

MOUNTAINTOP

A Novel



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EVICITION

Dr. Reginald Franks, grandfatherly dean and CEO of Redeemer Christian College, would never kick David Singer out. At least David hoped not. Not after David graduated with highest marks. Not after David and his grandmother had given the college all their money. Not after his grandmother died and David took out student loans to continue his studies. And certainly not after all that talk of Redeemer College being a family. David had done everything they'd asked of him, and he'd believed every promise they made to him: that he was being prepared for a fruitful career in ministry. Yet, despite all that, he'd applied to over a hundred churches over the last six months and no one had offered him a job. At least not a paying job. Some churches had offered to take him on without pay, with a vague promise that the role would eventually become a paid position. But working for free was a luxury well beyond David's means. Although he was certainly a gifted musician, no church was willing to take a chance on hiring him, not when they had people of their own who could do an adequate job, and do it for free.

And so, after his graduation, when his classmates moved on, David simply stayed at Redeemer College. A few of his fellow graduates found jobs in ministry, but most had either moved back home or moved on to further their studies and their debt load. At first, David thought he would stay for a few days, until he came up with a plan or until one of those churches offered him a job. But days turned into weeks. He almost left when the college turned off his internet access, but he still had nowhere to go. So he stayed, reading, playing his guitar, singing, praying and hoping he wouldn't be kicked out. But it was now August. New students would be arriving soon, and the dorms would be filled with actual students. Paying students.

David's phone buzzed with an incoming text message.

“This is your final notice.”

It was from his cellular service. He'd stopped paying the bill in May, when the student loan money was gone. David was wondering where he'd find the money for his phone when he heard the knock on his door.

“David?” said Mitch, through the door, “Dr. Franks wants to see you.”

Mitch was the campus caretaker and handyman. David had been helping him out over the summer. He was a patient and soft-spoken man, perpetually clad in his olive-green work pants and shirt.

David opened the door.

“Mitch, I know. I tried to stop by his office yesterday, but he wasn't there. Thanks for letting me know. I'll go see him today.”

“David, I'm sorry. Actually, I'm supposed to take you to see him right now.”

“Why?”

“Dr. Franks told me I'm to come get you and bring you back with me to his office. We have to go, both of us, to his office. Right now.”

“What's so urgent?”

Mitch shrugged and looked away.

“OK. Well, let's go.”

Neither spoke as they walked down the stairs, through the doors, and across the quad to the admin building. They both knew what this was about. David had been avoiding this meeting for two weeks.

They reached the door to Dr. Franks' office. Mitch stopped, reached up to knock, hesitated, and then turned to David.

“David, thank you for all your help this summer. It was nice having someone to work with. And, I'm sorry.”

“Don't be sorry, Mitch. Nothing you could do about it,” said David.

Mitch knocked on the door and opened it a crack. “Here he is.”

“Thank you, Mitch. Come in, David. Mitch, you'll be carrying on, will you?” Dr. Franks looked over David's shoulder at Mitch.

“Yes, sir.” Mitch looked nervously between David and Dr. Franks.

“Thanks, Mitch. David, please sit down.”

David sat in a worn leather chair opposite Dr. Franks. Between them was a shabby antique oak desk, bare except for two envelopes. Dr. Franks folded his hands and placed them on the edge of the desk

and exhaled. Then he looked David in the eye.

“David, it’s time.”

“Time?”

“You know exactly what I’m talking about. It is time for you to move on. You need to leave campus.”

David shifted his feet. “Well, I was wondering if I could enroll in some extra courses for the fall semester.”

“David, you’ve already graduated top of the class from our music ministry program. There’s nothing more we can teach you.”

“I was thinking some of the churches I applied to wanted someone who could do music *and* youth, so I should probably take some youth ministry classes. Dr. Franks, you know all I’ve ever wanted to do is serve in a church. I think some youth courses could help me realize my dream. I mean, God’s calling on my life.”

“David, you’d be better off volunteering in a church youth ministry. It wouldn’t cost anything and you’d probably learn just as much. Besides, how would you propose paying for another semester?”

“Is there any unclaimed scholarship money?”

“No. Well, I mean yes there is, but not for you. It is time for you to move on.” The dean let out a sigh. “David, you must understand this is really for the best. I hope you know I want the best for you. I care about you, you’re part of the Redeemer College family. I hope you won’t be angry with us.”

“Dr. Franks, how could I ever be angry with you? You’ve been like a father to me. Especially after my grandmother died.”

Dr. Franks’ shoulders sagged. David saw his opening and pressed his advantage.

