the herbs, and her face shone with contentment.

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Early one morning, Rena awakened with swords clashing and clanging against shields. Rex growled and wanted to go outside. Slipping on her dressing gown, Rena ran out with him to investigate the commotion.

The sky darkened until it almost resembled a furious thunderstorm. Through the obscurity and lightning clashes, angels warred. It was a terrifying scene. Beastly demons, gray like dead meat, desperately tried to destroy the golden angels of God. With shark-like teeth, they snarled and snapped, striving to bite into spiritual flesh while screeching with ear-splitting clamor.

A winged white horse rode into the crowd. Its rider was undoubtedly the Lord for the tumultuous scattered, sending the demons back into the ever-burning abyss.

The sun shone light across the darkness, diminishing all signs of confusion.

With peace restored, all was back in control.

Wow- I just witnessed an incredible spiritual onslaught, no wonder humans have no chance against the perils of darkness. I now truly understand that protection comes when we remain close to our savior, who defends those who are his.

Carol entered back into the kitchen, dressed and filled the kettle with water to place on the stove.

Melody walked in, looking puzzled. "I thought I heard thunder and saw lightning flashes, yet looking out, the sun is shining, and there's no resemblance to a change in the weather."

"Perhaps you were dreaming," Rena offered an explanation, "or perhaps there was a heavenly fight overhead."

"Oh Rena, you're such a tease," Carol laughed while setting the table.

"Am I? Well, at least I made you laugh. Is that water ready yet? I'm famished." Rena collected the milk as she spoke, setting it on the table before sitting down.

"Well, ladies, come and look at this and tell me what you think. In time, as we help others find their way, we will need a place for them to stay."

She placed her plans for the extensions down on the table for their inspection.

"What is this for, Rena?" Melody inquired. "This seems like a large endeavor."

"Yes, it likely will be," smiled Rena, "but you'll learn to deal with it, and extra help will come."

"Me," Melody looked shocked. "What about Carol?"

"Yes, what about Carol?" With both faces turning to look at her, Carol's face turned crimson.

"This isn't fair, you two; I wanted to keep my secret a little longer. I'll tell you, but just you, mind - don't go letting anyone else know."

Melody sat forward in her seat. Carol had a secret, and Melody loved intrigue.

"Well," began Carol. "Glenn has been seconded to another station about three hours further north. He wants us to marry and go there as a married couple. What do you think? I need an expert opinion."

Melody jumped straight in to say what she thought. "I like Glenn. He seems dependable, and his regard for you, Carol is beyond reproach. I say go for it." Carol

looked at Rena for her answer.

"Well, Carol, ultimately, it's your choice. I like all I have witnessed regarding Glen's genuineness and love towards you. The people of this town hold him in high

regard. You, Carol, have known the bad side of one man; I believe you would know only the good side of this one."

"Yes, you two." She looked at both her friends. "I feel Glen and I share much in common. He is considerate, and no one has treated me as well as Glen does. I believe I'll give him a positive answer on his next visit."

Melody clapped, so Rena joined in, then both hugged Carol and wished her well.

"Okay, now look at this house plan, please, girls. If you think there is room for improvement, then please let me know. Three heads work better than one."

Neither Carol nor Melody saw any reason for the change. But both admitted that they couldn't see it working with so many people.

"Don't worry, leave the organizing to me. When the time comes, I will have a list of people, and everyone will contribute equally." Rena folded the plans, ready for when Clary and his two offsites arrived the next day.

• • • •

Clary was in his element. The timber was due for delivery, and in the meantime, the fence was under erection. "There'll be no Roo's messing with your garden, Miss. Rena, once this goes up." Rena was sure he was correct.

The men worked hard with the fence erected in two days and the house timber due the day after. Because a herb-picking visit was scheduled in four days, and knowing the herb shop wouldn't be ready in time, she used the front verandah until its completion.

The verandah came second, and Clary assured Rena he was prepared to complete it over a weekend when no customers were due.

Rena was too busy to miss seeing Aiden, yet she always enjoyed his phone calls and some of his humorous stories. One night, he informed her. "I'm thinking of a spring wedding Rena, but will leave the date to you." Rena had been thinking the same yet wanted more confirmation.

The weekend they erected the back verandah, Avigdor surprised her with an early Sunday morning arrival, saying she was needed. Still, only four o'clock, Carol and Melody slept, Rena left a note on the kitchen table saying she didn't know if she'd make it to church.

In full armor and daylight breaking, Rena felt she'd be visible, though being assured of complete safety from human sight. She and her angels flew near the river, looking for the riverboat. A young sixteen-year-old girl was to be on board and due to be sold off to a man of Middle Eastern origin, three times her age.

Sharma grew up Muslim, yet through a friend at school, she had given her life to Christ. Under Sharia law, the father could have killed her; instead, he sold her to an older, strict man who would instill his will.

