

YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED
HUTZ THE PUT

**THE
END**

THE BOOK

Part Two

**“All these are the beginning of sorrows”
Matthew 24:8 KJV**

J.L.ROBB

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NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

The End The Book series is a fictional account of the predicted apocalypse as outlined in the *Bible*. Several readers have asked me, “Is it true?”

It is true that the Biblical *end* will happen, but I have written this series as a counter-weight to the apocalyptic fiction coming out of Hollywood, like *Armageddon* and *2012*, that fail to mention God and His role. Any similarities between things that are occurring now and things written in this series are purely coincidental. It would be impossible to write a “true” account of the Biblically described *End Times*.

I hope all readers will find this series thought provoking, as well as thrilling, and might make us think about some of the things we believe and why we believe them.

In *Part Two: You Have Been Warned*, Jeffrey Ross continues his journey of unbelief from one tragedy to another, disaster lurking just moments away.

What would you do if you woke up one morning, turned on the TV to get the latest weather and the screen showed only an announcement: *Please Standby for Homeland Security*

You try other channels, but all are the same. What would you do if you found out the end really *was* near, and there wasn't a thing mankind or science could do about it? What if the electricity went out and never came back on? Could you make it?

I hope you enjoy reading *Part Two* as much as I enjoyed writing it for you.

J.L. Robb is an author and free-lance writer with a degree in zoology. A U.S. Navy veteran and cancer survivor, he lives in the Bible-Belt with his Great Dane and two kitties.

PREFACE

“They made pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen around the hem of the robe. And they made bells of pure gold and attached them around the hem between the pomegranates. The bells and pomegranates alternated around the hem of the robe to be worn for ministering, as the Lord commanded Moses.” Exodus 39:24-26 NIV

Jerusalem

“**W**hat do you think he meant by that?”

“By what?” James had no idea what John was talking about; the question came out of the blue. John did that sometimes.

“What do you think he meant when he said the temple would be destroyed and then rebuilt in three days?” John loved his little brother, but sometimes James just couldn’t seem to keep up.

Judas followed the conversation, contemplating. He had a lot of questions himself. Standing up, he shook the desert sand, cooled by the night air, took off his sandals and removed the sand-brier lodged in his heel. He finally spoke.

“You know, the rabbis, especially Caiaphas, say the Teacher is crazy as a loon, just another fake Messiah. They do seem to be coming out of the woodwork. Look at that teacher in the desert, what was his name, Bar-Abba? He had hundreds of followers. There have been others who have claimed to be the Messiah.”

Judas had a tendency to speak out more than the brothers James and John, as well as Andrew.

“Some of the things he says make no sense to me,” he continued.

“Judas! What are you saying?” John whispered the question. The garden was deserted except for them, no one could hear; but John was beginning to notice a change in Judas. “Be quiet or the Teacher will hear you!” he whispered, this time emphatically.

“I’m just saying, like you said, what did he mean about the Temple being destroyed; and then it reappears in three days? Does that not sound a little crazy to you?”

Judas was animated but whispered quietly. He continued.

“King Herod would have a stroke if someone destroyed his Temple. Then he would kill all of us! Don’t you see that? Herod needs no reason to kill Jews. Think about it,” Judas continued, pausing a moment to look around the perimeter of the garden, the cicadas suddenly silent against the night sky. Y’shua sometimes seemed to just appear, Judas knew. He loved Y’shua and wouldn’t want to disappoint him, but . . .

“He said that before the day of God’s wrath, nations would rise against nations and wars would be everywhere. Do you really think that could happen? Who would possibly go to war against Rome? They rule the world, and they rule it with a mighty sword. Who could stand up to Caesar, I ask?” Judas was in rare form today, agitated even more than usual.

James looked at John, and then Judas. There were no other followers of the young rabbi around, at least none in sight.

“The Teacher also said other things Judas. He didn’t mention anything about Rome. Maybe it’s not the last days. He said there would be storms and earthquakes like never before. That hasn’t happened. The seas would ‘roar’ like never before is what he said. That hasn’t happened. The Mediterranean is no worse than ever before, except maybe during the Great Flood. The Sea of Galilee has bad storms, but no worse than before! You have misread the prophecies of the Ancients, Judas.” James scolded Judas, as he had done many times before.

“Let’s go to Pomegranates and have a hot tea.”

James addressed the invitation directly to Judas; and the four followers of Jesus left Gethsemane, walking under the trees of the olive grove around the Mount of Olives and into Jerusalem, the City of David, as it was often called. The trail was dusty from the prolonged droughts of recent years, the dust evolving into a small cloud suspended in the air a few inches above their sandals.

A brief forty minute walk later, John, his brother James, Andrew and Judas entered the side entrance of Pomegranates and took a seat on the

hard benches in the back by the portal. The portal was the only window in the dingy place, and the stained granite table offered a limited view of the street. James knew a limited view was better than no view, better to keep a lookout for the feared Roman Guard.

The tall and olive-skinned Philistine servant approached the four men and bowed to each before asking their pleasure.

“Bring a pomegranate mint tea for myself and my three friends.” James ordered.

“Sir, do you want the Pomegranate Mint Tea or King Herod’s Mint?” The servant seemed anxious and glanced over his shoulder at the two guards in the front of the dark, dry café. James noted the silent tip and said, “King Herod’s of course!” He spoke loudly enough for the two guards to hear. They paid no heed.

James was wise beyond his years and knew to accept any brand of tea other than King Herod’s Mint would bring unwanted scrutiny by the two guards, large men with plated leather gear for protection, and great big swords. Judas said nothing; and James held his breath, knowing how John sometimes was, hoping he would make the right tea choice. He did.

After the servant brought the men the hot tea, James looked at Judas and asked, “What’s up with you Judas? You seem to be having doubts that Y’shua is who he says he is.”

“That’s the question, James. Who does he say he is? The Son of Man? What’s that? I’m confused, James. The rabbis are the real teachers, and they all say that Y’shua’s ‘miracles’ are a fraud from Satan himself.”

“Judas! You have seen the wonders with your own eyes. My God, man, what’s wrong with you? Do you not believe your own eyes?”

“I didn’t see him walk on water. No one can walk on top of the water James, don’t you see that?”

“I saw it,” Andrew said, softly.

“Peter and Andrew saw it? Peter tried it himself, was successful for a moment, according to Andrew, then sunk like a rock. But Andrew said Peter walked on top of the Sea too, about 30 cubits. Do you think they just made up that story?”

“We didn’t make it up. Why would we?” Andrew asked.

“I don’t know.” Judas was suddenly sullen, stressed. “I just get confused, James. I want so much to believe that he is the Messiah, *The* Messiah. Know what I mean? He was supposed to come and liberate us from our misery, and I think the prophets meant Rome. But he walks around Judah preaching love and peace, love your enemy as yourself. That’s the

most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. Love your enemy? Love the Roman Legion?? Love the Arabs? I don't think so."

"I think Y'shua is just saying," James paused as John listened intently. "I think he just means that if everyone in the world would love each other, the Commandments would fall in place naturally. He knows that's not going to happen, according to Matthew at least."