“I mean, you know my situation. And when Nan died... I had nowhere to turn. Redeemer was my family. You know, the rest of the class, well, they all either found jobs or went back home to their families. Redeemer College is the closest thing I have to a home and a family.” David looked out the window behind Dr. Frank’s desk, then up the ceiling and threw up his hands. “I mean, if I had somewhere else to go, I would. But, well, what option do I have? And it’s not like I haven’t tried to earn my keep. Mitch has really appreciated my help. He’s told me so, many times. It all makes me think that maybe God wants me to stay here.”

Dr. Franks shook his head slowly, unfolded his hands and slowly drummed his fingers on the desktop. “David, I appreciate the help

you've given Mitch over the summer. I really do, and yes, so does Mitch. However, I am informed by our board of directors that we have likely broken several labour code regulations by allowing you to do that. I shudder to think about the situation we'd be in if you'd fallen off a ladder or some such thing and injured yourself." He folded his hands again. "When you didn't leave after graduation, I thought it would be OK for me to look the other way. I don't regret that, but it has been three months and you're still here. Regardless, the board has also instructed me in no uncertain terms to resolve this situation, no later than today. David, my hands are tied."

"So you're kicking me out?"

"David, don't make this any harder than it has to be, please. Look at it from my point of view."

"From the point of view of someone who has a job and a place to live?"

Dr. Franks' hands slowly closed into fists. He took a breath, relaxed his hands and looked back at David.

"I happen to have a job and a place to live because forty years ago when I graduated from college I took responsibility for my life, started working and haven't stopped since. It's time you did the same. But lest you think I am completely heartless, I have some good news. I am giving you a choice in how this plays out."

"A choice?"

"As I was agonizing about this yesterday, I received a phone call from a former student, Rick Avery. He pastors a small church in Lachance, about three hours north of here. They need a worship pastor, and Rick is highly motivated to hire one as soon as possible. It's an entry level position, full time. I told him about you. I told him you are the most gifted music student we've had here at Redeemer College in a long time. They're very interested in you. If you're interested, they'll send someone to pick you up. Today. Are you interested?"

"Well, yeah. Of course I'm interested."

Dr. Franks slid one of the envelopes across the desk toward David. "Here's the job posting and some information about the church that my assistant printed off their web site. Have a look at it."

David took the envelope and began to open it.

Dr Franks continued, "The deal is, David, that if you say yes, once they pick you up and take you away, you can't come back here."

Regardless of whether or not you get the job. Understand?”

“Oh, I see. It’s a way to get rid of me. Dr. Franks, I appreciate you setting this up, but I’ve applied to about a hundred churches all across the country and not one of them wanted to hire me. What makes you think this will be any different?”

“David, I know Rick. Their situation is unique. I think you stand a very good chance. And I sense the Lord’s hand in this.”

David had sensed the Lord’s hand before, but the Lord’s hand always turned out to be wishful thinking.

“So, I could end up stranded there if they don’t hire me? In a strange city where I don’t know anyone? I don’t really like my chances. What’s the other choice?”

“The other choice is that Mitch drives you into town and drops you off at the homeless shelter with this envelope which contains fifty dollars cash.”

“What? I can’t believe that! You wouldn’t do that to me, Dr. Franks. You just couldn’t! Just give me another week. I’ll go out to this church, but chances are they’ll turn me down like every other church has.”

“David, you head to Lachance or to the homeless shelter. Which is it?”

“You would seriously throw out an orphan?”

“David, you’re twenty-one years old. You’re a grown man, orphan or not.”

“Can I have some time to think about it?”

“No. I need an answer now.”

“What if I refuse? Are you going to drag me away?”

“The board informs me that if you refuse, then you are trespassing and it becomes a legal matter.”

“A legal matter? What does that mean?”

“It means we call the police, they arrest you for trespassing, you probably pay a fine and end up at the homeless shelter. Without the fifty dollars.”

David sighed and looked across at Dr. Franks. “I’m sorry I’ve been difficult. Thanks for letting me stay here over the summer. I guess I’ll take my chances with the job.”

“Very good, David. I think you’ve made a wise choice. Pastor Rick is a good man and he’ll teach you a lot.”

“If I get the job.”

“Yes, but it sounds to me like you’d be a perfect fit. I’m hopeful.

I'll call them and let them know. You can go start packing up your room, but before you go, I'd like to pray for you."

"Sure. I need it." David felt the tension in his neck and shoulders as he bowed his head and closed his eyes.

"Dear Lord, I thank you for David and that you have a perfect plan for his life. I thank you that you care for him and will be with him. Lord, if it is your will, I pray that he would find favor with the folks at Lachance Community Church, that this would be the beginning of a long and fruitful ministry. Amen."