Chapter 21

No Prayer Goes Unanswered,

Sharma prayed hard for God to intervene. Because of her earnest request, Rena and her angels came to her rescue before the boat docked. Entering the small cabin, Rena's heart went to the sorrowful figure lying face down, crying into her pillow.

"Reveal yourself and speak to her," Avigdor prompted.

"Sharma, God has heard your prayers, and we are here to take you away from this wrongful situation." Rena now glowed visibly to be seen. "Don't be afraid. My name is Serenity, and I am a spirit warrior who accompanies God's angels to help those in need."

Sharma stopped crying and listened before turning over and sitting to see who spoke. "You are here to help me?"

"We are. Now, if you can gather your belongings, we will be off; there is a need to hurry as this boat will dock shortly."

In a state of shock, Sharma moved slowly at first, and then, as reality coursed through her veins, her pace quickened.

"Where will we take her," Rena questioned Avigdor, unheard by Sharma.

"Why, of course, Dana needs the companionship of others such as herself."

Sharma stood ready, a small suitcase in hand.

"Close your eyes, Sharma," Rena instructed. "One of God's angels will carry you. You are safe - and in a short time will arrive at a safe home to be with other girls. They will befriend and help you."

Sharma smiled weakly, "I trust my God, and I will do as you say. Avigdor lifted her into his powerful arms, and she closed her eyes, becoming invisible to the human eye. Ariel took her suitcase, and they were off, leaving the paddle steamer far below. Flying in the spirit was almost like the blink of an eye - Dana's home soon came into view.

An early riser, Dana and some girls would already be awake. Flying down to her front door, Rena looked for the two dogs. They rested in their usual place, giving no resistance to the unusual visitors.

As Sharma's feet touched solid ground, her eyes opened.

"This is your new home, Sharma. We will leave you here so you can announce yourself to Dana. Knock on the door, we may see you again; and God Bless you."

Sharma hardly said thank you before her rescuers were gone.

Remaining on high, Rena watched as Dana opened the door and pulled Sharma into her arms. "Another one protected Avigdor. Thank you for including me." Rena smiled.

Soaring through the air, the land below flashed like a colorful kaleidoscope, and Rena gave praise and thanks for the Lord's quick answer to Sharma's prayer.

"God hears all prayer Rena," Ariel answered humbly.

"Sometimes the result is fast, and other times comes later, or it may even be a NO! Our Heavenly Father sees the bigger picture and knows what's best for us."

"Yes, I realize. And this time was an emergency."

• • • •

The angels departed when coming into view of Rena's house, leaving her to descend alone. Clary's truck rambling in to begin work revealed that the hour was still early. Rena grabbed her note from the kitchen table while hurrying to her bedroom. Looking at the clock, it was almost 6 am, so she went back to bed for another hour of sleep before getting up to prepare for church.

A squawking flock of black cockatoos woke her up later. Goodness! Already fifteen past seven, and no one had called her. Dressing quickly, Rena hurried out to the kitchen. The kettle boiled, and she heard the men talking outside.

After setting the table and making a pot of tea, Rena went to see what was happening. Nothing looked

unusual. The verandah was taking shape and, hopefully, would be ready by the time they returned from church.

Aiden phoned that evening to announce he'd be arriving tomorrow and staying for the week if that was alright.

Rena concluded he must be coming on the paddle steamer this time, and she was right.

She couldn't wait to see him and watched the boat as it sidled alongside the rough timber dock to the moor.

With eyes searching the passengers, Aiden was seen dressed in casual clothes and wearing a broad brimmed hat. He looked tall and handsome, with some women passengers vying for his attention.

Hey, Rena wanted to yell at them. *He's mine!* Aiden was oblivious to anything except looking to see if Rena was there.

To show he was her man, she ran to him the moment his feet touched land and, seeing her coming, he

lowered his suitcase and opened his arms. Leaping at him, being lifted and swung around, and then kissing soundly in front of everyone, was a pure delight.

"Oh, how I've missed you." Aiden held her at arm's length to look his fill.

"You grow more beautiful every day." Lowering her to the ground, he grabbed his bag and placing his arm around her waist; they walked as lovers to the car park. "Tell me what you have been doing at your house."

Rena filled him in as they drove home. When Aiden heard about the building, he volunteered to help anywhere needed.

"I don't want you to work the whole time, Aiden, so today and your last day will be just ours. Do you mind?"

He leaned over in the seat and kissed her cheek. "I'd mind if you didn't want to spend time with me."

Aiden liked the look of the back verandah and stopped, standing at the end. He volunteered to paint the inside and make it ready for use. He was delighted that Rena

was teaching Melody to be a herbalist and take over from her.

They were harmonious days. Kangaroos had ventured in one night, seen by their droppings the next day. Not being able to get over the ten-foot fence, they disappeared to different pastures. Rena's Herb Shop was ready for business, and Melody delightfully helped carry everything from the verandah to arrange on the new shelves. She had become so efficient with her knowledge that Rena stood by as she diagnosed and gave out herbs. Only once did she enquire of her mentor.