The three sat silently for a moment, and James pondered what Matthew had said, that Y'shua did not mean for us to turn the other cheek indefinitely, that Y'shua himself would return again, this time with a sword to judge mankind, not a kiss.

"It's not going to be pretty," and James had a feeling Matthew was right.

"Judas, I know the scriptures said that the Messiah will free us from oppression, but it's not Roman oppression he is freeing us from, don't you see? That's not what he is talking about!"

"What then? What is he going to free us from? And when in Yahweh's name will it happen?"

James understood Judas' frustration and angst. The Jews had been waiting a long time for this prophesied savior, hundreds of years. This was him, James knew that for sure. He had seen Jesus cure that blind man, with his own eyes, in an instant. He had seen the miraculous feeding of thousands of hungry followers with a few loaves of bread. He had seen Jesus call out to Mary and Martha's brother Lazarus, dead in the tomb four days, the atrocious smell of death flowing from the tomb like honey from a hive.

When Jesus' friends, Mary and Martha, had first sent the message that Lazarus was deathly sick, Jesus was heart-broken and felt for the two sisters. You could just tell in his eyes. Still, he waited for two days, continuing to cure the sick and heal the lepers. There were so many miracles, too many to count, much less remember. The apostles had wondered why Jesus waited so long. When Jesus finally did show up, the sisters were almost angry.

"If you had just come earlier, Y'shua, Lazarus would still be alive," and Martha was visibly distraught. Mary wept nearby. James spoke.

"Moses freed us from the slavery of Egypt, Judas. Y'shua is here to free us from the slavery of death. That is if we don't kill him first. Most Jews hate him with a passion and think the miracles are not from Yahweh. I don't know how he's going to do it, but Y'shua is here to save us from ourselves, can't you see that?"

“The time is not right for the last days. I’m not sure what he meant about the Temple being restored in three days. I know it sounds impossible but so is curing a man from blindness since birth. Y’shua is the first person in our history who has ever done such a thing. It is not possible, but Y’shua did it! Think about it. I believe future generations will look back and understand perfectly.

“If great earthquakes suddenly start happening more often, if the oceans roar and rise above the shore more than normal, if the winds begin to roar exceedingly and if hail storms proliferate the land, when the sun turns hotter over the land and the world warms beyond normalcy, then we will know: the end *is* near. It will get much hotter!”

“So why did Jesus wait so long to save Lazarus when he could’ve just issued the word; and Lazarus would have been healed, right?”

“Judas, maybe he did it to prove to us who he really is, something you are having a hard time believing. Maybe Jesus waited until Lazarus was dead, so he could bring him back to life. That was pretty impressive, don’t you think?”

The Roman guards turned to leave, when one noticed the four apostles were whispering. He turned to walk their way.

“What are you Jews whispering about? Aren’t you followers of that prophet, the one who heals lepers?” The Roman soldier was large, but he appeared even larger in his leather armor.

“No Sir. We don’t know who you’re talking about.” Judas denied Jesus that night, long before Peter did the same. The other three followers said nothing.

“I would like to learn about this Jesus. I saw one of his miracles.”

The guard turned away from the men, disappointment on his face.

LIST OF MAIN CHARACTERS

Alphabetical by First Name

Abe the Bartender: Key character. General Manager and bartender at *The Divide Disco & Café*.

Aboud Rehza: a.k.a Vinny, a.k.a. Ricky, a.k.a. Jean Philippe. In charge of U.S. Operations for *Jihad's Warriors* and various other Islamic Jihadist groups. Twin brother of Mohammed Rehza.

Aludra Khalid: Muhammed's sister. Lives with Muhammed, leader of terrorist Jihad's Warriors, in the Korengal Valley, Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Amber Michelle: Investigative reporter with al-Jazeera USA.

Betty Davis: Also known as Betty Davis Eyes. Bartender at American Legion Post 251 in Duluth, GA.

Bill "Wild Willy" Briggs: Master of Nanotechnology, Georgia Tech Nanotechnology Research Center, Atlanta. Ex-U.S. Navy, CIA and Homeland Security. Works closely with Israel's Mossad. His cover is high dollar repo man.

Chad "Chadbo" Myers: Assistant Director, Near Earth Object and Heliospheric Laboratory, Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, MD.

Chuck Hutz: a.k.a. Hutz the Putz. After accident, speaks fluent Hebrew and witnesses to others while in a trance.

CJ: Bartender at American Legion Post 251 in Duluth, GA. Helped capture terrorist wannabe that attacked the Post.

Condi Zimmerman: Independent news anchor/reporter and Atlanta contract correspondent with FOX News Network and OLNN.

Dan Brunson: Nuclear physicist and public speaker.

Dennis Duncan: Geophysics Professor and public speaker.

Dmitry Ustinov: Chechnyan-Russian arms dealer. Brokered the sale of 5 high-yield nuclear weapons and delivery systems from Pakistan to Iran. Arranged high jacking of Nerpa 155 nuclear submarine.

Dr. Joseph Rosenberg, PhD: Public Speaker and Professor of Apocalyptic Religions, Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

Edgar Allen Poe: Homeless veteran who discovers terrorist plot.

Erica P. Robbins: Freelance reporter and U.S. War Correspondent.

Gray and Andi Dorey: Close friends of Jeff and Melissa Ross. Philanthropists and owners of Dine for Dollars.

Jack Russell: United States Senator from Cumming, Georgia and ranking member on the Military Finance Committee. Married to Samarra Russell.

Jeffrey “Jeff” Ross: Main character. Ex-husband of Melissa Ross. Father of three daughters, Jami and Jenni (twins) and Audry. U.S. Navy SEAL until discharged with injury after the Vietnam conflict.

Jill Haskins: Wife of Leon “Bubba” Haskins and Samarra Russell’s closest friend.

Judi Ellis: Director of Paleobiology, Emory Primate Research Center, Atlanta.

Judy Blanton: Lives in Lukeville, Arkansas. Previous owner of J. Blanton concrete Company.

Kara Mulherin: Missionary to Haiti and future girlfriend of Scott Johnson.

Kari K. Verm: News anchor with OLNN, Omega Letter Network News. Columnist with www.omegaletter.com

Kipper T and Missy T: Angels

Kyoto Kushito: Founder and Director of *The Foundation*, a shadowy, suspected worldwide terror think tank, based in the Hiroshima, Japan area. *The Foundation* funded the hijacking of the Nerpa 155 nuclear submarine.

Leon “Bubba” Haskins: Owns the largest minority contracting firm in Georgia and a tourist submarine facility at Lake Lanier Islands, Georgia. Married to Jill Haskins.

Mehdi: Chief of Security and Jihad Planner for Muhammed Khalid. Lives in Korengal Valley along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Melissa Ross: Also Melissa Ross-Jeremias. Divorced from Jeff Ross, mother of twins, Jami and Jenni, and adopted daughter, Audry. Recently married Robert Jeremias, later killed in a plane crash. May have been raptured.

Mohammed Rehza: Ruthless Islamist in charge of European operations for *Jihad’s Warriors*. Twin brother of Aboud Rehza (a.k.a. Vinny and others)

Muhammed Khalid: Islamic Jihadist and founder of the extremely secretive *Jihad’s Warriors*. Lives in Korengal Valley with his sister, Aludra.