"Amen. Thanks Dr. Franks." David got up and shook the dean's hand across the table. "Dr. Franks, can I ask you one more thing?"

"Of course, what is it, David?"

"Can I still have that fifty bucks?"

DRIVEN

When David got back to his room he found Mitch, standing next to a stack of three plastic bins filled with all of David's belongings. At the beginning of the summer Mitch had begun giving half his sandwich to David at lunch. After a few days, Mitch began bringing two sandwiches. Some days, that was all David ate. A couple times a week, Mitch would invite David to dinner where his wife Sarah would dote on him, their own children having grown up and moved away.

"I'm sorry, David. Dr. Franks told me I had to. I mean, the board is really making us do this. I don't mind having you stay here. I'd even let you stay with us, but the seniors' residence doesn't allow overnight guests."

"Mitch, thanks for everything. Thanks for all you've done for me. Tell Sarah thanks, too. I'm really going to miss both of you."

"It was our pleasure. Really, it was. It was nice having someone to help me out. So, are you going to go for that job interview?"

"Yes. I have nothing to lose, really."

"Yeah. You're a real good singer. I think you'll be a great music leader. And you can keep these bins. The bottom one has your books, so be careful. It's real heavy."

"Thanks, Mitch."

David's phone rang before Mitch could respond.

"I better take this. It might be my new boss."

Mitch smiled, waved and left. David stared at his phone. He had heard that your voice sounds better on the phone if you're smiling, so he forced a smile onto his face and answered the call.

"Hello, David Singer."

"David! This is Rick Avery. Dr. Franks told me all about you. I'm

so glad you're willing to come up and see us this weekend."

The voice on the other end of the phone was confident and smooth. Rick Avery was probably smiling.

"Yes, so am I. I am also glad about that I am coming." David winced at his awkward response, then remembered to keep smiling.

"Um, great. Well, here at Lachance Community Church, or LCC as we call it, we are on the cusp of some great things. And we need the right kind of leader for our music ministry. From what I hear, you are just the type of man we are looking for."

"I hope so, Pastor," said David.

"Well, my right-hand man, Wayne, will be at the campus in about three hours to pick you up, OK? We've got a meeting here tonight with some of our key leaders in the church, and then we'd love for you to share a song in our service tomorrow morning. How's that sound? I hear you play a mean guitar. You'll bring your guitar?"

"You bet! I'll bring all my stuff." David stared at the plastic bins.

"We'll see you later tonight. God Bless, David."

"Thanks, Pastor. And thanks for this—"

Pastor Rick had already hung up.

David was sitting on a bench outside the dorm building, holding his wallet open and staring at the fifty dollars. It had been quite a while since he'd held that much money. He looked up as he heard a truck making its way down the lane where it stopped in front of him. The driver rolled down the window. "You David?"

"You must be Wayne?"

"That's right."

Wayne got out of the truck. He was tall, thin, wiry and looked about 40 years old. He was wearing work boots, jeans, and a navy work shirt that said "Dawkins Construction" on the sleeve. He looked at David and then at the three plastic bins, duffle bag, and guitar case on the bench beside him.

"Is that your stuff? You need all that?"

"Well, I sort of do, yeah. Is that OK?"

"Yeah, sure. I'll just have to make some room."

Wayne went to the back of the truck, opened the tailgate, lifted the box cover and started rearranging the contents to make room for David's things. David wondered if he should offer to help, but the tools and other materials he could see looked heavy. How embarrassing would it be if he wasn't able to lift them?

“OK, that should be good for the bins. We can stuff your guitar and the duffle bag in the cab. Let’s go.”

David handed Wayne the bins, one by one. They found room behind the seats in the cab for the rest of his things, and then David sat in the passenger seat. Wayne got in, started the truck, and pulled away. As the truck wheeled around to head back out the lane, David saw Mitch coming out of the dorm building, waving goodbye. David waved back and wondered if he’d ever see Mitch again.

“OK, three hours and we’re there. Sit tight,” said Wayne.

Three hours. That’s a lot of small talk. David hated small talk, but he wanted to impress Wayne. He tried to initiate some light conversation.

“That’s a lot of tools you have back there.”

“Oh yeah. Being in construction, this is my rolling office and workshop. You gotta be ready for any situation. That means having the right tools with you at all times. Like, for instance, say lightning hit that light standard there and knocked it down in front of us. We’d be stuck here, right? Well, no sir. I have an angle grinder that would cut through that steel like butter. There’d be sparks flying everywhere, but we’d cut it up, clear it from the lane, and be on our way.”

David wondered what an angle grinder looked like.

“Is that why you brought all that stuff?” asked Wayne. “To be prepared?”