• • • •

Having an in-depth discussion with Aiden on his last day, Rena revealed a dream she'd had the previous night. "It was so real, Aiden, that I thought it happened." Her eyes glowed with excitement.

"It was our wedding day, and I can tell you the date. It was a Saturday, the sixth of October, at 11 am. Not

inside the church, but outside in the open air. I even saw a special dress."

Aiden listened intently, happy about the wedding date but uncertain about the importance of his dreams. He held her in his arms, not wanting to burst Rena's happy bubble. "October, you say, well my vacations are due around then, so it would suit me perfectly. Will Pastor Horton be presiding? Because if so, I'll go and see him as soon as I return?"

Aiden kissed her long and hard. "I think in ten months, all should be settled regarding your home and the business, and we'll both be free to concentrate wholly on Kalgoorlie."

"And Rani, _ Aiden, how is she getting on with selling my herbs? I have been too busy of late to ask you."

Aiden laughed. "She is a wonderful asset Rena, no problems there. The customers like and trust her, and she is also romantically involved with Ben Carter."

"Oh, how wonderful!" Rena was ecstatic to hear this.

"And do you have any news about a young woman named Olivia? Your mother would have known of her."

"Are you referring to Olivia, who lived in a dilapidated house with three little ones?"

Rena nodded eagerly, "yes, that's her. It broke my heart to see her hardship."

"Well, Rena, rest assured all is well with her." He hugged her close. "Her parents visited and were shocked by what they saw. They bought a home in the area and remain. They have Olivia and the children with them now."

Rena went from a happy face to a sad one. "She loved her husband, so whatever eventuated with him."

Aiden looked somber and shook his head. "Mum will know more about it than me, but he still lives in that run-down house where they lived. Olivia's father has laid down the law for him to clean up his act."

Rena didn't know how she felt about a couple now separated because she understood he could be a decent husband and father. Under her breath, Rena prayed for God to work the separation out for good.

"Please visit him when you can, Aiden. He needs to know the Lord and to get rid of the demons that control his head."

"I will, Rena, I promise you. A family should be together, not apart."

Chapter 22

Much Happiness

In the beginning, people came to the herb shop in droves, telling Rena they were entirely out of their stock of healing potions. Many people told Rena how glad they were to have her back, and Rena assured them that Melody could serve them as well as she or her grandmother had in the past.

After the first couple of busy weeks, life settled down, and they could pick and dry more herbs. The supply needed to be available when necessary.

Life couldn't have been better. The building stood completed with the two large rooms painted inside. Clary worked alone, finishing the exterior house painting. Rena had settled on a cream color all over with the guttering and trim in dark green.

Melody had helped paint the other two bedrooms, and what a difference it made, so now it was time to order carpet in all the bedrooms. Although this wasn't her

original plan, she felt it would be more comfortable in the long run.

She ordered those new electrically powered ceiling fans for all rooms, plus curtains, two large lounges, and a long dining table with more chairs.

Rena and Carol took the time to go into town and do the ordering, while Melody stayed behind to man the shop.

They chose a two-toned gray carpet for all the rooms. A man from the store was to come and measure up the next day -then it would take a week or perhaps more for it to arrive from Melbourne. The fans and other furniture would take longer. Still, they were not under a time frame, so it didn't matter.

Both women felt excited about the buys and talked of nothing else as they did the grocery shopping. They bought one massive meat and an apple pie as a treat for dinner that night, so they only needed to cook mashed potato and peas.

Two tired ladies trudged home packed to the brim with everything they'd done that day to relate to Melody.

"Would you believe it, Melody? Rena has purchased the ceiling fans you can only see in books, and a man is coming tomorrow to measure for carpets." Carol's enthusiasm was catching as Melody begged to hear more.

Glen came past his usual time after the evening meal and sat through all the excitement of being told what they had been doing.

He and Carol disappeared outside to say goodnight, and when Carol re-entered, it was with tears in her eyes.

"Glen wants a decision from me about marriage as he has to start his new location at the beginning of March."

Rena frowned. "Goodness, Carol, I thought you would have given him an answer by now. Is that why you are crying?"

She placed her arms around her friend, guessing her fears about leaving the one place where she'd found security.

Carol hung her head. "I know Glen is the right one for me; it's just going to be hard to go off and leave you two."

"I tell you what," Rena encouraged her. "You and Glen make it a rule to come here for Easter and Christmas; this can be your home away from home. Do you want that?"

"Thank you so much, Rena. You and Melody have become like family to me, and one always goes home to a family at special times." Carol looked around. "I love this place. It's full of love, peace, and safety."

Rena kissed her on the cheek, and Melody followed suit.

"I will be returning to live in Kalgoorlie in October to marry Aiden and live there," Rena shared with her friends. "However, we will also return here at Easter and Christmas so we can all be together as a family."