Naomi: Old Jewish woman who carries a cross necklace. Helps Aludra escape Korengal Valley through Tajikistan.

Pam MacLott: Owner of *The Divide Disco & Café*.

Richard “Rich” Badey: Investigative reporter.

Robert Jeremias: Missionary, philanthropist. Married Jeff’s ex, Melissa Ross, before he was killed (or missing) in a plane crash.

Russ Ivies: Chief of Security, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta. Actor and producer. Suffered one of first Spanish Flu cases.

Samarra Russell, PhD: Director of Research of Communicable Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta. Married to Senator Jack Russell.

Scott Johnson: Assistant manager of *The Divide Disco & Café*.

Sheryl Lasseter: Director of the United States Public Relations Liaison. Works directly for the U.S. President.

Terry and Toni Fahey: Next door neighbors of Jeffrey Ross.

The Admiral: Justin P. McLemore. A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and retired four-star Admiral. Director of Near Earth Object and Heliospheric Laboratory, Goddard Space Flight Center, Maryland.

Three Wild Women: Wanda, BJ and Beverly from the American Legion Post 251, skilled in self-defense and sharp-shooting.

Vinny: A truly bad man, his real name is Aboud Rehza, a product of wealthy Saudi parents. He and his twin brother, Mohammed, had been child prodigies and both speak several languages, fluently. A man of many aliases. Vinny resides in the United States after infiltrating across the Mexican border. Aliases include Vinny, Ricky, Jean Philippe, and others.

PROLOGUE

December 20, 2012

Jeff was in a remarkably good mood, and Abe the Bartender was glad to see him finally socializing. It had been awhile. Abe didn't know Samarra, but wasn't surprised at her beauty. Jeff seemed to do that. Samarra sat next to Jeff at the bamboo-topped bar, as magnificent as ever.

"Hey man. Glad you decided to come party." Abe winked at Samara and continued. "You know Jeff, I've always wondered how you know so many beautiful women. I mean, you're just not that hot."

Samarra smiled.

"Thanks Abe, I'll come over and Round-Up your camellia bushes. Think we're gonna make it through the night?" Jeff asked, sipping the cool glass of Duckhorn merlot.

He wasn't making light of the prediction of a December 21, 2012, calamity. The crowd at *The Divide* grew, everyone waiting for midnight, December 20. That's when the real partying would begin, all over the planet, twenty-four hours of December 21" revelry, unless the Mayans and Hopis were right.

Abe the Bartender pondered while serving Judi Ellis a dirty martini, still astounded by her remarkable and quick recovery, and her gorgeous legs. He was happy with his new relationship. *Judi Ellis and Abe the Bartender; who would've ever figured?*

"We are if Hutz the Putz is right, and he seems to be right a lot."

"Why, what did he say?" Judi asked.

“He was ranting again about parents and how they are so permissive with their kids. He does that a lot and has really ticked off a lot of people. Wait, there he is.”

Abe turned the TV volume up, and the small crowd gathered around. Hutz was speaking Hebrew, as usual; and Audrey Ross interpreted for the crowd.

“Yahweh, the God of Israel and the universe, is not happy. Why do you let your children dye their bodies with drawings and paganistic symbols. Do you not know what Yahweh said in Leviticus 19:28? Let me tell you:

‘Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD.’

“What do you think he meant by that? Do you think it’s alright to disobey Yahweh because it applied to Jewish Law and not Christianity? Didn’t Jesus himself say he didn’t come to change the Law? This is what Jesus said in Matthew.”

Chuck paused and sipped his iced tea. He was perspiring profusely, and beads of sweat spilled onto his blue and white seersucker coat.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Chuck held a Bible up, opened to Matthew, chapter five.

“Israel, did Yahweh rescue you from the depths of the holocaust and restore your bones? Did Yahweh take you back to the land he gave Moses, just like Ezekiel prophesied in chapter thirty-seven? And how do you show Yahweh your respect?

“You don’t keep the Sabbath holy, and you are sanctifying men marrying men. Do you not remember Sodom and Gomorrah? And now you kill your children while still in the womb, rejecting their chance at life in this world. But Yahweh takes these children directly to his Kingdom, the children you did not want. Where does this logic come from, Yahweh wants to know? He blesses you from the First Book of the Torah, yet you kick him in the face.”

The vision of Chuck Hutz was interrupted by a loud explosion, but Chuck kept talking.

“People of the world, hear what I say. The dust of the dark comet will come to you and poison your waters, and your thirst will be quenched with bitterness

and death. The day is coming when the ships of the Great Sea will sink at the pleasure of Yahweh, and your military-might will disappear.

"Let the world hear what I say. A time is coming soon, O' Israel, a time of great distress.

"You have been warned."

Chuck Hutz the Putz slumped in his seat, exhausted and drenched; and Kari, the OLNN news commentator, looked concerned, though this was the normal routine.

"There you have it. The latest from Mr. Hutz. Not sure what the explosion was; but as soon as we hear, you will hear.

"Now to Noah's Ark. Archeologists state that they are ninety-nine percent certain that the find on Mt. Ararat could be the remnants of Noah's Ark. The large ship is remarkably preserved, and no one is certain why. The DNA analysis has puzzled many microbiologists. Apparently much of the DNA is from unknown life forms."

"Do you believe that?" Jeff asked, interrupting Kari and the news. "Haven't they found Noah's Ark many times in the past, just to find out they were wrong?"

"That's true," Samarra said, "only this time there is DNA. That's different. Would you start believing if they really have found Noah's Ark?" Samarra whispered in Jeff's ear, her breath warm and . . . sexy; and she was happy for the first time in a long time. She found Jeff Ross to be quite dreamy.

"Maybe." He answered, and held her hand. Judi made note of the possible budding romance.

Across the club, Chad, The Admiral and Sheryl were in deep conversation, their demeanor animated and serious. Judi and Samarra motioned, the way ladies do; and they both headed to the rest room. Abe poured Jeff another glass of Duckhorn.

"Abe, did I ever tell you about my dreams?"

"... in Brazil. The Parliament has legitimized the young religion through their more recent liberalizing of social morés. The Temple of Molech will be built next year. If you recall from an OLNN exclusive report last year, Brazil also lowered the consent-for-sex age to ten years old."

Kari knew the worship of Molech wasn't a "young" religion and actually predated Judaism. Molech, the stone god that accepted every parent's first sacrifice, their first born child, burned to death on the altar of Molech. She hoped the Molechites in Brazil wouldn't be burning their babies alive and continued. *"Pakistan is reporting a security breach at a*

nuclear weapons lab. Reuters is trying to verify that as many as four nuclear warheads may be missing.

“Now to Morgellons disease. Cases of this very strange illness are being reported throughout Asia, and scientists are studying the possibility that comet dust or lunar dust could be the culprit.”

“I don’t think so. What dreams?”

Abe thought about the near-death experience from the Spanish Flu, and he again wondered if Jeff had seen the light that so many spoke of.

“I’ve been having these dreams since the flu, and they are the weirdest things. I thought maybe it was just part of my *experience*, but I keep having them. I think there’s more to it.”