“Yes.” Technically, David was telling the truth. He needed to be ready to move into the nearest homeless shelter should he fail to get the job.

“Well I admire that. You never know what might happen. Best to be ready.”

A surge of satisfaction came over David. He had impressed Wayne. He relaxed and settled back into his seat. “So tell me about the church.”

“Oh, yeah, I guess you’d like to know all about the church. Well it’s roughly thirteen thousand square feet, brick exterior, wood frame construction. Overall, it is pretty well-built. Roof was replaced fifteen years go, probably good for another ten. H-VAC is underpowered if you ask me, but nobody asks me. Of course, it was built before the sewer lines made it to our end of the street so we’re still on septic. The city won’t pay to connect us to the sewer. I figure it’s because we’re a church. If we were an abortion clinic I bet they’d

hook us up, no questions asked. Bunch of baby-killin' commies at city hall. Anyways, in the meantime, we're still on septic. Can you believe that?"

"Believe what?"

"That we're still on septic." Wayne took his eyes off the road to look at David.

"Um, I don't really know what septic is." David instantly regretted revealing his ignorance.

"Really? Man, I don't know how, in this advanced country, we let a grown man graduate from college without basic knowledge, like what a septic system is. Well, it's basically a localized sewage treatment system for a building that isn't serviced by a municipal sewer. First, the waste goes into the septic tank..."

Wayne spent the next forty-five minutes or so explaining how septic systems work. He talked about various tanks, the drain field, sludge, the scum layer, the importance of regularly scheduled maintenance, and how to tell when the tank needed to be pumped. At times, he held the steering wheel still with his knee so he could use both hands to indicate the relative size and locations of the various components of a typical septic system. David did his best to feign both interest and comprehension.

They stopped for dinner at a rest stop off the highway. David was relieved when Wayne paid for both their meals, since he didn't know how long he'd need to stretch the fifty dollars from Dr. Franks. Over their hamburgers, Wayne went on to describe the H-VAC system along with something about BTUs without ever explaining what a BTU was.

As they got back into the truck, Wayne lamented that the church's electrical service was barely adequate and how even an expensive upgrade of the main panel would not prevent the women's ministry from plugging four fifteen-amp coffee makers into a single twenty-amp circuit.

"Well, we got about an hour left. And I haven't even told you about the sanctuary renovation we did last year. All new carpet, seating, sound system, lighting, newly renovated foyer. It looks as good as any new mega church you'll ever visit in there."

"Really? What kind of sound system does it have?" David perked up. This was good news. As the prospective worship pastor, he would be responsible for all the music at the church. The idea of a state-of-the-art sound system was enticing.

“Well that’s the funny thing. The building committee brought in this sound consultant who wanted ten grand just to design the system. That’s without even buying a single speaker! So I told them to forget that. I’ve been to lots of churches and it’s pretty easy to see that all you do is hang some speakers and point ’em where the people sit. So that’s what I did. And you know why I did that?”

“Why?”

“Because I care about quality.”

David shook his head, bewildered. “How does ignoring an expert help with quality?”

“Because with the money we saved on the sound system we were able to do the main bathroom floors in tile instead of linoleum.” Wayne looked pleased with himself.

“So, how does the sound system actually sound?”

“Oh, man. I guess it sounds OK. I’m half deaf from working with power tools my whole life. But with the way our band plays, maybe you don’t want to hear them anyway! And most people can’t tell the difference, but everyone knows the difference between linoleum and tile.”

David kept his opinion on linoleum versus an acoustic engineer to himself. “Well, can you tell me about the people in the church?”

“Oh yeah. They’re great!”

David waited to hear more, but Wayne was not forthcoming.

“They’re great? Like, what do you mean? In what way?”

“Oh, they’re great. I mean, most of them are. There’s some people that cause problems for Pastor Rick, but for the most part, they’re great. You know, they’re church people.”

They crossed a long bridge over a river. On the other side was a large faded wooden sign reading “Welcome to Lachance! The luckiest place on earth!” Behind the sign was a lumber yard piled high with logs.

“Here we are.” Wayne waved a hand. “This is the old lumber yard. Still going, even though they’ve been threatening to close it for years, but it still keeps going. It used to be the main employer in town.”

David silently watched as the piles of dead trees drifted by his window. The scenery changed as they entered an industrial area with nondescript warehouses, then a business district.

“Here’s Main Street,” said Wayne, “There’s the city hall, the war memorial, and Lachance Park. Lots of stuff happens there in the

summer.”

They passed through the business section into an old residential neighbourhood and then turned left on Cedar Road.

“There she is, down at the end of the street.”