Sitting on the floor, Rex seemed to smile in agreement. "Come on, boy," Rena stifled a yawn and got up, "we all need our beauty sleep."

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An engagement party got quickly organized for the following Saturday, with Carol looking less afraid and seeming to look forward to her future. Glen had been in total agreement with them keeping Rena's place as a home base, as he had no family either.

The church phoned everyone to attend, upon hearing that Glen had another assignment in four weeks and wanted to marry before leaving. It was a joyous time, even though Aiden couldn't make it on such short notice. "I'll be there for the wedding," he assured Glen.

"You better be, mate, because I was hoping you'd stand in as best man."

Aiden wasn't too surprised because Rena was going to be the maid of honor.

"Glad to do it, Glenn, and thank you for asking." Aiden hung up after speaking with Rena for a short while.

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On the engagement evening, the church ladies brought a plate of food, as was the custom of sharing. A long trestle erected on the back verandah supported all the food.

Some men brought musical instruments to play. With a harmonica, guitar, violin, and squeezebox, it kicked up a great rhythm, setting feet tapping. The men began pulling women up to dance, and those who weren't dancing clapped to the beat of the music.

So much laughter followed before the Pastor arrived and decided to make it a square dance. He did the calling, and everyone tried to follow his fast instructions. More laughter evolved due to those who couldn't keep up the tempo.

Finally, all felt tired, thirsty, and hungry. Punch got handed around before the eating began. The pastor prayed over Glen and Carol. Then, Glen drew a red velvet box from his pocket and presented Carol with the token of his love. Slipping the ring onto her finger and looking into her eyes, he whispered loudly, "I'll love you forever."

"I will you too," Carol responded.

Their friends all shook their hands or kissed them while offering congratulations. Carol could hardly believe this was all for her and Glen.

Glen thanked everyone and then invited them to fill a plate and eat. "I hope you're hungry," he ended.

"Because I'm starving."

Everyone milled around gathering food and talking, then finding somewhere to sit. Rena collected a few titbits for Rex even though he had eaten earlier.

Carol looked beautiful at her engagement. She wore a glamorous dress that a church family member made for her as a gift. It was white with big brown spots that suited her coloring. With a white ribbon tied around her hair, she looked and felt like a princess.

Later, after everyone had packed up, said their goodbyes, and driven off, Glen and Carol, along with Rena, Melody, and Rex, gathered in the lounge room to open the gifts.

"We will thank everyone for their generosity at church tomorrow," Carol spoke, and Glen acknowledged.

The gifts were perfect for setting up in a new home. These comprised tablecloths, linen, towels, kitchen utensils, a clock, and a rare, patterned teapot. Rena's gift to them had been the party with extra food and drinks, so they expected nothing else.

Carol protested when she brought out a significant gift from her and Melody.

"Open it," commanded Rena. "And don't argue with your sisters!"

"It's so big. What can it be?" On opening it, Carol gasped. A beautiful white chenille double bedspread with rosebuds was the most beautiful, unexpected gift ever.

"Nothing is too good for our sister," Melody announced, stopping Carol from any further ado of the 'you shouldn't have discussion.

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With Carol and Glen's wedding just two weeks away, there was a lot to be done and the house seemed to be

in a continuous flurry. They measured the carpet and it would likely arrive after Carol's big event.

The next plan was the making of Carol's dress. Rena would have liked Mavis to make it. Yet the distance to travel was unreasonable. They ordered the materials and gained a lady dressmaker in the church.

Carol was beside herself with joy. "My first so-called marriage was nothing like this. It was at a Registry office, and my dress was the everyday kind. I'll have a memory to last a lifetime and a good husband to share it with."

"Yes!" agreed Rena. "And... I will get a photographer to make sure of those memories go up on your wall as a reminder."

Happily, they all went about their daily chores of tending herbs, serving customers, keeping the house, and the wedding preparations.

Rena wasn't sure about the wedding gift and sort Glen's opinion on what to buy. His suggestion of a sewing machine was perfect. He would purchase it and bring it with him a few days before the marriage.

A sewing machine was a wonderful investment for future years to come. Carol knew little about sewing yet displayed her willingness to learn by helping the dressmaker with her wedding gown. Rena decided on her next trip to town, and she would purchase a couple of patterns and a good pair of scissors to go with it to start Carol off.

Chapter 23

Sad Goodbyes and a Cantankerous Spirit

The wedding day had a slight overcast for a February day, but with the kookaburra's laughing, it signaled a change in the weather. Rena prayed that morning for the sun to come out and shine down on the unique pair.

They prepared all the reception food the previous day, and it sat covered on tables in the church hall. Straight after breakfast, Aiden drove off to attend Glen, dress, and be at the church by 10 am.