“Are they *bad* dreams?” Abe asked.

Another scuffle appeared on the Towne Green, and Abe kept vigilant. People were everywhere with their TEIN signs, large and small displays of *The End Is Near! Repent!*

“No. Not yet at least. I keep seeing the same two people, Missy T and Kipper T; and I can’t quite figure out their relationship.”

“Well, it’s just a dream. I want to ask you, did you see the light that so many see when they have a near death experience? So many NDEs are consistent with that.”

“No. I didn’t see a specific light at the end of a tunnel. There wasn’t a tunnel; but there were multi-colored lights everywhere. There is this series of rooms, and each has its own color; and there is a door, a black door. I have dreams of going through the black door and never returning.” Jeff was talking faster than normal.

Samarra and Judi returned to the bar, talking about the lady they met in the ladies room.

“You met a lady in the bathroom?” Jeff asked.

“Yes, we do that. You men go in, do your business and leave. We like to talk, make friends.” Samarra winked at him and smiled. Her hand slid into his.

“She was an immunologist,” Judi chimed in, “from NIH.”

“Yes, and she was telling us about the HIV breakout in Tajikistan and throughout Asia. Apparently there is widespread concern at the National Institutes of Health that the disease is spreading through flea infestations. Since the droughts, there have been numerous infestations; fleas, mosquitos, mice.”

“I thought they were talking about mosquitos carrying the disease.” Abe said.

“They were, but now it appears to be getting totally out of control. HIV is spreading like wildfire throughout China.”

Diana Hendricks, young and blonde, was the head waitress at *The Divide* and motioned to Abe. He walked from around the bar to see what she needed. She was an expert at spotting potential drunks.

“See the ladies sitting at the hi-top in the corner?”

Abe recognized the three.

“Yep. That’s Wanda, BJ and Beverly from the American Legion Post.”

“The *Three Wild Women*?” Diana had heard of them many times and would go introduce herself.

“Yep, that’s them. Nice ladies, but you wouldn’t want to mess with ‘em. Tough as nails. One is a sharp-shooter, and they all have black-belts.”

“Well, there’s a guy who keeps hitting on them; and they are getting annoyed. He is well on his way to drunkville. He thinks he’s so suave bollo, but they are so not interested. We need to keep an eye on him.”

“Go find Scott. He can handle it. Those ladies will chew that guy up and spit him out. I’m a lover, not a fighter.” Abe grinned, ear-to-ear. A news alert flashed across the numerous flat screens.

“Astronomers in Chile have spotted an intermittent, bright object in the sky; and they have confirmed that it is Blip, the bright light reported by people all over the world. Astronomers are trying to determine the origin and why it’s there. Spectroscopic analysis indicates that the chemical makeup may be organic.

“Now to the giant chunks of ice that fell from the sky today.”

“It’s been a helluva year, hasn’t it my friend?” Abe placed a glass of water in front of Samarra.

“It’s been a helluva year, Mr. Abe the Bartender,” and Jeff’s thoughts drifted back to January.”

Midnight crawled westward.

Chapter One

“It’s not the fall that kills you; it’s the sudden change in direction.” Chuck Hutz, aka Hutz the Putz

Montserrat, once the jewel of the Caribbean, had been a British island, high-dollar resorts, romantic beaches, until... until the volcano.

“Soufrière Hills has erupted again!”

The commentator was breathless.

“Actually, more than erupted. The Caribbean’s most active volcano is now the only volcano in recorded history that has exploded and fallen into the sea. Eyewitnesses who managed to survive, said the entire mountain lifted several thousand feet into the air and crashed directly into the ocean, about a half mile from a cruise ship of some kind. The ship completely disappeared before their eyes. Just another in a long line of climatic and geological disasters the last year. The tsunami has wiped out many islands in the Caribbean and Bahamas. Survivors using HAM radios say that dead fish and other sea animals are everywhere. There is no news coming in at this time from any other sources. Please stay tuned.”

Melissa fell over the side of Cayman Grand Hotel, washed over the side actually, toward the dark asphalt parking lot forty feet below. The fall seemed surreal. She wasn’t sure how long the descent would last and was awed at all the thoughts that

crossed her mind in the few seconds before she would lose consciousness.

Where had that wave come from? That was one of her thoughts. It had been so sudden... *where was Jeff...* and almost silent. She was sure, had the electricity on Grand Cayman Island not been out, Jeff the news-junkie would have known; and she recalled the news reports from yesterday, something about the Soufrière Hills Volcano erupting. Could that have caused *this*?

Falling, she again thought of Jeff. They were holding hands when they ran to the edge of the roof and looked out to sea. What had earlier appeared as a gray ribbon stretched across the horizon, the dark wave had grown immensely and was approaching the beach *so* fast. She had never seen a tsunami, except in news reports, and was briefly amused at the beauty involved. *So beautifully terrifying.* She had not expected that the giant wave would actually come over the roof of one of Cayman's taller hotels, but she knew that four floors wasn't all that high off the soon-to-be-flooded ground below.

Falling face down, Melissa tried to rotate her body in the air; but the BC hindered her coordination. She was glad to have the Buoyancy Compensator strapped on, one of the last things she and Jeff had done before running to the edge to watch doom approach. Should the fall not kill her, at least she would stay afloat. Maybe that would keep her alive until the comet hit, and she wished she hadn't recalled *that*.

Miraculously, her acrobatics worked; and the sunlight hit her squarely in the eyes as she completed her rotation. She noted the coconuts as she passed through the thick fronds of the palm tree. At least when they found her body, her face wouldn't be all smashed up; and she laughed at her vanity just before crashing onto the hood of the black Mercedes limousine parked below.

Her last thoughts before blackness set in was how hot the hood of the car was, and where was Jeffrey?

Jeff watched Melissa wash over the edge of the hotel's roof. He felt the wave would breach the rooftop and squeezed Melissa's hand tightly. He knew the power of the water would destroy the grip, and she was gone in an instant.

They had remained at the edge of the roof, almost hypnotized by the specter of the rapidly approaching wave, at least until the bright blue cabanas, jet skis and paddle boats started slamming against the stucco siding of Cayman Grand. There was nowhere to go, but they went anyway. Holding Melissa tightly, they hid together behind one of the large rooftop air conditioners and waited. It seemed the seconds were creeping by. Jeff leaned over and kissed Melissa, softly on her lips. The ambient noise was so great by now, he mouthed, "I love you Melissa. Always have." And then she was gone, ripped from his grip by the salty tsunami and washed over the side, into the parking lot below.

Jeff didn't have time to mourn his great loss as he lost his grip on the roof exhaust fan and raced the green air conditioning system to the edge. He hoped the air conditioner would win this race, because he knew that landing on the HVAC system would probably be better than the HVAC system landing on him.