David looked down the road at the thirteen thousand square foot building and wondered who was waiting for him inside. He prayed silently as they approached it. *Dear God, help me make these people like me.*

INTERVIEW

They pulled into the parking lot of Lachance Community Church, past an illuminated sign, the lettering advertising the upcoming “FALL KICKOFF 2010! SUNDAY SEPT 13.” Wayne and David got out of the truck. David counted six cars in the parking lot.

“Bring your guitar. They’re probably gonna want to hear what you can do. I’ll get your duffle bag. You think you’ll need any of the boxes?”

“No, just the duffle bag. Thanks for the ride, Wayne.”

As they came to the glass double doors of the church, David read the handwritten sign taped to the left door — “PLEASE!! USE OTHER DOOR.” The ‘PLEASE’ was underlined three times. Wayne dutifully opened the correct door and David walked through with his guitar into the foyer. He was surprised at how well appointed the foyer was. It had new carpet, and reminded him of a modern hotel lobby.

“Well, hello there, you must be David! Welcome, welcome, welcome!”

David turned around to see who had welcomed him. A man approached him, mid-forties, black dress pants and a shiny grey dress shirt, tucked in and stretched tight around the stomach.

“I’m Pastor Rick. We are all really looking forward to getting to know you. Glad you could make it on such short notice!”

“Hi, I’m David Singer. Thanks for inviting me. Pleasure to meet you.” David tried to produce a smile that projected ‘confident and comfortable religious professional.’ Inside, he was terrified.

“I hope the ride was OK and that Wayne didn’t talk your ear off. Anyways, we’ve got a group interview with some of our music team tonight. Then tomorrow morning we’ll have you participate in the

service. After that, there's potluck lunch and I'll meet with the council to decide what direction we're going with all this. Sound good? Well the gang is in the boardroom, let's go meet everybody. Wayne! Thanks for picking him up."

"You know it, Pastor, anything you need, as always," said Wayne.

David, Pastor Rick, and Wayne walked into the boardroom where three people were already seated. It was obvious that the recent renovations had not made their way into this room. It contained two square wooden stacking tables, pushed together, surrounded by cushioned stacking chairs. Some of the chairs had tape covering frayed sections of the fabric. In the corner was a chair with a handwritten sign taped on the back "Broken. Do not sit." A flowery wallpaper border along the wall near the ceiling was peeling off at the seams.

"I'm Carissa! Welcome!" said a woman who appeared to be in her late thirties. Everything about her looked expensive. Her hair was shimmering blond, salon styled. Emerald earrings matched her green sleeveless blouse, which revealed tanned muscular arms. A gold watch on one wrist, designer charm bracelet on the other. She wore a wedding ring with an enormous diamond. She reached out a hand with manicured nails to David. He wondered if the combined value of her jewelry, clothing, manicure and haircut would be the equivalent of his entire student debt.

"The Lord bless you, David!" She looked sweetly into his eyes, head tilted to the side.

"Thank you, you too." David wanted to say her name, but he'd already forgotten it. He was nervous and wasn't off to a very good start.

The woman smiled, blinked furiously and sat down.

Next, a middle-aged man approached, receding grey hair pulled back in a ponytail, black button-down shirt unbuttoned over a concert jersey. There was a fedora on the table where he was sitting. "Inq Lang. Salutations."

Inq shook David's hand, turned, and sat down.

"Ink?" said David.

"That's correct. I-N-Q. It is unusual, I know. Its origin is actually somewhat interesting"

"But we don't have time for that story tonight," interrupted Pastor Rick, to the apparent relief of the rest of the room, as though they knew the story well.

“And this is Trisha,” said Pastor Rick.

“Hello.” Trisha stood to shake David’s hand. She appeared in her early twenties, with short brown hair, delicate features, beautiful but not glamorous. She was dressed in jeans and a long sleeved T-shirt. She had an intelligent, serious look in her eyes, perhaps even a little sad. But she smiled as she shook David’s hand. He realized he was beginning to stare and shook himself out of it.

“Very nice to meet you, Trisha.” David truly meant it. He began speculating whether he had a chance with her. As he shook her right hand, he looked at her left hand. Good. No wedding ring.

“David, we’ll start by telling you a bit about us. I’m Pastor Rick, the lead Pastor here at Lachance Community Church. I’m married to Elizabeth and have two grown daughters, Sarah and Rachel. I’ve been here at Lachance for seventeen years.”

“Well, I’m Carissa.”

Ah, that was her name, thought David, repeating it to himself so as not to forget again.

“I spend most of my time looking after the twins, Skylar and Brodie.”

And getting your hair and nails done. And shopping and working out, thought David.