With the dishes quickly washed, Rena and Melody dressed, leaving their hair for last. It was time to decorate the bride, and Carol wore an air of peace and grace as the wedding dress lifted over her head.

It was a beaded bohemian ivory gown with elbow-length sleeves, drop waist, and hung to mid-calf. Melody dressed Carol's hair in a plated oval shape at the nape. Her headgear was a silver crystal chain with some falling in delicate drapes. There was still one hour before the service, time for Rena and Melody to complete their

appearance. Carol applied her make-up just the way she liked it.

At ten minutes to the hour, Clary pulled up to take them to the church. He felt honored to be chosen to give the bride away and kept beaming with pleasure.

As they set off, Carol sat in the front seat beside him with the other two ladies in the rear. Clary drove proudly, tooting his horn as other vehicles passed them. Most were wedding guests on their way to the church.

The sun peeped out as they climbed the few steps into the sanctuary. Rena stood in front of the bride while Melody went to take a seat. As the bridal hymn played, Rena strolled down the aisle in front of Carol and Clary, who followed at a few paces behind.

The congregation stood to their feet, and the photographer clicked his camera. All was perfect, and Carol's face shone like an angel.

Joining Glen, Rena heard him whisper to his bride, "I love you." Aiden looked over Carol's head to Rena, his eyes speaking the exact words to her.

Everything from the service to the reception went perfectly. Gifts went home to open. No one worried about this; they just felt thrilled to be a part of the celebrations.

Carol and Glen spent their wedding night at the town's only hotel. They ate an excellent breakfast before returning to Rena's home to open their lavish gifts.

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It was early afternoon when the newlyweds finally got on the road to their destination. They carefully packed all their possessions, including the presents and their suitcases, in the trunk of their motorcar. After last-minute tears and hugs, they were on their way.

"Don't forget to phone that you have arrived safely," Rena called after them.

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When Aiden left a day later, the house seemed unusually quiet, and Melody aired her opinion of this to

Rena. "I'm used to having so many people around that it feels lonely."

"Well, enjoy solitude, Melody, because you will be busy again before long." Rena did not know why she said what she did, but her words couldn't have been more accurate.

Pastor phoned that afternoon. He had a woman with two little ones destitute and with nowhere to go, so they wandered into the church.

"Bring them here, Pastor; they are welcome."

Hanging up the phone, Rena understood why she said what she did to Melody; it was the Holy Spirit speaking through her.

The carpet was due to be laid tomorrow, and as yet, the beds hadn't come, so hopefully, the mother and children could all sleep in a double bed until all was ready.

Clean clothes could be a problem, especially for the children, but they'd cross that bridge when they came to it.

Pastor drove up to the house and, leaving the three in his motor, he came inside, carrying a bag to talk to Rena. "I felt they would need some clothes. My wife picked these out to give you. They are all clean and decent, but I didn't wish to embarrass Mrs. Dawson by talking to you about them in front of her. They'll need a bath and food, and I know you will see to their health."

Rena took the bag off the Pastor and asked him to send them inside in five minutes. She carried the bag into her room and spilled the contents onto her bed. The clothes were small sizes, which meant the children must be. Pulling out a dress and underwear for the mother first, then did the same for the children. Taking them with her, she walked from her room, closing the door behind her. These clothes went straight to the bathroom to await the new owners.

Rena barely had time to let Melody know their guests were here before the Pastor gave a knock on the front door and ushered them inside.

A small boy and girl wandered inside with their mother close behind them. The children stared wide-eyed with the little girl speaking out, "you must be rich to have such a nice house."

"Be quiet, Rachel; I told you to mind your manners," she slapped the child across the head. Rena was stunned - yet the child didn't even cry, which showed she had become accustomed to such treatment.

Rena held her hand to the woman, introducing herself, while her other hand gathered the child close to her skirt.

"My name is Leah Dawson, and these two brats are my kids. Rachel, she's four, and Billy here is three. Now don't go taking any nonsense from them."

The smell that came with them was unpleasant, and Rena was careful not to show she noticed. Turning to

look at Melody, she asked her to put the kettle on and to pour the children a cup of milk each for a start.

Pastor asked if there was a need for him. Otherwise, he had work to do. Rena smiled and nodded. No! Giving him the okay to leave.

"Come and sit down," Rena invited Leah, picking up Billy and placing him on a chair before doing the same for Rachel.

"They're not babies," Leah quipped. "You don't need to help them."

Rena stared at her. "It's my pleasure to love little ones, Leah."

The children guzzled their milk and accepted two biscuits each from Melody.

The adults poured and handed around tea. Leah also accepted the biscuits, sipping her hot drink as fast as she could without burning herself.

Rena was looking down at her cup, thinking about how to lay down the rules; she wanted no abusive language

or actions in her home. Looking up quickly toward Leah, she saw a horrible gnome like a demon sitting on Leah's head, which promptly sank inside her as Rena watched.