A blur of blue *something* flew toward him, caught in the wave like so much other debris; and he recognized the bright blue cushions that had recently adorned the white oak chaise lounges on Seven Mile Beach below, just a few seconds earlier. His instinct and quick reaction allowed the catch; and he held the cushion tightly, heading perilously toward the north edge of

the roof. Now floating a good six feet above the roof's surface, something slammed into him. Dazed, his mouth full of Caribbean saltiness, he tried to protect himself with the cushion when he suddenly recognized the object of the collision. Earlier it had been the little old man from France, who always walked up and down the beach, greeting everyone he met with a *bonjour* and a smile. Now the Frenchman was wet and dead, twisted in two like a pretzel, deep wounds turning his face crimson. They raced for the edge, the torrent heading north toward Rum Point and the open sea.

The air conditioner, the dead man and Jeff washed over the edge at the same time; and the water below now completely covered the parking lot. Jeff barely missed the black Mercedes limousine, now floating across what had been bright pink and red bougainvillea bushes edging along the sidewalk. He pulled himself tightly into a ball, not very easy with the inflated BC strapped tightly to his torso, and landed with the blue cushion stretched out in front of him. The cushion hit at just the right angle; and Jeff surfed over the parking lot, floating higher with each second as the flood grew. Nearly a half mile inland, he slammed into the top of a coconut palm about twenty feet above the cars and the two-person Pedi-cabs that had been driving below. He lost all consciousness in an instant. He had no last thoughts as he passed from an otherwise beautiful Cayman Island's sunset into blackness, darkness, comfort.

“Reports are still coming in, but heavy damage has been reported from the Bahamas to Barbados and now the Cayman Islands and Jamaica. Cuba is in the big wave's sights, and the eastern coasts of Florida will be hit within an hour. Beaches

along the entire Gulf and Atlantic coasts have been evacuated. We have no news from the Cancun area or the Mexican Riviera because of continuing power outages.”

Sitting in Duluth’s newest sensation, *The Divide Disco and Café*, Abe the Bartender listened to the six o’clock news. Condi Zimmerman, the news babe, projected in high definition from the flat screen. Tonight her beauty was far from Abe’s mind. His thoughts were with Jeff and Melissa, and their friends, Gray and Andi. He had flown back from Grand Cayman just a day earlier to handle the New Year’s Eve crowd at the new club. He had to admit, as he sat on the plane, it did occur to him: *What’s the use?*

For the life of him, he couldn’t figure out why so many people were coming to celebrate the New Year; and it was happening at clubs everywhere, not just the United States. Big *End of the World* parties were being thrown along the French Riviera; and Hong Kong’s famous Privé Club was totally booked at \$ 15,000 per person, champagne included. London and Las Vegas gamblers were betting on where the comet would hit and at what precise second. It seemed that no one really believed, or else it was mass denial. Abe was still undecided.

Abe was a self-taught Jewish and Christian *Bible* scholar, of sorts. He couldn’t match up to the *real* experts and had never attended professional theology schooling, but he had come a long way since his days of *disbelief*. He had studied the Jewish prophecies thoroughly but didn’t remember anything about God destroying the world with a comet. There *was* that prophecy in *Revelation 8* about a burning mountain falling from the sky and hitting the great ocean; but if his memory was correct, that was one of the latter things that happened in God’s plan of destruction and renewal. Hail and fire would be thrown at the

Earth first, then the burning mountain falling into the sea... *could that be Soufrière Hills...* then the star blazing like a torch that fell to Earth. *Is that the dark comet?*

Condi continued.

“This just in, a retired Admiral, Justin P. McLemore, and the United States Public Affairs Liaison, Sheryl Lasseter, were the victims of an armed robbery attempt today when at least three ‘Pants on the Ground’ gang members followed them from the Fox Theater to a Ponce de Leon Street parking garage.

“Unfortunately for the street thugs, the Admiral turned out to be a retired Navy SEAL team member; and Ms. Lasseter had just won the military’s top civilian honor in pistol sharpshooting, the coveted Crosshairs Trophy. As the admiral chased one perpetrator up Ponce de Leon, Ms. Lasseter fired through the bottom of her purse, blowing the gun out of the perp’s right hand. The taller gang member lunged at Ms. Lasseter with a knife, and she shot him in the chest, squarely in the sternum. Before the other gang member could react, Ms. Lasseter pointed her gun at his, well, can I say ‘private parts’ on TV, and told him not to do anything silly, like run.

“The police arrested the two young men and are looking for others. The ‘Pants on the Ground’ gang has been connected to several armed robberies, including some possible homicides. Admiral McLemore was released from Grady with a foot injury after kicking one fugitive in the head.”

“Hey Abe. What’s up? Have you heard anything yet?”

“Oh, hey Pamela. You startled me. The owner’s not supposed to be here early. No, I haven’t heard anything from anybody. I did just hear on Channel 5 that Admiral McLemore and Sheryl

were robbed or something down by the Fox. I was daydreaming and only caught part of the story.”

“You’re kidding!”

“No. I’m sure there will be an update in just a few minutes. Sounds like they’re OK. I bet those guys wish they had chosen another target.”

“Do you think we will have a crowd tonight? I mean, with all the terrible things that are happening. I heard Jamaica has at least 30,000 deaths and counting and the Bahamas have been swept away. Not sure how much of that’s true. You know how first reports are.”

Pam briefly considered if she should’ve told Abe about the death estimates, but she knew that he had probably heard as much news as she had. They both knew the estimates would be higher. The ejection of the Soufrière Hills Volcano into the Caribbean Sea and the subsequent earthquake was sure to cause more death and destruction before this day was over.

Pam glanced out the open French doors adorning the entrance of *The Divide*. The day had been unusually warm for December 31. A crowd was beginning to gather on the Duluth Towne Square, children running up and down the yellow brick path that designated the geography of the Eastern Continental Divide that ran straight through the center of downtown. Pam had never thought promoting the Continental Divide as a tourist attraction would work for the city, but it had. The crowd was early, and the sun was setting, darkness racing westward at a thousand miles-per-hour.

“With the President admitted to the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, it is suspected that he has also contracted the Spanish Flu. The new United States President

will be installed January 3rd. With the death of half the White House staff and much of the Senate and Congress, the Spanish Flu continues to take its deadly toll. The entire Senate, House and Justice Department have been temporarily quarantined until the spread of the virus is investigated. The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta has an entire bio-lab crew on sight at the White House as we speak. The President's family is in China on vacation and has been advised to stay there until the source of the carrier can be found. Homeland Security is suggesting that it could be the result of terrorism, and now, this: A man identified as a member of TACS has been found in a local D.C. hospital where he passed away yesterday. The hospital is now under quarantine.

“The Army of the Christian Soldier, whose sole intent is the overthrow of the U.S. government and the installation of a Christian theocracy, has been connected to various computer hacking incidents. Some of you will remember the traffic light incidents last year that caused so many deaths and injuries. It appears that this particular ACS member visited the White House with a tour group last week.

“The dark comet continues heading toward Earth, and most of the world's nuclear ICBM missiles have launched on an interception course...”

Pam gave Abe a conciliatory hug and kiss on the cheek. “I’m sure we will hear something soon. It looks like the crowd’s starting early tonight. I wonder how many will make it to midnight to see the Duluth Disco Ball ascent? Remember all those people last year who were so impressed that our ball went up instead of down? They gave it a standing ovation. How many disco balls have ever gotten a standing ovation?”