“Bob is my husband and he’s really busy with the business. I sing on the worship team, I’m passionate about ushering God’s people into His glorious presence in worship! I’ve been coming here to Lachance for eight years.”

The man with the strange name spoke next. “Well, I’m Inq Lang. I’m a software consultant and I’ve been attending here for about ten years. I play bass in the worship team as well as in my Jethro Tull tribute band called “The Aqualung Experience.” In my opinion, the energy, sophistication and aesthetic moral imperatives of progressive rock reached their zenith in the artistry of Jethro Tull, and we, in the Aqualung Experience, endeavor — ”

“That’s fine, Inq. We all appreciate Jethro Tull, I’m sure,” interrupted Pastor Rick again.

“Well,” huffed Inq. “I’m simply sharing for the benefit of Mr. Singer.” He gestured deferentially toward David.

David nodded, then turned to Trisha when she began to speak.

“I’m Trisha Bain. I’ve been attending this church my whole life and I play piano in the worship team. I teach primary school.”

David wondered if she had a boyfriend and then scolded himself.

First get the job, then get the girl.

“Well, David, that’s us. We know a little about you from your resumé, but why don’t you tell us your story. Start with growing up.”

David knew this was coming. He didn’t like talking about growing up, but he took a deep breath and began. “I was raised by my grandmother. My mom wasn’t really a part of my life growing up. I only remember being with her a couple of times when I was very young. I’ve never met my Father.” David paused to clear his throat. “But my grandmother took care of me. She was a strong Christian and I grew up going to church regularly. I answered an altar call at Vacation Bible School one summer and gave my life to Jesus. I also began singing in church. I remember that every time I sang, the pastor would make the same joke about my last name being ‘Singer’ so I really had no choice.”

They all chuckled at this. David started to relax. Of course, they’d chuckled in all the other interviews at the other churches as well, but he wasn’t offered any of those jobs. It would take more than chuckles this time.

“My grandfather died before I was born, so all we had was his pension to live on, but Grandma sacrificed so I could have voice lessons. When I was fifteen, she surprised me with a guitar on my birthday. I think she sold half her jewelry to afford it.” He inadvertently looked at Carissa as he said this, then shyly looked away.

“Anyway, I began singing regularly in church and that’s when I knew that was what God made me to do. It was everything to me. It still is. When I graduated from high school, I enrolled at Redeemer College.”

“My alma mater!” Pastor Rick interjected.

“Yes. Grandma sacrificed a lot to put me through college. She passed away two years ago.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” said Carissa.

The rest of the room nodded in sympathy.

“Well, thank you. But I really had to learn to trust God through all of that. It was sudden. She didn’t suffer. I’m just sorry she never got to see me graduate and become a pastor. That was her dream for me.”

Carissa was wiping tears from her eyes. It made David wonder if his story struck the right balance between pathetic, a poor orphan, and a comfortable and confident religious professional.

“At college, I joined the worship team right away and it really was my passion. It’s my dream to become a worship pastor and share that passion with a church like yours.”

Now Carissa was nodding and looking around at the rest of the people in the room. It looked like he had at least one vote in his favor.

“That’s really great, David. I’ve asked the committee here to prepare some questions for you. Why don’t you start us off, Carissa,” said Pastor Rick.

Carissa smiled and picked up her designer purse on the table, digging out a small journal with a floral pattern on the cover. She opened it and found her page, reading a question written in purple ink.

“David, we’ve all heard a lot about the need for the church to be *missional*.” She slowed down and emphasized this last word, a satisfied look on her face as she nodded toward each one in the room. “What would you do to ensure that our worship is *missional*?”

“Oh, well, I guess we should start with defining *missional*. It can mean a lot of different things to different people. What does *missional* mean to you?”

“Oh!” replied Carissa, looking confused now. “I guess, well, it’s sort of a way of saying that... well, I guess that’s something I thought you would know!”

Trisha rolled her eyes and smiled at Carissa, who smiled back and shrugged. Inq looked sideways at her, annoyed.

“OK... well, let’s not worry about Bible College buzzwords,” said Pastor Rick. “Inq, what’s your question?”

“Tell me, David. Are you familiar with the work of the great medieval philosopher Boethius?” asked Inq.

Now Carissa looked annoyed. Trisha stifled a giggle. Pastor Rick rubbed his forehead.

“I told you we shouldn’t have invited him,” said Wayne.

“Inq, nobody’s ever heard of him,” said Pastor Rick. “David, Inq has an unhealthy fascination with this Boethius person. Usually we humor him, but you don’t have to answer that.”

“Well, actually, I wrote a paper on Boethius,” said David.