Speaking through her mind, Rena commanded it to leave and not return. "Who's going to make me?" A nasty, sneering voice answered back.

"We will," answered Avigdor. "You leave now and go straight to the feet of the Master. Otherwise, we'll take you to the bottomless pit and lock you in for a thousand years."

"I'll go," the demon replied, coming out of Leah and running out of the back door. Rex growling as it fled past.

With the demon gone, Leah's body shook before she gave a loud yawn. The children stared yet didn't dare to say a thing, as they were terrified of her.

"Now," began Rena, "There are few rules here, so I'm sure you'll have no trouble with them. First, Leah, we keep our rooms clean and tidy with everyone helping

with the housework. Except for the children, they can play and learn about Jesus."

Leah looked at Rena blankly. But the critical attitude was gone. "That's fine," she muttered.

"Also," Rena continued, "there are to be no profanities or offensive language used. We are considerate and kind to each other. And we say please and thank you."

"This must be a friendly house," little Rachel put in.

"Yes, it is Rachel. Jesus lives here, and so do some angels. If you are good, then someday you may see them."

Rachel and Billy looked at each other while drawing in their breath and making an 'O' with their mouths.

Chapter 24

Surprises

"Are we allowed to play with the big doggy?" Billy asked with a lisp.

"Why, certainly," Rena replied. "He loves to play catch with a ball, but you must never pull his tail or hurt him; otherwise, he won't be your friend."

"We won't," answered Rachel. "We will be his friends."

"Okay, Kiddies," Melody interrupted. "Bath time. Come with me. "As they trotted after her, Melody said, 'You may call me Aunty Melody because we are going to be a family.'"

"Are we?" Rachel was probably unsure what that meant, but it must be beautiful because everything here was.

Sitting with Leah - Rena thought she might have some questions. "Is there anything you would like to ask me, Leah?"

"Yer, how come you do this for us when you don't even know us?"

"We are Christians, Leah. We live according to how God wants us to be towards others. He loves us, and we love him."

"I've heard about Christians but never met any before."

"I feel you have had a hard life, Leah, but God loves you, so he brought you here to us for you to learn his ways."

Leah did not answer; she felt tired and needed help, so she was prepared to accept it. She was aware of her dirty, ragged clothes and felt ashamed.

"You and the children will have to sleep together for a couple of days while we make a room ready for you. Tradespeople are coming in tomorrow to lay the carpet, and we are also waiting for beds and wardrobes. When that's all done, the children can sleep together, and you can sleep alone."

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"Here we are." Melody was back with the children, all freshly dressed. "Your bath is waiting for you, Leah, and you'll find clothes to fit you as well." Melody smiled kindly. "I know it's all confusing to you, and it was to me at first, but as time goes by, you'll settle in, so feel welcome."

Tears gathered in Leah's eyes. "I hope we work out."

"Come, and I'll show you the bathroom." Rena led the way, opening the door and standing back for Leah to enter.

"Oh, clean clothes for me also!"

"Yes," Rena looked perplexed. "As Melody has told you, they are yours. You'll find more in your room and nightwear as well."

When Leah turned to look at Rena, she had hope in her eyes. "I don't know what I've done to deserve this kindness, but I am grateful."

"Take your time, and if you feel sleepy or dizzy, then get out of the bath immediately." Closing the door, Rena walked away.

They had stew and often cooked more than needed, keeping till the next night for leftovers, so there was plenty to go around.

Later, the children sat on the floor, patting Rex and talking to him while he lapped their attention. Watching them, Rena decided they needed a few toys and asked them what they did at Christmas. They looked at her before Rachel asked. "What's Christmas?" Rena's heart sank. This little darling didn't know what Christmas was; how terrible!

"Tomorrow, you will find out what Christmas is because it is a special day, and we will tell you all about it then."

Taking Melody into the other room where the children couldn't hear, Rena told her the plan to give Leah and the children a lovely lunch the next day and gifts. "I don't want to leave you alone with them, so I will phone

through an order to be delivered." Melody felt excited about the idea.

"It's 5 pm, Rena. If you phone now, you might get the owner, Mr. Carrington, and he can send everything with the carpet tomorrow morning."

Rena could get through to the store owner, who said he was just about to close. Asking what toys there were for young children, he suggested a ball for each, a teddy bear for the boy, and a doll for the girl. Rena ordered these. Then they requested him to supply outfits of clothing and underwear that were appropriate for their age, along with dresses and lingerie specifically for Leah.

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Mr. Carrington was pleased to be late closing and told Rena it was worth it to get such a good sale.

Just as Rena hung up the phone, Leah came into the kitchen a clean, changed woman, transformed and incomparable to the woman she had been.

"It's been a long time since I felt this good; perhaps I'm in heaven."

"Not yet, Leah, but one day we hope you will be with us."

Rena pulled out a chair. "Why don't you sit here, and I'll do your hair for you? I'm sure you haven't experienced being waited on."