Pam greeted some of the employees on the way back to her office, but she couldn't contain her amusement at all the revelry. Florida was getting ready to get creamed by a tsunami, a comet was hitting Earth in less than three weeks, street gangs were roaming the streets, rapes were up big time; and all these people seemed in total denial.

“Ghana has reported its 34th case of mosquito-borne HIV. This is devastating news, as if there weren't enough. Spraying of the dreaded pesticide DDT has begun in large areas of the African coastal regions.”

Abe left Condi Zimmerman's reporting at the bar and started mingling with the crowd, welcoming the revelers to what could be the last New Year's Eve party. He thought again about *Revelation 8* and the mountain that would fall into the sea. That prediction says a *third* of sea life will be destroyed and a third of the world's ships.

Abe circled the bar, taking note of the mumblings about the Mayan calendar and December 21, 2012, and whether we would even make it until that date. Abe figured he would know on December 22, as his thoughts drifted back to Jeff and his friends at Grand Cayman Island and whether they were still alive.

CHAPTER TWO

“Who you calling fat boy, hero?” and Sheryl laughed as she retold the story of the attempted mugging to her friend Judi.

Judi heard the news report while driving home from Emory and called her friend Sheryl right away, out of concern but also curiosity.

“Yeah, Justin chased that poor guy up the street; and when he turned around, Justin kicked him right in the head. I’ve never seen anything like it Judi. For an old man he moves quite well. Of course now he can’t walk!”

They both laughed, but Judi couldn’t help but notice... *Justin?* Sheryl had never called The Admiral *that* before. She smiled, her mind working like an inquisitive mind will, and thought maybe there might be just a little hanky-panky going on. Women knew these things.

“Justin?” she queried.

Sheryl felt her face flush and was glad there was a land-line between them, not really understanding her sudden blush. She found herself feeling like a school girl, something she hadn’t felt for years. She ignored the query.

“Judi, have you heard anything from Jeff? We didn’t even know about the disaster in the Islands until we were leaving the hospital. *We*, she and Justin. She liked the sound of that.

“Nope. Haven’t heard anything yet. There has been no news from any of the Cayman Islands and just a few tidbits from the others. Apparently Jamaica has had a really bad day, at least the eastern part. I heard something about a large cruise ship that was

totally capsized and washed back out to sea near St. Thomas. It's awful. All the news is awful." Judi was not her usual, jovial self. Who could be? Her doorbell rang and she carried her cell phone to the front door. She was expecting a package from Dr. Rosenberg.

"Hold on Sheryl. Let me see who this is. Joe is sending me a synopsis of tomorrow's speech."

Sheryl and Judi had often worked together with Dr. Joseph Rosenberg, a professor of apocalyptic religions at Emory. An interesting man to say the least.

Sheryl heard the doorbell ring once more followed by a knock and Judi saying, "I'm coming. I'm coming. Cool your cookies," followed by a scream and the sound of breaking glass, then silence as the phone went dead.

The light was bright, extraordinarily, even brighter than the dentist's light that always manages to blind you even with your eyes closed. He could actually see his blood vessels winding their way through the pinkness of his closed eyelids and tried to open his eyes but couldn't. Then it was gone. Slowly he tried again, annoyed at whatever was sticking into his back. He vaguely remembered... something... water maybe? His head was killing him. It was eerily quiet, except for the sounds of the splashing water beneath him; and he was surrounded by darkness, clinging to him like a fog.

"Where the hell *am* I?" he wondered. Then he fell from the palm tree to the waters below, even before he could force his eyes open. Jeff slid into a world of unconsciousness and dreams, drifting closer to Rum Point and Stingray City.

Jeff's injuries were internal, so there was no blood to attract shark, barracuda or other predators of the sea. He alternated between unconsciousness to semi-consciousness, back and forth throughout the night. At times he was sure he saw a flash of light because his eyelids would turn pink, just for an instant. He finally forced his eyes open after one such experience only to see a sky full of stars, a Milky Way as clear as it used to be on the farmlands surrounding Charleston when he was a child.

He continued his horizontal voyage toward the north side of the island, often bumping into *something* that floated into him, maybe a log, a table, a body. Gradually he began to recall the day's late afternoon events, the wave, Melissa washing out of his grip and over the side of the building. Melissa... For the first time in many years, Jeffrey Ross cried.

Gray and Andi Dorey had been close friends with Jeff and Melissa when they were married, when they were divorced, when Melissa remarried and after Melissa's new husband was killed in a plane crash off Puerto Rico. Before heading out to sea on their ultra-quiet, electric jet skis earlier in the day, they were convinced that whatever Jeff and Melissa once had, a special fondness, was back. They were happy for the Ross's. They were happy for themselves. There were many memories between the foursome, most good.

“What was that? Did you *feel* that Gray?”

“I did.” Gray answered Andi's question matter-of-factly; but he knew what had just happened wasn't normal, the sudden rise in the ocean's surface. They were stopped less than a mile out to sea, their electric jet skis nearly silent except for the occasional

slap from a passing wave assaulting the yellow and green fiberglass housing.

“What do you think that was?”

“I’m not sure, but it was odd.” Gray looked back toward Seven Mile Beach, George Town just to the right. George Town, the capital of Grand Cayman, was bustling with activity, shopping and high finance. The crowds on the beach were small for the Christmas season, but many Europeans and Canadians were not traveling because of the smallpox outbreak and the Spanish Flu fears. Then he lost sight of the beach, of George Town, the entire island had disappeared; and Gray rubbed his eyes in disbelief.

“Andi, I think it was a tsunami,” and in the few seconds since Andi asked the “what was that” question, the massive wave began to grow as it rushed to shore. Everything disappeared behind the height of the now towering wall of water; and then it crashed inland, skirting between the rows of buildings.

“Do you think Jeff and Melissa were still diving?” Andi was notably distressed, and the end of *div-ing* was almost an octave higher than the rest of the question.

“I hope not,” was all Gray could say, as the quiet, still air was insulted by the sounds of the thunderous wave crashing inland, carrying mounds of beach chairs, umbrellas, jet skis, pine trees and sea life with it. The Cayman Grand held its stature against the onslaught, as did most of the structures; the island had strict building codes and little poverty.

“What are we going to do?” Andi and Gray were stunned, almost dizzy, from the sudden turn of events. The sight was totally surreal.

“Let’s go. We have to try to find Jeff and Melissa. Andi, we’re not going to like what we see, so try to prepare yourself. There will be bodies, carcasses, ants, snakes, no telling what, floating in the water. Then there’s the debris. Let’s get closer, but be prepared. Most of the time there are two or three waves, often more.”

As they made their way slowly and deliberately toward what had been Seven Mile Beach, the mist grew in the eyes of both Gray and Andi. They were almost sure their friends were dead, whether they were resting on the beach or had been doing a shore dive. Darkness crept through the afternoon quickly, the sun setting in the west. It was going to be a long night.

By eight o’clock, Gray and Andi gave up their search, reluctantly. Andi was sick, and the darkness set in, the only lighting coming from the stars above. Andi threw up again.