Carissa, Trisha and Pastor Rick all stared at him with stunned expressions.

“You don’t know what a septic tank is, but you heard of Boethius?” said Wayne.

Inq looked around triumphantly.

“Really? I half thought Inq had made him up,” said Pastor Rick.

“No, he was real,” said David. “He wrote that ‘All fortune is good fortune, for it either rewards, disciplines, amends, or punishes — ”

“And so is either useful or just!” said Inq, finishing the quote with David.

The room was silent for a moment until Inq, beaming, stood, picked up his fedora from the table and smartly put it on. “Pastor, I’ve heard enough. It is my recommendation that you hire this man immediately.” Inq stepped back from the table, walked out of the room. They all looked silently out the door until they heard a car start and pull out of the parking lot.

“You are the first person I’ve ever met, other than Inq, who’s heard of Boethius,” said Pastor Rick. “But don’t worry. We won’t hold it against you.”

“Well, actually I slept in one day and was late to my church history class. We were picking project topics and Boethius was the only one left. But please don’t tell Inq,” said David.

They all laughed.

“Trisha. You’re up.”

“David, you’ve spent a little bit of time with us now. What are your first impressions of us?” Trisha looked earnest and David couldn’t read her at all. Was she fishing for a compliment? Or was she testing him to see if he was observant?

“Well, I’m pretty impressed with how quickly this has all come together. You didn’t even know who I was until yesterday afternoon, but you arranged to pick me up, set up this entire candidating weekend for me. You all cancelled your Saturday night plans to meet with me, arranged the church lunch for tomorrow. I think that means you’re all very committed and decisive. You must think this role of Worship Pastor is important if you can work so quickly to arrange all of this. It really is quite humbling that you’ve done all that for me.”

David was happy with his answer. He hoped it made the committee members and Pastor Rick feel good about themselves. However, after he spoke there was only awkward silence in the room. Carissa and Trisha both looked at Pastor Rick and then down at the table. Wayne looked at the ceiling, shaking his head.

“Well,” Pastor Rick said. “David, we truly believe that God chose you to be here with us this weekend. That’s the truth. And, it is also

the truth that we arranged this candidating weekend two months ago for another young man. On Friday morning we found out that he accepted a call to another church and neglected to inform us. Now, due to a peculiarity with our budgeting approval process, we need to fill this position before the end of the month or the funding will be reviewed and possibly revoked. So that's when we called you! Now the Lord rarely plans things out with straight lines, and this is just one of those times. We are very glad that *you* are here."

It took David a few seconds to comprehend what Pastor Rick said. But as he understood it, he felt a sting of humiliation. All this was meant for someone else. David was not their first choice. He didn't know quite what to say. Most of all, he felt foolish for thinking all this was arranged just for him. He hoped he wasn't blushing.

"Well, I'm glad to be here, too." He tried to sound positive, wondering why they hadn't told him this until now.

"Would you like to sing something for us?" asked Carissa.

"That's a great idea, Carissa," said Pastor Rick. "Let's go into the auditorium. You can see it and then we can hear you sing something."

As Pastor Rick led them out of the conference room, a matronly middle-aged woman was waiting in the foyer. She wore a brightly patterned blouse with shiny gold buttons and shoulder pads. Her arms were folded over her stomach with a large black handbag dangling from her elbow. Crimson lipstick outlined the scowl on her face.

"Oh Elizabeth! What perfect timing!" said Pastor Rick. "David, this is my wife, Elizabeth. Elizabeth, this is David, our candidate for worship pastor."

Elizabeth's scowl quickly transformed into a benevolent smile as she thrust out her hand towards David. "Aah! So nice to meet you, David. We are glad you're here. We're looking for someone who can bring some real spiritual depth to our music ministry."

David noticed that she glanced at Carissa while saying this.

"Well, I'm happy to be here and hope that I have a chance to help out."

"Very nice. Good to meet you, David. And Carissa, how are you? And how are things with Bob?"

"Oh, Bob's doing great," said Carissa.

"It would be so nice to see him at church some time. I do keep him in my prayers. I can't imagine what you go through, being

spiritually single like that.”

“I certainly appreciate your prayers,” said Carissa as she turned away and walked into the auditorium with Trisha following close behind.

Elizabeth turned back to Pastor Rick. “Rick, how long will you be?” She stretched out her arm to look at her watch.

“I can get a ride home with Wayne. You go on ahead, Sweetheart,” said Pastor Rick.

Elizabeth said nothing, but turned to leave, digging car keys out of her handbag on the way out the door.

David followed Pastor Rick and Wayne across the foyer, through a set of double doors into the auditorium. It was beautiful, newly renovated with theatre-style seating. David thought he could smell a trace of new carpet. He figured it would sit five hundred people.