The children ran through the back door as Rena finished Leah's hair. "Doesn't your mother look pretty?" She stood back for them to get a good look.

"Is that our mom? She is beautiful," Rachel stared in awe.

"She is, isn't she?" Rena answered. "You all are. Okay, who is going to help me set the table? It's an early dinner because we must be up early in the morning for all the excitement."

"What excitement?" mother and children spoke in unison.

"Why someone is coming to put down the carpet, and..... we will have Christmas."

"Christmas was over a couple of months ago." Leah looked perplexed.

"I know," Rena responded, "and I also know you all missed out. So, we are going to have it tomorrow instead. However, instead of having it in the house, we'll have to make it a picnic outside under that big old tree. Do you like picnics?"

"Don't know. We never had one, did we, Billy? What's a picnic, Aunty Rena?"

"A picnic is when you sit outside and eat your food, but we'll have gifts also because we will think about when the baby Jesus was born."

The thought of this made little eyes shine in wonder, and as Rena looked towards Leah, she seemed to blink back the tears.

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Everyone was up early the following day, with the children bursting with energy and chasing each other. Soon tired, they sat on the floor to pat and talk to Rex. The store truck lumbered in after breakfast. Rena left Melody and Leah washing the dishes and cleaning up while she went outside to see the driver and collect the surprises.

There were two men who could also do with a good feed by the look of them. Knowing this, we included them in the picnic lunch. They lifted a large bag off the truck bed first. "Is this what you are waiting for, Miss.?"

Rena thanked him and asked if he'd carry it into the kitchen for her. "I'd like you both to come inside before you work and have a cup of tea and toast."

The men looked at each other and followed on inside the house after thanking her.

Since the kettle was continually on the stove, tea got made immediately. The bread was placed into the toaster with butter and different spreads on the table.

Rena filled the biggest teapot, guessing the men would likely drain it.

She introduced the men around after requesting their names. "I'm Cliff," said the older of the two, "and this is Denny."

"Well, pleased to meet you both." Rena smiled. "Oh, we are having a picnic lunch at about twelve, and you are both invited."

"Thank you, Miss.; we'll be there. Too right!"

"And now it's time for Christmas gifts. Melody and I have already had ours, so now is the turn for two little children and their mother."

Looking into the bag, the stuffed bear was the first thing Rena pulled out and handed to Billy. Next came the doll for Rachel and a bottle of scent for Leah.

"Now, because the men are laying carpet, we'll have to keep these other things in the kitchen, but first, let's see what else is here."

Pulling out dresses for Leah and the clothes for her little ones, they all held them against themselves. "I like Christmas; you do too, don't you, Billy." Rachel took the lead as usual, with Billy nodding in agreement.

"You have done so much for us, and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts." Leah put her arm around Rena and Melody, hugging them together.

The men watched on, Cliff winking at the kids and Denny beaming a big, white-toothed smile. They made their toast and ate while watching.

Leah neatly folded the clothes and put them back in the bag, ready to be taken to their room. Meanwhile, the children excitedly went outside to play ball, and Rex followed to keep an eye on them.

Happiness ruled that day with lovely fried chicken, potato salad, and salad vegetables served on plates. Later, they all sat outside under a shady tree enjoying a Christmas lunch picnic.

Chapter 25

Forever to Remain

October 1924 arrived, with the time getting closer to Rena's wedding. She was already in Kalgoorlie, and Mavis was busy making her Chantilly lace wedding dress. Carol and Glen were due to arrive any day soon, with both standing in as best man and matron of honor.

Carol's dress was to be a simple style; Mavis assured Rena that she could make it in a day. It was a pleasant surprise when Carol arrived on the second day of the month. She was four months pregnant and just beginning to show.

After letting Carol have a good rest, Rena walked with her to see Mavis. "Yes, it was fine," Mavis assured them, as she chose a unique pattern that could easily accommodate Carol's advancing pregnancy and be let out. It was to be a shot silk color that turned from blue to purple; Carol fell in love with it.

There was much to talk about, with Carol telling them of the friendly town where they lived. She had made many

friends and had never been as happy. Glen had a surprise to reveal. He had achieved three promotions and was now in charge of four other police officers as an inspector.

"It had much to do with that opium farm we found." He informed them and looked over at Carol. "This beautiful woman of mine has been an asset in every way." Taking Carol's hand in his, he kissed the back of it. "Life goes from better to better since we met."

The night before the big day, Rena had visitors, her three angels. Avigdor pronounced a blessing over her with Ariel, and Akim lay hands on her head with him.

"After your wedding, you will no longer be the Spirit Warrior," he informed her. "I will hand on your mantle with a new armor to the one you discover to be of a similar spirit to yourself."

Rena stood listening without interrupting.

"The Lord has already picked her out, and she is to be revealed in three to four months. You have done a good job, Rena, and the Lord is extremely pleased with you. You will keep the gift of discerning spirits."