“You OK sweets?” Gray knew she wasn’t OK, who could be. The wave had not been followed by other waves, unless they were too small to detect. Seven Mile Beach was Seven Mile Beach again, George Town was only slightly flooded, but the night was silent, except for the occasional groan, or a cry from out of the distance.

“I’m not OK Gray. Are you?” She wasn’t angry, though the question would lead some to believe so.

The devastation looked worse than the Indonesian tsunami of 2004, at least it appeared so when viewing *live and in person*. Hundreds, probably thousands of bodies, floating in the sea along the shore line and many just resting on the streets, in a final sleep.

“Gray, I’ve never seen so many dead animals. This place is going to be a field day for the birds. It’s already beginning to smell. Where are we going to stay tonight?”

“I would say we go back to Seven Mile Beach, see if there are any top floor rooms available that aren’t heavily damaged. Or we could go to the Ritz.”

“*Going to the Ritz,*” and Andi sang the jingle with a nervous laugh. “I say Cayman Grand, because I know, if Melissa and Jeff were on the beach, they would’ve known right away what was happening. As soon as the ocean drained out to sea, they would’ve headed to higher ground.”

They turned their jet skis back toward Cayman Grand, moving slowly in case they hit unseen debris, or worse. Andi again felt nauseous. The indicators told the story of the jet skis’ batteries, less than two hours of charge left. Gray kept his eye out for floating jet skis, battery powered or otherwise. That could very well be their only mode of transportation until they found Jeff and Melissa. *If* they found them. Then there was the question: How were they going to get back to the United States? Was the Cayman airport damaged? How much damage would the tsunami cause to Florida and the other coasts? And what about that comet or *what-ever*.

Making their way onto Seven Mile Beach, they pulled the jet skis onto shore and took the starter keys with them. Entering the hotel was not easy, the outdoor lobby now filled with dead fish, squid, people and beach chairs. There was a small dog waiting at the rear entrance, and they couldn’t believe their eyes. Neither could the dog, as he came bounding into their arms, licking Andi all over her face. Every cloud has a ... Andi thought, and the small dog brought immense joy to their hearts. How could

that dog have survived, the only life they had seen in more than three hours?

Had Andi and Gray looked across the back parking lot still covered in four-and-a-half feet of salty sea and up into the trees, they might have spotted Jeff hanging in the very top of a palm, supported by the dark, blue strap of his buoyancy compensator.

Jeff floated with the help of the inflated BC and chaise lounge cushion that had remained entangled around his leg, northward toward Stingray City off the North Shore. He also floated in and out of consciousness, mostly out. Occasionally he would awaken, sure that someone was shining a flashlight in his eyes but would see nothing except a jet-black sky with a crystal chandelier that only God could make, enhancing God's ceiling with a jewelers delight. Only he didn't believe in God, in spite of all Abe's counseling, bless his heart, the last year. These disasters were purely coincidence. Besides, he had actually prayed to God a few days earlier, to bring his best friend his only true love, back into his life. He had actually gotten on his knees for Pete's sake. But it hadn't happened. Almost had, it seemed. Now she was gone, drowned probably, in a forty foot wave that came out of nowhere. Melissa... he drifted back into dreamland, still floating northward toward Rum Point and Stingray City; and he was sure something was nibbling on his toes. One minute 'til midnight.

"JEFFREY ROSS!!!"

"Did you hear that?" Andi jumped out of the damp, queen-size bed of the third-floor room they had found earlier, a room with at least a dry bed. She almost collided with Gray as they rushed out the sliding glass doors, now warped in a half-open position, and onto the Roman tiled balcony. The night was dark, but the Milky Way was no longer visible due to the intensity of

the light in the distant sky. It was an unusual light, almost blue-white. Gray knew it was no star or supernova, at least from what he had learned last summer at the Duluth Library's *Conference on Astronomy*.

"What do you think that is Gray?" Andi had about had it with natural wonders, and her anxiety showed. "Could it be a search helicopter?" She knew that couldn't be. As quiet as it was, she would surely hear the motor in the distance.

"Nope, can't hear the motor," Gray answered. Andi couldn't help but note how smart her hubby was. "What was the noise? It nearly shook me out of bed. I swear the radio on the night stand was vibrating." Gray seemed shaken, but the noise had been *very* loud, much louder than thunder.

"It sounded like a loud band instrument of some kind, maybe a trombone, or trumpet, except..." Gray recalled his marching band days and his old high school buddy, Darrell Edwards. They would grab a trombone, a baritone, a trumpet, a tuba, any brass instrument they could find and see who could blow it the loudest and the longest without taking another breath. Used to drive his parents crazy. He briefly wondered about his old friend Darrell but figured he was probably a famous trumpet player somewhere, maybe in Austria or Sweden, or maybe a famous symphony like the one in Charleston, South Carolina where Jeff grew up. He snapped out of the day dream.

"I thought it sounded like a voice. I know it sounds crazy, but I am absolutely sure it was a voice. It was like a mega-decibel shout."

There was silence between them as they continued to watch the light. It really couldn't be a star, because it wasn't actually *shining* in their eyes. As intense as it was, it was more like a

spotlight at the opera, focused, a beam almost like a fat blue-white laser of some kind and very high in the sky.

CHAPTER THREE

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Mark 13:32

“Abe, do you think the world is going to end in December? Everybody’s talking about it, December 21, 2012, the Mayans, the Hopi Indians, and Nostradamus. Every time I turn on TV there’s something about the end of the world.” Pam was having serious doubts that the world would even make it to January 21, 2012.

“No one here seems worried about it tonight,” Abe answered, observing the rapidly growing deluge of people. He considered the 1500 or so missiles journeying through space toward the dark comet. Would it work? Could the nuclear missiles actually affect the comet’s trajectory? He would know soon. They all would.

“And don’t forget the whackos who predicted May 21 of last year would be the return of Jesus, then October 21 would be the end of the world. Bet they were surprised October 22 when they were still here.” Abe chuckled but knew these sorts of things, these *predictions*, turned more people further from God.

“Yeah, they put up billboards, one in Atlanta, at least one. How embarrassing.”

Pam scanned the bar and dining areas, man-made fog flowing across the neon dance floor, filled with pretty girls in gorgeous disco dresses, dancing the night away with the men in their lives. Donna Summers sang *MacArthur Park*, and no one really

seemed worried about December 21, just 11 months away. No one seemed the least concerned that a 100 mile-wide comet was supposed to make a direct hit on Earth in about two weeks.

“No, I don’t think so. I think 2012 could be a significant year in the whole scheme of things. There is that planetary and star alignment that only occurs every 26,000 years. That’s supposed to happen December 21 and may have a gravitational effect of some kind. However, if the *Bible* is correct, and I think it is, we’re at least seven years away from *the end*. This comet hitting Earth is not supposed to happen until a lot of other stuff happens. And the other stuff hasn’t happened.

“Hollywood’s version of 2012 was a fantastic movie; but in the Biblical version of the end, Earth isn’t here one day and gone the next. According to the people who study prophecy a lot more than I do, before the world ends there is to be a seven year period of *great distress*, and the distress will increase each year. You know, hail storms, hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanos...”