Two large projector screens flanked the stage. A set of drums, an electronic keyboard, some monitor speakers, and guitar amps were arranged on the platform. A microphone stood at centre stage.

“Why don’t you use that mic there, David. I asked our sound man to leave it set up and there should be a cord for your guitar too if you need it,” said Pastor Rick.

David went up on stage with his guitar, took it out of the case and plugged it in. The PA system popped as he did so. He walked up to the mic, strapped on his guitar, prayed silently to himself asking God to calm his nerves and give him strength. He began to play the introduction to his favorite song, Tom Lindsay’s hit worship song, *Mountaintop*.

His voice echoed through the auditorium, beginning softly with the verse and then growing more passionate as he reached the chorus of the song. David lost himself completely in the song, as he’d done countless times. After working so hard to be impressive during the interview, singing was the one thing he could do effortlessly. He pulled back from the microphone and let his powerful voice fill the sanctuary naturally for the final rousing chorus.

“You lift me to a highest place
I see the beauty of your face
My love for you will never stop
Because you, You take me to the Mountaintop.”

As he finished the song, a reverent silence hung over the

sanctuary. Carissa, Pastor Rick, and Trisha walked up on the stage as he turned and put his guitar away. Pastor Rick was the first to speak.

“That was great, David! You really can sing.”

“Very nice,” said Trisha, smiling. “I love that song.”

She loves that song, thought David.

Carissa had tears in her eyes again. “Wow. Oh, my heart! Wow. David, that was so, so — *Missional!*” Carissa, looked around, nodding at Trisha and Pastor Rick.

“Well, thank you. That’s just such a great song,” said David.

“How ‘bout that sound system?” said Wayne.

“Oh, yes, very nice. Very nice, Wayne,” said David.

As Wayne nodded approvingly, the doors opened in the back of the auditorium and a man walked in, a silhouette barely visible to David with the stage lights in his eyes. Trisha walked down the aisle to meet him, kissing him on the cheek. David felt instantly disappointed, though he knew someone like Trisha must have a boyfriend.

But as they walked into the light, David saw that it was a man in his sixties, thinning hair with a paunch, wearing dress pants and a pale blue golf shirt. This was definitely not Trisha’s boyfriend.

“This is Bill Bain,” said Pastor Rick. “He’s our treasurer, and is also Trisha’s dad. He’s been around this church just about forever. I asked him to pick you up, David, and take you to your hotel for the night. It’s been a long day for you. I’m sure you must be tired, and we want you rested for tomorrow morning.”

“Sounds good.” David shook hands with Bill and said goodnight to Carissa, Pastor Rick, Trisha and Wayne. He stopped by the boardroom to pick up his duffle bag. Bill was waiting for him at the main doors.

“How’re you holding up?” asked Bill as they walked out to his car.

“Pretty well, I guess. Everyone’s been really nice. And I really feel like I could contribute to the vision that Pastor Rick — ”

“Hold it right there! Just relax. You don’t have to impress me,” said Bill.

“Oh. OK then.”

“Well, listen David, I can take you to a hotel, but I have a perfectly good guest room at my house as well. Would you be OK if we saved the church a little money and you stayed at my place tonight?”

“Whatever you’d like. I’m easy. In fact, I admire your good stewardship. Pastor Rick must be so thankful to have a treasurer like you.”

“David, first of all, I said you don’t have to impress me. Second of all, Pastor Rick’s opinion of me as a treasurer is a subject for another day.”

David wondered what that comment could mean.

“I won’t be an inconvenience for the rest of your family?” David wondered if Trisha lived there.

“No, it’s just me. I’m a widower. It’s no trouble at all.”

Ten minutes later, they arrived at Bill’s small bungalow. Bill offered David something to eat, but David declined out of politeness. Bill showed him his room.

“This used to be Trisha’s room, but I turned it into a guest room when she moved out. I’ll wake you up for breakfast and we’ll be at church in plenty of time for you to get ready for the service.”

“OK, thanks a lot.” David wasn’t sure whether he should call him Bill or Mr. Bain. He wasn’t yet comfortable calling older men by their first names.

He sat down on the bed and wondered if it was the same bed Trisha used to sleep in. He tried thinking of something funny to say to Trisha the next morning about sleeping in her bed, but decided it would be far too creepy. He looked around the room trying to detect any signs of her. The room held no pictures or dolls or anything to suggest it had once belonged to a little girl.

David undressed and got into bed, reviewing the events of the day. He prayed earnestly. “Oh dear God, let this be it. I need this job. Please help me make them like me.”

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