Looking up at the ceiling and lifting both of his arms, Avigdor waited for the Lord to shine his light down on Rena, sealing her as his forever.

Rena stood in the glow, becoming translucent for a few moments before returning to her earthly self.

She felt brand new, totally regenerated, and prepared to tell Avigdor so. He shook his head at her; there was no need to impart this information, for he already knew.

"Farewell, Serenity Grace, your journey takes a different path in two days, but we shall never be far from you."

"Farewell, my angels," came her returned whisper.

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Rena felt sad, and yet she felt happy. Aiden was forever close and attentive to her. Soon, she would be his wife, and many changes would occur as they already had. Aiden's mother, Eunice, was engaged to marry Barney Well's. He had an excellent job at the mine, and his co-workers respected him.

You have seen me through so much, Lord, and I've grown in my understanding of you and others. Thank you for your leadership and for giving me a beautiful family, people that I love. Keep using me in whatever way you know you can. Amen

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Both Rena and Aiden wanted their wedding as natural as possible. So instead of being held inside the church, it was to the side near a beautiful rose arbor. A violinist played as a substitute for the traditional organ. The haunting melody filled the air with romance, adding to an atmosphere of days gone by.

A lady from the church with a beautiful voice sang, "Oh promise me," which produced many a tear. And more fell with the beauty of the wedding waltz. Wearing flat shoes to ease dancing on the grass, Rena swayed in tune with her new husband to the Brahms Waltzes. As they communicated their love, Rena and Aiden were the only two in their intimate world. Eyes clung to eyes with the promise of what was to come, a uniting of two souls.

Onlookers could see the completion of two hearts melting together as one combined, receiving the Lord's blessing.

"I will always love you," Aiden whispered in her ear.

"I will always love you." The realization of her words drew cupid's arrow into her heart. Yes, love could be both sweet and painful.

Now the complete uniqueness of eternal love hit her in its full force, and she felt a terror of perhaps losing him.

"No, Princess warrior, God has not given you a SPIRIT of Fear," she heard Avigdor's voice. She smiled no; there was nothing to fear; they would have a long and fruitful life together.

The music finished, and he kissed her long and passionately. No matter who watched, they belonged together, and she was finally his.

Aiden quietly spoke as they stood together. "We don't have to stay. Let's leave. I want you to myself, and it's been a long wait."

"Yes, I agree," she responded. "Let's go."

Booked into the Metropole Hotel for the night, they said goodbye to their guests and drove off.

"Alone at last," Aiden slung his arm around her shoulders, pulling her closer.

Their destination, only a couple of miles' drive away, stood majestically tall on the corner of two streets, built over an old gold mine. "I got us the best room - wait till you see it," Aiden's love shining eyes lingered on her face.

"Watch the road, Aiden; I want to get there in one piece."

"Okay, you're right, and here we are." He drove around the back of the hotel to park.

Jumping out first to open her door, he pulled the two smaller overnight bags from the trunk. He could still hold her hand by placing one case under his arm and carrying the other.

"Let's go," he gave her a cheeky look.

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Swinging the door of their room wide open, Aiden watched her respond. Rena had never seen such luxury. The bed was enormous and enough for four or more people; chandeliers twinkled from the ceiling, casting jeweled shadows around the walls. The thick carpet sunk with each step.

"Is it fit for my queen?" Aiden performed a fake bow before her.

"It's incredible, Aiden." She didn't like to say it was way too grand because she knew he wanted to impress her. *Our magical night will be something to remember and tell our grandchildren in time to come.*

Both cases landed on the floor, "Come here, Serenity Grace," picking her up in his arms, he walked to the bed, carefully laying her down, "Love is here with you," he told her as he claimed her lips.

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By 10 pm, they were starving. "All I want is you." Aiden held her close.

"Well, I'd like something to eat. Let's call room service."

He didn't need second bidding, and Rena guessed he was probably hungry too; it had been hours since they left the wedding without eating.

"Let's have a shower while we wait." He propelled her to the bathroom.

"Together, Aiden. What are you thinking?"

"It's not a thought," he answered with a laugh. "Married couples shower together, come on; I'll wash your back."

The following day, Aiden asked her if she loved him. After her yes answer, he wondered how she liked married life.

"Well," she ventured, "It's different!" And then she blushed as he roared, laughing.

When the laughter subsided, he took her into his arms;
"I love you, Rena Grace, and... I love married life with
you as well."

The End

Dear Reader, I pray you enjoyed this story. Please do me a favor and leave a review to let others know your thoughts. I appreciate you.

Thank you, and God Bless you.

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Crystal Mary Lindsey writes Inspiration Romance centered within the vast, mysterious Australian Outback.

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Crystal is the widow of an American U.S. Marine and lived and worked for a few years in Tennessee. Her love for that area eventuated in her writing Christian Inspirational Romances, located around the southern states.