“Comets and tsunamis,” Pam interrupted. “Abe, I’m not a religious scholar by any means; but there is a specific mention of a star, flaming like a torch, that falls to earth in the end times. That was described in John’s writings two thousand years ago. That could easily be a comet. Comets look like stars falling. That’s why they call meteorites ‘falling stars.’”

Abe remembered the verse well. He’d been hooked on end times prophecies for a long time and the *trumpets* that would hail their oncoming disasters. He recited it in his head: *Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water.*

“And you are correct again Ms. Pam, *Revelation 8:10*. But if that were to happen now, it would not be in the prophesied time frame. I’ve been studying prophecies for years, and they all seem to come true. In exactly the sequence predicted. The apostles asked Jesus when *the end* would be, 2000 years ago. You know what he said, don’t you?”

“He said he didn’t know, that no one knew except God.”

“Well, there you go. ‘No one’ would include the Hopis, Mayans and Nostradamus. ‘No one’ is pretty specific, so I don’t doubt it. Like I said, they all come true. It wouldn’t surprise me if we blow that thing right out of the sky. I’m a lot more worried about Jeff and Melissa,” he paused, “and their friends.”

Abe checked his trusty Timex, 11:45. Just fifteen minutes ‘til midnight. “Let’s move outside and mingle, get ready for the New Year’s Disco Ball.” He faked jubilation.

“You go ahead. I need to find Scott and tell him to give everyone free champagne at midnight. I’ll meet you over by the amphitheater.” Pam turned from Abe, scanning the crowd for Scott Johnson, the assistant manager. At six-foot five, he should be easy to spot, and he was. She made her way through the unexpectedly large crowd toward the manager’s office. On the way she thought about what Abe had said and wondered how that little Jewish man ended up being a Christian. She decided she would ask when the time was right. People were funny about *religion*, but Pam felt in her heart that Abe probably had a heck of a story.

Walking out of the club through the open, hand-carved, persimmon French doors, Abe couldn’t believe how warm the night was. The A/C had been running all night in *The Divide*, and the air inside was still a little stuffy. He subconsciously

looked up into the northern sky. The dark comet, as everyone called it after the Hutz statement, was clearly visible now, even over all the city lights. Glancing over his shoulder, he thought he heard his name, Abe blindly ran straight into the arms of Admiral McLemore and almost knocked Sheryl onto the all-brick patio.

“My goodness, I didn’t know you cared so much Abe. You shoulda told me.” They laughed out loud, and the din of the crowd grew stronger. The waitresses were working the outdoor patios and gardens, the free champagne flowing.

“Look at the crowd,” The Admiral commented.

“Yeah, it’s huge.” Abe confirmed.

“That’s not what I meant,” Admiral McLemore responded. “They’re all looking up.”

Abe noted that no one was looking toward the soon-to-ascend Disco Ball but up into the north sky, many pointing toward the comet. Abe considered the comet’s brightness. It had been invisible to the naked eye just a couple of days earlier. It wasn’t a *pretty* comet like the ones Abe had seen in pictures and movies. It was a dull white, more gray than white, with no tail.

“Heard anything from Jeff or Melissa?” Sheryl interrupted the sky gazing.

“Not yet. We borrowed a ham radio from Woody’s Nursery. Scott’s been monitoring it, but the only broadcasts he’s getting from the Islands have been from Jamaica and Haiti. Seems like there have been few deaths at either place, which is hard to believe, especially in Haiti. I guess the two hours of warning gave everyone time to head to higher ground. The bad news is, one report said Grand Cayman Island had suffered a major

power outage caused by solar flares. That's not good. They may have had no warning at all."

"Well, the Cayman Navy made it out of port, so someone knew something." The Admiral always had inside knowledge on anything *military*.

"Abe, do you know Judi Ellis?"

"I do. Dirty martini girl. Why?"

"She was attacked today at her own home by four men and is at St. Joseph's. Can you believe that? They stole both her laptops."

"Actually, I do believe it. There are youth gangs everywhere, as you well know from what I heard on the news earlier. *They're* certainly not worried about any comets hitting Earth. Is she alright?" Abe didn't know Judi well but had always admired her poise, and her legs. She did wear some short dresses sometimes, but why not? If you have the wheels, show them.

"I don't know the story. I called the Roswell police and they rushed to her home. Never found the four guys, and Judi was only shaken. They told her it was a warning to Dr. Rosenberg."

"Dr. Rosenberg?" Abe was not familiar with the name.

"He's a religious scholar who Judi works a lot with, over at Emory. She schedules conferences for him. I have assisted in a couple."

Abe thought he had heard, or seen, the name before. "By the way, how's that foot doing Admiral?" Abe winked at Sheryl. "Heard you saved an angel in distress."

"My foot's fine. I haven't kicked anyone in the head in years. And don't give me any grief, or I'll hit you with this crutch."

They made their way over to the Disco Ball, The Admiral hobbling along with Sheryl offering support; and Abe thought he might detect a romance being born. It was 11:59.

Jeff continued his voyage, the warm Caribbean Sea slapping against his body, and occasionally, something else. And there was something else, something wrapped in plastic, or maybe a baggie, lying on his chest. He opened his eyes as soon as he heard his name, and the light was blinding. Just like the light he had seen a year before in Villa Rica. Out of reflex his eyelids slammed shut, reacting to the intensity. Jeff was reminded of the previous sighting of this *blip* of light and how it reminded him of the old Kodak Brownie cameras with the flash cube. If someone took your picture, you couldn't see for five minutes. He could still see his blood vessels through his closed eyelids.

“Let's go!” Gray grabbed Andi's hand and led her down the three flights of stairs. “Let's get the skis and go over there.”

“Are you sure?” Andi worried about running into things in the darkness, like dead bodies. She also worried that the batteries in the jet skis might not last.

“We have to. I think Jeff may be out there. The battery gauge said two hours. I'll use my headlight and you can follow me.”

“Why do you think Jeff is out there?” Andi knew the answer. She had heard the same noise that Gray had heard. *JEFFREY ROSS*.

Gray hesitated, then answered. “Did you think the noise we heard sounded more like a voice or a trumpet, maybe *some* kind of horn?”

“It sounded like a loud trumpet or French horn. But whatever kind of musical instrument it was, it didn’t play music. It said *Jeffrey Ross*. At least that’s what I heard.”

“Yeah, me too. That’s why we have to go.”

Gray and Andi pulled the heavy jet skis into the water. The batteries that powered the craft were made of lithium, not as heavy as lead but still heavy. The silent motors started as soon as the keys were turned. Gray turned on his headlight and they headed toward the light. There was no noise, only silence and the water that slid by the skis.

“You know what that light looks like?”

Gray and Andi had been married thirty two years and were always on the same wave-length; and Gray replied, “The Star of Bethlehem, at least from the drawings I’ve seen over the years,” and he admired the intensity and the narrow focus of the beam. It was truly awesome.

Jeff was beginning to find the light annoying. There had been no other sounds, other than his name; and now he wasn’t even sure he heard his name. He may have been dreaming. Then the light spoke again, softly this time.

“*Your prayer was answered,*” and the light went out just as Gray and Andi saw Jeff, spotlighted in the bright beam like a moth in a light.